

A concise explanation of
WHY HOME EDUCATION IS SIGNIFICANT
and should thus be defended and protected.

Democratic Freedom

Democracy, in its literal sense, means "the people rule." Inherent in this concept is the idea of freedom from tyrannical whims of either a single ruler or a self-serving group. Thus in the application of the meaning, there are two necessary parts: a collective sovereignty of majority vote, and an individual sovereignty of responsible citizenship, both in balance with each other. One group may not deprive another of its legitimate rights, nor may individuals live in anarchy. On the personal level, people may, indeed must, make choices on how to live their lives within the general parameters (guidelines) decided in vote for the common good, which recognizes the benefits of a free society bound by duties to others.

Democracy, then, is based on the principle of subsidiarity. In Switzerland, this means communities may not infringe on what families and individuals are best suited for; cantons may not intrude on the duties of communities, and the Confederacy may not trespass into the sphere of the cantons (nor, it should be noted, will the Confederacy permit outside nations or supranational organizations to supersede its national sovereignty). Decentralization of rule is essential to a working democracy. Top-down micro-management of the personal and family sphere is totally inconsistent with the prerogatives of democratic citizenship.

Parent-directed education of children, then, is completely consistent with the definition of democracy and the principles of subsidiarity. The private sphere of belief, habits, and personal relationships, and the transfer of them to the next generation, remains with the family, in accordance with the natural order, as protected by the Cantonal and Federal Constitutions. Of course, the State does have an interest in having an educated populace, because only educated people have the capacity to read, reason, and discern between good and bad, in order to make informed and intelligent votes, upon which a functional democracy depends. The State will insist on an education being provided, and that education must be consistent with the principles of a free society and the particular customs of the nation; but to preserve the necessary freedoms of democracy, the State will not insist on a single or even narrow range of options to acquire that education. Educational freedom is one of the many freedoms of democracy. Parent-directed education of children is the foremost expression of the principle of subsidiarity in education. The State may address abuses of freedom, meaning neglect of duty or gross mismanagement, but States best promote what is good by leaving it alone. This being true, we can say that normal home education is not an area with which a good State should concern itself, and any potential serious abuses can be covered in the normal penal code.

Societal Good

A good State has a limited government that merely keeps internal and external order so that its people and communities may carry out their functions unimpeded, as much as humanly possible. A State, being an impersonal conglomerate, is too big and clumsy to manage things that occur on a human scale, that is, the workings of families in communities. This area is the outworking of the personal (and religious) spheres of life, what we call society. Any society is only as healthy and prosperous as its families are healthy and

prosperous.

Family structures and functions are relatively fragile. They break down under too much pressure and coercion from either or both of the other two spheres of life: the religious and the governmental spheres. (Religion won't be addressed here.) A State may harm families by penalizing or taking over the family's normal functions. (Again, a State cannot do any good directly, or reward good, but can only penalize good or bad actions, or reward bad actions which indirectly penalize and discourages good. The State -not meaning the individual people in it, but rather the aggregate result of the whole apparatus- operates only with a sword, never with love, that is, with self-sacrificial giving for another's good; it is not human, so it cannot love.) A State will harm families by attacking marriage bonds, the family economy, and parent-child relationships. If parents are not permitted to educate their children, but must send them to State-approved schools or have a State-certified teacher, then children no longer belong to the families but to the State. Parents become mere functionaries and breeders and feeders and night wardens (at their own expense) for the State. Educating children is inextricably linked with raising children, because education is the passing of one generation's knowledge and beliefs and customs to the next generations, not mere "neutral" infusion of facts. No knowledge exists apart from a pervading belief system, so there is no such thing as neutrality in education. That is why it is inherently dangerous for governments to be operating schools at all, because governments are - in practice, if not in principle - self-serving, power-seeking, and expansion-minded, so a self-perpetuating elite typically gets control of the education apparatus and forms it to mold young minds and lives to its own ideology. This is directly contrary to all principles of the diffusion of ideas within a culture that is associated with the freedoms of democracy.

Forcing children into schools weakens the parent-child bond. State-sponsored day care further aggravates that weakening. These separations of children from parents deprive the children of what they need to see in and learn from parents: the self-giving love, the setting of boundaries by an authority one wants to obey, the sense of identity that comes with belonging to those who care for one's self, the rootedness that gives purpose to life, the personal encouragement to develop one's capacities in safety, self-control, initiative, responsibility and all the benefits of a mutually supportive family.

When the family structure weakens or is broken, the children are less able to form human attachments, identities are muddled, home and cultural groundings are uprooted, authority is mistrusted, fear of failure interferes with initiative, dependencies on peers or institutions or substances develop, and often anti-social behavior accompanies the frustrations and confusion of these young people. With dependencies and anti-social behavior comes necessary intervention from the State, again by use of force. As more force is applied, by way of more laws, of more micro-management of personal lives, of more police and bureaucrats and social workers to administer all the laws, of more punishments, then families are even further restricted in their functions, so they are further weakened, as the State is strengthened to take more and more functions upon itself. Besides being policeman and king, the State becomes Father (provider and protector), mother (nurturer), priest, doctor, psychiatrist, employer, entertainer, chauffeur and teacher to all the people. Then the people exist for the State and serve the State, rather than the State for the people.

In a properly functioning society, however, in which strong, stable families work together in cohesive communities, everyone carries out his duties, and children learn from the examples around them how to be responsible adults. They do not need the force of government to keep them in check or provide for

them or fix their problems, so the government has then no need to extend its reach into the personal sphere. Then government is limited by a responsible, self-disciplined citizenry and freedoms flourish.

Educational Advantage

Not only is family-centered education in harmony with democracy, and beneficial to general society by promoting limited government through civic virtues, but it confers educational advantages to children themselves and to their families. The advantages are both from avoiding the problems of schools and from inherent benefits in parent-directed forms of education.

With all the impediments of institutional learning, children do not get an efficient and focused education. Spirit-dulling routine in forced confinement is the rule of every day, year after year. Children get very little free time to play and imagine and make sense of the world in quiet thought. Bells and clocks direct every minute. Someone is always saying "do this" or "don't do that." Institutions like schools are necessarily homogenizing, centralized, rigidly scheduled, relatively impersonal, factory models, where people tend to become units of production rather than human individuals. In schools, uniformity pervades peers rule, conformity dominates and the whole is less than the sum of its parts.

In schools, high achievement is often ridiculed by the mediocre mass. Standards are lowered to the average. The brightest and the weakest get lost in the everyday push to keep to a schedule and curriculum. Little or no time is allowed for personal interests or talents. Some self-appointed elite body of pedagogues somewhere decides what everybody ought to need, whether they want it or not, or have an aptitude to achieve it or not. If someone has a great ability in some particular area, his talent gets lost in the time-consuming generalism required of all.

In schools, the instilling of vices tends to be more influential than the instilling of virtues. Children from weak and broken families bring their problems to school and infect the others. Poor language skills, bad language, low moral standards, violence, destructive behavior, sloppiness, and substance abuse get passed to other children by peer pressure and lax discipline. Spiralling cycles of problems come from the "Pauseplatz" (Playground) into the classroom, troubling the teacher, and inhibiting student learning. Teachers become less motivated to deal with so many problems, and the students sense the withdrawal and defy authority even more. Serious violence sometimes erupts. Everyone blames every else and education suffers.

In the homes of dedicated parents, however, children can thrive. All over the world, millions of children are led by their parents, in their homes, out in nature, in the community and in work places, to learn about the real world, in real time, with real things having real problems and real solutions. Children work with people of all ages, becoming vertically socialized, and not horizontally oriented in age groups, as in schools. Children have schedules, goals and curriculums made to suit their needs, abilities and desires. Their own personalities and talents are enhanced. Their weaknesses are addressed. Educational emphases fit the child, not the child to a cookie-cutter system. Normal and bright children are not treated like the neglected children and orphans that schools were first set up for. Weaker children are not lost in the push for standardization.

All children should be educated as unique individuals of worth. Those in home education get that advantage. They go on to become the leaders of the next generation, and we can hope they will help spread the benefits of this educational choice for even more children.

This is why more and more parents are choosing, often at great sacrifice, to bring their children home. It is for the children's sake.

Sarah Bachmann
Adliswil, Switzerland

(Thanks and recognition go to many sources, especially publications from The Howard Center, for expressing these ideas more fully and deeply.)