

Preamble

My aim in this first of a series of articles is simple enough: to ask how we arrived at the educational system we now have, and to suggest ways in which home-education might potentially offer a different sort of education than that currently on offer in school. As such, the aim is not negative (to show how 'bad' school is), but rather positive (to show how 'good' home-education can be); within this, however, some criticism of school is inevitable. Similarly, since my aim is to show the advantages of home-education, I have avoided dwelling on the difficulties and disadvantages; in doing so, I am not pretending that the latter do not exist, nor suggesting that home-education is ever an 'easy' option. It isn't! Finally, I am in no way suggesting that there is some sort of 'moral imperative' for Catholic parents to choose home-education rather than school for their children. This is of course a personal decision based on prayer and discernment.

If anyone finds any factual errors do alert me to them (there may well be some: I have ventured into philosophy, history and educational theory, though I am certainly not an expert in any of these areas). Similarly, if anyone disagrees with what has been said, please do let me know (one of my reasons for writing is to engage others in conversation on the topics covered; there is always something to be learned!).

Home education: why do we do what we do?

Sometimes in life you find that you have been doing something for so long that it has become simply, 'what you do'; when asked why you do it, you might find yourself at a loss to answer, not because you don't know the answer, but because you have stopped asking yourself the question. This happened to me with home-education. When, a year or so ago, I was asked by a teacher why I educated my children at home, I found it difficult to give a satisfactory answer; in the end I fell back on the old, well-rehearsed responses but knew as I spoke that my motives for choosing (and continuing with) home-education had changed, and were much more radical than they had been ten years ago.

Back then, my husband and I went through the same process followed by most home-educating parents: we questioned the value of what the local school was offering, we looked into alternatives, we faced enormous opposition from friends and family, we read, prayed, discussed, observed, and took the plunge. For the next decade or so we were too busy trying to raise and educate our own children to devote much time to articulating the 'whys and wherefores' of our decision to curious, hostile or even supportive onlookers. However, we were aware that our reasons for home-educating were deepening and developing: whereas at the outset, we were reacting 'negatively' in wishing to avoid the deficient RE programmes, unnecessary 'PSHE' lessons, overcrowded classes and so on of the local Catholic primary, as time went by we realised that there were more positive aspects to home-education (and more negative aspects to school) than we had expected.

Aside from the issues mentioned (R.E., etc.), we did not at first question the value of schooling in principle, and so did not set out to do anything radically different. We were both (reasonably successful) products of the school system, and presumed that our task would consist largely in replicating the best aspects of this kind of education in our home. However, through extensive reading and our own practical experience we came to realise that there was a great deal wrong with the system, and that, rather than offering merely a pale imitation of school education (which would never quite come up to scratch, we were told, since we were not qualified teachers), we had the potential to offer our children something different. We realised, in short, that the aspects of school which we had rejected initially were manifestations of deeper problems, and that our decision to continue home-educating stemmed from a desire to avoid those problems and to offer our children an education which differed both in content and method from that typically offered within the school system.

School versus education

You don't have to be a radical Catholic home-schooler to realise that all is not well with the schools. Open the education pages of any newspaper or magazine and you'll find plenty of articles bemoaning the state of modern education. Universities and employers complain that many applicants, even those possessing an impressive array of school qualifications, are often unable to think for themselves, to argue cogently, to express themselves coherently, or simply to stretch their minds to deal with subjects or ideas with which they have not been trained to deal. This seems to present a paradox: surely the pupil who has achieved a good set of grades should be the one who is also well-educated, i.e. the one who also possesses the intellectual skills listed? In reality, the disjuncture between success at school and 'good education' is at the heart of the problem.

John Taylor Gatto, a vocal critic of the school system, (who rather ironically entitled his acceptance speech for the New York City Teacher of the Year Award in 1990, "Why Schools don't educate") points out the same phenomenon when he observes that "*most of our children will **not** have an education, even though they may be thoroughly schooled.*" Gilbert Highet, in his learned book *The Art of Teaching* (1951), points to a reason for this: he observes that the classroom teaching and standardised testing so commonplace in our modern schools are the inevitable concomitant of universal schooling, and notes that these methods seem unheard of before the nineteenth century when universal schooling became the norm (Highet can't help noticing parallels with the industrial age: "*A room full of candidates for a big examination, timed exactly by huge clocks and supervised by watchful invigilators, resembles nothing so much as an assembly line at the Ford works.*"). He goes on to observe that an examination system which can be run like a machine might be delightfully easy for the examiners to mark but militates against one of the main purposes of education – to develop in the pupil a sense of structure, a sense of how individual facts fit into the broader picture. This leads, he concludes, to the mastering of "*atomic facts which can be learnt almost entirely without real knowledge and real education.*"

So, here we begin to see the separation of mastering facts (and gaining grades for doing so) from the wider process of education. Catholic observers such as Curtis Hancock identify the same problem, "[*Schools*] *may still impart knowledge, but this has only to do with data and technique. Hence learning in today's school system is about more or less discrete knowledge, but not really about education.*" Such observers also recognise that this change can have deeper implications: "[*Schools*] *can no longer even begin to teach the human being what it is to be a human being.*"

How did we get where we are today?

Here we have to pause and ask, what *is* education? What have we lost, and when did we lose it? If education isn't the same as the 'schooling' we are all so familiar with, what does it look like? We don't need to make up our own answers here: we need, rather, to look at what was understood by the term education before the advent of the modern school system. My apologies if this section seems overlong, and guilty of gross over-simplification, but the history of education is a vast subject which could fill many volumes!

Plato to the Renaissance

Our task is made easier by the fact that the basic understanding of the purpose of education did not change much for the 2,000 years from the Platonic age, throughout the period of Catholic Christendom until about the eighteenth century. For the ancient Greeks, education aimed primarily at producing good citizens, but Plato, one of the earliest writers to formulate a distinct educational philosophy (in his famous allegory of the cave), established a higher motive, grasping without the aid of Christian revelation the essential truth which that later revelation would confirm: that the fundamental purpose of education is to free a man from the chains of material desires and train him to 'see' the invisible world by right use of his reason. This spiritual or transcendent aspect of

education (arguably somewhat obscured by the Romans in their concern to produce orators rather than speculative philosophers), was intrinsic to the Christian understanding of education right from the beginning of the Church – unsurprisingly, given that it was taught by Our Blessed Lord Himself in his admonition to 'seek ye first the Kingdom of God'.

Education in the early Christian world of the 'Dark Ages' was essentially moral (preoccupied as it was with the conversion and civilisation of the barbarian) but, as Latin was already the language of the Church, there was still a place for classical (largely, at this point, Roman) education. The monasteries kept this tradition alive, adapting the old liberal classical education to the service of the Church. Early medieval education, predominantly reserved for the clerical state, continued to be based on Latin grammar, Latin classics, the Latin fathers, the bible and the liturgy. The discovery of the works of Aristotle, Euclid and the Arab scholars in the twelfth century led to a new focus on science and mathematics which, in its attempts to find a rational basis for theology, led in turn to the scholasticism characteristic of the universities established in this period (Paris, Oxford etc.). The rediscovery of Classical Greek culture in the fourteenth century led to a renewed emphasis on the aesthetics (somewhat neglected by the Schoolmen) of literature, drama, poetry and history: the Renaissance synthesis of classical humanism with the spiritual ideals of Christianity was essentially the model later adapted by the Jesuits and other teaching orders in the aftermath of the Reformation.

Bacon to Voltaire

At the same time, from the fifteenth century onwards, developments in practical technology and science (largely outside the universities) were leading to a new movement which, whilst similar in some respects to that represented by Roger Bacon in the twelfth century (both sought knowledge through nature and mathematics), differed radically from its predecessor in that it sought this knowledge outside of the framework of Christian theology and philosophy, and tended towards the separation of faith and reason. Here we see the undercurrent which eventually led to the predominant rationalism of the 'Age of Reason' and the first great breach with that Christian humanism on which education had hitherto been based. It is important to note here that it was not scientific study in itself which was at the root of the problem, but the underlying philosophy of its practitioners. The claim that scientific investigation and religious faith are *de facto* mutually exclusive is an idea which the Church has never supported: what She objects to is 'scientism', defined by a recent pope as

'the philosophical notion which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences, and relegates religious, theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy'.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was the first to express most clearly the implications for education in the move from speculation to experimental methods, writing of the need to reorganise studies on the new basis of active science in order to further the cause of humanity's progress. Bacon was a man of faith and believed science should be used for the greater glory of God, but soon, notably with the rationalist philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650), theology was removed from the picture and faith began to be treated as divorced from reason and akin to superstition. New ideas on the nature of Man, and thus on his education, were appearing rapidly. In England, the teaching of John Locke (1632-1704) that knowledge could come to the 'blank mind' of the child only from the material world through the senses was to have far-reaching effects; Rousseau (1712-1778) also believed that knowledge came only from first-hand experience, but denied the importance of passing on a body of objective knowledge and felt the child should be allowed to develop his 'innate goodness' naturally. Most dangerously for the old order, Voltaire (1694-1778) preached the 'creed' that religion was irrelevant: the progress of man was what mattered, and that would be achieved not by religion but by rational scientific study.

Modern education and the work of Dewey

The crusade for compulsory universal education was in large part (though less so in England) inspired by the spirit of the Enlightenment. Indeed, shortly after the death of Voltaire, Prussia became the first modern state to create a centrally controlled school system; by the end of the nineteenth century, the Prussian model had been adopted across Europe and in the U.S. The new emphasis on scientific knowledge and the move towards universal schooling, coupled with the demands of a rapidly increasingly urban population, effectively reduced education to a question of how to impart the largest amount of information to the greatest number of children in the shortest possible time. By the beginning of the twentieth century, much schooling was utilitarian in purpose and focussed on scientific specialisms, discouraging pupils from looking beyond the material world to metaphysical, let alone theological, realities.

The final part in this brief history of education is best represented in the work of the American John Dewey (1859-1952) whose ideas have arguably had a more profound influence than those of any other in the formation of our present day education system. Dewey represented a reaction against the existing system and insisted, following the ideas of Rousseau, that education be based around the interests of the child, that the teacher inspire rather than 'indoctrinate with facts', and that children learn only through direct experience. To our modern minds, most of this sounds very familiar and even reasonable, probably because we are so accustomed to seeing this kind of 'progressive' education in our primary schools that it appears normal. However, from a Catholic perspective, Dewey's ideas present numerous difficulties. He was essentially a philosopher – secularist, socialist, anti-religion – and viewed education as the essential means for training a child to play his part in secular democratic society. One of Dewey's supporter's described his philosophy as the main enemy of "every doctrine which holds that a man should tend to a supernatural end, in function of which he ought to organise his earthly life". For Dewey, there is no revelation, no objective religious or moral truth. As Dewey himself was fond of saying, "Education as such has no aims." Dewey's own life encompasses the final stage – often pinpointed at some time between the two World Wars – in the transformation of education (mirroring a transformation in culture generally) from the consensus of the centuries to the modern era in which we find ourselves.

This brief overview suggests that our present education system is largely a combination of two modern approaches. In the primary years direct teaching of basic knowledge and skills is often replaced with subjective learning experiences; in the secondary years, this interest-led approach tends to be replaced with the assimilation of subject-specific information for examinations. Both of these approaches are founded, even if remotely, on faulty philosophy (the former on a rejection of objective truths, the latter on a form of educational utilitarianism), both fail to offer an education in truth and virtue, and both consequently struggle to produce pupils who can "*think carefully, read thoughtfully and write and speak 'the right principles' eloquently*" (Sr. Miriam Joseph, *The Trivium*).

Catholic schools: how different are they?

Many parents presume that Catholic schools, operating as they do semi-independently of the state system, have escaped the relativistic or utilitarian mindset – but is there much evidence of this? How many really fulfill the following criteria of Pope Pius XI?

"To be this (a Catholic school), it is necessary that all the teaching and the whole organization of the school, and its teachers, syllabus and text-books in every branch, be regulated by the Christian spirit... so that Religion may be in very truth the foundation and crown of the youth's entire training; and this in every grade of school, not only the elementary, but the intermediate and the higher institutions of learning as well."

The results of a Catholic school education, in terms of how well school-leavers know and practice their faith, make parents a little sceptical. The evidence suggests that our own schools have been greatly influenced by modern educational philosophies. This can be seen in the RE programmes popular in the majority of our primary schools, which reject direct teaching of the doctrines of our faith in favour of 'experience-based' discussion and exploration (the popular 'Here I Am' course is a good example of this). Raised on a diet of 'what do you think/feel about this?', many young Catholics fall prey to the moral relativism around them and lack the knowledge necessary to defend, let alone practice, the Church's teaching – particularly those moral teachings deemed out of step with secular society. Judging by the experience of numerous parents, teachers and children currently involved with Catholic schools, it doesn't seem extreme to conclude that our own schools, like their secular counterparts, have in many cases forgotten that (to quote Pope Pius again) *'there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end.'*

This Pope wrote not only of the duties of Catholic schools, but also (rather prophetically, given the increasing secularisation of those schools) of the rights and duties of parents in the education of their offspring:

"The family therefore holds directly from the Creator the mission and hence the right to educate the offspring, a right inalienable because inseparably joined to the strict obligation, a right anterior to any right whatever of civil society and of the State, and therefore inviolable on the part of any power on earth." This accords perfectly with the admonition of Leo XIII that *"... it is the duty of parents to make every effort to prevent any invasion of their rights in this matter, and to make absolutely sure that the education of their children remain under their own control in keeping with their Christian duty, and above all to refuse to send them to those schools in which there is danger of imbibing the deadly poison of impiety."*

Strong words. Yet, for many parents, the Popes give clear affirmation that keeping children out of schools which fail to meet the criteria necessary to be 'Catholic', is simply one way of fulfilling their parental duty.

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Can home-education ever be 'as good as school'?

One of the most common criticisms levelled at home-educating parents is that they cannot possibly hope to give their children as good an education as they would receive in school (most of us have been asked: 'Who do you think you are?' 'Are you a qualified teacher?' 'How on earth will you get them through their GCSEs?' and so on). If this doesn't put parents off the idea of home-education before they even get started, it can still make them feel anxious or inadequate. I can honestly say that, after a decade or more of home-educating (very imperfect, mistake-filled and challenging home-educating), I believe that this particular criticism is rarely, if ever, warranted, and stems from an over-optimistic understanding of what school has to offer children. The simple answer to the objection, 'You can't do what school does', is, quite simply, 'That's OK, because I'm not trying to do what school does, I'm trying to educate my children.' That is a little tongue in cheek of course, but there's also a lot of truth to it, because, as I suggested above, for a school to offer an education as traditionally understood (based on objective truths and objective moral principles) that school would essentially have to reject both the philosophical underpinning and the resulting pedagogical approach inherent in the modern school system. With home education we are free from both, and can begin to rebuild an authentic Catholic education for our children.

Catholic education: spiritual, cultural and intellectual

Spiritual

We know from the constant teaching of the Church that when we come to consider the kind of education we wish our children to have, we must refer to the development of the soul as well as that of the mind. So, for instance, when we read that “*The role of the teacher is this: teaching children to think well,*” (Laura Berquist, author of 'Designing Your Own Classical Curriculum') we understand, as Berquist does, that teaching our children to 'think well' is not an end in itself. The ultimate purpose is supernatural – it is to teach the child to use the intellect 'rightly', which means to give him wisdom, and thereby lead him to God. To refer back to Pope Pius XI,

“...the true Christian, the product of Christian education, is the supernatural man who thinks, judges and acts constantly and consistently in accordance with right reason illumined by the supernatural light of the example and teaching of Christ.

To put this in simpler and more contemporary terms,

“Education... exists for two natural human ends: developing habits of wisdom and prudence. Catholic education exists for the further more-than-natural end of getting us to heaven.” (Redpath, Forward to 'A Philosophy of Catholic Elementary Education').

How do we achieve this? Firstly, in terms of actual teaching, it does not mean that everything we teach must be *directly* related to the Faith but rather that our attitude to every subject must be permeated with our desire to put teaching in a Catholic context, either a remote or proximate context depending on the subject matter (e.g. remotely, we study science not because all truth can be scientifically proven but because our studies of the material world can teach us about its Creator; proximately, we might teach why IVF is morally wrong even though it is scientifically possible). Secondly, it means that practically speaking, in our day to day life, we must ensure that our teaching timetable leaves plenty of time for family and private prayer and devotions so that the development of our children's intellectual life is always rooted and centred in the practice of their Faith. Home education can provide a living, common faith within a supportive family environment, together with curriculum choices and teaching which support the spiritual ends of education: our children can thrive because they are secure in knowing who they are, where they belong, what the purpose of their life is, how to distinguish right from wrong and so on. This may be possible in a Catholic school setting, but it appears to be becoming noticeably less common.

Cultural

When we reflect that Western civilisation rested on the foundation of Catholic culture for the better part of two millennia, it makes a great deal of sense to give our children a good working knowledge of the rich heritage into which they have been born. We transmit culture in two essential ways: firstly, it happens almost unconsciously in the example of daily life which we exhibit to our children (thus, if in our life choices, in the way we talk about the world, in our attitude to the Church, prayer, in what we read, in how we respond to suffering, etc. we are directly informed by our Faith, we will without direct effort be forming our children in a Catholic culture); secondly, we transmit culture directly by ensuring that our children are aware of the historical and artistic elements which together constitute our Catholic heritage. Catholic historian Christopher Dawson insists in his enlightening book, *The Crisis of Western Education*, warns that

'the study of Christian culture is the missing link which it is essential to supply if the tradition of Western education and Western culture is to survive, for it is only through this study that we can understand how Western culture came to exist and what are the essential values for which it stands....if modern education fails to

communicate some understanding of this great tradition, it has failed in one of its most essential tasks.'

Home-education provides parents with endless opportunities to expose their children quite naturally, and on a daily basis, to their own Catholic culture, thus making it a real, living thing to their children. This kind of 'natural' cultural transmission takes place most effectively within the family – the most school can do is support it, but even this role seems to have diminished in recent years, to the extent that parents often experience conflict rather than support). In terms of direct teaching of culture, home-education comes up trumps again because we have the freedom to design or employ curricula which give a central place to historical Christianity: few if any schools offer this. Dawson warns that the man who has no real knowledge of any culture other than the one he finds himself living in *'almost inevitably tends to accept the standards and values of his own society as absolute.'* All the more reason to ensure that our own children have the cultural knowledge to be able to measure today's society by a better standard, and make better choices.

Intellectual

Many people might be prepared to accept the argument that home-education has obvious advantages over school in spiritual and cultural areas, but would find it hard to accept the idea that home-education might have any claim to superiority in the intellectual arena.

I suggested earlier that the aims of 'traditional' education and modern schooling are quite different: ultimately, traditional education seeks to teach the person to judge rightly and to raise the intellect to what is beyond it; modern schooling seeks, essentially, to train the child to function as a productive member – and a useful economic unit – in society. Correspondingly, as the aims differ so do the methods: in the older model, whilst essential skills are first mastered via 'facts', this is done primarily as a means to develop the intellect, not as an end in itself – the emphasis, once basic skills are acquired, is on using the material to promote logical thinking and expression by a teacher-guided process of reflection, reasoning, and discussion; in the contemporary model, subjects are studied either for personal interest, or for the accumulation of decontextualised facts for utilitarian purposes – in an overcrowded curriculum, the child often moves on without having mastered basic skills, and is encouraged to be a much more passive learner, with discussion and reflection often discouraged or simply impossible in classroom conditions. What this shows is that in both its aims and methods, our modern system is almost the antithesis of what education used to be, and this is why it fails to 'educate' in any historic sense of the word. This is not an original observation: our newspapers frequently carry reports in which prominent educationalists make essentially the same point. In *The Independent* newspaper in 2009, Dr. Anthony Seldon, headmaster of Wellington College ('one of the country's top independent schools'), observed that:

"...we have lost sight of what education is about in Britain. We have allowed ourselves to believe it is all about exams and testing, for which pupils absorb facts, and rote learning, and schools and teachers are valued wholly by their exam scores. Education is about much more than this. It is about teaching the whole child and this involves being taught how to think and reason independently. We have to put discovery back at the heart of education. When a child works out something for him or herself, it will always be their own: when a teacher tells them, it will always remain someone else's knowledge. Thinking has to be active not passive."

On the BBC news in June 2012, Helen Fraser, head of a charity which is in charge of various independent girls schools, observed that:

*"Learning should be about engaging with ideas, rather than 'regurgitating facts.'
....Schools need to create the space for children to think creatively around a*

subject....It's only by learning deeply about and around a subject that you can truly hope to master it."

In home-based education, we can avoid the drawbacks of the school approach and focus instead on making sure that skills in essential subjects are mastered, that logical connections are made, that reflection takes place and that the usefulness of what is learned goes beyond the passing of a test. We can also, as I suggested above, place intellectual development firmly in a context of cultural and spiritual development: indeed, it seems evident that one of the reasons schools fail to 'educate' is that they have isolated the 'academic' from the rest of life – they have 'decontextualised' information and thus rendered it meaningless to the majority of children. In *'The Abolition of Man'*, C.S Lewis observes that modern education, having rejected the principles on which education had previously been based, is in grave danger of destroying civilisation, since it is incapable of transmitting those very moral and social qualities which produce the *'reasonable men and responsible citizens'* who alone can render a society civilised.

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Education at home: conversing, reflecting, simplifying

There are three obvious ways in which home can improve on school when it comes to achieving these ends: we have more chance to talk with our children on a one to one basis; we have an opportunity to carve out some times in the day when our children can be quiet and can reflect; and we can pare down the over-crowded school curriculum so that there is time to cover the essentials well and still have time for other pursuits.

Conversing

It may seem over-simplistic in a world of scope and sequence charts, but one of the key ingredients in a good education is good conversation. In addition to the obvious benefits of conversation (already mentioned) in terms of cultural and spiritual formation, one of our greatest advantages is that we know exactly what each child is studying, and we are there to discuss the work with the child. It can make a huge difference to the quality of a child's learning if his teacher (or in this case parent!) can try to find time to talk to him about his work, making sure he really understands the material before moving on. The conversations an interested parent has with his or her child will enhance the child's understanding – and allow him to ask any questions he might have – far more effectively than a textbook could. This is something Laura Berquist, founder of Mother of Divine Grace (correspondence) School, stresses time and time again. In the Introduction to *'Designing Your Own Classical Curriculum'* she writes:

'Conversation with you is the most formative part of (your children's) intellectual life.'

and

'Even if your children are able to go off...and do their lessons without your help, it is important that they converse with you, important that you guide their understanding of the part of reality they encounter in their reading. '

Another Catholic educationalist explains why this kind of conversation, rarely found in a school setting, is so essential and effective:

"...Education is elevation of our intellects by our intellectual betters. Its method is that of... conversing with the intellectual superiors around us about the natures of

things and people.

Properly speaking, teaching involves guiding a person to come to know by leading that person to imitate the sort of reasoning process the teacher uses to discover and communicate a truth. Teaching occurs through intellectual imitation...Teaching, in short, is intellectually-elevating conversation”.

Interestingly for home-educators, this author goes further, arguing that in the primary years

'In most instances, the main teacher is not the classroom teacher. Not to recognize this fact is a grave mistake. By nature, elementary (lower) education begins in the home with conversations between parents and children, with home schooling. All further education is an extension of this primary education'.

(Redpath, *Forward to 'A Philosophy of Catholic Elementary Education'*).

In the early years, education through conversation is so natural that we do not even consider it 'education' even though it is absolutely vital to our child's normal development – particularly in terms of language – and when it is missing the results are disastrous. There is overwhelming evidence that when children are engaged in conversation with their parents from the earliest possible age (crucially, before the child can even make a 'proper' reply), children's language development will flourish. When we think of language development as simply the outward expression of intellectual development, we begin to see the importance of conversation. Many of the 'problem' children in schools who show no interest in learning have lost what innate interest they had because no-one talked with them, no-one took the trouble to explain the world to them when they *were* interested. Teachers trying to teach such children have an uphill struggle on their hands because without this interest, not much learning is likely to take place no matter how much teaching goes on – the children have 'switched off'.

However, the importance of conversation is not limited to the primary years. When it comes to the high school years, Berquist is adamant that conversation (which she actually describes as 'training in rhetoric') remains absolutely crucial:

'Exposure to copious amounts of high and noble objects..will not by itself bring about the good we desire for our children..what is more essential is the time and conversation we give to our children. Adolescent children are in formation, and the best source for their formation is our own explanations of the way we live, why we make the choices we do, how we view the world.'

The truth in this can be easily demonstrated when one thinks of the tutorial system employed by Oxford and Cambridge. Considered to be one of the most effective educational tools in existence, it consists essentially in leading the student's mind to truth through directed discussion. This kind of conversation, which historically private pupils would have had with their tutors, is crucial if children are to be led to an understanding not only of the subject at hand, but of how any given subject relates to another. It is a rare textbook which can help a child achieve this, and increasingly, in a contemporary school setting, a rare teacher too.

Reflecting

Busy parents reading this might be thinking, 'Well, I couldn't say that I have that much time to spend having intelligent conversations with my children – I'm too busy just getting through the day!' But even in a busy home, much of this conversation goes on very naturally. As any home-educating mother will tell you, a lot of the 'teaching' is done 'on the hoof', whilst our hands are engaged in some work or other (peeling vegetables, kneading bread, nursing babies...). Even so, we can also, unless circumstances are very difficult, carve out certain points in the day, or at least a few times in each week, when our children (and hopefully we ourselves) can find some quiet time to

slow down and reflect; when we can find, in other words, some leisure time.

Home-educating mothers probably view 'leisure time' as a luxury they can ill-afford, but there are strong arguments to suggest that in educational terms, leisure time is not a luxury but a necessity. It is not often remembered (or, if it is, it is less often acted upon), that the origin of the word 'school' is the Latin word *schola*, in turn based on a similar Greek word whose meaning is 'leisure'.

Intellectual development cannot take place when the mind is perpetually 'busy'; we must have some time for reflection on what has been learned, time to be 'at leisure' to contemplate, and, however busy we parents are, we have infinitely greater opportunities than a classroom teacher to carve out for our children time when they are not being 'kept busy', when they can reflect, however simply and briefly, on what they have learned. Indeed, this sort of reflection, coupled with the kind of directing conversation already outlined, is the point at which connections are made, when the capacity for lateral thinking, that ability to make connections between seemingly disparate fields and ideas so central to 'good thinking', is developed. Ultimately, however, reflection is necessary not only to 'good' intellectual development, but also in order to place intellectual endeavor in a proper spiritual context. Whilst we want to develop our children's intellectual capacities, we want that development to be ordered towards wisdom in the biblical sense rather than cleverness in the worldly sense. (For a serious philosophical discussion on the issue of leisure, the intrepid reader might consult *'Leisure, the basis of culture'*, by Catholic German philosopher Josef Pieper.)

Simplifying

Still, perhaps we wonder how can we find time for this when there is so much 'schoolwork' to be covered? How do we fit in not just English and maths but science, history, geography, modern languages, music, perhaps Latin...all those books to get through! All educationalists engaged in the restoration of 'real' education agree that the increasing multiplicity of subjects in the average school curriculum today inevitably leads not only to superficiality in learning, but to an increased failure of pupils to really master the basics of the most fundamental subjects. As Berquist comments,

"It is much better to do fewer subjects and do them in more depth, than to do many subjects superficially...for one thing, the student learns what real mastery is."

Not so long ago primary school was a more relaxed business – there was little if any regular testing, and the teachers' job was to ensure that children turned up at secondary school able to read, write and manage basic mathematical operations. Schools seem such busy places these days: the National Curriculum is jam-packed with all manner of subjects which *must* be covered, but, as a glance at the education pages of any newspaper will tell you, there is a price: the basic skills are being crowded out. At home we can focus on basics. As Andrew Campbell, author of *'The Latin-Centred Curriculum'* observes, applying the classic principle of *multum non multa* ('much not many') frees up our time: "*Eliminating busywork...from the school day, cuts the students work time tremendously,*" thus leaving more time not only for thoroughness in foundational subjects, but for all those other elements – familial conversations, time for reflection, transmission of culture, spiritual formation and of course all those other activities (sports, outings, hobbies and so on) – which go to make a 'whole' education and a rich life.

In summary, if we feel intimidated by the thought of taking on our children's education, and wonder if we can really 'do what school does', we should bear in mind that at home we can do things differently and in many ways we can do things more effectively: in this sense, as I suggested earlier, we are not obliged to imitate 'school at home'. In the next article I'll try to answer two questions raised by this assertion: firstly, if we are not trying to do what school does, how do we know what to teach and how to teach it? Secondly, can home-education, if it isn't imitating 'schooling,' effectively prepare children for the 'real world' in which employers and institutes of higher education reasonably expect our children to possess, as schooled children do, some recognisable 'proofs' of their educational attainments?