

Alternative Education

Match each text (1–5) to the correct educational system or approach.

Homeschooling

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Expedition ScioSchool

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Michaela School

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Waldorf / Steiner

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Montessori

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1 This system, developed in the Czech Republic, combined three weeks of daily online learning with one week of hands-on (= practical) field trips. It was meant to be a new approach to education for the modern era, focused on teamwork, project-based learning and life skills. Instead of being given simple grades for their work, students got personal feedback on their progress.

Critics said that the system put too much responsibility on children to manage their own learning. They said the online learning part was open to cheating and other abuse. They also worried that constantly going between long periods at home alone (for the remote learning) and periods of intense socialisation (field trips) could be psychologically challenging.

2 This school is based on a belief that old-fashioned methods such as rote learning (= memorising facts), accompanied by strict discipline, deliver better results. Children sit in rows in classrooms and do no group work. They must walk in silence between classrooms and may not gather in groups of more than four. There is a strict uniform code.

The school has some of the best scores for academic improvement in Britain, though it has been criticised for encouraging girls and boys to study different subjects, with very few girls taking subjects such as physics. Critics also point to a culture of intolerance and say the system is damaging to children's wellbeing.

3 Founded by a 19th-century educator, this was one of the first truly child-centred approaches to education. The system emphasises hands-on learning and independent discovery using specialised “sensory materials”, such as objects that must be sorted by size, shape, smell and sound. Supporters say that the approach leads to inventive and independent thinkers who are good at working on their own.

Critics argue that the system only works for certain types of learners and that it does not encourage working as part of a group or community. Some say that the system has not changed enough since it was first developed because people are not encouraged to question any of the theories of the founder.

4 This system focuses on the idea of “the whole child”. It's not just about teaching knowledge, but encouraging creativity and spiritual growth. The timing of the curriculum is based on the founder's theories of a child's natural development. It encourages a sense of community and responsibility towards the wider world. Supporters say it offers a very rich educational experience and produces well-rounded adults (= adults who have a good balance of different skills, interests and experiences).

Critics point to a general anti-science and anti-technology bias. Some argue that students in these schools often get left behind academically, both because of the emphasis on arts and crafts and because they study many things later than in ordinary schools.

5 This approach is widespread in the United States and tolerated to varying degrees in other countries. People who choose it feel they can provide a more individualised education than an ordinary school. They can meet the individual child's needs and support their strengths.

Some curricula are available to make sure kids learn everything they would cover in any good school, but parents choosing this type of education often reject standardised education and so do not want to follow a curriculum at all. Critics argue that in most cases, this leads to an unbalanced education. Parents are often motivated by their political and religious beliefs, which can have a big impact on what they do and don't teach their kids.

Discuss

- Which of these approaches sound most interesting to you? Why? Which do you disagree with?
- What are some questions you would like to ask about each one?