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## The Home Schooling Movement: A Few Concluding Observations

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Robert L. Crowson

In 1932, Willard Waller (*The Sociology of Teaching*) warned of the importance of distinguishing clearly between school and not-school. Otherwise, the special concerns of parents (vis-à-vis their own children), alongside community power inequities, would intrude heavily on the abilities of educators to be fully professional, to avoid favoritism and particularism, and to be effectively neutral.

Waller likely would be much surprised today to learn that a successful buffering of school from not-school is now given some credit (e.g., by Apple, 2000/this issue) for fueling the home schooling movement (see also Sarason, 1995). A rather unresponsive and notoriously bureaucratized profession apparently has not yet learned how to be adequately user-friendly.

Waller might be even more surprised to learn that the not-school, in very rapidly growing numbers (as noted by Ray, 2000a/this issue), is currently assuming the role of the school. What is the deep significance here? For parents to serve their children as pedagogues is not at all new, historically (see Carper, 2000/this issue); but the social and institutional implica-

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tions of the home schooling movement (at this time of much turbulence in education's policy environment) should be examined closely.

This issue of the *Peabody Journal of Education* has done an excellent job of beginning to do just that. Historically informative tensions between religious beliefs, family preferences, and the development of the common schools are clearly and succinctly sketched by James Carper (2000/this issue). Tyler and Carper (2000/this issue) combine in a highly instructive (and thoroughly readable) story of Zan Peters Tyler's personal political odyssey in South Carolina. The South Carolina case demonstrates that historically significant tensions persist—in a clear recognition by individuals, lawmakers, and educators that deep political "stakes" can be involved in home schooling legislation; that parental "clout" is already very much a force to be reckoned with in this state policy arena; and that the continuing "hold" of a home schooling minority on applicable state regulatory structures can be a key to successful policy implementation.

It is interesting to note that home schooling is by no means limited to the American context. There are also deep roots, with considerable success, in western European nations that are traditionally much less given to local control than is the United States. An informative summary by Taylor and Petrie (2000/this issue) notes the accommodate-the-home but protect-the-child flavor of enabling legislation in much of Europe—while observing the hard line against nonschool schooling taken in Germany. It would be well to learn much more about the politics and rationale of Germany's oppositional position.

As would be expected in a volume addressing such a value-laden issue, there are a number of articles that respond to the popular criticisms of home schooling (with "hard" data and with solid points of argument). Brian Ray (2000b/this issue) examines the key does-it-work question with valuable evidence that indeed it does, often for the same reasons that have been identified as keys to school improvement (e.g., high expectations, individualized curricula, direct instruction). Richard Medlin (2000/this issue) is effective in assembling research that counters the complaint that home schooling limits the social development and social adjustments of children; and Jacque Ensign (2000/this issue) offers evidence that home schooling also can work very effectively for children with special needs (from learning disabilities to giftedness).

There is just a bit of the let's-make-believers of the readership to some of the it-works articles. Such a tendency in this issue is nicely leavened, however, by pieces by McDowell, Sanchez, and Jones (2000/this issue) and by McDowell (2000/this issue) alone, which observe that the ethnic breakdown among home schoolers is, perhaps problematically, highly disproportionate to the larger society and that home schooling is not quite the

"pleasant" experience for every mother-teacher that a rather romanticized literature implies. Also, to the great credit of the editorship of this issue, some intellectually powerful and insightful critiques of home schooling are offered by Chris Lubienski (2000/*this issue*) and by Michael Apple (2000/*this issue*). I refer in more depth to their work in the next few pages.

Finally, two of the most intriguing and informative pieces in this issue are the articles by Patricia Lines (2000/*this issue*) and Paul Hill (2000/*this issue*). Lines provides a review and some specific examples of trends in the development of "partnerships" between public schools and home schoolers. Her piece is evidence that the movement has decidedly come of age if, indeed, public officials are now making adaptive responses to parental school-them-at-home initiatives. It is also a possible hint, as Lines suggests, of a paradigm to come in the provision of much greater, parent-friendly programmatic flexibility in public education. When a movement begins to influence significantly the "mainstream," it is truly something worth a focusing of our attention.

Paul Hill (2000/*this issue*), on the other hand, claims that home schooling is not at all likely to "meld back" into mainstream public education. Home schoolers dread much of the accompanying paraphernalia of public schooling (e.g., bureaucratization, unionized teachers, lax discipline). This is not to suggest though, continues Hill, that "something like schools" will fail to develop. As home schoolers continue to rely more and more on one another, new less conventional but decidedly school-like institutions will evolve (out of what is increasingly a privatization thrust in America). Thus, Hill too sees home schooling as a window into a "broad movement," with ramifications far beyond the actual (although not insignificant) numbers of adherents and participants.

### Some Additional Thoughts

Both Lubienski (2000/*this issue*) and Apple (2000/*this issue*) recognize fully that home schooling is a development of significance. Both, however, have deep concerns. Chris Lubienski wraps a strong piece of criticism around the tension between private benefits and public goals. When families deeply imbued with high-achievement attributes and expectations opt out, pulling their children away from the communal arena, they are removing themselves from a societal burden that we all share—to contribute to the larger "public good." Peer effects in classrooms are lost to the children of less well-prepared families, a privatization of economic interests displaces collective benefits, and "flight" is used to express dissatisfaction when the democratic use of "voice" might have led to societally beneficial change (in the organization and delivery of schooling).

Sharing much the same set of concerns, Michael Apple (2000/*this issue*) finds home schooling to be just one small element in a larger, very powerful social movement. There is good sense to be found in a legitimate concern for children and in a reaction to the bureaucratization of public education. However, disturbingly, this movement also reflects a pulling away from social equality and community toward stratification and “cocooning.” There is a retreat from democratic discussion and criticism into strategies, says Apple, of “possessive individualism.”

There may be less that is new to today’s privatization of interests or to today’s cocooning than Lubienski (2000/*this issue*) and Apple (2000/*this issue*) would imply. We learned long ago from C. M. Tiebout (1956) that Americans are adept at “voting with their feet” for educational services that match their individual preferences—usually in just-like-us communities of folks with similar tastes, similar incomes, and similar prejudices. To be cocooned, whether by choice or through lack of choice, is already a long and well-established tradition.

Nevertheless, there is, again, a sense (shared by Elshtain, 1995; Hawley, 1995; Murphy, 2000; and others) that a significant social movement is indeed in process—of which home schooling is just one part. Joseph Murphy noted a national mood of public cynicism about and an alienation from government-initiated activity, including a “widespread perception that the state is overinvolved in the life of the citizenry.” Indeed, Brian Ray’s (2000b/*this issue*) discussion of liberty and justice in a “non-dominant state,” in this issue, provides a well-articulated sense of the essential, underlying mood.

Thus, the trend in America is away from “the state” as a means to achieve one’s personal goals (e.g., access, equality, or communality)—and toward the individual and family unit as instruments of their own opportunities (Murphy, *in press*). Indeed (so goes the argument), it may be the state’s job, if doing much of anything, to stand aside, to remove marketplace impediments from the self-seeking and self-fulfilling journeys of individuals. “Choice”—not just whether to home school but whether to charter school, attend a magnet, receive a voucher, return from busing to “the neighborhood,” go to a workplace school, or join a for-profit school—seems decidedly to be the operant ideology in today’s increasingly differentiated array of options for education.

In an atmosphere—indeed, an ideology (Crowson, 1999)—of individualism and choice, it is hard to fault an option for families that (as the editors’ introduction notes) “is thriving; its ranks are swelling, and its children—according to the most current research—are flourishing.” Farris and Woodruff (2000/*this issue*) are quite correct in concluding that home schooling is now “a well-established part of the American educational landscape.” Evidence

is surfacing of exceptional academic performance, of enhanced family togetherness, of no loss in "social skills," of a valuable growth in "networking" among home schooling families, of a boom in available home-study materials and resources, and perhaps even a "carryover" (claim Farris & Woodruff) into more successful marriages and careers.

Among those who study the politics of social movements, an observation can be offered that home schooling seems to be rapidly becoming "institutionalized" in American society (see Crowson, Boyd, & Mawhinney, 1996). Differences between the states in the laws regulating home schooling are starting to wash out; federal rules governing eligibility for student financial aid are being eased for home schoolers; home schoolers increasingly are willing to compare themselves against "mainstream" measures of accomplishment (e.g., standardized test scores); some accommodations are surfacing between public school administrators and home schoolers; and indeed (as Lines, 2000/*this issue*, notes), the jargon of public school reform is now beginning to include home schooling or "independent study" as an acceptable option among reform alternatives.

In fact, insufficiently addressed in this issue are some concerns and possible issues of significance that should receive added attention as home schooling does reach an "institutionalized" status. Just a few hints of potential strains to come are mentioned by the authors. Carper's (2000/*this issue*) article asks how a growing diversity (particularly in religious beliefs) may influence the movement and "its relation to the state." Farris and Woodruff (2000/*this issue*) point out that home school families have tended to be "a distinctive segment of the American population" (i.e., somewhat wealthier and better educated), with a fairly common sense of curriculum (i.e., what's most worth learning). As the movement broadens and deepens, however, it may experience centrifugal forces that push away from its current distinctiveness.

In addition, Lines's (2000/*this issue*) interesting compilation of adaptive "partnerships" between home schooling families and the public schools forecasts a potential future wherein home schooling could become "co-opted" back into public-sector programming. In short, to be "accepted" and "legitimized" as an educational movement pulls home schooling into an entirely new realm of relationships and problems. Even if, as Hill (2000/*this issue*) suggests, the institutionalization that occurs takes a privatized direction all of its own, the very fact of institutionalization is itself of significance. Success as a movement carries its own deep threats to those forces that created and sustained the movement in the first place.

On the other hand, if Lines (2000/*this issue*) is quite correct that the adapting and co-opting that is beginning to occur "could become the model for tomorrow's education," then the significance of home schooling

is no longer to be found in its distinctiveness. The movement instead might receive central credit as a deviant “tail” that ends up wagging key pieces of “the dog” of public education. Indeed, Hill (2000/this issue) also recognizes that home schooling is less a threat to public education than a now-significant “force that will change it.” For a social movement initiated by families (indeed, by just a small “niche” of dissenting families) to begin to shake successfully the larger institution of public education—that is a potential “story” of educational reform well worth much attention and deep analysis.

Indeed, it is apparent in reading this important set of articles for the *Peabody Journal of Education* that, again, home schooling has decidedly “come of age” as a vital topic of policy analysis and academic research. No longer to be ignored or to be regulated to an out-of-the-loop set of topics for scholarly inquiry, home schooling is now a movement of significance and power. We need to give it much more attention and seek a much deeper level of balanced, objective understanding than has been the case to date.

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