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Editorial

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Editorial

R A N D A L L C U R R E N

NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS DEVELOPED and grew through much of the world over the course of a century, sustained by public school movements committed to eliminating child labor and replacing state-funded pauper schools with systems of publicly funded schools that would be second to none and thereby capable of attracting all but a small residue of school-age children. The expansion of these systems to accommodate nearly all children continued into the 1950s and 1960s, but in the 1960s the public school movements themselves began to falter, first and most obviously in the United States, where attempts to racially desegregate schools inspired resistance to the educational authority of the national government. In the course of the 1970s, an ideologically diverse 'homeschool' movement took shape in the United States. Over the course of three decades it has grown in numbers, political power and geographic reach. Most parents who educate their children at home do so on largely religious grounds, though school quality and climate, special educational needs and other factors figure into the decisions of many families. A National Household Education Survey released in December 2008 found that 1.5 million students were educated at home in the United States in 2007, 36% more than in 2003, though the actual number may be much higher.

Scholarly commentary on the normative and policy issues surrounding home-based education or 'homeschooling' has fallen far short of what is needed to adequately analyze the important matters at stake. What, if any, legitimate public interests and children's interests are advanced, and which, if any, are hindered by 'homeschooling'? How should we understand the nature and extent of children's educational rights and parents' educational responsibilities and authority to control the education of their children? How should we understand the scope of government authority and responsibility to protect the developmental interests of children? What regulatory approach is most likely to protect children's interests and ensure the adequacy of any

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home-based education that is permitted? To what extent, if any, should public policy discourage the spread of 'homeschooling'? To what extent, if any, should public resources be directed toward facilitating or ensuring the adequacy of homeschooling?

The articles in this special issue of *Theory and Research in Education* take some important steps toward answering these questions. The first three are substantially focused on regulation, both in the abstract and in the context of three very different national settings. Cynthia Villalba's article, 'Home-based education in Sweden', offers a revealing study of regulatory oversight of home-based education in Sweden, where the practice is closely supervised and very limited. Thomas Spiegler's article, 'Why state sanctions fail to deter home education', considers the German national context, where home education is illegal but more prevalent, and examines the reasons why home education is nevertheless a growing phenomenon. Robert Kunzman's article, 'Understanding homeschooling: A better regulatory approach', offers a comparative assessment of different regulatory approaches in the United States, where 'homeschooling' is unevenly regulated and growing rapidly. Milton Gaither's article, 'The homeschooling movement: past, present and future', is a history of the 'homeschool' movement in the United States. It provides an informative historical counterpart to the ethnographic research on home education reported in Kunzman's article. The final two articles address distinctive justifications for home-based education. Carrie Winstanley's article, 'Too cool for school?' explores giftedness as a rationale for home education and presents the perspectives of families in the United Kingdom who have chosen to educate their gifted children at home. In their article 'Can intimacy justify home education?' Michael Merry and Charles Howell pose the question of whether intimacy can provide a justification for the decision to home educate. They argue that 'attentive' parents are *prima facie* justified in educating their children at home if the conditions in available schools pose a threat to valuable parent-child intimacy.