

Why Homeschool?



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This article answers the most frequently asked question of families who are home schooling: "Why do you home school?" It also answers the most common concern: "Are you qualified to home school?"

Overcoming your personal concerns and fears as well as those of your family and friends will largely depend on your ability to satisfactorily answer these two questions. Your capacity to continue home schooling over the long haul will depend on your ability to stay focused on these reasons. They are the foundation upon which you build your home school philosophy. They are the basis of your commitment.

Once you know and are committed to these reasons WHY, you can always discover the HOW-how to get started, how to keep going, how to find help, etc. Whenever discouragement raises its ugly head, review this article. Think about the WHY, YOUR reasons why, and you will become refocused.

The reasons for home schooling are varied but similar and generally fall under the following categories: Academic or Mental, Social, Spiritual or Religious, Emotional, and Physical.

ACADEMIC REASONS

Many sources are available that show that children can learn better in a home school environment. Most people feel that the quality of education in the public schools is deteriorating and, therefore, seem to readily accept the fact that children can do well in an environment where they can receive more loving tutoring and coaching.

Reed Benson, in his Doctoral Dissertation, *The Development of a Home School*, quotes from an article published in the May 1960 edition of *Horizon Magazine* by Harold G. McCurdy, professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina. The article, entitled "The Childhood Pattern of Genius," reports on his study of twenty men carefully selected from a list of 1000. The editor of the magazine said, "What kind of early life fosters exceptional mental growth? A study of twenty great minds points to two prime conditions-and leads to a startling conclusion in the last sentence of this article." Here is Dr. McCurdy's summary and "startling conclusion:

"In summary, the present survey of biographical information on a sample of twenty men of genius suggests that the typical developmental pattern includes as important aspects: (1) a high degree of attention focused upon the child by parents and other adults, expressed in the intensive educational measures and, usually, abundant love; (2) isolation from other children, especially outside the family; and (3) a rich efflorescence of fantasy as a reaction to the preceding conditions. It might be remarked that the mass education of our public school system is, in its way, a vast experiment on the effect of reducing all three factors to a minimum: accordingly, it should tend to suppress the occurrence of genius." (McCurdy, May 1960. p. 38.)

A home school can be the perfect environment for academic training. Here are some examples of how home schools have fared in comparison with public schools:

The state of Tennessee, using two separate tests, measured third graders in reading. Public school children scored in the 62nd percentile (50 being average) while home schooled children scored in the 93rd percentile.

In the state of Alaska, children taught by their mothers using State imposed curricula, averaged

10 to 16 points above children taught by Alaska's teachers. Parent's level of education had very little to do with the results.

What about college entrance? Every major college and university in Utah has accepted home schooled children, and many scholarships have been awarded. ACT and GED test scores are two of the most important elements in accepting students to Utah's colleges. Dr. Raymond Moore said that Harvard's Chief Admissions Officer, Dr. Ellingsworth, gives priority to creative home schooled children (1990 Seminar in Utah)

SOCIAL REASONS

The common misconception is that if a child stays home he will not become socially well-adjusted. Raymond and Dorothy Moore, in chapter 18 of their book, *Home Style Teaching*, refer to this notion as "perhaps the most dangerous and extravagant myth in education and child rearing today." They say that neither the conclusions of sound research nor the voice of common sense give any credence to the idea that school provides the answer to youngsters' social needs.

"Children do not respond well to large groups. They become nervous, overexcited, and disoriented by confusion, noise, and too many people. Research clearly verifies that the more people there are around your children, the less opportunity they have for meaningful social contact. Most children relate to only about as many people as they are years old, and not necessarily for long periods of time...

"When [the child] does enter school, preferably not before eight or ten or even twelve, he usually becomes a social leader because he is already confident and independent in his thinking and in his values. He largely avoids the temptation to follow the crowd and becomes the productive, self-directed, and potentially excellent citizen this country so badly needs.

"Young children learn by observation and imitation...What youngsters need most of all are good models to copy: adults, especially parents, who exemplify the kind of values that they should acquire...They will adopt the behavior, attitudes, language, and even the tone of voice of the older members of the family.

"We are convinced that if children do not have a close and almost continuous identification with their parents in these most impressionable early years, they will become indifferent to family values-even reject them-and latch onto their peers.

"The trend toward separating little children from their parents at earlier and earlier ages-and substituting the age-segregated peer group as the source of social values-is a deceitfully dangerous form of child abuse, for it robs the child of his own identity and melds him into the crowd."

My wife and I have observed that children are generally about as socially well-adjusted as their parents. As someone stated, "We rise to the level of our coaches." As parent-coaches, it behooves us to become the best that we can be and then coach our children beyond even our personal level of excellence much like an athletic coach takes his players into realms above his own personal degree of competence.

My experience is that there are three basic elements of a "well-adjusted" person: (1) correct knowledge, (2) a strong work ethic, and (3) a be-of-service attitude. All of these three can be better served in a home school environment. A home school that incorporates these three elements will produce children who are very well adjusted.

EMOTIONAL REASONS

Joyce Kinmont quotes the Reverend Paul Lindstrom of the Christian Liberty Academy: "I see our children as young tender plants put into a hot house, given expert attention and care by a florist, until the plant is ready to be exposed to the wind, rain, and hail." Reed Benson put it this way, "A young Joseph nurtured by an old Jacob can make it into a heathen Egypt." (Benson, Dissertation, p.44)

In the March 1978 Radcliffe Quarterly, John Holt, a late leader in the home school movement, reported:

"A mother, teaching her children at home, wrote recently about her 12 year-old daughter, 'I can see the encrusted layers of school rigidity falling away; several times a lesson with her has dissolved into a conversation about her real worth as a loving, responsible human being versus the graded, classified, surely stupid person she sometimes felt herself to be in school.' No one in my own high-powered schooling ever had such a conversation with me, or tried in any way to deal with my growing conviction of my own worthlessness. Later, most of the children I taught or knew, high-IQ upper-class students in good schools, felt themselves to be largely stupid or worthless. Over the years, many people have written to me to say that their children were learning in school to feel this way about themselves, and to ask what they could do. I used to say, 'reform the schools'. Now I suggest that they do something that they really can do if they really want to and that will make an immediate difference in their children's lives (p.10)." (Benson, Dissertation, p.16)

The importance of a solid home-based identity for a child is illustrated by the educational programmer M.W. Sullivan "who told about the Marines of World War II who went throughout the worst campaigns of the war. The ones who stood up under it all were the ones who had a fortunate childhood. The ones who broke were the ones who had 'been up against tough conditions' in their childhood." (Benson, Dissertation, p. 45)

SPIRITUAL REASONS

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 makes it clear that parents are to teach their children God's law. A home school setting is an ideal place to teach our religious beliefs and moral values.

It is important to understand that it is religion that bring relevancy to education. How we interpret knowledge founded upon our religious beliefs. Children, as well as adults, want to know WHY things are the way they are. "Why" questions surface all the time in teaching and learning settings. Public and even private schools are limited in how they can answer fundamental "why" questions that will surface from every subject, from mathematics to history, from English to geography. How can children ever understand truth without the basis of religion?

Of all the wonderful aspects of home schooling. I feel that the greatest blessing lies in our opportunity to fully answer "why" questions. When a child asks a "why" question, entirely new areas of learning open to view, and new dimensions of knowledge are explored. since these new dimensions relate to the original subject, "relevancy" occurs (it makes sense, it fits, it's interesting, it's understood), or, in other words, learning takes place, correct knowledge is transferred.

But the home school opportunity of answering "why" questions goes much deeper. "Why" questions eventually lead to discussions about our basic beliefs, our value system, our religious convictions. Ultimately, it is religion that brings relevancy to education. Since education influences what we do and think, and doing and thinking is what life is made of, it follows that religion is what brings relevancy to life.

PHYSICAL REASONS

In their book, *School Can Wait*, Raymond and Dorothy Moore reveal the results of their extensive research on early childhood education. As a result of a \$256,000 federal grant, the Moores and their associates analyzed more than 7,000 studies made of young children by neurophysiologists, pediatricians, psychiatrists, ophthalmologists, psychologists, sociologists, and educators. They also analyzed data on 80,000 children and 3,500 schools. Their research showed that all the senses and abilities of the young child's brain to reason do not come together at the same time and that a child is not ready for formal instruction until the ages of eight to ten. Some psychologists at several universities suggest that ages twelve to fourteen would even be a better time to enter school if a good home could be provided.

The Moores also found that feelings of failure and frustration come to a child who is not mature enough for certain school tasks and that the earlier children go to school, the worse their attitude is toward schooling. They establish that many of the so-called learning disabilities can be traced to too much pressure on the unready brain. Those who enter school later out-perform the others in behavior, social and academic skills.

George B. Leonard, in his book *Education and Ecstasy*, made some very interesting observations about the average school not being a fit place to learn: "It is basically a lock-up, a jail... The child is worn down by the fatigue of sitting in one position for inordinate lengths of time... Even the worst ghetto home can be a better learning environment than most schools" (p. 102).

Leonard listed five of the ten essential principles of the Nuremberg Code which govern experimental research involving human subjects, showing how these principles were violated by the public school experiment, not the least of which was infringement on the individual's freedom (pp. 113-114). (See Benson, Dissertation, pp. 18-19, 23.)

Are You Qualified To Home School?

Confidence in ourselves determines our success in most things. Certainly home school is a place where confidence is needed. However, new home schoolers and those investigating home school often lack confidence in their ability to teach their children at home. They commonly remark, "But I'm not a certified teacher." Understanding the facts about teacher certification and what makes a good teacher will give every parent more confidence.

Teacher certification was the theme of the cover story of the September 24, 1990 issue of *Insight on the News*, entitled "The ABC's of Reform: Give Parents a Choice". The article revealed what many authorities say about certification.

Samuel Peavey, an emeritus professor of education at the University of Louisville says that "after 50 years of research, we've found no significant relationship between teacher certification and pupil achievement. It's just nil." He continued, "We mislead parents to think their certified teachers will provide the education they want. We mislead the public to put its money on a preparation that is simply not paying off."

Donald A. Erickson, professor of education at UCLA says, "Some of the worst teachers I've ever seen are highly certified. Look at our public schools. They're full of certified teachers. What kind of magic is that accomplishing? But I can take you to the best teachers I've ever seen, and most of them are uncertified."

C. Emily Feistritzer, director of the private National Center for Education Information, reveals that it is difficult to even find any link between teacher education and pupil achievement. She says she does not know "of a single study that says because a teacher has gone through this or that program, he or she is a better teacher." Proponents of training programs, she continues, "argue eloquently that teachers need to be grounded in all these things, but there has yet to be

a study that shows that in fact is the case."

Professor Erickson agrees. "We don't have evidence at all that what we do in schools of education makes much difference in teaching competence." He added, "We have this nonsense idea that schools of education have all this esoteric knowledge, which if we impart it to people, will work magic. There's no evidence for that at all."

What, then, makes a good teacher? You may recall that someone put it this way, "Trust no one to be your teacher not your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments." (see Mosiah 23:14).

God-fearing, responsive, nurturing parents are the best teachers in the world. No one has a child's interests at heart more than the parents. Studies have shown that parents without formal teacher training succeed beautifully at instructing their children at home. In fact, it has been shown that there is little if any correlation between parents' formal education and success in teaching their children. Parents who were high school dropouts have home schooled children that have become scholars.

The fact is that parents with teaching credentials usually have to unlearn much of their professional training to be effective teachers at home. That is even the case in many institutions. Marva Collins of Westside Preparatory School says about hiring teachers, "many times I find that I'm better-off if I get someone who has not been trained in education, because I don't have lots of bad habits to break." Dr. Raymond Moore agrees. He says that home schooling parents are better off without teaching certificates.

The Moores said, "An alarming number of parents appear to have little confidence in their ability to 'teach' their children. Research suggests that their ability to care, rather than to teach, is the criterion of parenthood during the early years, regardless of educational background. Sound care automatically provides sound teaching."

Home schooling is a labor of love. Dedicated, caring parents will outperform even the most educated and concerned outsider. Teaching your own children is our divine charge and privilege. Simply stated, parents are qualified because they are the parents.

The price of home school is not an easy price to pay, but the rewards are wonderful. Norma Luce, a home schooler, summed up wonderfully the feelings of many home schoolers in her account of "Year One Home Education":

"The first year August '78 to May '79 was my first year of home teaching.

"Academically, it was a smashing success. Physically, I have never been so exhausted in my life. Mentally, I have never been so exhausted in my life. Emotionally, I have never been so exhausted in my life. Spiritually, I was completely rejuvenated and began an upward spiral that will not stop until I have become the person I was meant to be. This past year has been one of absolutely monumental growth for me. Having a home school has taught me as no other single thing ever has before that there is nothing that I can't do. I just have to pay the price. And believe me, home school exacts a mean one. I stretch and strained, bawled and complained, balked, worked my fanny to the bone, and worried a lot. And why? It is either sink or swim. People are watching. Certainly not the most noble reason, but nevertheless, the reason. My vanity made sure I brought every resource, every talent, every brain in my head, and then some, to bear upon the success of this project...

"Before I established the home school I was mediocre and limited in my life and the influence I had on my family reflected it. The good Lord presented me with this sport of home teaching. I met the challenge and shattered the preconceived notion. My capacities were enlarged..

"But most importantly of all my family has drawn closer in love. I have a better understanding of my own children because of the contact I had with them in teaching, and I love and appreciate my husband more because of the support and help he's given me in this endeavor. Home teaching. There were times I thought the price too miserably high, but in the final analysis, as I sit here in the middle of the benefits of my efforts. I realize that a man will the price if he wants the prize." (Benson, Dissertation, pp. 82-83)

Research On Home Education

How well do home schooled children do academically? Many children who have graduated from home schools attend local colleges and universities with full-tuition scholarships. Harvard will look at accepting a home school graduate over a public school graduate. They find home schoolers attitudes towards learning "refreshing" and not stale. Boston University and others also look very seriously at accepting home schooled students over public school graduates.

We found this quote from the Chicago Tribune, Thursday, September 28, 1989, by Ellen Ogintz:

"Home schoolers cite the schools these youngsters attend across the country, including Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Brigham Young University and scores of less-well-known institutions. Indeed, an admissions officer at Middlebury College, a selective private school in Vermont, said home schoolers certainly would ensure that such a student got a second look from the admissions committee because it is so unusual.

"These kids seem to do fine here", said Jimmy Williams, Admissions Director at liberal Antioch College in Ohio. Williams said Antioch is now accepting a few of these students each year - after taking a close look at their test scores, writing skills and experiences. "They come with an educational hunger other kids may lack", he said. "Their education hasn't been from the first bell to the last one. Their whole world is their classroom."

Some state officials don't trust research reports on home-based education. Alaska authorized studies by objective researchers to compare its Centralized Correspondence Course (CCS) home study students with conventionally-schooled children on Alaska Statewide Assessment (ASA) tests for fourth and eighth graders in March 1985. Fourth-grade home schoolers averaged 11 percent higher in math and 16 percent higher in reading. Eighth graders scored 12 percent higher in both reading and math. A month later the national Survey of Basic Skills, CCS students in all grades averaged in the top quartile. This is the third consecutive year - since such comparisons were undertaken - the CCS students have scored higher. In Tennessee a state study found home-taught students rate up to 31 percentile ranks higher than public school students. (Dr. Raymond Moore, What Educators Should Know About Home Schools)

The National Home Education Research Institute has just completed the first study of its magnitude of home education in North Dakota. The students scored, on the average, at the following percentiles on standardized achievement tests: (a) total reading, 84th, (b) total listening, 81st, (c) total language, 81st, (d) total math, 81st, (e) science, 87th, (f) social studies, 86th, (g) basic battery (reading, language, mathematics), 83rd, and (h) complete battery (all areas tested), 88th. The national average is the 50th percentile. There were low to moderate statistical relationships between students' basic battery scores and parents' formal education level and parents' scores on the NTE.

For a complete copy of the report, Home Education in North Dakota: Family Characteristics and Student Achievement, write to the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), c/o Western Baptist College, 5000 Deer Park Drive, S.E., Salem, OR 97301. They also publish a newsletter, "The Home School Researcher" which features current studies published on home education.

The state of Tennessee, using two separate tests, measured third graders in reading. Public school children scored in the 62nd percentile (50 being average) while home schooled children scored in the 93rd percentile. (Refer to the Moore Foundation for more information, Moore Foundation, Box 1, Camas, WA 98607)

At an Options in Learning conference held in Hamilton, NY in August 1992, sponsored by the Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education (ALLPIE), John Taylor Gatto (New York State Teacher of the Year), told of an unpublished study conducted in Kentucky in 1991. The state of Kentucky decided to compare test scores of home schooled students against test scores of public school students. The public schools were notified about the test in advance. The home schooled students were not. Because the results were an embarrassment to the State Office of Education in Kentucky, the study wasn't formally published. The results were that the home schooled students scored much higher on the tests than their peers in the public schools. This was significant because the public school students were prepared ahead of time for the test. (1992 ALLPIE conference, John Taylor Gatto "Guerrilla Curriculum" tape one, available from Perpetual Motion Unlimited, 1705 14th St., Suite 396, Boulder, CO 80302.)

WHAT ABOUT SOCIALIZATION?

A pervasive question asked of home education parents is, "What about socialization?" Dr. Kathie Carwile Johnson focused on the socialization areas recommended by the Virginia State Department of Instruction for emphasis in middle schools. The seven areas are (a) personal identity, (b) personal destiny, (c) values and moral development, (d) autonomy, (e) relationships, (f) sexuality, and (g) social skills. She interviewed ten families in great depth and detail.

A few of Dr. Johnson's findings will be mentioned here. In terms of students' personal destiny, she stated, "All informants gave examples of their children earning money for themselves. This early admission into the real world may be of importance not only in the teaching of personal destiny but in the area of personal identity." An exploration of the relationships area of socialization surprised the researcher, "...the investigator was not prepared for the level of commitment exhibited by the parents in getting the child to various activities." She found that home educators are taking advantage of the many opportunities their children have through home school group activities, 4-H, Scouts, and many church meetings/activities. In terms of social skills, "It appeared that these students are involved in more social activities, whether by design or by being with the parents in various situations, than the average middle school aged child."

Dr. Johnson made some concluding remarks. She noticed that these home educators had "...created small communities for learning within the family, church, and home school groups" and the parents are attempting to help their children be actual participants in the world, not just observers until they reach some magical age. A final observation is significant: "While the methods used by home schoolers are sometimes unusual and nontraditional, these educators are addressing the socialization needs of their students in every area addressed." (Reported in the National Home Education Institute Newsletter, December 1991)

Children who have been educated at home will have higher self-esteem than those who are educated in more conventional ways. "In a national sampling of parent-educated children, J.W. Taylor found that (1) 77.7% of these home schooled children rank in the top quartile on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, with more than half of all home schoolers placing in the top 10 %, (2) the longer they are taught at home, the higher their self-concept and (3) self concept is unrelated to the parents' educational levels." (John Wesley Taylor V, Self Concept in Home Schooling Children, Doctoral Dissertation, Andrews University, Michigan, May 1986)

Many critics claim that children schooled at home do not receive the benefit of the socializing

influence of conventional schools. "The socialization of children becomes a problem in a society where traditional values are questioned. When adults, and parents in particular, are unsure of their responsibilities, children may be left to socialize each other, to form their values from their own peer group with consequent insecurity and negative self esteem." (Moore, Lorenz, Willey, More & DuPreez, 1975). A kind of Lord of the Flies mentality sets in upon children who are left to socialize themselves, rather than to be socialized by the example of responsible adults. Many parents agree, and have concluded that this negative self-esteem is a direct result of the overcrowded, artificial school environment. Children quickly learn the importance of identifying with the strong, and conforming to the norm, no matter how abnormal the norm is. It becomes too dangerous to stand alone, or be weak. This is how many view the average school yard.

Socialization problems has become the number one reason many parents choose to home school. This is not limited to negative peer pressure, it encompasses the new social agenda of moral relativism implicit in a value-free education. Is self-concept a reflector of socialization? Yes! The way children react to people, tasks and roles is often consistent with their view of self. (Purkey, 1970). DeFrancesco and Taylor (1985) conducted a study on self-concept in middle school students where they found, ...what a person believes about himself affects what he does, what he sees and hears, and his capacity to cope with his environment. This also coincides with Cooley's (1902) theory of the Looking Glass Self. The Looking Glass Self refers to the idea that we look to significant others in our lives in order to understand how they see us, and then in turn we build our self-concept and self-esteem from the reflection of ourselves that we see from them.

Recent research reported in the publication *The Home School Researcher* reported the following: Overall Self Esteem: Home Schooled Students 59%, Conventional Schooled Students, 44%. Personal Security: Home Schooled Students 46%, Conventional 32%. Peer Popularity: Home Schooled Students 23%, Conventional 32%. Academic Competence: Home Schooled Students 59%, Conventional 32%. Familial Acceptance: Home Schooled Students 41%, Conventional 24%. (Vol. 7, no. 3, 1991, p.-7-13.)

In three categories, Personal Security, Academic Competence and Familial Acceptance, the home schooled group had higher percentages of children that scored above average as compared to the conventionally schooled children. The conventionally schooled children had 9% more children score higher on the Peer Popularity scale than home schoolers. Academic Competence proved to be significant. This is consistent with the belief that people gain self-esteem from doing their work well. If we see school or learning as the job of children, it would be expected that it will greatly effect their self-esteem. If a child's perception is that he or she is doing well in his or her school work, they would naturally be more confident.

The Peer Popularity showed an inverse relationship between self-esteem and peer popularity. This indicates that with a rise in peer popularity there is a negative effect on overall self-esteem. It is only a moderate correlation, but certainly one that can't be ignored.

The home schooled population, by necessity, would require one parent at home, thus limiting the earning potential of most families. The study showed that the home schooled child had more self-esteem than the conventionally schooled child. Even if a parent is at home, for most of the day, the conventionally schooled child isn't. As a result, conventionally schooled children have to look outside the family for esteem building influences. This is why the results showed home schooled children scored high on Family Acceptance and conventionally schooled children scored higher on Peer Popularity. (1991 Paul Kitchen, Andrews University, MI)

"Socialization of home educated children was the focus of research completed by Thomas Smedley. He found that home educated children performed significantly better than their public school counterparts in terms of positive adaptive behaviors.

"Smedley conducted his research within the theory that a child is well socialized if he is poised,

articulate, and fluent within various communication and social contexts. He tested the hypothesis that says public (or conventional) schooling is needed to properly socialize children.

"The Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales was used for gathering data. It assessed communication, daily living skills, and socialization. In the composite score, home educated children scored at the 84th percentile (the national average is the 50th percentile) and were significantly higher than the public school comparison group.

"Smedley conjectured several reasons for home educated children doing well. One is that children taught at home are in a richer communication environment where they have instant access to the attention of a significant adult. Also, the home setting encourages age-integration that mirrors the larger society more so than does the conventional age-segregated school." (Dr. Brian Ray, The Teaching Home Magazine, Dec./Jan. 1992)

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