pact's point of view
The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

First published in Pact's Point of View © 2010
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Ask Pact
Homeschooling

Q: *We have three transracially-adopted children who are home-schooled. My husband and I are both credentialed educators with decades of public school teaching experience. We believe home-schooling of transracially-adopted children is an excellent way to educate and train a child for life beyond grade school. Unfortunately, the vast majority of public schools cannot meet our children's emotional or full intellectual needs. Let's face it, the vast majority of adopted children have great emotional needs due to the losses they have suffered. It is foolish to think that a public school teacher with a class of thirty students can even begin to meet my child's needs for love and acceptance and support. Many of these children have prenatal drug exposure issues that affect their learning. Our modern public school system is incapable of meeting their learning needs to the extent provided by a home-based education program. Don't you agree that home-schooling can be particularly beneficial for adopted children?*

A: Let's begin with your line "It is foolish to think that a public school teacher with a class of thirty students can even begin to meet my child's needs for love and acceptance and support." Yes, we agree, but question whether that is a teacher's job. Loving and supporting (and yes, educating) their children is something all parents do, all the time, but that does not mean that their child cannot also attend school for several hours a day. Schools are often the main social network for children and families during their growing-up years. The decision to home-school exclusively can sometimes take away opportunities to make essential racial connections for transracially-adopted people if adoptive parents do not have or create strong relationships with adults and children who share their child's race. For transracially-adopted people, this is a lost opportunity to have access, in a relatively safe environment, to other children (and their parents) and teachers who are of the same race as they. Parents need to ask themselves: How will I replace these potential independent relationships? While home-schooling parents often provide their children with a rich array of learning experiences, white parents of children of color need to make sure that they are also connecting their children to people of color who will provide a different world view and an understanding of race that comes from firsthand experience.

As far as emotional needs, none of us as parents should rely on any single environment to be "supportive enough" for our children. In fact, we must always help our children filter negative messages from the media, peers or any other social environment, including but hardly limited to school, with the goal that they can feel strong enough and supported enough to learn to wave off the negative in favor of the positive. Part of this comes from connections with people outside the family who give them room and backing to be who they are–the best they can become. Part of it comes from hard experiences where children get to figure out who their true friends and allies are (which should certainly include parents) in times of need. If we protect children from all challenges how will they learn how to overcome challenges they face when we are not present? Yes,

there are influences or treatment at school that parents may not be comfortable with, but remember, those can also become opportunities to educate your children in your family values and understand your child's experience, racial and otherwise, in the world. Transracially-adopted people are expected by the world to "know how to act their race" and often to be "grateful for being adopted." To learn to manage those expectations and to find a community for themselves as they grow into healthy and functional adults must be a goal for parents.

Since you are home-schooling, hopefully you can connect with other home-schoolers of color so that your child does not find themselves racially or ethnically isolated because they are not in settings where they can create connections to other children and adults who look like them. For children, education isn't just about learning history, math and reading, it is also about learning how to manage and succeed in the social milieu in a way that will serve them as they become adults.

You also mentioned learning issues and the emotional needs of adopted children and how they might be better met in home-schooling environments. You and your husband are unusual home-schoolers, in that you have professional training in educating children, which of course not all of us are lucky enough to have. While it is true that adopted children have a higher incidence of learning issues than their non-adopted counterparts, be careful about assumptions about why that might be. We know that children with learning issues often benefit from highly structured learning environments. When that can be more effectively provided in a home-schooling environment, great. For parents who do not feel that is their skill, traditional schools can be an excellent choice.

This discussion of homeschooling is in no way meant to be a treatise on the subject, either for or against, but we do want to point out some of the potential challenges that homeschooling presents to transracial families. Home-schooled kids are a relatively small group and do not necessarily interact a great deal with kids in mainstream schools and/or society, unless their parents go out of their way to make sure this happens. Please, as a transracial parent, factor racial connection into the formula as you make decisions about how to best serve your child's education.