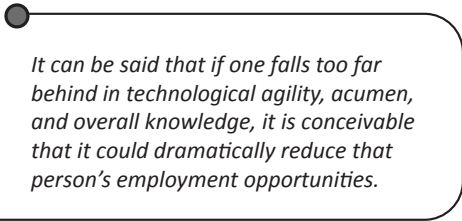


Research also indicates that homeschooling allows a personalized approach that enables children to have a broader exposure to the world than one finds in public school environments. Studies indicate that, as a result of this personalized and broad approach to schooling, homeschooled youth are more tolerant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



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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.





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