Chapter 7

Homeschooling Gifted Students: Considerations for Research and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The homeschooling movement has grown consistently over the past 50 years and is now a viable option for gifted children as well, particularly when traditional schools fail to meet their unique needs. As the educational option offering the greatest flexibility, homeschooling can hold great promise to assist the optimal development of both gifted and twice exceptional children. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight major trends in homeschooling practice for families with gifted children, as well as to focus attention on the need for further research into the topic of homeschooling and giftedness. Ways in which homeschooling can provide a fit for gifted and twice exceptional children, resources utilized by parents in meeting their children’s needs, and challenges parents face as they direct their children’s education are considered. The importance of flexibility in approach and curriculum, as well as utilizing outside resources, is emphasized.

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INTRODUCTION

Though homeschooling has existed in the United States since its inception, the practice has experienced a surge in growth over the past few decades (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Ray, 2011; Redford, Battle, & Bielick, 2016). Today, the choice to homeschool represents a departure from societal and institutional norms, and is thus not a decision made by default or out of necessity, as in the early years of the nation (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2013; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Parents who choose to homeschool do so for a variety of reasons, among them the need to provide education that responds to their children’s specific needs in ways that they feel public schools cannot. Parents of gifted children who homeschool fall into this category, as they seek to grant opportunities for growth, challenge, high-level thinking and creative outlets for their children (Jolly et al., 2013). This chapter will outline some of the issues leading to the choice to homeschool for families with gifted children, the resources homeschooling parents rely upon in creating educational experiences for their gifted children, and some of the challenges faced by these parents. Considerations for twice exceptional children are also highlighted. These issues are important to anyone who educates gifted children; parents can glean strategies for their own practice, and public or private school educators can better understand what gifted students who come to them after being homeschooled may have experienced.

BACKGROUND

It is important to note that research on the homeschooling community is sparse. The population is difficult to study, being both dispersed and, in many cases, suspicious of and resistant to oversight (Collom, 2005). Moreover, much of what exists can be deemed untrustworthy or unreliable due to methodological concerns as well as author bias. For example, much of the statistical research on homeschooling outcomes has been funded by the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) and conducted through the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI); these organizations have access to a broad range of homeschooling families nationwide, and have used that access to produce quantitative research on homeschoolers with large sample sizes. Their studies show consistently higher outcomes in terms of grades,
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