

## PERSPECTIVES – News and Comments<sup>1</sup>

### Beating a Dead Horse: Why Socialization is an Insignificant Issue for Homeschooling

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IT SEEMS THAT whenever homeschooling is discussed, whether on social media, in books, in academic studies, or even in random conversations on the street, the issue of socialization predominates. The literature clearly indicates that socialization is the number one critique or argument against homeschooling (Duvall, 2005, p. 153, Schanzenbach, 2019, p. 117, Wayne, 2018, p. 51), and Sproul (2004) calls this the “granddaddy” of all objections to homeschooling (p. 134). Much to the chagrin of veteran homeschool families, it seems like an issue that will never go away.

However, because of personal experience and research, I have come to believe this is a dead issue for most homeschool families. Even in light of the 2020 (and continuing) Covid situation, with its mask mandates, lockdowns, and quarantines; what may seem like a problem, truly is not a problem at all. In the interest of full disclosure: I am a homeschool father, a teacher of co-curricular courses to homeschool students from other families, as well as a researcher in the field of homeschooling and Christian education, and the director of a church-based homeschool cooperative ministry. My position within the homeschooling community notwithstanding, the literature supports the assertion that socialization is not the problem it may appear to be despite the prevalence of this subject when homeschooling is discussed.

#### Socialization in the Literature

Anderson (2016) concluded that most homeschool students “develop more advanced social skills simply because they have watched their parents and experienced for themselves firsthand interactions with people of all ages (p. 108). Duvall (2005) discovered that “Homeschool and traditional school students belonged to the same numbers of organizations, socialized equally as often with relatives and friends, and attended extrafamilial social activities with the same frequency” (p. 154). For Christian homeschool families, Schanzenbach determined that homeschool students learn social skills from adults as they “participate with both adults and peers in social activities centered around church and family” (p. 53). Ray (1989) provided evidence that counters the socialization myth by relating that “many home-schooling parents have indicated to this author that they must often consciously force themselves to avoid the lure of getting over-involved in outside activities so that they can achieve the objectives they have for their ‘home’ schooling” (p. 6). Wayne (2018) highlighted that “parents can choose social contexts that will be more positive. Homeschooled children often interact with other children in homeschool groups, church, and other community and family settings. Most homeschoolers are far from isolated” (p. 53). Lind and Hawkins (2019) succinctly concluded, “Homeschool children, on average, are socialized and educated by parent to a much higher level than can be achieved in a government-controlled school environment” (p. 147).

Subtly underpinning questions about socialization is the presumption, perhaps unconsciously, that institutional school socialization is ideal (Gatto, 2017, p. 65). In contrast to institutional schooling in an age-segregated environment, Anderson (2016) determined, “[It is a] false presupposition that healthy socialization only occurs ‘at school.’ Throughout history, proper ‘socialization’ occurred in an age integrated environment” (p. 107). The downside of this age-segregated paradigm is echoed by Burkard & O’Keeffe (2005, p. 235), and they described it as “the most unnatural social construct imaginable... These days, most children suffer from a lack of contact with people who are not their own age” (p. 237). Schanzenbach (2006) concluded, “students educated in school often develop all sorts of social problems due to their having been in the school itself” (p. 53).

Numerous authors turn the socialization myth upside down. Erickson (2005) stated, “prevailing youth socialization may actually be the best reasons for letting parents arrange their own youth-socialization systems” (p. 36). Schanzenbach (2019) bluntly asserted, “The idea that children will be properly ‘socialized’ by placing them in a large group of their peers is misguided foolishness” (p. 119).

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Wayne (2017) goes further by highlighting the negative impacts of peer group socialization which “corrupts good moral character” (p. 38). In another work, Wayne (2018) proclaimed, “Far from being a reason to choose government schooling, the socialization question should be one of the primary reasons we choose to homeschooling for our children” (p. 55).

Institutional schooling changed the historical model of socialization. Cox (2003) stated that, “The family was the ‘single most fundamental unit’ of socialization and cultural transmission in early America. The home was the central place for the child to learn business and work ethic” (p. 232). Homeschooling, as we know it today, is simply an integrated part of home life for most homeschool families, and so it seems that the historical basis for socialization is revived in modern homeschooling. At the inception of common schools, what we call public schools today, it was assumed that they would have a positive social impact to the extent of event eliminating “nine-tenths of the crimes in the penal code” (Blumenfeld, 1985, p. 211). Few would need more than the anecdotal evidence of school violence, including bullying and sexual assault, to convince them that this experiment has failed. Nevertheless, we need not rely solely on anecdotes as valid research (Medlin, 2000; Lundy & Mazama, 2014) backs up the assertion that institutionalized education does not produce desirable socialization, and certainly not from the perspective of most homeschool families.

## Anecdotal Evidence

To accusations that homeschool families are sheltering their children from socialization with their public-school peers, many parents, including this one, would plead guilty. Detractors might cite this as a negative for society based on a claim of a presupposed “student right to anonymity” (Marples, 2014, p. 31). Dwyer and Peters (2019) made an assertion that homeschooler develop “attitudes of hostility and uncompromising adamancy in dealing with persons who hold a different conception of the good” (pp. 171-172). Despite those who oppose homeschooling on this basis, additional research has shown that homeschool children are more than well adjusted for social requirements of post-secondary educational institutions, and in fact they typically outperform their public-school counterparts academically (Ray, 2004, 2017; Almasoud & Fowler, 2016).

If I felt the need to defend myself, though generally I do not, I could state the following from personal observation of both my own children as well as the dozens of other homeschool children with whom I have interacted. Most homeschool students have developed beyond the societal expectation of socialization for their age. Generally, they can interact not only with same-aged and similar-intelligence peers, but they more readily interact with others from those significantly younger to adults. This does not mean that there are no shy homeschoolers, but I find these introverted individuals often become a convenient excuse for those outside the homeschooling community to claim these common personality types indicate a lack of socialization.

I used to respond to socialization inquiries by saying that I provide my children with “intentional social development opportunities.” Then I would rattle off a list of formal and informal situations where my children interact with other including, but not limited to: homeschool auxiliary classes, homeschool cooperative classes, organized sports, neighborhood play groups, Sunday school classes, kids Bible clubs, et cetera. I no longer do this, but I prefer to ask questions that turn the tables on the socialization issue. For instance, “Why should I allow my children to socialize in the way that public school children are?” or “Have you seen the kind of socialization that occurs in public schools?” I no longer accept that the burden of proof for socialization falls upon my shoulders. With the tables turned, anyone who wishes to accuse homeschoolers of anti-socialization will shoulder the burden, which I am convinced they cannot do with any level of evidence.

The horse of concern about homeschooling socialization is dead. People should either provide empirical research evidence it is alive, or stop kicking it.

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### Endnote

1. The "Perspectives – News and Comments" section of this journal consists of articles that have not undergone peer review. \*