

## **Socialization: Homeschoolers Are in the Real World**

By Chris Klicka, Senior Counsel for the Home School Legal Defense Association  
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Academically homeschoolers have generally excelled, but some critics have continued to challenge them on an apparent “lack of socialization” or “isolation from the world.” Often there is a charge that homeschoolers are not learning how to live in the “real world.” However, a closer look at public school training shows that it is actually public school children who are not living in the real world.

For instance, public school children are confined to a classroom for at least 180 days each year with little opportunity to be exposed to the workplace or to go on field trips. The children are trapped with a group of children their own age with little chance to relate to children of other ages or adults. They learn in a vacuum where there are no absolute standards. They are given little to no responsibility, and everything is provided for them. The opportunity to pursue their interests and to apply their unique talents is stifled. Actions by public students rarely have consequences, as discipline is lax and passing from grade to grade is automatic. The students are not really prepared to operate in the home (family) or the workplace, which comprise a major part of the “real world” after graduation.

Homeschoolers, on the other hand, do not have the above problems. They are completely prepared for the “real world” of the workplace and the home. They relate regularly with adults and follow their examples rather than the examples of foolish peers. They learn based on “hands on” experiences and early apprenticeship training. In fact, the only “socialization” or aspect of the “real world” which they miss out on by not attending the public school is unhealthy peer pressure, crime, and immorality. Of course, the average homeschooler wisely learns about these things from afar instead of being personally involved in crime or immorality or perhaps from being a victim.

Practically, homeschoolers generally overcome the potential for “isolation” through heavy involvement in church youth groups, 4H clubs, music and art lessons, Little League sports participation, YMCA, Scouts, singing groups, activities with neighborhood children, academic contests (spelling bees, orations, creative and research papers), and regular involvement in field trips. In fact, one researcher stated, “The investigator was not prepared for the level of commitment exhibited by the parents in getting the child to various activities...It appeared that these students are involved in more social activities, whether by design or going with the parent in various situations, than the average middle school-aged child.” (1)

In nearly every community throughout the country, local homeschool support groups have formed in addition to the state-wide homeschool associations. In many areas these local support groups sponsor weekly and monthly activities for the homeschool students, including physical education classes, special speakers, sports, camping, trips to museums, industries, farms, parks, historic sites, and hundreds of other activities. Regular contests are also held including spelling bees, science fairs, wood working contests, and geography contests. Homeschoolers in many localities have formed homeschool choirs, bands, sports teams, bowling leagues, educational and activity clubs of every kind, and many types of resource libraries. The state homeschool associations generally sponsor a major conference where homeschool children can attend and the older children perform plays, assemble yearbooks, and participate in graduation ceremonies for eighth and twelfth grades. A review of the state homeschool association and local support group newsletters testify of the great many social activities available. Homeschool families, as a whole, do not raise their children in social isolation. (2)

In addition, several studies have been done to measure homeschoolers’ “self-concept,” which is the key objective indicator for establishing a child’s self-esteem. A child’s degree of self-

esteem is one of the best measurements of his ability to successfully interact on a social level. One such study was conducted by John Wesley Taylor, using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale to evaluate 224 home-schooled children. The study found that 50 percent of the children scored above the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, and only 10.3 percent scored below the national average. (3)

Another researcher compared private school nine-year-olds with homeschool nine-year-olds and found no significant differences in the groups in virtually all psycho-social areas. However, in the area of social adjustment, a significant difference was discovered: "private-school subjects appeared to be more concerned with peers than the home-educated group." (4) This is certainly an advantage for home-schooled children who can avoid negative peer influence.

Dr. Linda Montgomery studied homeschool students between the ages of ten and twenty-one and concluded that home-schooled children are not isolated from social activities with other youth. She also concluded that homeschooling may nurture leadership at least as well as the conventional schools do. (5)

Thomas Smedley prepared a master's thesis for Radford University of Virginia on "The Socialization of Homeschool Children." Smedley used the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales to evaluate the social maturity of twenty home-schooled children and thirteen demographically matched public school children. The communication skills, socialization, and daily living skills were evaluated. These scores were combined into the "Adaptive Behavior Composite" which reflects the general maturity of each subject.

Smedley had this information processed using the statistical program for the social sciences and the results demonstrated that the home-schooled children were better socialized and more mature than the children in the public school. The home-schooled children scored in the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile while the matched sample of public school children only scored in the 27<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Smedley further found that:

In the public school system, children are socialized horizontally, and temporarily, into conformity with their immediate peers. Home educators seek to socialize their children vertically, toward responsibility, service, and adulthood, with an eye on eternity. (6)

In another 1992 study, Dr. Larry Shyers compared behaviors and social development test scores of two groups of seventy children ages eight to ten. One group was being educated at home while the other group attended public and private schools. He found that the home-schooled children did not lag behind children attending public or private schools in social development.

Dr. Shyers further discovered that the home-schooled children had consistently fewer behavioral problems. The study indicated that home-schooled children behave better because they tend to imitate their parents while conventionally-schooled children model themselves after their peers. Shyers states, "The results seem to show that a child's social development depends *more on adult contact* and less on contact with other children as previously thought." (7)

Dr. Brian Ray reviewed the results of four other studies on the socialization of homeschoolers and found:

Rakestraw, Reynolds, Schemmer, and Wartes have each studied aspects of the social activities and emotional characteristics of home-schooled children. They found that these children are actively involved in many activities outside the home with peers, different-aged children, and adults. The data from their research suggests that homeschoolers are not being socially isolated, nor are they emotionally maladjusted. (8)

J. Gary Knowles, University of Michigan Assistant Professor of Education, released a study done at the University of Michigan which found that teaching children at home will not make them social misfits. Knowles surveyed 53 adults who were taught at home because of ideology or geographical

isolation. He found that two thirds were married, which is the norm for adults their age. None were unemployed or on welfare. He found more than three fourths felt that being taught at home had helped them to interact with people from different levels of society. He found more than 40% attended college and 15% of those had completed a graduate degree. Nearly two thirds were self-employed. He stated, "That so many of those surveyed were self-employed supports the contention that homeschooling tends to enhance a person's self-reliance and independence." Ninety-six percent of them said that they would want to be taught at home again. He stated, "Many mentioned a strong relationship engendered with their parents while others talked about self-directed curriculum and individualized pace that a flexible program of homeschooling permitted." (9)

As mentioned earlier, the greatest benefit from homeschool socialization is that the child can be protected from the negative socialization of the public schools associated with peer pressure, such as rebellious attitudes, immaturity, immorality, drugs, and violent behavior.

*Adapted from The Right Choice: Home Schooling by Christopher J. Klicka*

#### Footnotes

1. "Socialization Practices of Christian Home School Educators in the State of Virginia," a study of ten Virginia home school families, performed by Dr. Kathie Carwile, appeared in the *Home School Researcher*, Vol. No. 1, December 1991.
2. R. Meighan, "Political Consciousness and Home-Based Education, *Educational Review* 36 (1984): 165-73.
3. Dr. John Wesley Taylor, *Self-Concept in Home Schooling Children* (Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms International), Order No. DA8624219. This study was done as part of a dissertation at Andrews University. The results of the testing of the 224 home-schooled students was compared to the testing results of 1,183 conventionally schooled children.
4. Dr. Mona Delahooke, "Home Educated Children's Social/Emotional Adjustment and Academic Achievements: A Comprehensive Study," unpublished doctoral dissertation, California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles, 1986, 85.
5. Dr. Linda Montgomery, "The Effect of Homeschooling on Leadership Skills of Home Schooled Students," *Home School Researcher* (5) 1, 1989.
6. Thomas C. Smedley, M.S., "Socialization of Home Schooled Children: A Communication Approach," thesis submitted and approved for Master of Science in corporate and Professional Communication, Radford University, Radford, Virginia, May 1992. (Unpublished.)
7. Dr. Larry Shyers, "Comparison of Social Adjustment Between Home and Traditionally Schooled Students," unpublished doctoral dissertation at University of Florida's College of Education, 1992. Dr. Shyers is a psychotherapist who is the Chairman of the Florida Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Mental Health Counseling.
8. Dr. Brian Ray, "Review of Home Education Research," *The Teaching Home*, August/September 1989, 49. See Rakestraw, "An Analysis of Home Schooling for Elementary School-Age Children in Alabama," doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL, 1987; Reynolds, "How Home School Families Operate on a Day-to-Day Basis: Three Case Studies," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 1985; and Schemmer, "Case Studies of Four Families Engaged in Home Education," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ball State University, Muncie, IN, 1985.
9. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, study of home school adults by Assistant Professor of Education, J Gary Knowles, Associated Press article entitled, "University Study Says Home-Taught Children Won't Become Social Misfits," appearing in the "Grand Haven Tribune" 9 March 1993.