



The Pitfall of Homeschooling in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study looks into the homeschooling practice in the Philippines as it has become a growing trend in the country. There is a need to look into the possibility of homeschooling as an alternative form of education and thus, see if homeschooling lives up to the national educational objectives of the country. The research question of this study is how the homeschool setup develops the students in learning to live together in a diverse society. The study employs a qualitative exploratory design. Six co-researchers, all in college at the time of the study, participated in individual storytelling sessions and in-depth interviews as the core data gathering techniques. The study finds that the homeschooling setup in the Philippines builds a Culture Shock Syndrome in its students which makes it weak in developing students' learning to live together in a diverse society.

KEYWORDS

education, homeschooling, Philippines, pitfalls

Introduction

In the global context, the increase in number of parents who choose to completely take over the education of their children by giving it at home and away from state-run schools and state-accredited private schools is undeniably exponential. There is hardly any literature on homeschooling that does not mention the rapid growth of this educational phenomenon and has therefore captured the attention of the academic community and educational researchers (Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Lubienski, 2003).

This undeniably growing global movement of homeschooling has stirred and continues to capture the attention and concern of sociologists (Mazama & Lundy, 2012), educators and education policy-makers (Kunzman, 2009), and even individual parents (Hiatt-Michael, 2008) as it is a "development of significance" (Crowson, 2000, p. 296).

The main issues that stir controversy among educators and public administrators include debates on state recognition and legalization (Blackmore, 2010), educational responsibility (Cox, 2006), and charges for digression from the purpose of public education.

In the Philippine scenario, homeschooling is also starting to gain some popularity. HSLDA International (2013) reports that the Philippines has an estimated number of 4,000 homeschooling families, which is the highest number in Asia, together with Japan's same estimated homeschooling population. There is great possibility that the actual number is much higher than this estimated figure because there are still families who are not counted as homeschooling but whose children are not in formal schools either.

The Philippine education system faces many challenging issues and concerns that prove to be hindrances in attaining the quality of education that is envisioned for the youth who will be the future bearer and agents of national development. Reforms and innovations in education are welcome and accommodated.

However, accommodation must not necessarily mean blind tolerance. Though the formal education system is open to alternatives, quality check must still be a point of interest.

Central Research Question

With the mission to gain "in-depth understanding of" the homeschool phenomenon in the Philippines and weigh its value

against the national educational objectives, this study endeavored to answer the following central question:

How does the homeschool setup develop the students in learning to live together in a diverse society? How does it instill in its students the knowledge of, identification with, and love for the nation and the people to which they belong?

Research Design

The homeschooling phenomenon undoubtedly is a social occurrence of great significance that calls for deeper understanding of the actual experience, which can then shed light on the various facets of the phenomenon.

This study employed a qualitative exploratory method, which is the most appropriate approach that can lead the study to its main objective.

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain access into the inner experiences of the co-researchers, which would not have been possible with a quantitative approach to inquiry. An exploratory approach was also needed to be employed by this study as it enabled the researcher to gain the opportunity to understand in detail the real issues that concern the homeschooled students, without being restricted to specific areas of inquiry.

This study employed six participants as co-researchers who had the following criteria: a) they have had experience of homeschooling during their basic education years; b) they are willing to participate in the research, as it demanded time and openness to share their experience; and c) they must currently be in college at the time of the study.

The core data gathering techniques that were used included storytelling sessions and in-depth interviews. Storytelling is a powerful technique to let the participants share their firsthand experience of and feelings towards their schooling at home during their elementary and secondary years.

Findings

Analysis of data from the storytelling sessions and in-depth interviews brought out the major finding in relation to how the homeschool setup has developed the students in learning to live together in a diverse society.

This study has found that a Culture Shock Syndrome, which refers to the homeschoolers' experience of a general sense

of disbelief and shock when faced with a way of life that is different from their own, has developed in the homeschooled graduates.

The culture shock, seen in the patterns in the homeschooling experience, involves an overall sense of fear towards the world beyond homeschooling, a sense of refuge and safety among people who they perceive to be like them, and a sense of viewing themselves as different from their peers.

Fear of the "outside world"

Having a view of a so-called outside world is commonly manifested in students who were homeschooled for a substantial period, that is, from early on in elementary all the way until before college.

At some point in their homeschooling, the co-researchers became conscious that the world is rather different from what they expect it to be. Hence, they form an initial sense of disbelief, which later on develops into a sense of fear. This is evident in the experience of co-researcher Nikki, who upon thinking about life beyond homeschooling started feeling restless and anxious towards the imminent reentering into the school system at the end of homeschooling. The anxiety of leaving the comforts of their protected environment and the fear of embarking into a different world are crippling feelings that proved to have had detrimental effects on their pace of homeschooling. This is also evident in another case of Nikki who experienced a significant slowing down of pace before deciding to completely stop studying before reaching the end, thus missing out the last two grade levels.

The difficulty in acclimatizing back to social life in college after seven years of homeschooling is best captured by the recollections of co-researcher Ching:

I may not be the best at socializing because I was not faced with so many characters around me while I was growing up. I had a very protected environment with my family and good friends. There were no other people around me except good people. Unlike in regular schools, there are so many different people and different characters. It was rather difficult to handle such differences in college.

The shock that the co-researchers feel as they are faced with the culture of their classmates who were not homeschooled is characterized by reactions such as flight from anyone who they do not like or fight and clash with peers in disagreement.

Finding refuge in "my people"

Building relationships with people who are alike may be comfortable to many but fostering connection with diverse people may be a challenge. Inherent in their lifestyle, the homeschooled community has made for themselves a comfort zone that consists of other people who they find to be much like them as regards interests, values, and life perceptions.

Emerging from the narratives of the co-researchers is the concept of "my people" which is used to describe persons who seem to be easy to relate with by virtue of their having the same outlook in life, same line of interests, and same set of beliefs. The concept of "my people" may be a mirror of the safe and protected environment that the homeschooling setup had provided which may have served as a security blanket for its students.

Part of the transition phase that the homeschooled co-researchers go through as they join the mainstream in college is characterized by their search for that circle of "my people" and while they are not found, the co-researchers feel the repression of not being themselves amidst other people. This insight is best captured in the story of Ching who described the beginning of her college life as harsh years because she felt the need to restrain herself when around some peers who are different from her. The relief she got from finally coming across the "my people" group later on in college was also captured well in her narration:

The good thing is on my third year in college, I was able to meet friends with whom I can simply be myself. They were people who loved my opinion and loved my presence. They were just more open-minded than my earlier friends were. I felt accepted for who I am and I felt that they loved being around me.

These patterns that surface from the co-researchers' accounts speak of the disposition of the homeschooled children to find refuge in a secured environment as a reaction to being overwhelmed in a group of diverse characters. This refuge may be characterized by the consolation of security among the sameness of character without having to endure the challenge of putting up with differences.

Self-portrait of a homeschooled

A self-portrait is a representation of one's introspection. Among the several narrations of the homeschooled students emerges a common way of describing themselves. The concepts of odd, weird, peculiar, and different are the strokes commonly used in the portraits of themselves.

These terms were overwhelmingly used by the homeschooled co-researchers to describe themselves. Even though their personalities may be vastly different from each other, they have common portraits of themselves, which may be a reflection of how they think other people actually view them.

This is best captured in the account of co-researcher Sab as she talked about herself: *I would describe myself as weird because I like working a lot. I don't really like to rest. Many people say that I am weird. I know I am different.*

These statements show how homeschooled students generally view themselves. And this self-portrait has a significant bearing on their ability to blend in society.

Conclusion

In terms of the homeschool setup, the study finds that it is weak in developing students in learning to live together in a diverse society as the homeschool setup builds a degree of culture shock, which is the sense of disbelief and shock when faced with a way of life that is different from their own.

This Syndrome is characterized by a certain fear of the "outside world", a sense of need to find refuge in "my people", and a peculiar portrait of oneself, which is an essential foundation in building social relationships.

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