

Worldwide Home Education

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With an estimated 2 million students nationwide, homeschooling in the United States is considered almost “mainstream.” At the same time, homeschooling, or home education as it is known elsewhere, is seeing tremendous growth around the world in countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

The UK’s Channel 4 News Online issued a report in September 2007 indicating a sharp increase in home education. The report estimated there are 50,000 home-educated children in the UK, which reflected an average rise of 61% over a five-year period. Interestingly, a government spokesperson quickly diminished the importance of such numbers, stating various localities reported only .09 to .42 percent in any area being homeschooled, indicating home education to be a rarity. However, since there are over eight million school children in the UK, that’s still a lot of children being taught at home—hardly a rarity. Some sources say figures are closer to 1% of the entire student population. UK homeschool students often make headlines when they pass their GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) at an early age. They are also very successful in being admitted to universities.

In Ireland, the National Education Welfare Board estimates there may be up to 2,000 homeschoolers. Scotland, the very first country to introduce compulsory education in 1496, estimates 1% of the children are homeschooled. Parents may even receive help from authorities and may at times receive discounts for educational materials as well as have access to the same resources as the public schools. Wales remains friendly to home education as it becomes increasingly popular there.

Wikipedia lists a 1995 estimate of 20,000 home-educated children living in Australia. As this figure is 14 years old, and home education worldwide is increasing, it is likely the current number is much greater. Australian parents may choose from public home education programs and private programs. New Zealand (with 6,000-7,000 homeschool students) offers two major home education associations, while Australia offers three, and has its own Australian Homeschool Legal Defense Association.

Determining the exact number of homeschoolers in any given country is difficult. Nearly all countries which allow home education report their estimates may be off by at least 1% owing to the number of parents who do not report to any agency.

Because many provinces in Canada do not require homeschool families to register, it is especially difficult to estimate the number of home-educated children. Information provided by Canadian homeschool associations in 2000 sets the best guess at 80,000. While Alberta is one of the few provinces requiring home educators to register, it offers the advantage of providing options and support for home schoolers.

The reasons Americans choose to homeschool mirror those of our neighbors across the oceans: school violence, learning pace, lack of moral standards, religious views, poor educational quality, lack of challenge, and special needs. Individual reasons are as diverse as the families involved, yet similar from one nation to another.

Experts attribute the increasing numbers of home educators in Canada, Asia, and Australia to the availability of online support groups and resource centers. A quick Internet search reveals numerous websites offering books, online help, tips, forums, ask-the-expert advice resources, and curriculum suggestions. For example, Canadian home education conferences occur across Canada. Various websites allow the user to click on a province or territory and learn about homeschool events local to the user. One fantastic online resource is the National Home Education Research Institute (<http://www.nheri.org>). This organization researches homeschooling nationally and internationally and publishes its findings.

Other avenues of online support include blogs, Yahoo groups, and social networks such as Facebook and FuseFly. Students now have “email” friends instead of “pen pals.” It’s immediate information. Children receive replies to questions in minutes or hours instead of days or weeks. Students exchange pictures of their communities, historical landmarks, scenery, and local tourist sites. They receive a virtual tour of another country, complete with personal tour guides! Students improve their writing, researching, and typing skills while learning about foreign lifestyles, foods, clothing, beliefs, mores, and traditions. It’s like having their world history or geography book come alive.

As our world becomes more and more available to us via the web, and as long as governments around the world maintain leniency toward home education, homeschool students have incredible opportunities for education. The possibilities are truly endless!

Biographical Information

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