**Do home-schooled kids get enough social education?**

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**Should we be concerned with the potential effects of home schooling on children's social integration?**

THE first day of school is, for both child and parent, one of our great rites of passage. Who can forget that moment, as a child, arriving at the school gate, nervously gripping mum or dad's hand? And what parent can forget watching their little boy or girl waving goodbye as they turn to head into the classroom for the first time?

For a long time, we took it for granted that our children would, well, head to school. But an increasing number of parents are opting to educate their children at home, either doing the teaching themselves or engaging the services of private tutors. The Home Education Association estimates there may be as many as 26,000 children in Australia who are home-schooled.

Parents' motivation for home schooling varies from case to case. Some parents feel their children aren't suited to being taught in a classroom setting: perhaps they are too shy, or too energetic, or have special requirements.

Some may believe their children can receive a superior education with a tutor teaching them one-on-one. If Alexander the Great had a private tutor in Aristotle, and the Swedish queen Christina had one in Rene Descartes, then why shouldn't your little prince or princess have a dedicated tutor too?

There are many others who choose home schooling because they wish to preserve their moral or religious traditions.

This explains, for instance, why home schooling has grown steadily in the US, where it is especially popular among some evangelical Christian communities.

We cannot deny the interest parents have in raising their children according to their way of life. For some liberal philosophers, this goes beyond an interest: our right not to be interfered with must also extend to a right to shape our child's values and beliefs.

Yet education shouldn't be dictated by parental interest alone. We must also consider the interests of the children, as well as those of the political community.

This explains why some countries such as Germany compel citizens to send their children to recognised schools. Recently one home-schooling family from Germany was granted asylum in the US after a federal judge concurred that its members had a well-grounded fear that they would be persecuted for their beliefs should they return to Germany.

According to state officials in Baden-Wurttemberg, the rationale of the policy is to foster social integration and prevent the creation of parallel societies.

This is a legitimate concern. For all of its conceivable advantages, home schooling has one fundamental drawback: it has the effect of preventing children from socialising with others, including those from different backgrounds and traditions.

If we believe that a good education should equip children with the ability to deliberate with others and live alongside those with whom they disagree, this counts as a serious failing.

Does this mean we must follow the Germans in banning home schooling? Not necessarily. But one thing must be made clear.

Parents have no unconditional right to create civic handicaps for their children. Where they desire to keep school-aged children at home, the onus is on them to demonstrate that this doesn't cause more harm than good.

The ideal of education would be diminished if it didn't include an education for citizenship.

*Readers are invited to suggest subjects for future pondering. The email address:* [*philosophercolumn@gmail.com*](mailto:philosophercolumn@gmail.com)

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