

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

Global Home Education Conference (GHEC) 2012

Harriet Pattison
University of Birmingham

GHEC 2012, billing itself as the first ever global home education conference, took place in Berlin from 1st to 3rd November. Around 170 delegates gathered from all over the world including North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, the Far East and Australia; amongst their ranks lawyers, politicians, researchers, political activists, home education leaders and parents. Celebrating home education as the most exciting as well as the fastest growing educational innovation of the knowledge era, the conference worked hard to put aside the many political, religious and educational distinctions that create the global heterogeneity of those who practice and support home education. Recognising that the motivations and methods of home educators vary widely within as well as between nations, the conference declared itself explicitly non-judgemental of this diversity; focussing instead on issues of commonality.

Whilst the organisers argued that home education successfully competes with mainstream schooling they also asserted that home education would herald new and deeper insights into the nature of learning

and the possibilities of education. The conference presented research as well as the experience of individuals to emphasise the success of home education both in academic terms and in terms of the civic and social engagement of those educated in this way. The positive optimism however lay as a silver lining to more urgent and regrettable demands. Much of the programme centred around issues of freedom and control, given particular poignancy by the presence of delegates from Germany and Sweden; both countries in which home education is against the law. Personal experience from these families and from lawyers representing them left no illusions about the fragility of freedom nor about the immense personal sacrifices that some families have suffered in pursuing their educational convictions. Various talks discussed the persecution of home educators, life in exile and the struggles across the globe for freedom of choice to gain priority over state control. The conclusions of these talks came to settle, en masse, in the issue of freedom of educational choice as a human right. The International Covenant on Civil and

Harriet Pattison
University of Birmingham
harriet.pattison@gmail.com

Political Rights, the 1966 distillation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, protects the prior right of parents to choose an education for their children that conforms to their own moral and religious philosophies as a non-derogable human right. In countries which have either banned or restricted home education, this international and legally binding treaty provides both a chance and a hope.

Through the weekend the conference moved closer and closer to defining itself as a civil liberties movement as well as, or even over and above, a home educators' gathering. As feelings swelled around these issues the organisers of the conference drew up a document which they have named The Berlin Declaration.

The Declaration makes recognition of the range of international treaties that affirm the prior rights of parents to choose for their children an education which is in accordance with their own philosophical and religious convictions. In addition it highlights where such treaties make specific reference to either home education or to the involvement of parents in their own children's education. The Declaration goes on to condemn policies which run counter to these aspirations and to affirm the commitment of its signatories to supporting diversity, pluralism and freedom in educational provision through the legitimisation of home education worldwide.

To read more about the conference or to see/sign the Berlin Declaration, please go to: www.ghec2012.org

© Copyright 2013. The author, Harriet Pattison, assigns to *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, and to educational and non-profit institutions a non-exclusive license to use this document for personal use and in courses of instruction, provided that the article is used in full and this copyright statement is reproduced. The author also grants a non-exclusive right to *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives* to publish this document in full on the World Wide Web. Any other usage is prohibited without the express permission of the author.