

Homeschooling: A Restriction on Socialization for Children

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One of the first questions a parent is likely to receive when she states her child is homeschooled is: Does your child get enough socialization? This is a valid concern when a child is taught solely by their parents, in their own home and without exposure to other children on a daily basis. Individuals on both sides of this debate – those that choose homeschooling and those that choose traditional education – have passionate arguments as to why they feel socialization either is or isn't achieved. Based on research regarding socialization and personal accounts of homeschooled children, homeschooled children do not obtain adequate socialization when they are restricted to only being schooled at home, however, combined with outside activities such as homeschool groups or classes, community sports teams, community music/arts groups, summer camps, summer school, and community college, socialization can be achieved. The socialization achieved, however, is not at the same level obtained in traditional school environments.

This paper will generally review those arguments, explain that socialization is not 100% achieved by homeschooling and present other ways to achieve a kind of socialization for homeschooled children.

I. Socialization: An Overview of the Great Debate

Socialization is defined as “the process by which a human being beginning at infancy acquires the habits, beliefs, and accumulated knowledge of society through education and training for adult status.”¹ In essence, socialization is the ability to interact with the outside world. Each side of this debate believes that their method is the best way to obtain the skills to

¹ *Socialization Definition*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER.COM, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/socialization> (last visited April 15, 2014).

effectively socialize and interact with the outside world, however, their differences center around what qualifies as socialization and the way in which these skills are obtained.

Parents who choose to homeschool their children believe that their children are given every opportunity to gain the necessary skills to interact with the outside world.² They suggest that their children are actually more socialized than public school children because they are involved in more activities.³ Furthermore, parents speak strongly against the negative socialization children receive in traditional school environments.⁴ For example, they suggest that socialization in traditional school environments involves teasing, bullying, gossip, immoral discussions and general peer pressure.⁵ By choosing to homeschool children, they protect their children from this behavior. Essentially, parents of homeschooled children suggest that children obtain enough socialization by engaging in outside activities and with interactions with adults and do not need the peer interaction normally received in traditional school environments.⁶

On the other side of the debate are the opponents of homeschooling who believe that children are not adequately socialized in an isolated homeschooled environment. These individuals argue that homeschooled children live relatively sheltered lives without exposure to peer pressure and group dynamics in school, which offer coping skills for children.⁷ Children are also not effectively prepared for entering the real world with respect to interactions with their peers and potential colleagues in group settings.⁸ An additional problem with a lack of

² Chris Klicka, *Socialization: Homeschools Are in the Real World*, HSLDA, <http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000000/00000068.asp> (last visited Apr. 22, 2014).

³ *Id.* It is unclear whether this is due to the parent getting them involved or just by being with the parent. *Id.*

⁴ Samantha Lebeda, *Homeschooling: Depriving Children of Social Development?*, 99 J. CONTEMP. LEGAL ISSUES 99, 103 (2007).

⁵ *Id.* at n. 22.

⁶ *Id.* at 103.

⁷ Judith G. McMullen, *Behind Closed Doors: Should States Regulate Homeschooling?*, 54 S.C. L. REV. 75, 83 (2002-2003).

⁸ Lana Hope, *It's True: Homeschoolers Are Often Not Socialized*, WIDE OPEN GROUND, <http://www.wideopenground.com/homeschool-socialization-problem/> (last visited Apr. 22, 2014).

interaction with peers is that children are not exposed to competing ideas and beliefs.⁹ Homeschooled children are only informed of the ideas and beliefs of their parents, and as a result do not have the opportunity to learn and accept the ideas and beliefs of others.

II. Socialization is Still Not Achieved in Homeschooling

One quick search on the Internet brings forth countless articles from organizations such as the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), and blogs created by parents of homeschooled children that claim their children do not have problems with socialization and they successfully make it into the real world without any problems. It is shocking that news organizations and other media outlets have not discussed the inherent bias in the organizations and parents being the majority of the proponents. The same search is scattered with stories from adults that were homeschooled as children that wish they experienced school in a traditional setting because of a lack of socialization but these are not the focus of numerous articles.¹⁰ These findings show there is still something lacking in the way in which these children interact and communicate with the outside world.

Children need to be fully socialized in a way that prepares them for the outside world. Homeschooled children spend their childhood isolated and as a result, they are not exposed to peer pressure, group dynamics, and the ability to learn coping skills.¹¹ Daniel Kessler, a pediatrician and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics developmental-behavior group, states “Kids need to be successful in three overlapping spheres – at home, at school and with

⁹ Rob Reich, *Why Home Schooling Should be Regulated*, in HOME SCHOOLING IN FULL VIEW: A READER 109, 114 (Bruce S. Cooper ed. 2005).

¹⁰ See McMullen, *supra* note 7; Hope, *supra* note 8.

¹¹ McMullen, *supra* note 7.

peers.”¹² Kessler further states “Homeschooling compresses all that into a single setting that can be difficult for kids.”¹³

Parents of homeschooled children are quick to point out that the concerns that individuals have with socialization are misguided. They claim that homeschooled children are actually more prepared for the “real world” than traditional students because they have more “hands-on” experience and learn to emulate adults as opposed to “foolish peers.”¹⁴ Furthermore, parents of homeschooled children argue that if socialization includes bullies, peer pressure and immorality then they prefer their children to avoid socialization.¹⁵ Parents of homeschooled children have a very narrow idea of what they believe socialization is.

No parent wants their children to be bullied or exposed to immorality, however, the “real world” is full of situations that parents cannot shield their children from. As a child is exposed to bullies and peer pressure, children learn how to interact with peers and problem solve, which is similar to the experiences they may encounter in the “real world”. Parents of homeschooled children overlook that those “foolish peers” will eventually turn into their children’s colleagues in the “real world”. Peer pressure and bullying is not something that only occurs in school, it continues in different forms throughout life (corporate politics, pecking orders, etc.) and it is important for children to know how to deal with these difficult situations.¹⁶

¹² *Home Schooling: More Than A Million Kids And Growing: Can It Work For Your Family?*, NEWSWEEK (July 1, 2010, 1:37 PM) <http://www.newsweek.com/home-schooling-more-million-kids-and-growing-can-it-work-your-family-169786>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Klicka, *supra* note 2.

¹⁵ Alexandra Martinez, *The 3 Biggest Social Benefits of Homeschooling*, TLC PARENTABLES (Nov. 22, 2011) <http://parentables.howstuffworks.com/family-matters/social-benefits-homeschooling.html>; Klicka, *supra* note 2.

¹⁶ *Homeschooling Disadvantages: Five Reasons to Rethink Homeschooling*, SQUIDOO http://www.squidoo.com/homeschooling_disadvantages (last visited Apr. 29, 2014).

Homeschooled children that have entered the real world recognize the difficulties with the version of “socialization” they received and accept that there are deficiencies.¹⁷ Lana Hope, an adult who was homeschooled for twelve years, recognizes that homeschooled children are socialized in some ways, but it is limited to other homeschooled children and adults.¹⁸ She agrees that homeschooled children can be active, involved and productive people, but there is great difficulty when they leave homeschooling and attempt to merge with “mainstream culture.”¹⁹ The reality is that the “mainstream culture” they are entering is filled with those that were not homeschooled.²⁰ As a result, homeschooled children must learn to interact with these other individuals, which can prove difficult when they have not had the opportunity to form close friendships and have been cut off from their peers.²¹

Furthermore, homeschooled children have trouble when they actually have social problems with friends in the “real world” because they never had the opportunity to practice with these types of issues.²² For many homeschooled children, leaving home is the first opportunity they have to form their own friendships and even date. Although parents of homeschooled children may want their children to avoid dating, children in traditional school environments may not begin dating, but they are exposed to good and bad relationships and what are good and bad traits to look for once they do begin dating.²³

In addition to the research regarding effective methods of socialization, a second reason that homeschooled children are not achieving adequate socialization is the lack of diversity they

¹⁷ Hope, *supra* note 8.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.* “When I grew up, I had to enter a culture that I did not grow up apart of, and somehow learn to interact and socialize with it. I had a huge learning curve.” *Id.*

²¹ Hope, *supra* note 8; Liza Blau, *Social Disadvantages of Home Schooling*, GLOBAL POST, <http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/social-disadvantages-home-schooling-26526.html> (last visited Apr. 29, 2014).

²² Hope, *supra* note 8.

²³ *Homeschooling Disadvantages*, *supra* note 16.

are exposed to. One of the main reasons that parents choose to homeschool their children is the desire to provide religious or moral instruction.²⁴ However, this desire to provide religious and moral instruction likely results in an insulated child without knowledge of the outside world.²⁵

Proponents of homeschooling argue that most communities and public schools are not culturally diverse and therefore, children that attend public schools are not exposed to different cultures.²⁶ Even if the community is not considered “diverse”, children in both public and religious schools are still exposed to more diversity than homeschooled children.²⁷ Homeschooled children are not given that level of diversity in an insulated home where the parents have complete control over whom the children socialize with.²⁸ If they decide their children should not come in contact with certain individuals, they have that powerful control over their children. Therefore, homeschooled children do not gain much, if any, exposure to individuals from other cultures or with different beliefs from their parents.²⁹ The exposure to children who come from these different backgrounds can teach children compassion, acceptance and tolerance.³⁰ This lack of exposure leads to a concern that children will be unable to appreciate others who come from a variety of different cultures and ethnicities.³¹ An even bigger

²⁴ *The Condition of Education: 2009*, NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS iii (June 2009), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009081.pdf>. “The most common reason parents gave as the most important for homeschooling their children in 2007 was a desire to provide religious or moral instruction: 36 percent of parents cited this reason, followed by a concern about school environment (21 percent), dissatisfaction with academic instruction (17 percent), and “other reasons” (14 percent)…” *Id.*

²⁵ McMullen, *supra* note 7 at 85.

²⁶ Kathleen Roberts, *Negative Effects of Homeschooling*, LOVETOKNOW, http://homeschool.lovetoknow.com/Negative_Effects_of_Homeschooling (last visited May 6, 2014); Barb Vogelgesang, *Ideas About Teaching Diversity to Homeschoolers*, BRIGHT HUB EDUCATION, <http://www.brighthubeducation.com/homeschooling-and-socialization/121780-how-to-provide-diversity-awareness-for-your-kids/> (last visited May 6, 2014).

²⁷ Reich, *supra* note 9.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Blau, *supra* note 21.

³¹ *Id.*

concern is that homeschooled children will be unable to accept others and potentially lead children to be prejudiced.³²

III. Alternatives to Achieving Socialization in Homeschooling

Homeschooled children are not exposed to enough socialization with peers and adults; however, there are opportunities for these children to gain exposure to others and become effectively socialized. Some of those examples include the following: homeschool support groups, community activities (i.e. sports, scouts, music, theatre, etc.), community college classes, volunteering, camps and summer school.³³

One option for homeschooled children to become more socialized is to become a part of a homeschooled support group. These groups offer the homeschooled children the ability to interact with others and also allow parents the opportunity to interact with other parents that share their same ideals about homeschooling. For each state, there are lists of homeschooled support groups by county and city for parents to use to find the correct support group for their needs.³⁴ Although these support groups offer children an option to interact, many of these support groups are centered on religion. This may be a possible attraction for some³⁵, but could possibly detract those that chose homeschooling for non-religious reasons.

The community as a whole has a wide variety of options for homeschooled children to gain access to socialization with peers such as sports, scouts, music and theatre. A quick and effective way for parents to expose their children to socialization with peers is to sign them up

³² McMullen, *supra* note 7, at 85; Reich, *supra* note 9, at 114-15. Parents instill their beliefs in their children without the ability to question them or come up with their own beliefs. Reich, *supra* note 9. In essence, become unable to imagine other ways of living. *Id.*

³³ *Homeschooling and Socialization*, DAILY KOS (Feb. 25, 2012, 6:00AM), <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/02/25/1066762/-Homeschooling-IS-Socialization#>.

³⁴ *See generally Home School Organizations*, HSLDA, <http://www.hslda.org/orgs/> (last visited May 6, 2014); *see generally Homeschool Organizations and Support Groups*, HOMESCHOOL WORLD, <http://www.homeschool.com/groups/> (last visited May 6, 2014).

³⁵ As previously stated, 36% of parents choose to homeschool their children because of religious or moral reasons. NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, *supra* note 24.

for youth sports teams. Most cities or counties have a park district that may organize either teams or clinics for specific sports.³⁶ In addition to the athletic opportunities communities offer, there are also music lessons, dance, and arts and crafts.³⁷

The athletics offered by most communities are more than adequate for younger children, but the opportunities are limited for teenagers attempting to compete in highly competitive sports.³⁸ For those children that live in Equal Access States, they can participate in certain public school activities.³⁹ There are twenty-two states that currently allow homeschool children to participate in public school activities as long as they meet certain requirements.⁴⁰ The requirements vary from state to state, but generally include that the child is: (1) in compliance with rules regarding homeschooling, (2) meeting the same eligibility requirements such as age and residency, and (3) passing all of his or her core subjects.⁴¹ In Illinois, the Illinois High School Association states in their by-laws that the decision to allow a homeschooled to participate in public school activities is determined by each local school. Their requirements are:

“A student must attend a member school and may only represent in interscholastic competition the member school the student attends. For purposes of this by-law, the term “attend” shall mean that the student is enrolled at the member school, and is taking at, or under arrangements approved by the member school, a minimum of twenty-five (25) credit hours of work for which credit toward high school graduation will be granted by the member school upon the student’s completing and passing the courses. The school which enrolls the student shall be

³⁶ See generally *League Sports*, WHEATON PARK DISTRICT, <http://www.wpdathletics.org> (last visited May 6, 2014). Wheaton Park District offers a variety of sports for children such as soccer, baseball and softball, volleyball, lacrosse and football. *Id.* Additionally, there are a variety of clinics offered specific to certain sports. See generally *Spring 2014 Youth & Family Program Guide*, WHEATON PARK DISTRICT, <http://www.calameo.com/read/00286440413c179716959> (last visited May 6, 2014).

³⁷ *Spring 2014 Youth & Family Program Guide*, *supra* note 36.

³⁸ Isabel Shaw, *Pros and Cons of Homeschooling*, FAMILY EDUCATION, <http://school.familyeducation.com/home-schooling/parenting/29861.html?page=2> (last visited May 6, 2014).

³⁹ *Sports and Public School Cases*, HSLDA, http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/issues/s/state_sports.asp (last visited May 6, 2014).

⁴⁰ *Id.* The twenty-two states include Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming. *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

exclusively responsible to verify the student's compliance with all of the eligibility requirements of all IHSA by-laws."⁴²

Although Equal Access States, such as Illinois, offer homeschooled children the opportunity to participate in public school activities, it doesn't mean that parents of homeschooled children are supportive.⁴³

There are alternatives for those parents that do not want their homeschooled children to participate in public school activities or do not live in an Equal Access State. One of those alternatives is the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU).⁴⁴ The AAU is one of the largest non-profit, multi-sport organizations that helps promote amateur athletics.⁴⁵ An additional alternative is for the homeschooled community to organize their own sports teams. The Homeschool Sports Network is a non-profit that helps establish sports teams for homeschooled communities, provides tournaments for homeschooled athletes and showcases student athletes that are homeschooled.⁴⁶

In addition to the homeschool support groups and community activities, homeschooled children can also socialize with other children and adults by attending more traditional school environments. One of those environments is a local community college. The benefits of attending community college for the homeschooled child is two-fold: the homeschooled child gains socialization skills with peers and faculty, but also helps the child's chances of acceptance

⁴² IHSA Home School Fact Sheet, IHSA 1, http://www.ihsa.org/documents/forms/2012-13/Home_School_Fact_Sheet.pdf (last visited May 6, 2014).

⁴³ *Equal Access: Participation of Home Schooled Students in Public School Activities*, HSLDA (Apr. 1, 2011), <http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000000/00000049.asp> (stating that taking "government handouts" does not come without "strings attached", that this will open the door for school officials and legislators to begin to regulate all homeschooled children, parents who accept this will be more willing to accept other limitations in the future, and there will be less private alternatives with everyone relying on the government).

⁴⁴ Isabel Shaw, *Sports Participation for Homeschoolers*, FAMILY EDUCATION, <http://school.familyeducation.com/home-schooling/sports/40616.html> (last visited May 6, 2014).

⁴⁵ *FAQs*, AAU SPORTS, <http://www.aausports.org/FAQs> (last visited May 6, 2014).

⁴⁶ *See generally About Us*, HOMESCHOOL SPORTS NETWORK, <http://www.hspn.net/hspn.asp#AboutUs> (last visited May 6, 2014).

to school by demonstrating their competency in college level courses and begin earning credits toward their degree.⁴⁷ Not every state offers dual enrollment in high school and community college, so it is important to check each state.⁴⁸ A second more traditional school environment is to enroll a homeschooled child in public school part time such as summer school. Each state has different requirements, which can be found in the School Code.⁴⁹

IV. Summary

The debate regarding the great topic of socialization is one that will likely go on forever and possibly with no movement on either side. Although homeschooled children are not adequately socialized because of a lack of exposure to peers and diversity, there are a variety of opportunities for homeschooled children to gain access to some form of socialization with peers and adults. These opportunities require parents to make a concerted effort to get their children (and themselves) involved in the community. If the parents fail to give their homeschooled children these opportunities, they will not have any form of socialization skills to succeed in the “real world”.

⁴⁷ *High School Diploma*, HSLDA, <http://www.hslda.org/highschool/diploma.asp> (last visited Apr. 29, 2014).

⁴⁸ *Dual Enrollment in Your State*, LETSHOMESCHOOLHIGH SCHOOL.COM, <http://letshomeschoolhighschool.com/2012/07/15/dual-enrollment-in-your-state/> (last visited May 6, 2014). Illinois is one of the states that does offer dual enrollment. *Id.*

⁴⁹ To accept in part-time attendance in the regular education program of the district pupils enrolled in nonpublic schools if there is sufficient space in the public school desired to be attended. Request for attendance in the following school year must be submitted by the nonpublic school principal to the public school before May 1. Request may be made only to those public schools located in the district where the child attending the nonpublic school resides. 105 ILCS 5/10-20.24. *See also Questions you may have about Illinois Home Schooling*, ILL. STATE BD. OF EDUC. 3, <http://www.isbe.net/homeschool/faq.pdf> (last visited May 6, 2014).