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Homeschooling as an Alternative Form of Educational Provision in South Africa and the USA

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This paper studies homeschooling as an alternative form of educational provision in South Africa and USA to determine what knowledge and experiences from research on homeschooling in the USA may be relevant to the South Africa situation. Homeschooling in the USA has a sound legal foundation and has become an acceptable educational alternative. Research indicates that homeschoolers are not disadvantaged academically or with regard to social-emotional development or socialisation. Policy makers in the USA seem to be increasingly of the opinion that there should be some form of cooperation between public schools and homeschoolers. The South African Constitution does not contain a stipulation granting parents an explicit right to homeschooling, but does not make homeschooling unconstitutional either. Homeschooling in South Africa is growing phenomenally and educational reasons and religious beliefs appear to be the most important reasons for homeschooling in South Africa. This paper primarily recommends a partnership between government and homeschoolers.

Keywords: homeschool, alternative education, education provision, South Africa, USA

Introduction

Research has revealed that, internationally, homeschooling is a growing phenomenon. In the case of this research, homeschooling refers to the process whereby parents themselves supply education to their own children (Knowles *et al.*, 1994). The USA, Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Norway are but some examples of countries where homeschooling is growing rapidly (Marlow, 1994; Rakestraw & Fowler, 1995; Van Oostrum, 1997a). Where homeschooling previously has been banned in many countries, governments are presently more tolerant in this regard (Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990).

It seems as if parents previously decided to homeschool mainly for religious reasons (Knowles *et al.*, 1994). This appears to have changed and homeschoolers now opt for homeschooling due to diverse reasons (Rakestraw & Fowler, 1995). Apart from religious reasons, literature revealed that parents also choose homeschooling because curricula, teaching methods, policy and standards in schools disillusion them. Often they are of the opinion that institutionalised education is not flexible enough to provide for the indivi-

dualised needs of each learner (Knowles *et al.*, 1994; Natale, 1992; Van Oostrum, 1996).

The most powerful homeschool movement is probably found in the USA. The number of home learners in the USA is estimated by various sources as between 500,000 and 1 million, with a 20% growth rate annually (Natale, 1995). Although the origin of homeschooling in the USA can be traced back to the colonial era, homeschooling in the USA was a rare phenomenon 25 years ago. The contemporary revival and remarkable growth in homeschooling as an alternative form of educational provision lead educators and policy makers to focus increasingly on this phenomenon (Knowles *et al.*, 1992; Marlow, 1994; Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990).

In South Africa there is also growing interest in homeschooling (Van Oostrum, 1996, 1999). In 1998 the number of home learners was an estimated 3000 (Van Oostrum, 1998). Literature indicates that this number has since increased markedly. In 1999 the number of homeschoolers in South Africa was estimated by various sources to be between 4000 and 8000, and is increasing rapidly (Anon., 1999; Garson, 1999; Robinson, 1999; Van Oostrum, 1999). The growing interest in homeschooling can also clearly be seen in the growing activities with respect to homeschooling events and exhibitions (Home Schooling Events & Exhibitions in South Africa, 2002). However, very little research has been done on homeschooling in South Africa.

There are obvious similarities between the history and demography of the USA and South Africa (Vos & Brits, 1990). Both countries have a heterogeneous population regarding ethnic groups, language, culture and religion. The two countries also share a history of discrimination and resistance and have moved from segregated to integrated education in an effort to accommodate all the different groups (Claassen, 1995; Theron & Van Staden, 1995). Notwithstanding various reforms in the education systems, it appears as if education in both countries still does not meet the expectations of all groups and individuals (Dembitzer, 1990; Knowles *et al.*, 1994; Van der Westhuizen, 1991; Van Oostrum, 1997b). Taking into account the similarities between the two countries as well as the powerful homeschool movement in the USA, research on homeschooling in the USA may probably be very beneficial to researchers on homeschooling in South Africa. This study therefore seeks to examine the role of homeschooling in the provision of education in the USA and South Africa to investigate what valuable knowledge and experiences research on homeschooling in the USA reveal that may be relevant to education in South Africa.

A detailed literature study has been done on homeschooling in the USA and South Africa. Collected information has been considered and evaluated to reach certain conclusions. There are numerous research reports on homeschooling in the USA. However, homeschooling in South Africa has hardly been researched at all. Despite the apparent growing interest in the topic, there are very few formal research reports on any aspect of the contemporary homeschooling movement in South Africa. Apart from two MEd dissertations (Van Oostrum, 1997a; Van Schoor, 1999), one PhD thesis (Brynard, 1998) and very few scientific publications on the topic, limited information on some aspects of homeschooling could be obtained from popular magazines and

newspaper reports, as well as from the webpages of homeschool associations. Therefore research on the phenomenon of homeschooling in South Africa had to be supplemented with empirical research.

Methodology

Empirical research

Making use of the information obtained through the literature study, a questionnaire was compiled to determine the profile of the average South African homeschooler, which education methods are used by homeschoolers in South Africa and their reasons for preferring homeschooling to formal schooling.

Target population

The target population (i.e. the universum) was all parents presently practising homeschooling in South Africa. It was, however, not possible to reach all these parents. Literature revealed that not all homeschoolers are registered at education departments or homeschool associations (Anon., 1999; Badenhorst, 1998; National Coalition of Home Schoolers, 1999; Robinson, 1999; Slabbert, 1999). According to Van Oostrum (1999), all homeschoolers do not necessarily use pre-prepared curricula. It was therefore difficult to determine the exact number of homeschoolers and home learners.

Study population

The accessible population was all parents who practise homeschooling and either belong to one of the four homeschool associations in the country, or receive study material from curriculum providers ($n = 4000$). With the assistance of curriculum providers, access could be obtained to 3310 respondents and with the aid of homeschool associations another 690 were reached.

Sample

Apart from it being difficult to determine the number of homeschoolers in South Africa, these people are also concerned about confidentiality. It was therefore not possible to obtain lists of names from which a random population could be drawn. An attempt was made to include as much of the study population as possible in a nonproportional stratified sample ($n = 1000$).

Homeschool associations and curriculum providers were requested to assist in the distribution of questionnaires to homeschoolers. It was assumed that not all homeschoolers belong to homeschool associations and for that reason curriculum providers were included as well. It was also assumed that not all homeschoolers make use of pre-prepared curricula from curriculum providers.

Due to the nature of the research design, there was no direct communication with respondents at all. To ensure confidentiality, all correspondence was sent to homeschoolers via homeschool associations and curriculum providers. This was done to ensure a higher frequency of feedback.

There appears to be consensus that the proper sample size in this case would be 14% (cf. De Vos & Fouché, 1998; Vermeulen, 1998), $n = 560$ in this instance. However, it was attempted to keep the nonproportional stratified sample as large as possible in terms of finance and time for it to be more representative. A sample of 25% ($n = 1000$) was therefore used. Questionnaires were sent through homeschool associations (17.25%; 173 respondents) and through curriculum providers (82.75%; 828 respondents). Questionnaires were divided proportionally between the various homeschool associations and curriculum providers according to their membership and client bases respectively. Ten weeks were allowed for distribution, completion and return of the questionnaires. A total of 422 questionnaires were received within the allocated time. Some 150 questionnaires were received late and were not processed.

The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) was used to process and analyse the quantitative data.

The results of the literature review and the empirical research will now be discussed.

Findings on Homeschooling in the USA

Regarding homeschooling as an alternative form of educational provision in the USA, the following was found.

- The structure of the US government is based on the Constitution of 1787 and amendments following that. There is no federal education system in the USA, but individual education systems for each of the states, with many similarities, but also differences. This characteristic of the US education system makes it very difficult to report on the system, and virtually impossible to provide a typical description of the education system of the USA, also regarding homeschooling in the country (Hood, 1990; Theron & Van Staden, 1995).
- Various legal interpretations on the basis of amendments and court decisions had an important influence on education law in the USA. The US education policy is not predetermined, but is constantly adapted to new situations in practice. This is also true in the case of homeschooling. Various court cases through the years have determined policy regarding homeschooling and were later followed by other court decisions through which policy in this regard was changed again (Gordon *et al.*, 1994; Parker, 1992; Theron & Van Staden, 1995).
- Homeschooling was the primary form of education in the USA prior to the 19th century. However, public education became compulsory early in the 20th century and changed US perceptions on educational provision. The locus of responsibility for the education of children shifted from parents to public schools (Lape, 1987; Whitehead & Crow, 1993; Wynn, 1985).
- There are distinctive differences between homeschooling in the early US and contemporary homeschooling. In the past, homeschooling was a necessity due to the absence of public schools. Today parents are opting

for homeschooling rather than formal schooling due to particular reasons (Biggs & Porter, 1994; Metcalf & Tait, 1999; Whitehead & Crow, 1993).

- There are various factors contributing to concern about public schools in the USA, strengthening the case of homeschoolers (Fash, 1994; Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Hirsch, 1988; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995; Whitehead & Crow, 1993; Wynn, 1985).
- The differences between statutes and the wide spectrum of legal interpretations regarding homeschooling, makes it virtually impossible to generalise across state and judicial borders and to provide consequent guidelines regarding the implementation of homeschooling in the USA. However, homeschooling in the USA has a sound legal foundation and has become an acceptable, although still controversial, educational alternative (Gordon *et al.*, 1994). However, there is no legal consensus regarding homeschooling yet. Most states reflect the opinion that a reasonable balance must be found between the rights of the individual and the rights of the state, but it appears as if most courts have not yet determined clear guidelines regarding this balance (Gordon *et al.*, 1994).
- As previously indicated, estimates with regard to the number of homeschoolers in the USA vary from 500,000 to 1 million and higher. There is no doubt that the numbers are growing (Duffey, 1998; Meighan, 1995; Moss, 1995; Natale, 1995; Wagenaar, 1997; Whitehead & Crow, 1993; Wynn, 1985).
- Homeschoolers in the USA are very heterogeneous and diverse with regard to various aspects. Although some researchers have tried to compile a profile of US homeschoolers, it appears impossible to do so (Chatham, 1991; Knowles *et al.*, 1994; Meighan, 1995, 1997).
- The reasons presented by parents opting for homeschooling appear to be as varied as the families involved. Although these reasons are difficult to categorise due to their diversity, some researchers classify them within two categories, namely ideological and educational reasons. Within this category there are, however, variations and combinations. This categorising may furthermore be misleading, because some 'religious' parents describe their reasons as primarily of an educational nature, rather than religious convictions. There are also researchers who differ from the above-mentioned classification and are of the opinion that all homeschoolers are actually ideologues and that there should rather be three categories regarding philosophical aspects, namely religion, New Age and the liberal left (Cizek, 1994; Hunt, 1995, 1996; Mayberry, 1989; Van Galen, 1988, 1991).
- With regard to the structure of homeschooling, there are two extremes. On the one hand, there are the orthodox structuralists whose home-schools are actually miniature schools with formal and conventional curricula. On the other hand, there are the proponents of unstructured learning, who are of the opinion that children have an inherent ability to learn, even if parents supply no formal teaching. The largest group of homeschoolers is somewhere between these extremes (Guterson, 1992).

- Four contemporary educational philosophies had definite influences on homeschooling in the USA, namely essentialism, progressivism, perennialism and the existentialism (Hood, 1990).
- All research studies that could be obtained unequivocally indicate that academically homeschoolers perform very well. No studies could be obtained to indicate that homeschooling is academically inferior to schooling provided in conventional schools. All studies consistently revealed that academically homeschoolers perform just as well, if not better, than their peers in traditional schools do. These findings appear to be true notwithstanding the educational background of the parents, their degree of teacher training and their socioeconomic position (Whitehead & Crow, 1993).
- Most studies revealed that home learners are not in any way being disadvantaged by homeschooling with regard to social-emotional development or socialisation and that their development in these areas is just as good, if not better, than that of their peers in conventional schools (Chatham, 1991; Parker, 1992; Whitehead & Crow, 1993). They are not disadvantaged regarding admission to tertiary education either (Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Nelsen, 1998) and as the number of home learners at tertiary education institutions is increasing, the admission policies of these institutions come into the public eye once more. At present there are increasing differences regarding admission policies for home learners to public tertiary institutions (Hahn & Hasson, 1996).
- One should bear in mind that some of these results are based on reports from homeschoolers and home learners themselves, and may therefore be biased to a degree. However, there are so many studies with similar findings regarding the outcomes of homeschooling, that they cannot be ignored.
- Since the 1990s there has been, generally speaking, a more relaxed relationship between homeschoolers and public education. Integration of homeschoolers into public school activities – even during school hours – is also becoming more common. However, stipulations regarding the involvement of homeschoolers in activities at conventional schools still differ from state to state (Guterson, 1992; Hahn & Hasson, 1996; Parker, 1992).
- Policy makers in the USA seem to be increasingly of the opinion that there should be some form of cooperation between public schools and homeschoolers. Proposals in this regard appear to be related to two aspects, namely the enrichment of homeschooling, and the monetary advantages such cooperation may have for public schools (Fash, 1994; Guterson, 1992; Parker, 1992).

Findings on Homeschooling in South Africa

Based on the literature study, the following findings were made.

- The South African education system is presently in a phase of transition where there is a movement away from the previous racially segregated

education system towards a unified system within a democratic context. A number of structures from the previous dispensation have been reformed or are in the process of reformation, but there are also a number of aspects, such as homeschooling, on which education policy has not yet been finalised (Bray, 1996; Steyn *et al.*, 1997).

- The South African education system is structured within the framework of the South African Constitution, which acts as a guiding document. Education policy is therefore obliged to function within the parameters of the Constitution (South Africa, 1995).
- Although the South African Constitution does not contain a stipulation granting parents an explicit right to homeschooling, it does not make homeschooling unconstitutional (Visser, 1998).
- As opposed to the highly decentralised education system of the USA where there is no federal education policy, the South African education system has an overarching education vision and mission within which education policy should function (Steyn *et al.*, 1997).
- Homeschooling was once the norm in South Africa, as elsewhere, before the introduction of compulsory education (Van Oostrum, 1997b).
- The present stipulations regarding compulsory schooling in South Africa are contained in the South African Schools Act (Act no. 84 of 1996). This act also contains stipulations regarding grounds for exemption of compulsory schooling. At present educational law in South Africa does not stipulate *compulsory education*, but *compulsory school attendance*.
- Homeschooling was not always, as is the case now, a legal alternative (Hunter, 1995).
- Present policy on homeschooling is explicitly described in Article 51 of the South African Schools Act (Act no. 84 of 1996). New regulations regarding homeschooling in South Africa have been announced by the government in the Government Gazette of 23 November 1999 and came into power in January 2000. These regulations determine policy for the registration of home learners in terms of Article 3(4)(g) of the National Act on Education (27 of 1996) and are supplementary to Article 51 of the South African Schools Act (Act no. 84 of 1996). However, homeschoolers still express uncertainty about aspects like the minimum requirements of the curriculum in public schools and the standard of education in public schools with which they are required to comply with (Pestalozzi Trust, 2002).
- Apart from the regulations on compulsory schooling as mentioned above, the number of families in South Africa, as elsewhere, opting for homeschooling rather than school attendance is growing rapidly. As previously indicated, the number of homeschoolers in South Africa in 1999 was estimated to be between 4000 and 8000 and is clearly still growing.
- Although it appears as if homeschooling is most popular amongst whites, there are also members from other populations groups who prefer homeschooling (Coetzee, 1998; Verster, 1998a, 1998b).
- Homeschoolers do not necessarily possess teacher training and their qualifications differ (Botha, 1998; Rooi, 1998).

- Very little research has been done on the reasons of homeschoolers in South Africa. However, existing research indicates that the largest group of homeschoolers in South Africa is Christian parents who are not satisfied with the neutral religious approach presently followed in public schools. The largest growth in support, however, appears to be amongst concerned parents who are taking their children out of public schools for academic convictions. Other reasons that are mentioned vary from concern about a breakdown in moral standards, lack of discipline and growing negative influences such as drugs and sex in schools to reasons of a more personal nature. Parents often prefer homeschooling due to a combination of several of the above reasons (Anon., 1998, 1999; Behr, 1997; Botha, 1998; Garson, 1999; Kotzé, 1998; Robinson, 1999; Rooi, 1998; Van Oostrum, 1997b; Van Schoor, 1999; Verster, 1998a).
- Teaching methods in South African homeschools differ from less to more structured (Botha, 1998; Durham, 1996; Kotzé, 1998; Rooi, 1998; Van Oostrum, 1997b) and some homeschoolers use pre-prepared curricula, while others don't (Behr, 1997).
- There is no specific policy on cooperation between homeschoolers and public schools in South Africa.
- Homeschooling in South Africa as a field of study has hardly been systematically researched at all. Notwithstanding the growing interest in homeschooling, there is hardly any scientifically researched information available on homeschooling in South Africa.

On information obtained from the empirical data, the following was found:

Profile

- South African homeschoolers are diverse regarding various aspects.
- In most cases the mother is primarily responsible for homeschooling.
- There are more or less an equal number of Afrikaans- and English-speaking homeschoolers in South Africa.
- The majority of homeschoolers are white, older than 30 years and possess a matric only, or at most a matric plus a tertiary diploma.
- The majority of homeschoolers do not possess any teacher training or teaching experience and their basic income is more or less the same as that of an average white South African family.
- The majority of homeschoolers do not belong to any of the traditional religious systems and they are distributed across the country and not concentrated in a particular geographical area.
- There are more or less an equal number of homeschoolers belonging to homeschool associations as those who don't.

Methods

- Home learners are mostly not registered at education departments. Some are busy with the registration process and others indicated that they are experiencing problems with the registration process.
- Homeschoolers have mostly small families, which makes individual attention possible.

- Home learners vary from preprimary level to Grade 12.
- It is clear that the number of home learners has grown rapidly since 1998.
- More time is spent on formal lessons than on self-study and pre-prepared curricula are used in most instances. On average home learners spend just as much time on formal lessons as learners in formal schools do.
- A wide spectrum of subjects is presented and a wide variety of teaching and learning aids are used for homeschool programmes.
- Almost without exception homeschoolers are participating in various co-curricular activities of varying nature.
- Nearly 25% of homeschoolers indicated that their children make use of facilities at formal schools or participate in activities presented at formal schools. A number of those who do not, indicated that they would really like to do so, but were not allowed to do so by schools.
- It appears that homeschoolers in general are committed parents who are prepared to spend a lot of time and attention to their children's' education.

Reasons

- It appears as if educational reasons are the major motivational force for homeschooling in South Africa and religious conviction the second most important reason. If this is true, the situation would be different from that in the USA, where religion is the most important and educational convictions the second most important reason.
- The most infrequent reasons for homeschooling in South Africa appear to be social and political reasons, expensive private education, a way for homeschoolers to express their faith and the protection of children against violence in schools.

Conclusions

Although the situation in South Africa is different from that in the USA, policy makers and homeschoolers may very well benefit from the research done in the USA, as well as the lessons learnt from the development of homeschooling in the USA. It is clear that homeschooling in South Africa, as elsewhere, is a rapidly growing phenomenon that will not disappear overnight. Although it presently is a legal option, a number of aspects regarding homeschooling in South Africa still need to be addressed. It will be in the best interest of children for education authorities and homeschoolers to develop a partnership-relation and become jointly involved in policy making with regard to homeschooling.

Research in the USA has clearly indicated that homeschooling is to the benefit rather than to the disadvantage of children. Homeschooling does not in any way disadvantage home learners with regard to academic and social-emotional development or socialisation. Education authorities need to take note of this research and the opportunities that homeschooling as an alternative form of educational provision presents. The fact that children receive an education should be more important than the fact that they are attending formal schools. Education policy makers in South Africa should

rather consider legislation with regard to compulsory *education* in favour of legislation for compulsory *schooling*.

From the literature as well as the empirical research it is clear that homeschoolers are a diverse group of parents with only one aspect in common, namely a need to provide their children with the best education that they possibly can. These parents are actively involved in the education of their children. Internationally parental involvement is recognised as an important factor in the education of children and homeschooling provides an excellent opportunity for this.

As homeschooling as an alternative form of educational provision in South Africa increases, new aspects to consider will progressively come to the fore, such as the admission of home learners to facilities and activities at public schools for which there is presently no uniform policy. Homeschoolers need to share these needs with education departments in a partnership-relation.

Homeschoolers, on the other hand, need to accept that the state has an important role in assuring that all children, home learners as well, receive an adequate education. A spirit of cooperation is needed in which a situation is achieved that is to the advantage of all.

Research on homeschooling in South Africa should furthermore be promoted. Although homeschooling will most probably never replace mainstream education, the fact that more than 4000 families opt for homeschooling in favour of formal schooling suggests that homeschooling deserves more research.

The quality of educational provision in South Africa may even be improved by the inclusion of alternative models, including homeschooling, which are supplementary to each other. There needn't be only one system of educational provision.

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