HOMESCHOOL AND SOCIALIZATION

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After 3 years of being home schooled, my 9 year old son decided he wanted to attend 3rd grade at a public school, so we enrolled him in a local charter school. One afternoon the receptionist stopped me to tell me how much she enjoyed my son. She raved about what a delight he was to visit with each day, so “engaging and polite.” She then asked if I had other children. When I told her I did, but they were home schooled, she became alarmed and immediately declared that she did not approve of home schooling because the children could not develop the social skills necessary to function well in society.

Anyone who has home schooled has been pressed with the question, “What about socialization?” That question seems to come up more than concerns about children’s academic development. During a recent conversation on Facebook with a teacher opposed to home schooling I was asked about social development in a way that made me wonder if the children I had now home schooled for the past 10 years were deficient in social skills critical for them to function in society. Research of current studies indicates that the home schooling environment prepares students not only academically for the real world, but socially as well.

HOME SCHOOL IN THE U.S.

Home schooling is not a new method of education. From the beginning of U.S. history children received parent-led education in the home and through community activities and apprenticeships (Ferenga 1, Ray, HS
During the 19th century a reformation occurred in which compulsory education became a tool to “Americanize” the various cultures within the United States, and then the means to promote “social betterment” (Hess and Okun 2). By the 1970s there were only an estimated 13 thousand school age children who were being home schooled in the United States (Ray, HS Students 1). Since the 1980’s there has been a resurgence of home schooling and the movement has experienced significant growth. Home schooling has dramatically increased since the 1990s, now reaching an estimated 1.5 million home schooled students. The number of children who are home schooled is still a relatively small minority, making up only 3% of school-age children; but the rate, or percent, of home schooled children is also growing, experiencing a 31% growth from 2003 to 2007 (U.S. DOE 1-3). These numbers are only rough estimates as reporting requirements vary from state to state making it difficult to obtain firm numbers. Though requirements vary by state, laws in all 50 states today allow for home schooling (Hess and Okun 1 & 3, Gaither 11).

Home schooling options are evolving with the advancement of technology. The term Home schooling is now used to describe children educated by their parents or tutors, “mom schools” in which a co-operative is formed, dual enrollment or part-time enrollment, online schools, and any combination of those (Gaither 15).

Extensive studies by the National Home Education Research Institute, a research facility and clearing house for studies on home schoolers, show home schooled students are well prepared academically for college, regardless of family income or parent qualifications (Ray, HS Homeschooling on a dramatic rise in U.S.)
Students). Students are performing as well or better than their publicly schooled peers on the ACT, averaging in the 85th percentile (comparison of ACT Scores 2009). Home schooled students are being accepted into college and even specifically sought after by several institutions of higher education due to the students’ abilities to access and utilize information (Wichers 2). The Army website <goarmy.com> has a page for home school graduates explaining that the Army is now doing a pilot test accepting home schoolers on the same contractual terms as those with high school diplomas because of the success home school students are demonstrating (Powers n. pag.). Academically, home schooled students are meeting benchmarks that are recognized indicators for success.

Studies are also being conducted on the effects of home schooling and social development of students. Like most home school studies though, these studies are relatively limited. Population samples are unique and difficult to draw generalizations and comparisons from. Most of the research is conducted by home school advocates, which creates a bias concern to the validity of the research. However, as the participation in home schooling increases and studies continue to be conducted, they do support the success of home school (Hess & Okun 3-4, Medlin 118).

**Perceptions of Home School**

Within the US culture acceptance of home schooling is increasing as more children are home schooled, making more people familiar with home schoolers. Popular media is beginning to present home schooling in a positive light. In spite of this, misperceptions still persist about home schooling: images of the isolated student, cut off and sheltered from the real-world, indoctrinated by religious zealots, and destined to become

*The Army released a pilot program accepting Homeschool Recruits*
social misfits. In a survey of public school superintendents, 92% believed home school students were under-socialized (Romanowski 125-128). The National Education Association is adamantly opposed to home schooling and asserts that “home schooling programs based on parental choice cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience” (2011-12 NEA Resolution 38).

Critics of home schooling believe homeschooled children are not prepared for the “real world” or adulthood. They claim home schoolers are “too sheltered” and do not have enough exposure to people of various backgrounds (Ray 1). Other critics claim home schooling inhibits “social integration” and does not give students the education necessary to become good citizens (Farenga 2, Romanowski 127). However, home schooling advocates often invoke the same term, “socialization”, referring to the reason for pulling their children out of public school: to avoid negative socialization (Wichers 1). When surveyed, over 2/3 of the parents cited concern for the academic environment (drugs, negative peer pressure, bullying, etc.) as a reason they home school (U.S. DOE 2).

**DEFINING SOCIALIZATION**

The term “Socialization” is used very loosely. When people use the term they are often referring to different ideas of what socialization means. The most basic idea is the opportunity for students to interact with their peers. Socialization can also refer to learning to conform to societal norms, being able to work cooperatively and function within rules of society. Socialization also includes being exposed to a variety of beliefs, backgrounds, and cultures (Romanowski 25-26). Socialization includes all of these. Kevin Durkin, Professor of Psychology at the University of
Strathclyde, defined socialization in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* as “the process whereby people acquire the rules of behavior and systems of beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society” (Medlin, 107).

**CURRENT STUDIES**

The home school movement is still relatively young. An increasing number of studies are being conducted with greater care to addressing study controls and validity. These studies support the claim that home school students are doing well socially (Medlin 119). In his doctoral dissertation at Andrews University J.W. Taylor conducted a nationwide study of public and home schooled children using the Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale. He found, as far as self-concept is concerned, home schoolers are as well or better off than their peers (Romanowski 126). Richard Medlin’s review of research concluded home schooled children are socially well-adjusted with “no significant differences” between home schooled and publicly schooled students (Medlin 114). Home schooled students tend to lead out in skills identified with leadership (Medlin 117).

In her doctoral dissertation at Walden University, Kristi Warfe compared social skill maturity in home school students to public schooled students as well as private schooled students. Using the SSIS Assessment (Social Skills Improvement System) Warfe noted the social development ratings of home schooled students fell well within a healthy range. For the most part there were no significant differences in Social Skill maturity by school type (Warfe 85). Differences that were observed in the social development of Home schooled students as
compared to their publicly schooled peers were not to be interpreted as deficient (Warfe 94). The differences observed in Home schooled students tended to be more in line with social maturity differences identified between Private School students and Public School Students (Warfe 87).

**FACTORS OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The public school environment is often seen as the only place a comprehensive social development can be learned by students (Romanowski 125). The home school environment has several factors that make it conducive to the development of positive social skills: A diverse network of support groups, the natural social environment of the family, the opportunity to interact regularly within the community, and parental involvement all lend to teaching social development in students.

**DIVERSITY WITHIN COMMUNITY**

As home schooling grows in mainstream society and technology brings access to the world into homes and hands of average people, the cultural makeup of home schooling is changing. Home schooling is experiencing significant growth among minorities (Gaither 12-13), allowing for a diverse network of support groups which provide social outlets, peer contacts, and outside experiments. Romanowski explains reasons for home schooling are diverse as are the demographics as home schooling which “appeal to all races, religions, socio-economic groups and political viewpoints” (Romanowski qtd. 128). African-Americans make up the greatest minority growth among home schoolers, but growth is also being experience among Muslims, Hawaiians, American Indians, Jewish, and other minorities as well. Home schooling has also become an option.
for students who are focusing on training in intensive sports and arts where a lot of time is needed for training (Gaither 12-14).

**Natural Social Environment**

Home schooling provides a natural simulator for the development of social skills instead of placing children into segregated groups by age found only in traditional schools. The home and family environment mirror society at large with interactions among people of various ages and abilities. This provides a natural environment for the normal development of social skills within the daily routines of life as they interact with people of varying social maturity and challenging situations. Skills such as time management, problem solving, cooperation, and communication are learned and developed at home and then put into practice within the community (Medlin 113 & 119, Romanowski 126).

**Community Involvement**

Home school students are actively involved in their community. Instead of being isolated from the outside world, home schooled students are actively involved in their community through youth organizations, sports, and volunteer activities. 98% of home school students are involved in 2 or more activities outside of the home. The average home school student is involved in 5.2 ongoing activities outside the home (Romanowski 126) see fig. 1. This involvement continues into adulthood. Studies show that home school graduates are more likely than the general population to participate in ongoing community service and organizations, to be involved in political parties or causes, and to vote.
Home school students experience a natural evolution from involvement in the community as a child to involvement as an adult.

**Parental Involvement**

One of the key indicators of emotional competency is parental involvement and that is one of the greatest strengths of home schooling (Warfe 52). A nurturing adult facilitates active learning socially and emotionally, allowing children to thrive and fostering a climate for social and academic growth and development. Family relationships parallel the structure of society better than traditional public school with controlled, age-segregated environment (Medlin 119). Socialization, both positive and negative, involves imitation of behaviors, which are then reinforced by peers or adults. Home schooling avoids much of the negative socialization found in the traditional school environment (Warfe, 12). Parents of home schooled students recognize the need for social experiences and make extra effort to provide positive social experiences within the home and community (Medlin 109). Home schooling allows for a dynamic and adaptive individualization of a students’ education, with access to innovative programs that allow students to learn in an environment that is best suited to them (Medlin 119).

**Conclusion and Future Considerations**

The resurgence of home schooling is relatively new, and because the picture of home schooling is such a dynamic and diverse creature, the cross-sectional and longitudinal studies are very limited. Continued research with controlled questions, looking for more specific answers, must continue to be done (Medlin 118). That being said, the studies that
have been done, and continue to be done with better controls and designs, are not showing the home school students to be backward, social misfits, but rather show they are doing just fine. The home schooling environment prepares students not only academically for the real world, but socially as well.

Studies are showing differences among students educated in various ways, but those differences are only “differences and not deficiencies” (Warfe 94). By and large home school parents want to provide a good education for their children, with positive socialization opportunities, while maintaining strong family relationships, and they are doing a good job (Romanowski 129). Not only are home school students doing well within the “real world” but they often do better than their peers when it comes to active community involvement. Home schooling is succeeding at preparing students to be successful academically, but it prepares them socially as well to become fully functioning, contributing adults. In a 1991 follow-up adults who had been home schooled due to “ideology and geographic isolation” Knowles found “None were unemployed or on welfare. Nearly two-thirds were self-employed,” which points to the development of self-reliance and independence in the students (Rowmanowski 127).

While critics believe that the home school environment cannot provide the opportunities for students to fully develop socially, it is the unique environment of home school that makes social development a natural process: A nurturing atmosphere with parental involvement that regularly engages with the community in a natural social environment that is becoming increasingly diverse. There are going to be some misfits
who fit the stereotypes and are lacking in normal social skills. Someone will always be able to say, “I knew a family that home schooled and they were real ‘odd ducks’.” The truth is there are people lacking normal social skills in almost any group, including public schools. There will be home schooling families who ignore the importance of learning social skills, but these are the exception and not the rule (Romanowski 125, Warfe 54).

Curiosities of the studies that should be investigated further are the effects among subgroups. When broken into subgroups the disparities traditionally experienced among lower incomes and minorities are not apparent in the studies done among home schoolers. The African American demographic is one of the fastest growing minorities in home school. They are experiencing great success in the home school environment that they have struggled to achieve in the traditional school settings (Gaither13). Romanowski looked at the decline in self-concept often experienced by girls and found home schooled girls did not experience the social discrimination found in the public education environment (126). Both of these findings warrant further investigation to see if this is a factor of home schooling or other influences.

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