

# TOOLS CRITICAL FOR THE SUCCESS OF HOMESCHOOLING

**Peter Ernest Haiman, Ph.D.**

Recently my family and I heard a talk to parents at the first annual Northern California Homeschooling Association meeting. The speaker had been asked to discuss the “socialization” of children and adolescents. For the ten minutes that he talked, he spoke about the topic by mainly criticizing current public education. The socialization of the young is as complex as it is important, but the speaker never helped his audience thoughtfully engage and/or analyze any of the issues involved. Important questions are at the heart of any discussion about socialization: How are we to educate our children/adolescents so that they may live happy, useful and productive lives individually and collectively? How are we to educate our children so that they can fit into and/or modify the society they will inherit? These questions were never addressed.

The speaker not only failed to address the topic of socialization competently, he also misrepresented truth. He said that John Dewey’s philosophy of education is the basis of current educational practice in most schools in the United States. This is false. He wrongly spoke out against Dewey’s ideas and their influence on contemporary schools.

Anyone who reads John Dewey’s Democracy and Education (1916), Essays in Experimental Logic (1916), Human Nature and Conduct (1922), Experience and Nature (1925), or any other of his many publications on philosophy and education will quickly realize that John Dewey not only was the father of progressive educational ideas but is the man from whom John Holt, A. S. Neill, and many other more contemporary progressive educational philosophers got their inspiration and many of their ideas. It is indeed a sad irony that the speaker at the meeting blamed the current state of most of the nation’s public and private school education on Dewey. In this writer’s opinion, the last two generations of children, and our country as a whole, would have been fortunate if schools throughout the land had put Dewey’s ideas into educational practice.

For parents to implement sound educational practices with their children, they must first develop their own philosophy of education. To do this they need and should demand the best tools to help them think about educational issues that are important for their children and themselves. They need to engage in a dialogue both with the best thinkers available and with other homeschooling parents.

Important questions need to be raised and answered. Homeschooling parents need intelligently to decide how and what their children should learn; how much and what kinds of freedom and discipline are appropriate; how their homeschooling should relate to the outside community; and many other important questions.

Theodore Brameld’s book Philosophies of Education in Cultural Perspective (1955) is the best summary presentation and analysis of mankind’s thoughts about to what ends and by what means children should be educated. This book has long been recognized as a classic in the field. In the preface to his book, which is a letter addressed to prospective teachers, Brameld writes challenging paragraphs of great importance to homeschooling parents. “When philosophy does

its job, it disturbs anyone it touches. I hope that you will be disturbed by this book. If you are not, then the book has not succeeded in compelling you to subject your beliefs to reexamination, perhaps to modification, possibly even to rejection or drastic reconstruction. Unless you are willing to take the risk that this will happen, you can scarcely expect to qualify as a thoroughly trained teacher - as one whose beliefs about education and about the culture it serves have been weighed and tested.” (Brameld, 1955, p.vi) “I readily admit that the task is arduous. Issues as basic as those education now confronts can never be resolved hastily or superficially. If you are willing to go forward with me, you will find that we shall need assistance from the most profound minds of history: Plato, Locke, Hegel, James, Freud and a great many others. We shall need, further, to consider questions and situations that often create bitterness, even violence. Nothing less than a willingness to study and act upon them as honestly and forthrightly as possible will suffice.” (Brameld, 1955, p. vii)

It is the responsibility of homeschooling boards and the individual members of homeschooling groups throughout the country to see that the important questions posed and the differences reflected in the philosophies of education presented in Brameld’s book are thoughtfully discussed. Homeschooling parents can subscribe to and implement with their own children philosophies of education that are different from the philosophies of other homeschooling parents. But whatever philosophy they adopt, it should represent the culmination of a process of analyzing, comparing, contrasting, and thinking about alternative educational philosophies and practices. People need not agree on their educational philosophy but they should agree that, for their children’s sake, a thoughtful process is required to arrive at their own educational philosophy.

It is not enough to be against something like the current quality of most public and private education. Oh yes, it feels good to criticize those who you oppose. But criticism is only the first, small step. By itself, it will not help homeschooling survive as a movement. Criticism of current public and/or private school education, by itself, will not help homeschooling parents thoughtfully and deliberately engage the ideas they must consider if they are to be of benefit to their children.

Homeschooling, like any movement that wants to be useful and survive, must first and foremost, become an accurately informed movement. Knowledge is and forever will be power. It is up to homeschoolers to make sure that they obtain only qualified people to talk to them in homeschooling meetings. The people who talk to homeschooling families must have accurate knowledge and make thorough presentations to parents about the important issues and questions that pertain to the education of their children and adolescents. Good feelings and wishes about homeschooling will not build its success. An accurately informed homeschooling community can.

Peter Haiman, Ph.D., was graduated from the School of Education at Case Western Reserve University in 1970 and had two areas of graduate specialization: the historical, social, and philosophical foundations of education and educational psychology. He has taught these courses in universities and colleges in Ohio, South Carolina, and California.

This article originally appeared in *Skole, The Journal of Alternative of Education*. Summer 1988, Vol. IV, No. 1. pp. 38-40.