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UNDERSTANDING PARENTAL MOTIVATION TO HOME SCHOOL:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

By

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DISSERTATION

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in Educational Leadership

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Missoula, Montana

Spring 2008

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ABSTRACT

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Understanding Parental Motivation To Home School: A Qualitative Case Study

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Roberta D. Evans

Comparatively little educational research has focused on home schooling. Since most students are educated in public schools, parents' choice of other educational alternatives is often perceived as a deviation from the societal norm. Friends and neighbors of parents who home school rarely understand their motivation for doing so. This study addresses the following question: why do parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling, and how well do public school personnel understand this motivation? Using qualitative case study methodology, the researcher confined the study to a specific concentrated population of home schooling families. Phenomenological data analysis procedures were used to refine the volume of data and to construct a narrative containing the essence of parents' lived experience concerning the decision to home school their children. A total of 31 parents from 20 home schooling families participated in semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the researcher. Six public school administrators and 12 teachers from schools directly impacted by home schooling were also interviewed. Parents explained their motives for initiating home school programs and elaborated by telling their stories. Educators described their experiences with children being removed from their schools and with home school children returning to the classroom. They shared their experiences and perceptions of the value of home school and issues relating to student learning. Educators were included in order to determine how well they understand parents' reasons for choosing to home school a child. Data analysis revealed eight primary factors that initially motivated parents in this study to choose home schooling for their children: (1) negative effects of peer socialization; (2) religion; (3) a child's special learning needs and disabilities; (4) negative personal experiences of a parent as a student in school; (5) lack of administrative support; (6) an incident at school involving the child; (7) unique environmental needs of the family; and (8) recruitment. Data analysis also revealed that educators' understanding of these motivations was limited. Although educators' views of home schooling were primarily negative, they are clearly keenly interested in and concerned about the learning of all children, in and out of school.

DEDICATION

The process of achieving this milestone in my life would not have been possible without the constant support of my wife, Vicky. I am so grateful for your patience, for your constant support, and for your sweet words of love and encouragement. You truly are the “wind beneath my wings.” You are my best friend, the love of my life, my eternal sweetheart. In times of discouragement, you were there to buoy me up and you have been the inspiration that has enabled me to persist through to the end. I cannot imagine how I could have done it without you. Thanks, sweetheart!

I express my heartfelt thanks to my family for their love and support through the course of my graduate study. I express my love and gratitude to my children and their families: Landon, Karma, Keara and Denon; Deric, Aubrey, Mailei, Jalen and Laci; Julie, Jordan, Takara and Carissa. Thanks are also due to my parents, Ben and Georgean, for their belief in me and for instilling in me the drive needed to see this to fruition. I also express thanks to my extended family—to the Olsen and Campbell Clans—thanks for your patience, love and support.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family!

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I likely would not have embarked on this journey had it not been for the vision and determination of one man to provide the opportunity of doctoral study to educators in Southern Alberta. I acknowledge the influence of my mentor, teacher, buddy and friend—Dr. Leroy “Joker” Walker—ultimately, this would not have happened without you. To Joker’s family, I extend my love and my thanks for the influence of their father and husband in my life.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

According to American Home School Legal Defense Association Counsel Scott W. Somerville (2007), although home schooling, at the turn of the 21st century, should never have been a successful movement, it has. At the onset of the modern home schooling movement in the mid-1960s, “there were no support groups or newsletters for parents who taught their children at home...many parents who taught their children at home never knew there were any other people doing the same thing” (p. 1). In the early days of the movement, the only sure way to avoid legal trouble was to hide. Therefore, until the early 1980s, home schoolers comprised a primarily underground movement because public school officials viewed the practice as “criminal truancy” (p. 1). Some parents were arrested, jailed, or fined to compel them to put their children back in school. Public school officials strongly believed that they “were protecting innocent children from serious harm” (p. 1). Now, over forty years later, many school officials still have mixed feelings about the viability of home school. Like their early counterparts, they view home education to be child neglect, at best. Somerville wrote:

Home schoolers started out as scattered individuals with little or no resources who faced powerful enemies as they violated the law in a climate of social disapproval... The history of modern home schooling shows this journey took wave after wave of different kinds of people educating at home for very different reasons. Without this diversity, home schooling would still be a marginal movement. (p. 2)

It is this diversity that calls for ongoing research aimed at investigating the reasons why parents continue to opt in favor of home schooling their children.

Dobson (2000), author of many home schooling publications, explains:

It's only because we are now looking back over a 150-year history of government-supported, compulsorily attended schooling, one that most of us accepted as perfectly natural as we grew up (as did our parents and grandparents), that home schooling is perceived as something new. (p. 1)

The masses continue to be educated in government-supported public schools, and the loss of students to any educational alternative is perceived as a deviation from societal norms. Even so, those who choose to home school often live and work within a social context where friends, family and neighbors rarely understand their motivation for choosing to deviate from the normal choice of sending children to the neighborhood school.

From the mid-1990s to the present, a number of home schooling families have congregated in one Alberta school jurisdiction that seems to be perceived as being supportive, or at least tolerant, of home schooling. This situation provides a unique opportunity for this research. According to Farris and Woodruff (2000), "Most Americans harbor two antagonistic and irreconcilable drives within their psyche: the drive to conform and the drive to be different" (p. 239). While we admire those who stand out -- inventors, heroes, etc. -- we also feel the need to be like others, to conform to what society expects of us. Home schooling offers some rare insight into this continuing dialogue. Parents who choose to home school, and in so doing are viewed as different, may place themselves and their children in a socially hazardous situation.

In 1988, the School Act was changed in the Province of Alberta to provide a legal basis for home education. In 1996, the law was further revised to expand the legal right to

home educate and to add a provision for financial support to parents opting for this educational alternative. The 1996 revision reads as follows:

In order to provide choice in type of school, Alberta Education recognizes that, under the supervision of a board or an accredited private school, parents have the right to choose home education for their children. The province has a compelling interest in the education of all children and has a responsibility to assess that the knowledge, skills and attitudes being taught are sufficient and the achievement of the students meet standards acceptable to the minister. (Alberta School Act, 1996)

At the time of the revision, Section 23 of the Alberta School Act required parents who wanted to home school, to notify their resident board, a willing non-resident board, or an accredited private school, of their intention and to get a commitment from the board or private school to supervise their program. In the late 1990s, public schools demonstrated an increased interest in home-school students, with the apparent goal of getting them back into public school system (Patrick, 1998, p. 2). According to Patrick, in order to attract home schoolers back to the schools, “Public school systems need to become concerned that home education is a legitimate alternative for some students, and then secondly, examine how to assist home education families to meet their needs through registration with public schools systems” (p. 3). However, one of Patrick’s primary concerns lay with the sincerity of public boards in collaborating with home schooling families, that is, whether their motivation was to attempt to get these students back into the schools.

While home school parents and public school administrators may not completely agree in their respective philosophical views of education, they should be able to work

collaboratively in the best interests of the child. Ironically, as Patrick (1998) points out, the dictionary definition of collaboration may best describe how public and home school partnerships should function:

According to Merriam-Webster (2007) the definition of collaboration includes: a) to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor; b) to cooperate with or willingly assist an enemy of one's country; c) to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected. (p. 6)

The framework established by the Alberta Government (2006a) in the *Home Education Regulations* seems to have provided a workable environment for public school administrators and home school practitioners to collaborate in order to accommodate parental choice concerning their children's education. It is an unfortunate reality, according to Patrick (1998), that many home-school parents still view public school advances, as a trick to get their children back into the public school classroom. Patrick did not include in his study any home school families, only the superintendents of the 67 Alberta public school jurisdictions.

The voice of the home schooling parent in Alberta has not been heard. The purpose of this study is to interview parents engaged in home schooling in order to better understand what motivates them to engage in and continue the practice of home schooling.

Statement of the Problem

It is the intent of this study to determine what motivates parents to choose to home school their children and to discover how well educators who have been associated with home schooling families understand the motivation behind this parental decision.

This qualitative case study was conducted of one Alberta school jurisdiction where home schooling has been facilitated through the public school system. In many jurisdictions, the decision to home school has often been viewed as a threat to the survival of the local school and has been viewed by many educators and community members, to be an irresponsible, even anti-community choice. The researcher engaged in open, authentic dialogue in order to gather data needed to accurately depict experiences and perceptions of both parents and educators so that differences of opinion can be heard and valued, and so that greater insight into this growing educational phenomenon may be gained.

Archer (2000) noted that home schooling was one of the least studied but also one of the fastest growing phenomena in public education in the United States, a condition that still holds true. Snyder (2005) similarly noted, “Very few qualitative, descriptive studies have been done in the area of home schooling, and even fewer empirical works” (p. 3). In a National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) publication, Ray (2005) reported that during the 2002-2004 school year between 1.7 and 2.1 million American students were home-schooled (p. 7). According to Statistics Canada, home schooling in Canada is also growing at a significant rate (cited in Archer, 2000; Basham, 2001). Estimates for home-school enrollment in Canada, during the 2001-2002 school year, place the number between 50,000 and 95,000 (Ray, 2005, p. 7). While the numbers of home schoolers in the United States are significantly higher than in Canada, according to Ray, the percentage of the population is similar. Despite the significant growth of home schooling, there is a glaring lack of research aimed at understanding why parents choose to home school their children, especially in Canada (Patrick, 1998). According to Patrick, in a study of home schooling in Alberta, Canada he stressed the importance for

school jurisdictions to better understand home education in order to “develop progressive policy and guidelines which will be in the best interest of their constituents” (p. 9).

Significance of the Problem

School leaders at every level create regulations and make decisions regarding home schooling that are based on limited and often outdated information for this relatively unexplored area of education (Cloud, 1999; Garza, 1999; Higgins, 2002; Sowel, 1996). According to Ray (2005), whether it is referred to as “home schooling, home education, home schooling, home-based education, or home-centered learning, this age-old practice is experiencing a rebirth around the world” (p. ix). Ray noted that home schooling was once commonplace in all nations but had nearly disappeared by the mid-1970s. He also observed that in just over a quarter century since then, home schooling has reemerged and is rapidly growing in popularity and legitimacy throughout the United States and Canada. In regard to the impact and effectiveness of home schooling, Ray claims “home-schooled students in the U.S. and Canada score 15 to 30 percentile points, on average, above their public school peers” (p. 9). He has discovered that home schoolers now come from virtually all social, economic, religious and racial backgrounds: “Every year the variety broadens and expands” (p. 8). With ongoing changes to the demographic profile of home schooling practitioners, it would seem logical that parents’ motivations for choosing this educational alternative would also change and evolve. Arai (2001) notes that the categories previously used to classify home schooling motivation are no longer sufficient to adequately explain this growing phenomenon (p. 205).

Higgins (2002), in a study of home schooling in New Mexico, found that the parents “felt subservient to the school, rather than a partnered relationship in a combined effort of education” (p. 279). Consequently, they chose home school as the learning alternative for their children. Their reasons for choosing to home school included increased violence in schools, a watered-down curriculum, poor student conduct, low expectations of students, bullying and behavior problems, and an absence of personal connections with teachers (p. 286). The growing popularity of home schooling has been used to reinforce claims of deficiencies in public schooling (Arai, 2001; Ray, 2005). While these deficiencies may be perceived by a growing number of parents, there is little evidence to suggest that public school leaders are focusing on understanding why students are leaving public education in favor of home learning programs (Basham, 2001; Patrick, 1998). Basham (2001) noted:

Although home schooling is neither desirable nor possible for all families, it has proven itself to be a relatively inexpensive and successful private alternative to public (and costly formal private) education. As such, it merits both the respect of regulators and the further attention of researchers. (p. 16)

Apple (2000) issued a challenge for public schools to separate the elements of good sense from the elements of self-serving, anti-public ideology and carefully listen to the needs of the home-schooled population. He noted that if schools accept this challenge, there is the potential for them to become more responsive and better able to serve the needs of an ever-changing clientele.

Wallis and Steptoe (2006) describe the public school as being outdated and in danger of becoming obsolete unless educators can bring “what we teach and how we

teach into the 21st century” (p. 2). While not advocating for an abandonment of the public school system, these authors do stress the need for schools to “bring their methods into line with the way the modern world works” (p. 7). The popularity of home schooling surely suggests that there are lessons for educators to learn about why this is an attractive alternative to public schools.

Higgins (2002) notes that very little attention has been given to the phenomenon of home schooling, which is significant given the volume of educational research that is conducted every year. This educational movement deserves study, so that fact may replace myth and we may be in a better position to enter into a meaningful dialogue with those who opt for home schooling as an alternative to the public classroom. If we can understand the social and educational dynamics of what motivates the decision to learn at home, we may be able to improve pedagogical practice in our public schools by transferring valuable methods, materials, and insights.

This study is designed to provide a unique and needed look into the perceptions and beliefs of family decision makers in one Alberta school jurisdiction that have elected to opt out of school-based programs and to have their children learn at home. As educators are better able to understand what motivates parents to choose this alternative, school administrators and teachers may be better equipped to counsel and advise parents before they initiate a home schooling program. Particularly for administrators, the results of this study may guide admission and exit interviews with parents and facilitate better individual program planning for all students. Ultimately, the researcher hopes that the results of this study will inform school personnel about better ways to serve the needs of all learners and their caregivers.

Additionally, this study may have implications for teachers and administrators who are responsible for creating alternative learning programs to accommodate a growing diversity of parental expectations and demands. As educators better understand the issues surrounding a parent's decision to home educate, they will be able to collaborate more effectively to ensure that the needs of the child are met.

The implications of this study should be relevant for all school jurisdictions that are similar to those found in rural Alberta, where enrollment is declining and the ability to attract and retain students may ultimately determine the viability and ultimate survival of the local school. When parents remove students from school because of some dissatisfaction, regardless of the cause, school administrators must find a resolution or accept the reductions in funding, staffing and contributions that result from lost enrollment. As Higgins (2000) noted, "Listening to and understanding the home school community's difficulties with public education may provide us with the insight needed for curriculum revision, change, and the eventual evolution to improved services and programs" (pp. 10-11).

This study is important because it contributes to our understanding of a growing educational trend and practice that has serious implications for the public school as a social institution. As a study of parental motivators that contribute to the decision to home school, this research will add to what we already understand about this phenomenon, since it is conducted in a different time and place from past research. Eisner (1991) observed:

What may be said to occur in conducting research is the creation of resources that others can use to think about the situations in which they are interested. Multiple

perspectives need not lead to a fight between paradigms to determine which one is correct; a more constructive function is to determine which perspective is useful for what ends...Research studies, even in related areas in the same field, create their own interpretive universe. Connections have to be built by readers, who must also make generalizations by analogy and extrapolation, not by a watertight logic applied to a common language...Human beings have the spectacular capacity to go beyond the information given, to fill in gaps, to generate interpretations, to extrapolate, and to make inferences in order to construe meanings. Through this process knowledge is accumulated, perception refined, and meaning deepened. (p. 211)

Higgins (2002) stressed that ongoing home schooling research is needed because “our understanding of it, and the intentions of the families that practice it are essential to the maintenance of responsive educational institutions that serve the needs of all children” (p. 317). Being responsive to those who choose to home school requires that we hear and understand what they have to say -- we must listen to their stories. The personal stories of participants have provided rich, thick description for this case study and guided the description of the implications of the findings, further questions, and recommendations for further research. The following African folk tale illustrates the power of story:

But when the People gathered once again around the fire telling the story of all that had happened, something new came to mind. “We have overcome the strength of Elephant,” they said, “and our fear of Shark and Hawk. We have done this by sitting by the fire and telling stories of what has happened to us, and

learning from them. Only we, among all creatures, have the gift of story and the wisdom it brings. We do not need to be masters of the earth. We can share because it is wise to do so.” From that day on the People held their heads high, never forgetting to sit by the fire and tell their stories. Never forgetting that in the stories could be found wisdom and in wisdom, strength. (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p. 103)

Need for the Study

Claudia Hepburn (1999), Director of Education Policy at The Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan research and educational organization based in British Columbia, Canada summarized the state of public education in Canada as follows:

Canadian education is not just inefficient but seriously inadequate...Dropout rates, literacy levels, and academic achievement are signals of the dismal state of Canadian education today. Indicators published by the OECD show that 27 percent of Canadian adolescents drop out of high school—a higher rate than any other OECD country. Of those young adults who have completed high school in the past decade, 33 percent are insufficiently literate to cope in contemporary society...Public opinion polls show that confidence in the education system is at a 30-year low. Tangible proof of this is the growing number of children withdrawn by their parents each year from government schools: the percentage of families choosing independent (private) schools has doubled over the past 25 years, while the popularity of home schooling is unprecedented and growing rapidly. (p. 4)

Hepburn’s (1999) assessment of Canadian education is strikingly similar to that described in a U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education report entitled *A*

Nation At Risk (National Committee on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report described conditions in American education as a cause for alarm and basically portrayed American schools as failing in their mandate. The report painted a gloomy picture of the state of American education: "...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (p. 1). The Commission called for educational reform, yet prescribed no direction or solution for it: "We are confident that the American people, properly informed, will do what is right for their children and for the generations to come" (p. 2). With seeming evidence that American schools were in a dismal state, Hurd (1982), as quoted in *A Nation At Risk*, concluded, "We are raising a new generation of Americans, that is scientifically and technologically illiterate" (p. 5). *A Nation At Risk* appealed to the patriotic spirit of the American people to rebuild and reform public education. Further research (Berliner & Biddle, 1995) refuting the claims in *A Nation At Risk* have provided ample evidence to show the plight of public education was largely manufactured, even so, the negative public perception of education caused by it, persists.

Since the turn of the century, schools in Canada and the United States have continued to deal with a rising sense of turbulence and insecurity. Some parents may feel that their children are no longer safe in our public schools, and use as evidence for this fear the growing number of school shootings. These include the highly publicized school shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where two classmates entered the school then shot and killed 12 classmates, a teacher, and wounded 24 others before taking their own lives. Just eight days later, at W. R. Myers High School in Taber, Alberta, a male student entered the school and shot and killed a classmate. As criminal

activity increases in our schools and communities, the physical and emotional well being of our communities is endangered. As Hepburn (1999) noted, parents are taking action and the “popularity of home schooling is unprecedented and growing rapidly” (p. 4). The public expects schools to be safe and caring places where students are able to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to compete in a new and ever-changing world, but how do parents perceive their school? What motivates their choice to home school?

Rudner (1999) stressed that, in terms of demographics, home school students do not represent an accurate cross-section of society. He found that home schooling parents are primarily Caucasian, well-educated, affluent, two-parent families, in their first marriage, with a stay-at-home mother. Home-schooled children do well on national testing and college entrance exams. In one of the largest American studies of home schooling, Ray (1997) noted:

Home education may be conducive to eliminating the potential negative effects of certain background factors. Low family income, low parental educational attainment, parents not having formal training as teachers, race or ethnicity of the student, gender of the student, not having a computer in the home, infrequent usage of public services, a child commencing formal education relatively later in life, relatively small amounts of time spent in formal educational activities, and a child having a large (or small) number of siblings seem to have less influence on the academic achievement of the home educated. More specifically, in home education, educational attainment of parents, gender of student, and income of family may have weaker relationships to academic achievement than they do in public schools. (p. 99)

Cohen (1995) claimed that, where home educators, meaning parents, perceive that their opinions matter and their contributions are valued, new relationships develop over time to the point where they will “accept some guidance and standards from states and public schools” (p. 6).

Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) noted that a thorough understanding of parental motivation to home school is still lacking and that further study is needed:

The scant research that has been done has focused on parents’ reasons for home schooling (Knowles, 1988; Marlow & Muchmore, 1992; Knowles, Muchmore & Spaulding, 1994; Van Galen, 1988), the academic performance of home-schooled students versus public-schooled students (Boulter, 1999; Ray, 2000; Rudner, 1999) and the legal implications of home schooling (Arai, 1999; Reich, 2002). Because home schooling is a growing trend in the United States, up from 850,000 students or 1.7% of K-12 students in 1999 (Bielick, Chandler & Broughman, 2002) to 1.1 million students, or 2.2% of K-12 student in 2003 (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006), it is important to develop more systematic knowledge of parents’ motivations for home schooling. (p. 265)

Case Study Focus

Based on data gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews, a method that is fundamental to case study research, the researcher has attempted to determine what motivates parents to remove their children from public school in favor of home schooling. The personal childhood history of parents is informative, providing insight into influences and motivations that have led them to opt for alternative forms of

education for their children (Knowles, 1988). Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) observed:

A parent's decision to home school may be explained in part by psychological motivators (parental role construction, parental efficacy for helping the child learn, and parental beliefs associated with their children's schooling) and in part by their perceptions of personal life context variables (time, energy, knowledge, and skills) that may enable home schooling. (p. 266)

As Green and Hoover-Dempsey also noted, recent studies (Bielick, Chandler & Broughman, 2002; Collom, 2005) suggest that ideological reasons are subsiding in importance for home-schoolers, whereas pedagogical reasons and reasons relative to special needs are becoming increasingly important motivators for the parental decision to home school. Teachers and administrators need to be informed of these and other issues that serve as motivators for parents in their choice to home school. A deeper understanding and appreciation of home schooling may enable educational decision-makers to construct better learning programs for all students and to fine tune their public relations programs to improve the level of trust between homes and the school.

The context of this study is limited to a single Alberta school jurisdiction where home school practitioners have congregated from diverse locations in Canada and the United States. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the case study as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). They further describe a case study as being represented graphically as a circle, with a heart in the center. The heart of the research is the hub and the rest of the circle "defines the edge of the case: what will not be studied" (p. 25). This research was restricted to families who have either removed

children from school or who have never enrolled their children in the public school system and who, at the time of this study, home schooled their children for at least 50% of their total educational program. This research was also restricted to current school personnel who, at the time of this study, were members of communities in which the participating home schoolers resided. For Yin (2003), “Case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1).

Merriam (1998) suggests, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). She stresses, “The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s” (p. 7). Merriam observes:

[Case study research is an appropriate methodology when the objective of the study is] to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research. (p. 19)

This research focuses strictly on one Alberta school jurisdiction, for the purpose of exploring the motivating factors that lead parents to choose home learning programs for their children and the degree to which school administrators and teachers are aware of these motivating factors. This study explores the stories that parents tell of experiences with their child’s school, of their attitudes toward public education, of their relationships

with family, community and school personnel, and of their personal childhood experiences in school, for the purpose of investigating how these and other unforeseen factors contribute to a decision that has a far-reaching effect on schools, students, and families. According to Van Galen and Pittman (1991), “Few efforts are made to critically reflect upon what home-based educators have to say about learning, about educational policy, and about the strength and viability of the institution of schooling” (p. 5).

Investigation into parental motivators may well reveal unanticipated reasons for initiating a home school program, thus contributing new understandings to our current knowledge of this educational phenomenon, one that is becoming commonplace throughout the United States and now experiencing significant growth in Canada.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

This study is guided by the following central research question and its sub-questions: Why do parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling and how well is this motivation understood by public school personnel?

Sub-Questions

- How do parents describe their educational experiences as students in public school or as home-schooled students?
- How do parents describe their experiences, as adults, with their neighborhood school?
- Are there environmental factors that contribute to the parental decision to home school? If so, what are they?

- How do parents describe religion as a motivation to home school?
- According to parents, has home schooling changed family/home life? If so, how?
- Which of the parents is primarily responsible for home schooling programs?
- What do parents identify as benefits of home schooling for their children/family?
- What judgments of the public school system do home schooling parents make?
- How do educators describe the reasons for which parents remove children from school?
- Are there public school teachers who choose to home school their children? If so, why?
- What judgments do educators make of the effectiveness of home school programs?
- How are educators' perceptions of the reasons parents choose to home school aligned with the reasons parents actually give?

Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this research, the terms listed below are defined as follows:

Alberta Education: The provincial ministry responsible for forming policy and defining regulations to govern the administration of education for Alberta resident children. Compulsory attendance laws require students from age 6 to 16 to be registered in school or home based learning programs (Alberta School Act, 2005).

Blended Program: An Alberta learning program that is comprised partially of classes taken in a regular classroom and partially through home education. To qualify as a blended program, the home education portion must be at least 50% for grades 1-9 and at least 20% in high school. (*Alberta Education Funding Manual*, 2006).

Case Study: A phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. To further understand the case study, imagine it graphically represented as a circle with a heart in the middle. The heart of the research is the hub; the rest of the circle “defines the edge of the case: what will not be studied” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25).

Home Education Program: That portion of an Alberta student’s education program that is delivered by a parent to the student in accordance with the Alberta Home Education Regulations (1999). While the terms *home schooling* and *home education* are used interchangeably, Alberta Education prefers the term *home education*.

Home School Programs: The term *home schooling* will be used in this study to include all forms of learning in a home environment, where the student does not attend public, charter or private schools. The Statistics Canada definition will apply: “a child participates in his or her education at home rather than attending a public, private or other type of school. Parents or guardians assume the responsibility of educating their child and may develop their own curriculum guidelines” (Luffman, 1998, as cited in Basham, 2001, p. 3). Parents, in Alberta, may also choose to use the provincially approved curriculum in either print or distance learning format.

Home School/Home Education: According to the Alberta School Act (2005), “A parent of a student may provide, at home or elsewhere, a home education program for the student if the program meets the requirements of the home education regulation” (p. 33).

According to the Alberta Home Education Regulation (1999), these programs are eligible for funding support paid by the Alberta Government to the registering jurisdiction, half of which must be made available to the parent. Attached to the funding is the expectation that these students will participate in annual administrations of the provincial testing program in grades 3, 6 and 9. All home schooling students in this jurisdiction qualify for and parents receive public funding to support home schooling programs.

Home Education Program Plan: A learning plan developed by a parent, outlining the learning objectives and curriculum for the school year, in accordance with the current Alberta Home Education Regulation. The plan must include provisions for student assessment, curricular resources, facilities, contracted instruction and provision for school district supervision.

Ideologues: Home educators often identified as the Christian-right, who find rationale for their decision to home school in the work of Raymond Moore (1990). These home education practitioners normally have issues/concerns with the curriculum and values taught through school-based education (Van Galen, 1988, 1991).

Pedagogues: Home educators often identified as the political-left, or counterculture, find rationale for their choice to home school in the works of John Holt (e.g., 1964, 1981, 1983, 1995). Home education practitioners normally have issues with the state control of education and view schools as doing an inept job of educating and socializing children. They consider home education to be a more human way to educate children (Van Galen, 1988, 1991).

Portfolio: A compilation of student work and description of educational/learning activities accomplished for an approved home education program plan. It may include

pictures, recordings, samples of student work, journal entries, parent anecdotal reports, and so on.

Resident Board: An Alberta school jurisdiction, district or division (Public or Catholic Separate) in which a student resides (Alberta Home Education Regulations, 1999).

School Authority: Denotes either an accredited Alberta school jurisdiction or an accredited private or charter school.

Separate School Board: An accredited Catholic school jurisdiction, recipient of full provincial funding. According to the British North America Act (1867), education is the responsibility of each province. This right was upheld when the Canadian Constitution was repatriated under The Constitution Act of 1982, under the administration of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Throughout Canada, Catholic education boards exist and receive the same funding as public schools; they retain the right to exercise and teach precepts of the Catholic religion. This is in stark contrast to the American mandate to keep Church and State separate.

Supervising Board: The Alberta resident school board or the willing non-resident school board providing supervision for a home education program (Alberta Home Education Regulations, 1999).

Supervising Private School: An Alberta private school accredited under Section 28(2) of the Alberta School Act that has agreed to supervise a home education program (Alberta Home Education Regulations, 1999).

Statistics Canada (StatsCan): Statistics Canada produces statistics that help Canadians better understand their country in terms of its population, resources, economy,

society and culture. In Canada, providing statistics is the responsibility of the federal government. As Canada's central statistical agency, Statistics Canada is legislated to serve this function for the whole of Canada and each of the provinces. Objective statistical information is vital to an open and democratic society. It provides a solid foundation for informed decisions by elected representatives, businesses, unions and non-profit organizations, as well as individual Canadians. In addition to conducting a Census every five years, there are about 350 active surveys on virtually all aspects of Canadian life (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Willing Non-resident Board: An Alberta school board that is not the student's resident board but agrees to supervise a home education program (Alberta Home Education Regulations, 1999, 2006).

Chapter Summary

The intent of Chapter One is to explain and justify the need for this study. There is evidence of a "bounded system" (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003), as the focus for this study is limited to the experiences of individuals in one Alberta school jurisdiction who are currently home schooling their children for at least 50% of their educational program. This study investigates what motivates these parents to choose to home school their children and also how well educators understand and deal with this decision. This jurisdiction has a group of home school practitioners who came originally from a variety of places and now live and home school in relatively close proximity to one another. This situation has posed a challenge for the school jurisdiction in terms of dealing with the decision of parents to home school. Since the mid-1990s, school

jurisdictions throughout Alberta have continued to grapple with issues surrounding home education and its impact on the public school system.

The purpose of this study is to determine what motivates parents to choose to home school their children and, in addition, to discover how well educators understand the motivation behind this parental decision that keeps children from attending public school. Archer (2000) noted that home schooling has been one of the least studied but also one of the fastest growing phenomena in American public education, a condition that still holds true. Snyder (2005) similarly noted, “Very few qualitative, descriptive studies have been done in the area of home schooling, and even fewer empirical works exist” (p. 3). In a National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) publication, Ray (2005) reported that during the 2002-2004 school year between 1.7 and 2.1 million American students were home-schooled (p. 7). According to Statistics Canada, home schooling in Canada is also growing at a significant rate (cited in Archer, 2000; Basham, 2001).

While the numbers of home schoolers in the United States are significantly higher than in Canada, according to Ray (2005), the percentage of the population is similar. Despite the significant growth of home schooling, there is a glaring lack of research aimed at understanding why parents choose to home school their children, especially in Canada (Patrick, 1998). According to Patrick, in a study of home schooling in Alberta, Canada he stressed the importance for school jurisdictions to better understand home education in order to “develop progressive policy and guidelines which will be in the best interest of their constituents” (p. 9).

Many researchers have recommended ongoing research about home schooling in order to understand why parents continue to choose this educational alternative for their

children (Aria, 2000; Basham, 2001; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Hepburn, 1999; Higgins, 2002; Patrick, 1998; Snyder, 2005). These studies claim that a better understanding of home schooling is important for public school policy makers, administrators, and teachers to meet the needs of all students in a time when public education is subject to public criticism on the basis of academic performance and student safety, as evidenced in the U. S. Government Report, *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and the British Columbia, Fraser Institute's Report on Canadian Education (Hepburn, 1999).

Higgins (2002) noted that very little attention has been given to the phenomenon of home schooling, which is significant given the volume of educational research that is conducted every year. This educational movement deserves study, so that fact may replace myth and we may be in a better position to enter into a meaningful dialogue with those who opt for home schooling as an alternative to the public classroom. If we can understand the social and educational dynamics of what motivates the decision to learn at home, we may be able to improve pedagogical practice in our public schools by transferring valuable methods, materials, and insights.

This study is intended to provide a unique and needed look into the perceptions and beliefs of family decision makers in one Alberta school jurisdiction that have elected to opt out of school-based programs and have their children learn at home. As educators are better able to understand what motivates parents to choose this alternative, school administrators and teachers may be better equipped to counsel and advise parents before they initiate a home schooling program. Particularly for administrators, the results of this study may guide admission and exit interviews with parents and facilitate better

individual program planning for all students. Ultimately, the researcher hopes that the results of this study will inform school personnel about better ways to serve the needs of all learners and their caregivers.

The context of this study is limited to a single Alberta school jurisdiction where home school practitioners have congregated from diverse locations in Canada and the United States. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the case study as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). They further describe a case study as being represented graphically as a circle, with a heart in the center. The heart of the research is the hub and the rest of the circle “defines the edge of the case: what will not be studied” (p. 25). This research is restricted to families who have either removed children from school or who have never enrolled their children in the public school system, and who, at the time of this research, were home schooling their children for at least 50% of their learning program. As well, the study is restricted to school personnel who, at the time of this research, were members of the communities in which these home schoolers reside.

Chapter Two includes a review of the current literature relating to home schooling in the United States and Canada. It provides the research context for the study and also the background of how this educational phenomenon has evolved.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter Two includes a review of the current literature relating to home schooling in the United States and Canada. The literature review further frames and contextualizes the study, as is required for qualitative research (Creswell, 1998, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). An overview and synthesis of current research relating to the history and practice of home schooling in the United States and Canada contextualizes this study relevant to the home schooling movement. A review of previous attempts to classify parental motivators provides the foundation upon which this study builds. As this case study is bounded by the Alberta context, an overview of home education in Alberta is also included.

Home schooling is a growing phenomenon throughout the United States and Canada, and it is expanding into Europe and the rest of the world (Ray, 2005). Although it is gaining acceptance and growing in popularity, the reasons why parents opt for this form of educational alternative for their children are still not well understood, and there is a conspicuous lack of academic research into this form of schooling, particularly in Canada. Home schooling continues to grow in the province of Alberta, despite a higher level of governmental control than in other provinces (Hepburn & Van Belle, 2003).

Compulsory Education

Compulsory school attendance laws began to appear in North American culture about 1870; as a result, formal learning institutions eventually became the norm for the education and proper socialization of children (Basham, 2001, p. 5). The roots for American compulsory education are found in colonial Massachusetts of the 1850s. The

movement is credited to Horace Mann (1796-1859), who served as superintendent and who saw the common school as the great equalizer for society (Cremin, 1957). This colonial period was at the time of the industrial revolution, when a shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy began to occur. With this shift came new child labor and compulsory school attendance laws that were vigorously enforced (Dobson, 2000).

As noted by Wiles and Lundt (2004), the modern public school system is, largely, a product of the industrial revolution:

[Schools were] taking their cues from factory efficiency and organization, and following the dictates of Scientific Management principles... Schools were organized as little businesses. Students were seen as products moving through the grades, being assessed and certified. The business of education grew by expansion—not adaptation to the environment. (p. 22)

Wiles and Lundt further observed that the public school system, particularly in the United States, has not kept pace with a changing world: “Each day of this century, the school that we know, America’s pride and joy, slips further into oblivion” (p. 40).

Compulsory Education in Alberta

Compulsory school attendance in the province of Alberta was established with the introduction of the Truancy and Compulsory School Attendance Act in 1910 (Oreopoulos, 2005, p.10). As Ell (2002) noted, all Canadian public education falls under the jurisdiction of the individual provincial governments, and that, in Canada, no federal government department for education exists. Early in its history, even prior to provincial compulsory attendance laws, the government of Alberta prescribed a course of studies for all publicly funded schools and has continuously regulated the certification and licensing

of teachers. Institutional education in Alberta is still relatively young, compared with its American counterpart that has roots nearly 200 years earlier.

As Ell observed, “The period from 1945 to 1970 was the golden age of education in Alberta.... a time of expansion and optimism for public education” (p. 29). McIntosh (1986) described this era:

The year 1970, with passage of the new School Act, marks a turning point in Alberta’s educational history. In fact, a dividing line can be sketched on the topography of Alberta’s educational history from which the waters of educational development can be seen to flow in very different directions. For 25 years, beginning immediately upon the conclusion of World War II, the rivers of educational change had flowed strongly and surely along turbulent courses that nevertheless were well defined and widely supported. These were years not only of dramatic expansion in the scale of publicly supported educational services, but also of change in the nature of these services, which were broadened and enriched at all levels — from elementary to post-secondary. Public education in Alberta, as we know it today, was brought to maturity during this singularly creative period. (pp. 29-30)

According to Ell (2002), this so-called “golden age” of Alberta’s educational system was characterized by effective rural school divisions, a high school curriculum that included technical and vocational content, raised teacher preparation standards, and a maturing postsecondary education system.

By the late 1970s, some Alberta parents had become frustrated with limited educational services, especially for students with special needs, and with the common

practice of mainstreaming these students in classrooms (Gall, 1993). Ell noted that, by the end of the 1970s, challenges to the public education system in the form of private schools foreshadowed the debate that would come to define the 1980s. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, patriation of the Canadian constitution was accomplished as a result of the Constitution Act of 1982 and the adoption of the new Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Also in 1982, the Alberta Department of Education introduced a new provincial achievement-testing program, which became mandatory for all students in grades 6 and 9 in 1984. Also in 1984, provincial high school diploma exams were mandated as requirement for grade 12 graduation. In 1992, the achievement-testing program was further extended to include all Alberta grade 3 students.

In an effort to balance Alberta's provincial budget, public sector funding was reduced in 1993 and a mandated 5% rollback in public employee salaries, including teachers, occurred. Increased accountability for student learning, reduced funding for education, coupled with the passage of the Constitution Act of 1982 and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which had been in full force since 1985, created an environment where Albertans were more conscious of their legal rights. This contributed to a reduction of consumer confidence in the quality and value of public education, as Ell (2002) observed: "As a result, they [the public] began demanding that schools become more tolerant and inclusive, particularly with reference to the provision of minority-language rights and equality rights" (p. 37). In this same period the American educational report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) was released, which identified deficits in the quality of education in the United States. According to Ell,

A Nation At Risk contributed to feelings of discontentment with Canadian education as well, and during the 1980s, “more and more parents began schooling their children at home” (p. 39).

Home Schooling Defined

According to Statistics Canada, home schooling occurs when a child works on an educational program at home, rather than by attending a public, private or other type of formal, institutional school setting. Home schooling parents, or guardians, assume the major and often sole responsibility for educating the child, and often they develop their own curriculum guidelines (Luffman, 1998). Lines (1993) noted that the United States Government defines home schooling as “the education of school-aged children at home rather than at a school” (p. 1).

The struggle for legal recognition of home schooling as a permissible learning option has been similar in both Canada and the United States. Basham (2001) noted that, as recently as 1980, home schooling was illegal in 30 U.S. States and has only been legal in all 50 States since 1993. He also noted that in Canada home schooling is now legal in all 10 provinces.

In both Canada and the United States, education is the responsibility of the State or Provincial Government respectively; consequently, regulations governing home schooling vary greatly from state to state and from province to province. For example, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association (2007), in the American states of Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma and Texas, home schoolers are not required to give any notice to the State when a home school program is initiated. However, in Massachusetts, New York, North

Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont, home schoolers are highly regulated. Home schooling parents are required to send formal notification of their intent to home school to the State, and some require achievement test scores and/or professional evaluation of the children. There are other requirements, such as curriculum approval by State officials, teaching qualification for the parents, and required home visits by State officials. Other states fall somewhere between these two extremes, as detailed in Appendix A.

In Canada, similar diversity exists in provincial home schooling guidelines and regulations (Statistics Canada, 1997), as detailed in Appendix B. For example, in Ontario parents are required to notify their local resident school board or an accredited private school of their intent to home school. Although there are no provincial home schooling regulations in Ontario, the registering board or private school may develop guidelines to regulate curriculum and evaluation. The provincial government provides no funding to assist the board, private school or parents.

In Saskatchewan, parents must register with their resident public school board or local Catholic Separate board. An education plan must be prepared for each student and submitted to the registering board. However, no approval conditions apply for curriculum; the board just has to know what the parents are planning to do. In terms of evaluation, an annual progress report is required from parents, who choose the methods of testing and evaluation. These may include standardized tests, a portfolio of student work, a third party evaluator (acceptable to parents and board), or some other method that satisfies the parents and board. Schools do receive half of the basic student grant but are

not required to give any funding to parents (only 6 of 89 boards give some funding to parents) (Statistics Canada, 1997).

In British Columbia, parents may register with any local public school, any independent school, or any regional correspondence school. There is no regulation for or approval of curriculum. The registering school must offer evaluation services for home school students, but parents do not have to accept or allow outside evaluation of their children. In terms of funding support, the registering school receives 1/16 of the basic student grant and must provide parents with access to educational services and resources, free of charge. (Statistics Canada, 1997)

In Alberta, parents must register with a willing school board or accredited private school, but it does not have to be their resident board. Education plans must be prepared for each student and approved by the registering board or private school; however, parents are basically free to choose whatever curriculum they desire. The registering board or private school must ensure that a minimum of two home visits occur each year: the first to review the education plan, and the second to review progress toward achieving the plan. Student evaluation is at the discretion of the parents, but students in grades 3, 6, and 9 are encouraged/expected to write the provincial achievement tests (but are not penalized if they do not). The registering board or private school receives the basic home education grant (about 25% of the basic student grant), of which at least half must be given to the parents (Statistics Canada, 1997).

Home Education in the United States

For centuries, home schooling was the norm for education, and formal, institutional learning was an anomaly. Dobson (2000) stated, “Many people regard home

schooling as a new educational phenomenon, but that is simply a reflection of the bias of our times” (p. 1). Before the 19th century, education happened primarily at home through engagement in the daily work of life. Children who were fortunate enough to have a parent who could read might be afforded the gift of literacy, but for the masses education was grounded largely in apprenticeship. No laws existed prior to the mid-1800s to compel students to attend school (p. 2).

From the 1920s to the 1970s, the practice of home schooling seemed to go underground. It was largely a rural practice or, at best, a fringe topic in educational literature (Farenga, 2002). However, starting in the late 1960s and continuing to the present, home schooling has emerged from the shadows and is now generally viewed as a viable educational alternative (Basham, 2001; Ray, 2005).

Somerville (2007) asserts that the modern home school movement should never have succeeded, for four main reasons: 1) early home schoolers had extremely limited resources and virtually no support networks; 2) home schooling was viewed by schools and the state as criminal truancy; 3) it was denounced by certified teachers and highly trained administrators as an educational negligent and socially harmful practice; 4) home schoolers “faced a wall of opposition from their neighbors. There was a deeper sense that home education was somehow, un-American” (p. 2). As Somerville also observed, the growth in home school numbers has been slow but steady, particularly from the mid-1960s through the 1990s. During this period, a number of studies provided some evidence that home schoolers were adequately prepared for college (Barnaby, 1984; Webb, 1989); that they did not suffer socially (Delahooke, 1986; Shyers, 1992; Taylor, 1986); and that lack of certified teaching did not seem to adversely affect their

achievement (Rakestraw, 1987; Ray, 1990; Wartes, 1990). Where home school practitioners, particularly until the early 1990s, seemed to be motivated primarily by ideological or religious reasons, “[As the] social, academic and legal barriers to home education fell, a whole new wave of home schoolers appeared” (p. 5). It seems home schooling has come to be viewed as just another choice on the academic menu.

By the late 1990s, a wave of violence hit American schools in the form of school shootings. The worst recorded incident in U. S. history occurred in April 1999 at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado (Janofsky, 1999). In the wake of the Columbine shootings, the public perception of schools as safe and caring places for children suffered. A sense that schools had increased responsibility to address serious societal issues, and a public perception that schools were failing in this task, added to an erosion of trust between the home and the school, as was evidenced by an sharp increase in home school enrollment immediately following the Columbine shootings (Janofsky, 1999; Somerville, 2007). Ray, of the National Home Education Research Institute, was quoted in an article in the *New York Times* on August 11, 1999:

Traditionally, people choose to home school for four reasons: (1) to strengthen family relationships, (2) to pass on particular beliefs and values, (3) strong academics and (4) guided social interactions. While it’s too early to have hard data on how many families are home schooling because of violence in the past couple of years, we are seeing more parents concerned with safety at school, whether it’s physical violence or illegal drugs or psychological and emotional safety. (Sink, 1999)

While many parents investigate home schooling as an educational option, there has yet to be a major shift toward it. Somerville (2007) notes that, following the Columbine shootings in 1999, “A number of people seriously considered home schooling, but most of them abandoned the idea when they realized how much work was involved” (p. 5).

Farris and Woodruff (2000) observed that the “modern phase of home education is now roughly 20 years old” (p. 248) and that, to date, nearly all parents of home schooled children are still products of the institutional public school. Farris and Woodruff further claim that most barriers to home schooling are rapidly being overcome, so “as large as the home school movement is today, it is only a shadow of what it will be in 20 years from now” (p. 254). Somerville (2007) commented:

Modern home schooling was launched by the left-wing intellectuals and legalized by the religious right, but home schooling is not just for the ends of the political spectrum anymore. Home schooling today consists of an ever-more-diverse array of American families. (p. 6)

Through the 1980s and 1990s, public criticism of public education renewed interest in home schooling, a practice that is now thriving, particularly in the United States and Canada (Basham, 2001; Lines, 2000; Ray, 2001, 2005).

Home Education in Canada

Arai (2000) noted that “very little has been written on the topic of learning at home in the Canadian context” (p. 1). Therefore, Canadians continue to rely heavily upon research from other countries, primarily the United States, to understand this growing educational phenomenon (Knowles, 1991; Mayberry & Knowles, 1989).

In 1979, according to Statistics Canada, there were about 2,000 home-schooled students in all of Canada. However, by 1996, this number had grown to nearly 20,000 students; by 1997, claims for enrollment in home schooling were between 30,000 and 40,000, with the majority of these students in Ontario and Alberta (Basham, 2001, p. 6). In the mid-1990s, the legal recognition in all provinces in Canada of parents' right to choose the form of education for their children resulted in a dramatic change in the relationship between the school and the home.

Arai (2000) observed, "Despite similarities, there are reasons to expect that parents in Canada will have different motivations for home schooling than parents in the United States" (p. 206). According to the Home School Legal Defense Association (2007), there are currently 10 cases before American courts regarding home schooling issues, and an additional 86 cases are listed in the archives. On the Home School Legal Defense Association site for Canada (2007) no current or archived cases are listed. This seems to support Arai's claim that Canada and the United States have "very different legal contexts surrounding home schooling" (p. 206). Arai also noted that much of the research regarding home schooling is becoming outdated, especially when coupled with significant growth in this type of schooling. Therefore, one may expect that motivations will further change, as they did between the 1970s and 1980s (Knowles, Marlow & Muchmore, 1992).

In the 1970s, home schooling was largely a product of the hippie counter-culture movement, but by the 1980s more practitioners were Christian fundamentalist (Arai, 2002, p. 207). The ease with which parents may initiate a home schooling program comes

as a result of previous legal battles fought and won, making it possible for parents to choose this option as just another learning alternative.

The Province of Alberta is one of only two provinces in Canada that provide direct public funding for home schooling programs. As this case study is limited to a single school jurisdiction in the province of Alberta, it is important to understand the provincial requirements for establishing a home school program.

In Alberta, parents who wish to home school are required to register through a provincially recognized school jurisdiction or private school program. Alberta Education allocates varying amounts of funding to the jurisdiction to support the home school program, one-half of which must be made accessible to the parents. The amount of funding increases according to the amount of the home schooling program that is provided by the registering school jurisdiction or private school. In 2006, the amount given for a home schooling program provided entirely by the parent or guardian was \$1,323 (Alberta Education, 2006b). Public funding is allocated to the Alberta school jurisdiction of registration to assist parents to acquire the necessary learning resources to accomplish their approved home school program.

Currently, Alberta is the only Canadian province to require testing as a condition of home schooling programs. Even with these added regulations, Alberta has the second-largest population of home schoolers in Canada, second only to Ontario (Basham, 2001).

Parental Motivation to Home School

A number of studies have been conducted on what motivates parents to home school in the United States and Canada (Dahlquist, 2002; Fairchild, 2002; McLeod, 2002; Roberts, 2001; Tator, 2001; Tobin, 1997). These studies suggest that the primary reasons

for initiating a home education program are related to religion and a desire for family closeness. These studies also stress that, because the incidence of home schooling continues to escalate in both the United States and Canada, the reasons for home schooling seem to be changing; therefore, ongoing study of this educational phenomenon is needed. Furthermore, there seems to be a conspicuous lack of Canadian studies on home schooling practices.

Tator (2001) conducted a study of 25 families in order to understand what motivates parents to choose this option for their children, that is, the parents' perspective. She found that, while many of the home schooling families were religious, religion did not necessarily play a major role in the decision to home school. This finding suggests that there are other important mitigating circumstances that contribute to the decision to home school, including a lack of trust in the school, parents' perception that the needs of their children were not being met, parents' insecurity about the physical and emotional safety of their children, and so forth.

McLeod (2002) studied the roles that trust plays in parents' decision to leave public school in order to educate children at home. She found that a lack of confidence in public schools is one factor that leads parents to remove their children and seek alternatives for schooling, including the home schooling option. She also found other contributors to parents' decision to home school children: the inability of the schools to meet the learning needs of their children adequately, the nature of peer interactions, increased corporate presence in schools, and family beliefs and values. McLeod states, "Americans can now be described as fussy consumers who are clearly aware of their rights" (p. 4).

Trust is the element upon which relationships are founded and, a healthy relationship requires that open and honest communication regularly occur. Lewin and Regine (2000) stressed the importance of making a genuine connection with parents: "...you can't fake it and expect results" (p. 57). Fullan (2001) admonished, "It is time to bury the cynic who said [that] leadership is about sincerity, and once you learn to fake that, you've got it made" (p. 53). Fullan further stressed that effective school leadership is all about relationships and Lewin and Regine remind leaders to consider that in the dynamic world of education "everything exists only in relationship to everything else, and the interactions among agents in the system lead to complex, unpredictable outcomes" (p. 19). The importance of relationships has been emphasized extensively in leadership literature (Bennis, 1994; Burns, 1978; Fullan, 2001; Nahavandi, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1995; Wheatley, 1994).

Dahlquist (2002) found that families chose to home school for religious and other family-based reasons. She discovered that the motivating factors leading to home schooling became more diverse from 1992 to 2002 and concluded that, "because the incidence of educating children at home has been increasing, it follows that the reasons people choose to engage in this practice may be expanding" (p. 4).

In order to understand what motivates parents to home school their children, various attempts have been made to categorize and classify home schooling practitioners (Knowles, 1991; Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; Van Galen, 1988). Van Galen (1988, 1991) studied home schooling parents and classified them into two main groups: ideologues and pedagogues. These categorizations have been useful for many researchers as a starting point for understanding the motivation for home schooling. Knowles (1991)

and Mayberry and Knowles (1989) found Van Galen's classifications useful in their attempt to understand why people choose to home school their children, largely because these two groups reflect the driving philosophies behind the modern home schooling movement, as established in the writings of John Holt and Raymond Moore. John Holt, and Raymond and Dorothy Moore created the theoretical basis for these two founding camps that initially comprised the modern home schooling movement, which emerged in the early 1970s.

In 1969, Moore planted seeds that would legitimize home schooling as an educational movement. Moore (1990) set out to answer questions previously neglected by the educational community: Is institutionalizing young children a sound educational trend? And what is the best timing for school entrance? (p. 79). He claimed that formal schooling should be delayed until at least age 8 and perhaps even as late as age 12 (p. 80). In this theoretical camp, Van Galen's (1988, 1991) ideologues find credibility for their motives; ideologues are often characterized as the religious right and commonly stereotyped as Christian fundamentalists. Luke (2003) maintained that, whatever religious affiliation these people subscribed to, ideologues seemed to view home schooling as "the fulfillment of a divine plan, believing that parents are appointed by God" (p. 3). They feel that it would be irresponsible to transfer to anyone else the duty to educate their children.

From Holt (1964) came the call to decentralize schools and increase the autonomy of teachers and parents. Followers of this movement are those to whom Van Galen (1988, 1991) refers as pedagogues, generally viewed as politically left-wing malcontents. Lyman (1998) observed that Holt has become a "cult figure of sorts to the wing of home

schooling that drew together New Age devotees, ex-hippies, and homesteaders — the countercultural left” (pp. 4-5). According to Lyman, Holt was vehemently opposed to the compulsory nature of schooling and decried it as a “gross violation of civil liberty” (p. 21); ultimately concluding that home schooling was the most humane way to educate a child. Holt (1981) espoused a concept that has emerged as “unschooling,” a term he coined. Holt viewed unschooling as being different from other conceptions of home schooling, the only similarity being that the child is kept at home. Unschooling philosophy directs that a teacher, or parent, should not formally direct a child’s education, and that a predetermined curriculum is not necessary. It is left to the unschooled student ultimately to control his or her own education, choosing what, how, and when to learn. Unschoolers believe that learning grows from children’s natural curiosity about the world around them. Lyman further explained:

What is most important and valuable about the home as a base for children’s preparation for their place in the world is not that it is a better school than the schools, but that it isn’t school at all. It is not an artificial place, set up to make learning happen and in which nothing except learning ever happens. It is a natural, organic, central, fundamental human institution; one might easily and rightly say the foundation of all other human institutions. (p. 346)

Mayberry and Knowles (1989) found that parents who home school have issues primarily with the school as an institution and/or with the curriculum taught. That is, these parents either have an ideological conflict with the school, preferring their children to learn some alternative curriculum, or have issues with the pedagogical philosophy and practices of the school.

Attempts to categorize home schoolers have been a popular theme in educational research (Marshall & Valle, 1996; Mayberry, 1989; Rothermel, 2003; Stevens, 2001; Van Galen, 1991). Rothermel (2003), in a study conducted in the United Kingdom, observed that, as the home school movement continues to grow, “More types may have emerged than have previously been recognized... and perhaps there is too diverse a population pursuing home education to be neatly categorized” (p. 78). Marshall and Valle (1996) warn of the inherent danger associated with categorizing schemes and related practices, resisting the “temptation to reduce these parents into easily identifiable, and thus, easily disposable caricatures” (p. 8). They explain their concerns:

Ideologues ... become right-wing Christian fanatics, and pedagogues ... become New Age eco-progressives.... Marginalizing home educators ... serves to support and sustain all of the myths that have grown up around this movement, regardless of information that indicates otherwise. (p. 8)

Arai (2000) found that, while Canadian home schoolers choose this learning alternative for a variety of reasons, “many had both pedagogical and ideological objections to public schooling” (p. 213). This finding suggests that the appeal of home schooling extends far beyond the narrow classifications of earlier studies. All of the studies reviewed here stress the need for more research on the subject of home schooling, including parental motivation to home school.

Home Schooling in Alberta

In the early 1990s, the Alberta home school model was fashioned after those found in the United States. In 1988, the Alberta School Act was amended to allow parents to choose home schooling or enrollment in a private, or charter, school as a legal

alternative to the public school system. When parents opted for this alternative, public funds were withheld, but the parents were free to choose any curriculum they desired, at their own expense.

In 1993, the Alberta government imposed a series of financial cutbacks on the public sector, including education, in order to get the provincial deficit under control. In 1995, an additional measure was imposed on education, as the Alberta government initiated a dramatic move to reduce the number of local school jurisdictions through forced amalgamation of school boards. Pierce (2003) reviewed this amalgamation process and noted that the number of Alberta school jurisdictions was reduced from 188 to 66. Through this amalgamation process, local school boards lost their right to collect taxes locally, in favor of a provincially controlled levy. With increased centralization of power came other changes. The creation of private and charter schools was encouraged, and one of the most radical ideas to emerge from the ashes of the old paradigm was a provision to allow a school or school division to recruit non-resident students.

One school jurisdiction focused primarily on the growing interest in home schooling and started to recruit students from all parts of the province, including the division involved in this case study. Few of the newly amalgamated school jurisdictions recognized that they were losing students to other boards until it was too late to attract them back to their resident school system. This situation may be attributed to the distraction of bringing multiple school boards and school administrations under a common collective agreement and policy framework. However, with a significant loss of funding associated with the transfer of these students from resident boards, a concerted effort was made in 1996 and 1997 to attract these students back to their resident school

jurisdiction. Where declining enrollment is an issue, as was the case in rural Alberta at that time, a loss of enrollment to competing school systems seriously threatened the status quo.

In Alberta, home school students receive a block of public funding to assist in the accomplishment of home school programs. Half of this funding block must be made accessible to the parent/guardian of home schooled children, and the other half may be retained by the registering jurisdiction to offset costs associated with monitoring the home school program (Alberta Education, 2006a). Additionally, the registering Alberta school jurisdiction accepts some responsibility for these home school students; two annual contacts with the family are required, comprised of an initial meeting to ensure an educational program is in place and a year-end visit to assess whether or not progress was made toward accomplishing the education plan. With these minimal costs, the attraction of home school registrations is a significant funding windfall, if a jurisdiction can convince parents to enroll these students in partially or fully-funded programs. With the funding incentive to have students in as regular a school program as possible, great efforts are made to convince parents to accept public school classes for the majority of their home schooling program. When these efforts are successful, the child's education program plan is referred to as a "blended program" (Alberta Education, 2006a).

Marshall and Valle (1996), in a study of rural Pennsylvania home schooling, noted that the practice of enticing students back to the school system is relatively common throughout the United States, where public school systems "grudgingly headed toward positions of greater interactive support for home educators ... to recoup moneys lost when home students do not appear on public school rolls" (p. 7). According to

Basham (2001), throughout the United States and Canada, the vast majority of home learning programs are not funded by the public purse, leaving home school parents to their own resourcefulness to construct, finance, and administer educational plans for their children.

In 1995, families accounting for a total of 112 students transferred their registration from one Alberta school division (the jurisdiction for this case study) to a competing jurisdiction in order to enroll in a home school program. This recruitment reduced the amount of funding for the division by nearly \$500,000, as all of these students had previously been fully funded students in regular classroom programs. With funding as the primary motivating factor, in the 1995-96 school year education leaders worked to develop a local framework for a program designed to entice former students back to their resident jurisdiction. Within a year, nearly all students returned to their resident division, and many parents eventually returned their children to public school. However, this started a migration of home schoolers to the jurisdiction, creating a much more diverse home school population.

In 1997, this jurisdiction's plan was initiated, providing a home learning program for resident students that had the look and feel of home school. The new program was fundamentally different from most home school programs, as the plan required student-learning plans to be teacher directed and evaluated where the objective was to be fully compliant with provincial curriculum requirements, so that full funding could be claimed for these students. It was further believed that students would return to the school classroom when the relationship between school and family was adequately addressed through this intermediary home school program.

The Home Schooling Controversy

According Brian D. Ray (2005) of the National Home Education Research Institute, home schooling is not only effective, it is also a highly desirable alternative to a failing public school system. Ray claimed that home schooling has the potential to strengthen, and even heal, family relationships (p. 106), it instills the desire for lifelong learning in both parents and children (p. 113) and he even claims evidence “that shows home schoolers perform better academically than do those in institutional state-run schools, on average” (p. 104). Just as arguments may be made in support of home schooling, not all researchers consider it to be in society’s best interest (Arai, 1999; Labaree, 1997; Lasch, 1995; Lubienski, 2000; Menendez, 1996; Sandel, 1996).

Lubienski (2000) claimed that home schooling undermines public education and, therefore, the very foundation of democracy itself. Compulsory education was enacted to serve the public good, and home schooling, by its very nature, withdraws students from the democratic process. As Lubienski asserted, “It undermines the common good by withdrawing social capital as well as children from the public schools to the detriment of students remaining in these schools” (p. 207).

Other authors also criticize home education as lacking in democratic principles (Lasch, 1995; Sandel, 1996). They claim that when home schoolers take care of their own learning needs, what remains is an institution that is socially and financially burdened. While this argument has merit, Higgins (2002) noted, “Home schooling families...withdraw from schools only after repeated attempts at working within the framework public schools create” (p. 31). Lubienski (2000) wrote about the deterioration

of the democratic process and found there is no recognition of the events that may have led to parental withdrawal of their children from school in the first place.

The practice of home learning has also been criticized on the basis of academic achievement and deficiencies in socialization. Lubienski (2000) accused the home schooling movement of removing from public schools the best and brightest, which lowers the level of achievement for all. Ray (1997) found that home schooled students outperformed their public school counterparts by an average of 30 to 37 percentile points on nationally standardized tests, possibly because of the quality of the home learning environment. In terms of socialization, Aria (1999) claims that home educated children lack the ability to deal with difficult social situations because they are not expected to interact and learn with their social peer group and as a result fail to develop appropriate coping skills. In a study of home schooling families in Tennessee by Edwards (2007), the researcher found that 81% of the study group had opted for home schooling because of negative effects of socialization at school.

Some people believe that home schooling is a radical and even, an abnormal way to educate a child. The practice of being compelled to attend a state-approved teaching facility today, is considered sane and acceptable and yet, less than 200 years ago this would have been viewed as a gross invasion of privacy and freedom of association.

According to Holt (1995), children do learn something through their years of schooling, but it is often in reaction against, in spite of, or not even related to the formal curriculum to which they are exposed on a daily basis. In fact, as Dobson (1998) noted, home-schooled children exhibit a high level of sharing, networking, collaboration and

cooperative learning. Shyers (1992) observed that contact with adults, rather than contact with peers, is of paramount importance in social skill development in children.

Implications from Glasser's Developmental Model

As Glasser (1998a) maintained, "The current practice of schooling is aimed at trying to force students to acquire information by memorizing facts that have little relevance in the world in which they live" (p. 237). That is, although some of this information has value, it lacks universal relevance and should not be required for all students. Glasser claimed:

The main reason so many students are doing badly and even good students are not doing their best is that our schools, firmly supported by school boards, politicians, and parents, all of whom follow external control psychology, adhere rigidly to the idea that what is taught in school is right and that students who won't learn it should be punished. This destructive, false belief is best called schooling. It is defined by two practices, both of which are enforced by low grades and failure. (p. 237)

Schooling, therefore, forces students to learn information that has limited value in the world. As Glasser suggested, "School does not require that students retain knowledge, just know it for tests" (p. 238). Glasser observed further that, when students find little relevance in what they learn in school, they "retaliate by taking schoolwork and then school out of their quality world" (p. 239).

In an effort to better explain the decision-making process, Glasser (1998a) detailed five basic human needs that influence the choices we make. These needs served as a useful frame of reference for understanding parental motivators for choosing to home

school, following data analysis. The first and most basic of these needs Glasser claimed we were born with; he identified it as “survival” (p. 31). The need for survival gives us “the desire to work hard, carry on, do whatever it takes to ensure survival, and go beyond survival to security” (p. 31). Personal security falls into this most basic of human needs, and if threatened, negates any of the needs that extend from it. If a threat to self or children exists, it has the potential to influence a parent’s choice of where children learn. If schools are perceived as unsafe, other learning alternatives may seem more attractive.

The second need posed by Glasser (1998a) is the need for “love and belonging” (p. 33). This involves being accepted by peers, a long touted benefit of the public school, yet one often used to criticize the schools. Glasser claimed that, when we think of love, we think more of getting than of giving. Our efforts to get more often lead us to attempt to control others, which leads to a need for power. Social struggles for acceptance have long been recognized as a part of what Jackson (1968) described as the “hidden curriculum,” which is comprised by the informal, day-to-day social interactions that occur within the walls of our schools. If students do not experience acceptance by peers, bullying and persecution may result; these may also factor into parents’ choice to opt for a home school setting for their children. Historically, Glasser believes those who loved had a distinct survival advantage, which explains how love and belonging became a basic need of its own.

The same is true of Glasser’s (1998a) third need, the need for power or recognition, which is realized when individuals are able to identify and achieve goals, and to get what they need and want. Glasser noted, “We are the only power-driven species. It is this need for power that very early displaces survival and governs the lives

most of us choose to live” (p. 37). Even long-time friendships can suffer when one person wants or demands more than the other is prepared to give. The quest for power often leads us into competition, as Glasser explained:

We want to win; to run things; to have it our way; and to tell others what to do, see them do it, and have them do it the way we know is best. In the pursuit of power, many people have no qualms about doing whatever they believe is necessary to get it. (p. 37)

The abuse of power by those in positions of authority may also contribute to parents’ choice to educate at home.

Glasser’s (1998a) final two needs are for freedom and fun. These seem somewhat related when applied to the context of learning. Glasser stated, “Just as the power of others concerns us primarily when they use it to threaten what we want to do with our lives, freedom concerns us mainly when we perceive that it is threatened” (p. 39). Consequently, in order to escape from the domination of others, “We need freedom, which serves as a buffer against power” (p. 33). For Glasser, “The need for freedom is evolution’s attempt to provide the correct balance between your need to try to force me to live my life the way you want and my need to be free of that force” (p. 40). He suggested that this balance is best expressed in the Golden Rule. External control is the enemy of freedom and robs us of the ability to be constructively creative. Freedom may be an interesting concept against which to further understand parents’ motivation to home school their children.

Fun enters the picture as the reward for learning. Glasser (1998a) claimed that we are the product of people who learned more and better than others; so learning provides a

survival advantage. Glasser posited that we are creatures who play for our entire lives, “and because we do, we learn all our lives” (p. 41). He suggested that fun is best identified by laughter. Through playing and having fun, we learn how to get along and respect differences. Glasser observed that having fun learning together is the best way for people to learn how to get along with each other: “Laughing and learning are the foundation of all successful long-term relationships” (p. 41). Having fun through learning helps us to gain more love, power and freedom. Glasser cautioned, “The day we stop playing is the day we stop learning” (p. 41). Glasser’s five needs serve as a valuable tool to understand the data gathered from parents who chose to have their children learn at home and to understand how the level of understanding of this decision varied for the professional staff and administrators of schools, following data analysis.

In *The Quality School*, Glasser (1998b) claimed that low-quality student work has become commonplace, even acceptable, in our schools. He noted, “...fewer than 15 percent of those who attend do quality academic work in school, and even many of these do far less than they are capable” (p. 6). Especially for gifted and/or highly motivated students, this perception of the school’s academic environment may contribute to parents’ motivation to have their children learn at home.

Chapter Summary

Home schooling is a growing phenomenon throughout the United States and Canada and it is expanding into Europe and the rest of the world (Ray, 2005). Although home schooling is gaining acceptance and growing in popularity, the reasons why parents opt for this form of educational alternative for their children are still not well understood, and there is a conspicuous lack of academic research into this practice, particularly in

Canada. Home schooling continues to grow in the province of Alberta, despite a higher level of governmental control than other provinces (Hepburn & Van Belle, 2003).

Home schooling was the norm for centuries, with the institutionalization of the public school a product largely of the 19th and 20th centuries. As compulsory attendance laws were enacted in the United States and Canada, home schooling became an option only for those without access to a school (Basham, 2001; Cremin, 1957; Dobson, 2000). Those who resisted the requirement of compulsory education had to take the practice underground, where it remained until the mid 1960s, when educators such as Holt (1964) and Moore (1975) published works recommending the practice of home education. Researchers such as van Galen (1988) have attempted to categorize and classify home schooling practitioners according to the theoretical basis for their decision. Van Galen created two categories: ideologues, the religious right, commonly stereotyped as Christian fundamentalists; and pedagogues, the political left, often stereotyped as New Age devotees, ex-hippies, and homesteaders -- the countercultural left. While these distinctions are useful, the movement has grown to the point where there are too many different motivations and practitioners to allow easy classification (Rothermel, 2003). Furthermore, there is a glaring lack of Canadian research on the topic of home schooling (Arai, 2000; Basham, 2001; Hepburn, 1999; Patrick, 1998).

Home schooling in Alberta has the greatest degree of regulation and governmental interference of any Canadian province (Statistics Canada, 1997), yet Alberta has the second highest population of home schoolers in Canada (Basham, 2001). Some studies suggest that current home schooling is motivated by a lack of trust in the school to provide a quality education and physical safety for students (Dahlquist, 2002;

McLeod, 2002; Tator, 2001). These studies originate in the United States, so it will be interesting to see if these hold true for a relatively quiet, safe and rural school jurisdiction in Alberta, Canada. These motivators seem related to our most basic human needs, as Glasser (1998) suggests, and these needs provide added insight for understanding parental responses. Glasser's five needs are the needs for (a) survival, which includes personal security; (b) love and belonging, which includes socialization; (c) power or recognition; (d) freedom, which involves the need for personal choice; and (e) fun, which is seen as the reward for learning and that which motivates further learning. Glasser's needs may be useful in further understanding the parental motivation to home school.

Home schooling has been criticized for undermining the public school system (Lubienski, 2000), weakening the democratic ideals of our society (Lasch, 1995; Sandel, 1996), and resulting in poor academic performance and deficient socialization of children (Lubienski, 2000). These criticisms have been rebutted in studies that found home schooled children generally have more advanced social skills than their public school counterparts (Arai, 1999; Dobson, 1998; Shyers, 1992), and that home schoolers perform better academically than students in public schools (Ray, 1997).

There is a need for further research to better understand parents' decision-making process in regard to the motivators to home school, and also to inform schools and school leaders of factors that contribute to parental dissatisfaction with public education (Snyder, 2005). With better information, better policies and pedagogy may result that will benefit all students.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology for conducting this qualitative case study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study employed the methodology of an intrinsic case study and is an exploration of a “bounded system” (Creswell, 1998, pp. 61-62). The bounded system investigated is confined to one Alberta Public School Division. Participants in the study included parents with children registered with this School Division, with at least 50% of their child’s learning program being delivered through home schooling. Also included as participants are public school administrators and teachers who reside in the same communities as participating home schoolers. Merriam (1998) defined the case study as, “An intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 12). As stories and descriptions of this program are provided from inside and outside this bounded system, the researcher seeks common threads and themes to gain a thorough understanding of the program and implications for improving home/school relationships and learning programs for all students. Meaning is given to the participants’ lived experience using methods of interpretive research devised by Stringer (1999) and Denzin (1989).

Tellis (1997), referencing Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (1990) noted, “the quintessential characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action” (p. 5). These cultural systems are sets of interrelated activities engaged in by those who share a common social situation. He also observed:

Case study research is not sampling research, which is a fact asserted by all the major researchers in the field, including Yin, Stake, Feagin and others. However,

selecting cases must be done so as to maximize what can be learned, in the period of time available for the study. (p. 5)

Kyburz-Graber (2004) noted:

Case studies do not rely on a controlled and somehow artificial environment. They follow the research philosophy of analyzing an existing, real-life situation in all its complexity, exploring it as close to the people concerned as possible, describing the situation in as much detail as possible, and finally explaining the findings in a clear and comprehensible way. (p. 54)

According to Stake (1978) the case study is best used

... for adding to existing experience and humanistic understanding. Its characteristics match the “readinesses” people have for added experience... Intentionality and empathy are central to the comprehension of social problems, but so also is information that is holistic and episodic. The discourse of persons struggling to increase their understanding of social matters features and solicits these qualities. And these characteristics match nicely the characteristics of the case study. (p. 7)

Research Design

The qualitative tradition selected for this research is that of the case study. When engaging in a case study, Creswell (1998) suggested the researcher embark on the quest to understand a problem by “entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live, and display the phenomenon; and looking for the meaning of the participants’ experiences” (p. 31). Put simply, all qualitative research is an interpretive study of human experience. Its purpose is to study and provide meaning for human

situations, events, meanings, and experiences "as they spontaneously occur in the course of daily life" (von Eckartsberg, 1998, p. 3). Utilizing the tradition of qualitative inquiry provides rich data for the researcher through "a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency, and ambiguity" (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p. 5).

Interviews were conducted with home school parents and public school administrators and teachers. The purpose of the interviews, which were audio-recorded, was to gather data relative to a wide range of lived experiences, not just a focus on isolated descriptions provided within the confines of a prejudicial populous. In order to understand the dynamics of this bounded system, it is imperative to examine it from as many perspectives as possible (Yin, 2003). Knowledge was constructed from personal experience, impressions, feelings, and emotions in the retelling of each individual story. The holistic picture that evolved from this framework provides a comprehensive description of the home-based learning phenomena within this bounded context.

Despite non-generalizability, the results of this research may serve as a catalyst for the development of new learning methods and increased insight into home learning and the basis for parental decision-making, and into the factors that contribute to the erosion of trust in the home-school relationship. The findings may also stimulate further research.

Major theories that inform this research come from the writings of Denzin (1994, 1997), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1998), Stringer (1996, 1999), and Creswell (1998, 2003). The conceptual framework for this case study may be characterized as post-positivist, constructivist, and interpretive. The post-positivist view places the

researcher in the natural setting, which in this case was the home learning environment. Interviews with parents were conducted largely in the homes of home-based learning families, and those with educators, in their schools or offices in order for individuals to feel at ease and willing to share their stories with the interviewer. The post-positivist view also embraces the idea of discovery in the inquiry process, which many times leads to an increased participant awareness of his/her life. Glasser and Strauss (1967) noted that the post-positivist approach assists in understanding the meaning and purposes that people ascribe to their own attitudes and actions.

In regard to the researcher/participant relationship for case study research, constructivist theory stresses mutuality and considers it to be interactively linked, so that findings are created through the process of investigation. Due to the variable and personal nature of social interaction, individual constructs of perception can only be discovered through interactions between the researcher and the participant (Denzin, 1994).

Design Rationale

Creswell (1998) stressed that the five qualitative traditions of inquiry differ, at a most fundamental level, in what they are trying to accomplish – “their foci or the primary objectives of the studies” (p. 5). The focus of a case study is to better understand “how things happen and why” (Anderson, 2001, p. 153).

The case study is “an exploration of a bounded system or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in content” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). This study is bounded by space and time in that it is confined to participants residing in a single school jurisdiction and who were home schooling at least one of their children for a minimum of 50% of their learning program.

The bounds of time and space that characterize this study qualify it as case study research (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Multiple sources of information can include observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports. Data for this study was confined to the personal observations of the researcher and interview data gathered through face-to-face semi-structured interviews between the researcher and study participants. This research focused on a case that required study because of its uniqueness; it is therefore an “intrinsic case study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 62). According to Yin (2003), “the analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies” (p. 109). Since this study dealt with the experiences of parents and educators with a common phenomenon, that of home schooling, it was determined that phenomenological data analysis procedures would contribute to the rigor of data analysis and the reliability and validity of findings.

To prepare for semi-structured interviews with participants, the researcher drew up questions designed to explore the meaning of that experience for individuals and then invited individuals to describe their own lived experience. As Creswell (2003) stated, “Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured. Several aspects emerge during a qualitative study. The research questions may change and be refined as the inquirer learns what to ask and to whom it should be asked” (p. 181). By asking broad, open-ended questions, the researcher attempted to provide the reader with an unadulterated picture of what it is or was like to experience this particular phenomenon.

Participant Selection

The researcher also ensured that data were collected from individuals who had experienced the phenomenon in question and had first-hand knowledge and experience of

it. Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 1998) explained, “This information is collected through long interviews (augmented with researcher self-reflection and previously developed descriptions from artistic works) with informants ranging in number from 5 to 25” (p. 54). Interviewees were given sufficient time to respond, but also an opportunity to add to their comments at a later time, consistent with Creswell’s (2003) direction for using “member checks” (p. 202) as part of the process of validation of data. This was not sampling research; rather the cases, or participants were purposefully selected so as to maximize what could be learned as the researcher entered the field of perception of participants, searching for the meaning of their experiences. Participants were selected so the study sample would accurately represent the demographics of the jurisdiction in terms of experience and community representation. The researcher deliberately selected families from all parts of the jurisdiction with a wide range of backgrounds and experience with home schooling. Some parents were selected because the decision to home school was made in this jurisdiction and others because their decision was made elsewhere. Researcher also selected participants who have never had children in the public school system, others who removed their children from school and those who home school for a time and then return their children to school. Efforts were made to ensure that study participants would represent the diversity of the study population.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of a demographic survey and a series of open, semi-structured interviews with parents and educators primarily in their home or classrooms, to gather data regarding their experiences with home schooling. Following each interview

digital recordings were transcribed to produce verbatim transcriptions that were later sent to each participant to verification and editing, to facilitate member checking for reliability and validity (Creswell, 1998).

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher used a generally accepted method of data analysis. This consisted of dividing the original protocols into statements, a process Creswell (1998) refers to as “horizontalization”, creating “clusters of meanings” expressed in phenomenological concepts, and finally tying these “transformations” together to make general descriptions of the experience, dividing them into “textural descriptions of what was experienced and the structural description of how it was experienced” (p. 55).

The final issue for the researcher is to ensure that the reader better understands the “essential, invariant structure, or essence” of the experience. The reader of the report should feel, “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46).

Development of Research Questions

Central Research Question

The following central research question and its sub-questions have guided this study: Why do parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling, and how well is this motivation understood by public school personnel?

Sub-Questions

- How do parents describe their educational experiences as students in public school or as home-schooled students?

- How do parents describe their experiences, as adults, with their neighborhood school?
- Are there environmental factors that contributed to parental decisions to home school? If so, what are they?
- How is religion described as a motivation, by parents, to home school?
- Has home schooling changed family/home life? If so, how?
- Which of the parents is primarily responsible for home schooling programs?
- Do parents identify benefits of home schooling for their children/family? If so, what are they?
- What judgments of public school do home schooling parents make?
- How do educators describe the reasons for which parents remove children from school?
- Are there teachers who choose to home school their children? If so, what are their reasons?
- What judgments do educators make of the effectiveness of home school programs?
- How are educators' perceptions of the reasons why parents choose to home school aligned with the reasons that parents actually give?

Rationale for Questions

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many parents left Alberta public schools to home school their children, as explained in Chapter Two. The rise in popularity of home schooling came at the same time as rural Alberta schools entered a period of declining enrollment and cuts to education funding (Ell, 2002, p. 43). In order for schools to

survive, they need students, and having students depends to some extent on the trust and cooperation of parents (McLeod, 2002). When a parent chooses any alternative to the traditional classroom, the viability of the school begins to decline. If a sufficient number of parents choose to leave the neighborhood school, programs may suffer. According to McLeod, where the home/school relationship is poor, parents may not share their reasons for removing their children from a school. Occasionally relationships are irreparably damaged, but wise parents will leave the school on terms that protect the option, should the day arrive when they want to have their students return to the school and the traditional classroom.

This study will contribute to our understanding of what motivates parents to remove children from the traditional classroom to undertake the daunting task of ensuring that they receive an educational foundation sufficient to enable a lifetime of learning. This study is also necessary to reveal the level of understanding that school personnel have of these reasons.

Participants in the Study

It was vital to this study that only those with lived experience and/or involvement with home-based learning be interviewed. Study participants were comprised of parents whose children were home schooled for at least 50% of their learning program and administrators and teachers from regular divisional public schools. This ensured that the data collected would be relevant to understanding the phenomenon within the bounded context of the case study. Interviews were conducted with 31 parents, representing 20 families who have children currently enrolled as home-based learning students for at least 50% of their learning program. Creswell (1998) advised that, due to the length and depth

of the interview for a case study, the number of participants should be limited to 10; however, for this study, the researcher believed that a higher number of participants would provide more reliable and consistent data. As Merriam (1998) asserted, there is no set number for case study research:

It always depends on the questions being asked, the data being gathered, the analysis in progress, the resources you have to support the study. What is needed is an adequate number of participants, sites, or activities to answer the question posed at the beginning of the study. (p. 64)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended the number of participants should be sufficient to reach a saturation point, or that point where data gathering becomes redundant. Interviews were conducted with 31 parents, a group made up of 20 mothers and 11 fathers, providing representation from 20 home schooling families. Data gleaned from these interviews were supplemented with insights garnered by interviewing 6 public school principals and 12 public school teachers from divisional schools each of which, have been impacted by parental decisions to initiate or terminate a home schooling program.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the following: a survey developed by the researcher to gather demographic information of study participants and detailed interviews with parents, school based teachers and administrators. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling techniques based upon their experience with the phenomenon of home education in this one school jurisdiction.

The interview questions for this study consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit the motivating factors for parents' removing students from the traditional classroom to home school. This aligned with Merton and Kendall's (1946) recommendation that interview questions be relatively open-ended but focused around a specific topic and guided by some general questions. Interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed. Once transcribed, the recordings were annotated and filed for future reference. They will be erased when the study reaches a successful conclusion. Interview transcripts were coded and organized for data analysis.

Interview Protocol

A series of open-ended interview questions were constructed to guide the recall of the interviewee, in order to stimulate memories they need to describe their experience and to recall what motivated them to initiate a home schooling program. According to Creswell (1998), "The investigator writes research questions that explore the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks individuals to describe their everyday lived experiences" (p. 54). Furthermore, the investigator only collected data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation. This information was collected through face-to-face interviews.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations for this study may emerge from the following:

1. The study participants may have a preconceived idea of what the researcher may be looking for and strive to provide the perceived information desired, rather than expressing their honest and true views.

2. As this study is investigating phenomena that may be emotionally sensitive, one or more of the subjects may be reluctant to reveal details needed to portray their motives accurately.
3. As with any qualitative study, the interviews of study participants provide a snapshot view of what they can recall, potentially many years after the experience occurred.
4. There is no expectation for generalizability, as this is a qualitative study; however, there is an expectation that conclusions may have a degree of transferability to similar cases.

Ethical Issues

All reasonable efforts have been made to ensure the ethical treatment of participants and data gathered for this research. Participant involvement was totally voluntary, and the option to withdraw at any time during the study was communicated to participants. The researcher is confident that a reasonable degree of anonymity has been assured for all study participants and that no unusual risks exist for any participant.

According to Stake (2005), “Case studies often deal with matters that are of public interest but for which there is neither public nor scholarly right to know” (p. 459). Stake further observed that the qualitative researcher must remember that he or she is a guest in the private spaces of the study participants and proceed with strict ethical care.

Merriam (1998) cautioned, “Interviewing—whether it is highly structured with predetermined questions or semi structured and open-ended—carries with it both risks and benefits to the informants” (p. 214). Participants may reveal things they never intended and feel that their privacy has been invaded. Others may gain increased self-

knowledge, which may have positive or negative connotations for the individual. These potential benefits and risks were disclosed to participants at the onset of research, prior to the gathering of data. Respondents were also advised that they could withdraw from participation at any time, and that they would have the opportunity to withdraw or change their comments. Stake (2005) explained:

In-depth interviewing may have unanticipated long-term effects. What are the residual effects of an interview with a teacher who articulates, for the first time perhaps, anger and frustration with his position? Or the administrator who becomes aware of her own lack of career options through participation in a study of those options? Or the adult student who is asked to give reasons for failing to read? Painful, debilitating memories may surface in an interview, even if the topic appears routine or benign. (p. 214)

The following steps have been taken to protect the anonymity of study participants:

1. Voluntary, informed consent was obtained for all interviews.
2. Transcriptions were labeled by number, rather than by name, and at the conclusion of the study tapes will be erased.
3. Indicators that could identify the situation or participants were removed or changed.
4. Coded transcriptions have been secured and may be accessed only by the researcher and dissertation chair.

Delimitations

This study is delimited to parents and educators in one Alberta school jurisdiction. All participants were carefully selected, based on their participation either as home

schoolers or as educators with some contact with and knowledge of home schooling families. Participants' involvement with home schooling varied in terms of the number of children, length of time involved, and continuity of registration. Although statistics and trends for Canadian and American home schooling have been reviewed, the focus for this research is limited to the parents and professional educators in one Alberta school jurisdiction.

Data Analysis Procedures

In keeping with qualitative tradition, Creswell (1998) noted:

To analyze qualitative data, the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters with data of text or images and exits with an account or a narrative. In between, the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles around and around. (p. 142)

Creswell noted this as a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of data analysis for phenomenological studies. Gay and Airasian (2003) noted that qualitative data analysis requires the systematic search, categorization, integration and interpretation of study data. Gay and Airasian further stressed "Analysis involves describing what is in the data; while interpretation involves making sense of what the data mean" (p. 254). Phenomenological data analysis directs the researcher to become immersed in the data and through constant reflection throughout data collection and analysis, construct a narrative that enlightens the reader of the deep essential structures entrenched in the lived experiences of individuals (Thorne, 2000).

Applying phenomenological analysis to this case study data assisted the researcher to categorize and synthesize the data so the meanings and essences of the

phenomenon could emerge. As this case study explores a phenomenon bounded by place and time, phenomenological data analysis procedures were adapted for this study. The steps taken are as follows:

- The researcher began with a full description of his experience with the phenomenon. This was presented as a statement of researcher bias and fulfills the need for “bracketing” as identified by Creswell (1998).
- The researcher then found statements in the interview transcriptions and field notes relating to how individuals experienced the phenomena. In the process of horizontalization, the researcher listed out significant statements and phrases from the verbatim transcriptions relating to a unique thoughts or issues concerning the phenomenon. Each statement was treated as having equal worth, and then a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements was constructed. This left a group of horizons, or essential units of meaning related to the participants experience with the phenomenon, that constituted the invariant constituents of lived experience as noted by Creswell (1998), Polkinghorne (1989) and Moustakas (1994).
- These invariant constituents were then grouped into *clusters of meaning* units (Creswell, 1998), wherein the researcher listed these units and identified the core components of the experience. These core components were divided into primary topics and supporting themes substantiated by participant descriptions of the *textures* (textural description) of their experience—what happened—including verbatim examples. Polkinghorne (1989) described this

as phenomenological reduction that produces a detailed description of each participant's awareness, reflection and knowledge of their own experience.

- Throughout the construction of the textural description of participants, the researcher utilized imaginative variation or structural description, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon and constructed a description of how the phenomenon was experienced. Moustakas (1994) explained that imaginative variation requires the researcher to seek possible meanings through “imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (p. 97). Polkinghorne (1989) stressed the need for the researcher to reflectively distance himself/herself from logic or reasonableness in order to be open to any inevitability. During this stage in analysis, the researcher became totally immersed in the data and constantly visited and re-visited the data for continual verification, including only that which was explicitly stated by participants or that which was compatible with the data, if not explicitly stated.
- The researcher then constructed an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience using a blend of textural and structural descriptions. The narrative that constitutes the majority of chapter 4 is a composite description of researcher observation as supported by participant contributions. This integration of experiences has been structured into topics and themes that describe the essence of the phenomenon under investigation.

Creswell (1998) advised following the data analysis process first for the researcher's account of the experience and then for the account of each participant, until finally a composite description can be written. Issues that posed a significant challenge for the researcher include the need to have a solid grounding in the philosophical precepts of the tradition, the absolute necessity of ensuring that all participants have experienced the phenomenon in question, the ability of the researcher to bracket personal experience and biases, and the question of how to weave the researcher's personal experiences into the study.

This case study focused on parents who have gone through a common experience, or phenomenon, specifically, making the decision to have children learn at home. However, related to this experience, an investigation of school personnel was undertaken to determine if administrators and teachers have an understanding of what motivates parents to opt out of the public school program. The results of this study will inform administrators and teachers about the level of their understanding, and if the level is deficient, encourage them to examine current practice and to initiate change.

Standards of Quality and Verification

Creswell (1998) presented eight verification procedures common in the literature: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation; (b) triangulation; (c) peer review or debriefing; (d) negative case analysis; (e) clarifying researcher bias; (f) member checks; (g) rich, thick description; and (h) external audits. Merriam (1998) noted there are six basic strategies for enhancing internal validity for qualitative research: (a) triangulation; (b) member checks; (c) long-term observation; (d) peer examination; (e) participatory or collaborative modes of research; and (f) clarifying researcher bias.

Inherent in the dissertation process are peer review and external audits, which are accomplished through the screening responsibility of the dissertation committee. A qualitative study may be expected to contain rich, thick description and clarification of researcher bias. Creswell (1998) recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of these checks for any given study. For this case study, the researcher has used member checks, peer review, external audits, and rich, thick description to ensure the validity and reliability of findings.

Institutional Review Board and Gatekeeper Clearance

This study was conducted entirely in the Province of Alberta, Canada. Although the requirements for conducting academic research in Canada differ from those in the United States, because this study was conducted under the direction of The University of Montana, it had to comply with U. S. Federal Government regulations that require approval of an Institutional Review Board (IRB). Prior to the commencement of field research, IRB clearance was obtained.

Researcher Bias

Until 2000, I had not given much thought to home schooling, nor did I have much contact with anyone who practiced it. At that time, I had been a full-time teacher in the Alberta public education system for 22 years and had seen all three of my children graduate from high school. In the early fall of 2000, I found myself thrust into the home schooling world when I became the principal of a school responsible for alternative education within the public system. I quickly discovered that, to those engaged in home learning, learning and education are defined in terms far beyond the confines of the

classroom and test scores. I also discovered that a highly charged political arena exists where the legitimacy of home schooling is challenged on a regular basis.

Initially, the whole home schooling idea seemed radical and even a bit weird to me. I could not imagine why anyone would assume the responsibility of educating and providing adequate opportunities to socialize their children without the assistance of a school. I was a product of small, rural Alberta schools, and my personal experiences with school inspired me to become a teacher. My arrival at the alternate school came just a few months after the youngest of my three children graduated from high school. As I became familiar with the various learning alternatives associated with my new school, I started to wonder if perhaps alternative learning had merits that I had not previously considered. In retrospect, I might have even opted to home school one of my own children for a time.

As I interacted with students, parents and supervising teachers of a home-based learning program, I came to realize that I really did not know what home schooling was, what it looked like, or why people chose it for their children. After six years in alternative education, I returned to regular public school in 2006 as the principal of a junior high school. Despite daily interaction with over 300 students in grades 7 through 9, I still have burning questions about what motivates parents to choose a learning option that so dramatically alters a family's lifestyle, as I believe home schooling does.

As a principal, I was closely involved with many home schoolers from 2000 until the summer of 2006, and I established relationships of trust and friendship with many of the families, teachers and administrators from whom data were collected. The past year has provided some distance, as these families now have a new principal and I am

becoming a distant memory. This distance has helped me be more objective and less biased.

I have had many occasions to visit with home school families in both formal and informal settings. These caused me to wonder if there might be common threads that contribute to parents' decision to home school. How do these parents perceive the public school and those who work as educators and education leaders? How do these perceptions contribute to their motivation to home school? Perhaps there is something all educators can learn from the stories of parents who choose to home school, something that, if educators better understood it, could lead to more responsive schools and improved learning opportunities for all children.

This explanation of researcher bias addressed the need for bracketing, as required in phenomenological research. When stated prior to the commencement of data collection it allowed the researcher to set aside prejudgments and prior experience with the phenomenon, as recommended by Creswell (1998) and Moustakas (1994).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the study was to better understand the parental motivation that led to the decision to home school, and to examine how well school-based educators (administrators and teachers) understand these motivating factors.

The methods and procedures described outline how participants were selected and how data were gathered and analyzed. A questionnaire (See Appendix L) was used to collect demographic data; the questionnaire may also help the reader to transfer the findings of this study to similar situations. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with parents of home school children, the supervising teachers of home school

programs, selected school-based administrators, and teachers in regular school programs. Interviews were conducted with 31 parents, 6 public school principals and 12 public school teachers. Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. A print transcription of each interview was provided to each participant for editing and verification. When this study reaches its conclusion digital recordings will be erased.

Data were analyzed using phenomenological procedures modified from the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (cited in Creswell, 1998). Creswell identified issues that pose a significant challenge for the researcher: the need to have a solid grounding in the philosophical precepts of the tradition; the absolute necessity to ensure all participants have experienced the phenomenon; the ability of the research to bracket personal experience and bias; and choosing how to weave the researcher's personal experience into the study. Standards of quality and verification were addressed through rich, thick description, peer review, member checks and external audits. Creswell (2003) stated that at least two of these verification methods are sufficient.

The study involved adults (parents, administrators and teachers) who participated voluntarily, with an open option to withdraw at any time. I am confident that a reasonable degree of confidentiality has been assured, beyond the primary researcher, for all participants and that no unusual risks existed. Stake (2005) reminded the qualitative researcher to remember that he/she is a guest in private spaces and to proceed with strict ethical care. The researcher is confident this has been the case.

Chapter Four includes a detailed account of the data collected through a demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

A qualitative design was selected for this study because the researcher desired to provide a detailed description of home schooling from the perspective of parents who have selected this form of learning for their children, as opposed to having them attend a public or private school system. As Creswell (1998) noted, it is through the process of qualitative inquiry that the researcher “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). Eisner (1998) advised educators to search for the truth in social situations, experiences, and phenomena by working closely with individuals who have what Creswell referred to as the necessary and relevant “lived experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 54). In order to collect data, the researcher conducted candid, probing interviews with parents to discover the issues and motivations contributing to their eventual decision to home school their children. These interviews were conducted primarily in the homes of home schooling families, where the researcher met and briefly observed many of the home-schooled children. Similar interviews were also conducted with educators to gather data regarding their understanding of what motivates parents to choose home schooling for children.

The case study tradition was selected because, at the time of the study, a significant number of families residing in one specific school jurisdiction in Alberta were engaged in the home schooling of at least one of their children. This situation fulfilled the requirement for the case study to be bounded by time and place (Creswell, 1998, p. 37). All participants identified that at least one of their children was being home schooled for

more than 50% of their educational program; in fact, all participating parents had at least one child that was home schooled for 100% of the program, at the time of the interview.

Data Analysis

According to Yin (2003), “the analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies” (p. 109). Since the Central Research Question in this study dealt with individual participants’ experiences with a common phenomenon, that of home schooling, phenomenological data analysis procedures were followed.

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding and appreciation of the complexity of factors that motivate parents’ to make the decision to initiate home schooling for their children. Data collected from administrators and teachers, from the public school system, provided needed insight into the perceptions of educators who have been affected by the removal of students from the public school classroom, or by the return of home-schooled children to the classroom. The researcher intends for the reader of this study to come away feeling, “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). This is what Creswell (1998) described as the “essence” (p. 55) of the phenomenon.

The researcher followed the protocol for collecting data outlined by Creswell (1998) and Yin (2003). Access to parent and educator participants were gained by sending letters to school jurisdiction and school administrators (see Appendices C and D). Once gatekeeper clearance had been obtained, participants were identified and invitations to be part of the study were sent to principals, teachers and parents (see Appendices E, F and G). All participants received a copy of the IRB clearance letter (see

Appendix J) and then signed the consent to participate form (see Appendix K). Proper research protocols and procedures were followed in gaining access to all participants, recording interviews, storing and transcribing interview data, developing rapport and conducting interviews, and resolving minor field issues.

The analysis of data in a qualitative study is a continual inductive process. The researcher followed a process for data analysis similar to that described by Gay & Airasian (2003):

Data analysis is a cyclical, iterative process of reviewing data for common topics or themes. The analytic focus is on the context, events, and participants, with a focus on describing from the perspective of the participants. (p. 254)

The five steps for data analyses outlined by Creswell (1998), as described earlier, were closely followed. Bracketing of researcher bias and preconceived assumptions increases the likelihood of a more objective approach to data analysis and helped the researcher to avoid leading questions during the interviews. As the former principal responsible for home school programs, the researcher made a consistent effort to set aside personal judgments and beliefs about specific home school families and home schooling in general, in order to present an accurate and honest analysis of the data provided by the participants. Some participants selected for this study were new to the jurisdiction, and some were even new to home schooling. Many parent participants had no prior connection or relationship with the researcher, never having been under his supervision when he was principal of alternative learning programs in the study jurisdiction.

The second step in data analyses was to have each interview transcribed from digital recordings to a word-for-word print document. Private and commercial

transcription services were used to accommodate the volume of data collected. Interview transcriptions totaled 940 pages, of which 705 were interviews with parents and 235 interviews with educators. Interview transcriptions were returned to study participants for verification and editing through member checking. All participants were encouraged to make additions, deletions and alterations to ensure that the final transcription accurately depicted their views, opinions and experiences. Through the process of member checking no substantial changes to the original transcripts were noted by study participants. From the edited transcriptions, the researcher identified significant statements relevant to the topic; statements were each given equal value. This procedure is consistent with phenomenological data analysis protocol and is representative of “horizontalization” (Creswell, 1998, p. 55).

This second step involved the de-contextualizing of data referred to by Tesch (1990), where interview data is dissected into smaller pieces so it can later be re-contextualized into a “larger, consolidated picture” (p. 97). The coding of field notes and interview transcriptions assisted the researcher to classify statements into topics and themes that emerged from the data (Creswell, 1998). According to Bogden and Biklen (1998), the researcher is able to discover topics and patterns through the application of coding categories to the study data.

In the third step, the researcher further analyzed the data in order to cluster the horizon statements into topics. These topics emerged from vigilant, purposeful and repeated examination of the interview transcriptions and application of data clusters (Creswell, 1998, p. 55). A varying number of themes emerged that further defined and explained the relevance of each topic. The researcher then synthesized the data, removed

repetitive statements, and selected direct participant quotes for needed “rich, thick description, providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). This detailed process began immediately following the first interview and ended only with completion of the final draft of the study.

The fourth step involved the description of the lived experiences of the participants as understood by the researcher. This is the construction of the essence of the phenomenon, namely, description of the primary motivating factors that cause parents to initiate a home schooling program for their child. The researcher included both textural and structural descriptions; blending them into a narrative that addressed the Central Research Question.

The final step involved verification procedures to ensure, within reason, the reliability of data analysis and research conclusions. Member checks, external audits, clarification of researcher bias, peer review and the use of rich, thick description have been incorporated to verify and ensure the validity of data, data analysis, and conclusions, as noted by Creswell (1998, pp. 202-203).

All steps in data analyses were conducted by hand without the assistance of data analysis software. The researcher is confident that the topics and themes developed from the study data accurately depict the research phenomenon from the uniquely different perspectives of the participants.

Profile of Participants

The participants for this study included parents from 20 home schooling families. In some cases both parents consented to participate, while in other cases only the mother

was available for the interview. A total of 31 parents participated in recorded interviews, exceeding the proposed minimum of 20 parents but equaling the proposed number of 20 representative families. These 31 parents represent all 20 of the home schooling families selected for inclusion in this study. Parent participants included 20 mothers and 11 fathers. A summary of the demographic data collected prior to each interview, using the demographic information form (see Appendix L), shows there is wide diversity in the number of children home schooled, experience with home schooling, income level and educational background of parents (see Table 1).

Table 1. Profile of Parent Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Years Home Schooling	Number of Children Currently Home Schooled
Aaron	M	13	8
Abby	F	1	1
Adele	F	26	1
Amy	F	4	3
Bailey	F	7	1
Barton	M	5	2
Betsy	F	3	3
Bobbie	F	10	4
Brandi	F	2	4
Cameron	F	2	1
Candice	F	5	2
Carley	F	2	1
Carmen	F	14	2
Carter	M	10	4
Doug	M	5	4
Ethan	M	3	2
Hannah	F	13	8
Jackie	F	5	4
Jacob	M	5	2
Jennifer	F	14	6
Kaci	F	5	2
Kayla	F	4	2
Lane	M	5	2
Luke	M	2	1

Pseudonym	Gender	Years Home Schooling	Number of Children Currently Home Schooled
Martin	M	2	4
Mitch	M	4	2
Renaë	F	3	2
Rhonda	F	5	2
Sadie	F	5	2
Sidney	F	10	1
Wendell	M	1	1

Educator participants consisted of 12 teachers and 6 principals, equaling the number proposed for the study (see Table 2). Participants were purposefully selected to represent the communities in the jurisdiction affected by home schooling.

Table 2. Profile of Educator Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Years Teaching	Teacher/Administrator
Barry	M	31	Administrator
Beckett	M	23	Teacher
Bella	F	25	Teacher
Bonnie	F	35	Administrator
Chrissy	F	26	Teacher
Chuck	M	22	Administrator
Ellis	M	31	Teacher
Emmett	M	38	Administrator
Haley	F	18	Teacher
Julie	F	2	Teacher
Kevin	M	27	Administrator
Marc	M	22	Administrator
Mario	M	10	Teacher
Roger	M	5	Teacher
Shanna	F	32	Teacher
Shirley	F	16	Teacher
Suzanne	F	30	Teacher

Pseudonym	Gender	Years Teaching	Teacher/Administrator
Vicki	F	20	Teacher

The researcher used purposeful sampling to ensure that all participants had relevant experience with the phenomenon under investigation. The criteria for selecting parents was based on their prior decision to home school and having at least one child still in a home school program for at least 50% of the time. Educators were selected from schools in communities throughout the jurisdiction that had been impacted by the removal of students to home school.

The identity of participants and their place of employment or residence have been presented in such a way as to ensure confidentiality. However, confidentiality of identity and personal information did not interfere with the collection, analyses or presentation of data. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of study participants (see Table 2 and 3).

Before being interviewed, parents were asked to complete a demographic information sheet to help the researcher describe the study group (See Appendix L). Parents provided information relative to their residence and home schooling experience by identifying their location, gross family income, highest level of education attained and formal teacher training (if any), family size and number of children currently home schooling, marital status of parents, and religious affiliation. The intent of collecting this demographic data was to help describe the socio-economic makeup of the parents that participated in this study. The researcher made a conscious effort to select participants who would closely represent the socio-economic makeup of the jurisdiction that forms the bounds for this case study.

On the information sheets, parents reported home schooling experience that ranged from being in their first year of home schooling to long-term home schooling all of their children (in one case this represented over 20 years of home schooling experience). Some reported never having accessed any public or private school system, but the majority reported having removed their children after varying periods of time in a public school.

The majority of parents reported their only home school experience as being in the jurisdiction used for this study; however, some reported having started elsewhere and then later moving to the study jurisdiction. The home schooling population in this jurisdiction seemed fairly stable; in fact, one parent, Carley, reported having been home schooled in the jurisdiction as a child, thus representing a second generation of home schoolers. Carley shared her views about the decision to home school from her perspective as a formerly home-schooled child:

I think it would be wrong for people to assume that if a person was home schooled they will likely home school their children. I think people need to realize that when people make a decision like this [to home school or not] there are so many factors involved. It's not an easy decision. I would be like, why would a publicly schooled person suddenly home school? People don't always follow the same track they were raised on.

Family size for this study varied to a maximum of nine children. Some parents reported that all of their children had been or were being home schooled for some or all of their formal school program, while others reported home schooling just one or selected children. Parents also indicated that the number of years spent home schooling also

varied, from one year or less to all of the primary and secondary school years. All families had parents who were married and presently cohabiting, with the father as breadwinner. Most of these families reported gross income over \$40,000 per year placing them in the middle-income category. The highest education level attained ranged from a high school diploma to graduate degrees, with the majority having completed an undergraduate degree or college diploma. While a few parents, primarily mothers, reported having formal teacher training, the vast majority did not. Those with teacher training reported that they perceived this to be an advantage, since it enhanced their credibility in the eyes of the judging public. One mother with teacher training observed:

I think we avoided some criticism because I was a teacher. You know, she's a teacher so she can do this. But I found that, when I tried to do school at home, it didn't work very well. I really had to change my approach to learning.

All families in this study were Caucasian, and the majority reported membership in the same Christian religious denomination. The demographic information provided by the parents is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Parent Demographic Data

1. Number of jurisdictions you have home-schooled.	1	2	3	4 or more					
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	14	4	2	0					
2. Have you ever moved because of your decision to Home School?									
	Yes	No							
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	4	16							
<i>Reason: To be where home schooling was better accepted/supported.</i>									
3. Religious Affiliation									
	Christian		Other	None					
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	19		0	1					
4. Gross Family Income									
	- \$40 K	\$40-75 K	\$75-100 K	\$100 K +					
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	3	12	4	1					
5. Marital status of parents									
	Married	Single	Divorced	Common Law					
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	20	0	0	0					
6. Education level of mother									
	High School	College/University		Graduate					
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	7	13		0					
7. Education level of father									
	High School	College/University		Graduate					
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	1	18		1					
8. Formal teacher training									
	Father			Mother					
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	1			4					
9. Number of Children									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	0	2	1	10	2	1	3	0	1
10. Number of children currently home schooled									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<i>Number of parents reporting</i>	6	5	3	1	3	1	0	1	0

Following the transcription of each interview, the transcript was returned to each participant for member checking, which was one of the primary tools used for the purpose of verification and validity of data. Final data analysis did not occur until members had checked the data, enabling the researcher to feel confident that the data accurately reflect the views, opinions and feelings of each participant in the study. It is

significant to note there were no substantial changes noted by study participants as a result of member checking.

For the purpose of this study, the experiences of participants are presented in narrative form. Direct quotations have been used, taken directly from the verbatim transcriptions of interviews, to underscore the textual and structural experiences of participants. A number of topics and supporting themes emerged from the detailed data analysis of interview transcriptions and the researcher's field notes.

Identification of Topics and Themes

Themes emerged and were identified through the process of horizontalization, wherein the researcher combed interview transcriptions for significant and meaningful statements relevant to the central research question and sub-questions. These themes were then coded and clustered into groups according to the similarity of the issues described from which the topics emerged. The topics and themes were selected for their relevance to the central research question and sub-questions.

Central Research Question

The following central research question and its sub-questions guided this study: Why do parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling, and how well is this motivation understood by public school personnel?

Sub-Questions

- How do parents describe their educational experiences as students in public school or as home-schooled students?
- How do parents describe their experiences, as adults, with their neighborhood school?

- Are there environmental factors that contribute to the parental decision to home school? If so, what are they?
- How do parents describe religion as a motivation to home school?
- According to parents, has home schooling changed family/home life? If so, how?
- Which of the parents is primarily responsible for home schooling programs?
- What do parents identify as benefits of home schooling for their children/family?
- What judgments of the public school system do home schooling parents make?
- How do educators describe the reasons for which parents remove children from school?
- Are there public school teachers who choose to home school their children? If so, why?
- What judgments do educators make of the effectiveness of home school programs?
- How are educators' perceptions of the reasons parents choose to home school aligned with the reasons parents actually give?

Removal of Research Sub-Question

The sub-question specifically dealing with public school teachers who choose to home school will not be addressed in this study. Only one participant fell into this category; consequently the researcher decided, rather than risk violating the commitment

of confidentiality and protection of subjects, to remove this question from inclusion in the study.

Description of Topics and Themes

The first eight sub-questions determined the topics for parents and addressed the first part of the central research question. The last four sub-questions determined the topics for educators, both teachers and administrators, and addressed the second part of the central research question.

For each of these topics, relevant statements of significance were clustered into themes. As the researcher discovered, these themes emerged only after thorough and repeated examination of and personal reflection on the data. While common themes emerged, the actual experience was unique for each participant, relative to his or her own lived experience with the educational phenomenon of home schooling. Through this process, the researcher found the voice of each participating parent or educator emerging to describe individual perspectives on and perceptions about the decision and subsequent consequences of the choice to home school children.

The researcher then constructed a narrative relative to each topic and theme to illustrate how it contributes to a more thorough understanding of parental motivation to home school children, and how well educators understand this motivation. Following careful reflection and several reconstructions of the data, the researcher is confident that the following analysis of data accurately depicts and addresses the question that guided this research.

Eight topics emerged from the interviews with parents and the resulting analysis of the data as the primary motivations for initiating a home schooling program. While

each of the motivating factors were primary factors for some parents, others found them to be relevant as motivations for their decision to continue home schooling. Each of the topics and supporting themes are presented and supported by rich, thick descriptive statements gleaned from verbatim transcriptions of interviews, all of which have been verified by study participants.

Example of Data Analysis

Utilizing the process of horizontalization, verbatim transcriptions of interviews was broken down into statements – each of which was treated as having equal worth. This process of de-contextualizing the data into the invariant structures of data allowed for statements to be clustered into groups supporting a related topic. For example, a number of parent statements referred to the desire for their children to become more “peer independent” and they believed the best way for this to occur was to remove their children from their peer group until they were older and had family values more firmly ingrained into their character—so they would be better equipped to deal with peer pressure and conflicting values.

Horizon statements were then clustered into groups of similar meaning. A number of parents identified that social stratification and the need for children to be more peer independent were issues they associated as a problem with public school. These and other issues emerged from parent interviews as concern parents had with peer group influences. Other horizon statements related to bullying, labeling, not fitting in, negative influences such as pornography, drugs and then the disruptive influence this type of influence and information had on their home and other siblings.

From these horizon statements, or themes, the topic of peer socialization emerged as one of the core topics alluded to by parents. The research data was then scrutinized more closely to see how many parents actually identified these concerns as either “the reason” or “a main” contributing reason leading them to make the initial decision to home school. Many of the reasons given by parents for choosing to home school, were identified as having emerged after the initial decision was made. The researcher came to the decision that the most important motivations were those that led parents to make the initial or first decision, for as most parents confirmed, without the first decision, their children would likely still be in public school.

A total of 11 topics emerged from the analysis of data: eight topics from parent interview and three from educator interviews. All steps were completed by hand without the assistance of computer data analysis software. The procedure followed for the analysis of data, utilizing phenomenological methods, is illustrated in Table 4. Another example of data analysis is included as Appendix M.

Table 4. Summary of Data Analysis Procedures

<i>Horizontalization</i>	<i>Cluster Meaning Statements (Themes)</i>	<i>Emergence of Patterns/Core Topics</i>
<p>Described a child with autism (Henderson, p. 4)</p> <p>Described a child who was severely introverted – May (p. 3)</p> <p>“...we didn’t feel our son was being challenged.” Paul (p. 2)</p> <p>“...our son is gifted and the school wouldn’t address it. This is our main reason.” Paul (p. 4)</p> <p>“...schools don’t have the resources to create special courses for all kids, but we do.” Paul (p. 17)</p> <p>“...we could see that our son was being labeled by being in the modified group.” Albright (p. 2)</p> <p>Described a child with ADD – Watson (p. 1) – Main Reason</p> <p>Described child with severe retention issues – Henry (p. 2) – Main Reason</p> <p>“...our daughter was extremely bored, and this was grade one.” Matkin (p. 2)</p> <p>Described child with anxiety disorder that was ignored by staff – Nice (p. 1&2) – Main Reason</p> <p>“...we believed our son had ADD because he was acting out and always in trouble and I really didn’t want him labeled.” Bloom (p. 1 & 3) – Main Reason</p>	<p>Learning Disabilities</p> <p>Learning Concerns</p> <p>Behavioral Issues</p> <p>Medical Issues</p>	<p>Special Needs of Children</p>

Topics and Themes

Topics and themes related to parental motivation to home school are as follows:

1. Past Experiences of Parents as Students
 - a. Negative Experiences
 - b. Positive Experiences
2. Special Needs of Children

- a. Learning Disabilities
 - b. Learning Concerns
 - c. Behavioral Issues
 - d. Medical Issues
3. Peer Socialization
- a. Perceived Negative Influences
 - b. Social Stratification
 - c. Effect on Home Life
4. Religion
- a. Stewardship to Teach
 - b. Curricular Content
5. Incidents at School
- a. Safety of Children
 - b. Physical/Emotional Abuse
6. Environmental Factors
- a. Distance from School
 - b. Family Needs
7. Recruitment
- a. Influence of Other Home Schoolers
 - b. Jurisdiction Support of Home Schooling
 - c. Home Schooling Literature
8. Emergent Issue
- a. Freedom to Choose

In addition to these eight topics emerging from parent interviews, the following three topics and related themes emerged from educator interviews. The resulting analysis of this data are presented and supported by thick, rich descriptive statements gleaned from verbatim transcriptions of interviews that have been verified by study participants.

The topics and related themes from educators are as follows:

1. Educator Perceptions of Parent Motivation to Home School

- a. Administrator
- b. Teacher
- c. School Response

2. Educator Judgments of Home Schooling

- a. Socialization
- b. Blended Programs
- c. Funding
- d. Advantages of Home Schooling

3. Educators Issues

- a. Accountability
- b. Trust
- c. Communication

The analysis of parental and educator contributions to this study suggests that the relationship between the school and home schooling families, in this jurisdiction, is somewhat strained and less cooperative than it ought to be. The researcher does not intend to assign or intimate blame of any kind concerning the rift in this relationship. Through the process of telling their stories, the researcher believes he has taken an

important and necessary step to create a relationship of greater trust between the public school and home schooling communities. Rogers (1956) explained:

If I can create a relationship...which I am by real feelings and by a warm acceptance of a liking for the other person; by a sensitive ability to see his world and himself as he sees — then the other individual in the relationship will experience and understand aspects of himself which he has previously repressed; will find himself becoming more integrated, more able to function effectively; will become more similar to the person he would like to be; will be more self directing and self confident; will become more of a person, more unique, more self expansive; and will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and more comfortably. (p. 6-7)

By its very design, this research has opened a dialogue between home school parents and public school educators, as the voice of each has been heard. Calabrese (2002) observed, “Effective leadership discusses the undiscussable” (p. 38).

Introduction of Parent Topics

As parents shared their reasons for initiating a home school program, the researcher discovered these reasons were often quite different from those identified as motivation for continuing to home school. It became clear from the data, that educators need to understand parents’ initial motivations leading them to make the decision to home school, for without these initial motivating factors, parents would likely never have considered and ultimately opted to remove their children from the public school system. The factors that initially motivated parents to choose home schooling were often found to

be quite different from the factors that motivate them to continue the practice. Renae, a parent, stated, “My reasons for home schooling really changed after I began.”

The primary focus of this research has been to identify those primary motivating factors that led parents to begin a home schooling program. While their motivations for continuing the practice may be interesting and important, these may never have emerged if the initial decision to home school had not been made.

Every home schooling family in this study identified the mother as the parent primarily responsible for educating the children; all are stay-at-home mothers. While the majority of mothers stressed the importance of having the father’s support, many had to convince their husband of the importance of the choice to have their children learn at home. Ethan, a father, recalled, “When we discussed it, I knew the greater burden of home schooling would fall on her [the mother], so seeing that she really wanted it, I felt that I needed to support her.”

The decision to home school was rarely a “snap decision.” Rather, parents emphasized their decision was very deliberate and often took months or even years to reach. One of the mothers, Cameron, remembered struggling with the decision to home school, even though she was convinced early in the decision-making process that her child’s needs were not being adequately addressed at school. She reflected:

There’s a lot of judgment out there about home schooling and I used to judge that way. But I had only seen one case of home schooling and that parent didn’t do any schooling — they just wanted someone to babysit. I discovered there are good and bad in home school, just like everything else. I had seen one case that was negative, but I later got to know a good half-dozen really positive home schoolers.

I was impressed with how the kids were and I went to some home schooling seminars. It took months before I really knew.

Every family had a story that was uniquely theirs of how they came to choose home schooling. Another couple, Kayla and Mitch, described what the decision-making process was like for them. Kayla remembered:

I had a girlfriend who was home schooling her children and that put the first thought in my head — you could home school, but what is that like? My daughter was 2 years old at the time I went to my first home schooling convention. Then I really started considering it and I started reading and going to more conventions. The more I read the more convinced I was that this [home schooling] was something I wanted to do. It took over three years to make the decision.

When Mitch was asked what role he played in the decision and how supportive he was, he responded:

I've always trusted Kayla's instincts with our kids. She wrestled with this—not just at the start—for five years. She wrestled with it since before we started this [home schooling] and the weighing back and forth and at some point there was a shift for me, where I decided this [home schooling] was very important for me too. But it took a while before that happened.

Parents' Past Experiences as Students

In recounting their own past experiences as students in school, 18 of 31 parents reported having good, even great experiences; 7 of 31 reported having had a primarily negative experience; 4 of 31 indicated that their experience with school was a mix of good and bad and were relatively neutral in their estimation of school; and 2 of 31 parents

were primarily home schooled as children; however, each of these had entered the school system at some point in their school experience and reported having generally a good experience.

Of the 20 families, five parents identified their own past negative experiences in school served as a primary motivation to initiate home schooling for their children. One of these parents determined that her children would never go to public school, which to this point in time has been the case, after more than 12 years. This mother, Jennifer, shared what school was like for her, as the child of immigrant parents who did not speak English in the home. When asked why she made the choice to home school, she said, “The initial reason was probably my own experience in school.” She described her experience as follows:

I was quiet and didn't know English when I went to grade 1, so I attended remedial classes. I would say that I basically sat quiet in the corner for the first nine years of school. By the time I was 14, I had learned to get the wrong kind of attention and my last two years in high school were just one big party. So other than learning to read and write; I didn't get much out of school. School wasn't a great experience for me.

Like all parents, Jennifer also had secondary motivations that contributed to her initial choice and a number of other motivations for deciding to continue to home school. Significantly, parents in this study suggested that, without the initial reasons that served as their primary motivation, their children would likely be in the public school system. As the researcher discovered, negative school experiences were a common element in

parents' stories and often served as a strong motivation for making the decision to initiate and continue home schooling.

Some parents revisit the home schooling choice on an annual basis. These parents felt their children should have a say in their method of schooling, so they gave their children a choice to return to school. Carter, one of the fathers who reported having a negative experience in school, noted, "Our daughter has gone back to school and that's a choice that she made and we support her in it."

Negative Experiences

Many parent participants identified that their school experience was more negative than positive; in fact, 5 of 20 families noted that this was a primary motivation for choosing to home school. Where this was not the primary motivation, it clearly served to reinforce the correctness of the original decision for many of the participants. One of the fathers, Barton, identified that he had a difficult time learning to read as a student — a problem he felt was largely ignored, for which he now feels cheated. His perception is that schools are unable or unwilling to address special learning needs of students. He described his experience as follows:

School was mostly negative for me. I couldn't read until I was in grade 6 when my parents removed me from [school] and sent me to a [small rural school]. It was there that, all of sudden, somebody turned the light on for me. All of sudden I could read, because it was a one-to-one thing. In my first school, I was fed the same thing as everybody else and it just didn't click for me. It was miserable because you're behind and you can't understand anything — you've always got a big pile of homework, your parents get on your case because your grades are bad

and pretty soon you find yourself sitting at the table with your mom yelling and screaming at you. Even though I learned to read when my parents moved me, it wasn't until I went to vocational school that I realized that I could actually learn and get good grades. I really didn't want my kids to have that same experience.

Another parent, Jackie, shared her experience as a child in school. She recalled that, where they lived, her family was the only one belonging to their church and, as such, bore the brunt of religious intolerance, discrimination and persecution – both in and out of school and by both adults and children. In school, she recalled:

My brother had a yardstick broken over his head by a teacher, and in the three years attending that school, I had a complete education of everything immoral because of the neighborhood we lived in and the stories told on the playground during recess. I vividly remember my first three years of school, and it wasn't good.

It would be erroneous to assume that only parents with negative experiences in school would be sufficiently motivated to choose to home school their children. The majority of parents in this study actually reported having a more positive experience in school. Their decision to home school resulted primarily from other motivating factors.

Brandi shared her recollection of past experiences as a student:

It was absolutely the hardest thing I ever did in my whole life. I started kindergarten as a brilliant child — I could write the alphabet with my left and my right hand. I could write my full name, also with each hand. Now I feel that is amazing because I have kids and I still can barely get them to write anything, let alone with both hands. By the time I finished kindergarten I couldn't write

anything, because every time I picked up a pencil with my left hand my teacher would smack me across the back of the head and put me in a corner. At that time, it was believed that left-handed people were inferior. From this experience, I grew up afraid of teachers. I remember in grade 1, standing up when the teacher asked me, so I could take my turn answering a question. I was so scared that I would nearly wet myself. I assumed all teachers were mean and would hurt you, so I feared teachers all through school. I ended up dropping out of school in grade 12 because I felt that I just wasn't smart enough. Every time a teacher put stuff in front of me, it stressed me out. I ended up going to college as a young adult, and all of a sudden I started doing really well and started to love school. When I went to college it was my decision and I no longer felt afraid — I completed the requirements for high school graduation. I finally had teachers who inspired me.

Brandi also emphasized that her fear of teachers and its effect on her self-esteem were a significant factor in the decision to home school her children. Her husband observed, “I think when we started seeing that our kids were having the same educational experience as my wife—the frustration and how it was affecting their self-esteem — we didn't want them to have to go through that.” Brandi stated, “I didn't want my kids to feel broken, like I did.”

Another mother, Bobbie, also had a very negative experience in school related to being left-handed. She described her experience:

Elementary school was very difficult for me. I was raised in a small town and my teachers told me that left-handed people were inferior. Whenever I would use the “wrong” hand, I would have my hands strapped—they still had the strap in those

days. Eventually, my teacher grew so tired sending me to the office to be strapped for using my left hand, so she started tying my arm to my chair behind my back—this was my grade 2 and 3 experience. I never learned cursive handwriting until I taught my children when I was home schooling.

Bobbie added that she was eventually able to figure out what her teachers wanted and to give it to them. She indicated that she learns easily, especially when she can read about it first:

When I got to high school, I had really good grades but I didn't really learn much. When it came to a decision for my children, I didn't want them to figure out how to give the teachers what they want and not learn anything. I wanted them to learn to think and to have an opinion.

For many participants, their negative experiences with school played a much stronger role than their positive experiences in the decision making process. Those parents who recalled school as being a very negative experience rarely shared other more positive memories of their school years.

Positive Experiences

Parents who initially reported having a positive school experience almost always qualified it with some negative aspect, as Wendell did:

I have very fond memories of school. I had a really excellent experience, but at the same time I can remember that most of the negative things I was introduced to in my life came from school. It certainly wasn't at home with my parents, it wasn't at church or other social activities — it was at school that I learned all of the swear words, and everything that goes with that, all of the garbage.

Another mother, Kaci, indicated that her experience as a student was positive, but that it also included negative aspects. This was the case for most of the study participants. Kaci's story, while uniquely personal in the details, accurately depicts school experience for many people in this study:

I actually loved school as a kid. I did very well academically and loved my teachers, especially in elementary school. If I had any negative experiences, it stemmed primarily from the social aspect. I didn't belong to the popular group of children. I'm not sure whether it was because my clothes weren't as new or whatever, but I was shy and so I only had a few friends. I was made fun of and left out of things. I don't think it is right for a child to have to go through that. When I got older, I started to have problems with my complexion and that only made it more difficult to fit in. Lots of kids were openly mean, especially the junior high boys — they can be rotten. I don't think I really reached my potential in school, mainly because I developed low self-esteem, I think largely because I didn't fit in socially. When my son started getting bullied in preschool, I decided that I didn't want my child to go through the things that I did. Even though 90% of school is positive, it's that 10% of negative stuff that I really want to protect my children from.

The data from this study revealed that the experiences parents have in school form, in large part, their perception of what school would be like for their children. Even though schools are vastly different places than those in which most parents were students, parents are likely to base their decisions and develop attitudes based on their own frame of reference. If parents consider the option of home schooling for their children, past

experiences as students can be a strong motivating factor to initiate this learning alternative.

Special Needs of Children

Having a child with a special learning disability or even a physical disability is often sufficient to cause a parent concern. When school personnel do not properly accommodate these learning challenges, the parent may choose some other learning alternative for the child.

Learning Disabilities

Sometimes children have a learning style that makes learning in a public school classroom extremely challenging. A child may even come to the point of hating school. In order to qualify for the learning supports that some children require, special needs coding must be in place to access funding. Special needs coding most often requires extensive educational and psychological assessments by qualified professionals outside of the educational arena, such as pediatricians and psychologists. Bailey made the decision to home school her son, primarily for this reason:

When my son was in grade one — he is in grade 8 now — by the end of October, I was contacted by the school with the suggestion that my son might have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). I was told that he did not have a normal attention span and so on and so forth. I really didn't want to have him labeled right then and that early. My mother had home schooled my youngest brother and when I talked to her about it, she recommended that I try home schooling — try it and see. Before I actually removed him, some assessments were done on my son, but they showed that he didn't have any problems, so he would not qualify for an

aide. I thought, at the time, if he needs help and you can't give it to him, what good are you? So I just pulled him out.

Bailey's son has not returned to school, where he would now have been in grade 8.

Bailey also noted that she has a daughter who is, and has been, in the public school system for all five years of her formal education.

The analysis of data revealed that parents do not always choose to home school all of their children. Some parents view home schooling as the preferred learning method for a specific child to accommodate a specific need of that child. Bailey observed, "This decision wasn't about the school as much as it was about my son and what he needs; it just works for him. His learning style is just too difficult for a classroom." Bailey also expressed the desire, or wish, that educators could be less judgmental about her decision and look for ways to support her. However, she also commented that the public criticism and skepticism of others, including educators, have made her more determined to make home schooling work. Said Bailey, "I'll show them!"

Learning Concerns

Children come to school with differing abilities. As the data revealed, some home schooled children struggled when they went to the public school and started to believe they were stupid. Carmen is a mother who made the decision to home school most of her children, over a period of almost 20 years. She remembered taking her first child, a daughter, out of school, as she was going into grade five. The child had experienced some problems in school and the mother perceived that the school was unable to address them. Over that summer, Carmen made the decision to keep her child home. Her plan was to fix the problem and then send her daughter back to school. She intended her initial decision

to be a short-term solution to a problem she felt best qualified to address. According to the data, there are times when parents initiate a home school program for one reason and then discover other motivations to continue home schooling. Such was Carmen's experience:

When I made the decision to take my daughter home for school, the school superintendent came to visit with me. He was very supportive and brought all of the distance learning [correspondence] materials for grade five: Big stacks of stuff! When I started using those materials, I found I was having the same problems the school reported having with my daughter. I needed different results, so I put those stacks of stuff on a shelf and there they sat forevermore. I started doing other things and focused mainly on helping her with reading. She could read pretty well but then couldn't remember anything. The moment I made my decision to home school was the day she came home from school with an assignment to review her notes from class; to prepare for a test the next day. She said that she had been really frustrated at school, all day! The topic was the Mount St. Helen's eruption. To help her remember, I asked her if she remembered when we were picking raspberries after the eruption and how they were all dusty? She indicated that nobody told her about that. A few lines later in her notes, in her own hand, she had written about the ash in our community. I thought, if you wrote it down, you had to hear it, so whatever is going on, it isn't working. So we started to home school.

After we started to home school, I discovered we could do all kinds of fun things to learn. We did speech, dance and gymnastics. She was in the speech

festival and all kinds of stuff. I have had my kids in and out of school for years. I home schooling my two youngest now, but if I'd known then what I know now, I probably wouldn't have sent any of my kids to school. I've learned so much and with all of the helps available now, it's easier and I've found that I love it. I just love the home schooling lifestyle. My husband travels a lot and home schooling lets us all go too. We have much more leisure time, because the kids don't go to school all day and then do homework all night.

Carmen mentioned that all of her children returned to public school as they approached high school age, as they wanted to obtain a provincial high school diploma and felt they could more easily achieve this goal by attending a public high school. She also noted that her children have been well prepared academically and socially to return to the public system:

As a mother, I didn't particularly want them to go back to school. I love home schooling and I'd be happy for them to stay home and continue on, but they were ready and that is fine. It needs to be their goal by the time they get to that age [high school].

Carmen's story illustrates how the initial decision can change once a parent has actual personal experience with home schooling.

One of the greatest challenges for classroom teachers, as identified by participating educators, is to differentiate instruction effectively so that the learning style of each student is accommodated. One mother, Amy, described her son's experience in school and the events leading to their decision to home school:

The main reason that I originally chose to home school was that my son was having academic difficulty in school. He was a bit younger than others in his class and he just didn't get reading. I would read to him every day, but he just wasn't interested. So school moved along and he just didn't. He struggled, but stayed in school until near the end of grade 5. By that time he was in remedial classes and received extra help with reading. I had decided to leave it to the experts. The defining moment came when I attended the divisional track meet. While looking for him, I found him with the kids from his remedial class—the kids in regular classes had started to label them stupid and dumb and, they didn't want to associate with him anymore. Most of the kids in the remedial program came from rough families, single-parent families and families with a history of substance abuse. I feared that he would grow up to be more like his new friends than like his family. I knew he wasn't progressing academically. So right there, at the track and field day, I decided to pull him and start a home school program.

Amy recalled that the benefits of home learning were slow to emerge and took time to realize. She described that her child had developed a strong dislike for learning, especially reading; her son's struggle with learning to read led her to consider home schooling. Amy felt that literacy was the key to performing well in school, and her son had developed such a poor attitude, especially towards reading, that the school likely couldn't make a real difference. Amy reported her son saying that he hated to read—that he hated school. So, Amy's motivation was help her son learn to read. She recounted: "We spent years overcoming it [poor reading ability]. Sometimes he still slips back into that attitude, but it's less and less frequently. Now he reads fluently, so home school has

been a success for him.” Her focus, like that of many of the parents in this study, was to attempt to recover a love of learning in her child — something she felt the public school system had taken away. Amy also pointed out that home schooling doesn’t fix everything, but that the benefits for her family and for her children outweighed the shortcomings:

I try not to be anti-school. I’m very supportive of choice. I think it is important for both the parent and child to want to home school. This is important if it is going to work. One of the reasons we decided to home school was that my son couldn’t read and now he can, and I know it because we read together. He reads very well, but it took years, years to undo all the damage that was done. He had developed a very poor attitude about reading — he would say that he hated reading; I can’t read; I’m stupid at reading. We spent years overcoming that. Still sometimes he will slip back into that attitude, but it’s less and less frequently. So I feel he couldn’t read before, or he read very poorly, and now he reads fluently and really well, so home school has been a success. That’s why I pulled him out of school, because he needed to learn to read and now he can. We still have work to do in some other areas, like math and writing, but his improvement in reading has been great.

In *The Quality School*, Glasser (1998b) claimed that low-quality student work has become acceptable in our schools. He noted, “... fewer than 15 percent of those who attend do quality academic work in school, and even many of these do far less than they are capable” (p. 6). This perception about the public school’s academic environment may help to motivate parents, especially parents of students who are gifted and/or highly

motivated, to have their children learn at home. For at least two parents in this study, this perception was the primary motivating factor to initiate a home school program.

Behavioral Issues

Detailed data analyses revealed that parents become concerned when a child's behavior changes once he or she begins attending school. Some parents commented on the negative influences of their child's peer group, sometimes causing the child to become very unhappy and unwilling to go to school. The data revealed that the ordeal of getting a child out of the home to go to school is sufficient to motivate parents to choose home schooling as the learning alternative for their child. Rhonda, a mother, shared her experience:

When our son was in fourth grade, he would come home and tell me that he wanted to be home schooled. He would constantly say that he didn't want to go back [to school]. He just hated it! He didn't want to be around his friends—he didn't want to be around anybody. He would come home and totally be a recluse. He didn't want to be around anyone. The thing that finally did it for my husband, was finding our son in his bedroom crying on the first day of school. It wasn't that he even really wanted to home school, it was more that he just couldn't bear the thoughts of going back to school. He felt totally helpless and hopeless. So, we decided to try home schooling. I had a cousin who home schooled, so I called her—I had no idea what I was getting myself in to. About the same time that we were having trouble with our son, our daughter started kindergarten and when she would come home, after school (sometimes right outside the school doors) she would turn into this little raging tornado. She would rant and rave and scream and

cry. It was like she was having an emotional breakdown every single day after kindergarten. I thought that it was just an adjustment to school, so we'll give it a few months and see how it goes. Half way through the year [in January] we had a really cold snap. The van wouldn't even start, so we stayed home. We did some alphabet activities, and then we did some number games and played other games—no temper tantrums at all. So I started to think, well, let's see what happens when she goes back to school. Yep, the very day she went back, she had a breakdown as soon as she got home. So I thought, that's it—she's done! I withdrew her from school.

Rhonda and her husband have two other school-aged children whom they were not home schooling. These children attend school in the same small community and same school as their home-schooled siblings formerly did. Not all parents choose the same form of learning for all of their children. As the data revealed, in many families some children are home schooled and others thrive in the public school system. Many of the parents in this study stressed that they want to “do what is best for my child”. For some, that means going to school, and for others, it means home schooling. Bailey, a mother, commented on the differences in her children to illustrate her feeling she could best meet the needs of one child at home while her other child is best served by public school:

It is just about what's best for your kids. That works for one doesn't necessarily work for the other. My son had some behavioral problems in school and he hated being there. He had trouble paying attention and even at home he struggles with it. He needs more time and likes to learn by doing—not reading. He needs my one-to-one attention and if he can talk about it, or draw diagrams, then he get it

and that's why I think he needs me. He's just not cut out for the classroom. But my daughter—they're truly opposites, my kids. She's very social and she loves school. She has no desire to learn at home and I'm okay with that.

Bailey started home schooling her son during his grade one year; about two years later her daughter started school, and she has never been home schooled. This illustrates Bailey's determination to do what is best for her individual children. In fact, all participants stressed that they felt their decision was in the best interest of their child or children. Another parent, Carmen, elaborated:

I wish people at school weren't so threatened by what we do [home schooling]. I feel like, too often, there's the misconception that if you're home schooling it's because you're against the school—because you think school's a bad, awful place. My daughter, who was home schooled, is now a mother living in the States [United States]. She became acquainted with a group of home schoolers where she lives and was invited to their reading club [her children are still very young]. My daughter was surprised to learn there are home schoolers with such a negative connotation of what school is like and were shocked to learn that my daughter hadn't made a decision about the form of schooling for her children. My daughter has my attitude, I'm afraid—I wish educators and home schoolers could just see and value each other a little more and see both sides of it. I wish educators weren't so threatened by parents who have their kids at home. There are some people who pull their kids, that don't know what they are doing, but they know that their child has a problem and they need to do something about it. They're not always successful and sometimes send them back. I wish the school would

welcome these kids back and not make the parents feel like such a failure. I think, too often, that happens. It's important to remember the child was failing before the parents pulled them out—don't make the parents feel like it's their fault that suddenly the child is having trouble—he was having trouble before. I don't believe any parent chooses home schooling to intentionally mess up their children. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't.

Medical Issues

According to study data, a number of students now being home schooled were diagnosed with medical conditions that required special attention or some accommodation to enable them to function at school. Data analyses revealed that there have been incidents where parents perceived that adequate or proper attention was not given to their child. In one case lack of attention was identified as the primary motivating factor causing the parent to initiate home schooling for the child. Cameron, the mother, shared her story:

When my daughter started kindergarten, she was given an educational assistant because she was a selective mute. She refused to communicate with anyone in the school. By grade 2 she started to communicate, but started to exhibit anxiety and developed some serious medical problems, including kidney trouble that required surgery. After some educational assessments, it was determined in her IPP (individualized program plan) that she not be placed in high stress situations, like doing things in front of the whole class. Even so, teachers either did not know or ignored this accommodation and placed her in this kind of situation. Without any notification, she was pulled from the regular program and placed in a pullout,

modified class. My daughter had been in school from kindergarten until sixth grade. She had always been a very good student in the public system but in grade 6 she developed more medical problems and was diagnosed as having anxiety disorder. When I informed the school of the problem, I felt the administration and teachers chose not to listen to me. I was willing to work with the teachers, but they were not willing to work with me. I let them know that I was available anytime I was needed—in fact, I quit my job and went home so I would be available. Her grades started to fall and I did not receive any communication from the school. I reached the point where she started to be bullied, because the school had pointed out to her peers that she had problems—that she was different. The bullying, combined with academic difficulty led me to consider taking her out of the school, which I did near the end of the year. I was frustrated with the lack of communication and the lack of appropriate educational programming for my daughter. I had a good friend that home schooled and she told me how she did it. Knowing I would have someone to turn to, with experience doing it, was what I needed to make this difficult decision.

Cameron said she felt strongly that she was the person most capable of giving her daughter the consistent emotional support she needed, support that could not, or would not, be provided at school. Said Cameron, “The only way she could get the help she needed was at home, no matter what it [this decision to home school] meant for our family.”

Peer Socialization

The study data revealed that many parents now home schooling were concerned over what students learn from each other as they engage in the social experience outside of the influence of adults. This concern with peer socialization was a common thread for participating parents, who viewed the negative influence of peers as a primary motivating factor that contributed to their initial decision to home school. Ethan, a father, recalled his past experiences in school that contributed to the initial decision to home schooling their children. Ethan remembered:

When I look back on the things I've seen and the problems in my life, it goes back to influences that occurred riding the school bus, or hearing things from classmates that you really didn't want or need to hear, or even when you were in a class when certain things were discussed. Most of the negative influences in my life came in school-related settings where there was not an adult there to supervise.

A number of parents in this study expressed concern about negative influences of their child's peer group and a desire for a greater degree of parental influence and control with their child's socialization. These parents wanted their children to learn important life lessons from them [the parents] instead of from peers on the playground. They identified that they preferred their children to associate with a group of other like-minded home schoolers. They expressed a keen desire for more control over the social experience of their children. Renae noted:

We're not trying to isolate them [our children] from people. We're not building this little community where they don't know that other people exist or other ideas

or philosophies. We are actually trying to expose them to people of all different religions, beliefs and lifestyles but in a way that is educational to them; where they can learn about it in a safe and comfortable way, but with mom and dad there to explain things to them.

Perceived Negative Influences

The final decision to home school usually came, as the data revealed, after the child had been in a public school for a period of time. When certain behaviors started to change, some parents identified a strong desire to shelter their child from negative peer influences. Abby explained what it was like for her to send her oldest child to school:

There were a few things that we didn't love about him going to school. He changed quite a bit. He became less like himself. He started to like the things the kids at school liked instead of what he liked. There were a couple of incidences where he came home and threw his backpack in the garbage, because the kids were teasing him at school that his backpack was too small. He wanted different toys because they were what the other kids liked; like guns and things like that, it was just changing him and we didn't like that. We just wanted to keep him home a little longer in a safe environment.

When asked what benefits home schooling had brought to her family, Abby added, "He gets along better with his siblings. I love that I can teach him through the scriptures—just the freedom to put whatever I want into his education." Another mother, Renae, stated: "I feel the best thing I can do for my kids is to protect them as long as I can. To give them good, strong values."

According to the data, when a child started to identify with a peer group that parents viewed as having values that conflicted with those of their family, a concern arose sufficient to motivate the parents to remove their child from the perceived negative influences and initiate home schooling. Amy confirmed:

At a divisional school activity she observed all of the little groups of children playing together, all nice and everything. Then I finally saw my son. He was with other children in his remedial program—and these kids, I hate to put this in your study, were those who came from very rough families—families with a history of drug and alcohol abuse. In a small community you know who the kids are that are going to grow up doing drugs and vandalism and you can see it progress through the years. I knew what this group was going to be like and I didn't want my son to be a part of it. I know my son, he's a minimizer—he only does the bare minimum, so he would be staying in the modified program and since that had happened he had lost his good friends who now look down on him. He had a good friend whose parents had started to home school the year before, and since there wasn't a good social connection at school, we decided to home school him. Just a month ago, one night in town, my husband ran into that little [remedial] group our son was hanging around with, who have now formed their own little gang, and they were drunk. Well, they were either stoned or drunk, and we thought to ourselves, “Great that we did it!” Those were the people who were extending friendship to our son, and children need friendship.

Social Stratification

Data analyses revealed that a strong parental desire for a closer, happier family was the goal for the vast majority of the parents in this study. The belief that home school provides a better setting for the attainment of this goal was a strong motivation for some parents to initiate a home school program for their children. Parents shared their perceptions that school was negatively impacting their family dynamics, and that their desire for a close knit, loving family was a sufficiently strong motivation to initiate a home schooling program as an alternative to public school. After having home schooled for a short time, Hannah, a mother, returned her children to school. The decision to send her children back to school had a negative effect on their family, as Hannah related:

When I saw the effects of school on my children—that their love of learning was starting to be dampened and the socialization, that stratification creeping into our family, my emotions were getting really involved, where I became adamant that we weren't going to do school anymore. My children started to fight and refused to play with one another, because they weren't in the same grade. I decided it was much better the other way [home schooling]. Our motivation the second time we chose home schooling had to do with the negative effect the social stratification created by the structure of grades in school had on our children. The way this affected relationships in our home was unacceptable. I knew there was a better way to learn!

Analyses of the data revealed that parents often feel their children are not accepted by other children and are mistreated by their peers. Martin, a father, shared his feelings about the effects of school socialization for his children:

We felt they [our children] were learning things at school that they didn't need to know—as far as core beliefs and values. Kids in grade school, some of our kids' friends brought pornography and alcohol to school. Our kids got bullied a lot! Even though the school has policies against bullying, there are really no consequences. So you teach your kids one set of values, then you send them to school and they learn a whole new set of values. We felt like it would be better for our children not to be exposed to all of those things.

Effect on Home Life

Study data revealed that benefits for families do not come without a price. Parents identified that sacrifices must be made to be successful home schooling. A majority of parental participants stressed that they believe any parent can be successful in home schooling, but they also cautioned those considering home schooling for their children.

Renae stressed:

When you are making the decision to home school, it is important to consider the needs of your family and your own emotional condition. This is going to be the most draining thing you have ever done. If you're not in a healthy emotional place, then it will not be the best solution for your family. Your children will just end up with a mom or dad who is mad at their kids; cranky and yelling and telling them and it's going to be much worse than to just have your kids go to school.

Detailed analyses of data revealed that some parents have formal teacher training. However, even those with teaching degrees observed that their training as teachers often got in the way because they tried to “do school” at home. One mother, Renae, who had limited post-secondary education, said:

I'm not special. I'm not super intelligent or have boundless energy. I think that what it takes to be successful is to be a little more relaxed. There are times when we just don't do school, but you are always looking for those teaching moments and even trying to create those moments.

Jackie had a similar opinion:

If the children don't get it from me, they're not going to get it at all. When you come to realize this, everything becomes a learning experience and you look for teaching experiences and teaching moments. When I took them [my children] home, I just realized if it's not coming from me, it's not coming, so everything becomes a teaching opportunity. It requires a total change in your approach to life.

In their interviews, parents shared their observations about the impact of home schooling on family life. Parents were asked about husband support of the mother, who in every case in this study is primarily responsible for the home schooling program. Jackie commented:

To be honest, there are times when he [her husband] is not supportive. Which is okay, because there are days when I wonder if I should put the kids back in school too. If it was a continual disagreement, I don't think it would be worth it, because there would be too much disharmony in the home. I believe disunity at home would be more disruptive to my child's life and learning than going to school.

One of the major benefits of home schooling for children, described by both parents and educators, is the opportunity to experience things at first hand. Abby said:

I like the fact that I can go places with my children. We can leave for a week and go visit my mother [who lives far away] because school goes wherever we go. We have the freedom to take them to the zoo or take a trip to Sea World in Vancouver, because we have been studying whales. Home schooling really gives you a lot more freedom.

This feeling of not being tied down to a school year and required daily attendance, of having freedom and flexibility, appeared to be more of a motivation to continue to home schooling than a motivation to initiate it.

Religion

In a study of home school parents in Oregon, Mayberry (1988) discovered that nearly two-thirds of parents in the study chose home schooling for religious beliefs. In a recent study of parent motives to home school conducted in Tennessee by Edward (2007), the researcher found the most influential factor for choosing home schooling was religion (p. 87).

At the outset, the researcher felt a need describe the social and religious dynamics of the jurisdiction where this study was conducted, as it relates to religious motivation to home school. The largest community in this school jurisdiction has a population of fewer than 4000 people within its corporate limits, and the smallest community is well under 1000. Residents of these communities and the surrounding rural area are primarily members of the same religious denomination and prescribe to the same faith-based principles. It is a common experience for many of the teachers from the public school system to have contact with and even teach the home-schooled students (from this study)

in a religious setting. The researcher found this dynamic intriguing and wondered why religion would be a primary factor for some to choose home schooling for their children.

Most of the participating parents stated that they did not feel that religion was the primary motivating factor, or a motivation at all, yet it emerged from the analyses of data as a recurring factor contributing to the parental decision to home school. While 10 of the 20 families identified religion as a primary factor motivating their decision to home school, another three parents intimated that religion was a strong motivation to home school. This was most strongly evidenced in the parents' desire to shelter their children until they were older and had a stronger foundation in core family and religious values. The fear of negative influence from peers, from undesirable curriculum content and the discussion of controversial topics in class further evidenced a motivation born in participants' religious or moral values. It is every important to note that no religious denomination or religious leader in any way promotes or seeks to influence parental choice for schooling options within the bounds of this study, a fact stressed by many of the participating parents. Hannah summarized one of the primary religious motivations:

I guess if we thought about our view of morality, it might have colored our decision in the beginning. While we want our children to be tolerant of other views, we want them to embrace our values and beliefs throughout their lives.

Parents with two or more years of experience with home schooling readily identified religious benefits to their family that resulted from home schooling. In fact, 20 of 31 parents commented on important religious benefits of home schooling that they had come to value. According to parents, religious benefits are a strong motivation to continue their home school program. Ethan, a father, explained:

No one in our Church ever said that we should home school our kids. There was no religious pressure from anyone, however, the nature of public school and the government curriculum results in there being conflicts with our family values—and our values are affected by our religion. To that extent I would have to say that religion was a factor that influenced our decision to home school.

Another parent, Jackie, shared how religion factored into her decision to home school:

My children had been in school for about two years when I started wondering if there was a better way to educate my children. I spent a lot of time meditating and really contemplating whether I needed to bring my children home. I got a strong impression from the spirit that this was the right thing to do and felt that if I can just get them back to heaven, it will be fine. For me, every morning, as I would push my children out the door to catch the bus, I felt like I was sending my lambs to the wolves—it was a rough year for me because I felt I was going against the direction I had received from spiritual sources. And, as soon as I brought them home, there was a great deal of peace and my children really began to flourish. For me, religion was a huge factor.

Some parents readily identified religion as their primary motivation for choosing to home school, while others were more reluctant to do so. For example, when Brandi was asked what role religion played in her decision, she stated:

It [religion] was my number one reason! I read a book written by a home schooler who is a member of my church and I also attended a big conference in the United States put on by a group comprised of mostly members of my church who home school. I felt really strongly like this was what I needed to do. It was a very

spiritual experience for me. I knew that I needed to focus on spiritual things for my family and home schooling allows me to do it.

Stewardship to Teach

Some mothers reported feeling strongly that their children were gifts from God that came to their family along with the responsibility for the parents, especially the mother, to nurture, protect and even teach them. This motivation was identified by some of the mothers in this study as their stewardship from God. Three of the mothers interviewed identified this stewardship responsibility as the primary motivating factor that led them to make the initial decision to home school. Kayla, a mother, stated, “I felt that if I am going to have children, it is my responsibility to raise them, and I shouldn’t give that responsibility to anyone else. That is part of my personal religious beliefs.”

Similarly, Bobbie commented:

I am expected, as a mother, to nurture my children, so why would I hand that responsibility over to someone else? When they go to school they’re gone most of the day, they come home, eat dinner, do their homework and go to bed—where is the nurturing aspect? I believe it is my duty to teach my children what they need to know in this life. My church does tell me that home schooling is a better way, but I feel it is the best way for me to do what I believe God expects me to do.

Carmen summed up this strong religious motivating factor:

My personal religious values, honesty and integrity, my family, are very important to me. Learning is a lifelong thing, intelligence is an important thing and we should strive to attain all that we can. As a mother, I feel like my

stewardship is to teach my children, and having them home, I'm able to teach them all things at a time when they are ready.

Curricular Content

Data analyses revealed that some of the curricular content in schools is an issue for some home schooling parents. Concern about curriculum was a motivating factor that led parents to favor home schooling. Some parents shared that they found some school curricular content to be extremely controversial and of concern, as it violated their religious and personal values. Examples included the inclusion of sex education and topics such as evolution, without reference to creationism. The data further suggested that some parents had a problem accepting school or even playground discussions of same-sex marriage and alternative life-styles choices. These parents expressed the desire to have more control over curriculum; this was a primary factor leading them to initiate a home schooling program. Barton, one of the fathers, passionately shared his concern that much of what is included in the provincial school curriculum is inappropriate for his children:

It's all the lies in the textbooks. I don't agree that evolution, the gay agenda, and sex is taught in schools; just lots of stuff that is not needed. When you home school, you're the one buying the textbooks so you read them before your kids do. If we see something in a book that we don't agree with, we can take it out. We are able to control what our kids are exposed to—and, I know some people would construe that to be negative.

Whether one agrees with the logic of Barton's argument is not important; however, it is important to note that this perception of and attitude about school

curriculum can be a strong motivating factor influencing parents to choose home schooling as the educational alternative for their children.

Study participants openly and honestly shared their views, regardless of how controversial they may appear to others. Their openness adds to the credibility and validity of this research; as the purpose of this study is to help us better understand parental motivation to home school. Postman and Weingartner (1969) stated, “Once you have learned how to ask questions—relevant and appropriate and substantial questions—you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want or need to know” (p. 23). Even though parents have the right to opt their child out of such areas of school curricula, they are still problematic for parents, as the discussion of these topics frequently spills over into peer conversations in other classes, on the playground, and elsewhere. Rather than avoid these topics, engaging in a critical investigation of them, in an age appropriate way, could help parents and teachers alike come to their own conclusions about what is true.

A sentiment frequently expressed by parents is well summarized by Ethan, who made the following judgment of public education: “In public schools and public education in general, they teach you what to think. Our goal as parents, and the reason we are doing this, is to teach our kids how to think.” Some parents expressed a more anti-establishment view, well summarized by Ethan when he said, “I do have a problem with government determining curriculum and teachers not being able to pick and choose what their students learn.” Kaci, a mother, further explained, “As a home schooling parent, I really prize the ability to have control, that autonomy over what is in the curriculum;

what is covered, how challenging it is and how well it suits my child's interests and needs."

Most of the parents in this study were somewhat reluctant to identify religion as a motivation for choosing to home school; however, once the children were at home, the majority of parents described how religious content became a regular part of their instruction. One of the fathers, Doug, shared his observation:

Most days, my wife starts with religion classes and then moves on to math, English and the sciences. So she kind of starts and finishes each day with a spiritual focus. When I come home, the kids are telling me about the different things that happened in the world and religious aspects. By combining regular lessons with religious teachings, their [the children's] learning has elevated a lot.

If religion was not the primary motivation for parents in this study, detailed data analyses revealed, many parents viewed the freedom to incorporate religious materials and teachings in the learning of their children as a very desirable and commonplace practice that serves to perpetuate their decision to home school.

Incidents at School

Parents related a number of incidents with school personnel that contributed to their decision to home school their children. Their descriptions were limited to negative experiences with adults working in the school in the capacity of administrator, teacher or support staff. When this form of misconduct occurred and was not properly dealt with by school administration, even if only from the perception of the parent, it was a powerful influence motivating parents' decision to remove a student from school and initiate a

home school program. The analysis of data revealed this was the motivation for two parents in this study.

This motivation based on the perceived misconduct of school personnel is an important point for educators to consider. Whether or not the matter was properly addressed may not be the important issue, for even if it was, unless the parents felt supported, they may still have removed their child from school. Educators would be wise to remember the old public relations mantra: “Facts are facts, but, perception is reality.”

Safety of Children

In interviews, parents related that when they send their children to school there is an inherent expectation that the physical and emotional well being of the child will be the highest priority for school staff. However, parents identified that issues concerning the safety of a child were a factor that motivated them to investigate other learning alternatives for their child, including home schooling. Safety became an issue for Bobbie, a mother, when her first child entered the public school system in another province:

We started school in [another province] when our daughter started grade one. I believe my daughter was bored and as a result she would often leave the classroom without the teacher noticing. Her class had 28 little bodies in it, so the teacher had a very challenging job to keep each of these little people engaged all of the time. The school was across the street from a minimum-security prison and this caused some anxiety for me, especially when I learned that when my daughter would go missing from class someone would often find her outside by the schoolyard fence. I had a friend who was looking at home schooling her child, and that got me thinking. About halfway through grade one, we pulled her out. I

felt wrong about her being at school, not because of her leaving the classroom, but because of why she was leaving the classroom—the teacher just didn't have the time and resources to meet the learning needs of my daughter.

While Bobbie was quick to excuse the teacher for this lack of attention, it is significant that, when asked to reflect on what led her to make the initial decision to home school, this was the first thing she mentioned.

Another safety concern for parents was the potential for physical or emotional abuse by school staff and peers. The issue of safety, in terms of peer abuse, arose in a number of parent interviews where parents identified bullying as a concern that led them to consider home schooling their child. One of the fathers, Martin, related:

When our son was in grade 2, we moved to [this jurisdiction] and even though there is a no bullying policy, our kids got bullied a lot! I think some of the policies they have are a joke because they say one thing and do another. There are no real consequences for lots of kids. When you teach your kids one value and the school has a whole different set of parameters, we felt it was better for our children not to be there.

When Martin and his wife were asked what keeps them motivated to continue to home school, Martin's wife, Brandi, commented on another safety issue that arose when their son was in school:

I cannot believe that one year ago, my son was at a point that I was getting so many phone calls from the schools. One day his teacher called and reported that my son was missing. They didn't know where he was—he had run away from school. This really scared me. Later I told him [my son] that I was scared that one

day I would be coming to visit him in prison because of the choice he was making. My son wasn't safe at school, more because of his own issues than issues with the school. When our facilitating teacher started working with him, she told he that she was scared to be alone with him, because of the anger and rage inside of him. After just 10 months at home, he now treats his little brother with love and care—seeing this change keeps me motivated.

Physical/Emotional Abuse

Data analyses revealed that on some occasions a bad experience or incident in school caused parents to do things they would have never have considered. Most of the educators interviewed expressed their belief that parents choose home schooling when they have some problem with the school. Data analyses confirmed that this perception on the part of educators is true for some parents. Sidney, a mother, ended up home schooling all of her children, but it started when her first child was in grade four and her second child was in grade one. Like other parents, her reasons for continuing to home school changed after she had home schooling experience, but the original motivating factor for Sidney's decision is unique in this study; it centered on an abusive incident and a lack of support from school administration. Sidney remembered:

Well, there was an incident. Sometimes I think there is always an incident that happens that makes you even consider home schooling. I had never even entertained the idea before. In fact, I used to raise my eyebrows at people who even considered home schooling as an option. I thought they [home schoolers] were crazy! But, there was an incident in my son's grade four classroom that involved my son and a support worker. I was in the school at the time and I got

word the support worker had bashed my son against a wall. When I confronted the worker and later the principal, it was just a nasty, nasty situation. I felt it was very poorly handled. After being yelled at by the support worker, I was told to take my son home and teach him to be more respectful. To this day, there has never been an apology from either the worker or the school administration.

My son's grade four class, at that time, was a small class of twelve students, but had three support workers assigned to help in it; so, it was a real problem class. That got me thinking, every year it will be the same issues with this group of kids. If I don't have the support of the principal, this won't work. I had a friend who was home schooling. After visiting with her, I went to some home school seminars and got myself all geared up to pull my boys out of school at the beginning of next year. (The children were not removed immediately.) I had a lot of hurt feelings for a long time, but actually, home schooling has been a blessing for our family. I still have one boy who is home schooling, but the other two have gone back to high school and graduated with honors—so, obviously I am doing something right and home schooling hasn't hurt my kids.

Sidney's story illustrates parents' need to feel supported by the school. When school personnel make mistakes, the manner in which school administrators deal with the issue can make a tremendous difference for parents and students. Public relations are all about relationships, and relationships are about trust. Calabrese (2002) noted, "Where mistrust exists, people are prone to act defensively" (p. 56). Sidney admits that, had this incident not occurred, it is very unlikely that she would have opted to home school her children.

Environmental Factors

Data analyses revealed some surprising findings. Some parents disclosed that they decided to home school without really having identified why they wanted to do it. Jackie expressed it this way:

You know when I first started [to home school], I don't know if there was any big deal. It was just something that I had always wanted to do. I don't have anything against the public school system. It was just something that I had always wanted to do for my children. It was something I had a desire for, even before I had my first child.

For some parents, home schooling emerged as the logical choice to meet the learning needs of the family. Some environmental factors included having a father with a job that required extensive travel and extended periods of time away from home. Where the family moved around a lot, home schooling seemed to be the logical choice to enable the family to remain together. One of the teachers, Vicki, commented that moving children from one new school to another, in her opinion, would be more detrimental to the children than home schooling. Parents and educators noted that advances in technological delivery of education through the Internet and virtual schools make learning at a distance much more appealing and enjoyable for the student, while parents still have the option to choose the curriculum.

Distance from School

Analyses of data revealed another environmental factor, physical proximity to the public school, which one parent identified as the primary factor motivating the decision to initiate a home school program. In isolated areas, home schooling may even be a

necessity. The school may be located a great distance from a child's residence, requiring the child to leave home early and arrive home late. One family in this study identified distance from school as the primary motivation to initiate home schooling. Hannah described their situation:

The real catalyst [to home school] came when we moved to Calgary for my husband to begin his career, following the completion his university degree. Our local neighborhood school was full. The community had grown so quickly that there was no room for any more children to be enrolled there. My oldest was the age to begin kindergarten. Up until this time, while living in Eastern Canada, we had started learning at home--practicing phonics activities, some math and counting and playing with manipulatives. That's how we played. We were living in an outlying area, so our son would have had to ride a bus to one of the larger schools further in the city. Thinking about sending him across the city to another school wasn't pleasant. I thought he was too young to spend that much time away from his mom. Really, what do you learn in kindergarten anyway? Since kindergarten was optional, we chose not to register him with the local school division. We just chose to keep him home. At the end of the year, I thought I had done pretty well for his kindergarten year, so why send this little kid off to school? I couldn't see any real value in it. Not that I was against it; I just couldn't see any additional value in it. So the real reason was a practical one. I didn't want him to have to catch a bus at 7:30 am and get home after 4:00 pm. It just seemed wrong for a child, who is just 5 years old, to be away from his mother for that

many hours a day. There was no negative sentiment toward public school. That didn't come until much later.

Just after we made the decision to home school for grade one, we went to a neighborhood park on a lovely autumn day, in early September, to collect leaves to press in wax paper. Some older kids from one of the schools were there, young teenagers, as I remember. I remember thinking, "Okay, I've got all this freedom to do these great learning activities and have all these great experiences with my children. Then, two of the teenagers started making out on one of the park benches, while the others started yelling at each other and in about a ten-minute space of time, my little grade one boy heard some of the vilest swear words the we could have been exposed to. That was a real epiphany for me, because I realized that I have the opportunity to introduce my children to the world on my terms, on our own schedule—but I can't really shelter them. It will come and find me, just like it did on my very first little field trip.

Sheltering our children was probably one of the motivations in my heart, but the truth is, and I realized it early on, that it was going to be a lot less sheltering and more just being the first one to introduce them to things and be able to explain our family values at the same time.

Hannah also emphasized that school was a great experience for her, "I had great experiences in school, so I had no real reason to not lean toward putting my children into public school at the usual ages." In fact, of all parents interviewed, Hannah's may be one of the most positive stories of school experience:

I have very vivid memories of my kindergarten year, and I loved school. It was my natural element. In fact, I really, really did well in school. I was reading by the time I went to kindergarten. We had lots of books in our house and I'm sure I was read to, but I just loved learning. I like to please people, so that's a good way to function in school, to get good grades and incentives and things like that. I really loved school. I remember the smells of school. I loved the smell of books. I loved my teachers and I was always fortunate to have kind and interesting teachers.

Family Needs

Occasionally, a family has the opportunity for a great adventure that makes home schooling the only way of continuing the education of the children. For example, when Renae was a child, her father decided to take his family and sail around the world. She remembered:

We lived on tropical islands and it was a wonderful learning experience in and of itself. When I came back to Canada and completed middle school and high school, I honestly had some of my worst experiences and they came from teachers who brought pornographic material into the classroom; it was very explicit and inappropriate in my mind.

According to the data, positive experiences with home schooling, such as this kind of adventure which was followed by negative experiences associated with the public school system, may contribute to a parents' motivation to home school their children.

Data analyses revealed that some families in this jurisdiction have become more transient. Parents in these families suggested that, when a family needs to travel to earn a livelihood, home schooling might become the learning alternative of choice. Because of

the nature of one father's vocation, his family must make frequent trips that take them away from home for extended periods of time. In such cases, parents deemed home schooling to be preferable to having their children constantly changing schools with the associated adjustment of making new friends and fitting into a new social structure.

Rena observed:

The longer my husband works in the business he is in, we need to travel a lot and that's is a reason we home school, one that became a reason when my husband started traveling. For me, this is just more fuel for my fire; I just don't think I will ever send them to school.

Recruitment

In Alberta, parents are not required to register children in school with the school jurisdiction where they reside. If they choose, they are free to register with any willing public or separate [publicly funded Catholic] school jurisdiction or private school. This has created an environment where alternative learning programs advertise and openly recruit students within the boundaries of other school jurisdiction. If parents choose the alternative program, all funding for that student is lost to the resident board.

Data analysis revealed that, within the jurisdiction used for this study, some schools feel somewhat threatened by the number of parents who choose to home school. Some administrators and teachers expressed their belief that practicing home schoolers do a certain amount of recruitment by openly sharing home schooling literature and the advantages they have realized as home schooling families. One parent, Sadie, revealed that this was a primary motivating factor in her decision to initiate a home school program for her children:

I have a friend who has home schooled for a long time who used to come and visit me regularly and we would talk about it. I was really impressed with her children and so I thought I should learn more about it. I knew my husband really like home school and wanted us to do it, even before we had children. When my first child went to kindergarten, I saw some things I didn't really like and that made me think—so I called my home schooling friend. She gave me a book to read and then, about two weeks later, came over and told me that if I didn't choose home schooling today, I would miss the cutoff for funding. Not that I'm greedy, but that pushed me over the top—I decided to do it. That was five years ago.

Influence of Other Home Schoolers

Some parents expressed their perception that situations arise in school where some students fall through the cracks. They believed that the schools may not be able or willing to address the needs of their child. In such cases, when the parent had a family member or close friend who resolved a similar issue through home schooling, this was a strong, primary motivating factor for initiating a home schooling program. Renae recalled having three stepbrothers, all with special needs, who were sent to school and later home schooled:

My mom adopted three boys who were teenagers. They all suffered from fetal alcohol syndrome, attention deficit disorder and other special learning needs. They were put into school with wonderful teachers; tons of support, lots of funding, lots of special programs and they just did not thrive. They were lying, stealing, failing, being teased and even bullied so my mom decided to try home schooling. It took away her time, but the boys have changed—home schooling

was good for them. It wasn't about the school it was a decision about what was best for the boys. I knew that home schooling could be a good thing, so I wasn't afraid to choose it for my children.

Based on the data, it would be erroneous to assume that parents believe the answer to all special learning needs is a home school program. However, it is difficult to refute that a dedicated and diligent mother working full-time with her child in a one-on-one situation can also make a significant difference for the child. As one couple stressed, "nobody loves our kids more than we do." The parents, for whom the issue of a child's special need was a primary motivating factor, were determined to make a difference for their child and identified this determination as their primary motivation to initiate home schooling.

Jurisdictional Support of Home Schooling

The analysis of data revealed another factor contributing to the decision to home school. An environmental factor that influenced parents to choose home schooling, a factor that apparently weighed heavily in their subsequent decisions to continue home schooling, was the existence of and/or access to a support network of other home schooling families and trained facilitators from their registering school jurisdiction. The vast majority of parents in this study noted how valuable the facilitating teachers, employed by the jurisdiction, were to the success of home schooling programs. Some parents noted that jurisdictional support was one of their primary reasons for choosing to relocate their family into this jurisdiction.

Parents identified another related factor that contributed to their decision to home school. They commented that association with and/or knowledge of other families who home school can make home schooling a more viable alternative. Renae recalled:

The first reason I even thought about it [home school] was because there were people living around me who were doing it. People that were very successful and had brilliant, nice children; this put the idea in my head, and was the primary reason I did it. I remembered that I didn't enjoy my experience in school, as I got older. In fact, most of my sisters were home schooling and together with my experiences as a home schooled child, well, home schooling just seemed to make sense.

At the time of this study, there were three teachers employed by the jurisdiction who had home schooled their own children for all or part of their formal education. Home schoolers felt that these teachers were a wonderful resource and a strong reason for continuing to home school; however, educators had mixed feelings. Kayla, asked how important her teacher facilitator was for their program, responded:

Having a teacher support our home school program is phenomenal. In our previous jurisdiction, we felt a great deal of pressure to do the school program at home. Since we moved here, it is so much different. We feel like someone is trying to support what we are trying to achieve as a family rather than trying to fit us into a mold of what public school thinks home school should look like. To have someone come into our home and offer advice and suggestions...I wish she could come more often.

On the other hand, Shirley, an experienced educator, felt that jurisdiction support may enable people to do something they would not otherwise do:

This is kind of a slippery slope, isn't it? Its kind of you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. You want these kids to get an education and how will that happen without some support. But then on the other hand, maybe if we didn't support them they would be back in school. The problem in our province is, if we don't help them—they'll just register with someone else who will. I guess we need to do what is best for the kid.

Home Schooling Literature

One mother identified the impact of reading a book on the subject of a certain home school philosophy as being the primary factor that motivated her to initiate home schooling for her children. Betsy had been employed as a teacher, mainly in middle-school grades, for eight years prior to making this decision. Betsy's story is an interesting one:

I have to say as a public school teacher, I was not a strong advocate of home schooling, especially in light of own experiences with home schoolers who came back to school. But, my sister started to home school her kids, so I wanted to know what she was doing with them. I hadn't even considered it for my own family. We were both living in [a community outside this jurisdiction] and doing well in school. No problems, in fact, the kids were at the top of the class. Then I read a book my sister had given to me—well, that book hit the nail on the head for me. Everything it covered and addressed I had seen or experienced or been part of. I like the ideas and the principles the author talked about. I thought, this is the

way we should educate your children and it just twisted me around and I decided: I've got to do this. It took several months of talking it through with my husband, as he was totally opposed to it. His opinion was that home schooling was for nerdy people. He didn't want his kids to be socially backward. But I had the support of my sister and my parents, which made it much easier. When I announced this decision to the children, they were heartbroken—it was a lovely school, lovely teacher and great friends. Then we relocated [to this jurisdiction]...I really feel this is the best thing for my family.

Judging from Betsy's experience, the decision to home school can be motivated simply by a shift in values and the result of a conscious choice to engage in something one feels is a better alternative. While the prospect of support from others may have played into her decision, the single primary factor motivating Betsy's choice to home school was the impact of exposure to home schooling literature. The book that ultimately motivated Betsy's to initiate home schooling for her children was *A Thomas Jefferson Education*, by Oliver Van deMille (2000).

While it was not the researcher's intent to delve into the different approaches to home schooling, it became evident that some parents wanted to share their philosophy of home learning. A number of the families participating in this study subscribe to a form of unschooling made popular in the works of John Holt (1964). The researcher found this departure from using any prescribed curriculum to be most common among those with a passion for "A Thomas Jefferson Education" (Van deMille, 2000). The Thomas Jefferson Education approach to home schooling emphasizes the study of classical literature in preparation for leadership and statesmanship, carefully selected mentor relationships, and

allowing students to chart their own course for learning. Unschoolers believe that children have an innate curiosity and ability to learn and, if left to follow their own interests, will acquire the basic learning skills of literacy and numeracy as they discover where they are necessary, in order to learn that which they have become passionate about. The Thomas Jefferson Education home schooling philosophy requires that parents model appropriate learning for their children, who then mimic their parent's example and are then assisted in their learning by their parent or some other mentor. Many of the families that subscribe to this home schooling philosophy see it as a way of instilling a life-long love of learning in parents and children alike.

A number of parents stressed that their personal love of learning had returned, or had been discovered, since making this unschooling home schooling choice for their children. This unschooling method of learning seems to be problematic if and/or when a child returns to the public school classroom before age-appropriate skills and knowledge are in place. Teachers explained that they are often frustrated with returning home schooled students because they feel the child has learned little at home. One of the participating educators, Emmett, noted:

When students have been out for a year or two and then come back in, it is common for little progress to have been made. Not having progressed in the curriculum at all, we have to catch them up. Some of the kids have been well taught at home and have done very well—mostly those who have tried to stay with the same curriculum as the school. The others, well, it makes you wonder if they're learning or whether they're getting an education. One thing that I have noticed with those kind of families is that at a very early age, they allow the

children to make the decision about where they go to school – I mean, a 10 year old or younger! That really concerns me.

If the child never comes back to school, the child's lack of learning really becomes a moot point, but it was a concern for every educator in this study. With few exceptions, the child who returns to school is way behind, and that means a lot of work for educators and frustration for the child.

An Emergent Issue

In late March 2008, a decision by the Court of Appeal for the State of California made news in Canada (Jonathan L. and Mary Grace L. v. LA County Department of Children and Family Services, Los Angeles County). This California Court held that home schooling was not a constitutional right in California. On page 17 of the Court Decision, parents were ordered to “(1) enroll their children in a public full-time day school, or a legally qualified private full-time day school and (2) see to it that the children receive their education in such school.” This ruling caused concern for home schoolers, who perceived their freedom of choice to be threatened, even though the ruling was from another country. Once again, “perception is reality.”

According to study data, at least one of the families who reported having relocated because of their decision to home school cited concerns that are related to this emerging issue. Sadie, a mother, expressed her concern with governmental accountability for home schooling:

There is an expectation that someone in government expects home schooling to look a certain way. If it doesn't, you're going to be in trouble. I've even been told that I could have my children taken away—my mother fears that. I've been told

that I could lose my children over this [home schooling]. I don't know if it's true or not, but I do fear it.

Freedom to Choose

Detailed analysis of the data revealed that having the choice to choose home schooling was the primary factor motivating one family to choose this as the learning option for their children. As home schooling becomes perceived as being a more mainstream option, parents may simply choose it because they are able, as one father, Wendell, stressed: “We liked the idea of home schooling and felt it would be nice to have our kids home for a while longer. We just thought we would like to try it and figure out the reasons as we go along.”

The level of support and even the freedom to choose the form of home schooling vary according to where one happens to live, as discussed earlier. Jackie observed:

We went to Arkansas for a month and I had the opportunity to visit with some home schoolers. I realized they didn't have funding, or any government or school support. There appeared to be an effort to have everyone in the public school system, so when you elected to home school, you were completely cut off from all supports—you are totally on your own. I came home loving the Alberta system. I don't even mind the government expecting me to have my children write the provincial tests. I just wish the tests didn't start in grade three.

One couple that had recently moved into the study jurisdiction expressed strong feelings about the importance of parents' having the freedom to choose learning alternatives for their children. In response to the question, “If there were more

governmental intervention [in home schooling] would you relocated to a place with less governmental control?” Renae responded emphatically:

We would definitely move! There are some places where it is illegal to home school. Sometimes you get put on some kind of social services hot list when you home school. If that were the situation, we would definitely move.

Another parent expressed her concern that home schooling be protected as a parent’s legal right to choose:

I think I should have the freedom to choose to home school! I feel that other people sometimes think the public school way is the best way and that I can’t possibly be as smart as they are because they have specialized. And they may be right, but sometimes learning from a specialist, who is too narrow-minded, isn’t the best way to learn either. I try not to be anti-school—it’s just that I’m very supportive of choice. I really hope we are always given the freedom to home school, to choose. You know, many people believe the system is set up now—that it has always been this way, so it’s got to be right. Well, it hasn’t! There was a time when it [public school] didn’t exist. I would love it if everybody home schooled until the child was 12 or so and then, once all the basics were down and they were more mature to handle the negative stuff of school, maybe then allow them to branch out and explore things, whether that’s at public school or something else.

When asked how important it is for governments to protect parental choice, in relation to home schooling, one mother, Sidney, commented:

I think it important. I mean, for me it was important that I had options from the very start. And, those options turned out to be really, really positive for not only their education but for our family. A strong family is a repercussion of that choice that does way down. For my youngest child—to have options for him—I would fight for those--for that to be a freedom! I'm so thankful we live in country that allows us that choice.

In the context of this study, the data revealed that accountability was generally referred to as a requirement or expectation in place to qualify for and justify public funding for home schooling. Jennifer stressed that if she could change something about home schooling it would be the following:

There would be no funding! And, we wouldn't have to register with anyone! I want the government to just butt out of what we are doing! It's the funding that traps us—we have to give up too much.

One of the participating teachers, Vicki, reflected on the recent California Court ruling in regard to the freedom to home school:

If something like that were to happen here [in Alberta] there would be a huge outcry from the home school parents because they really believe strongly in what they do, at least some of them. I look at home schoolers in two different ballparks—the strong home schoolers that have a very adequate program; sometimes an amazing program at home. From those, there would be a strong outcry, justifiably so—they are doing what needs to be done and they are providing a good education, so why take away the parent's right to school them at home. I think that we would see more dropouts—if the parents don't want the

kids at school and they aren't allowed to teach them at home, they will just quit—or go underground. They would likely just disappear.

A Message For Teachers

The analysis of data revealed important messages that home school parents wanted to share with educators, but they were wary of how teachers might perceive them. Much of the school-home relationship for the parent participants appears to be rooted in their experiences when they were publicly educated students. When asked to consider what they would like to see different in public education, many parents expressed the desire to have a closer partnership with their neighborhood school. They recognized the benefits in public education but perceived that public school is “all or nothing.” Parents desired a system in which they would have the freedom to do part of their program at school, for those things that are best suited for school, and to do part of their program at home, for those things best suited for home. One teacher, Suzanne, commented, “They want to have their cake and eat it too.” In interviews with educators, it became obvious that there was greater support from administrators than from teachers for blended programs, or the mix of home school and public school programs.

The majority of parents in this study expressed a great deal of respect for educators and the challenges of meeting the ever-changing and increasing demands of the public to solve social issues. Renae summarized this sentiment:

I think many educators feel that we [home schoolers] look down on them or we think we are better than they are. But I think educators have the most ridiculously hard job of anyone in the world. I think it is completely unfair what teachers are expected to do. They are expected to give instruction in so many facets of a

child's life because of the way family dynamics have changed over the past century. It used to be a partnership between the parents, their religion, the school, and the child. In many cases either the mother or the father is physically missing and maybe both are missing emotionally, and religion has been taken away, so teachers are expected to balance the life of this beautiful child and teach them everything. The poor teacher. That's just impossible, there's no way to succeed at that. You might be able to succeed with one or two children, but there is no way you can expect them to reach every child, no matter what the movies show!

Parents were asked, "If you could tell educators anything, what would you like them to know?" In response to this question, nearly all parents wanted teachers to know what Hannah summarized: "We're not in opposition to them. We still respect what they do. We are not trying to mess up our kids. What we do really works!" Hannah then elaborated on what she wishes teachers had the freedom to do:

I wish teachers were allowed to draw on their own talents, what they are passionate about and share it with their students. Covey (2004) calls it the "8th Habit," allowing people to find their own voice. I think our public school system has lost sight of the fact they have a goldmine in their people. They aren't given the freedom to make a difference—there is too much attention given to preparing for tests and covering the curriculum.

Educator Perceptions

Educator Perceptions of Parent Motivation to Home School

It was evident from the data that administrators and teachers alike are very biased in favor of public school. They see many benefits for children that are potentially lost

when a child is removed from the public school classroom. Barry, one of the participating principals, summarized this perception:

I'm a firm believer in a broad, public education as being a value to society and to our culture. If you're home schooling, you automatically narrow down the vision of what you are looking at, because you are looking at one family—that is as wide as the vision goes. The basic skills of math and literacy are important, but the democratic principles of life are really important too! I think that a home school situation is too narrow to really learn what they need to learn in terms of social and cultural values.

Administrator

According to the data, when a parent decides to home school, it is most common for the principal or some other administrator to be the school representative who is informed. However, when asked why the parents chose home schooling, the majority of principals reported that they really didn't really know the reason. Four of the six principals felt that parents are not totally forthcoming in sharing their true reasons for deciding to opt out of the public school system. Barry observed, "I believe the reasons that parents give me for home schooling aren't the real reasons they want to home school." Chuck, another principal similarly noted, "I think in many cases the problem identified as the reason [to home school] isn't the real problem, and I don't really know why sometimes that would be the case. I just don't believe a lot of the lines I've heard."

Administrators interviewed for this study generally had a great deal of experience with home schooling within the study jurisdiction, due to the length of time they have worked and lived here. The data revealed that these administrators also live in the small

communities in which they work, and in most cases also belong to the same church as these home schooling families. Consequently, the researcher considered their observations to be important contributions to this study.

According to the data analyses, administrators believe that the primary reasons motivating parents to home school include bullying, avoidance of parental responsibilities, concerns about curriculum, concerns about teachers or other staff, a desire to address special needs at home, conflicting moral or religious values, negative experiences with school as students, and, the influence of other home schooling families. Some of these issues were actually identified by parents; however, others were simply the perception or belief of the principal, based on observations of the family before and after the decision.

One of the participating principals, Emmett, expressed that his school and community have been significantly impacted by the trend to choose home schooling as a learning alternative:

I've had parents write letters to me on why they are doing it [choosing to home school] and most of them state that it has nothing to do with the school. It's because of other values they have and things they want to teach their children. They just feel it's the best thing for their family. Some of them [home schoolers] feel the influences of other kids at school are a problem and they don't have control over what their kids learn from other kids, I think, over what their kids hear and see and sometimes have to put up with. They [the parents] feel their children can learn better and do better without those negative influences, which they perceive as being undesirable. Other times, its bullying or unfair teachers—

that kind of thing. Whenever something goes amiss with their child, they're in and then take the kid out saying, 'I don't want that to happen to mine, to have my child go through what I went through in school'. Bullying is often mentioned, that and feelings of inadequacy they had as students.

Barry, another administrator, related an experience he had with one family that decided to home school their children:

As I recall, the family had three children who didn't like to come to school; so, their parents didn't make them. This happened when I was still teaching—before I became an administrator—the administration constantly called and encouraged, bordering on hassling, the parents to get the kids to school. I believe the parents choose home schooling as a way to get school administration to stop bothering them. As I observed this family in the small community in which we live, I saw the children playing on the school playground at recess with all the other kids, bragging about not having to come to school; that they did only a half hour of school twice a week. My observation led me to conclude this family really wasn't doing anything that could be described as school. Those three individuals are now adult age and still live in our community and they don't hold jobs very well. They are irresponsible, like they were as children. Now, I'm not going to make the connection that home schooling turned them into irresponsible people, but it certainly didn't turn them into more responsible people.

Participating administrators were particularly frustrated when they felt that parents had a problem they were not willing to deal with at home, or a problem with something in the school, but were not willing to identify the problem so that it could be resolved.

Bonnie, an elementary principal, shared her feeling that parents have reasons that can't be easily categorized for choosing to home school, a view also noted by Rothermal (2003). Bonnie reflected:

I think every family has their own reason. I really do! I've got some right now who don't want to be bothered with putting their kids into a more regimented way of life. They don't like schedules. They want the freedom and flexibility that home school offers. They want to teach their kids the way they want. I've had some families that have been away, the parents work away somewhere, so they just want to be gone for a while. One boy was injured in an accident, so his parents wanted to work with him at home. So I think the reason are a different as the families.

Teacher

The teachers in this study have had far more experience with students returning to school after a period of time in home schooling, than with children leaving school to begin home schooling. Teachers affected by the removal of child from their classroom expressed that they were rarely given a reason for the action, so they were often left to speculate as to why the parent chose to take the student home. When this occurred, teachers shared they often felt the action was a personal statement or attack on their teaching ability or even a judgment on their character. Suzanne, a teacher with a great deal of experience in early grades, reflected:

I feel like they were saying to I'm not good enough to teach their child. I think the length of time in my classroom would make a difference: if it were a short time, it would be different than 3 months or more. The longer it had been, the more of an

affront it would be to me. I really don't believe a parent can do as good a job as I can. Mother's have too many other responsibilities in the home to be doing school too. I think too many kids in home situations are expected to learn on autopilot.

Now, there are times home school is the best thing, but that is the rare exception.

When asked why they thought parents chose to home school, teachers identified the following reasons: parental anger with the school, issues related to bullying, avoidance of labeling (especially a student with severe learning or behavioral disabilities), a child's difficulty with fitting in socially, family problems, and the desire to shelter the child. Teachers also expressed the opinion that some parents choose home schooling just because it is an option.

A special needs teacher, Shirley, observed that having to deal with a learning disability could potentially be very frustrating for parents. Having a child who may struggle in school is a strong motivation for parents to choose to home school, as Shirley recalled:

I remember one mother with a little fellow who took him out [of school] in grade one and now his would be in junior high school. He's still being home schooled and has never been back. Her [the mother] attitude was that rather than have him labeled, frustrated and pulled out or having an assistant work with him, the mother just decided to home school. We never really had a chance to work with him. If he ever does come back, I am convinced he will be really quite far behind.

One teacher made an astute observation regarding home schoolers who return to the public classroom, describing a generally negative opinion of home schooling held by many teachers and administrators. Even if teachers don't understand or agree with

parents' reasons for initiating home schooling, if teachers' experience has been that home schooled children learn as much and as quickly as publicly educated children, they would have little cause for criticism. However, the opinion of teachers in this study seemed to be grounded in experiences with home schooled students who returned to their classroom with significant deficits in their learning. Ellis observed:

Generally speaking, I haven't had any positive experiences with home schooling, but, in fairness to home schoolers, we don't see the successes come back to school. You know, I'm sure there are successful parent in successful home schooling situations, but those kids are doing well and so they continue to move through that system. We seem to pick up the ones where it's [home schooling] is failing. Where they [the parents] give up on it and send their kids back to school.

Another teacher, Bella, commented that religion seems to be a major reason for parents' decision to home school. Most of the educators in this study belong to the same church as most of the home schoolers. When asked if parents had ever shared their reasons for pulling their child out of the school, Bella recalled:

In our church, we are taught that mothers should teach their children and nurture them. I know some mothers wonder how you can do that if you send your kids to school for six or seven hours a day. As a result, they choose home schooling. So religion is a big reason! I think for lots of parents, it's rooted in a religious reason. They say it isn't, but it is.

The educators in this study expressed that they are generally not informed of the reasons parents give for choosing to home school. Becket stated, "They [the parents] just say they are thinking about pulling him [the child] out and then he's gone. They really

don't share the whys." While this is frustrating for some teachers, the responsibility for the rest of their class quickly diverts their attention away from the one who left, as Julie reflected: "I guess I was a little offended, even though they said it wasn't about me. And, I just said, well, good luck, I hope you do a good job." On the other end of the scale, Chuck stated, "I've never had a student that wanted to do home schooling that I wouldn't have been happy to have go."

School Responses

Analysis of data showed that a school is impacted by the parental decision to home school, and the effects are felt throughout the school community. As the number of students decline, so does funding and staffing for the school, affecting all students. In one community, the number of home schoolers is so large that the perception is that home schooling is hurting the school and hence the community. According to some educators, home schooling is viewed as an anti-community choice. One father, Jacob, confirmed this view:

I've had discussions with several different people and they feel like my kids are getting a very good education at home, but our home schooling is hurting the rest of the kids because they would benefit from being around our kids. There is a strong feeling out there that you're not supporting your community if you are not sending your kids to school. Some people think, that we think we are better than they are—too good for them. To be honest, I don't have a good answer for them.

The data revealed that school personnel respond in a variety of ways to the parental decision to home school, ranging from active attempts to talk parents out of their decision to acceptance and offers of assistance. Nearly all of the administrators clearly

stated that they have an open door policy, with an open invitation for home schoolers to take advantage of whatever part of school they desire. One parent, Sidney stated, “An administrator tried very hard to bring me to my senses—it was never a feeling of support. I think schools feel threatened and it’s hard to support something that threatens you.”

In contrast, Kevin, one of the participating principals, stated that in most cases he lets the parents know they are welcome to come back whenever the time is right for them and that, in the interim, their children are free to take classes and participate in field trips and extra-curricular activities as they choose. Kevin stated:

We allow [home schoolers] to come back for school things like ski trips, swimming lessons—and some of our home schoolers send their kids for those kind of things. We try to support the family because there is no way we’re going to get those kids back, and I’m not trying to get them back. They are having a great educational experience, so why try? Why not try to help them embrace parts of school to help teach them social skills. We all need to realize that education is “where” it is at—it doesn’t have to be in a classroom. It’s everywhere and kids can be learning lessons from curriculum wherever they are. They can be outside, doing other things, on a family trip, and they are still learning. I don’t feel threatened by home schooling at all: if it is better for the child, that’s what we want to do and if a parent really takes the time to do it right, that’s the best parenting! I don’t feel threatened because I have an idea how much work it really is, and not many parents would be willing to make that kind of sacrifice—mom can’t work, and it’s cheaper to send them to school.

Evidence from interviews, and the personal knowledge of the researcher, confirms that schools' willingness to accommodate home schooling needs has improved steadily over the past 10 years. According to the data in this study, the majority of school administrators have an open-door policy and welcome home schoolers into the school on a regular basis. This is still at the discretion of the school, and some home schoolers express the feeling that this offer is not made seriously. One of the parents, Martin, shared an experience to illustrate this issue:

I really wanted my boys to be able to participate in a sports program, which in our area is only available through the schools. The principal of the local school told me if the boys came for a class or two, they would be eligible to participate on the extra-curricular sports teams. We took our son to school for band class, and he was allowed to play volleyball, but there were problems. For example, practice schedules would get changed and we wouldn't be told—things like that. The big thing for our family was to be able to play basketball. When the time came for team selection, the coach told me the team had already been picked and that was all there was to it. My son was not playing! It really frustrated me. When I challenged the teacher, I was told that he had no intention of taking playing time away from school kids so a home school kids could play.

The data revealed that, even when school administration makes an effort to accommodate home schoolers, sometimes these efforts are frustrated. It was evident in this study that administrators' acceptance of home schooling is greater than teachers' support. For example, when Shanna, a teacher, was asked how she felt about home

schoolers having “à la carte” access to school programs, she shared a view held by a number of teachers:

It’s probably a selfish way to think of it, and it’s probably not the way I should be thinking of it, but, it just kind of gets under your skin. We’ve had home schoolers come and join us and my first reaction was “grrr”. Why should they get to do that? I try to tell myself, at least this child is getting this social interaction and it’s good for the kid.

Educator Judgments of Home Schooling

The opinions and values that the educators in this study hold about home schooling often showed in their comments about perceived issues with this learning alternative. Administrators and teachers shared some common concerns about home schooling as a learning option that they viewed as being detrimental for the child. They nearly unanimously agreed that socialization is an issue in home schooling.

Socialization

Almost all parent participants commented on the issue of socialization. They noted that the most common criticisms they hear from friends, family, acquaintances and educators center on unhealthy socialization of the children. Without exception, these parents felt this to be a non-issue. The longer a family engages in home schooling, it seems, the more home schooling becomes a defining characteristic of family and personal identity. A long-time home-schooler, Hannah, shared some deeply personal insights about the effects of home schooling on the socialization of her family:

Our experience with socialization is that every family wears the eccentricities of that family—the idiosyncrasies, like speech, mannerisms, the family dress code,

and so forth. These things may even deviate from what is seen in the mainstream public school setting, which is more of a menagerie, a result of multiple influences from many families and the peer identity of different groups of students. This likely sets us apart and makes us a bit different.

Because we [parents] are part of our children's peer group, I find my home-schooled children likely relate to adults in a different way than kids who go to the public school. Some adults tend to feel a bit challenged when our children dare to question them, but in our home, everybody's opinion matters and we discuss almost everything. Parents still make the decision, but our children learn that their opinion has value. Home schooling has created a unique family culture. I don't think you could really take home schooling out of the Evans family, because we would be Evans' anymore. We would have to become some other brand of Evans, I guess.

Hannah's story further illustrates that, for some home schoolers, the way they learn becomes a defining characteristic for their family. It creates a unique family lifestyle and an identity that becomes more pronounced over time. Hannah cautioned, "We have to be very conscious that home school doesn't become the only thing that defines our family."

Concern about socialization was a universal concern for the participating educators in this study. While concern about the negative effects of peer socialization was a primary motivating factor for parents to initiate home schooling, educators identified problems with socialization as one of the perceived weaknesses of home schooling. A high school teacher, Mario, described what he has seen happening in his class:

I think so much of a child's life at school is in terms of the real curriculum, what they are learning is learned in a group cooperative dynamic. In old school education, you had a teacher who lectured and the kids wrote notes and somehow the kids learned it—that's what school looked like for most parents. Much of what we do today is having children work with each other, learning from each other, with a teacher at the side, guiding them in the process. And that, I think, is an important skill best learned at school with the same grade level. It would be a much different experience having a grade 7 student attempting to work with a grade 12 student or an adult—that communication is not as legitimate as what happens when they're working with their peer group. There are so many skills that come from that group situation. I don't think parents realize how much school has changed since the time they were students.

Roger was a teacher whose first interaction with home school was as a student in high school. He remembered a certain home-schooled student who joined his class as being very smart and very capable, but he could never read her handwriting. He added, "Socially it was really hard to interact—that took a while." Later, in a different role as a teacher and coach, Roger had experiences again with home-schooled children. He recalled:

She had great basic skills but as far as communication with adults and other students, she struggled at times. The other issue was respecting the personal space of others. I've had other home-schooled students in school and in soccer. For the most part they seem very bright, but my biggest concern with home schooling is the social aspect. One of my biggest fears is having people making global

decisions who don't know how to deal with the bully. If your only friends are members of your family or friends your parents pick for you, how will you ever learn how to pick friends? How will you learn to discern between people you can trust and those you need to be careful with? When you start looking at the world, there are a lot of crazy things and bad things, but if we don't let our children be influenced by some of them, or at least know they are out there, sooner or later they're going to have to deal with it.

Suzanne, an elementary teacher, has observed many home schoolers who have returned to public school. Her greatest concern is their socialization:

The social aspect of it [home schooling], I think, is the most detrimental. These children do not learn social skills. Now, in a family situation you do learn some social skills—you learn sharing and how to get along and dealing with little issues, but not in on the same scale as the classroom. The classroom has all kinds of differences and lots of different issues will come up that would never come up at home. Like learning to patiently wait your turn, how to deal with people who annoy you, how to respect the personal space of others and dealing with injustices. There is a lot of social and emotional learning that goes on in the classroom that can't be replicated at home. The benefits of being socialized in your peer group is your learn who you are, you learn how to relate with others, how to work collaboratively, and you learn to respect different views and opinions. I feel home schoolers miss out on so much that will help them all through their life.

While educators reported perceptions and concerns about socialization for home schooled children that were generally negative, one of the principals, Marc, observed:

There are kids who have been home schooled their whole school career and they're still at the activities after school, they're still at church functions, community social functions, they have their group of friends and they just deal with it. Others didn't fit in at school and they don't fit in afterwards. We have social misfits come out of school too.

Barry, another participating principal, likewise noted, "I believe there are some socializing benefits in school, but it isn't the most important reason to go to school." Teachers reported that they often find it difficult to engage with home school parents socially, as the common experiences associated with what is happening at school are missing, and they struggle to find something else upon which to base a conversation. As Roger commented, "It's hard to be part of the group, if you're not part of the group. And, if the children aren't part of the group, the parents likely aren't part of the group either."

Blended Programs

A blended program is one in which a student receives part of his or her educational program at school and the rest at home. There are occasions when students have a special interest in gaining access to programs offered at school that would be difficult to offer in a home school setting, such as a music, band or physical education class. According to the data, benefits to the student of accessing such programs would include association with children in their peer group and the opportunity to have a group learning experience while engaging in peer socialization. Further analysis of the data revealed some mixed feelings regarding blended programs and the challenges they pose

for schools. While one principal admitted using the blended program to attempt to entice home schoolers to come back to school, most felt that it is in the best interests of the students to provide these opportunities for socialization and learning.

When asked what the school does to attract home schoolers into the public system, Chuck shared his philosophy:

To facilitate reintegration of home-schooler back into the school, we make it easy for them to blend their learning programs. I want to make it open to them, because I want them back, even if that's all they every do. We've had several who have started to come part-time and then come back full-time and I see that as the best thing for them. If they can come back and see success and have a good experience, even if it's for one or two periods a day, they're mingling with more kids, they're seeing more adults who aren't their parents, and that's a good thing because it get them ready for the world.

Another principal, Bonnie, has observed some challenges, especially for teachers, in making a blended program work smoothly in her school. She observed:

I think they [teachers] get frustrated sometimes when a student is here part-time. I mean, if a student is just here for physical education class, especially in elementary school where our schedules change from day to day. When that happens and the home-schooled student doesn't know about it, well, it's frustrating for the student, the parents and the teacher.

A teacher, Roger, reiterated Bonnie's view of the difficulties involved in making a blended program work. His experience illustrates how the philosophies of home and school sometimes make it difficult to blend the two programs together. Roger recalled:

I had a home-schooler doing a blended program and that was very difficult. There were times she would come to my gym class and we were running a modified time schedule to accommodate an assembly or guest speaker. I don't want to say it was a hardship, but she would show up some days and the class would be over and it was a nuisance to call and tell her mother that the schedule is different today—most of the time we were so busy, it just didn't happen. Blended programs are a great idea but hard to make it work.

Funding

As previously noted in the literature review, in the Province of Alberta, funding is available for home schooling programs. Depending on the degree of compliance with the provincial program of studies and blending, the amount of funding varies. In this study, parents reported feeling that the funding is helpful but insufficient to influence their decision to home school. Almost all parents stated that they would continue to home school without financial assistance from the government. As noted earlier, one parent even expressed the view that funding should be eliminated. On this issue there was a great deal of misconception on the part of educators. Some believed home schoolers receive computers and other technology, which served as their main motivation; many educators felt that funding support was a strong motivation for parents to choose to home school.

Not surprisingly, the analysis of data revealed that the majority of educators feel that funding should come with an increased expectation for parents to be accountable for curricular learning. For some educators, it was a foreign idea that parents might even have a right to choose alternative curriculum, so curriculum-specific testing would be

irrelevant in those cases. For accountability measures to be fair and meaningful, testing would need to be aligned with clearly communicated expectations for home-schooled students; however, this is not the case in Alberta at this time.

The most common opinion expressed regarding the funding issue was that increased accountability must be attached to the receipt of financial support of home schooling. Chuck, a middle school principal, expressed a view held by many educators:

I believe parents should receive funding to help with their child's education.

Taxes are collected to fund education and if the parent feels the public system is not meeting the needs of their child, I believe that should be funding available to help them at home. But, I also believe there should be accountability, because when I see kids come back, most of them haven't done any work—at least not any of the work they would have been required to do if they were in school. There needs to be testing, especially in language arts and math. I don't think funding should go without accountability!

While only a few educators held the view that home schoolers choose this option for the money, the perception that they do exists in the school community. Shirley expressed her concern:

I've often had the feeling that some of them do it because they think it's worth it for the money they get. I've felt that with some of the families who home school. They can't give it up because they are able to pay for a computer, sports programs, music lessons and more. I think some families see this as the only way they can provide some of these things for their kids.

In regard to funding as a motivation to choose home schooling, one of the principals, Bonnie, summed up the feeling also expressed by the majority of parents on this issue: “Parents who really think about this [home schooling] would not make that decision for the funding.”

Advantages of Home Schooling

The analyses of data revealed that all participating parents realized both anticipated and unanticipated benefits from their decision to home school. Educators also identified many of these benefits as advantages of learning at home. Among the advantages identified by educators were flexibility for the family to choose activities without outside interference, the opportunity to travel and experience the world at the family’s discretion, the opportunity to spend more time developing talents, the opportunity to develop closer family relationships, the ability to protect children from negative influences, and a setting where children can develop the ability to work more independently. The data show clearly that parents see many advantages in home schooling, and the advantages are often very unique to the individual family. Every educator interviewed recognized some advantages for home learning, but most were not convinced that home-schooled students in their communities were actually realizing these benefits. The interview data revealed that educators were much more inclined to focus on the disadvantages of home schooling and its detrimental effects on children.

Most educators in this study recognized flexibility as the greatest benefit of home schooling. This notion ranged from the flexibility to choose different curriculum and resources, to the flexibility of being able to travel whenever family circumstances

permitted, to having the freedom to learn outside of the normal school day. Emmett reflected:

I think the big advantage is flexibility with the curriculum. Parents can chop out lots of stuff that teachers are required to include. Students also progress at their own rate, so they should never get bored. They would have the opportunity to develop other talents like singing, piano or other music—that kind of stuff. I've seen kids excel in areas they don't have an opportunity for in school because they are regimented into the compulsory subjects and where elective subjects didn't match the student's interest or talent. So, there are some definite advantages.

Another educator, Shanna, identified a number of advantages that she has observed in home schooling families:

I've seen students who have developed the ability to work on their own. They've learned to figure things for themselves, but they rarely have any pressure to meet a deadline, so they have trouble working under pressure. But, for the gifted student, they don't have to wait around for the rest of the class—they just roll along at their own pace. Also, they can go and do things that are not possible in a classroom. So, they can go to cultural things, or a science center—things easier to do with fewer children. I also know a family where the father travels a lot for his job, so he just packs up his family and they are able to learn wherever his work takes them—it can be a great adventure!

Issues for Educators

Educators recognized and openly admitted that home schooling can be the best choice for some children, due to special needs or learning styles that can be more

adequately addressed at home by a parent with the desire and ability to focus on the needs of the child. Issues arise for educators when they actually observe cases where home schooling is not providing the same quality of learning, as the child would receive in the public system. Issues also arise for educators when they perceive that the parents are avoiding the need to address a challenge their child has in school, rather than dealing with it directly. Another basic issue arises from educators' perceptions about the very existence of home schooling as an alternative to the public school system. The data clearly showed that educators believe school is the best learning choice for the vast majority of children, and they become frustrated when children are removed from school for reasons they perceive to be unclear and unjustified.

Accountability

Accountability is a huge concern for the public school educators interviewed in this study. Each year teachers must account to parents, school administration, school board and provincial education ministry. Regular provincial testing is part of the provincial government's expectation and requirement for accountability (Alberta Education, 2007, p. 2), and schools are required to address issues of poor test results. For many teachers, home schooling parents seem to be exempt from having to account for the learning of their children. This leads educators to question whether home-schooled children are learning what they will need in order to take their place in society. Hannah, one of the mothers interviewed who is also a certified teacher, shares her observation:

I know that if my children were to be tested academically on a wide variety of subject areas, like public students are at the same age level, there would be places where they would fall below the line. But, I will tell you also, there are lots of

areas my kids would not even be close to the line—they would be way above it. I am conscious of the areas that are weaker, and I have a plan to get them where they need to be—just not on the same schedule as the school. The real difference I see is that all of my children love to learn. They love to discuss things with each other and with us [their parents]. Because we focus more on how to learn and let them pursue interests, if or when they go to school they will be well equipped for whatever is required. I just don't want the required stuff to stifle the passion they have for learning.

Educators in Alberta are responsible for teaching the curriculum prescribed in the Alberta Programs of Study (Alberta Education, 2008), while parents have the freedom to deviate and choose an alternative curriculum. When parents choose alternative curricula or do not keep pace with the school, an issue for educators emerges when the home schooled child returns to the public system. The experience of every educator interviewed was that home-schooled children are not at the same level as students in school; they are behind. This was the reason for educators' concerns about accountability. When asked if returning home schoolers were performing at grade level, Chuck, an administrator, commented, "They were miles behind! It takes some students years to, academically, get caught up. They adjust socially much faster." Bonnie similarly observed, "If they [home school students] have been out a long time, they are usually way behind." About home schoolers who return to the public system in high school, Mario noted, "Some home schoolers actually do better than the rest of the class. But, that would be a minority. I'd say, at least 80% of the time, they [home school student] are below where I think they should be."

According to the data, not all home schoolers are academically behind when they return to school. In fact, some parents revealed they work very hard to have their children follow the same curriculum as their public school counterparts. Some parents choose home schooling with the intent to delay their child's entry into the public school system, and educators work with parents to help prepare their children for the time they will re-enter the classroom. Roger recalled, "When the student entered in grade 3 as planned, I felt she had been taught everything she needed to know. She actually knew a lot of extra things that really contributed to the class." From an administrator's view, Bonnie observed, "When the school knows they [home schoolers] are coming back at a certain grade level, it's really helpful because both home and school can work to make sure the student is prepared for that grade."

Issues of Trust

As study participants expressed, it is unfortunate that public school and home schooling are often viewed as dichotomous entities, like oil and water, which simply do not mix. Analysis of data revealed an opinion held by parents and educators that home schooling somehow undermines the public school system. When the school makes an effort to accommodate or assist home-schoolers, the offer is often considered with some reservation: there is an element of distrust, a sense of apprehension and even suspicion as to real motives. Teachers in this study were quick to admit that they feel the best place for children is in the public school classroom, so one can perhaps understand why parents may feel the school has an ulterior motive for offering assistance. Do they really want to help, or are they just trying to lure home-schooled students back into the classroom?

Of the 31 parents interviewed, 17 expressed the opinion that schools perceive home schooling as a threat, as hurting the school, as a public criticism of public education and specifically of a teacher's professional ability and/or moral character. Of the 18 educators participating in this study, only 4 expressed the opinion that the public school system has nothing to fear from the home schooling movement.

The majority of educators interviewed in this study, both teachers and administrators, were clearly unsure of the true motives driving parents' decision to initiate home schooling. Even administrators, four out of the six interviewed, openly admitted they really do not know why parents choose to home school. Barry reflected:

I really don't know why they [parent] do it. I have my opinions, but most of the cases where the parent takes a child out of school, they really don't want to share their reason—they don't want to talk. It's more common they'll tell us they think it's just the right thing to do. I think they know we are willing to work with them; it's just that they've made a decision and don't want to be talked out of it [their decision].

Communication

The educators in this study viewed the decision to home school, the act of actually withdrawing or withholding children from school, as a challenge to the worth of the public education system. Even though the analysis of data showed that the majority of parents have no serious issues with school, their act of removing their children from school creates a serious issue for educators. Within this paradigm, efforts to facilitate meaningful communication may be unrealistic. One of the participating administrators, Marc, suggested:

I think educators and home schoolers could benefit if they had more open dialogue—if it were honest dialogue. But, I don't know if there many educators that could be totally honest and I don't know if there are many parents who would be totally honest. I believe they would tend to couch their responses to make their decision or view of things look better than the other. I'm afraid that pride would get in the way. Both parent and educator believe they have what is best for the child. When parents make the decision to home school it's almost like they join an exclusive club and they develop an attitude that home schooling is education on a higher plane—almost an elitist attitude. I think public education and educators start to be looked down on—we become something they may have a need for in the future, so they want to keep their options open, but it would not be their first choice. I'm not sure that home schoolers and public educators have a lot of common ground to have an open and meaningful dialogue—if there is one, it would be what is best for the child.

One of the parents, Candice, remembers notifying her principal of her decision to home school by writing a letter: “I emphasized that it had nothing to do with how the kids were treated at school. Their experiences had been good, but I've always considered home schooling as an option and I had just decided that we were going to try it.” Communicating the decision to home school by letter, according to administrators in this study, has become a common method of notification, as it eliminates the need for a face-to-face confrontation between the administrator and the parent. As the data revealed, educators tend to believe and often assume that unresolved issues led to the parents' decision to home school, and that parents often choose home schooling to avoid having to

deal with issues relating to their child. Chrissy, an experienced teacher/administrator, identified avoidance as an important issue:

When parents start to home school in order to avoid an issue at school, I think their chance of being successful is low. With the supports that are in place now that help home schoolers, I think even those who have avoidance issues have a better chance of success than they used to. It may start out as avoidance but now I see it moving from avoidance to more proactive reasons. I think parents often find a better reason to home school after they get going than the reason they used to make the original decision—at least those who are successful. Avoidance can be a real issue because it sometimes perpetuates dysfunctions in families that might be more readily addressed if parents were more open with the school.

Communication is difficult if one group feels they are superior to another. The data revealed that both parents and educators sensed an air of superiority with some home schooling parents. One parent, Sidney, summarized this nicely:

I'm very careful to not throw home schooling out there in people's faces, because I think that happens sometimes. I try to be respectful of the school system.

Another parent, Adele, similarly observed:

In the home schooling community there have been problems because some people rant and rave that it [home schooling] should be done a certain way. Because some didn't like it, we were looked down on and accused of not really home schooling. Some have even taken up school bashing and that's sad because those parents are doing it for the good of their child, they're doing it out of spite.

Finally, one educator, Barry, also commented on this issue:

I think most parents really want to be good parents. They want to do the best thing for their children, but I think they are a bit suspicious of each other. If someone is doing something different then both become suspicious. If one parent chooses home schooling, and their neighbor doesn't, I think they feel they have to justify their choice—the parent who chooses public school feels they have to justify their decision every bit as much as the parent who chooses to home school.

A Message to Home Schoolers

Emerging from interviews with educators were insights that they wished they could share with home schooling families. However, there is limited communication and sometimes an atmosphere of suspicion and even mistrust between educators and home school parents. The data revealed that educators felt there were things about school they wish home school parents understood.

The first message comes from Roger, who shared the hope that home schooling families and the public school classroom could find a way to contribute to enhance the learning experience for all students:

I think one of the things that we could learn from each other comes down to teaching experiences. Every teacher [home or school] has different experiences and every teacher has a different way of teaching. It would be great to create a partnership with a family doing a road trip or a great field trip somewhere. I mean, that's something that home schooling, if they do it correctly, really have an advantage. I think every road trip has a chance to be a great learning tool, and that would be phenomenal. It would be neat to be able to collaborate with a home-school teacher [parent]. If I knew a certain family was going on this road trip and

you could use it to cover part of the curriculum in school, they could log it or use technology to share it with you. The kids in school could virtually follow along with the kids at home. I think this would help to bring more social acceptance for the home school kids, because they would be helping us do our work. It would be neat to have a home school child come in to the class and report on their great adventure. In our little communities, I think this would help the kids when they get together in other social settings and help everybody be more accepting of each other.

While the data revealed that some parents are concerned about peer socialization and view it as being mainly a negative influence for children, Chrissy shared an experience from a colleague's classroom:

Douglas [not his real name] teaches grade four. In our school, the special needs kids are integrated into the regular classes. This means there are some students with learning disabilities and other learning challenges in every class—there are several in Doug's classroom. One in particular is a little girl, Sally [not her real name]. Doug often plays a math game called "around the world", where the student competes with another student and the winner moves forward, trying to move around the class to the end and win the game. Doug teaches math and they were practicing multiplication. Sally's not very good in math and is allowed to use a number chart to help her. When it came around to her turn, she was the very last child in the class to have a turn. Sally went and stood by a very able student and the teacher gave them the question: three times three! The able student remained silent and just kind of puzzled, finally shrugging her shoulders. Sally

found “nine” on her chart and gave the right answer. Doug was taken back. He looked at Sally and said to the more able child, “Didn’t you know three times three is nine?” She just shrugged. So, Sally moved forward. The next question: two times four! The next child quickly answered, “ten!” Sally found the answer on her chart and said, “eight!” Every single child in that class either gave no answer, shrugged their shoulders or gave the wrong answer. Doug related that he had to excuse himself from the classroom because he couldn’t hold back the tears. He said, “In all the years I’ve taught, I’ve never had that kind of compassion shown to a child.”

Chapter Summary

The data for this study came from semi-structured interviews with 31 parents, who represented 20 families who were practicing home schoolers at the time. Also interviewed were 6 public school administrators and 12 teachers from jurisdiction schools that were impacted by students being withdrawn for home schooling or returned to the classroom from home schooling. Interviews were audio-recorded, and verbatim print transcriptions were produced so that participants could check their input and so that detailed data analysis could be performed.

Detailed data analysis was conducted using phenomenological methods. The researcher identified 11 topics addressing the central research question: Why do parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling and how well is this motivation understood by public school personnel?

To answer the central research question, the researcher focused the analysis of data on discovering the primary motivating factors that led the parents in this case study

to initiate a home schooling program for their children. While the data showed that the reasons that caused parents to initiate home schooling often changed after they started their home schooling program, the data also strongly suggested that, without the initial reasons for beginning home schooling, the subsequent reasons likely would never have emerged, as the child/children would still be in school.

As to the second part of the question, concerning educators' understanding of parents' initial reasons, the analysis of data showed that it is most common for parents not to share with educators their motivations for the decision. Educators, therefore, rely heavily on assumption and speculation for their understanding of parents' true motives. Given the power of observation and the social structure of communities within this study, these educators have a good general understanding of parental motivation to home school, but they have little specific or first-hand knowledge on which to base their judgments.

Detailed data analyses revealed eight primary factors that initially motivated parents in this study to choose home schooling for their children: (1) negative effects of peer socialization; (2) religion; (3) special learning needs and disabilities; (4) negative personal experiences of a parent as a student in school; (5) lack of administrative support; (6) an incident at school involving the child; (7) unique environmental needs of the family; and (8) recruitment. Data analysis also revealed that educators' understanding of these motivations was limited. Educators' views of home schooling were primarily negative, but the data clearly showed that educators have a keen interest in and concern about the learning of all children, in and out of school. The data further suggested that

educators are willing to accommodate the interest expressed by some home schoolers to access programs and/or services offered in the public school.

The data analyses suggested that communication between parents who opted for home schooling and educators was guarded and bordering on mistrust. Parents admitted being reluctant to share their true motives with educators and realized that educators, especially teachers, likely assumed there was a problem with the school that the parents felt was irresolvable. The data also showed that, once a home schooling program commenced, parents' reasons for continuing to home school tended to change. Educators were more likely to identify parents' reasons for continuing to home school than the reasons that initially motivated the parents' decision.

Near the end of the study, a home school issue emerged that resulted from a ruling by the California Court of Appeal. This ruling caused study participants to consider the right of parents to choose the form of schooling for their children. Both parents and educators expressed concern about this change in policy, although it occurred outside the country where this study was conducted.

Data analyses also revealed some unexpected results that emerged from the stories of participants. Educators shared ideas they wished that home school parents would consider; and, parents shared ideas they wished that educators could understand about home schooling. The data suggests there is a desire to open a dialogue between parents and educators, but each group find it difficult to initiate the discussion because of the seemingly dichotomous nature of the relationship that exists between public school and home school.

Chapter five will include a summary of this study, accompanied by the researcher's conclusions, implications for the world of practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This final chapter summarizes the findings of the study, presents conclusions, identifies implications for stakeholders in education, makes recommendations for educators, school jurisdictions, provincial/state policymakers, and home schooling families, and offers recommendations for future research. The central research question guided this study, supported by sub-questions that framed eleven topics that emerged from the data. These topics answered the central research question.

Removal of One Sub-question

The sub-question that dealt specifically with public school teachers who choose to home school has not been addressed in this study. Since only one participant fell into this category, in view of the researcher's commitment to confidentiality and protection of subjects, the decision was made to remove this sub-question.

Summary

The central research question for this study was this: Why do parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling, and how well do public school personnel understand this motivation?

To answer the central research question, the researcher focused the analyses of data on discovering the primary motivating factors that led the parents in this case study to initiate a home schooling program for their children. The data showed that the reasons that initially caused parents to choose home schooling often changed as they started their home schooling program; however, without the initial reasons that led the parents to

begin home schooling, the subsequent reasons for continuing to home school likely would never have emerged, as the child/children would still be in school.

The second part of the central research question relates to the understanding educators have of the reasons parents give for initiating home schooling. Three topics emerged from the analysis of data. The data from both parent and educator interviews revealed that parents were often reluctant to share their reasons for initiating a home schooling program. Educators, therefore, relied heavily on assumption and speculation for their understanding of parents' motivation to home school; this was often based on personal observation of home schooling families in their community and of home schooled children who returned to their school.

Several topics emerged from the detailed data analyses of verbatim transcriptions of semi-structured interviews with 31 parents, representing 20 home school families, 12 public school teachers and 6 public school administrators. Each topic contributed to the answer for the central research question.

1. Past Experiences of Parents as Students

The data revealed that parents choosing to home school have a wide range of school experiences. The vast majority of home schooling parents had attended public schools and had mostly positive experiences socially and academically. For some parents, the decision to initiate a home school program was primarily motivated by their own negative experiences in school; in most cases, this motivation was coupled with the negative school experiences a child was having.

These parents tended to perceive that the school experience for their child would be more or less the same as it had been for them. They were largely unaware of changes

in curriculum and pedagogy and assumed that their children would be taught in school more or less as they themselves had been. Many parents did not recognize the changes that have occurred in public education. They would likely be surprised to find that, in many ways, school and home learning programs are actually quite similar. The advantages of home schooling that parents identified as lacking in school learning were the same characteristics that one administrator described as benefits in the public school: focus on the child, attention to how learning occurs, student collaboration and discussion, group learning and problem solving. The data suggested that educators need to make a greater effort to inform parents of what goes on in school, because parents have a great deal of misinformation about how school has changed.

According to the data in this study, parents' prior experiences of school when they were children are one primary factor that motivates them to initiate a home school program for their children. This motivation becomes more powerful if their child also has a negative experience in school.

2. Special Needs of Children

Parents in this study related their concerns about children with special learning needs, which the school had not addressed to their satisfaction. Some parents did not want their child labeled as being different, while others felt their child's needs could be better accommodated at home. Parents also described how their child had become bored with school and developed a poor attitude toward learning. In such cases parents commonly explained their decision was, as one stated, "To do what is best for the child."

Parents recognized how difficult it is for teachers to meet the needs of all students, with more and more children requiring accommodation for special learning and

behavioral needs. Some children that parents perceive as having a learning disability do not have a severe enough need to qualify for the level of individualized assistance that parent's desire. This may be the result of formal assessments that reveal a mild or moderate learning disability. At other times, parents decide to deny permission for the administration of formal assessments. Some parents of special needs children choose to assume this responsibility and have the child learn at home, as one parent did when her son developed a strong dislike for reading. She based her decision to home school on her son's attitude toward learning and the fact that he was not learning to read at school.

Having a child with a learning disability, unique learning style, behavior issue, or medical concern that is not addressed by the school to parents' satisfaction was a primary factor that motivated some parents in this study to initiate a home school program. This motivation clearly became more powerful if the parents did not feel supported by school personnel, especially the principal.

3. Peer Socialization

The issue of peer socialization tended to be closely tied to parental values, often based on the religious beliefs and moral values of the families. Parents cited negative peer socialization as a strong motivation to have their children learn at home. They often mentioned concerns that the negative influence of peers was starting to creep into the home. Parents cited as evidence of this negative influence the disintegration of sibling relationships, as brothers and sisters started to fight more frequently or refused to play with one another because they were in different grades in school. In addition, some parents felt that their children were subjected to bullying at school, and that schools are unable to address the problem of bullying.

4. Religion

Some parents readily identified religion as a primary factor motivating their decision to home school; however, others were reluctant to admit having a religious motivation. Nearly all participants in this study identified their membership in the same religious denomination; as such, they often interact at religious services and social gatherings. Some parents who were reluctant to identify a religious motivation for their decision to home school referred to personal religious observances as part of their decision-making process and to their desire to instill their moral and religious values in their children, in an environment with fewer conflicting values. The data in this study show that parents' desire to protect or shelter children from negative influences that contradict their religious and moral values was a strong motivation to home school.

Some parents were very forthright that religion was their primary motivation to home school, even going so far as to identify teaching and nurturing their children as a divine responsibility or stewardship from God. This motivation for home schooling has been identified as a strong motivating influence for parents in other studies. While half of the participating parents in this study identified religion as their primary motivation for choosing home schooling, the researcher felt that other parents were reluctant to identify religion as their motivation because they did not want to be viewed as religious zealots. Religion plays an important role in the lives of members of the predominant religion ascribed to by the majority of study participants, to the extent that it would be difficult to identify a choice that was not influenced by personal religious beliefs and values. For most parents, the primary religious motivation to home school their children is the opportunity to take advantage of those little moments that occur during the day to explain

their religious beliefs and values to their children, opportunities they feel would be lost if they attended a public school. This motivation becomes even more powerful if accompanied by conflicts between the moral values held by the parents and the influences of peers or school curriculum.

5. Incidents at School

According to the data in this study, a serious incident at school, which parents perceive to be a threat to the safety of their child, is one primary factor that motivated parents to initiate a home school program for their children. This motivation becomes even more powerful if the parent is not supported by school administration. It is critical that the parent feel supported.

When an incident happens at school with a child, immediate warning signals go up for parents. The data from this study revealed that two different types of incidents significantly contributed to parents' initial decision to home school. The first type of incident involved a physical assault by an adult against a child. When informed of this incident, the administrator initially chose to support the staff member and gave the parent the impression that fault for the incident lay with her and her child. Physical and emotional abuse is intolerable in any public school setting; when it occurs, it can be a strong motivation for parents to remove a child from school in favor of other learning alternatives, such as home schooling. In this case, when the physical and verbal assault was followed with a lack of support from school administration, it was more than sufficient motivation for the parents to remove all of their children from the school system and to start a home schooling program.

The second type of school incident involved a child wandering away from the school. Parents expect that educators will exercise due diligence in supervising students to ensure their physical safety; this includes knowing where students are at all times. One mother reported that her child left the classroom when opportunities arose, because she was bored. This happened regularly, which led the mother to investigate home schooling as an option for her child.

6. Environmental Factors

The environment of a school includes many elements: classroom atmosphere, the way the adults in the building treat students, the social interaction between students, the physical location of school, and the unique influences of the surrounding community. There are cases where home schooling may be viewed as the only educational option for children, such as when a family lives in a remote area far from schools.

Environmental factors, for the purpose of this study, were restricted to factors that influenced the parent's decision about where education should take place to best suit the needs of the family. The researcher considered two unique issues to be environmental in nature. The first involved a couple's decision to home school because they didn't want their young children to have to ride a bus across a city to attend a distant school, since their neighborhood school was full. The prospect of having small children away from home from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm was not acceptable to the parents, so they decided to home school. The other environmental factor identified by one family in this study involved the need for the father to travel because of his vocation; in this case home schooling represented a desirable solution for educating the children while keeping the family together on the road.

7. Recruitment

Home school literature often describes public education as a conveyor belt system (Van deMille, 2000) that produces people who have little ability to think for themselves and in whom the love of learning has been stifled. Parents often view a shift from public school to home school as a move from a lower form to a higher form of learning. This belief can bring with it an elitist attitude that may distance this unschooling group from other home schoolers and further distance home schooling from the public school.

According to the data in this study, the influence of other home school parents and exposure to pro-home schooling literature are primary factors that motivate parents to initiate a home school program for their children. This motivation becomes more powerful if accompanied by a negative issue arising from their child's school experience or alignment with religious or personal moral values.

8. Emergent Issue

An emergent issue concerned the legal right of parents to choose home schooling as an educational alternative. In March of 2008, the California Court of Appeals (Jonathan L. and Mary Grace L. v. Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, 2008) handed down a ruling that threatens a parent's right to choose home schooling. While this ruling directly affects only those home schooling families living in the State of California, its implications have begun to surface in Canada. While the legal system of Canada is independent of American influence, home schoolers still fear the right to choose their form of schooling may one day face a similar threat. Parents expressed the importance of being able to choose home schooling, and some parents did clearly choose to home school simply because they have the freedom to do so. A few

parents indicated that they chose to home school without really considering what motivated them.

The ability to exercise the right to choose to home school as one of many educational options available to parents was a primary factor that motivated these parents to initiate a home school program for their children. This motivation often gives way to other motivations after home schooling begins.

9. Educator Perceptions of Parents' Motivation to Home School

The public school educators in this study clearly had little first-hand knowledge of the motivating factors leading parents to choose home schooling for their children. The reason cited by educators and confirmed by many parents in this study was simply that parents are doing what they feel is best for the child and/or family. As the data revealed, it was common for unresolved issues to emerge only after children are removed from school. Administrators also commented that parents often notify the school by letter of their decision to home school, and one administrator suggested that they do not give their reasons when they do inform the school. In their search to understand the removal of children from the school, educators are often left to rely on speculation and assumption. The data strongly suggest that primary factors motivating parents to choose home schooling are deeply personal and are rarely shared with the public school community.

When children are removed from the school, classroom teachers often perceive that the decision is based on a problem with them. Some teachers take the removal of a child as a personal insult, even a negative public statement on the quality of their teaching ability and/or moral character. In fact, the data revealed, the majority of parents wanted teachers to know that they respect the job they do and hope teachers don't take the

decision as a personal attack. According to the data in this study, educators almost universally admitted that they did not understand why parents choose to home school their children.

10. Educator Judgments of Home Schooling

Analysis of study data showed that these educators are fiercely loyal to public education. They are firm in the belief that the needs of the vast majority of students are best served through the school experience, where students acquire the fundamental building blocks that prepare them for a lifetime of learning. Educators also stressed the importance of the social experience of school, extolling the benefits of working with other students of similar age and experience.

Most of these educators expressed a negative opinion of the effectiveness of home schooling, particularly in terms of academic preparation and socialization. While they identified a number of potential advantages of home schooling, based on their experience with home school students who returned to their classrooms, they clearly felt that the shortfalls of home schooling outweigh the potential benefits. They cited examples where returning students had significant deficiencies in basic literacy, communication and math skills, deficiencies that often required extensive remedial programs to address.

In terms of socialization, educators felt that formerly home-schooled children may have trouble working with children of their own age and adjusting to the behavior expectations of school. Teachers noted that home schooled children, when they return to school, often relate better to adults than to children their own age and that they struggle when under pressure to complete tasks within a certain timeframe. Nearly all educators expressed concern about home-schooled children missing the social experience of school.

According to the data in this study, most educators made value judgments about the merits of home school, based primarily on personal, rather than professional, contact with home schooling families. Their professional judgments about the effectiveness of home schooling were restricted to those students who leave school for a time and then return to the public system. Some educators identified that many returning students are likely products of a failed home schooling experience; consequently, their passing judgment on home schooling from that perspective would be biased and largely unfair.

11. Issues Expressed by Educators

As the data showed, educators believe home school parents need to be held more accountable for their children's learning. Educators felt that this could be achieved through a government mandated testing program for home-schooled children, one similar to that in place for students in public schools.

The inability of educators to accurately identify the primary factors that led parents to initiate home school programs may be attributed to issues of mistrust and a lack of communication. Communication between home school parents and public school educators was found in this study to be largely superficial. The data revealed that, having decided to home school, parents had little interest in sharing their motives with or explaining their decision to the school. They often made the decision some time before they actually removed their children from the school. Several waited until the end of the school year so that they could start the new school year at home, to make a less traumatic break with the school.

The educators in this study felt that home schooling is rarely the best choice for students. However, they based this opinion about the value of home schooling primarily

on their experience with children previously returned to school from unsuccessful home school situations. Educators did recognize many of the reasons that parents gave for choosing home schooling. They were, however, somewhat judgmental about parental motivations to home school, and they remain convinced the public school classroom is the best place for the vast majority of students. Further, these educators clearly believe that the vast majority of teachers are caring, dedicated and highly qualified professionals who strive to do what is best for every student. They recognize that home schooling is sometimes the best alternative for a student, and that students are always welcome to return to the public school classroom.

Understanding Parent Motivation Using Glasser's Needs

Glasser (1998a), an internationally renowned psychiatrist, maintained "the current practice of schooling is aimed at trying to force students to acquire information by memorizing facts that have little relevance in the world in which they live" (p. 237). The parents in this study were concerned that students in school are being taught what to think instead of how to think. While this was not identified as a primary motivating factor for initiating a home school program, it was identified as a strong supporting factor for many parents to continue home schooling. Glasser argued that, while some knowledge presented in school is of value, much more lacks universal relevance and therefore should not be required learning for all students: "Education is not about acquiring knowledge; it is best defined as using knowledge. The value is in using what you have learned, and this is where the schools fail to focus" (p. 238). This notion was reflected in the interest expressed by many parents in this study, as it related to their interest in "A Thomas Jefferson Education" (Van deMille, 2000) and the concern they shared about

standardized, government testing. The concern about current school practice, which Glasser described, was a primary motivating factor for at least one of the parents in this study, and many others viewed it as a source of concern. The study revealed that some parents were motivated to initiate home schooling so that they would be able to focus children's learning on areas of study that stimulate their intellect instead of rote memorization of facts.

Glasser (1998a) detailed five basic human needs, each of which has the potential to have a powerful influence on the choices people make. A review of Glasser's needs may be useful in this study to help explain these parents' motivation for choosing home school for their children.

The first and most basic of these needs, which Glasser (1998a) claimed we are born with, is the need for "survival" (p. 31). Glasser maintained that survival includes "the desire to work hard, carry on, do whatever it takes to ensure survival, and go beyond survival to security" (p. 31). Personal security is a critical component of this most basic of human needs, and if threatened, negates any other need that may exist. If a threat to self or children exists, it may influence the parent to take immediate and direct action; in this study, the action involved a decision about where children would learn. When schools are perceived to be unsafe, other learning alternatives may suddenly appear much more attractive. A primary motivating factor, in this study, included incidents in school that involved the physical safety of the child; the motivation was sufficient for parents to initiate a home schooling program where they might otherwise have had no interest or inclination to do so.

The second need described by Glasser (1998a) is the need for “love and belonging” (p. 33). This involves acceptance by peers, a much-touted benefit of the public school, yet one often criticized. Social struggles for acceptance have long been recognized as a part of what Jackson (1968) described as the “hidden curriculum,” comprising all of the informal, day-to-day social interactions that students experience in the school setting. If students do not experience acceptance by peers, bullying and persecution may be the result, and these may also factor into parents’ choice of home schooling for their children. Historically, Glasser believed, those who love and are loved have a distinct survival advantage, which explains how love and belonging became a basic need of its own. The need to belong and the related impact of one’s peer group, especially in the formative public school years, was referenced by many parents in this study as a primary motivating factor leading to the decision to home school. The topics and themes addressing socialization and many of the issues parents had with personal and religious value conflicts with the school illustrated the powerful effects of love and belonging in the lives of children and adults alike. When issues and conflicts arise based on the need for love and belonging, it can be a determining factor leading to change.

The same may be said of Glasser’s (1998a) third basic need, the need for “power or recognition” (p. 37). This need is realized when individuals are able to identify and achieve goals. Parents in this study identified their desire for their children to succeed wherever they choose to have them learn, to obtain a quality education, and to acquire needed skills to get along with others. In this study, particularly in cases where the primary motivation was that school administrators were slow or unwilling to address concerns raised by the parent, a primary factor leading to the decision to home school

was revealed. The real or perceived abuse of power by those in positions of authority can be a powerful factor contributing to parents' choice to home school.

The fourth of Glasser's (1998a) basic needs is "freedom" (p. 39). The third and fourth needs seem somewhat related when applied to the context of learning. Glasser stated, "In order to escape from the domination of others...we need freedom, which serves as a buffer against power" (p. 33). Parents' freedom to choose the form of learning for their children appeared in this study to be a primary motivating factor leading in the parents' initial decision to home school, particularly when curriculum content came into conflict with a parent's religious belief. Parents viewed the recent ruling in the State of California Court of Appeals revoking a parent's right to home school as a threat to this basic need.

Glasser (1998a) identified the fifth need as the need for "fun" (p. 41), which enters the picture as the reward for learning, especially in relation to the ability of the individual learner to gain more love, power and freedom. Glasser claimed, "The day we stop playing is the day we stop learning. Fun is best defined by laughter. People who fall in love are learning a lot about each other, and they find themselves laughing almost continually" (p. 41). Parents referred to this final basic need as the "love of learning," which they identified as a benefit of "A Thomas Jefferson Education" (Van deMille, 2000). The families' discovery of a renewed love of learning on the part of their children confirmed for parents in this study of the correctness of their decision to home school, motivating them to continue this form of schooling for their children.

Glasser's five basic needs help to explain how the identified topics and themes serve as primary factors that motivate parents to decide to initiate a home schooling program for their children.

Conclusions

According to Jeub (1994), parents chose to home school for four broad reasons: (1) social reasons, which include the opportunity to emphasize life skills, limit exposure to negative social experiences, and strengthen family relationships; (2) academic reasons, which include the opportunity for more one-to-one learning, more individualization of programming, and greater flexibility with curriculum; (3) family reasons, which include the opportunity for parents to have more influence with children, to counter and control negative influences, to strengthen the family bond, and to promote and maintain cultural identity and values; (4) religious reasons, which include the opportunity to promote their religious values and the flexibility to include religious content in the curriculum.

The Central Research Question for this study was as follows: Why do parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling, and how well is this motivation understood by public school personnel?

The initial decision to home school is the most important one, especially for educators. The data revealed that, without the initial motivation to choose home schooling or even to start investigating other learning options, the chances of the child remaining in school would have been much greater. Once the decision was made and the child removed from school, the home schooling experience revealed other benefits that parents had not anticipated. For many parents, the primary motivation to home school quickly changed once the children were at home; however, without the initial decision,

the children would still be in school. Consequently, the researcher chose to focus on motivations for the initial decision.

The answer to the central research question lies in the reasons that parents identified in their interviews with the researcher. As the data from this study show, the primary factors that motivated parents in this jurisdiction are similar to those found by Jeub (1994), with some additions. Eight motivating factors emerged from the data as being primary motivators for parents to initiate home schooling for their children. The rich, thick description of these eight factors serves as the essence of the lived experience for parent participants, in terms of what motivated them to choose home schooling in the first instance. The factors, identified by parents as primary motivating factors that led them to make the initial decision to home school, are peer socialization, religion, special needs of the child, parents' negative experiences when they were children in school, incidents related to child safety, environmental issues, recruitment, and the freedom to choose home schooling.

The negative effect of peer socialization was the most common motivation identified by parents contributing to their initial decision to choose home schooling. This is consistent with finding in the literature as noted by Jeub (1994), Duffey (1998), Babbitt (1991), and Williams (1984). These included bullying, the negative influence of peers on their child, and the undesirable changes they began seeing in their home. Parent concerns included social stratification that caused rifts in sibling relationships and influences that would lead their children to depart from the parents' social, moral and religious values. Many parents commented they wanted to control what their children were exposed to and to be the filter through which their children were introduced to the world.

Parent participants identified that a common motivation for initiating the decision to home school was religion. In the literature, religion has often been found to be the primary reason for choosing to home school (Edwards, 2007; Chopp, 2003; Rudner, 1999; Basham, 2001), yet it has also been shown in the literature that religion may not be the primary motivating factor to home school (Tator, 2001; Harrison, 1996). In this study, reasons given that related to religion varied according to family, as did the fervency of parents' expression. Some stated that they decided to home school because of their God-given responsibility to teach and nurture their children. Their belief that the responsibility to teach their children should not be delegated to someone else was an extremely powerful motivation, the conviction that home schooling is something the God wants parents to do. The majority of parents citing a religious motivation mentioned concerns with curriculum, the removal of religious observances from school (i.e. prayer), the absence of religious content in the curriculum (i.e., the inclusion of creationism), and the general deterioration of moral values in society.

The data revealed a common motivation for initiating a home school program was the perceived need or desire to address a child's special learning need at home. This finding is consistent with literature suggesting that parents often choose home schooling when a child's special learning needs, physical needs or gifted and talented needs are not being met at school, as noted by Chopp (2003) and Mayberry (1988). Some parents wanted to avoid the labeling that often accompanies the special needs coding process needed to access additional funding. Others were concerned about the influence on their child of other special needs children. Most commonly the parents wanted the ability to

give their child one-to-one attention and to individualize their child's learning program. In one case, the child had a medical condition that was best accommodated at home.

Another common motivation for initiating a home school program involved parents' prior negative experiences in school as students. They expressed the belief, or fear, that their child's experience in school would be similar to their own. When their child started to experience challenges or have issues at school, the parents' own negative experiences helped to motivate them to remove their children from school. While parents did not describe their own negative school experiences in great detail, they were clearly of great significance. Some of the parents' experiences involved unaddressed learning problems, bullying, boredom and conflicts with teachers. McLeod (2002) found that a lack of confidence in the public school to provide a satisfactory learning experience for their children is sufficient to motivate parents to opt for home schooling. While related to this finding, the researcher posits that prior negative experiences of parents, as an initial motivating factor to home school, has not been posed in prior home schooling research.

Some parents identified their motivation to initiate home schooling involved an incident at school, such as assault on a child, neglect of a medical condition, or a missing student at school. Finding by Edwards (2007) concur that safety issues are a strong motivation for choosing to home school, when she found "the majority of parents...felt that public schools did not provide sufficient safety measures for all children" (p. 87). When an incident happens at school, unless parents feel it is properly and adequately addressed, they may feel strongly motivated to seek a learning alternative for their child. School administration plays a key role in resolving incidents, yet clearly this was a missing element in some of the examples shared in this study.

The data revealed unique environmental factors for the family were a motivation for initiating a home school program. In one case this related to the parents' desire to keep the family together while the father traveled extensively as a requirement of his job. The other case involved physical proximity to the child's school. The parents felt the required bus ride would require their young children to be gone for too much of the day; since the mother was an experienced teacher, they decided to home school. The family later moved and the children returned to school. However, when an issue related to peer socialization later emerged in the new school, the parents shared how easy it was to make the subsequent decision to return to home schooling.

Another motivation identified by parents to initiate home schooling was described as recruitment. This motivation relates to the exposure parents get regarding the benefits of home schooling, both through others who home school and through literature published about home school philosophies and methodologies. One parent identified that she was convinced by a home schooling parent to give home schooling a try; her respect for the individual motivated her to make the initial decision. Another parent described how exposure to home schooling literature inspired her, a former teacher, to choose home schooling for her children. She said, "the principles rang true and I decided that this is what I wanted for my children." Reference to recruitment as a motivation to home school seems to be lacking in prior research and seems to be a new contribution to the literature.

The final factor that parents identified, as motivating the initial decision to home school was simply the freedom of choice. The parents viewed home schooling as a legitimate option for the education of their children. The prospect of having their children at home for a longer period of time was attractive to the parents and the home schooling

option made this possible. As this issue emerged from a 2008 ruling of the California Court of Appeals, it is reasonable to conclude that the legal right to choose home schooling, is once again an issue for education and home school research.

These eight factors answer the first half of the central research question, that is, why parents remove their children from traditional, public school programs to initiate home schooling. The second part of the central research question asks how well public school personnel understand what motivates parents to make this choice. In this study, almost all of the educators admitted that they do not understand why parents choose to home school their children. There is an inherent element of conflict between public schooling and home schooling; these two learning options are in competition with each other for students, so one takes away from the other. It is difficult for educators not to feel threatened by home schooling, especially since they have had experiences with home school children who have returned to school, in many cases, from unsuccessful home schooling situations. Judging home schooling only by these students would be like judging public school only by students who struggle and often fail.

While many parents expressed the hope that educators would not take personally their decision to home school, they need to understand that it is difficult not to take personally something about which one feels passionate. The decision to home school charges the emotions of parents and educators alike. In this emotionally charged arena, it is not surprising that issues of trust and lack of communication emerge. The researcher hopes that a result of this study will be a re-emergence of trust, as parents and educators make genuine efforts to communicate. If these two groups make efforts recommended by noted sociologist Carl Rogers (1956), and start to see the world from the perspective of

the other that to this time have been repressed, they may “be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and comfortably” (p. 7). Calabrese (2002) stated:

The leader understands that a trust-filled environment is central to his efforts...He creates dialogue opportunities with the members of his organization and community. He focuses on the process and not on the outcome. He eliminates behaviors that separate, segregate, or punish. Dialogue is at the heart of trust. When members of an organization join in dialogue, they express their opinions and feelings knowing that those receiving the communication actively listen without making judgment. Dialogue requires members to commit to seeking mutual understanding. It places responsibility on each member to raise unresolved issues. In this sense, dialogue is open, honest, and free from attack. It is the only way through seemingly irresolvable issues to a common understanding. (p. 57)

The clear discussion point of this research is its focus on the primary motivations given by parents as their reasons for initiating home schooling for their children. Particularly, in terms of home schooling research in Canada, there is little evidence that parental motivation to initiate home schooling has been investigated. It is also important to note that these initial parental motivations were found to often decline in importance and were replaced by other motivations once home schooling programs began. This illustrates that home schooling is still a very complex issue that requires ongoing investigation.

Implications for Stakeholders in Education

A number of implications have emerged as a result of data analyses and researcher reflection on extensive face-to-face interviews with home schooling parents,

public school administrators, and public school teachers. The transcripts of these interviews record over 36 hours of in-depth, semi-structured discussion of issues relating to home schooling. Recommendations are provided for public school educators, school jurisdictions, provincial/state policy makers and home school parents.

The findings of this research will serve to inform public school educators and jurisdictional administrators, within the bounds of this study, of the primary factors that motivated these parents to make their initial decision to home school. Those outside the bounds of this study will need to determine the degree of transferability of this information to their own context.

Recommendations for Public School Educators

Administrators in this study were open and candid in expressing their views regarding home schooling and its implications for their schools. All recognized potential benefits for the student and family but expressed concern about what home school students miss by not being in school. Their concerns centered primarily on the socialization of the child, that is, missed opportunities to make friends, develop conflict resolution skills, and develop collaborative learning skills through team participation and inquiry learning. Clearly these administrators desire what is best for the child, and in most cases they have attempted to support the parents' decision to home school.

Most people would agree that the purpose of schools is to help produce well-educated citizens, and that education involves much more than just academic learning. Education also includes the responsibility to allow individuals to gain wisdom, self-discipline, and the ability to make correct choices. In a national study on the effects of home schooling, Ray (2005) claimed, "It appears that home schooling will produce wise

adults who make good decisions, because their parents are modeling a lot of good things for them” (p. 104).

The first recommendation for educators is they should be less critical of the decision to home school. Studies by Shyers (1992) and Ray (2001; 2005) dispute the claim that home schooled children suffer socially or academically. These students may have to adjust when placed in a school setting in order to learn needed institutional skills, but home schooling seems to produce adults capable of making meaningful contributions to society. Perhaps it is school skills and not social skills that concern educators.

The major challenges for educators in regard to the impact of home schooling on the public school system centered on issues of trust, communication and misinformation. Many feared the consequences of losing students, such as reduced staff numbers and a reduced ability to offer certain option classes for all students. When parents make the decision and the time comes to remove the child from the school, educators feel that parents do not openly share the reasons for their decision, although they recognize why this may be the case. Administrators stressed that they try very hard to respect the parent’s decision and make a concerted effort to be supportive by offering assistance and resources and providing access to school academic and extra-curricular programs, with an open invitation for the student to come back at any time. This blending of programs, where the parent is allowed to pick and choose parts of the school program viewed to be important, appeared to be a valuable option for administrators as they attempted to preserve or heal relationships with home school families. However, teachers often viewed it as a frustration, and some were openly negative about blended programs.

Administrators and teachers expressed a desire for more open dialogue with parents, especially when parents are considering a decision to home school. Educators believed that the decision to home school is usually the result of a problem, or perceived problem, with the school. All expressed confidence that, if given a chance, they could resolve the problem.

Educators should remember that children from families with successful home schooling programs will likely not come back into the school. If and when they do return to school, they will likely transition back into the classroom with minimal adjustment, as some teachers in this study observed. Educators need to be less judgmental of the student or parent when home schoolers return to the public school classroom, for parents are sure to share their experience with others.

The second recommendation for educators is to focus attention on improving the home-school relationship through better communication with home school parents. It is nearly impossible to identify who will consider home schooling, so it is important to build a relationship with all parents. This is especially important in the early grades, as parents begin to let go of their children. Finding ways to get parents into the school and letting them see the positive things that go on every day in and around school could help to strengthen the relationship between parents and educators. Educators must do a better job in providing opportunities for parents and community members to learn about changes and advancements in public education. More extensive use of public meetings and information seminars is needed to adequately address this recommendation.

The researcher further recommends that educators act promptly whenever there is an issue with a child. Educators, especially administrators, must ensure the parent is

informed and knows that appropriate action is being taken. Most of all, it is important to make sure parents feel supported; that their concern has been heard and that the school is doing something about it. Educators need to realize that sometimes parents make decisions for their children that are not about the school and that they can't force parents to send their children to school.

A final recommendation for educators is that they find a way to put some "fun" back into learning. None of the parents even intimated that they were motivated to home school because their child was having too much fun at school; on the contrary, for some the primary motivation was that their child had stopped learning and was bored. Parents suggested that they could help put the fun back into their children's learning by allowing them to have more freedom to choose what they learn, in home school. Obviously it is not possible in school to allow children the freedom to choose what they learn, to the extent it is at home. However, instead of giving "busy work" to students who finish assigned work early, perhaps teachers could give students the freedom to pursue their own interests. According to Glasser (1998a), having the freedom to choose helps learners to attain the fun that comes as the intrinsic reward for learning.

Recommendation for School Jurisdictions

Parents and educators in this study noted the value of home school facilitators, who work with parents, assisting them to meet educational goals for their children. They viewed facilitators, who were provincial certified teachers, as being extremely valuable in terms of directing student learning and managing the liaison between home and school.

The recommendation for school jurisdictions is to find more ways to support parents. Some parents in this study expressed the desire to engage in professional

development with educators, seeing this as training that would benefit their child. The goal for many schools is to increase the level of parent participation in the education of their children, yet when parents become totally involved they no longer feel accepted by educators. More effort should be made to involve home school facilitating teachers, especially in home school programs that transition back into the public system. These teachers are most likely to be aware of home school programs that are struggling and approaching the time when the child may need a school program.

In small communities, life often revolves around the school, which becomes the hub of social activity for students, parents and community members. Many educators expressed frustration about initiating a conversation with home school parents because there is a lack of common experiences, often related to what is going on in school. When educators and parents lack a topic for conversation, it hinders the development of meaningful relationships. Without these, it would be difficult to establish the level of trust at which cooperation can occur.

It is the recommendation of the researcher that jurisdictions empower educators with the tools necessary to facilitate more meaningful interactions with families who home school. This may include improving communication through newsletters, websites, and other locally available media. Jurisdictions should invite parents to participate in professional development activities and other special events.

Recommendations for Provincial/State Policymakers

For many of the educators in this study, accountability became an issue when students returned from home schooling with deficiencies in their learning. This led many to assume that little learning takes place in home schooling programs. While some

recognized that some students return to school because the home schooling program is not working, most did not make this connection. It seems reasonable to assume that children are not usually returned to school if the home schooling program is working.

For most educators, increased accountability would involve some sort of regular testing program to ensure that home school students are progressively acquiring skills and knowledge that will prepare them for eventual post-secondary education. The educators in this study recognized that parents often choose alternative curricula, so they suggested that, for reasons of accountability, tests should focus primarily on literacy and math. Some parents felt they would be in favor of these types of assessments, but they were concerned about the testing environment, something that most home schoolers avoid. The parents in this study were very suspicious of any governmental interference in their choice to home school.

The research recommends that provincial/state policymakers take their responsibility for education quality more seriously. Some home-schooled children suffer because of their parent's decision to learn at home. A number of parents in this study observed that not all home school situations have sufficient quality to ensure the children are acquiring needed academic and social skills, and they would support some form of accountability measure to ensure this occurs. Policymakers would be wise to include home school parents in the construction of these accountability measures, as the sequence of learning at home is often different than what is found in public school. The researcher further recommends that since many of parents in this study removed their children from public school for concerns related to social issues; there is a need for a social needs assessment for children in the public school system. Policymakers must take steps to

address these social concerns as an addition to their focus on standardized academic testing.

Many parents in this study have either moved because their decision to home school or are prepared to move if their right to choose is threatened. They also noted that, if the jurisdiction were to take away its support of home schooling, they would quickly transfer their registration to a school board that was more receptive to their choice. Parents shared how much they appreciate what funding allows them to do in terms of enrichment and resources, but emphasized that they would home school even if no funding were available.

The researcher recommends that governments do all they can to preserve the right for parents to choose the form of schooling for their children. As noted earlier, making home schooling illegal does not stop the practice. Currently, jurisdictions are able to assist parents in providing high quality learning experiences, which occur in many homes.

Many parents and educators recognized that a mix of home schooling and public school might be the best learning situation for the child. Educators expressed the desire to have parents actively engaged as partners in the learning of the child, so that the child would be learning at home and at school. The blended program accomplishes this objective by allowing home-schooled students to take part of their program at school.

In addition, it is recommended that policy makers create an incentive program designed to encourage jurisdictions and schools to make blending a more viable and attractive option for home school students. If a concern exists about the quality of

learning that occurs in the home, it seems logical to provide training for parents so that they are more likely to succeed in the home schooling of their children.

Recommendations for Home School Parents

Most of the parents in this study revealed that they frequently revisit their decision to home school; some re-evaluate their decision each year. Where there is a possibility of returning a child to school after a period of home schooling, it is important for parents to consider what the transition back into the public school classroom will be like. If the child has no friends at school and is lacking in basic academic skills, the transition will be a challenge for both the child and his or her teachers.

The researcher recommends that home school parents have a transition plan to prepare their children for eventual return to school. It should include preparing students for expected school behavior, becoming familiar with what students at school are studying, and helping the children establish healthy relationships with other students attending school. Such steps will help returning students to reintegrate quickly into the public school classroom.

Most often, home school parents remove their children from the public school without opening sharing their true motives. Administrators stressed their desire to assist families with their choice and to welcome returning children back to school for some of their learning program. A blended program could be of great value for parents as it provides opportunities to access programs that would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to provide at home, such as band choir, athletics, ski trips, dances, and after-school competitive sports programs. A second recommendation for parents is to strive to develop and/or maintain a positive, cooperative relationship with the school. This takes

effort on both sides, and it requires parents and educators to compromise in order to do what is best for the child.

One of the more common reasons that parents gave for initiating home school stemmed from negative experiences they themselves had as students in school. Times have changed and many improvements have been made in curriculum and teaching methodology. Classroom learning in the study jurisdiction involves a great deal of peer collaboration and problem solving, investigation and inquiry learning, and project-oriented activities designed to develop positive ethical values and critical thinking skills.

The researcher recommends that parents get into the schools and see what is really going on. School is not the same today as it was when the parent was a child. Administrators and teachers both expressed the belief that, whatever issue a parent has, it can be resolved if they are willing to work together. As one administrator stressed, “I want to know what is wrong! I want to know what the parent sees as the problem because we can fix almost anything. That’s what we do—fix it and get ‘em back to school.”

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study support the following recommendations for future research:

1. Ongoing research is needed to explore the factors that cause parents to choose home schooling. A better understanding of the initial motivation for parents to home school would help educators understand how the school factors into the decision. It may also help school administrators to plan how to respond to parents who have decided to home school.

2. A better understanding of what motivates parents' decision to return children to school would help public educators to prepare to meet these children's needs when they return. Furthermore, a study of families who return children to the public school system may shed light on what causes the home schooling situation to break down.
3. A similar study could be performed in different provinces or states, especially in areas where there is a great diversity of ethnic groups, religions, socio-economic groups, and family structure with the primary research focus on the parent's initial decision to home school.
4. Further research is needed to examine what happens to home-schooled children, once they reach adulthood, in terms of socialization, problem solving skills, conflict resolution skills, and success in post-secondary education.
5. A study could be performed to determine the effect of home schooling on students' socialization.

Endnote

In gaining access to the parent participants for this study, the researcher relied upon his past reputation as the principal of alternative programs and on his ongoing relationships with home school facilitating teachers, employed by the school jurisdiction in this study. A number of parents consented to participate because of the endorsement these home school facilitators provided, for which the researcher is extremely grateful. It is of significance to note that parents frequently thanked the researcher for listening to their stories and noted how relevant and meaningful this study is for them. It is particularly relevant and meaningful that the average length of parent interview exceeded

77 minutes. The longest interview exceeded 130 minutes, at the end of which, the parent commented, “I think we’ve talked ourselves out. I want you to know this is not a hobby. At the start, I think we were trying it, but we just happened to fall in love with it. Thank you for listening.”

Parents greatly appreciated the opportunity to have their voices heard. A sentiment expressed by another participant at the end of an interview captures the essence of the interview experience for most, if not all parents. When the researcher stated, “I hope this [interview] has been helpful,” Mitch responded:

Really helpful! I think the one thing that I appreciated about this process for us was the invitation and opportunity to reflect on why we started and why we keep going.

An old football coach, for whom the researcher once served as an assistant coach, once remarked in the heat of the game that young men don’t go on the field to mess up. A similar sentiment is applicable here. Whether we are teachers or parents, we need to trust one another more and appreciate that, with few exceptions, neither parents nor teachers consciously make decisions about kids with the intention of “messing” them up. The researcher concludes this study with a greater sense of admiration for parents and educators, a greater appreciation for the depth of their caring for children, and greater confidence that our future is in good hands.

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APPENDIX A. U.S. STATE REGULATIONS FOR HOME SCHOOLING

The following table shows the diversity of home school regulatory requirements in the United States, according to the Home School Legal Defense Association (2007).

U.S. Home School Laws by State			
No Notice	Low Regulation	Moderate Regulation	High Regulation
Alaska	Alabama	American Samoa	Massachusetts
Connecticut	Arizona	Arkansas	New York
Guam	California	Colorado	North Dakota
Idaho	Delaware	Florida	Pennsylvania
Illinois	District of Columbia	Georgia	Rhode Island
Indiana	Kansas	Hawaii	Vermont
Michigan	Kentucky	Iowa	
Missouri	Mississippi	Louisiana	
New Jersey	Montana	Maine	
Oklahoma	Nebraska	Maryland	
Puerto Rico	Nevada	Minnesota	
Texas	New Mexico	New Hampshire	
	Utah	North Carolina	
	Virgin Islands	Northern Mariana Islands	
	Wisconsin	Ohio	
	Wyoming	Oregon	
		South Carolina	
		South Dakota	
		Tennessee	
		Virginia	
		Washington	
		West Virginia	
No Notice	States requiring no notice do not require parents to initiate any contact.		
Low Regulation	States with low regulation require parental notification only.		
Moderate Regulation	States with moderate regulation require parents to send notification, test scores, and/or professional evaluation of student progress.		
High Regulation	States with high regulation require parents to send notification or achievement test scores and/or professional evaluation, plus other requirements (e.g. curriculum approval by the state, teacher qualification of parents, or home visits by state officials).		

APPENDIX B. CANADIAN PROVINCIAL REGULATIONS FOR HOME
SCHOOLING

This table provides a summary of home schooling guidelines and regulations for the provinces and territories of Canada, according to Luffman and Cranswick (1997).

Province	Registration	Curriculum	Evaluation	Funding
Newfoundland	Parents register with local school board, or a private school.	Ed plans not required to be approved. There are some guidelines.	No provincial assessment guidelines - left to the discretion of the district superintendent.	Schools receive grants for registered home schoolers and textbooks are available free of charge.
Prince Edward Island	Parents register with the Ministry of Education.	Ed plans are not required to be approved but a certified teacher monitors each child.	Parents are required to submit progress reports at least twice a year.	There is no funding, although textbooks are available for a refundable \$50 deposit.
Nova Scotia	Parents register with the Ministry of Education.	Ed Plans are not required to be approved.	Parents must report on child's progress at least once a year. Choice of assessment method may include: standardized tests, qualified assessors,	There is no funding for schools or parents.

Province	Registration	Curriculum	Evaluation	Funding
			portfolios, etc.	
New Brunswick	Parents register with local school district.	Ed plans are not required to be approved but the school district will discuss the plan with the parents.	A liaison person from each school district will meet with the parents. At the elementary level, evaluation procedures at the discretion of the district superintendent.	There is no funding for schools or parents.
Quebec	Parents register with a local school board, or a private school.	Ed plans are not required to be approved.	There are no provincial regulations. School boards may develop guidelines.	There is no funding for schools or parents.
Ontario	Parents notify their local school board or private school of their intention to home school.	There are no provincial regulations but individual school boards develop guidelines.	There are no provincial regulations but individual school boards develop guidelines.	There is no funding for schools or parents.
Manitoba	Parents register with the Department of Education's Home	Ed plans must be submitted outlining program of study	Parent required to submit progress reports twice a year on the	There is no funding for schools or parents.

Province	Registration	Curriculum	Evaluation	Funding
	Schooling Office.		topics/skills covered. No standardized testing is required.	
Saskatchewan	Parents register with a local public or separate school board.	Ed plans must be submitted but are not required to be approved.	Annual progress report is required from parents. Parent chooses method of testing and evaluation. (Standardized tests, portfolio, 3 rd party acceptable to parents and school, or other agreed upon method)	Schools that register receive 50% of basic student grant. Six of 89 boards give some funding to parents.
Alberta	Parents must notify a resident school board, or a willing non-resident board or a private school.	Ed plans are approved by the minister (or designate) and must meet requirements (meaning a school administrator must approve the plans).	Registering board/school conducts at least 2 assessments per year. Parents must maintain a portfolio of student work.	Schools receive some funding of which at least 50% is given to the parents.
British	Parent may register	Ed plans are not	Registering	Registering

Province	Registration	Curriculum	Evaluation	Funding
Columbia	with any local public school, any independent school or regional correspondence school.	required to be submitted.	schools are required to offer assessment services-but parents don't have to accept them.	schools receive 1/16 of basic grant -but must provide access to ed services and resources free of charge.
Yukon Territory	Parents register with the ministry of education.	Ed plans approved by minister and must meet requirements.	No specific assessment or evaluation requirements.	No funding for schools or parents – but ed resources are free of charge.
Northwest Territories	Parents register with local school.	Local principal and parents agree on ed plan.	Principal and parents agree on assessment – meet 2 times per year to discuss progress.	School boards receive half of the basic grant – 50% of which is given to parents.

APPENDIX C. JURISDICTION ACCESS LETTER

Return Address

DATE

Inside Address

Dear Superintendent:

RE: **Request for Jurisdiction Permission to Conduct Study**

I am a doctoral student in educational leadership studies at The University of Montana. The topic of my dissertation is “Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School.” The purpose of this study is to qualitatively describe the perceptions and experiences of parents, school administrators and teachers as they consider the decision of parents to home school their children. Through qualitative data analysis, this study will reveal parental motivation to home school and examine how aware school-based educators are of this educational phenomenon.

Dr. Brian Higgins (2002) informs us that very little research has been conducted of home schooling; this is significant given the volume of educational research that is conducted every year. This study is important so that facts may replace the many myths that surround the practice of learning at home. In so doing, we may be in a better position to enter into a meaning dialogue with parents who opt for this learning alternative. If we are able to understand the social and educational dynamics of home learning, we may even be able to improve pedagogical practice in our public schools by transferring valuable methods, materials, and insights that are revealed.

This case study will seek to better understand what motivates parents to choose to have their children learn at home, so that school administrators and teachers will be better equipped to counsel and advise families prior to their starting a home learning program. Particularly for administrators, the results of this study may serve to guide admission and exit interviews with parents and to facilitate better individual program planning for students in regular school programs. Ultimately, it is the hope of the researcher that results of this study will serve to inform school personnel of ways to better serve the needs of all learners and their caregivers. Additionally, this study will have implications for teachers and administrators responsible for the creation of alternative learning programs to accommodate a growing diversity of parental demands. As educators better understand the issues surrounding a parent’s decision to home educate it will enable them to more effectively collaborate with them to ensure the needs of the child are best served.

As Alberta school jurisdictions enter a state of declining enrollment, their ability to attract and keep students may determine the viability and ultimate survival of a school. Higgins (2000) noted, “Listening to and understanding the home school community’s difficulties with public education may provide us with the insight needed for curriculum revision, change, and the eventual evolution to improved services and programs.”

My research design has identified a target population of parents, registered through your alternate school program, as well as teachers and school administrators employed in your school jurisdiction. I am requesting permission to conduct research on the topic of “understanding parental motivation to home school” within your jurisdiction. With your consent, principals will be asked for permission to interview parents (if appropriate) and teachers from their school community. As well, I would ask your permission to interview at least six school administrators who have experience with home schooling families. Once jurisdictional and school approval has been obtained, consent will be sought with participants to involve them in a face-to-face interview. All participants will be asked a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview, and the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate later transcription and data analysis. I have determined each of these questions, and through the process of open-ended questioning it is hoped that other questions will emerge to inform this research.

It is expected that interviews will take about 60 minutes to complete. Each participant will receive an envelope with a copy of your letter of permission, and an informed consent form. I assure you that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained through all reasonable measures. Reporting of results will not identify your jurisdiction, schools or participating individuals.

Thank you for your consideration in providing permission to allow this study to proceed within your jurisdiction. As it directly affects you, I will be please to present the findings of this study to your Board of Trustees and senior administration upon its completion, if invited. If you have any questions, please contact me at (403) 653-4958 or my advisor Dr. Roberta D. Evans (406) 243-5877.

Thank you, in advance, for your time and significant contribution to this study.

Respectfully yours,

Nolen B. Olsen, Doctoral Candidate
The University of Montana-Missoula
Graduate School—Department of Educational Leadership

Enclosures

- Letters: Principal Permission, Principal Cover, Teacher Cover, Parent Cover
- IRB Approval & Informed Consent Form
- Interview Protocols (3)

APPENDIX D. SCHOOL ACCESS LETTER

Return Address

DATE

Inside Address

Dear Principal:

RE: **Request for Principal Permission to Conduct Study**

Your jurisdiction Superintendent has granted permission for me to elicit the collection of data from schools within your jurisdiction. The data collected will be used to complete my doctoral dissertation in educational leadership through The University of Montana at Missoula. The topic of my dissertation is “Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School.” The purpose of this study is to qualitatively describe the perceptions and experiences of teachers as they observe students in home learning programs and the impact it has on their school. Through qualitative data analysis, this study will attempt to determine common thread in teachers’ perceptions as they identify what motivates parents to choose to home school their children.

I am requesting access to at least two teachers from your staff with some history with home schooling families, as well as yourself or another administrator in your school with the same experience.

Dr. Brian Higgins (2002) informs us that very little research has been conducted of home schooling; this is significant given the volume of educational research that is conducted every year. This case study will provide a unique and needed look into the perceptions and beliefs of family decision-makers, in your school community, who choose to opt out of school-based programs and engage in home learning programs. As we better understand what motivates parents to choose to have their children learn at home, school administrators and teachers will be better equipped to counsel and advise families prior to their starting a home learning program. Particularly for administrators, the results of this study may serve to guide admission and exit interviews with parents and to facilitate better individual program planning for students in regular school programs. Ultimately, it is my hope that results of this study will serve to inform you of ways to better serve the needs of all learners and their caregivers.

As school jurisdictions and schools experience periods of declining enrollment, their ability to attract and keep students may determine the viability and ultimate survival of a school. If parents are pulling students out of regular school programs because of dissatisfaction with educational opportunities or perceived injustices, it would seem beneficial for a school to be able to resolve these issues. Higgins (2000) further noted, “Listening to and understanding the home school community’s difficulties with public education may provide us with the insight needed for curriculum revision, change, and the eventual evolution to improved services and programs for all students.”

Participants in this study will engage in a face-to-face interview with me. They will be asked open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview, and the interview will be audio-recorded. School administrators and teachers will be asked a series of 12 questions. I have determined all of these questions, but through open-ended questioning it is hoped that other questions will emerge as I seek to get to the heart of this issue.

Teacher and administrator interviews will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete. Each participant will receive an envelope with a copy of your letter of permission, and an informed consent form. I assure you that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained through all reasonable measures. Reporting of results will not identify jurisdictions, schools or participating individuals.

With your permission, I will arrange to visit with you soon to identify 4 teachers on your staff to be approached for inclusion in this study, of which 2 will be selected. They will receive a letter inviting them to participate in the study along with a letter of permission, a cover letter and a human subject informed consent letter. The interview will take from 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete, and it will be audio-recorded.

I appreciate your participation and support in helping me conduct my dissertation research. I assure you that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Reporting of results will not identify jurisdictions or schools or any information that can identify schools.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (403) 653-4958 or my advisor Dr. Roberta D. Evans at (406) 243-5877. Thank you in advance for your cooperation in assisting me with this important study of a growing educational phenomenon.

Respectfully,

Nolen B. Olsen
Doctoral Candidate
The University of Montana-Missoula

Enclosures:

- Letter to teachers
- Human Subjects Informed Consent Form
- Letter of approval for study from jurisdiction administrator

APPENDIX E. PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER 1

Return Address

DATE

Inside Address

Dear Principal:

RE: Principal Cover Letter

Your jurisdiction Superintendent has granted permission to me to approach you to participate in research for my doctoral dissertation. I am nearing completion of my doctorate in educational leadership at The University of Montana in Missoula. The topic of my dissertation is “Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School.” One of the focuses of this study is to qualitatively describe the perceptions and experiences of school administrators and teachers as they observe students in home learning programs and the impact it has on their school. Through qualitative data analysis, this study will attempt to determine common thread in teachers’ perceptions as they identify what motivates parents to choose to home educate their children.

I have permission from your superintendent to interview at least 6 school administrators from your division, as well as a number of teachers from divisional schools, all who have a personal history with home schooling families.

This case study will provide a unique and needed look into the perceptions and beliefs of family decision-makers, in your school community, who choose to opt out of school-based programs and engage in home learning programs. As we better understand what motivates parents to choose to have their children learn at home, both school administrators and teachers will be better equipped to counsel and advise families prior to their starting a home learning program. Particularly for administrators, the results of this study may serve to guide admission and exit interviews with parents and to facilitate better individual program planning for students in regular school programs. Ultimately, it is my hope that results of this study will serve to inform you of ways to better serve the needs of all learners and their caregivers.

As school jurisdictions enter a state of declining enrollment, their ability to attract and keep students may determine the viability and ultimate survival of a school. If parents are pulling students out of regular school programs because of dissatisfaction with educational opportunity or perceived injustices, it is of benefit to the school to better understand these issues so resolutions may be found. Dr. Brian Higgins (2000) noted, “Listening to and understanding the home school community’s difficulties with public education may provide us with the insight needed for curriculum revision, change, and the eventual evolution to improved services and programs.”

As a participant in this study, you will participate in a face-to-face interview with me. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview lasting from 30 minutes to 1 hour. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded, so that it can be later transcribed to allow me to conduct a thorough analysis of the data collected. I have pre-determined these questions, but through the nature of open-ended questioning I anticipate that other questions will emerge as we get to the heart of this issue.

I have included a copy of a letter of permission from your superintendent and principal, and an informed consent form. I assure you that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Reporting of results will not identify jurisdictions or schools or any information that can identify schools.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (403) 653-4958 or my advisor Dr. Roberta D. Evans at (406) 243-5877. Thank you, in advance, for your time and significant contribution to this study.

Sincerely yours,

Nolen B. Olsen, Doctoral Candidate
The University of Montana-Missoula
Graduate School – Department of Educational Leadership

APPENDIX F. PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER 2

Return Address

DATE

Inside Address

Dear Parent:

RE: Parent Cover Letter

Your Superintendent has granted permission for me to elicit data collection from parents with students presently enrolled in home schooling. I am requesting your assistance in gathering data about your experiences with home learning, by allowing me to interview you.

The topic of my study is “Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School”. The purpose of this study is to qualitatively describe the perceptions and experiences of parents as they reflect on their experiences with home learning programs and the impact it has on their family. Through qualitative data analysis, this study will attempt to determine common thread in parental perceptions as they identify what motivates them to choose to home school their children.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and all reasonable efforts will be made to ensure your identity remains anonymous. Reporting of results in this study will not identify individual participants, schools or jurisdictions. Your perceptions and views are critical to the objectives of this research as it is ultimately the parent who is the first teacher of their children and it is very important that professional educators understand why you choose to have your children learn at home. It is my objective to dispel the myths surrounding home learning, to open a dialogue that will lead to a deeper understanding, to increase tolerance and support and to improve the relationship between public schools and families in your community.

To provide your perspectives, I would like to visit with you, and ask you a number of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview that will last about an hour, or longer if the need arises. It is my intent to audio-record our interview, to assist me in later transcribing your responses and analyzing my data. This will also allow me to check back with you to ensure that I do not misinterpret your responses. The data I gather from our interview will be held strictly confidential, and will be used only for my dissertation research. Upon successful defense of my dissertation, all records and transcriptions will be destroyed.

I look forward to having an opportunity to visiting with you at some later time, to share the results of my study as this is an important phase of my research and will be completed prior to its conclusion.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (403) 653-4958 or my advisor Dr. Roberta D. Evans at (406) 243-5877. Thank you, in advance, for your time and significant contribution to this study.

Respectfully yours,

Nolen B. Olsen, Doctoral Candidate
The University of Montana-Missoula
Graduate School – Department of Educational Leadership

APPENDIX G. PARTICIPANT COVER LETTER 3

Return Address

DATE

Inside Address

Dear Teacher:

RE: Teacher Cover Letter

I am nearing completion of my doctorate in educational leadership at The University of Montana in Missoula. Your Superintendent and Principal have granted permission to me to approach you to participate in research for my doctoral dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is "Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School." One of the focuses of this study is to qualitatively describe the perceptions and experiences of teachers as they observe students in home schooling programs and the impact it has on their school. Through qualitative data analysis, this study will attempt to determine common thread in teachers' perceptions as they identify what motivates parents to choose to home educate their children.

This case study research will provide a unique and needed look into the perceptions and beliefs of family decision-makers, in your school community, who choose to opt out of school-based programs and engage in home schooling programs. As we better understand what motivates parents to choose to have their children learn at home, both school administrators and teachers will be better equipped to counsel and advise families prior to their commencing a home schooling program. Ultimately, it is my hope that results of this study will serve to inform you of ways to better serve the needs of all learners and their caregivers.

Your school jurisdictions has experienced state of declining enrollment in their recent past and their ability to attract and keep students in the public school classroom may determine the viability and ultimate survival of schools. If parents are pulling students out of regular school programs because of dissatisfaction with educational opportunities or perceived injustices, it is of benefit to the school to better understand these issues so resolutions may be found. Dr. Brian Higgins (2000) noted, "Listening to and understanding the home school community's difficulties with public education may provide us with the insight needed for curriculum revision, change, and the eventual evolution to improved services and programs for all learners."

As a participant in this study, you will participate in a face-to-face interview with me. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview lasting from 30 minutes to 1 hour. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded, so that it can be later transcribed to allow me to conduct a thorough analysis of the data collected. I have pre-determined these questions, but through the nature of open-ended questioning I anticipate that other questions will emerge as we get to the heart of this issue.

I have included a copy of a letter of permission from your superintendent and principal, and an informed consent form. I assure you that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Reporting of results will not identify jurisdictions or schools or any information that can identify participants in this study.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (403) 653-4958 or my advisor Dr. Roberta D. Evans at (406) 243-5877. Thank you, in advance, for your time and significant contribution to this study.

Sincerely yours,

Nolen B. Olsen, Doctoral Candidate
The University of Montana-Missoula
Graduate School – Department of Educational Leadership

APPENDIX H. EDUCATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Educator Interview Questions

Please self-identify: I am currently a principal (or teacher) who is employed in a school that has been affected by home schooling. – OR – I am not currently a principal (or teacher) who is employed in a school that has been affected by home schooling.

1. How long have you been an educator? (as teacher? As administrator?)
2. Please think back to the first experience you had with home schooling. What do you recall? What other experiences have you had with home schooling and/or home schoolers?
3. What is your opinion of home schooling?
4. Has a student ever left your classroom because a parent elected to home school him/her? How did you feel? What was your opinion of their decision?
5. Have you ever had a home-schooled child join your classroom? How did this influence your opinion of home schooling?
6. What is your overall perception of home schooling at the present time?
7. Are you acquainted with home schooling families in your community? Why do you think they do it?
8. What do you perceive are the advantages and disadvantages of home learning? Which outweighs the other?
9. How are home school families/parents/students treated in the community at large? How has this changed over the years?
10. Is there anything you can/could have done to convince parents to keep their children in school? Why or why not?
11. What have you done, or what do you do, to try to attract home-schooled students back into the regular school program? (if anything)
12. In your view, can teachers learn anything from home learning that would improve teaching practices and enhance student learning? Please explain.
13. Is there anything else I need to know about your school and its relationship with home schooling families?

APPENDIX I. PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Parent Interview Questions

1. How long have you home schooled your children?
2. Please think back to the time that you first considered home schooling as an option for your child. What led you to finally make this decision?
3. What influenced your decision have your children learn at home?
4. What influence, if any, did actions/inactions of school personal contribute to your decision?
5. How did the potential for funding (for a home school program) impact your decision?
6. What effects has home schooling had on your family life?
7. How has home learning affected relationships with other people in your community?
8. Did religious beliefs contribute to your decision? If so, how?
9. If you were to return your children to a public school, what would first have to change? In the school? In your home? Anything else?
10. Take a moment and then I would like you to rank, in order of importance, the “top 5 factors” that contributed to your decision to learn at home.
 - a. Now, what are the “top 5 factors” that contribute to your “continuing” to home school?
11. What do you think is most misunderstood by your community about home schooling?
12. If you could change anything about public education, what would it be?
13. If you could change anything about home schooling, what would it be?
14. What would you like educators to know about home schooling?
15. Is there anything else you think I need to know about learning at home, the decision making process you went through to start it, and what schools need to change?

APPENDIX J. IRB CLEARANCE

#271-07



The University of
Montana

Legal Counsel
133 University Hall
The University of Montana
Missoula MT 59812
Phone (406) 243-4742
Fax (406) 243-2797

Date: December 27, 2007
To: Nolen B. Olsen and Dr. Roberta Evans, Educational Leadership
From: Claudia Denker, IRB Chair
RE: IRB approval of your proposal: "Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School: A Case Study"

This study has been approved on the date that the "checklist" was signed. If the study requires an Informed Consent Form, please use the "signed and dated" ICF and Assent Forms as "masters" for preparing copies for your study. **Approval continues for one year.** If the study runs more than one year, a continuation form must be approved by **December 26, 2008** or it will need to be resubmitted.

Also, you are required to notify the IRB if there are any significant changes or if unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study. Finally, when you terminate the study, please notify our office in writing so that we can close the file.

Claudia D. Denker
Claudia D. Denker

[attachment(s)]

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Understanding Parental Motivation to Home School: A Case Study

Investigator: Nolen B. Olsen
Contact Information: e-mail: nolen.olsen@westwind.ab.ca
Telephone: (403) 653-4958 or (403) 653-2513
Mailing Address: Box 24, Mountain View, Alberta, Canada
T0K 1N0
Committee Chairperson: Dr. Roberta Evans
Telephone Number: (406) 243-5877

I. INTRODUCTION

You are invited to take part in a doctoral research study. Before you choose to participate in this study, you need to understand the potential risks and benefits associated with it. This form provides information about the study. The investigator of the research study will be available to answer your questions and provide further explanations, should you require it. If you agree to take part in the research study, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview, which should take approximately 30 - 60 minutes. Your responses will be audio-recorded to assist me in transcribing your responses and later conducting an analysis of data.

Your decision to take part in the study is completely voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not you will proceed with the interview at any time.

II. PURPOSE

As a doctoral student in the Graduate School at The University of Montana in Missoula, this researcher is conducting this research study as a requirement for the degree, Doctor of Education. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the reasons parents choose to initiate a home schooling program for their children. Further, the researcher will attempt to determine how well informed school personnel are of these reasons and if there are implications for changes in policy or practice.

The study will take place entirely within the geographic area of Southern Alberta, Zone 6. The investigator (person in charge of this research study) is Mr. Nolen B. Olsen, Doctoral Candidate.

III. PROCEDURES

If you are a home schooling practitioner, your family is one of twenty home schooling families selected to participate in the study. If you are a school administrator or teacher, your school is one of six schools selected in your school jurisdiction. Subsequent to receiving permission to conduct this research, from your jurisdiction Superintendent and principal, you received a cover letter outlining my research objectives. The total amount of

time you will be asked to participate in this study is approximately 30-60 minutes, depending upon the interview process and any follow-up that may be needed.

IV. POSSIBLE RISKS

To the best of the investigator's knowledge, the research activity that you will participate in will pose no greater psychological stress or risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. However, if anything arises in the course of the interview that you wish to remove from the interview record, you are free to do so.

VI. POSSIBLE BENEFITS

There should be no expected personal benefits associated with taking part in this research study. The information gained from this study, however, may benefit our collective knowledge of this phenomenon and inform individuals at some future time. This study may be beneficial for educational leaders, senior level administrators and principals as they determine educational policy and practice so the home/school partnership may be enhanced. It may also benefit teachers and home school practitioners as they reflect on their interactions with each other and with the children they teach.

VII. COSTS

There are no costs associated with taking part in this research study.

VIII. COMPENSATION

You will not receive any financial compensation for participating in this study.

IX. RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY

Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. You may choose to stop participation or withdraw from the study at any time. You will be told of any new information about the research study that may cause you to change your mind about participation.

X. CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH RECORDS

All participant responses will be held confidential. Only the researcher and his faculty supervisor for this dissertation research will be aware of your identity. To protect the identity of participants the researcher will use a pseudo name for each respondent. Participant responses will only be used for research purposes associated with this researcher.

XI. QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the procedures of this research study, please contact Nolen B. Olsen by telephoning (403-653-4958) during the workday or (403-653-2513) during the evening. You may also e-mail any questions to: nolen.olsen@westwind.ab.ca. If you would like to visit with my dissertation chairperson, please call Dr. Roberta Evans (406-243-5877) at The University of Montana-Missoula. If you have questions regarding your

rights as a human research subject, please contact Claudia D. Denker, Associate Legal Counsel/Research Compliance Officer of The University of Montana (406-243-4755).

Thank-you, in advance, for your time and significant contribution to this study.

Respectfully,

Nolen B. Olsen
Doctoral Candidate
The University of Montana-Missoula
Graduate School – Department of Educational Leadership

APPENDIX K. VOLUNTARY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

Voluntary Consent to Participate

I certify that I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all of my questions and concerns have been addressed/answered to my satisfaction.

Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions that I may have, will also be answered by a member of the research team. As such, I voluntarily agree to take part in this educational research study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed (Typed) Name of Participant: _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher: Nolen B. Olsen, Doctoral Candidate

The University of Montana—Missoula

APPENDIX L. PARENT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

Parent Demographic Information

Please provide the following information to assist the researcher to better understand the demographic makeup of the families who comprise this study.

1. Please note the communities with this jurisdiction in which you have home schooled your family—and the number of years that you home schooled in this community.							
<i>Community:</i>	<i>1</i>		<i>2</i>		<i>3</i>		
Comment:							
2. Have you ever “moved” because of your decision to home school?						Yes	No
If yes, why?							
3. What is your religious affiliation? (Denomination)							
Comment:							
4. What is your family gross income?							
<i>Below \$40,000</i>		<i>\$40-75,000</i>		<i>\$75-100,000</i>		<i>\$100,000 +</i>	
Comment:							
5. What is the current marital status of parents in this family? (<i>Check the one that applies</i>)							
<i>Married (living together):</i>		<i>Single:</i>		<i>Divorced (living apart):</i>		<i>Common Law:</i>	
Comment:							
6. What is the highest education level of parents?				<i>Mother:</i>		<i>Father:</i>	
Comment:							
7. Does either parent have teacher training?				<i>Mother:</i>		<i>Father:</i>	
<i>If so, describe:</i>							
8. Children		<i>How Many?</i>		<i>Boys:</i>		<i>Girls:</i>	
How many are home schooled (at least 50% of the time)?				<i>Boys:</i>		<i>Girls:</i>	
Comment:							

APPENDIX M. EXAMPLE OF DATA ANALYSIS

<i>Horizontalization</i>	<i>Cluster Meaning Statements (Themes)</i>	<i>Patterns/Core Topics</i>
<p>“...don’t want my kids to learn the facts of life on the playground.” Allen (p. 23)</p> <p>“...our kids, who used to get along, now wouldn’t play with each other.” Shaw (p. 12)</p> <p>“...our son threw his back in the garbage because his new friends said it was stupid.” Wayne (p. 10)</p> <p>“...our son was ostracized by the other kids because he wasn’t wearing the right shoes. He started to get bullied a lot and the school wouldn’t do anything about it.” Holland (p. 3) – Main Reason</p> <p>“...our grade 3 son used to be best friends with his little brother, but they started to fight because the older boy started to think it wasn’t cool to play with a little kid. School was wrecking our family.” Beck (p. 16) – Main Reason</p> <p>“...we want our kids to grow up to be more peer independent—that way when they are confronted with tough value decisions, they will be better equipped to make the right choices.” Marshall (p. 9)</p> <p>Described a bullying situation and inappropriate things their children learned from peers – Pilling (p. 2 & 4) – Main Reason</p> <p>“...our son was labeled by his peers as a nerd—then the bullying started.” Nish (p. 5 & 10)</p> <p>A desire for peer independence mentioned by – Albright (p. 2-3); Williams (p. 4); Shaw (p. 5); Henderson (p. 7)</p>	<p>Perceived Negative Influences</p> <p>Social Stratification</p> <p>Effect on Home Life</p>	<p>Peer Socialization</p>