

# UNDERSTANDING HOMESCHOOLING, COTTAGE SCHOOLS AND LEARNING CENTERS

By Evette Erasmus



Home-schooling has been a feasible alternative to mainstream schooling in South Africa since the revised Schools Act of 1996. Home-schooling is recognised in the Schools Act and a few guidelines are provided regarding the legal and administrative issues surrounding home-schooling a child. Home-schooling in its technical essence only includes a child of school going age (7 to 15 years: grades 1 - 9) being schooled in the parental home. Any formal teaching endeavor that falls outside of these parameters and does not include mainstream schooling, is not classified as home-schooling.

In the last decade there has been a growing popularity and, in certain instances, dire need for investigating alternatives to the Department of Education's mainstream educational offering. In some situations, not even the Independent Education Board (IEB), Waldorf and Montessori approaches to education provided acceptable solutions, which led to an upsurge in the formation of learning centres and cottage schools all across South Africa.

Learning centres and cottage schools are very similar in the education service they offer. Some distinctions include that learning centres are somewhat bigger than cottage schools. Other distinctions refer to a difference in operations and education focus. A cottage school is no more legitimate than a learning centre because it has the word "school" in the name. In fact, only if the establishment is a registered independent school with the Department of Education, may it lay claim to that title.

Learning centres and cottage schools Offer a "home-school" feel to education and facilitate the learner's schooling away from the parental home. Thus, instead of a variety of subject tutors coming to the learner's home to dispense teaching and syllabi, it can be done at an establishment outside of home. Learners are dropped Off in the mornings and fetched in the afternoon. School. and yet not quite, school.

Learning centres and cottage schools are positioned to provide learners with small, informal learning environments, a range Of alternative teaching methods, the flexibility to provide uniquely tailored schooling experiences and the chance for tutors and learners to form a real connection that can only happen in a learner-centred educational context. For learners that experience emotional, social and learning difficulties in a larger mainstream environment, a learning centre or cottage school can be a proverbial education utopia.

For parents/guardians of learners that are in need of a critical change in schooling environment or even for parents/ guardians that feel that they are odds with the mainstream educational systems educational philosophy. secular approach or even a specific registered school, could find researching the available and viable alternatives, a mine field.

Over the course of the next few weeks Opti-Learn will be publishing a series of short, informative articles to educate and empower anyone that is seeking an alternative to mainstream schooling: parents, guardians, educators and learners included. These articles do not seek to discredit the mainstream schooling system as it does serve many learners and their parents/guardians. However, perhaps, the information that is needed to make an informed decision should be easily accessible and should come from a reliable source. Opti-Learn has been involved and has evolved in this very sphere Of education for the past 12 years. What we are about to tell you is the truth,,..

Feel free to share these articles with all and sundry that might benefit from this information. Let's start an unencumbered conversation about not only alternatives to the current education system, but also how we can all contribute to improving and maybe. even change education in this quirky country of ours.

