

Making Home Education Work

- ***Pray and ask if this is the best option for your whole family. If it is – GO FOR IT, BUT don't criticise others who don't.***

Attitudes towards home education differ around the world. In some countries it is well accepted and there are tens of thousands of children involved, in others it is legal but almost unknown and there are still others where it is illegal. You and your colleagues bring these differing attitudes with them and it is easy to become critical of each other for not choosing the same educational solutions for our children. Also it is worth bearing in mind that in countries like the USA, where home education is a normal choice, there are many resources available to choose from whereas in a country where it is illegal, there will be no purpose made text and workbooks.

- ***Know your own and your children's abilities and strengths.***

Can you handle this? Do you have the necessary academic ability and teaching skills? Do others around you think that you could succeed as well?

It sounds so obvious to say that it will be a very demanding and time-consuming role, but there are parents who start out on home-ed hoping to continue other work as before. Supermen and wonder women who can do this are rare! Are you ready to let some of the other work go, so that you can teach your children? Will your children be able to work largely on their own? (Some do, and thrive) Can you answer positively that they will respond well to you as a teacher as well as a parent?

- ***Involve the whole family.***

The main job of teaching will probably fall to one parent, usually the mother, but it should not become just "Mum's project". Dad needs to be involved too, giving support, encouragement and input. This is not to say that both parents should become so involved that it is their main ministry – that's a trap to avoid – but there does need to be joint commitment and involvement.

- ***Define what you want to achieve. Keep good records of achievement.***

Many home educators struggle because of the lack of clarity of purpose. What are your long-term aims? How will you arrange your teaching to achieve them? These are critical questions, otherwise there will be drift from one day and week to the next, using books and schemes that may seem OK, but that are maybe not the best way to achieve what you want. All schools have to keep thorough records of achievement, we should not be sloppy about this, otherwise we can make transitions to other systems unnecessarily difficult.

- ***Plan out timetables and set realistic goals.***

The discipline of a timetable that is similar to ones used in schools helps avoid drift and time wasting. Of course, there can be flexibility; allowing a few minutes extra or ending a few minutes early according to the demands of the work. Just as there are overall aims, so there need to be realistic objectives for each lesson. Specific learning outcomes give a target for you as the teacher and for your children to aim at.



- **Keep an appropriate balance of subjects on the timetable and ensure that re-entry needs are considered.**

Vital! Parents can be tempted to teach to their strength areas – not too bad an idea, and place insufficient emphasis on (or even avoid) the difficult areas – definitely a bad idea. The end results? Mathematicians who can't put together more than two sentences of free writing, or kids who devour literature but are barely numerate. Extremes maybe, but this is a real danger to be avoided. In almost all educational systems, such lop-sided education would leave children seriously disadvantaged on re-entry and would result in the need to repeat school years to catch up with vital material missed out.

- **Use a balance of teaching methods.**

Don't bore the kids with repetitive styles, especially monotonous "fill in the blanks" workbooks.

- **Choose resources that fit your curriculum, don't let workbooks and textbooks dictate to you. Do use good resources; stick with them if they work. Check them for usability and moral & spiritual content**

Textbooks and workbooks are NOT the curriculum. They may be someone else's best effort to create a resource to help deliver it, but they are not the curriculum. You need to work to a recognised curriculum that fits the long-term goals that you have for your children. As already stated, re-entry almost always has to be one of those goals, so the curriculum that you choose must allow your children to do that successfully. However, it is not the only goal and slavishly following learning plans from the passport country and only using resources from there is to miss a golden opportunity. You can deliver a recognised curriculum from a Christian viewpoint, not just the Bible Education/RE part of it, but all of it. You can also use local resources and inspiration and draw in ideas and input from colleagues in multi-cultural teams. This is a much more stimulating approach than just ploughing through dull workbooks from one supplier.

- **Use professional advice; don't work in isolation. Link up with SHARE, AERC or education advisers. Try to find an objective mentor who will give you realistic assessments. Do link up with local support and home-education co-operative groups.**

Some agencies, such as SIL, require that their personnel participate in an annual review of their children's educational options and progress, whatever option is being used. Working with others provides support, ideas and input, and a degree of objectivity that can be difficult for you as parents to provide. Because SIL is a huge international organisation, this support has to be provided locally. Where parents are launching into home-ed as a new venture, support should be strong and reviews should be frequent; perhaps monthly with open access to the adviser all the time. The idea of mentoring has already been put in previous editions of Educare and we believe it to be necessary; no parents should be working in isolation.

- **Use local resources and vary your activities.**



Variety is the spice of life – and education! An international team and a rich local culture as well as your own represent huge resources – especially in terms of people.

- **Be flexible and ready to change if this is not working for any reason.**

This can be the hardest thing of all to acknowledge, and this is where objective mentors help. It could be that small changes are needed early on that would prevent major problems later on. It could be that the home-ed option is not working for some reason and you have to decide whether this is a hurdle to cross, pain barrier to be overcome or whether it is an indication of something more serious and that the bold, but difficult decision to stop is necessary.

The short article on home education is only a discussion starter, not the definitive word. Over the coming months we will be trying to ascertain how many of our families are in home-ed and for what reasons, so that better support can be offered. We will also invite contributions to future editions as well as WELCOME your responses to the article here. E-mail us now!

Responses to previous editions

A lot of things resonated with me from the Dec 02 one – having worked in CAR where there are no anglophone education options and many people have been put off bringing families because of the political instability, and then going through the penultimate coup and subsequent evacuation with the kids (and home school teacher, aged 18!) well, I could see where you were coming from! Also that some of the kind of discussion starters and issues to consider which you raise could be helpful to our Central Africa team as we look to the future.

Judith Sawers of WBT working in the Central African Republic

I really appreciated what you had to say concerning timing of change and the issue of records. One of the issues and elements that I would add to the record keeping is information concerning any trauma experiences or high stress experiences that have been endured or ones that will continue. The academic record tells us a great deal but an individual who has been traumatized may suddenly discover themselves living with very significant tensions after the event that stand in the way of the maintenance of their academic capabilities. That information should follow the child as well.

Dave Pollock of Interact commenting on the June 2003 article on changing educational systems

In the last edition of Educare on change, I used the example of the attempt by allied paratroopers to capture the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem to pave the way for the main infantry forces and speed the liberation of the Netherlands in the Second World War. After quoting that as a case where a bold plan failed, I rewatched the “Bridge too far” film and read up a bit more about the reasons why this part of the campaign went so wrong. There are lessons in this for us, both in our consideration of changing educational systems and in pursuing existing ones.

1. The bridge was just too far for the main infantry forces to arrive in time and relieve the beleaguered paratroopers who had attempted to take the bridge against vastly superior firepower. The plan was too ambitious for the real situation on the ground.

Q. Are our plans for our children’s educational changes too ambitious?

2. Communications equipment used by the paratroopers was faulty and almost useless. This meant that the advance forces could not communicate with each other or headquarters. Consequently supplies that should have been dropped to sustain the battle were dropped behind enemy lines. Even worse, reinforcements also landed there, either to be shot down or immediately taken prisoner.

Qns. Are our communications links able to do the job of allowing our children to make the changes?

Will the children be in regular and open contact with you?

Has the receiving school received all of the necessary communication?

Will the children be able to communicate with others who could help support them?

Remember that although our communications hardware may not be faulty, it is still used by fallible humans like us, and user errors can be disastrous.

3. Intelligence reports indicating that crack Panzer divisions were in the Arnhem area were disregarded. Paratroopers were led to believe that resistance would be weak.

Q. Are we willing to listen to the intelligence reports of schools and advisers who may be able to steer us away from unrealistic and unworkable options, or will we carry on regardless?

4. Planning was too hurried; the logistics of troop movement and supplies were not in place. There were not enough aircraft to deliver everything in one go and key supplies to the front were held up because air commanders were reluctant to let planes take off in fog.

Q. Sometimes a change could work, with the necessary time to make full plans and consider all the logistics; are we willing to wait and plan patiently rather than hurry things through – whatever the external pressure from companies and organisations?

The Anglo-Mexican Experience of changing times

Rachel and Sophie Lawrence (now 19 & 17) moved to Mexico in 1992. They were schooled there in small private Mexican schools for 8 years until they returned to England. Rachel entered a 6th Form College (Yr 12)* and Sophie entered a comprehensive school (Yr 10).** These are their observations and experiences on the differences between the systems.

Mexico, being a poorer country than England, has far less resources available, and this is felt very acutely in the education system. Even though they went to a private school, we had to pay for even basic resources, whilst in the UK good resources are available free. We left a school in Mexico with about ten 10-year-old computers (without modems – no internet!!) and Sophie went to a 'technology college' with over 100 modern workstations all with Internet access while Rachel went to a well-equipped (standard) 6th Form, which was quite a shock to the system. However, the greatest difference to do with resources was undoubtedly the libraries, both school and public, which after the almost untouched, poorly stocked Mexican libraries, made the UK seem like a utopia of knowledge.

Thanks to all the resources in England, we found the choice of subjects was wider, and less academic subjects such as the arts (drama, music, fine art...), technologies (food technology, design technology...) and languages are far more widely available. Specialisation in Mexico is not available until much later on (age 17) while in the UK it is available earlier (age 14). Learning styles in both countries are very different, Mexico's education system is more memory-reliant, while in England, the focus is more on concepts and finding things out for yourself through experimentation. Streaming*** in England has allowed different abilities to learn at different paces, and points are often reinforced in different ways throughout a lesson to help people with different learning styles.

The timetable in Mexico starts and ends earlier than the English one, which can be an advantage, as the afternoon is then free for homework or other activities. Students are very different. English students are often more materialistic and have lower moral standards than the Mexicans. In addition, the Mexicans often seem to have a better attitude to work, probably because they appreciate how much their parents are paying to keep them in a private school. Many English students don't really care about school, so teachers have to be more authoritative.

Rachel found it as easy to settle here in the UK as she would have found it entering a new school in Mexico. She was already expecting a big change to the Mexican version of 6th form college, and everyone at her new college was also new, so it was easy to make friends. She especially liked the choice aspect of the British system. Sophie, having never been to school in England, found it more difficult. She does, however, see it as a very useful experience, as she is now more able to adapt anywhere and pick up any cultural cues. The most difficult thing for her is keeping in touch with people on two continents.

In some ways, living abroad has made us more confident, and of course, now we know an extra language, which is a definite advantage. Both countries are academically similar although UK resources are probably better. Both of us achieved very good grades both in Mexico and here. Rachel is at Art College at the moment, doing very well, and Sophie is in her final year of 6th form college, applying for University. However, at the end of the day, the most important thing is that we both made and keep friends in both places. Although Rachel feels at home both in Mexico and the UK, for Sophie sometimes it feels like she has no real home, but in any case, we are simply passing through this world, and as Hebrews 11:16 says, we are "looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland"(NLT)...

Heather Lawrence

* 6th Form College –specialising in education for ages 16 – 18, particularly in university entrance courses

** Year 10; normally begins at age 14 and is the first year of the 2-year GCSE examination programme.

*** Streaming (or more often setting) - dividing the children of each school year up into teaching groups according to academic ability; standard practice in most secondary schools in the UK.

Resources

The following resources are now available

1. Going Home – A Re-entry Guide for Parents of Younger Children by Carole Steedman

Carole wrote this guide as part of a master's degree after her experience teaching at Wesley International School in Indonesia. This fills an important gap in resources, as so much material is aimed at older children coming up to graduation, final exams and entrance into further and higher education. This guide is complete with activities for children, including a game, word searches and quizzes. All beautifully illustrated with colour sketches and photographs. Available on floppy disks or on CD.

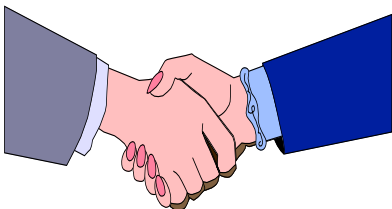
2. Pre-field Orientation for Children, a guide for parents and sending organisations. Various contributors, edited by Steve Bryant.

This was prepared in response to a number of sending organisations requesting help in this area. The format and layout is similar to Carole's re-entry guide, with guidelines and ideas for parents and organisations to use, plus games, quizzes, puzzles and work cards for the children. This is prepared as a bank of ideas and possibilities for children of all ages preparing to go to a new situation. Response to its use so far has been positive. Available on floppy disks or on CD.

Both of the above resources are available together on one CD at cost price plus postage to mission agencies. If you have friends in commercial companies who would like to use this material, it is available, but please refer them on to us to work out the details.

Do you subscribe to Interact? This publication is part of the services offered by Interaction International, an organisation specifically geared to meet the needs of third culture kids. Recent editions have covered child protection, raising daughters in an Islamic culture, Korean TCK issues, helping children cope with crisis & trauma, eating disorders and more. The cost is \$18.95 per year for quarterly magazines and as with Educare, there is an open forum for response. Find out more on the Interaction website at www.tckinteract.net

Educare can be forwarded on to whoever you like. Just make sure that the receiver wants it, as we don't want to become another piece of SPAM in the e-mail box!



Working with you to serve the best interests of our children.

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