Equipping Parents for Effective HOME Schooling

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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis has shuttered schools across the globe and left millions of schoolchildren quarantined. This pandemic has highlighted the importance of adequately educating homebound children. Although homeschooling has been growing in popularity in some areas of the world, particularly in the United States, it has not constituted a large percentage of the educational establishment in any part of the world. There has been debate about homeschooling for decades. This paper aims to show that success with homeschooling is possible and it will provide suggestions for empowering families to achieve that.

Four ways to empower home educators have been summarized into the HOME acronym. This acronym stands for (H) helping families find their fit, (O) offering a diversity of teaching resources, (M) making homeschooling socially acceptable, and (E) empowering homeschool partnerships. These practices can serve as a template for organizations that wish to support families who choose to homeschool their children or who are forced to by global constraints.

The recent crisis has provided an opportunity for nations, organizations, families, and students to share the leadership of their educational resources and practices. Collaboration and cooperation can help ensure homebound children receive the education they need. This type of collaboration will help prepare the world for the educational challenges the future might bring.

Keywords: *Homeschool, Homeschooling, Education, Coronavirus, and COVID-19.*

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1.   Introduction

Many countries have closed their schools in response to the COVID-19 crisis and most of the globe's schoolchildren have been impacted (UNESCO, 2020). Homeschooling, which up until now has been on the fringes of the educational spectrum, has become a practice of global importance. Success with homeschooling is possible and support for homeschoolers can help achieve that.

Before going any further, a disclosure must be made. Three of this article's authors were homeschooled as children, three have homeschooled their own children, and one is the founder and director of the Rio Grande Enrichment Studies LLC (RGES) homeschool service. These authors could hardly be deemed un-biased. Still, two have completed degrees in education, giving them an understanding of issues related to both home and public schooling. The authors also share nearly six decades of combined experience in homeschooling.

The current paper is not intended to provide an exhaustive analysis of homeschooling. Rather, it will summarize some of the research that shows homeschooling success is possible. Much of the research that will be considered is based on homeschooling in the United States but some other countries' experiences will be considered as well. Finally, based on the literature, the paper will propose the HOME acronym, advocating (H) helping families find their fit, (O) offering a diversity of teaching resources, (M) making homeschooling socially acceptable, and (E) empowering homeschool partnerships. These are a few ways to practically support homeschooling families.

2.   Homeschooling can be a viable model

Homeschooling is not a new phenomenon in the United States. Gordon and Gordon (1990) explain, "During the colonial experience we know that a broad formal education was given in many households by a tutor or parent" (p. 266). The traditional one-room schoolhouse, famous in New England in early America for teaching students of various ages and grades, achieved a very high literacy rate. John Adams remarked in 1765 that, "all ranks and orders of our people are intelligent, are accomplished – a native of America, especially of New England, who cannot read and write is as rare a phenomenon as a comet" (Smith, 1966, p. 395). From a study of materials from 1640-1700, Samuel E. Morison found a 95% literacy rate in Massachusetts (Morison, 1960). Morison (1960) noted that the schools used the Bible as their central text and that families were heavily involved in teaching in the home and selecting the schoolmasters for these local schools.

Although parents were more involved in their children's education earlier in American History, the modern homeschool revolution is a relatively new phenomenon. Gaither (2009) explains, "the homeschooling movement in the USA emerged in the 1970s" and "the movement's goals of legalizing and popularizing homeschooling were realized by the mid-1990s" (p. 331). Families across America are continuing to adopt this approach to education.

Mazama and Lundy (2015) note that, "Homeschooling, and academic interest in this phenomenon, have increased tremendously over the last decade" (p. 123). Homeschooling comprised just 0.03% of the United States educational system in the 1970's but has grown 113-fold to 3.4% in the past forty years (Ray, 2017). Ray (2017) adds, "It appears that homeschooling is continuing to grow and will do so into the foreseeable future" (p. 617). This is true in general but it is also true among minority demographics, like in the African American community (Mazama & Lundy, 2013; Mazama & Lundy, 2015), and among families with children with disabilities and special needs (Cook, Bennett, Lane, & Mataras, 2013).

The trend is also expanding beyond the United States. It is being utilized in many European countries (Blok & Karsten, 2011) and in other areas, like Malaysia (Alias, Rahman, Siraj, S., & Ibrahim, 2013), Australia, Canada, Japan, Kenya, Russia, Mexico, South Korea, Thailand, and more (Ray, 2015b). Although popular in America, homeschooling is also a growing educational alternative in many countries.

Values of homeschooling

There are many reasons families choose to homeschool. Tilhou (2020) notes that many families value "strong family bonds, teaching faith, closely guided social interaction, and responsive pedagogy" but doubt that public education can achieve these goals (p. 75). Another reason that motivates some families is the fact that homeschooling can empower parents to ensure that their children receive the education they deserve while mitigating inequitable outcomes they might otherwise encounter (Dennison, Lasser, Awtry Madres, & Lerma, 2020).

In a study of 100 homeschooling families, Baidi (2019) found that homeschooling can enable parents to best meet the needs of their children and inspire children to learn in both academic and practical contexts. Although some have publicized potential negative homeschooling outcomes, like a lack of socialization, parents can intentionally address these issues to help their children thrive in these areas as well (Firmin, Younkin, Sackett, Fletcher, Jones, & Parrish, 2019).

Religion can influence homeschooling choices also. In Malaysia, for example, religion is a key driving force in homeschooling (Alias et al., 2013). Religious conservatives also comprise a large percentage of American homeschoolers (Kunzman, 2010). Kunzman (2010) explains, "The relative freedom and flexibility of homeschooling allows parents to craft an educational environment that reflects their values and priorities, and religious conservatives find such an option particularly appealing" (p. 18). Many American Christian families feel a deep sense of responsibility for their children's education because of various biblical passages. One example of this is Proverbs 22:6 (New International Version), which states "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." The importance of training children in an understanding of the Bible and the Christian Worldview is a primary motivation for some Christian homeschool families.

Although religious conservatives make up a large part of the American homeschooling demographic, they are not the only ones homeschooling their children. World-renowned homeschool researcher Brian D. Ray notes that current homeschooling trends have seen

participation from many different parts of the societal spectrum (Ray, 2015b). Some non-religious families are also taking the educational process for their families into their own hands out of a desire for higher academic achievement, individualized instruction, stronger family-focused learning, or the passing on of family values (Ray, 2015b). Today, there are Christians and atheists, conservatives and liberals, and families with many different ethnic, educational, and financial backgrounds participating in homeschooling (Ray, 2015b). Homeschooling appeals to a large and diverse group of people for a plethora of motivations.

Various teaching resources can help parents succeed in homeschooling. Technological advances and tools have made homeschooling more accessible to more people. Curriculum choices can also be beneficial. Allowing parents flexibility in how they teach can also be important. Each will be considered below.

The role of technology in homeschooling is growing. Walters (2015) found that various technological tools, like computers and smartphones, are helpful resources for homeschoolers. Various technological options, like the internet, social networking sites, mobile learning solutions, interactive video games, and others, have also shown value in the homeschooling arena (Alias et al., 2013). Andrade (2008) found that computer and communication technologies helped lower barriers to homeschooling and helped parents successfully continue homeschooling. Technological advancements are providing new tools for homeschoolers.

One of the values of the homeschooling approach is the ability to tailor curricula to a student's particular needs and learning style. Research has found that homeschooling parents "use a variety of teaching and learning strategies including individualized instruction, mastery learning, self-directed study, collaboration with peers and adults, and application and connection of information" (Gann & Carpenter, 2018). Cardinale (2015) found similar attributes, including, "strong nuclear families, direct teaching, self-study or self-directed education, mastery learning, purposive conversations, and challenging curriculum" helped homeschooled children succeed (p. 3). Efford and Becker (2017) elaborate:

> Child-centered and child-driven learning can provoke the creation of curriculum that is responsive to students' particular learning needs, is engaging and meaningful, and promotes learner agency. Homeschool settings provide opportunities for parent/educators cognizant of child-centered and child-driven curriculum to meet students' interests, readiness, growth, and educational drive with responses tailored for each unique situation. (p. 34)

Hirsh (2019) summarizes, "Homeschool families are hyper-autonomous units with tremendous freedom to create curriculum, redesign typical learning pathways, and build innovative partnerships" (p. 1).

For example, some minority households have chosen to homeschool their children in order to circumvent the institutions that have at times perpetuated inequalities (Dennison et al., 2020). Mazama and Lundy (2013) found that many "African American homeschoolers believe a Eurocentric curriculum is bound to gravely interfere with their children's self-esteem and sense of purpose" (p. 123). Others are frustrated with the poor quality of public and private education

available to them (Mazama & Lundy, 2015). African American homeschoolers have performed better than their publicly educated counterparts in reading, language, and mathematics (Ray, 2015a). Similarly, some Hispanic parents choose to homeschool so they can be more involved in their children's education and so their children will learn their parents' language and culture (Easterday, 2011). Helping families find their fit is one way to equip them for homeschooling success.

In a qualitative analysis of 15 homeschooling families, Firmin et al. (2019) found that parents were able to help their children achieve success in their education by adapting their educational approaches to their children's specific needs. They also found that these families reported greater levels of bonding between parents and children (Firmin et al., 2019). Pannone (2014) found that many different objectives can drive homeschooler curriculum selection, including recommendations, religious and moral beliefs, and a child's needs and desires, and that homeschooling curricula can adapt over time. Various aspects, like "collaboration, community, faith, individualized instruction, and structure," are common among homeschoolers (Thomas, 2015, p. v). Specializing curricula to meet children's needs is a common theme in homeschooling and offering a diversity of teaching resources can help home educators thrive.

The curriculum is not the only thing that matters in a child's education. One of the values of the homeschooling approach is the ability to foster a child's intrinsic motivation to learn, something that cannot always be achieved in a crowded public education system with limited time and rigid curricula (Riley, 2016). Homeschooling allows parents to adapt what they teach but it also enables them to adjust how they teach, helping them inspire their children to learn.

Potential disadvantages associated with homeschooling

Lubienski, Puckett, and Brewer (2013) insist there is a "remarkable lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of this popular approach" (p. 378). Although some might argue with their assertion, there are undeniable barriers to homeschooling. Some parents may feel inadequately prepared to meet the educational needs of their children. There can be a financial burden associated with homeschooling as well. Resources and curricula can be expensive. Homeschooling families often sacrifice potential incomes as well (Isenberg, 2007). The time requirements associated with homeschooling can be demanding, especially for single parents. These issues can also limit the career opportunities of homeschooling mothers (Isenberg, 2007). Giving each child the attention they need, can also be difficult.

In their survey of German children, parents, and educators who were forced into homeschooling due to the COVID-19 crisis, Letzel, Pozas, and Schneider (2020) found significant issues. Students reported less time in education, decreased attention for different ability levels, and general feelings of listlessness, boredom, and worry (Letzel, Pozas, & Schneider, 2020). Parents noted a lack of teacher support and reported negative emotions including stress, anger, and nervousness (Letzel et al., 2020). Teachers also admitted various struggles (Letzel et al., 2020).

This paper cannot provide final answers to all of these issues but it will show that the model can work. Even though the current crisis has forced many into home-based education, families and

students can still achieve educational success. Although there are persistent stigmas associated with homeschooling, making homeschooling socially acceptable can help empower families to circumvent these barriers and succeed with this approach.

Benefits that have been associated with homeschooling

There is research that affirms the value of homeschooling as well. Some of that will be considered here with an emphasis on work by noted homeschool researcher Brian D. Ray. He has compiled an extensive collection of evidence that demonstrates a generally positive relationship between homeschooling and academic achievement, social development, and success in adulthood (Ray, 2013; Ray, 2017).

In fact, in his survey of a wide range of research on the topic, Ray (2017) found that the vast majority of empirical studies showed that the results of homeschooling outperformed public schooling, a small percentage found similar results for the two, and only a few studies reported homeschooling results that were inferior to public schooling ones. Some of Ray's previous research has indicated that "homeschoolers scored 34-39 percentile points higher than the norm on standardized achievement tests" and that the "national average ranged from the 84th percentile for Language, Math, and Social Studies to the 89th percentile for Reading" (Ray, 2009, p. 3). Ray (2010) surveyed 11,739 students and found that across the standardized testing spectrum, overall homeschooler "scores are well above public school student averages" (p. 27-28). He added that this result was unsurprising and consistent with other research in this area (Ray, 2010).

Research has discovered positive outcomes in other domains as well. Ray (2018) has demonstrated that homeschoolers have lower incidence of abuse than their publicly schooled counterparts. Homeschool adolescents are less likely to approve of using, have access to, or abuse substances like alcohol or marijuana (Vaughn et al., 2015). White, Moore, and Squires (2009) evaluated 51 previously homeschooled college students using the Big Five personality model and found them to be equal to their publicly schooled counterparts in extraversion and neuroticism domains and significantly ahead of them in the agreeable, conscientious, and open domains. Another evaluation of homeschooled college students found they had lower levels of depression than their publicly schooled counterparts and viewed their college experience more positively as well (Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012).

Ray (2010) notes that some variables, like parent education level, have been associated with homeschool student success but only weakly. Dickson, Gregg, and Robinson (2016) explain a general principle that parents with high levels of education often raise children with high levels of education. Parent education levels can benefit children but are not a prerequisite for effective homeschooling. Ray (2010) warns that other factors, like the amount of homeschool regulation by the state, have only minimal, if any impact on student achievement.

There are also advantages that go beyond the students and their families. The United States currently spends more than $12,000 per full-time equivalent student ("Education Expenditures by Country," 2019). A recent survey by the National Center for Education Statistics found that

around 1.69 million Americans are currently being homeschooled (McQuiggan, Megra, & Grady, 2017). These numbers would indicate that homeschooling families save United States taxpayers more than 20 billion dollars annually.

Supporting homeschooling families

Providing support for homeschooling families can help mitigate hindrances and equip families for success. Resourcing home educators with virtual tools and online resources can be helpful. Giving tax credits or access to funding for educational needs can offset costs. States do not have to view homeschooling in a negative light and can collaborate with families to ensure children's needs are being met.

Many homeschool groups have arisen to supplement families' efforts in homeschooling. Thomas (2015) notes, "There have been more instances in recent years of mixed educational programs across the United States" (p. v). Hirsh (2019) identifies some of these as "online schools, microschools, co-ops, and support centers" (p. 1). These organizations exist primarily to help families "share resources, expertise, and common values" (Tilhou, 2020, p. 75). Hybrid homeschool organizations are one of these types of organizations that have been growing in popularity. Wearne (2019) defines a hybrid homeschool as "a school in which students attend school on a campus for (typically) two to three days per week, and work at home the rest of the week." Many families will opt for hybrid homeschools because of their desire for smaller class sizes, education that aligns with their religious convictions, schedule flexibility, and more opportunities for the family to spend time together (Wearne, 2019). Empowering homeschool partnerships has helped many families and it can be an important part of a successful approach to home education.

3.   Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an opportunity for the world to open up to the possibilities of home education. Homeschooling presents a unique opportunity for parents to adapt and customize their children's education to match their specific learning styles and strengths. The goal of this article has been to provide guidance for families who have utilized this model of education in light of the pandemic. Within that context, an analysis of some of the literature on the topic of homeschooling has been considered. There are other perspectives on this topic and readers should apprise themselves of those. Homeschooling is a viable and effective means of educating children. How nations and organizations support homeschooling families can directly impact the quality of home education and maximize its efficacy.

Four ways a society can support homeschooling can be summarized with the HOME acronym. First, authorities can assist home educators by (H) helping families find their fit. They can do this by supporting and encouraging families to customize their education techniques to match the individual needs of each child. Next, a society can support homeschooling families by (O) offering a diversity of teaching resources. These can include technological and curriculum options. Third, nations can support education in the home by (M) making homeschooling

socially acceptable. Through acknowledging and informing the public on the benefits of this practice, the false stigmas that often encumber homeschoolers will be mitigated. Last, by (E) empowering homeschool partnerships, a society can open up more doors for hybrid homeschool organizations and associations to form. This can lead to greater success in the homeschool community.

The risks that are present in today's dynamic world have highlighted the educational vulnerability of the global community. New approaches are needed to ensure children receive the support they need. By sharing educational leadership with families, nations can prepare them to effectively educate their children even in the context of dire global pandemics or other educational interruptions they might encounter.

4.   References

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