

AN INDEPENDENT STUDY AND CRITIQUE OF THE SWEDISH GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED NEW LEGISLATION ON HOMESCHOOLING

By C.C.M.Warren, M.A. (Oxon), Retired Professional Educator

**Submitted to the Swedish Government's Department of
Education**

Dedicated to all Homeschoolers in Sweden and Internationally

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A. Personal Preface

A1. Introduction

A British Resident Homeschooling

¶**A1a.** I am a British resident in Sweden and have been in your country now for 12 years (having lived and worked in Norway 9 years prior to this) and currently homeschool three of my seven children who have dual British and Norwegian nationality.

Dual State and Home Schooling

¶**A1b.** Three of my other children passed entirely through the Norwegian and Swedish State School systems, one was partly homeschooled and partly schooled in the State System, and three of them are currently being homeschooled by me in Sweden.

Professionally Assessed Homeschooling

¶**A1c.** All three are continuously assessed by a professional

nationally- and internationally- accredited organisation using an independent curriculum and will take examinations in England and obtain internationally accepted and recognised certificates which will be valid for university entrance.

Eldest Homeschooler and the National Test

¶A1d. The eldest (now in the 9th Grade) of the latter has been homeschooled since the first grade and will be taking the final Swedish national tests this academic year (2009/10) in addition to the British examinations. He will continue homeschooling in the two years leading up to his university entrance examinations and, if he is still living in Sweden, will almost certainly take the Swedish state examinations too - I shall certainly be encouraging him to do so. He will also be travelling to Britain during this time to join in homeschooling programs there.

Two Sons in Swedish and Norwegian State Education

¶A1e. My eldest son went to a Swedish University where he studied Computer Engineering and now has a full-time job in Norway where his trilingualism (English, Norwegian and Swedish) is serving him well. My second eldest son is hoping to enter a college in Canada to study Media with a view to going into TV broadcasting as his career. My youngest son will be joining his brother and sister in homeschooling in 2010.

A2. My Professional Background

Educator, Lecturer and Writer

¶A2a. I am myself a retired (for the last 10 years) professional educator, writer and lecturer working in private schools in England and Norway, and briefly in the state sector in Norway.

Professional Qualifications

¶A2b. I have Bachelors and Masters Degrees from Oxford University, England, in Biochemistry, specialising in Growth & Development, Biochemical Neuropharmacology, Plant Biochemistry and Immunology. My thesis was *Biochemical and*

Physiological Studies on Phenylalanine Ammonie-Lyase in Beta Vulgaris Leaf Discs (Oxford University: 1977). I also have qualifications in Business Computing and Systems Analysis from the British Computer Society.

Professional Teaching Posts

¶**A2c.** I worked as the Principle (Rektor) of a Private School in Oxford educating students in GCSE 'O' and 'A' Levels (ages 15 to 18) for 10 years before moving to Norway where I established and became the head of the IT and Computing Department at an International School, teaching GCSE, 'A' Levels and International Baccalaureat for 9 years, in addition to being employed part-time by a Norwegian municipality (*kommune*) to do some English teaching.

Children will Move Abroad

¶**A2d.** Since my retirement I have devoted myself to educating my three youngest children, all of whom have so far expressed the wish to either work in Norway or an English-speaking country like the UK, Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand or elsewhere when they graduate. None of my children have expressed a wish to permanently settle in Sweden even if they do regard it as a second home (see [¶A3a](#) below).

A3. Why We Homeschool

Swedish Residence Temporary

¶**A3a.** We are intending, at some point, to return home either to Norway or the UK (as three of my children have already done) where we have all of our roots and family connections, and have formulated our educational goals accordingly.

Frequent Travel

¶**A3b.** We live near the Norwegian border and travel frequently both to visit family in Norway and in connection with the work that I do in retirement. This is increasingly taking us abroad more often. The children bring their homeschooling work with them

when we travel.

English Language-Based Education

¶**A3c.** As obtaining an English-based education in Sweden would entail going to a private fee-paying International School (which is beyond our financial means, assuming we even wanted that) and as such a school does not exist where we live (in any case), and since we travel regularly (to Norway and elsewhere), homeschooling offers the perfect solution to our needs and offers the children an English-based multi-linguistic and multi-cultural education which would not otherwise be possible in a school system.

Retired Professional Educator Homeschooling

¶**A3d.** Furthermore, as a retired educator, I am in a perfect position to offer my expertise and services from the comfort and convenience of our own spacious home. I have a library of over 7,000 books, extensive audio-visual and computer software resources, internet-facilities and some laboratory equipment which I have slowly built up over the years. We live in a converted school and the children study in a large library. Visitors who also homeschool and bring their work with them are able to share and socialise in this peaceful, orderly and work-conducive bully-, drug-, alcohol-, tobacco-, and foul language-free environment where they can consult with their parents whenever they need to. The children have their daily work goals and set their own times and pace. Most like to start early and finish early.

Avoiding Bad Social Conditions at State Schools

¶**A3e.** As should be evident, a major reason we homeschool is to avoid the bullying, violence, alcohol, smoking and drug milieu which no one, including the Swedish authorities, denies exists; and whilst attempts have been made to eradicate these, it is also acknowledged these attempts have only met with very limited success. The optimism expressed that these matters will eventually be fixed, in spite of there being no concrete evidence that they will (for reasons which will be examined later in this study), does not inspire confidence in parents such as myself, especially when we believe that the reasons these negative

conditions prevail is in part because of the school system itself. As one who has worked in the school system for two decades I have experienced first hand how these problems have, on balance, got progressively worse, *not* better. Therefore we find no grounds for accepting the assurances given to us by various state-appointed authorities that a safe school environment will eventually result.

Philosophical and Religious Grounds for Homeschooling

¶**A3f.** In spite of the incredible and totally untenable claim made by the proposed new education law that the present system accommodates all religious and philosophical world views (which will be analysed in Section [#C](#)), we are also homeschooling for religious and philosophical reasons, as is permitted and guaranteed to us by the *EU Convention on Human Rights* and *UN Declaration of universal human rights* - the former of which takes precedence over all Swedish laws, and the latter, though not law, accepted in principle. Though desperate attempts have been made to 'reinterpret' these by certain minority interest groups to accommodate a state-only schooling system, that requires the use of Orwellian 'Newspeak' (in other words, twisting the plain sense of language), these machinations are being challenged by others.

Conflicting Calendars

¶**A3g.** The Swedish State School System basically follows the Lutheran Calendar for its semesters and vacation periods, with a long summer vacation and shorter christmas and easter vacations, even though ostensibly a complete separation between state and church took place in 2000. This can, and does, cause problems for various religious groups including Muslims (who do not work on Fridays), Hindus, Jews and Christians of other types who follow different calendars (and in some cases, atheists who object to what are essentially christian festivals) and the only way that they can cater to these is either by homeschooling or by attending private or independent schools that follow their own traditions. This does, admittedly, pose problems for a secular state, and as a result certain compromises have had to be made in retaining what are essentially Lutheran observances and making and adapting them to the secular

culture. This is another good reason for permitting alternative educational systems so that the needs of religious groups can be met. We, as a family, have our major vacations in the spring (March/April) and autumn/fall (September/October) (along with millions of Jews, Messianics and Church of God adherents), so that the summer months - when Swedish State Schools are in recess - are occupied by us with a combination of homeschooling (when we do most of our Biology practical work, for instance) and leisure.

A4. The Potential Impact of the Proposed New Swedish Educational Law

Destruction of a Way of Life for Foreign Visitors

¶**A4a.** The proposed new education law in Sweden, which intends, for some obscure reason (which I will analyse presently) to make homeschooling virtually illegal and practically impossible, would completely destroy our educational goals and way of life, and that of other non-Swedish families who come to Sweden for shorter or longer periods of time (for employment and business reasons, for example) who wish to educate their children using their mother tongue and who cannot afford, or who do not want, to send them to the few and scattered private fee-paying international schools that exist.

Discrimination Against Foreigners

¶**A4b.** Such a law, if it is passed, would discriminate against, and penalise, foreign parents on the basis of their income (if they cannot afford a fee-paying school), prevent them from working in areas where such schools are not available, and force their children to change educational system and language mid-stream (in many cases) and thus interrupt the smooth process of education in the system with which they are familiar, comfortable, and intend to pursue to completion.

The Importance of Choice

¶**A4c.** Whilst, it is true, that some foreign parents might be perfectly content to place their children in Swedish State Schools (which is of course within their rights if that is their genuine

preference) they would at least have a genuine choice which the new law would remove.

A Deterrent to Foreign Workers

¶**A4d.** The proposed new law would then act as a deterrent to either skilled or unskilled foreign workers offering their services to Sweden and drive some away who are already here.

A5. A Worst Case Political Scenario

A Potential Political Disaster

¶**A5a.** What would happen to both foreign families like ourselves, as well as to Swedish families, were the proposed law to come into effect? In analysing this scenario both from the Swedish government's, as well as homeschooling parents' perspectives, the effect of enacting the proposed new law would be a political disaster.

The Pluralism and Tolerance Motivation

¶**A5b.** Though there are many reasons why I chose to move my family to Sweden, including economic ones and the unique opportunity of acquiring an old school, one of them was Sweden's enlightened attitude to pluralism and tolerance of different lifestyles - what is generally known as the 'Swedish Social Utopia' - and its reputation as the world's undoubted leader in promoting environmentalism (a passion I shared with one of the state school Rektors who was monitoring one of my sons). And though homeschooling was not, in the first instance, one of the reasons we came to Sweden, it became an important reason for our staying when I retired two years later and decided to put down some roots here.

The Risk of Civil Disobedience and Emmigration

¶**A5c.** What is the worst that could happen if this law is passed unmodified? Some homeschooling families will send their children back to the state schools, no doubt, but the rest would probably be provoked to civil disobedience and create a great deal of media attention. (I myself am sending this document to all the

national newspapers in Britain and other English-speaking countries). Others would emigrate, effectively becoming refugees in other more politically tolerant countries.

Political Refugees from Sweden

¶**A5d.** Sweden is known and respected internationally for its generous admission of, and provision for, refugees from political persecution. For the first time in its history, Sweden would have **political refugees fleeing from Sweden**, as is currently starting to happen in Germany from which homeschooling families are fleeing abroad to defend their rights and way of life. This has earned Germany strong rebukes from the United Nations and international community (which I will be discussing later).

Intolerance of a Minority

¶**A5e.** For the very first time, Sweden would be seen internationally as intolerant of what is, in reality, a tiny harmless minority (currently only about 50 families or 100 children) who not only pose absolutely no threat whatsoever to the Swedish way of life but who bring enrichment to its national life.

Imprisoning or Fining Homeschoolers

¶**A5f.** Others would remain behind and be willing to serve prison sentences or other penalties to make their plight known and garner as much media attention as they can nationally and internationally, as is happening in Germany today. This also happened in the United States in the last century before the rights of homeschoolers were finally recognised.

We Will Fight

¶**A5g.** I myself would fight this tooth-and-nail (by all legal means, as I have already been forced to do to ensure that my children could be homeschooled under the confusing existing laws in the first place) and make sure the injustice of it received maximum media coverage abroad, as many others have done and are doing now.

Only Two Choices for Sweden

¶A5h. I know, having spoken to a lot people in Sweden, that many will fight this even if it does become law. The Swedish Government would then have two choices:

1. Go into denial about its bad decision to implement the new law on homeschooling, and become oppressive and totalitarian in its treatment of families resisting the new law, as is happening currently in Germany, destroying its image as an advanced, progressive democracy; or
2. Be humiliated, climb down, in which case no doubt some political careers would suffer.

Damaging Sweden's International Reputation

¶A5i. Either way, the result would tarnish Sweden's international reputation as an enlightened plural democracy and witness its recategorisation as a Class B democracy, i.e. **a democracy with alarming totalitarian elements**, losing its status as a Class A democracy respecting the rights and freedoms of all.

The Wisest Choice

¶A5j. However, a far wiser and more prudent solution would be to rewrite the existing law on homeschooling to safeguard the rights of homeschoolers (see Section [#F](#)), whether for foreigners and residents like myself or for native Swedes and citizens, recognising that homeschooling is a rising national and international trend, that it serves and enhances Swedish democracy and pluralism and safeguards human rights. To that end, I would like to make some serious proposals as a professional educator which will be set forth in later sections of this paper.

A6. The Proposed New Law

Many Improvements in the New Law

¶A6a. The homeschooling issue aside, I have to state up front, having studied the new regulations, that overall the proposed

new Educational Law has many excellent improvements from the point-of-view of traditional schooling (*assuming* that you agree that this *is* the best system - it is, in the final analysis, only one point-of-view and there are other valid alternatives).

Greater Efficiency in the State Sector

¶**A6b.** The teachers I have spoken to mostly agree that the system is much more efficient (for them) and enables better monitoring of academic progress, though they understandably are not all so happy about the extra work load.

Long-Term Consequences of the New Regulations

¶**A6c.** So were I in the school system as a professional educator (as I once was for 20 years), I would, on balance, give it my support, though I do think you will have problems (based on my experience in the British system): you will be creating a bureaucratic nightmare for teachers, creating a lot of unnecessary work, and that this will, over time, have a negative, demoralising impact on the teaching profession as well as the pupils, which as a further result could witness a further decline in educational standards. (See, for example, *Dagens Nyheter*, Wednesday 27 May 2009, p.14, containing a report by Ulrika By that gives a frightening insight into the state of public schools in Stockholm where teachers are already under enormous pressure and are regularly taking medication just to survive). I experienced this kind of thing first hand when such regulations were introduced into the British system. In the end, you will probably need to come to a compromise between the old and the new (as the new mechanised system stifles educational creativity) by streamlining the monitoring system, especially in the Primary School sector. Modern British education, which currently has such a system, has not been a great success, and has resulted in an *increase* in illiteracy and numeracy, amongst other things.

A7. Alternative Educational Systems

Valid Alternative Educational Choices

¶**A7a.** I personally believe, as do many other educators too, that

there are other equally valid alternatives to education, of which schooling and homeschooling are just two. A measure of how enlightened a society is will be, in my view, its ability to accommodate many if not most of them.

Unschooling vs. a Structured Curriculum

¶**A7b.** There are many systems of schooling that include the Steiner, Waldorf and Montessori models, amongst others, for example. At the other extreme, there is a valid case (for those who believe in it), in my opinion, for unschooling - at least up to a certain age (14 would probably be my absolute limit) - which I will be analysing in more detail later (see [#C19](#), *The Case for Unschooling*). Accordingly, there are different views of home education. As a professional educator, I see the value and need for a structured curriculum, but I have also seen the damage that too much structuring can do to children in their younger years when creativity is manifesting for the first time and in its strongest phase.

Compulsory Education, Not Compulsory Schooling

¶**A7c.** Finally, I wish it to be known that I, as an educator, am 100% in favour of compulsory **education**. I am absolutely *not*, however, in favour of compulsory **schooling**. I am also 100% in favour of compulsory **structured** education from 14 years old (or perhaps a little earlier) and above, and I shall be presenting the reasons for this later.

A Lack of Parenting and an Increase in Psychological Ill-Health

¶**A7d.** I share similar concerns to Jonas Himmelstrand who presented a paper in a seminar in the Swedish Parliament on 10 December 2008, entitled: *Secure Children - Secure Parents - The Rôle of Family in the 21st Century* (www.stratletter.com/dec10speech.html) who is rightly worried about the increase in psychological ill health among Swedish youth, the increase of stress-related ill-health among adults, the increase of behavioural problems among youth, the plummeting educational results in schools, high levels of divorce and lower quality parenting. He concludes - rightly, in my opinion - that one of the factors contributing to these problems is the decline in the opportunity

for parents to properly parent caused by a uniform system that insists that that the state assume more and more of the parenting rôle. He advocates more management of education by parents of which homeschooling is one method to reverse this negative trend. Accordingly homeschooling needs to play a *greater* rôle in Swedish society, not a reduced or zero one as the government now proposes.

B. Summary of 30 Key Points of This Report

1. Education can take place anywhere and everywhere, in a school building or outside it.
2. Education is compulsory, schooling is not.
3. State schooling, Independent schooling and Home schooling are the three main and international examples of education.
4. The European Convention and UN Charter on Universal Human Rights state that education is a human right.
5. The European Convention and UN Charter on Universal Human Rights protect the right of parents to choose the type of education their children will have, which includes home schooling.
6. The Swedish Government's plan to effectively ban home schooling on religious and philosophical grounds is illegal and a violation of these fundamental human rights.
7. Most homeschoolers choose home education not on religious or philosophical grounds but because of the appalling social conditions - and in some cases, poor academic performance - of Swedish schools whose negative psychological influence they wish to protect their children from.
8. Some home school because they wish to instruct in the language of the parents which may not be Swedish so as to prepare their children for higher education abroad in that language.

9. Some home school because they believe in unschooling, at least during the Primary School years.
10. Home schoolers are a cross-section of Swedish society from every political, religious, secular and philosophical background.
11. Home schoolers come from all professions and include professional educators.
12. Home schoolers come from all income groups.
13. Home schoolers believe in integrating with society, not in forming parallel societies.
14. Home schoolers believe that parents and guardians have the primary rôle in educating and raising their children, not the state.
15. Home schoolers are not "fundamentalists", in the negative and politically loaded sense of the term applied to religious terrorists but believe in fundamental individual human rights.
16. Home schoolers believe in pluralism in democracy, not in totalitarian uniformitarianism.
17. There is considerable ignorance of, and prejudice against, home schooling generally in Sweden because of a lack of accurate government and media information about it.
18. The current Swedish government seems to want to emulate Germany which has banned homeschooling on the grounds of an old 1938 Nazi law which has never been reformed in that country.
19. Home schooling is a growing international trend: where it is unfettered, it is growing at the rate of about 8% per year.
20. Home schooling rights should mirror those enjoyed by home schoolers in the USA and UK where there is currently the most freedom.
21. More would home school in Sweden were it not for the

impossible restrictions under the current law - about 45,000 instead of the current 100 (extrapolating from the US model).

22. Sweden is in danger of sliding into totalitarianism if home schooling is banned.

23. If home schooling is banned, Sweden will have political refugees *leaving* it, as in Germany, and become a political pariah.

24. Sweden will become a Class B Democracy if it bans home schooling (a democracy with totalitarian elements), and cease being a liberal democracy.

25. Home schooling should be made an easy option by law with minimum state interference and quality contact.

26. The Ministry of Education, and Education Minister Jan Björklund has turned down offers to consult with professional home schooling representatives because he "doesn't have time".

27. Jan Björklund has admitted that Swedish schools have the highest levels of truancy, destruction and most bad language in all the 30 OECD (organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries.

28. The current government policy towards homeschoolers is reminiscent of colonialism and imperialism.

29. The home schooling issue is more than about just home schooling but about the way the government treats individuals and abuses individual rights.

30. Home schoolers will not lie down and surrender their rights but mean to fight this battle vigorously both at home and in the international media.

C. Detailed Analysis of the Proposed New Law

C1. The Law and Human Rights Conventions

The Government's Implied Perfectionist Claim

¶C1a. The Swedish government is arguing for the virtual banning of homeschooling because:

"...education in school should be comprehensive and objective and thereby designed so that all pupils can participate, regardless of what religious or philosophical reasons the pupil or his or her care-takers may have."

The Government's Reason for Banning Homeschooling

¶C1b. Thus, the suggested law argues:

"...there is no need for the law to offer the possibility of homeschooling because of religious or philosophical reasons in the family. All together this means that this proposed change cannot be said to contradict Swedens international obligations [i.e. Human Rights Conventions]."

What the European Convention Says

¶C1c. These conventions state:

1. **"Everyone has the right to education.**
2. **"Education shall be directed towards the full development of the human personality.**
3. **"No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any function which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the state shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."** (*Article §2 of Protocol No. 1 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Incorporated into Swedish law on 1 January 1995*).

What the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights Says

¶C1d. And

"Parents have a priority right to choose the kind of education their children shall receive." (*Article §26(3) of the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights, 1948. Not a part of Swedish law but carries great moral and ethical weight*).

C2. Education and Schooling

The Right to an Education

¶C2a. The European Convention states that everyone has the right to **EDUCATION**. It does not say that everyone has the obligation to attend a **SCHOOL**.

Defining Education

¶C2b. Education is:

1. The act or process of acquiring knowledge;
2. The knowledge or training acquired by this process;
3. The act or process of imparting knowledge;
4. A particular kind of instruction of learning.

Defining Schooling

¶C2c. Schooling, on the other hand, is:

1. Education received at a school;
2. The process or teaching being taught in a school.

Schooling and the "Fourth Purpose"

¶C2d. Schooling is not, therefore, education, but a type of education based on *location* and an *educational philosophy* which has its roots in the Industrial Revolution of the 19th (in Prussia) and 20th (Britain, France and the USA) centuries. Designated by

some scholars as "Fourth Purpose Education", it was originally designed to churn out workers for the factories. Initially installed alongside the other three main purposes of education - (1) to find a path of transcendence, (2) to make good citizens, and (3) to develop personal genius - the "Fourth Purpose" has now come to almost totally dominate the philosophy of all modern school systems in the West. Adapted in the 20th century to accomodate socialist ideals, it has been transformed further in the Swedish experiment into a new philosophical model called the "*Lagom Principle*" that seeks to combine the best of capitalism with the best of communism. (See, for example, *Lagom är bäst - På spaning efter en hållbar livsstil*, Naturskydds föreningen, Värnamo: 1998)

Defining Homeschooling

¶C2e. Homeschooling is:

1. Education received at home;
2. The process or teaching being taught at home.

Homeschooling does not necesasarily reflect any particular philosophical, political or religious view - those who practice it mostly have the same views as a typical cross-section of parents whose children are educated in the state sector. Many, if not, most homeschoolers in Sweden adhere to the *Lagom Principle*. As we shall see, though, they have very special reasons for believing in, and practicing, home education.

Where Education May Be Received

¶C2f. Education may therefore be received:

1. At a school;
2. At a college or university;
3. At home;
4. Anywhere in principle, including a ship, plane or even a space satellite.

The Universal Location of Education

¶C2g. In short, education may in principle be acquired in any

physical and social setting. Really this is just plain common sense which everyone knows. It is not limited to government 'temples' (schools) or a 'priesthood' (state institution) to manage it. Education is something that 'happens' as a matter of course, whether it is directed or not. Experiments done in India, where Internet connections were provided free to street children, demonstrated that unsupervised and unregulated children were able to attain to high levels of knowledge and obtain skills by simply exploring for themselves. And whilst educators like myself do not subscribe to this as a sole means of education, we recognise it as having an important component in the education process. It is certainly more efficient and is an important element in home education, as we shall see.

C3. Rights and Obligations

Defining a Human Right

¶C3a. A **right** is an option to receive something if you want it, obliging the state to give it to you or to allow you to have it if you want it. These rights exist to protect individual citizens.

Defining an Obligation

¶C3b. An **obligation** is not an option but an act of compulsion whether we want it or not.

Schooling is a Right, Not an Obligation

¶C3c. Thus **schooling** is a **right** (if we want it but equally we don't have to have it) whereas **education** is an **obligation** (whether we want it or not).

Confusing Rights and Obligations

¶C3d. The formulators of the proposed new education law (a workgroup from the Department of Education, *Skollagsberedningen* (U 2006:E)) apparently desire to change the **right** to school into an **obligation** and to deny parents the **right** to educate their children in the way they choose. It signals the weakening of individual rights, not their strengthening, taking

these rights away from individuals (the parents) and transferring them to the State.

Totalitarian Word-Bending

¶C3e. It is therefore *essential* that we are careful to ensure that these two concepts are *not* confused. In totalitarian systems no distinction is made between them as they are used interchangeably. The bottom line is absolute state control.

C4. Subsets of Education

Education and Schooling are Not Synonymous

¶C4a. **Education and schooling are not synonymous** any more than a European and a Swede are not necessarily synonymous. All Swedes are Europeans but not all Europeans are Swedes.

Avoiding Orwellian Double-Speak

¶C4b. Schooling and homeschooling are therefore different subsets of education. All schooling is education but not all education is schooling. To claim that education and schooling are synonymous is to indulge in Orwellian double-speak.

EU Citizens' Obligations

¶C4c. As a member of the European Union I am required, by law, to give my children an education, to ensure that that education shall be directed towards the full development of their personality (see the *Sixty Character Traits* in [#D7](#) below, for example), and finally I have the right to educate my children according to my religious or philosophical convictions. **The European Convention does NOT state that I must send my children to a school, whether state-run or independent.** It simply says that I must give my children an education. This, as a homeschooling parent (and professional educator), I already do and mean to continue doing. I will seriously fulfil my obligations to educate.

The Proposed New Education Law is Illegal

¶C4d. Any EU state or government that says otherwise is in flagrant violation of the plain sense of the intent and plain wording European Convention. Therefore the proposed new education law banning homeschooling is in violation of the European Convention, is therefore *illegal* and must be rewritten to harmonise with the Convention..

C5. The German Non-Example

A Nazi Law Defying the United Nations

¶C5a. In recent times proponents of homeschooling in Germany, which was made illegal there in 1938 by Adolf Hitler after he seized power, have been challenging the unreformed nazi education laws in that country. To date Germany, as one of the three major EU powers (with France and Great Britain) has not only exercised its political and economic muscle to maintain its own system but has flagrantly disregarded a United Nations resolution to grant proper education rights to its citizens and residents. The UN has requested that Germany make educational reforms to guarantee those rights (see IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 60/251 OF 15 MARCH 2006 ENTITLED " RIGHTS COUNCIL" - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Vernor Muñoz, Addendum: MISSION TO GERMANY - 13-21 February 2006, A/HRC/4/29/Add.3).

A Dangerous Road for Swedes

¶C5b. If the writers of the proposed new education law are trying to emulate the behaviour of Sweden's German neighbour, it is going down a very dangerous road indeed. Strenuous (and, many would argue, dishonest and coercive) efforts have been made by the German Government to "reinterpret" the European Convention so that it is not forced to grant homeschooling rights to parents who desire it and have a natural right to it.

Dismantling Sweden's Social Utopia

¶C5c. With strenuous efforts currently being made by defenders of freedom and pluralism in Germany to get the Federal

government there to comply with the European Convention to which it is a signatory, it would be unwise of Sweden to emulate an old, unreformed nazi law which could be overturned in the future, blotting Sweden's reputation as a Social Utopia and giving Sweden a bad name abroad, especially as Sweden would subsequently be obliged to follow suit and undo what it now proposes to create, if it adopts the proposed new education law. Sweden would cease to be seen as a champion of liberty and of human rights but have its reputation tarnished by what really amounts to an ill-conceived and ill-considered rule on homeschooling.

The Homeschooling of Konrad Adenauer

¶C5d. Germany and Sweden should especially note that West Germany's first post-war democratically elected Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, who served also in the Weimar Republic, was elected Mayor of Cologne (Köln) was imprisoned by the nazis, and was named as *Time's* Man of the Year in 1953, was home educated. Along with Robert Schuman (France) and Paul-Henri Spaak (Belgium), he is regarded as one of the founders of the European Union and is commemorated with the other two politicians on a famous Belgian gold commemorative coin.

C6. Rewriting Human Rights Conventions

The New Law Would Rewrite the EU Convention

¶C6a. If the state decides what kind of education a child shall receive, irrespective of what *it* may believe will satisfy individual parents' religious or philosophical convictions in its school program, then plain common sense tells us that the *European Convention* would have to be worded:

"...the state shall not respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions because the state is able to do that all on its own." (*underlined text added*)

which it obviously cannot not.

The New Law Would Rewrite the UN Declaration of Universal

Human Rights

¶**C6b.** Similarly the *United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights* would have to read:

"Parents do *not* have a priority right to choose the kind of education their children shall receive because the state has invented a system of education which incorporates all other systems of education." (*underlined text added*)

An Insult to the Intelligence of Swedes

¶**C6c.** No intelligent, human rights-orientated person would of course take such statements seriously and the Swedish parliament would become a laughing stock were it to vote in the proposed new law on education because of its obvious implications.

C7. Religion and Comprehensive Education

An Excellent State Textbook on Religion

¶**C7a.** In reading through Börge Ring's state-approved textbook, *Religion och sammanhang - Religionskunskap kurs A B* (Liber, 2001), a text book used successfully by my eldest daughter at Swedish state school, there is no doubt that a careful attempt has been made to present religion in all its diverse worldwide forms, in spite of a very obvious underlying philosophical thread running throughout that is heavily slanted in favour of humanism.

Comprehensive and Objective

¶**C7b.** There is no doubt that such books as this at the various school grades come close to measuring up to the objective of the proposed new education law, which is that "...education in school should be comprehensive and objective and thereby designed so that all pupils can participate, regardless of what religious or philosophical reasons the pupil or his or her caretakers may have" (see [¶C1a](#)).

Used By My Own Children

¶C7c. Because such books are comprehensive, I gladly use them in homeschooling to teach the diversity of forms of religion and their beliefs even if I do not necessarily agree with all of their conclusions about religion in general.

C8. Philosophy, Science and Comprehensive Education

Jan Björklund's Remarks on Teaching

¶C8a. What concerns me more is the present state system's approach to philosophy and science which blurs important distinctives in different fields of knowledge. A clue as to the current government's present philosophy may be quickly discerned not so much from the current or proposed new education law but from remarks made by Education Minister Jan Björklund at a recent press conference (Stockholm, 23 October, 2007, LifeSiteNews.com), and reported in the international media, in which he said: "Teaching in school must have a scientific basis".

Of Science and Humanism

¶C8b. And whilst this is certainly true for the sciences, geography and history (for example), is this true of religion and philosophy, neither of which are empirical bodies of knowledge? For the implication here is that science 'arches over' and in some way defines both philosophy and religion. If this is so, then the philosophy of the state schooling system is humanism, which is fine if you want your children to be educated from that primary world view.

Defining Humanism

¶C8c. Humanism is defined as a school of philosophy that believes in human effort and ingenuity rather than religion. How do we know that Education Minister Jan Björklund's views are essentially humanistic? Because in the same press conference he said: "Prayer, including religious services or assemblies [in private faith schools, for example], will remain legal, as long as no teacher in a classroom **teaches** that there is any **reality**

behind it". Or in other words, provided it is understood that the overriding philosophy of atheistic humanism is clearly **taught** as *fact*, and that religion is irrational, though acceptable in the 'cultural' sense. In other words, religion must be viewed through the lens of atheistic humanism (itself a belief system) and taught as such.

In Search of Religious and Philosophical Neutrality

¶C8d. If this is true, then the state school system is neither religiously nor philosophically neutral. Again, I have no problem with that, provided this bias is clearly stated so that:

1. The public knows that the state school curriculum is based on atheistic humanism; and
2. The public is given a choice of an education for its children which does not have as its underpinning a forced religious philosophy (like Lutheranism or humanism).

However, it is not for the Minister to define 'reality', which is a highly subjective concept. He was not elected to tell us what is real and what is not, but to supervise general education.

Defining Reality

¶C8e. What is reality? **Reality is the state of things as they are or appear to be, rather than as one might wish them to be.** It is also defined as **that which exists, independent of human awareness, that is, the totality of facts.** Does the education minister and his teaching staff have before them the sum total of facts? Do they have a full knowledge of all that exists? Obviously not. Nobody does.

Intellectual Presumption

¶C8f. Therefore it is highly presumptive of the minister to artificially draw lines between current scientific knowledge and claim to know what reality is so absolutely as to preclude other world views of reality that do not concur with his own and, by implication, in state education. Rather what is known should be taught and different theories as to what is not yet absolutely

known be presented and discussed in the classroom leaving students to make up their own minds based on the available evidence. Anything else is indoctrination.

Separation of Church and State

¶**C8g.** I personally support the move in 2000 by the Swedish Government to separate Church and State. However, for education to be fair and equally weighted, then the state school system needs to be philosophically neutral and scientifically unbiased as well. If humanism is the underlying philosophy of the state school system (as is the privilege of the state if it can be clearly determined by a nationwide poll that the majority holds to a humanistic world view - and not just the ruling élites, for if you just consider the latter then you have an oligarchy or a plutocracy, and not a democracy), then the state must also permit faith-based schools with underlying faith-based philosophies without demeaning them as not being based in any kind of 'objective' or 'scientific' reality. It should remember, in the words of Blaise Pascal, that "the heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing whatever". In other words, the boundary between objectivity and subjectivity may not always be clearly defined in all fields of knowledge. Science, however important, is but one field of knowledge and has its limitations.

C9. Reasons for the European Convention and U.N. Declaration

Pluralism Guarantees Neutrality

¶**C9a.** Education Minister Björklund is rightly concerned about the state school being used to proselytise, for the state must absolutely be religiously neutral. But by the same token it should be philosophically and politically neutral too if it is to be consistent with its mandate to uphold a pluralist democracy (see [#D](#)). Might this be a reason why the European Convention guarantees "the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions" because the framers of that Convention knew that it was impossible for a government to be totally religiously and philosophically neutral? And might the new proposed education law in Sweden in fact have been framed with a view, not to

guaranteeing plurality and freedom of philosophical and religious views but to impose, in an authoritarian and totalitarian manner, a uniform system based on only one philosophy? The evidence suggests that this is the underlying motive which cannot be allowed in a pluralistic democracy.

Working Within the Framework of the Convention

¶C9b. It therefore devolves upon the Swedish government to *carefully* work within the framework of the European Convention and UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights which were designed to guarantee liberty from totalitarianism by allowing for multiple forms of education, and not attempt to twist its true meaning.

Total Transparency

¶C9c. What the government should ensure is that in their education children should be made aware of not only all the different world religions and their alternative interpretations but also all the different world philosophies and scientific models. It should not be dictating a single philosophical or religious (or anti-religious) line. That is for the people individually to choose. It is not for the state to parent us and it is not the reason we give it the mandate to manage national affairs on our behalf.

Three Homeschooling Goals

¶C9d. As a homeschooler I am comitted to educating my children so that they:

1. Will be able to secure jobs in the work market;
2. Can think for themselves, learning the rules of logic and critical thinking; and
3. Can be properly informed of history, religion, politics, philosophy and lifestyles in their many views and presentations.

In this way they will experience and enjoy the full development of their personality and can make intelligent, informed choices as they grow up.

C10. The Social Environment

The Two Government Statements Examined

¶C10a. We must now ask whether the second statement in the banning of home schooling logically follows from the first:

Statement #1. "...education in school should be comprehensive and objective and thereby designed so that all pupils can participate, regardless of what religious or philosophical reasons the pupil or his or her care-takers may have."

Therefore:

Statement #2. "...there is no need for the law to offer the possibility of homeschooling because of religious or philosophical reasons in the family. All together this means that this proposed change cannot be said to contradict Sweden's international obligations [i.e. Human Rights Conventions]."

Why We Want Our Children Out of the School System

¶C10b. For one thing, this is not just about the issue of religious and philosophical neutrality, even if that is what the framers of the proposed new education law want us to focus on and to accept their uniform secular religion. Many parents are entirely or reasonably happy with the current school curriculum and many will probably be even happier with the new one. There are undoubted improvements. Many homeschoolers are atheists who even like the state's clear humanistic bias. They, like most other homeschoolers, have different reasons for not wanting their children to attend state schools, and this relates primarily to the negative aspect of the school **social environment** and not the curriculum content *per se*. Many want their children out of the school system because of:

1. Bullying and violence;
2. A lack of Discipline;
3. The Drug milieu;
4. The Alcohol milieu;

5. The Tobacco milieu;
6. The Bad Language milieu;
7. The liberal Sex milieu
8. The Gang milieu;
9. The Crime milieu;
10. The Conformist milieu

The Safety of the Home Environment

¶**C10c.** Whilst alternative independent schools *may* address one or more of these problems, in the experience of homeschoolers who have used them, they usually do not. They quite simply prefer the safer home environment for learning. And why not? Millions of pupils have been homeschooled worldwide and have been none the worse for it. Indeed, all scientific studies on homeschooling report on improved results.

Statistics on British Schools

¶**C10d.** Why are homeschoolers concerned about the social environment at schools? In my home country, the United Kingdom, which was once a leader in education as Sweden was, the state school environment reveals that:

1. Each week: 450,000 children are bullied in school;
2. Each year: more than 360,000 children are injured in schools;
3. Each year: at least 16 children commit suicide as a result of school bullying;
4. Each year: an estimated 1 million children play truant;
5. Each year: more than 1 in 6 children leave school unable to read, write or add up.

The statistics vary a little in Sweden but the trends are similar. And frankly I do not want my children in such a risk zone. It would be irresponsible of me not to be alarmed.

Bullying in Swedish Schools

¶**C10e.** Bullying is a widespread problem in Sweden, where many students complain about being ostracised or picked on by groups of classmates. More often verbal than physical, bullying is a high-

profile issue with politicians and authorities often speaking out about the need to find ways to combat the problem. Intervention programs are only having limited success and are not eradicating the problem, as they cannot with such low teacher-to-pupil ratios - 1:30 in the classroom, and considerably higher in the playground where most bullying takes place. I have been present in state school playgrounds where there have been *no* teachers present to monitor and supervise and I have seen bullying take place. My children have spoken with state-schooled children and have heard their experiences. In our home we have a teacher-to-pupil ratio of between 1:3 and 1:1 showing the clear advantage of homeschooling in terms of physical security and psychological well-being.

Tom Daley, Olympic Gold Medallist

¶C10f. As recently as March of this year UK gold medal swimmer Tom Daley, the youngest ever Olympic performer in the Beijing Olympics, was removed from school by his parents and put into homeschooling because of threats by bullies in his state school to break his legs. They could not afford to send him to a fee-paying school. (*Daily Mirror*, 23 April 2009)

The Testimony of a Community Medicine Report

¶C10g. In [Samhällsmedisin: Barn och ungdomars hälsa](#) (Community Medicine: Child and Youth Health) we read:

"School should be a safe environment for all children. But unfortunately it is there that most bullying occurs"

The Testimony of Swedish Education Minister, Jan Björklund

¶C10h. Jan Björklund, Swedish Education Minister, has admitted in public that:

"Swedish schools have the highest level truancy, destruction and most bad language in **all** the OECD* countries".

This statement is quickly confirmed by visiting state schools and

following what is being reported in the media where there is classroom disruption, foul language, conformism, gang activity, bullying, violence and criminality, especially amongst boys. I have witnessed some of these things first hand whilst waiting for my children to do their state school testing.

[* *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* - the 30 member states are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea (South), Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States]

The Socialisation Myth

¶**C10i**. It is therefore outrageous and an insult to public intelligence when local Swedish *kommuns* and state schools, who are either ignorant of reality or in major denial about it, have denied homeschooling rights on the grounds that homeschooled children will be inadequately socialised! (See [#G](#), Appendix I, *Creating Policy from Discursive Exchanges on Compulsory Education and Schooling in Sweden*). If this is also a ground for making homeschooling illegal in the proposed new education law, then this would, in my opinion, constitute criminal negligence of the public interest.

The Testimony of Winston Churchill

¶**C10j**. Internationally renowned statesman Winston Churchill (who was homeschooled) was even harsher in his evaluation of the purpose of institutionalised schooling when he said:

"Schools have not necessarily much to do with education.... they are mainly institutions of control, where basic habits must be inculcated in the young. Education is quite different and has little place in school."

Whether or not we agree with that assessment is not as important as the fact that it is a warning that 'schooling' (as opposed to education), which originated in militaristic Prussia, was invented by that state to program and control the masses

into accepting and being subservient to the interests of the ruling class. The same education system, which basically still exists today, is therefore potentially as open to abuse as it was before, as the examples of 20th and 21st century totalitarian fascist and communist states have shown us. Given, for example, that Independent Schools in Sweden are heavily funded by big business, there is a danger of such schools being "shaped" in the interests of the desires of plutocrats both now and in the future. Education should be shaped by learning principles, not by big money or political doctrine.

Miniature Environmental Replicas & State Surrogate Parenthood

¶C10k. Schools are, for the most part, miniature environmental replicas of the current social system with all of its social ills. For parents willing to risk putting their children into that system, this may be acceptable to them but for those parents who, like myself, are not, homeschooling is really the only option left to them. That is why the European Convention and the UN Charter on Human Rights give parents the option *not* to take that risk if they so choose and *not* give their children over to what are effectively surrogate parents who do not have the same commitments to their children, nor the time, as their parents do. The proposed new law on education wishes to remove that right from us and force us to 'accept' what amounts to anarchism. We will absolutely *not* do this because of the responsibility we feel towards our children.

The Lindström Report on Bullying in Schools

¶C10l. According to statistical research on bullying done by Lindström on Grade 7-9 pupils in a typical Swedish state school in a particular academic year, an average of 84 pupils had been hit by other pupils causing injury, 25 pupils had been hit and required medical attention, and 81 had been hit but required no medical attention. An average of 4% of both boys and girls fall victim to serious violence. 3% of pupils had witnessed violence against an adult and 36% had witnessed violence against a fellow pupil, with as many as 4% of pupils reporting having been bullied by their *teachers*. Teachers themselves have fallen victim to harrassment. Such an environment is totally unacceptable to homeschooling parents and is commonly why we refuse to send

our children to state schools. Given that bullying can often have racist connotations and be higher against foreign students, I, as a foreigner have added reason not to want to send my children to the school system. As a one-time victim of bullying at school I know the devastating psychological affects it can have on a child.

C11. Academic Performance of Homeschoolers

The Meighan Study: Why Homeschooling Works So Well

¶**C11a.** There is an ever-increasing amount of research evidence to indicate that home educated children are advantaged academically. Dr. Meighan of the University of Nottingham School of Education, United Kingdom, published a paper entitled, *Home-based Education: Not Does It Work but Why Does It Work So Well* (1996) which listed some home educated individuals acknowledged to be well educated, including Thomas Edison (American scientist and inventor), John Stuart Mill (British philosopher, political theorist, political economist and MP), George Bernard Shaw (Irish playwright, socialist and atheist), C.S. Lewis (British novelist, academic and Christian) and Bertrand Russel (British philosopher, logician, mathematician and social critic).

The Tizard & Ray Studies

¶**C11b.** Others (Tizard *et al* 1982) observed that home-educating mothers used more sophisticated language and made more intellectual demands upon their children than do teachers at schools. They concluded that "this study suggests that a child's intellectual and language needs are much more likely to be satisfied at home than at school". Amongst many others, Dr. Ray (1992) found, in a nation-wide study of home educated children in the USA, that those children averaged at or above the 80th percentile on standardised achievement tests in all subjects. (It is important to note that the *national* average for children in these subjects is the 50th percentile). This would suggest that academic achievement is not a problem for home educated children. It is also important to note that this information is given here to answer criticism - it is not suggesting that academic achievement should necessarily be the reason for homeschooling, though some homeschooling parents may feel this because of

state schools with a bad performance record.

Famous Homeschoolers

¶C11c. Famous people who were home educated include:

- 1. Inventors:** Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Cyrus McCormick, Orville Wright and Wilbur Wright
- 2. Artists:** Claude Monet, Leonardo da Vinci, Jamie Wyeth, Andrew Wyeth, John Singleton Copley, Rembrandt Peale, Ansel Adams
- 3. Composers:** Irving Berlin, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Anton Bruckner, Felix Mendelssohn, Francis Poulenc
- 4. Writers:** Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Dickens, Brett Harte, Mark Twain, Sean O'Casey, Phillis Wheatley, Mercy Warren, Pearl S. Buck, Agatha Christie, C.S. Lewis, George Bernard Shaw, Beatrix Potter, Irving Berlin, Leo Tolstoy, Daniel Webster, Robert Frost, Phyllis Wheatley, Will Rogers, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Louisa May Alcott, Christopher Paolini
- 5. Religious leaders:** Joan of Arc, Brigham Young, John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, William Cary, Dwight L. Moody, John Newton, Hudson Taylor
- 6. U.S. Presidents:** George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, James Madison, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt
- 7. Scientists/Business men:** George Washington Carver, Pierre Curie, Albert Einstein, Booker T. Washington, Blaise Pascal, Thomas Edison, Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, John Stuart Mill
- 8. Statesmen:** Konrad Adenauer (Germany), Winston Churchill (UK), Benjamin Franklin (USA), William Penn (USA), Henry Clay (USA), George Mason (USA)
- 9. U.S. Governors:** Patrick Henry [VA], Charles Pickney III [SC], Richard D. Spaight [NC], William Livingston [NJ], Richard Bassett [DE],
- 10. U.S. Senators and Congressmen:** William S. Johnson [CT], George Clymer [PA], John Francis Mercer [MD], William Blount [TN], William Few [GA],
- 11. U.S. Supreme Court Judges:** John Jay, John Marshall, John Rutledge, George Wythe - Justice of Virginia High Court

12. Educators: Frank Vandiver (Texas A&M), Fred Terman (Stanford), William Samuel Johnson (Columbia), John Witherspoon (Princeton), Timothy Dwight (Yale)

13. Generals: Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Douglas MacArthur, George Patton

14. Famous Women: Abigail Adams, Mercy Warren, Martha Washington, Florence Nightingale, Phyllis Wheatley, Agatha Christie, Pearl S. Buck, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Louisa May Alcott, Clara Barton - started the Red Cross, Elizabeth Blackwell - First Woman Doctor, Sally Ride - Astronaut

15. Philosopher: Charles Montesquieu

16. Naturalists: John Burroughs, John J. Audubon

17. Physicians: Albert Schweitzer - Physician, Elizabeth Blackwell - First Woman Doctor

18. Others: Charles Chaplin - Actor, George Rogers Clark - Explorer, Andrew Carnegie - Industrialist, Noel Coward - Playwright, Bill Ridell - Newspaperman, Will Rogers - Humorist, Louis Armstrong - Musician, Ansel Adams - Photographer, John Paul Jones - father of the American Navy, William Houston - Lawyer, Frank Lloyd Wright - Architect

19. Athletes: Venus and Serena Williams, Tamara McKinney - World Cup Skier, Jim Ryun - World Runner, Jason Taylor

20. Celebrities: Dakota Fanning, Whoopi Goldberg, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Miley Cyrus, Hanson, Jayden Smith, Elijah Wood, Leann Rimes, Raven Simone, Jonas Brothers, Bindi Irwin, Hillary Duff

C12. International Home Educating Trends

The Success of Government Independent/Free Schools

¶**C12a.** The introduction of Independent or Free Schools by the government in Sweden has been a great success and very popular, meeting a very real need and illustrating the importance of choice in a plural democracy. I applaud this move even though it was initially met with scepticism in government circles in the early days. The government took a risk, paid no attention to its 'gut feelings', and, to its credit, was willing to experiment. Such an attitude is needed in the homeschooling question too.

Homeschooling Expanding Internationally

¶**C12b.** Though home education may be said to have got off to a late start in Sweden, this is not because people don't want to homeschool but because there have been so many restrictions and obstacles imposed by the government on home educators (see [#G](#), Appendix I). There is just too much prejudice against it based for the most part on misinformation and political propaganda. There is no doubt that home education is gaining in popularity and that once just and fair laws have been put in place in Sweden, more will want to homeschool, reap the benefits and enrich society. This follows an undeniable international trend. In the United States, where it is the most popular, home education is now expanding at an annual rate of 8% even during the current financial crisis because parents are willing to make the sacrifices to ensure the well-being of their children.

C13. The Call for Emancipation

Stop Discriminating Against Homeschoolers

¶**C13a.** Home educators in Sweden, Germany and in other countries, where home education is highly restricted or illegal (and in Britain where they are about to make the same mistake of regulating as they have done in Sweden), are crying out for emancipation and to be given a legal mandate to exercise their rights of choice. They object to being discriminated against in an age where emancipation in the spheres of gender, sexuality and politics is being otherwise granted everywhere in Western democracies.

The Testimony of Deborah Markus, Secular Homeschooler

¶**C13b.** Deborah Markus, the editor of [Secular Homeschooling \(Issue #1, Fall 2007\)](#) in the United States where home education is fully legal, makes the following blunt and pithy plea to those who do not homeschool, to make an effort to understand, accept and dialogue with homeschoolers:

1. Please stop asking us if it's legal. If it is and it is it's insulting to imply that we're criminals. And if we were

criminals, would we admit it?

2. Learn what the words "socialize" and "socialization" mean, and use the one you really mean instead of mixing them up the way you do now. Socializing means hanging out with other people for fun. Socialization means having acquired the skills necessary to do so successfully and pleasantly. If you're talking to me and my kids, that means that we do in fact go outside now and then to visit the other human beings on the planet, and you can safely assume that we've got a decent grasp of both concepts.

3. Quit interrupting my kid at her dance lesson, scout meeting, choir practice, baseball game, art class, field trip, park day, music class, 4H club, or soccer lesson to ask her if as a homeschooler she ever gets to socialize.

4. Don't assume that every homeschooler you meet is homeschooling for the same reasons and in the same way as that one homeschooler you know.

5. If that homeschooler you know is actually someone you saw on TV, either on the news or on a "reality" show, the above goes double.

6. Please stop telling us horror stories about the homeschoolers you know, know of, or think you might know who ruined their lives by homeschooling. You're probably the same little bluebird of happiness whose hobby is running up to pregnant women and inducing premature labor by telling them every ghastly birth story you've ever heard. We all hate you, so please go away.

7. We don't look horrified and start quizzing your kids when we hear they're in public school. Please stop drilling our children like potential oil fields to see if we're doing what you consider an adequate job of homeschooling.

8. Stop assuming all homeschoolers are religious.

9. Stop assuming that if we're religious, we must be homeschooling for religious reasons.

10. We didn't go through all the reading, learning, thinking, weighing of options, experimenting, and worrying that goes into homeschooling just to annoy you. Really. This was a deeply personal decision, tailored to the specifics of our family. Stop taking the bare fact of our being homeschoolers as either an affront or a judgment about your own educational decisions.

11. Please stop questioning my competency and demanding to see my credentials. I didn't have to complete a course in catering to successfully cook dinner for my family; I don't need a degree in teaching to educate my children. If spending at least twelve years in the kind of chew-it-up-and-spit-it-out educational facility we call public school left me with so little information in my memory banks that I can't teach the basics of an elementary education to my nearest and dearest, maybe there's a reason I'm so reluctant to send my child to school.

12. If my kid's only six and you ask me with a straight face how I can possibly teach him what he'd learn in school, please understand that you're calling me an idiot. Don't act shocked if I decide to respond in kind.

13. Stop assuming that because the word "home" is right there in "homeschool" we never leave the house. We're the ones who go to the amusement parks, museums, and zoos in the middle of the week and in the off-season and laugh at you because you have to go on weekends and holidays when it's crowded and icky.

14. Stop assuming that because the word "school" is right there in homeschool, we must sit around at a desk for six or eight hours every day, just like your kid does. Even if we're into the "school" side of education and many of us prefer a more organic approach we can burn through a lot of material a lot more efficiently, because we don't have to gear our lessons to the lowest common denominator.

15. Stop asking, "But what about the Prom?" Even if the idea that my kid might not be able to indulge in a night of over-hyped, over-priced revelry was enough to break my

heart, plenty of kids who do go to school don't get to go to the Prom. For all you know, I'm one of them. I might still be bitter about it. So go be shallow somewhere else.

16. Don't ask my kid if she wouldn't rather go to school unless you don't mind if I ask your kid if he wouldn't rather stay home and get some sleep now and then.

17. Stop saying, "Oh, I could never homeschool!" Even if you think it's some kind of compliment, it sounds more like you're horrified. One of these days, I won't bother disagreeing with you any more.

18. If you can remember anything from chemistry or calculus class, you're allowed to ask how we'll teach these subjects to our kids. If you can't, thank you for the reassurance that we couldn't possibly do a worse job than your teachers did, and might even do a better one.

19. Stop asking about how hard it must be to be my child's teacher as well as her parent. I don't see much difference between bossing my kid around academically and bossing him around the way I do about everything else.

20. Stop saying that my kid is shy, outgoing, aggressive, anxious, quiet, boisterous, argumentative, pouty, fidgety, chatty, whiny, or loud because he's homeschooled. It's not fair that all the kids who go to school can be as annoying as they want to without being branded as representative of anything but childhood.

21. Quit assuming that my kid must be some kind of prodigy because she's homeschooled.

22. Quit assuming that I must be some kind of prodigy because I homeschool my kids.

23. Quit assuming that I must be some kind of saint because I homeschool my kids.

24. Stop talking about all the great childhood memories my kids won't get because they don't go to school, unless you

want me to start asking about all the not-so-great childhood memories you have because you went to school.

25. Here's a thought: If you can't say something nice about homeschooling, shut up!

An Absence of Consultation and Dialogue

¶**C13c.** Sweden is famous for dialoging and entering into discussions to reach amicable agreements. Why were we, as home educators, treated as non-people and never consulted by the Working Committee (*Skollagsberedningen*) who drew up the proposed new education law on homeschooling? The formulation of the law and its motives show a complete lack of knowledge or awareness of homeschooling - it's as though it never existed. The *Rohus* organisation has pointed this out to the Ministry of Education on several occasions during this Consultation Period and offered to meet and discuss their misgivings. Why has this not been taken seriously? Why has the Education Minister, Jan Björklund, refused to meet with *Rohus* representatives to discuss the proposed new education law in homeschooling? Why was this proposal made without any sort of consultation with us homeschoolers, contrary to the best traditions of the Swedish consultative process? Why has the existing government left completely unaltered the new education proposals made by the previous one? Should not a new government carefully review the work done by a previous one that has been elected out of office? Why are we suddenly to be made criminals if we continue to homeschool, as is done in fascist and communist societies, if this highly biased and misinformed law is passed? It is because we are treated as either second-class citizens or virtual criminals (see [#G](#), Appendix I).

Professional Homeschoolers

¶**C13d.** The powers-that-be need to search their hearts and do some *serious* research as well as show home educating parents some respect. Some of us are every bit as professional as they are, and some maybe even more so with considerable experience in state, private and homeschooling sectors. I myself have worked in all three.

Jonas Himmelstrand on Parenthood in Sweden

¶C13e. Finally, it is time to stop demonising parenthood as something outmoded which rôle only the state institutions (like school) can supposedly adequately fulfil in our children. Swedish education expert Jonas Himmelstrand has observed:

1. "Untrained parents are more successful teaching their children than schools. Children seem to have a better social development through home schooling than in school. Especially interesting is that parents with low education are better at educating their children than schools. Why?"
2. "One probable reason is that adult attachment (*bonding*) is a more important factor in learning than what educational science has realised. As children we want to fulfil the expectations of those we attach (*bond*) to. Parents have higher expectations than peers. Also home schooling has the advantage of being fully individualised and highly time-effective.
3. "A not particularly bold guess is that the dominance of pre-school and school will not survive a knowledge[-based] society. Rather we will in the future see a considerable amount of education decentralised from the State and managed by parents in various ways.
4. "It is an unfortunate sign of the view of families in Sweden that the Swedish Government lacks understanding of home schooling. Through prejudice and lack of knowledge pioneering Swedish home schooling families are, in spite of home schooling being supported by law, chased with threats of the social authorities and fines in many, but not all, Swedish municipalities. Among western democracies only Germany treats their home schoolers worse than some local governments in Sweden."

He concludes:

5. "Swedish family policies during the last 30 years have resulted in insecure children and youth, stressed adults and lower quality parenthood. As security in children is a strong

social legacy, it is a negative spiral." ([Secure Children - Secure Parents - The Rôle of Family in the 21st Century](#), Speech given to a seminar of the Swedish parliament, 10 December 2008)

Remove Stifling Restrictions

¶**C13f.** A quick way to start reversing this destructive trend is to not only confirm the legality and validity of homeschooling in the proposed new education law but to remove the stifling restrictions from it too and grant the same kind of autonomy to them that is currently enjoyed by home educators in the United States and United Kingdom.

The Britta Johansson *Svenska Dagbladet* Survey

¶**C13g.** What is needed is a new social revolution that restores parenthood to its proper place. A study conducted by Britta Johansson of *Svenska Dagbladet*, a conservative Swedish newspaper, demonstrates that even healthy, intelligent and reasonable Swedish parents have problems being parents today. Parents have forgotten the folk knowledge acquired over generations about parenthood because they have come to believe and expect that the 'experts' in child day care centres and schools are better able to do a parenting job than they are, and so they leave the parenting up to them. No 'expert' can compensate for the lack of one-to-one time and trust which only parents can give, as any child psychologist will confirm.

A Government Report on Psychological Ill-Health

¶**C13h.** The reality is that the famed 'Swedish model', whilst a spectacular success in terms of increasing the material wealth of its citizens, equality of wages, low levels of child poverty, low levels of child mortality, and equality of the sexes, is, on balance, a disaster on the social front. Psychological ill-health amongst youth is at an all-time high with Sweden, according to a Government report (SOU 2006:77) having the worst development in this area of 10 Western countries: Finland, Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Wales and Scotland) and 1 Eastern (Hungary). According to Jonas Himmselfstrand:

1. "Stress and anxiety is the new Swedish national disease... stress related disease is the most common form of sick leave in Sweden today" (*Op.cit.*)

Divorce has sky-rocketed in Sweden from 10% 40 years ago to 50% today.

A Lack of Quality Parenting in Sweden

¶**C13i.** Himmelstrand traces most of these problems back to a lack of available parenting time for children in the 4-18 age range:

1. "When we are young we need someone to love us also when we do not seem to deserve it. Someone who stands ready in a storm. Someone who continuously gives the message: I am here for you, I love you, we can work this out together, we will manage this situation. Young people need their parents." (*Op.cit.*)

Make Homeschooling an Easy Option

¶**C13j.** Himmelstrand has six useful suggestions to reverse this trend, one of which is:

"Make home schooling an easy option by law." (*Op.cit.*)

I totally agree. Were Sweden to completely relax its home educational laws to the same degree as the United States enjoys, then the number of home educated children in Sweden could rapidly rise from a mere 100 to 45,000 (the equivalent number in the USA scaled down to the population of Sweden) and start restoring proper parenting again. With financial incentives, Sweden could make a bold step towards reversing the disastrous social situation in the country and subsequently recoup its investment from better mental and physical health and less loss of work hours. It could allow home educators, amongst others, to become pathfinders in this quest.

C14. Reasons for the Proposed New Education Law

Home Educators Angry

¶**C14a**. Nothing occurs in a vacuum and the proposed new education law has been under preparation for many years. And yet home educators have simply been left out of the equation and dismissed as though we were some kind of illness or low life form. This is unacceptable in a free, pluralistic society (see **#D** below). We are rightly angry for being trampled on in this thoughtless and arbitrary way. Consequently we must ask ourselves: what are the real reasons behind the desire of the compilers of the proposed new education law for wanting to ban homeschooling?

The Real Reasons Behind the Proposed New Education Law

¶**C14b**. The single reason given in [¶C1b](#) is, as we have already examined in [#C10](#), makes no logical sense, forcing us to speculate as to the *real* reasons. Accordingly we must do some guesswork and simply state the possibilities, one (or a combination) of which is then probably the correct answer:

1. **Carelessness or Indifference**. Home education is not treated seriously and since there are so few homeschooling families in Sweden currently (about 50 - there would be *far* more were it not for the current regulations) and they are not currently a large or vocal minority as in the USA or UK, they are not worth the time and effort of the legislators and government. We may not be large but we are going to become *very* vocal and militant indeed if our rights are ignored and if we are going to be treated as criminals in this appalling way. If this law is passed there may be civil disobedience on the part of some with the attendant media coverage leading to a decline in Sweden's reputation as an enlightened, free democratic state (see [#A5](#)). Many home education families mean to fight back and some may even become political refugees abroad, an irony given Sweden's impressive record in being a haven for the oppressed;

2. **Prejudice**. Very little is known about homeschooling, particularly in the *kommuns* where homeschooling parents have often been met by abysmal ignorance and have frequently been treated shabbily as though they were

criminals, with some children even being abducted by the state (taken into state 'care') as though the parents were mentally ill. At the time of writing one Swedish-Indian couple have had their child removed from them simply because they insisted on homeschooling - the *kommun* responsible is still refusing to make a public statement explaining their reasons. It took us many years to finally be recognised as serious by our local *kommun* and to get proper consultations in place. This required us to take legal action to have our rights respected under the *existing* law. We now have a good working relationship with our *kommun* but only because we had to fight tooth and nail to have our rights honoured. I suspect that much of the opposition of local politicians (who must approve homeschooling on an annual basis) and educators who are personally against home education is done on doctrinaire grounds and so they are accordingly prejudiced and hostile. They are simply regurgitating the unchallenged canons and creeds of political dogma that have been their staple diet for so long because they have never been properly educated. Once the local *kommun* finally opened up a dialogue with us and they could see that we were professional in our approach, they began to be more sympathetic. Accordingly much more information about homeschooling needs to be made public and available to the Education Departments of the local *kommuns* in Sweden to avoid this kind of abuse in the future;

3. Totalitarian Conspiracy. It is possible that there are minority political interest groups with a totalitarian mindset who are opposed to pluralism and prefer dictatorship in government and education and who wish to therefore see home education, which promotes pluralism and freedom, eliminated altogether. This element, which has a fascist or communist mindset, has always existed in Swedish politics (as it indeed it has done in every democratic country) but because it is in the minority, it must achieve its aims by working by subterfuge in the background by disseminating false information and using other subtle methods to attain its ends. The scandalous pre-war neo-nazi eugenics policy that promoted Swedish racial purity resulting in the forced sterilisation of women who did not have the desired Nordic features, or who otherwise were regarded as genetically

'weak', is an illustration of the kind of sinister anti-democratic activity that has occasionally succeeded in exerting its influence in the Swedish Parliament to advance its totalitarian agenda (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compulsory_sterilization). The total nationalisation of education belongs to authoritarian right- and left-wing states, not to pluralistic liberal democratic ones such as Sweden.

Reprehensible Attitudes

¶C14c. It is possible to see all three elements at work in the formulation of the proposed new education law - carelessness or indifference, prejudice and a totalitarian mindset. All of these attitudes are reprehensible, as all democratically-minded people would agree.

Tolstoy's Parable of the Herd

¶C14d. Where the power of choice resides determines whether you have a democracy or a dictatorship. A democratically elected government can, if it wants, either overthrow liberty quickly (as the nazis did in 1933 when they were elected to power in Germany) or they can gradually erode liberty over a period of time by systematically removing the power of choice (usually in the name of state security), thereby eroding the principles or constitution upon which the democratic state is founded. We must not be so careless as to allow the kind of state of affairs to evolve that was foreseen by Leo Tolstoy when he related the following parable:

1. "I see humanity as a herd of cattle inside a fenced enclosure. Outside the fence are green pastures with plenty for the cattle to eat, while inside the fence there is not quite grass enough for the cattle. Consequently, the cattle are trampling underfoot what little grass there is and goring each other to death in their struggle for existence.

2. "I saw the owner of the herd come to them and when he saw their pitiable condition he was filled with compassion for them, and thought what he could do to improve their condition. So he called his friends together and asked them

to assist him in cutting the grass from outside the fence and throwing it over the fence to the cattle. And they called that charity.

3. "Then, because the calves were dying off and not growing into serviceable cattle, he arranged that they should each have a liter of milk every morning for breakfast. Because they were dying off in the cold night he put up beautiful well-drained and well-ventilated cow sheds for the cattle. Because they were goring each other in the struggle for existence he put corks on the horns of the cattle so that the wounds they gave each other might not be so serious. Then he reserved a part of the enclosure for the old bulls and the old cows over seventy years of age. In fact, he did everything he could do to improve the conditions of the cattle.

4. "And when they asked him why he did not do the obvious thing - break down the fences and let the cattle out, he answered: 'If I let the cattle out, I should no longer be able to milk them.'" (Leo Tolstoy)

Stop Fencing Us In

¶C14e. If you tell the citizens of your state that only one form of education is allowed (e.g. schooling), then you fence your children in and create a situation not unlike that described by Tolstoy. And no matter how many improvements you try to effect to the one system you 'allow', you are still not addressing the fundamental problem of choice - choice of alternative systems like home education in the 'green grassy area'.

"For Knowledge, Choice and Safety"

¶C14f. The proposed new school education law (Ds 2009:25) is titled: "*för kunskap, valfrihet och trygghet*" which means "**For Knowledge, Choice and Safety**" all of which are indeed noble sentiments. I have, however, three questions to pose to the framers of this proposed law:

1. Does this 'Knowledge' include all knowledge or specially selected knowledge? And according to what philosophical

system and principles will this knowledge be presented and disseminated?

2. Is the "Choice" being offered only within Tolstoy's "government fence" or will it include the free choice to home educate?

3. Will the "Safety" offered guarantee the elimination of both physical and psychological bullying at school?

Knowledge Excluded, One World View Allowed Only

¶**C14g.** As we have seen in [#C8](#) (also see [#C17](#)) the Education Minister has made it clear that some kinds of knowledge will be excluded and that other kinds must only be presented from a particular philosophical world viewpoint, so I am immediately sceptical.

The Illusion of Real Free Choice

¶**C14h.** As we have also seen in this section, our free choice is only to be exercised from among those "choices" offered by the government of the day which tomorrow could be a totalitarian one, thus giving the state absolute control over the minds of our children. And even though it is true the government is giving more choice in the Independent School sector (a very positive move indeed), it will still have an absolute control and monopoly over the curriculum if it bans homeschooling, thus moving Sweden one step further in the direction of mind-control.

Reducing Society's Safety Margins

¶**C14i.** As we saw in [#C10](#), the government cannot promise the kind of safety from bullying and other kinds of abuse that home education offers. In proposing to ban homeschooling, it is reducing the safety margins, not increasing them. As we have seen, the social environment in many state schools is a catastrophe.

Beyond a Mere Slogan

¶C14j. And so whilst "For Knowledge, Choice and Safety" is a nice and noble slogan, that is only what it is - a political slogan. In truth, the proposed new education law is going to **reduce** all three aspects by banning homeschooling. But if the government *includes* free home education and enacts legislation to positively *protect* and *support* it (see [#F](#)) then the slogan will indeed be credible and Sweden will be taking a major step forwards into greater educational enlightenment, gaining the respect of the world, instead of taking one step backwards into the kind of totalitarian temptation and darkness that it has done before, and as a result will earn contempt for itself internationally. Sweden has the opportunity of either stepping backwards (if it enacts the proposed new education law) or of moving forwards (if it is prepared to rewrite it in favour of home education).

C15. Absolute Neutrality vs. Reality

All-Embracing Systems are an Illusion

¶C15a. We have now seen that you cannot have a single educational system that incorporates all others any more than you can have a political party which can claim to represent *all* political viewpoints, a philosophy that incorporates all other philosophies, or a religion that incorporates all other religions, even if you play around with words to make it *appear* that you can. A political viewpoint that claims to represent all political viewpoints **is a new political viewpoint**, a philosophy that claims to represent all other philosophies **is a new philosophy**, and a religion that claims to incorporate all religious views **is a new religion**.

No Such Thing as Neutrality

¶C15b. I state these rather obvious truths because the authors of the proposed new education law, who seek to ban homeschooling, are, in effect, claiming that their form of schooling is able to present all religious and philosophical views in a neutral manner, that is, in a way that children from all religious and philosophical backgrounds can 'participate' in the fullest sense of the word. That is impossible. There is no such thing as 'neutrality' as the creators of the online Cyber Encyclopedia, *Wikipedia*, have discovered and who are now taking steps to limit

user management and input. The belief that you can be entirely neutral in the presentation of philosophy or religion **is an unsustainable philosophical view in and of itself** and the result is that the imagined 'rights' of the state to present a philosophical view are at total variance with the legal rights of the individual - not to mention being at variance the Swedish Constitution - to hold personal religious or philosophical views and to educate ones children in those religious or philosophical views as the parents see fit.

Our Mutual Obligation to Teach All Religions and Philosophies

¶C15c. At the same time I think most homeschoolers would agree that as homeschoolers they have an obligation to educate their children about *other* religious and philosophical views as well as their own, and present them with relevant information. This is done as a matter of course from the 7th Grade in the Swedish School System to the 9th. As a homeschooling parent, my children use the Swedish State School religion text books as well as doing their own research on the internet.

The Swedish Constitution

¶C15d. No two individuals have a single world view, even if people may identify with one another because of *similar* world views. The sharing of similarities is a desirable thing for it leads to cohesion but it must be something that happens spontaneously, without coercion, and with all views legally expressible, in public as well as in education establishments, as is guaranteed by the Swedish Constitution:

Art. §1. Every citizen shall be guaranteed the following rights and freedoms in his relations with the public institutions:

1. freedom of expression: that is, the freedom to communicate information and express thoughts, opinions and sentiments, whether orally, pictorially, in writing, or in any other way;
2. freedom of information: that is, the freedom to procure and receive information and otherwise

acquaint oneself with the utterances of others;

3. freedom of assembly: that is, the freedom to organise or attend a meeting for the purposes of information or the expression of opinion or for any other similar purpose, or for the purpose of presenting artistic work;

4. freedom to demonstrate: that is, the freedom to organise or take part in a demonstration in a public place;

5. freedom of association: that is, the freedom to associate with others for public or private purposes;

6. freedom of worship: that is, the freedom to practise one's religion alone or in the company of others.

(The Swedish Constitution, Chapter 2, *Fundamental Rights and Freedoms*).

C16. The Principle of the Primary and Secondary View

Every Presentation Has Bias

¶**C16a.** The presentation of multiple world views (religious, political or philosophical) must *ipso facto* be done through the projection lens of one of the available world views. Every presentation takes place through the primary world view of each individual or a collective assembly of individuals agreed on a particular world view. Humanism views and presents religion in one way and religion views and presents humanism in another, for example. There is no one single way to present religion or philosophy that will satisfy every religious or philosophical viewpoint. Thus the need for plural views in both education and society generally in order to maintain the principle of pluralism. Thus the need for state schools, independent schools *and* home education. We desire neither religious nor secular dictatorships in education.

Sweden Has Not Discovered the One-and-Only Perfect Way

¶**C16b.** The proposed new Education Law amounts to a highly dubious declaration that there is only one primary world view, that the Swedish and German 'states' (for example) have 'found' it (or whoever it was who authored their educational legislation - the nazis authored the German legislation), and that therefore all Swedish and German citizens should be coerced into accepting it by using a legal mandate to enforce its teaching at school. Since no other primary world view is to be allowed, the implication is that other states who have not 'arrived' at this view are 'behind' and 'inferior'. I cannot believe that Swedish citizens believe this for one minute, or responsible politicians either, for that matter. We should have learned the lessons of the disasters caused by totalitarian governments in the 20th century and have a moral obligation not to fall into their 'brave new world' traps again.

Accountability: Who Drew Up the New Proposals?

¶**C16c.** Who are the people who drew up the proposed new law? What are their names? What are their individual philosophical and political world views? Who appointed them to their positions? What is their view of other philosophical and religious views? Why can't we talk to them to find out how they arrived at their views in the wording of the proposed new education law? Do they view these views dispassionately or do they hold strong beliefs about them? Is there bias in their collective world view? The people have a right to know.

Extremism Rides on the Back of Moderation

¶**C16d.** I recall one Swedish member of Parliament not so long ago comparing the former Lutheran state religion of Sweden with nazism and being strongly censured for her unwise and politically incorrect remarks. This leads me to ask what some extremist politicians secretly believe in but who are maintaining a façade to conceal those views in order to not to appear autocratic in public. It is well known historically that extremists ride on the backs of moderates, pretending to be them for personal advantage, to gain access to the reigns of power - fascists on the backs of conservatives and communists on the backs of social democrats, for example. Consequently our politicians must be carefully

monitored so that the electorate can know whether they are being properly represented or not - every politician should have a public 'brief' stating what his or her views truly are on a wide range of political, religious and philosophical themes.

The Quest for Total Objectivity

¶**C16e**. Is the maintenance of total objectivity possible? I do not think so, however silent people may be about their real feelings. And those feelings, even if not publically expressed (in spite of occasional lapses - see ¶**C16d**), without a doubt contribute towards the shaping of any policy. Added to that, there is *no* doubt that teachers have feelings about philosophical and religious views too and will subtly express them in one form or another. I used to be one and knew other teachers who were my colleagues who did so. And the way they taught their classes was indisputably influenced by their personal beliefs, if not in words then certainly in tone and attitude, even though we all worked from the same essentially humanist curriculum. It can't be avoided without destroying what it is to be a human. So total objectivity is impossible. This is why multiple systems are needed, or at least the option for citizens and residents to choose between them in the educational arena so that teachers can teach according to their convictions in the primary sense whilst also presenting alternative world views in the secondary.

C17. Safeguards Against Extremism and Fundamentalism

Jan Björklund on Violent Extremism

¶**C17a**. In his Stockholm News Conference of 23 October 2007 (LifeSiteNews.com) Education Minister Jan Björklund rightly expressed concern over the kind of violent Islamic extremism that police have identified with many Muslim schools in Britain and Europe and no doubt with some isolated homeschoolers of that same belief system. Controlling violent groups such as these which may exploit, if given the opportunity, Independent Schools and homeschools to propagate their extremism, is not solved by banning, monitoring or restricting Independent Schools or Homeschools, but by monitoring the extremists themselves. Totalitarian-minded governments have successfully exploited

terrorist acts in the past to serve their own selfish interests and political agendas - which they may, in some cases, have instigated themselves, such as the Reichstag fire of 1933, supposedly caused by a Dutch 'communist' but who was in all likelihood a nazi agent - and used as a pretext by the nazis to curb citizens' freedoms and to enact so-called 'emergency legislation' that resulted in a dictatorship. We must be alert to any signs that such behaviour is repeated in education or any other arena of state. As pluralist democrats committed to the protection of democracy, we must be on the alert for the dishonest activities of covert extremists who claim to be our protectors.

Playing with 'Fundamentalism'

¶**C17b.** Therefore remarks like "Pupils must be protected from every sort of fundamentalism" made by the Education Minister at the same conference ought to give cause for alarm, not because the government should not be concerned about potential acts of terrorism (which it absolutely must) but because words like 'fundamentalism' can be used to include and describe other law-abiding citizens who do not, for example, believe in violence or terrorism of any kind but who can conveniently and unjustly be labelled as 'anti-government' and even 'suspect terrorists' (a tactic used by fascist and communist régimes against democrats in the past) because they do not accept the government's autocratic uniformitarianism or because the government grandees simply don't like them.

Defining a Fundamentalist

¶**C17c. Fundamentalist:** a person who is, according to a dictionary definition, "immovable from his beliefs". To be a fundamentalist means that you are comitted to fundamentals. Unfortunately this term has somewhat been redefined in modern colloquialism as a term of *derision* to mean anyone who believes in the concept of absolute truth, and typically a 'fundamentalist' is then 'conveniently' associated with the artificially-created image of being 'unloving, intolerant and unkind'.

Prejudice Against Religious People

¶C17d. So my question is this: whom was the Education Minister referring to when he spoke of protecting pupils from "fundamentalism" when speaking about religious education at schools? Is he referring to intolerant, religious people who commit acts of violence, or to all religious people who believe in absolute truth? Whom was he attacking with this umbrella word? Why did he choose to use the word "fundamentalism"? For if we adhere strictly to a dictionary definition, a fundamentalist is immovable in, or passionate about, his beliefs, which would also include most people who have any sort of conviction about anything, religious or secular.

Fundamentalist Religionists and Atheists

¶C17e. Thus a 'fundamentalist Christian', who does not believe in violence, could unjustly be lumped together with the 'fundamentalist Muslim' who does simply because of an arbitrarily apportioned label - 'fundamentalist'. This is a devious use of 'political correctness' to demonise groups of people who do not agree with a governmental position. What of a 'fundamentalist atheist' who evangelises with the same passion as a fundamentalist Muslim or Christian for his atheism (such as Oxford scholar Richard Dawkins who argues from a minority extremist atheist position, not unlike that of communists, that the teaching of all religion should be banned everywhere in society)? We must not bracket together law-abiding people with those (like terrorists) who are not law-abiding simply because they espouse a philosophy or religion dissimilar to that espoused by the government. There is nothing wrong in being a 'fundamentalist' provided those fundamentalists believe in the peaceful, non-coercive propagation of their views and respect the rule of law.

State Monopoly

¶C17f. The Education Minister would have better advised to have used a less politically loaded word in order to avoid any misunderstandings and not deceptively give cause to those who wish to install a totalitarian system of education in which the state totally monopolises the education of our children. Such an undertaking is entirely contrary to the precepts of a liberal, pluralistic democracy (see #D, *Education for a Pluralist, Parallel or Uniform Society?*).

C18. Independent / Free Schools

The *Kunskapsskolan*

¶C18a. There is no doubt that Swedish Independent or Free Schools, run on the voucher system, have been popular in Sweden and meet the needs of many parents and students who prefer a less structured form of schooling since the 1992 school reforms. Some British politicians are urging the state to copy this system in the UK. The *Kunskapsskolan* (Knowledge School) system, financed by business, very much mirrors the homeschooling system which we employ in the domestic setting in many ways, emphasising the responsibility and independent action of the student.

Seven Problems with Independent Schools

¶C18b. There are, however, problems:

1. Independent Schools are still 'schools' and do not give a choice of alternative environment to the school one, such as home education does;
2. There are not many of them (in large cities, catering to only about 20% of all pupils), with only about 20-30 Knowledge Schools throughout the country and mostly limited to large cities, making them inaccessible to the majority of the population. They are not an option for our children for this reason;
3. The language of instruction is (understandably) only Swedish which does not meet the needs of foreigners such as ourselves who wish to have an education based in their own language;
4. They represent, to some extent, the interests of those who finance them, namely, business;
5. Independent Schools are viewed and treated differently depending which political parties are in power - thus there may be restrictions placed on them depending whether

right-, centre- or left-wing coalitions are in government;

6. Whereas State Schools are always guaranteed funding, Independent Schools are dependent on industry and business money supply - in the current recession (2009) many are encountering serious financial problems;

7. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the majority of homeschoolers, Independent Schools have identical or similar social problems to State Schools when it comes to bullying, drugs, and the like.

Independent Schools Cannot Meet All Other Needs

¶**C18c.** As a result, whilst Independent or Free Schools may meet many of the needs of those parents and pupils dissatisfied with the State School System, they do not - and cannot - meet all of them. The difference between them is essential only in the method of tuition. State and Independent Schools, whilst important components of education in a pluralistic society, are not themselves enough.

Reforming State Schools

¶**C18d.** Creating Independent or Free Schools was definitely a move in the right direction, they have since become very popular, and a demand for more of them has conspicuously grown. This popularity, in its turn, has caused the State Schools to do some serious self-examination, become more competitive, and to effect improvements and reforms of their own, which is all to the good. If the creation of Independent Schools was indeed effected as a permanent development of two separate school systems, then the politicians did well.

An Experiment in Dialectics?

¶**C18e.** But if in the creation of Independent or Free Schools the driving force was a kind of 'dialectic materialism' to create a duality of models and then (later) effect a synthesis - that is, if the goal was, and is, to improve the State School System by creating a controlled 'rival', reforming the State School System until the two are more or less the same, and then merging the

two again so that once again there is only a State School System - then really Independent Schools were not created out of a desire to see plurality but to conduct a Marxist experiment. This may, of course, not be (and probably isn't) the case and the two types of schools may survive as separate systems of education in the future as a result of 'market demand' but it is right to pose such a question in the interests of covering all angles and possibilities when it comes to the motivations and causes which have brought these two variants on a common school theme into existence.

Two School Systems but a Single Curriculum

¶**C18f**. The bottom line is that Independent or Free Schools are nevertheless built around the same state-controlled curriculum in spite of their having different methods of teaching. The same critique made by Tolstoy (see ¶**C14d**) applies equally to the Independent or Free School as to the State School which, though closer to the home educating system in its philosophy of teaching, is still very different from it and cannot adequately replace or compensate for it.

C19. The Case for Unschooling

Jessica Shepherd Reviews Alan Thomas and Harriet Pattison

¶**C19a**. Journalist Jessica Shepherd of the left-wing British national newspaper, *The Guardian* (19 August 2008), has written an excellent article reviewing a book by Alan Thomas and Harriet Pattison of the Institute of Education, University of London, entitled *How Children Learn at Home* (Continuum, 2008), which critically examines a particular kind of home education known as "unschooling" amongst Great Britain's 50,000 or so homeschooled children. Unlike schooling and home educators (like myself) who follow a curriculum and have fixed periods of study, unschooling involves no formal lessons or structure of any kind.

An Astonishingly Efficient Way to Learn

¶**C19b**. Alan Thomas, who is a visiting fellow in the institute's Department of Psychology and Human Development, and Harriet

Pattison, a research associate, conclude that informal learning at home is an "astonishingly efficient way to learn", as good if not better than school for many children. "The ease, naturalness and immense intellectual potential of informal learning up to the age of middle secondary school means they can learn certainly as much if not more," they conclude. Thomas and Pattison interviewed and observed 26 families who home-educated, between them, more than 70 children. Some had been out of school for a couple of years, others had never been inside a school. Most were British, but a handful were Irish, Australian and Canadian. The authors discovered that these children absorbed information mainly by "doing nothing, observing, having conversations, exploring, and through self-directed learning".

Positive Results of Informal Learning

¶C19c. They liken the "chaotic nature" of informal learning to the process that leads to scientific breakthroughs, the early stages of crafting a novel, coming up with a solution to a technical problem, or the act of composing music. "Its products are often intangible, its processes obscure, its progress piecemeal," they say. "There are false starts, unrelated bits and pieces picked up, interests followed and discarded, sometimes to be taken up again, sometimes not... Yet the chaotic nature of the informal curriculum does not appear to be a barrier to children organising it into a coherent body of knowledge." Thomas and Pattison acknowledge that critics will say home-educated children are likely to pick up information peppered with misunderstandings or inaccuracies, and parents may unwittingly pass on their own misconceptions. "Yet the lack of information quality-control does not appear to lead to muddled, confused children," they say.

An Alive and Dynamic Model for Education

¶C19d. "In some ways, it may be an advantage because, rather than presenting knowledge in neat packages, the informal curriculum forces learners to become actively engaged with their information - to work with it, move it around, juggle ideas and resolve contradictions... It is not a static thing contained in a series of educational folders. It is alive and dynamic." Thomas and Pattison marvel at the way one girl learned maths by

"helping with the cooking and shopping, and collecting supermarket-trolley money...She came to appreciate the value of material goods, but she did not see it like that," they say. "She saw only the concrete activity. If she did sometimes count money or do sums in her head, it was her decision, sparked by her emerging understanding, or simple curiosity about numbers. The point is that maths, certainly most of what is acquired at the primary level, can be learned as an integral part of everyday concrete activities. In school, maths has to be divorced from the dynamic realities of everyday life."

Homeschooling an Extension of Good parenting

¶**C19e.** Home education is just an extension of good parenting, Thomas and Pattison argue. "School itself necessarily curtails such parental contribution." Why, they ask, do we as a society assume that formal learning needs to take over beyond the age of five? "There is no developmental or educational logic behind the radical change in pedagogy from informal to formal when children start school," they say. Contrary to expectations, the home-educated children had no difficulty entering formal education, the authors found. The informal curriculum is "as good a preparation as any" for college, university or academic correspondence courses, they say. "The young people had the personal skills to make the transition with apparent ease."

Advantages of a Curriculum

¶**C19f.** Professor Alan Smithers, director of the *Centre for Education and Employment Research* at the University of Buckingham, urges caution. Informal learning is an adjunct, not a replacement for a formal curriculum, he warns. There's a case for starting formal education later in this country, he acknowledges, but the curriculum is still essential. "Living our lives is a deeply mysterious business," he says. "The curriculum opens up a number of ways we can understand it: history, science, art, maths. It's very important that we give all young people the opportunity to engage with all subjects, whether they immediately occur to them or their parents or not. Schools have developed ways of condensing canons of literature, for example, and introducing it in sequence to children."

Professor Smithers: The Homeschooling Option is Important

¶**C19g.** Professor Smithers concludes: "It's very important that parents have the option to home-educate their children" though he personally favours traditional systematic schooling.

(www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/aug/19/schools.education)

Unschooling Valid During Primary School Years

¶**C19h.** In my opinion, unschooling is a valid option for home education up to about the age of 12, 13 or 14 but that thereafter some sort of curriculum becomes essential. Ideally, from this age onwards, a combination would probably produce the best results.

C20. Conclusion

The Need for Government to Expand Its Thinking

¶**C20a.** I understand that these may be difficult concepts to grasp by an Education Department such as in Sweden where there is little or no experience with home education. There is a natural fear to allow children to step out of the kind of rigid curriculum-based system which has been a way of thinking for Swedish education for such a long time. However, there is now a wealth of information and research work available on homeschooling from the international community for those who are willing to be objective and unprejudiced.

Preserving the Natural Learning and Creative Instincts

¶**C20b.** The current effort by the Swedish Education Department in the tightening up of the curriculum in schools for children 13/14 years and older whose parents prefer this system is understandable but I believe that there will be a stifling of the natural learning and creative instincts if this system is applied to children below that age. As far as traditional schooling is concerned, I think the Swedish Education Department may find itself in possession of a double-edged sword, one edge of which will improve the situation for older children and one which will have a negative impact on the intellectual and emotional growth

of the younger ones. Time will tell.

Reasons for the Proposed New Law on Homeschooling are Weak and Puerile

¶**C20c.** One thing is certain: there are no objective reasons for denying homeschooling from a pedagogical point-of-view. The objections raised by the Department of Education's Work Group for banning home education (¶**C1b**) are exceptionally weak at best and puerile at worst, revealing either a total ignorance of what home education is and what it has already achieved or a deliberate attempt to suppress freedom of choice. In either case, the section on homeschooling in the proposed new education law *must* be scrapped and a maturer, more intelligent set of rules that permit and liberally promote homeschooling be made (see [#F](#). *Recommended Government Legislation for 2010-11*).

The Government Should Actively Consult with Rohus

¶**C20d.** I recommend in the first instance that the Swedish parliamentary homeschooling action group, *Rohus* (*Riksorganisationen för Hemundervisning I Sverige* - www.rohus.nu), which has a number of highly qualified educators in their organisation, be actively consulted and be asked to make their recommendations for making a new draft of the section pertaining to homeschooling as quickly as possible. I myself would be prepared to assist and make recommendations too if it was felt that this would be of benefit.

Informing the World Media

¶**C20e.** In the meantime, I shall be making contact before the end of September 2009 with all the major international newspapers throughout the world, beginning with the United Kingdom and the United States where I have contacts, and submitting this paper to them for their use in publication, with a view to exposing this shameful and undemocratic recommendation which is not worthy of the high standards and professionalism that traditionally belong to Swedish education. Let us hope that this blot on the integrity of Swedish democracy and pluralism will not survive careful parliamentary investigation and be quickly relegated to the trash heap where it deservedly

belongs.

D. Education for a Pluralist, Parallel or Uniform Society?

D1. Pluralism

Does Homeschooling Create a Parallel Society?

¶D1a. Arguments are being advanced by opponents of homeschooling (especially in Germany) that claim home education results in a parallel society and is not, therefore, in accord with pluralistic goals of a democratic society. In this section we shall examine this fallacy and demonstrate that home education does precisely the opposite.

Defining a Pluralistic Society

¶D1b. What is a pluralistic society? **A pluralistic society consists of many different groups co-existing and co-operating peacefully within a common society.** What does this mean practically?

1. That a common political society exists. A common political society exists when there are enough common and shared beliefs, systems or attributes within a recognised boundary to create a common society. Without some common structures there is no common society - just different groups living autonomously within a geographic area. The Russians and Romanians of Transnistrian Moldova are an example of this or the Serbs and Muslims of Bosnia;
2. For different groups to exist these groups must have something that makes them distinctive. If there isn't, then there is just one big homogenous group - no pluralism. Things that distinguish groups may be racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, or philosophical, and others.

Many of these characteristics may be shared - and many may be different.

The Five Shared Characteristics of Democratic Pluralism

¶D1c. What is it at a minimum that must be shared for a pluralistic democratic society to survive and thrive? Though this is open to debate, there are, I would suggest, *five* at least that must be shared:

1. A common boundary (the border of the Kingdom of Sweden);
2. A common language (Swedish);
3. A common economic system (The Swedish model of social capitalism);
4. A common legal system (Swedish Law); and
5. A common political authority that reflects the will of the people with respect to laws that apply equally to all (the Swedish Government on all levels from the National to the local *kommun*).

Homeschoolers are Assimilated

¶D1d. Home educators, including foreigners like myself, are in complete agreement with these five tenets, and even if learning Swedish (for example) had not been a requirement, I would have insisted on it as a matter of principle and common sense - you should be able to communicate in language of the country you live in (or one similar to it that is comprehensible, like Norwegian or Danish - I speak Norwegian in addition to English). Those who identify with these five characteristics of a pluralistic society may be said to be assimilated. Those who do not may be said to be living in parallel societies to one degree or another.

Benefits of a Pluralistic Society

¶D1e. What is the benefit of a democratic pluralistic society? The idea is that in such a society, people from different groups can co-exist and work together for a common good. Is this always a reality? No, it is not. It is more of a goal. But the benefit of such a system is that individuals are able to live and work peacefully together within a common society that respects and protects basic fundamental human rights without requiring that a group give up important characteristics that distinguish them from other groups. This benefits society as a whole through the introduction

of new ideas and ways of doing things.

D2. Parallel Societies

Definition of a Parallel Society

¶**D2a.** Let us contrast the idea of parallel societies with pluralistic societies. If we do this, we see that a parallel society is a group of people who live inside or within another society but do not share in these minimum common characteristics. These societies within a society seek not to interact but to remain isolated. Such a "parallel society" limits its contact with the larger society and seeks to operate its own civic institutions, legal functions, and would likely reject learning a common language.

The State and Parallel Societies

¶**D2b.** If we accept the idea that government exists to maintain order by establishing a rule of law that applies equally to all within its jurisdiction - then indeed parallel societies are dangerous. In such parallel societies the rights that should be protected and enjoyed by all citizens of the society could be repressed in the name of some other philosophy, legal system or religion, perhaps. If this were true, it would mean that that not all citizens would be receiving equal protection under the law. Because it is the duty of the state to protect the rights and equal application of the law to all people living within its jurisdiction - this cannot be allowed.

Homeschoolers Not Creating a Parallel Society

¶**D2c.** Are homeschoolers creating or seeking to create a parallel society, as they are accused of by the Germany State in order to keep homeschooling illegal? Are homeschoolers looking to be isolated from a common language, a common law, a common set of civic institutions or even an economic system? Not at all. Parallel societies may indeed be the enemy of a democratic state. But dogmatic and coerced uniformity is the enemy of a pluralistic society and the friend of totalitarianism.

D3. Autocracy and Uniformity

The Mutuality of Democracy and Pluralism

¶D3a. The question is not whether a free society can or must be either democratic or pluralistic - it can and should be both. All civilized nations profess a commitment to both democracy and pluralism. I would suggest that no responsible homeschool leader or homeschooler would advocate for the creation of what I have defined as parallel societies. I certainly do not.

State-Controlled Coercive Education in Germany

¶D3b. In Germany, what we see in education is not pluralism but rather support of a state-controlled and coercive system of education - the purpose of which is not to promote pluralism but rather to standardise and integrate children into a uniform society, such has obtained historically on German soil in the form of fascist (Third Reich, 1933-45) and communist (German Democratic Republic, 1949-91) governments. Forcing all children to attend state-sponsored schools is a sure way to stamp out pluralism.

A Tautological Argument

¶D3c. In the state schools a uniform curriculum is provided by uniformly organised teachers in uniformly organised and established schools - this will create a uniform social structure within society. This is a tautological argument. It speaks for itself. And the result is not a pluralistic democracy.

Sowing the Seeds of Future Conflict

¶D3d. One can easily argue that by forcibly constraining educational choice in Germany, the German government is sowing the seeds of parallel societies and future conflict between these societies within Germany in the future (see [¶D8c](#)).

Germany may have an understandable concern in protecting against the "rise of parallel societies" that may be dangerous or hurtful to German Culture or more importantly, a parallel society that may within its power seek to repress rights that the German government is duty-bound to protect, but this is hardly the goal of homeschoolers.

False Justification for Repression

¶D3e. However, in seeking this goal or protecting the rights of all, Germany may not use this argument to justify repression of educational freedom and the right of parents to determine the best form of education for their children. The undisputed empirical reality is that homeschooling by itself does not create parallel societies - and if German authority structures and those who influence them (such as the media and academics) would care to look beyond its own borders, this would be obvious.

Standards of Pluralistic Freedom and Inalienable Human Rights

¶D3f. In Germany's efforts to prevent the creation of parallel societies that may be dangerous to the democratic institutions of its society, it must not deny basic human rights standards of pluralistic freedom. This notion of pluralistic freedom in free societies lies at the heart of the international and natural law standards for human rights law, that is that people have certain inalienable human rights that must be protected. And that it is government's duty to protect these rights.

D4. Statism and Individualism

The State Must Not Shape Society

¶D4a. The democratic state should not exist to form or mold or shape society; it exists to protect the rights and freedoms of its individual people from internal and external threats and to apply the rule of law equally to all. Yes, the state may do more than this, but the further it gets from this basic premise, the closer it gets to setting social order and shaping society. Is this what we want? In this scenario those who have power get to use that power to establish the order they think best, rather than allowing the people to sort things out amongst themselves within the boundaries of respect for life, liberty and property.

Self-Deception and Ignorance

¶D4b. Unfortunately and all too often the modern state has taken on a rôle in shaping society. To deny this is to demonstrate

self-deception or reflect ignorance.

Control and Society-Shaping

¶D4c. Those who would shape society know that in order to shape society it must control education. Why? Because the children of today are the culture of tomorrow. Children are impressionable, and those with whom they form the closest attachments are their teachers and parents and by default impress upon them moral and social norms that they carry into adulthood - thus forming the culture and society of tomorrow. **Indeed it may be argued that the state is creating its own parallel society in the school system with which it intends to replace the *existing* society in successive generations.**

Hitler's Designs on German Youth

¶D4d. When Hitler sought to unify German society in the 1930s by abolishing the states and taking control of all private and public education and requiring under pain of criminal penalty that all children attend state controlled schools he said this:

"The youth of today is ever the people of tomorrow. For this reason we have set before ourselves the task of inoculating our youth with the spirit of this community of the people at a very early age, at an age when human beings are still unperverted and therefore unspoiled. This [Third] Reich stands, and it is building itself up for the future, upon its youth. And this new Reich will give its youth to no one, but will itself take youth and give to youth its own education and its own upbringing."

A Generation of Brainwashed Fanatics

¶D4e. The result was a generation of brainwashed fanatics which tolerated no contrary political, social or religious opinions other than its own. This is why educational pluralism is so important to a free society and why Sweden must *not* go down the German road. After the collapse of Imperial Germany in 1918, the new Weimar Republic, dominated by Social Democrats and Liberals, understood this and as a result permitted home education. Only the nazis and communists were against it. And as we have seen,

when Hitler came to power, he banned it, just as Sweden proposes to do now. This is a very dangerous move that threatens our fundamental liberties.

Standardisation is the Enemy of Pluralism

¶**D4f.** An exclusive and state-controlled system (a monopoly) of education with the purpose to standardise children and "integrate" them is no friend of pluralism - it serves only totalitarian interests. In the name of equality of opportunity such a system represses group distinctives - distinctives which are necessary for pluralism. A nation that demands and coerces unquestioned, non-exceptioned uniformity in such an important area of its public life has abandoned the principles of pluralism and individual liberty. If Sweden outlaws home education it will be taking a major step towards fascism. Accordingly we must learn the lessons of history - and in particular from Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia - and not repeat the mistakes of the past.

The Destruction of Distinctives and Loss of Individualism in People

¶**D4g.** The natural effect of sending children to public schools is to impose a level of nationally applied and coercively mandated uniformity. Children study the same curriculum as chosen by the state, are institutionalised for a majority of their time with children their own age (an arrangement which exists nowhere else in the real world) and are expected to conform to this nationally mandated set of standards. This is educational uniformity, and it results in the stripping away of distinctives in people, leading to an undermining of a pluralistic society. The result is always a loss of individualism that leads ultimately to slave societies run by exclusive and democratically unaccountable élites.

D5. Global Pluralism

The Aga Khan and the 'Great Conversation'

¶**D5a.** The Aga Khan is the imam of an enlightened sect of Muslims that live primarily in Canada. They are called the Imalia Muslims. This Muslim imam has established himself as a leader in the area of global pluralism. Here is what he said at a symposium

on pluralism in Lisbon, Portugal just last year about pluralism in education:

"For too long some of our schools have taught too many subjects as subsets of dogmatic commitments. Economic insights, for example, were treated as ideological choices - rather than as exercises in scientific problem-solving. Too often, education made our students less flexible - confident to the point of arrogance that they now had all the answers - rather than more flexible - humble in their life-long openness to new questions and new responses. An important goal of quality education is to equip each generation to participate effectively in what has been called 'the great conversation' of our times. This means, on one hand, being unafraid of controversy. But it also means being sensitive to the values and outlooks of others."

D6. Results of Homeschooling

Civic Awareness, Maturity, Socialisation and Integration in Society

¶**D6a.** The truth is that homeschooling has been proven all over the world to deliver this kind of result. Homeschooling provides high quality educational results with students who grow up to be civically aware, mature, socialised, integrated and beneficial to society as a whole when compared with their peers in public and private schools.

Homeschooling in the Vanguard of Freedom, Pluralism and Democracy

¶**D6b.** Rather than creating a parallel society, homeschooling advances the goal of a free, pluralistic and democratic state. Thus, in reality, the only people who are doctrinairly opposed to homeschooling - as has been proved historically - are those opposed to these liberal ideals.

Homeschoolers as Productive and Integrated Members of Society

¶**D6c.** The overwhelming majority of homeschooling families want their children to take their place as productive and integrated members of society. While they may choose their own

rôle in the education of their children for a variety of reasons, rarely is it because they want their children to be completely and totally isolated from all of society. This can be empirically proven if one looks at nations where there are significant groups of homeschoolers such as the United States and United Kingdom. It can be anecdotally proven anywhere else.

Integration and High Ideals

¶**D6d.** Homeschool families understand the need for their children to be integrated within society, and they take steps to insure that the highest ideals of their own culture are taught within their homeschool program. This may not be exactly the same as others in the society, but that is the very nature of pluralism.

D7. The 60 Character Traits

Positive Social Aspects of One Homeschooling Curriculum

¶**D7a.** What are some of these ideals? In the program that my homeschooled children follow, we seek to inculcate what we call the "Sixty Character Traits" which are consciously and deliberately integrated into all the social aspects of the curriculum we use. These traits have been assembled based on research conducted by Dr. Ronald R. Howard who interviewed parents from many religious and political backgrounds and asked them what they thought constituted "decent children" - the kind of children they would like and the kind of children that would benefit society the most by serving as worthy rôle models to represent ideal character. These are the 60 traits that he came up with (in alphabetical order):

1. Appreciative 2. Attentive 3. Available 4. Committed 5. Compassionate 6. Concerned 7. Confident 8. Considerate 9. Consistent 10. Content 11. Cooperative 12. Courageous 13. Creative 14. Decisive 15. Deferent 16. Dependable 17. Determined 18. Diligent 19. Discerning 20. Discreet 21. Efficient 22. Equitable 23. Fair 24. Faithful 25. Fearless 26. Flexible 27. Forgiving 28. Friendly 29. Generous 30. Gentle 31. Honest 32. Humble 33. Joyful 34. Kind 35. Loyal 36. Meek 37. Merciful 38. Observant 39. Optimistic 40. Patient

41. Peaceful 42. Perseverant 43. Persuasive 44. Prudent 45. Punctual 46. Purposeful 47. Resorurseful 48. Respectful 49. Responsible 50. Secure 51. Self-Controlled 52. Sincere 53. Submissive 54. Tactful 55. Temperate 56. Thorough 57. Thrifty 58. Tolerant 59. Truthful 60. Virtuous

What Parents Really Want in Their Children

D7b. You will not find many parents who do not want these virtues in their own children or who would be opposed to them being taught in a school curriculum. Indeed, from what I have seen of the Swedish system over a twelve year period, I am sure that the majority of politicians would not object to an educational system which inculcates these values into children. Adults brought up in these values can only be of benefit to society.

D8. Human Rights, Groups and Individuals

Human Rights are Not For Groups but Individuals

¶**D8a.** Because human rights belong to individuals, not groups, the right of individuals and parents to make educational decisions must be protected as a fundamental human right. If a society bases the protection of human rights on an individual identifying with a larger group, parallel societies are encouraged, not opposed - but if society protects the rights of individuals to become a part of society without losing important individual or family distinctives, pluralism is supported.

Many Effective Educational Approaches Possible

¶**D8b.** In the United States, Great Britain, and in other countries, homeschoolers individually and as a collective group have demonstrated that there are a wide variety of effective educational approaches and philosophies that can co-exist regardless of race, ethnicity, income level, social class, and geography. In most of these countries, homeschooled students demonstrate that they are active in society, well-trained, sought after by universities and employers because of their reputation they are not isolated - they are integrated and productive members of society.

Repression Leads to Parallel Societies

¶**D8c.** In Germany, the government's current program of repression of homeschooling, itself a legacy of national socialism (nazism), is more likely to push people and families either out of Germany (as indeed is now happening) or into parallel societies where they will be protected and cherished because of their connection with the group and not because of their connection with society (see ¶**D3d**). Homeschoolers do not want this. Sweden should not want this but if the Government enacts the proposed new education law, this is precisely what will happen. And no free state should force people to make a choice between leaving their country or homeschooling. The only states that do so are by definition totalitarian states. I cannot believe that this is what Swedes truly want.

D9. Sweden's Opportunity

Sweden Could Set a Wonderful Example

¶**D9a.** Sweden today is in an ideal situation to create a fair and just educational law that reflects a truly pluralistic society, and to continue to be an example to other pluralistic democracies, including the United Kingdom which is seeking to emulate it. The old education law certainly needed altering both to improve current state education as well as to clearly define home education rights and to protect pluralism.

Extreme Statism

¶**D9b.** The only alternative is extreme statism such as exists, or has existed, in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Fascist Spain, Communist Russia (the Soviet Union), Communist China, the former Communist East European satellites of the Soviet Union (Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria), and various Communist states around the world like Albania, Yugoslavia, Kampuchea, Laos, Vietnam and North Korea. All of these had, or have, a uniform schooling system in order to create a uniform fascist or communist society. All of them have seriously abused human rights, and continue to do so.

Democratic-Totalitarian Combinations Don't Work

¶D9c. Any attempt to combine fascist or communist statist ideas with pluralistic democracy can only result, ultimately, in totalitarian government. What the Swedish Government is proposing is not, moreover something new, even if political elements within it may believe that combining totalitarianism with democracy is something untried. Democratic-totalitarian combinations that ban pluralism have been tried and have been shown to be disastrous for human rights and liberty. Stalinist North Korea (Peoples' Democratic Republic of Korea) is one such 'democracy' - communist East Germany (German Democratic Republic), which allowed for multiple political parties, was another. Both are, or were, police states. 'Democratic-totalitarianism' is an oxymoron - you can no more combine them than you can oil and water.

Democracy without Pluralism is Totalitarianism

¶D9d. Democracy without pluralism is not true democracy but something else, and it's called **totalitarianism**. Consequently, in defence of pluralism and individual liberty, **the government proposal to ban home schooling *must be rejected and replaced with a law that improves upon the existing home schooling law that also gives greater liberty to homeschoolers, not one that replaces it completely.*** (See [#F](#). *Recommended Government Legislation for 2010-11*).

Sources

[1] Michael P. Donnelly, Lecture given at the *Netzwerk Bildungsfreiheit Conference* and the *Second International Colloquium on Home Education* at Burg Rothenfels-am-Main, Germany

E. Deficiencies and Consequences of the Current Educational Law

E1. Realities and Implications of the Existing System

A Vague Law Exploited by Municipalities

¶E1a. Dr. Cynthia M. Villalba of the Institute of International Education, Stockholm University, in a research study, *Creating Policy from Discursive Exchanges on Compulsory Education and Schooling in Sweden* (2004), provides one of the best academic insights into homeschooling in Sweden under the current educational laws (see [#G, Appendix I](#) before continuing in this section). By using several case studies to illustrate the relationship between parents and the Swedish authorities, with detailed examples from the decision-making process of the municipalities (*kommuns*), she highlights the major problems and complexities facing homeschoolers in their quest to have their needs recognised. This has happened in part because the law is vague and gives local municipalities (*kommuns*) considerable freedom in the decision-making process. As a result homeschoolers must basically deal with the entrenched prejudice and hostility of the system and essentially beg like a dog begging for scraps of food at the dining room table as the junior partner in the double parenting scenario that is education in Sweden.

Comparisons with Colonialism and Imperialism

¶E1b. With the *kommun* given the right to interpret the law as it sees fit, and parents expected to accept that interpretation, decisions tend to be based on whatever the current political whim or preference happens to be. Under the current system parents, who for the most part are mature, responsible adults in real life, come to occupy the humiliating position of small, ignorant and immature children asking permission from their all-wise and all-powerful elders for some favour which they would never need to seek as adults. This kind of micromanagement of homeschoolers is not at all unlike the patronising approach of the former European colonial powers over their African subjects. What you have, under the existing arrangement, is a kind of internal colonialism and imperialism. And under the *new* proposed education law, you have an even more oppressive system not at all unlike the former French North African colony of Algeria which was not merely a 'colony abroad' but which was governed as a direct extension of metropolitan France itself. I do not regard my family as a colony of the state.

An Artificial Parallel Society

¶E1c. Worse still, in many respects, as we look more closely at the education model that is evolving in Sweden, we observe that the state school has become a government-sponsored and -mandated artificial parallel society all on its own - separate, effectively distinct and isolated from the real world as a whole (see [#D](#), *Education for a Plural, Parallel or Uniform Society?*). The nearest equivalent or parallel would be the military. It is a kind of sociological 'boarding school' not unlike the private schools of Britain enjoyed by the wealthy or by those willing to sacrifice for it, whose unwritten purpose was to raise up and train a plutocratic élite for government and administration of the state. In either system, the temptation is to use school as a system of political control (see [¶C10h](#)).

School as a Government Test-tube Baby

¶E1d. Indeed, as some have suggested, the state school may, with some justification, be viewed as a kind of 'test-tube baby' in a private government laboratory which exists for the moulding and shaping of the thinking and behaviour of our children - with the state as a kind of 'surrogate parent' which one researcher describes as a 'synthetic' and 'institutional' family (see [¶G1b](#)) - a 'family' which would appear to have been designed to replace the original family unit in gradual steps as occurred in the former Soviet Union when it briefly abolished marriage. The fact that parents are now playing an increasingly secondary rôle in their children's upbringing - more so if the new legislation is enacted - would seem to be confirmation of this thesis. The threat to have homeschooling made a crime simply confirms a barely concealed agenda by various elements of the state, or other influential groups who control them, to gradually take over our children completely, as was, and is, the aim of fascist and communist states, and to totally ignore the Human Rights Conventions designed to protect them from such totalitarianism. How can this be happening in a pluralist, liberal democracy like Sweden?

Parents Progressively Excluded

¶E1e. This artificially-created parallel society (see [#D](#)), arguably being shaped to replace the existing one, has, over the years, acquired an independent life all of its own with its own rules and

regulations that largely exclude the parents who fund it through taxation and have voted in the politicians to manage it, and seems to exist for the purpose of deliberately manipulating and changing the values and morals of society in a thoroughly undemocratic way. It may be argued to be a kind of brainwashing. Though the parents are always consulted, if the parents happen to disagree with the state, the state has the right to override their wishes and frequently does. Parents under the existing system are now mere functionaries of a higher, artificially-created parental authority.

Tension and Conflict Between State Philosophy and Human Rights

¶E1f. Since Sweden's accession to the European Union, a tension has come into existence between the little known and little publicised philosophy (political doctrine) of the state education system and the rights guaranteed parents by the European Convention to determine the nature and course of their children's own education - whether in the state, private or homeschooling spheres, and according to their own religious or philosophical convictions. This has resulted now in a crafty attempt by elements of the Swedish state, as it seeks to assume a Big Brother rôle, to eliminate homeschooling altogether by playing word games with the public to make it appear as if its system answers all the needs of homeschooling parents, which as we have seen is impossible. By casually dismissing homeschooling as an outdated relic of the past, and insisting (by playing word games) that exclusive state schooling is *not* in conflict with the EU Convention or the UN Charter on Human Rights, is it unreasonable to postulate that the state is now seeking to make it illegal in order to continue pursuing its social experiment of remolding society into its own totalitarian image under the guise of 'democracy'? Or is the reason simply laziness and indifference, a desire to be rid of an extra level of bureaucratic funding and management?

Halt the Slide into Totalitarianism

¶E1g. We see plenty of evidence of this covert state goal in the way local *kommuns* (municipalities) and in particular, some politicians, have handled applications by parents to homeschool under the existing laws (see [#G](#), Appendix I). This slide into

monolithic, uniformitarian totalitarianism has to be halted *now* and a genuine effort made to restore a proper balance that guarantees the rights of *all* to educate in the manner that they wish. This is not a call to necessarily change state schooling as it presently exists (though giving parents more direct say and power over what happens in their schools would certainly better reflect the aspirations of a true pluralistic democratic state) but to allow free home education devoid of all the unnecessary current government red tape and arbitrary ruling against homeschooling parents. Homeschoolers want freedom.

If This Thesis is Flawed...

¶E1h. Now if my thesis is flawed or even false (which it might be) then the government can prove its integrity and commitment to democratic pluralism, given the evidence supporting the legitimate doubts raised by this report, by implementing the proposed regulations (see [#F](#), *Recommended Government Legislation for 2010-11*), revising and reforming the existing law, which will guarantee the right of parents to freely homeschool their children with the *minimum* of state institutional interference and with the financial support which they have already paid for in their taxes.

An End to State Paternalism

¶E1i. What we seek, on the domestic educational front, is the equivalent of the independence and liberation of former colonial states, trusting them to be competent and able enough to govern their own affairs without the need of colonial masters to 'father' them - the same kind of trust that was begrudgingly given to the Independent or Free Schools when they first appeared. I myself, as a professional educator, certainly do not need 'fathering' in the area of education by politicians and state functionaries, and nor does the average homeschooling parent who has been shown, in multiple studies across the world, to be more than competent in doing a good teaching job of his/her own children. And since most homeschooling parents are mothers, the implication that they are incapable and incompetent if homeschooling is criminalised has nothing less than sexist implications too.

E2. The End of Multi-Culturalism?

Manipulation of Culture

¶E2a. We have established that the school environment - whether in the form of state or independent schools - is an artificial miniature culture of its own. It is a sub-culture whose purpose is to transform the existing culture outside the school environment by indoctrinating children into one universal system of thought by making it its primary cultural lens through which all other cultures are to be assessed and judged.

Three Different Cultures

¶E2b. This conflict between the main culture 'outside' the school system and the school system itself, otherwise artificially cushioned because of the reduced contact between the two, is highlighted when the school sub-culture comes into contact with another sub-culture, namely, homeschooling. The attitude of the school sub-culture towards the homeschooling sub-culture is not unlike the attitude of the former colonial powers towards the cultures they conquered or their attempts to impose new cultural values of their own through their colonial administrations and especially through their schools.

A Form of Racism and Genocide

¶E2c. Were the school and homeschooling sub-cultures to consist of two different ethnic groups, then the attitude of the schooling sub-culture towards the homeschooling culture would rightly be described as *racism*. Instead of seeking to equalise the relationship and recognise the independent value and right of each sub-culture, the government's solution - eliminate homeschooling - is the equivalent of political genocide. By a process of 're-education' at state schools the ultimate aim can only be the extinction of multi-culturalism, not by gradual and natural evolution in the wider culture outside, but through progressive forced training in a 'new culture' called the schooling system.

Artificial vs. Real Culture

¶E2d. Sweden is a complex amalgam of different races and

cultures who like their distinctives and whose distinctives can be, and are, enjoyed by other races and cultures in their mutual contacts. I myself was born and raised in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic Asian country and was richly rewarded by my interactions with them. Each culture has distinctive values, norms and rules for behaviour. Even within the 'native' Swedish population there are different values, norms and rules of behaviour depending on their respective religious and philosophical belief systems. Though there are always shared values (the 'co-culture' - see [#D](#)) the 'sum values' are not nearly as homogenous as the government would like us to believe and which it tries to instill into our children - without our consent necessarily - through its schooling system.

Getting Out of the Rut

¶E2e. Western - and by extension, international - state education has more or less evolved in only one direction and become stuck in a rut. It's *raison d'être* is based on certain assumptions and goals which are arguably élitist when viewed in a broad sense (see ¶C2D, *Schooling and the Fourth Purpose*). Modern systems, as we have seen (like militaristic Prussia - which created mass state schooling to control and brainwash the proletariat - and totalitarian fascist and communist states of the 20th and 21st centuries who did the same) - evolved an education system that has progressively become more intolerant of others and in the process forgotten the benefits of the ones it has replaced.

E3. Benjamin Franklin, Native American Education and Ethnocentrism

A True Story from Virginia

¶E3a. To illustrate what I mean, I reproduce a pamphlet published in 1784 authored by statesman Benjamin Franklin and co-founder of the United States, entitled *Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America*.

1. Savages we call them, because their Manners differ from ours, which we think the Perfection of Civility, they think the same of theirs.

2. Perhaps, if we could examine the Manners of different Nations with Impartiality, we should find no People so rude, as to be without any Rules of Politeness, nor any so polite, as not to have some Remains of Rudeness.

3. The Indian Men, when young, are Hunters and Warriors; when old, Counsellors; for all their Government is by Counsel of the Sages; there is no Force, there are no Prisons, no Officers to compel Obedience, or inflict Punishment. Hence they generally study Oratory, the best Speaker having the most influence. The Indian Women till the Ground, dress the Food, nurse and bring up the Children, and preserve and hand down to Posterity the Memory of public Transactions.

4. These Employments of Men and Women are accounted natural and honourable. Having few artificial Wants, they have an abundance of Leisure for Improvement by Conversation. Our labourious Manner of Life, compared with theirs, they esteem slavish and base; and the Learning on which we value ourselves, they regard as frivolous and useless.

5. An Instance of this occurred at the Treaty of Lancaster, in Pennsylvania, anno 1744, between the Government of Virginia and the Six Nations. After the Principal Business was settled, the Commissioners from Virginia acquainted the Indians by a Speech, that there was at Williamsburg a College, with a Fund for Educating Indian youth; and that, if the Six Nations would send down half a dozen of their young Lads to that College, the Government would take care that they should be well provided for, and instructed in all the Learning of the White People.

6. It is one of the Indian Rules of Politeness not to answer a public Proposition the same day that it is made; they think it would be treating it in a light manner, and that they show it Respect by taking time to consider it, as of a Matter important. They therefore deferr'd their Answer till the Day following; when their Speaker began, by expressing their deep Sense of the kindness of the Virginia Government, in making them that Offer;

7. "For we know," says he, "that you highly esteem the kind of Learning taught in those Colleges, and that the Maintenance of our young Men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinc'd, therefore, that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you, who are wise, must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things; and you will not therefore take it amiss, if our Ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same with Yours.

7. We have some Experience of it; Several of our young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Woods, unable to bear either Cold or Hunger, knew neither how to build a Cabin, take a Deer, or kill an Enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were themselves neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors; they were totally good for nothing.

8. We are however not the less oblig'd by your kind Offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take great Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make *Men* of them.

Consequences of Ethnocentrism

¶E3b. Extreme ethnocentrism leads to a rejection of the richness and knowledge of other cultures. It impedes communication and blocks the exchange of ideas and skills among peoples. Because it excludes other points of view and ways of doing things, an ethnocentric orientation is restrictive and limiting.

Good Intentions are Not Always Enough

¶E3c. This is precisely how homeschoolers feel about the Swedish government's belief that it knows the best and only way to educate. We know better. I am sure, like the Government of Virginia's attitude towards the Indians, that its intentions are "Good", or would be were this not now to become a matter of

compulsion. The availability of the state system is good ***if it is by invitation*** but becomes Bad when it forces it on those like us who do not want it for all the many valid reasons which we have given.

We Represent a Cross-Section of Sweden

¶E3d. We represent, moreover, as has been made plain, every kind of lifestyle, political persuasion, philosophical orientation, primary language and religious belief that can be found in Swedish society at large. We are a representative cross-section of the main culture, with all its sub-cultures and co-cultures, united with one purpose: the desire to homeschool our children in the way which we, as parents - and with ample precedent from the evidence on homeschooling in the international community - know in no way threatens the existing order or consensus.

Minimum, Quality Contact Wanted

¶E3e. We may not do things the same way but we have the same goal of giving the best to our children, which we insist may be done in any number of different ways. If we are given the freedoms we deserve, we will not become a bureaucratic or financial burden on the state, but quite the opposite. We want, and demand from those we have elected into power to represent us, meaningful and quality interaction with the local *kommuns* but with minimum contact, two or three times a year at most, but with the right to request more contact and help on an individual family basis as and when we feel it might be needed. We want an end to autocratic government behaviour with its thin veneer of 'democracy' added on top of it to lend it an imagined legitimacy. We want the freedom to be personally responsible and not be treated as children or as criminals, for we are neither.

F. Recommended Government Legislation for 2010-11

F1. Important Concepts

Seven Principles to Form a Working Model

¶F1a. The following concepts need to be clearly expressed in the legislation and leave no room for ambiguity or for multiple interpretations:

1. Education in Sweden is compulsory from the ages 7 to 16;

2. The type of education each child receives is a matter of parental choice and shall be chosen from among either:

I. State schooling (the default);

II. Independent or Free schooling (subject to place availability); or

III. Home education.

3. Every parent needs to be clearly informed of his/her three options by written communication from the local *kommun* several months in advance of each child's first academic year so that adequate time can be given to the children's parents or guardians for making an informed choice;

4. State Schooling shall be the default form of schooling given and shall be that offered if the parent(s) do not contact the local *kommun* and inform them of their choice for either Independent Schooling or Homeschooling, having first been contacted ([¶F1a.3](#));

5. Otherwise the parent(s) shall contact the *kommun* and inform them that they are either making a choice for an Independent or Free School (subject to the availability of places) or for Home Education;

6. It should be clearly understood that in contacting the *kommun* to indicate a choice for one of the two alternatives to state school education that the parent(s) are *not* seeking the "permission" of the *kommun*, as has hitherto obtained in the current law, but are exercising their automatic right and exercise of free choice - they are simply informing the *kommun* of their decision, as is the common practice in countries like the United States and United Kingdom, so that the *kommun* knows where and how they are being

educated, and may thus discharge themselves of the responsibility to ensure that compulsory education is being given; neither should they have to 'apply' each year: once the decision has been made by the parent(s), it is permanent unless the parent(s) decide to unilaterally change systems mid-stream;

7. Education in Sweden is free, being funded by taxation.

Homeschooler Access to State Resources

¶F1b. The *kommun* and local state school shall exist as a local resource on expertise for the home educating parent(s) for those parent(s) who wish to utilise state resources. Each homeschooling parent should be informed of how to make contact the Principal (Rektor) and Class Teacher so that he/she may get in contact to ask for assistance should this be desired. Parent(s), should they desire it, should be able to ask and be granted permission for their children to:

1. Voluntarily join any class sporting, gymnastic, musical or other activities offered by the school that they may choose their children to attend;
2. Have access to science laboratory facilities (for example) in the higher grades by having the option of joining any classes if they so wish.

F2. Accreditation

National Tests and Alternative Curriculum Choices

¶F2a. It is important, for the sake of the children, that the *kommun* ensures a child involved on a homeschooling program is properly accredited or qualified before he/she enters the work force. To this end homeschooling parents must either:

1. Present their children for the four National Tests (*nationalprov*) at the times stipulated by the *kommun* and receive such assistance as they should need in being helped to prepare for these tests; or

2. If they choose not to follow the National Curriculum, to inform the *kommun* of an **alternative curriculum** that is internationally accredited or recognised in one or more foreign countries to which the child is subscribed and studying for.

3. The child should not, if it has been enrolled in another internationally recognised curriculum, be expected to follow *both* curricula at the same time. This is the situation that my family finds itself in today, making at times for an impossible workload for the children.

The Three Grounding Subjects

¶F2b. To this end, in respect of ¶F2a.1 above, it is important that a process exists, that is fair and unbiased, to ensure that parents are fulfilling certain minimum criteria. These should include obligatory teaching of

1. Mathematics;
2. Swedish (as either a first language or as a second language), and
3. English.

in the first school years. And obviously students need educating on Society (*Samhälle*) and how it functions in Sweden. Diagnostic tests should be made available to parents so that they can ensure their children are acquiring these fundamental skills.

F3. Material Resources and Funding

Free Schooling, Vouchers and Funding

¶F3a. As every person officially resident in Sweden is paying tax, all education must be free, as the law states. This means that parents should receive:

1. Free education at a state school;
2. Vouchers for Independent or Free Schools; or
3. Funding for home education.

It is important that the economic discrimination against homeschoolers end and that the new legislation protect the right of homeschoolers to be funded in proportion to legitimate needs. No homeschooling family should be expected to pay 'twice' - once for a system of education through taxation that it is not using, or barely using, and once for its own resource materials.

Books Made Available

¶F3b. What kind of funding should be made available for homeschoolers? Basically, all that is available free to pupils who enroll for State or Independent/Free School education. This should include:

1. Text books (which may be borrowed or given, depending on the local school policy);
2. Work or activity books (issued free).

Funding for Alternative Curricula

¶F3c. If the homeschooling parent(s) are following another curriculum, funds should be provided by the *kommun* for the ordering and purchase of the required materials (books, work/activity books, audio-visual materials, computer software, etc.) to meet the material needs of that curriculum, upon presentation of an itemised receipt to the *kommun*. It should not be difficult to organise an honest and fair method to ensure that home educators are compensated for what they genuinely need from their taxation.

Homeschooling is Very Inexpensive for the State

¶F3d. Compared to the financial investment in each child enrolled in the state schooling system, the economic needs of home educating parents are tiny, especially as homeschooling parents never ask for financial compensation for actually teaching, i.e. they receive no salary. Further, homeschooling parents do not need to pay for the construction, maintenance and running costs of school buildings and other facilities used by the state as schooling takes place at home. These two items, which constitute the bulk of the state budget in financing state schooling, are entirely absent from the homeschooling budget.

Accordingly, homeschooling would be cheap and economical for the government to subsidise. As the homeschooling community grew, so the government would not be burdened with the need to build as many new schools to meet the needs of the growing population.

Ending State Theft of Homeschooler Taxation Funds

¶F3e. It is important that what has hitherto amounted to state theft - the refusal by *kommuns* to fund homeschoolers in any degree under the present law - come to an immediate end. Denying homeschoolers access to the funds they need when they are being taxed to fund their children's education is unjust. In the time-honoured Swedish method of consultation, *kommun* and homeschooling parents should be able to come to sensible agreements on what is fair and what is not, depending in part what physical resources from the local state school can be made available to the home educator *at home*.

The Alternate Tax Refund

¶F3f. Alternatively, the percentage of tax allocated and deducted for state schooling should be returned to the parents who shall thereafter be entirely responsible for the provisions of all material educational needs. Though probably the least practical and desirable of the two alternatives, it is one possible solution.

F4. General State Monitoring and Assessment

Mutual Consultation and Good Working Relationships

¶F4a. Home educators do not want to be treated as a "special case", an "exception", "potential trouble-makers", "law-breakers" or a group of people "under suspicion" requiring "special monitoring" but to be treated like every other parent using the state system (see ¶C13b). However, we do absolutely want contact with the *kommun* for mutual consultation and good working relationships.

Homeschooling Unions & Municipality Contact

¶F4b. We recommend the eventual setting up of four types of contact:

1. **National**, consisting of a National Home Educator's Union (I recommend that *Rohus* assume that rôle if the organisation is agreeable), to which all Home Educators may belong, with democratically elected representatives, to represent all homeschoolers in Sweden, which meets at a minimum of once a year in Stockholm with the Department of Education to discuss mutual concerns, interests and needs;
2. **Regional**, consisting of a Regional Home Educator's Union (as a division of the National Union), organised along the same lines as ¶F4b.1 above, to represents all home educators in each Region (*län*). As home schooling is currently not large this may not have any particular significance until a later time when the homeschooling movement grows, as it almost certainly will;
3. **Local**, for each *kommun* where there is more than one home schooling family, with the same purpose in mind. Again, this may not be a practical necessity for some time in view of the small numbers; and
4. **Personal**, annual or biannual meetings between homeschooling parents and representatives of the local *kommun* and schools for parents to discuss their particular needs and problems, and for the *kommun* to assist with these problems and be satisfied that the parents are not promoting violence or sedition in the education of their children, for example (see #C17, *Safeguards Against Extremism and Fundamentalism*). An example might be help in Swedish tuition for foreign families.

The Urgent Need for Consulation with Homeschoolers

¶F4c. In any event, the state and homeschooling parents need to sit down together and come to an agreement on the respective responsibilities and obligations of all parties before the proposed new education law is voted on by Parliament. What all homeschoolers are agreed upon is that the state should *not*

continue its neo-mediaeval rôle of the 'Church' as a censor and oppressor of those who have divergent beliefs and educational practices, but learn to work together with them in the building of a pluralist society. We are not social heretics.

Learning to Agree to Disagree and Live With It

¶F4d. There should be mutual willingness to agree to disagree, when unity cannot be found, in a mature, tolerant and non-belligerent way, to foster mutual respect so that both parties may, side by side, build and sustain the common pluralist democratic ideal. To this end, there should be a positive intent, rooted in good will, to build unity in diversity as has by and large happened in other segments of Swedish society, where neither side seeks to bully, intimidate or bend the other to its own will, and certainly not the larger and more powerful (the state) the smaller and weaker (home educators). This will prevent ill-advised arbitrary interference with homeschoolers on the part of many officials who have not been properly trained to view homeschooling parents as *bona fide* citizens under the protection of the law but as potential enemies of the state, which they absolutely are not.

A Home Educators' Charter

¶F4e. To ensure a harmonious working relationship between the state and homeschooling parents, I would like to recommend, as one possibility, that any National Home Educators Union (see ¶F4b.1) draw up a **Charter** to which members of the said union could officially subscribe, and be compelled to adhere to, as a condition of their membership, which the state could recognise and negotiate with and in consequence give said members maximum autonomy in conducting the business of homeschooling. Such would, on the one hand, allay any fears the state might have and on the other commit the state to positive and honourable engagement with homeschoolers and so effectively protect the rights of homeschoolers. The Charter would have to be religiously, philosophically and politically neutral so as to embrace all homeschoolers, no matter what their religious, philosophical and political affiliations might be, so as to properly reflect and respect the European Convention and the United Nations Charter on Human Rights..

Mutual Benefit from Experience

¶F4f. As a result both the state educational system and home educators would mutually benefit from one another's rich personal experiences for the welfare of all children in the country, irrespective of which form of education the parents choose.

F5. Specific State Monitoring and Assessment

Waiving Continuous Assessment for Homeschoolers

¶F5a. In order to ensure maximum work efficiency for serious home educators, the new regulations already in force in school since 2008, requiring almost continuous assessment of all pupils, must be waived for homeschoolers who may be following alternative curricula. Since the implementation of these new regulations in state schools, many home educators have been labouring under impossible conditions. Whereas previous to these new rules, home schoolers were monitored only twice a year (on average), the new regulations require homeschoolers to attend dozens of assessments at home and at school requiring much travel (itself expensive - a two-way trip to our local school and home takes 1 hour and 10 minutes, longer if buses are employed because in our area of the country buses are infrequent - a whole day can be wasted just to attend a single, short test) and interruptions of homeschooler's existing study plans. Such a system, though practical for students working on-site at a school, places impossible burdens on many homeschoolers who may be operating under completely different conditions.

The State Education Philosophy: One of Many

¶F5b. It has to be clearly understood that many, if not most, home educators operate a completely different philosophy to that of the state. The state schooling system may be said to be based on the following propositions:

1. An educated person is someone who knows a little about everything:

this is the basic tenet of a curriculum: cover all the

bases;

often this achieved knowledge has no real "life" validity. (It's the fresh graduate that is hated by the seasoned worker).

2. True learning does not require the desire to learn:

students who have no desire to learn the prescribed material are forced into "learning". The teacher considers it good enough to repeat the material and be able to speak it back (via verbal or written testing). Following this procedure is the only way for the student to "get out," or "graduate".

3. Everyone learns the same way (at the same time in life; at the same rate; etc.):

The same methods used for all, proving that those in charge believe everyone learns the same way (even though they admit this is not true). One standard is used to grade everyone (the curriculum);

Students who do not fit the "norm" are either mentally inferior, possess behavioral problems, are lazy, or have some chemical imbalance (usually "fixed" with prescription drugs).

The New Regulations a Heavy Burden for Homeschoolers

¶F5c. To expect homeschoolers to engage in this particular form of testing is to effectively force them back into state schooling. Indeed, the "arrival" of these new rules shortly before the proposed new education law was finally made public does, unfortunately, lend considerable weight to the "Conspiracy Theory" described in ¶C14b.3, namely, that this was part of a move to justify the undemocratic banning of homeschooling, since meeting the new state school criteria for testing would be virtually impossible for homeschoolers under any other system but that of the state school.

Separate System of Assessment for Homeschoolers

¶F5d. Therefore the new law should not bind home educators to the new already-in-force regulation regarding assessments. This is even more true for homeschoolers educating in another language other than Swedish, as we are.

G. APPENDIX I

Creating Policy from Discursive Exchanges on Compulsory Education and Schooling in Sweden

By Dr. Cynthia M. Villalba

Institute of International Education, Stockholm University,
Stockholm, Sweden

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(New Format and numbering of paragraphs has been added)

Preface

National and Local Framework for Compulsory Education

¶**Preface.** The paper first introduces the national and local framework for compulsory-level 'undervisning på annat sätt' [teaching/education otherwise than in school] education in Sweden. According to national statistics in Sweden, every year an average of 100 children are registered as receiving their education at home, arranged in some cases by school officials or by parents themselves. That this figure seems small causes most local school officials to view this form of education as 'rare' and, consequently, 'is no need for special legislation or policy'. Many of the 290 municipalities, however, have been exposed to parent-

arranged home education in their local areas, either through activation of a working arrangement with parents, sometimes resulting in a local policy, or via an often drawn-out legal struggle involving state, child and parental rights. Using material from a doctoral study, examples are presented in order to illustrate how, in one country, requests for home education are both negotiated and denied.

G1. Introduction [1]

The Mission of the Primary School

¶**G1a.** In his book on the development of mass schooling in Sweden, Boli (1989:225) argues that the mission of the primary school has, since the 19th century, expanded enormously:

1. "[T]he curriculum is supposed to consider and develop all aspects of the child's being, and the schools regularly assume much responsibility for students' health and dental care, psychological and social problems, and leisure activities."

School Becoming a Synthetic, Institutional Family

¶**G1b.** The school, according to Gatto (2002), is becoming a 'synthetic' or 'institutional' family.

The State as Has Primary Parenting Rights

¶**G1c.** The opening chapter of the Education Act, considered one of the several steering tools used for governing basic education in Sweden, makes reference to this ever-expanding 'upbringing' function of the modern Swedish school, which should be shared with the home. The school's influence in the child's life is so powerful that although parents or guardians must be consulted prior to major decision-making by schooling officials, their objections can be overruled (Erdis, 2003: 18).

Tensions Between State and Biological Parents

¶**G1d.** Despite this gradual transfer of upbringing tasks from the

family to the school (or other societal institutions for that matter), Sverne (1992: 19) argues that within the framework of school education in Sweden, tensions continue to exist concerning the boundaries of decision-making power accorded to the student, parent and the school. These tensions are even more apparent when parents want to claim their right to decide upon the dominant influences in their children's lives, prioritising family and the greater community (local, national and international alike) above the school.

Basic Education and Historical Demands for Alternatives

¶G1e. In this way, the issue under study is the demand for basic education, rather than its supply or provision by the state or other organisers, a point that is rarely taken up in studies made on developed industrialised societies. People take for granted that once a society reaches nearly full enrolment of the schoolaged population in compulsory-level school, the demands for additional forms of education will be redirected to the available supply. It is hard to believe that this will always be the case given that throughout the history of mass schooling there have always been demands for alternative forms of education.

National Curriculum and Syllabi: Minimum Detail

¶G1f. Other than the Swedish Education Act (*skollag*), which can be described as the most important steering instrument in society' control over the school system (Fredriksson, 1987: 5), various tools created by the central government are used to steer and govern the education system, such as the national curriculum (*läroplan*), and syllabi (*kursplaner*). The National Agency for Education (NAE) refers to these policy documents and legislation as 'instruments' which are to contain as little detail as possible so as to allow the schools and municipalities the greatest freedom possible (National Agency for Education, August 2004). There are also other instruments used to steer or govern education at the local level, such as school plans, which will be referred to below.

Exemptions from School-based Education

¶G1g. Swedish legislation on compulsory education is often applied or adapted to cases where children engage in formal

education outside of the school system, either on a temporary or longer-term basis, as in the case of home-based education. The part of the Act that deals directly with exemptions from schoolbased education (SFS 1985: 1100, 10:46) stipulates that it is possible to engage in out-of-school education instead of school education, but:

1. "out-of-school education must be an approved and equitable alternative; monitoring (*insyn*) by authorities must be arranged; approved applications are valid for only one year; and, official permission can be withdrawn on short notice." (Vynnycky, 2004: 83)

The Local State Decision-Making Body: The MEC

¶G1h. According to section 10:6, requests for alternative forms of compulsory-level education should be addressed to the decision-making body in charge of the school where the child would have enrolled, in this case the municipal education committee (MEC). The MECs are composed of lay politicians.

Homeschooling as an Exemption

¶G1i. Practices such as home-based education are considered *exemptions* from conventional schooling, which is otherwise treated as obligatory in Sweden. The average person on the street would probably not know that it is possible to register for compulsory education outside of school, nor that there are hundreds of children doing so at present. As Ingrid Nilsson remarks in her report on independent schools for the NAE, although home education is becoming well known in other parts of the world, it is 'foreign to the Swedish tradition of education' (Nilsson, 2000: 54). Given the historical shifts in education, however, it 'may not remain that way forever' (p. 54).

Historical Context: Mass Schooling and Home Education

¶G1j. Of course, on the other hand, if one refers back far enough to previous generations throughout Europe, it was only in the 19th century with the introduction of mass schooling that some governments in Europe sought to limit education based at home and in the community (Taylor & Petrie, 2000:50), and Sweden is

no exception. Prior to this time, noninstitutional forms of organised education in the region were in many respects considered quite natural (p. 50). According to one historical study of a Swedish municipality, for instance, older forms of 'home education' were dominant prior to 1842, when the law on compulsory school education became a reality. By 1880, what was referred to as home education had tapered off to 6.7% of all school-aged children (Litsgård, 1995: 19).

Official Number of Homeschoolers

¶G1k. Today, the official number of children approved for basic education outside of the school is usually around 100 of the school-aged population. During one point in the 2002/2003 school year the figure was 124, and for 2003/2004 there were 91 children registered in this category (NAE, 2004).

Unreliable Statistics

¶G1l. From the experience gained from the present study, however, these statistics, gathered each year by the national bureau of statistics and published by the NAE, are rather unreliable as they refer to all categories of approved out-of-school education. This includes not only children engaged in traditional home-based education organised by parents or families themselves, but children in distance education programmes, children who refuse to attend school, children in the care of the state, and so on. As explained below, requests for home education are received and approved/denied at any time throughout the year, and committee decisions sometimes take time or are brought to higher appeals courts by parents, and many families move between municipalities or travel. Furthermore, in many cases, before or after an official request is made by families, home education is in progress and there are apparently no central records on the number of cases pending at any given time. Some cases are tied up in court for years. A few municipalities I contacted were not able to explain why their municipality was registered as having a case or cases of out-of-school education. Therefore, in this context, the true number of families engaged in traditional home-based education, or even home education with support from distance or correspondence programmes, cannot be estimated at this time.

G2. The Article and the Study

Discursive Mode of Governance

¶**G2a.** Documentary materials from four applications to one municipality in Sweden have been chosen from the larger pool of primary sources collected for an ongoing doctoral study on local-level home education policy in Sweden. Through their discourse, local governments 'appropriate' material for 'authorised policy' on compulsory education, the latter defined by Levinson and Sutton (2001: 2) as a 'discursive mode of governance absolutely central to the administration of modern societies' This policy serves as

1. "a legitimating charter for the techniques of administration and (sic) an operating manual for everyday conduct; it is the symbolic expression of normative claims worked into a potentially viable institutional blueprint."

Qualitative Content Analysis

¶**G2b.** The article presents a brief qualitative content analysis and discussion of municipality (local authority) responses to requests for an alternative to compulsory schooling. Policies that did not exist prior to these events are developed throughout the process of discursive exchanges. The article presents certain themes found in the documents, for use in further theoretical elaboration once an analysis of all primary source materials collected for the dissertation has been conducted.

Data from 33 Municipalities

¶**G2c.** Some comparisons are made from the general study of documentary and interview data in 33 municipalities to this particular case selected for more intensive study. The case is thus restricted to the world portrayed inside documents by certain actors, or the 'documentary reality' and further investigation and checking of facts and information via interviews and other methods needs to be presented for a full picture of the municipality. For example, many legal and scientific claims to truth are made by local officials and parents and at this point these claims have not been given a fair critical review. An

additional restriction is that the documents sampled are further broken down into textual excerpts, which are removed from their original contexts.

G3. The Application Process

Application to the MEC

¶**G3a.** As mentioned in the introduction, families who want to pursue home-based education, i.e. to withdraw their children from school, or not to enrol them in the first grade, must, by law (SFS 1985:1100 amended 1995:1248,10:5), apply to the appropriate MEC for permission. There are no set rules for the content of the application, nor the criteria to be used by the MEC in considering it. Parents can appeal against the decision to the relevant county appeals court.

Persons Involved in the Application Process

¶**G3b.** Most of the documents reviewed here deal with the application to the MEC. They include the parents' initial communication with the MEC and discussion with its representatives. The latter include local politicians, school heads, administrators and home education 'persons' appointed by the municipality. However, it should be noted that appeals to the judicial system following the MEC' rejection of an application can lead to a great deal of back-and-forth communication, sometimes lasting more than a year, during which the child is often engaged in home education.

G4. The Four Applications and the Case Municipality

Home Education Only for Grades 1-3

¶**G4a.** The municipality contains fewer than 50,000 people and is in the south of Sweden. While the research was in progress it received four separate applications from parents wishing to home educate. Only one of these was approved by the MEC. As often happens in relation to home education in Sweden, this featured in the local press. It was the first recorded case in the municipality

and was presented in a favourable light. Two cases were rejected quite quickly, reportedly on the basis of selected legal and steering documents such as the Education Act, foundational bills leading to the Act and 'relevant legal praxis' (MEC Minutes). Both children were in grades 7-9, and the committee cited documentary material supporting its view that home education should only be approved for children in the first three years of compulsory education. Age was also a factor in the rejection of the fourth family's application, even though the application stemmed from problems the child had been experiencing at school, culminating in various health problems and school refusal.

G5. Family Documents

Analysed from the Municipality's Point-of-View

¶**G5a.** Because the main focus of this paper is on the municipality's responses, only a summary is presented of the documents submitted by parents. The documents made available to the author included: (a) the family's application to the MEC, with covering letter, education plans, photographs of the home setting, excerpts from the legislation, letters and examples of work from the children, attachments from distance education programmes and résumés of parents; (b) written correspondence to the education administration office, school officials and other contact persons.

Key Themes Under Discussion

¶**G5b.** Key themes discussed here are: (1) views of school education and home education as a solution and the rôle of the family in education; (2) how the authorities and schools should be involved in cases of home education in terms of governance, monitoring and support; and finally, (3) how Sweden should behave in an international context in respect to compulsory education (especially educational choice, school laws, international instruments, etc.). These themes overlap and deal with both the political and practical issues related to compulsory education, such as who should organise education and make major decisions, and the perceived negative effects of modern schooling, which is based on the paradigm created during the industrial revolution (see Albert, 1999 and Gatto, 2002 for views

on the latter point).

Negative Effects of Schooling

¶**G5c.** The negative effects of schooling and troubled school environments feature in parents' letters. According to one family their daughter

1. "couldn't concentrate on her schoolwork and she was disturbed by the chaotic environment . . . because of many teacher changes, incompetent teachers, (and) bad discipline . . ."

Bad Social Environment

¶**G5d.** Her situation was apparently well understood by sympathetic teachers. She refused to attend school due to her distress over foul and sexually loaded language, lack of respect for adults and violence (Family Four, letter to county appeals court).

The Homeschoolers' Focus

¶**G5e.** All of the applications focused on the nature of a parent's 'responsibility' for their children's education:

1. "Teaching (our son) is a great responsibility in respect to guaranteeing a good education for him." (Family Three, application)
2. "According to the UN Declaration of universal human rights, that Sweden has signed, it is the parents who choose the type of education for their children. The municipality has a great responsibility for all children's education and social development and we agree naturally to assure that our daughter receives this necessary development." (Family Four, application letter)

Insyn and the Setting of Homeschooling Boundaries

¶**G5f.** Most families also had clear ideas about their desired relationship with the municipality and its contact persons, and

they demonstrated an awareness of the government's likely demands. Family Three set very specific boundaries as to how the authority should be monitoring or 'looking into' (*insyn* [2]) its homeschooling. The Swedish concept of '*insyn*' is very widely used in all of the authority and family documents, perhaps indicating on the part of the latter that they are aware of the state's concern with transparency in respect to education outside of school:

1. "We would like the municipality/school to review or look into (our home programme) at least once per term, if you can organise it, and we hope to get an evaluation of our work, including good advice. In the main all will be presented by K himself, but we also keep a detailed diary of our work and what we have gone through." (Family Three, application letter)

The Desire for Good but Infrequent Contact

¶**G5g**. They also hoped to have good but infrequent contact with the school, and requested materials, along with financial support if possible. Their experience was perhaps based on the good relations they had enjoyed with their former municipality, where several home-educating families with children of various ages were registered. Family Two also wished to have 'relevant instructions and guidance from (the local school)' and also requested materials so that they themselves could 'provide the knowledge needed' at home (Family Two, second application letter). The same points were made by Family One, who had already met with the school head, who had promised them the materials they requested (Family One, application).

G6. Municipality Documents and Decision Making

Types of Document Under Analysis

¶**G6a**. Five general types of documents, out of the seven types found in all documents from all municipalities, were available for analysis (see bold type in Table 1). These documents are produced by (or on behalf of) administrative heads, assistants or others employed in the education administration, or by the politicians in the local committees, such as in the case of minutes

from MEC meetings. Some documents in this group are produced by (central) state or regional authorities such as the NAE or the judiciary authorities; however, documents from the last two groups are not included as sources here.

Table 1 Documents from local authorities, regional or higher courts and the NAE

Minutes from local education committee meetings and working committees
Written correspondence from office of educational administration to parents; school officials; social services
Internal correspondence within administrative office and MEC [e.g. from or to contact person for home education]
Notes on case, including excerpts from relevant legislation
<i>Decisions from county and higher courts</i>
<i>Official decisions from NAE regarding local case and other cases</i>
Related documents from NAE and local authorities, such as applications from parents for independent schools

The Illustrative Value of Some Documents

¶**G6b.** A small sample of documents was selected based on their illustrative value. As mentioned above, 14 documents of various types comprise the sample from the municipality, relating to the same family documents.

MEC Concepts of Correct Thinking and Problem Diagnosis

¶**G6c.** Textual analysis has tentatively identified two areas in which the MEC seeks: (1) to outline the 'right' ways to think about schooling and, to a lesser degree, education and society in Sweden (in effect, to communicate its vision of education and schooling); (2) to attempt a diagnosis of various types of 'problems' and solutions including the perceived rôle of

nonexperts/families in respect to authorities and the law; and (3) ultimately, to set boundaries, reconstruct its identity and responsibilities, and create a plan of desirable action for determining and justifying success or failure in its mission. Below are some excerpts from the documents to illustrate these points.

Value-Related Questions

¶G6d. (1) When a municipal education authority or school is presented with a request by parents to home educate their child/children, or when there is a problem at school that leads to school refusal or where alternative education is organised for some reason, the school officials and educators are suddenly confronted with a set of value-related questions. A local authority in charge of education is of course expected to have a vision of education and its system, not least because arguments addressed to the surrounding community can be made based on this vision.

'Social Training'

¶G6e. (a) Throughout the selected accounts it becomes apparent that in this particular Swedish municipality, basic school and schooling are constructed as essential and ideal institutions for the modern Swedish child or children being raised (or residing) in Swedish society. Above all, what is repeatedly referred to as 'social training' is seen as 'one of the school' main tasks' For the child, this process is said to take on more importance as the child grows older, and it is school attendance that 'provides' this experience, which is also essential for the child' development. No doubts are raised as to the success of the school in providing this training for all students (Internal background letter for MEC regarding Families One and Two). School attendance, rather than 'individual instruction' can 'guarantee' subject-specific knowledge goals as well as social training (Minutes of MEC meeting regarding Family Four).

MEC Concepts of 'Democracy'

¶G6f. With the background that school is depicted as the ideal place for the child to be exposed to the right social environment, the local authority argues that the school plan outlines the correct route to democracy, through 'unorganised play' as one

method. The correct adult rôle models, who mediate the testing of differences in opinion, are also present in this 'democratic' environment. Within one school, moreover, different ' contexts' are provided (Background report for MEC regarding Family Three). One author asserts that school is now seen as good for development through its collective organisation, whereby individual independence can be fostered within a peer group:

1. "In this way learning research is coming closer to the school situation, in which the individual learning process occurs in a collective situation." (ibid.)

Development and School Experience

¶G6g. From this we might conclude that the MEC believes that in contemporary society, children's development becomes dependent upon the school experience.

Rationales for Compulsory School Attendance

¶G6h. (b) Several points are made regarding home-based versus school education, the first using a citation from a legal praxis handbook (UFB) often referred to in MEC decisions. Firstly, school-type knowledge can only be found in school so it is nearly impossible for parents to provide it, which is why legislation makes school attendance necessary (Background report for MEC regarding Families One and Two). Home cannot replace school, so there is seen to be no real alternative to institutionalised education:

1. "It would be difficult for guardians through individual education to give children the knowledge . . . that can compare to that which she or he would receive in the basic or independent school. Therefore children, for their development especially, not least for social training, almost always can be taken to need the experience that school attendance provides." (Background report for MEC regarding Family Three, referring to UFB 6)

Negative Logic

¶G6i. Furthermore, compulsory attendance should be applied

uniformly in the negative sense that 'every other child' goes to school:

1. "It is an important principle that this child participate for his social training in the ordinary school education in the same way every other child does." (Minutes from MEC meeting regarding Family Three)

The School and Rehabilitation

¶G6j. (c) For MEC in this municipality, obligatory school attendance is in principle 'non-negotiable' (Background report for MEC regarding Family Three), even if the Act does give room for alternatives. When an exception is made, exemption from school is 'not an alternative for all compulsory school years' (ibid.). The child's age is labelled as a 'basic issue' (Internal memo regarding Family Four) in the case of Family Four, an issue which overshadows other dimensions of the case, such as the family's right to choose correspondence school or other flexible alternatives. In response to this request, the MEC couldn't find any mention of distance education in the Act [3] (MEC statement to the county appeals court regarding Family Four) and thus reason that school attendance is the only way to 'rehabilitate' the Child:

1. ". . . we think that from the student's perspective the need for rehabilitation will be met with a phasing into school's everyday life, if our decision is implemented." (ibid.)

Religious Education

¶G6k. (d) Another issue often raised, perhaps overemphasised, in respect to home education in Sweden, is the rôle of religion in education in contemporary Swedish society. Religious motives were mentioned in respect to one application, that of Family Three, and indirectly through association with the relatives of Family Four, who unsuccessfully applied to the NAE to start a Christian independent school. Family Three pre-empts any inquiries about religious motives in their application, stating that

1. "our home education will definitely not have a religious or special ethical profile, only be effective, exciting and

broad." (Family Three, application letter)

Humanist Rationale: Religion vs. Society

¶G6l. One MEC politician makes accusations to the contrary:

1. "My opinion is that the real reason is their religious beliefs whereby they want to raise their child in a special religious atmosphere that comes into conflict with today's society and school." (Minutes from MEC meeting regarding Family Three)

Home Schooling Requests Treated as a 'Problem'

¶G6m. (2) Quite likely due to the fact that cases of home education per municipality are in the context of school education, rather few and far between, such requests are often initially approached as a problem, and diagnoses and solutions are sought. This is perhaps the case even in municipalities where relations have developed with the home-educating families over a number of years.

The psychological Point-of-View

¶G6n. (a) In this way a psychological point of view is often adopted at the municipal or school level. In the municipality case, psychological or moral arguments are made in respect to 'social training' where a MEC politician requested an evaluation by a school psychologist before deciding on the family's application (Minutes from MEC meeting regarding Family Three).

The Concept of 'Holistic Judgement'

¶G6o. The expression '*helhetsbedömning*' interpreted as 'holistic judgement' is found throughout the municipal documents, in court documents and in the Act. This key expression depicts the desired method of conceptualising the approach to evaluation of home education activities and applications, and the MEC locates its use in the foundational bills preceding the Education Act. In view of this approach, again, it is 'social training' that is given the most attention, and in order to facilitate it, 'special measures' would have to be designed for promoting social contacts in cases

of individual education (Background report for MEC regarding Families One and Two).

Family's Motives for Homeschooling

¶G6p. (b) Aside from the political and legal issue as to whether the authority believes the family has a right to choose the form of education for their child, the family's motives for home education are of interest:

1. "It is difficult to decide which is the motivation for the parent's decision . . . sickness [of the child] or the general school situation." (Internal administration memo regarding Family Four)
2. "These parents haven't given any reason for their wanting to home educate their children." (Background report for MEC on Families One and Two)

Family's Motivation Not Important

¶G6q. In the end, however, it appears that family motivation for home education does not feature as a significant factor in decision making for MEC.

Negative Reasons for Granting Homeschooling

¶G6r. (c) When granting permission to Family Three in the case municipality, some committee members reasoned that it is better to accommodate the family rather than risk damaging the child:

1. "I am in principle against that children may be exempted from the chance to receive the social milieu that the school stands for. I see yet in any case a risk that if we turn down the application we will come into conflict with the family, which could damage the child." (Minutes of MEC meeting regarding Family Three)

Accommodation to Prevent Migration

¶G6s. Rather than potentially driving the family from the area, which is the case in several more conservative municipalities in

Sweden, the officials elected to accommodate the family. Many municipalities have also taken this stance, a point that will be dealt with later in the dissertation.

The Law is Often Disregarded

¶**G6t.** On the other hand, one politician who voted against approving Family Three's application argued that the parent's complaints about the local school were not reason enough to justify 'individual education' even if it is allowed by law:

1. "That the parents in their earlier application claim that [the school] is untidy, they do not like age-mixed classes or think that their own child doesn't get enough stimulation in school, are in my opinion not reason enough to motivate individual home education." (Minutes of MEC board meeting regarding Family Three)

Consequences of Refusal Preferred

¶**G6u.** Thus, some representing the local authority would opt not to accommodate the parents, and would instead be prepared to deal with the consequences, as mentioned above.

Right to Education and Public Resources

¶**G6v.** (3) As official documents are produced and arguments made for consumption by state actors, families and the interested public, the education authority, including the administrative and political units, defines itself and its mission in respect to both the child's right to basic education and school/public resources and that education is according to the state law, compulsory. In home-based education, the most contested aspect of this dual imperative is whether in a contemporary democracy, institutional schooling is itself, compulsory.

A Legitimizing Charter

¶**G6w.** In the process of defining itself, the local authority delineates its boundaries and responsibilities, and it sets in writing how to judge if its mission was a success or failure. One manifestation of these activities, as well as a 'legitimizing

charter' for its daily conduct, is an 'authorized policy' [4]

Financing Home Education

¶G6x. (a) The question of financing home education, unsurprisingly, appears throughout documents collected from almost all municipalities, though there is definitely no consensus as to the solutions. Some municipalities provide various kinds of financial support, such as for distance programmes, and some only provide school books and/or loan computers. In the case municipality, MEC argues that vouchers [5] do not extend beyond school education, although books and other similar materials can be loaned to children at home:

1. "We support that the school supply those books that other students have access to, partly due to 'rights' and partly to ease the pupil' return to the classroom. We deny on the other hand the proposal on [school vouchers] since parents who are ready to wholly take over responsibility for their children's schooling must also be prepared to take economic responsibility." (Minutes from MEC meeting regarding Family Three)

Financing Refused

¶G6y. MEC will not approve financing for those who do not carry out education according to the Education Act. (Background report for MEC regarding Family Three)

Economic Burden Shifted to Parents

¶G6z. A major share of 'economic responsibility' is thus shifted to parents, and compulsory education is consequently no longer free of charge as for school pupils. In contrast, some politicians proposed, without success, that MEC pay for 'school meals' and that families be reimbursed for average costs of teaching based on the per-head cost for pupils (Minutes from MEC meeting regarding Family Three). The municipality finally argues that its refusal to offer financial support to the family is warranted as it 'bears some costs for monitoring' and cannot on the basis of one child 'making any savings to speak of' (ibid.)

Independent School the Only Alternative

¶G6aa. (b) As the independent school is mentioned in the Education Act, and it is subject to approval by the NAE, it is constructed as the 'right' alternative to public education. MEC makes this point when it suggests that the same requirements should be applied to home education (Minutes from MEC board meeting regarding Family Three). Other legal experts make the same point:

1. "In the same way as in private/individualized teaching at home, permission to operate an independent school may be revoked by the NAE if the school no longer satisfies the necessary requirements." (Erdis, 2003: 18)

Appeals Courts

¶G6ab. As will be discussed in forthcoming articles, appeals court judges have also referred to independent school regulations in relation to home education.

Municipality 'Actors' and 'Teams'

¶G6ac. (c) Actors' rôles and the functioning of 'teams' are tested in the course of considering proposals from parents and in creating policies on home education. A follow-up document by the municipal administration, a good example of its attempt to demonstrate accountability for its actions and learning from the experiences with Family Three, included in its summary that visits to the home were made by both the class contact teacher and the development leader. Positive relations with the administration and the school were documented, as well as good achievement by the pupil and that the goals of the National Curriculum were met. Good 'social teamwork' was also demonstrated (Minutes from MEC board meeting regarding Family Three).

The Actor's Rôle

¶G6ad. One actor's rôle that is defined more clearly in the course of home education is that of the 'responsible head' who is delegated certain decisions in respect to carrying out the law:

1. "MEC' decision is based in all respects on the basic views of the Act, that the social context is a key aspect of which learning and development have everything to do, and in turn are grounds for the responsible head's mission." (MEC statement for the county appeals court regarding Family Four)

Extensions

G6ae. In many municipalities, perhaps including the present case, the number of responsible actors directly involved in a case of home education often increases following acceptance of an application, but tapers off if the child is engaged long-term. Some municipalities, for example, delegated monitoring to one contact person and MEC decisions for extensions were made each year, with little debate. Some municipalities delegate responsibility for *insyn* to the school and some to the municipal administration, both of whom normally serve as contacts between MEC and the family.

G7. Summary and Conclusions

Parents' Natural Rights

¶**G7a.** Parents appropriate the Education Act and the legal and practical framework existing in Sweden, presumably in order to arrange a family-governed and child-focused education on the basis that it is their natural right (and responsibility) to choose a suitable form of education for their children.

Themes in Parents' Documentation

¶**G7b.** Themes in parents' documents from the case municipality deal with views of school and home education, and how to solve problems and increase learning time and pleasure in learning through noninstitutional education. Part of their rôle as parents is in taking what they see as their responsibility for their children's education.

Parental Views for Homeschooling

¶G7c. Family plans for contact and involvement with the school and the municipal authorities illustrate their views as to how home-based activities should be monitored and what public support they may need. At the very least, parents' documents demonstrate an awareness of the public authority's concerns.

Policymaking in Progress

¶G7d. We can approach the processes of responses to parent initiatives as instances of policymaking in progress, of 'appropriating' material for a legitimate policy of governance, either purely discursively or through policy documents. Below are examples of policy materials that emerged from municipalities following exposure to home-based education and the subsequent process of debate among politicians.

Rôle of the Steering Instruments

¶G7e. In a summary written by the administration following their particular experiences, foundations for a policy emerged. Their understanding of the rôle of the steering instruments in home education become apparent here, where MEC finds

1. that individual education can be permitted even if special reasons do not exist, other than the parent's wishes;
2. that the requirement for teaching must be tested and shall be judged in every special case;
3. that the pupil's age is of decisive importance;
4. that religious beliefs are not of importance;
5. that the possibility of *insyn* is of decisive importance; and
6. that the need for social contacts is of decisive importance.
7. (Supplementary document from the municipal administration)

Satisfying *Insyn*

¶G7f. In reference to *insyn*, the documents imply that it may be satisfied in a number of ways: visits to the home a certain number of times per term; children's activities with others in school, where he or she may be seen and so on.

Differences in Municipality Approaches

¶G7g. Municipalities may differ in their view of the concept of *insyn* and thus the child's and the parent's rights with respect to compulsory education, illustrated below using excerpts adapted from a more detailed home-based education policy in another municipality.

Explaining *Insyn*

¶G7h. The school shall have *insyn*. *Insyn* means that:

1. Information on the steering documents is given to the home (nine local and national-level documents are mentioned here, for example the National Curriculum; grading criteria; school plan; local working plan; term plan for the local school/class; and school healthcare services).
2. The pupil participates in national and local assessments (seven tests and evaluations are mentioned, for example, national exams in the 5th and 9th grades*; reading tests in grade 3; mathematics in grade 6). [** In the new regulations, national exams also take place in the 3rd grade*].
3. The school: conducts home visits every quarter or more as needed; loans teaching and other materials decided upon by school head; invites children to social activities; cooperates with the home regarding individual development plans and goals; and offers access to school facilities.
4. If home-based education is conducted in the 9th grade, applications for secondary education are taken according to the regulation GyF (Secondary school regulations) 6:3, which states that admission places are available to those children who because of special circumstances should be given access to secondary schools and/or who come from schools where grading is not equivalent to that for ordinary compulsory-level Schools.

The Interpretation of Legislation

¶G7i. After some exposure to several cases of home education requests, the municipality constructs a general approach to how parents who are approved for home education need to behave, and what they need to comply with, if their programmes are to be extended. This approach was created from the more specific case of Family Three. The points made by MEC appear more or less as an interpretation of legislation, along with an extracting of particular ideas from court documents reflecting what the members see as the 'spirit' of legal praxis in Sweden:

The Conditions of One Municipality

¶G7j. Conditions for a trial term for Family Three (with author's comments in *italics*):

1. National steering documents and the School Plan should guide teaching. (*Parents must agree to use the steering tools.*)
1. The municipality should have full view and control of the family's activities. (*Parents must agree to surveillance of the activities.*)
2. The child's results and development can be followed. (*Parents must agree to a particular kind of evaluation and assessment that officials understand and accept.*)
3. The child's social development must enable a transfer to school without trouble. (*The child must be socialisable in a future school environment; parents must facilitate school-type socialisation.*)
4. Parents must be aware that permission to home educate will not be given for a whole 9-year period. (*Parents must acknowledge the local policy despite their own interpretation of the national legislation.*)
5. An agreement plan must be made for contact, follow-up and evaluation. (*Parents must be prepared to sign a contract with the authorities.*)
6. An extension application should be made only after

evaluation of the trial term. (*Parents must apply again after the end of the term, and be aware that it hinges on evaluation of activities.*)

The Struggle for Primary Influence

¶**G7k.** Using the document excerpts discussed above, a variety of evidence has been presented concerning the discursive struggle for primary influence over school-aged children in Sweden. Practical-pedagogical-cognitive versus political-social-moral elements are predominant in the discourse between the family and the education authorities in the municipality. The first set would include issues on the school environment, age of the pupil, teaching methods and monitoring methods, whereas the second contains more value-oriented items such as 'social training' equity and equality, and the concept of compulsory education itself.

The War Between Two Sets of Parents

¶**G7l.** Understandably, the family and local authority discuss these issues from different points-of-view, according to their particular interests or rôles. It remains to be seen if parents will engage in contestation of official views if municipalities continue to create policies on home-based education, and if all interests will be taken into account in the process.

G8. Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Dr Cynthia M. Villalba, Institute of International Education, Stockholm University, Stockholm SE-10691, Sweden (Cynthia.Villalba@interped.su.se).

G9. Notes

¶**G9.1.** All translations from Swedish were made by the author.

¶**G9.2.** *Insyn*, with respect to the administration and governance of education, denotes the control, surveillance and presence of the authorities in education at home.

¶**G9.3.** The correspondence programme requested by the parents was Sofia Distance (www.sofiadistans.nu), a Swedish programme offering basic education for years 6-9, roughly mirroring its school-based courses offered in Stockholm. If the municipality agrees to the programme, it implies costs of somewhere between 30,000 and 90,000 per student per year, which are often borne by the municipality or district (email correspondence with Sofia, February 13, 2004). This was not mentioned by MEC, only that they could find no legal basis in the Education Act for granting the use of a distance programme (MEC statement for the county appeals court regarding Family Four). MEC added that Sofia is, according to their brochure, aware of the Swedish education system and have clear instructions, and the school is only responsible for 'kunskapsfo`rmedlingen' or knowledge-related services.

¶**G9.5.** When the municipalities included in data collection, who had registered pupils in home education, were asked if they had a policy on home education, most replied that they did not and that these applications had to be dealt with on an individual basis due to the nature of their requests.

¶**G9.6.** In Sweden, tuition for all compulsory education is to be free of charge for the user and is financed through local and national taxes. Money calculated per pupil follows the pupil regardless of whether s/he attends a public or independent school; parents and children can select a school of their choice but are naturally restricted by the schools in their area and available places. In several of the relatively rural municipalities interviewed there were few schools or no independent schools from which home-educating parents could have chosen.

G10. References

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