

## SOCIALIZATION AND THE HOME SCHOOL

One of the most frequent questions asked regarding home education concerns socialization. Unfortunately, it is a common misconception that well-socialized children require peer group association provided by conventional schools. Urie Bronfenbrenner, in his Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R., states

*If the institutions of our society continue to remove parents, other adults, and older youth from active participation in the lives of children, and if the resulting vacuum is filled by the age-segregated peer group, we can anticipate increased alienation, indifference, antagonism and violence on the part of the younger generation in all segments of our society – middle-class as well as the disadvantaged . . .*

*It is not primarily the family, but other institutions in our society that determine how and with whom children spend their time, and it is these institutions that have created and perpetuated the age-segregated, and thereby often amoral or antisocial, world in which our children live and grow. Central among the institutions which, by their structure and limited concern, have encouraged these socially disruptive developments have been our schools.*

The question we should ask, then, is not whether the children *will* be socialized, but rather what *kind* of socialization do we want for them?

The child who feels needed, wanted, and depended on at home, sharing responsibilities and chores, is much more likely to develop a sense of self-worth and a stable value system – which is the basic ingredient for *positive* sociability. More self-directed and independent, the child usually becomes a social leader. In 1959-60 and again in 1972-73, Raymond Moore of Hewitt Research Foundation conducted a study with school aged children that involved them in systematic daily chores in the home and school. The results? Fewer discipline problems, better attitudes, and higher achievers. They also tended to be more responsible, neat, prompt, orderly, dependable, and industrious. Carrying their share of the family load contributed a sense of security in the children that expressed itself in positive ways in the children's everyday lives.

In contrast, *negative* sociability develops when a child surrenders to his peers. Those who spend more time with peers than their parents generally become peer dependent. Right down to the preschool level, heavy peer group associations breed a "persuasive pessimism" – about themselves, their futures, their parents, and even their peers, and hence, a loss of self-direction, self-worth, and a dependency that promote learning failure and even delinquency. Doubtful manners, habits, and morals become contagious in a consistent, heavy peer environment.

However, some still question whether a home educated student will be prepared for the "real world" because of his "isolation." But what is the "real world"? Is it an age-segregated office or factory? On the contrary, the "real world" is made up of individuals of varying backgrounds and ages within the home and work place. Not raised in social isolation, home schooled children participate in support group activities, church functions, sports and community events. Instead of artificial segregation by age, they interact with both children and adults of all ages, thus enabling them to relate to people of a broad age spectrum. Measured on the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, half of the home schooled children tested scored in the upper 10%. Researchers attributed these findings to the higher levels of parental involvement and corresponding lower levels of peer association.

Over the years, my husband and I invested much time in our children in academic training, teaching life skills, family outings, heart-to-heart talks, and much more. We participated in our home school support group's weekly activities/outings. From these contacts, our children formed their closest friendships. All three had part-time jobs in their teen-age years. They volunteered at the local museum, Meals-On-Wheels, and also served

apprenticeships. Everyone participated in household chores. These combined experiences and responsibilities instilled character and stability into our children. They are respected, trusted, and well-liked in their circles of influence.

Students who are home educated are generally secure, confident, independent, and stable – essential qualities for leaders. They share relationships with people of varied ages and backgrounds. Interested in the world around them, they can carry on a conversation that extends beyond themselves. Social misfits? Not in the least! Home schooling families are training our leaders for tomorrow.

**NOTES:**

1. Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood: U. S. and U. S. S. R.* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970), p. 11-17, 151-53.
2. Raymond S. Moore, "Research and Common Sense: Therapies for our Homes and Schools," *Teachers College Record* 84 (Winter 1982): 366.
3. Bronfenbrenner, *Two Worlds of Childhood*, p. 101.
4. John Wesley Taylor, "Self-Concepts of Home-Schooling Children," *Home School Researcher* , Vol. 2, No. 2 (Corvallis, OR, June, 1986).