

Homeschooling and Personalized Learning



Homeschooling: The Ultimate Personalized Environment

We are living in the Information Age—an era in which teachers appreciate the need for personalized education more than ever before (Fraser, 2007). As part of this trend, educators are inquiring about homeschooling advantages because they demonstrate the ultimate personalized schooling environment. For the purposes of this chapter, a personalized education means adapting instruction to each individual student so that it varies according to the student's needs. This individualization may affect pace, time, and/or place of learning. Homeschooling, by definition, is an environment where personalized learning can thrive (Orr, 2003). One of the reasons for homeschooling's increased popularity is that it is perceived as the ultimate personalized educational environment. In addition, unlike education in public schools, there is no negative relationship between family socioeconomic status (SES), parental education level, and the academic outcomes of their children. As Short (2010) states:

As it turns out, in a basic battery of tests that included writing and mathematics, homeschooled children whose mothers hadn't finished high school scored at the 83rd percentile, while students whose fathers hadn't finished high school scored in the 79th percentile. (pp. 88–89)

Approximately 3.4% of students in the U.S. are homeschooled, which places the total number in excess of 1.77 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). This number represents about 25–30% of the school population that attends nonpublic schools (Moore & Moore, 1994; Nel, 2010). The percentage of students that are homeschooled could increase because it allows for a level of flexibility in instruction and learning that many parents and children find more personal and attractive than what is offered through public schooling (Jeynes, 2007a, 2012). For society to benefit from the growth of homeschooling, it is vital that the scholastic community realize that there is much to learn from the homeschooling environment and practice that can be applied to nearly all public schools. Admittedly, the data available on the benefits of homeschooling are rather thin. Nevertheless, when one combines the studies that have been done on homeschooling and

those that have been done on the specific components of this approach, there is a greater understanding of what qualities of the home's education environment can benefit public schools.

What Makes Homeschooling So Successful?

What are some key aspects of homeschooling that make it so successful and personalized that can be applied to virtually all schools? This is an important question. The answers presented here are discussed not so much to encourage homeschooling but rather to argue that public and private schooling can learn a great deal from the homeschooling rubric to make large-scale schooling more effective.

Increases Parental Involvement

Perhaps the foremost distinction of homeschooling is that it provides the ultimate expression of parental involvement (Jeynes, 2006). There is no question that the decision to homeschool is a considerable commitment. A high level of parental involvement is virtually a prerequisite in the decision to homeschool (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Immell, 2009), and research has shown increased parental involvement improves student outcomes (Jeynes, 2003a, 2007b). Moreover, meta-analyses and the examination of nationwide data sets suggest that the most potent components of this engagement result from the family interactions and expectations that occur in the home rather than parents participating in school-based functions (Jeynes, 2005, 2007b, 2010).

Parenting qualities such as having high expectations, concurrently maintaining a loving and structured environment, and communicating in a constructive way with children are some of the most salient components of involvement.

Parenting qualities such as having high expectations, concurrently maintaining a loving and structured environment, and communicating in a constructive way with children are some of the most salient components of involvement. Homeschooling provides an ideal environment for children to learn in that maximizes the time they are exposed to these qualities in their mothers or fathers (Fisher, 2003; Stevens, 2001).

Among academics, there is growing interest in homeschooling largely because of one quite amazing reality—homeschooling is the only educational approach in which youth of low SES achieve at levels that are as high scholastically as those of their high-SES counterparts (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995; Ray & Wartes, 1991). This parity is not only the ideal, of course, but is also a very elusive one to accomplish. Increasingly, social scientists are attributing this relationship primarily to the elevated levels of parental engagement that are present in virtually all homeschooling environments (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Stevens, 2001). The reason they reach this conclusion is because studies suggest that a considerable percentage of SES's association with school outcomes is explained by the involvement of mothers and fathers (Gregory, 2000). Successful parents are more likely to be involved than their less successful counterparts because they are convinced that the American system works and that the investment they personally make into the schooling of their children will ultimately be worth it (Fisher, 2003; Gregory, 2000; Stevens, 2001).

The decision to homeschool almost by definition is rooted in the belief that such a sacrifice of time and effort into a child's life is worth the effort. One principle that can

be learned from homeschooling is that parental involvement matters (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007) and it means a great deal to the success of the student (Fisher, 2003; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). Evidence indicates that not only do homeschooled youth outperform students in public school by two years but also that they outperform those in faith-based schools by one year; these differences remain almost the same even when one adjusts for race and SES (Mayberry et al., 1995; Ray & Wartes, 1991).

To whatever extent parental engagement explains the scholastic advantage enjoyed by homeschooled children and adolescents, it befits public school instructors to do what they can do to enhance the extent to which fathers and mothers are engaged in their children's education. Public school educators need to take three specific actions to both maximize and enhance parental participation.

First, teachers should examine what traits mothers and fathers have that enable young people to thrive more from instruction at home, on average, than they do in public school even when the results are adjusted for race and SES. The answers are probably rather facile. Parents are more likely to have a deeper love for their children than educators do, and they are more likely to have a thorough knowledge of their children as individuals. Regrettably, modern society underestimates the extent to which these two qualities alone give parents a decided advantage over teachers in schooling their children.

It is ironic that the trend has been to assume that teachers, who are trained professionals, would be better than most parents in training children. In centuries past, just the opposite was assumed. In fact, one of the founders of the public school system, Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827), asked why it was that children learned better at home than in any alternative environment. He answered his own question by declaring the reason was because children were loved by their parents at home (Fraser, 2001; Jeynes, 2007a, Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Therefore, Pestalozzi (1901) concluded that the best teachers needed to be similar in the school environment to mothers in the home. He therefore argued for the maternal role of the school. Unfortunately, since the early 1900s, schooling has steered away from an emphasis on teachers supporting and loving students and has embraced more of an industrial model that emphasizes proper methodology and pedagogy (Fisher, 2003; Fraser, 2001; Jeynes, 2007a).

A small number of academics and a myriad number of parents warned about the eventual consequences of emphasizing the mode of teaching more than knowing and loving the children (Gatto, 2001; Horne, 1931, 1932). Horne (1931, 1932) led the academic argument in favor of loving and knowing the children. However, in a modern world that became enamored with the marvels of industrialization, those who argued that the school system needed a pragmatic approach that emphasized the teacher as a specialist within an industrial society seemed destined to win the tug of war (Dewey, 1915, 1978). Although many families opposed this new approach to education as too standardized and mechanized, they did not wield enough power to affect the eventual outcome (Gatto, 2001). Horne (1931, 1932) appreciated the value of efficacious pedagogy. However, he believed that if loving, supporting, and understanding the children did not make up the foundation of education, students would not flourish. He warned of a future educational state in which teachers were well acquainted with the best means of instructing children but whose hearts were no longer filled with love and compassion for the children. Horne was concerned that the eventual outcome would be a school system that was mechanical and overly standardized (Jeynes, 2006).

For centuries, educators, as well as those who were the foremost architects of the schooling system, recognized that parents were the primary educators, and the teacher's role was to supplement that instruction (Fisher, 2003; Gatto, 2001). However, in the past 50 years in particular, Americans, Europeans, and others have become compliant with increased government control of schooling and submission to the professional status of teachers (Fisher, 2003; Gatto, 2001, 2009; Kurtz, 2010; Whitehead, 2013). The undeniable success of homeschooling suggests that teachers need to reacquaint themselves with the salience of mothers and fathers in the schooling process (Fisher, 2003; Gatto, 2001; Rivero, 2008). The assumption that college or graduate tutelage in educational practice and theory grants teachers more instructional acumen for a given child than mothers and fathers, when parents have known their children for years and teachers have not known the children long at all, is naïve at best and blatantly presumptuous at worst (Hirsch, 2006).

When George Counts wrote his book titled *Dare We Build a New Social Order?* in 1932, it was quite controversial, especially among parents. Many Americans thought it was immensely arrogant for educators to think they could create a new social order and even more presumptuous to assume that it was desirable for them to try (Gatto, 2001). In contrast, in contemporary society, a statist philosophy in which the government is strongly involved in shaping society is often assumed or at least accepted (Welling, 2005). In the broader societal context, this statist approach may or may not be appropriate (Gatto, 2001; Welling, 2005); nevertheless, within the context of schooling, this approach, which highlights the influence of government spending for schools, public policy, and teacher professionalism, has had the effect of crowding out the primacy of the parental role (Gatto, 2001, 2009). The success of homeschooling has been a poignant reminder that research repeatedly points to family factors as being considerably more salient than school factors in predicting academic success among students (Schneider & Coleman, 1993). It is highly unlikely whether any amount of government spending increases, policy changes, or acknowledgement of teacher professionalism will outweigh the effect of family factors in influencing the scholastic outcomes of youth (Schneider & Coleman, 1993).

The second action teachers can take to enhance parental involvement is to convince parents that engagement is worth the investment. Educators need to use more than verbal communication to draw in parents. Instructors themselves need to demonstrate a love and interest in the child that makes the parents much more likely to show a commensurate level of love toward and interest in the child (Brodie, 2010). In addition, although some teachers welcome the engagement of parents, others do not (Immell, 2009). Rather, these instructors want parents to "leave the teaching to the professionals" and often want *carte blanche* authority to provide tutelage to the children in whatever way they see fit (Gatto, 2001, 2009). However, homeschooling is a reminder that the parental qualities of love, understanding, compassion, and patience are key if learning is to be maximized (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). Public school teachers need to realize that teachers and parents need each other (Jeynes, 2003a). Parents need the instructional knowledge that teachers possess, and teachers need the knowledge of the child that parents possess.

It is interesting that, beginning in the 1600s with the Pilgrims and Puritans until about the early 1960s, it was the general practice for elementary school teachers to visit the homes of all of their students before the commencement of the school year. The reasons

for this practice were not only to build partnerships with the parents, but also to draw from the family's knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the child (Gangel & Benson, 1983; Jeynes, 2007a; Morgan, 1986). Ironically, when various Eastern Asian nations imitated the American paradigm of K–12 schooling in the mid-1800s until the early 1900s, they embraced this home visitation practice (Jeynes, 2007a). American schools largely jettisoned this practice just over half a century ago, concurrent with the cessation of physicians making house calls (Jeynes, 2006). In contrast, East Asians have maintained this tradition and cite these visitations as one of the key reasons why their students significantly outperform their American counterparts (Jeynes, 2006). Teachers in the U.S. need to communicate to parents that family participation in their children's schooling is worth the effort. They need to not only verbally communicate this truism to parents but also demonstrate this investment themselves by listening to and building relationships with students' families.

Third, educators need to share with parents what components of parental involvement are most helpful to children (Jeynes, 2010). What is of concern is that, although most teachers know that parental involvement in the most general sense facilitates high levels of scholastic achievement by youth, they

have a dearth of knowledge about the facets of that participation that are most efficacious (Jeynes, 2010). Most educators think of parental engagement in its most traditional sense of attending school functions, checking homework, being

...the most vital components of parental involvement are subtle and have more to do with love, high and reasonable expectations, and positive and informative communication...

an active member of the parent–teacher association, setting household rules to make sure schoolwork gets done, and volunteering in the classroom (Jeynes, 2010). However, meta-analyses on parental involvement over the past dozen years or so have made it clear that the most vital components of parental involvement are subtle and have more to do with love, high and reasonable expectations, and positive and informative communication (Jeynes, 2003a, 2007b, 2010). Unfortunately, very few teachers are aware that the more subtle aspects of parental engagement are the most important (Jeynes, 2010). Given that numerous family members look to educators for guidance about how to best become involved, the vacuity of information is concerning.

Provides for Less Standardization and More Freedom

A second key aspect contributing to the success of homeschooling is that it generally relies considerably less on standardized testing and government mandates (Immell, 2009). Therefore, parents have greater freedom to focus on the development of the whole child, particularly when it comes to character education (Reavis & Lakriski, 2005; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Ironically, beginning with Plato and continuing until the early 1960s, most of the leading proponents of the Western model of education traditionally believed that teaching children to be loving, compassionate, and moral human beings was actually more important than instruction addressed solely with expanding the mind (Deresiewicz, 2011; Dupuis, 1966; Mann, 1957; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999).

The resistance of parents to the increased standardization of the curricula in No Child Left Behind and Common Core State Standards is indicative that families want more

control over classroom priorities than they currently experience. Parents generally want input into how their children are instructed. Families usually place a great deal of value on character instruction which encourages youth to develop their skills, strengthen their weaknesses, and prepare for contributing to society in a meaningful and productive way. Some families believe that this translates into less standardization and more emphasis on the individual child, thus homeschooling becomes the antithesis to the current standardized environment (Immell, 2009). Under the past three presidents, Clinton, G. W. Bush, and Obama, the United States has unquestionably gone in the direction of greater standardization. Given that not all parents wish to go in this direction, perhaps it is time to learn from the strengths of homeschooling and broaden instruction to apply to the whole child. One can argue that, with the increased omnipresence of the Internet, the trend toward a more personalized education is more accessible.

Enables More Individualized Instruction

A third key beneficial aspect of homeschooling is its provision of an environment in which students receive more individualized instruction from their teachers (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Hayes, 2002; Pyles, 2004). Nearly every type of homeschool approach yields very small class sizes, and research has shown that both smaller class size and school size are associated with higher levels of scholastic success (Feldmon, Lopez, & Simon, 2006; Jeynes, 2012). That is, students within a given nation that are in schools with very small class sizes, on average, achieve at higher levels than their counterparts that are in highly populated classrooms. Admittedly, this trend holds within nations, but does not hold across nations (Jeynes, 2007a). However, this fact should not be surprising, given that there are a multitude of complexities that reflect why average achievement is higher in certain nations than others (Jeynes, 2006). Moreover, research indicates that two reasons why students from faith-based schools outperform their counterparts in public schools are both related to receiving more individualized instruction. On average, religious schools have smaller class sizes than do public schools. In addition, their faith-based leadership generally places much more emphasis on engaging parents in their children's education than one sees in public school administrators (Jeynes, 2000, 2002). Admittedly, these factors do not totally explain the religious schools' advantage, but it is patent that they explain a significant portion of that edge. When class sizes are smaller, in practical terms, this translates into a teacher having more time with each individual student—to know the student's personality, strengths, and weaknesses. As a result, the instructor can be more adept at formulating a pedagogical strategy that is appropriate for that child (Hayes, 2002; Pyles, 2004). There is no question that small classes are appealing to students, parents, and teachers (Feldmon et al., 2006; Jeynes, 2014; O'Connell & Smith, 2000).

Another way that the homeschooling approach is more individualized is that children tend to have the same instructor for multiple years. In public schools, generally teachers have students in their class for only nine months. Often these educators bemoan the fact that, shortly after they have come to know the youth in their care, it is time for the children to progress to the next grade level (Orr, 2003; Rivero, 2008). Numerous private schools and a small percentage of public schools have concluded that a long-lasting relationship between each teacher and pupil is salient in fabricating a sensitive and individualized pedagogical plan. Although a child's parents potentially could continue to

teach their children for four, eight, or twelve years, public schools cannot be expected to replicate this practice, nor would it be appropriate. Nevertheless, logic would dictate that schools should foster a longer and deeper relationship between teachers and their students than currently exists (Rivero, 2008).

The homeschool environment provides a personalized approach to instruction that makes it possible to build a curriculum that thoroughly considers the unique gifts, talents, and skills of a given student (Lesaux & Marietta, 2011; O'Connell & Smith, 2000). In a large class, a teacher often encounters the conundrum of how best to instruct the whole class and yet, in a time-efficient way, still meet the needs that emerge because of individual differences among the students (Gatto, 2001; O'Connell & Smith, 2000). A considerable amount of research indicates that certain instructional approaches may be best for particular kinds of children. Even if a given approach is better overall, there are children who thrive more when an alternative approach is used (Jeynes & Littell, 2000; Lesaux & Marietta, 2011).

Foreigners reserve their greatest praise for the American system of education by declaring that the U.S. encourages its students to develop high levels of creativity (Worek, 2008). One common testimony to American creativity is that the U.S. has, by far, won more Nobel Prizes than any other nation. In fact, the University of Chicago, the American university that has won the most Nobel Prizes, has won more awards singularly than all but a few entire nations (Worek, 2008). Many educators attribute the American edge in Nobel Prizes to fostering creativity, recognizing the value of each individual student, and urging students to develop their own unique set of skills to the fullest extent possible (O'Connell & Smith, 2000; Worek, 2008). To the degree to which this edge is typified in the academic advantage that homeschooled youth enjoy over their counterparts in public schools, contemporary school administrators and policymakers would do well to give as much personal attention to each student in their care as possible.

The research indicates that one of the major advantages of homeschooling is that the pace of learning can be adjusted to what is ideal for the individual child (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2013). In a public school whole-class environment, this is harder to accomplish. In a public school, or even in a private school that may have smaller class sizes, if a student is confused about a particular concept, the teacher does not always have the freedom to stop the progress of the class simply because one student is confused (Kunzman, 2009; O'Connell & Smith, 2000).

Homeschooling offers a similar advantage when the child learns a new concept quickly. When a student easily grasps a new concept in a regular classroom, that student must wait until a large enough percentage of those in the class understand the idea for the teacher to justify moving on to the next concept. Depending on how long that delay is, it accrues into a considerable amount of wasted learning time for the student. In contrast, homeschooling allows the parent to quickly proceed to the next concept, building from what the student already understands and knows. Because of this specific advantage, some parents prefer to homeschool in the belief that there is more of an opportunity for their children to be intellectually challenged in a homeschooling environment (Jolly et al., 2013). Tsubata (2003) did a research synthesis of homeschool surveys, which indicated that 77% of homeschool parents believe that providing home-based tutelage enables them to aim higher than American school standards.

Research also indicates that homeschooling allows a personalized approach that enables children to have a broader exposure to the world than one finds in public school environments. Studies indicate that, as a result of this personalized and broad approach to schooling, homeschooled youth are more tolerant than are children from public schools (Cheng, 2014; Medlin, 2013).

Immerses Students in High Technology and the Internet

Another homeschooling advantage that public schools can emulate is immersing students in the broad use of high technology and the Internet. Many homeschool curricula use Internet- and computer-based instruction, and there is more flexibility to use technology at home (Davis, 2014; Kunzman, 2009; West, 2012). To be sure, public and private schools often require and, at times, even supply iPads, laptops, and other technological equipment. However, the teachers often utilize these tools within a narrow range. Consequently, when these students enter college, many professors report that the high school graduates are inadequately prepared to use some of the most important scholastic applications electronically available (Davis, 2014; West, 2012).

There are several reasons why the use of high technology and the Internet are popular with homeschools, including (a) it enables parents to give their children an education that is consistent with a modern Information Age model rather than the older industrial rubric practiced by public schools, (b) it enables children to explore the world more freely than in typical schools, and (c) it helps youth develop levels of technological skills that would generally not be possible in a public school environment where teachers must accommodate the pace of students who are struggling with the computer (Davis, 2014; Kunzman, 2009; West, 2012).

It can be said that if one falls too far behind in technological agility, acumen, and overall knowledge, it is conceivable that it could dramatically reduce that person's employment opportunities.

Technology has brought dramatic changes to everyday life. It can be said that if one falls too far behind in technological agility, acumen, and overall knowledge, it is conceivable that it could dramatically reduce that person's employment opportunities. Moreover, it is evident that the potential for Americans to compete in the global marketplace depends substantially on the technological preparedness of its graduates for the workforce. The existence of flexible and creative school curricula that encourage students to constantly become engaged with computers and the Internet on a broad scale will produce a student population with a high level of technological sophistication. It would therefore be wise for public schools to enact more of a personalized approach to using technology. In the industrialized model of education that emerged especially during the period of 1890 to 1935, teachers replaced parents as the focal point of public school education. However, generally speaking, mothers and fathers are considerably more aware of their children's gifts than are teachers. As a result, homeschooling often encourages youth to develop their giftedness in technology considerably more than one witnesses in public schools. Public schools ought to allow more room for students to exercise technological giftedness and interest.

Currently, the primary emphasis in public education is on equality, which certainly is a worthy goal. However, this direction has resulted in an overemphasis on standardized

tests and “sameness.” In contrast, only about 2% of the education budget in the U.S. is spent on giftedness training (Lewis, 2008; Stevens, 2009). To most fair-minded people, this percentage suggests an imbalance. It reflects a lack of personalized education, one manifestation of which is a lack of flexibility in allowing students to pursue advanced technological skills.

Supports Students in Special Situations

An increasing amount of evidence suggests that homeschooling applied to the broader educational landscape may provide students in a variety of unique situations the best opportunity to thrive, including those with special cognitive, physical, or emotional needs, as well as those who are bullied (Hayes, 2002; Noll, 1995; Peterson, 2009; Pyles, 2004; Rafter, 2004). To be sure, there is a certain degree of irony to this. Taxation to support public schools provides a copious amount of funds with which these centers of learning can provide facilities for these youth that the majority of faith-based schools neither have the size nor the financial resources to afford (Burman & Siemrod, 2013; Sacks, 2001). The average public school in the U.S. spends about \$10,658 per student, which is usually 70% higher than one finds in faith-based schools (Burman & Siemrod, 2013; Center for Education Reform, 2012; Sacks, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Despite this considerable financial edge that public schools enjoy, there is an increasing recognition among parents and educators that what many students with special needs require is more love, understanding, and support, more than they do sophisticated facilities (Hayes, 2002; Peterson, 2009; Pyles, 2004). There is no question that the augmenting of school grounds to include an increasing number of adaptations facilitating movement and learning for those with special needs is well intentioned and often helpful (Burman & Siemrod, 2013; Center for Education Reform, 2012; Sacks, 2001). Nevertheless, it is equally true that no amount of elaborate adjustments can replace the love, support, and understanding that these youth receive from compassionate and adoring family members (Brodie, 2010; Jeynes, 2003b; Metzel, 2004). One of the reasons why homeschooling works well for children with special needs is because the challenges these youngsters face are often truly unique and best adapted to in a personalized environment such as one finds in homeschooling (Jones, 2004; Peterson, 2009).

Allows Specialization in a Particular Discipline

Finally, homeschooling provides unique opportunities for children to specialize in a particular discipline or set of activities that inspire them. That is, homeschooling provides more opportunities for a personally chosen focus than one usually finds in the public schools. One example is that homeschoolers have developed a reputation for winning the National Spelling Bee (Smith & Campbell, 2012). This is especially impressive because homeschoolers represent just 3.4% of the school-age population (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Another example of this ability to specialize is the debate and court teams at Patrick Henry College. The overwhelming majority of students from this institution are homeschooled. Many homeschooled children aspire to be successful debaters and prepare at home during their K–12 education because Patrick Henry’s debate and court teams have had amazing success. They have often triumphed over top universities, such as Oxford University and Notre Dame University (Rosin, 2007).

Clearly, the home environment cannot be and should not be replicated. However, teachers can take a number of steps to allow for greater flexibility in the classroom experience.

First, depending on the age of the children, students can be asked about their career interests. They can then be encouraged to explore their particular career interests in terms of writing reports, taking fieldtrips with like-minded students, and conducting interviews. Second, teachers can ask students about what they would most like to learn and accomplish during their school years and explain why this is important for their lives and future. The teacher can place students with similar interests into small groups. The students can take action to improve their abilities and collectively encourage and strengthen one another in their pursuits. Third, students who are a little older can be asked what courses they intend to take in the next few years and then prepare in advance for that course in order to increase proficiency. Such an approach to education will encourage students to be better prepared for their lives ahead.

Conclusion

One should note that education, as its founders originally formulated, did not involve the degree of standardization and government intervention that it does today (Elkind, 1987; Jeynes, 2006; Perrone, 1990). Most educators believed that too much standardization and rigidity usurped the parents' and teachers' ability to personalize their instruction in a way that could best benefit the students. In contemporary society, movements such as Common Core State Standards have increasingly made schooling nationalized and standardized. As a result, there is vigorous debate in liberal, moderate, and conservative circles regarding whether the degree of this standardization and government intervention is empowering or enervating the effective practice of schooling (Jeynes, 2000, 2006).

Creativity can manifest itself in a variety of different ways along a continuum. Often creativity manifests itself in an environment with a high level of flexibility, which is why one can argue that the flexible homeschool ambience is more conducive to spawning creativity than the more standardized public school environment (Rivero, 2002, 2008). The modern-day homeschool movement appears to have started in 1969 with Herbert Kohl's book, *The Open Classroom*. In it, Kohl (1969) stated, "For most American children there is essentially one public school system in the United States, and it's authoritarian and oppressive" (p. 12). That may seem like an extreme statement, but placed in more moderating terms, Kohl's assertion reflects the attitude that the government system of schools stifles creativity. A good number of historical figures, such as Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Agatha Christie, and Jane Austen, were homeschooled (Mayberry et al., 1995). These individuals were known for their creativity while living in very unique and disparate situations. Teachers need to learn from the homeschool environment what encourages creativity. Granted, there are many creative people who have not been homeschooled. Nevertheless, homeschooling encourages a level of flexibility that fosters the development of certain talents and supports the strengthening of certain weaknesses.

It is clear that the practice of homeschooling is not merely valuable in its own right but also can provide exemplary principles that can be applied within the public school system. It offers many advantages often overlooked by those who are not directly engaged in this instructional practice. The potential benefits that can accrue from a loving and personalized environment are advantages that should not be limited to homeschooling alone but should also be considered as lessons for the practice of teaching overall.

Action Principles for States, Districts, and Schools

With the strong educational contributions that homeschooling can potentially make for children, it is wise for education agencies at various levels to consider what can be learned from the practice of homeschooling.

Action Principles for States

- a. Encourage parents to become more involved in their children's education (which is inherently the case with parents who homeschool). Parental engagement at all levels is good for youth and good for society.
- b. Learn from economists and recognize that monopolies are not good for society. The virtual monopoly that the public school system has is no exception. Implement policies that encourage parental- and community-level participation and choice. Ninety-one percent of K–12 students attend public schools. Public schools should encourage educational innovation in the private sector and welcome the competition.
- c. Place more emphasis on individual children than on standardized testing, the overuse of which often runs antithetical to fostering an atmosphere of a personalized education. This would allow educators to decrease the percentage of time allotted to preparing for standardized tests and allow a greater flexibility in the curricula, including inviting parental suggestions.
- d. Provide policy and supports to develop school leaders' and teachers' capacities to use technology to facilitate personalized learning and to support students' own skills in technologies.
- e. Value character education more. When a child is homeschooled, he or she has the benefit of receiving individualized instruction to become a more virtuous and moral human being (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Support implementation with fidelity of research-based social/emotional learning programs and similar interventions (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Action Principles for Districts

- a. Become more focused on the good of the overall student population in the school district rather than only those who attend public school specifically. Encourage the implementation of a variety of practices used by homeschoolers. Offer seminars on this issue and make them available to all K–12 educators, not simply those in the public schools.
- b. Offer parents courses on how to be more effectively engaged in a child's schooling, even if parents are limited by workplace demands, etc.
- c. Offer district facilities, when possible, so that parents can use public school equipment to enhance the homeschooling experience for their children.
- d. Train teachers how to best help youngsters who either entered public school from a homeschooling environment or who are homeschooled for some classes but not for others. The training would involve the participation of teachers and families who had worked with such a transition and address what the keys are for success in these adjustments.

- e. Facilitate learning from homeschooling by holding joint conferences with homeschooling advocates regarding what public school districts and homeschooling families can learn from one another to maximize educational outcomes.

Action Principles for Schools

- a. Private schools should more aggressively offer homeschool options. Some schools give students the option of either attending their school or using the same textbooks in a home-based environment. This benefits the school by increasing overall enrollment. It also offers advantages to the family because it makes schooling more affordable for them and more personalized.
- b. Develop a more holistic approach to schooling. Leaders need to care about the education that all children receive, not merely those who attend public schools. They need to make it easier for homeschooled youth in their area to participate in extracurricular activities and homeschool without excessive red tape from the school.
- c. Contact the homeschool associations and families, encouraging them to send their children to take courses at their schools that would be difficult to teach at home (e.g., chemistry).
- d. Realize that homeschooling is a very helpful and practical option for parents who encounter some rather unique situations with their children, such as children who have special needs, who have been bullied persistently, who have disabilities, or whose parents must move frequently. Be willing to encourage families in these situations to exercise these options.
- e. Contact homeschool teachers and ask if they would be willing to tutor struggling public school students, given their expertise in instructing students one on one.





"This course was developed from the public domain document: Jeynes, W. H. (2016). Homeschooling: The ultimate personalized environment. In M. Murphy, S. Redding, & J. Twyman (Eds.), Handbook on personalized learning for states, districts, and schools (pp. 99–113). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, Center on Innovations in Learning. Retrieved from www.centeril.org"