

Challenging and Creating Citizenship and Community in a Montreal Home-learning Centre

A major debate between critics and advocates of homeschooling is what affect it has on notions of citizenship and community involvement. Apple (2000) argues that religious homeschooling, as part of growing neoliberal and neoconservative movements in the United States, is a direct challenge to education that teaches critical thinking, develops citizenship, and provides an opportunity for diverse students to interact. This argument, though, is largely based on an oversimplification of homeschooling that does not consider the variety within the homeschooling community. Other writers offer different perspectives. For example, Arai (1999) argues that homeschooling families are constructing a distinct form of citizenship from that taught in schools, based on participation in varied activities as well as strong family relationships, and that this is a positive phenomenon because of how it challenges and expands our conception of what citizenship means.

In my research with members of a home-learning centre in Montreal, I have found that parents at the centre consider it an important source of learning about citizenship, diversity, and interpersonal relationships for their children. Through volunteering at the centre and conducting semi-structured interviews with parents involved there, I have begun to trace the interrelated ways in which their views on community affect the centre, and how the centre affects their perception of community. Additionally, I have noticed a significant gap in the current research on homeschooling, which almost entirely overlooks the development of communities of support between homeschoolers.

This case study, then, introduces important questions that homeschooling research has

overlooked. What differentiates this type of 'homeschooling centre' from a school? How does the creation of learning spaces outside the education system both challenge and reinforce social norms? How do we address (both conceptually and in practical responses) the diversity of homeschooling approaches, communities, and notions of citizenship, particularly as they affect public school systems?

This paper will use my original research to address these questions, and offer suggestions as to how their answers may impact future studies on homeschooling and within educational anthropology.

References

- Apple, M. W. (2000). Away with all teachers: The cultural politics of home schooling. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 10(1), 61-80.
- Arai, A. B. (1999). Homeschooling and the redefinition of citizenship. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 7(27).