

HOME SCHOOLING: A VIEW OF FUTURE EDUCATION?

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ABSTRACT

Home schooling is carried out by parents in their own home, with curricula supplied by parents, with very little or no input from educational authorities. Research from Britain and the USA has found that the majority of parents do so for one of four interrelated reasons (a) religious values, or beliefs which cannot be taught in an existing local school, (b) conflict with how children should be taught or allowed to learn, (c) disagreement with the school on some problem with a child(ren), (c) other worries about the school environment such as bullying or other violence. Home schooling is carried out in several western countries and in Australia. The use of the new information and communication technologies enable greater access to resources within the own home. The paper discusses whether home schooling may enable the delivery of education to all in a more equitable manner.

INTRODUCTION

Home schooling has a longer tradition than compulsory school education. There is a growing research literature on home schooling. The majority of the publications are not normative or broadly based qualitative or quantitative research. The majority of articles are documentations of individual family experiences such as Port (1989) and Reimer, (1994).

Education is thought to have begun in the family or home as parents saw the need to pass onto each successive generation the accumulation of knowledge and skills, the routines of daily life and collected wisdom of the previous generation. School education as we know it today began as a response to the needs of industrialisation. In England compulsory state school education was to give basic skills of literacy to those children who were too poor to be educated privately and whose parents lacked the necessary literacy skills to educate their own children. It attempted to follow the curriculum and values of those private schools that educated the wealthier classes. In the USA compulsory school education began to guarantee that all persons were able to competently read The Bible and not be deceived by the wicked. Distance education has a long tradition too (Boulter, 1989). Education in the home today is the home schooling movement. This type of education, described by one American researcher, Mayberry, as "woven into the very fabric of family life. For home school parents, playing a primary role in their children's education is fundamental to their sense of what it means to be a parent." Mayberry et al., p2.

DEFINITION OF HOME SCHOOLING

Home schooling is sometimes contiguous with distance education. Many children in the remote regions of Australia are learning through distance education at home. They live in isolated, inaccessible locations, and cannot possibly travel to school each day. These families cannot afford or do not want to send their children to boarding school. This also happens in other countries where children live in isolated regions. Home schooling is sometimes education that occurs before the child reaches school or preschool age. Some parents are actively involved in teaching academic skills to their children before they can walk or even talk. Many researchers emphasised the value of giving children a head start, and television programs such as Play School and Sesame Street, were devised with this in mind. In particular, Sesame Street addressed the children of poor, immigrant groups, with limited language skills, to address a lack

in the home. Also the perceived lack of opportunity to learn basic academic concepts and skills needed to succeed at school.

However, home schooling is not restricted to this period of life, nor is it homework or private tuition in addition to traditional school education. Home schooling or home based education is where the child (or children) is instructed, facilitated or co-learns in the home environment following a curriculum devised or authorised mainly by his or her parents.

Strictly speaking home schooling is not distance education, where the student follows the more or less the same curriculum as other children in his or her educational cohort or age group while isolated from his or her peers by distance, illness or disability. Home schooling is not usually education in the home by a private tutor. Whether definition of home schooling or home based education should include that education where the tutoring or instruction is by a non-family member is an issue. Some states in the USA allow non-family children registered in a home schooling situation. The more inclusive term of home based education includes all the above situations.

LEGALISED HOME SCHOOLING

Australia, Britain, United States, Canada, Netherlands and Japan are countries that are recorded in the literature or on the internet as having some legalised home schooling within the stricter definition of the term. Other countries may have some home schooling in the broader definitions. A British researcher suggests that some countries, such as Sweden, do not have home schooling movements because they have such good home-school relationships. He suggests that where parents have always had a great deal of input into the school at all levels, and so the idea of teaching your own has not gained favour (Meighan, 1989).

All states of Australia have home schooling or home based education as a provision of their educational systems, controlled under state educational acts. In New South Wales the Education Reform Act of 1990 provides for registration of children for home schooling (Division 6, clause 70-74.)

In New South Wales the parent has to request registration, and registration may be refused, but there is a right of appeal (Education Reform Act, 1990.) Registration may be for as little as one term or as long as 2 years. At the end of 1996 there were slightly more than one thousand children registered for home schooling in New South Wales under the Board of Studies. The registration is mostly in terms of being able to show (a) satisfactory learning environment, (b) appropriate school curriculum and (c) appropriate resources are available at home or locally and (d) the parent keep adequate records of the child's lessons and learning. The level of registration is either primary or secondary according to the child's age. It is also important that one or both parents will be the primary instructor. Research in the USA has found that it is primarily the mother who carries out supervision and instruction in home schooling. In New South Wales, the separation of distance education and home schooling are primarily these differentiation factors.

The countries that have now legislated for home based alternatives to home schooling have reasonably flexible registration procedures. In the USA some states such as Oregon, all the parents have to do is notify the local school authorities of their intention to teach their children at home (Mayberry et al., 1995).

In the USA some states have legislation that provides that the child must show at the end of each year that the home schooled child has made satisfactory progress. Some states allow for the home school child to participate in extra curricular activities at the local public school system, such as inter school sports events. Some states require that the parent(s) be qualified teachers or

demonstrate competency as teachers, some states require that the home school children take standard achievement tests and perform adequately. All states of Australia and the USA require that adequate records of the child's achievements be kept by the parents.

In Britain, England and Wales, the law allowing home schooling was differently worded. The law requires compulsory education for children of a certain age not compulsory school attendance. In 1996 a revision previous Education Acts stated in Section 7 of statute 600, "The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him (sic) to receive efficient full time education suitable (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and (b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise." (Education Otherwise, 1996, p 1.)

As mentioned earlier Scandinavian countries are not particularly interested in legalising the home schooling of children who could attend school. Denmark makes provision for ill or permanently disabled children to be educated at home if their parents prefer this. In South Africa the new government has not recognised home schooling (National Center for Home Education, 1996, p 1). According to this publication the government authorities have removed the children of one family and placed them in a home. This forcible separation of children from their family was because the parents refused to allow them to attend school and wanted them educated in the home. In the USA where each state has legislation for home schooling in place, problems arise when the family may misunderstand or contravene the particular state legislation. Some state legislatures are well disposed toward creating legal home schooling whereas the law courts have quibbled at different interpretations of the law and required parents to fulfil legal requirements to the letter. For example two parents in Tennessee were home schooling their child beyond the 9th grade. The court upheld that the limitation on parents in home schooling children beyond the 9th grade was reasonable and the parents had acted illegally. Parents in Michigan were fined \$50 each for educating their children when they did not have the state required teaching certificates. The court denied the parents' claims that only parents have the right to direct the religious education of their children. The legal requirement of teaching certificate for parents involved in home education of their children was found to be reasonable.

RESEARCH INTO HOME SCHOOLING

Many states have legislated to give parents back the right to educate their children as they see fit. Has home schooling provided a viable alternative to school education? An examination of the research literature reveals that the majority of the research into home schooling has occurred with the USA or Britain. The variables investigated are parents reasons for choosing to home educate their children, the academic achievement of home educated children, the socialisation, self concept or self-esteem of home schooled children, as well as the academic or employment outcome when the children are beyond school age.

Reasons for Home Schooling

Estimates in the late 1980's early 1990 have put the numbers in home schooling in the USA at between 700,000 and a million (Lines, 1991). Many studies have investigated the reasons for parents selecting home schooling (Jeub, 1989, Mayberry, 1989, Mayberry et al., 1995). There are four main reasons why parents opt for home schooling in the USA. These reasons are not necessarily discrete.

1. *Religious reasons.* The major reason for home schooling is religious. (Riemer, 1994). In the USA the push to educate all seems to have arisen within their religious beliefs and the requirement that all should be able to read the Bible. The Amish people felt that secular authorities could not direct their lives according to their strict religious beliefs. All facets of their lives are lived separately from the rest of American society. Many others of strong

religious beliefs find state and private religious schools do not have the values that they wish to pass onto their children (Blumfield, 1995).

2. *Lack of satisfaction with school teaching methods* (Holt, 1978, 1981). The religious parents have formed an alliance, sometimes formally, in the American Home Schooling Association, with the deschooling or the alternative schooling or the alternative society movements. The publications by John Holt have formed a foundation for the alternative schooling groups to support home schooling. John Holt showed by case study methods the problems in teaching. Illich's publications showed the problems of the hidden curriculum in traditional schools. Many parents wished to protect their children from such damaging experiences by educating their children at home. The Christian, some Muslims and Jewish parents feel strongly too that the local state schools cannot properly educate their children in the values of their faith. Thus they all follow the dictum of Holt, to teach your own. Holt was adamant that no child ever went to school a failure, but many leave schools so branded by the experience.
3. *Fears for the safety of the child within the public school (inner city) environment*. More recently parents are faced with the growth of violence and illegal drug distribution. This fear may be found in parents who live in the inner city areas of places such as Los Angeles. Some have found schools cannot guarantee the safety of children either within the classroom, playground or on their way to or from school. These parents find the home is a safer environment in which to educate their children (Blumfield, 1995).
4. *Economical reasons*. Some parents cannot afford the tuition or boarding fees at private schools, therefore they opt for home education. One research study found that the majority of home schooled children in Kansas were from larger families with fundamental Protestant Christian viewpoint. They could not afford private schooling in line with their Christian views. So they kept their children at home when they would have preferred to send them to private schools if they could have afforded the fees (Schumm, 1994).

Academic achievement of home schooled children in comparison to school children.

Many home schooling opponents believe that within the insularity of the home, parents, often without teaching qualifications, could not provide adequate academic instruction for children. Yet, recent research in this area indicates that children who learn at home do better academically than children in conventional schools, particularly children in public or state schools. Some individual home school children have gone on to find placement in tertiary institutions such as Harvard. The standard test results of Oregon and Arkansas Departments of Education have consistently shown the home school children achieve on average better results than the school educated children.

Socialisation of home schooled children

Cutting children off from their age peers and the social opportunities of school is often the central concern of the opponents of home schooling. Contrary to these expectations, children who are home schooled often have greater social opportunities outside the home in comparison to school children. They are often active church goers. As well they attend many of the social functions attached to their church. When compared with the conventionally educated these home schooling children had more extensive informal friendship group networks than school children (Ray & Wartes, 1991). Studies of home schooled children's behaviour in interaction with other children and adults have shown the majority of children do not have great difficulty in communication or interaction (Ray, 1993) The investigation by questionnaires of self-concept has shown home school children have high self esteem. They have more positive social and academic self-concepts (Ray & Wartes, 1991.)

ACADEMIC OUTCOME, EMPLOYMENT AND FURTHER EDUCATION

The academic outcome of the home schooled children when they reach the legal school leaving age was investigated by some researchers. In Britain and the USA many distance colleges and university courses are available for further study and these students are attracted to such courses. In the USA some colleges and universities are providing scholarships and other inducements for home schooled students to attend their institution.

In Britain, a large study of children learning at home, found evidence that these children are later able to gain employment. They gained employment with employers who value what these people are able to do rather than formal qualifications (Webb, 1989, 1990a, 1990b). Another encouraging feature is that some homes are being used by as work stations. Large institutions deploy their office work to homes and the employee is able to carry out computer based work at home and pass it onto his employer through email. Also many of the home school children go into the parents' business that is run from the home.

These changes to the business world and work are giving new opportunities for parents. Parents who wish to look after their children in the home. Also to other parents who find the long travel to inner city and other work and school locations unacceptable.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND HOME SCHOOLING

The new technologies are changing the nature of school education but education in general. The idea that information can be supplied to all quickly and effectively, in a form that all people can understand and act upon is changing the knowledge members of a society need. A large memory for facts, a capacity for calculation and problem solving, are no longer needed for academic success. Also the needed academic skills can be learned via CD-roms in the home environment at a lower cost than in the larger school environment (Riesberg, 1995). The cost to the state of sending a child to a state school is estimated to be much greater than sending to a private school (ABC Late line, 1996). Obviously the cost of educating a child at home is less for both parents and the state.

PROBLEMS WITH HOME BASED EDUCATION

One of the major problems with home based education is the supervision of this form of education to ensure that progress is made and standards are high. The indications are that parents whom current home school have a vested interest in ensuring the progress of their children and maintaining good standards. It should always be remembered that most parents have an enduring commitment to their children that even the most dedicated teacher would not have towards all his or her pupils.

Another problem with home schooling is that it seems to run counter to the struggle to make teaching a professional career. Any suggestion that the parent, who is not a professional teacher, can provide education for a complex western society is a very controversial one. The downgrading of the teaching role into mere childminding is viewed as the result of widespread support of home schooling.

An equally serious problem with home schooling is the that it is the female parent, who provides the majority of home based education. It is the men who go outside the home to work then may provide additional help after work. This is placing women back into the home environment from which they have recently been "liberated" into the work force. Many women, particularly feminists, would find the apparent confining of children and women to the home environment unacceptable. The increased family orientation of children and adults is also unacceptable as it seems to undermine the recent advances toward full economic and social equality for women.

Schools and teachers can now provide for socialisation in addition to that found in the home through debating, oral communication, drama, dance and sport will in fact liberate teachers from the dreary aspects of academic group learning which is best carried out on an individual basis. Teachers can become involved in providing professional support to the parents in their educational role and give supervision to the learning either through electronic communication or by actual in situ contact. The home school and the conventional school institution and its administrators would be in partnership in the educational process rather than in competition (Temstra, 1995). The teaching professional in schools, can also allocate more time to the spiritual and personal growth and health of children if the majority of the academic learning was conducted outside of school time. Thus, with these changes, the professionalism of teaching is not endangered. The adequate supervision of the education of young people is ensured and increased, and women's role within the home environment is enhanced and not restricted. Also the idea that education is only for the young and will, if conducted satisfactorily in a school environment, be retained for life, is no longer tenable. Society can now provide for the socialisation, wellbeing and continuing education and employment for all persons of all ages within the home environment.

A VIEW OF FUTURE EDUCATION

Governments in many countries, particularly Australia, are being pressured to provide educational opportunities for all groups, particularly the disadvantaged such as homeless youth and minority cultural groups such as Aboriginal. Home schooling, may be an economical way to educating our children providing an opportunity for all children, from birth to learn in a warm, accepting and non-competitive environment (Bull, 1989). Instead of limiting the society's legal education to the what is now the school age years. Education could be provided to individuals' needs from birth onward as necessary. Of course, those parents that opt for traditional school education could spend their educational allowance in this direction. Children who exhibit special needs, such as ADHD, may be better taught within the home where drug type interventions may be kept to a minimal level. Also children who are unmotivated, or unable to learn in the school environment because of school phobia, may be better served by a home based education program (Knox, 1989).

So too, children with behavioural problems that prevent other from learning within the classroom may be taught at home thus ensuring the learning of others.

CONCLUSION

Home schooling or home based education has become for various reasons another option for the education of children who would normally be educated in a school setting. Research has shown that these children do as well or better than children in an ordinary school setting. The progress in electronic and communication technologies has made it possible for children to be taught new academic skills. They no longer need some of the older academic skills requiring memory, calculation and problem solving. Research has also found that home schooled children are just as well adjusted in their social behaviour and communication as school educated children, but they are more family oriented than peer oriented. These children may find employment outside the home with employers who value them for the skills they have acquired rather than formal academic qualifications. Also some home schoolers have gone onto further education in either college or university setting or in distance tertiary education where they can gain formal qualification. The role of schools and teachers may change to provide for more personal, health and spiritual development of the children in them. Schools can concentrate of teaching those skills that can only be done in a group setting. The necessary academic foundations, that must be learned on an individual basis, may be carried out in a home setting. The economics of education delivery may allow for parents and individuals to choose when and how they or their children are educated.

Therefore, taking into consideration the many reasons provided in this paper, society may turn to home schooling in its broader sense for the delivery of education to all. Home based education, in all its varieties, is what may occur in the twenty first century.

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