

There is no school equal to a decent home and no teacher equal to a virtuous parent

GANDHI



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'STOP BEING SO CRUEL'

LOCAL queer artist Nakhane paid tribute to Mhlayisa Booker, a black trans woman who was shot dead in Dallas, Texas, and while he says he isn't shocked by society's actions, he has appealed for the cruelty against the transgender community to come to an end.



COMMENT



HOME EDUCATION IS A BOON TO SOCIETY

BOUWE VAN DER EEMS

THE regulatory environment created by the SA Schools Act (SASA) in 1996 failed to provide the most vulnerable in our society with a quality basic education.

It merely replaced race-based inequality with class-based inequality. The majority of children attend dysfunctional public schools.

Well-functioning model-C schools are affordable to the middle class but increasingly inaccessible, with long waiting lists. Private schools are generally not affordable to the middle class and poor families.

As SASA failed, civil society developed alternative education solutions, including home education and community-based learning centres or cottage schools.

They follow a diversity of approaches based on totally different philosophies than mainstream education. This diversity offers solutions for rich and poor, gifted children and children with special needs. It works equally well in high-density metropolitan areas and rural areas.

It can be adapted to the needs of families with two parents, broken families, extended families and child-led families and restores families and communities. Alternative education already saves the state an estimated R4.6 billion a year. This can increase exponentially, making funds available to fix dysfunctional public schools.

An estimated 280 000 learners in alternative education already reduces class sizes and provides access to model-C schools to thousands of learners, especially in the Western Cape and Gauteng metros.

However, although alternative education is good for learners, it is not good for all South Africans.

The education establishment believes in a centralised, uniform state-controlled education system.

This provides stable jobs to unionised teachers. It enables the state to ensure that it can transfer its values to the next generation so that there are no surprises in elections.

Many children struggle to cope with the school environment.

The pharmaceutical industry has developed various drugs that can help children to adapt to the school environment.

In home education, however, the environment can be adapted to the needs of the child, and there is no need for drugs any more.

A significant growth in home education can therefore have a negative effect on the pharmaceutical industry.

The Department of Basic Education centrally purchases textbooks from a small number of educational providers. If alternative education grows significantly, parents will choose from a variety of smaller educational providers, disrupting the market for education products and services.

Alternative education has grown so much since 1996 that government acknowledges that it is too late to stop.

Proposed legislative changes therefore attempt to make alternative education part of the formal school system, rather than outlawing it.

Some estimates indicate that as little as 1% of home learners are registered with the state. To really make alternative education part of the formal school system will require a compliance of well above 80%. To do this against the will of parents who think that it is in the best interest of their children not to be part of the formal school system will be a long, uphill struggle with increasing conflict.

[Bouwe van der Eems and his wife Debbie homeschooled their five children. Bouwe is actively involved in the Association for Homeschooling and the Pestalozzi Trust. With his family he has been running the SAHomeschoolers website since 2010.]

THE BIG DEBATE

Is home education the panacea?



It is not an easy option even for those parents in a position to practise it

A one-size-fits-all approach to schooling is not ideal as every child is unique



ELIJAH MHLANGA

IN recent months and weeks, we have had to answer a series of questions from various people and, indeed, members of the media regarding home education.

In every instance before providing responses I have had to start by correcting the nomenclature regarding the matter.

The conversation usually starts with me saying: "Let's agree to call it home education, not homeschooling because a home is not a school."

"The policy refers to it as home education. If we can get that right, then we will understand all the other issues we will discuss on this issue."

The next question is whether the department supports home education. The answer is a resounding yes.

We support it and we believe that there is space for it in the basic education sector. We are fortunate to live in a democratic country where people's right to choose is enshrined in the Constitution.

It is for that reason that home education is legally recognised in South Africa in terms section 51 of the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act 84 of 1996) ("Sasa", or "the Act"). In November 2018, the Minister of Basic Education Angie Motshhega promulgated a Policy on Home Education.

The Policy was determined in terms of section 3 of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act 27 of 1996) (Nepa) and should be read with s. 51 of Sasa. Home Education as an alternative to schooling places demands on parents to ensure that the child's right to basic education is not discounted.

Home education is provided under the direction and supervision of the learner's parent primarily in the environment of the learner's home; may include tutorial or other educational support if necessary secured by the parent on specific areas of the curriculum followed by the learner; and should meet the requirements for registration of a learner for home education contemplated in section 51 of the Act.

Studies of home education indicate that a parent who undertakes to educate a child at home is typically highly motivated and prepared to make considerable investments of time, money, energy and resourcefulness on behalf of the child's learning.

Home education is not generally a choice available to parents who are without means or who must be away from home at work, or seeking work. Typically, a non-working mother is the primary teacher or learning facilitator.

Home education is not an easy option even for those parents who are in a position to practise it.

The demands of the task are considerable, for both parents and

learners.

Not all parents and learners who embark on home education are able to sustain the effort.

Schools remain a safety net for them if they decide not to continue at home.

A parent of a learner who is subject to compulsory attendance who chooses to have her or his child educated at home in terms of section 51 of the Act must comply with the registration procedures; conditions for registration; curriculum provision; recording and reporting; assessment and monitoring as stipulated in the policy.

The social aspect of a child is as important as the academic aspect.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of a parent to: (a) nurture the learner and prepare her or him to play a positive role in a democratic South Africa which is founded on the values of human dignity, the achievement of equality and advancement of human rights and freedoms; (b) prepare the learner for global citizenship; (c) prepare a learner for an inclusive society based on non-sexism, non-racialism, equality, and non-discrimination which includes non-discrimination on the basis of race, colour, gender, etc; (d) enhance the learner's understanding of human rights; (e) respect the learner's right to human dignity; and (f) enable social inclusion in the home education programme by exposing the child to learning in and around the child's environment and by promoting integration, human rights, unity in diversity and inclusivity.

The state has a duty to ensure that every person's fundamental right to a basic education is respected, protected, promoted and fulfilled (Constitution, sections 7(2), 29(1)(a)).

The government has responded in a number of ways, including the enactment of compulsory school attendance provisions in Sasa, which require every parent to cause each of their children of compulsory school attendance age to attend school.

It is also the responsibility of both the parents and the department to make sure monitoring takes place.

This involves the department officials making contact (including a visit to the home) to ascertain that the policy is adhered to.

This is important because we have found that some parents do not teach their children at home, but instead take them to neutral venues elsewhere to gather with other children from other households.

The practice is inconsistent with the policy which clearly states that the site of teaching and learning is the home.

We call on, and have consistently advised parents, to ensure that they inform themselves adequately with the concept of home education and to fully understand the implications prior to registration for it.

The department is always ready and willing to re-admit the children who were taken out of school and whose parents encounter challenges with the demands associated with home education.

[Mhlanga is the chief director for communications at the Department of Basic Education.]

HOW TO REGISTER

TO register a child, a parent must: (a) submit a written application and necessary documentation to the HOD; (b) submit the application by September of the year preceding the year in which home education is to commence for the learner. The HOD may allow a deviation from this if the parent can provide sound reasons for the delay in registering the learner for home education; (c) ensure that the application is for one of the following phases: Foundation Phase (grades 1-3), Intermediate Phase (grades 4-6), or Senior Phase (grades 7-9); and (d) ensure that after completion of each phase, the proof that the minimum outcomes have been met are submitted by the parent(s) with the application for the registration of the next phase.

Conditions for the registration of a learner as set out in the policy include that: (a) the parent understands home education, accepts full responsibility for the implementation of home education for her or his child; and undertakes to: (i) make suitable educational resources available to support the learner's learning; (ii) monitor the learner's academic progress; (iii) arrange for the learner's educational attainment to be assessed at a standard that is not inferior to that which is determined in the NCS; and (iv) provide the HOD with the learner's assessment report signed by the competent assessor, as evidence at the end of each phase.

Benefits of homeschooling

- ◆ According to SA Homeschoolers, homeschooling carry these benefits:
- ◆ Home is a safe space and a child can develop without the threat of being bullied.
- ◆ Parents can develop the full personality of their children which is intellectually, emotionally, social, physical and ethical.
- ◆ The pace of learning can be adjusted.
- ◆ Parents are able to guide their children's emotional development and IQ.
- ◆ Children are taught manners and ethics, therefore are able to socially interact with other people and make good choices with friendships.

Drawbacks of homeschooling

- ◆ Parents take on the full responsibility for the education of their children which can be overwhelming.
- ◆ Parents are subject to criticism from friends and families on their choice to home educate their children.
- ◆ Parents can find teaching multiple ages at once a challenge as well as teaching difficult subjects.
- ◆ The homeschool parents are with their children 24/7. Moms who need some alone time need to schedule to meet their needs.
- ◆ As one parent stays at home to teach the children, most homeschool families live on a single income. There are however many homeschool moms who start a home business where they also involve their children.



ANELLE BURGER

HOME education produces well-educated adults who are well adjusted, resilient and tolerant of differing viewpoints. In contrast to commonly held beliefs, the parent is well equipped to direct the learning of home-educated children. Families that embark on the home education journey typically do this because of the safety of the home and quality of the education.

Every child is unique, and every child learns differently. A one-size-fits-all approach is not ideal. The ability to tailor the education to the child's individual preference, even within the same family unit, is one of the most important benefits of home education. Parents can adjust the pace of learning and choose from a variety of curricula and approaches.

By doing this, the parents' ability to tap the natural curiosity of each child ensures that learning is both focused and interesting and prepares the child for a life of learning that does not end when the school-leaving certificate is obtained.

The home and, by extension, the everyday environment of the child is, by nature, the perfect classroom. For instance, where better to learn the basics of mathematics, that is, logic, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and fractions, than in the kitchen when helping with the preparation of meals or following recipes when baking?

Activities such as working in the garden and visits to the park or nature reserve provide excellent opportunities to learn and apply science and biology. It is well proven that learning in context provides meaning to what is learnt and results in retention of knowledge that may endure a lifetime. And all of this happens in a safe and loving environment.

The flexibility of home education affords more opportunities for free play and for children to pursue their own interests, be it gymnastics, playing the piano, acting, computer programming, gaming or reading a book.

Play is important not only for relaxation and as a physical activity, but it is essential to children's development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of children and youth. It improves their language skills, strategic thinking, creativity, and negotiating skills. It helps them make sense of the world around them as play often mimics life. Play also gives them the opportunity to internalise what they have learnt.

One of the biggest misconceptions about home education is that parents cannot fulfil the role of a qualified teacher. While many parents do not have the training to teach a classroom full of children or hold a relevant degree, they are fully equipped to create a learning environment for the optimal development of each of their children.

There are a multitude of online resources as well as real-world sup-

port available. And no one is more invested in the education of the child than the parents. Parents are best qualified to determine what is in the best interest of their children.

The real-world support structures also serve another and maybe more important purpose, i.e. they provide the milieu in which the child learns to interact with the world and those around the child. These structures are typically groups of families who come together for educational and social gatherings, such as a visit to the museum, aquarium, science centre, etc. There are chess clubs and groups who prepare for maths and computer Olympiads and eisteddfods. There are sports clubs that cater for home-educated children where the teams are multi-aged and mixed gender. Parents establish co-operatives where their talents and resources are pooled and used to the benefit of all the children. This builds community and teaches children to work collaboratively.

Research has shown that home-educated children are more frequently exposed to a wider variety of people and situations than traditionally schooled children. Importantly, research has also shown that home-educated children have self-concepts comparable to and usually stronger than those of traditionally schooled children. This last finding explains the resilience of home-educated children and together with the first, their ability to function in a diverse range of situations within a diverse society.

Home-educated children are therefore empowered to contribute to the growth and development of a tolerant and successful South African society. Dr Brian Ray, of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) in the US, found that "home schooling produces successful adults who are actively involved in their communities and continue to value education for themselves and their children". Interestingly, research published in the Journal of School Choice shows that home-educated students tend to be more politically tolerant than those who attended public school.

Taking all this into account, home education is an obvious choice for families who can embark on that journey. But parents with children in public school can also benefit from this approach by challenging schools to embrace the values of home education.

If you are considering home education or would like more information, such as support groups in your area, I can recommend any of these channels.

The Gauteng Association for Home Education can be contacted by email at jaco.lemmer@gmail.com

Cape Home educators can be contacted via www.capehomeed.co.za or on Facebook and Instagram.

A good website to visit is starting-homeschooling.co.za

The Homeschool Lounge is a YouTube channel dedicated to home education and the Pestalozzi Trust (www.pestalozzi.org) is the legal defence fund defending the rights of home educators.

[Burger is the spokesperson for the Cape Home Educators and is host of a YouTube channel dedicated to home education called Homeschool Lounge.]