THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE HOME EDUCATOR

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the experiences of twelve home educators from the North Carolina, USA. The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews, supplemented by visual collages which were completed by participants. Data were coded and analysed using NVivo 12 software. The research resulted in nine major themes which emerged out of the experiences shared by the participants: 1) Structure, 2) Curriculum, 3) Personal Fulfilment, 4) Personal Struggles, 5) Sought Advantages), 6) Reasons for Home Educating, 7) Reflection, 8) Support, and 9) The Decision to Homeschool. I analysed these themes from the participants' experiences through the lens of inductive thematic analysis. The experiences associated with the home educators in this study serve as a framework for discussion of the way in which home education is experienced by its practitioners and the perceived value home education has in their lives.

The research revealed that control is a fundamental necessity for home educators. Additionally, the findings reveal that home educators craft the lifestyle and practice of home education to match their own capacity, desire and lifestyle. Recommendations are made for home educators, traditional educators and further study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

While homeschooling is an educational practice that has been employed for centuries, it has experienced tremendous growth over the past several decades (Russo, 2008). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2009) reports that homeschooling grew from 850,000 students in 1999 to 1.5 million students in 2007. Reidford, Battle and Bielick (2017) report that approximately 3 percent of the school-age population of the United States engaged in homeschooling in the 2011–12 school year. In addition, The National Home Education Research Institute (2015) estimates that the homeschool population in the United States is growing at a rate of 2% to 8% per annum, today, that is close to 2 million home educated students. Waddell (2010) identifies the practice of home educating as something 'that an increasingly large proportion of the population chooses' (p. 541).

1.1 Problem Statement

Educational researchers have noted the growth and examined the practice of homeschooling (Collum, 2005). Research on homeschooling has centred primarily around three main areas: teaching style (Cai, Reeve, & Robinson, 2002), motivation to homeschool (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Patterson et al., 2007), and academic outcomes (Barwegen et al., 2004; Cogan, 2010; Duvall, Delquardi & Ward, 2004). As the homeschool population grows, so too has the research surrounding homeschooling. However, while areas such as the motivation to homeschool (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Patterson et al., 2007), and the academic outcomes of homeschooled students (Barwegen et al., 2004; Cogan, 2010; Duvall, Delquardi & Ward, 2004) have been well researched, there are still gaps in the research on how

homeschooling individuals experience the practice; what they struggle with, what their strategies are, and how their lifestyle is impacted (Green & Hoover-Dempsy, 2007; Raja, 2012). Raja (2012) observes that there are a variety of questions about homeschooling that are yet unanswered; among them are; How do the parents feel? What really happens during homeschool?' (Raja, 2012, p.18). It is clear that there is a gap in the research literature surrounding the personal experiences of home educators as they engage in this practice. This phenomenological study aims to address this gap in the literature as it seeks to understand home educators' experience of their practice as it is lived.

1.2 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experience of home educators in the context of a town in North Carolina, United States. Through the use of personal interviews, home educators were able to add their voice and perspective to this important topic. During the study, participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences. The main objective of the research study was to gather insights from home educators. The introduction will present the topic, and the personal dimension. The review of literature will set out the literature related to home schooling and reiterate my research questions, exploring why they are important questions to ask. In Chapter 3, I will share my methodology and the method that I have used so that the reader can understand the basis of my conclusions. The basic method was to conduct 12 interviews which incorporated the creation of a visual collages with home educators in a town I shall call Lafayette, North Carolina. The data analysis chapter examines how findings were established and the processes by which themes and patterns were discovered. The Findings chapter discusses

what I learnt about the lived experience of home schooling from the point of view of 12 parents. Finally, in my concluding chapter, I discuss the implications of my findings in relation to the literature and research context. I will examine how and from where home educators derive resources while exploring the channels through which they derive support. Curricula, extracurricular activities, and familial interaction will also be explored as the experience of the home educator is probed.

While examining the lived experience of the home educator the focus on the sense of responsibility and the personal connection to the recipients of the education will be of great interest as a possible source of motivation to home educate and the impetus to continue. I will examine whether this is inherent for home educators due possibly to the biological and emotional connection to the learner. It is suggested (Cassidy & Bates, 2005) that there are few factors in education that have a greater impact on a student's educational experience than a caring relationship with his or her teacher.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions framed this study:

Question 1 How do parents describe their experience of homeschooling?

Question 2 How is the decision made to homeschool?

Question 3 What support systems do these homeschoolers experience?

1.4 My Personal Journey

In order to give a clear picture of my journey into home education and to illuminate my positionality and interest in the research topic, I will explain my level of personal involvement in the subject matter. I am a qualified teacher with a child who was home educated. I was not personally home educated but chose home education for one of my children as an appropriate arrangement, after much research and soul searching.

1.4.1. Childhood

Although my parents came from fundamentally different backgrounds their philosophy of life, family and education united them. Education was a prominent feature in our lives. From as early as I can remember we were surrounded by books. Learning was fun to us. The variety of encyclopaedias, atlases, dictionaries, biographies, novels and reference books was unending. My reflection on my childhood is significant in this context in that it formed the foundation of my desire to pursue education as a vocation. My desire has not only been to pursue education for myself, but to impart education in a way that it is a meaningful and positive experience for my students.

1.5 The Decision to Homeschool

Working with my children at home after school, it became apparent to me that both children were bright, with differing learning styles. I discovered that I was increasingly spending more time on homework for one of my children and began to explore the idea of homeschooling. I subsequently began homeschooling in Sandwell, UK after a period of deliberation. Because I worked very closely with the school that my son was attending I,

along with the school principal and classroom teacher arranged a system for my son known as ‘flexi-schooling’, where he attended school on a part time basis and was educated at home for the remainder. This was advantageous, particularly in our locality because of the absence of a homeschooling community, thus his social and physical needs were still being addressed in the school setting. For example, he was still able to join his classmates for all social activities, including lunch, P.E, Gym and other communal events. A parliamentary briefing paper of May 2018 described flexi-schooling thus:

‘Children who are educated at home can also be registered at school and attend school for part of the week. Such an arrangement is known as ‘flexi-schooling’. Schools are under no obligation to agree to such an arrangement, but some are happy to do so. Schools must enter a pupil on the admission register from the beginning of the first day that the pupil will attend the school; this will include a pupil who is flexi-schooled. Where a school has agreed to a flexi-schooling arrangement, the time a child spends being educated at home should be recorded as absence’ (Lord Agnew of Oulton, cited in Foster, 2018 p. 10).

Although this had never been done in our local education authority before, all parties involved were confident that this would be a good arrangement and were eager to observe the dynamics of how it would operate. Our principal and LEA suggested that if successful, as the pioneer of such a project I would spearhead a project for others to do the same. Consequently, within months of beginning homeschooling, others were sent my way to obtain information and ideas on homeschooling. We continued to homeschool in Lafayette, North Carolina, USA where there is an established homeschool community.

In North Carolina, homeschooled students are required by law to take an annual standardized test appropriate to their age and grade level. For home educators, this gives an indication of progress and illuminates strengths and weaknesses in the student. Although the teaching methods used within home schools are as diverse as the families that engage in it, I found that teaching in line with national standards of education allowed me to keep abreast of what schooled counterparts were studying.

My decision to homeschool was not a criticism of the established educational framework; but a personal choice to provide an education that I believed would allow my son to achieve his full potential in an environment that worked for him. I found the homeschool community itself to be very diverse. We went to great lengths to make sure that we engaged in a variety of social and physical activities on a regular basis. The issue of 'social aspects of home education' is often a bone of contention when home education is discussed in the wider community (Harris, 2009). An issue, however, that lies beyond the scope of this research.

The flexibility of homeschooling allowed us as a military family to endure the possibility of being relocated at very short notice and very often. There was a deep sense of reassurance in knowing that we did not have to worry about new schools, new teachers, and new curriculums, although of course, finding new friends was always a concern. The curriculum or culture of the learning environment did not change because of our location. Of course, the choice to homeschool was a huge sacrifice. Ostensibly, I chose to partially step away from a profession that I loved, opted for zero income, in exchange for the peace of mind I achieved in knowing that my son's educational needs were being met.

1.6 Conclusion

I am aware that the classroom is a complex and diverse environment and there are numerous ways of delivering instruction. However, there is also a school of thought that realizes that instruction can also be delivered in environments outside of the traditional classroom setting. The Homeschool or Home Education setting is one such method that has taken the educational experience away from the traditional setting in exchange for a more tailored, home and community-based environment.

Home education can be described as a method of education tailored to meet the unique individual needs of its students (Klicka, 2002, Knowles, 1998). Though there are many reasons for homeschooling and as many descriptions of what homeschooling actually is; reasons for homeschooling range from religious separatism to special education needs.

Homeschooling was a constant journey of personal discovery for me. I discovered a deeper insight into the strength and importance of the community, which in my experience, was the backbone and driving force behind my positive homeschool experience. Additionally, I saw the value of mentorship as an essential tool to guide new educators through the initial stages; reflecting on their own past experiences and offering advice on a variety of issues. The development of a meaningful relationship with the student is a natural consequence of being the parent of the home educated child, however the wider implication here is the possibility of a deeper awareness of the child, which fosters enhanced learning through improved communication. It also inspires a deeper desire and personal passion for student success (Pianta, 1999). Home education, in my personal experience, offered a new angle and a variety of insights to my experience as a teacher. My lived experience as a home educator

may differ quite extensively to the experiences of other home educators. However, the focus will be on the lived experience of the home educator in a specific community of home educators, offering insight into their unique experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this chapter is a review of the literature regarding parents and the practice of home education. It is typically parents that make this choice and the consequences of that choice affect them and their families profoundly. The aim of this chapter is to present the reader with an overview of the field and to identify the basis of the research questions. The chapter includes consideration of the nature of home education and what is known about some of the effects of home education, the reasons for choosing home education, the challenges and costs of home education for families; the content and challenges of home education, and the situation of the community in which this study is set. The chapter concludes with the research questions, which are rooted in the arguments presented in this chapter.

2.1 Home Education and Homeschooling

The term home education is used interchangeably with the term home schooling throughout this study. 'Home education' has been suggested as the preferred term among home educators in the UK, since it is argued, that 'homeschooling' seems to imply that parents are attempting to replicate schools at home (Burke, 2011). Since the focus, however, of this thesis is based in the USA, the term homeschooling is used more consistently throughout the study.

Home education can be described as an alternative form of education, where parents decide to provide education to their children outside of the traditional classroom setting. The education is based on a 'tutor method' and is usually tailored to the individual needs of the

child. This method of educational instruction, since its inception has purportedly changed from being a practice of families that were opined to be on the fringe of society, to being widely considered a viable educational option by mainstream Americans (Ray 2017).

2.2. Prevalence of Home Education Within Specific Groups

Although homeschooling did not emerge from the vision or work of any one person it is well documented that in the USA, in the 1960's and 1970's the homeschool population had strong support from the political left, and was dominated largely by prominent voices such as Ivan Illich (1917) and John Holt (1989). As new ideas about education began to emerge, Holt was one of several education and social critics who questioned traditional methods of schooling. Holt was influenced by Illich's 'Deschooling Society' (1971), with its criticism of schools serving a deep social function of maintaining the status quo of social class for the majority of students**.** In his book, 'Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better' (1976), Holt proposed removing children from school legally or as an act of civil disobedience. His intent was to instigate reform in schools from the administrative level, however, the educational establishment barely recognized his work. Instead, parents from various backgrounds started to notice his work and began writing to him, explaining that they were homeschooling their children. Rural families, city dwellers and various others disclosed that they were either legally homeschooling their children or doing so underground. In turn, Holt reciprocated and eventually created a newsletter that would connect these likeminded people to each other. Thus, in August 1977, the first issue of Growing Without Schooling (GWS) was published, purported to be the world's, first periodical about homeschooling. Among his strongest views was that he never felt that only

trained teachers should teach students. For example, in an issue of GWS he describes how a welfare mother who doesn't know how to read can still teach her own children by finding a child, relative, or friend who can teach them all to read. Additionally, he makes reference to mass literacy programs used in a number of developing countries in which people are taught to read and almost immediately begin to teach others. Likewise, he describes schools that allow older children to teach younger children to read, reporting excellent results. Similarly, Harrold Bennett (1972) wrote what he described as an operator's manual entitled *No More Public School*, which explains how one can take their children out of public school and educate them at home. As the century progressed these groups began to fade in prominence and were increasingly replaced by Christian groups.

Monk (2003) states, 'It is important… to recognize that parents who home educate are far from a monolithic group' (p. 570). Currently in the United States, the fastest growing group within the homeschool population is Muslim Americans. This growth has also been identified in the UK. An OFSTED report of 2015 expressed growing concerns over the potential for the practice to be used as a means of radicalisation.

'We are determined to tackle radicalisation wherever it occurs. We have provided Ofsted with extra inspectors to eradicate extremism in education.

We are working with them to address their concerns about home education being exploited, while safeguarding the rights of parents to determine how and where to educate their children.'

A key group identified both in the UK and USA is the Christian Right group, as identified by Rothermel (2003). Rothermel's study suggests that the majority of home educators in his study, chose to so because of either Christian or Islamic beliefs. Research has typically found that the average home educating family is white, with usually more than two children; parents are usually more educated than the general adult population and hold conservative, often Christian values (Anderson, 2000).

Research on home education in the United States has predominantly focused on the White/Anglo population. Over the past decade, however, particularly post 2008 observers have noted an increase in the practice of home education among the African American population, (Ray 2017). A study of the emerging trend of African Americans choosing to home educate, revealed that reasons for homeschooling were similar to reasons given for homeschooling among White/Anglo homeschooling families at large in the United States. According to Ray (2000) the five reasons most often selected for homeschooling were, (a) Parents preferred to teach children at home in order to provide religious and moral instruction; (b) to accomplish more academically, than in conventional schools;(c) for parents to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to the child, (d) to customize or individualize the education of the child; (e) to provide religious or moral instruction which differs from that taught in schools. Some did mention race/ethnicity issues as part of their many reasons for homeschooling (Ray 2000). However, he found no evidence to suggest that African Americans were choosing to home educate to promote Afrocentrism or other political ideologies.

It is suggested that precise statistical information is limited due to what Isenberg (2007) describes as the political history of homeschooling. Isenberg suggests that data that exists about homeschooling is restricted on the state level and is derived mainly from telephone surveys. Thus, he suggests, the insights gained from these surveys on questions of how many, why, and how parents homeschool their children is just a glimpse of the depth of information that actually exists. Isenberg argues that this paucity of available information has impaired understanding of even the most rudimentary aspects of homeschooling.

2.3 Why People May Choose to Home Educate Their Children

Reasons to home educate are varied but may include; necessity and support for a travelling lifestyle, escape from a negative school environment, improvement of social interactions, religion, and support of children with learning challenges.

2.3.1 Migration

Hefling (2013) wrote an article on military families who home educate and suggests that many military families, as well as those who have diplomatic positions within the U.S. government, have to cope with frequent moves. To that end, they often opt for homeschooling as a practical choice. Participating military families, according to Hefling, say home schooling also allows them to schedule school time around the rigorous deployment, training and school schedules of the military member.

One of the most challenging components of moving according to research is maintaining consistency in education. D'Arcy (2014) in her study of travelling groups and their choice to home educate notes that the few previous scholarly treatments of travellers (including Romany

Gypsies, members of the Fairground or Showman communities, and Irish Travellers) claim that travellers choose home education because it fits easily with their migratory patterns. She argues that even though it is hard to get a clear picture of Traveller home education, there are other factors that commonly arise among these groups that force home education as a reluctant choice. Although she maintains that interviewees appreciate the opportunity home education provides to maintain traveller culture, to accommodate the children's special needs, and to foster child initiative, others felt the need to engage in homeschooling after their children experienced bullying incidents in their local schools. D'Arcy's study concludes that Travellers care about their children's educations, but discrimination in the schools forces them into home education. One of the benefits of homeschooling for migrating families is that the curriculum and lessons can be done from any location. This helps to ensure that there are no unnecessary interruptions in learning.

2.3.2 Negative School Environment

The National Household Education Survey (NHES), which is conducted every four years by the U.S Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), says that highest rated reason parents choose to homeschool is the negative environment of their child's public school. According to the study over 26% of respondents cited a negative environment as their most important reason, and over 90% listed it as one of their reasons for making a change to homeschooling. (NHES 2012). The survey asked: 'What environmental factors are parents concerned about?'

Most often, parents are concerned about bullying. In large part, bullying is difficult for parents to determine, because unlike a report card or a letter from a teacher, according to the

Calvert Education group (n.d.), it is difficult to know if one's child is being bullied at school or online by classmates. Incidents where students are teased, have personal belongings stolen, are subject to physical harm, or are exposed to abusive or hurtful language, can often be dismissed by teachers and go unreported by the children who experience the bullying (Calvert Education, no date).

As children get older, bullying and its effects can become even more severe, often magnified by growing social pressures in school. Bullying, according to research, can lead to lower grades and self-esteem, poor sleeping habits, and depression. (Brodie, 2010). Homeschooling is thus sought as an option to remove the child from the environment where the bullying is experienced. It must also be pointed out here, however that a fear of bullying is also cited as a reason for parents to choose homeschooling, whether or not it is ever experienced by the child. Research shows that parents, through personal anecdotes or stories they have heard from others base their decision to home educate on what can be identified as a preventative measure (Dreher, 2018).

Brodie cites author and psychologist Izzy Kalman's (2010) view on homeschooling as a response to bullying or the threat thereof, suggesting that homeschooling is not a good response to bullying. Kalman recommends that as an alternative, children should be taught social strategies to defend themselves against and ultimately eradicate bullying.

2.3.3 Social Interaction

Another suggested reason parents may decide to homeschool their children is that they want less exposure to peer pressure in the public-school system, and more tailored social interactions that support their values. (Ray, 2000).

Homeschooling parents reportedly attempt to make the world around them the classroom and maximize learning opportunities in the environment. While, it is suggested most public school students spend large amounts of time in classrooms listening to lectures (over 150 days per school year), homeschooled students have more activities that take place outside of the home (Ray, 2010). With a flexible homeschool curriculum, families are better able to go to museums, parks, and historical sites, and participate in community service activities as part of their daily learning. (Hermitt, 2012).

2.3.4 Support for Children with Learning Exceptionalities

Literature concerning the provision of home education for children with special needs is largely informal. Researchers, home school advocates, and news writers have given home schooling broad coverage (Farris, 1997; Hawkins, 1996; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998), however within this literature, there is little reference to special needs students. There is, however, a wealth of informal literature in the form of parent support group communications and personal testimonials, much of which is found on the internet where there are multiple support groups or educational resource sites for parents who choose to home educate children who have exceptional needs.

There is no known study that directly addresses parents' rationales for home educating their children with special needs, but within the literature, home school researchers and advocates have offered opinions on this matter. An informational booklet on learning disabilities published by Home Education Press (1996) featuring experiences of families who home schooled children with this diagnosis highlights parent's frustration over the lack of satisfactory support in public school. A mother featured in the study declared, 'Our family needed a break from this madness. We needed to be nourished. We needed to have time to regroup and learn to enjoy one another again … we began homeschooling' (p. 6).

This mother's statement implies severe frustration that her child's needs were not being met, but in a broader sense suggests a need to gain control not just of the child's education, but of the family's general wellbeing. Other studies demonstrate parents' focus on the child's needs alone (Duffey, 1999), where the rationale was a desire to customize the education to the needs of the child.

There are parents who feel that their children with learning and/or physical disabilities are not thriving in public schools (Ray, 2009). Their belief is that with limited resources and time, it is often difficult for many of these students to get the specialized instruction they need, to learn to their full potential

Ray (2003) claims a benefit of homeschooling is that despite the real or perceived inadequacies in most cases, and in many areas, it is still possible for homeschoolers to use any of the public school services that are available. For example, services for speech therapy, dyslexia, physical handicaps, remedial classes, art, music, and other offerings are all often an option.

2.3.5 Other Reasons

There are, of course, other reasons why parents decide to homeschool their children.

Mitchell Stevens (2009) associate professor of education and sociology at New York University and author *of Kingdom of Children: Culture and Controversy in the Home-schooling Movement*, suggests, 'Home schooling is an especially good educational strategy for children with exceptional talents.' He continues, 'Parents can organize learning around the passions and skills of their children. Likewise, for students who are in fine arts, music, and theatre, and have rehearsal, work, and performance schedules that make traditional public school impossible, the flexibility of a homeschool curriculum allows parents to better manage their rigorous schedules' (Ray 2003).

Making learning fun

Another reason to homeschool that has been well documented is that parents want to create an environment where their children enjoy learning (Ray 2003). Ray argues that in most public schools, there is a lot of pressure being placed on students. More and more, he argues, students are becoming stressed over the volume of homework, the need to memorize a lot of information, and the daily routine of being forced to do things without any input into their learning. After a while, he argues, learning ceases to be fun and engaging.

Fortune-Wood (2005), in an exploration of home education in North America observes that during the 1980s and 1990s the home education sector was growing among non-religiously motivated families. Parents with children who were having problems with state education began to withdraw them in preference for home education. Illich and Holt (1960, cited in

Fortune, 2005, p. 2). Staunch alternative education advocates became frames of reference for many of these new families who structured their home schools on the philosophical frameworks of these thinkers; all life, according to Illich, (1960, cited in Ellis, 2003, p.1) should be 'convivial':

'That is, it should be lived in joyous collaboration with friends and colleagues. Learning and work alike should be fun and fulfilling. They should be entered into as, and not differentiated from, play and recreation. A society that does not create that kind of convivial learning and living is not living up to, nor fulfilling the potential of, humanity.' (Ellis, 2003, p.1).

Attraction to home education based on the common statistical conception.

Statistics illuminated by Fortune (2005) highlight the fact that in 2005 the US Census Office estimated that three percent of all children in North America were home educated; sixty percent of whom were for non-religious reasons. Ray (2002), president of the National Home Education Research Institute arguably has estimated an annual growth rate of between seven and fifteen percent for the Home Educated children of North America.

Ray offers an additional explanation for the continual rise in home education as parents' desire to optimize educational outcomes and improve their children's' opportunities for higher education. This in part may be due to the common conception held among supporters of home education, which suggests that on average in North America, homeschool students in grades 1-4 perform one grade level higher than their public and private school counterparts (Rudner, 1999). This argument that is often presented by supporters of home

education is problematic in a number of ways. First, the statistics are not supported with information about the rate at which home educators take these test as compared to their schooled counterparts; there is no way to know if homeschoolers are taking these tests at a lower or higher rate than public or private school students (Jehan, 2014). Additionally, if broken down by demographics, according to Jehan (2014), the statistics may tell a different story. Homeschoolers, he argues, tend to come from higher earning and better educated families, which may account for the higher scores. Burns (1999), an early researcher of the claim that homeschoolers perform significantly better than their schooled counterparts, proposes that for homeschool research, the sampling methods used to compare homeschoolers to public school students may be problematic. Factors such as marital status (Burns, 1999), and parental support and commitment are often overlooked. However, because these conditions are linked to student learning, they need to be accounted for in homeschool effects research. Without appropriate controls, it is impossible to establish whether outcomes are the result of homeschooling or other factors (e.g., family income) (Belfield, 2005). Or as Lines (1995, p. 3) suggests, without controls research does not allow us to 'determine whether the same children would perform better or worse in a public classroom or in a home-schooling arrangement.'

2.4 Personalised System of Education

There a variety of formats of homeschooling, most of which are tailored to the values and dictates of the parents. Among the many philosophies exists the idea that education should be tailored to and driven by the student (Darling-Hammond,1997), as opposed to the didactic method of instruction issued from the adult. This philosophy is synonymous with

the Finnish system of education and philosophy of personalised learning experiences for students. Mary Hayes (2011), president of the Massachusetts Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (MASCD) attended the symposium on personalised learning in Finland, February 2011. She identified five key elements of this practice: First, she identified the expansion of teacher roles beyond academic instruction, which she entitled 'Teacher Roles Redefined, Expanded'. Teachers in Finland, she argues have great autonomy for all aspects of their work and in addition to being responsible for curriculum development, planning, instruction and assessment they also serve as 'tutoring teachers' or advisers on the secondary level until the students have completed their upper secondary requirements. The tutoring takes the form of academic, social and career guidance. On the primary level students are required to attend classes related to religion (Hayes distinguishes religion from faith) However with the influx of new immigrant groups in Finland, resources are limited in the area of religion since there exist requirements for students to study the religion with which they are affiliated at school. Parents have thus been enlisted to help in this area, which inadvertently strengthens relationships between families and schools.

2.4.1 Student Driven Learning

Hayes (2011), was told by secondary school teachers within the Finnish system that in their experience the strongest feature was the freedom of choice for students to; decide what subjects to take, when to take them and with whom. Hayes commented that this sentiment was confirmed by students. She does however point out that an ongoing challenge for teachers is guiding students to make 'good' choices. Students have the freedom to select

their courses *and* their teachers and are encouraged to complete their secondary school studies within three years.

Halstead's (2003) view of personalized education differs dramatically to that of the Finnish idea, which shares similar characteristics to the practices and ideals employed in home education. Home educators also describe their method as personalized, since education is said to be tailored to the individual needs of each student: where learning styles, temperament and individual strengths and weaknesses are all taken into consideration in its planning, development and execution.

2.5 Caring Educators?

It is argued that a successful and productive learner is generally one who has experienced an adequate level of caring throughout the learning process. (Howes and Richie 2002: Hamre and Pianta 2001).

History suggests that a caring component was gradually embraced, both in the UK and USA, evidenced, for example, in the move from child labour to education in (Cahan 1989), thus the road to teaching as a caring profession has been a long one. Today's classroom has evolved significantly and the emphasis on caring has continued to evolve. Educators, suggests Cahan (1989), have placed the student as the central consideration in the education process and have realized that learning is enhanced by a safe, happy and caring environment. His research into the influence of caring on student outcomes concludes with the argument that teachers' caring positively influences students' grades and behaviour.

Nell Noddings (1999), known for her exploration of the ethics of caring has made significant contributions to theory and practice in education. Noddings, in her writing views caring and relationship not only as educational goals, but also as fundamental aspects of education. Flinders (2001) suggests that Noddings's emphasis on caring was borne out of her personal experience of education and her positive encounters with caring teachers. Schooling played a central role in Noddings' life and she attributes her love of mathematics and philosophy to her admiration of the teachers who taught them.

Noddings' work suggests that care is basic in human life. She argues that all humans want to be cared for. She distinguishes 'natural caring' from other forms of caring and describes it as a 'moral attitude.' In other words, a 'longing for goodness that arises out of the experience or memory of being cared for. She views education as being central to the promotion of caring in society. She describes education as 'a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation' (p.283). This is a crucial consideration when exploring the practice of home education, since Noddings places the home as the central to the educational experience. She views the home as the primary educator and recognizes the deep contribution of the home to the development of children.

In placing the home as a fundamental figure in the education process Noddings asserts that it is essential for development, for every child to live in a home that has a least adequate material resources and attentive love.

Central to Noddings' ideology is the concept of the 'Cared-about' and the 'Cared-for'. She makes a distinction between the two types of caring in that 'caring-for' generally refers to

the face- to- face interaction, where one person directly cares for another. 'Caring-about', she argues, is more general and refers to a concern for the wider population. According to Noddings 'caring about involves a certain benign neglect', suggesting that people are disconnected from the object of such care; 'one is attentive just so far'. She argues that by giving donations to charities and other needy causes, society believes it fulfils its duty to the 'cared-about.' She feels however, that this is inadequate and that in order to improve this unfortunate situation we must first learn what it feels like to be cared for. Only then, does she believe that one can truly learn how to effectively care about. Noddings sees 'caring-about' as being the key element and the foundation of society's sense of justice. Thus, 'caring-about' she argues, 'is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations.' (Noddings 2002).

Noddings identifies four key components embedded within education from the care perspective: Modelling, which encourages educators to demonstrate what it means to care; Dialogue, which she believes is essential in order to model caring; Practice, she refers to as immersing oneself and others in the experience of caring; and Confirmation, where one engages in the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others.

In her advocacy of the importance of caring in education she provides a clear blueprint of the thinking processes of 'good' practitioners.

2.6 Regulation Surrounding Homeschooling

To return to Fortune's (2005) account supporting his theory of home education as a movement; he contends that the practice arose out of a number of legal battles over whether

creationism was to be taught in schools. Because the teaching of creationism was increasingly being criticized as being unconstitutional it led to discontentment among conservative Christians. At the same time, according to Fortune (2005), during the 1960s a counterculture of sociologists, psychologists and educational theorists including Rogers, Illich and Holt began to highlight the failings of the education system and its inability to impart democratic education. They advocated for the establishment of democratic education in alternative schools and eventually personalized education, which lead to home education, or homeschooling as it is more commonly known in North America.

In North America, there are regional variations of the levels of acceptance of home education; for instance, it has been argued in certain states including California that high numbers of home educators pose a threat to the stability of state education, whereas in Alaska the state actively encourages home education with incentives, including grants - an attempt, according to Fortune (2005) to provide an effective solution to the problems associated with educating children in remote areas.

2.6.1 North Carolina

Since North Carolina is the primary focus of the present study, it is appropriate to take a closer look at the region-specific rules and regulations surrounding home education. All educational practices in North Carolina are governed by the North Carolina Department of Education Administration (NC DOE). Home education falls under the category of the Department of Non-Public Education (DNPE).

Initially, North Carolina law defined a home school as,

‘a non-public school consisting of the children of not more than two families or households, where the parents or legal guardians or members of either household determine the scope and sequence of the academic instruction, provide academic instruction, and determine additional sources of academic instruction’.

An amendment to the law; General Statute 115C-563(a) in 2012 changed the definition of a home school, allowing for hired tutors, and student participation in group settings where they receive instruction (co-ops, 4-H classroom instruction, etc.). In these settings, students are allowed to be instructed by an expert that is not a part of the household in the established homeschool, allowing homeschool parents greater freedom to choose what is best for the education of their children.

The North Carolina DNPE is authorized by state law to receive home school notices of intent to begin initial operation and to terminate operation. Additionally, they are authorised to annually inspect the school's student attendance and nationally standardized achievement test result records. Chief administrators of home schools, usually the parent, should anticipate receiving a request to meet with a DNPE representative at a public location in close proximity to the home school while the home school is in operation. Although stated, due to limited resources, these visits are rarely accomplished and homeschools are usually left to their own devices unless a report is made regarding inappropriate practice.

Parents and guardians residing in North Carolina who home school their school-age children are required by law to adhere to the following requirements:

1. Hold at least a high school diploma or its equivalent.

2. Send to DNPE a Notice of Intent to Operate a Home School. The notice must include the name and address of the school along with the name of the school's owner and chief administrator.

3. Select a Homeschool name:

4. NOT to use the name of their curriculum in the school name.

5. Not to use A or THE at the beginning of the school name.

A Notice of Intent must be sent to the DNPE stating the intent to operate a home school. The letter must also stipulate whether the home educator wishes to operate as a religious or as a non-religious school under (Part 1 or Part 2 of Article 39) the North Carolina General Statutes.

Home educators must agree to operate the school on a regular schedule, excluding reasonable holidays and vacations, during at least nine calendar months of the year.

It is mandatory for home educators in North Carolina to maintain at the school, disease immunization and annual attendance records for each student.

It is also mandatory that a nationally standardized achievement test is administered annually to each student. There are select number of accepted tests which can be used by home educator, and the test must involve the subject areas of English grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics. Records of the test results must be retained at the home school for at least one year and made available to DNPE when requested. The first standardized test must be administered within one year of the home school start date, and then annually thereafter.

Finally, home educators are required to notify the DNPE when the school is no longer in operation.

2.7 The Perceived Advantages and Challenges Involved in the Decision to Home Educate

Controversially, research has suggested repeatedly that on standardized tests, home educated children are continually outperforming their schooled counterparts (Barwegen, Falciani, Putnam, Reamer, & Stair, 2004; Holder, 2001; Medlin, 1994; Rudner & Home School Défense, 1999, Ray, 2004). Although problematic, due to insufficient evidence to support this claim, or offer any known well-structured comparisons, this may serve as one of the key attractions to the practice of home schooling to parents that are considering their options. But there are questions that arise frequently regarding home education; what about socialization? Are home educated children contributing to the formation of a generation of social misfits? Research suggests that home educated children are generally at a low risk of social maladaptation because of the concerted effort by parents to involve them in a variety of activities that involve other children on a regular basis (Anthony, 2009).

Anthony (2009) in his concern over the socialization of home educated children explored in depth, the life of a home educating family and was able to present a clear picture of a typical home educating family's experience. He looked at motivations for choosing home education, daily schedules, curriculum choices, discipline procedures; basically, the gamut of the home education experience. Though he was able to provide a very interesting synopsis of the actual experience of the home educated he reveals very little about the journeys, qualities, and development and challenges of the home educators themselves.

2.8 Costs

There are a number of challenges that home educators face, that they may not ordinary face if their children were enrolled in traditional education settings. One major challenge is cost. Home education can generate a considerable amount of financial and emotional impaction. In almost all cases at least one parent must sacrifice their time, earning potential and financial freedom to provide home based education. The additional costs have the potential to cause additional stress on families and potentially take an emotional toll. For some families, homeschooling may bring the family together, but for others it has the potential to cause varying degrees of conflict. (Davidson Institute 2017). In most cases one parent assumes the responsibility for homeschooling, while the other parent is employed. For single parent families, the burden can be even more extensive. Homeschooling families will typically live with a budget of a single income. However, research suggests that homeschool materials and activities can often be found to meet almost any budget (Jennings, 2013). Additionally, for some parents, sacrificing such a large portion of one's personal and professional life can have a devastating long-term effect on a parent's wellbeing, leading to depression and malaise, thus not providing the satisfaction initially anticipated.

2.8.1 Inter-Familial Relationships

Serving the dual role of parent and educator can also be stressful on the relationship between the parent and child. At times the distinction between the role of parent and educator can at times be difficult to maintain. Having a mother or a father as teacher can be very difficult, particularly for younger students, who struggle with interacting with the caregiver as anything but their parent, this can be confusing and thus stressful for children

(Davidson Institute 2017). While spending quality time with a child is generally thought of as a positive interaction, the additional time interacting in the educational relationship can also be very constraining. With this arrangement, the child cannot go to school, as other children do, which can serve the function of allowing time away from parents. Likewise, parents cannot go to work as a reprieve form the ongoing demands of the home setting. It would also be difficult for students to seek advice or complain about their teacher to their parents, due to the dual role of the parent (Rud, 2013).

2.8.2 Financial Cost

The cost of home educating varies from family to family. Parents craft out what their priorities are and where major expenditures will arise. There are parents that purchase ready-made materials and opt for private tutors for some lessons. While others take the thriftier route, opting for free and discounted resources available in the community (Ensign 1997). Curricula and other materials, for example kits for science experiments, or musical instruments can be fairly costly, however, there are multiple ways to avoid unaffordable expenditure. Many homeschoolers engage in the cooperative method of homeschooling, where resources are shared, borrowed and passed around the community from year to year. Many are also adept in making use of common items found in the home or natural environment. Public resources such libraries, parks and museums are popular resources for many homeschooling parents (Ensign 1997).

Homeschoolers also have to consider the cost per student, since the size of the family will invariably determine the cost for each family. To educate a child in the traditional setting costs state and local governments and is indirectly funded through taxes (Ray 1997). The

expense to homeschool a child comes directly from the parents. Homeschooling is often an option for parents who may have considered private education for their child but were unable to afford the tuition (Ray, 1997). Thus, home schooling offers the personal attention and care they seek in the non- traditional school (Ray 1997). In his 1997 survey of homeschool expenditure Ray reports that respondents spent an average of $546 per child per year, as compared to an expenditure of $6,993 per child per year in the public sector.

2.8.3 Time and Energy

The cost of homeschooling can be expansive and with limited hours in each day, home educators have to budget their time economically.

'Homeschooling moms everywhere face the same challenges, including how to juggle homeschooling, housework, cooking, mothering, some personal time, and being a good wife all in one twenty-four-hour period' (Tamara Eaton, 14 Jan, 2016, *New Homeschooler*.)

Tamara Eaton (2016) in her article *15 Time Management Tips for Homeschooling Moms* chronicles some of the necessary steps recommended for efficient time management as a home educator. Although her article is not to be considered a manual for all home educators, it offers insights into her life as a home educator and how she tackles the challenges of time management. Among her suggestions, she includes simplifying: developing a system for maintaining the home, which includes getting the whole family involved. She recommends that home educators should not be afraid to lower their expectations of themselves. Perfection, she argues, is not a realistic goal.

Apple (2007) asserts that without outlets home educators would otherwise be isolated in the home and therefore are advised to connect with other home educators, enabling often only virtual but still intimate emotional connections.

Apple asserts that there is a risk that without careful planning, homeschool costs can steadily multiply and become overwhelming. For many, according to Ray (2003), the cost of homeschooling, whether financial or emotional, is offset by the fulfilling experience.

2.9 A Parent's Choice

Although homeschooling parents find themselves in the unique position of witnessing and cultivating their child's education, it can be disheartening for parents when the child does not share the same zeal for homeschooling (Davidson Institute, 2016). Parents may also feel guilty or inadequate when concepts are not fully understood by their children or they are having difficulty adjusting to learning in the setting. Parents have to 'want' to homeschool (p. 12). Parents typically experience a level of anxiety, which is to be expected with such a big decision. Often parents wonder whether they really possess the necessary skills to educate their child. In an effort to reduce some of the anxiety, parents often collaborate with other, often more experienced home educators in networks, online forums, or they rely on their child's natural interests to guide them.

A common concern is knowing what to teach the child. How to introduce new material, and how to assess for understanding. Research continually points to the role of support networks within the homeschool community as a source of strength and motivation. Homeschool parents are encouraged to actively seek out support as a valuable resource for ideas,

dilemmas, or just a sounding board (Davidson Institute,2016). The homeschool cooperative group (co-op), homeschool conventions, other families, in addition to experts in the field are all listed as great outlets for the challenges home educators encounter.

2.10 Additional Challenges

Other challenges may come from family members and others in the community who strongly oppose the decision. Many home educators experience strong criticism for their decision to home educate.

The Davidson Institute homeschool (2016) guide suggests that one of the chief concerns among home educators is time management and organization. The publication suggests that being organized is key for a successful and fulfilling home education experience. It is suggested that organisation facilitates efficient and effective learning but goes on to suggest that having a framework enables redirection, should educators veer from the beaten track at times. (Davidson institute 2016). It is also pointed out that even if parents opt for minimal or no direct instruction or transportation, organization is still crucial in that solid provision must be made for supervision of the homeschooled child, in addition to any documentation or assessments that may be required as dictated by regional regulations.

Advanced planning, according to the authors minimizes the concerns of too little time and allows greater flexibility and satisfaction. Homeschoolers are advised by publications, online forums and veteran home educators to take time daily and weekly to plan and update schedules ahead of time in order to structure activities, while looking ahead to plan for new

lessons and activities. Administrative tasks such as grading, record keeping, photocopying, printing or searching for resources are also strongly recommended for this time.

Organization and planning ahead is also key to boosting confidence for the home educating parent. The Davidson Institute (2016) suggests that organization allows for flexibility in pace, rigor and structure, which together allow for a smoother teaching experience.

One of the greatest challenges for the home educator is the maintenance of the relationship between the parent and the child. As mentioned earlier, the dual role of the parent as caregiver and educator has the potential to strain the parent-child relationship. It is therefore suggested (Ray, 2009) that parents schedule times for independent work for both parent and child; offering a welcomed break and a chance for independence for the growing child. Additionally, academic learning, it is argued, should not replace personal interests, hobbies and extracurricular activities. Again, this is where forward planning and organization become crucial in accommodating all areas of development (Ray, 2009).

2.11 Growth and Development as Educators

In an exploration of home education and its significance as a legitimate provider of quality education it is important to explore who these educators are, in addition to the recurring questions of why and how they educate. An examination of how they initially prepare and ultimately develop as educators would be a great starting point and would offer insight into the quality of education they provide and also offer a clue as to the reasons for their reported successful outcomes in regard to national test scores.

An exploration of how home educators begin and develop professionally can serve as a very useful tool and will be examined in greater detail. Though it should be noted that some within the home education community refute the idea that professional development in the traditional form typical of traditional educators is necessary for advancement as an educator. There are other avenues by which home educators may seek to develop themselves professionally (Bauer, 2004), including conferences, workshops, classes and seminars which are offered regularly as opportunities for certification. These events are usually hosted by experienced and or credentialed professionals who are engaged in the practice of homeschooling on some level. Additionally, through various sources of literature, including that of Bauer (2011) and Ray (2000) home educators are encouraged to educate themselves. By employing a combination of resources in addition to (and sometimes instead of) physically attending events, Bauer (2011) advocates that home educators take their own education seriously.

She encourages home educators to make an effort to continually sharpen their own reading skills in addition to making time to focus on other specific areas of concentration individually. She offers schedules of study as guidelines, for example; Science for three months, Maths for three months, foreign languages and classic literature. She advocates that home educators keep a personal learning journal, subscribe to professional/educational journals and utilise self-study resources when possible. Many home educators have a copy of *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home by Susan Bauer* (2004). This is a well-used resource within the home education community and offers strategies and homeschooling ideas, including daily schedules and curriculum ideas. There are home educators who choose to follow similar paths to that of traditional educators, and attend

classes, workshops, conferences, seminars and training programs. Conversely there are those that believe that 'experts' or teachers, as we commonly refer to them are not entirely necessary and that the world is the classroom, where learning continually takes place; lending support to the belief that home educators do not necessarily need specific training in order to be successful. Klicka (2007), in his article 'The Myth of Teacher Qualifications' refutes the idea suggested by education officials that teachers need special qualifications in order to be effective. He suggests that many teachers, who are highly qualified demonstrate very poor teaching skills. And conversely, he continues, among some of the best teachers he has encountered, many are in fact uncertified. This observation, according to Klicka (2007) lends support to the rise of the uncredentialled educator.

Klicka (2004) makes reference to similar research in an attempt to support his position, including that of Feistritzer (1990), Director of the private National Center for Education Information (USA). Feistritzer argues that she has not found a single study that provides evidence to suggest that because a teacher has gone through a particular program that he or she is a better teacher. An examination of Feistrizer's work, however, reveals that her comments are directed towards alternative routes into teaching and do not refer specifically to home educators. This is an aspect of research that is clearly limited, and Klicka (2007) in particular provided a very one-sided argument as an ardent supporter of home education.

Fortune-Woods (2002) in her radio commentary proposed an argument that focuses squarely on the right to home educate and places the child as the central figure in the learning process. She does not see the role of the parent as a fundamental one in the transference of knowledge, which goes hand in hand with her criticism of schools and the lack of necessity

for experts and teachers. Her negation of the need for teachers explicitly illuminates her attitude towards traditional classroom teaching as an unnecessary and contrived profession. Yet teacher knowledge expands far beyond the confines with which she attempts to place it. Schulman (1987) in his advocacy for teacher reform promoted an idea of teaching that emphasises comprehension and reasoning; transformation and reflection; critical areas of the process of teaching and learning that have not been considered here.

Apple (2007), like others refers to home education as a movement and contends that it is challenging the very core of what teacher education is all about. He identifies home educators as a group whose majority is comprised of conservative, religious fundamentalists whose voices are becoming increasingly more powerful. He believes these groups consider themselves to be the 'new oppressed' since their identities and cultures are ignored by schools and the media. They re-appropriate the philosophies of prominent figures like Dr. Martin Luther King in order to categorize themselves among the ‘last truly dispossessed groups’.

Many home educators, according to Apple’s research (2007), may appropriately be referred to as 'authoritarian populist parents' who are on a quest to defend their threatened culture and therefore opt for a form of schooling that equips their children with a set of skills and values that will change the world in such a way that it reflects the religious conservative values that are central to their lives.

Interestingly, Apple (2007) focuses on what he identifies as one of the major vehicles for the growth of this group - the Internet. He argues that by focusing on the social uses of the internet by this group of conservative activists he was attempting to contribute to a greater

understanding of how such 'populist conservative movements' grow and support themselves ideologically.

Another interesting observation of Apple's (2007) is the way in which the business community has become involved in the (so called) homeschooling movement. Apple (2007) references Stevens (2001) who identified the home educating community as a lucrative market, mentioning prominent figures in the home education community such as Michael Farris, founder of the Homeschool Legal Defence Association (HSLDA) who has sustained a profitable career offering legal advice, information merchandise to home school participants:

'This is a place rich with opportunity for entrepreneurs of all sorts, a place in which someone with a big idea and a willingness to work hard can...build an impressive piece of the kingdom.' (Stevens, 2001. p.5).

2.12 Homeschool Curriculum and Its Impact on Parent Educators

Apple (2007) points out the obvious fact that as with traditionally schooled children home educators are faced with the realities of their children's temperaments, interests, personalities and learning styles. They regularly have to deal with boredom and changing interests. Without a background in education and usually no formal training parents are forced to seek out alternative sources of help, support and advice. Apple argues that in addition to chat rooms, forums, discussion boards and even blogs as resources, prayers and suggestions for recalcitrant children are all available and provide a way of dealing with the educational and emotional labour that goes hand in hand with home education.

Many parents select home education because they see it as an opportunity to select a single, or as many pedagogies as suits their needs and desires (Davis 1999). The choice may be structured or unstructured, religious based or otherwise. Davis suggest that parents who remove their children from formal education, usually adopt a less formal method of instruction, where schedules and timetables are not rigid. He, also states that parents who remove their children from formal education as a result of negative school experiences, tend to gravitate towards a more structured approach.

Apple (2007) views technology as a substitute for formal teacher education. He concurs with Fortune's perception of the attitude of home educators in his suggestion that the common mode of thought of home educators is, ‘We don't need experts.’ (Apple, 2007, p. 125). He continues, ‘With hard work and creative searching we can engage in serious and disciplined education of ourselves and by ourselves.’ (Apple, 2007, p. 125).

Thus, suggesting that home educators do not see the need for external training and education, believing that they are fully equipped to prepare themselves for the task at hand. Not only are materials available through technological gateways but also a huge level of support exists locally, nationally and globally: he views the internet as the prominent tool in the home education community for marketing, movement building, emotional support and intellectual reinforcement.

To that end, the question may be asked what do home educators teach and how are resources selected?

There are many curriculum options available to homeschoolers today. Parents have the option to choose packaged curriculums, where a template similar to that of the traditional school curriculum is followed. They may subscribe to online schools, where little teaching is done by the parent and the child becomes a member of a virtual classroom, with a virtual teacher. Parents may choose a multifaceted approach where some classes may be taken online, some are taught in the home, and others are taught at cooperative forums or other locations in the community. Based on the parent's budget, it is possible also to 'mix and match textbooks and courses from multiple providers, in order to meet the academic needs and interests of the student. There are also resources that target specific areas of study, for example, the Stanford Online High School for literature, as its name suggests, provides a platform for extensive literature study. 'The Art of Problem Solving, targets the area of Maths; while Rosetta Stone software provides one of the greatest international sources for online language learning. Many universities offer online courses, which many home educators select for their children; The Open University, MIT, Yale University, to mention but a few.

As a useful guideline, many parents find it necessary to determine their child's academic level by referencing their state's academic benchmarks. Parents are able to access these benchmarks through their local and state Department of Education websites. Parents may also register their child for achievement tests such as the widely used SAT or ACT, both of which are used in the public sector as determinants of college readiness and placement.

Parents are often concerned as to whether they are truly meeting their child's academic needs, since children advance at differing speeds and complexities. This becomes even more

of a challenge when multiple children are being homeschooled. Particular programs may only work for a while for some home educators and their children, then prove to be ineffective in advancing the child's academic repertoire after a while. Parents are encouraged to try different methods, strategies and programs to find the appropriate fit.

Thomas (1998) found that home educators are constantly pioneering new educational approaches, in attempt to find a comfortable fit. He suggests that many parents opt for less formal approaches to home education, even if initially they imitated something closer to a school type structure. He suggests that parents opt for homeschooling for a variety of reasons, but one of the most fundamental is the flexibility of the homeschool approach. When children learn in schools, he contends, it is the curriculum that determines what is taught and thus learnt. Learning is sequenced and structured in a logical way. In the homeschool environment, he contends, increasingly, children learn on a more informal basis and are thus able to determine what is learnt.

Fortune-Wood (2005), in a UK study also found that the overwhelming majority of participants of his 2005 study favoured flexible, autonomous and often project based arrangements. He found that it was not uncommon for parents to mix a variety of approaches, producing a unique methodology suited to the individual family circumstances.

Fortune-Wood (2000) was able to gain some interesting insight into the methods adopted by homeschoolers in the UK. Out of a sample of 277 home educators, he found that two percent of them followed the national curriculum closely and thirty-nine percent did not follow the national curriculum at all, the remainder engaged in a combination of the two options.

His study also identified the fact that two thirds of his sample of 277 participants did not follow a set schedule, while the remaining third only followed one loosely. It is important to mention, however, that Fortune-Wood's research was situated in the UK and thus not necessarily representative of other regions. The author himself notes that responses from the participants within his sample vary quite radically from many other researched groups and, given the diversity of homeschoolers discussed above, this calls for more studies into the practices and experiences of homeschoolers. In Fortune-Woods study, over half of families who home educated for religious reasons, did so in a structured way. This is consistent with the findings of Burke (2009) whose identified a high population of home educators who engaged for religious reason, and reportedly adopted a higher level of structure and less flexibility.

2.12.1 Technology

Interestingly, Fortune-Wood's (2005) study points out that almost of quarter of participants made no mention of using a computer. He argues that for some, this may have been a matter of choice, but for others on low incomes, it was related to the cost. Again, it is important to mention that this statistic may very well be region or time related, since Burke's research (2009) identified a heavy reliance on computer technology and the internet. Her study found that the internet gave parents the flexibility to source information from a variety of online resources, and globally. Consistent with Burke's study, Basham (2007) found a heavy reliance by home educators on the internet. In fact, it is estimated that 93-94 % of home educators utilize the internet as an integral component of their home education. The internet, according to Basham, enables parents to tailor the educational needs of each family

member, providing a wealth of educational resources, while allowing parent educators to network with other home educators.

Burke (2009), in reference to Basham's study reports that in Canada, technology is provided free of charge to homeschoolers in certain states. While in British Columbia home educating families used to receive a government issued $4,000 package, comprising of a computer, CD Rom, Internet access and relevant software. (Basham 2001 p10, in Burke 2016, p 51). More recent details are not available.

2.12.2 Religious Studies

Although many previous studies have found a predominance of Christians engaging in home education (Rudner, 1998, Carper, 2000), it is understood that home education is no longer confined to Christian groups. Welner and Welner (1998) continue the conversation of Muslims as a growing sub group within the sphere of home education. El-Sawah (2006) suggests that this increasing number of Muslims entering the home education sector, is due largely to their dissatisfaction with 'the state schooling system'. El-Sawah refers to the Islamic Home Schooling Advisory Network (IHSAN), which serves as an advisory board to home educating Muslim families in the UK and allows them to make contact for help and advice. Muslim families, according to El-Sawah, feel that home educating allows them to avoid discrepancies with the moral teaching in schools, teachings which contradict their parental and religious beliefs. Muslim parents also expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum of the traditional school setting, which they feel teaches a white/Christian world view.

Similarly, many Christian families who adopt the practice of home education, do so primarily because they feel their beliefs may be compromised by the traditional school system. An ongoing debate that has existed among Christian adherents is the Creationist discourse, which posits that God created the Earth and all living organisms. In 1987 the teaching of creationism was outlawed in schools, when the Supreme Court determined that the use of religious argument, material, and paraphernalia in science was unconstitutional. For this reason, Christian home educators felt that homeschooling would give them the freedom to seek out teaching materials which reflected their beliefs (Goldberg 2005).

Like most home educators, Christian home educators are able to access a vast amount of resources that suit their purpose and ideology, often, however at a cost. For example, there is a popular curriculum series among home educators called Teaching Textbooks™ (2006). This series is an online curriculum that teaches maths to children from kindergarten age to twelfth grade (the equivalent of school leaving age in the UK). Similarly, another popular online publication is Switched on Schoolhouse (2008) In addition to reflecting the curriculum of the US national curriculum, it also offers a Bible Study component as an optional subject. Similarly, The Accelerated Education Programme (Published by Lighthouse Christian Academy 2016) is also another popular option among Christian homeschooling families. In addition to imparting family religious values, each method allows educators to choose their style of instruction. The majority of the packaged curriculums require a model of teacher to student direct instruction for the early years. However, as students get older, the move is typically towards independent study, where the parent facilitates in the role of a tutor and guide, rather than direct instructor.

2.13 Ideologies

Van Galen (1988) identified two distinct groups of home educators, home educating for ideologically different reasons: 'Ideologues' and 'Pedagogues.' Ideologues, he identified as home educators who chose this path because they wanted their children to learn the fundamental principles of their religion. Ideologues, he suggests hold conservative political and social perspectives, which place the family at the centre of society and advocates individual freedoms. Ideologues, he argues, who are particularly concerned with teaching specific knowledge and core values tend to follow a similar patter to traditional schools. Their typical days are structured similarly to the average school day and there is a heavy reliance on commercially produced textbooks and resources. Pedagogues; although these homeschoolers have broken free from the traditional school setting, argues Van Galen, they have not separated from the formal ideology of formal education. Van Galen suggests they are home educators who home educate primarily for pedagogical reasons. These families advocate spontaneity and creativity, while rejecting the formal structure of traditional schooling.

2.14 Conclusion

Apple (2007) sees the growth of the homeschool movement as a major contribution to the loss of legitimacy of a dominant institution - traditional schools. He argues that home education is de-traditionalizing society and yet re-traditionalizing it in other aspects. He argues that home education produces the desired effect of 'Godly technologies, Godly schooling and Godly identities' for religious citizens who have opted for home education and questions the cost of such ideologies on the wider society who have no interest in

maintaining such values. In his reference to 'Godly values' Apple appears to be referring primarily to the authors of the predominant sources of research available about the home education community.

For others, including the Muslim community, Christian groups or the so-called pedagogues, homeschool affords the opportunity for parents to educate their children within the framework of a system tailored specifically to the needs of their family.

2.14.1 Home Education in This Study

Home education is not limited to the anti-establishment, fundamentalist religious groups or to those in rural communities (Sousa, 2007). Today there is little evidence to suggest that the choice to home educate is situated merely in religious or political dissatisfaction. Neither is there enough evidence to suggest that it is the fulfilment of a desire to join a grassroots movement (Apple 2002). Is it possible then, that many home educators choose to educate thus, based on little more than a sincere desire to provide an education deemed appropriate for their child - tailored to his or her specific needs? The review of the literature identifies research that offers many reasons parents may choose homeschooling but does not explain why they do so in any way that makes the choice predictable. The studies above do show, however, that there is a shortage of information about groups of homeschoolers and their specific experiences in different locations.

The current study's focus is situated in the lived experience of the home educator. Lafayette, North Carolina has a home education population of approximately 13.5 % of the school aged children in the region. It is therefore selected as an optimal area for research of this

nature. Lafayette is also home to a US military base. It is believed that the region will serve as a useful source of information, while answering questions about how parents as educators experience the teaching process and how the decision to home educate is made. –. I will probe for the prevalence of a certain type of home educator – whether there is a predominance of a common characteristic among home educators in the region. Finally, I will examine the perceived driving forces behind home education, and any support systems in place within the select and wider community, while also taking a closer look at fundamental issues that initiate the decision to home educate.

This research is of particular importance because home education is an ever-increasing trend and is thus responsible for the education of a significant number of children. To that end it is of great relevance and efforts should be made to ensure that its efficacy as a method of instruction is optimized. The experience of the home educators themselves is the primary focus, since little research has been done in this area. A greater insight into the lived experience of the educator will offer valuable information for future practice in this method of instruction, while informing other institutions of education on how they can support and possibly partner with home educators.

The increase in partnerships between home educators and schools may also illustrate the desire of parents to provide a quality education for their children without disdain for traditional schools. Lines (2000) conducted research on programs that forge relationships between public school professionals and home educating parents, opening their doors to share resources with both parents and children, such as the professional services of teachers. ‘These are programs’ she argues, ‘that accept parents as the child's primary teacher.’ This

research provides an initial understanding of such programs but admits that further research into the efficacy of such programs is needed (Lines, 2000). Additionally, Lines admits that the success of such programs is contingent on the level of interest of homeschooling families in such programs, funding, and a responsive faculty.

2.14.2 What is Lacking in Research?

So far in this chapter I have examined the fundamental properties of home education. I have reviewed literature that fully supports home education and others that oppose it. I have attempted to understand the significance, complexities and contributions of home education as a growing and increasingly accepted form of educational instruction. The validity of knowledge is also questioned, contingent predominantly on its source.

I identify significant gaps in research and the fact that there remain many unanswered questions including how home educators prepare themselves academically for the task of homeschooling; how home educators are supported academically, emotionally and financially. I also identify the lack of studies of home education practices and, in particular, on the experiences of home educators.

The purpose of this research is to examine the lived experience of the home educator. To explore practices of individual home educators; how they prepare and develop themselves as educators, and how they sustain their practice. Key elements such as the community, mentorship, educator support and reciprocity which form the foundation of many home school experiences will be examined while addressing the main research questions:

Question 1. How do parents describe their experience of homeschooling?

Question 2. How is the decision made to homeschool?

Question 3. What support systems do these homeschoolers experience?

The aim of my study is to gain insight based largely on the personal experiences of the practitioners of home education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes methods adopted to address the research questions, the planning and implementation of the research design and data collection, and then considers the justification of this method. The initial section of this chapter will examine the research design which includes a description of the research paradigm and an overview of phenomenology, with its relevance to this study. It provides a synopsis of the participants and a discussion of the development of a series of interviews with 12 home educating parents, accompanied by visual collages constructed within the context of the interview. The research process will be examined, with a focus on how interviews were conducted, and visual collages approached.

The sections that follow will cover the research context and setting and how participants were selected. A brief biographical sketch of each participant is presented for the purpose gaining additional information about participants. Finally, data collection is explained, including a review of the semi-structured interview question items, ethical considerations for research of this nature, concluding with data analysis. The chapter ends with a summary of the details of the chapter. The reader is thus oriented to a discussion of the findings in the subsequent chapter. The research questions for this study were:

Question 1. How do parents describe their experience of homeschooling?

Question 2. How is the decision made to homeschool?

Question 3. What support systems do these homeschoolers experience?

I utilized a qualitative approach within the realm of phenomenological research methods to explore the unique experiences of participants. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) described phenomenology as a common qualitative research approach to explore the experiences of an activity or concept from the perspective of a particular group. Furthermore, Randles (2012) asserts that phenomenology allows for rich descriptions and a way of looking at perceptions of identity, and of an individual's experiences, in which quantifiable assessments are not easily made.

I conducted a small pilot study of 3 semi structured interviews. Yin (1994) advocates the use of pilot studies, I incorporated this strategy within my research. The implementation of the pilot exercise proved to be essential in three ways. (1) Finding issues and barriers related to recruiting potential participants, (2) estimating how much time and resources would be necessary to complete the larger version and (3) modifying interview questions.

1) Finding issues and barriers related to recruiting potential participants.

Participants were selected from the same homeschool support group, to that end, there was little variability between participants since they shared many philosophical and cultural similarities. It was a requirement that members of the GRACE homeschool group held and supported Christian values. I felt that this criterion limited the potential scope and breadth of the study and added an element of homogeneity to the study. My aim was to establish as diverse a sample as possible. Because I handpicked the participants for the pilot study, I felt that snowball sampling for the main study would garner a more diverse group of participants. The friend that recruited the initial participant for the main study is involved

with multiple homeschool networks, forums and arenas, which gave me access to a wider variety of homeschoolers.

2) Estimating how much time and resources would be necessary to complete the main study:

I realised that for home educators time is very valuable. To that end, I made a conscious effort to be respectful of their time constraints and arrange interviews at times that would be most convenient to them. The majority of participants were between activities when we met for interviews.

As far as resources, I increased the number of artistic implements. For the pilot study, participants were only required to write comments next to a stick figure which represented them in their environment. The addition of paper, glue, scissors, magazines, and coloured markers allowed for more elaborate expression.

(3) Modifying interview questions:

This practice clarified the scope of the research and provided support to the researcher-made instruments, the interview questions. The goal of the pilot study was to gather insight into the planned question format and procedures to help me refine my final interview protocol before conducting interviews with my study participants. From the pilot study, I determined that the interview questions worked well but additional questions would be useful in exploring home educator' experiences. As such, adjustments were made to the interview questions but not the interview format for the research study. It was determined that the research would be enriched by adding questions about how the decision to homeschool was

made. This would add richness to the descriptions of the processes experienced from the onset of the idea to its execution.

Experiences of homeschooling shared by pilot participants were not used in the data analysis component of this study. I conducted a wider range of interviews with 12 participants, guided by the insights from the pilot study.

Table 1 illustrates the transition from pilot to main study and the changes that were made as a result of the guidance of the pilot study.

Table 3.1. Main study progression from the pilot study.

	Number of Participants	**Participant Selection**	**Time/Resources.**	**Semi-structured interview questions.**
Pilot Study	3	Researcher individually selected participants from a specific homeschool support group (GRACE).	Interviews conducted within 45 minutes, with a basic visual collage.	12 semi-structured interview questions were asked, regarding the homeschooling process.
Main Study	!2	Snowball sampling used to acquire a wider, more eclectic sample.	Interviews lasted at least one hour, with resources provided for more elaborate visual collages.	Two additional questions were added to the original questions, regarding how the decision to homeschool was made.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 The Research Paradigm

A good research-undertaking starts with the selection of the topic, problem or area of interest, as well as the paradigm (Creswell, 1994; Mason, 1996). Stanage (1987) traced 'paradigm' back to its Greek and Latin origins (paradeigma and paradigma respectively) meaning pattern, model or example. A paradigm is a model to follow according to which design actions are taken. Thus, a paradigm is an action of submitting to a view (Stanage, 1987). This view is supported by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 157) who define a research paradigm as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action'. The researcher's epistemology according to Holloway (1997), Mason (1996) and Creswell (1994) is literally his or her theory of knowledge, which guides the way in which the social phenomena will be studied. Qualitative research provides an in-depth, robust look at a phenomenon to give clarity and describe the problem (Ary et al., 2006). The present study is exploratory in nature. I mainly used the social constructivism/interpretivism paradigm to interpret the meaning that the home educators give to their lived experience. As researcher, I took on the role of an interpreter, I sought to understand and explain the lived experience of the home educator through the reality that the participants give to that phenomenon. My epistemological position regarding the study I undertook can be formulated as follows: a) data are contained within the perspectives of people that are involved in homeschooling their children; and b) because of this I engaged with the participants in collecting the data.

3.1.2 Phenomenology

'Phenomenology tries to show how our words, concepts, and theories inevitably shape and give structure to our experiences as we live them' (Van Manen, 2014, p. 58). Qualitative studies conducted with a phenomenological approach allow for an understanding of the lived experiences of participants as they describe and interpret them.

Randles (2012) and Gay et al. (2012) further describe phenomenology as a common qualitative research approach which allows for rich descriptions and a way of looking at perceptions of identity of the individual experiences from a particular group of participants' perspectives, in which quantifiable assessments are not easily made.

I explored the phenomenon of home educators' lived experiences by conducting individual semi-structured interviews with guide questions, intended to solicit descriptions of valuable experiences. I inquired further for rich descriptions by engaging in conversation with participants based on their responses. Collected data were coded for themes in participant responses which informed an identifiable essence of participant experiences in homeschooling. Although generalizability is not the objective in phenomenological studies, the 'essences of the experiences' of research participants can be acknowledged to inform specific practices that can potentially be transferred to others in similar situations (Randles, 2012).

Phenomenological studies aim to convey results and applicability of a single phenomenon to those impacted by the phenomenon. Randles (2012) suggests that data gathered in a phenomenological study through interviews, conversations, discussions, observations, focus

group meetings, and journaling are analysed by finding common themes among data sets and individual responses. Randles (2012) also notes that qualitative research models allow for rich explanations of the lived experiences of participants, and furthermore asserts that their involvement in qualitative research contributes to genuine, relevant knowledge.

Also, I was concerned with patterns that emerged from the data, to provide potential insights into homeschooling as a practice. Epistemologically, I viewed home educating parents as both the key to understanding the phenomenon and the phenomenon itself. The experience that I brought to this research includes engaging as a homeschool parent for 5 years and serving on a homeschool committee during that time, where home educating parents were my peers.

I attempted to reflect the lived experience of home educators by using rich text and quotes, and carefully analysing visual collages, transcript data, semi-structured interview responses, and conducting member checks. This type of analysis helped counteract any personal bias. Additionally, the literature review process served to focus my thoughts into this research topic and hone my skills as a researcher.

3.2 Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry is described as ‘an interactive process between the researcher and the participants’. (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). This type of inquiry ‘uses people's words and observable behaviour as the primary data’. (p.9). The qualitative methods adopted for this investigation were the semi-structured interview and visual collage methodologies.

3.2.1 Interview Methodology

The semi-structured interview was chosen as the main research method for this study. The pilot study of 3 participants served to guide the direction of the substantive study involving 12 home educating parents situated in Lafayette, North Carolina. The semi-structured interviews were conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, employing a series of open-ended questions. Responses, where relevant were accompanied by follow-up, why or how questions from me. This method of interviewing is time consuming since it is necessary to prepare for the interviews, set up the interviews, conduct the interviews, and analyse the interview transcripts. Although time-consuming and labour intensive, this interview technique was chosen due to its utility in probing the thoughts of each participant. Because participants are encouraged to speak freely, there is great potential for the direction of the interview to veer into uncharted territory with unknown but potentially significant issues (Galletta, 2013). This technique also allows the interviewer to spot useful leads and pursue them.

Additionally, for the purpose of gaining insight into prevalence and regulatory protocols in the region, a representative of the North Carolina Department of Non-Public (NCDNP) education was scheduled to be interviewed, but this interview was subsequently denied as the representative reported a lack of available time, and referred me to the NCDNP website for general information on homeschool policy in the region.

3.2.2 Visual Collage

Visual collage was chosen as an additional research method because of its ability to provide additional information that may be omitted in the spoken interview.

'Collage portraits provide the opportunity to include marginalized voices and encourage a range of linguistic and non-linguistic representations to articulate authentic lived experiences'. (Gerstenblatt, 2013. p. 295).

For the present study, the visual collage is used as a method of generating qualitative data and creating a representation of the lived experiences of individual home educators in the area of LaFayette, North Carolina. The etymology of the term 'Collage' can be traced to the French word 'collé' - which means glued. This concept was introduced as a technique for cubist modern art pioneers Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in the early 20th century. The use of the visual collage here, was to add to the data provided by the semi-structured interview, offering information that may not have been explicit, or even offered in the spoken form. In other words, 'to represent stories and voices traditionally silenced by textual and linguistic data collection and analysis methods (Knowles & Cole, 2008, as cited in Gerstenblatt, 2013. p 295) This was a particularly advantageous method, since it allowed me as researcher to both observe the compilation of the collage making process, as well as acquire the finished product, both of which can be used as valuable pieces of data. As suggested by Phillips & Bellinger, (2011), it was my belief that the visual collage would support and enliven the analysis of interview data, thus producing new knowledge and interpretation. Additionally, the construction of the visual collage involves piecing together fragments to form a whole, serving the purpose of supporting my process of qualitative

analysis that connects various forms of data within this study, including interview transcripts, research memos, and reflective notes.

An added advantage of the visual collage is that it is presented as a fun activity, I believed therefore that it had the potential to help participants feel a little more at ease in what might otherwise have been an intimidating process by some participants. The disadvantage, however, is that the activity in itself has the potential to dispirit the participant if he or she is not comfortable with artistic presentation. To combat this, participants were reassured that artistic skills were not a necessity.

3.3 Qualitative Assumptions

Certain assumptions were made at the outset of this investigation: (a) That participants have a basic education, or the equivalent of at least a U.S twelfth grade education (equivalent to the successful completion of senior school in the U.K). (b) That participants at times may display contradictions in their accounts and experiences.

My role in the investigation was researcher, however as a fellow home educator my position had the potential to reduce the distance between researcher and participant (Creswell, 2007.). 'To truly understand someone else's experience, one must enter the life world of the person being observed' (Van Manen, 2007, p.69). For me this was easy to do as an experienced home educator.

The research questions and interview questions were formed to explore the contextual framework of home education in the region of LaFayette. As far as possible the attempt was made to interview home educators from a variety of cultural and backgrounds, in order to

make the sample as representative as possible. It was important to guard against bias when conducting interviews; I acknowledged my personal bias towards the advantages of homeschooling, however, by carefully analysing the transcript data, member checking, and by using rich text and quotes I was able to counteract any personal and professional bias. I endeavoured to minimize bias throughout the study by remaining aware and focused on sources of my own bias.

Mutual interest and experience were a valuable asset which encouraged active collaboration and allowed the conversation to flow freely; opening up opportunities for in-depth discussions, revealing unique experiences and realities.

3.4 Research Context and Setting

The interviews were conducted in the LaFayette area of North Carolina, USA. The participants all reside in the area of LaFayette, which spans a wide geographical area of North Carolina. The population of LaFayette is currently estimated at 205, 687 (2011) and is ranked as one of the largest municipalities in North Carolina.

The school district headquarters are located in LaFayette, NC; operating fifty-one elementary (the equivalent of UK primary) schools, sixteen middle schools (intermediate), ten high schools and nine alternative and specialty schools; making LaFayette the fourth largest school system in the state of North Carolina and the seventy-eighth largest in the country. The number of Homeschools operated in the area is 1,393 and a total of 47,977 for the entire state (North Carolina Department of Non-Public Education, 2011).

For both the pilot study and the follow-up study, interviews were held in natural and mutually agreed upon locations; either in participants' homes or local venues. All of the participants reside in their own homes with at least four bedrooms and two bathrooms.

3.5 Research Participants

3.5.1 Pilot Study Participants

The participants included three home educating parents. Each interviewed participant was female, and all have been home educating for at least five years.

Ages ranged from 30 – 55. All reside within the same geographical location, and within 25 miles of each other. All participants of the pilot study attended the GRACE homeschool support group at the time of the study. Two of the pilot study participants were Caucasian, one was African American.

3.5.2 Main Study Participants

Participants included twelve home educating parents (including one parent representative – an adult sibling). Of the twelve, eleven were female. All respondents have been home educating for at least one year. Ages ranged from 25 -55. All participants reside within the same geographic location, and within 25 miles of each other. Participants engaged in varying degrees of belonging to support groups; from no interaction to rigorous interaction.

All participants were required to read and sign a participant consent form prior to the commencement of the interview (See Appendix A).

Participants came from varied backgrounds and experiences. Only one was home educated herself as a child; other participants arrived at the decision to home educate for a variety of reasons and personal experiences. Participants expressed a commitment to home education and shared a common goal to be the primary provider of education to their children.

3.5.3 Participant Selection

Through a personal friend I introduced the idea of my research to homeschooling parents. That friend invited several home educators by word of mouth, illustrating the snowball sampling technique recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (2007). 12 participants came from the initial personal invitation from that friend and were instructed to contact me by telephone or text message to express their interest. With snowball sampling, typically one or two participants are able to garner the interest of others. According to Bogden and Biklen (2007), once the ball is rolling, it picks up momentum along the way and becomes larger and larger, thus it snowballs. The specific type of snowball sampling used in this study is Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, where typically, the first subject recruited to the sample group provides one or multiple referrals. Each new referral may in turn refer additional participants until the sufficient number of the pre-specified sample size has been met. For this study, the pre-specified sample size was 12 participants. There are specific advantages to this method of sampling: it is a no-probability method of sampling that is particularly useful for soliciting participants that would be difficult to obtain otherwise. Ethically, it is important that confidentiality is observed, so participants are advised not to identify potential participants, but rather are asked to encourage them to come forward if they are interested, which was the case for each participant in this study.

This technique is not, however, without its drawbacks. The study may not have resulted in a representative sample of all home educators, but snowball sampling provided a useful method for qualitative research because of the difficulty finding and reaching out to willing subjects. For this study, participants of the snowball sample shared the fundamental characteristics of families who choose to homeschool their children.

This study sought to recruit 12 home educating families in order to interview the primary educator. Selection sample was based on specific criteria, which included:

(a) That participants were full time home educators – where the majority of instruction was home based and initiated by the parent;

(b) That participants agreed to participate in the study:

(c) That participants have been home educating for at least one year.

(d) That participants have a basic education - the equivalent of at least a U.S twelfth grade education (equivalent to the successful completion of senior school in the U.K).

3.6 Participant Descriptions

Table 3.2 Pilot study participant descriptions

Participant	Gender	Age Group	Marital status	# Currently Homeschooling	Total # Homeschooled	Curriculum	Structure
TC	F	50-55	S	2	2 of 6	Computer Based	Structured
AG	F	30-35	M	3	3 of 3	Computer Based	Structured
JC	F	50-55	M	3	8 of 8	Computer and Tutor Based	Structured

Table 3.3 Main study participant descriptions

Participant	Gender	Age group	Marital status	# Currently HS	# Total HS	Curriculum	Structure
1. ES	F	30-35	M	1	2 of 2	None	Loose
2. SD	F	35-40	M	2	4 of 4	Computer based/Online	Structured
3. WL	F	35-40	M	1	1 of 1	Tutor Based.	Structured
4. KL	F	30-35	M	5	5 of 6	Eclectic	Structured
5. CV	F	35-40	M	3	3 of 3	Eclectic	Loose
6. GC	M	45-50	D	4	4 of 4	Textbook based.	Structured.
7. NP	F	35-40	M	2	2 of 2	Computer based/Online	Structured
8. MU	F	40-45	S	1	1 of 1	None/Unschooler	Loose
9. Penelope	F	35-40	D	2	3 of 3	Tutor based.	Loose
10. RAK	F	50-55	M	1	1 of 1	Textbook & External Tutor based.	Structured
11. TA	F	25-30	*S	1	4 of 4	Eclectic	Structured
12. DL	F	30-35	D	1	1 of 1	Computer based/online	Structured

Participants we all invited to create their own pseudonyms:

RAKA is a married mother of one child whom she is currently homeschooling. She is the wife of a military service member and has a university degree. RAKA has no prior teaching experience and has been homeschooling for approximately ten years.

Penelope is a mother of three. She is divorced and currently homeschools the youngest two of her three sons. Penelope has a university degree and has some teaching experience. She has been homeschooling for approximately 10 years.

SD is a married mother of four. She is currently homeschooling her youngest two daughters but has educated all four of her children to the point of high school graduation. SD has no

prior teaching experience but is currently enrolled in a regional education program. SD has been home educating for approximately 11 years.

WL is a married mother, home schooling her only child. WL has a background in teaching and is university educated. She has been homeschooling for approximately five years.

KL is a married mother of six children, currently homeschooling the youngest five children. KL has a university education and has a military background, meaning that her spouse is a military service member. She has no prior teaching experience. KL has been home educating for approximately eight years.

CV is a married mother of three, homeschooling all three of her children at the time of the study. She is university educated and also has a military background. CV does not have prior teaching experience. She has been homeschooling for approximately five years.

DL is a divorced mother, homeschooling her only child. She does not have prior teaching experience, and reports a lack of education beyond high school, due to family commitments. DL has been homeschooling for one year.

GC is a male participant who is homeschooling four children. He reports not having a university education when he embarked on his homeschooling endeavour, but says that he educated himself to Bachelor's level while homeschooling his children. GC has been homeschooling for seven years.

TA is an older sister who at the time of the study was home educating her younger brother. TA is single without children of her own. She has no prior teaching experience. She has been homeschooling for approximately one year.

ES is mother of four, currently homeschooling her youngest son. Prior to homeschooling her youngest, she also homeschooled her older son for a short period before placing him back into the school system. ES is university educated, with no prior teaching experience. Because ES' child has additional educational needs, she is supported full time by a therapist who addresses his additional needs. She has been homeschooling for approximately eight years.

NP is a married mother homeschooling her two children. She has a background in education and has been homeschooling for 10 years.

MU is a homeschooling mother, educating her only child. She has a university education but does not have a background in teaching. MU describes herself as a single parent and has never been married. She has been homeschooling for three years.

The idea to select three participants for the pilot study was based loosely on the notion prescribed by Creswell (2007) who suggests that four or five cases is an appropriate number for a single study. The case study reference is used here only as a broad guide to establish a sample size. It was deemed necessary once the pilot study was completed to expand the sample in order to gain a greater perspective of the lived experience, by incorporating a larger variety of participants.

By mapping the journeys of the participants, I aimed to identify support mechanisms, pedagogic practices and other potentially influencing factors that have been instrumental in allowing them to pursue the path of home education. In addition to the participants accounts the study contained additional data sources form the local education authority for the purpose of gaining an in-depth insight.

3.7 Bias

My relationships with the participants ranged from unfamiliar, somewhat familiar, to well acquainted. As a former home educator, and someone that still has significant connections to the homeschool community, it is necessary to make explicit my potential for bias. My position as an insider is thus incongruent with the positivist approach where researchers are objective and strive to minimise sources of bias wherever they can. Research is true, researchers exist apart from their data, and the best research is quantitative (Charmaz, 2006).

Acknowledgement of researcher bias is necessary for trustworthiness (Maxwell, 2005). Personal, professional, and practical interests of the researcher need to be identified to keep integrity within the project design and analysis. Honest evaluation of the situation to self can reduce bias, protecting the validity of the study. I continually acknowledged my personal and professional bias through journaling.

I gave a voice to the participating home educators by using rich text and quotes and carefully analysing the transcript data. This type of analysis helped counteract any personal

biases I may have had. Additionally, the literature review process served to focus my thoughts onto this research topic.

The nature of this study allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life (Yin, 2009, p.4). Having been personally involved in the crucial role of gathering and interpreting data I was able to uncover a series of tales and experiences, including my own as both researcher and experienced home educator. I accept the notion that an author can never be truly objective, nor can one suggest that the values, studies, events, people, places, and situations are absolute, concretely factual, or objectively representative. Thus, rather than attempt to remove myself from the study and imply that my assumptions and interpretations from the study are correct and irrefutable, I have made my presence in the entire study explicit. My role as researcher was to record and respond to occurrences and to evoke emotions and thoughts rather than to attempt to define a particular situation or event.

Bias has the ability to serve both a positive and negative function. Explicit in this study, which can be seen as a positive aspect of bias, is the fact that it actually exists. It is difficult, if not impossible to remove bias from the data collection and analysis stages of qualitative research, this study being no exception; it thus becomes necessary to account for it rather than to remove it or to deny its existence. It is necessary for bias to be controlled however, because if uncontrolled there is a great risk that the quality of the research will be severely undermined. Results could be distorted, and findings thus affected.

Bias in the present study was addressed by refraining from asking biased questions and by asking for clarification when necessary. Throughout the research I made a concerted effort

to maintain objectivity; I was aware that feelings, attitudes, and personality can distort analysis and interpretation. Triangulation and member checking play an important role in reducing bias for the present study.

3.8 Data Collection

Data were drawn from multiple sources: One-on-one semi-structured interviews, visual collages, and local education authority statistical resources. Qualitative researchers rely rather heavily on in-depth interviewing (Kahn and Cannel, 1957). Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that interviews have the capacity to extract large amounts of information in a relatively short period of time. The interviews in the present study yielded a large amount of information as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016). The interview protocol sought descriptions of the practice of home education as experienced by participants. A phenomenological research methodology was chosen because, according to Giorgi (2012), 'phenomenology wants to understand how phenomena present themselves to consciousness and the elucidation of this process is a descriptive task' (p. 6). The purpose of the interview is to understand and explain how the participants make meaning out of their experiences (Maxwell, 2005). In this study, the phenomenon investigated with the interview was the meaning that educators gave to their own experience as educators.

Upon making arrangements for the interviews I allowed participants to be instrumental in choosing the location. Creswell (2007) recommends suggesting a quiet location – preferably free from distraction but appropriate for accommodating audio and/or videotaping. Additionally, he suggests that interviewers attempt to remain within the specified time limit when possible. Each interview lasted no more than one hour. The interview protocol

consisted of semi-structured, open ended questions (Appendix B), giving the participants the opportunity to elaborate on the details of their home education stories. A review of the literature helped me define the problems to be studied and construct the interview questions (McCracken, 1998). I aimed to synthesize the literature findings with the personal experiences of participants and the focus of the study. As McKracken (1998) suggests, my interview questions began with biographical questions, followed by question areas specific to the topic. Participants were advised that questions were grouped by categories. Each category would be briefly explained before the presentation of the questions. Consistent with the research questions it was important to structure questions in a way that would adequately address the topic of how the home education experience is lived. To that end it was determined that questions that explored multiple aspects of the educators' experience as it is lived would address the central phenomenon.

Effective interviewers set the tone of a session by eagerly listening to the answers and presenting oneself as curious, but not inquisitive (McKracken, 1998). To that end, I demonstrated deep interest in the participant and in what they were saying by listening intently, physically showing interest with facial expressions, and by asking follow-up questions.

Interviewing is a particularly effective technique for collecting data about the lived experience of participants (Van den Berg, 2005). Interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach reflecting on research questions and a review of the literature. Although I had prepared open-ended interview questions with prompts to guide the experience

(Appendix B), exact wording and order remained flexible to best navigate the interactive experience with each respondent (Merriam, 1998).

Interviewees were advised that the session would be audio taped. They were also advised that they would be asked some personal questions regarding marital status and educational level, of which they were under no obligation to answer. Participants were assured that the audio taped interviews would be transcribed and kept in a secure file at my home. Each interview culminated with the construction of a visual collage.

3.8.1 Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Participant background

Tell me about yourself and your family. (Prompts below)

1. How many children are home schooled?

2. How long have they (the parents) homeschooled?

3. What is the educational experience of the primary educator, including highest educational qualification.

How do parents as educators experience the teaching process?

4. What do you aim to include in your child's homeschooling curriculum?

5. What does a typical day look like in your homeschooling?

6. What materials do you use?

Tell me about your decision to homeschool (prompts below).

7. At what point in the child's life did you decide to homeschool?

8. Why? What was the reason for homeschooling?

9. Who participated in the decision?

10. How did you make this decision What processes were involved?

11. What, if any alternatives did you explore?

What challenges are faced as a homeschooler?

12. What are your greatest challenges as a homeschooler?

13 Given the opportunity, would you choose homeschooling again?

What support systems are used?

14. What, if any support systems do you use as a homeschooler? (Group affiliation, co-ops).

3.8.2 Visual Collages

Upon the conclusion of each interview, each participant was asked to complete a visual collage; providing them with an opportunity to reflect on their own lived experiences. This would include activities, support structures, individuals, groups, events that they felt were indicative of their home education journeys.

Pilot Study Visual Collages

Visual data is an approach that can be used in collaboration with observation and interviews to unpick how people construct the world around them, what they are doing or what is happening to them in terms that are meaningful and that offer rich insight. (Banks, 2008).

For the pilot study a template was given to each participant, who was then asked to make a collage related to the visual image. Given a stick drawing of a person in the centre of a blank page or white board, I used the following prompt, ‘How would you visually represent the support systems that you feel have been instrumental in your homeschool journey?’

I continued with:

Begin at the head of the figure, who represents you, with your earliest recollection of support and continue around the body labelling each experience form number one to number five – number five being the most recent or current level of support. Please name and describe who, when and what each group, individual or event did to impact or support your home education experience.

The participants wrote directly on the paper or used sticky notes to complete the task. As they worked through the task, they verbally described the person, group, or event.

Main Study Visual Collages

For the main study, the visual collage instructions were broadened, and participants were asked to depict their experience using a variety of writing and artistic implements. I felt that the nature of the visual collage in the pilot study was too limiting and did not allow for free expression. I was thus guided by the pilot study to modify the requirements of the visual collage.

3.9 Validation of Interpretation

Member checking is a strategy that is recommended to validate the interpretation of qualitative analysis. Also known as member/participant validation, member checking in qualitative research findings has been viewed as an important aspect of establishing accuracy, credibility, and validity (Koelsch 2013). Member checking occurs when the researcher returns to participants to seek approval that the researcher has accurately reported their narratives, and to gain further comments. The inclusion of member checking was necessary in this case because I felt it was important to compare my understanding of what

an interview participant said or meant with the participant's feedback to ensure that my interpretation was accurate. This is a valuable quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview. For the present study, once interviews were fully transcribed, participants were asked to review the transcripts; checking that my interpretations of the transcribed data coincided with what they intended to convey. Furthermore, all participants were asked to sign a letter of informed consent (Appendix A). The letter states the purpose of the study and ensures confidentiality.

3.10 Trustworthiness

It is pertinent to address how qualitative researchers establish that the research study's findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. Trustworthiness is ensured by a commitment to the establishment of these criteria (Lincoln& Guba, 1985). To investigate, to check, to question and to theorize are integral components of quantitative inquiry that comprise trustworthiness (Kvale, 1989).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the purpose of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry is to ensure that the findings are worth paying attention to.

Credibility as an aspect of trustworthiness, relates to the integrity of the research (Ary et al., 2006). It establishes the truthfulness or accuracy of the findings (Ary et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Method and data triangulation enhanced credibility of my research. Additionally, member checks and participant feedback add to the credibility of the results. Rich description is also

a valuable attribute that boosts credibility in research. Lincoln and Guba (1986) additionally advocate prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis to increase credibility. Thus, since the present study did not produce maxims that could be accepted as universal truths, measures were taken to protect the trustworthiness of the research. The use of additional data sources provided enhanced trustworthiness to the study (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, reflecting, coding and analysing participant responses extended the potential for trustworthiness, also allowing for the finding of commonalities among participants.

Transferability, which involves the generalization of the findings to other contexts, was ensured in this study by the use of thick and rich descriptions, such as the use of meaningful quotes, limitations discussion, a detailed account of methods, and reflective statements. Such descriptive narrative is 'developed about the context so that judgments about the degree of fit or similarity may be made by others who may wish to apply all or part of the findings elsewhere' (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77). An audit trail and updated reflective journal provided rich descriptions, and quotes and gave 'voice' to the participants.

Since dependability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the results, or more precisely, 'the extent to which variation can be tracked or explained' (Ary et al., 2006, p. 509), this study took measures to ensure that dependability was ensured. Again, use of the audit trail, as with the transferability aspect of trustworthiness, establishes dependability (Ary et al., 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1986), since it provides the method for other researchers to be able to replicate the same results from a given set of data. I ensured an effective audit trail by thorough record keeping, careful note taking, describing choices made about the

research and its procedures; kept detailed records of the research activities; and consistently made rich journal entries (Ary et al., 2006).

Also labelled ‘rigor’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), trustworthiness in qualitative research suggests that confirmability maintains that while complete objectivity is impossible in social research, it must be made implicit that the researcher has not overtly allowed personal values to manifestly direct the research and its findings. Thus, confirmability essentially focuses on objectivity and neutrality in research (Ary et al., 2006). To help guard against the influence of my personal values, I kept a researcher’s journal and monitored, to the best of my control, my subjectivity. Peshkin (1988) described it this way: ‘By monitoring myself, I can create an illuminating, empowering personal statement that attunes me to where self and subject are intertwined. I do not thereby exorcise my subjectivity. I do, rather, enable myself to manage it-to preclude it from being unwittingly burdensome as I progress through collecting, analysing, and writing up my data’ (p. 20).

Finally, by examining the study’s findings concurrently with the literature review, I was able to further support trustworthiness. Thus, through the triangulation process of finding coherence, intersections and patterns among several different data and information sources trustworthiness is enhanced.

3.11 Limitations

This chapter supports the notion that all qualitative research is imperfect on a variety of levels. The reader is reminded that the study is situated in a specific context; that of home educating parents who all have at least completed high school and have committed to

educating their children at home. In addition, since the number of participants is relatively low the ability to make the findings generalizable is impaired, but not destroyed. The small sample size, however, may also be considered a strength since such a concentrated sample allows for potentially rich data gleaned from the sustained in-depth interviews.

3.11.1 Positionality

While insider positionality of the researcher is considered an advantage in qualitative research (Ganga and Scott, 2006), there is also the risk of the same positionality creating tensions between the interviewee and researcher, although this was not perceived to be an issue for the present study. Insider research can be described as, 'Social interviews between researchers and participants who share a similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national or religious heritage'. (Ganga and Scott, 2006, p.2).

My experience as a former home educator serves as an asset to understanding and interpreting the essence of participant responses within this study. I discussed my own personal lived experiences throughout the research process to increase rapport with participants.

Munhall (1988) argues that describing the experiences of others in the most faithful way possible is the most critical ethical obligation of the qualitative researcher. A useful, and important strategy for fulfilling this responsibility in phenomenological research is the notion of 'bracketing'. The purpose of bracketing is to suspend or set aside one's beliefs about the phenomenon being studied in order to avoid influencing both the collection and interpretation of data (Oiler 1982, Knaack 1984, Cohen 1987, Jasper 1994). Although

bracketing is used as a way to allow readers to learn about the researcher's experiences as well as evaluate whether the researcher's experience influenced the study results, in phenomenology the researcher's experience is considered to add to, rather than detract from, data collection and analysis. Creswell (2013) correctly points out however, that, in phenomenology, bracketing can be difficult as the researcher brings some experience and assumptions to the research phenomenon.

In phenomenology, researchers cannot fully remove themselves from the any portion of the study but the decision to bracket out assumptions during data collection and analysis 'serves to identify personal experiences with the phenomenon and to partly set them aside so that the researcher can focus on the experiences of the participants in the study' (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). I made an effort to identify and bracket out any assumptions I may have had about participants' responses and personal experiences and listen to what was being reported. Corbin, Dwyer, and Buckle (2009) discuss how being a member of the research population can be an asset but also create some confusion around the researcher's role. Being an 'insider' in the research often promotes acceptance by participants which can produce data with more depth and cultivate trust and openness; this can result in an immediate common ground from which to start a relationship with participants. However, researchers who are members of the research population should be aware of role confusion, when the researcher is familiar with the research setting through her own experience, because participants may make assumptions about common experiences and fail to fully explain their experiences, assuming the researcher already understands the situation. Conversely, the researcher is also in danger of making assumptions about participant responses based on her own experiences (Corbin, Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). To avoid relying on my own assumptions during the interviews, I relied on essential aspects that characterize the qualitative

phenomenological semi-structured interview (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). I focused specifically on the *Descriptive*, where the requirement is to describe experiences, feelings, and actions as precisely as possible, and the *Deliberate naiveté*, where interviewer is open to new phenomena.

I disclosed my own experience and potential for bias by articulating my connection to the research.

I provided descriptions of the settings, activities, and movements of the participants to connect the reader to the characteristics of the interviews and participants.

Because I am an experienced home educator and share a number of similar experiences with the participants, I brought to the process the positionality of a trusted researcher, likeminded to a limited extent, with a broad knowledge of the ideologies of the participants. However, my position could also have been a source of inhibition for participants, preventing them from sharing their stories for fear of being judged. As a person who has pursued a great degree of education, in addition to possessing years of experience in the field of education there was a risk of the feeling of inadequacy among participants. Briefing participants prior to the interview and giving them an opportunity to decline from answering any questions they were not comfortable with allowed participants to proceed at their comfort level. Furthermore, my periodic interjections of my own experiences, successes, failures, and misgivings gave the impression of researcher and interviewee sharing the same platform.

I reminded myself throughout the process, that as a researcher, my main goal was to listen, with the knowledge that assumptions would always be present. By nature, and the

descriptions of friends, family, and colleagues, I am described as a problem solver. The ability to listen intentionally without jumping to conclusions or forming opinions was very important for me to practice, and I found this to be difficult at times. The need to feel listened to and heard is very important in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994), and thus it was necessary for me to resist any desire to problem-solve with and for participants.

I also had to acknowledge that as a former home educator I had developed my own specific style of homeschooling, with specific schedules, curriculum choices and activities. I was acutely aware that my biases could impact the way that I listened or the way that I analysed the data, due to differences that I may have perceived. Remembering that this study was not focused on me or about my specific experiences in homeschooling was extremely important and led me to be careful of my conflict in roles.

Through constant reflection, journaling and being aware of my own biases I was reminded that multiple approaches to homeschooling would be presented through the participants' own experiences. The goal of this study was to hear the lived experience of home educators. Staying on a clear path for interviews was important in that I did not allow my own biases to make judgements about issues of curriculum, structure, or other program choices.

Participants may feel that sharing their personal stories may cause them harm in some way. Transparency in this research was a key strategy and participants were fully aware that I shared some common experiences. Participants were assured full access to their own transcripts if desired.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Each participant was given the opportunity to sign an informed consent form before becoming engaged in the research process. The information sheet and consent form signed by each participant is included in Appendix A. The informed consent form provided participants with information on the purpose of the study, benefits of participating, guarantee of confidentiality, assurance that they could with withdraw at any time and a person to contact if any questions arose (Creswell, 2009):

To gain support from the participants, a qualitative researcher conveys to participants that they are participating in a study, explains the purpose of the study and does not engage in deception about the nature of the study'. (Creswell, 2007. P. 142).

Kavanagh and Ayres (1998) stress the importance of assessing participants for signs of distress during research on sensitive topics and identifying strategies for minimising discomfort. In the event that participation in the interview caused the informant emotional distress, it was made clear that participant welfare would take priority over the research for signs of distress during research on sensitive topics and identifying strategies for minimising discomfort.

I promised and maintained confidentiality in my thesis by using general descriptive terms for each participant that included identifiers excluding names, such as the district in which they reside. I ensured confidentiality in my research presentation by holding the individual identities of the research participants in confidence and utilizing measures to ensure anonymity, such as the use of pseudonyms chosen by the participants.

I reduced the risk of harm to the participants in my research study by thoroughly articulating the expectations for participants' investment, including expected time commitments. I stored interview transcripts, audio recordings, field journals, and notes in a locked file cabinet and on password-protected devices. Any files or data that included participant names will be securely archived. After a minimum of seven years, I will personally dispose of any confidential files, data, and audio recordings by shredding hard copies and deleting digital files.

This study complied with the protocol of the research process and was approved by the Ethics Committee of Nottingham University.

3.13 Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) describes data analysis as the process of making sense of the data sources. Colazzi's (1978) phenomenology data analysis model describes conceptual patterns and reflects the process I chose as I prepared for my investigation. The following steps guided my approach for data analysis:

1. It is important that the researcher thoroughly reads and then rereads the transcribed interviews to identify with the data and to begin to develop a sense of each individual and his or her background and experiences.

2. The researcher identifies significant statements from the transcripts which pertain directly to the proposed phenomenon.

3. The researcher develops interpretive meanings of each of the significant statements.

4. The researcher rereads the research protocols to ensure the original description is evident in the interpretive meanings.

5. The interpretive meanings are arranged into clusters, which allow themes to emerge. The researcher seeks validation, avoids repetitive themes, and notes any discrepancies during this process.

5. The themes are then integrated into an exhaustive description. The researcher also refers the theme clusters back to the protocols to substantiate them.

6. The researcher produces a concise statement of the exhaustive description and provides a fundamental statement of identification: The overall essence of the experience.

It was imperative that as the researcher I immersed myself in the data by repeatedly reading over the material as I prepared for analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My data collection, note-taking, coding and memoing transpired simultaneously from the beginning of the research and my sorting process facilitated project organization. First, I reflected on the data as I reviewed the dialogue and then moved fully into reading all material from start to finish. The next step of questioning required me to begin making notes of interest as I reread the material in order to begin the development of a structured interaction with the data. As previously mentioned, my study was guided by a phenomenological framework. Firmly based in qualitative research, phenomenology provided me an avenue for discovering the lived experiences of the respondents. From the transcripts, I searched for comparisons in how the participants experienced the phenomenon; as meaning ultimately evolved from relationships in the data (Colaizzi, 1978).

For the present study, I approached data analysis and interpretational findings through an inductive and recursive process with the expectation of patterns, categories or themes evolving.

The audio tapes were transcribed to a word file format. It is possible for data analysis to begin informally during interviews and continue during the process of transcribing the interviews when evidence of recurring themes becomes apparent, in addition to patterns and specific categories (Creswell, 2007). Once transcribed data is available, analysis can then be involved for the coding of the data and the identification of salient or key points.

For the present study data were coded by semi-structured interview questions and individual participant responses. Guided by Goodman (2008), I assigned data codes to the responses from the interviews. I open coded data from interview transcripts (Appendix E) and created a set of initial codes (Appendix D) utilizing these with the formal data analysis and refined them throughout the participant analysis. These codes helped identify patterns within and across participant responses. Each of the individual participants had a story to tell (Yin, 2009), explaining their experience as home educators, in their own voice. I looked for critical events and milestones in an attempt to find valuable interpretive information. Additionally, I examined commonalities and variations paired with an analysis of the data.

It was important for me to allow participants to express their feelings and subjective experiences as related to their home education, in order for their stories to emerge. The areas of discussion were developed loosely, as opposed to rigidly as no more than a guide. This allowed participants to elaborate and flow in a direction that came as a natural occurrence to them. Issues that were thought not to be relevant by interviewees were at

times passed over, while other issues that were not directly related to the research were talked about in depth at times. Both situations were acceptable.

3.14 Interpreting and Judging the Data

In analysing and interpreting the texts derived from the transcribed interviews moving backward and forwards between interview transcripts and analysis made it possible to develop description and analysis in addition to clarification of salient points illustrated within the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that the researcher initially codes the data, then further organizes the data from this coding. This method proved very helpful. QSR International's NVivo 12 software (2018) was used for the present study. Patterns and themes immediately started to emerge once the coding process began.

'What is at issue is the best means to 'make sense' of the data in ways that will facilitate the continuing unfolding of the inquiry, and second leads to a maximal understanding of the phenomenon being studied' (Lincoln and Guba 1985 p224).

3.14.1 Step by Step Process

The interviews were transcribed within 72 hours of the interviews. Next, all transcripts were uploaded to QSR International's NVivo 12 software (2018), and all analyses were carried out in the NVivo 12 program. The analysis of data was conducted after the transcription by reading, reviewing, writing, rewriting, and re-reading. The data analysis process included continual reflection, a practice recommended by van Manen (1990). This method allowed uncovering the nature of the home educators' experiences. I conducted thematic analysis to determine the existential themes. The interpretation and descriptions of the findings evolved as the themes

emerged from the analysis, and from my researcher notes that included the languages and feelings in the responses of the participants.

3.14.2 Thematic Analysis

First, all transcripts were interpreted as a whole in their entirety to gain a holistic understanding. Then, I reviewed all transcripts again, this time highlighting texts, expressions, and judgments that gave meaning to the phenomenon of study. Thirdly, I again read all 12 transcripts line-by-line, concentrating on any connotations embedded in the text. To understand the expressions of the participants I identified important responses from the transcripts of the participants and classified them under thematic headings. After I completed coding of all the participants' transcripts, 60 initial nodes were coded, citing the participants' important accounts that emerged from the analysis. Subsequently, I analysed the 48 codes and identified relationships between the codes using my understanding that I derived from aspects of the literature review and grouped the themes. The clustering resulted in 10 thematic clusters that incorporated thematic headings and sub-headings. Accordingly, I marked representative themes and gathered thematic portrayals from the data (Van Manen, 1990). In the next step, I interpreted the data by reviewing all transcripts again, now using the themes that evolved as headings and reassembling participants significant narrations listed under these thematic headings. Interpretation of the findings was undertaken by reading, reviewing, writing, rewriting, and elucidating the meanings, then going back to the relevant literature, reflecting, and reordering of the themes to capture the essence of the experiences of the participants.

Once all transcripts were coded, I compared all codes across all participants in the QSR International's NVivo 12 software (2018) program. During the comparison, I made a note of

similar associations and combined them, maintaining each participant's significant phrases. Interpretations unique to one participant were additionally added to this file, and those that were similar were merged, creating the first list of themes through comparison. In naming themes, it was important for me to capture the essence of the participants' meaning. Themes were separated from each other by examining the context of the participants' story, and how participants phrased what they expressed. Thus, an iterative process emerged with naming themes, moving back and forth between individual participant's words and from individual participants to all participants' voices. The 10 resultant broad themes were explored to identify all possible meanings of each theme. This part of the process clarified my thinking about some of the themes, so I was sure that the theme was something unique to the experience of the home educators.

Within this study the visual collages (which ranged from very basic to more detailed) offered a compelling insight into the experiences of the participants. (Appendix C). Visual collages were coded and analysed as data, where meaning was assigned to fragments of each collage, in addition to collages as a whole. Fragments of collages were coded within the same thematic units as the transcribed interviews, where text and illustrations within these fragments were given meaning.

3.14.3 Interpreting Lived Experiences

As themes emerged, I started the writing with the help of reflective researcher notes. The descriptions painted a concentrated, coordinated presentation of the participants' lived experiences. To develop the analysis, I referred to memos and researcher notes comprising of relevant information gleaned from the narrative of each participant. Next, I described the experience that helped me to realize the essence of participants' experiences. I wrote down

interpretations and included quotes that made the story of the participants clear. I felt that the inclusion of quotes was necessary to capture the essence of the participants' experience. This process reduced the data to the substance of each participant's experience and the accurate quotations were incorporated to fashion and support the interpretation. The whole process was insightful as I attempted to gain perspective of the features of the phenomenon.

3.15 Summary of Interpretations

Beginning with the research questions as a guide, interview responses were recorded. The next step of the analysis involved transcribing the full original audio recording to a document that could then be input into QSR International's NVivo 12 software (2018). The initial data analysis process began with a familiarity and memory refresh of the interview. Each transcript was reviewed and read multiple times to develop a general sense of the participants' lived experiences prior to proceeding to content analysis, and researcher notes were added to the transcript to capture insight into each participant's experience (Patton, 2002). This was integral in identifying key statements and 'provide an understanding of how the participant experienced the phenomenon' (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Hycner (1985) further describes this exercise as 'bracketing and phenomenological reduction'.

I sought to identify those aspects that are common, emerging, and unique across all participants (Stake, 2010: p. 238). With the aid of QSR International's NVivo 12 software (2018) reduction and elimination of the data allowed me to identify the universal phenomenological themes for all interviews (Hycner, 1985) as shown in the example, Table 3.1 *Initial nodes* and correlate with the in-depth analysis as described in the initial analysis of transcriptions. Patton (2002) describes this process as 'content analysis' in which the

researcher ‘identifies coherent and meaningful examples, themes and patterns in the data, as well as related quotations or observations that illustrate consistency of a specific idea, issue, or concept’ (Patton, 2002, p. 149; Cope, 2005).

A critical step in identifying theoretical themes that contribute to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial learning and development is the ‘clustering’ together or synthesizing evidence that confirms emergent relationships (Hycner, 1985). A final step as described by Eisenhardt (1989, p. 544) is to compare ‘emergent concepts, theory or hypotheses‘, with any existing literature to develop ‘enfolding literature’ that may potentially contribute to future theory building with ‘stronger credibility and deeper conceptual insight’ (Cope, 2005). This is discussed in the final chapter.



Online support groups.	6	6	JDW	9/3/2018 12:54 PM	JDW	9/4/2018 2:16 PM
No support group membership.	2	2	JDW	9/4/2018 8:20 AM	JDW	9/4/2018 1:13 PM
Friend support	2	2	JDW	9/4/2018 9:36 AM	JDW	9/4/2018 1:36 PM
Extended Family support.	2	4	JDW	9/3/2018 2:50 PM	JDW	9/4/2018 1:42 PM
Coop	3	3	JDW	9/3/2018 12:43 PM	JDW	9/4/2018 2:14 PM
Structure	10	16	JDW	9/4/2018 11:43 AM	JDW	9/4/2018 11:59 AM
Uses tutors	4	5	JDW	9/3/2018 9:46 AM	JDW	9/4/2018 1:36 PM
Unschoolers - unstructured.	4	4	JDW	9/3/2018 9:49 AM	JDW	9/4/2018 1:42 PM
Textbook based	1	1	JDW	9/4/2018 10:46 AM	JDW	9/4/2018 10:46 AM

Figure 3.1. Examples of initial nodes.

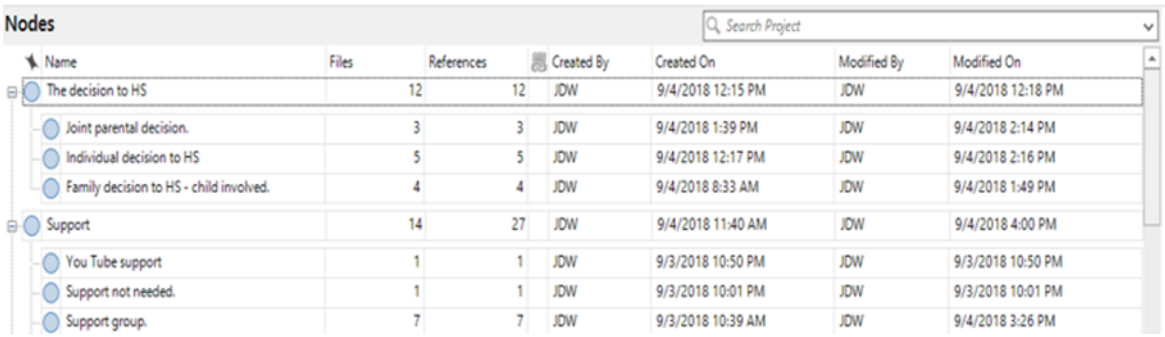


Figure 3.1.1. Further examples of initial nodes.

Identification of condensed themes, achieved through the use of QSR International's NVivo 12 software (2018) and further corroborated by manual review of the researcher, depicted the spectrum of topics discussed with each participant. Keywords are identified, and as often as the keyword is used it is counted and categorized. For example, ‘challenges and disadvantages’ was discussed numerous times by each participant and thus recorded 41 references, while ‘socialization’ was only mentioned once and only shows a single reference. The breadth and depth of topics covered during these interviews are further supported by the annotated transcripts.

Condensed Nodes/ Themes

Nodes

Name	Files	References
Advantages	13	25
Anticipated outcomes.	12	12
Challenges and disadvantages.	16	41
Curriculum	12	14
Education	12	14
Reasons	12	20
Reflection	11	15
Socialization.	1	1
Structure	10	16
Support	14	27
The decision to HS	12	12

Figure 3.2. Condensed nodes, thematic units.

The above illustrations show how themes emerged from coding derived from the data produced from semi-structured interviews and visual collages. I refer to the final themes as Condensed Nodes, which are the resultant thematic units.

As a premise of phenomenological inquiry, the participant is the driver of the conversation, and thus semi-structured interview questions were used to guide the conversation. The dialogue, however, was free flowing with the researcher leading with a question, and intermittently interjecting to carry the conversation and encourage, and facilitate the participant's sharing of their lived experience. Each interview varied greatly based on the participant's level of engagement.

Since the researcher assumes the role of the facilitator of the dialogue, Sara Delamont (1992) stresses the importance of reflexivity in social research. She stresses that the researcher must be constantly self-conscious about his or her role, interactions, and theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates. Where qualitative researchers are continually reflective, she argues, issues of reliability and validity are more easily accessible and readily addressed. This can be challenging at times, particularly when the researcher is also experienced in the field of study, as I am. Not only am I a former home educator, but I have also been a public-school educator too. To that end it was necessary for me to stay within my researcher role when ideas contrary to my ideology and practice were illuminated.

This chapter presented the research design and methodology that was employed and concluded with data analysis for the present study. It included a thorough description of the research process, ensuring a quality study; bias and researcher positionality were also discussed. The sample consisted of 12 home educating parents who have been home educating for at least one year.

Throughout the study I focused on the lived experience of the home educator by examining practices, costs, challenges, and support systems utilized by home educators that enable them to provide education for the children they have chosen to educate at home. My sources include interviews, visual documentation, and regional data on home education.

3.16 Concluding Comments

This chapter outlined the way in which I addressed my study of the lived experiences of the homeschooler from a phenomenological and interpretivist standpoint. Within this realm I was able to develop and subsequently pilot semi-structured interviews and visual collages with the twelve home educating participants. The resulting data from the semi-structured interviews and visual collages were analysed through a process of coding and thematic analysis. It is important to note that the present study is qualitative in nature and makes no claims of generalizability. It does, however, possesses the ability to offer insights into the experiences of the participants within the context of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter I present the findings from the processes and procedures described in the previous section in which I engaged in field research to generate data central to my study. Through the process of analysis, I identified 9 themes significant to the research questions. I repeatedly reviewed the initial groupings of meaning through the context of the responses for clarity and identification of developing themes. I will begin with a review of the research questions. This is followed by a brief review of how themes were generated and synchronized through the coding process and identification of themes. The subsequent section offers detailed descriptions of the findings as related to each research question, comprising of data derived from interview transcripts and visual collages. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings, revealing that the lived experience is situated in the capacity and needs of the home educator, that home educators care for and about their children, and that home educators demonstrate a need to control their environments. The findings are a result of the systematic treatment of the research questions.

4.1 Research Questions

Research Question 1. How do parents describe their experience of homeschooling?

Research Question 2. How is the decision made to homeschool?

Research Question 3. What support systems do these homeschoolers experience?

The study examines how home educators view their own practice, as well as how the practice is experienced by caregivers who have chosen homeschooling as a method of education for their children.

Each research question is undertaken individually and will be examined in relation to the corresponding themes that developed from the data. The nine themes identified were; 1) Structure, 2) Curriculum, 3) Personal Fulfilment, 4) Personal Struggles, 5) Sought Advantages), 6) Reasons for home educating, 7) Reflection, 8) Support, and 9) The decision to homeschool. The themes correspond closely with the final consolidation of the ten identified nodes derived from the coding process. The themes were appropriately labelled as data were systematically analysed. A synchronization of the main thematic units is directly related to the central research theme of how the process is lived and experienced by home educators, capturing the essence of the central phenomenon.

4.2 The Generation of Themes

A brief explanation of how themes were established is necessary for a clearer understanding of the process. The purpose of this study was to examine the central phenomenon of home education, otherwise referred to as homeschooling. The research questions sought to explore the lived experiences of select home educators in a small region of North Carolina, USA. Broad areas of homeschooling were addressed in the participant interviews, which were developed as a result of the initial pilot study that served the purpose of guiding the focus of the research. Participant responses and data gathered from the pilot study were not included in the findings. Through the interview process and resultant responses from the main study, themes began to emerge from the data. These categories constituted the initial nodes (Appendix D) which began the coding process, leading to consolidated nodes and themes. Each area was explored from the perspective of the participants, using their own words to express their lived experiences.

Moustakas (1994) maintains that thematic units together generate the essence of the central phenomenon.

In addition to interview questions the use of the visual collage for this study proved invaluable in providing a snapshot of the lived experience of the home educator. This provided a useful supplement to the verbal testimonials of the participants. In my observation, I felt that the collages in many ways were even more insightful in certain areas. Participants were encouraged to be as honest, creative, and free to express their experiences as possible. They were reminded that this was completely optional and that no artistic skills were required. With the materials provided, participants were free to draw, glue, write, or present a combined approach to their visual collage. All participants chose to complete the visual collage and took between 10 -25 minutes to complete the exercise. All participants appeared to enjoy the exercise, laughing, smiling, and talking while doing so. The conversation during the exercise was not recorded, although researcher notes were taken by me.

4.3 Specific Findings

This section offers a detailed examination of the generative themes with relation to the research questions.

Research Question 1: How do parents describe their experience of homeschooling?

Thematic Units: *Structure, Curriculum, Personal Fulfilment, Personal Struggles and Reflection.*

4.3.1 Thematic Units

4.3.2 Thematic Unit: Structure

The thematic unit of structure refers to the way in which homeschoolers organize their daily activities. Of the twelve participants, one considers herself an 'unschooler', which basically refers to an unstructured method that is not directed by a teacher or a curriculum, in essence, it is described as child centred learning (Dodd, 2011). The term adopted by Dodd (2011) was derived from the writings of John Holt (1977) who advocated for radical school reform which focused more directly on the desires of the child learner. The child is considered the centre of the learning process and every encounter throughout the child's day is considered a learning experience. Two participants consider their structure to be loose, where there is no adherence to a particular schedule; in one case and eclectic curriculum is used, including textbooks, online resources and outside tutors; whereas the other reports the use of no specific curriculum, due to, as she states, her child's specific challenges. The remaining participants consider their homeschools to be structured environments, where each day is dictated by a set schedule, and specific learning materials are utilized. The style of homeschooling is indicative of a system that works for the parent, by their own admission, since it is their choice that determines the structure. There is no evidence through thorough review of transcripts that suggests that structure was determined by anything other than personal choice of the home educator.

Participants were asked specific questions about the structure of their homeschool environment and day to day activities. Responses were specific and unique, although several adhered to similar conventions. Structure is significant in the context of this study because it speaks to a major part of the experience as it is lived moment by moment. Many parents like the idea of

homeschooling because there is freedom to teach what one wants, when one wants, whether in a structured or unstructured environment. Some homeschoolers prefer rigid routines while others prefer a looser structure. Participants within the study have reported a variety of styles but, specific participants like CV and similarly KL argue that when children don't know what is expected, the power struggles and bargaining start. A structured schedule can help to avoid any confrontations and establish how the days should proceed, suggests participant KL. Structure holds as much relevance for the home educator as it does for the child. Structure is predominantly determined by the homeschooling parent and is examined here from the experiential perspective of the homeschooling parent.

ES suggests that because of the educational challenges her son faces, she has opted for minimal structure and has no set curriculum at this time. This, she suggests, works for her because attempting to insert academic instruction would be too stressful for her, when her child has greater needs in the areas of social skills and self-management.

ES: 'So as far as my curriculum goes, because he's on the low end of the spectrum, we focus at this current point, because he is so smart educationally, without any lessons'

NP goes into detail as to how her school day is structured.

NP: 'At the beginning of the school year, we set up the template which is a board program, and it goes from kindergarten all the way through to 12th grade. And basically, you set up your students and then they have their own profile and all of their own subjects. And it guides them it's a pretty much a self-guided program. But it guides them every day. Through all the subjects and all the tasks and all the exercises that they have to do each day,

They will probably do about four hours of work, take a break for about an hour, do another two hours of work, take another break. And then we will finish up. The teenager has a more rigorous schedule and is more independent than my seven-year-old. And even though they are both independent, I do a little bit more looking over the shoulder of my seven-year-old. Once they have completed their work on the program, they have to hit submit. I also have a profile whereby I can check their work and correct it and return it to them online. So we have a kind of network setup in the family in the household. ... once I've checked their work and corrected it, I will send it back to them with a grade and corrections if necessary.'

MU considers herself an unschooler. MU reports that she supports the philosophy that children learn best when they are with their parents and are engaged in everyday life, learning through their surroundings and circumstances.

MU: 'We really don't have a set curriculum. I believe I consider everything to be a learning experience. There's no necessary books. My kids like to read. We go to libraries, we go to museums, we go to parks, we do really whatever.'

For participant RAKA, who employs a structured approach, the necessity exists due to the multiple activities scheduled throughout her and her child's daily activities:

RAKA: 'She gets up, we go to one of her classes. She has classes almost every day. She comes home, she has a little downtime and then she starts her independent study and I check the work and sometimes I don't check it 'til the next day.'

However, Penelope, who like RAKA utilizes external tutors, opts for a looser structure. She admits that initially, she adhered to a strict structure as a home educator but relaxed her methods as she became more experienced.

Penelope: ‘So when I first started out, probably that first five years, I was us getting up at 10 or well, not me, them, getting them up at 10 having a big breakfast, that was really important to have some hot meals, breakfast, and then we would, I would go to each child and say, Okay, here's your daily curriculum for today. I would have it written down on a whiteboard of what assignments, they would be working on. Everything was written out ahead of time. I had calendars. I had, you know, everything organized based on the curriculum and the assignment thing to do this day. They would work a couple hours and we'd have lunch. A lot of times we would go somewhere, whether it was to meet other homeschoolers or go to an event after lunch or go to the park. As we have art days on Friday, we will do that and then we will come back, four o'clock, five o'clock, and if we have anything left over that didn't get done, we might work on that for another hour. Have dinner have family time and there were days I was very lax with when they went to bed. And so a lot of times they would stay up till then, you know, between 10 and 12.’

‘If it's at the community college they get up and they head on to classes.’

‘We farmed them out to these other wonderful people (tutors). It just helps. ‘

Participant SD, although admitting to allowing her children a certain level of freedom in deciding how they wanted their day to go, still adheres to a structured day, where a schedule is followed.

SD: ‘After about two and a half years my kids were tired of sitting in front of computer screens and TV monitors and decided for themselves; ‘we can read this for 25 minutes and we need to listen to this teacher for 45 minutes and have homework assignments.’

Participant WL relies on external tutors, and is involved with a structured homeschool group, where tutors do the majority of the teaching. Parents facilitate supplemental aspects of the lessons, including homework. WL also serves as one of the tutors for this program. It is a highly structured environment and follows a fairly strict timetable.

WL: ‘It's called classical conversations… I happen to be a tutor. So I’m trained to tutor up to 12 kids in a classroom and we meet on campus one day a week. I introduce all the material for that week, but the mom is still considered the teacher, so she is still the authority. So she goes home, and I've presented the information and she picks and chooses how she will implement. You know, whether she expands on that or not.’

KL: If there was a typical day. The kids have some independent work that they do on their own....so we're starting at the beginning of the day. We read the Bible together as a family. Have breakfast and we usually do some of our readings at breakfast because they're eating and they listen well. And so we might read a history reading and then they would go back to explain what they listened to, and we were learning Latin this year and the kids are really doing well at that. We do have a school room that's got our books and we use the whiteboard up there for our Latin and they're getting really good at translating from Latin.’

CV is clear in her choice of structure and is emphatic in her desire to adopt a structure that suits her needs:

CV: ‘I don't have like a strict schedule. I'm not a schedule person. Some people get anxiety. If they don't have everything written out and everything like that. And it's like, I just go to the next page in the book. And that's what we do and I kind of know what we want to do that day. And if we don't fit everything in then that's fine. We start with that subject. The next day, or whatever, like I'm kind of get everything done but I’m not, I don't sit down at the beginning of the year and like plan out every single day.’

Both participants GC and TA follow a structured daily routine where activities and lessons are allocated specific time frames throughout the day.

GC: ‘We get up typically around 6:30, 7 o'clock, we will generally have breakfast, a morning devotion and nine o'clock sharp, I divide the kids into two groups. The teenagers, which are 16 and 14 comprise one table and my 12-year-old and my 7-year-old daughter will be at another table with their age appropriate materials.’

TA: ‘He uses a structured curriculum the whole year, and then as he finished one, on to the next grade level.’

‘We'll have our devotion breakfast, and then we'll start around 830, 9 o'clock. Reading then take a break. Then science.’

It would appear that although multiple learning environments and structures have been presented, it seems clear that the choice of structure is overwhelmingly the parent’s decision. From the reports of the parents, it seems that the structure is designed to fit the needs and abilities of the homeschooling parent. This is an interesting concept, to be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

Thematic Unit: *Curriculum*

The findings in this section reveal the variety of curriculum choices used by participants within this study. Curriculum epitomizes the lived experience of the homeschooler in that it encapsulates a large portion of the daily engagement of the homeschooler. Participants report having tried and switched between a variety of curriculum choices, however, the curriculums listed are those utilized at the time of the study. Two participants stated that they do not use any form of curriculum. Others, however, refer to using a variety of curriculums and or teaching materials. Four participants reported the used of online curriculum. These are typically self-guided, grade appropriate programs, designed to cater to each child within the homeschool program. The role of the parent is predominantly as facilitator, checking that work is complete and guiding the learner from activity to activity as far as the structure of the day. Five participants inform of an eclectic use of a variety of teaching materials, texts, online resources, and external tutors. One participant used what she calls a standard curriculum, which is closely aligned to the curriculum used within the public-school sector. She uses this, she suggests, out of fear of teaching the wrong thing and consequently putting her children's education at a disadvantage. Another participant reports using a Scripture-based curriculum which associates Biblical themes with academic principles.

Curriculum is mentioned under the category of this research question because it often goes hand-in hand with structure. Very often in my experience, homeschoolers will collaborate on the sharing of materials, ideas for curriculum, share and exchange textbooks, teach collective subjects to individuals and groups of students within the community. Its relevance to the lived experience is situated in its ability to impact the experience of the home educator.

Where relevant, all respondents referenced curriculum or teaching materials utilized for the homeschooling process. Specific questions addressed this area of inquiry.

Beginning with participant ES, she reiterates that due to their unique situation no curriculum is being used.

ES: '…we focus at this current point …without any lessons.'

NP utilizes an online curriculum, which is self-guided for her children, allowing them to work on academic tasks without direct instruction from NP. Her role is thus more of a facilitator, checking work, grading, and returning for revisions when necessary. NP, however, still remains in charge administratively of the structure of the day; when school begins, break times, leisure activities etc.

NP: 'My both of my children use an online curriculum. So it's pretty much set up for them'.

Participant MU's homeschooling approach does not incorporate the use of any curriculum, but rather uses incidental occurrences throughout the day as learning opportunities for her homeschool.

MU: 'I don't really have a set curriculum. We are what you call unschoolers--homeschoolers',

'We really don't have a set curriculum. I believe I consider everything to be a learning experience. There's no necessary books. My kids like to read. We go to libraries, we go to museums, we go to parks, we do really whatever we want to do'.

RAKA adopts an eclectic style of teaching, opting for a variety of resources:

RAKA: Right now what I'm using; books from seventh and eighth grade. I've been using different kinds of curriculum and putting them together. So it's a lot of independent study. Okay, at this point in her life, in my life, she does much better with independence. So we do Apologia (home ed program) and math. We're doing government history and I'm actually putting that together myself. She learns the constitution and all the articles. We do as I as I said, Apologia.'

Although participant Penelope utilizes multiple sources outside of the homeschool setting, including tutors and community colleges, she takes an active role in making sure that the work gets done. Her approach is eclectic.

Penelope: 'Okay, here's your daily curriculum for today, I would have it written down on a whiteboard of what assignments they would be working on. Everything was written out ahead of time. I had calendars. I had you know everything organized based on the curriculum and the assignment thing to do this day.'

Participant SD reflects on how out of fear she used standard curriculums that match exactly with what children on the same grade level in public schools were using. However, with experience, she relaxed her methods somewhat and used DVD based curriculums, which she refers to as accredited. These, she points out, were still targeted towards the appropriate grade levels of her children but removed the responsibility of direct teaching from her.

SD: '…out of fear of and intimidation for homeschooling. We did a DVD based program that was fully accredited.'

WL reports an adherence to Scripture-based curriculum.

WL: ‘Okay, so we are doing geography, which is a Biblical and a worldview. So we look at timeline and we incorporate the world history timeline, the Biblical timeline and then the geography intertwined.’

‘Math U See’ is a popular curriculum series used among home educators in the USA. Since its focus is mathematics, home educators are directed elsewhere for other subjects, creating an eclectic learning environment, where resources are drawn from multiple sources. KL fits into this category of homeschoolers:

KL: ‘We use Math U see for our math curriculum and I'm very happy with that; we we've been using Apologia for science. So, far we have, well this year we're doing anatomy. So the kids and I go through the Apologia anatomy book and learn all about the body.’

CV enjoys an eclectic style of home education and submits that it works well for her needs and abilities.

CV: ‘We're more eclectic. We went to the bookstores when we were first starting to homeschool, and we went to the North Carolina homeschool conference up in Winston Salem, so we could put our hands-on curriculum, but we didn't really like an all in one curriculum, where we liked everything. Like, we'd like the math, but we didn't like the history and it's like if I don't want to teach it, then they're not going to want to learn it.’

So we just pieced together you know this math curriculum that I liked and this English curriculum that I liked and the science curriculum, and we just pieced it altogether. And so I came up with curriculum that way we enjoy all of it and it's not you know dry, and I enjoy teaching it.’

Similar to her fellow participants DL also used an online curriculum that allows for a self-paced, self-guided style of learning for her children.

DL: 'Well, I use an online program and everything is in it. So basically, I don't really have to even think about the curriculum. I just basically turn it on and guide her through what she has to do, and all of the lessons are set up there.'

When probed with the same question, GC stated his preference for the 'A Becca Curriculum. This is an all-inclusive curriculum that caters to all academic subjects and grade levels right up to twelfth grade, which is the highest level of schooling in the USA.

GC: 'I use A Becca.'

For participant TA, a comprehensive curriculum was used initially. Since TA is the sibling of the home educated child, she collaborated with her parents to adopt a more relaxed approach to homeschooling. Classical Conversations, the structured group and curriculum they formerly used placed great demands on the student according to TA and often the expectations were often a source of distress for him. TA currently pulls from a variety of resources to educate her brother.

TA: 'He used a structured curriculum the whole year, and then as he finished one …to the next grade level.'

There were no visual depictions of curriculum in any of the visual collages.

4.3.3 Thematic Unit: *Personal Fulfilment*

All participants described value associated with homeschooling. Commentary and experiences regarding the positive aspects of homeschooling are described as advantages. When describing

some of the positive aspects of homeschooling, participants talk about the benefits to *them* as individuals. The responses indicate the self- serving nature of homeschooling on a personal level as they reflect predominantly on how homeschooling enhances or fits into their lifestyle and fulfils their personal needs. Personal fulfilment emerges as the greatest advantage to the lived experience of the home educator, where the personal needs are addressed by the lifestyle choice.

Personal Fulfilment.

As nodes were analysed and themes developed, it became apparent that questions that explored advantages or positive aspects of home education, were answered with reference to the personal feelings of fulfilment of the home educator. An expression of the positive aspects of the homeschool experience as reported by the participant allows the reader to understand what is felt and experienced by the practitioner, who in turn assigns a positive personal experience to the event or occurrence. The most efficient way to do this is to reference the thematic corresponding units that emerged through the gathering of data from interview transcripts. Specific interview items focused on examining potential advantages of home education as experienced and stated by participants. The theme of advantages addresses the positive aspects and rewards of the practice, stated in their own words. Each participant mentioned experiences and aspects of home education that would qualify as an advantage at some point of the experience.

With regard to relevance, the lived experience focuses on a representation of the experiences and choices as stated by the participant. We can learn so much about people's lives in specific contexts by concentrating on the actual personal experiences as they are lived. A phenomenological approach accepts that each person is the authority on his or her own experience Van Manen 1982).

Reports of advantages (personal fulfilment) in context, as stated by participants are dominated by expressions of personal need and fulfilment of the practitioner.

Participant NP added value to this theme by suggesting:

NP: ‘I look at it as a positive because I'm sowing into my kids. Because I know that we are all going to reap the benefits in the end’.

In her visual collage, NP elaborates to a greater extent on the advantages of homeschooling. She stresses the advantage of the connectedness to her family and to other homeschoolers that homeschooling offers. She also highlights the potential for valuable memories resulting from the experience.

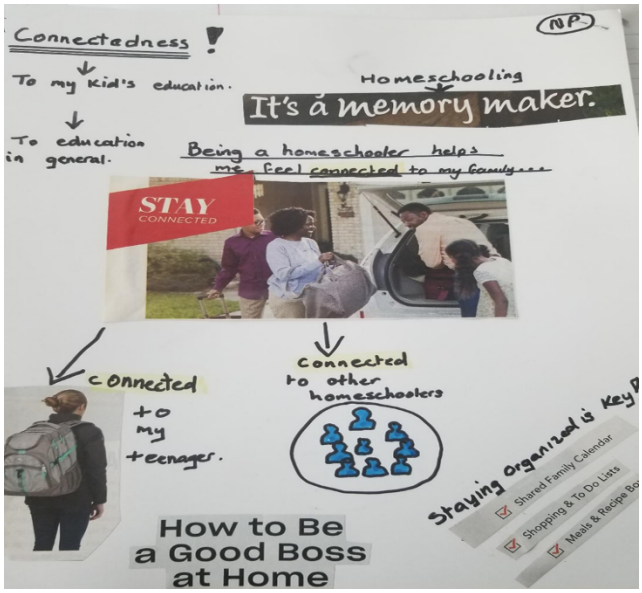


Figure 4.1. NP’s visual collage

Participant SD expresses a predominance of advantages to her homeschooling experience in her visual collage. Her advantages are expressed as *her freedom* to choose how the education of her children will be imparted: She illuminates the freedom to learn about different cultures of their choosing, the freedom to travel as far and as often as they please, schooling outdoors (illustrations of nature; insects, butterflies, plants), hands on science – where she posts a picture of a manatee; suggesting the freedom to actually interact with the phenomenon under study:



Figure 4.2. SD's visual collage

Participant KL makes several comments on the benefits and advantages of homeschooling to family life:

KL: 'I think it's really good for the family, just creates family bonds J**** was in the military until he retired two years ago and it's so good for us to be able to take time off when we can spend time with him and do school … with him. And so we can go on family trips.'

When asked about the time constraints, she continues:

KL: ‘Well I try to remind myself that it's a short season. And down the road I'm gonna be missing these days. I am looking forward to where my oldest son can help more; he's babysitting age so he can do that. I've just started running again, which I love. And so that 30 minutes in the morning really is the insanity saver’.

When asked about support systems, this was listed as an advantage.

KL: ‘We had moms’ nights when they'd have a mom’s night out and they had other activities like a square dance. Again, the square dance was beautiful, a beautiful spot’.

Similar to fellow participants, KL’s visual collage illuminates predominantly highlights and advantages of the homeschooling experience. She identifies nature watching, family baking, sweet treats, family fruit picking, travel, and family biking expeditions as major aspects of her lived experience, which are also interpreted as advantages of the experience:

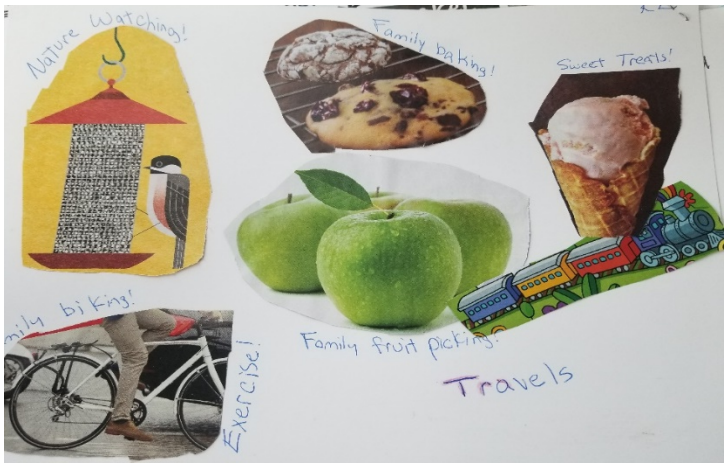


Figure 4.3. KL’s visual collage

When asked what his main objective and anticipated outcome for homeschooling was, participant GC commented:

GC: ‘To have a richer, more meaningful relationship with my kids‘.

An interpretation of GC’s comment would suggest that he sees this as an advantage of homeschooling. GC declined to participate in the visual collage exercise, arguing that he had no artistic abilities. GC was reminded that that his artistic abilities would not be judged and were not necessary for the exercise, but he maintained that he preferred not to participate.

RAKA: Aspects of her Visual collage depict advantages of homeschooling.

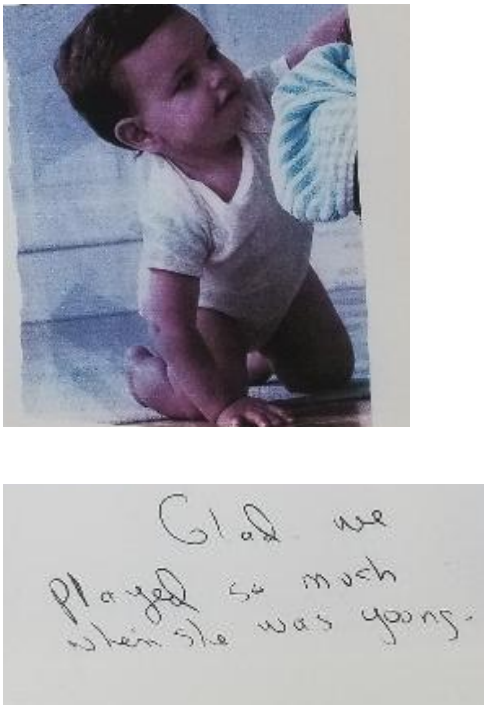


Figure 4.4. RAKA’s Visual collage excerpt: ‘Glad we played so much when she was young.’

Here RAKA expresses her gratitude for the opportunity to have spent so much time with her child. She feels that the choice to homeschool afforded her this quality time.

RAKA also brought attention to the fact that as a homeschooler she is able to relax:

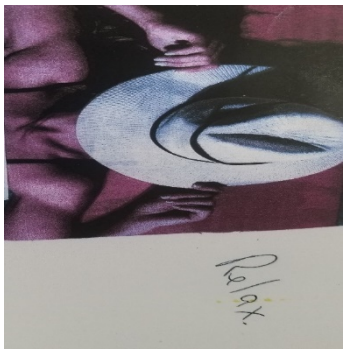


Figure 4.5. Excerpt from RAKA's visual collage

CV used her visual collage to depict the flexibility of homeschooling. 'Some days don't work out, or someone is under the weather; so you can take a slow day and relax and try again tomorrow'.



Figure 4.6. CV's Visual collage excerpt

Furthermore, CV points out that as a business owner, the flexibility is imperative: 'I own a storefront business. Homeschooling allows me to run the business without worrying about drop-

offs and pick-ups.' Referring, of course to transporting her children to various venues, events and activities throughout the school day.

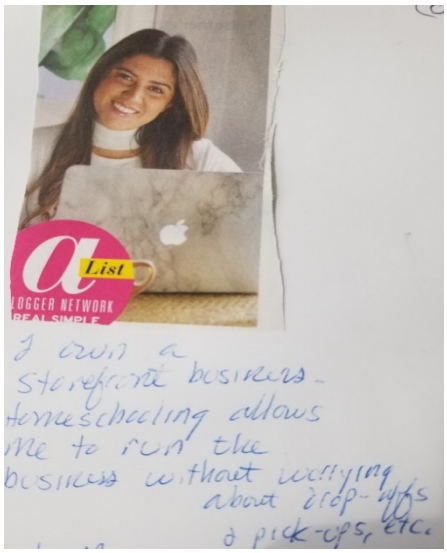


Figure 4.7. CV's Visual collage excerpt: 'I own a storefront business. Homeschooling allows me to run the business without worrying about drop-offs and pick-ups.'

In actual fact, like NP's visual collage, CV's is essentially a tapestry depicting the advantages of homeschooling as she experiences them, where her final statement and corresponding illustration points out the advantage of being on vacation while still operating homeschool 'We can vacation while everyone's in school'.

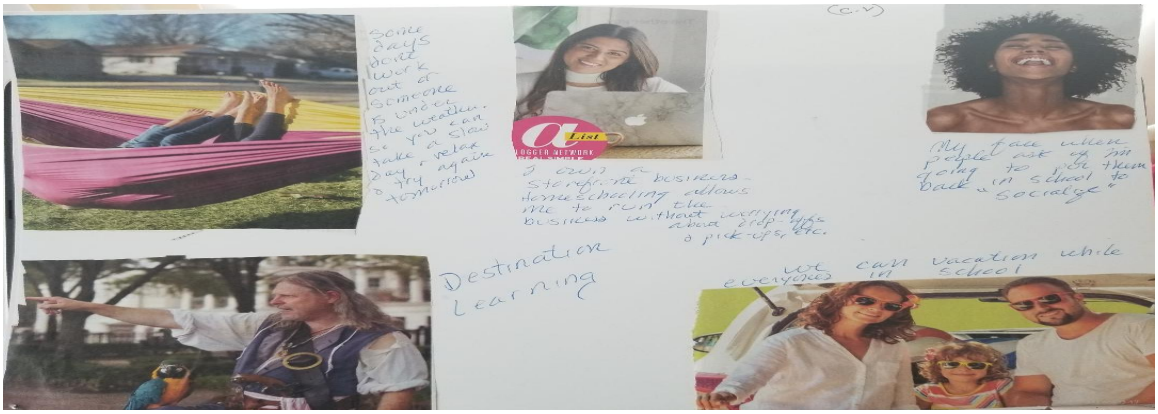


Figure 4.8. Participant CV's complete visual collage

MU made her experience of the advantages of homeschooling explicit in specific areas of her visual collage but, unlike others did not dominate her collage with an illustration of the advantages. Her visual collage represented a more balanced description between advantages and drawbacks of her lived experiences. She begins by elegantly aligning homeschooling with a rich experience, giving her quality time with her children, with an illustration of a jewel adorned hand:

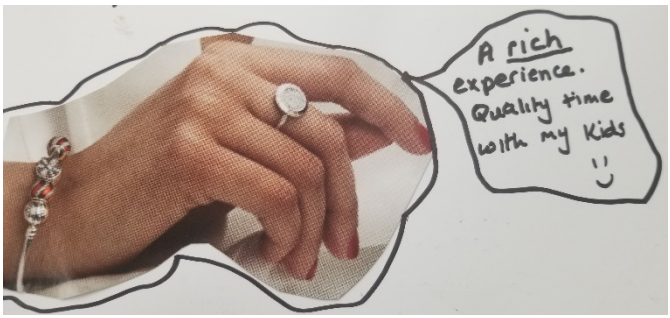


Figure 4.9. MU'S Visual Collage Excerpt: 'A rich experience. Quality time with my kids

MU also alluded to the experience of homeschooling boosting her self-esteem, and increasing her self-confidence, while also being full of surprises – allowing her to learn more about herself and her children each day:

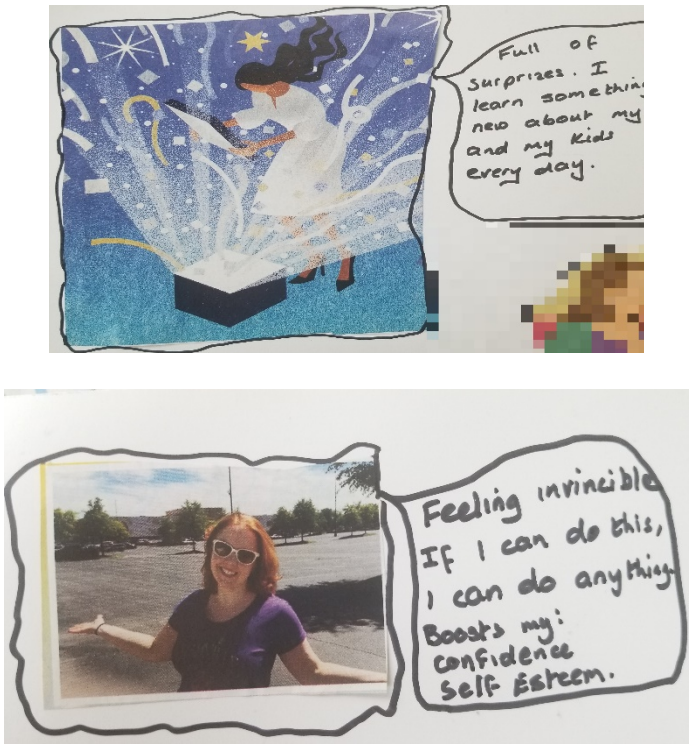


Figure 4.10. MU's visual collage representations of advantages of homeschooling: 'Feeling invincible. If I can do this, I can do anything. Boosts my self-confidence, self-esteem.' 'Full of surprises. I learn something new about myself and my kids every day.'

Although participant Penelope lists challenges, the general essence of her visual collage depicts positive aspects of her journey. With the exception of her reference to 'busy days and crockpot meals' (coded under challenges and coping strategies respectively) her collage inserts point to a generally advantageous experience of homeschooling her children, listing versatility, feeling like a kid again, building a legacy, and lifelong learning as advantages:

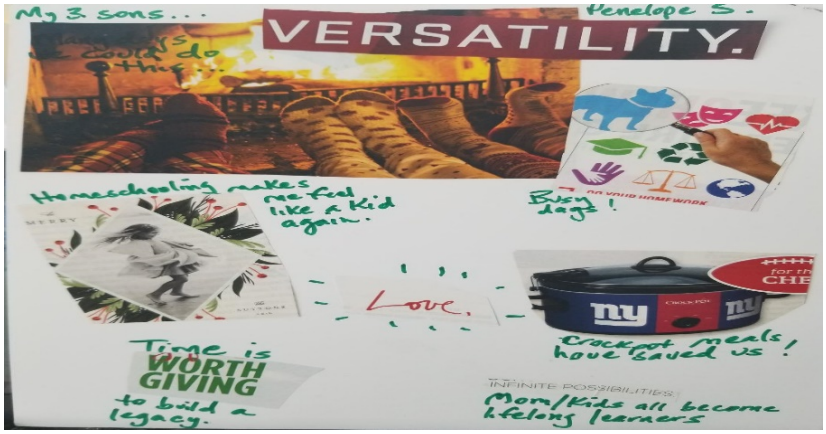


Figure 4.11. Penelope's entire visual collage

Participant TA created an extensive visual collage, dense with varied expressions of her account of how she experiences the homeschooling process. While she does mention some of the pitfalls, fears, and challenges of homeschooling, she, like other participants places great emphasis on the advantages of home educating. TA is an older sibling providing home education for her younger brother. Among her perceived advantages she includes:

'Being his superhero even when I thought I failed!' Although coded with advantages, there is overlap between this and the theme of challenges. Among her stated advantages TA also includes the advantage of being with her loved one, and 'seeing the joy in his face'. Additionally, she emphasizes the lack of necessity for attention to her wardrobe or appearance with, 'no need for a wardrobe change', 'can wear comfy clothes'., and 'no need for make-up'. Continuing with advantages TA uses a picture of a father and child engaging in a game to suggest that homeschooling affords her the ability to be creative 'on the spot. Spending lots of quality time together…' She goes on to mention that she engages in the necessary task of teaching the mundane but has the freedom and flexibility to make it fun. Related to the same point she

continues; ‘Seeing his gifts unfold and how on days when it’s harder, he perseveres‘. TA sees creating food together as an advantage and uses a picture of a laundry basket to illustrate what she refers to a s ‘doing life together’. She culminates with an animated picture of a lady opening a box full of surprises, stating, ‘Every day is a surprise. The unexpected.’



Figure 4.12. TA’s complete visual collage

WL described the advantages of her homeschool experience from a spiritual perspective, based on her Christian faith. As a major advantage of her ability to homeschool, she alludes to the fact that homeschooling gives her and her child the freedom to be who they are designed to be;

WL: ‘As a child I never fit in or was in the ‘norm’. I wanted to be ‘me’, and it was ok to be different. As an educator, I chose a profession that embraced everyone’s uniqueness. In Early Childhood Education we are all different, and its ok. We are made for a purpose’.

WL feels that homeschooling epitomizes the ability to express one's exclusivity while fulfilling one's higher purpose on Earth:

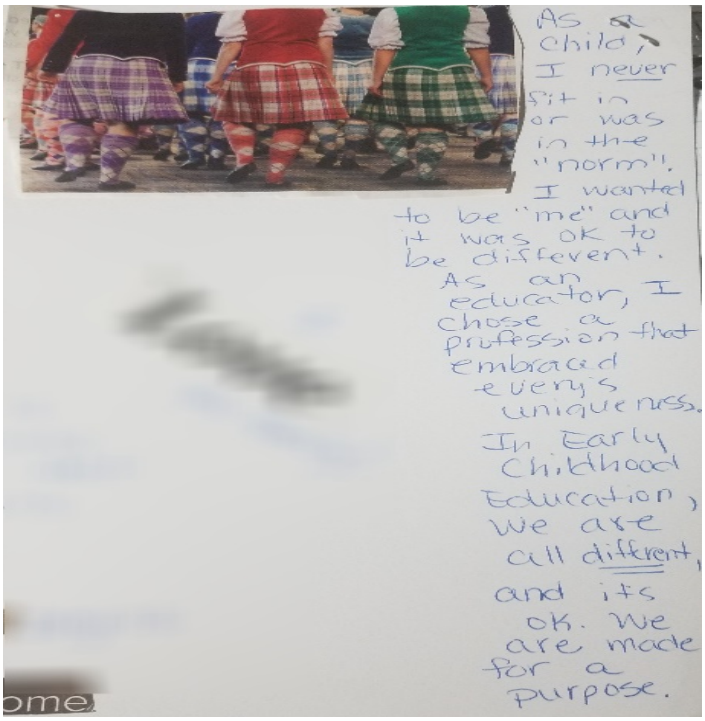


Figure 4.13. WL's visual collage excerpt depicting advantages of home schooling as she experiences them.

Participant DL uses her visual collage to express the advantages of homeschooling, with little reference to challenges associated with the experience. She refers to the advantages of support within the homeschool community. She expresses satisfaction at the thought that she is doing the very best for her child, supported by the caption 'What's in it for you?'. She considers the absence of worry over potential bullying in an alternative schooling system a big advantage, supported by the quote 'Feel better, Sleep Better, Live Better'. DL places great value on the time she is able to spend at home with her child, doing, as she illustrates 'stuff we love'. But the greatest advantage, it appears, for DL is her ability to maintain control over her child's

education. To that end, DL's entire visual collage is displayed as a predominantly, overall advantageous experience.

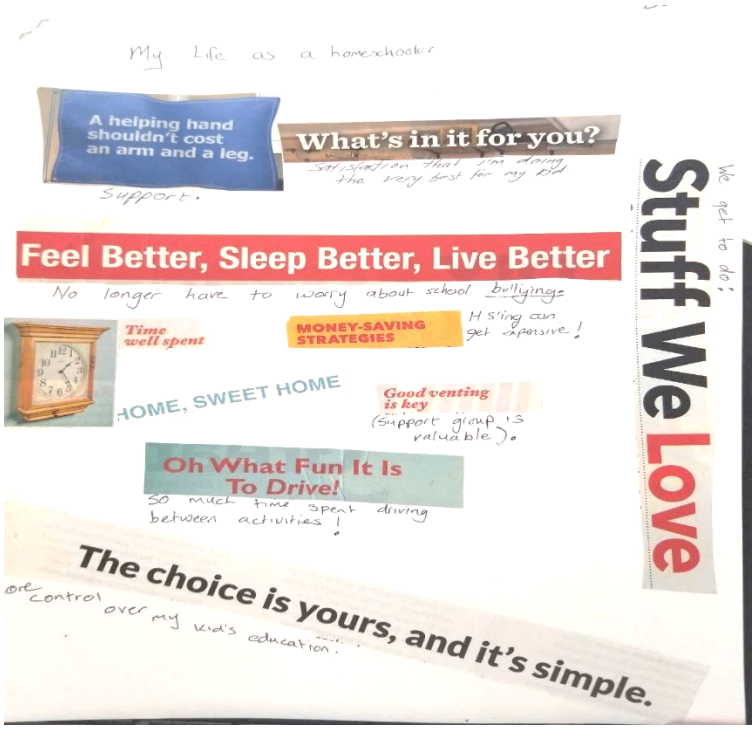


Figure 4.14. DL's complete visual collage

4.3.4 Thematic Unit: *Personal Struggles*

When describing some of the challenges associated with homeschooling, again the personal needs of the educator come to the fore. Among the greatest of challenges is time management and balance, where 7 of the 12 participants refer to time travelling to various activities, efficiently organizing the school day in terms of activities and lessons, and managing personal time as recurring issues. Expenses are also noted by the majority of participants, where travel and curriculum dominate as the most expensive aspects of homeschooling. Fear of failing their children is also a recurrent concern, where parents question their ability to provide what is

necessary to optimally educate their children. Three participants refer to interpersonal conflicts with their children as a major challenge. Additionally, participants referred to feelings of being overwhelmed and stress as regular components of their daily experiences. Thus, it seems apparent that the challenges indicate the incongruence that homeschooling presents with their personal needs for balance and control over their own lives first and foremost.

Personal struggles – Responses.

An exploration of the lived experiences of the homeschooler benefits greatly from the self-reports of some of the challenges associated with the practice. Responses provide details of how these challenges and disadvantages are experienced. In an analysis of thematic units, the area of challenges and disadvantages as related to homeschooling produced the greatest number of coded references from participants. Specific questions focused on the challenges and disadvantages of homeschooling, however applicable responses were identified in a variety of other areas within the interview.

When asked to identify some of the greatest challenges, participants offered multiple and varied personal accounts.

Participant ES, in her response to the question of challenges answered thus;' I don't know if it seems like it to other people, but my biggest challenge is being able to get my doctor's appointments done because I am not able to take a take ES into doctor's appointments with me and my husband works full time for the military in the army. He's getting ready to retire, but he's currently still active duty full time and being able to get into my regular doctor's appointments (have to be) put it off for a long time'.

ES: ‘The biggest hurdle is trying to keep my brain sane’.

For participant ES, reference is made to her ability to attend doctor’s appointments. As she alluded earlier her son presents specific challenges. To that end since her child is with her at home predominantly, as opposed to being in a school setting outside of her home, it presents an additional challenge in meeting her own personal needs. Contrast this situation to parents whose children attend school outside of the home, who, even if employed may be able to schedule doctor’s appointments without their child or children in tow. Her statement ‘Trying to keep my brain sane’ suggests personal challenges with balancing her own personal needs and homeschooling her child.

Participant NP makes reference to several challenges through her interview and; fear of failure is cited by NP as a major concern and presents as an emotional challenge in her homeschooling experience.

NP: ‘For me, just knowing that I'm doing the right thing, knowing that my child is learning and understanding. So for me, the challenge is fear, I guess, and I'm worried that they may not be getting everything that they could be getting, if that makes sense’.

NP also refers to the expenses incurred by homeschooling as one of her greatest and ongoing challenges. This is referenced by several other participants as a challenge.

NP: ‘Well, for us, the biggest expense is curriculum, honestly, because the curriculum that we purchase is quite costly’.

‘There are also costs due to a lot of activities in the community. So driving, gas can be expensive, too. So those are my biggest expenses’.

Time management is also referenced as a major challenge by participant NP. Balancing family time, school time and personal time appears on several occasions as a recurrent issue among homeschoolers within this study.

NP: ‘Honestly, between homeschooling and parenting, all of my time is taken up. But that's my choice’.

In her visual collage, however she offers a strategy for dealing with the issue of time management:



Figure 4.15. NP’s Visual collage excerpt for combatting the challenge of time management

In reference to challenges associated with her homeschool experience, MU remarks on several challenges both verbally and by means of her visual collage. As with her fellow participants she references time as a major challenge, specifically time to herself:

MU: ‘Sometimes I feel like I have no time to myself’.

Additionally, she highlights how stressful and overwhelming the task as a homeschooler can be. In fact, her narrative is replicated in her visual collage, indicating that stress is a major challenge for her.

MU: ‘Sometimes it could be very, very stressful, sometimes overwhelming’.

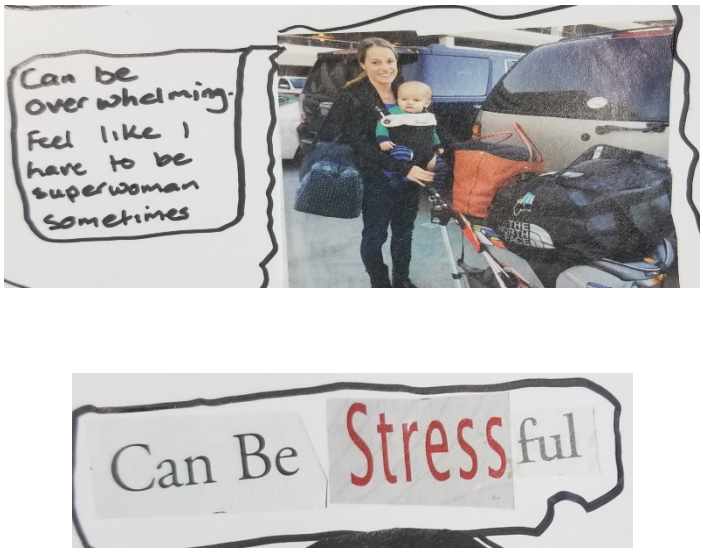


Figure 4.16. MU’s visual collage excerpts: ‘Can be overwhelming. Feel like I have to be Superwoman**.’**

Fear is also an identified challenge, as MU states her fear of failing her child and fear that she made the correct decision to home educate exists as a persistent source of worry. Additionally, she expresses her initial concerns over her children’s access to other peers and their ability to establish and maintain friendships:

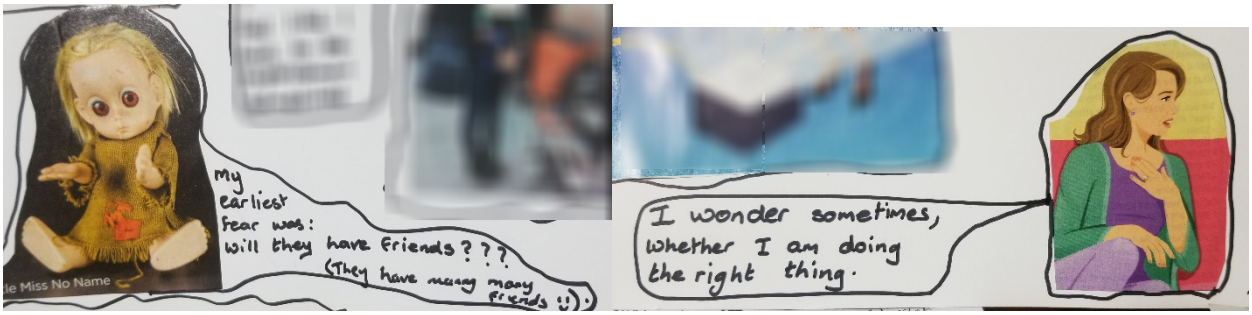


Figure 4.17. MU's visual collage excerpts. Challenges. 'I wonder sometimes, whether I am doing the right thing'. 'My earliest fear was, will they have friends?'

The fear of failure for MU indicates the potential onset of other far reaching consequences, as she states; …' If I can do this, I can do anything. Boosts my self-confidence, self-esteem'. It therefore becomes a concern that homeschooling has the potential to positively impact the confidence of the educator, or to negatively influence it:

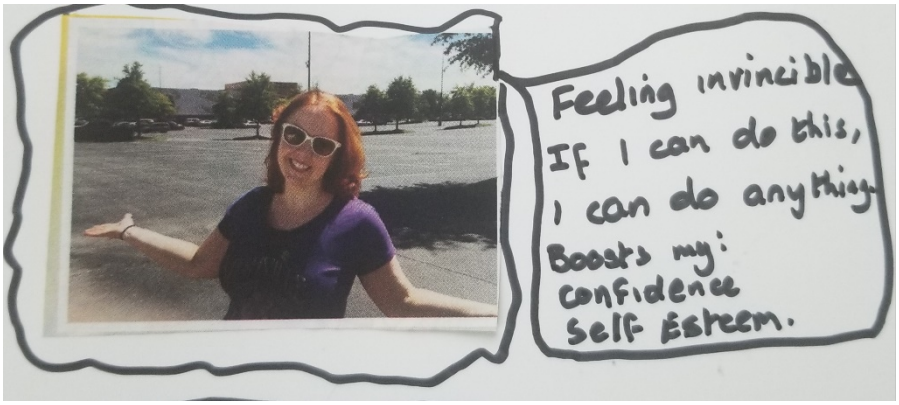


Figure 4.18. MU's visual collage excerpt. Self-confidence.

RAKA, when posed with the same question elaborated on the some of the emotional and interpersonal challenges associated with her homeschool experience. The challenges expressed

across participants are varied and unique to each individual situation. It is not suggested that her challenges are insurmountable, but they are perceived as challenges nevertheless.

RAKA: ‘I homeschool but my daughter's very strong willed, and we butt heads a lot, which is why a lot of independent study. She is very bright, which is good and then it's difficult at the same time, because when they are so bright, you know, many times, they're like, I already know that I already know that or I can do that, are very independent so... She's very artistic, you know, emotional because the artistic part seems to make them very (emotional) children and adults … more emotional.’

As she continues, RAKA discusses the expenses associated with homeschooling. Although she is satisfied with the choice she has made to homeschool, she admits that the expenses do impact the general finances of the family.

RAKA: ‘Her classes. So I pay for those, I pay for all her books. I tend to buy them new and sell them in good, great used condition on eBay if I can. Usually something like Apologia, you can sell right away. It's a great curriculum. I pay for acting camps, I pay for voice lessons, I pay for all her music lessons.’

RAKA: ‘So I mean I think she probably wouldn't be able to do as much if she wasn't homeschooled. The flexibility is great, but you pay for more if you're doing a lot of things.’

RAKA elaborates even further on the challenges associated with homeschooling, by highlighting the fact, in agreement with fellow participants, that it is a stressful undertaking, even though it is fun.



Figure 4.19. RAKA's Visual Collage Excerpt: 'Fun but stressful'.

When asked about challenges and disadvantages associated with her homeschool practice as she experiences it, Penelope also focused on some of the emotional and interpersonal challenges that she faces. She mentions burnout as a significant challenge:

Penelope: 'But they procrastinate (her children) and it's the biggest challenge for me, this procrastination and the naive sense that there's all the time in the world to get things done'.

'That's a big challenge and then I would say burnout, burnout for parents. It all falls on you and that's fine because you're a parent. That's what you expect but when their whole career and curriculum and education and future is all on you and maybe your spouse is not agreeing to everything or supporting you, or picking up the slack and you end up doing all of it on your own its overwhelming. And there's years that they're struggling academically, emotionally, they're going through puberty and now you're doing everything and it's exhausting'.

Penelope illuminates several challenges experienced by her as a homeschooling parent. While highlighting these challenges, she reports that the challenges can become overwhelming. In her visual collage, she illuminates the fact that days are busy but offers a visual solution in the form of balance. The illustration she chose depicts the importance of balance:



Figure 4.20. Penelope: excerpt from visual collage. Balance: 'Busy days.'

Again, different challenges for different participants are magnified in this section. For participant SD who has been homeschooling for several years, her challenges, she emphasises have been centred on balance and organization within the homeschool structure.

SD: 'In my experience, my greatest challenge for many years was always trying to educate three different children, three different grade levels, three different learning styles and fitting that into a day when I was a lot of times a single parent only because my husband was deployed a lot. And trying to take care of the home front … all of the responsibilities as a wife, appointments and bills and like I said, the three different kids, grade levels, learning styles; that was probably my biggest challenge for many years, finding ways to make it all flow together. '

Additionally, as similarly reported by fellow participant homeschoolers expenses incurred by homeschooling was stated as an ever-present challenge. SD points out however, that as she developed as a homeschooler, she discovered ways to curtail many of the initial expenses,

arguing that many were actually unnecessary and could have been avoided had she had the foreknowledge as a beginning home educator.

SD: ‘Well we incurred some expenses in the beginning, not realizing that they were really unnecessary. Thinking that I had to make my home resemble a private or public school, thinking that my kids had to have a desk and a computer and all of these materials and items to be a schooled at home. So we incurred some costs with that; individual computers, laptops, and then they went out and had to get a desktop’.

SD continues:

SD: ‘But then you know I kind of realized that that was private schooling that I put in my house. It wasn't really like the freedom of homeschooling, and things like curriculum and mileage on your car. Those expenses that incurred were expensive because of my own fears. We chose a fully accredited curriculum and so three different grades, all boxed curriculums that tuition. It was literally like private school in my home’.

‘Until recently there really wasn't mileage expenses. Then, it was just tuition fees.’

The fear of failure, or miseducation of their own children was a recurrent concern among the participants. SD explains that many of her expenses could have been avoided had she not been so fearful of schooling incorrectly or inadequately. Additionally, North Carolina, among other states requires annual testing and score reporting for all home educated children. This factor has the potential to add to the anxiety felt by home educators, since poor results can serve as a direct reflection of the home educators teaching abilities.

SD: ’My husband used to tease me and say I was like a drill sergeant schooler in the beginning because I was so worried about, you know, it had to be just right. ‘

‘You know I tried to make their learning fit my box and they could have done more if I had turned that loose.

Participant WL, again, similar to her fellow participants illuminates financial challenges as one of her greatest obstacles within her homeschool experience. When asked about this as an area of the lived experience, she responded:

WL: ‘The finances. The reason I became the tutor for classical conversations was to offset the cost for the curriculum. The reason I decided to become the book rep and sell the resources was to alleviate some of that stress on my husband. He's the sole provider. He works a full time job and then comes home and does a part time job and we're both not getting any younger and I just want that quality of life…So in a perfect world… when he made a doctor’s salary and we could do all these trips and we could do this and that, but finances is probably our biggest obstacle.’

Time management is also reported as a significant challenge for WL. A level of frustration is detected in her delivery of this segment. Immediately following interview, WL reported having to attend multiple homeschool activities before the end of the day.

WL: ‘But the majority is the time; I felt like we were too busy trying to get to point from A to B and not focusing on what we really were supposed to do.’

‘There are not enough hours in the day I am busier now than I ever was when I worked a full-time job.’

Participant KL repeats the concern and challenge of balance as a homeschooler. A common theme among participants is the balance between providing education in the home setting and also managing the additional demands of the home setting.

KL: ‘Really just balance. And balancing time with each of the kids and time with the house doesn't seem to stop. So that's the biggest thing.’

KL also mentions her frustration at times with the actual teaching and learning process.

KL: ‘Teaching my fifth child to read and I think about how frustrated I was with some of the first couple, as they didn't get it quite right at the beginning and it comes with time and you don't have to stress. It's okay.’

CV, who owns a family business reports multiple challenges with attempting to be effective and successful in both arenas; the homeschool and the family business. For her the biggest issue is balancing the responsibilities and ensuring that each receive her due attention.

CV: ‘It’s a real struggle because my business is important to us. But my homeschooling is really important to us, but I can't neglect one or the other. So it's a big balancing act.’

Associated with her dual responsibility is the need to be in both places at the same time according to CV. She describes having to find creative ways to manage her time efficiently.

CV: ‘Just, I guess, making time because I always get interrupted you know, the phone's always ringing and you know my employees are like, 'Hey, can you come down here and talk to this mom or something'. And so I'm like, okay, can I talk to them on the phone? She's like, no chance of meeting in person? I'm like okay, so we have to drop everything and it’s like once, they're

kind of at that age, that you like drop it, like it's really hard to get them back and, you know, you just have to work with the timing.'

In addition to the necessity for effective time management, she also has to figure out how to effectively deal with emotional and interpersonal challenges between herself and her children throughout the process, a similar challenge to that expressed by her fellow participants.

CV: 'Oh the greatest challenge for me; it is basically just trying to sit down and actually do this stuff without getting interrupted or, you know, taking three hours for two pages in math, because they want to sit there and throw a fit of, you know, do their math. So I try to praise them on the days that it takes them five minutes to do their math. I'm like see!'

She attributes some of the interpersonal challenges to the hormonal changes that her children may be going through, since, she said, they are teenagers.

CV: 'Hormonal changes. Hello. Yeah.'

Time management, for CV presents as the greatest hurdle, as she refers back to it as a major challenge throughout the interview.

CV: 'Yes. After they go to bed I stay up. I usually go to bed around midnight. My husband goes around 10 or 1030 unless we're watching something and then it's like I just sit there with my computer and either do work or get something out of the way, or just look at stuff I wanted to look at or, you know, I'm trying to start kind of a photography business. So, you know, watching YouTube videos on photography and things like that, just trying to just sit in there and watching

TV and just turning everything off during the day. Yeah. During the day I don't get too much done. There's always something to do.'

CV mentions finances and expenses as a challenge embedded within her homeschool experience. She mentions her own financial struggles with homeschoolers in general, stating it as a common problem among her peers.

CV: '…not only do they not have income coming in but now they have to pay for things that you don't have to pay for a public school and you're feeding them three times a day so yeah it does add up.'

Interestingly, DL, when asked about challenges and disadvantages mentions feelings of loneliness and isolation. Additionally, she alludes to the fear factor associated with homeschooling expressed by participants of this study, with references made to feeling out of her depth at times.

DL: 'I do sometimes feel out of my depth. I do feel lonely sometimes.'

'And I feel a little isolated.'

'I just wonder whether I'm really doing the right thing. That's my fear.'

Financial constraints are stated as a major challenge for DL, specifically in the form of travel expenses and the cost of materials.

DL: 'My greatest expenses really are, I do a lot of traveling in the car.'

'And, of course, I pay for all materials.'

‘Oh, of course, the curriculum, because that's pretty expensive. We pay easily $400 a year for that curriculum.’

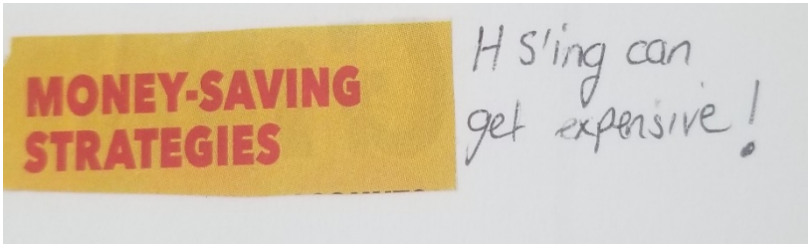


Figure 4.21. DL’s visual collage excerpt. Expenses: ‘Homeschooling can get expensive.’

It is interesting to note here, that verbally, through the interview process DL expressed several disadvantages and challenges, yet her visual collage reflects mostly positive aspects of the home education journey as she experiences it.

Participant GC who declined to participate in the visual collage exercise spoke briefly of specific challenges associated with his home education process. He alludes to his inadequacy when it comes to teaching mathematics. This is aligned with the fear expressed by other participants who expressed concern over failing their children in specific academic, or all areas of homeschooling. GC, in addition to fellow participants found that sourcing certain subjects out to experts within their community was a solution to this concern.

GC: ‘The greatest challenge, which I discovered early on was, and I mentioned math, I am math dumb.’

Participant TA, as a homeschooling sibling of her younger brother, expressed various challenges both verbally and visually, in the form of her visual collage. TA’s fear was multifaceted in that

she was fearful of failing her brother, herself, and her parents. As a sibling, she felt that there was an added dimension to their relationship, in that he perceived her as a superhero.

TA: 'I pressure myself to do things in a certain way, at a certain time. That was the hardest part, getting fearful that I was going to screw him up.'

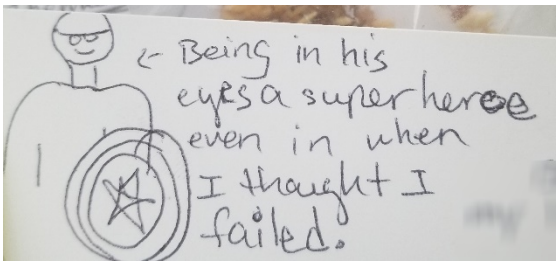


***Figure* 4.22**. TA's visual collage excerpt. 'Being in his eyes a superhero, even when I thought I failed.'

4.3.5 Thematic Unit: *Reflection*

Here participants were offered the opportunity to reflect upon their homeschooling experience and explore the idea of choosing an alternative form of education, should they be afforded the opportunity. Participants predominantly responded affirmatively, that they would choose homeschooling again, given the opportunity. However, responses were varied; for some, although they were committed to their choice, they would do things differently; they would not be as strict as they formerly were, they would make it a more pleasurable experience for both themselves and (they say) their children. Some argued that they would spend less, others suggested greater involvement with other home educators. Only two of the twelve participants

responded to the contrary, suggesting that given the appropriate resources and settings, they would not choose to homeschool again.

Reflection – Responses.

With regard to reflection, participants were asked to examine their own experience of home education and based upon that, decide, if given the opportunity whether they would choose home education again. This gives us an insight into the level of comfort, satisfaction and personal achievement experienced by the home educators as they experience the process. We cannot assume however, that if home educators opted not to pursue home education again, given the opportunity, that it was a negative experience. This section aims only to gain information about the process as it is experienced by the practitioners.

Because of ES' history of previous public schooling placement, she feels that homeschooling is her only choice. She feels that her options are directly determined by social justice and equity within the school system. Additionally, she feels that she is currently the only person adequately equipped to accommodate some of her child's additional challenges. It is thus a lack of satisfaction with current educational provisions that seemingly presented this forced choice for ES.

ES: 'God, I would have no choice Yes.'

Interestingly, NP suggests, that given the appropriate setting, resources, and general environment, she would not choose to homeschool her children again. This again suggests a possible forced choice, based on her disappointment with the current educational provisions for her children.

NP: ‘Honestly, as much as I liked it, I think if the right school, then I would probably have them in school, if I could be guaranteed that they would be getting the education that I want them to get.

In response to the same question, MU offered a vehement affirmative answer. Whether circumstances differed within alternative school structures or not, she asserts that her convictions would remain unchanged. MU would choose homeschooling again.

MU: ‘Yes, absolutely.’

When asked what, if anything, would the participant do differently, MU’s response was a positive and firm answer.

MU: ‘Nothing.’

Suggesting that she is satisfied with the choice that she made to educate her child at home.

For Penelope when the same question was asked: ‘What if anything would you do differently? And given the chance would you do it again? She responded:

Penelope: ‘Nothing, and yes, absolutely.’

Through her interview responses and her visual collage inserts and captions, Penelope expressed great excitement and satisfaction in her homeschooling process.

Likewise, SD, in her reflection suggests that she would homeschool again given the opportunity and had no regrets for doing so. She described her homeschooling as a positive experience and considers the freedom to choose the direction of her children’s education to be a necessity. Her

choice to home educate is rooted primarily in an ideological conviction.

SD: ‘I would do it sooner. I would steer clear of these accredited boxed curriculums although they may be good for some families. They weren't good for us.

When participant WL was asked: ‘If you had the opportunity …. Would you do it again?’ She responded adamantly.

WL: ‘Absolutely.’

When asked, what, if anything, she would do differently if she could do it again, WL responded:

WL: ‘In the beginning I wouldn't worry so much. I wouldn't stress academics so much. I would take more time to sit and play Legos or play outside cuz I can't get that time back.’

Although she reports that she would choose homeschooling again given the opportunity, she says that she would do things differently. Suggesting placing less pressure on herself and her children, it appears that SD realizes the potential for the homeschooling journey to be more gratifying for herself and her children.

WL’s reason’s for homeschooling are rooted in her Christian beliefs and she feels that her purpose is being fulfilled in her desire and ability to homeschool. As depicted in her visual collage, she considers homeschooling to be her mission.

WL: ‘This is the season in which I am in. I have been called to do this.’

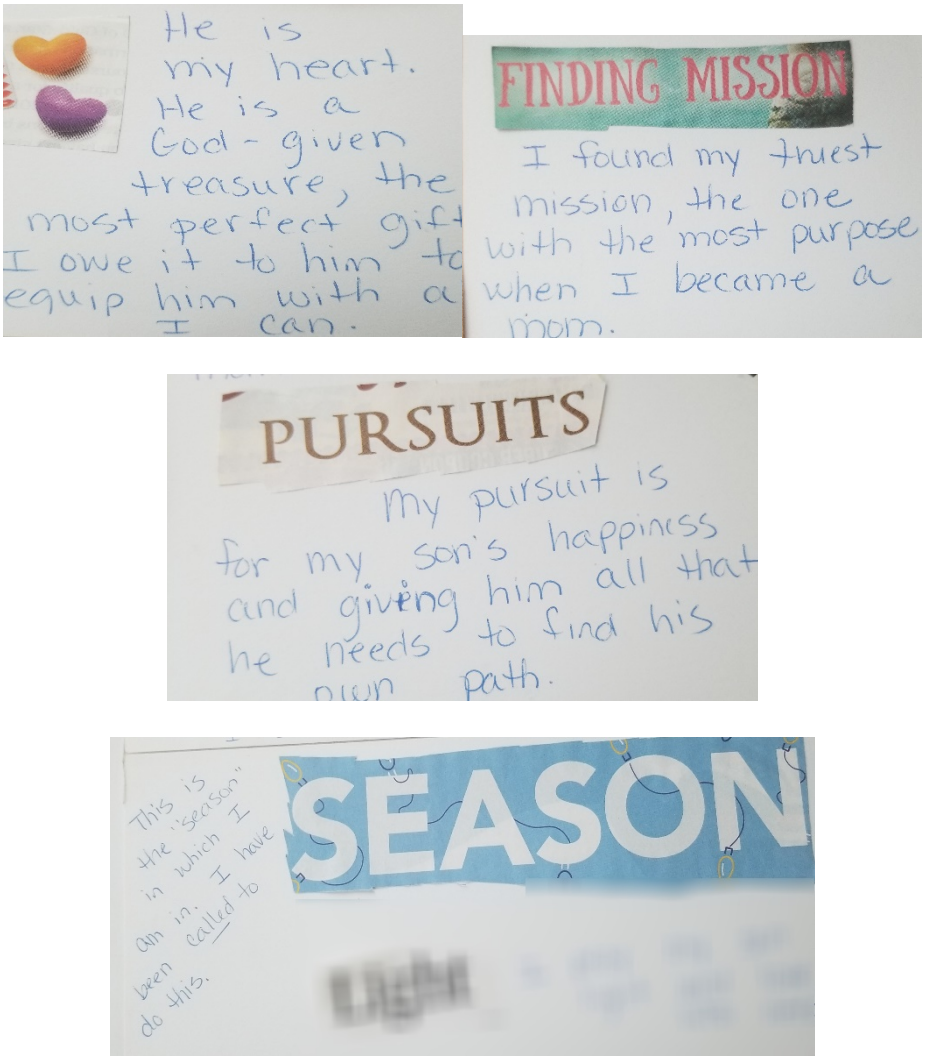


Figure 4.23. WL's visual collage excerpts

Remaining on the subject of reflection, the same questions were posed to participant KL In response to being asked what, if anything she would do differently, she reflected on how stressful it was teaching her children initially, and as she became more seasoned as a home educator she was able to practice with less stress.

KL: ‘Probably not stress so much… teaching my fifth child to read and I think about how frustrated I was with some of the first couple as they didn't get it quite right at the beginning and it comes with time and you don't have to stress.’

When CV was asked if, given the opportunity, she would choose homeschooling again, she responded:

CV: ‘Yes.’

CV alludes to adopting a very strict regime when she first began homeschooling but realizes that it is possible to homeschool with less restrictions, making for a more positive experience for her. CV and other participants, upon reflection realize that their own piece of mind is as important and in fact necessary for a more gratifying experience. Additionally, she reflects on how necessary it was for her to allow her children to take some responsibility for their part of the process: Encouraging them to apply greater effort to their own learning, thus placing less pressure on her as an educator to motivate them to do their work.

CV: ‘I would probably do better, you know, at certain things. Probably try to be a little bit more strict with their work and making sure that they're actually doing it.

It's like right now my 13-year-old, you know, I'm like, hey, you need to do these pages and I'll say did you do them. And she's like, yes. And so I'll check a couple days later, and she is still like, on the pages that I told her three days ago. I will initial where I want her to stop and they'll be my initials, and it's on a blank page.’

‘I mean, you know, so, trying to get her to do her work, but she doesn't want to come down because her brother and sister are with her. When they're all in the same room trying to do [their work] because my son and daughter like to listen to Pandora and stuff. They're talking and they're pretty much on the same lesson and stuff. They're talking about times tables and what does this equal and you know, little tricks that they learned about math or English or whatever. …so it's like …go up there to check on her and stuff but definitely to just to make sure they're doing the work. And I would probably homeschool through summer … You're going through that review stage and so at least do your Math and your English and maybe your Science and stuff, maybe go to historical places or something.’

‘And make sure that they're out a little bit those months. It's like okay, …we have to get ahead because I do have a homeschool mom that has her son in like four different soccer leagues and all of these activities…. So it's like, oh, well, we can fit all these in and overachieve and all that stuff. And I'm like, that is not gonna work for us.’

CV expressed no regrets for homeschooling and sees it as a necessity for the culture of their family, and more specifically, for her.

Participant DL when presented with the same dilemma responded affirmatively. Because she has experienced bullying, she has an aversion to traditional school settings. Homeschooling her child, she suggests assures that her child is protected from the potential for any future school bullying.

Additionally, DL, in her visual collage makes it explicit that she wants to have control over her children's education. Next to her chosen caption, 'The choice is yours, and it's simple,' she wrote the words 'More control over my kids' education.'

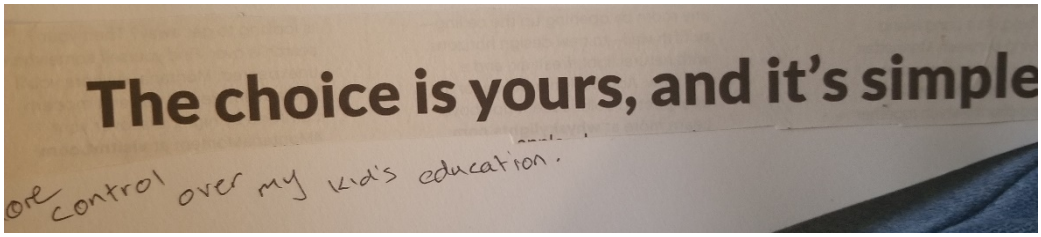


Figure 4.24. DL's visual collage excerpt: 'More control over my kid's education.'

DL: 'Oh, yeah, absolutely. This was the right decision. '

When asked if she would do anything differently, she responded:

DL: 'Okay, that's a tough question. Well, right now, it's still new for me...Really, the only thing I can say is that I would do a little bit more research and probably I really believe I still have to… but I would definitely do a little bit more networking.'

Participant GC's only regret was not starting to homeschool sooner. GS feels that had he been more knowledgeable about homeschooling initially it would have been a decision that he would have made with his first child.

GC: 'If I had the opportunity to do it all over again, I would have started sooner.'

GC: 'My oldest son would have been homeschooled from day one.'

Participant TA's response was an interesting one in that she is home educating her younger sibling. She emphatically stated that she would choose the homeschooling route again. She did

not elaborate further within the setting of the interview but stated afterwards that when she eventually has children of her own, she would definitely homeschool them children too. Given the opportunity to do it again, however, she states that she would homeschool with more patience and less rigidity.

TA: 'I would be kinder and more patient with myself and I would also not do so much within one day,'

Research Question 2: How is the decision to home educate made?

To answer this question, we explore the responses to questions within three of the thematic units; Sought Advantages, Reasons for Home Educating, The Decision to Homeschool.

4.3.6 Thematic Unit: *Sought Advantages*

As the lived experience is examined it is useful to explore what the initial and ongoing expectations of the home educators entail. Although responses were varied, the general anticipation of parents was to provide what they perceived as a better or superior education than what is available to their children in alternative settings. The tensions that immediately arise here allude to what the homeschool experience is being compared to. 'Better than' is therefore interpreted as what the homeschooler compares homeschooling to, based on his or her own personal experience. It must also be pointed out that participants refer to situations they are protecting their children from by homeschooling. Bullying is repeatedly referenced by participants, or rather the lack thereof as an anticipated outcome of homeschooling. Several participants also reference the continuity of their own religious ideology as an expected, and guaranteed outcome of them educating their own children. While arguably, others believe they

are the most qualified to provide the highest level of education for their children. Central to the theme of anticipated outcomes, however, is the ability to control how their children are educated.

Sought Advantages - Responses.

It can be assumed that the decision to home educate is based on an expectation or desire for a particular outcome. For this research, it was necessary therefore to explore how the decision to homeschool was made. This was necessary to furnish a greater understanding of what the parents hoped to gain from this experience; what provision, sacrifices, plans, for example were put in place in order to put the idea in action.

The decision to home educate has great relevance to the lived experience of the homeschooler because it involves a decision that will directly impact the daily life and environment of the parent who takes on the role of the educator.

A common theme among the respondents in the desire to home educate, appears to focus on parents' desire to protect their children. Whether it is to protect them from bullying, inadequate academic structure and knowledge, or conflicting ideologies, parents feel that home educating eliminates the perceived risks that may be at large within alternative educational settings. In essence, the interview question asks, 'What did you expect to happen?'

Direct interview questions addressed the anticipated outcomes of those who engage in homeschooling:

Participant ES's narrative attempts to explain the rationale behind the decision to homeschool, thus she illustrates her determination to forego her own needs, doing whatever she needed to do

to make it happen. In summary, ES wanted to protect her child:

ES. ‘Try to keep him away from adults that have really severe issues going on in their personal life that like to take it out on children that can't speak, that's my goal. That's basically it. Whatever I have to do to make that happen. That's what I'm gonna do.’

In exploring NP’s anticipated outcomes, she stipulates that ultimately, what she wants for her children is happiness and an optimal education that would elevate their chances of going to college. By homeschooling, NP feels that she would have a degree of control over making this happen.

NP: ‘I want my children to be happy. I want them to get an optimal education. And honestly, I want my kids to go to college. I want them to have a fair opportunity to go to college.’

Regarding outcomes, participant MU states a desire for her children to be happy, and safe. She is influenced by her own experiences of bullying as a child and does not want her children to be subjected to the same traumatic events.

MU: ‘That my children can live free, be happy and not be bullied, as I was’.

Participant RAKA envisions what she describes as a well-rounded education as a desired outcome.

RAKA: ‘To provide a well-rounded education.’

Likewise, participant Penelope feels that homeschooling will enhance her children’s chances of the future that she desires for them.

Penelope: ‘To prepare my kids for a productive and rewarding future.’

Participant WL bases her anticipated outcomes on her desire for her children to become the kind of individuals that her faith aims to shape them to be. Interestingly, she places greater value on discipleship than academic scholarship.

WL: ‘Well as a Christian. I'm raising a disciple and not a scholar.’

Participant KL’s anticipation is similar to that of WL. She wants her children to reflect her faith:

KL: ‘I homeschool because I want my children to grow up to be educated godly men and women who love God and love others.’

Participant CV feels that homeschooling will provide outcomes in her children that public schools may not. By homeschooling, she believes that she has a greater level of control over those outcomes.

CV: ‘I just want them to be a little bit more rounded I guess than the public-school kids. I mean, they're around adults a lot. They're learning stuff that they're learning, but differently.’

Participant DL, like ES and MU, fears bullying. She feels that by home educating she will be able to exert a level of control over what happens to her child in the educational setting, safeguarding her from bullying and other negative influences external to the homeschool setting.

DL: Well, I can avoid bullying. I have complete control over what she learns and who she interacts with, and it gives me peace of mind

Participant GC’s stance is an interesting one in that he stipulates that his expected outcomes are

not based on religious ideology or an aversion to public education, he simply wants to maximize his time with his children, and feels well equipped to provide their education:

GC: ‘To have a richer, more meaningful relationship with my kids and to have them know that they are more empowered academically, than their peers who have been otherwise educated. And I'm not, don't get me wrong; there's nothing wrong with public education. But I do believe that my kids will be that much better equipped for the world having been homeschooled.

I know a lot of people homeschool because of religious reasons, and social reasons, and things along those lines. But I know that anything that they learn at home is reinforced. But they will still experience these other things in the world. So that was not my primary goal. My primary goal was their education, everything else they will learn on their own as they get older.’

Participant TA offers a philosophical outlook on what is anticipated as an outcome for homeschooling:

TA: ‘The main goal, is to equip the child to think on his own. To give him all the information for him to be able to take in the information and then make his own decisions. And to be as well informed about what actually matters and what's going to help him in his future.’

Of the 12 participants, only SD depicted an outcome or objective for homeschooling within her visual collage. SD’s suggested outcome referred to a broader implication of school reform.

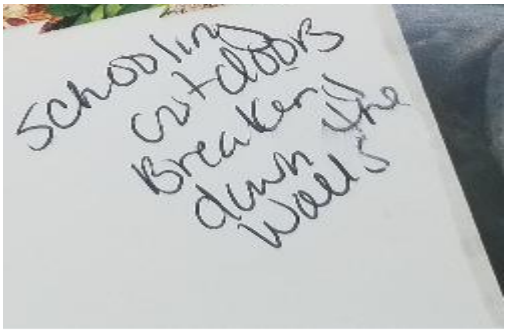


Figure 4.25. SD's visual collage excerpt: Schooling outdoors breaks down the walls.

4.3.7 Thematic Unit: Reasons for Homeschooling

Participants stated numerous reasons for making the decision to home educate. Among these reasons was a disappointment with the public-school, system related to unresolved administrative or academic issues. Two respondents stated logistic reasons for homeschooling, specifically military relocation and deployment. Rather than repeatedly move their children from school to school, participants stated that it was easier and produced less disruption to education to homeschool. Participants also stated that incidents of bullying either experienced by the parent during childhood, or by their own children were the main reasons for homeschooling. Two participants stated that they were actually inspired by other home educators who portrayed homeschooling as an attractive option. Another participant stated a fear of her children being exposed to negative experiences in the school system as her reason for homeschooling. Others attributed their reasons to their faith and the need to envelope their family in an atmosphere that promotes their faith. It can be clearly seen that the reasons for homeschooling substantiate the disgruntlement, logistics, fears, fantasies and ideologies of the home educating parent. Again, we

see an attempt of the home educating parent to control his or her environment, and by default, that of his or her children.

Reasons for homeschooling - Responses

Reasons for homeschooling are differentiated from anticipated outcomes in that chronologically homeschooling parents developed their reasons before determining what the outcomes would be. Through a review of interview transcripts, it can be determined that participants almost invariably can recall a starting point from which the decision was made to home educate. Whether it was a specific incident, or an ideological standpoint, a reason can almost always be articulated by the practitioner. Specific interview questions focused on the reasons for choosing homeschooling.

Participant ES refers to specific incidents that led to her decision to homeschool. She cites issues of bullying and disappointment with the bureaucratic system of the public school system as her catalyst for making the change to homeschooling.

ES: ‘And we had another somewhat similar incident as my 15-year-old, but it was involving the teachers instead of involving another kid with the bullying, and they refused to put cameras in the classroom...I had no other alternative because the school system as a county was not cooperating. They would not do what they should do, and put cameras in all of the classrooms with children that were nonverbal, like they do for children in a nursery because they’re babies and they can't talk … have cameras everywhere so that they can be watched … should be the same thing for children with special needs who have no ability to speak, it's the same thing.’

Participant NP was quite specific in stating her reason for homeschooling. For her and her

family, logistics played a major role. As a military family, frequent relocation is an expectation as long as the service member is active duty. It made sense therefore to NP and her husband to consider homeschooling as an alternative to uprooting their children from their school each time they received new relocation orders.

NP: ‘Well, because my husband is military, it was pretty early on; I think she was about four or maybe five. But my husband is military and moves around quite a lot. And I did not like the instability of moving my child from school to school every time my husband got stationed somewhere else.’

MU reports being bullied as a child and to that end, always knew that she would

homeschool as a result of that experience.

MU: ‘I always knew that I was going to homeschool, I had a bad experience in school myself. And I never wanted to put my own children through that.’

‘That my children can live free, be happy and not be bullied, as I was.’

RAKA’s situation is similar to NP’s in that as a military family relocation is a regular occurrence. Homeschooling was initially intended only as a temporary option, but the decision was made to continue indefinitely.

RAKA: ‘We were called to move to Germany from Georgia. My husband, as I said, is military so that's why, because of the transition. I thought it would be best to homeschool until we get situated and then just continued on.’

Participant Penelope recalls being strongly influenced by a presenter of a program she attended while in college. Up until she observed the presentation, homeschooling had not been a consideration. However, the speaker triggered her initial thoughts and when she had children of her own, she activated the thought that was initiated as a result of the presentation; although it was not her initial choice. Issues of bullying with her child in a public-school setting helped to solidify the decision to homeschool.

Penelope: 'It dates back to when I was in college, I took a marriage and family class and I learned a lot of really cool things. A lot of speakers came in, and one of the speakers that came in was a homeschool mom. She was a president of the coop and she started talking about homeschooling and I remember sitting in a class saying I want to do that one day. There were just some things going on, some bullying and some issues with another child.'

Academic struggles and not getting the help she felt she needed from school personnel was the impetus for embarking on homeschooling for participant SD. She discussed a general discontent for the public-school system, and after extended periods of what she portrayed as ineffective dialogue with officials, decided that homeschooling would be a suitable alternative.

SD: 'Okay, so I remember seeing some issues with my older son when he was in second grade. He was struggling and bringing home lots of homework. He wasn't getting in trouble, but he was coming home with school work and it was taking so long to do. And I remember thinking maybe he needs tutoring, and I went to the school to inquire about that but they refused tutoring unless he was seen by a pediatrician first. And this was at F*** B******, Georgia in a DOD (Department of Defense) school.

‘So I took him to a pediatrician and I said, look, I need tutoring from the school, they won't let me do it unless I bring him here first. They just asked me a couple basic questions: What seems to be the problem? I said, well, he seems to kind of spaced out in class and he comes home with other schoolwork. He wrote up two prescriptions for my son and said that he had ADD.’ (Attention Deficit Disorder).

‘But in his sixth-grade year, different things that happened at school, programs were showed to him that were completely inappropriate; rated R movies for example. I had parent- teacher conferences that did not go well. And that's when we decided that we were going to at least attempt this whole thing.’

Participant WL comments on her own internal struggles with leaving her child with strangers:

WL: ‘The thought of leaving him with a stranger, but it was just the thought that I would miss eight hours a day with him and I would miss many milestones.’

Participant KL attributes her interest in homeschooling to a friend who presented homeschooling as such an attractive option that she wanted to try it. Having tried it, SD decided to continue, since it was a system that worked for her and her family. She also commented on the importance of having the freedom and authority to decide what her children learn, rather than have it decided by someone else.

KL: ‘Well, when my oldest was three or four I had a friend who was homeschooling, and she just talked about all the great things about homeschooling. And so we thought that we would try it for a year and then there's just so many things that we loved about it that we just kept going and we never stopped.’

KL: ‘Deciding what our kids learn, not somebody else deciding. Especially about the things that we say, the things that matter. But we just want to be the ones guiding and giving our children the worldview that we believe they should have.’

Participant CV expressed a desire for her children to be eligible for the same opportunities available to public school children, but without exposure to the negative experiences she considers public school children are exposed to.

CV: ‘I just want them to have the same opportunity but be smarter about it and not be exposed to the things that they're exposed to like in public school.

Similar to fellow participants, bullying was a significant issue for DL. Like MU, she personally experienced bullying as a student, and was thus reluctant to send her child to school with the knowledge that bullying was a possibility. She also alludes to the fact that having control over what her child learns and who she interacts with is of paramount importance.

DL: ‘She did go to preschool and there was an incident that looked like bullying to me. So it was just too fresh in my mind. And I did not want her to go through what I went through. So it was a no brainer for me that homeschooling would be the right thing for her.’

DL: ‘Well, I can avoid bullying…I have complete control over what she learns and who she interacts with, and it gives me peace of mind.’

TA’s reason are unique in that as a sibling, it was more of her parent’s decision to home educate, a duty that she was facilitating on their behalf. However, rather than stating a reason for doing so, she states a reason for continuing to do so.

TA: ‘I got to teach him how to read. I got to see a lot of his firsts and then I got to see how to persevere and also how he looks at the world, which I found quite interesting.’

4.3.8 Thematic Unit: The Decision to Home Educate

This section looks at who was involved in the decision, and how the decision was made. Five participants reported that the decision to home educate was entirely the primary educator’s decision, while four participants report the decision was agreed upon between both parents. Two of the twelve participants suggest that the decision was a joint family decision, where the children were actively involved. In response to questions related to how the decision was made, respondents recall doing research in a variety of ways, including networking with other homeschoolers, visiting libraries for information, and conducting online research. Participants recall family discussions where following the finalization of the decision, children were either asked how they felt about the decision, or told about the decision. One participant reports involving close friends in making the decision to homeschool, valuing their opinions as an integral part of the process. Ultimately, even though on two occasions, the children were consulted for their opinion, parents made the decision to homeschool. It is not known what the outcome would have been, had the children that were consulted for their opinion declined the suggestion; an area for future research.

The Decision to Homeschool – Responses.

(How the decision was made. Who was involved).

The question of who was involved in the decision to homeschool is an important one, in that such a decision certainly affects the family, but more significantly, directly impacts the parent or caregiver who elects to do the teaching. Although this is a decision that greatly impacts the child, it is the individuals' lived experience that is under study and within the scope of this research.

Participants were asked to provide information on how the decision to home educate was made and who was involved in the decision. All participants responded to the question.

Responses are listed as simple annotated responses to the direct question that was asked.

- ES: 'You could say mostly everything comes down to my decision. If it involves me and my time it's my decision. JS (husband) always knows that I will always make the best decisions for our kids. So he just kind of goes with what I said.'
- NP: 'It was entirely my decision. Basically, you know, my husband just said, make sure that you know what you're doing, get all the information, network with other people that you know that are doing it, give it a try. If after two years, you're not happy or the child is not happy, then we'll have to do something different.'
- RAKA: 'All three of us.' (Participated in the decision; RAKA, husband and daughter).
- Penelope: 'I want you to know from each of you, do you want to homeschool next year? And they all said yes unanimously. '
- SD: 'Me and my husband, then we told the kids what we were doing. They were excited. It was interesting for them.'
- WL: 'Well, it was mine.' (Decision).
- KL: 'Joint, my husband and I decided together.'

- CV: ‘We (husband and wife) decided to homeschool.’
- DL: ‘Well, it was completely my decision. Her father is not in her life.’
- GC: ‘Well, I'm a single parent, and that is a challenge in and of itself. But I did include several friends.’
- TA: ‘It was mom and dad.’

Research Question 3: What support systems do these homeschoolers experience?

To answer this question, we explore the responses to questions within the following thematic unit: Support.

This research question bears great relevance to the lived experience as a whole because many of the themes are a development of, or are intrinsically connected to this area of inquiry in some way.

4.3.9 Thematic Unit: *Support*

Support is a highly significant area of the homeschooling experience. Interestingly there appears to be significant variability in how support is sought, yet it must be noted that all participants of the pilot study belonged to a physical support group. This observation is based on my personal experience as a former homeschooler, participant accounts and supporting literature. Participants involved in the present study report a strong reliance on the support of extended family, online support groups and coops, in addition to physical support groups, while two participants report a reliance on no support systems at all. Of the twelve participants, two stated that they used to utilize physical support groups but have opted for online support instead. Five participants, however, report primarily belonging to physical regional support groups where fellow home

educators meet on a regular basis, engage in discussions, share resources and arrange activities for parents and children alike. Two participants rely on the support of extended family members. Four participants use online support groups predominantly. It is clear that support as a resource caters almost exclusively to the needs of the homes educator, whether the need is emotional, educational or otherwise, it is viewed by participants as integral.

Support. – Responses.

Specific questions addressed the utilization of support systems. Support in this context can take various form. Participants were simply asked where they choose to go for support. Participants offered various responses, including family, support groups, and other parents. Participants were asked about any support system as far as networks, online groups, and co-ops. The findings here are interesting, while all participants of the pilot study utilized support groups, belonged to regional coops and relied heavily on networking as practitioners, participants enlisted within the body of the main study relied to a far less extent on physical support, opting instead for online support. It is important to note however, that pilot study information was not included as findings for the main study, since the sole purpose of the pilot study was to guide the research questions and direct the semi-structured interview questions.

It is interesting to examine the reasons associated with the necessity for support, for example, ES, when asked about her utilization of support forums responded negatively, aligning the need for support with the use of specific curriculum, which she does not use:

ES: ‘No, because there's no educational curriculum.’

Participant NP has a strong reliance on various online support groups for guidance and

information. She articulates that although she is able to glean a lot of information from online support groups, a physical support group would probably be beneficial. It is evident that she feels there is merit in belonging to a physical group to minimize feelings of isolation.

NP: 'We do belong to an online support group, which I communicate with daily.'

'Um, let me see. Even though I did get a lot of information, I did a lot of research, I probably would seek out physical support groups and physical networks. And I'm going to be honest with you; I might still to do that If I can find anything close to my neighborhood, because I do feel a little isolated sometimes and a little lost.'

Participant MU states that she does not connect with support networks of any kind, and has not found a place in her practice for their necessity. NP was blunt and precise in her response, choosing not to further elaborate on the issue.

MU: 'Well, I don't belong to a network or any online forums. I just kind of do my thing.

That's it.'

RAKA reflects on having been affiliated with various support groups as a homeschooler. By her own definition she is an older homeschool mom and reflects on having adhered to physical support groups in her early days as a homeschooler. In her latter years, she has increasingly been drawn to online support groups as an alternative.

This is an interesting concept, since RAKA's early years of homeschooling would directly coincide with my years of homeschooling. At that time, in my experience, it was common for homeschoolers to belong to a regional support group. It was rare to find homeschoolers that did

not belong to one group or another. In fact, I would go as far as suggesting that it was common for homeschoolers upon introduction, to ask each other which group they belonged to.

RAKA: 'We spent most of our time at different types of homeschool groups and some have been really supportive.'

'Right now I'm doing online and finding out (excuse me) about different things going on for homeschool (my voice is getting dry).'

'That's how I found out about the acting class and the different things that she does, from my homeschool group. Someone posted them.'

From RAKA's narrative, it is clear that although the support groups may not be physical forums, the online groups are still able to provide information about regional events and resources.

Similarly, Penelope described various experiences with support groups, and mentions her membership of a regional coop. Penelope reflects on her great dependence on the support group and attributed much of her ability to sustain as a homeschooler to the support provided by her groups. Additionally, Penelope mentions family support. This, she maintains has been immeasurable and was necessary for her as a homeschooler.

Again, like other participants, as she became a more seasoned home educator, Penelope has become more reliant on online support groups than physical local groups.

Penelope: 'Definitely the large Co-op that I joined years ago. Also, you kind of gain a clique with the other moms that you really get along with. You kind of merge into your own little group and then you become best friends. And so I have five moms …we circled our red wagons around

each other and did everything we could, and that's been 10 years of a very strong, strong yet small circle within a bigger group.'

'And then my family. Even though my parents don't live in the state, they're very, very supportive and all the grandparents of the kids are huge supporters.'

'Now I'm more into, like the Yahoo group... and more online because my kids don't want to go play in the park on Fridays (with coops) anymore.'

Participant SD places local support groups as an integral part of her practice. She is a member of a coop, and to that end has a responsibility of reciprocity. If her children receive benefits from attending the coop, she has an obligation to serve in some capacity. So essentially, when the child attends coop, mom attends coop. SD did not elaborate on the capacity in which she serves, but it is a weekly obligation.

SD: 'Wednesdays, she's part of a co-op and she does classes there.

In addition to the co-op, SD reveals a reliance on her association with other homeschool moms:

SD: 'I would say other local homeschool moms (for support).'

But again, interestingly we see a leaning towards the online and social media forms for support.

SD: 'Social media sites that I've recently joined in the last few years to be able to share similar experiences.'

WL reports belonging to a rigidly structured support group and educational platform called Classical Conversations. This is a national homeschool resource that has established a

curriculum and a prescribed style of homeschooling. Members pay an annual fee, in addition to the cost of books and materials. Students attend classes, taught by trained practitioners of the Classical Conversations method. It is a faith-based program, and although lessons are not taught directly by parents, it requires deep involvement from parents to ensure that all assignments are completed accurately, and that standards and expectations of the method are continually reiterated by the parent. This method takes the direct teaching out of the hands of parents, but is still considered homeschooling. The method encapsulated the essence of the support group and the coop in that reciprocity of service is required and networking with other parents is strongly encouraged.

WL: 'At this point I like Classical Conversations, we have a community. So we meet once a week and there's moms there. So if you're having a bad day, you've got that mom who has been where you are and she'll give you that encouragement.'

Participant KL refers to a coop that she attends regularly for resources, support and friendship. 'Enrichment day' which she refers to, is the weekly day of classes and activities hosed by the coop, usually in a public or private building, large enough to house a large group of participants. KL, as other participants formerly associated with several groups, but resigned herself to remaining attached to one group for simplicity, while using online resources for her other needs.

KL: 'And so it has an enrichment day once a week that we really like a lot so the kids go; and most of my kids took three classes every Wednesday and they really enjoyed… they enjoy the classes and they enjoyed all the kids that were there and that's a lot. It's a co-op so I helped teach PE class.'

‘…had moms nights when they'd have a mom’s night out and they had other activities like a square dance.’

‘We were part of some other physical groups and we decided just to be part of H**E, but we're still on some of the online groups because it's a great source of information.’

Participant CV states that she is very reliant on support in a variety of forms. Her parents are very supportive of her and her children, and she also belongs to various physical support groups within her region. It is clear that the support of her family is very important to CV.

CV: ‘… and then we had my parents. My parents lived in R******, they moved from Washington to R****** and so we had them come down and stay with them (the children) for the first time that we went to the homeschool conference.’

‘I am a part of quite a few homeschool groups around here.’

‘ …my whole family's very supportive. I mean, like I said I was home schooled so my family is very supportive.’

‘We don't have any, you know, family members that are against it, or try to talk us down from it or anything like that. It's a very supportive environment.’

Without great elaboration, DL indicates connectedness to a support group, that is physical in nature. She makes the distinction between that group and an online support group, of which she is also a member.

DL: ‘I'm connected to a support group.’

‘I also belong to an online network of homeschoolers.’

Participant GC confidently states that he does not belong to any support groups of any kind, but does rely on the support of close friends and acquaintances. He alludes to the fact that he has made contact with online forums on occasion, when he has had a specific question, but does not belong to any specific group.

GC: ‘As a homeschooler I don't belong to any groups any co-ops or networks anything. Currently I belong to no groups or networks but if I run into a curriculum hang up, A Becca has an online support network that I can access and there are also several YouTube subscription sites. I can't think of a name of one right now but it's a very good tutorial for the teacher or instructor. I currently have not found any local flesh and bone support networks that I feel like joining.’

‘I have no other contact than getting advice on one subject or the other you know, a question requested is usually answered but I have not reached out to them to try to build a social group or join a coop.’

‘Don't need support, but I am sure that if I raised the flag I have several friends that would come to my rescue if I had a question.’

Participant TA, the sibling of a younger child, recalls formerly belonging to the Classical Conversations group, but currently does not participate in any support group activities, academically or socially. Interestingly she alluded to the fact that she is taking the route of self-educating, via videos and tutorials in order to expand her knowledge and inform her practice.

TA: '…but the ones that I use the most surprisingly were on YouTube, I watched a lot of other homeschooling home educators, how they did their day.'

4.4 Additional Revelations from Visual Collages

Participants were invited to participate in the construction of a visual collage, which would depict the experience of the home educator visually. Participants were provided with markers, pencils, scissors, glue and magazines for clipping, and instructed to utilize whichever implements suited them. An analysis of the in-depth interviews in comparison to visual collages showed a significant difference between what was spoken and what was visually depicted. Visual collages tended to illustrate predominantly positive aspects of the lived experiences, with only few references to the downside of homeschooling. Visual collages referenced the freedom to control what their children learn, how their own time is structured, fun with the family, and freedom to travel on several occasions. In their personal interviews the picture was far less optimistic. For example, participant KL references only positive experiences; nature watching, family baking, sweet treats, family biking, family fruit picking, and travels in her visual collage. Yet when interviewed, she revealed concern over her ability to maintain balance between her personal life and homeschooling duties, allocating sufficient time between herself and each of her children, which she describes as frustrating. Similarly, CV's visual collage depicts images of fun with learning with the caption 'Destination Learning' a picture of a happy family able to travel and vacation whenever wish, and the ease with which they are able to run a family business while homeschooling, where a picture of a smiling woman with a laptop is inserted. CV's interview, however, illuminates multiple challenges, where she struggles to be optimally effective in both her business and as an educator. Like KL, she struggles with allocating her time

between her children of different ages, in addition to challenges with emotional and interpersonal challenges between herself and her children.

This discrepancy between what is said in the interview and what is depicted in the visual collage, does not at all question the legitimacy of the participants' contributions, but rather looks at the nature of the data source. It is possible, that the very nature of the production of the visual collage creates the perception of a fun activity. To that end, positive images are brought to the fore. But more importantly the addition of the visual collage to this study provides the opportunity to include and encourage a range of linguistic and non-linguistic representations to articulate authentic lived experiences.

'It has become increasingly clear since the latter half of the 20th century that knowledge or understanding is not always reducible to language. . .. Thus, not only does knowledge come in different forms, the forms of its creation differ. The idea of ineffable knowledge is not an oxymoron.' (Eisner, 2008, p. 5).

4.5 Summary

The findings from this study follow the research questions and the findings, addressing the lived experience of the home educator, how the decision is made, and support systems utilized. Of the nine themes that were identified, the following four stand apart as fundamental components of the experience and warrant further attention in order to direct focus to their significance.

4.5.1 Structure

It emerges that structure is a major component it the effort to answer the question of how the home experience is lived. The study finds that there is not one homogeneous way of

homeschooling, and that within the selected group of participants, multiple structures are identified. Participants vary in style and structure of homeschooling from a very rigid structure, where activities are scheduled, to a loose structure, where activities and events are not planned, or are loosely planned. One participant describes herself as an unschooler. Unschooling takes the form of engaging in whatever the day brings. Participant MU describes her unschooling activities as giving her children the opportunity to learn naturally within the environment. Associated with the thematic unit of structure is the thematic unit, curriculum. Participants described the type and style of curriculum that best suited their homeschooling. Curriculum varied from adherence to the standard curriculum, utilized by schooled counterparts usually in the form of textbooks and other resources used in schools, to boxed curriculum purchased from companies that specialize in producing curriculum for home educators. These boxed curriculums purport to be aligned to the national curriculum providing students with a compatible education to that offered in schools. The legitimacy of this clam has not been explored in this study, neither has the claim of some of the curriculums to be accredited, which although interesting lies beyond the scope of this research.

Several participants suggest the adherence to an eclectic style of educating, where resources are drawn from multiple sources. Participants utilize elements of a standard curriculum, online resources, external tutors, self-created activities, and joint activities, where students join other home educators at co-op activities.

This study finds that the structure of the homeschool is largely a reflection of the needs, abilities, and desires of the home educating parent. There is a need for the structure to fit in to the physical and emotional capacity of the home educator. Transcripts reveal that when a specific structure

did not work for the participant, it was changed. Some participants remained with a specific structure throughout their homeschool experience because it worked for them, while others felt the necessity to experiment with a variety of structures until they found one that fit.

4.5.2 Personal Fulfilment

The thematic unit of personal fulfilment speaks directly to what is being derived from the experience by the home educator. The initial direction of investigation was to explore some of the advantages associated with homeschooling. What emerged was a predominance of references to personal gains. For example, participant SD talks about her freedom to educate her children, NP mentions how it allows her to feel more connected to her family, as do KL, MU, RAKA and GC. CV illuminates the benefit of homeschooling in allowing her to be a business owner, whereas participant Penelope describes the experience as allowing her to 'feel like a kid again.' She also mentions the versatility of homeschooling, and her ability to build a legacy, which she did not elaborate on, but can be interpreted as her perception of a successful future outcome for her children as a result of her homeschooling efforts.

Challenges

Similar to the thematic unit of personal fulfilment, the thematic unit of challenges speaks directly to difficulties, obstacles and pitfalls as experienced and described by the participant. These challenges are entrenched in issues that directly impact the educator on multiple levels; self-esteem and confidence, personal time, fear, and stress are among the experiences described. It is interesting to note that issues listed as challenges can also be identified as elements of the experience that the homeschooler feels that he or she has little or no control over.

4.5.3 Support

Support is mentioned as a fundamental element of the homeschooling experience. Participants demonstrated significantly low adherence to a physical support group, but valued support as a necessity nevertheless. Of the twelve participants, five belong exclusively to local support groups. Participant Penelope asserts she has a great dependence on the support group and attributes much of her ability to continue homeschooling to the support provided by her groups. Online support groups are mentioned by participants repetitively, in addition to family and friend support.

When homeschoolers get together, exciting, creative, and amazing learning happens! Connecting with other homeschoolers locally is one of the best ways to ensure that you and your children have a successful and enjoyable learning experience. (HSLDA, 2016).

Two participants within this study report an initial adherence to a physical support group but engaged in a gradual gravitation towards online support groups. It can be suggested that this drift from the physical support group to the online support group may be attributed to a number of factors. The first and possibly most obvious that comes to mind is logistics; on repeated occasions, participants have mentioned the time constraints and challenges of homeschooling. As a former home educator, I recall travelling between activities as a very time consuming aspect of the experience. Attending a support group session on a weekly basis added to the challenge of attempting to balance one's time. It can therefore be assumed that attending an online support group would be a simple solution to this issue; where attendance on a specific day and time is not required. Other participants have mentioned that they saw no necessity for support groups of any kind (GC), relying instead on the help and advice of friends and family members.

Support of any kind for the home educator is identified as a vehicle to sustain the emotional and academic needs of the home educator, where he or she is able to share experiences, get advice and learn from others in addition to obtaining resources. Homeschoolers are also able to obtain legal advice regarding their state's laws.

4.5.4 The Decision to Home Educate

The decision to home educate and the way in which home education is practiced is situated firmly within the personal needs, lifestyle, philosophical standpoint and faith of the home educator. Additionally, the concept of control seemed to weave through the various thematic units, where the home educator sees the necessity to establish and maintain control over self, family, and environment. For example, of the twelve participants, although the primary educator was involved in the decision to home educate in all instances, on six occasions it was the sole decision of the primary educator. The remainder included the input of a marital partner and children.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter included information related to study findings pertaining to the lived experiences of home educators in LaFayette, North Carolina. A discussion related to the description of research participants, procedures used in the qualitative study, intellectual and research traditions, and data analysis was included in this chapter. In answering the research questions, by the development of thematic units using coding strategies, ten significant thematic units emerged from the findings. It can be concluded from the findings that Home Educators care for and about their children; identified in the concern expressed over their welfare and the stated importance of

spending quality time together. Home educators demonstrate the necessity of a level of control over their lives and their environments, evidenced in the decisions they make. And finally, the structure and experience of the practice of home education is determined by the primary home educator. To offer crude and basic responses to paraphrased

research questions, in the context of the findings, one could offer the following responses.

How is the home education experience lived? In a way that is conducive to and determined by the needs of the primary educator.

How is the decision to home educate made? Always with and most often, by the primary educator.

What support systems are utilized? Those deemed necessary by the needs of the primary home educator, who invariably determines the level of support required.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter begins with a summary of the research and then discusses the conclusions that have been reached as a result of interviewing twelve homeschooling participants who have opted to educate their children at home. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to answer the following questions:

1. How do parents describe their experience of homeschooling?
2. How is the decision made to homeschool?
3. What support systems do these homeschoolers experience?

To answer these questions, a pilot study was initially conducted, where three participants from a specific region of North Carolina, USA were interviewed for the purpose of guidance and direction of the study. This was followed by the main study comprising of 12 participants from the same region. This phenomenological study was thus designed to investigate the lived experiences of home educators. The study was qualitative in an effort to understand the nature of a setting, which in this instance is the homeschool, and the experiences others have in this context (Merriam, 1998). I used phenomenological inquiry including personal memos, researcher notes, visual collages (Appendix C) and personal interviews (Appendix A) to explore the lived experiences of home educating participants.

In an attempt to assess the breadth of available information related to the lived experience of the home educator, the literature review examined a variety of related works situated around the practice of home education. Although there are no known examples of literature that focus on the experience of the homeschooler specifically from the perspective of the parent educator,

information does exist that focuses on the reasons why parents choose to home educate and how it is done. How it is experienced is unique to this study.

Anecdotally, I must admit that I was both exited and surprised by the findings of this study, particularly since I am a former home educator. Out of curiosity I posed the research questions to myself upon the discovery of the findings (unscientifically of course) and realized things about myself that were not at all apparent to me initially but were a clear demonstration of the efficacy if the inductive process. Specifically, I found that home educations was as much a choice of lifestyle for me, (if not more), as it was for my son. I realise that I did it because it was an attractive choice for me, it is not something I would have ever done under duress. Likewise, throughout the study there was no indication that any of the participants were doing it against their will. As with the participants, being in control of my environment was also gratifying.

In attempting to obtain the true essence of the lived experience, participants were probed to reveal how and why the decision to home educate was made. The findings of this study were consistent with studies in the literature review that list religion, bullying, and dissatisfaction among the reasons for homeschooling (Rothermel 2003, Ray, 2000,). Also, consistent with earlier findings as stated in the literature review, is the stated need to home educate due to frequent migration (Walsh, 2013). Participants NP and RAKA both reflect on the utility of home education as military families that have been subject to frequent moves.

Also consistent with the findings of this study is the literature related to bullying (Brodie 2010, Kalman, 2010) mentioned earlier in this research. Bullying is stated by participants within this study on several occasions as a primary reason for choosing to homeschool. Whether the bullying is feared or anticipated due to personal experiences as a child (MU),

or parents have dealt with encounters with their own children (DL and ES), it is stated as a concern.

Available literature does corroborate the homeschool experience, but the experience is often related to that of the child. My objective is to view the lived experience specifically from the lens of the parent.

5. 1. Discussion

5.1.1 Home Educators Are Caring Educators

Consistent with the research cited in the literature review, this study concludes that home educators are caring educators (Noddings 1999). By the very nature of the biological relationship between the parent and child, the caring relationship is established. Participants within this study exemplify this level of caring in the need to protect their children from bullying, negative school environments, contrary ideologies and what specific participants refer to as negative school environment (participant ES).

5.1.2 The Need for Control

The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and the findings; exploring the lived experience of the home educator, how the decision is made to home educate, and support systems utilized. The concept of control weaves through the various thematic units that emerged, where the home educator sees the necessity to establish and maintain control over self, family, and environment. For example, of the twelve participants, although the primary educator was involved in the decision to home educate in all instances, six participants reported that they were the sole decision maker. The remainder included the input of a marital partner and children. This

is a significant issue because there is currently no known literature that supports this concept. Although the literature review for this study makes reference to concerns about certain groups potentially using homeschooling to promote extremist values, or as a smokescreen for other unscrupulous practices, there is no literature that suggests that the practice serves such a significant purpose for the practitioner.

A conclusion to be drawn from these findings is that the home educators in this study demonstrate a desire to maintain control in various areas of their own lives; a desire to effect and maintain control over his or her own life, children, environment, finances, career, and religion. The lived experience is determined by the choices of the home educating parent; why it is done, how it is executed, and with whom it is shared, all dictated by the primary educator. The iterative process of this research reveals that homeschooling fits into the lifestyle of the educator in addition to the needs of the child. Further research is required to explore the concept of control, as related to home educators.

5.1.3 Is Homeschooling for the Home Educator?

(Home education fulfilling the needs of the educator)

The findings of this study suggest that the way in which the home educator experience is lived, primarily serves the function of the fulfilment of the needs of the home educator. Parents report that they home educate for a variety of reasons, including, controlling what their children learn, protecting their children from bullying, (in specific cases, because they were bullied), instilling religious values, accommodating military deployments, operating a family business, disputes with formers schools. Literature suggests that home educators engage in the practice out of

concern for their children's education (Ray, 2000). Other reasons parents give for home educating their children, according to Ray include, concerns about the school environment, dissatisfaction with academic instruction, a desire to provide moral and/or religious instruction, a child with special needs. Although these are salient points and do factor into the decision to home educate, the findings of this study suggest that these reasons are secondary to the desire of the primary home educator who selects home education as an option for their family. In other words, the primary educator *elects* to home educate. Without a willingness of the primary educator to engage in the practice, it is unlikely that home education would take place.

Not only does the primary educator play a major role in the decision to home educate, he or she dictates how the practice is executed. The findings of this study suggest that the lived experience of the home educator is determined by the home educator.

The way in which the experience is lived is reflective of the direct needs and desires of the parent; the structure of the day; a strict or relaxed structure, the number of activities, how finances are managed, if and when the homeschooling process should end. The daily activities of the homeschool must accommodate the desires, needs and capacity of the homeschooling parent. Thus, the way in which the homeschool experience is lived is directly determined by the character and chosen lifestyle of the homeschooling parent. The home educator crafts the structure of the homeschool to meet his or her own needs, desires and capacity.

This is further illustrated in the decision to home educate, where the primary educator is involved in every stage of the decision making, as we see from the findings. It is the primary educator's need and desire to home educate that initiates the process. Without an initial desire to home educate from the primary educator, it is unlikely that home education would be an option.

Although no known research related to the findings within this study has been conducted, a child advocacy organization, The Coalition for Responsible Home Education (CRHE) takes issue with what it perceives as a parent controlled entity, where, they argue the needs of children are rarely a consideration. The CRHE criticizes the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) which is the largest advocate and support forum for homeschooling parents in the USA.

HSLDA's mission is to defend and advance the constitutional rights of parents to direct the education of their children (HSLDA 2013), while CRHE's goal is advocating for homeschooled children.

HSLDA makes it clear that they are advocating for the interests of their members—homeschooling parents—at the expense of the interests of homeschooled children.

'We do not believe that this is a positive framing for homeschooled children, who may not have chosen homeschooling as their educational method and who may not have a voice of their own.' CRHE (2010).

Although the focus of this research is on the lived experience of the homeschooling parent, the findings lead to a conclusion that supports some of the claims of CHRE.

In an exploration of the question; is home education for the home educator or home educated? it can be said that although the fundamental purpose is to educate children, findings of this study suggest a significant level of personal gain that is derived from the process by the home educator. Reports of feeling invincible, and feeling like a superhero (TA) suggest a level of satisfaction that is being gleaned from the experience.

5.2 Limitations

This was a very small study of 12 parents in a particular geographical region. The study sought to look specifically at their lived experience which was rooted in local and cultural factors. These may well have contributed to the choices and experiences of these families. For this reason, no claims are made for the generalizability of the conclusions of this study however the findings are offered as an example of a deeper inquiry into a small setting. Second, it is likely that participants, inasmuch as their anonymity and my discretion was ensured, may have still feared that their anecdotes may have been recognized by other homeschoolers and thus may not have been willing to voluntarily share certain pieces of information for fear that they might be identified through their stories. Moreover, as a former home educator, my own experience is important. It led me to investigate this situation, but may also have shaped my inquiry. By revealing my position, I hope the reader can take this into account, since transparency is a step towards trustworthiness in qualitative research.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed from the data collected as part of this research:

1. Recommendations for home educators.
2. Recommendations for all educators.
3. Recommendations for Further Study.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Home Educators.

It is my recommendation that individuals engaged in, or considering home education consider evaluating their suitability and capacity for homeschooling by:

1. Deciding whose needs the practice is aimed at serving. Whether the needs of the educator or the educated are being considered.

Enduring a minimum period of training and education from experienced home educators. Such training would involve peer mentoring and shadow sessions.

2. Professional development. Consider engaging in certification courses to enhance knowledge and pedagogical practice. Specifically in areas of academic weakness. For example, if a home educator struggles with maths, they should consider taking courses to sharpen their skills in that area.

3. Ensure that they are protecting the interests of students, while also fulfilling the role of parents in shaping their child's educational experience. This means finding a middle ground between intrusive regulations and having no oversight at all.

4. Before embarking on the journey of home education, determine one's own strengths and weaknesses, and make an assessment as to whether one has the capacity to deliver an appropriate education to one's own children, understanding that a desire to do so may not be an adequate reason to practice.

5. Explore other means of personal fulfilment prior to and during the practice of home education.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Educators

It cannot be ignored that participants have expressed a desire to be closer to their families, the value of spending time together, fear of bullying, and the continuance of philosophical perspectives as reasons for educating their children. This element can be interpreted as caring. In addition to the fulfilment of their own needs, parents home educate their children because they care about them. This caring, for most parents comes naturally.

Teachers, we assume, also care about the children they teach.

'all teachers care.' It is because they care that people go into teaching.' (Noddings, 1984)

It is argued however, according to Nell Noddings (1984), that we all have known teachers who are cruel and uncaring, and these people should not be in teaching at all. It would be interesting and valuable if the kind of caring imparted between the caring parent and child could be mimicked in the classroom. Noddings advocates the relational sense of caring. The relational sense of caring, she argues, forces us to look at the relation.

'It is not enough to hear the teacher's claim to care. Does the student recognize that he or she is cared for? Is the teacher thought by the student to be a caring teacher?'

When we adopt the relational sense of caring, Noddings argues, we cannot look only at the teacher. In her recommendations, Noddings seems to reflect many of the attributes unique to the homeschooling experience: Perhaps teacher and students need more time together to develop a relation of care and trust? Perhaps classes should be smaller? Perhaps the pressure of standardized testing should be reduced so that teacher and students can explore topics of mutual

interest more deeply? Perhaps more attention should be given to students' interests? With regard to standardized testing in formal education, Noddings suggests that it would be possible to reduce the need for testing if caring relationships were full established:

'If no adult has time to spend with a child—shared time that yields dependable and supportive evaluation—then society looks for an easy and efficient way to evaluate: test, test, and test year after year. Then fear and competition take the place of eager anticipation and shared delight in learning.' (Noddings 1984). By nature, such relationships are already established between the homeschooling parent and child.

5.3.3 Recommendation for Further Research

1. Qualitative studies provide the opportunity for discovery, exploration and understanding. Additional research is recommended to expand the scope of this study. Home educators live the home school experience on a daily basis. Many continue with the process for the long term, others do not for a variety of reasons. For those who do not continue with homeschooling due to reasons associated with its associated challenges, it would be interesting to further examine the processes that lead to the termination of the process.

2. This study was comprised predominantly of female participants, with eleven females and one male. It would be interesting to examine the findings of a study that included a greater number of male participants,

3. This study sought the experiences and perspectives of home educators through personal interviews. Experiences and perspectives of family and non-family members associated with homeschoolers are not known. The inclusion of others in such a study such as

spouses, children, extended family members and fellow homeschoolers would add to the triangulation process.

4. The participants ages and years of experience were varied. The study of home educators within a certain age range or years of experience may add useful insight to the central phenomena.

5. Participants in this study reside in urban and suburban areas. Further research may focus specifically on participants from rural and remote areas.

6. Interviews for this study took place between January and May of the same year. This is typically a time when the school has been fully established. It is recommended that such a study be conducted at the beginning and end of the school year to determine whether additional stressors and other factors present at different times of the year.

7. A deeper examination of the role faith plays in the daily execution of home education would be both interesting and insightful in relation to the impact it would have on all of the themes that emerged throughout this study.

8. A longitudinal study of the participants and one of the children involved in this research to examine the perspectives of the home educators, and their children, in addition to an exploration of the lived experience itself; if and how it evolves.

9. A more in-depth investigation into the possible interrelatedness of the need and desire for control of the self and the environment, and the home educator.

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of home educators within a specified are of North Carolina USA. In addition to a literature review, this study included an examination of twelve homeschooling adults. Thematic units were analysed and an essence was revealed.

It has become clear to me that the homeschooling experience is not a homogeneous one. Participants reflected on various experiences, styles and philosophies of homeschooling. What emerged however from the findings is that most, if not all of the lived experiences of the home educator, are determined by the home educator. What is learned, what is done, how it is done, and who it is done with is dictated by the primary educator. Because home educating becomes the life of the educator, he or she demonstrates a need to establish and maintain some semblance of control over that life. To that end, the daily activities of the homeschool life of both educator and educated, fit into the lifestyle chosen by the primary educator. Although the home educators I spoke with often stressed busy lives, with rigorous schedules, they all expressed a love of their family. The way in which the life of a home educator is lived in context is fundamentally the choice of the home educator.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

Project title: The Lived Experience of the Home Educator

Researcher's name: Janice D. Williams

Supervisor's name: Jane Medwell and Tony Fisher**.**

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.

- I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview. (Where applicable).

- I understand that data will be stored electronically, in addition to hard copies of transcripts for the purpose of the study. Access to data will only be available to personnel involved in the study (myself and my supervisors).

- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …….Research participant)

Print name …… **Date** ……

Contact details

Researcher: Janice D. Williams 910 682 7971, ttxjw12@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisors: Jane Medwell. Email: ttzjam@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk

Tony Fisher. Email: ttzamf@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk.

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix B

Semi-structured Interview Questions

·Participant background

Tell me about yourself and your family. (Prompts below)

• How many children are home schooled?

• How long have they (the parents) homeschooled?

• What is the educational experience of the primary educator, including highest educational qualification.

How do parents as educators experience the teaching process?

* What do you aim to include in your child's homeschooling curriculum?

* What does a typical day look like in your homeschooling?

* What materials do you use?

Tell me about your decision to homeschool (prompts below).

* At what point in the child's life did you decide to homeschool?

* Why? What was the reason for homeschooling?

* Who participated in the decision?

* How did you make this decision What processes were involved.

* What, if any alternatives did you explore?

What challenges are faced as a homeschooler?

* What are your top greatest challenges as a homeschooler?

* Given the opportunity, would you choose homeschooling again?

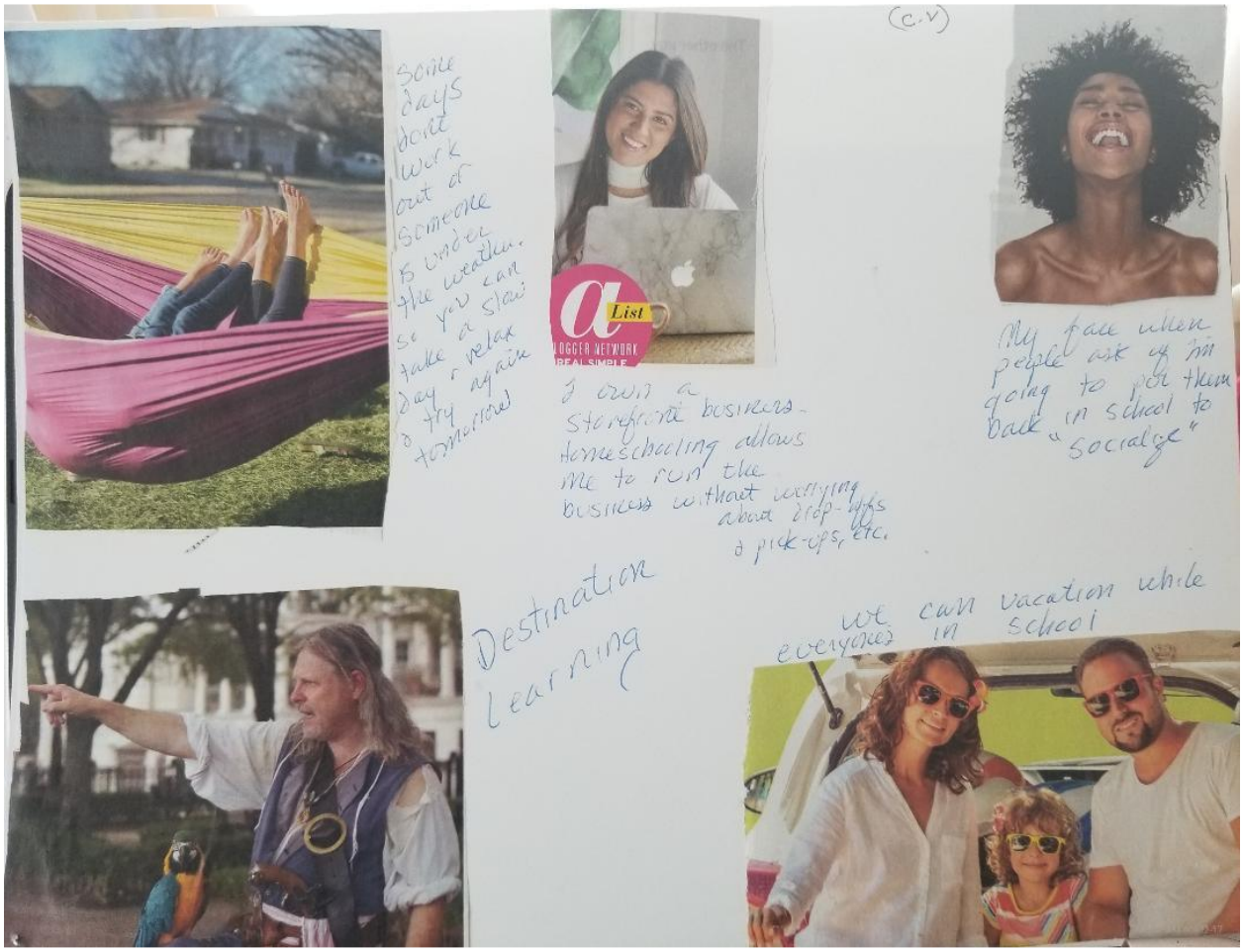
· **What support systems are used?**

* What, if any support systems do you use as a homeschooler? (Group affiliation, co-ops).

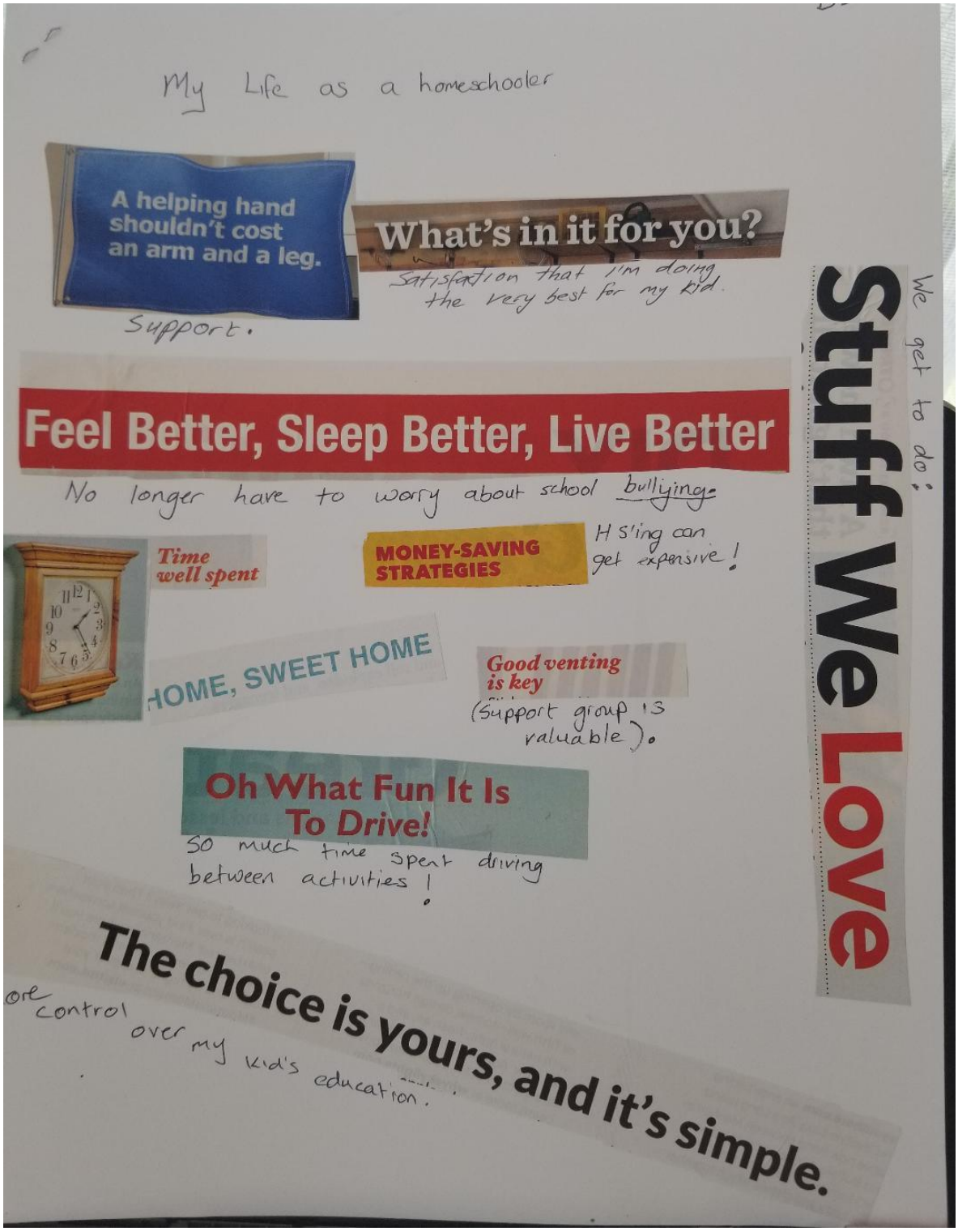
Appendix C

Visual Collages

Participant CV



Participant DL



Participant ES



Participant KL



Participant MU



Appendix D

Nvivo 12 Data

The Lived Experience of the Home Educator

Nodes

Name	Description	Files	References
Advantages		13	25
Ability to multitask		1	1
Family together time.		12	14
Finding purpose	Refers to what parents have described as their purpose, or true mission.	2	3
For stress relief.		2	3
Money saving	Demonstrates ways in which Home educators save money.	1	2
Self Discovery - Parent.		2	2
Anticipated outcomes.		12	12

Name	Description	Files	References
Goal - College, better education.		1	1
Happiness, freedom in educational setting. Well rounded.		8	8
Other outcomes.		2	2
Challenges and disadvantages.		16	41
Balance challenges.		4	5
Expenses, curriculum.		4	5
Expenses. Travel.		1	1
Fear of failure.		7	7
Finacially challenging.		2	2
Lonliness and isolation.		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Parent child, sibling struggles, clashes.		3	3
Stressful		9	9
Time consuming.		6	8
Curriculum		12	14
Computer based curriculum.		4	4
Ecclectic style		4	5
No curriculum		2	2
Popular HS curriculum.		1	2
Religious based curriculum		1	1
Education		12	14
Associates - Highest Ed Level		3	3

Name	Description	Files	References
Bachelor's Highest Degree Level		5	5
Background in teaching.		2	2
High School Diploma		2	2
Masters highest.		2	2
Reasons		12	20
Bullying.		4	5
Disgruntled with public schooll system.		1	1
Military Logistics necessity.		2	2
Outsider trust issues.	Related to homeschooling due to mistrust of other and not wanting to entrust child to others.	5	5

Name	Description	Files	References
Parental control over what is learnt.		4	4
Reason for HS'ing, word of mouth.		2	2
Reason for HS'ing. Academic struggles.	Child experiencing academic struggles in the school setting.	1	1
Reflection		11	15
No regrets for choosing HS'ing.		8	8
Would do differently.	Given the opportunity.	6	6
Would not HS again.	Given the right resources and environment, Homeschooling would not be the option.	1	1
Socialization.		1	1
Structure		10	16
Independent study - self paced.	The student is directed by an online, computer based or similar program with	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
	minimal direct teaching from the parent educator.		
Structured school day.		5	5
Textbook based	Non-computer based curriculum.	1	1
Unschoolers - unstructured.		4	4
Uses tutors	Instructors outside of the homeschool environment.	4	5
Support		14	27
Coop		3	3
Extended Family support.		2	4
Friend support	Where personal friends a great source of support.	2	2
No support group membership.		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Online support groups.		6	6
Support group.	Belongs to physical support group or expresses interest in joining.	7	7
Support not needed.		1	1
You Tube support		1	1
The decision to HS		12	12
Family decision to HS - child involved.		4	4
Individual decision to HS	One parent or guardian made the decision.	5	5
Joint parental decision.		3	3

Appendix E

Interview Transcript – Sample GC

Jan
Okay, well, I'm here with another willing participant and this time we have a male homeschooling dad, GC.

So Mr. [GC,] thank you very much for participating. I'm going to just ask you a few questions about, you know, your home education experience, and they're what we call semi structured questions, meaning that there's no correct or incorrect answer.

And I may vary the way that I ask you the question and just feel free to answer in any way that you feel comfortable. Elaborate as much or as little as you want. And I'm going to split it up into pretty much sections I'm going to ask you to tell you about yourself and your family, how you experience the teaching process, the challenges that you face, and what support systems you use as a home educator.

So I'm going to begin.

How many homeschoolers do you educate at home currently?

GC
Right now I homeschool three boys and one girl for total of four.

Jan
Um, can you tell me the ages of the children?

GC
They are 16, 14,12 and seven.

Jan
And how long have you been homeschooling?

GC
I have been homeschooling for seven years which would have made my second child second oldest child, seven years old. Okay, he's 14 now.

Jan
OK, can you tell me what your educational background is and what is your highest level of education?

GC

Well, believe it or not, when I started homeschooling, I only had a high school education myself. And over the seven years that I've been homeschooling. I have advanced up to a bachelor's degree.

Jan
Excellent. Thank you. Ok. Now I'm going to move into how you as a parent experience teaching process. Okay. So what do you include in your child's homeschooling curriculum?

GC
What we used to call the three Rs: reading, writing, arithmetic, and because this is the new age I include the sciences. Computer science and some chemistry and a little bit of biology.

Jan
Okay. And is there a specific curriculum that you use?

GC
I use A Becca.

Jan
Okay.

GC
And is that like a standardized curriculum is very standardized. When I say a standardized they basically based on what you want to teach. They will send you all of the materials, all the books, test practice materials, and progression charts so that you know that you are tracking your child at grade level.

Jan
Okay, great. Thank you. And Mr. gc, what does a typical day look like in your homeschool,

GC
We get up typically around 6:30, 7 o'clock, we will generally have breakfast, a morning devotion and nine o'clock sharp, I divide the kids into two groups. The teenagers, which is 16 and 14 comprise one table and my 12 year old, my seven year old daughter will be at another table with their age appropriate materials.

If I had assigned homework the night before, we will start off with the checking of the homework, going over the homework, correct the mistakes or whatnot. And once that is done, we will go into our what I call our structured day. It always starts off with math, because that is the hardest subject for the oldest kids. And I always want to hit math when a brain is fresh. As we progress through the day with the reading right before lunch, because it is more entertaining to have it before lunch. And they are looking forward to lunch.

We do a 45 minute lunch. And after lunch, we get into English and after English will usually end the day with one of the sciences. And the last thing we do because like I said, this is the new age is computer lab.

Jan
Great. Thank you.
Okay, now I'm going to talk a little bit about the decision to homeschool. So can I ask you At what point in your child's life you know, being your first child? or which one of your children's lives? Did you make the decision to homeschool and how old was the child?

GC
Okay, there were two factors that influenced my decision to homeschool. The first factor was a personal decision. I retired from the military when my oldest child was nine. And my youngest child was seven

My oldest child spent the first part of his life going to public school. And I had made a commitment that once I retired, I would spent as much time as I could with the kids.

Now, at first education was not on my radar. It was just a more of a social family type atmosphere that I wanted to create. But I noticed something my seven year old, he did not know as much at seven as a 16 year old knew at the same age. And when I questioned him about it, he complained that certain things so were not understandable in school. And I asked his older brother when he was at age if he understood and he told me that well, they taught him differently than they were teaching his younger brother. And I was thinking to myself,
what would happen if I could teach all of my kids on the same standard, they would all be have the same education level or the same smarts and I will be the first to admit, while I might be smart, my daughter is smarter than the other three kids combined. And I want to get them all as close to same brain wave, same IQ as possible. Is that possible?

Jan
It's definitely a subject for discussion.

GC
So what I did at that point to, to that end, I had known people that homeschooled. They were all self employed in the insurance and real estate business. And in Texas A BECCA was the standard. I bought some books and studied them and looked at them. And I gave one of the books to my 16 year old. Like I said, he was 16 at the time. And he said that he could understand it.
He said that it was something, he's pretty sure, that was far easier than what he was learning in school. And it was, in my opinion, a grade level or two grade levels above what he was learning in school. And in other words, if he was learning 10 plus 10 is 20 and his class in his math class, the Abecca book was teaching him that 10 times 10 was 100 on the same grade level.

And that's what I liked. I'm not saying that my kids, were going to be superior to their peers that we're going to regular school, but I wanted them to have as many advantages as possible. being black education is an advantage that is very important to me.

Jan
And I asked you who participated in the decision was it just you? Any partner or other family members?

GC
Well, I'm a single parent, and that is a challenge in and of itself. But I did include several friends. Like I said, I knew people that worked in the real estate and insurance business, which is what I did part time and they not only told me that it was a good decision, but they also gave me recommendations on how to pursue the program. And they gave me the application for Abecca to apply for their curriculum. So I did not have to make the decision on my own. And like I said, I had talked to my two oldest children, and they were both on board. First the oldest looked at the material and then the second one looked at the material,

Jan
What if any alternatives did you explore?

GC
Hmm. I looked at private schools briefly, you might remember I said that I was retired. So I was on a fixed budget. And the price of the Abecca material was a fraction of a semester or a school year at private school,

Because I knew that I wanted my two youngest children to follow in their older siblings, footsteps, the amount of money being spent at private school only progress and gotten more and I was pretty confident and sure of myself in my ability to teach the kids at home and not be distracted.

Jan
Thank you. I want to talk a little bit about some of the challenges that you face and some of the, you know, the advantages, and some of the challenges you face. So first of all, what would you identify as your top greatest challenges or greatest challenge as a home educator?

GC
The greatest challenge, which I discovered early on was and I mentioned math, I am math dumb. Even though I went back to school, I did not gain an appreciation for math, because I didn't appreciate it. It was hard for me to teach it initially. So there had to be my greatest challenge, getting the kids to understand it, but the Abecca books helped immensely in that area.

Jan
Thank you. Um, what about expenses? Did you find expense added burden or challenge?

GC

Believe it or not, I sat down and I made up budget sheet, a hypothetical spreadsheet and an actual spreadsheet, that hypothetical had such things on it as school materials etc. And when I say school materials, I'm talking about uniforms, additional paper, pencils, crayons, you know, those things that are required in a public school setting that the they will send a wish list or a required lists home with you. I also included such things is the school lunches, if I was going to drive the kids to school, I included the price of gasoline and things along those lines. And then the second expense sheet, I actually put down what I was spending the Abecca program, my utilities, you know, lights and what I was paying for food and whatnot for lunch. And believe it or not, homeschooling came in at hundreds of dollars cheaper than sending this kids to public school because I didn't have to worry about buy in uniforms, or buy a new clothes every year so that my kids can look as good or better than the next kid or worry about what kind of sneakers they were putting on because they were being homeschooled. Also, I didn't have to worry about clothes wearing out.

So for me, there was a substantial cost saving

Jan
And staying with the on the subject of expenses, what extra curricular activities are you and your children involved with? And does that add a burden to your financial situation?

GC
Extracurricular activities, as I said that my class time or school day typically starts at nine on most days, it will end at three and we reserve three to five for something in a social setting. I will take them to the park allow them to go out with friends or whatnot or we will reserve a Friday afternoon for a movie. Other than that it has been encouraged but I have not found a homeschool social network to participate in extracurricular activities like field trips and things like that during the day. Summertime we do set aside an actual day to maybe go to the zoo or something like that but above and beyond that there is no real financial burden because truth be told the things that I do after three o'clock with the kids are something that I would probably be doing anyway if they were in public or private school.

Jan
staying with the same subject as far as a cost, what about your time, you know, what are the time constraints like for you how much of your time does this take up?

GC
It takes eight to 12 hours a day. There's the class time and then there's the time before I get them up or I will grade their work and prepare their curriculum for that day. But like I said I'm single father and my focus right now is 100% on the kids so what time I make for myself and what expenses I incur is a little consequence and there's always the weekend.

Jan
Alright moving on to support systems What if any support system do you use?

GC

As a homeschooler I don't belong to any groups any co-ops or networks [or] anything.

Currently I belong to no groups or networks but if I run into a curriculum hang up A Becca has an online support network that I can access and there are also several YouTube subscription sites. I can't think of a name of one right now but it's a very good tutorial for the teacher or instructor. I currently have not found any local flesh and bone support networks that I feel like joining.

Jan
Okay
GC
I have no other contact than getting go advice on one the one subject or the other you know, a question requested is usually answered but I have not reached out to them and try to build a social group or join a co op.

Jan
Okay, and do you feel supported? Or do you feel that you need support?

GC
Don't need support, but I am sure that if I raised the flag

I have several friends that would come to my rescue if I had a question.

Jan
Would you homeschool again if you have the opportunity to do so

GC
If I had the opportunity to do it all over again, I would have started sooner.

Jan
And that was going to be my next question. What if anything, would you do differently?

GC
My oldest son would have been homeschooled from day one.

Jan
Okay.
And final question, what is your main objective, your main goal for homeschooling?

GC
To have a richer, more meaningful relationship with my kids and to have them know that they are more empowered academically, than they're their peers who have been otherwise educated and I'm not, don't get me wrong. There's nothing wrong with public education. But I do believe that my kids will be that much better equipped for the world having been homeschooled,

I know a lot of people homeschool because of religious reasons, and social reasons, and things along those lines. But I know that anything that they learn at home is reinforced. But they will still experience these other things in the world. So that was not my primary goal. My primary goal was their education, everything else they will learn on their own as they get older.

Jan
Thank you very, very much. I really do appreciate your time. Thank you. Thank you. Do you have any questions for me?

GC
No, ma'am.
Jan
Thank you very much, and have a good day.

GC
Goodbye.

Interview transcript – Sample – NP

Jan
Good evening.
Thank you for coming and for responding and being a willing participant. My name is Janice, I'm just going to be asking you a few questions semi structured, meaning that there is no correct or incorrect answer. You are just allowed to speak freely regarding the question that was asked in you can be as long or short and answer as you like.

I'm going to first of all ask you to tell me just a little bit about yourself and then I will go into how you experience the teaching process I'll be looking at some of the challenges and the advantages that you faced as an educator and finally, we'll talk a little bit about support systems

Okay, so first of all, just tell me a little bit about yourself and your family. How many children do you currently home educate?

NP
Well, currently I home educate my only 2 children.

Jan
Can you tell me the ages of your children?

NP
My son is seven and my daughter is 15. And

Jan
How long have you been homeschooling?

NP
I've been homeschooling for 10 years.

Jan
And can you tell me about your educational background and also your highest level of education?

NP
Well, I have a bachelor's in psychology and I have a master's degree in education. I'm also a qualified teacher and I taught special education for 14 years.

Jan
Thank you.

Now I'm going to ask you a little bit about how you as an educator experience the teaching process.

Um, what do you include in your child's homeschooling curriculum?
NP
Well, I try to follow what the kids in regular education are doing. So I included pretty much everything because my goal is for my kids to go to college. So I want them to have all the same subjects that all the other kids have, so that they couldn't compete basically with the other children.

Jan
And what does a typical day look like in your homeschool setting?

Jan
Well, when we wake up in the morning, we will generally to breakfast together. Sometimes it's a fully cooked breakfast. Other times, it might just be cereal and fruit.

NP
My, both of my children use an online curriculum. So it's pretty much set up for them.

At the beginning of the school year, we set up the template which is a board program, and it goes from kindergarten all the way through to 12th grade. And basically you set up your students and then they have their own profile and all of their own subjects. And it guides them it's a pretty much a self guided program. But it guides them every day. Through all the subjects and all the tasks and all the exercises that they have to do each day,
they will probably do about four hours of work, take a break for about an hour, do another two hours of work, take another break. And then we will finish up the teenager has a more rigorous schedule and is more independent than my seven year old. And even though they are both independent, I do a little bit more looking over the shoulder of my seven year old. Once they have completed their work on the program, they have to hit submit. I also have a profile whereby I can check their work and correct it and return it to them online. So we have a kind of network setup in the family in the household. So once I've checked their work and corrected it, I will send it back to them with a grade and corrections if necessary.

Jan
Okay, great. Thank you. Good answer.

I'd like to talk a little bit about your decision to homeschool.

At what point in your child's life did you decide to homeschool?

NP
Well, because my husband is military, it was pretty early on. I think she was about four or maybe five. But my husband is military and moves around quite a lot. And I did not like the instability of moving my child from school to school every time my husband got stationed somewhere else.

So I started reading about homeschooling. I'd heard about it from somebody else and I was increasing from the get go. So I decided that it was something that I wanted to try.

Jan
Okay, thank you. And who participated in the decision?
NP
Well, it was a joint decision. But in the beginning, my husband was not on board. It was something that he was not familiar with. He said that he was raised through the public school system and that he came out okay. So he was very skeptical at first, however, he trusted me and we kind of went with it.

Jan
And how did you make this decision?

NP
Basically, you know, my husband just said, make sure that you know what you're doing get all the information, network with other people that you know that are doing it, give it a try for years. If after two years, you're not happy or the child is not happy, then we'll have to do something different.

Jan
Okay, thank you.

What, if any alternatives did you explore?

NP
Well, the other alternative would have been to have our child and eventually children live with my parents who lived very close to an awesome school, which was a Steiner school. And we love the Steiner school. We love the model, but there was no Steiner school close to where we live. So that was an alternative that we tossed around for a little while. But we did not want to be separated from our children. So we really didn't go anywhere with that.

Jan
Okay, moving on to some of the challenges that you may possibly face. What In your opinion, are some of your greatest challenges that you have faced or are facing as a homeschooler

NP
For me, just knowing that I'm doing the right thing knowing that my child is learning and understanding. So for me, the challenge is fear, I guess, and I'm worried that they may not be getting everything that they could be getting, if that makes sense.

Jan
Okay, continue with challenges. What kind of expenses are involved in homeschooling?

NP

Well, for us, the biggest expense is curriculum, honestly, because the curriculum that we purchase is quite costly.
There are also costs due to a lot of activities in the community. So driving, gas can be expensive, too. So those are my biggest expenses.

Jan
Speaking of extracurricular activities, what if any activities are your children involved in currently?

NP
Well, my son does soccer. My daughter does ballet, modern dance, tap, and gymnastics. So they stay pretty busy. And then we all do swimming together.

Jan
So, um, how much of your time, does this really take up? Do you find that you have time for yourself? Or is it very consuming regarding your time?

NP
Honestly, between homeschooling and parenting, all of my time is taken up. But that's my choice. So I don't look at it as a negative thing. I look at it as a positive because I'm sowing into my kids. Because I know that we are all going to reap the benefits. In the end.

Jan
Can you tell me about any support systems that you currently use?

NP
Um, we actually do not belong to any co-ops or anything like that. We do belong to an online support group, which I communicate with daily and I have a couple of ladies in my neighborhood that also home educate, will not exactly a co-op, or we do things together particularly, which is great because it means one of them have children the same age as mine.

Jan
Okay, thank you. Given the opportunity. Would you homeschool again? Would you do this again?

NP
Honestly, as much as I liked it, I think if the right school, then I would probably have them in school, if I could be guaranteed that they would be getting the education that I want them to get.

Jan
What, if anything, would you do differently given the opportunity?

NP

Um, let me see. Even though I did get a lot of information, I did a lot of research, I probably would seek out physical support groups and physical networks. And I'm going to be honest with you. I might still to do that. If I can find anything close to my neighborhood because I do feel a little isolated sometimes and a little lost.

Jan
What is your main objective? Your main goal for homeschooling? What do you want to get out of homeschooling?

NP
I want my children to be happy. I want them to get an optimal education. And honestly, I want my kids to go to college. I want them to have a fair opportunity to go to college. And I felt that as a military family with all the moving around that we will live in those opportunities.

Jan
Okay, well, thank you very much. That's the and if you have any questions for me, I'd be happy to answer them.

No, thank you. Not at this time. Well, again, thank you so much. I really appreciate it.