

Redaksioneel Editorial

December 2013 was the twentieth anniversary of the incarceration of André en Bokkie Meintjes of Vanderbijlpark. They were jailed in December 1993 after court cases that lasted nearly five years. Their crime was that they homeschooled their children.

The three children were sent to an orphanage at the other end of the country. They had to be prevented from visiting their parents in jail to be further exposed to such “appalling” parental influence. The Meintjes couple was released about six months later under the general amnesty that was declared at the adoption of the new constitution.

In the same year that they were released, 1994, the new constitution made it impossible for those in authority to prohibit home education again.

For that reason homeschoolers started, also in that year, to make submissions and recommendations on how home education might be accommodated in the new education laws. For, although the constitution protects home education, there are still many ways in which the authorities can impede and obstruct home education if homeschoolers do not protect their freedom.

Home education grows explosively

No-one knows how many homeschoolers there were at the time of the inauguration of the new constitutional dispensation. However, it is most unlikely that there were more than about fifty. According to the most recent census, by contrast, there were already 56 858 home learners in the country by 2011.

That is a thousand fold increase in hardly fifteen years.

This census result has made a few people prick up their ears because, by April 2013, accord-

Homeschooling running into heavy weather

by *Leendert van Oostrum*

(Executive Officer : Pestalozzi Trust)

ing to a [statement by the national education minister](#), there were only 3019 registered home learners in the country. If the total number has not changed since the census, that means that fewer than 6% of home learners were registered with education departments.

It is especially people who view themselves and one another as “stakeholders” in the education of homeschooled children who sat up and took notice.

To understand who these self-appointed “stakeholders” are, one needs to consider the implications that the existence of nearly 57 000 home learners have for various parties.

(In the nature of things, one has to allow for the fact that there is no certainty about the accuracy of Statistics South Africa’s census figure. Informed homeschoolers are of the opinion that the figure is, in many ways, an over count and in others an undercount. However, using this figure as a working estimate of the real situation is considered justified.)

There are, in particular, three parties who have started showing an intensified interest in home education: the teaching profession, government, and investors.

Members of the teaching profession maneuver to gain power over home education

If there are 57 000 home learners, there would be about 130 empty schools if the schools existed.

However, that also means that there are about 2000 potential teacher posts that are vacant. And any labour union that discovers 2000 potential posts in its sector that are vacant, must of necessity take note of it and take steps to regain those posts. That is why labour unions exist.

Since the very first talks with education departments, officials from teacher unions have joined consultations about the laws and policies for home education. One union representative, for example, stated expressly at a meeting where the Pestalozzi Trust was present that homeschoolers “take the bread from the mouths of teachers”.

Accordingly, it is to be expected that the teaching profession, especially by means of its unions, will attempt to constrain home education by gaining control or influence over the applicable policy and practice.

Indeed, this is what happened. According to a [statement by the education minister on 8th August 2013](#) SACAI, the new examination board (provisionally accredited by Umalusi), is presented as “the responsible body” that must assess home learners.

This is also why the education department consulted SACAI about the assessment of home learners. However, there is absolutely no reason why SACAI should play any special role in the assessment of home learners. It has no known expertise or experience in home education. What is true, is that SACAI examines almost no candidates other than home schoolers.

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It is significant that SACAI was established at the initiative of the South African Teachers Union (SAOU). Like other teacher unions in SA, the SAOU has provided evidence that the best interests of children is a secondary concern to them, and must be subordinated to the interests of its members. Consequently this union also has a history of its members going on strike for higher pay shortly before the matric examination. It is also on record that it will not allow education inspectors into the classrooms of its members.

SACAI is operated from the offices of the SAOU and most of its senior staff have close ties with the management of the SAOU.

The question arises: Why would a teacher union extensive resources to provide services to a sector that causes a loss of 2000 jobs to its members?

From its new position of power, SACAI has already issued an [“Assessment Instruction”](#) in which it defines home education by stating what home education is and how it must be done. By redefining home education, SACAI assumes to itself the power to formulate policy on home education. Its definition is in conflict with the way home education is conducted in practice and with what is written in the law. The Pestalozzi Trust has pointed that out in a [statement about the SACAI document](#).

After the Trust’s attorneys wrote to SACAI, SACAI made it clear

in another “Assessment Instruction” that its definition only applies to clients that make use of its services. However, SACAI is silent about the fact that the education minister has already stated that she envisions that *all* home learners will be compelled to be assessed by SACAI. If this plan is implemented, it means that SACAI, a body that knows nothing about home education, will determine how home education must be done.

It seems, therefore, as if there are urgent maneuvers being carried out between the education minister and a teacher union to bring home education under the control of the union.

The education minister maneuvers to restrict home education

In principle, the hundreds of millions of Rands that homeschoolers save the education budget, or at least a part of the saving, should be used to develop effective, research based policy for home education. The savings should also enable the minister to appoint competent officials with the necessary academic qualifications and experience to administer the law on home education. This is not happening.

Apparently, there are just more and more bureaucrats being appointed in education departments. Among other such events, the education minister

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again announced over the past two years that she is developing new regulations to “bring home education into conformance with the formal education system”. Such announcements in themselves are nothing new; ministers and officials make such announcements every year or so. This time, however, is significantly different.

In May 2013, the national education department advertised three posts for senior officials. The most important function in the job descriptions is “to formulate policy for home education”. There are no requirements that the applicants should possess any qualifications or experience in home education.

If these posts are indeed filled, it means that the national education department, for the first time in nearly twenty years, is acting to bring home education effectively under its control. It means that there will be three senior officials who will have to report every year what policy they have formulated for home education.

It is clear that the minister and her officials are no longer satisfied with just uttering threats. She has warned, in so many words, that homeschoolers can expect that there will be strong pressure from government over the next three to five years.

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The judge went on and stated that, “These home-schooled child’ern are a bunch of illiterates—the jails are filled with illiterates.” Then he paused and stated, “What asylum did these families escape from?” When I confronted him with the high illiteracy rate among the public schools, the judge admitted, “The public schools aren’t what they used to be.”

(Dr Chris Klicka in Homeschool Heroes)

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Influential business people maneuver to subject home education to their purposes

There is a third group of “stakeholders” who want to have a say in home education – investors who have bought into major providers of home education programmes.

If the average homeschooler spends only six thousand Rands per child per year, it means that 57 000 homeschoolers spend more than three hundred million Rand (R342 000 000) on materials and services for home education. If all homeschoolers were compelled to use only “approved” homeschooling programmes (which are more costly than other approaches), this figure would rise to more than half a billion Rand per year. That is a big market, which has grown thousand fold in fifteen years.

That is the kind of market that makes even big investors sit up.

It should, therefore, surprise no one that more and more providers of home education programmes have been taken over by major investors and multinational organisations. According to information at our disposal, one of the biggest investors in “distance education” has strong ties with India. And there are indications that more and bigger investors are sniffing at the bait.

But: This group has a commercial interest in homeschoolers being compelled to use their products and that there will not be a wide variety of approved programmes to choose from.

At present, at most 20% of homeschoolers buy prepackaged programmes. The remainder put together individual pro-

grammes according to the needs of each child.

So, to make this entire market exploitable by providers of “approved” packages, it is highly desirable (from the perspective of investors) that the 80% of homeschoolers who do not use prepackaged “formal education” programmes be compelled by government to do so.

Also, as is commonly known, investors have only one objective – to maximize their profits. In principle, few homeschoolers would object to investors making profits. That is what investors are for. However, it means that the interests of home learners and homeschooling families are of secondary importance to the investor.

Many of the staff that investors

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appoint to develop and offer products and services for home education are competent people with much expertise and experience in school education. Of home education, however, they have very little if any knowledge or experience. The products look more and more attractive to the eye, according to the norms that apply to school education. But we are also getting more complaints that the programmes are not suited to home education.

History repeatedly teaches what the most important problem with commodification and commercialization of home education is: Investors want, in the first place, a risk free business environment. That means that, when there is conflict between the interests of the consumer and the interests of the state, the careful investor will attempt to stay in the good books of the state. It does not surprise, therefore, to find more and more providers of home education programmes who

force their clients to comply with requirements set by officials – irrespective of how unreasonable, counterproductive or unlawful those requirements are.

Conclusions

It appears that there are at least three groups of “stakeholders” in home education, who do not educate any children at home, but whose interests are in large measure starting to synchronise.

They are government, the teacher unions, and big investors. There are signs that at least two of these, government and some teacher unions, create structures that will eventually restrict home education drastically.

Indications are that the third group, those investors who already control the largest section

of the market for formal home education programmes, is ready to join hands with the other two groups. The environment of home education will then be constrained even faster.

Of this there can be little doubt. Not only has the national education minister already proclaimed that SACAI, which belongs to a teacher union, will be designated to assess all home learners; but in November 2013 the Gauteng Education Department also revealed at a meeting, where the Pestalozzi Trust was present, who the “stakeholders” are who take part in the process to formulate new policy on home education in that province.

Five out of seven institutions that are represented were presented as “internal stakeholders” – divisions of the Gauteng Education Department. The sixth institution represented is the national department of community development (the old “Welfare”).

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And the seventh is “curriculum suppliers”.

There is no provision for even a single representative from the homeschooling community itself.

The Pestalozzi Trust has already taken steps to rectify this dangerous situation. However, every individual homeschooling family, in concert with all other homeschoolers, will have to raise its voice in no uncertain way to ensure that the authorities can hear their concerns. The Trust is

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currently getting in touch with the associations for homeschooling to give their members a voice.

The growth of home education has now become a threat to home education itself. It has attracted the attention of people and institutions who feel endangered by home education, or who see an opportunity to exploit it. The greatest threat of all is that the future of home education is now being determined without homeschoolers being allowed any say in the matter.

That must change. And to change it, homeschoolers will

have to do their duty to protect their children, as God has commanded.

The way forward

Over the past fifteen years, many homeschoolers have become complacent about their independence in educating their children. They have enjoyed complete freedom, ignoring the education authorities as if they do not exist and ignoring the law as if there is no law.

As shown above, those in power are resolved that this situation must change dramatically

in the near future. They are investing many millions of Rands into bringing home education under control.

This will succeed if homeschoolers fail to perform their democratic duty to ensure that the laws and policies being planned do not interfere with providing in the needs of their children.

To protect the interests of their children, homeschoolers will have to use every democratic means at their disposal, organizing to be represented, raising funds to bring their message to the attention of the public, the

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media, the bureaucracy and the lawmakers. There will be a need to fund research and obtain the services of local and international experts, and homeschoolers must be able to send their representatives to meetings in Pretoria, Cape Town and elsewhere. They will have to pay for court cases.

Nobody is going to do this for them and nobody can do it without their active support. Homeschoolers will have to join and support their representative organisations and associations in large numbers again, at local, provincial and national level.

To help homeschoolers in getting organised for the struggle to come, the [tuisonderwys] forum is available as a central meeting place where homeschoolers of any persuasion can give or get information and get in touch with others to build the necessary networks.

Homeschoolers who are not yet signed up with the forum need only send an empty email to tuisonderwys-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

From there, the job can be taken further.

QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT 08-08-2013: Home education

General Assembly: On 8th August 2013, The [Minister of Education responded to a question by a Member of Parliament:](#)

Ms Cherylynn Dudley (ACDP) asked the Minister of Basic Education:

With reference to her reply to question 2521 on 18 October 2012,

- (a) whom did her department contact during their extensive consultation process on the development of a policy on homeschooling,
- (b) who does her department recognise as the elected representatives of the organised homeschooling community and
- (c) was this organisation contacted during the specified consultation process; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?