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Homeschooling and the Redefinition of Citizenship

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Abstract
Homeschooling has grown considerably in many countries over the past two or three decades. To date, most research has focused either on comparisons between schooled and homeschooled children, or on finding out why parents choose to educate their children at home. There has been little consideration of the importance of homeschooling for the more general issue of citizenship, and whether people can be good citizens without going to school. This paper reviews the research on homeschooling, as well as the major objections to it, and frames these debates within the broader issues of citizenship and citizenship education. The paper shows that homeschoolers are carving out a different but equally valid understanding of citizenship and that policies which encourage a diversity of understandings of good citizenship should form the basis citizenship education both for schools and homeschoolers.

Introduction

There has been a heightened interest in homeschooling in both popular and academic circles in recent years. The numbers of homeschoolers across North America, Australia and Western Europe have grown significantly over the past two decades (Knowles, Marlow and Muchmore, 1992; Thomas, 1998), and this growth shows no sign

of abating. The number of "how-to" manuals has exploded, as has the number of support groups and regional, national and international support organizations.

Most of the debates about homeschooling have been framed as primarily educational issues. For example, the most common theme in discussions of homeschooling is whether or not homeschooled kids are disadvantaged in the education they receive, versus children who attend regular school (Rudner, 1999). Other issues which have received significant attention are the legality of the practice (Marlow, 1994), the motivations of parents to homeschool (Knowles, 1991; Mayberry, 1988; Mayberry and Knowles, 1989), and the different ways in which homeschooling is accomplished (Mayberry, 1993; Thomas, 1998). In most of these discussions, the implications of homeschooling for citizenship are downplayed in favour of educational or methodological concerns.

However, the broader issue of the place of homeschooling in contemporary democratic societies can be better understood as a more fundamental debate about the nature of citizenship, and the place of the school as a major agent of socialization in the construction of citizens. In short, most of the concerns about and objections to homeschooling are worries about whether homeschooled children will grow up to be good citizens.

This paper begins with an overview of the major objections to homeschooling, and how these objections can be seen as concerns about citizenship. The next section summarizes international trends in citizenship education in schools, especially the concept of multidimensional citizenship. This is followed by a review of the international evidence on homeschooling, and how homeschoolers are implicitly creating a different vision of citizenship by keeping their children out of school. Finally, some policy implications, for schools and for homeschoolers, are outlined.

Objections to homeschooling

When parents decide to homeschool their children, they face many hurdles. These include self-doubt about their decision, worries about the reactions of family and friends, bureaucratic interference from school officials, and sometimes even problems with the legality of their decision, depending on how they choose to pursue homeschooling and the laws of their jurisdiction (Marlow, 1994; Mayberry, et al., 1995). But the most common question which homeschoolers hear, from bureaucrats, educators, teachers, family and friends alike is, "What about socialization?" (Holt, 1981; 1983)

Socialization

The "socialization question", as it is known among homeschoolers, is actually an omnibus inquiry which usually leads more specific questions. Homeschooled parents are often asked questions like, "Don't you worry that your kids will grow up to be weird?", "How will you prepare them for the real world?", or, "Will they be able to get job?" These are really concerns about homeschoolers not participating in one of our most important institutions of proper socialization. It is useful to break this larger question about socialization down into its major components.

The inability to cope. One of the interpretations of the socialization question is that students who are homeschooled will not be able to cope with the harsh realities of life beyond their family environment (see Luffman, 1997). In school, the argument goes, children learn valuable skills such as the ability to work with others, to handle interpersonal conflicts, work in groups or teams and to make personal sacrifices for the

betterment of the group. These are vital skills later in life. Homeschooled children, who will not necessarily acquire these skills because of the protective cocoon of the home, will then be at a disadvantage when they grow up. (Menendez, 1996).

A different version of the same argument is that homeschooled children will be unprepared for the harsh and competitive nature of the labour market. They will then turn to government assistance, their parents, or a life on the margins of society in an attempt to reproduce the utopian bubble in which they were raised. In either version, parents are doing their children a great disservice by not giving them the opportunity to learn these skills at school. This quickly leads to a conclusion about the desirability of compulsory schooling, which will be addressed later. But the point here is that without school, and the valuable "job skills" it teaches, homeschooled children will not be willing or able to compete with their schooled counterparts (Pfleger, 1998; see also Webb, 1989).

In addition to job skills, schools teach children a great deal about social expectations (Pfleger, 1998). Standards of behaviour, dress, etiquette and morality are all powerfully reinforced through schooling. That is, school "normalizes" people because they learn important social norms and their sanctions, even if they choose not to follow them. School provides a kind of "informed consent" in that people who choose to ignore social prescriptions do so in full awareness of the penalties that they will likely encounter. Homeschooled children do not receive this majoritarian filtering of norms, but are more likely to pick up their parents idiosyncratic understandings of the world. They will again be disadvantaged because they will not realize what constitutes conforming and unconforming behaviour once they leave the family and enter the wider society (see Taylor, 1986).

Bias and narrow curricular content. A second issue which is sometimes referred to by the socialization question is whether or not parents can provide their children with a sufficiently broad education. In school, critics argue, children are exposed to many different teachers, each with their own areas of expertise. No parent, no matter how intelligent and dedicated, could possibly provide this breadth of understanding for their children. The necessary conclusion, if these premisses are valid, is that schooled children receive a better education than homeschooled children (Menendez, 1996). Many of these critics will admit though that homeschooled children receive much more individual attention than children in school, and that this may offset some of the advantages of having many teachers.

The problem of bias and narrow curricular content is more serious when parents deliberately set out to teach their children a "distorted" or erroneous view of the world. This claim is usually reserved for those people who keep their children out of school because they want to teach them a dogmatic view of the world, such as a belief in creationism. Occasionally, people who try to instill "new age" values or beliefs in their children are accused of bias. There are two problems with people who teach their kids a distorted view of the world according to this argument.

First, there is the problem that these parents know full well what the dominant social attitudes, beliefs and understandings are, and they have deliberately chosen to teach their kids something else. These people are not good citizens because they are purposefully flouting established conventions and disadvantaging their children in the process (Menendez, 1996). The second problem is related to the problem of the inability of homeschooled children to cope in the real world. Because these kids have been fed a biased and inaccurate view of the world, they will not fit into the wider society when they are forced to live on their own. If these homeschoolers are returned to school at some point, it is the school system and taxpayers who have to provide the resources to

correct mistakes made by the parents (Pfleger, 1998).

Lack of exposure to others. A final major thread of the socialization objection to homeschooling is that homeschooled children do not receive enough exposure to other people and their distinctive ways of life. Especially in this era of many cultures, schools teach students from extremely diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. All students benefit from this diversity because they learn about other ways of life, and the values of tolerance, difference and novelty. Homeschoolers on the other hand, do not receive this exposure because they are cooped up in the home. Not only is this a less enriching environment, but it can undermine social cooperation if homeschoolers do not learn the value of tolerance of others. Homeschooling, according to this argument, runs the danger of producing a less unified culture, including people with higher levels of prejudice than if everyone went to school (Menendez, 1996).

All of these criticisms about the lack of socialization for homeschooled versus schooled children are primarily about what schools teach beyond the regular curriculum. That is, the value of tolerance and cooperation, an awareness of the dominant culture, and a broad perspective on life are not things which are taught directly, but which children learn in order to participate in the formal lessons of school. So these are things that homeschoolers cannot teach their children by simply picking up a book and lecturing out of it. These are "life skills" which can be taught most effectively through school because of its communal organization.

Elitism

Homeschoolers have also been accused of being elitist. The argument takes one of two forms. The first one is that the current public system is in disarray, but parents have a duty to try to improve that system to make it better for all children. Taking a child out of school may be fine for that one student, but it does nothing to improve the situation for all of the other children who are left in school. Homeschooling then, is an ungenerous act because those parents who choose it are shirking their duty to the other families who stay in the system (Menendez, 1996). In addition, if middle and upper class parents leave the school, this removes active and concerned parents who might otherwise fight for improvements. Occasionally, this criticism takes on a class or ethnic dimension as well. That is, homeschooling may be a viable solution to poor schools for middle and upper class families with a stay-at-home parent, but it is not an option for the lower classes where both parents must work in order to survive. Since ethnic minorities are over-represented in the lower classes, homeschooling is a way for ethnic elites to protect the education of their own children while abandoning children from other ethnic backgrounds.

A second version of the elitism criticism of homeschooling is that homeschooling can only be done by parents with high levels of education. The argument is that homeschooling may work for the well-educated elites because they have the ability to teach their kids at home. But for people who don't have high levels of education, they must rely on the public school system (Menendez, 1996). Again, this is a way for elites to maintain privilege. The interesting thing about both versions of the elitist argument is that its implications for the public school system contrast sharply with the socialization arguments above. In the socialization arguments, school was seen as superior to homeschooling while in the elitist argument school is viewed as inferior to the home, at least for elites.

Higher education

Another worry of critics of homeschooling is that homeschooled kids will be disadvantaged in their abilities to apply for post-secondary education opportunities. This criticism is different from all of the other criticisms because it is a concern that is shared by homeschoolers. The argument from the critics is that homeschoolers will not have the credentials (namely a high school or equivalent diploma) to apply for college, trade school or university. Therefore, homeschooled children will be forced either to go to school anyway to earn these credentials, or to demonstrate their abilities through some other means. This can prove difficult because most post-secondary institutions have little or no experience or interest in evaluating the qualifications of homeschooled applicants. Again, the criticism is that children will be punished for unwise parental decisions.

Citizenship and choice in education

All of the above criticisms of homeschooling are really concerns about parental choice in education, and the conflict between parental rights and state rights in education Worries about coping in the real world, getting along with others, working for the common good rather than individual privilege and being able to contribute to society through higher education are all based on a vision of what good citizens do. Because of this, they are also concerns about citizenship and whether or not homeschoolers will fit into the larger society in the proper ways.

One of the most sophisticated arguments against parental choice in education, including the choice to homeschool, is Eammon Callan's (1997) Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy (see also Callan,1995). Callan's argument stems from the ongoing debates in political philosophy concerning the nature of rights, democracy, rationality, fairness and justice, and how we can construct schools which promote these principles. He argues that a true common school, in which all students receive a common curriculum, with some reasonable departures, provides the best way of ensuring a vibrant sense of citizenship among present and future generations. This sense of citizenship is built around the virtues of a critical tolerance of diversity, the power of rational thought and argument, and commitment to a defensible moral code. Citizens who develop these graces will have an understanding of the world which will give them the freedom to choose how they live their life, which is the ultimate aim of the liberal democratic state. Moreover, it is through common schooling that these attributes are best developed. As Callan wrote,

> Schooling is likely the most promising institutional vehicle for that understanding since the other, extra-familial social influences that impinge heavily on childrens' and adolescents' lives--peer groups, the mass media of communication and entertainment--do not readily lend themselves to that end (Callan, 1997, p. 133).

Callan has in mind a very particular form of schooling here which he refers to as "schooling as the great sphere" (Callan, 1997, p. 134). This is a form of schooling in which children are helped to explore the world and in the process they acquire the abilities to decide for themselves how and where they wish to live in that world. Callan further argues that schooling as the great sphere should be mandatory for all children, except in some clearly defined circumstances. The reason is that the preservation of a liberal democratic state depends on it. As he wrote,

> The need to perpetuate fidelity to liberal democratic institutions and values

> from one generation to another suggests that there are some inescapably shared educational aims, even if the pursuit of these conflicts with the convictions of some citizens. (Callan, 1997, p. 9)

This is reminiscent of the early mandate of public education systems to provide the people of the country with the skills to allow them to become proper citizens (Wong, 1997). The key question concerning homeschooling, then, is when is it permissible to not send a child to a common school. Callan has argued that parents have a right to keep their children out of school in only two circumstances. The first is when a parent's right to freedom of association with their children would be jeopardized by sending them to school. If the teachings of the common school would so alienate a parent from a child that they could no longer sustain an adequate parent-child relationship, then the state must allow these parents to keep their children out of a common school. The second situation is when a community creates a separate educational system which helps preserve the integrity of that community. For example, if a distinct community was able to construct a set of educational institutions, and these institutions were necessary to preserve the integrity of that community, then the state should grant children in that community an exemption from the common school. The example he uses is an Amish community that cannot preserve its integrity if its children attend a common school.

However, Callan is clear that these are very unusual circumstances, and exemptions are only to be granted after careful scrutiny of each case. One cannot keep their child out of school simply because they think it is in the best interests of the child to do so. He explicitly argues that parents do not have the right to reject great sphere schooling for their children. The reason is that this would interfere with the child's future "zone of personal sovereignty" (Callan, 1997:155) by keeping the child "ethically servile" (Callan, 1997:155) to her or his parents. Children who are ethically servile to their parents are those who have been raised in "ignorant antipathy" toward all points of view other than that of their parents. In other words, parents do not have the right to keep their children out of a common, great sphere school because they could be brainwashed into believing in only their parents very limited view of the world. This is not only harmful for the child so brainwashed, but also for the larger society. As Callan wrote,

> Large moral losses are incurred by permitting parents to rear their children in disregard of the minima of political education and their children's right to an education that protects their prospective interest in sovereignty (Callan, 1997, p. 176).

Further, he argues that, "Those who would argue for the right of parents to veto the great sphere are effectively demanding a right to keep their children ethically servile" (Callan, 1997, p. 155). In Callan's argument, the personal rights of the child are connected with state rights to the preservation of liberal democracy to cancel out parental rights to make choices about their children's education. There appears to be little room in his proposal for homeschooling. Homeschooling would only seem possible under extreme circumstances when parents would be at risk of losing their relationship with their children, or if they happened to belong to a community in which homeschooling was the chosen method of preserving a distinctive way of life. But since the reason for requiring attendance at school is to help create good citizens, the issue becomes what sort of citizenship education children receive in school.

Citizenship and citizenship education

The concept of citizenship is interesting because while there is general agreement about some of the elements which form a core definition of the concept, there is wide disagreement about its final composition, and which elements should receive more prominence than others. Most understandings of citizenship include some combination of five elements: group identification; rights or entitlements; responsibilities or duties; public participation, and; common values (Derricott, et al., 1998; Touraine, 1997; Callan, 1997). Various models of citizenship have been proposed and debated (see Delanty, 1997 for a good review of the major positions), but there is no single vision of citizenship which is acceptable to all. Perhaps this is not surprising given that citizenship is a fundamentally political concept. Similarly, there are many different proposals about the nature and content of citizenship education.

Starting with the earliest ideas of citizenship, there was an important distinction between good people and good citizens in ancient Greece. Good people lived their lives according to a set of legitimate moral principles, but good citizens carried the additional burden of participating actively in the public life of the society (Cogan, 1998). And this participation required a certain level of education.

With the development of industrial capitalism and the rise of public education, the school became a primary site for citizenship education (McKenzie, 1993). Early versions of citizenship education in most countries stressed several elements including nationalism and national history, individual rights and responsibilities and factual information about a country's geography and systems of governance (MacKenzie, 1993; Wong, 1997). In many cases, schools continued to emphasize one's duty to participate in the public life of the society. In these early years, participation meant not only following political events and voting in elections (if one had the right to vote) but also working within the local and church communities to which one belonged. That is, children were taught that they have a duty to work actively to improve the conditions of life for themselves and others in their immediate environment (Fogelman, 1991; Wong, 1997).

Over time, more and more emphasis was placed on "civics," or the facts about a country's political system, and less attention was paid to participation and community identification, beyond formal political participation in elections. In many countries, citizenship education was confined to history courses, and later to social studies courses (McKenzie, 1993; Wong, 1997). This led to the teaching of a more formalistic understanding of citizenship, one which stressed rights and responsibilities rather than participation and group identification. When participation was stressed, the fear was that it was incomplete and did not result in strong bonds between individuals and their communities. As Touraine (1997:146) says, "In today's mass society, everyone talks of participation; but participation tends to mean dissolving into what David Riesman called "The Lonely Crowd"". In other words, in many schools participation was a rather vacuous moral injunction to be publicly involved. This has begun to change with the development of "community service" elements in many curriculums (Cogan and Derrricott, 1998; Fogelman, 1991; MacKenzie, 1993). Schools appear to be rediscovering that participation in the daily events of life are important for the education of proper citizens.

Fogelman has shown that although citizenship education has stressed public involvement, there is a clear difference between the attitudes and behaviours of students. In a survey of British students, many of them reported that public involvement, especially in helping others, is important but very few students were actually involved in these activities. For example, the percentage of students who thought charitable work

Homeschooling and citizenship

Moving beyond homeschoolers responses to criticisms levelled at them to the larger body of research on homeschooling, there is evidence to suggest that homeschoolers appear to be involved in a process of constructing an alternative vision of citizenship for them and their children, albeit largely implicitly. Consistent with the notion of multidimensional citizenship, homeschoolers are involved in combining a different mix of attributes to become good citizens. In particular, they emphasize participation and the importance of family as the basis of a different definition of citizenship.

In school, citizenship education emphasizes history, geography and social studies lessons, with some limited participation in extra-curricular activities both inside and outside the school. However, as Fogelman (1991) shows, the amount of extra-curricular participation is limited. For homeschoolers, participation in the public sphere is a more important component of their education. They are much more involved in things like volunteer work than schooled children, which also further offsets socialization criticisms. For example, Ray (1994: 1999) found that over 30% of homeschooled kids 5 years old or older in both the US and Canada were actively involved in volunteer work, compared to the 6 to 12% found by Fogelman for schooled kids.

In other activities, homeschooled kids also exhibit high participation levels, although perhaps not any higher than schooled children. In the same surveys noted above, Ray found that 98% of homeschooled kids in the US were involved in 2 or more regular activities outside the home (Ray, 1999) and that Canadian homeschoolers had an average of almost 9 hours per week of contact with non- family adults and over 12 hours per week of contact with non-sibling children (Ray, 1994). And while the generalizability of these results must be treated with some caution, there is some evidence to substantiate the claim that homeschooled kids are very involved in activities outside the home. This suggests that homeschooled kids and their parents are keen to integrate into the wider society rather than pulling back from it, as is commonly presumed.

Mayberry and Knowles (1989), Knowles (1991) and Mayberry (1988) have also shown that "family unity" is a major factor in many parents' decisions to educate their kids at home. They feel that homeschooling promotes or at least allows them to have much stronger relationships with their children than would be possible if they went to school. These parents feel that these strong relationships are important not just for them but for two important characteristics in their children as well.

First, children with strong family relationships have the confidence to explore the world in challenging and sometimes unconventional ways. For instance, Thomas (1998) suggests that strong family bonds allow children to learn at their own pace, to maintain a heightened level of curiosity and to be involved in intense learning processes. As he says, "At home, on the other hand, children spend most of their time at the frontiers of their learning. Their parents are fully aware of what they already know and of the next step to be learned. Learning is therefore more demanding and intensive" (Thomas, 1998, p. 46).

Homeschooling parents also feel that a strong family will give their children the ability and the confidence to be more independent and to think for themselves. Indeed, raising kids who are willing and able to think for themselves is a primary goal many homeschooling parents (Knowles, 1991; Thomas, 1998). There is also some evidence to suggest that homeschooled kids see their relationships with their families as crucial to their own independence (Sheffer, 1997). It may be the case then that some

homeschoolers would fall under Callan's "freedom of association" exemption from mandatory great sphere schooling. That is, strong family bonds, whether they are the motivation for or an effect of homeschooling could be jeopardized by not allowing parents the right to homeschool.

The strong bonds in homeschooling families are also thought to be the basis of deliberate and informed participation in the larger society, especially later in life (Sheffer, 1997). Many homeschooling parents find the level of consumerism and/or materialism in the "dominant society" to be too high and they want their kids to be able to resist these intense pressures. Some homeschooling parents have pulled their kids out of school because of the peer pressure and the availability of drugs and alcohol, while others mentioned that the pressure to be part of the "in crowd" was antithetical to the way they wished to raise their children (Marshall and Valle, 1996). Homeschooling then, is a way to live out a lifestyle which is somewhat different from the norm and to raise their children to make their own decisions about how they wish to live. In other words, these parents share Callan's vision of raising and educating children to make informed and reasonable choices about their lives.

Policy Implications

While the form and content of citizenship education among homeschoolers is clearly different from what children receive in school, it is not an inferior experience. Homeschoolers, in other words, can be good citizens. Here I have argued that homeschoolers, despite being accused of not being good citizens, are actually engaged in a process of defining their own vision of what it means to be a citizen. They clearly do not believe that compulsory schooling is a necessary prerequisite of adequate citizenship and they prefer to stress the importance of family and participation in public activities as the basis of their understanding of the good citizen. The key issue now is what this implies for educational policies about homeschooling and compulsory schooling.

The major implication for compulsory schooling in this paper is that schools cannot be the only, or even the primary, agent of citizenship education for all children. Homeschooled kids can be good citizens, even if their vision of citizenship is somewhat different than that taught in schools. This undermines the arguments that schooling should be compulsory for all children in order to preserve "democracy", and that wanting a right to not send children to a common school is necessarily to want to keep them ethically servile. Most homeschooled children and their parents, just like most schooled children and their parents, are fervent supporters of democracy and have no interest in ethical servility.

Schooling is not an antidote to ethical servility, and policies surrounding the compulsory nature of school should be re-examined in light of this. Specifically, the need to educate all children to be good citizens has always been a cornerstone of mandatory schooling policies, so if these policies are to be retained, they need to account for the fact that children can become good citizens without going to school. This is not to suggest that a rationale for compulsory schooling is impossible, but only that it cannot be based primarily on constructing good citizens.

As for the content of citizenship education which is taught in schools, the argument in this paper is consistent with policies which would continue to build on the importance of participation as a crucial element of citizenship education. This would not only help to legitimate the definition of citizenship being modelled by homeschoolers, but would also close the gap between what is taught in school and what is taught by home educators.

Further, schools should continue to pursue policy initiatives which promote multidimensional citizenship. Schools need to recognize that there is no one best version of being a good citizen, but that there are many valid interpretations of an ideal member of society. Moreover, multidimensional citizenship suggests that becoming a citizen is a constant process, and that people's ideas about good citizenship can change. Perhaps all educators, including those who teach at home, need to consider multidimensional citizenship as an important component of helping children become citizens.

Finally, it is clear that there are no guarantees for creating good citizens. Homeschoolers have an alternative and very powerful understanding of citizenship, but this does not mean that we should relinquish all citizenship education in schools, or that schools should adopt the vision of citizenship shared by many homeschoolers. This is no more a cure for poor citizenship than is forcing everyone to take civics classes. Rather we need to recognize and evaluate the validity of alternative definitions of citizenship, and to recognize that it does not have to be taught at school.

For homeschoolers, the policy implications are a little less clear, because they are much less likely to have a "policy" on citizenship education than are schools. However, homeschoolers should recognize that there are good elements to citizenship education in schools as well. For example, basic facts of national history and governance are often very important for informed participation in a democracy. Most of the people that homeschooled kids will encounter later in life will have this understanding, and those people will presume that homeschoolers have it as well. Homeschoolers need to be prepared to deal with these expectations, either by acquiring the relevant knowledge or convincing others of the validity of their experiences.

In addition, homeschooling parents and children must recognize that they are not just keeping their kids at home, and that they are not just making a statement about parental rights in education. Rather, they are also helping to define and shape what it means to be a citizen of their country. They must be prepared to think in these broader terms, and to recognize that what they are doing has some good elements and some bad elements, just as citizenship education in schools has strengths and weaknesses. In other words, homeschooling is not just about where kids will learn their ABCs, it affects the very definition of what it means to be a member of a society.

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