

Kingdom of Children
Culture and Controversy in the Homeschooling Movement
By Dr. Mitchell Stevens
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Dr. Stevens is a Professor of Sociology at Hamilton College and we can learn a lot about the homeschooling movement in Vermont, from *Kingdom of Children*. Although he studied both religious and non-religious homeschooling for 10 years in the Midwest along with a few national organizations, his book could have been written about Vermont homeschoolers. We are not a homogenous group and our ways of organizing ourselves can be very different. Yet it does not matter where on the political or religious spectrum we find ourselves, we have some powerful ideas that give us some common ground. Dr. Stevens writes:

“The plurality of home schoolers makes them harder for the rest of us to comprehend. On what could fundamentalists and atheists, Muslims and Mormons, Buddhists, and Baptists all agree? I found that despite their varied backgrounds, home schoolers agree that children have enormous potential for distinctive accomplishments and that standardized ways of educating children temper or even squelch this potential. Home schoolers also are wary of state intrusion into family life and generally are skeptical of the ability of bureaucracies and “experts” to meet the task of child rearing. Because these beliefs are rooted in some cherished American cultural traditions, they are compelling to a wide range of people.” Page 5

“... what I found most remarkable about home schoolers was the big item on which they agreed. Time and again, parents told me that **their children’s self-development was worthy of virtually any sacrifice.**” Page 8

“American civil law has long lent **sanctity to the parent-child relationship.**” Page 41

“The inherent complexity and uniqueness of each child renders conventional schooling inadequate as well as the philosophies behind it....” Page 43

“What distinguishes home schoolers from other parents is not their basic understanding of childhood but rather the exceptional extent to which home schoolers have elaborated that understanding and put it into practice.” Page 70

“[Through] the terms of contemporary childhood.... homeschoolers have shown us what a demanding creature childhood can be. It is cranky about standardized treatment, preferring customized service: from schools certainly, but also from churches and child care providers and the wide array of organization that help parents nurture little selves into maturity. Our contemporary child needs to be understood in all its uniqueness.... from some one or two grown-ups who are heroically committed to putting in the time.....In exchange for the trouble it causes, this childhood offers enormous promise.”