

Day to Day Operations of Home School Families: Selecting from a Menu of Educational Choices to Meet Students' Individual Instructional Needs

Kenneth V. Anthony (Corresponding author)

College of Education, Mississippi University for Women, USA

E-mail: kanthony@edhs.muw.edu

Susie Burroughs

College of Education, Mississippi State University, USA

E-mail: sburroughs@colled.msstate.edu

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Abstract

This study examined the day to day operations of home schools. The case study method was used with four families from a larger pool of families that held membership in a home school organization. Data was gathered using interviews, observations, and artifacts. Findings suggest that these families operated their home schools using traditional methods to reach progressive goals. The families operated their home schools much as a person in a restaurant would choose food from a menu. They identified instructional goals and selected methods from a variety of choices available to them including courses taught through a home school cooperative, community colleges, online courses, video instruction, and individual study. Public schooling was not an option available to them. Traditional schools can learn from this home school model as it serves as a resource that supports individual learning goals rather than as the sole distributor of knowledge in a community. (Words=149)

Keywords: Home school, Home education, Educational choice, Parental control, Curriculum decision-making

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an in depth knowledge of the day to day activities of home school families in order to better understand the instructional techniques and curriculum decisions that contribute to the success of home education as an educational treatment. Of particular interest were home education practices that could be useful in traditional education settings. In describing her work Mead (1996) wrote, "We have tried to do only two things: either to convey that some one aspect of human behavior could be organized differently- such as adolescence, or a proneness to heavy drinking, or a sensitivity to art- or to convey the extent to which cultures differ from one another" (p. 31). This study will attempt to do a similar thing in education. Most Americans are educated through traditional means, and consequently, they fail to comprehend why or appreciate that some people in our society choose to educate their children differently than the majority.

Since the late 19th century, education in America has been associated with publicly funded schools and compulsory attendance (Basham, 2001; Knowles, Muchmore, & Spaulding, 1994). Beginning in the late 19th century, public education grew as schools became institutionalized in the form of public schools replacing home education and other forms of education as the dominant practice in America. The current home school movement is an outgrowth of the liberal reaction against public schools in the 1960s (Knowles, Marlow, & Muchmore, 1992). From its austere beginning it quickly grew into a group that, if considered as a separate school district, would be larger than the New York City public school system (Hill, 2000). The growth of the movement and its significant departure from the educational norms in America have made it an interesting subject of study for those interested in studying how humans can organize differently to teach and learn.

To date, the focus of home school research has been on the reasons why people choose to home school and the academic and social success of home school students (Basham, 2001; Carper, 2000; Jeub, 1994; Klicka, 2002; Knowles et al., 1994; Princota & Bielick, 2006; Ray, 2000). Little research has been conducted that examines what exactly goes on in the day to day activities of a home school child (Barratt-Peacock, 2003; Cizek, 1993; Knowles,

1991). The study described herein focused on the day to day activities of home school students and their families. This study is important for several reasons. As an educational treatment, home education has been shown to be as effective for those students who are homeschooled as traditional forms of education are for those who are educated in traditional schools (American College Test, 2008; Basham, 2001; Collum, 2005; Homeschool Legal Defense Association, 2004, 2005; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; Ray, 2000; Rudner, 1999; Smith, 2007). The question then becomes, what things are being done in home education that can be useful in traditional education? Because of its potential influence on our society, it is important to understand the phenomenon of home education at the classroom level. This study is informed by two lines of research. The first is an effort to place home schooling in its historical and cultural context. The second is prevailing criticism of home schooling.

2. Review of Literature

The first line of research is the cultural and historical context. In 2005, Brian Ray, president of the National Home Education Research Institute estimated over 2.5 million students were home schooled in the United States (Roberts, 2005). Other studies estimate the number between 1.2 and 1.7 million students in America (Lines, 2000; McDowell & Ray, 2000). Home school students may represent as much as 2.4% (Basham, 2001) or 3.4% (Rhodes as cited in Basham, 2001) of the school age population in the United States. More recent data reported the number of home schooled students at 1.1 million in 2003 and 1.5 million in 2007 (Bielick, 2008). Despite the disparity in the estimated numbers of home school students it is evident that home schooling has become a viable option for a significant minority of Americans. As home schooling grows in the United States and home schooled students attend college and move into the workforce, it is inevitable that they will begin to have a significant impact on American society. According to McDowell and Ray (2000): "The home education movement is a growing one. Its numbers are growing, its acceptance is growing and its power to affect the political environment is growing." (p. 1) The growth of home education highlights the importance of this group of students as significant for study. If McDowell and Ray's assessment of the movement is correct, home schooled children will have a large impact on our society as adults, and an understanding of their educational background is important.

Knowles, et al., (1994) described the beginnings of the modern home school movement among liberal education reformers including John Holt, in the 1960s and 1970s who advocated home education as the most humane place to educate children. This changed in the 1990s when "Christian fundamentalists... swelled the ranks of home-educating parents" (Knowles, 1991, p. 205). Today, though home schooled students "run the full range of the societal spectrum from religious conservatism, to moderate views, to liberal humanism" (Knowles et al.). Some maintain that home schoolers as a whole are "not a cross-section of the public" (Rudner, 1999, p. 28). This however conflicts with a study conducted by Yang and Kayaardi in 2004 where it was found that there were no significant differences in demographic, religious, socio-economic, or family structure characteristics between families that home school their children and those who do not. A limitation of the study was that the home school families involved in the study represented only 2.4% of the sample. Hence, additional research is needed to draw more definitive conclusions.

Earlier studies indicate that home school families tend to be intact as well as more affluent, white, socially conservative, and religiously fundamental (Basham, 2001; Knowles, 1991; Princiotta & Bielick, 2006). These demographic characteristics place many who are home schooled on paths to academic, economic, and social success. It is possible that many future leaders in our communities will be the product of home schools. In fact, that is one of the goals of many home school networks. They aim to produce leaders who will impact their community by spreading the social and religious beliefs they have learned while home schooled (Klicka, 2002). Knowles et al. (1992) stated that "home schools became grounds of and for ideological conservative, religious expressions of educational matters which symbolized the conservative right's push towards self determination" (p. 227). An understanding of the cultural and historical context of the home school movement provides some with comfort that it provides a model for educational success for families, but others see home schooling as a danger to both individual students and American society.

The second line of research concerns criticism of home schooling. While much of the discussion surrounding home schooling is favorable or neutral towards home education, criticism does exist. An analysis of the criticisms indicates that the criticisms are generally are opinion based and theoretical or philosophic in nature. For example, Lubienski (2003) wrote that home school students would have performed just as well in other settings; therefore, the home school claims of a superior teaching environment are overstated. Other criticisms center on the effect home schooling has on the society as a whole and on the socialization of the home school student.

The most significant criticism waged against home schooling is that it undermines the civic foundation of American society (Apple, 2000; Lubienski, 2000). Lubienski argued that home schooling "undermines public education's

singular potential to serve as a democratic institution promoting the common good” (p. 211). Home schooling removes money and students from the public schools that can help them be successful (Lubienski, 2000). Apple and Lubienski criticized what they saw as a consumer mentality towards education: parents making decisions based on what is best for their children without regard for how it affects others. Kohn (as cited in Lubienski, 2000) wrote, “This is part of a general trend with active and affluent parents to pursue the best possible advantages for their own children—even if it means hurting other children’s chances” (p. 209).

Lubienski (2000) echoed Kohn, stating that “home schooling denies democratic accountability and disenfranchises the community from its legitimate interest in education” (p. 229). While reinforcing Kohn’s idea of consumerism, Lubienski raised another criticism that home schooling pulls the power over education away from an interested public and rests it solely in the hands of the parents. Reich (2002) also criticized the sole control of parents over education. He stated, “Home schooling is the apogee of parental control over a child’s education, where no other institution has a claim to influence the schooling of the child. Parents serve as the only filter for a child’s education, the final arbiters of what gets included and what gets excluded” (p. 4). Reich also believed that parental limitations restrict students’ access to information that they will need in the future: “Students should encounter materials, ideas, and people that they or their parents have not chosen or selected in advance” (p. 58).

Reich’s assertion presented in the previous paragraph alludes to what is probably the most cited concern by outsiders about home schooling: the lack of student socialization. Reich (2002) built his argument against home schooling by stating that home schooling insulated students from diverse ideas and people. The idea of socialization was raised in a *Newsweek* article by Kantrowitz and Wingert (1998) where they cited critics who believed that home school children would not acquire adequate academic and social skills needed to participate in our democratic society. Kantrowitz and Wingert proclaimed that “social isolation can be especially damaging in the middle school years” (p. 64).

Aside from the damage to the student who is not seen as being adequately socialized in the home school environment, the philosophical question of privatization was raised by Apple (2000). He saw home schooling as a part of a larger movement in America from public institutions to private institutions: “The movement toward homeschooling mirrors the growth of privatized consciousness in other areas of society.... It is the equivalent of gated communities and of the privatization of neighborhoods, recreation, parks, and so many other things” (p. 66). Apple compared home schooling to the Internet because it enables the creation of “virtual communities which are perfect for those with specialized interests” (p. 67).

These criticisms focused on the relationship between the individual, or individual family, and society. The fear was that the individual will follow his own path to success at the detriment of or with little concern for the greater community. The critics feared that this will hurt the greater society. Are these concerns valid? A detailed understanding of the day to day operations of home schools can provide critics and concerned observers with data to make their own decisions about the criticisms delineated above.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study sought to fill a perceived gap in the literature on home schooling by exploring the day to day operations of home schools. It was part of a larger study of home school family motivations (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010), curriculum choices, and challenges. To this end, the research was guided by two lines of research. The first was intended to place home schooling in a larger historical and cultural context. The second was designed to present criticism of home schooling as a method and movement. Because of the nature of the questions the study sought to answer, the case study method was employed. As explained by Merriam (1998), “Case study is appropriate when the object of an evaluation is to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of a program” (p. 39). Data collection was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What does home education look like day to day?
- ii. What types of teaching strategies does the parent use?
- iii. What is the nature of the instructional environment?
- iv. What can be learned from home school instruction that will be of value to traditional education?

3.2 Sample

Four home school families that were active in a home school organization that operated in the southeastern U.S. were chosen and agreed to participate in a year-long study. The home school organization the families were affiliated with was a cooperative that embraced a classical approach to education. Readers can find more

information about the classical approach to education in *The trivium: The liberal arts of logic, grammar, and rhetoric* (Joseph, 2002). The organization was made up of primarily religiously conservative families. Though chosen from the same home school organization, the families transitioned to home schooling before they joined the group. The criteria for choosing the families were that they (a) had at least three years of home school experience, (b) had children they were currently home schooling, and (c) had at least one child who had completed the home school education and had moved on to college or into the work force. These criteria were chosen to insure a study cohort with extensive experience with home education that was willing to candidly discuss their home schooling experience.

Glesne (2006) wrote that homogeneity sampling can be used to describe a subgroup in depth. The researchers used purposive homogeneity sampling from a home school group of religious conservative families in order to find a sample that would provide a rich detailed description of the research problem. This narrow sampling increases the depth of the findings of the study but limits the transferability to other groups who differ from the sample. Table One provides demographic data on the sample families.

3.3 Procedures

Data for this study were gathered through (a) interviews with the parents and children, (b) informal discussions during and after periods of observations, (c) observation of the families at home, (d) observations of home school group activities, and (e) collection of artifacts (student work samples and weekly logs). Interview protocols were scripted using open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, comprehensive dialogue from the participants. Observations were conducted in the homes of the homeschoolers in an effort to “gather data about the ‘lived’ experience of participants” (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 125).

Data analysis began with an initial set of domains that emerged from the review of the literature. As additional domains emerged during the data analysis, the set expanded accordingly. QSR’s NVivo 8 software was used to code the data collected during the interviews and the observations. Data charts and matrices were used to analyze the information gathered within and across the four cases that was relevant to the research questions. Supporting data from both parents and children as well as from the multiple data sources were identified to elicit major findings of the study. Peer review and participant checks were utilized to confirm the trustworthiness of the study’s findings and conclusions. The trustworthiness of the data was also bolstered by the facts that the data were collected over a period of a year and multiple data points within and across the cases were used to support each finding.

3.4 Researcher’s Roles

The researchers are from a public school background. Both were educated and taught in public schools. The primary researcher is from a conservative religious background, and he has peers who have home schooled or consider home schooling as an educational option for their children. The primary researcher used connections with an individual in the home school cooperative to facilitate the research proposal to the group and to recruit participants from the larger group. There was a danger that some participants would be overly accommodating and provide the researcher data that he was looking for in an effort to help him complete the project. To control for this the researchers reinforced the idea that the goal was to get a balanced view of home schooling, including the good, the bad, and the ugly. Efforts described above were taken to control for bias and confirm the trustworthiness of the study’s findings and conclusions. The exclusive criteria for selection of participants also meant that members of the sample were comfortable with their role as home schoolers and were not threatened by the idea of sharing their private lives with the researcher and were more open to share both their successes and failures.

4. Results

4.1 Within Case Analysis

4.1.1 Smith Family

The Smiths operated their home school in a very flexible and open environment. They received most of their instruction from the cooperative and Jane (the mother) served to support the children’s efforts to complete the assigned work and study for tests. The primary mode of instruction was reading, including read aloud and silent reading. The Smiths viewed the author as a teacher. Reading helped the Smiths build learner independence. Jane used other teaching strategies, including direct questioning, technology, and memorization. The nature of the instructional environment on the surface appeared to be very conventional or traditional, because it included memorization, a significant amount of reading, and little of what would be considered progressive methods, but a closer look indicated that the educational efforts were progressive in that they were designed to provide the student with both the skills and knowledge that allowed him or her to be independent learners. The goal was not the accumulation of facts and knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but the accumulation of facts and knowledge to be

used in the production of new and independent ideas and products. The production of new ideas and products was not designed only for the school years, but for life.

There was a traditional or conservative goal in the Smiths' home school as they aimed to preserve and pass on their Christian worldview. The Smiths' home school was similar to other educational environments in that it could not be described as either progressive or conservative, but rather as a mixture of the two. One thing that is of value to traditional educational settings was the use of reading to develop independent learners. This began early and rather than viewing reading as a subject, it was viewed as a tool to develop educational autonomy in students.

The Smiths' curriculum was based on a Biblical worldview, but was designed to provide the children with a liberal, balanced education. Their curriculum was primarily provided by the cooperative. The family's stated goal was to teach their students to learn on their own. They based their curriculum decisions on their children's needs and desires and on their assessment of their progress. Their curriculum decisions also indicated the progressive nature of their home school. Their efforts were focused on the children's learning rather than on a particular program or curriculum.

4.1.2 Johnson Family

The Johnsons operated their home school in varied ways depending on the age of the children. The older children were basically independent. They received direct instruction from the parent-teachers at the cooperative and worked independently to complete their assignments at home. The majority of their assignments were reading. Independent reading was the primary mode of instruction for the older children. They received almost no direct instruction at home from their mother. The primary mode of instruction for the younger children was reading also, but the mother read aloud to them. Cynthia (the mother) would ask questions and check for understanding as she read aloud to Caitlin (age 8) and Conner (age 6). Her main role with Calvin (age 16) and Caroline (age 13) was to keep the younger children from distracting them. Cynthia provided one-on-one tutoring to both Caitlin and Conner for math, phonics, grammar, and composition.

Memorization was an important instructional method. All of the children had to memorize passages of scripture from the *Bible*, poems, speeches, writings, and facts. This was part of the classical curriculum. The information memorized would help them write and speak better. The facts would also be applied at a later date to create a new product or idea in other classes.

The Johnsons operated their home school using both traditional and progressive methods. Their overall goal was conservative. They aimed to transmit their Christian beliefs through their home school, but they also wanted to develop independent learners. They used traditional teaching methods to achieve the progressive goal of creating learners who had the skills and knowledge to learn without help from a teacher.

The Johnsons' curriculum was primarily classical. Besides being classical it was based on a conservative Christian worldview. Their religious motivations to home school were reflected in their home school curriculum. They did not want to shelter their children, but wanted to give their children a broad, liberal education while using their religious beliefs as guidelines. The bulk of their curriculum was provided by the cooperative. They based their curriculum decisions on what was best academically and developmentally for their children. The Johnsons saw the curriculum as an integrated whole. Everything was connected. They used history as the organizing subject and attempted to link the other subjects studied to it. The desire to integrate their curriculum and remove artificial subject boundaries was an example of the progressive nature of their curriculum. The desire to transmit their belief system to their children was an example of the conservative or traditional nature of their curriculum.

4.1.3 Harbor Family

The Harbors were more structured than the other families in the study. Rachel (the mother) required the two boys to be dressed as if they were leaving for school. She also had a room set aside for a classroom. Randy (age 16) and Ray (age 10) received most of their direct instruction from Rachel. Her primary role was to structure their weekly assignment and insure they completed them for Friday classes. The primary teaching strategy was reading. The children also wrote and memorized like the other families. Rachel supplemented their instruction with computer based mathematics programs. She also actively helped them study for tests and provided one-on-one tutorial when needed. She identified her primary role as keeping them on task. She was more directly involved with Ray than with Randy, because Ray was younger and Randy was operating as an independent learner.

The Harbor family home school was run on a more traditional basis. Randy and Ray had set schedules and were more closely monitored than some of the other children. The goal was similar to the other families in that Rachel wanted to support the development of independent learning. She felt she had been successful with Reese and was well on the way with Randy and Ray. Reading, memorization, and writing were the key elements in developing

learner autonomy. She also allowed some student choice and based instructional decisions on student progress and interests indicating elements of progressive education.

The Harbors depended on the cooperative for over 90% of their curriculum. In addition to what the cooperative provided, the Harbors provided mathematics instruction using computer based programs. They also provided foreign language instruction to their children using computer programs. The nature of the curriculum was classical. The family's goal was to provide a liberal education that reinforced their religious beliefs. Future college success was important to the Harbors, and they envisioned extensive reading and writing as the keys to this success. The family was less concerned with academic success as measured on standardized tests and more concerned with the development of their children's character. The family used a mixture of traditional and progressive methods to achieve their curriculum goals.

4.1.4 Riley Family

The Rileys operated their home school based on an autonomous model. Matt (age 15) received his direct instruction from the parent-teachers at the cooperative on Tuesdays and Fridays. Apart from that instruction, he received very little instruction at home. Mary (the mother) did not schedule or control his school work. He was nearly completely independent. He studied when he wanted to and took breaks when he wanted to. The primary thing that Mary did was hold him accountable if necessary. Her goal was for him to become an independent learner and he was almost there during the study. The primary teaching strategies used in their home school were the same as the other families: reading, writing, and memorization. Like the others he did work on hands-on projects and research papers as assigned by the parent-teachers at the cooperative. Mary emphasized the importance of writing in the curriculum. She believed that writing was a way to teach critical thinking. She also believed that reading was the key to independent learning. Their home school relied on both.

Like the other families, the Rileys used traditional methods to achieve progressive goals. Reading, writing, and memorization were used to develop an independent learner. The overarching objective to pass on their religious and cultural heritage along with the skills to be life-long learners was a combination of traditional and progressive goals.

The Rileys' curriculum was traditional in the sense that it was based on a religious worldview and relied on traditional teaching methods. It was progressive in its goal to provide the classical education. Her goal was to provide her children a broad, liberal education that would give them the knowledge and skills to be self learners and critical thinkers. She wanted them to be able to apply their knowledge at a later date to advance and defend their religious views. Because of this, she did not shield him from material that differed from their beliefs, but used divergent beliefs as a way to compare and contrast with their own beliefs. Finally, her curriculum was progressive in that she did not equate education with a location. She believed education was an ongoing process. She sought out different opportunities for her children to learn.

4.2 Cross Case Analysis

4.2.1 Home School Operations

The families in the study operated their home schools in similar ways, because they were all members of the home school cooperative. There were variations at each home school because each family supplemented the cooperative's instruction with mathematics instruction and other courses that their children were interested in or needed because of an academic deficiency. The families all received over 90% of their direct instruction and lessons from the parent-teachers at the cooperative on Friday. The other days of the week the children worked at home with help primarily from their mothers. The curriculum was based on the classical education model and the teaching strategies were primarily reading and memorization. The children would apply knowledge learned through reading and memorization in writing assignments or other learning projects. The cooperative was instrumental in each of the families' home school operation.

4.2.2 Teaching Strategies

The teaching strategies used by the families in the study were primarily traditional. The most important teaching strategy that they used was reading. The families used both independent reading and read aloud as a way to transmit knowledge. They all envisioned the author of the books their children read as teachers. The parents would read aloud to the younger children and the older children would read independently. The families reported that about 70% of the instructional day was spent reading. This was supported by analysis of journals, observation, and other documentary evidence. This finding is significant; it fills a gap in the literature by answering the question what do the children do at home all day.

The children received lectures and participated in discussions at the cooperative's Friday class days. The parent-teachers used methods similar to traditional school settings. The teachers provided course syllabi, lectured,

led discussions, took the children on field trips, gave homework, and tests. The parents in the study generally relied on the grades from the parent-teachers at the cooperative for evaluation of their children's progress. They did have the freedom to not use the grades provided or to conduct additional assessment.

Mondays through Thursdays the children completed assigned work from the previous Friday. If they had questions they asked their parents or emailed or called their teacher. The role of the parent at home during the week varied depending on the age of the children. The parents generally spent most of their time with the younger children and allowed the older children to work independently only intervening when needed. The parents tried to foster learner autonomy by encouraging independent work. The children also studied mathematics from Monday to Thursdays because it was not taught at the cooperative. The amount of parent interaction during mathematics instruction also depended on the age of the children. Like the other courses, there was an inverse relationship between the amount of direct parent student interaction and the age of the child. The families all used commercially produced mathematics programs at one time or another, but the Rileys and Johnsons also used a local for profit educational corporation for higher level instruction.

The instructional environments varied from family to family. This variation depended on the personality of the mother, ages of the children, and number of children in the house. The Harbor house was the most strictly run. The children generally worked in their classroom and were required to be dressed like they were going to traditional school. The Smiths and Johnsons were more relaxed. The children were free to study in their rooms, the kitchen, living room, dining room, or outside. The children generally moved around as they pleased. The most relaxed was the Riley family. Matt was the only child at home and he was in high school. Though his mother wanted more control at times, she had reconciled herself to his independence. Her desire for more control linked back to her past as a school teacher and administrator.

The direct interactions between parents and children were either reading aloud to them or were one-on-one tutorial interventions when children needed help. The parents indicated that their goal was to serve as a guide or helper to their children. They did not see themselves involved in directly teaching their children. This was highlighted by both the parents and children in interviews and during observations. The responsibility for learning was placed primarily on the learners shoulders. The parent was there to provide resources and assistance as needed.

4.2.3 Nature of Instructional Environment

The families' home schools operated somewhere between the highly structured school at home models (Knowles, 1991) and the child-led unschooling model (Rivero, 2002). The classroom instruction and assignments provided by the cooperative provided the school at home part of the operation, but the freedom to study in depth other subjects the children were interested in as well as the ability to opt out of cooperative classes made the home schools appear more like unschooling. The families' abilities to operate between the two extremes indicated a degree of autonomy. The children were provided with a choice of courses from the cooperative, as well as other courses available through distance learning, computer based video instruction, other teachers in the community, and independent study. The families operated their home schools on the premise that education was not linked to a particular place or program, but rather was a process. Because of this they were able to identify their learning goals and provide an educational menu that their children could choose from with help from the parents. In this way the home schools were operated in a more progressive way.

There is some contradiction in the families' operation of their home schools and their stated motivations. The families criticized outcome-based education and other progressive teaching strategies when describing why they home schooled, but they integrated some of those very ideas into their home school practice including journaling, critical thinking, and relying on primary sources over textbooks.

The autonomy that the families achieved through home schooling also gave them autonomy from outside authority. They were not controlled by what a school board or teacher felt was important, but rather what they felt was important. These findings echo the concerns of Apple (2000) and Lubienski (2000). They developed their curriculum using the freedom provided by home schooling. Their motivations to home school included the desire to provide a religious education to their children and they incorporated that into their curriculum. This can be seen by the nature of the history and literature courses, which used the *Bible* as a primary text, the theology classes they taught, and the nature of their science instruction, which focused on a scientific view based on creation science rather than evolution. In this way the home schools were more conservative in nature in that they were trying to maintain and transmit their current values and beliefs. Though they had a conservative goal, they used a mixture of traditional and progressive methods. They also added a progressive goal of developing life long learners. Table 2 includes examples of traditional and progressive aspects of home school operations as observed in each of the families.

The home school families' goals were not just to provide a religious education to their children. They all indicated that they wanted their children to become independent learners. Their reliance on independent reading and writing about what they had read as primary instructional methods were traditional means of teaching. The families intended to use these traditional instructional methods to achieve a more progressive goal. The progressive goal was to develop independent, life-long learners. Barratt-Peacock (2003) identified home schooling practices as historically progressive in that the parents served as guides and tutors and fostered the development of the children into the field of authentic adult practice. In many ways these families are trying to do this. When describing the goals of the families involved in the home school cooperative, Mary Riley made the statement that for the Johnson family, "Education is a way of life." Observations of the interactions between all of the families in the study as well as the fact that the parents are required to teach at least two classes at the cooperative indicated that the families in the study saw education as a way of life and the whole family was involved in learning, not just the children. The families are attempting to create communities of learning within their families. These family communities of learning extended beyond the mother and children. The fathers also would become involved in what the children were learning by finding articles in the news that were related to what the children were studying as well as by incorporating educational objectives into family vacations. Table 2 provides data comparing the traditional and progressive aspects of each home school.

4.2.4 Curriculum

As seen earlier, the majority of the curriculum was provided by the cooperative. Table 3 provides further information on sources of curriculum for each family. That does not mean that the families were passive receivers of the curriculum. They had a say in what courses were taught and the option to choose what they wanted or did not want from the curriculum. There was not always agreement and the cooperative made changes based on input from the families. Notably, they changed the nature of the writing program and they also added an astronomy class. The families in the study also opted out of different classes for a variety of reasons, including disagreements over the nature of the theology class, time available, and student interest in a particular course.

The classical curriculum as provided by the cooperative and the courses they provided at home were designed to be a rejection of what was taught in traditional schools both private and public. All of the families were particularly drawn to the cooperative because of the classical nature of the program. Both Cynthia Johnson and Mary Riley indicated that private schools may have been an option if there was one that taught from the classical model. Though the families rejected the traditional model of education, they did incorporate some of the traditional elements. One notable element was the cooperative's structured classroom instruction. See table three for details about sources of curriculum for each family.

The Johnsons, Smiths, and Rileys readily gave up their autonomy gained from home schooling to the cooperative in exchange for the benefits they saw from the classical education provided and the lessening of their work load. Rachel Harbor was concerned about the autonomy that she was giving up to the cooperative, but still opted to participate.

One interesting aspect of the families' rejection of what they identified as progressive practices in public schools was the fact that they frequently sounded like progressive educators when they described their goals. Another way that they appeared to be progressive was in their evaluation. The families kept samples of their children's best work in folders. When the researcher commented that they kept portfolios, Cynthia Johnson responded that they did not use that word because it was associated with O.B.E. When pressed, she admitted that, in fact, what they were doing was maintaining a portfolio of their children's quality work for evaluation purposes. Their ideological differences with the public schools sometimes made it hard for them to see that what they were doing that was similar to what was done in the public schools.

One way that the families insisted that they were different was in the focus on objective truth. When supporting an opinion or developing a hypothesis or supporting a theory, none of the families would allow the children to indicate how they felt. They were not concerned with the affective domain. They operated in the cognitive domain.

The core of the curriculum for all of the families was history. Their science, literature, and other instruction were linked to the particular time period of history that they studied. They aimed to break down what they felt were artificial barriers between the academic disciplines. Like the early social studies movement, they wanted to harness the knowledge and skills from the varied disciplines to create learners who would become good citizens. The difference was that these families aimed to create good citizens of both the United States and a heavenly kingdom. Once again there is juxtaposition between progressive and traditional goals in the operation of the home schools.

The families attempted to differentiate their curriculum based on their overall educational goals, student need, interest, and age appropriateness. The families made curricular decisions based on several factors. The first was their

belief system. The families tailored their curriculum to reinforce their religious beliefs. This links back to their desire to provide their children with an education that would prepare them to defend and advance their religious beliefs. All of the families indicated that providing their children with an education that was based on their beliefs was a major reason they home schooled. The second factor was student needs or interests. The families adapted the curriculum based on their assessment of the individual student need. This was possible at home, but less so during the instruction at the cooperative on Fridays. At home the families allowed the children to choose what they wanted to study on a day to day basis, some with more freedom than others. The Harbors had the least amount of daily freedom and the Rileys had the most freedom. The Harbors exercised more control primarily because of Rachel's personality. The Rileys had more freedom because of Matt's personality. If a student was behind, the parents would adapt the daily instructional activities to get caught up. The families would also address student weaknesses in particular subjects. The Harbors and Smiths kept children back one year in math because they were weak. The Rileys and Johnsons were considering allowing Calvin and Matt respectively to graduate early based on their strengths. A fourth factor that influenced curriculum material was appropriateness. The families as a whole were not concerned about subjecting their children to material that deviated from their beliefs, but they did control the ages when material was presented. Some topics were toned down. An example is, when the families studied Homer's *Iliad*, the younger children read a children's version of the book that skipped over the more graphic parts of the poem.

These attempts to differentiate curriculum extend findings in the literature. Martin (1997) described the home school environment as adaptable to student strengths and weaknesses and providing curricula that reflects the family's beliefs. Ensign (2000) emphasized the ability of the families to address student learning needs. Rivero (2002) described how home schools allowed families to move forward at their own pace. These families make decisions based on student interests and needs as well as allow their children control over what they study in school. Children have significant input, but parents maintain a veto over a child's decision.

The families operated their home schools in a way that they felt would result in a superior education for their children. In response to concerns some critics raise about the greater societal good (Apple, 2000; Lubienski, 2000; Reich, 2002) these families state that they are helping society. They believed that by providing a qualitatively different education to their children they were helping the nation. They felt that rather than preparing their children for narrow careers or jobs, they were preparing their children for life and to be leaders in the community.

5. Discussion

What can be learned from this study of four home school families that helps outsiders and critics better understand home schooling or is applicable to traditional schooling? First the families operated their home schools using a combination of traditional and progressive approaches. Though their primary teaching strategies were traditional, they used them to achieve a progressive end. Their goal was a well rounded, liberally educated adult who could learn and think on his or her own. The second finding was that the primary instructional method was reading. The families viewed the author of a book as the teacher and the reader as the pupil. Reliance on reading as an instructional method resulted in greater learner independence. They felt that the best way to learn was for the learner to grasp difficult ideas through reading. Traditional schools can adopt a similar view of reading and education as well as retreat from the testing mentality and begin to focus on teaching the whole student.

Of particular interest is the idea that the families viewed education as a process. They did not tie education to a specific location or institution. They treated the education of their children as a diner does a menu. They chose the educational opportunities they wanted from a wide variety and implemented them. The choices on their menu included courses at the cooperative, online courses, courses taught by other people in the community, video courses, and dual enrollment at community colleges. Interestingly, the autonomy that these families exercise in educational decision making is not available in many traditional school settings. Children in traditional schools are generally required to receive their entire curriculum from the school with little option to go outside of the school to replace a course offered in the school. This provides a model that schools could adopt that might make them more relevant in the communities they serve. Schools would cease to be the only place associated with learning in a community and would become one of many resources available to families. Families would be empowered to take responsibility for learning with support from the schools. Families would be free to take as much or as little of what the school had to offer.

Important to understanding the day to day operations of home schools is that the families' home school operations were dependent upon the cooperative. The cooperative addressed many of the challenges associated with home schooling, as well as criticisms from outsiders. The cooperative also signified a compromise for the families between the almost total freedom of home schooling and the accountability and support provided by a traditional

school. It was also the vehicle that the families used to provide the classical education to their children. The cooperative provided a way for families to provide socialization opportunities outside of the immediate family as well as teach students necessary skills for future education in more formal settings at a university. The development of formal curricula at the cooperative helps fulfill the Line's (2000) prediction that home school families would develop organizations that began to look like schools. If home school families can adopt the good that traditional schooling has to offer, maybe schools could adopt the good that home schooling has to offer. This idea is more completely developed below.

Apple's (2000) and Lubienski's (2000) concerns about parents exercising independent control of their children's education are reinforced by the findings of this study. These families do take a consumer mentality towards education. They determine what they want their children to learn and choose from a menu of educational choices to reach their goals. The families educate their children autonomous of the traditional educational authorities and public interests (Reich 2002), but are willing to surrender autonomy to the cooperative on their own terms to achieve their educational goals. Interestingly, the parents used their autonomy from the traditional education authorities to develop their children into autonomous learners.

The significant role that the cooperative plays in their home school operations indicates that these families are not necessarily rejecting community, but are searching for a community of learners that meets their educational and philosophical needs. Another interesting finding is that these families are educating their children using private institutions as warned by Apple (2000). These include their family, the cooperative, private educational corporations, commercially produced programs, online courses, and other members of their communities. In response to Reich's (2002) concern about student's exposure to ideas different than their own these families make a concerted effort to teach their students with materials and about ideas that are different than their Christian worldview. Critics can find much to reinforce some of their concerns, but also have some concerns alleviated as they realize that these families are making positive and informed choices about their children's education and future.

Though home schooling will never become a dominant form of education in America, it can have a positive influence on the organization of education in America. The unlinking of the traditional school setting from learning that home schoolers have accomplished, their development of learning goals and subsequent selection of learning choices from a broader educational menu is a model that can influence learning and education in America. This model swings the pendulum of responsibility for education away from the school in the direction of families who will be empowered to make positive decisions in the best interest of their children with as much or little help from the traditional schools. Schools will remain the primary purveyors of most educational opportunities, but families would have the flexibility to substitute or reinforce instruction without penalty.

6. Implications

This study resulted in several implications for future practice and research. The first implication of the study was based on the flexibility that these families exercise in their home schools. These families' educational menu approach includes many options, but not public schools. Two of the families indicated that they would opt into some public school activities and classes if allowed. The Johnsons actually tried to participate in limited public school sponsored activities, but were denied because they were unwilling to enroll completely in the school. The findings of this study indicate that at least some home school families would be willing to participate in public schools activities. This is important because it would help to reduce some of the barriers between the public schools and home school families. The ability to opt into limited activities provides additional choices to the home school families' menu of choices, and it would increase the public school's part-time enrollment resulting in more revenue based on student attendance. The literature also supports the importance of future partnerships between public and home schools (Hill, 2000; Lines, 2000).

A second implication was the idea that education is a process and not linked to a particular place or institution. As home schools are evolving and developing institutions that look something like schools (Lines, 2000), schools can change too. One way is for the traditional school to operate as a community resource that provides educational resources, including instruction to members of the community. Rather than being the sole purveyor of knowledge, the schools would be a tool that people can use to achieve their individual family educational goals and needs. This would seem to reduce the influence of the schools in the community, but as members of the community took more responsibility for their own individual learning, the school would become more relevant because it would be meeting differentiated educational needs based on consumer type demand rather than guessing what is best for students and providing a similar education to all.

A third implication was the importance of reading to home school operations. Reading accounted for 70% of the instructional day at home. The students received limited lecture and discussions on Fridays at the cooperative and

spent the vast majority of Monday through Thursday reading. This indicates the importance of reading as an instructional method. Reading was not seen as a subject that students took or a skill they learned separately; rather it was a tool necessary to learning. Because of this they did not place much emphasis on learning to read; rather they read to study other subjects and in the process learned to read. This idea could be incorporated into other traditional education settings because it would help develop more independent learners and allow for very individualized instruction as the learner-reader chose or was given a book to read and learned from the teacher-author.

A fourth implication was the significance of the cooperative. As Hill (2000) predicted, these families had become part of an organization that look something like a school. The cooperative was instrumental to the parents' ability to provide the classical education. It also helped address some of the problems associated with home schooling most notably socialization and the teaching of difficult or unfamiliar material.

The final implication of this study is that it filled an important gap in the literature identified by Cizek (1993). Cizek stated that research was needed that described what home educators do, and this study has provided a description of their day-to-day activities. The findings of this study add to the literature by providing a better understanding of what home school families do while most of American children are sitting in desks.

This study was designed to increase understanding of the day to day operations of home schools. The study focused on religiously conservative families who participated in a cooperative. Focusing on religiously conservative families is recognized to be a limitation; therefore, it is recommended that a similar study be conducted focusing on non-religious families that home school for strictly pedagogical reasons. Something that was not anticipated was the similarities found between the home school practices of these families because of the huge influence the cooperative had over their home school operations. Because of this it is recommended that a similar study be conducted of families who home school independently to see what differences are found.

The importance of the cooperative to these families' home school operations leads to a final recommendation. Further research is needed to determine the role of cooperatives in home schools nationwide. Is this a growing phenomenon? Do other home school cooperatives operate similar to the one in the current study? How did families develop the cooperatives? What challenges did families deal with as they came together to form cooperatives? Was it difficult to give up their freedom to others even if voluntary?

One implication of the research noted earlier was the idea that public schools could allow home school families to opt into some programs. If this is to happen further research is needed to determine what barriers exist on both sides to making this happen. In the state where this study was conducted, many school officials will not allow home school families to participate in public school activities. When a bill was introduced in the state's legislature to allow limited home school involvement in public schools, the bill was defeated by home school advocates. This indicates that there are concerns on both sides of the debate. In order to understand these concerns, further research is needed into how home school students have opted into public schools in areas where it is allowed.

7. Conclusion

Neumann and Aviram (2003) described home schooling as a fundamental change in lifestyle. It can also be described as a fundamentally different way to educate. Home school families have moved education from the place of school to the larger world, opening increased educational opportunities for their children. Traditional schools have the opportunity to learn from these families and open the closed school to the larger world, providing increased choice and opportunity to the students and the communities they serve. Schools can become resources providing educational options to families. School would cease to be synonymous with education, but would be one option on a larger menu of educational opportunities.

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Table 1. Sample demographics

	Johnson Family	Harbor	Smith Family	Riley Family
Family structure	Intact	Intact	Intact	Intact
Father's occupation	Constitutional Lawyer	Business owner	University employee (non faculty)	Business owner
Mother's educational level	B.S. History	Some college	Some college	B.S. Education/M.S. Education administration
Children in home school	Male (16), Female (13), Female (8), Male (6)	Male (16), Male (10)	Male (15), Female (8)	Male (15)
Children in college	Male (20), Female(18)	Female (18)	Male (18)	None
Adult children out of college or work force	None	None	None	Female (26), Male(25)
Children ever in private school?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Children ever in public school?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2. Traditional and progressive aspects of home school operations

Case	Traditional	Progressive	Observation
Smiths	<p>Mother: “You memorize things that are in your head and at a later point they remember it. They put things together. It’s training for self discipline.”</p> <p>Researcher: “What types of things do your children memorize?”</p> <p>Mother: “Lots of scripture. Things that go along with history. Some Shakespeare. Usually history.”</p>	<p>Mother: “Critical thinking makes them think logically and be able to understand what they read.”</p>	<p>Higher level thinking: Son had to evaluate syllogisms then write his own syllogisms</p>
Johnsons	<p>Father: “That’s one of our greatest frustrations with the public school approach is the way they tinker with pulling out phonics and the whole language approach and all this spelling is another... it almost appears as if there is a concentrated effort to keep kids from learning how to read and reading quality material”</p>	<p>Father: “The word we like to utilize is integration. In our history we try to integrate with our science which we integrate with our literature, and hopefully it all ties together so that they’ll understand”</p>	<p>Freedom to move: The two older children continued to work independently while the younger boy moved about playing with the dogs and the younger daughter moved to the kitchen table to work on grammar with the mother.</p>
Harbors	<p>Mother: “What we are having them read is not just fun or entertainment but actually to teach them how our culture developed. Why we are where we are. Why we think the way we do. Those kinds of things. Those shaping influences have shaped the people who have gone before us.”</p>	<p>Mother: “We are even exposing them to ideas that we wouldn’t necessarily agree with their stance or their philosophy; they greatly influenced the people before us so for that reason we do a whole lot of reading.”</p>	<p>Books used in curriculum and on book shelf in “school room” at house include works that go against the families’ conservative religious beliefs.</p>
Rileys	<p>Mother: “They read all the time. Books and articles. I feel the more they read the better the student is.”</p>	<p>Mother: “He is more independent. So he gets his assignments out on Monday and chooses what he wants to do. We don’t have a set thing on times or a set schedule.”</p>	<p>Unlike other families, this parent does not make a lesson plan for the week. The student is responsible and works at his own pace.</p>

Table 3. Sources of curriculum

Family	Courses (offered to all children at home during study)	Source
Smith	Humanities, history, composition, speech, astronomy, art appreciation	Cooperative
	Algebra	Home based, commercial program taught by the mother
	Piano	Private lessons
	Biology	Family friend (professor)
	Social	Soccer, church, Boy Scouts
Johnson	Humanities, literature, history, theology, rhetoric, Latin, composition, biology, music appreciation, fencing	Cooperative
	Astronomy	Online course
	Violin	Private lessons
	Math	Computer based lessons at home and local private education corporation
Harbor	Composition, biology, humanities, rhetoric, grammar, astronomy, theology, literature, Latin, fencing	Cooperative
	Piano	Private lessons
	Geometry	Computer based lessons at home
	Pre-algebra	Home based, commercial program taught by mother
	Social activities	Boy Scouts, church
Riley	Composition, history, science, astronomy, Latin, music appreciation, theology, literature, humanities	Cooperative
	Math	Local private education corporation
	Social	Church worship band