

The Myth of Socialization

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As homeschooling grows across the country and around the world, so does the body of research about homeschooling and its effects. Among the most common objections to home schooling is “How will your children learn to get along with others? How they be prepared for the real world—employment, peers, and civic involvement?”. Experience has caused many homeschoolers to call this the myth of socialization - popular belief that children learn best how to be fit for companionship with others and adapt to the needs to society when they are placed in groups of others their same ageⁱ. Does the research confirm the experiences of most homeschoolers, that this myth is truly fiction?

The first concern seems to be whether homeschooled students will form friendships, participate in outside activities, and receive the benefits of multiple influences. Quoting a study by Thomas Smedley (1992) Brian Ray, of the National Home Education Research Institute states “Home educated children are more mature and better socialized that are those sent to school.” Dr. Larry Shyers (1992) found that homeschooled children exhibit fewer problem behaviors than non homeschooled children.ⁱⁱ

In 2007, the Fraser Institute, an independent educational research organization, released a report on homeschooling, quoting multiple studies on socialization and other aspects of student achievement. In all the studies, not one showed homeschooled students lacking in the social skills needed to acquire and maintain healthy relationships, both during the school years and into adulthood. The authors cite two studies that showed homeschooled students had a higher self-

esteem than and were as well adjusted as students in private schools. Further, the authors' state, "data has also been collected suggesting that home schooled students are friendlier than their public school peers, as well as more independent of peer values as they grow older."ⁱⁱⁱ

Finally, all studies seem to point to involvement in outside activities, interacting with a variety of influences, to be at or above the level of public schooled peers. Researchers agree that homeschooled students are able to function well in groups of students as well as enjoy a variety of outside influences, all the while being under the care and direction of parents.

Like many homeschooling families, our experiences bear this out. Our children interact with a range of ages each week when we meet for a meal and Bible study with four other homeschooling families. In addition to the twenty three children typically in attendance, they also share with the other parents, two sets of grandparents and a great-grandmother (not their own). Our homeschool community stays connected via a monthly print and a weekly e-mail newsletter, with typical choices including creative writing classes at a public library branch, horseback riding lessons, summer camps at local universities, a basketball tournament, and a policy lecture at the Family Research Council. Outside activities and companionship are not lacking for those who choose to look for them.

Along with the question of companionship, homeschooling parents are asked whether they think their children will be prepared to participate in the workforce, community activities, and politics. Again, the research places homeschooled graduates above the crowd. In 1991, Dr. Gary Knowles studied adults who had been homeschooled, of whom 94% said that home education prepared

them to be independent persons. At the time of his study, none were unemployed and none were on welfare.^{iv} (Ray, Home Education Research: Fact Sheet IIIc 2001). While the research base on adults who were home educated is growing, most studies show that they participate to greater degree in local community service, in political activities and voting, and perform in higher education at or above the general population.^v It is clear that homeschooled students are as prepared or better to function as active, contributing citizens.

Some critics argue that homeschool students are overprotected, but Bliss questions whether this is a negative, "Protection during early, developmental years for purposes of nurturing and growth is evident in many arenas: plant, animal, and aquatic. Why should it be considered wrong or bad in the most vital arena, human development?"^{vi} (1989) Much of the research available discusses the negative traits of conventionally schooled children. During a recent repair to our home, the contractor began discussing homeschooling with me. Although he had no children yet, he stated firmly that when or if he did have children they would not go to a public school. "It will be hard enough to train their own bad habits out of them. Why would I send them to school where they can learn everyone else's bad habits? It would be more for me to train out of them later." A homeschooling friend offered this comment on overprotection and socialization:

"I always smile when people bring up their concerns over whether my children will be "socialized" enough to function in the "real world." . . . Homeschooling is not the easiest path for a family to take, and I have not met anyone who made that decision in order to prepare their children to live on their own personal planet someday. We all want our children to grow into competent, caring adults. Those of us who homeschool choose this path because we believe we can best achieve that goal by allowing our children to learn in an environment infused with love and faith, and full of rich learning experiences, diverse opportunities for service and ministry, fellowship, and field trips . . . Add to that,

daily encouragement from the people who love you more than anyone else on earth, numerous lessons in patience and forgiveness (often provided by younger siblings), and opportunities to give and receive grace on a regular basis, and I think you have a very well rounded educational experience.”

Along with workforce and academic success, most homeschool students show strength of character that is not reflected in their conventionally schooled peers. We recently had the privilege of welcoming a national home school leader [Andrew Pudewa] to our home after he gave seminars for home and Christian school students in our area. We also invited four other homeschool families, children included. After the meal, the younger children dispersed around the house, with the older ones keeping an eye on the youngest ones, allowing the adults to converse with relatively few interruptions. The young adults in our group, mainly high school students, remained with the adults and contributed, even enhanced our discussion. They were able to clearly communicate their ideas without appearing arrogant or overly shy, honoring their parents and the other adults in the room with their conversation.

With the plethora of research available on this topic, the myth of socialization is truly fiction. Homeschooled students consistently exhibit the training and preparation their parents so diligently instill in them. As with anything, the burden of proof is on the accusers. The next time someone asks the socialization question, ask on what research or experience he bases his assumptions. Perhaps he will discover, as I did in researching this article^{vii} that it is a lot harder to find evidence that homeschooling produces socially immature adults than it is to find evidence that it produces strong, contributing members of society.

ⁱ In addition to the expected definition of socialization as it relates to companionship and functioning in society, the American Heritage Dictionary's initial definition of socialization was "to place under government or group ownership or control." This is precisely the reason most parents choose to homeschool, so that their children are not socialized in this way. The next time someone asks the dreaded socialization question, be sure to ask what kind of socialization they mean.

ⁱⁱ Ray, Brian. "Home Education Research Fact Sheet IIe." National Home Education Research Institute. 2000. <http://www.nheri.org/Fact-Sheet-II.html> (accessed 25 February 2009)

ⁱⁱⁱ Basham, Patrick, John Merrifield, and Claudia R. Hepburn. "Home Schooling: From the Extreme to the Mainstream, 2nd edition. Fraser Institute. October 4, 2007. http://www.fraserinstitute.org/commerce.web/product_files/Homeschooling2007.pdf (accessed 25 February 2009)

^{iv} Ray, Brian. "Home Education Research Fact Sheet IIIc." National Home Education Research Institute. 2001. <http://www.nheri.org/Fact-Sheet-III.html> (accessed 25 February 2009)

^v Ray, Brian. "Research Facts on Homeschooling." National Home Education Research Institute. September 18, 2008. <http://www.nheri.org/Research-Facts-on-Homeschooling.html> (accessed 25 February 2009)

^{vi} Bliss, Barbara A. (1989). Home Education: a Look at Current Practices. Research Project, Michigan State University. Quoted in Aiex, Nola Kortner, "Home Schooling and Socialization of Children. ERIC Digest. 1994. <http://www.ericdigests.org/1995-1/home.htm> (accessed 25 February 2009).

^{vii} For further research, search the websites listed above. The Fraser Institute document cited above includes a comprehensive list of studies and articles on homeschooling and is available at no charge. Along with searching library indexes and databases for studies on socialization and homeschooling, a simple Google search on "homeschooling socialization" brought back predominantly positive results. Research about the negative impact of homeschooling on the socialization of children is not easily found.

Biographical Information

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Danielle Olander, when not caring for her husband or homeschooling their four children, teaches homeschool writing and literature classes near their home in West Michigan. As both a homeschool graduate and a homeschool mom, she understands first hand the benefits and challenges of home education. Also a freelance writer and editor, she is an Accomplished Instructor and exhibitor with Excellence in Writing and co-authored IEW's Life Science-Based Writing Lessons with her father.