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HOME SCHOOLING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Why people choose to home educate their children and how indeed this is effectively possible as an alternative education is an under-researched topic. In this paper, we examine some literature about the Western experience in this regard in order to highlight the issues involved and the hypotheses that are there for further research, especially in the Indian context of scant academic attention to this phenomenon.

KEY WORDS:

Home education, Pros and Cons, Sociological explanations, Intensive parenting, Causes of high academic achievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Home education or home schooling is parent-led and home-and family-based education. A definition is as follows: "Home schooling is the practice in which the education of children is clearly parent-controlled or parent-directed (and sometimes student-directed) during the conventional hours during the conventional-school days of the week." Another definition is as follows: Home schooling is "parent or guardians educating their children at home by choice", as distinct from educating a child at home because he/she is not able to attend school. These are stricter definitions (see Ray, 2000; Aurini and Davies, 2005). For, a looser definition can be fabricated in so far as in most cases home schooling accommodates home tutoring by outside resource persons as well in conjunction with parental initiatives and participation.

There are two interesting websites standing for home schooling.

One is that of *Education Otherwise*, which is a registered charity based in England that gives information and support to families whose children are being educated otherwise than at school, and to those who wish to uphold the freedom of families to take responsibility for the education of their children. We come to know from this website that in UK education is compulsory for children between the ages 5 and 16, but school is not. Many families prefer to educate their children otherwise than at school, and it is their right under UK law to do so. Moreover, home educating families do not have to follow the National Curriculum and there is no single "right" way to educate a child at home.

The other website is that of *Swashikshan*. This is the Indian Association of Home Schoolers, which echoes the views of *Education Otherwise*, in the Indian context. A problematic in India though that we come to know in this regard is that the recently introduced The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, simply known as The Right to Education Act (RTE), seems to have disturbed the peace of mind of the growing Indian home schooling community. A lot of homeschoolers are said to be worried about the legality of their choice after the introduction of RTE, even as in reality RTE does not seem to be making home schooling illegal. In many countries, home schooling is still illegal.

Mountney (2008) rationalizes homeschooling as follows:

There are as many reasons for this as there are families doing it. Here are a few of them: children's ill health; unhappiness, loss of a 'childhood', bullying, children turning into unrecognisable aliens! Poor

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academic achievement despite intelligence; lack of support for learners' needs; lack of respect for children - their personalities and gifts; the increasing stress of testing and attainment targets; poor interaction with others in schools - both children and teachers alike; narrowing of the curriculum; intense pressure; unreasonable expectation put upon children and teenagers.

In general; miserable, stressed, switched off kids. And the deep inherent feeling in parents that surely there has to be another way. Surely a successful life in the real world after school years is not dependent on this!

You'll be glad to know, it isn't!

To put some other worries at rest; educating out of school is legal, you don't have to be a teacher, your kids do make friends, there is support, you will not be alone or the only ones, children do learn, and finally home educating does work!

In light of this, what follows is a brief review of this topic which nevertheless gives a reasonably comprehensive picture of the state of the art knowledge about it.

2.CRITICALREVIEW

Some common pointers of available research that we find from the North American context of USA and/or Canada are as follows (see Romanowski, 2001):

- There has been a spectacular growth in home schooling despite data collection problems leading to under-reporting, since the 1980s, and this only testifies to the demand by parents for alternative and less-institutionalized education.
- Home schooling as a movement is not a new phenomenon. It was prevalent until the late 19th century as very much integral to the history of Western civilization. By contrast, the growth in popularity of compulsory school attendance at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, along with the idea that trained professionals could best teach children, decidedly moved the education of children into the hands of school personnel as the 20th century began.
- Home schooling has re-emerged in the last 3 decades as a contrary trend in relation to the modern trend toward the institutionalization and professionalization of education.
- The home schooling choice has increasingly been made by diverse people. Once reserved primarily for fundamentalist Christians with religious motivations for educating their children at home or for utopian parents inspired by John Holt's case for "unschooling" as a way out of the structured and regimented schooling that has turned out to be inept and oppressive, home schooling has now emerged as a mainstream alternative form of education chosen by a wide range of families from all ethnic groups and social classes including minority families subscribing to a broad range of ideologies. This discredits the long-accepted view that only public schools serve well children from diverse backgrounds.
- The growth of home schooling has led to the growth of literary industry and supporting organizations that provide a mixture of several methods out of which parents can choose that suit their children best.
- In light of the above, home schooling is not a passing fad, but has indeed been a visible movement animated by a robust mix of parents and children and capable local and national leaders. Home schooling has gained legitimacy because of its proven effectiveness and success in both academic and social areas.

Romanowski's (2001) paper highlights the point that there is no form of education without pros and cons, and this holds good for home schooling as well.

The salient strengths of home schooling as against public schooling, according to him, are as follows:

- Students are more likely to become academically successful and reach their potential due to high parental involvement in children's education.
- Home study enables families to build tight bonds amid a society where the family institution is falling apart even as social relations have become increasingly impersonal. Impersonality of mass public schools has become too much.
- Home schooling leads to character development alongside intellectual development. Parents can impart their children morals and values that they deem appropriate.
- Home schooling is flexible. It allows for adjustment of the curriculum and instruction to fit the individual needs of students as home schoolers generally use one-on-one tutoring style of teaching. Spontaneous decisions can be made without red tape and administrative constraints. Traditional time constraints are removed within home schools.
- The one-to-one teaching style provides the individual student with undivided attention, allows for quicker diagnosis of problems, offers more opportunities to ask questions, and lets student develop a

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deeper understanding of the subject matter.

- Every day experiences can be taken as the foundation for learning. Student's interests can also become the basis for learning.
- Home schooling enhances the confidence of students. Home schooling provides the supportive environment of a concerned family, where wounds suffered from bad learning experiences can heal and therefore students can recover and slowly regain their confidence. Home schooling also enhances the confidence of students by minimizing the importance of grades/marks and encouraging students to learn for the sake of gaining knowledge. Learning is intrinsically motivated and becomes joyous.
- Home schooling leads to positive and comprehensive socialization of the child. Home schooled children are more frequently exposed to a wider variety of people and situations than could be expected in a traditional class room environment where their exposure is limited to people of similar age and socioeconomic background. More importantly, because home schooled children are more likely to develop a sense of self-worth and a stable value system, they easily demonstrate positive sociability. Moreover, by participating in outside activities such as scouting, dance classes, group sports, volunteer work, etc. home schooled children pick up socializing skills.

The salient limitations of home schooling, according to critics of home schooling, are as follows:

- As regards socialization, home schooled children are isolated from the outside world and are therefore socially handicapped. Moreover, home schooled children seldom are exposed to the diversity of beliefs, viewpoints, backgrounds and lifestyles that they would encounter in most public school classrooms. Furthermore, the lack of peer interaction in the classroom is detrimental to a home school student's education.
- Home schooling suffers from lack of resources, funding and facilities to deliver a well-rounded curriculum.
- Quality of education is jeopardized because most parents lack the ability and professional preparation that they need to provide effective instruction, especially as the children move into the secondary level. Also because, home schooling suffers from lack of clearly defined learning tasks and intense concentration and unbroken period of study.
- Home schooling does not impart skills like organizational skills, time management, intense study habits or the ability to work with others—all skills that are important for successful students, employees, and professionals.

The value of Romanowski's (2001) paper lies in giving the above pros and cons as a set of hypotheses to embark on their empirical testing. The limitation of the paper is that the author does not discuss the empirical credence of these pros and cons; nor does he discuss the methodologies of empirical testing in this regard.

Aurini and Davies (2005) first distinguish between public education and private education. Education is private when it is not governed or funded by state bodies. Private education constitutes various forms such as private schools, tutoring businesses, preschools, vocational colleges and home schooling. All forms of private education have been on the rise in North America as also in other continents.

These authors' purpose is to examine home schooling within a context of growing private education, drawing on a variety of secondary sources and their own data from Ontario, Canada in order to highlight suggestive patterns and trends. They recognize the growth of home schooling as substantial despite numerous ambiguities in available data. They also find that home schooling is enjoying a new level of legitimacy and is attracting more mainstream followers unlike the religious or utopian freaks. The heart and soul of the paper lies in debunking three sociological explanations for the rise and legitimacy of home schooling and upholding the fourth explanation. And to this we turn now.

The growth and legitimacy of home schooling cannot be attributed to (a) the neoliberal critique of public school systems for lacking incentives to be effective, and neoliberal championing of the introduction of market competition in schooling, which is supposed to weed out substandard educators, and reward schools that are cost effective and of high quality and responsive to parental preferences; (b) the higher demands for job skills; and (c) the strategy of the middle class to give their children an advantage in an era of heightened educational competition.

According to these authors the above sociological explanations do not have empirical credence for the following reasons. Neoliberalism or the free markets ideology plays a role in homeschooling mainly by legitimizing it through the logic of extending "choice", and nothing else. In fact, home schooling represents a choice without markets, as homeschoolers assert their right to choose without espousing market ideology. What is striking about the recent growth of home schooling is its lack of obvious economic benefit over other forms of school, public or private. Home schooling is seldom oriented toward

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intense academic competition. It cannot conclusively offer parents advantages for class reproduction or human capital acquisition. Homeschoolers lack networks of famous alumni, recognized social cache, established track-records of academic achievement or a clear competitive advantage. There is no evidence that home schooling leads to boosted academic success (the claims of homeschooling associations notwithstanding), nor that it bestows prestige, since it lacks high-powered alumni networks. Homeschooling is usually practised long before children enter educational or occupational contests, and demands copious amounts of parental time and effort, often at the cost of foregone income, both of which threaten a household's class position. While they are slowly changing, many North American universities still do not even grant admission to homeschooled students. This is not all. The utopian unschoolers as a subset of homeschoolers are practising something that is totally opposite to the neoliberal ideology as they are opposing the rising degree of regimentation in the public schools on the basis of standardized tests and intensified curricula.

The fourth explanation is what these authors endorse, and this goes by the caption of "intensive parenting". What does this mean? It means all these things. Parents are concerned about providing personal attention and tailored forms of pedagogy. Homeschooling also attracts many parents via its cultural benefits, whether to inculcate parental values and preferred educational philosophy, strengthen family unity or shield children from societal undesirables like drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, peer pressure or consumerism. A most emphatic finding is that most parents see home schooling as a way of providing a menu from which to choose an assortment of pedagogies, with the aim of finding that which suits one's child. Social supports and information networks are emerging to aid this quest for more choice and educational customization.

Aurini and Davies' (2005) paper is very provoking indeed. All the explanations that the authors offer can be taken as hypotheses for further empirical testing and grounded theorization in different countries.

Ray (2000) puts forward a diametrically opposite picture to that of Aurini and Davies (2005) in that the author furnishes a lot of empirical evidence to the effect that home education benefits children and youth through high academic achievement as reflected in the above national averages scored by homeschooled children on standardized achievement tests in comparison with the scores of conventionally educated school children.

However, the central point of the paper is that there is no consensus or there is little consensus regarding the cause of the homeschooled children's high academic achievement. This conclusion is drawn from the author's own statistical analysis in the backdrop of the antecedent statistical analyses. And as such, this problem has not been thoroughly investigated through statistical techniques of multiple regression and tests of comparison.

A researcher can list out various independent variables in order to find out their link with superior academic achievement of homeschoolers as follows: father's educational level, mother's educational level, years taught at home, gender of the student, frequency of visits to the public library, degree of regulation of home education by the state, who administered the tests to students, use of computers for the education of the student, family income, money spent on education, legal status of family, father been certified teacher, mother been certified teacher, time spent in formal instruction, and the like. The question is whether the link is positive and significant.

Ray's paper is awesome in terms of imparting a heightened sense of mystery regarding the identification problem with respect to home schooling in terms of what causes the high academic achievement of homeschoolers.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Why people choose to home educate their children and how indeed this is effectively possible as an alternative education and how this relates to the mainstream society in a generalized context wherein many people look back on school as the "best days of your life" is a researchable agenda.

There is no doubt about home schooling's growth and legitimacy in North America.

However, theoretical explanations for this are varied and questionable. How do we sense which theory is right unless we find out by doing anthropological research with respondents in the formal and informal educational systems?

What is even more intriguing is that while a variety of families who represent varied philosophical and religious worldviews, socioeconomic statuses, and races and ethnicities are drawn to home schooling leading to their children's high academic achievement, the cause of this remains a "black box". There is thus need for research that includes larger samples of home schooled children with more varied backgrounds and characteristics and that entails a careful causal-comparative design.

A serious limitation of this critical review is that the psychological impact on parents as well as

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students of various forms of education, private and public is not probed.

All this suggests that there is ample scope for further research in not only North America but also in other parts of the world, and especially in India where research is scant on this topic, in order to comprehensively throw light on home schooling with regard to its motives and outcomes.

A safe generalized conclusion would be that parents, schools, and the community will have to work together to educate all children, no matter what form of education parents choose. As Romanowski (2001) says: "Instead of constantly comparing and contrasting public and home schools, we need to learn from one another and then use this information to improve the learning experiences of all children."

Be that as it may, we must note that homeschooling has obviously been primarily a middle class choice in the developed West even as the rich people everywhere are attracted to private schooling. In a poor country such as India, where poverty, homelessness and adult illiteracy are rampant, home schooling is not a choice for poor people; for them, the only choice is public schooling. However, the middle class in India seems to be very receptive to this option in recent times and there is fresh research in terms of surveys and case studies required to understand this in comparison with the emerging findings in the developed world.

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