

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN HOME SCHOOL EDUCATION

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Home school education has a rich history. It is embedded in America's most early form of education practice, with character education being a central component. By the 1960s, however, home school education developed mostly into adoption by extreme groups. First, the Left adopted the protocol as a means of implementing their non-traditional approach to societal milieu. Following court cases that removed religion from the public schools, home education became dominated by fundamental, then evangelical parents. Presently, home schooling is a significant movement that public school educators cannot simply ignore as 'fringe'. The wide spread use of the internet likely will propel home education's popularity via distance education mediums.

During the past two decades, the American public's familiarity with home education has evolved from a level of almost complete ignorance to one of widespread, if largely uninformed, awareness (Basham, 2001; Jackson, 2007). Feature articles on home schooling have become prominent in national publications (e.g., Specklow, 1994; Mauschard, 1996; Benning, 1997; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998; Kay, 2001; Cloud & Morse, 2001). The notoriety that the home school movement has achieved prompted the generation of the present article, helping readers both to be better informed as well as to provide a context for aptly understanding the phenomenon.

In the United States (US), various estimates suggest home education is growing at a rate of 11% to 40% annually (Ray, 1999;

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Cloud & Morse, 2001). In 1970, there were an estimated 15,000 home school students; in 1985, there were only 50,000 (Thrall, 2007). By 1992, however, the estimated number of children educated at home jumped to nearly 300,000 (Gutterson, 1993). In the fall of 1995, the US Department of Education (US DOE) estimated that approximately 850,000 students were being home schooled. However, according to the national organization Home School Legal Defense Association, by the fall of 1996 there were 1.2 million home schoolers. To put this in context, the United States has approximately 50 million students attending 85,000 public schools and 26,000 private schools (US DOE, 1996).

Therefore, home-educating families may comprise the equivalent to 2.4% of the school-aged population, although a more recent estimate places the total as high as 1.7 million, or 3.4% of the school-aged population (Cooper, 2007; 2008; Rhodes, 2000). Although public universities at one time viewed high school graduates from home schools with suspicion, Wasley (2007) indicates that now the pendulum has swung the opposite direction, and home-schooled students generally are in high demand. Generally, home-schooled applicants achieve above average ACT and SAT scores and aptly complete their college degrees.

The sociodemographic characteristics of home schooling families tend to fit one of two categories: ideologues and pedagogues. The ideologues are mainly, but not exclusively, religious conservatives, while the pedagogues are preoccupied with improving their child's academic and social environment (Van Galen, 1991). Livni (2000) reports that an estimated 75% of American home educating families are practicing Christians. Also, Basham (2001) found that home-schooling families are almost exclusively two-parent families. In both milieu, concern for the control and direction of character development among the home school children (religious or otherwise) seems to be a common thread among many families.

Concern for Character Education

The Greek philosopher Plutarch (circa 45–125 A.D.) wrote, “The very spring and root of honesty and virtue lie in a good education” (Brooks, 2001, p. 72). Character formation and the moral development of students have become a central issue in American education and school reform initiatives in recent years. Character

development is acknowledged by most educators as an important context in which to promote cooperation and learning. Dawidowicz (2003) observes that “teaching morality has become prevalent in not just parochial and private schools, but also public schools throughout the United States” (p. 276).

Hunter (2000) believes that the most effective context for the teaching of morality is within a unified community. He states: “There is a body of evidence that shows moral education has its most enduring effects on young people when they inhabit a social world that coherently incarnates a moral culture defined by a clear and intelligible understanding of public and private good” (p. 154). This unique social culture within a Christian community or within a family unit is seen as a necessary part of creating an environment conducive to the development of character. Therefore, home-schooled families often reason: “The formation of character in students requires a coherent moral culture that includes a shared understanding of the goals of education and a shared narrative that is linked to a socially embodied tradition” (Glanzer, 2003, p. 302). A unique feature of the Christian school and home education milieu is that they offer the potential of providing a cohesive environment that potentially could promote the amalgamation of their perspectives toward character and virtue.

The historical Christian underpinnings and social context for Biblical morality served as an active part in early American education. The morality traditionally taught during this time period was based upon one central authority: “The Bible served as the primary textbook for reading and the daily lessons reinforced a commitment to moral codes of behavior based upon the Scripture” (Algera & Sink, 2002, p. 163). American society provided a moral basis on which to relate relevant scruples.

However, in the contemporary, pluralistic American society, this is no longer true. During the 1960s and 1970s, more didactic forms of character education stemming from the early 20th century surrendered to what Rath et al. (1966) referred to as “the new values clarification approach” (p. 16). Consistent with postmodern thought, this new approach gave little basis for absolute truth and instead allowed for and encouraged alternate realities (Kirschenbaum, 1977). Values clarification, for example, was intended as an intervention to alleviate the values confusion of students by teaching these individuals to apply a process of valuing so as to diminish comparison

between absolutes. This created suspicion in the minds of parents who viewed life from a conservative, Christian worldview where absolutes exist in the form of Bible teaching. In short, the move away from traditional, Biblical worldviews, has been a salient contributing factor to the present home school movement (Thrall, 2007).

Historical Perspectives

The concept of private schooling and home education is not a new idea in the history of American education. Long considered a private matter in North America, education is not even mentioned in the US Constitution (Basham, 2001). Throughout history, societies have home-educated (Gordon & Gordon, 1990) and schooling at home has been practiced throughout American history. Instruction typically came from the parents or through the employment of a private tutor. The first colonists' home educated their children out of necessity, since settlement schools were not yet established. Yet, even after local schools were formed, the resulting rural, one-room schoolhouses were often church run, religiously based, and typically private, community schools (Loria, 2002).

At this time in the progression of American education, the historical Christian underpinnings and societal contexts for Biblical morality served as the prime purposes of education. The chief goal of schooling, especially among the original Puritan and Separatist Colonists, was to foster religious devotion (Schindler, 1987). Inherent in the Reformation's concern that everyone be able to read a Bible, the schools were aimed towards the instruction that would make this possible. Lierman (1999) states:

Three hundred years ago, Christian education and character education could be synonymous to education. Moral growth was viewed as the driving force in the initial establishment of American schools. The colonists believed that personal encounter with Scripture ensured individual salvation and ethical citizenship. (p. 6)

American society originally provided moral grounding, with moorings in the Bible, on which to teach relevant ethics. Obviously, American society's inclusive trends have moved from these original anchors.

With the establishment of compulsory education in the 1870s, the industrial revolution in America influenced the development of

government-supported places of instruction. The school bell ringing to change classes was a perceived mental connection with what Loria (2002) refers to as the “industrial model” (p. 1), where a bell rang to signal the shift changes at the factory. Even after the institution of compulsory education, home education and, in remote areas, the community-run private schooling model continued to be used. Notable home-educated individuals in American history included presidents such as George Washington, John Quincy Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Other successful products of American home schooling include inventor Thomas Edison, General Robert E. Lee, civil rights activist Booker T. Washington, writer Mark Twain, and industrialist Andrew Carnegie (Basham, 2001). Public schools rendered a general Protestant-influenced educational experience and most early American students received a form of government-sponsored education with shared moral and character values.

It was not until the early 1960s that home education was again promoted as a viable, alternative response to compulsory public education. This movement, at the beginning, traced its theoretical lineage to the libertarian Left, as promoted by the late teacher and humanist John Holt. Basham (2001) notes that Holt provided the leadership in advocating a radical movement that stressed educational decentralization and greater parental autonomy. This movement became known as “laissez-faire home schooling” (Hunt & Maxson, 1981, p. 57), a concept currently referred to as “un-schooling” (Ray, 1999, p. 13). The contemporary, stereotypical image of home schooling parents often depicts a homogeneous, deeply religious, socially conservative sub-group of the population. However, in the 1960s and into the 1970s, many home school parents were members of the counter-cultural Left. They often were advocates of New Age philosophies, ex-hippies, or homesteaders. State standards eventually were established mainly between the years 1975–1993. Basham (2001) notes: “In 1980, home schooling was considered illegal in 30 states. It has only been legal in all 50 states since 1993” (p. 4).

This same period of history witnessed a rejection of Biblical authority in the public education system with three famous Supreme Court decisions. These three rulings effectively removed religious influences from government-run schools. In 1962 the Supreme Court Case *Engel v. Vitale* banned public schools from

requiring recited prayers that were done previously in the public schools. The next year, 1963, witnessed the case, *Abington School District v. Schempp*, which forbade voluntary prayer from being uttered in schools. The third case was the famous, *Murray v. Curlett*, which effectively removed Bible reading from state schools. Additionally, forced federal desegregation of public schools, as an outgrowth of the civil rights movement, occurred at this time. Consequently, the removal of the students from their neighborhood schools also resulted in the weakening of the public school system's attraction for Christian parents (Algera & Sink, 2002). In response to these major shifts in public education, many fundamentalist and some evangelical Christians withdrew their children from the public schools and this demand for an alternative to public education fueled the contemporary Christian day school movement.

Also during the period of the 1960s and 1970s, within the public schools, more didactic forms of character education of the early 20th century surrendered to the new values clarification approach (Raths et al., 1966). This approach gave few bases for absolute truth and instead encouraged idiosyncratic values and alternate realities (Kirschenbaum, 1977). Values clarification was intended as an intervention to help focus the ethical confusion of students by teaching individuals to apply a process of "valuing" in order to diminish the comparisons between absolutes. This ideological shift in the premise of educational theory, coupled with the rejection of Christian practice and the authority of Scripture, was a significant catalyst for the exodus of many fundamentalist and evangelical Christian students from public education.

During the 1980s and 1990s, some educators, who viewed the values clarification approach as morally relativistic and ultimately detrimental to the goal of apt character development, began advocating a return to character education (Lickona, 1991; Ryan, 1986; Wynne, 1991). Still, confusion as to what constituted this new secular morality and how best to counter it—significantly increased the difficulty in unifying the movement. Alexander (2003) expressed this secularization of moral virtue:

It does not follow that to be ethical or moral one must believe in God. But it does imply that one must believe that something is of value beyond one's self and one's community . . . To think of the absence of the sacred that is, its total absence, is to conceive a condition in which nothing excites horror. And in such a world, moral education cannot gain a foothold. (p. 366)

The attempt to return to character education in public schools during the early 1990's seemingly did little to impress the Christian parents who felt strongly that they were responsible before God for the training of their children. From the standpoint of fundamentalist Christians, the public schools by this time were doing too little, too late.

The cost of taking Christian students out of the public schools was high. Not only were these Christian parents assuming the extra expenses and time commitments involved in alternative Christian education and home schooling, but in some instances, they also risked breaking the compulsory public school attendance laws enacted by all states legislatures. Home education and non-chartered Christian schooling options were, in many cases, not state sanctioned, as Ingersoll (1990) reminisces:

Some states went so far as jailing parents who sent their children to schools violating the restrictive guidelines; other states granted the schools virtual autonomy, believing that education is a protected religious activity. Many schools not subject to state regulation voluntarily submitted to non-governmental accreditation from organizations such as the Association for Christian Schools International. (p. 41)

The legal groups and national organizations such as Home School Legal Defense and Association of Christian School International aided the long battle for state acceptance, and by 1993 home education was legal in all 50 states.

Home Education Movement Today

The US DOE recognized the following qualifications for home school education:

Students were considered to be homeschooled if their parents reported them being schooled at home instead of a public or private school, if their enrollment in public or private schools did not exceed 25 hours a week, and if they were not being homeschooled solely because of a temporary illness. (Bielick et al., 2001, p. 2)

How this educational option exists across contexts, of course, is much more complex than the simple definition connotes. This is particularly true in light of each state having the Constitutional right to determine standards for children living within those

respective states. Across the nation, nonetheless, home schooling has grown into a national educational movement and has become a catalyst for change in education, according to Kay (2001):

Home schooling, initially off the radar screen, has in the last 30 years of its modern revival become a completely mainstream alternative to institutional schooling of any kind, public or private. No longer monolithic, home schooling is easily accessible, adaptable and responsive to its consumers...home schooling is the still extreme, but it is rapidly assimilating cultural prototype for inevitable reforms to public education in the coming decades, already in vigorous germination in the form of school voucher programs and charter schools. (p. 28)

Rudner (1999) conducted a seminal study measuring 20,760 home schooled students in all 50 states, concluding: "Those parents choosing to make a commitment to home schooling are able to provide a very successful academic environment" (p. 84). Rudner's findings, when comparing academic standing between home school, public school, and Christian school, found that overall, test scores for home-educated students fell between the 75th and 85th percentiles. Public school students tested at the 50th percentile, while private school students' scores ranged from the 65th to the 75th percentile.

Rudner's (1999) study also found that 24.5% of home-schooled students performed one or more grades above their age-level peers in public and private schools. In fact, according to Ray (1997) of the National Home Education Research Institute, home-schooled students in grades 1–4 perform typically one grade level higher than their public and private-schooled peers. However, by grade 8, the average home-schooled student performs four grade levels above the national average.

The question aptly raised in these types of reported studies, of course, is whether any cause and effect relationship exists vis-à-vis home school education (Ensign, 2000). That is, do moderating variables exist, suggesting that somehow being educated in a home environment, compared to a school institution, causes superior performance by individual children? To date, no controlled studies exist that shed significant light on the important question. Thus, in order to address this research matter aptly, one would need randomly to assign children to a control group (no school), treatment group 1 (public school), treatment group 2 (private or religious

school), and treatment group 3 (home school). The ethical constraints—not to mention practical ones—are obvious. However, until some type of study is conducted, using control and experimental groups, the question likely will be left for speculative—rather than concrete answers.

Yi, Reeve, and Robinson (2002) reported the results of a study between the motivating styles of roughly 70 public and home school teachers as well as education students attending a public college (in each respective group). Results showed that religiously motivated home school educators used a motivating style that was more controlling than styles utilized by public school teachers. Additionally, regardless of the educational context, the variables of being male and frequent church attendance also resulted in the tendency toward controlling preferences. Yi et al. (2002) concluded that the factors of being religious and also home schooling one's student(s) likely was influenced by a desire for modulation over the input and influences that students receive.

Home school research has expanded to multicultural contexts. For example, it has drawn attention to students with learning disabilities (Bannier, 2007; Norwich et al., 2005), minority students (Reese & Gallimore, 2000), immigrants (Dyson, 2001), students of low socioeconomic status (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002), and applying international models to American home education (Beveridge, 2004; New et al., 2000; Bridgemohan et al., 2005). Pilling (1999) indicates that the wide availability and use of the internet has revolutionized the potential for home school education. Additionally, Huerta et al. (2006) report that the home charter school movement has connected to the internet, quietly challenging traditional in the class public school model.

Apple (2007) notes that the new world of technology has opened entirely new venues for home school education. Traditional home school education was tethered by books, in vivo instruction, and sometimes to correspondence work. However, with the recent advances of the internet, satellite instruction, DVDs, and other media technologies, home school instruction has a much broader range of potential for ensuring children achieve learning objectives. Both religious and non-religious home school groups have taken substantial advantage of this new technological wave in advancing the popularity of home schooling across the country (Apple, 2006).

Significant challenges continue to exist for the home school education movement. Apt socialization and development of a moral commitment of children often top the list (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). Parental participation is known to be a significant, positive factor in students' achievement (Lewis & Forman, 2002); but when deeply involved parents pull their children out of the public schools, it has implications for the remaining children and school milieu. This does not imply that home schooling is a threat to the public education system; but its growing numbers do show it has some impact and cannot simply be dismissed by public school leaders.

McCarthy (2000) argues that having meaningful connections, where possible, between involved home school parents and their local public schools exists as a salient need for continued development. The need exists on several levels: philosophical, practical, and given the tax money lost by local districts annually to home school endeavors, even financial (Wenders & Clements, 2005). As public schools continue to find their financial resources challenged by charter schools, Klein and Poplin (2008) believe that the pressure for public school administrators to feel the loss of income squeeze from local home school parents will become more acute than it has in the past. Finding the right balance between cooperation with home school parents—and viewing these children as needing to reunite with their local public school systems—are likely the most salient future challenges deserving future attention.

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