

## CATHOLIC EDUCATION: HOMEWARD BOUND

KIMBERLY HAHN & MARY HASSON. IGNATIUS PRESS, 1996.

*Reviewed by Gini Shimabukuro*

As the title *Catholic Education: Homeward Bound* suggests, this book examines home schooling in the context of Catholic education. The authors argue that home schooling in Catholic families is “exploding” due to the perception of parents that they can provide a more thoroughly Catholic education than parochial schools. They attempt to support this position through generalizations critical of Catholic schooling that are not grounded in research. For example, Hahn and Hasson write, “Some Catholic schools are shamefully pretending to be something they truly have no intention of being. In fact, it can be dangerous to send our children to Catholic schools that do not accurately represent the Faith—it can subject them to the risk of rejecting a Faith they were never given a real chance to know” (p. 42). At question here is the perception of what constitutes an “accurate representation of the Faith” as well as a defined population when referring to “some Catholic schools.” Hahn and Hasson further assert that “religion classes in Catholic schools may rarely refer to Sacred Scripture” and substitute “time-bound, current ideologies for timeless Catholic values” in an attempt to appear “relevant for today” (p. 50). They claim that these schools “...have relativized the Faith, watering it down at best or diluting it with poison at worst” (p. 42). These are strong accusations; because they are unsubstantiated by research, the authors lose their credibility.

Hahn and Hasson assert that parents can create psychologically, spiritually, and intellectually functional home-learning communities superior to those developed by professional educators. The authors claim that “success depends on the teacher’s awareness of the child’s real needs, talents, and deficits and on the teacher’s own commitment, attention, encouragement, and love—all of which are more easily found in a parent than in a classroom teacher” (p. 25). The authors fail to acknowledge that effective instruction involves a great deal of knowledge, reflection, and guided practice. Certainly, many parents are effective educators; but it is rash to presume that they are able to implement instructional strategies that promote brain-compatible learning and that respect children’s learning styles.

The instructional strategy that is at the core of home schooling is identified as the tutorial method. In fact, the authors state that “tutoring is the most effective teaching method” and “provides the best education for our children” (p. 27). Here, as elsewhere, their claim is an overstatement. Effective

instruction involves the use of a variety of approaches. For example, large-group discussion, cooperative learning, and role-playing are just a few of the teaching strategies which provide for a range of valuable learning outcomes that a singular approach could not possibly achieve.

Socialization is a commonly debated issue associated with home schooling. Hahn and Hasson claim that institutional schools are peer-dominated, age-segregated environments that limit the social-skill development of children. On the other hand, the authors argue that the age-integrated, parent-dominated home schools promote healthy socialization. The assumptions that institutional schools are peer-dominated and that children attending them are no longer influenced by their parents raise questions foundational to the larger issue. Again, no research is presented to substantiate these claims. In continuing their discussion regarding the socialization of home-schooled children, the authors do cite research that has demonstrated that home-educated children tend to score higher on self-concept tests than their peers in public institutions, and that these children appear to be less aggressive than institutionally educated children. Since the research involved comparisons with public-school students, it would be of significant interest to replicate these studies with Catholic-school students. Convey (1992) concluded that a great deal of evidence demonstrates that a "functional community," as defined by Coleman, dominates the culture of the typical Catholic school and serves as a key factor in the school's effectiveness. With this fact in mind, comparative studies between home-schooled Catholic students and home-schooled non-Catholic students could reveal a disparity of results.

To assist in socialization, the authors recommend home-education support groups which, they insist, "can spell the difference between success or failure in home education" (p. 240). They state that families who engage in support group activities statistically (although the source of this data is not indicated) sustain home education for longer periods of time, as compared with their counterparts who are not involved in support groups. Support groups collaborate on field trips, special interests, sports events, curriculum materials, teaching, and a host of other activities and vehicles to disseminate helpful information to strengthen the home-education effort, in addition to providing peer support to home-educated children and their parents. Networking opportunities are provided by national Catholic home education associations such as Baltimore-based TORCH (Traditions of Roman Catholic Homes), which is the largest network of Catholic support groups in the country, and NACHE (National Association of Catholic Home Educators) in Broad Run, Virginia.

A major section of this book is devoted to the procedures of home education, including how to select curricula, suggestions for planning the year's instruction, models of daily schedules and record keeping, recommended designs for the space designated as the schoolroom, and advice regarding the

father's role in the process. In addition, teaching guides are provided on the Sacraments, character formation, and the Catholic faith.

*Catholic Education: Homeward Bound* is a disturbing and revealing book. The claims made about Catholic home education are consistently unsubstantiated. The book raises many questions concerning the status of the research on Catholic home schooling. For example: What are the actual numbers of Catholic families involved in home schooling? What are their reasons for opting for home schooling over their local Catholic schools? Are the assertions of Hahn and Hasson representative of the Catholic home-educated throughout the country? This book extends a challenge for further research in this area. In addition, it is informative for Catholic educators. It helps them understand an emerging educational movement and assess the promise of Catholic home schooling to transform homes into "embassies of Christendom—places of refuge in a foreign land" (p. 55).

## REFERENCE

Convey, J. J. (1992). *Catholic schools make a difference: Twenty-five years of research*. Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association.

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