

## **Home education (home schooling) as a social and pedagogical phenomenon in potential support of healthy development of the child**

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Home education represents one of the options to individual education that is usually carried out in a family environment. It is one or more pupils, mostly siblings, who are educated. The role of the educator is mostly performed by parents, rarely by grandparents, and also sometimes by home tutors. The pupil learns the materials stipulated by school curricula and, after an agreed period of time, he/she goes to the school, which they had enrolled with to fulfil the compulsory school education, to take their examinations. Apart from the term 'home education', such a variant of individual education may also be called 'home schooling'. Both the terms (home education and home schooling) are accepted in special educational terminology and are associated with the circumstances motivating the parents to take on such a form of tuition.

In special literature there are usually several reasons for parents to make their minds up about home education for their children, e.g. health impediment of the children preventing them from regular school attendance, long-term stays abroad of the family without adequate opportunity to send their children to school. However, both the reasons seem secondary and in principal they do not require a specific course of tuition in comparison with a mainstream school. For these cases the term of home schooling (school at home) seems more appropriate.

The second group of parents has based their decision to withdraw their children from a regular school based mostly on their worldview (religious) reasons. In special literature such parents are more simply called 'ideologists' and their motivation may be substantiated by the efforts to strengthen family relations and values, not allow exposure of their child to undesirable worldview influences and/or negative peer socialisation, and, at the same time, provide a high educational standard for their children. The parental decision may be accelerated by the fact that in schools their child may come across the values not shared or accepted by the family, and, apart from that, that the child may be exposed to the risk of social pathological influences. Also parents who are convinced that they will be able to educate their children better than the school belong to this group. Such parents are sometimes more simply called 'educators'. As a rule, both 'educators' and 'ideologists' are convinced that their parental

responsibility towards the child is ‘crucial and irreplaceable’ and must be fulfilled both in the aspects of upbringing and education. Though they may not have any reservations about the particular school, they opt for not sending the child there despite the fact that their child might not even have entered the school gates. They suppose that the education, at least in the very first school years, is so general that any parent with a standard level of education will be eligible enough to manage most of it by themselves. At the same time, the parents consider the education of their children so important that it would be impossible for it to be handed over to other people. And for that reason, for education motivated in such a way, the term of ‘home schooling’ may seem more appropriate in comparison with that of ‘home education’ (cr. Mertin, 2003, p. 406 – 407).

Home schooling in the Czech educational environment can be understood as one of the options to educational concepts made possible thanks to the changes in our social and political system after 1989. At the same time, home schooling represents a trend which has been widely discussed both by the academic and general public in the Czech Republic and abroad. As this topic has not been depicted in any special monograph in the Czech Republic yet, we are going to outline briefly the history of home schooling in this country in comparison with the situation abroad starting from the 1990’s till present. In our study we will make use of special Internet resources, and quite infrequent information from Czech articles and daily newspapers.

### **Home schooling in the US and European modern history**

One of the countries where home schooling has a particular tradition is the USA. American parents started to express an interest in this form of education in the 1960’s and 70’s due to the rising dissatisfaction with the quality of state schools which resulted, firstly, from the low level of knowledge of the state school graduates, and, secondly, from the enhancing parental concern about the increasing violence, bullying, and drugs in the school environment. The development of home schooling in the USA is depicted by e.g. D. Nitschová, who points out the dissatisfaction with state schools in the USA in the 1960’s resulting in a range of alternative home education experiments. One of those alternatives was home schooling acquiring numerous followers during the 1970’s and 1980’s. In the 1980’s, home schooling was entered into by religious families whose main reservations about public school were not concerned so much with educational issues, but with the ideological content of the learning

and moral upbringing of children. Today, American religious families make up the majority of home schooling families. However, with increasing popularity of it, the resistance to home schooling still became more pronounced. Home education efforts were criticised by educational authorities in the 1970's, the academic community took no notice of it, in many US states parents were taken to court for breaking the law. Breaking point was finally reached in Massachusetts where home schooling parents won a court case in 1979, did not have to limit themselves to school curricula and were allowed to educate their children at home (see Nitschová, 2004). In connection with this the author states that, after some time, the conflicts and confrontations between the parents and schools lessened and the cases of co-operation intensified. A significant role in the change of the relations was played by the results of the court proceedings. In most cases the court ruled in favour of the parents and thus the proceeding costs had to be paid by the school. But, after initial refusal, the parents themselves became more open and initiated talks about this issue with teachers and school authorities. The courts often also recommended the schools to work out particular guidelines for home schooling. Some schools agreed to only partial attendance allowing the children to attend just special subjects. The parent-school co-operation in child education had also been supported by specialists demonstrating the importance of parental participation in the reaching of optimal learning effects. In the 1990's, US home schooling was consolidated, the number of home educated children increased as well as the number of supporting organisations, publications, and guidelines. Home schooling was accepted by the general public. Whether home schooling was realised mostly in the countryside at the beginning, due to legislative amendments during the recent years, it has spread throughout towns as well (Nitschová, 2004).

In European countries, home schooling has developed under the influence of specific conditions in each of the countries. According to J. Tůma, parents in most European countries are obliged by law to register home educated children either in a particular school or in a local educational authority. Some countries (e.g. Austria, Norway, and Luxemburg) require the observance of approved national curricula in home schooling. Other countries, e.g. the United Kingdom, do not relate such requirement to home education, however, British parents are legally obliged to provide every child with compulsory education in accordance with their age, abilities and talent, through regular school attendance or by other means. A similar situation exists in France, where the law requires providing compulsory education but not compulsory attendance. Schooling in France is compulsory from the age of 6 to 16 and can be

implemented in state or independent schools, in families, or by a person designated by the family. In Great Britain, the law does not stipulate any particular inspections of home education results; it only prescribes the obligation to monitor whether the child is being educated. French law requires the assessment of competence level at the ages of 8, 10, and 12. In Austria, the children have to demonstrate the ability to master particular school-year material at the end of the academic year in the school where they registered, on condition that the other school children are also obliged to take such assessments. Upon successfully passing the assessment tests, the local school education authorities prolong their consent for home schooling of the children for one year more (cr. Tůma, 2001). More detailed information about home education in other European countries can be found on the particular website listed at the end of this article. The approximate numbers of home educated children have been taken from those website resources. In the USA, the country with a more than 30-year tradition of home schooling, there are currently about 1.5 million children aged 5–7 involved in home schooling, which represents about 3% of all school-aged children. Out of this number about 82% of children are educated in their homes. The remaining 18% children attend the school to study the subjects which their parents do not feel competent enough themselves to teach. Out of those 18% more than 2/3 children attend school for less than 9 lessons a week, 1/3 come to school for 9–25 lessons per week (see <http://www.nova-budec.szm.com/clanky/dv.htm>).

Exact up-to-date numbers of home-educated children in the other countries are not available at the moment, however, we can estimate that they are definitely lower in proportional comparison with the US numbers (Canada: 60,000 children, Great Britain – about 14,000 children, Austria: about 0.04% children of school age).

### **An outline of home education development and situation after 1989 in the Czech Republic**

Resulting from several years of effort by a group of Czech parents, home schooling has been gradually incorporated into the Czech education system. Starting from the school year 1998/99, Czech parents have been able to educate their children at home under the ‘Home Education Trial in the Czech Republic’ project. During the trial, a working pattern of family-school co-operation has been established and based on the regular evaluation of home education results on a half-yearly basis including optional consultations with particular families. The evaluation of trial home education of primary school pupils dispelled any fears

that Czech families would get down to home education in greater numbers. Despite the media effort to show home education almost exclusively in a positive light, the initial number of approximately 350 home-educated Czech children has stabilised and has not risen. Also, the fears that the parents would not be able to manage home education were not substantiated. The children did not have any serious problems with their school results or with enrolment into further education at the school. It turned out that the group of parents who participated in home education of their children appears very specific and cannot be compared with common criteria valid for the whole society. In a few cases there were parents who did not manage home education, or even neglected it. However, the school, in time, found out about the shortcomings and suggested a solution acceptable for both parties.

A group of home education supporters formed The Association for Home Education and in 2005 submitted to the Czech Education Ministry a trial project of a follow-up Individual Home Education for Lower Secondary School Pupils. The project says: ‘The reasons for which the parents and children opt for individual home education do not disappear upon completing the primary school...’ There are also parents who are convinced that another year or two of home schooling during the lower secondary school years would facilitate the development of advantages of home schooling to a fuller extent and thus ensure the permanence of its asset. The parents of a big group of pupils who have just completed the first trial project of primary school home education have been the vanguard of home education enthusiasts who had already invested their great effort, energy, and finances into the initial project. Among the pupils, there have been a great number of gifted students who are supposed to do well in grammar schools. They all know that the current grammar school system of learning is quite time-consuming, and, on the other hand, in a way impedes the development of the potential revealed in the children by earlier home schooling. In consequence of that, they have had to limit their after-school activities developing the child’s personality and go back to the learning techniques which they had already overcome perceiving lesser efficiency and lower versatility. Current experience indicates that instead of the follow-up home education at the lower secondary school level, the parents have had to prepare their children for their entry or return to mainstream schooling. They would definitely prefer the continuation of the previous home schooling system (see the Project of home education trial...). Nevertheless, the follow-up home education trial project at lower secondary level has not been launched yet. The Czech Education Ministry has agreed upon it with The Association of Home Education, due to the lack of practical experience of parents and lower

secondary schools with individual learning programmes within the framework enabled by the new 2004 School Act; having come in force as of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005.

Statements expressing the advantages and pitfalls of home education have become an essential part of any discussion on this issue. Home education has also become a topic in which both general and academic public have a say. While expressing their opinion, the following questions have arisen: ‘Is home education a substitutional variant of mainstream education?’ ‘Is home education a fully-fledged alternative?’ The arguments of its supporters implicitly suggest it as a fully-fledged alternative. The opponents argue that home education is only a substitutional solution which could be utilised in substantiated instances (cf. Štech, 2003, p- 433). What prospects home education could have is a question for the future.

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