

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY INVESTIGATING THE INFLUENCE OF HOMESCHOOL  
PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESS ON THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

by

William Ronald Johnson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this instrumental multiple case study was to understand how a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. defines success as it pertains to their children's education, and how their ideas about success influence the learning environment that they established. The study examined the cases of eight homeschool families from the perspective of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. I used Tomlinson's methodology of differentiated instruction as the conceptual framework, and I examined the cases with particular emphasis on this framework's primary pedagogical constructs of content, process, and product. I collected data through an open-ended questionnaire, interviews with the parents, primary educator interviews, and a focus group. I coded and analyzed the data using methodological approaches proposed by Stake (1995, 2006) so that I could paint textual pictures of each of the individual cases and present an aggregate portrait of all participant cases. The findings revealed that homeschool families' definitions of success are comprised of academic proficiency, love of learning, ability to think critically, communication skills, healthy relationships, strength of character, and spiritual security. With regard to the learning environment, the findings further revealed that, in order to accomplish these goals, these families focus on curriculum choice, involvement with external educational resources, integration of subjects, teaching to the child's strengths, discussion and questioning, mastery of subject matter, independence, and practical application.

*Keywords:* homeschool, success, sociocultural theory, differentiated instruction

## **Dedication**

I was unaware of a certain irony when I first entered the lifestyle that accompanies writing a dissertation. One of my primary reasons for choosing to undertake such a massive project was simple: to better provide for my wonderful family. I was unprepared, however, for the number of times I'd have to decline throwing the Frisbee or football, turn down a game of Rummikub, shorten or skip altogether our evening family time, or miss out on potential date nights. So while I was collecting and analyzing data on how other families were endeavoring to achieve success through their home education efforts, I was—in many ways—letting things slide in this area in my own home. It helps a little that my family and I had many discussions about these types of concerns and that I had their full support, but only a little.

For this reason and many others, I dedicate this work to my family. Holly, you've been my constant support, research assistant, encourager, and sounding board throughout this entire project. You've patiently listened as I've read just about every page out loud to you, sometimes more than once. Without you by my side, this would not have been possible or worth it. And so you have it in writing, this is my last degree. Sarah, Emma Beth, Julia, and Will, you guys have been my inspiration throughout this endeavor. I'm so very proud of each of you and the way you all are maturing and turning into amazing young adults. I believe that when each of your homeschool educations are over, I'll have learned more from you than you did from me. I have no doubt that you are all on track for success (however one chooses to define it), and I'm proud to have played a role in your achievement of it. I love you all more and more each day.

## **Acknowledgements**

The list of those who have mentored, encouraged, inspired, critiqued, motivated, and guided me throughout this journey is too long to do adequate justice here, but I'll do the best I can. I had my first conversation about taking on this challenge with my good friend, Dr. Wes Smith. He's been monitoring my progress from day one and has encouraged and advised me from the start. Thanks, Wes, for the motivation and encouragement.

To my committee members, Drs. Holubz and Rathmell, and my research consultant, Dr. Swezey, thanks for your frequent critiques and constructive criticism of my various revisions. This final product is far stronger having had you involved in the process.

To my chair, Dr. Collins, thank you for always being available for my every question, no matter how trivial, and for providing such sound advice throughout the process. You were a calming voice of reason at times when stress might otherwise have ruled the day. Not only is my dissertation better for having you as chair, but I am a better person for having worked with you.

Finally, to the study's participant families who opened up your homeschooling lives to my academic scrutiny, I will be forever grateful for your willingness to discuss the issues raised in this study with such transparency and passion. As each of you move forward with your educational endeavors with your children, may you exceed your own expectations of success. May your children take heed of and you take heart in Proverbs 1:8-9: "My child, listen when your father corrects you. Don't neglect your mother's instruction. What you learn from them will crown you with grace and be a chain of honor around your neck." God bless each of you as you strive towards success.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

The modern homeschooling movement is relatively young, having started only in the late 1960s (Gaither, 2008). Since that time, the number of homeschool students increased from approximately 12,500 in 1970 to almost two million in 2012, while homeschooling as a percentage of the overall school-age population grew from 1.1% in 1994 (the first year this statistic was available) to 3.4% in 2012 (Bielick, 2008; Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013). The growth of the movement caused state governments and school districts to examine and adjust regulations and policies that affect the homeschooling population to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are being met (Belfield, 2004). The increased numbers of homeschool graduates have resulted in postsecondary schools changing their admittance policies to accommodate the unique education of these students (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Despite the growth in the numbers of homeschool students and the influence homeschooling has had on educational policy, a large number of homeschool-related areas remain unexplored or underexplored by researchers (Bauman, 2001; Ray, 2004; Waddell, 2010). One area that is lacking in research concerns homeschool parents' definitions of success as it relates to their child's education and the effect these parents' definitions of success have on the homeschool learning environment.

### **Background**

A precise definition of homeschooling is difficult to find in the literature (Murphy, 2012), due in large part to the numerous options available to homeschooling families (e.g., homeschool co-ops, virtual charter schools). For the sake of this study, homeschooling is defined as the education of school-aged children administered by the parents in the home rather than at a school (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007), with the

understanding that homeschool co-ops and online learning environments will likely play a limited role in the child's education.

Prior to the 1870s, when states began to pass compulsory education laws, homeschooling was prevalent throughout the United States (Basham et al., 2007; Gaither, 2008). Because of the compulsory education laws, homeschooling dramatically decreased during the early 1900s (Cogan, 2010), resulting in occurrences of homeschooling being rare until a rebirth occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This resurgence of homeschooling was due in large part to the work of public education critics John C. Holt (1964, 1967)—whose first two (of 10) books laid the foundation for the modern homeschooling movement—and Raymond S. and Dorothy N. Moore (1975), who wrote one of the earliest works that outlined a practical approach to homeschooling.

The first serious effort to collect data on the number of homeschooled students in the U.S. occurred in 1999, when the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics conducted its first survey, which was repeated using the same methodology in 2003, 2007, and 2012 (Bielick, 2008; Noel et al., 2013; Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2004). Researchers have conducted other studies that examine a number of factors surrounding homeschool education. Topics include the growth rate of homeschooling (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Noel et al., 2013; Ray, 2011a), demographics of homeschool families (Ray, 2010; Rudner, 1999), academic achievement of homeschool students (Cogan, 2010; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004), and the reasons parents choose to homeschool their children (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Collom, 2005; Noel et al., 2013).

While there have been studies that address the motivations homeschool parents give for choosing to homeschool (Collom, 2005; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007) and academic

achievement of homeschool students (Cogan, 2010; Ray, 2010), there have been few studies that examine the degree to which homeschool parents factor academic achievement or any other quantitative measure of success into their motivations. A review of the literature did not reveal any studies that specifically explored the effect homeschool parents' perceptions of a successful home education have on the learning environments that they established.

### **Situation to Self**

My motivation for conducting this research stemmed from my work in two areas: as a homeschooling parent of my own children and as Quality Assurance Evaluator at an Army school, where I was responsible for ensuring the education we provided was resulting in graduates who demonstrated our idea of success. As a homeschool parent, I have a strong desire to see my children thrive in every area of their lives, to include areas not typically considered a primary responsibility of traditional schools (e.g., spiritual and emotional development). As the primary educators of our children, my wife and I have come to understand that our expectations of success must span every area that we deem important. Our failure to articulate our clear expectations of success in any area is often the primary reason why our children fail or only partially succeed in that area. In my role as Quality Assurance Evaluator, I saw, on a larger scale, the effects of instructors communicating their definitions of success to their students, and I regularly evaluated the effectiveness of the implementation of their ideas of success into the learning environment.

Research suggests that clearly communicated and sufficiently high expectations of success lead to higher levels of student learning (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Based on this research and my personal experience, I was motivated to undertake this study exploring the influence homeschool parents' ideas about educational success have on the

learning environment. Having used concepts inherent in differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001) while educating my own children and understanding the proven effectiveness of this methodology (Geisler, Hessler, Gardner, & Lovelace, 2009; Mastropieri et al., 2006; Tieso, 2004), I used differentiated instruction as the conceptual framework for this study. I used the three learning environment constructs—*content*, or what educators teach; *process*, or how educators teach; and *product*, or the assessment of what the students have learned (Tomlinson, 2001)—as the foundation of my secondary research questions as well as the basis for one of the four data collection tools.

I approached this study from multiple paradigms. Qualitative research is constructivist by nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and I approached the intent of the research from this perspective (e.g., subjectivity of the researcher, interaction between participants and researcher, emerging meaning). Case study research must also be rigorous and follow systematic procedures (Yin, 2009); this postpositivist perspective guided the process of the study (e.g., structured research framework, systematic data collection and analysis). Finally, the results of this study have implications on practice; hence, I took a pragmatic approach in identifying the problem that prompted the study, establishing the purpose of the study, and with regard to assertions that the data analysis uncovered.

### **Problem Statement**

A problem arises when examining what various educational stakeholders mean by “success.” Researchers most often measure educational success in terms of quantitative variables such as academic performance and persistence to graduation (Kuh et al., 2006; Schreiner, 2010). Students, on the other hand, often view success in terms of enjoyment, ability, and satisfaction (Lawson, Leach, & Burrows, 2012; Rosevear, 2010), while institutions of



higher education typically use the number of degrees awarded, level of attainment, and graduation rates as measures of success (Mullin, 2012). Notably absent from this list of stakeholders are the parents. A review of the literature did not reveal research that explored how parents measure the educational success of their children. This is significant in the current environment of increasing numbers of school choice options (Loeb, Valant, & Kasman, 2011) where parents ultimately make the decisions regarding the nature of the education that their child receives. This absence is especially notable in the context of homeschooling, where the parents are the primary educators and the ones responsible for communicating their expectations of success to their children as well as assessing the degree to which their children achieve their expectation of success. This study sought to address this problem by first examining what these parents mean by “success” and then exploring how that meaning influences the learning environment that they create in their homes for their children.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental multiple case study was to understand how a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. defines success as it pertains to their child’s education. Additionally, the study sought to understand how homeschool parents’ definitions of success influenced the learning environment that they established for their children. The study specifically focused on what homeschool parents taught their children, how they taught their children, and ways that they assessed the degree to which learning has taken place (Tomlinson, 2001). The use of this comprehensive framework ensured that the results of the study included a thorough exploration and analysis of the extent that homeschool parents’ views of success affect their educational decisions.

## **Significance of the Study**

Despite the varied and often implied definitions of success in traditional education (Kuh et al., 2006; Schreiner, 2010), there are clearly accepted goals and expectations in the form of an established GPA system, standardized testing, an assortment of textbooks and rubrics, and other age-appropriate tools. Homeschool families, on the other hand, have the option—within the limits of state regulations—to fully or partially incorporate, modify, or altogether disregard many of these tools or select their own resources, depending on the goals and expectations that they establish for their children (Hanna, 2012). The exploration and analysis of the influence of several homeschool families' perceptions of success will benefit home educators by shedding light on the importance of understanding what is meant by success. This study uncovered a variety of ways that homeschool families use their ideas of success to drive their educational decisions, which in turn can help others examine their own situations in this regard.

This study was also important because it provided insight into a view of success from a subset of educational stakeholders' previously unexplored perspectives. This study examined this issue within the context of homeschooling; however, the underlying principle is true in a wide variety of contexts. All educators may benefit from gaining greater insight into how perceptions of success affect the learning environment.

## **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following two primary research questions and three secondary questions that drove the design of the study and the types of data collected:

1. How does a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. define success as it pertains to their child's education?

This question addressed the diverse and sometimes ambiguous nature of success by

uncovering the full extent of individual perceptions of success. Chapter Two includes a discussion of how the literature suggests that stakeholders perceive educational success, both in general terms and from a homeschool perspective.

2. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence the learning environment in their home?
  - a. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence what they teach their children?
  - b. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence how they teach their children?
  - c. How do homeschool parents assess their child's progress in achieving success?

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Tomlinson's (2001) methodology of differentiated instruction place significant emphasis on the environment and its impact on learning and development. Question 2 provided a linkage between individual definitions of success and the influence those definitions have on the learning environment. The learning environment framework defined by differentiated instruction includes the three areas of content, process, and product, and the three secondary questions correlate to these three constructs and served to focus the study in these three particular areas.

### **Research Plan**

This qualitative study employed an instrumental multiple case study design (Stake, 1995, 2006). This design was appropriate because the study attempted to uncover how several homeschooling families "function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus" (Stake, 1995, p. 1) with regard to how their individual views of success affect the learning environment in their homes. Homeschool families were an appropriate bounded system (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) that

one can observe in their natural setting (Yin, 2009). Further, Merriam (1998) proposed that case studies have three common characteristics: particularistic, meaning they focus on a specific event or phenomenon; descriptive, meaning thick, rich narrative is used to fully describe the phenomenon; and heuristic, meaning the case study causes the reader to extract new meaning or extend his or her existing understanding about the phenomenon. The nature of this study on homeschool parents' ideas about success and the influence those ideas have on their lives is particularly fitting for all three of these characteristics. I will elaborate further on instrumental multiple case study design in Chapter Three.

The bounded system in question was a traditional two-parent family who was currently homeschooling at least one child and who had homeschooled no less than the previous four years. Families' participation in co-ops, online classes, and other non-home-based activities did not disqualify them for the study, provided at least 50% of the child's education occurs in the home. I represented the diverse motivations for homeschooling among the participant families by deliberately selecting families motivated by both ideological and pedagogical reasons (Van Galen, 1991). Using a recruitment letter and a short demographics and motivations questionnaire, I selected eight families that provided diverse representation of each of the motivational categories. The only significant area lacking in diversity was that of faith; all eight families were Christian. This is not unusual, however, since almost 98% of homeschool families identify themselves with some variant of Christianity (Ray, 2010).

Data collection was comprised of four steps, the first three of which I designed to provide a funnel effect from general to specific: an open-ended questionnaire, a semi-structured interview with the parents, and a face-to-face interview with the parent who is the primary educator. The fourth step was a focus group, which allowed for a means of gaining clarification

and a wider perspective of issues that emerged. I analyzed the data in two phases, the first of which I based on Stake's (1995) individual case analysis procedures. This step involved the identification of patterns through the processes of direct interpretation of individual texts of data and categorical aggregation of multiple statements. The patterns that emerged through this analysis resulted in codes that were then refined, combined, adjusted, and re-categorized so that I could present a portrait of each individual case.

The second data analysis phase incorporated a series of cross-case analysis worksheets proposed by Stake (2006). This analysis involved several steps, the first of which was to organize the individual case analyses in a consistent way to highlight the uniqueness and similarities of the cases. The next step was to identify the extent to which details within each case supported the primary and secondary research questions, which resulted in the findings of each individual case merging with one another. The final steps were recording assertions that emerged resulting from the previous steps, mapping those assertions to what became the findings of the study, and categorizing the assertions into logical groupings. I conducted all of the data collection procedures except the focus group prior to these final steps. I conducted the focus group after I analyzed the individual cases and merged the findings of the individual cases. By adhering to these data analysis procedures, I was able to present a coherent description of the phenomenon as evidenced by the multiple cases.

### **Delimitations**

Researchers use delimitations to narrow a study's scope (Creswell, 2003). I delimited the participants in this study to traditional two-parent families, because almost 98% of homeschool students come from this type of family (Ray, 2010). Given the sample size and nature of the study, were I to have included single-parent families, there would have existed a high probability

that some of their reasons for homeschooling and perceptions of success would be, in quantitative terms, outliers, and as such would not provide data that would be as meaningful given the purpose of the study.

Another delimitation was the selection of participant homeschool families who have been homeschooling for at least the previous four years. I believe that this restriction resulted in participant families who understand both the benefits and downsides of homeschooling and have chosen to continue homeschooling despite any challenges.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since its inception four decades ago, the modern homeschooling movement has grown tremendously, with the latest estimates of the number of homeschool students in the U.S. exceeding two million (Ray, 2011a). Despite this growth, there have been surprisingly few studies investigating many of the areas surrounding homeschooling when compared to other areas of education of equal magnitude and influence (Bauman, 2001; Medlin, 2000; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). This literature review will focus on the historical roots of homeschooling, the descriptive data pertaining to demographics and motivations of homeschoolers, the accepted measures of success, and some of the ways that homeschooling families achieve that success. Before delving into a review of existing literature, I will discuss the theoretical framework for the study and examine several challenges surrounding homeschool research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory builds upon the notion that a child does not develop independently of his or her environment, with a child's participation in some activity—some specific interaction between the child and the environment—serving as the theory's smallest unit of analysis. The theory proposes that rather than the individual and the environment being two separate entities that affect one another, the individual and environment are actually inseparable (Miller, 2011). It is through this relationship between child and environment that learning occurs, and because of that learning, independent development occurs.

### **Learning and Development**

The proposition that learning and development are discrete processes that have a cyclic relationship with one another is a central tenet of the theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky believed that humans are unique from other animals in that they possess the ability to create

stimuli that he called signs, which he considered products of culture and language. He contended that social interactions cause the creation of these signs. These signs are the mark of higher order mental functions, and they are unique to humans because no other species creates artificial causes that result in some desired effect. He contrasted higher order functions with those of lower order, characterized by causes that are a natural part of the environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

Mental development occurs as an individual masters these higher order functions, with the individual internalizing them through social interaction (Bruner, 1997). Learning, on the other hand, “awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90). In other words, the relationship between the learning and development processes are complex but cyclical; a child learns something through some external means leading to the child’s gradual mastery and internalization of the higher order function, which in turn raises the foundation upon which further learning and development can take place.

### **Zone of Proximal Development**

This relationship between learning and development sets the stage for one of the theory’s key constructs: the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky based the ZPD on two unique types of developmental levels. First, the actual developmental level of a child is the mental age of a child who is acting independently and not under the guidance of outside influences, such as a teacher or parent. The potential developmental level of that same child is his or her mental age when he or she is making decisions based on input from an external guide. The ZPD is the difference between these two developmental levels (Vygotsky, 1978). In order for productive instruction to occur, each child’s actual and potential developmental levels must



be known, and the level of instruction must be within the confines of this lower and upper threshold—or within the child’s ZPD (Mahn, 1999).

Bruner (1997) referred to the ZPD as an instrument that encourages “almost limitless growth” (p. 70), and he then observed, “we had it in us naturally to move ahead, given the right social arrangements and opportunities” (p. 70). It is in how we create these social arrangements and opportunities that Tomlinson’s (2001) ideas about differentiated instruction and the treatment of children as unique individuals with their own zones of proximal development come into play. I will discuss differentiated instruction later in this review of the literature.

### **Research Challenges**

Ray (2011a) contended that homeschoolers fall under a category that Salganik and Heckathorn (2004) called a “hidden population” (p. 195), which is a subset of a population for which it is difficult or impossible to obtain a representative sample due to either the target population size or the difficulty in finding members of the target population. Because of this characteristic, it is difficult to generalize the findings of any study for which homeschool families comprise the sample. There are two primary issues related to the empirical study of homeschooling that are a result of the hidden nature of the group: challenges in obtaining accurate data about the population and the validity of the data gathered from the population.

Lines (1991) best represented the first issue when she stated:

There are countless difficulties in making estimates or gathering information on the home schooling population. Research on this population rests on the use of lists from states, newsletters, magazines, curricular suppliers, or associations. As membership on any list is self-selected, all such lists will have a built-in bias. This means no study of home schoolers can claim to rest on a representative sample of the full population. (p. 5)

There is a tremendous amount of variance between states in regard to the oversight and governance of homeschooling, with some states requiring full disclosure of a wide variety of homeschool-related details and others not even requiring notification by the parents of their intent to homeschool (Gaither, 2009; Yuracko, 2008). Consequently, the lists to which Lines is referring may be somewhat accurate, but there are no guarantees. Researchers must begin their studies on the subject with the assumption that the information provided by the states is accurate (Ray, 2011a).

The second issue is that an assumption is required of researchers that any surveys completed by homeschool parents are being completed accurately, given the fact that in states which attempt to maintain strict control over homeschooling, there is a certain percentage of parents who choose to homeschool “under the radar” of the state (Ray, 2011a). Further, homeschool parents often have philosophical reasons for opposing the efforts of formal academia in general and research efforts to learn more about the nature of homeschooling in particular due to their opposition of any oversight—government, academic, or otherwise (Lines, 2000). These factors result in a sample that contains a built-in bias.

Lubienski (2003), who took a more critical view towards homeschooling, discussed what he considered a more subtle bias concerning studies of the academic achievement of homeschool students. He observed that homeschooling families made a choice that indicated their commitment to their children’s education, and these families had the resources and initiative to make homeschooling a viable option. As a result, one should expect that homeschooled students have higher academic achievement and would excel regardless of the educational environment. He goes so far as to say, “in light of [these advantages] . . . homeschooled students should be doing even better than they are. Perhaps they would have even greater academic gains if they

were in schools” (Lubienski, 2003, p. 172).

Regardless of the extremes to which researchers and critics take the arguments regarding homeschool research issues, it is clear that there are some unique challenges surrounding the study of homeschooling. Researchers must take extra care to ensure that they reduce bias as much as possible in their studies of this area.

### **Review of the Literature**

A review of the current literature concerning homeschool research revealed three broad categories that are applicable to this study. This first area is the history of homeschooling. Next is descriptive research, which includes the numbers and percentage of homeschool students, demographics of the homeschool population, and the motivations for choosing to homeschool. Since the growth of homeschooling and the motivations for choosing to homeschool are central to the problem that led to this study, I will examine motivation-related research as it applies to homeschooling and traditional schools. The final category is product-based research, which explores accepted measures of success in general educational terms as well as the academic achievement, socialization, and performance of homeschoolers in higher education and beyond. I will conclude the review of the literature with a discussion of Tomlinson’s (2001) differentiated instruction, which is the conceptual framework used for the study, and an overview of some instructional delivery and support options available to homeschool families.

### **History of Homeschooling**

While the modern homeschooling movement began in the late 1960s, the history of educating children in the home predates the birth of the U.S., with public schools gaining acceptance across the country only by the 1840s (Gaither, 2008). Notable figures from American history who were educated at home include presidents Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow

Wilson, and both Roosevelt's; authors Samuel Clemmons, Agatha Christie, and Pearl Buck; military leaders Robert E. Lee and Douglas MacArthur; and other historical figures such as Thomas Edison, Booker T. Washington, and Andrew Carnegie (Basham et al., 2007; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). To be fair, however, the nature and acceptance of home education by mainstream society during their lifetimes were quite different than it has been during the last several decades that constitute the modern era of home education. Compulsory education laws, such as the first one passed in Massachusetts in 1852, had been passed in every state in the U.S. by 1918 (Landes & Solomon, 1972), making homeschooling controversial at best and even illegal in many states (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). Home education remained as such for the next 50 years, and researchers made no serious efforts to determine the extent or influence of the practice during that time.

In 1964, John Holt (1964, 1967, 1977, 2004) published his first book—*How Children Fail*—and a sequel three years later—*How Children Learn*—voicing a rising public opinion of dissatisfaction of the country's public schools. Over the next decade, he grew increasingly disenchanted with public schools, advocating for their closure until the 1976 publication of his book *Instead of Education: Helping People Do Things Better*. This resulted in him becoming a leading proponent for the newly emerging homeschool movement that was being made possible in large part by the U.S. Supreme Court's pro-homeschool decision in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972) that resulted in an increasing number of states affirming the legality of homeschooling (Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012; Gaither, 2008; Yuracko, 2008). In 1977, Holt began publishing a periodic newsletter—*Growing Without Schooling*—that served to unite for the first time those growing numbers of parents who were choosing to educate their children at home.

While Holt provided a voice to homeschoolers in general, he is more commonly

associated with those who comprised the liberal roots of the homeschool movement. What Holt did for those motivated more by pedagogical reasons, Raymond and Dorothy Moore (1975, 1981) did for those on the conservative side of the movement who were more motivated by ideological reasons. During the same timeframe in which Holt was beginning to actively support the homeschool movement, the Moore's, who had been researching the impact of forced early learning in children, published their first book, *Better Late Than Early: A New Approach to Your Child's Education*, which served to bring them into the national educational spotlight. Over the next few years, they became outspoken advocates for the growing homeschool movement, especially those who were evangelical Christians. Their 1981 book, *Home Grown Kids*, has been one of the most influential books of the modern homeschool movement (Gaither, 2008).

While the libertarian left and the ideas of Holt dominated the early years of the homeschool movement, the religious right, whose ideology was best articulated in the works of the Moore's, came to represent the majority in the 1980s (Collom, 2005). Since then, there has been an increasing trend towards diversity among those who homeschool, as will be discussed in the section on demographics later in this chapter. Homeschooling continues to be a debated form of education today, with states providing a wide range of regulatory practice, ranging from virtually no regulations (nine states, including Texas, the state in which this study was conducted) to high regulatory requirements involving assessments and potential home inspections (Belfield, 2004).

Some scholars have made the argument that parents have a limited constitutional right to educate their children at home (Waddell, 2010), that states should be obligated to regulate homeschoolers (Waddell, 2010; Yuracko, 2008), and that homeschooling is contrary to the public good (Lubienski, 2003). Regardless of how the legal and constitutional arguments are

ultimately resolved, homeschooling continues to be an increasingly popular educational choice in the U.S. today (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Lines, 1991; Ray, 2011a). It has the potential to revolutionize education by emphasizing the benefits of flexible instruction tailored to the needs and abilities of individual children and highlighting the advantages of moving learning out of classroom environments (Belfield, 2004).

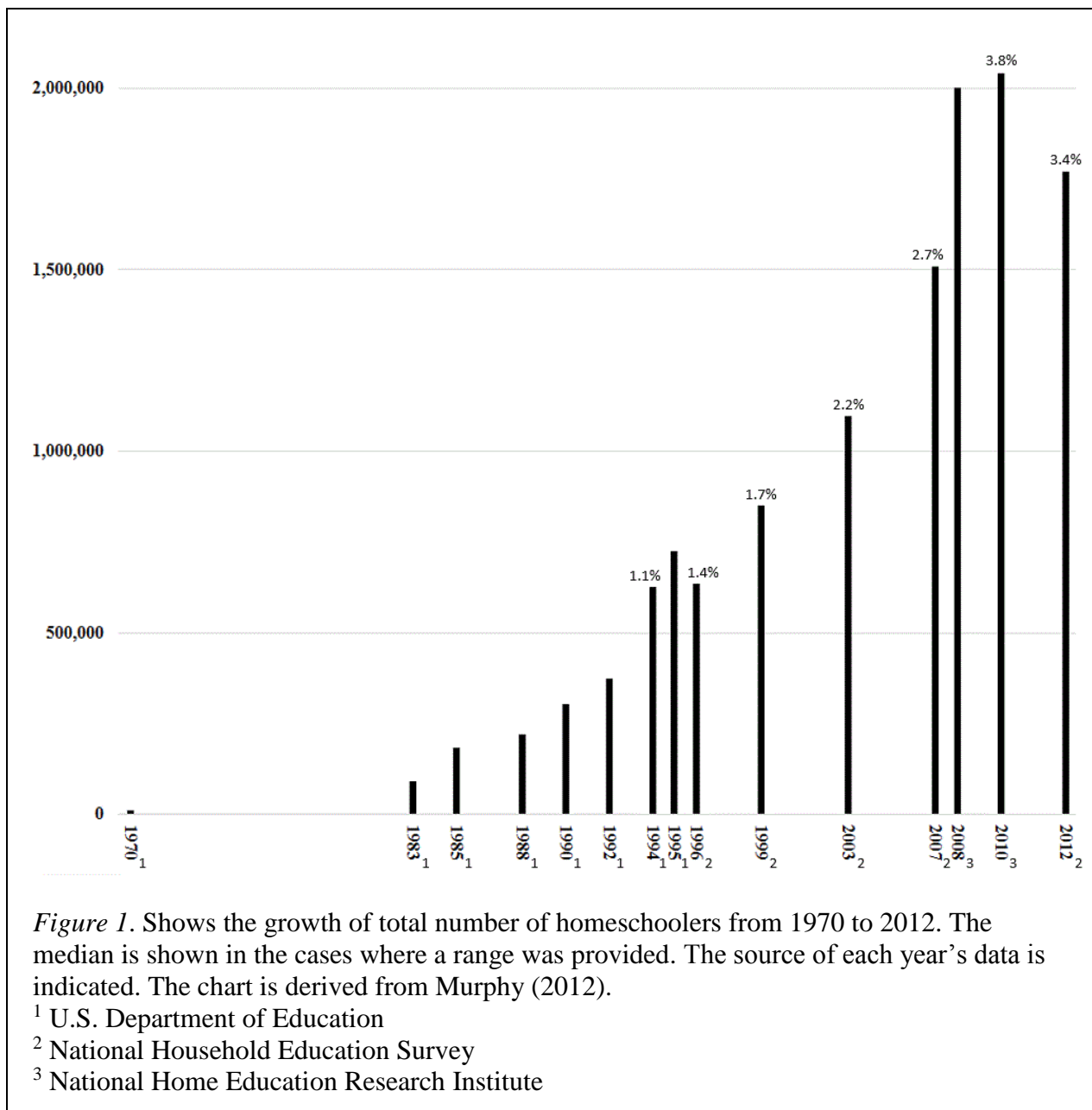
### **Number and Percentage of Homeschool Students**

Obtaining an accurate estimate of the number of homeschool students in the U.S. at any given time is extremely difficult, due largely to the research challenges discussed earlier (Ray, 2010). As a result, researchers who have conducted studies in an attempt to obtain such an estimate have had to rely on a wide range of data sources. It is clear, however, that the number of homeschool students has grown dramatically since the early 1970s (Lines, 1991; Bielick, 2008; Noel et al., 2013).

There are three primary sources for homeschool estimate data: the U.S. Department of Education (Lines, 1991), the National Center for Education Statistics (Bielick, 2008; Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2004; Noel et al., 2013), and the National Home Education Research Institute (Ray, 2010, 2011a). Figure 1 shows estimates of homeschoolers for various years between 1970 and 2012. The figure provides the percentages of the population of homeschoolers relative to the total school-age population when that information is available.

Due to the growth of homeschooling over the past several decades, the U.S. Census Bureau now recognizes that including homeschool-based items on its surveys is warranted (Basham et al., 2007), and homeschooling is now listed as a school type on the SAT questionnaire (Belfield, 2004). This growth has led some to predict that this increase in the homeschooling population will create a greater demand on public schools and online learning

environment providers to offer an increasing range of services geared towards homeschoolers, creating a greater variety of educational options than currently exists (Bauman, 2001).



## Demographics of Homeschool Families

One of the most extensive studies on the demographics of homeschool families ( $n = 11,739$ ) was conducted by Ray (2010), the results of which closely mirrored a study conducted

by Rudner (1999) 12 years earlier. White, non-Hispanic students accounted for 91.7% of the participants, with Hispanic (2.2%), Asian (1.5%), Black (1.2%), and Other (3.5%) accounting for the rest. The results of the most recent study conducted in 2012 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) suggested that a racial shift is occurring, finding that 68% of homeschool families were white, 15% Hispanic, 8% black, and 4% Asian or Pacific Islander (Noel et al., 2013). These results confirm other recent studies that indicated the number of minority homeschool families is growing (Bauman, 2001; Gaither, 2009; Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Ray, 2007, 2011b). Gaither (2009) quoted Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) president and cofounder J. Smith as saying, “the Black homeschool movement is growing at a faster rate than the general homeschool population” (p. 13).

Of those participating in Ray’s (2010) study, 50.3% were male and 49.7% were female. The average size of homeschool families was larger than the national norm, averaging 3.5 children under 21 years of age per family, compared with the national average of 1.92 children per family (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, Table AVG3). Ray found that over 68% of homeschool families had three or more children. In terms of religion, over 97% professed some form of Christianity. Over 66% of fathers and 62% of mothers had completed at least a bachelor’s degree, and 5.3% of fathers and 15.8% of mothers had previously held a state teaching certification. The median household income for these families was between \$75,000 and \$75,999 (Ray, 2010).

In terms of distinct characteristics, the most striking is the vast majority (97.9%) of homeschool students’ parents were married couples (husband and wife), compared with 69.4% nationwide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, Table C9). Within these two-parent families, 80.6% of the mothers did not work, and of the 19.4% who did, the vast majority did so only part-time.



The median cost per child spent on educational material was between \$400 and \$599 per year with over 65% spending less than \$800 annually (Ray, 2010), compared with the national public school average of \$10,560 spent per student per year in elementary and secondary public schools in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

### **Motivations for Homeschooling**

Vygotsky (1992) described motivation as “our desires and needs, our interests and emotions” (p. 252). While his context was motivation as the underlying basis for understanding thought and language, these descriptors apply as well to parents’ motivations for making decision about their children. Parents’ desires, needs, interests, and emotions will serve as the foundation for this discussion of the motivation for choosing to homeschool.

In one of the most extensive studies conducted on the subject of motivation for choosing to homeschool, Collom (2005) examined parents’ motivations for homeschooling broken down by certain demographics of the parents. He found four primary reasons parents chose to homeschool: criticism of the local public school system, preference for a regional home charter school in which parents assumed the role of teachers, ideological reasons, and child and family needs. The reasons differed in priority based on the demographics of the parent, but these reasons were common to all participants. Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) conducted a similar study a few years later, but—in what one could consider an anomaly, based on other research (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Collom, 2005; Noel et al., 2013)—they found that parents generally did not have anything against traditional schools. Instead, parents felt that they had a personal responsibility to educate their children and that they could do so in a way that was in line with their personal priorities and values. Green and Hoover-Dempsey also found that homeschool parents had a higher level of efficacy than a public school comparison group, and

this no doubt factored into the decision to homeschool.

The NCES conducts a variety of surveys as part of its National Household Education Survey (NHES) program. In one of the first studies that used this survey data as its primary source, Bauman (2001) analyzed the data collected in 1996 and 1999 by the NHES. The top three reasons for homeschooling that were given those years were the belief that the child could get a better education at home (selected by more than one half of respondents), the learning environments in schools were poor (30% indicated this reason), and religious reasons (cited by one third of the parents). Other significant reasons included an objection to the curriculum and a lack of challenge for their children.

Bielick (2008) conducted a similar analysis of the 2007 iteration of the NHES surveys, which asked respondents to rank their top three reasons for choosing to homeschool. In this study, he compared the 2007 results with the results from 2003. The reasons given were similar as those presented by Bauman (2001), but the order changed slightly and the percentage of parents indicating each choice rose. The 2012 NHES survey results were also recently released (Noel et al., 2013), again with similar results. Table 1 shows the top reasons given in 2003, 2007, and 2012. Table 2 shows the top three single most important reasons given by homeschool parents for choosing to homeschool in 2007 and 2012.

Table 1

*Parents' Reasons for Homeschooling*

Reason	2003	2007	2012
Concern about school environment	85%	88%	91%
Desire to provide religious/moral instruction	72%	83%	64%/77%*
Dissatisfied with academic instruction at other schools	68%	73%	74%
Prefer nontraditional approach to child's education	-	65%	44%
Child has special needs	29%	21%	17%
Child has physical or mental health problem	16%	11%	15%
Other reasons	20%	32%	37%

\*The 2012 survey broke this response into two parts, one for religious and one for moral instruction.

Source: Bielick (2008) and Noel et al. (2013)

Table 2

*Parents' Most Important Reason for Homeschooling*

Reason	2007	2012
Desire to provide religious instruction	36%	16%
Concern about school environment	21%	25%
Dissatisfied with academic instruction at other schools	17%	19%
Other reasons	26%	40%

Source: Bielick (2008) and Noel et al. (2013)

Gaither (2009), when referencing the 2001 NHES data, pointed out that, while parents who were motivated to homeschool primarily for religious reasons were still prevalent, 70% of respondents to that year's survey listed a nonreligious reason as their top reason for homeschooling. Only 30% specified religion and morality as their top reason (note that in 2007 this reason accounted for 36% of respondents' top choice, whereas that number dropped to 16% in 2012). In 2001, concern about the school environment was the most frequent response at 31%, followed by inadequate instructional quality at 17%. Gaither (2009) referred to this growing group of non-religiously motivated homeschooling families as "the new home schoolers" (p. 12), pointing out that the demographics of these new homeschooling families are shifting to more closely match the demographics of public school families in terms of ethnic background, religion, and socioeconomic levels. He observed that, while the modern homeschooling movement may have started largely as a political movement, "home education is now being done by so many different kinds of people for so many different reasons that it no longer makes much sense to speak of it as a political movement" (Gaither, 2009, p. 14).

While Gaither's (2009) analysis of recent data suggested that homeschooling families motivated by religious and moral reasons might be on the decline, all of the current data indicate that this subset of families still represents a significant part of the homeschool population. In fact, this reason is, to a large degree, the dividing line between what researchers have traditionally considered the two predominant subsets of homeschooling families (Van Galen, 1991). The next section will discuss the history and rationale behind the classification of these two groups, followed by a closer look at the other two leading reasons given for choosing to homeschool: concern about the school environment and dissatisfaction with academic instruction.

## **Ideologues and Pedagogues**

Van Galen (1986, 1988, 1991) conducted research and published seminal works on homeschool motivations that have been the foundation of numerous research studies (Arai, 2000; Collom, 2005; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Hanna, 2012; Mayberry & Knowles, 1989). Van Galen coined the terms *ideologues* and *pedagogues* to refer to the primary motivational categories of homeschool families. She makes it clear that the two categories are not discrete, but are

based upon the rhetoric that the parents use to explain why they are home schooling and upon the values and beliefs implicit in the parents' interpretation of their role in society and in their descriptions of how they structure their children's education. (Van Galen, 1991, p. 66)

Homeschool families' reasons for homeschooling are complex, and as such, there is some degree of the characteristics of both categories in virtually all homeschooling families (Collom, 2005; Van Galen, 1991).

Van Galen (1991) characterized ideologues by their desire to foster strong relationships with their children as well as their tendency to take issue with traditional school curricula. They are typically conservative Christian fundamentalists who desire to teach their own values and beliefs to their children, being concerned with character education as much as academics. Ideologues often believe that God has called them to educate their children at home, pointing to various scripture as a mandate to do so (for instance, see Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Because of their conviction, ideologues are often vehemently opposed to any limitations imposed by the government on their ability to teach their children at home (Van Galen, 1991). Taylor-Hough (2010) noted that ideologues often use a public school classroom as the model for structuring the

home-based classroom.

Pedagogues, on the other hand, generally believe that schools are inefficient—if not incompetent—when it comes to educating their children, and they feel that they can do a better job. To borrow constructs from Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated instruction, their concern is not so much with the content of what schools teach as the process by which they teach it. These parents are often former professional educators, have access to relatives who are educators, or have studied on their own to become educators, and they believe they possess the pedagogical qualifications and expertise to provide an education for their children (Van Galen, 1991). They value independence, both that of the child and his or her capacity to learn and of the family and its ability to educate at home. These families can also be opposed to government-imposed restrictions on their right to homeschool, but their reasons are typically secular; they would cite an infringement on their constitutionally guaranteed freedoms rather than the ideologues' argument of a violation of their God-given right to educate their children as they see fit (Van Galen, 1991). These parents are often more politically liberal and tend to prefer experimental methods of instruction (Collom, 2005).

Hanna (2012) conducted a study that explored, among other things, the motivations of homeschool families in Pennsylvania ( $n = 250$ ). She found that, in 2008, 46.8% of participants identified themselves as ideologues, 24.6% as pedagogues, and 26.4% a combination of the two, confirming other studies' conclusions that ideologues constitute the majority of homeschooling families (Collom, 2005; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). Hanna found that many participants who started homeschooling for ideological reasons continued to homeschool for increasingly pedagogical reasons as they became more aware of state homeschool regulations and standardized testing requirements. While there was almost a two-to-one ratio between self-

identified ideologues and pedagogues, the fact that the typical ideologue increased in pedagogical tendencies over time lends credence to Van Galen's (1991) assertion that the majority of families have characteristics of both motivational categories.

One of the three leading motivations for choosing to homeschool—desire to provide religious instruction—is at the heart of the distinction between ideologues and pedagogues. The other two leading motivations—concern over the school environment and dissatisfaction with academic instruction at traditional schools—also deserve greater attention. In the next section, I will examine research pertaining to the current condition of the school environment and the effectiveness of academic instruction in schools, followed by a look at how researchers define success in elementary and secondary education, both in general terms and with specific regard to homeschooling.

### **The School Environment and Academic Instruction**

Concern with the school environment is one of the primary reasons parents give for choosing to homeschool (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Noel et al., 2013), so an examination of current trends in school environmental issues is warranted. During the 2010-2011 school year there were over 1,246,000 cases of school-related victimization in the U.S., almost half of which involved violence. The cases included 25 homicides and six suicides. During the previous school year, 85% of schools reported that at least one incident of crime occurred on school grounds, calculating to over 1.9 million crimes being committed at school that year (Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder, 2013). Table 3 shows statistics for a variety of school environmental issues for the 2009-2010 school year.

Table 3

*School Environment Issues*

Issue	Percentage
Crime/Violence	
Schools reporting one or more crime	85%
Schools reporting one or more violent crime	74%
Schools reporting one or more theft	44%
Students (grades 9-12) reporting participating in at least one fight anywhere	33%
Students (grades 9-12) reporting participating in at least one fight at school	12%
Weapons	
Students (grades 9-12) reporting being threatened or injured with a weapon	7%
Students reporting carrying a weapon anywhere (previous 30 days)	17%
Students reporting carrying a weapon at school (previous 30 days)	5%
Discipline Issues	
Schools reporting widespread classroom disorder	3%
Teachers reporting student misbehavior interfered with teaching *	34%
Teachers reporting student tardiness and class-cutting interfered with teaching *	32%
Gang Activity/Hate Incidents	
Schools reporting gang activity	16%
Schools reporting cult/Extremist activity	2%
Students reporting being target of hate-related words	9%
Students reporting hate-related graffiti	28%
Bullying	
Schools reporting bullying on daily or weekly basis	23%
Students (ages 12-18) reporting being victims of bullying	28%
Students (ages 12-18) reporting being victims of cyber-bullying	9%
Alcohol/Drugs	
Students (grades 9-12) reporting drugs offered, sold, or given to them	26%
Students (grades 9-12) reporting drinking alcohol at least once (previous 30 days)	39%
Students (grades 9-12) reporting using marijuana at least once (previous 30 days)	23%

\* 2007-2008 School Year

Source: Robers, Kemp, Truman, & Snyder (2013)



The public has also traditionally been interested in the physical school facilities (Chaney, Lewis, & Greene, 2007). The most recent NCES report on school facilities indicated that 22% of public schools in the U.S. have more students enrolled than the facility designers intended. Principals reported that heating and air conditioning interfered with instruction to some degree in 37% of the schools. School administrators have installed portable buildings in 78% of schools nationwide. Portable buildings had moderate or major acoustic and noise issues in 18% of the cases, room size or configuration issues in 16% of the cases, indoor air quality issues in 14% of the cases, and problems with the condition of the construction of the building in 14% of the cases (Chaney et al., 2007). The public school student to teacher ratio in 2010 was 16 students per teacher (Aud et al., 2013).

An examination of the trends of academic achievement in the U.S. will serve to highlight the effectiveness of the academic instruction. Math and reading scores for 9- and 13-year-olds have generally increased since the early 1970s. Math and reading scores for 17-year-olds have not shown a significant difference, with the 2008 scores being almost identical to scores from the early 1970s (Aud et al., 2013).

Globally, math, science, and reading literacy scores in the U.S. rank above the international average in both grades that were assessed (4th and 8th). The U.S. ranks tenth in the world in 4th grade math and ninth in 8th grade math. In science, the U.S. ranks seventh and tenth in 4th and 8th grades, respectively. The U.S. has a reading literacy score that is sixth in the world for 4th grade (the only grade measured in this domain). The U.S. averages 851 instructional hours per year for 4th grade, which is 46 hours less than the international average. In 8th grade, students in the U.S. attend school on average 979 hours, which is 52 hours less than the international average (Aud et al., 2013).

It is important to note that the statistics concerning the school environment and effectiveness of academic instruction are trending towards improvement in the majority of areas, which appears to be at odds with data indicating that parents are often motivated by a dissatisfaction with the academic instruction in traditional schools (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Noel et al., 2013). However, the increasing numbers of homeschool students and percentage of homeschool students within the overall population indicate that the upward trend towards improvement of academic instruction does not appear to be stopping the momentum of the growing homeschool movement (Lines, 1991; Bielick, 2008; Noel et al., 2013). In part, this is true because homeschool parents believe that they can do a better job educating their children and helping them achieve success than traditional schools can (Belfield, 2004; Collom, 2005; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009). In the next section, I will look at how researchers have defined success in elementary and secondary education, both in general terms and with specific regard to homeschooling.

## **Success**

Various measures related to success lie at the center of the majority of educational research; educational outcomes, standardized college entrance exams, grades, the preparedness of students for higher education, and other similar areas are common variables of interest (Kuh, et al., 2006; Mullin, 2012). The definitions of success range from the general (e.g., the student is prepared for a meaningful future [Conley & Wise, 2011]) to the specific (e.g., higher SAT or ACT scores result in a student's acceptance into college [Zwick, 2007]), though success is typically described only in general terms. Given the nature of quantitative research, it is impossible to look at more than a handful of variables in a given study, making a holistic approach to a topic as complex as success difficult. It is beneficial for the sake of this study,

however, to examine what variables and constructs have been the focus of research pertaining to success in education.

Sparkman, Maulding, and Roberts (2012) observed that “traditional predictors of college persistence and academic success center on the student’s high school grade point average (GPA) and standardized test scores” (p. 642). Many studies confirm this statement. Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005) explored the predictive relationship between these two variables from the perspective of their predictive value for minority students, and Zwick and Sklar (2005) analyzed those same variables in the context of ethnicity and language. Vare, DeWalt, and Dockery (2004) found that students’ SAT scores (verbal and math) and high school grade point averages, in that order, were the top three significant predictors of first year grade point ratio of undergraduate students in a teacher education program. These studies are just a few that suggest that these quantitative measures—high school grade point average and SAT scores—are the primary measures of high school success in that they serve to predict whether a student will succeed in post-secondary education.

Other studies have taken different approaches. In a study that explored the relationship between fear and performance in secondary schools, Jackson (2010) looked at two discrete areas of performance: academic and social, with the implication being that these two areas fully encapsulate success and failure. Rosevear (2010) concluded in a study comparing perceived success of music and non-music students that enjoyment is an important element of success, at least from the perspective of the students. Similarly, student satisfaction was the measure of success examined in a literature review conducted by Lawson, Leach, and Burrows (2012). They concluded that student satisfaction was not an appropriate measure of success when used in isolation, but it did provide valuable information when used in conjunction with other measures.

Schreiner (2010) explored success from the perspective of what she called “The Thriving Quotient” (p. 4), which measured the five areas of engaged learning, academic determination, positive perspective, diverse citizenship, and social connectedness. She contended that these five areas constitute thriving, which is ultimately the reason a student does or does not succeed in school.

In the context of homeschooling, researchers have examined a number of areas that one could interpret as indicators of homeschool success. Ray (2004) implied perhaps the broadest range of characteristics of success of homeschool students, to include continuing on in college; reading books, magazines, and newspapers; participating in community service; voting and involvement in politics; tolerance of opposing viewpoints; participation in religious activities; and engagement in protests and boycotts. Lubienski (2003), however, summed up the two characteristics of success that are most often examined by homeschool research when he observed that “two of the primary goals most often discussed in relation to homeschooling are socialisation [sic] and academic achievement” (p. 170). I will examine these two areas as they relate to homeschool students next, followed by a discussion of the role values education plays in the home education. I will close this section by looking at the performance of homeschool students in higher education and beyond.

**Academic achievement.** Most homeschool researchers have focused on academic outcomes, despite many homeschool parents’ stated motivations for choosing to homeschool being largely non-academic (Hoelzle, 2013). Researchers have used some measure of academic achievement of homeschool students as their variable of interest more than any other quantifiable area of homeschool education. This research focus is in line with many studies of traditional education (Kuh et al., 2006; Mullin, 2012; Zwick, 2007). For many of the same reasons why it is

difficult to obtain accurate estimates of the number of homeschool students, it is also difficult to study with accuracy the academic achievement of homeschool students. Rudner (1999) conducted one of the earliest major studies of this area. He surveyed almost 12,000 families that included over 20,000 homeschool students to obtain background, demographic, and academic data on the students' recent administration of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills or Tests of Achievement and Proficiency, depending on their grade level. Participants represented every grade and all 50 states. Rudner found that for every grade and every subject, homeschool students scored higher than their public, private, and Catholic school counterparts did. Throughout the grade and subject spectrum, the homeschool students had median scores between the 62nd and 91st percentile across all subjects, with the majority falling between the 75th and 85th percentiles.

Ray's (2010) similar study conducted 12 years later ( $n = 11,739$ ) produced results that generally mirrored those of Rudner (1999). Ray found that homeschool students scored on average in the 80th percentile across all subject areas, reflecting 30 or more percentile points higher than the national average. No difference existed between students who had been homeschooled their entire academic lives as compared to those who had been homeschooled only a few years or even a single year, and no difference existed between homeschool students enrolled in full-service curriculum compared with those whose parents selected curriculum on a subject-by-subject basis. Families who spent \$600 or more had students who performed statistically better than those who spent less than that amount, though the effect size was small. The results indicated that students whose parents had never held teacher certifications slightly outperformed those students with at least one formerly certified parent, though at least two previous studies found a weak relationship between parent certification and student achievement

(Medlin, 1994; Ray, 1995). Because of this study and his analysis of previous research on homeschool academic achievement, Ray concluded that, while existing research may not justify a cause-and-effect claim between homeschooling and positive academic achievement, it does not eliminate this as a possibility.

Collom (2005) examined several characteristics of homeschool parents and the effect those characteristics had on student achievement. In his study that used a homeschool charter school as the basis of its participants ( $n = 235$ ), he found that the parents' educational attainment and political affiliation had a moderate positive effect on student achievement in reading, language, and math. Students of parents with higher levels of education performed better, as did students whose parents identified themselves as conservative. Students whose parents were more critical of public schools also performed better in reading and language. Collom found that the amount of instructional time was not a statistically significant predictor in any of the three areas of achievement.

In one of few studies that compared roughly equivalent groups of public school students and homeschool students, Martin-Chang, Gould, and Meuse (2011) found that students who were taught in a structured homeschool environment (i.e., systematically taught from lesson plans) scored an average of over one full grade level higher than their public school counterparts across seven subject areas. Ray (2010) similarly found that students in structured learning environments scored better than those in unstructured environments did, but the effect size was small in his study.

Cogan (2010) took a different approach when studying homeschool students' academic achievement by using as his sample students who were entering an institute of higher learning, comparing homeschooled students with their non-homeschooled peers. He found that the

homeschool group, on average, had higher graduation rates, ACT scores, and GPAs than the non-homeschool group. He also looked at each group's first and fourth year GPAs and found that the homeschool group scored higher in both areas. Jones and Gloeckner (2004) also looked at homeschool students who were entering higher education institutes, but this time from the perspective of college admissions officers' attitudes toward homeschoolers who are applying for admission. They found that the majority of admissions officers have an expectation that homeschool students will perform as well as or better than their non-homeschooled peers. This represents a dramatic shift over the past 15 years in this area. In the 1990s, college admissions officers were struggling with how to handle the new and growing population of homeschool students, but this study found that those officers are now expecting homeschool graduates to succeed (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004).

The body of existing empirical research about the academic achievement of homeschool students suggests that these students are at no academic disadvantage as compared to their traditionally-educated peers, with most of the research indicating that homeschool students perform at least as well as if not significantly better than their public and private school colleagues (Basham et al., 2007; Ray, 2010). In the next section, I will discuss the homeschooling topic that research indicates is most controversial: socialization.

**Socialization.** Durkin (1995) defined socialization as the “process whereby people acquire the rules of behavior and systems of beliefs and attitudes that equip a person to function effectively as a member of a particular society” (p. 614). Socialization is perhaps the single-most divisive issue regarding the effectiveness of homeschool education. Since this study will explore homeschool parents' attitudes about success for their children, and since the literature suggests that socialization is, to some degree, linked to success in the minds of many, it is

appropriate to examine what research tells us about the socialization of homeschool students.

Many characterize homeschoolers as deprived of adequate social interaction (McReynolds, 2007). In contrast, Basham, Merrifield, and Hepburn (2007) referred to the perceived lack of socialization of homeschoolers as “the most widely-held misconception about home schooled students” (p. 16), and in his discussion of four myths pertaining to homeschooling, Romanowski (2006) listed “Homeschooling Produces Social Misfits” (p. 125) as his first myth. Medlin (2000, 2013) conducted two literature reviews that specifically examined the socialization component of homeschooling, observing that public schools in the U.S. have increasingly undertaken the responsibility of providing socialization experiences for students in addition to academic instruction. He noted that mainstream psychologists have expressed concern that homeschool students are not likely to receive adequate socialization experiences to allow them to adapt to life after homeschooling and that these children suffer because of their exposure to only their parents’ values, as opposed to public school students whose exposure encapsulates the values of society as a whole.

In his review of the literature, Medlin (2000) found three trends that support the adequate socialization of homeschoolers. First, homeschool students are engaged in social activities in their communities, possibly to a greater degree than their traditionally educated counterparts are. He also found that homeschool students appear to be learning appropriate social behavior and have similar levels of self-esteem as other children, with some studies finding that their socialization experiences are more effective when compared with those of non-homeschooled children based on the comparative scores on self-concept scales and adaptive behavior tests (Lee, 1994; Shyers, 1992). Finally, although there was not enough research to draw solid conclusions, studies have suggested that homeschool students excel in leadership skills and social abilities



(Montgomery, 1989; Sutton & Galloway, 2000). Medlin concluded that adults who were formerly homeschooled “appear to be functioning effectively as members of adult society” (Medlin, 2000, p. 119). Ray (2004) drew a similar conclusion, finding that there was no evidence to indicate that homeschool students were at a disadvantage when compared with non-homeschooled students in the area of social and emotional development. In his subsequent review of literature, Medlin (2013) confirmed that his earlier conclusions were still valid and, if anything, even stronger, and he concluded that current literature suggests that homeschooled children may have an advantage over their traditionally educated counterparts in the area of socialization.

Other recent studies have found that homeschool students are actively involved in a wide range of activities outside of the home. These activities include church groups, sports leagues, music-related activities, and summer camps (Basham et al., 2007; Klein & Poplin, 2008; Ray, 2004; Romanowski, 2006), providing them with a diversity of interactions with peers and adults and preparing them for life after homeschooling. In a study conducted by Bolle, Wessel, and Mulvihill (2007), the researchers found that the homeschool student participants experienced the same general challenges and successes as their non-homeschooled peers about their social adjustment to the higher education environment. They all made friends quickly, professed an increased tolerance for differences as they encountered others with values and ideas that differed from their own, and joined a variety of co-curricular clubs and organizations that ensured a satisfactory social experience.

Whereas homeschool advocates are often critical of public schools and the socialization that occurs there (Cox, 2003; Shyers, 1992), critics often argue that homeschool students are sheltered from a variety of diverse people and ideas by being kept out of public schools

(Lubienski, 2003; Waddell, 2010). Apple (2000) used the term *cocooning* to refer to the act of sheltering one's self, family, and children from diversity and ensuring that the only allowed influences are those with which one agrees, and he generalized this behavior on the entire modern homeschooling movement. He argued that public schools serve as a social reference point for our culture, and that "it is exactly this common reference point that is rejected by many within the home schooling movement's pursuit of 'freedom' and 'choice'" (p. 262). Reich (2002) echoed this sentiment when he asserted that homeschooling threatens to undermine "the social glue that binds a diverse people together" (p. 58), and he implied that public schools are the only places where students can learn "such common values as decency, civility, and respect" (p. 58). Buss (2000) made a similar argument, contending that the academic lessons learned in public schools are relatively small in comparison to the identity formation that occurs as students are exposed to others with diverse experiences and attitudes. She argued that homeschool students suffer because of their lack of exposure to a variety of ideas.

Noticeably absent from these critical reviews of the social dangers of homeschooling is empirical evidence to support the claims made by the authors. The preponderance of the research pertaining to socialization and homeschooling indicates that homeschool students are actively involved in a wide variety of civic and extracurricular activities, and they have social skills that are at or above average when compared with traditionally educated students (Ray, 2003). Because of the overwhelming amount of research that suggests homeschooled children are at or beyond traditionally educated children in the area of socialization, Medlin (2013) suggested "that future studies focus not on outcomes of socialization but on the process itself" (p. 284).

**Values.** The desire to provide moral and religious instruction is one of the leading

reasons why parents choose to homeschool (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Collom, 2005; Noel et al., 2013). Studies conducted by Van Galen (1987) and Basham, Merrifield, and Hepburn (2007) found that many homeschool parents believe that traditional schools are either unable to teach values that they desire their children to learn or teach values that contradict their own. In a study that explored how parents transmit their values to their children in a homeschool environment, Hoelzle (2013) found that all of the formerly homeschooled (and now adult) participants of his study continued to have strong relationships with their parents and maintained, to some degree, their parents' beliefs and values. He pointed out that, since the majority of parents choose to homeschool in part because of their desire to impart their values and beliefs to their children, his findings should not come as a surprise. These parents undoubtedly saw their children's adherence to their values as a measure of success.

Buss (2000), on the other hand, argued that one of the responsibilities of the state is to ensure that all students receive exposure to ideologically diverse viewpoints, especially those that are contrary to the views they receive on a daily basis at home. Based on current psychological literature, she contended that providing all students with this exposure would encourage identity development on a broader scale than would be possible in what she saw as a limited home environment. Similarly, Reich (2002) asserted that homeschool parents do not have a right to serve as the only educator of their child "with no intermediary between them and their child" (p. 58). While parents choosing to homeschool claim that it is their responsibility to instill values in their children, Reich contended that public schools are the only places where children can learn many of those same values.

Aside from the research indicating the significant role that morals and values play in parents' decisions to homeschool, limited research exists that looks at how parents teach values

to their children or the degree to which parents view the impartation of values as a measure of their success. Given the importance of values as a driving factor in parents' decisions to homeschool, it seems intuitive that the successful impartation of those values to their children would serve as a significant measure of success that homeschool parents use in determining the quality of their children's home education.

**Homeschoolers in Higher Education and Beyond.** It is clear from numerous studies of both traditional and homeschool students that post-secondary education performance is one of several accepted measures of success (Hoffman & Lowitzki, 2005; Sparkman, Maulding, & Roberts, 2012; Sutton & Galloway, 2000). In this regard, Ray (2004) conducted a review of the literature surrounding research that examined how well homeschool students adjusted to life after high school. He found that empirical research has consistently shown that homeschool students display critical thinking skills and perform academically as well as or better than non-homeschool students in post-secondary school (de Oliveira, Watson, & Sutton, 1994; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). Research has also shown that homeschool students are at least equal to their traditionally educated counterparts in the areas of leadership abilities, self-esteem, self-confidence, and health of relationship with others (Sutton & Galloway, 2000). Ray (2004) concluded that homeschooled students are "very likely to succeed in college, both academically and socially" (p. 10).

Drenovsky and Cohen (2012) conducted a study to explore how homeschooled students adjusted to life in post-secondary education, to include both their levels of self-esteem and depression and their academic achievement as compared to their traditionally educated counterparts ( $n = 185$ ). They found that homeschooled students did not have significantly different self-esteem levels than their traditionally educated peers, but they did have lower levels

of depression. Homeschooled students were more likely to report that the majority of their grades were A's, whereas their traditionally educated peers were more likely to report B's. Homeschool students were also more likely to report that their overall higher education experience was "excellent."

The desire to teach values to their children is one of the leading motivations parents give for choosing to homeschool (Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Collom, 2005; Noel et al., 2013). Smiley (2012) conducted a qualitative study to examine whether those values persisted through a homeschooled student's post-secondary education. He found that the formerly homeschooled students involved in the study tended to not forsake the values and beliefs with which they were raised. For the most part, the interactions the students had with others in the university setting challenged and stretched the homeschooled students, with an examination of existing beliefs occurring in almost all cases. This examination typically resulted in either an incorporation of a contrasting belief—such as gay marriage or microevolution—into the student's existing belief system, or an increased resolve that they were confident in their beliefs. In no case did a student abandon their pre-existing beliefs.

A majority of U.S. colleges and universities have policies that apply specifically to homeschool applicants, and many post-secondary institutions are actively recruiting homeschool graduates (McReynolds, 2007; Ray, 2004). In a *Wall Street Journal* article, Golden (2000) reported that, in a recent semester, Stanford University accepted 27% of applicants who were homeschool graduates, which was nearly double the overall acceptance rate.

In a study that focused on the perceptions of homeschool students held by community college admissions officers ( $n = 12$ ), Sorey and Duggan (2008) found that half of admissions officers reported that they had an official policy for admission of homeschool students. The

admissions officers reported that students could use one or more of several documents in lieu of official transcripts, to include self-made transcripts or diplomas, ACT or SAT scores, GED, and letters of recommendation. Regarding the admissions officers' perceptions of homeschool students, all participants in Sorey and Duggan's (2008) study either agreed or strongly agreed that they expected homeschooled students to be as successful as traditionally educated students. The majority also agreed or strongly agreed that homeschooled students 18 years old and older were prepared academically (64%) and socially (55%). A minority held the same opinion of students under 18. The majority felt that there would be an increase of homeschool applicants in the future, and they generally felt that their institution was prepared to deal with the current and future homeschool population. The researchers concluded that the reactions of the community colleges in this study to homeschooled students applying for admission varied. Although there appeared to be a lack of bias by admissions officers towards homeschooled students, obstacles that these officers need to overcome in order for those students to gain admissions into community colleges still exist. Those obstacles appear to be more a function of knowing how to deal with the unique situations of homeschooled students rather than any bias. The authors encouraged these colleges to establish and publicize policies for dealing with these students.

Current research suggests that homeschooling is succeeding when measured by the same quantifiable variables as are typically used to measure traditional school success. Homeschool students appear to be doing well academically, socially, and as productive members of society after they complete their homeschool experiences. A review of the literature did not reveal any empirical studies that examined failed homeschool situations, and the majority of literature that presented homeschooling in a negative light lacked empirical evidence that supported the claims of the authors. Based on available research, successful homeschool experiences—regardless of

how one measures that success—seem to outweigh those situations in which home education fails.

### **Differentiated Instruction**

Having examined several areas that serve as accepted measures of student success, I will now discuss a conceptual framework by which students and teachers might see that success achieved. Differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001) is rooted deeply in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and focuses generally on the learning environment and specifically on three areas of that environment: *content*, or what educators teach; *process*, or how educators teach; and *product*, or the assessment of what the students have learned. For the sake of this study, I will use differentiated instruction as the conceptual lens through which sociocultural theory applies to the homeschool environment. Tomlinson (2001) defined differentiation as a teaching approach “in which teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs of individual students and small groups of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in a classroom” (Tomlinson et al., 2003, p. 121). The general idea is that by modifying the content, process, and product based on the needs of each individual student, increased learning will take place (George, 2005).

Differentiating content involves adapting what the educator teaches to each student. A number of strategies exist that teachers can use to accomplish content differentiation, the most fundamental of which is to teach concepts and understanding rather than lists of facts that have little relevance. Using a variety of resources that teachers gear towards different levels of learners is a critical component of content differentiation, as well as using learning contracts, where student and teacher agree on various tasks that the student will perform during some specified upcoming timeframe. These contracts ensure that the student works on those tasks at

an appropriate pace, and the teacher holds the student accountable for accomplishing the tasks (Anderson & Algozzine, 2007). Providing multiple ways for students to access material is also important, and teachers should take into consideration all students' learning preferences, interests, and strengths (Lawrence-Brown, 2004).

One can think of a process as a “sense-making activity” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 79). Process differentiation involves modifying activities in ways that help students make sense of content based on individual student needs. Countless accepted strategies that teachers can use to accomplish this differentiation exist, such as journaling, role-playing, and interest groups, to name a few. The intent of process differentiation is to allow students the flexibility to choose activities that help them accomplish their learning goals most easily (Anderson & Algozzine, 2007).

Teachers use product assignments to cause students to “rethink, use, and extend what they have learned over a long period of time” (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 85), and they should use them as the primary means of assessing what students have learned. Differentiating products allows students to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge in ways that are most comfortable for them, and, like content and process differentiation, teachers should individualize this demonstration of knowledge based on each student's abilities and preferences (Anderson & Algozzine, 2007).

The needs of individual students can be broken down into three areas: the child's level of readiness to learn, the interests in the content, and the preferred means of accessing new material (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). One can think of readiness in terms of the Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD), and Tomlinson, like Vygotsky, stressed the importance of identifying each individual child's ZPD, or readiness level (Hawkins, 2009; Tomlinson & Allen,



2000; Vygotsky, 1978). By ensuring that the ZPD is the focal point of all instruction by increasing the level of support, teachers can help maximize students' motivation (Silver, 2011; Tomlinson, 2001). Vygotsky (1992) also understood the importance of tapping into students' interests, asserting that interest and motivation are linked and that every thought is founded in a motivation that is built on "our desires and needs, our interests and emotions" (p. 252). Similarly, Tomlinson (2001) contended that by encouraging students to explore topics from the perspective of their personal interests, their motivation to learn increases. Through his discussions of both the ZPD and the influence of culture, Vygotsky (1978) contended that children have different ways of learning that educators must take into account on an individual level. This contention generally correlates to Tomlinson's (2001) construct of student learning profiles, which involves the teacher's awareness of the student's learning style, talent, or intelligence profiles.

While the intent of differentiated instruction is its incorporation into traditional classrooms where there are students with a vast array of strengths, weaknesses, experiences, and learning preferences seated side by side and under the instruction of a single teacher, its applicability to the homeschool learning environment is undeniable. One of the primary foci of differentiated instruction is customized curriculum for each student, which is a characteristic inherent to homeschooling. In a literature review conducted by Tomlinson et al. (2003), the authors noted that in the current school reform movement, teachers are required "to adjust curriculum, materials, and support to ensure that each student has equity of access to high-quality learning" (p. 120). This describes precisely what a home educator does on a regular basis, whether multiple siblings or a single child are being instructed. Differentiated instruction is an integral part of the homeschool experience, and one could view the ability to differentiate

instruction based on the needs of the child in any given subject or on any given day as the measurable characteristic of the effectiveness of the home educator.

The results of several studies indicated that differentiated instruction is effective in a number of areas. In a study conducted by Geisler, Hessler, Gardner, and Lovelace (2009) that examined the effectiveness of differentiated instruction techniques in a classroom of gifted African American elementary students, the researchers found that the incorporation of differentiated instruction strategies increased students' productivity, their ability to generalize concepts, and their active participation in their own education through self-monitoring and observation. This resulted in a greater improvement of writing skills than would otherwise have been possible. Mastropieri et al. (2006) conducted an experimental study that compared the performance outcomes of a group of students with whom educators used differentiated instruction techniques with those of a group taught using lecture and other traditional instructional means. Both groups included students with learning and emotional/behavioral disabilities. They found that the first group of students outperformed their peers on a state high-stakes test and that the teachers generally agreed that the differentiated instructional strategies were effective for all levels of students. Tieso (2004) concluded that both students and teachers preferred classrooms that incorporated differentiated instruction strategies, and their motivation levels increased as a result.

The general idea of the individualized learning environment and the three constructs of content, process, and product that are inherent in this theory of differentiated instruction provide an excellent framework for examining how homeschool parents' perceptions of success as it relates to their children's education affects their educational decision-making processes. This methodology serves as a conceptual framework for the research questions as well as the overall

design of the study that I will discuss in Chapter Three. The next section provides an overview of some of the optional activities that homeschool parents sometimes use to assist them in providing differentiated instruction to their children. I will also discuss the various curricular options that help support the content and product of the educational process as well as several process-oriented support groups and other related options.

### **Instructional Delivery and Support Options**

Formal home-based curriculum dates back to 1905, when the headmaster of Calvert School, a private academy in Baltimore, MD, began offering the school's curriculum to local parents whose children were unable to attend Calvert. Within five years, around 300 families from around the world were using the curriculum in their homes, and that growth has continued until present time. As of 2006, approximately 11,000 families were using Calvert's accredited curriculum (Calvert School, 2013; Gaither, 2008). Similarly, Fireside Correspondence School, a Seventh-Day Adventist school briefly known as Home Study Institute, Home Study International, and now Griggs University and International Academy, began offering correspondence programs for home use in 1909. Today around 2,500 students are using Griggs' accredited curriculum, and more than 235,000 people have used the curriculum since it was first offered over 100 years ago (Gaither, 2008; Griggs University & International Academy, n.d.).

In addition to the curriculum of Calvert and Griggs, homeschool parents today have a tremendous variety of curriculum choices, with one popular website that reviews homeschool curriculum, providing reviews for over 750 individual curricula (Home School Reviews, 2013). Hanna (2012) reported that over 70 publishers are producing various types of educational material that homeschool parents can purchase either online or at local bookstores. Hanna (2012) noted that, when it comes to curricula, "there is something for everyone" (p. 613).

A growing number of homeschool parents are implementing a classical, trivium-based education for their children, especially among Christian home-educators (Sherfinski, 2014). Sherfinski (2014) found that this methodology provides parents with several positive possibilities, to include a solid pedagogical approach to education and a wide variety of classical and Christian curricula available to homeschool families. Hahn (2012) also observed the growing number of classical homeschool educators in her study that focused on the rise of Latin instruction among homeschoolers, noting that the classical education movement being adopted by homeschool parents should be viewed “in a generally favorable light” (p. 26).

There are also an increasing number of options when it comes to how homeschool parents deliver the instruction, and it is largely because of these options that there is no accepted formal definition of homeschooling. The variety of available choices is creating an increasingly ambiguous line between home and traditional education. Gaither (2009) pointed to an emerging subset of pedagogically-motivated homeschooling families who are “challenging the historical dichotomies between public and private, school and home, formal and informal that have played such an important role in the movement's self-definition and in American education policy” (p. 18). More than 70% of homeschool families participate in homeschool co-ops (Hanna, 2012), and homeschool involvement in internet-based options is increasing (Basham et al. , 2007; Klein & Poplin, 2008). Because of the widespread use of these instructional delivery and support options by homeschooling families, and because the definition of homeschooling used in this study explicitly allows for the incorporation of these options into participant families’ educational structures, the most common options deserve further discussion.

**Homeschool learning cooperatives.** One of the earliest means in the modern homeschool movement of adding variety to a purely home-based education was homeschool

learning cooperatives, or co-ops, where groups of homeschool families come together and pool resources, allowing for parents—in some cases, certified teachers—who are strong in certain subjects to teach in classroom environments (Gaither, 2009). By joining together and pooling resources in a co-op, music programs, team sports, dramatic arts, and other group based activities can be offered, and courses—especially ones offering advanced content—can be taught to groups of students by subject matter experts. As co-ops have become more mainstream, many have come to look more and more like traditional schools, though some are more in line with Holt’s (1977, 2004) notion of *unschooling*, where the students are in complete control of the nature of what is taught (as discussed later in this section). Regardless of the form the co-ops take, participation by homeschoolers in them continues to be a growing trend (Gaither, 2009; McReynolds, 2007).

**Virtual public schools.** In 2001, Bauman predicted that as homeschooling continues to grow, constituents would pressure states to provide the same online services—such as online classes—to homeschoolers as are being made available to public school students. His prediction appears to be coming true, as many states are making concerted efforts to use increasingly advanced technology to meet the educational needs and desires of their students, and in many cases homeschool students are reaping the fruit of those efforts. Texas, Illinois, and North Carolina, for instance, have established virtual schools that are available to all resident students, regardless of their enrollment status (Illinois Online High School – Home School, 2011; North Carolina Virtual Public School, 2012; Texas Virtual School Network, 2012). In all three of these states’ virtual schools, a wide array of subjects are available à la carte, with costs varying depending on the state and status of students. In Texas, any student enrolled or eligible for enrollment in a public school or open enrollment charter school may take courses in the virtual

school. The cost for each course is around \$400. In Illinois, the program is free for independent homeschoolers, but a modest fee is required for students with other enrollment statuses. The North Carolina program is free for public school students but several hundred dollars per course for homeschool and other non-public school students. Other states have established similar online schools or provide online programs to homeschool families (Johnson, 2013).

**Virtual charter schools.** Similar to online public schools, another growing trend among homeschoolers is participation in virtual charter schools. These online schools provide instruction by certified teachers and are operated under the regulatory guidelines of the charter granting or state regulatory agency (Cambre, 2009), using advanced technology to offer curriculum “which allows for innovation, freedom from traditional structure, and tuition-free education for all its students” (Klein & Poplin, 2008). Klein and Poplin (2008) studied, among other things, the reasons parents chose to participate in a virtual charter school in California, and they found that the vast majority of reasons given were pedagogical in nature, with religious reasons not offered by a single participant. This would suggest that the virtual charter school option is especially popular with pedagogues since it provides enough flexibility to allow the parents to control the nature of the instruction, whereas ideologues might balk at the idea since they lose control over the content that the virtual charter school provides to their child. Some of this latter group no doubt avoid virtual charter schools because of the government oversight, which, indirectly, is one of the primary reasons they chose to homeschool in the first place (Lines, 2000; Williamson, 2012).

**Extracurricular activities.** Currently 22 states have passed laws that mandate public schools to allow homeschool participation in either extracurricular activities or their academic courses (Johnson, 2013). Other states, such as Texas, leave that decision in the hands of

individual school districts (Killeen Independent School District Office, personal communication, December 11, 2012). Many states allow homeschool students to participate in music, sports, and extracurricular activities, and a few states, such as Florida and Iowa, allow homeschool students to take individual resident courses (Bauman, 2001).

**Other publicly available resources.** Homeschool families often take frequent advantage of other publicly available resources, such as libraries, museums, and other historical and educational sites (e.g., battlefields, zoos, fire stations, dairy farms). Museums, for instance, often offer home school programs or discounts for homeschool students during certain hours, such as the programs offered by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 2013). Willingham (2008) observed that recent national education surveys indicated that over 80% of homeschool students use public libraries. She suggested that one of the most critical relationships a homeschool family can foster is that with the local head librarian. Similar to museums, many libraries offer programs specifically geared towards homeschool students, such as those offered by Allen County, IN, public libraries (Allen County Public Library, 2013). Homeschool families' usage of this variety of resources supports the fact that, "despite being 'home' based, most homeschool programs are conducted in many different places, from the backseat of the car while doing everyday errands, to parks and museums, and, of course, in libraries" (Willingham, 2008, p. 60).

**Unschooling.** First suggested by John Holt (1977, 2004) as an alternative to what, in his opinion, was a broken public school system, unschooling refers to a means of totally freeing the child to learn in a natural setting. It perhaps best represents the farthest extreme of the pedagogically motivated subset of homeschoolers. Concerning curriculum and homeschool models, the parent gives the child the freedom to discover knowledge completely independently

of any established curriculum, and the parent is present just to support that effort. While this form of homeschooling does not appear to be widespread based on the current body of research, it warrants mention for two reasons. First, some homeschoolers do learn in completely unstructured learning environments (Martin-Chang et al., 2011). Second, its close association with the individual many refer to as “the Father of Homeschooling,” John Holt (Finch, 2012), makes it a significant construct of the modern homeschooling movement.

### **Summary**

While there are differences of opinions and a wide range of critical analyses of the methodology and implications of current homeschool research, a few things are clear. Homeschool families have a variety of options when it comes to methodology and curriculum. The number of homeschool students is growing, with even conservative estimates indicating a rate of growth that is greater than other means of education. Homeschool students are performing academically as well as or better than the national average, with many studies indicating that they are performing significantly better than public school students are. A number of reasons why parents choose to homeschool their children exist, and the types of families choosing to homeschool are becoming increasingly diverse. Homeschool students are performing well, both academically and socially, in post-secondary education, and they are adjusting well to life after school.

The research in three areas in particular—academic achievement, socialization, and homeschoolers in higher education—indicates that, irrespective of the reasons homeschooling parents initially had for choosing to homeschool, homeschooling seems to be effective based on their children’s academic and social achievements and their success in higher education and beyond. The research does not address, however, all of the factors that are involved in these



parents' perceptions of success for their children, nor does it address how these perceptions affect what and how these parents teach their children and assess how their children are measuring up to their standard of success. The intent of this study was to help fill this gap in the current literature. The next chapter will cover the methodology used to accomplish this.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to understand how a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. defines success as it pertains to their children's education. Additionally, I sought to understand how homeschool parents' definitions of success influences the learning environment that they establish for their children. The study focused specifically on the content, process, and product that make up that learning environment (Tomlinson, 2001). In this chapter, I describe the methodology that I used, to include a description of the design, setting, case, participant selection procedures, my role as the researcher, data collection and analysis procedures, and measures taken to increase trustworthiness and ensure fair treatment of all participants.

#### **Research Design**

Case study is a qualitative research design "that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Merriam (1998) stated that case study design "is employed 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" (p. 19). This study focused on how homeschooling parents' perceptions of success influence the process taken to accomplish that success. It would be impossible to understand these perceptions and their influence on educational decisions outside of the context of the homeschool environment, and attempting to understand this phenomenon through the lens of a single data source would not provide a complete picture. With these factors in mind, case study was an ideal design for this study.

A case is the unit of analysis that is the central focus of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Stake (1995) referred to it as an integrated system with an encapsulating boundary and

working parts. He made a clear distinction between the case and the issues within the case that provide direction to the study. “Issues draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, the complex backgrounds of human concern” (Stake, 1995, p. 17). He went so far as to assign the Greek letters theta and iota to represent the case and the issues, respectively, to emphasize the importance of these two constructs in case study research. A traditional two-parent family who was currently homeschooling at least one child and who had homeschooled no less than the previous four years constituted the case in this study. The two primary research questions regarding how a select group of homeschool parents perceives success as it pertains to their children’s education and how those perceptions shape the learning environment represented the issues.

Stake (1995) also defined two types of case study: intrinsic and instrumental. The former is a study in which the case itself is of prime interest, while the latter is a study in which the researcher uses the case to gain a deeper understanding of the issues. A study is instrumental “when the purpose of case study is to go beyond the case” (Stake, 2005, p. 8). This describes the purpose of this study, which used individual cases to examine a larger issue. Also in this study, multiple homeschool families served as individual cases, and each of these families were instrumental in providing insight into the issues common to each family. Stake referred to case studies with more than one case as collective case studies (Stake, 1995) or multiple case studies (Stake, 2006). Yin (2009) and Merriam (1998) also used the term multiple case study. Given that the issues pertaining to success were the central focus (as opposed to a particular family or case), and given that multiple families participated as cases, this study was an instrumental multiple case study.

## **Research Questions**

I addressed the following primary and secondary research questions:

1. How does a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. define success as it pertains to their children's education?
2. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence the learning environment in their home?
  - a. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence what they teach their children?
  - b. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence how they teach their children?
  - c. How do homeschool parents assess their child's progress in achieving success?

## **Setting**

The setting for the study was a central Texas community adjacent to a large military base. Half of the participant families lived in the area because of military assignments. These four families had a variety of military assignments around the world prior to moving to this area, and none of them was originally from Texas. Three of those four families anticipated a military-related move away from this area at some point in the future, with the retired Evans family being the exception. This characteristic of these families lessened the significance of the specific geographic setting while increasing the geographic diversity of the participants.

Texas is among the most homeschool-friendly states in the country, imposing virtually no oversight on homeschoolers (Home School Legal Defense Association, 2013). As such, no legal circumstances affected the study.

There are several homeschool co-ops and support groups in the community, some of

which are religious and some non-religious. These groups served as the starting point for participant selection, as discussed in the next section. No studies exist that examine the demographics of any of these groups, and because of this, it was not possible to determine the similarities between the groups and the population at large. The data collection itself took place primarily in the homes of the participating homeschool families, since this is where most of the educational processes take place.

In the latest census in 2010, the Texas community from which I drew participants had a population of approximately 128,000 people, representing a 47% increase over the previous 10 years. This increase was due, in large part, to the growth of the military population in the area. The school age population—those between the ages of 5 and 19—represented 23% of the total population, while 44% were between the ages of 25 and 54. The three largest racial groups were Caucasian, African-American, and Hispanics, accounting for 45%, 34%, and 23% of the population, respectively. The median household income for the community was \$43,082 (Greater Killeen Chamber of Commerce, 2009).

### **Cases**

The unit of analysis—or case—for the study consisted of a traditional two-parent family who was currently homeschooling at least one child and who had homeschooled no less than the previous four years. Stake (2006) posed three guiding principles to consider in selecting cases in a multiple case study: the relevancy of the individual case to the collective study, the diversity provided by the individual cases in the context of the other participant cases, and the ability to learn through an individual case when studied alongside other participant cases. With these three factors in mind, the participant cases of this study were comprised of eight homeschool families, all of whom lived in the aforementioned central Texas community. Since they were all

homeschool families with at least one student who had been homeschooled for at least four years (resulting in an age range of qualifying children between 9 and 18 years of age), the study will meet Stake's (2006) first guiding principle of relevancy.

In order to capture the diversity to which Stake referred in his second principle, I ensured that the participants represented the two broad areas of motivation discussed in the review of the literature. Van Galen (1991) categorized homeschool parents in one of two groups based on their reasons for homeschooling: ideologues and pedagogues. The ideologues choose to homeschool for two primary reasons: they have concerns about what traditional schools are teaching and to strengthen the parent/child relationship. The pedagogues, on the other hand, include those who feel that traditional schools are doing a poor job, and they believe that they can educate their children better. A number of studies have concluded that these broad motivational categories are still appropriate today (Biellik, 2008; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Gaither, 2009; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). Because of this distinction, I ensured that my selection of participant families was representative of both motivational categories. This variety of participant ideology and experience also ensured that the study met Stake's third guiding principle—the opportunity to learn from the cases.

I did not impose gender limitations on the children of the families involved in the study, nor did I eliminate parents from participating in the study based on age or education, though I gathered this information during the data collection process. Families' participation in homeschool co-ops and other external educational activities did not disqualify them for the study, but the families had to conduct the majority (i.e., more than 50% of a typical week's instructional time) of their children's education in the home. The parents—one or both—had to be the primary educators, and they had to have selected the curriculum. The intent of this

delimitation was to ensure that the participant parents—as opposed to the government or local school board—controlled the educational decisions surrounding their child to the fullest extent possible. Students enrolled in public schools for academic services (e.g., publicly funded virtual academies, classes that are under public school district or other government oversight) were not allowed to participate in the study. For consistency, I limited the participants of the study to traditional two-parent families, as these families constitute almost 98% of homeschooling families (Ray, 2010).

In order to implement Miles and Huberman’s (1994) recommendation to examine an array of both similar and contrasting cases in order to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon, I had representation from a range of lifestyles, to include families from both the military and civilian communities. The advantage of conducting the study in an area with such a large military population was that families from around the country were gathered in a central location due to military requirements, which resulted in greater diversity with regard to where the participants call home. I also attempted to ensure diversity through the families’ motivations for choosing to homeschool. Table 4 shows each family’s military affiliation and motivations for initially choosing to homeschool.

Table 4

*Participant Families' Motivations for Homeschooling*

Name	Military Affiliation	Ideologue/Pedagogue Self-Identification	Top Three Reason for Homeschooling
Aycock	Activated Reservist	Half Ideologue/Half Pedagogue	Religious reasons To develop character/morality Can give child better education at home
Baker	None	Moderately Ideologue	Poor learning environment at school To develop character/morality Religious reasons
Caldwell	Activated Reservist	Mostly Ideologue	To develop character/morality Religious reasons Can give child better education at home
Davis	None	Moderately Ideologue	Object to what school teaches To develop character/morality Want private school but cannot afford it
Evans	Retired	Mostly Ideologue	Religious reasons Can give child better education at home To provide stability due to frequent moves
Franklin	None	Moderately Pedagogue	To develop character/morality Object to what school teaches Can give child better education at home
Graham	Active Duty	Completely Pedagogue	Can give child better education at home Parent's career To provide stability due to frequent moves
Harris	Dept. of the Army Contractor	Moderately Pedagogue	Poor learning environment at school To develop character/morality Religious reasons

**Procedures**

I acquired approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to collecting any data (Appendix A). With the assistance of leaders of local homeschool co-ops and



other informal homeschool networks, I used purposeful, snowball sampling to identify potential candidates. After establishing personal contact with families and ensuring some level of interest in participation in the study, I emailed 10 families a recruitment letter (Appendix B) that explained my background and the purpose of the study as well as a link to an online Demographics and Motivations Questionnaire that I developed for the study (Appendix C). Eight of the 10 families completed the online questionnaire, which confirmed their eligibility for the study. I then contacted each in turn via email to arrange a time to meet. I also sent them the first phase of data collection, an open-ended questionnaire, to complete prior to our meeting. At our first meeting, we completed the second and third phases of data collection as described below. At the start of each family's participation in the study, they each signed an informed consent form (Appendix D). All eight of the families continued their participation throughout the entirety of the study.

Prior to collecting data, I assigned surname pseudonyms to each family and first name pseudonyms to each child. From that point through the end of the study, all raw data transcriptions, notes, and reports referred to individuals and families by their respective pseudonyms (e.g., Mr. & Mrs. Smith for parents, Sally or John for children). No identifying information was included in the data, draft reports, or in this final report.

The first phase of the four phases of data collection involved the completion of an open-ended questionnaire by each participant family. The intent of the questionnaire was to provide each family time to thoughtfully consider, in general terms, what is important to them in regard to the success of their child, as well as what they are doing to ensure that their child is on track to achieve this success. Upon completion of the questionnaire, I analyzed the resulting data and used it to construct an interview guide for a semi-structured interview with the parents. The

purpose of this interview was to encourage dialogue between the parents that resulted in increasing specificity of their thoughts on success. Next, I interviewed the primary educator in order to obtain detailed information about how the families are addressing the content, process, and product on a daily basis. After I completed all three of these steps with all eight families, I conducted a focus group that provided a means of gaining a different perspective of the topic and allowing participants a chance to add to and clarify their thoughts about issues that emerged throughout the study.

I audio-recorded all interviews and the focus group, and I transcribed the content of those recordings as quickly as possible after each event. I secured all data at all times throughout the study, storing digital data—which comprised the majority of data—in a password-protected directory to which only I have access, while hard copies of data are stored in a locked filing cabinet, again to which only I have access.

I analyzed all individual case data using Stake's (1995) single-case analysis techniques. I used Stake's (2006) cross-case analysis methods for analyzing the combined cases. Individual case analysis began early in the data collection process, occurring simultaneously while I collected the data. It concluded after all data had been collected and appropriately analyzed. I conducted cross-case analysis after I finished analyzing all individual cases.

### **The Researcher's Role**

As the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in this study, I understand the importance of disclosing my personal experiences in the areas of homeschooling and research for the sake of transparency and increased credibility. I have a Bachelor of Music Degree in Music Education and Music Performance, a Bachelor of Science Degree in Computer Science, and a Master of Music Degree in Music Education. I have served over 16 years on active duty in the

U.S. Army, the last three and a half of which were as instructor, administrator, and quality assurance evaluator at the Army School of Music. I also have seven years' experience as a software engineer and one-year experience as a middle and high school band teacher in a North Carolina public school. My wife and I have four children, currently ages 16, 14, 10, and 7, all of whom we have homeschooled from the start of their education. I am an avid proponent of homeschooling, for reasons involving (as the literature suggests) both pedagogical and ideological reasons.

As a homeschooling parent, I share a number of similar experiences and inherent similarities and interests with all of the participants. Because my family fits the definition of the case being studied, I have given significant thought to the research questions being presented here on a personal level, and I know what my wife and I believe to be true for us (see Appendix E). By identifying these beliefs and assumptions, I am making a deliberate effort to avoid bias to ensure that my personal experiences and preferences do not interfere with the credibility of the study. Those beliefs and resulting assumptions will be set aside throughout this study to ensure that I am able to present an accurate portrayal of the participant families. My role throughout the study in relation to the participants will be strictly that of nonparticipant observer and data gatherer.

### **Data Collection**

I collected data through four means: open-ended questionnaires, interviews with the parents, primary educator interviews, and a focus group. The research questions, purpose of the study, underlying theory, and current literature drove all questions and topics. Subject matter experts validated all data collection tools to ensure their reliability. After receiving IRB approval, I conducted a pilot study of the data collection tools with two families who met the

qualifications for participation to ensure the credibility of the study. I did not use the data collected during the pilot study as part of the final study, and the families who participated in the pilot study did not participate in the final study.

I used the open-ended questionnaire to collect general ideas, followed by semi-structured interviews with the parents that served as an in-depth exploration of these ideas with the family as a whole. I then conducted structured, face-to-face interviews with the primary educator in each family to obtain specific data on the day-to-day decisions regarding how they are attempting to achieve success. After completing all three of these phases for all eight families, I conducted a focus group comprised of parents from the participant families. The focus group provided an opportunity for participants to discuss ideas that have developed over the course of the study with one another.

### **Open-Ended Questionnaires**

The first stage of data collection consisted of a short, open-ended questionnaire with the four standardized questions shown in Table 5. I asked each of the families to work together to provide thoughtful and in-depth feedback to begin to formulate their personal definitions of success as it related to the child's education and the influence of their ideas of success. By presenting open-ended questions in a written questionnaire, I hoped to provide participants with time to formulate their answers to these key questions. Appendix F shows a sample completed questionnaire.

Table 5

*Open-Ended Questionnaire Questions*

- 
1. Describe how you define *success* as it pertains to your child's education.
  2. What characteristics and attributes do you presently see in your child that indicates he or she is on the right track toward success?
  3. What characteristics and attributes do you desire to see exhibited in your child at the conclusion of his or her homeschool education that would indicate he or she has achieved success?
  4. What are you doing to ensure that these characteristics and attributes develop in your child?
- 

The literature suggests that there is no universally accepted definition of success. Question 1 is intended to get the participant families thinking in general terms about their definition of success and to explore the degree to which the families indicate—as the literature suggests—that areas such as academic achievement, socialization, and performance after homeschooling play into their definitions of success. Questions 2 and 3 explore the families' thoughts of success in more detail by looking at specific characteristics and attributes that would indicate that the child is on track to achieve their idea of success. Question 4 addresses, again in general terms, the learning environment that is so important to both Vygotsky (1978) and Tomlinson (2001) that is presumably leading towards that success. The literature also suggests that homeschool families generally have available a large variety of options in terms of curricula, organizational structure, and external activities (Hanna, 2012), and this fourth question began to uncover the full extent of each participant family's use of their available options. I explored the

areas covered on the questionnaire in increasing depth as the data collection phase moved to parent interviews, primary educator interviews, and focus groups.

### **Parent Interviews**

The second stage of data collection was an interview with the parents of each participant family. Patton (2002) stated that the purpose of interviews is “to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). While there are disadvantages to interviewing multiple individuals at the same time, an advantage of this methodology is the likelihood that the interviewees will have complimentary responses that result in a more detailed, comprehensive response (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Given the purpose of this study, this advantage outweighed any drawbacks presented by the complicated nature of such interviews.

In most cases, I conducted an interview with both parents. The only exception was with the Franklin family; Mr. Franklin was unable to attend the interview. The purpose was to encourage the parents to talk more systematically and in depth about their perceptions of success as they relate to their children’s education and the methods by which they are attempting to achieve that success. I developed an interview guide for each family based on their answers to the open-ended questionnaire. The interview guide provided a semi-structured framework for use with each of the parent interviews (Patton, 2002). Whereas the purpose of the questionnaire was to encourage participants to think in general terms, the interviews with the parents were used to encourage specificity and to extract examples of daily situations in which the learning environment—specifically the content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 2001)—was (or was not) leading towards the development of the identified characteristics of success. The interview

guides were flexible enough to allow for follow-up discussion as appropriate during the interview with the parents. Table 6 shows a sample interview guide, and Appendix G shows a partial transcript from one of the interviews.

I audio-recorded all parent interviews and transcribed those recordings as quickly as possible after the interview. I also took reflective notes immediately following each interview.

Table 6

*Sample Parent Interview Guide*

Participant Family #1	
I.	<p>Perceptions of Success</p> <p>A. The comments provided on their questionnaire indicated that their perceptions of success fall into the following categories. Ensure these categories cover the full “big picture” of success. (Categories shown here are samples only. I included categories based on their questionnaire results when collecting data from participants.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Academic</li> <li>- Emotional</li> <li>- Social</li> <li>- Spiritual</li> <li>- Physical</li> </ul> <p>B. Within each category, explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Details for clarity and more in-depth descriptions</li> <li>- Additional clarification of potentially idealistic answers from the questionnaire</li> <li>- Whether the balance of the categories are captured correctly (for instance, if the five categories listed above were the actual categories derived for a family, does one category carry significantly more weight than another.)</li> <li>- Short-term milestones indicating they are on the right track</li> <li>- Assessment tools</li> </ul> <p>C. If the child is present, explore whether the parents have communicated—either explicitly or implicitly—the full extent of their perceptions of success with him or her, keeping in mind that a child’s response must be considered in light of his or her age .</p>
II.	<p>Characteristics and Attributes</p>

- 
- A. The following characteristics and attributes that indicate success has been achieved are list. (Characteristics and Attributes shown here are samples only. I included characteristics and attributes based on their questionnaire results when collecting data from participants.)
- Acceptance into college/university
  - Ability to support themselves
  - Happiness/Contentment
  - Spiritually mature
- B. For each characteristic/attribute, explore:
- Details for clarity and more in-depth descriptions
  - Where the characteristic/attribute fits into their definition of success
  - Whether or not satisfactory progress is being made towards the development of the characteristic/attribute
  - How they measure their progress or determine the achievement of the characteristic/attribute has been obtained
- C. If the child is present, explore his or her opinion regarding whether each characteristic/attribute is important to them and if they feel that progress is being made towards its development.

### III. Actions Leading to Success

- A. Courses of Action. (Courses of actions shown here are samples only. I modified these to reflect participants' courses of action as identified on the open-ended questionnaire.)
- Homeschool co-op
  - Homeschool soccer league
  - Church youth group
  - Informal, student-led learning activities
- B. Each course of action that the parents are taking to lead to success is listed below. For each course of action listed, explore:
- Details for clarity and more in-depth descriptions
  - How the action helps accomplish their success goals
  - How content, process, and product relate to each action
  - How the action affects each category of success
- C. If the child is present, explore his or her opinion regarding whether the parents' courses of action are achieving their desired success goals.
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*Note.* Adapted from Patton (2002, p. 420-421)

The three primary areas of exploration during the interviews with the parents were



Perceptions of Success, Characteristics and Attributes, and Actions Leading to Success. Area I correlates to Question 1 of the Questionnaire and ties into the literature's lack of account for an accepted, comprehensive definition of success in general terms. In terms of success, the literature focuses primarily on academic achievement, socialization, and performance in life after homeschooling. My intent for the Area I topics was to continue to uncover the full extent of families' perceptions of success and to explore the degree to which these and other areas play in their perceptions.

Area II correlates to questions 2 and 3 of the questionnaire, the intent of which was to examine what specific characteristics and attributes are important to the families. The literature on success suggests that traditional educators place emphasis on quantitative measures such as GPA and standardized test scores (Sparkman et al., 2012), whereas homeschool families see other areas as equally or more important (Ray, 2004). This area of questioning shed light on specific characteristics and attributes that the participant families see as the most important indicators of success.

Area III correlates to Question 4 of the Questionnaire and reflects the importance of the learning environment, as discussed by Vygotsky (1978) and Tomlinson (2001), as well as the literature that suggests that homeschool families incorporate a wide range of learning activities into their daily educational routines. The intent of the final question of each section was to ensure that I was able to present the voices of any children who may have been present during the interview.

### **Primary Educator Interviews**

After the questionnaire and interview with the parents, I conducted a face-to-face interview with the parent who is the primary educator of the child, which in all cases was the

mother. In most cases, the father attended this interview as well, though the mothers typically did most of the talking. I designed the interview around an approach that combines standardized, open-ended questions and an interview guide (Patton, 2002). This method involved explicitly listing key questions exactly as I planned to ask participants along with related probes to each question to “deepen the response to a question, increase the richness and depth of responses, and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired” (Patton, 2002, p. 372). I used the probes listed in Table 7 to ensure that we covered each question’s associated topics adequately. As the interviews progressed, I found that, in most cases, the participants addressed the subtopics covered by the probes without my stating them. I only verbalized the probes when necessary to ensure the richness and depth of their responses as Patton noted was sometimes necessary. This ensured that the data gathered from all participants had a common structure, but it also provided participants the opportunity to delve into carefully controlled tangential areas that were in keeping with the purpose of the study. The intent of the interview was to provide an in-depth exploration of how participants’ perceptions of success influence their day-to-day educational decisions in practical ways (e.g., curriculum choices, pedagogical rationale, assessment tools). I attempted to determine the extent to which the parents’ ideas about success were driving these decisions, as opposed to other extraneous factors (e.g., time, energy, finances). Table 7 provides a list of standardized, open-ended questions as well as each associated list of probes. Appendix H shows a sample transcript from a primary educator interview.

Table 7

*Standardized, Open-Ended Interview Questions with Associated Probes*

Question	Probes
<i>Content (What you teach)</i>	
1. How do you determine <i>what</i> to teach to your child?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there a systematic process?</li> <li>- Is the process more logical or emotional?</li> <li>- How—if at all—does the process (or lack thereof) support the parents' specific ideas of success?</li> </ul>
2. Describe the curriculum you use, if any, for each of the following subjects: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Math</li> <li>Science</li> <li>Literature</li> <li>Writing</li> <li>Social Studies</li> <li>Second Language</li> <li>Fine Arts</li> <li>Other</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Publisher</li> <li>- Religious affiliation, if any</li> <li>- Length of use</li> <li>- Opinion about quality</li> </ul>
3. What was your rationale for choosing each of these curricular options?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child's readiness</li> <li>- Child's interest</li> <li>- Child's learning profile</li> </ul>
4. In what ways, if any, did your perceptions of success for your child play into your decisions regarding what you teach or allow others to teach your child?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure all areas included in participants' perceptions of success are covered, as identified in the questionnaire and interview with the parents</li> </ul>
<i>Process (How you teach)</i>	
5. How do you determine <i>how</i> you go about teaching your child?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there a systematic process?</li> <li>- Is the process more logical or emotional?</li> <li>- How—if at all—does the process (or lack thereof) support the parents' specific ideas of success?</li> </ul>
6. Describe how you structure your homeschool in your home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primary teacher</li> <li>- Role of the non-primary teacher(s)</li> <li>- Location(s) where schoolwork is done</li> </ul>

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|--|---|
| 7. Describe a typical school year.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Annual start and finish dates</li> <li>- Traditional vs. year-round</li> <li>- Holidays and other time off</li> <li>- Seasonal events</li> <li>- Do you think in terms of grade levels?</li> </ul> |
| 8. Describe a typical school week.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of days a week of schooling</li> <li>- Recurring weekly events</li> <li>- Incorporation of extracurricular activities</li> </ul>  |
| 9. Describe a typical day of schooling.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Daily start and end time</li> <li>- Formality of schooling</li> <li>- Group vs. individual work (if siblings are present)</li> <li>- Hands-on vs. worksheet and related activities</li> </ul>      |
| 10. What role, if any, do external academically oriented organizations play in your child's schooling?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Co-ops</li> <li>- Virtual classes (public, charter, or private)</li> <li>- Libraries</li> <li>- Museums, field trips, etc.</li> </ul>  |
| 11. What role, if any, does technology play in your child's schooling?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Virtual classes (public, charter, or private)</li> <li>- Software-based curriculum</li> </ul>  |
| 12. To what extent is your child involved in extracurricular and other non-academic activities?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sports leagues</li> <li>- Boy/girl scouts</li> <li>- Church activities</li> <li>- Civic organizations</li> </ul>   |
| 13. What was your rationale for choosing to structure your homeschool environment this way?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Child's readiness</li> <li>- Child's interest</li> <li>- Child's learning profile</li> </ul>   |
| 14. In what ways, if any, did your perceptions of success for your child play into your decisions regarding how you teach or allow others to teach your child? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure all areas included in participants' perceptions of success are covered, as identified in the questionnaire and interview with the parents</li> </ul>  |

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*Product (How you assess)*

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|--|---|
| 15. How do you determine which methods you will use to assess your child's progress?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is there a systematic process?</li> <li>- Is the process more logical or emotional?</li> <li>- How—if at all—does the process (or lack thereof) support the parents' specific ideas of success?</li> </ul> |
| 16. Describe how you assess the extent to which your child is developing your desired characteristics or attributes of success.      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formal tools (e.g., standardized tests, GPA)</li> <li>- Informal tools (e.g., observations, discussion with spouse)</li> </ul>   |
| 17. What do the results of formal assessment tools indicate in terms of your child's success?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Standardized test scores</li> <li>- GPA (home, co-op, etc.)</li> </ul>   |
| 18. In what ways are you satisfied or dissatisfied regarding the progress your child is making towards achieving your success goals? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure all areas included in participants' perceptions of success are covered, as identified in the questionnaire and interview with the parents</li> </ul>  |
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I divided the interview questions into three sections that correlate with Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated instruction constructs of content, process, and product. Questions 1 through 4 explored what the parents teach their child, looking specifically at the curriculum choices they have made and the reasons for making those choices. Question 1 served as an icebreaker for this section and as a discussion starter, focusing on the general topic of the rationale behind what parents are teaching. Question 2 and its probes relate to the literature surrounding available curriculum options and ensure the nature of the selected curriculum is covered. Question 3 examined the parents' reasoning for selecting any given curricula, with the probes ensuring that we explored Tomlinson's (2001) suggested student characteristics for which teachers can differentiate—readiness, interest, and learning profile. Question 4 explicitly linked curriculum-related decisions to the parents' perceptions of success. I derived the probes for this question from the participants' answers to the questionnaire and parent interview questions, which ensured that we covered all of the areas that the parents deemed important.

Questions 5 through 14 inquired about how the parents go about instructing the child, with an emphasis on how they structure their homeschool environment organizationally, spatially, and chronologically, as well as the role played by external organizations and activities. Question 5, like question 1, opened the door for a general discussion of the rationale behind the choice of how teaching takes place. Questions 6 through 9 focused on the internal, home-based structure (both the physical and the temporal), while questions 10 through 12 focused on external factors. Questions 13, like question 2, probed the motives of the parents in making these structural choices, again from the perspective of Tomlinson's (2001) constructs of readiness, interest, and learning profile. Question 14, like question 3, directly tied structural and pedagogical decisions to the parents' previously identified perceptions of success.

Questions 15 through 18 examined how parents assess their child's learning and development, with question 15 providing a means of addressing assessment in general terms. Question 16 looked at specific assessment tools that are used and question 17 explored the quantifiable results of the formal assessment tools that are used. Question 18 provided the parents the opportunity to articulate their thoughts regarding their beliefs about the effectiveness of their current course of action.

Primary educator interviews followed the same procedures as parent interviews regarding audio recording. Again, I took notes immediately following each interview, ensuring that I kept an accurate record of data throughout the study and increasing the dependability of the results.

### **Focus Group**

A focus group is a type of interview in which multiple people are present and the objective of which is "to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (Patton, 2002, p. 386). For the final phase of

data collection, I conducted a focus group comprised of parents from the participant families. The purpose of the focus group was to provide a means of gaining additional clarification and perspectives of key ideas that emerge through the data collection and analysis. I attempted to schedule the focus group at a time when all of the primary educators could be present. I further attempted to adjust the schedule so that both parents from a family could attend. Ultimately, both parents from six of the eight families were present. Neither parent from the Franklin or Harris families were able to attend.

Prior to conducting the focus group, I analyzed the data collected in each individual case and performed the initial cross-case analysis through the completion of the Merged Findings Worksheet (Appendix L). At that stage of the analysis, a list of significant findings from each case had emerged, and I mapped the extent to which those findings supported the research questions. I used the results of the merged findings analysis to derive questions for the focus group. Similar to primary educator interviews, I used an approach that combines standardized, open-ended questions and an interview guide (Patton, 2002). This allowed me to ask specific questions to start each topic, followed by appropriate follow-up questions that encouraged deeper and more focused conversation about the topic. These questions provided the participants a means of clarifying key points and ensuring the accuracy of each finding. Table 8 shows the final interview guide I used for the focus group.

Table 8

*Focus Group Questions*

- 
1. What are your thoughts on each of the following assertions?
    - Definition of Success
      - Academic
        - **Academic excellence:** *Academic excellence plays a significant role in homeschool families' views of success, but it is not the only—or even primary—measure of success.*
        - **Love of learning:** *Love of learning and the ability to self-learn are more important than mastery of specific subject areas.*
        - **Critical thinking:** *Homeschool families see the ability to think critically as the most important academic outcome of the child's education.*
      - Social
        - **Communication skills:** *The ability to formulate and express opinions, to include effective communication skills, is valued as much as academic achievement.*
        - **Relationships:** *Homeschool families value the child's ability to interact with and relate to others.*
      - Values
        - **Character:** *Character matters, with homeschool families often viewing academics as a framework for instilling values.*
        - **Spiritual:** *There is a spiritual element of success common to most homeschool families; they most typically identify this as a relationship with Christ.*
    - Impact on the Learning Environment
      - Content (What you teach)
        - **Curriculum choice:** *Homeschool educators choose curricula that meet their needs and support their success goals; however, there was no emotional attachment to any specific curriculum, regardless of subject area.*
      - Process (How you teach)
        - **External educational sources:** *Involvement with external education activities (e.g., co-ops, field trips, sports leagues) is dependent on the quality of the available activities and the educational approach of the homeschool family; there is no one-size-fits-all extracurricular model.*
        - **Integration of subjects:** *Homeschool families typically view academic subjects as an integrated whole, even when some subjects are taught independently of one another.*

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- **Teaching to strengths:** *Focusing on each child's unique strengths, gifts, and abilities becomes increasingly important as the child ages.*
  - **Discussion and questioning:** *In-depth discussions and deliberate questioning techniques are an integral—albeit often informal—part of the pedagogical approach used by homeschool educators.*
  - Product (How you assess)
    - **Mastery of Subject Matter:** *Proficiency of subject matter is more important than grades; assessments of learning are usually informal, with standardized test results used primarily by the parents to indicate whether they are on the right track.*
    - **Practical application:** *Homeschool families view the ability to apply what their child has learned as the most important measure of success, whether the topic at hand is academic, social, or values-related.*
2. Regarding Research Question 1, do the three categories—Academic, Social, and Values—encapsulate your ideas of success?
  3. In what ways do you see your views of success as homeschool parents different from those of traditionally-education families?
- 

Additionally, I provided the participants with a copy of an initial version of Figure 2 (Success Goals and the Learning Environment) to use as a reference during the discussion. Table 9 shows the differences between the version reviewed by the focus group participants and the final version. The changes that occurred between the two versions were a result of the focus group discussion and my further analysis of the data.

Table 9

*Differences between Versions of Success Goals and Learning Environment Figure*

Initial Version	Final Version
Academic Excellence	Academic Proficiency
Critical Thinking	Ability to Think Critically
Relationships	Healthy Relationships
Character	Strength of Character
Spiritual	Spiritually Secure
Curriculum Choice	Curriculum Choices
External Educational Sources	External Educational Resources
Teaching to Strengths	Focus on Strengths
- Not Included -	Independence

I took notes immediately following the focus group session. Like the preceding interviews, I audio-recorded and personally transcribed the focus group as well. Appendix I provides an excerpt from the focus group transcript.

### **Data Analysis**

Stake (2006) observed that a dilemma exists in multicase study analysis because the nature of the study constantly pulls the researcher in two directions: toward the details of the individual cases on one hand and toward the aggregate meaning of the cases when analyzed collectively on the other. With this dilemma in mind, I conducted individual case analyses on each case followed by cross-case analysis on the cases collectively to look for similarities and differences between the cases to provide a thorough understanding of the individual cases when considered collectively (Stake, 2006). Because analysis began early in the data collection process (Stake, 1995), it warrants noting here that I personally transcribed all interview and focus group data as soon as possible following the sessions with the participants.

## **Individual Case Analysis**

Stake (1995) emphasized that understanding the case is the primary purpose of case analysis, and he proposed two primary means of doing so: direct interpretation, which is the interpretation of individual passages of text to establish general themes, and categorical aggregation, which involves the analysis of multiple events and statements collectively to extract meaning and patterns out of the data. Both direct interpretation and categorical aggregation depend upon the identification of patterns. To assist in this, I used the software program ATLAS.ti, which provided a means for assigning codes to lines of transcript text. I numbered each line of significant data chunks, and I read and reread each line, assigning one or more topical codes to each. Some of these codes were identified in advance, such as—in the context of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001)—content, process, and product. The majority of codes emerged throughout the coding process. Once I completed preliminary coding for a given case, the list of codes will be combined, categorized, and adjusted in order to present a holistic portrait of each individual case.

## **Cross-Case Analysis**

For cross-case analysis, I incorporated an organizational structure of the data as represented by a series of worksheets proposed by Stake (2006) that correlates to the steps that I took during the cross-case analysis process. The first step of this analysis involved the creation of the Research Question Worksheet (Appendix J). I listed each primary and secondary research question in this chart, and I used it to provide the overarching focus during the analysis phase.

During the second step, I completed the Notes Worksheet (Appendix K), which I used to help organize notes and codings taken during the data collection phase. Its purpose was to serve as a repository for important findings about each case that were identified during the individual

case analysis, the extent to which the research questions were represented by the findings of each case, the uniqueness of the individual case, and the similarities that emerged with other cases. As such, there was one Notes Worksheet for each case, and I used them as working documents throughout the data analysis phase.

The third step consisted of delving deeply into the data and providing a detailed look at how specific aspects of each case supported the research questions of the study. I used the Merged Findings Worksheet (Appendix L) to record the results. In this step, I mapped the extent to which the major findings of each case represented each of the study's research questions, using a rating system of high, medium, and low for each finding/research question relationship.

The fifth step, which consisted of completing the Assertions Worksheet (Appendix M), ran concurrently throughout the cross-case analysis phase, though I finalized it only after we conducted the focus group. This worksheet provided a structure for recording assertions that emerged throughout the cross-case analysis process as well as a means of mapping the assertions to the various case findings. The document served as a working document throughout the analysis phase and underwent countless changes as tentative assertions gained evidence to become final assertions, underwent transformation as new data emerged, merged with other assertions for further consideration, or lacked evidence and were deleted.

The final step of the analysis process involved organizing the assertions into logical groupings as they related to the research questions. I assigned each assertion to a broad category, and then within each category, I formed subcategories until I was able to present the data in the final report in a manageable and understandable way (see Figure 2 for a graphical representation of the findings). This modified approach based on Stake's (2006) methodology allowed me to accomplish an accurate and thorough analysis of the vast quantity of data that I collected and

ensured that I was able to present the assertions resulting from the data in a readable and organized format.

### **Trustworthiness**

The terms validity and reliability that are associated with quantitative studies do not have an appropriate direct correlation with qualitative research (Krefting, 1991). Lincoln and Guba (1985) applied the term *trustworthiness* to qualitative studies to describe the issues that researchers must address in order to increase the quality of the study. They contended that trustworthiness is comprised of four parts—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I took a number of steps to increase the trustworthiness of the study, all of which I address below.

### **Credibility**

Patton (2002) contended that credibility could be broken down into three broad categories. First, the credibility of the research methodology includes ensuring the study's methods are rigorous. Next, the researcher establishes his or her credibility by explicitly stating any professional or personal information that could have an impact on data collection or analysis. Finally, the credibility of the underlying philosophical beliefs regarding qualitative research involves the appreciation of qualitative methodology, to include the holistic approach to the research design, the choice of the setting and the case, participant selection procedures, and the techniques surrounding data collection and analysis. The latter two categories have been discussed elsewhere (see Situation to Self in Chapter One, The Role of the Researcher in Chapter Three, Appendix E, and Chapter Three in general). The first category—ensuring methodological rigor—involved several strategies that I will discuss next, to include considering alternative conclusions, triangulation, and design and member checks.

One challenge to the credibility of any qualitative study “stems from the suspicion that the analyst has shaped findings according to predispositions and biases” (Patton, 2002, p. 553). By discussing my predispositions and experiences with homeschooling openly (see Appendix E for a discussion of my personal perceptions of the issues at hand), I was able to set aside potential biases as much as possible and be open to alternative conclusions than what I might expect. Similarly, by systematically collecting and analyzing data, I ensured that the conclusions drawn were logical and unbiased. I also presented all conclusions, including those that might be negative or discrepant.

Triangulation is a means through which researchers can assure that meanings ascribed to the data are accurate, that oversimplification of each individual case or the multiple case analysis has not occurred, and that they are not placing too much emphasis on unwarranted data (Stake, 2006). I incorporated triangulation in two areas: data collection procedures (open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group) and the inclusion of eight families as participants in the study.

Member checking involves the solicitation of participants’ feedback regarding the conclusions drawn during data analysis (Schwandt, 2007). I incorporated member checks periodically throughout the study so that participants could verify that what I wrote was an accurate reflection of their experiences. This increased credibility throughout the process as the participants were empowered to verify my work, which in effect made them co-researchers and co-owners of the study.

## **Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative research parallels generalization in quantitative studies.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) contended that, since generalization implies a context-free assumption and one can only view qualitative research within some given context, transferability is a more appropriate term when referring to the ability to extend the findings of one study to other contexts. To increase transferability, I used detailed and rich descriptions to describe the cases as categories emerged from the data. Painting a vivid and detailed written picture describing the cases and the steps the homeschool families took to define success and their efforts to achieve it ensured that the reader is able to view the fullest picture possible.

### **Dependability**

Guba and Lincoln (1982) defined dependability in terms of the stability that is present despite any intentional changes a researcher chooses to make in the emergent design of a qualitative study. It is, as Patton (2002) referred to it, “a systematic process systematically followed” (p. 546). I took several steps to increase dependability of this study.

Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and personally transcribed, which helped ensure that I kept an accurate record of data throughout the study. I used data audit trails by incorporating a case study database throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of the study. The committee overseeing this study—and the committee chairperson in particular—provided feedback and guidance throughout the process, one of the purposes of which was to increase the dependability of the study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the process by which a researcher links the findings of a study to the data, confirming that the researcher logically ties the participants’ experiences to any assertions that are drawn (Schwandt, 2007). The aforementioned member checks were one way that I sought to accomplish this. In addition, external auditing and the focus group provided additional

steps to verify that I accurately traced each assertion presented in the findings back through the data analysis procedures to a point of data (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

### **Ethical Considerations**

A few ethical considerations warrant discussion at this point. As is the case with most research, I, the researcher, have a strong interest in the subject matter. My extensive personal experiences with the phenomenon in question could lead to a perception of bias or skewed results, especially given the overwhelming positive nature of my personal experiences. I set aside those personal experiences and assumptions by explicitly identifying them (see Appendix E) and focusing on the experiences of the participants, and I made a deliberate effort to ensure that I reduced or eliminated all bias.

I attempted to minimize the use of hard copy documentation, using digital means whenever possible. I scanned most hard copy documents obtained during the data collection process to a digital format, and I destroyed the hard document. I stored all digital documents in a password-protected directory on my personal computer, and I made a backup of that data at least once a week to an external, password-protected hard drive. I locked all hard copies that have proven to be indispensable in a file cabinet to which only I have access.

I assigned pseudonyms to identify all families and family members prior to collecting any data to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of participants. I used these pseudonyms extensively throughout the study. All parents involved in the study signed an Informed Consent Form (Appendix D).



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

This study examined how a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. defines success as it pertains to their children's education. Additionally, the study sought to understand how homeschool parents' definitions of success influence the learning environment that they establish for their children. The study specifically focused on what homeschool parents teach their children, how they teach their children, and ways that they assess the degree to which learning has taken place (Tomlinson, 2001).

After a short demographics and motivations survey that verified the qualifications and captured the motivations for homeschooling of each family, I collected data using four data collection instruments. Each family completed a written, open-ended questionnaire about their perceptions of success. I used this feedback to develop a semi-structured interview guide for an interview with the parents of each family that delved more deeply into those perceptions. The primary educator in each family—along with their spouse, in most cases—then participated in a structured interview that examined what the family is doing on a day-to-day basis to achieve success. Finally, I conducted a focus group for the parents of the participant families who served to provide additional clarification and perspectives in a social setting.

I conducted individual case analyses on each participant family's data using the methodology presented by Stake (1995), followed by analysis on the collective set of family data using Stake's (2006) cross-case analysis methodology. I used the software program ATLAS.ti to assist in both of these analyses. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce and provide the results of the individual case analyses of each participant family. I will then present the findings that resulted from the cross-case analysis, using the research questions and sub-questions as the framework for presenting that analysis.

## **The Families**

Eight families participated in the study. When selecting these families, I attempted to ensure diversity with regard to approach towards education by examining the families' motivations for initially choosing to homeschool. Using Van Galen's (1991) framework as a general means of categorization, I selected families with a variety of motivations, resulting in representation from across the ideologue/pedagogue spectrum. Specifically, the Demographics and Motivations Questionnaire (Appendix C) prompted each family to identify their motivations for initially choosing to homeschool on an ideologue/pedagogue continuum that contained six choices: completely ideologue, mostly ideologue, moderately ideologue, moderately pedagogue, mostly pedagogue, and completely pedagogue. In some cases, further discussion during the interview with the parents resulted in the family adjusting their self-identification in this area. By using this characteristic of each family as part of the screening process, I was able to obtain a broader range of perspectives than would otherwise likely have been possible.

I assigned pseudonyms for each family and each child. A table is included as part of each family's analysis that lists each child's pseudonym and pertinent demographical information.

### **The Aycock Family**

The Aycocks had three girls, all of whom they were homeschooling at the time of the study (Table 10). They started homeschooling at the start of their oldest daughter's second grade year, and their youngest two had been homeschooled since the start of their education. They identified their motivations for initially choosing to homeschool as an equal mix of ideological and pedagogical reasons. Over time, they shifted to the ideological side of the continuum, and they identified their current motivations as mostly ideological. Their top three reasons for initially choosing to homeschool were (a) religious reasons, (b) to develop character/morality,

and (c) can give child better education at home.

Table 10

*The Aycock Family Children*

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
Julie	F	14	9	7.5	Homeschooled
Ashley	F	12	7	7.5	Homeschooled
Katie	F	8	4	4.5	Homeschooled

Mr. Aycock held a Bachelor's Degree in Finance, and he was working towards his Master's Degree in Logistics Management. At the time of the study, he was an activated reserve officer in the Army. Mrs. Aycock held a Bachelor's Degree in Communications Sciences and Disorders, specializing in Deaf Education. She was a full-time stay-at-home mother.

The Aycocks saw success as falling in three broad categories. First, they desired to see comprehension, synthesis, and critical thinking skills develop in their children. Academics—viewed as knowledge of traditional subject matter such as math, science, and literature—was an important part of this aspect of success, but it also extended beyond traditional educational subjects. Mrs. Aycock said,

We want them to be able to take something in, do all the different things, apply it, use it, think about it critically. So in an educational environment, or a real-life environment, they can see a problem, think about it, and go, “Oh, it might work to do this.” Think through it critically, and not just see something and go, “Okay, that’s what it says, so it must be that.” That they can really think through things on their own, problem solve, have a good grasp of the material beyond regurgitation.

Second, they wanted to impart to their children the skills necessary to become

independent adults, willing and able to be involved in the lives of other people. This area included the character traits of compassion and initiative as well as the ability, as Mrs. Aycock put it, to “do life successfully on their own without depending on us all their lives, without depending on the government, whatever. The only one we want them to depend on is God.” Finally, the Aycocks desired to instill in their children a biblical worldview, exemplified by a strong relationship with Christ.

Underlying all areas of their success goals was their desire for their children to be able to apply their education to their lives in practical ways. When asked how they defined education, Mrs. Aycock responded,

I think it is way more encompassing than the 3R's, history, spelling, whatever you want to add in. And I think that's the beauty of homeschooling, that you get all of those book subjects—I think that's what I mean by academics, is books subjects—but you also get to add in life with it. . . . Sometimes it is math as we walk along the road, but to me education is way more than the academic subjects. It's preparing them for being adults. It's teaching them math and reading and science and history, but it's also teaching them how to behave as young women and learning to listen to God and learning to help others and learning how to brush your teeth.

Mr. Aycock had a similar opinion, but from a slightly different perspective, responding, “I think in my mind what [Mrs. Aycock] was saying is more wisdom. . . . When you're doing life with your friends or parents, you're learning what I interpret as wisdom. Putting that education to use.”

The Aycock's success goals influenced the learning environment that they created in several ways. They taught critical thinking skills by encouraging discussion using different

methods of questioning, which in turn led the children towards the development of problem-solving skills. They put the children in a position to have to work independently on a daily basis, and they set the example to show them what it means to be an involved adult. Mr. Aycock stated,

I think a big thing with the involvement—besides talking about it—is Mom and Dad modeling it. Being involved by voting and reading of issues, being involved in church, and modeling that and encouraging them to be the same way. And sometimes they're encouraging us to be involved, like giving things. I think that's a big lesson to the girls, seeing that over the course of years, of us trying to model it.

They taught biblical worldview through discipleship. They saw their role as parents through the lens of the command of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 to “go and make disciples.” Mr. Aycock observed, “When we talk about discipling the kids, it's about making sure they understand Scripture and how it applies to their life, how they relate to God's word, just getting that applied understanding and their walk with God.” Discipleship was the foundation upon which they were building their children's education.

The Aycocks assessed their children's progress through formal and informal means, using grades more consistently and at an earlier age than other participant families. The children had also taken the Iowa Basic Skills Test. They took the test so Mrs. Aycock could validate her educational methodology and ensure that she did not have a biased opinion of the girls' academic performance. The Aycocks also wanted to give the children experience taking standardized tests in order to prepare them for similar tests later in life. They were very pleased with the girls' performance, and as a result, they were confident that the steps they were taking to accomplish their success goals with their children—both academic and otherwise—were effective.

## **The Baker Family**

The Bakers had five children, the youngest two of whom they adopted (Table 11). They homeschooled their oldest two children in past years, though during the year this study occurred they were both attending a classical preparatory school three days a week, with Tyler, who was in eighth grade, in his third year and Michelle, who was in sixth grade, in her first year. At the time of the study, the Bakers were homeschooling Shannon, and they planned to homeschool their youngest two when they entered school age. The top three reasons they gave for choosing to homeschool were (a) poor learning environment at school, (b) to develop character/morality, and (c) religious reasons. They self-identified as moderately ideologue, and their reasons for homeschooling and the ensuing discussion supported that, though they focused more on the pedagogical structure of their children's education than most other families in the study. Their use of the classical preparatory school was part of their long-term, deliberate plan for their children's education, and they planned to incorporate it into the education of all of their children during the later years of their education.

Table 11

*The Baker Family Children*

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
Tyler	M	13	8	2	College-Prep School
Michelle	F	12	6	4	College-Prep School
Shannon	F	9	2	2.5	Homeschooled
Makayla	F	5	-	-	Pre-Homeschooled
Amanda	F	4	-	-	Pre-Homeschooled

Mr. Baker had a Master of Science degree in Industrial Engineering and was the Director of Corporate Engineering at a local company. Mrs. Baker had a Master of Science degree in Public Relations and did not work outside the home, choosing instead to be a stay-at-home mother.

The Baker's definition of success centered on a well-rounded, classical education, with the trivium being at the core of their chosen educational model. Their ideas of success were much broader than academics, however, as the Bakers wanted their "kids to recognize that education is not everything there is. It is a part of life but only a part." The ability to self-learn, think critically, interact with others, do hard things, overcome setbacks, and apply their education to real life were all important when it came to their children's success, along with performing to the best of their ability on standardized tests and other assessments. As Mr. Baker put it, "We are not terribly driven; we're just sort of doing what we think they're capable of. Why do less?"

The Bakers also mentioned a spiritual component to success, though they took a slightly different approach than many of the other families. Mrs. Baker noted that the spiritual "is

probably the fundamental, core, river of everything that we do,” to which Mr. Baker replied, “[Our kids knowing Christ] is not a goal for me only because it’s almost below bare minimum, I guess. I have so much more in mind for their walk with the Lord than just praying a prayer.”

The Baker’s ideas of success distinctly influenced the learning environment. They were extremely systematic and logical in how they chose their curriculum, and, just as they held a broad, integrated view of success, they chose curriculum that provided a broad view of subject matter that they could integrate across subjects.

Mr. Baker     One thing that we probably haven’t talked too much about . . . is integration of subjects. That’s something that we like, for what you’re writing about in English to be related to what you’re studying in history, so that all the stars align.

Mrs. Baker     And let’s go ahead and use proper grammar while were expressing ourselves in writing.

Mr. Baker     Yeah, so it’s just that all of curriculum hangs together. It’s not these isolated pieces of subject matter that we’re just going to throw in our heads and not understand the connection. So in terms of success and attributes and that sort of thing, I like to see the kids synthesize things that I haven’t previously put together for them. You know, for me that’s probably the most fulfilling thing that happens. When a kid takes something from here and goes, “Well that’s kind of like this over here.”

The Baker’s children took standardized tests in the first year or two of homeschooling, but Mrs. Baker noted, “The test told me absolutely nothing that I didn’t already know. Which is Michelle’s not good at math, Tyler’s not good at narration, Tyler’s very strong in science. So



maybe we did do it two years, but after that we've not done it since." When asked how they use formal assessments to adjust what they teach from year to year, Mrs. Baker said,

I can tell you right now what I'm going to be working on with this kid four years from now. I can tell you right now what those issues will be. We'll be four years farther along in the curriculum. So I don't know that I need the standardized tests.

Rather than using formal assessment tools to facilitate the decision-making regarding adjustment of curriculum, Mr. and Mrs. Baker had many discussions, both alone and with the children, and they used their own intuition to determine when to adjust. To describe their philosophy along these lines, Mrs. Baker relayed an experience they had when bricking a freestanding garage. She said,

As we bricked it, it took me a while to figure out that there was a front and a back side of the brick, but I figured that out a little late. Our garage is unique. But did the structure of the garage surface do what it was supposed to do? Did it do it was supposed to do? Did it house all this stuff we didn't have room for in the house? Yeah. Are some of the bricks not quite right? Those are the ones that I did (laughs). Yes. And it's still standing ... The individual bricks can be off, but it doesn't change the successfulness of the garage being built and doing what it was supposed to do.

Because of the classical methodology chosen by the Bakers, the couple's high level of education, and the variety of educational mediums that they have used and continue to use, the Bakers provided a unique voice to this study. In terms of an educational methodology continuum with a structured learning environment on one end and an unstructured learning environment on the other, the Bakers served as the most structured of any family in the study.

## The Caldwell Family

The Caldwells had two daughters, both of whom had been homeschooled for the entirety of their education up to the time of the study, and Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell planned to continue to homeschool until the girls graduated (Table 12). They identified their motivations for initially choosing to homeschool as mostly ideologue, with their top three reasons being (a) to develop character/morality, (b) religious reasons, and (c) can give child better education at home.

Table 12

### *The Caldwell Family Children*

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
Annie	F	15	10	11.5	Homeschooled
Bethany	F	14	7	9.5	Homeschooled

Mr. Caldwell was a chaplain in the Army. He held a Master's of Divinity and was currently working on a Master's of Science in Counseling. Mrs. Caldwell held a Bachelor's of Arts and was a stay-at-home mom. She also did some proofreading and editing as a part-time job.

Success for the Caldwells involved their children becoming life-long learners, reaching their full potential at each grade level, developing godly character, fostering independent learning skills, and understanding God and the purpose he has for their lives. Academics also had a significant role to play, but these other areas were what they saw as most important, and the teaching of academics was in some ways simply a means by which they addressed the development of these other more important areas.

Mrs. Caldwell    I want them to be knowledgeable about the world, I want them to be able to have a basic knowledge of subjects, but that really is not the

determining factor in what's most important in life.

Interviewer      Would the desire to learn be symbolic of what you see as the most important?

Mrs. Caldwell    One of them, yes. The desire to grow, not just in one area, but spiritually, emotionally, socially, all those different areas. And continuing that growth even beyond when we're done with school. But I can't let go of academics. I can't let go of that.

They created a learning environment to accomplish these goals by selecting appropriate curricula and through "culture, practical, real-life application (i.e. balancing a checkbook), [and] integration of academic subjects with everyday life." They also encouraged daily personal Bible study with a goal of ever-deepening relationships with Christ for each child. They established an environment in which the girls were able to work with increasing independence as they got older, and they encouraged the children to look for ways "to engage the culture with love and biblical truth" on a regular basis.

An underlying thread that ran through everything that the Caldwells were doing to accomplish their success goals was "many, many discussions based on issues brought up by school subjects." In reply to a question about what they did to help Annie overcome a particular challenge, Mrs. Caldwell responded,

I think, especially, [Mr. Caldwell's] willingness to talk through anything with her. I think that probably was a huge benefit and made a big difference. . . . I would get a little more emotional about it, so I think she didn't feel quite as much freedom with me. But with him, he could honestly and objectively talk through anything with her. That's been important with how things have gone.

The Caldwell's used these discussions to challenge and encourage the girls in every area of their success goals. They used open-ended questions that forced the girls to think and formulate their own opinions about the topic at hand, whether it was academic, social, emotional, or spiritual. Mr. Caldwell described a conversation he had with Annie about the issue of homosexuality.

I usually give her both sides of the coin, because she doesn't like to be in a box. That's taught me that if I give her a definitive answer, then it bothers her. So if I give her an answer, like the situation with the gay lifestyle, that everybody should be respected and treated as a human being regardless of their orientation, they are people, we're all made in the image of God, it's what the Bible teaches, therefore, what do we say to that? . . . I ask her, "So your understanding of God—you're not a rocket scientist—but how do you see God looking at them?" And I give her those open-ended questions like that, and she can't give me yes or no. . . . Those are tough questions, and as you get older, these are the things you're going to have to face. People are going to want to know, where do you really stand on this stuff?

More than any other participant family, the Caldwell's highlighted the differences between their two children and the influence those differences had on their unique views of success for each child within the aforementioned areas. Their older daughter, Annie, was "all about the big, the noticeable. She's thinking about this idea of being a youth pastor or an FBI agent." Bethany, on the other hand, was an introvert who took them by surprise when she decided to learn tae kwon do, since "she's the one who, if she accidentally hit you, she'd be all over you apologizing." Because of these differences between their two daughters, their approach to each girl's education was different as well. This was apparent in both what they teach each

girl and how they were encouraging and allowing each girl to learn. It was especially evident in the nature of the discussions they had with each of the girls. This deliberately differing approach for each child within a single framework of success made the Caldwell's perspective unique.

### **The Davis Family**

The Davises had two children, the oldest of whom—being in fourth grade—was the youngest elder-sibling to qualify for the study (Table 13). They identified themselves as mostly ideologue, giving the top three reasons for choosing to homeschool as (a) object to what school teaches, (b) to develop character/morality, and (c) want private school but cannot afford it.

*Table 13*

#### **The Davis Family Children**

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
Kaelee	F	9	4	5.5	Homeschooled
Danny	M	6	2	2.5	Homeschooled

Both Mr. and Mrs. Davis had some college, but neither had finished their undergraduate coursework. Mr. Davis was working towards a degree in art, while Mrs. Davis was studying music. Mr. Davis was the co-owner of a general contracting firm specializing in residential homes. Mrs. Davis was a stay-at-home mom and part-time professional musician.

The Davises initially identified academics as being the focal point of their educational success goals, specifically “reading, writing, math, as well as critical thinking skills.” It quickly became clear, however, that they saw a spiritual aspect running parallel to and, in many ways, overshadowing everything they did in terms of importance. As Mr. Davis put it, “If my children grow up and have a wonderful relationship with the Lord, and they drive a garbage truck, then to me their life is successful.” He went on to indicate that instilling a biblical worldview, along

with academic excellence, was one of the primary goals of education, and that the two were interrelated.

Interviewer      What does that [biblical worldview] look like in real practical terms?

Mr. Davis        I don't know. You would hope to kind of see that life budding there. And I think it will manifest itself academically, just basically the whole person, who they are. . . . I want to see the whole person develop. I want to see them reach their potential academically, spiritually, how they relate to others, just be everything that they could possibly be in Christ.

The Davises also saw the ability to formulate and express opinions as important outcomes of their children's education. They saw their children developing these skills, and that assured them that they were on the right track when teaching critical thinking skills. In response to a question concerning critical thinking skills assessment, Mrs. Davis replied,

I think it's important that they have opinions. Sometimes I think we tend to tell our children that they should be seen but not heard. You shouldn't challenge things, you shouldn't question things. I think encouraging them to ask those questions and to express themselves in their opinions, I think that's very important.

In order to accomplish their success goals, the Davises were implementing a classical education approach, using history—taught chronologically—as the framework. They logically chose curriculum from this perspective, and the amount of structure they incorporated into their school day, week, and year was indicative of the structure associated with the classical approach. They made a deliberate effort to integrate as many hands-on learning projects as possible, and they assessed the degree to which their children were learning primarily subjectively and informally.

Mr. and Mrs. Davis provided a unique perspective in that they had homeschooled their children for the entirety of their education, but they had done so for the shortest time relative to other families in the study. They were perhaps approaching their children's education more in line with their original ideologue-centric motivations for choosing to homeschool than other participant families, since the least amount of time had passed since they first made the decision to homeschool. Their viewpoint balanced those of the Evans and Franklin families, both of whom had children who had graduated and moved on to life beyond homeschool.

### **The Evans Family**

The Evanses had five children, all of whom had been homeschooled for their entire education (Table 14). Their oldest two had graduated and were in college. Self-identified as mostly ideologue, their top three reasons for initially choosing to homeschool were (a) religious reasons, (b) can give the child better education at home, and (c) to provide stability to my child due to frequent moves.

Table 14

#### *The Evans Family Children*

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
Joel	M	20	Grad.	12	College
Rebecca	F	18	Grad.	12	College
Madeline	M	10	5	5	Homeschooled
Lilly	F	9	4	4	Homeschooled
Lacy	M	7	2	2	Homeschooled

Mr. Evans was a construction site manager, having recently retired from the military. He held a Master of Music degree. Mrs. Evans was a stay-at-home mom, taught piano lessons on

the side, and occasionally performed at a local community theater.

Academics were important to the Evanses, but they saw homeschooling as a means of providing their children with an education that was much broader than academics. They believed that their children's work ethic, initiative, love of learning, ability to continue to learn on their own, communication skills, and interpersonal relationships were important indicators of success. Ultimately, however, their children's character was what they viewed as most important, and they used academics as a way to instill character in their children. Along these lines, Mr. Evans stated,

Being able to homeschool and have influence over our children all the time enables us to focus on their character: fixing things that are not right with their character and encouraging things that are right. Without that stability, without that strength of character, nothing else really matters. The academics . . . really feeds into that, so that you've got the character on one side and the understanding on the other. And that, to me, rounds out the education.

Another area that was an important success goal of the Evanses was social and communication skills. Like with character, the teaching of academics was, in part, the means by which they were accomplishing this goal. They spent time and effort to ensure their children had the ability to interact and connect with others. Mrs. Evans stated,

It's not good enough for me if I've got a bunch of smart little geniuses but they don't know how to interact with people and relate to them emotionally and be able to have happy marriages where they can communicate and not check their brain at the door. I want them to be able to engage in their lives, because you need to be able to do that. The learning environment that the Evanses have created ties in to their success goals.



While they used the teaching of academics to impart knowledge of traditional subject matter, they also used it to teach concepts that they contended were greater than that subject matter. For instance, they taught history in chronological order, relating it to scripture and current events, so that the children had a context for what they were learning in all areas of their education. They also taught history this way so the children understood where they fit into the larger picture and learned from mistakes made in the past. Similarly, they used academics as a means to teach initiative and work ethic, Mrs. Evans noted,

I always say that your goal, to me, is to get them to a point where they know how to research things on their own, and they can pursue the subjects that really interest them on their own. And I don't want to hold their hands all the time. The further we went, the less I handheld. They were able to follow instructions and work ahead and do what they needed to do. And that was my goal.

Rather than using grades or standardized test scores as a measure of success, the Evans's assessment of the accomplishment of their goals was subjective and informal. Mr. Evans stated,

To see Joel off at school thriving and loving life and getting into discussions with people about different things and really hanging on it and seeing him bloom, . . . that's what, to me, means success. To know that he'll continue in that vein.

While the Evans's approach to homeschooling was typical of several other participant families in this study who held mostly ideological views of education, the fact that they had two children who had graduated and were achieving traditional standards of success in college gave their views a credibility unlike many of the other families. Their input was even more valuable because, in addition to their children who have graduated, they were in the midst of homeschooling the three younger children, applying past lessons learned in the process.

## The Franklin Family

The Franklins had six children, all of whom had been homeschooled for the entirety of their education through the time of the study (Table 15). The Franklins initially identified their motivations for choosing to homeschool as completely ideological. After discussion, however, they determined that their original reasons for choosing to homeschool fell more on the pedagogical side of the continuum and that they had shifted far to the ideological side over time. Their top three reasons for choosing to homeschool were (a) to develop character/morality, (b) object to what school teaches, and (c) can give child a better education at home.

Table 15

### *The Franklin Family Children*

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
Nate	M	20	Grad.	13	Active Duty Military
Breanna	F	18	Grad.	13	Active Duty Military
Greg	M	13	8	9	Homeschooled
Hannah	F	10	5	6	Homeschooled
Andy	M	9	3	3	Homeschooled
Charity	F	5	1	3	Homeschooled

Mr. Franklin had a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and worked as a general repair technician for a local company. Mrs. Franklin was a high school graduate. She was a stay-at-home mom and worked part time at a local library. She was also president of a local homeschool co-op and was actively involved in teaching and participating in classes and activities offered there.

The Franklins were the most unstructured of all of the participant families, choosing

unschooling (Holt, 1977) as their guiding methodology. This choice of schooling reflected their ideas about success. The Franklin's perception of success could be broken into five categories: character development, the ability to overcome, attitude, desire to learn, and work ethic. Mrs. Franklin's elaboration on character development highlighted the link between the student-initiated methodology of unschooling and the success goals that she and her husband established for their children.

But I think [character] is really important to have, and, you know, you don't want, well, cookie cutter children who can't speak for themselves, or can't hold their own opinion, can't form their own opinion, because, you know, they're afraid to. You want brave and outgoing and spontaneous, you want them to be able to speak to people. I always make sure that they look people in the eye when they talk to them or answer them or whatever. And that's not being taught. I mean there's, the kids nowadays, they're just the opposite of what you would expect of a grown-up. We're training children to be grown-ups, yet we try to take away their ability to be grown-up by taking away their ability to make decisions and things like that. I think that's very important.

While academics played a role in the children's education ("[I teach] reading, writing, and arithmetic, obviously, and then I try to do a lot of history"), the Franklins saw desire to learn and work ethic as overshadowing specific disciplines, with reading being the only explicit exception. Mrs. Franklin stated, "I think that them being able to work without complaining, . . . I think that is the most important thing next to being able to read." She also placed emphasis on the children's relationships with others, bragging on separate occasions about the children's relationships with adults, small children of family friends, and each other. Underlying everything the Franklins view as successful, however, was their desire for their children to excel

spiritually, which for them means a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I think that I would really like the kids, I don't care if they can't do math, I don't care if they can't read, I don't care if they don't know any science, as long as they have a relationship with Christ, where they can talk to him. That was important to me.

Just as academics did not play a leading role in the Franklin's definition of success, the content of what the Franklins taught did not play the leading role over the process of how they taught with regard to the influence their definition of success had on the learning environment. The process by which each child went about learning and expressing what he or she learned was, in many ways, more important than the content of what the parents were teaching the child.

Nate was the type of learner that, I couldn't get him to write a paper. He was studying about the Battle of Argonne or something, and I was like, "Could you write me a paragraph? A paragraph, please? Just a paragraph?" No. He wrote me two sentences, and I'm like, "This is not enough." And he's like, "Come on, Mom, come out to the driveway." He took chalk. He completely drew that entire battle in the driveway, with everything, the battle lines, the hills, everything. The trenches, he drew everything from memory. And he was telling me about the battle. I'm like, "OK; that's how you learn." Alright, so I'm OK with that. And, you know, but to me, if I'd tried to force him to do that paper, I don't think he would have been able to get it across as intelligently as he did.

This approach was quite different from the structured methodology taken by many of the other participant families. Additionally, two of their six children had graduated after having been homeschooled for their entire education and were doing well serving in the military. As a result, the Franklin family provided a unique perspective to this study because of their ability to reflect on their unschooling experiences over the full course of two children's education and four

others in progress. While the Bakers served as the most structured family on a structured/unstructured educational methodology continuum, the Franklins were the most unstructured.

### **The Graham Family**

The Grahams had five children, the oldest three of whom had been homeschooled for the entirety of their education up to the time of the study, and they planned to homeschool their youngest two children when they were old enough (Table 16). The Grahams were unique to this study in that they were the only family to identify their motivations for choosing to homeschool as completely pedagogical. Their top three reasons for choosing to homeschool were (a) can give the child a better education at home, (b) parent's career, and (c) to provide stability to my child due to frequent moves.

Mr. Graham was active-duty military and was almost finished with his bachelor's degree in business. Mrs. Graham was a stay-at-home mom, and she had completed three and a half years towards her bachelor's degree in education prior to having children. Mrs. Graham taught literature classes to other homeschool children out of her home as a sort of informal homeschool co-op.

Table 16

*The Graham Family Children*

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
David	M	13	8	8.5	Homeschooled
Lynda	F	11	6	6.5	Homeschooled
Amber	F	5	K	0.5	Homeschooled
Lori	F	3	-	-	Pre-Homeschooled
Charlie	M	1	-	-	Pre-Homeschooled

The Graham's idea of a successful education was one that prepared their children for real life. They measured this success by their children's love for learning, as evidenced by their ability and initiative to continue learning throughout their lives. Mrs. Graham pointed out that she knew their education was working "as long as their nose is in a book, or they're googling something, coming in and telling me something they've learned." Critical thinking skills, a solid academic foundation, and the possession of tools needed to research and find answers on their own were essential elements of their children's successful education.

The ability and initiative to learn were high on the Graham's list of attributes of success. Much of what the Grahams were doing was instilling these characteristics in their children. Mrs. Graham relayed this example:

Right now, David is into robotics. I can't teach him robotics. [Mr. Graham] can teach him some electrical stuff and fuses, but that's the extent of it. So [David] goes in and watches TedTalks all the time. And he'll watch all these YouTube videos about how to do this stuff. Then he'll come in and say, "Look, I made this robotic hand." And I'll say, "Oh, that's great!" And I think that's successful right there, when he doesn't think,

“Well, there’s no one here to teach me, so there’s nothing else to do than play video games.”

In order to accomplish their success goals, the Grahams saw their role as educators as being the providers of the tools that their children needed in order to learn. Exposure to a wide variety of books, technology, differing viewpoints, and types of assignments and discussion topics were central to the education process, as well as the incorporation of the Socratic Method, which they used “to help them hear as many different viewpoints as possible and to learn to evaluate them critically.” They were careful not to tell the children what to think, but rather they encouraged them to make up their own minds about issues.

Similar to many other families in the study, the Grahams assessed their children’s progress mainly informally. They relied on discussions with each other and with the children to determine whether the children were making adequate progress towards meeting the family’s success goals and the extent to which they needed to make adjustments. It was largely through these conversations that the Grahams determined where they needed to make changes as they moved forward.

In many ways, the Graham’s perspective of success—with instilling a love for learning at the core of their success goals—was unique when compared to the other families in the study. This underlying core of their goals served as a guide to help them determine what their children’s education should look like on a daily basis. They were the most decidedly pedagogical of all participant families, and the approach they took towards education supported their underlying motivations for homeschooling by focusing more on the educational processes than the content. This facet of their approach to education made their input important to this study.

## The Harris Family

The Harrises had two children (Table 17), and they started homeschooling at the beginning of their oldest son's second grade year. They identified their motivations for initially choosing to homeschool as moderately pedagogical, with their top three reasons for choosing to homeschool being (a) poor learning environment at school, (b) to develop character/morality, and (c) religious reasons.

Table 17

### *The Harris Family Children*

Name	Sex	Age	Grade	Years Homeschooled	Current Status
Stephen	M	11	6	4.5	Homeschooled
Kelly	F	8	3	4.5	Homeschooled

Mr. Harris was a high school graduate who worked as a contract electrician at a local army base. Mrs. Harris had an Associate's degree. She was a stay-at-home mom and had a photography business on the side. She and the children usually participated in a local homeschool co-op, where she often taught classes.

The Harrises saw education as covering the four primary categories of spiritual, academic, social, and real world application. They had a strong Christian faith, and biblical teaching was at the core of everything surrounding their children's education. They believed that "spiritual success in its simplest form would be that [their] children have a strong faith rooted in a relationship with our Messiah," and they saw this relationship developing in both of their children's lives. Academically their children excelled, as indicated by Stephen's above-average standardized test scores. However, they believed that creativity, the ability to formulate and express well-thought-out opinions, and critical thinking were far more important than



standardized test scores (a test that, according to Mrs. Harris, Stephen took “more of a gauge for myself than for him”). They felt that one of the more significant benefits to homeschooling was in the social arena. Mrs. Harris stated,

The kids [who are educated] at home, their attitude changes. They’re more respectful, they’re more patient, they’re more understanding, because those are values that are being taught and emphasized at home, because they don’t have the outside influence of maybe other kids with attitudes, who knows what kind of influence?

The final category of success—real world application—ran through all the other categories. Recurring themes that were associated with this category were responsibility, work ethic, community involvement, and relationships with others. They desired that their children make all of their life decisions through the lens of a biblical worldview and that they “not just interact [with], but really engage the world around them.” They were far more concerned with their children being academically prepared to deal with the realities of life than memorizing facts that they would never use. Mrs. Harris observed,

There’s a lot of things that we learned in school, that I remember learning, that I never used. What was the point of learning that? . . . There’s a lot of stuff that we learn that’s really just in one ear and out the other. It’s not going to get stored and never get used, so we’re never going to remember it, never recall it. But there are things they are going to have to know how to do. Things like, change a tire. That’s important. Understanding things about your car, about your home. . . . Employers are going to want to hire you and see that you are responsible and that you are independent, and that you can figure things out, you have life experience. In today’s world, right now—and I don’t expect it to get much better—but it’s hard to get a job. And they’re looking for people who are going to

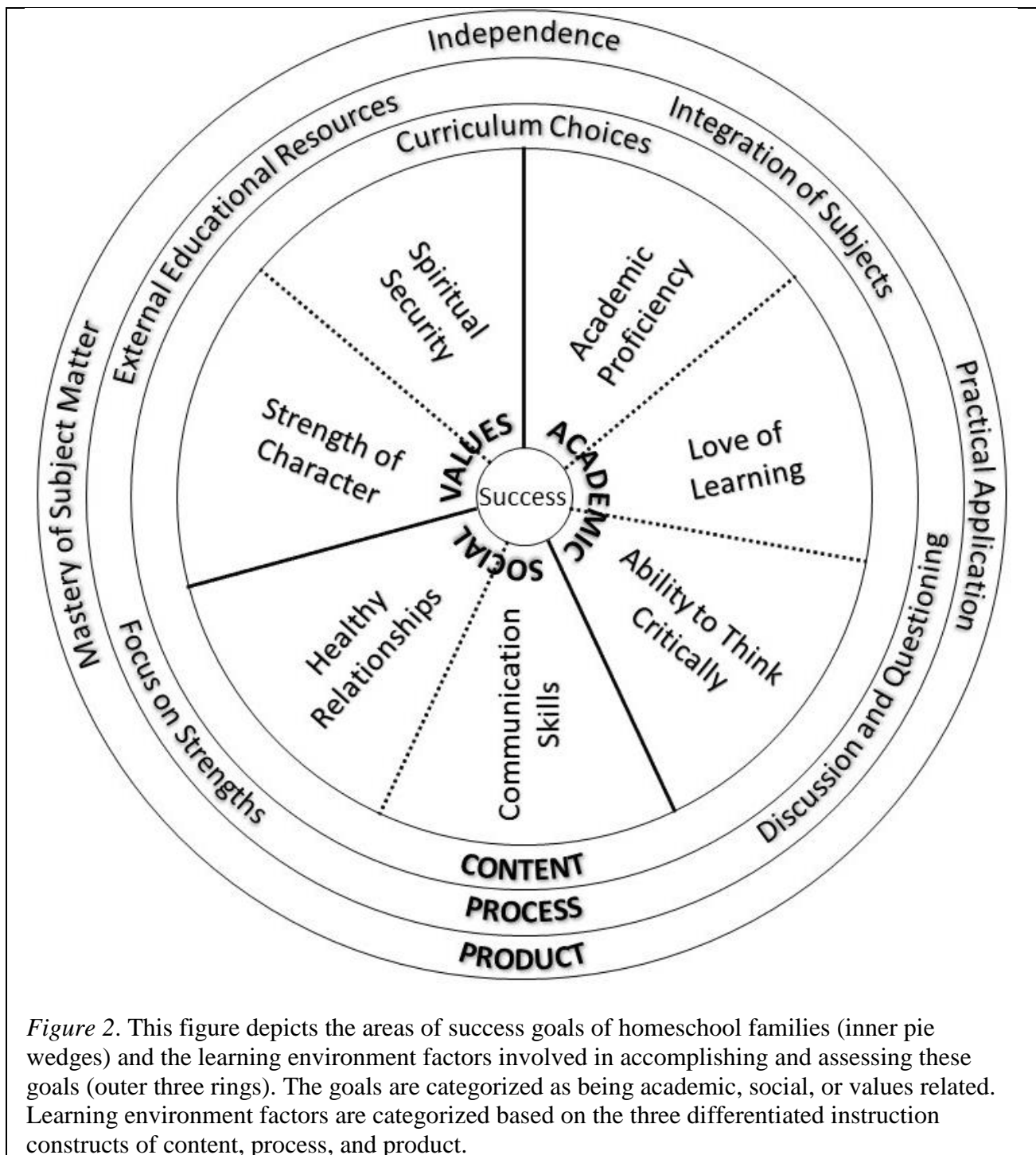
be the most prepared.

In order to accomplish their success goals, the Harrises believed that their first responsibility was to set the example for their children in all of the identified areas of success. They made a deliberate effort to model a biblically oriented approach to life. They used open-ended, thought-provoking questions to get the children to think critically to formulate their own opinions and solve problems. They encouraged their children to interact and engage with children who others seemed to be excluding in social settings. One of their underlying goals was to put their children in situations where they could apply things that they have learned.

Mr. Harris, who was initially more skeptical about homeschooling than Mrs. Harris was, had become a staunch advocate. He stated, “I love what it’s doing, I love the relationships that it builds between us, the way my kids are, the way my children are, the way she is with them. I love everything about it right now.” Because of this attitude toward homeschooling, the underlying belief system, and their approach towards education, the Harris family represented the national norms in many respects (Ray, 2010; Rudner, 1999).

### **Final Assertions**

In the next sections, I present the findings that emerged through the cross-case analysis phase. I collected data via open-ended questionnaires, parent interviews, primary educator interviews, and a focus group. I analyzed each individual case using the methodology proposed by Stake (1995) and had each family review the results to verify accuracy. I then used a series of cross-case analysis worksheets based on those developed by Stake (2006) to assist in formulating my final assertions (Appendices K – N). Figure 2 graphically depicts the resulting assertions. I will elaborate on these assertions in the next two sections.



### Research Question One

The first research question focused on how homeschool parents define success as it relates to their children's education. The factors that contributed to the participant families'

ideas of a successful homeschool education fell into three broad categories: academic, social, and values. These categories support existing literature that suggests that these three areas are a central focus of homeschool parents with regard to their children's education (Collom, 2005; Hoelzle, 2013; Lubienski, 2003; Medlin, 2000, 2013; Ray, 2010). I pursued the accuracy of my analysis pertaining to these three categories at the focus group to ensure that this was indeed all-inclusive, and I left convinced that this was the case. Table 18 lists the seven assertions that emerged during the study that related to homeschool families' views about success. While each participant family would prioritize the list slightly differently, I found all seven of these assertions to be characteristic of all eight of the study's participant families.

Table 18

*Research Question 1 Assertions*

Category	Code	Description
Academic	Academic Proficiency	Academic ability plays a significant role in homeschool families' views of success, but it is not the only—or even primary—measure of success.
	Love of Learning	Love of learning and the ability to self-learn are as important as the mastery of specific subject areas.
	Ability to Think Critically	Homeschool families see the ability to think critically as one of the most important academic outcomes of the child's education.
Social	Communication Skills	Effective communication—verbal, written, and listening—is a primary desired social outcome of a homeschool education.
	Healthy Relationships	Homeschool families value the child's ability to interact and socialize with others of all ages.
Values	Strength of Character	Character matters, with homeschool families often viewing academics as a framework for instilling values.
	Spiritual Security	There is a spiritual element of success common to most homeschool families; they most typically identify this as a relationship with Christ.

**Academics**

Academics refers to “the specific focus on academic content areas such as mathematics, reading, writing, and other curriculum domains” (Cochran & New, 2007). While this definition is in keeping with current research on the academic achievement of homeschool students (Collom, 2005; Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Ray, 2010), I extended this definition to include how one approaches learning in general terms as well as how one incorporates academics into his or

her critical thinking. This broader definition served as a means of ensuring that I correctly categorized the assertions that were more scholarly in nature—as opposed to those that were social and values related—while still allowing me to organize the study’s findings using the same categories found in the current literature. The assertions that fell in this category were academic proficiency, love of learning, and the ability to think critically.

**Academic proficiency.** Academic ability plays a significant role in homeschool families’ views of success, but it is not the only—or even primary—measure of success. Academic proficiency was clearly important to every participant family, with all of them teaching the traditional academic subjects of math, science, language arts, and social studies. Every family had at least one child taking music lessons or involved in band, and the majority of families ensured their children are learning a second language, with Latin being most common.

While these families wanted their children to excel academically for extrinsic rewards such as scholarships and college acceptance, they were more concerned that their children demonstrate the character traits of work ethic, persistence, and initiative through their academic endeavors. There was also an insistence that the child do his or her best in all areas of schooling. The Harrises wrote in their open-ended questionnaire, “Academically, I know my children are capable of performing ‘above average’ on a national standard scale, and I would expect nothing less to be considered success.” Mr. Baker stated the same idea from a spiritual perspective:

So academic excellence. We think our kids are bright enough to do well in school, and they ought to. Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily as unto the Lord.” So it just wouldn’t be acceptable to do less than your best.

Because their motivations for expecting their children to perform well academically were largely intrinsic, these families were not overly concerned with standardized test results and did

not view these tests as an accurate measure of their children's academic abilities. They assessed their children's academic abilities primarily informally, relying on observations and discussions to determine how well their children were doing and in what areas they needed to adjust. This exchange between Mrs. Graham and me captured the prevailing view of academic assessment and adjustment:

Interviewer      Okay, last question, pertaining to assessment. How do you know that what you're doing is working? Either formally or informally?

Mrs. Graham      Well, I think just being with my kids, I see that it's working. Through conversations, seeing their writing, hearing conversations I have with other people. As they grow, I see that it's working.

Interviewer      How do you know when to adjust?

Mrs. Graham      When I find flaws in either their thoughts or their writing or whatever. Or maybe they're just really struggling. If they're not understanding it, we're not moving on. So usually, one way or the other, they get it.

The ability to perform well academically was a part of every participant families' definition of success to some degree, as indicated by the fact that every family brought it up during the various interviews and the focus group discussion. Most of these families felt like one of the key factors that set them apart from their counterparts in traditional education was the lack of emphasis that they placed on traditional measures of academic assessment, specifically standardized tests. A recurring theme throughout my data analysis was the families' focus on using academics as a means for developing intrinsic qualities in their children that they considered more important than knowledge of traditional academic subjects.

**Love of learning.** Love of learning and the ability to self-learn are as important as the

mastery of specific subject areas. Every family stressed the importance of their children developing a love of learning or becoming life-long learners. While never explicitly stated, it was clear, based on the emphasis given by the participants, that instilling the desire to continue to learn throughout their children's lifetimes was far more important than knowledge of any specific academic discipline. They understood that this quality in their children was not a given, but that effort must be made on their parts to develop love of learning and to teach their children how to research and learn on their own. Mrs. Caldwell stated,

I think it's part of not just teaching them facts and things, but teaching them how to learn, so that when they are on their own, they have a desire and the know-how to continue to learn on their own. They know how to look things up, they are curious about finding things out, so when they have that, they know how to do it. I think that's part of it, and I think part of it is just the motivational aspect. Desire to continue to learn all their lives and not to think that they've arrived and don't need to learn anymore.

The families saw the development of a love of reading as critical in instilling a love of learning in their children. To encourage this, they used motivators ranging from mandatory individual reading time to reading to their children to bribery for reading certain books. As a result, the majority of participants indicated that their children were avid readers and, in most cases, they read earlier than the parents expected they would. Mr. Aycock verbalized a common thread in this regard:

That would be one thing that I would kind of gauge as success: that they have the ability to read and be able to read at a high enough level, and to go along with that love of learning, to be able to self-teach. If there's something that they want to learn, want to discover, instead of having to sit in a classroom if they don't want to, they can read books



and gain an understanding and kind of teach themselves. To be able to read well and to like it I think is a good gauge of success.

Mrs. Franklin put it more succinctly when she said, “If they can read, they can do anything.”

Throughout the interviews with every family as well as the focus group, I heard this theme of a lifelong love of learning being an important measure of homeschool success repeated. Statements such as this one made by the Grahams in their open-ended questionnaire highlighted the emphasis placed on this subject: “A child excited about learning each day is a measure of success on both of our parts.” The participants contended that if their children finish their homeschool education without a desire to continue to learn, either formally or informally, they have—to some extent—failed in their efforts.

**Ability to think critically.** Homeschool families see the ability to think critically as one of the most important academic outcomes of the child’s education. The homeschool families in this study valued the ability to think critically and problem-solve, especially when requiring the use of multiple fields of knowledge. Like love of learning, they saw this as more important than the mastery of any specific academic subject, though most of them also believe that their children cannot think critically if they do not have a solid grasp of academics first. As the Aycocks wrote, “Successful education of our children would include them being able to comprehend, synthesize, and think critically about the subjects they have been taught.”

Along with problem solving, they also valued the ability to formulate opinions based on knowledge learned. These families were not dictating to their children what they were expected to believe or think; rather, they were encouraging them to decide for themselves, based on facts and—in some cases—faith. The Grahams were perhaps the most deliberate in this regard, but most of the families articulated the importance of this. Mrs. Graham told me how she

approaches this aspect of success:

I love to talk about something, bring it up, get them kind of starting to argue it in one direction, and then I'll flip it. And I'll get the other side, until they're absolutely confused and they don't know which one is which, which one is right. So we'll do this with, like, global warming. We'll look at all the evidence, just like, "We're killing polar bears, turn off the lights." And then we'll flip it and look at all the evidence saying, "Wait a minute, look at the Nile, didn't that used to flood?" Just all the science saying this is a complete hoax. And they have to stop for a minute, and they have to dig, and they have to kind of realize that there's always two sides to a story. Which one is where I fit in? And how much evidence is presented here to actually convince me? So I like for them to look at things that way.

For many of these families, the ability to think critically extended past the academic realm into the area of values. They desired that their children be able to use their critical thinking skills to distinguish right from wrong. Mrs. Baker observed that if young people fail to attain "the ability to ascertain truth in and of its own right—or right versus wrong, good versus bad, whatever those moral compasses are—then I think you're in trouble." Again, similar to love of learning, these homeschool parents used academics as the primary means by which they teach critical thinking skills, but they then proceeded to push their children to use those skills in every area of their lives.

## **Social**

The second category of participants' success goals consisted of findings that were social in nature. I included all of the topics that primarily centered on interactions with other people in these assertions. Socialization was a central component of this category, which supports existing

research that indicates both the role socialization plays in home education and the lack of concern homeschool parents have that their children are deficient in this area (Basham et al., 2007; Romanowski, 2006; Medlin, 2000, 2013). Communication skills and healthy relationships were the two assertions that were social in nature.

**Communication skills.** Effective communication—verbal, written, and listening—is a primary desired social outcome of a homeschool education. The participant families saw the ability to communicate effectively as a central tenet of the education process. Like love of learning and critical thinking, they often used the teaching of academic subjects as a means for instilling effective communication skills. Mrs. Baker stated, “So for me that’s kind of an important part of it, is getting broader than your academics and being able to carry on a conversation with adults and with peers.”

This topic came up frequently in conjunction with participants’ thoughts on the importance of critical thinking, specifically the ability of their children to formulate their own opinions based on learned knowledge. Parents observed that logical opinions are far more effective if the child also has the ability to communicate those opinions with others. Mrs. Evans noted,

I think the idea that when they get to that older level they should be able to not just have the facts and things in their mind. They should have a context, and they should be able to communicate from the context: Why is that what you think? Why do you believe what you believe? It’s not enough just to have a bunch of information in your head. We live in a world where we have to communicate with people.

Several families specifically mentioned the importance of their children looking others in the eye when they are communicating. The reason for this has to do as much with character

development as it does with effective communication. Mrs. Harris highlighted the reason for this focus:

One thing that I think we both said is important to us, Stephen used to be a lot better about it, is to look people in the eyes when you're talking to them. I mean, that really is a social thing. It builds trust. If I'm looking in your eyes as I'm talking to you, there is relationship there. There is respect, there's trust. If somebody can't look me in the eyes, then I'm thinking, "Why not? Why are they so shift?" I think it's important.

The tie-in of both critical thinking and character development to communication skills is important, as it is indicative of how all of the success areas intertwine with one another. Rarely did the families speak of the importance of communication skills as an isolated idea; it was always in relation to academics, character, spiritual views, critical thinking, or other areas of success.

**Healthy relationships.** Homeschool families value the child's ability to interact and socialize with others of all ages. The ability to have healthy, mature relationships with others was a common success goal of the participant families. All of them emphasized the importance of their children being able to relate well with others, to include parents, siblings, friends, young children, and other adults. They believed that one of the primary benefits of homeschooling is their ability to teach and monitor social skills. As Mr. Davis said,

Because we're so involved in their lives, we can observe how they address adults, to make sure they're being polite and respectful. And how they address other kids, that they're not being selfish or mean or bullies. That's one advantage, the fact that we're there observing rather than the teacher. As the parent, we're going to have a lot more exposure and the ability to correct rather than putting that in the hands of a public

employee.

This aspect of success is the one most closely related to socialization, with the majority of families scoffing at the idea that their children lack socialization skills. This interaction with the Grahams illustrates the prevailing attitude towards socialization:

Mrs. Graham    I think it's ridiculous, the idea of socialization happening in public schools. I think it's indoctrination. You know, if you're not wearing this shirt or you are not in this club, then they break you down and put you in a socialized group. Or the teachers. "Well, you're not really reading so I'm going to put you with the slow movers group." And the stigmas, they stick with them.

Mr. Graham    As far as socialization, they are in almost every activity that any other kid would be in, if not more. You figure, David goes to play the piano at 2 o'clock, when most kids are still at school. Whether playing soccer, T-ball, whatever else. They've played every other sport except football. Lynda's in ballet, she's done dance, she's done theater. Horse riding. So right now, they're going to swim lessons, David's playing piano. The other three girls are doing swimming lessons. They're all doing something at some time. Also the homeschool co-op, they're getting together with kids, they're also going to church, getting together with kids. So they're always socializing, no matter where they are, no matter what they're doing. They're getting socialization every time they step out of the house.

Mrs. Graham    But the socialization is not to the point where it's a distraction from

education, which I think it can be in some ways.

Relationships as a family were also a key factor in this area of success. Family relationships were valued, and the participant families saw homeschooling as a means of strengthening those relationships. Mrs. Evans described their home situation:

They're helping each other, and the family, and they're helpful, they're kind to one another. That's another thing, too, that I think is a mark of success. Are your kids, are they part of the family unit? Are they working as a team? Are they jumping in there to work for each other? And I think that's a huge advantage we have is homeschoolers, when your kids are close to each other. And I think that would be a mark of success, educational and relational.

Relationships with others and socialization were a priority for these homeschool families, in part because these areas have frequently been presented as a weakness of homeschooling (Apple, 2000; Lubienski, 2003). The families involved in this study, however, were not remotely concerned about their children's education lacking in these areas. In fact, they frequently contended that by homeschooling, they were able to provide diversity of relationships and a healthier means of socialization to their children than would otherwise be available.

## **Values**

Values-related assertions comprised the final category pertaining to participants' success goals. Malle and Dickert (2007) defined values as "an abstract, desirable end state that people strive for or aim to uphold, such as freedom, loyalty, or tradition." There is limited research on the extent to which home educators use the degree to which their children adhere to their values as a measure of their success. However, several studies have been conducted that indicate that the impartation of values is an important motivator for parents who choose to homeschool

(Bauman, 2001; Bielick, 2008; Collom, 2005; Hoelzle, 2013; Noel et al., 2013), and it stands to reason that parents would view the instilling of values as a measure of success based on this research. This category included findings involving intrinsic characteristics such as integrity, honor, and responsibility, among others. I also expanded the category to include the spiritual element of the parents' goals for their children. Assertions that were values-related included strength of character and spiritual security.

**Strength of character.** Character matters, with homeschool families often viewing academics as a framework for instilling values. During this study, participants discussed character in general terms and as an overarching umbrella of specific traits, such as honesty, initiative, respect, compassion, and responsibility. Every family stressed the importance of some aspect of character, with some viewing character as the most important aspect of education. The Franklins succinctly articulated this attitude towards character in their questionnaire: "I define success by their character."

Like the other facets of success, strength of character intertwines with many of the other areas, such as its relationship with academic excellence as previously discussed. It shares many characteristics with love of learning, such as initiative, responsibility, and perseverance. Healthy relationships require the character traits of honesty, loyalty, kindness, and compassion. Most of the families also noted the relationship between character and spirituality. Mrs. Caldwell said in this regard, "I think that the character issues, the growing in godliness, creating a desire to learn, all that stuff, I think is more important [than academics]. It has become more important."

More than any other area, the parents bragged and told stories about their children's strength of character. This is clearly a point of pride for the families in the study. Mrs. Harris related one of a number of these stories:

One thing I noticed with Stephen with football, he would, let's say a kid was struggling. Stephen is in shape, but not a big boy. The big boys are the ones that cry the most. It's the hardest for them, and they're doing hard yards or bear crawls or whatever, and he's already finished his and they are struggling, and he'll come back and get down on the ground with them and do extra. He'll be like, "Come on, I'm here, you can do it." And encourage them. He's a leader. He'll take that second lap around with the person that's being lapped, because they need to know that I'm here for you. That we're a team. And that's engaging people, meeting them where they are. Being there in ways that they need you.

Strength of character was clearly an important success goal for these homeschool families, based on the number of times it came up in conversation and the passion that was evident when they discussed the subject. They all see homeschooling as the best—if not only—way to instill the desired character traits in their children.

**Spiritual security.** There is a spiritual element of success common to most homeschool families; they most typically identify this as a relationship with Christ. All eight of the study's participant families classified themselves as Christian. The Grahams attended an orthodox church while the others were a part of a variety of mainstream and nondenominational churches. To varying degrees, the participants saw the spiritual aspect of education as important, with some of the families initially overlooking this area because it was such an engrained part of their lives. Mrs. Baker stated that the spiritual "is probably the fundamental, core, river of everything that we do." Similarly, Mr. Caldwell said, "The spiritual component is hard, because it is so much a part of our life that it doesn't, it's not just school. It's who we are as people, so it flows in and through everything." Mrs. Evans contended that the spiritual is "who you are, and it's what you



do.”

For some of the families, this aspect of education was ultimately the only thing that mattered. They believed that what happens in life has eternal consequences, so for them, academic and social skills are trivial when compared with what they see as their children’s eternal spiritual health. Mrs. Harris saw success in these terms, observing,

For me, [success] in its simplest form is to have a strong faith in Christ.... And I really want them to understand that it’s their own personal relationship, and I want them to pursue that on their own. I want them to be learning how to do that now, but especially when they’re a little bit older, really only that, being able to understand and being able to do that without mom there and without dad there to hold their hand.

Mrs. Franklin has a similar view, seeing her children’s relationship with God being the only aspect of success that ultimately matters. She stated that

[What is] more important is his relationship with God, and it’s, I don’t care what book he’s going to read as long as his relationship with God, Jesus, is the most important thing. . . . Everybody’s going to find a different path, [and] as long as it leads to Jesus, and Jesus is the son of God, and Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and he rose three days later, that’s what’s important. He died for us. As long as he’s good with that, I’m alright.

All of the participants in this study were Christian, which is clearly not representative of the school-age population in the U.S. When compared with the entire population, there is a skew of the results of this study with regard to spiritual security. However, over 97% of homeschoolers classify themselves as Christian (Ray, 2010), and when considered in light of this high percentage, the results are more meaningful.

## **Research Question Two**

The study's second research question explored how homeschool parents' definitions of success influenced the learning environment as defined by Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated instruction, the primary constructs of which are content, process, and product. The findings related to this research question generally supported current literature on instructional delivery and support options (Hahn, 2012; Hanna 2012; Sherfinski, 2014; Willingham, 2008). Table 19 shows the resulting eight assertions that fell into these three categories. These eight assertions played a role in the pedagogical approach of the study's participant families.

Table 19

*Research Question 2 Assertions*

Category	Code	Description
Content	Curriculum Choice	Homeschool educators choose curricula that meet their needs and support their success goals; however, emotional attachment to any specific curriculum was minimal, with only a couple of exceptions.
Process	Involvement with External Educational Resources	Involvement with external educational activities (e.g., co-ops, field trips, sports leagues) is dependent on the quality of the available activities and the educational approach of the homeschool family; there is no one-size-fits-all extracurricular model.
	Integration of Subjects	Homeschool families typically view academic subjects—especially history and literature—as an integrated whole.
	Focus on Strengths	Focusing on each child’s unique strengths, gifts, and abilities becomes increasingly important to homeschool families as the child ages.
	Discussion and Questioning	In-depth discussions and deliberate questioning techniques are an integral—albeit often informal—part of the pedagogical approach used by homeschool educators.
Product	Mastery of Subject Matter	Proficiency of subject matter is more important than grades; assessments of learning are usually informal, with standardized test results used primarily by the parents to indicate whether they are on the right track.
	Independence	The ability to function independently is a desired byproduct that incorporates all areas of success goals.
	Practical Application	Homeschool parents view their children’s ability and desire to apply what they have learned as their primary concern when assessing all areas of success.

**Content**

The content element of Tomlinson’s (2001) differentiated instruction involves educators

adapting what they teach to the strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles of individual students. Curriculum choice, which spanned the majority of academic subjects that the participant parents taught, was the only assertion that fell in this category.

**Curriculum choice.** Homeschool educators choose curricula that meet their needs and support their success goals; however, emotional attachment to any specific curriculum was minimal, with only a couple of exceptions. All of the study's families typically used a formal curriculum for math, science, social studies, and language arts. The only exception was the Franklins, who used a custom science curriculum that Mrs. Franklin designed and no curriculum at all for geography. Most families chose curriculum based generally on logical reasons considered prior to use, with the exception of the unschooling Franklins, whose rationale for curricula choice is more emotional. Mrs. Caldwell articulated her and several other families' approach to curriculum choice, saying,

I'm very eclectic in the stuff that I do use, not only within the same year, but from year to year. What I do is make sure that I know what we're going to do for each of them in the main subjects—math, history, those kinds of things—and then we talk about other things that they might be interested in doing and kind of add some of those in as well.

Each family had at least one child involved in music lessons of some sort, and a few of the families used a curriculum for some aspect of teaching other fine arts areas. The children in the majority of families were studying or had studied at least one second language, with five families choosing Latin, which was the most common and supported the observations made by Sherfinski (2014) regarding the increase of Latin instruction in homeschool education. In some cases, this involved the use of a purchased curriculum, though more often the parents utilized a co-op or other external educational resource for this purpose. Other second language choices

included French, German, Spanish, Greek, and American Sign Language.

With only a couple of exceptions, none of the families in the study had significant loyalty to a particular curriculum. It was common for families to switch from one curriculum to another from year to year. When asked what curriculum they used for a specific discipline, parents would frequently reply with, “You mean this year, or ever?” The only two exceptions to this lack of loyalty was with the math curriculum *Teaching Textbooks* and the science curriculum *Apologia*. Teaching Textbooks (<http://www.teachingtextbooks.com>) is a computer-based program for basic math through pre-calculus that includes a video of an instructor explaining a given concept, a set of problems to complete in order to master the concept, and a video of the instructor explaining each missed problem. The program is self-paced and automatically graded, taking the majority of the workload for this subject away from the parent. The following discussion from the focus group is indicative of the passion the majority of the parents have for this program.

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Interviewer | So Teaching Textbooks. Why do you like that so much?   |
| Mrs. Aycock | Because it keeps me from killing my children (laughs).   |
| Mrs. Graham | It can do an algebra lesson 47 times. I cannot do that same algebra lesson 47 times.   |
| Mrs. Davis  | It teaches independence, which I like. They have to be responsible to get on the computer, do their lesson, watch their lesson, master their lesson, and you the parent can go in and check the grade. I like that independent aspect. And math is one of those subjects that either you're great at teaching or you're not great at teaching. So I like that it takes the burden off of the parent. |

The second exception of a curriculum to which parents were loyal is *Apologia* (<http://www.apologia.com>), which is a Christian-based science curriculum that presents science topics from a biblical worldview. A question about parents' reasons for liking Apologia resulted in the following dialogue:

Mrs. Davis        I like how it speaks directly to the student. I do like the Christian aspect of it; I think it's wonderful how they compare the Christian view, particularly when we're talking about astronomy and creation. But they also present the other side of things, the whole big bang. And I like that they present those sides, but they explain why . . . the Christian view is probably more accurate than the evolutionary perspective. But they don't just not talk about it, they don't just skip over it. They address it, which I like. I do think they need to understand both sides of the theory. But at the same time it gives them the opportunity to make up their own mind as well. That, and for elementary kids I love the way it's written. It's very easy for both of my kids, one in second and one in fifth, to grasp.

Interviewer       (to Mrs. Evans) Why do you like Apologia so much?

Mrs. Evans        It's very doable. Written to the student. I had kids who did it in high school, they did biology on their own, and then went to [a local community college] and did, well, Joel did biology for science majors, and he didn't even like science that much, but he got a B. So it prepared him well for college-level science.

Mrs. Aycock       That's what I was going to say. The middle school and high school

levels of Apologia, I think, are, I know they're more advanced than I ever had when I was in high school going to a public school. So I am very pleased with the level of challenge that they have as well, along with the other aspects that [Mrs. Davis] said.

Even in the case of these two exceptions, the parents were not so loyal that they would not change if the need became obvious. Mrs. Aycock articulated the consensus, saying,

But on the other hand, as much as I love Apologia, if one of my kids said, or I can see this is not to getting it for me, that I'm not so emotionally attached that I would be like, "No, were not doing anything else." So I really like what they have, I really like what Teaching Textbooks has, but if they came to a point where it wasn't working for us, I'm okay with switching.

While every family had a spiritual dimension as part of their success definition, it played a significant role in their curriculum choices in only about half the families. Some families deliberately chose curricula with a biblical worldview, especially for science and history, but others made a concerted effort to avoid doing so. For instance, Mrs. Baker said,

We want them to have a requisite amount of foundational biblical understanding, but we're not—most of our curriculum is not—purchased from religious curriculum houses where you've got to throw a verse on every page. . . . God created the physical universe and knows all about it, and so that's going to weave itself into how we teach our kids science. But we don't necessarily need to have Bible verses in the science texts. So I think that the spiritual components of what we're doing with the kids are actually less structured than other parts of the academic world because we take it as we go.

Curriculum choice was an important component of the strategy these parents used to help

their children accomplish their success goals. The families spent time and effort on at least an annual basis to determine the best curricula to use each year for each subject. However, the families were typically not adamant about any particular curriculum, and they were flexible enough to allow the situation and needs of each child to determine what curriculum to use at any given time.

## **Process**

Tomlinson (2001) described the process of differentiated instruction as the adaptation of the activities that educators use to help students make sense of content based on the needs of individual students. There were four assertions that fell in this category: involvement with external educational resources, integration of subjects, focus on strengths, and discussion and questioning.

**Involvement with external educational resources.** Involvement with external educational activities (e.g., co-ops, museums, historical sites) is dependent on the quality of the available activities and the educational approach of the homeschool family; there is no one-size-fits-all extracurricular model. A wide range of educational resources outside of the home was available to homeschool families in Central Texas. Several co-ops were within a 30-minute drive of all of the participant families, and a variety of museums and historical sites were close enough for a field trip during the school day. While most of the families had been involved with co-ops in past years, only a minority were currently involved at the time of the study, and of those, most did not do so on a consistent basis. Several of the families who moved to this area from somewhere else praised the co-ops in their previous locations, but they were not excited about what was available here. Mrs. Aycock said, “When we lived in Tulsa, the homeschool group that we were with had an excellent homeschool co-op . . . [but] we just haven’t found a



good fit here. But I'm definitely open to that." The families that were currently involved in a co-op were generally not using them to supplement academics. As Mrs. Graham noted, co-ops "are fine. Those are fun for us, but I can't count on them academically. They're certainly not going to fill in a gap. But they're fine, and they give them an opportunity to explore other interests."

Other learning activities outside the home that families frequently utilized were museums, zoos, planetariums, historical sites, and libraries. While a visit to one of these locations was often a planned day-trip, it was just as common for it to occur out of convenience. Some of the families saw libraries as more important, with Mrs. Graham remarking, "We live in libraries." Other families noticed a decrease in their library usage over the years as their incorporation of technology has increased. In general, the participants placed value on these types of activities outside the home, but they did not see them as critical to accomplishing their goals. More often, they saw these types of resources as reinforcement of whatever topic the children were currently studying. Note that this was true of these central Texas families involved in this study, but it is not necessarily indicative of similar resources available in other geographic areas in the U.S.

There was a large community college available to all of the participants, and the families with older children who have already graduated—specifically the Evanses and Franklins—took advantage of it during one or more of their children's high school years. Several other families with younger children intended to have their children attend when they are old enough. Joel and Rebecca Evans and Breanna Franklin attended the college to earn dual credit for one year of their high school education, which allowed the Evans' children to enter the four-year college of their choice as transfer students.

None of the families, whether actively involved in external educational activities or not, had an emotional attachment to the idea of involvement in these activities. In all cases, they felt that they could accomplish their success goals regardless of the availability of what they consider quality educational resources outside the home.

**Integration of subjects.** Homeschool families typically view academic subjects—especially history and literature—as an integrated whole. The integration of subjects was most prominent with history and literature, with most of the families aligning reading assignments to the time in history that their children were studying at any given time. For instance, the Franklins recently studied the Great Depression in the U.S., and two of the books Mrs. Franklin had her children read were *Out of the Dust* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, both of which are set in that timeframe. Similarly, the Aycocks stopped their curriculum-based study of American History at the appropriate point in order to do a study of the U.S. Constitution, using the constitution itself and other writings by the founding fathers during that timeframe as the source documents for the study.

Most of the families taught history chronologically, with several using this approach as the framework for most of what the children did on a daily basis. Mrs. Evans articulated her rationale for this approach, saying,

I love the idea of history being chronological and pulling in Scripture and art and other subjects into that timeframe. It makes so much sense to me, to learn history that way, to make history your backbone, and then everything else pulls into that.

Several of the families adhered to a classical, trivium-based approach to history, where the children study history from start to finish over four years, repeating the study in increasing depth three times over the course of the child's homeschool education.

In answering a question about what, if any, fine arts curriculum she used, Mrs. Harris elaborated on the nature of the comprehensive study of subjects. She stated,

As far as other fine arts things, there's a lot of that that is intertwined with their history, which gives suggestions. There's a specific fine arts section that's set aside, that's built into the history curriculum. With a lot of the science, they will have projects, you know, that requires you to do something artistic. Make little books, different things like that.

And sometimes even, take a moment to study a person, even the science will do that with a specific person in history that may have been [important]. But the history does that more than anything. . . . I think Stephen had to look at some art by Rembrandt, because it had to do with Belshazzar's feast, and he had to look at the stuff and learn a little about Rembrandt. So it incorporates that.

Regardless of the degree to which families integrated subject matter, they enjoyed the freedom they had to do so, and they saw themselves at an advantage in this regard by being the primary—if not sole—educator in their children's lives. Like their ability to choose their curriculum and participate in their choice of educational activities outside the home, integration of subjects was an area in which these homeschool parents have complete control.

**Focus on strengths.** Focusing on each child's unique strengths, gifts, and abilities becomes increasingly important to homeschool families as the child ages. I observed more variability in this aspect of the learning environment than any other area, though the families were typically more decisive in their respective opinions of their approach to this facet of their children's education as well. Most families allowed their children time to discover their interests early in their education, and then they began to cater the education toward those areas of interest as the child got older. Mrs. Davis explained it like this:

I want them to be well rounded, but at the same time, if they're bent towards something, the advantage of homeschooling is you can kind of custom tailor their education towards what they're looking for in the future, what they're bent towards. I think at a young age, your best bet is to expose them to a lot of different things, options. And you can find out what that is. As they get older, I think you can kind of hone in on that, on the specifics, and go more in that direction.

The classically oriented Bakers and the unschooling Franklins served as endpoints of a spectrum that emerged in this area. The Bakers decided early on that that they would take a broad, liberal arts approach to their children's education, and they have stuck with that decision ever since. At one point during the focus group, parents were discussing the benefits of being able to teach to their children's strengths. Mr. Baker countered what many other parents were saying, observing, "I'll just throw out the counter to that. We want the strengths to get stronger, but we also want the weaknesses to get stronger as well. We're trying to raise the water level." He was summarizing his view on which he had elaborated during the parent interview that his children needed a well-rounded, classical education throughout the entirety of their schooling. Contrast his opinion to that of Mrs. Franklin, who said, "Unschooling is, like, child-led, it's what their passion is. So I try to feed that passion." While the other families fell closer to the Baker's end of the spectrum when it comes to structure, they were generally closer to the Franklins with regard to focusing on their children's interests.

**Discussion and questioning.** In-depth discussions and deliberate questioning techniques are an integral—albeit often informal—part of the pedagogical approach used by homeschool educators. While there is nothing unique to homeschooling when it comes to parents having discussions with and asking questions of their children, I included this area as a key factor

involved in the processes integral to the homeschool learning environment because of the emphasis so many of the participant families placed on this topic. The majority of families, without my prompting, elaborated on the importance of having in-depth conversations with their children and asking them deliberate, open-ended questions. They frequently used discussion and questioning “after hours,” often by the non-primary educator, to continue pursuing subject matter learned and issues encountered during the day, and they often viewed these interactions as critical to—but outside of—education.

The families’ reasons behind their emphasis on this topic were multifaceted and covered the full range of success goals—academic, social, and values-related. First, it enhanced the child’s education and fed into their success goals of critical thinking and academic proficiency. Mrs. Graham said, “I use the Socratic Method for discussion to help them hear as many different viewpoints as possible and to learn to evaluate them critically.” With regard to the value deliberate questions have on academic excellence, Mr. Aycock stated,

I think, as opposed to just asking a yes or no question, or a question that would prompt a memorized response, trying to get at it from a different angle, to see if they really understand. Coming at it from a different angle, you know, where the book didn’t really address it this way but to see if you can apply it from that angle.

Another reason for their deliberate implementation of discussion was the benefit it had on developing communication skills and healthy relationships. Relationships were important to all of the families and were an implicit reason why many of them chose to homeschool. Mrs. Evans elaborated on the impact discussions have on their children’s social development:

I kind of feel like during the teenage years, that we had an awful lot of late-night conversations about things that are going on in their lives, and a lot of exchange of ideas.

They didn't always agree with us, but we did not ever want them to feel like their ideas and thoughts weren't valid. We wanted to really explore that with them and let them talk through these things with us. So keeping those lines of communication open was really important, and I think that that's part of that process, being able to come to us and tell us why they thought what they thought. And that kind of goes outside of education, but it kind of applies because you're still having to communicate what you think, why you think it, and to be able to think logically about that, and to be able to go back and forth and have those conversations.

Finally, families encouraged discussion because it supported their values-related goals for their children. In response to a question about how they are developing desired character traits in their daughters, Mrs. Caldwell stated,

Mostly discussion, conversation. Talking through and understanding who you are as a person and how God has created you. And understanding that God has created other people differently than you. Some of that kind of ties into it, too. We've had some good discussions about spiritual gifts, that kind of thing. So really, it could fall under social or spiritual. It's just being real, being who you are, and if you don't know, saying that I don't know.

More than any other area of the learning environment, this one was most comprehensive in its ability to span all areas of parents' goals of success for their children. It not only served as a tool to assist parents in meeting their goals, but it was also valuable in helping them assess their children's progress towards accomplishing those goals.

## **Product**

The product of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2001) is the varied means by which

educators assess what their students have learned. The three assertions that fell in this category were mastery of subject matter, independence, and practical application.

**Mastery of subject matter.** Proficiency of subject matter is more important than grades; assessments of learning are usually informal, with standardized test results used primarily by the parents to indicate whether they are on the right track. Assessment through grades was among the lowest of priorities for just about all of the participant families. The primary reason the home educators in the study gave grades at all was for the preparation of high school transcripts. This is not to say that grades were completely irrelevant, but as the Bakers wrote, “They are not defined purely by their grades.” Mrs. Evans summarized the consensus when she noted, “I’d rather see them have mastery of a subject, and I think there other ways than just assigning grades.”

One of the leading assessment tools in traditional schools is standardized tests (Sparkman et al., 2012). Most of the participants’ children have taken standardized tests in the past, even though Texas does not require it of homeschool students. Unlike traditional schools, however, parents used the test results primarily to determine whether they were on the right track as educators and to help them decide whether they needed to adjust their focus to a particular area of weakness. Standardized testing was a particularly passionate topic throughout the study, and a focus group discussion on the subject was no different. Mrs. Graham articulated the views of most families when she said,

I know they’re doing well, and I think at this point it’s adding more pressure or stress. I almost feel like I’m being evaluated, versus them. I don’t really need them evaluated. I know they’re doing well. I don’t think I’d do it again. It messes up my entire philosophy of educating them. I don’t care how they measure up. I can see they’re measuring up

through discussions and interests.

Despite the parents' attitudes towards standardized testing, most of them indicated that their children's performances on these tests were above average or grade level. Even when using the test results as a measure of their children's academic success, however, the parents remained unconvinced of the accuracy or need. Mrs. Evans noted, "[Rebecca's] a terrible speller, but she scored really high on the standardized test. And I was like, 'Really?' So I don't really know how accurate even that is." While discussing her son's test results, Mrs. Harris reiterated Mrs. Graham's earlier sentiments when she said, "[Stephen's] worst subject, he was right on where he was supposed to be, and all the other subjects he was a grade or two or three ahead. So I know they're doing fine. And I already knew that."

While the parents did not completely denounce the benefits of grades and standardized testing, they did not place the same prominence on these assessment tools as they perceived that public educators do. The reason most of the families incorporated grades and testing into their children's education was for transcripts and to ensure that the children knew how to take tests that are similar to what might be expected of them in college. They did not see these assessment tools as an integral part of their success strategy. However, they did see mastery of subject matter as central to their children's success.

**Independence.** The ability to function independently is a desired byproduct that incorporates all areas of success goals. The families placed high value on their children growing into independent adults, able to function on their own after they finish their homeschool education. I had tentatively defined most of the other areas prior to the focus group but had not included independence in that initial analysis. The parents noted its absence at the focus group, and we debated where it should fit in the study results. The parents knew that it was important to



them, but they had difficulty deciding whether it was a success goal (and if so, whether it was academic, social, or values-related) or an aspect of the learning environment. They concluded that they saw their children's growth in independence as a means of assessing whether they are succeeding as home educators, and they believed its purpose as a measure of assessment spans all three categories of their success goals.

For these parents, functioning independently entailed their children being able to live without their constant supervision and intervention. It involved practical things like their children having jobs that pay reasonably well, ability to balance a checkbook, cooking skills, and the ability to apply what they have learned academically in appropriate situations. It also encompassed the social and values-related aspects of success: being able to maintain healthy relationships without external assistance, making wise life choices, and staying true to their beliefs after they leave home. During the discussion of the multifaceted nature of independence, Mr. Caldwell observed that, as homeschool parents, they are "trying to work [themselves] out of a job. It seems to me that that's the goal." As Mr. Baker put it, "They need to be spiritually independent; they need to be financially independent, socially independent. It's not a slice of the pie, it's the big picture."

**Practical application.** Homeschool parents view their children's ability and desire to apply what they have learned as their primary concern when assessing all areas of success. The child's capacity to apply practical knowledge learned throughout their schooling was ultimately the primary measure of the success of that child's education. This was true regardless of the area of success goals; the education was successful only to the extent that the child was able to apply what he or she learned, whether that be academic knowledge, social skills, or commitment to personal values. Mrs. Evans noted that after her children have gained some new knowledge or

skill, they should “be able to apply those things in the context of life, and if they can’t do that, then we messed up somewhere.” While discussing the benefits of education at home, Mr.

Aycock pointed out that it was more than just an impartation of knowledge; it was also

Putting that education to use. How do you apply that? How do you use it? How do you make wise choices? How do you exercise discernment? I’ve learned about this, now how do I actually use it in my life? In my mind, the education is just the filling your head, but I think homeschooling adds the “How do you use it? How do you apply it? What does it mean to me? How does it apply to my life?”

It was not enough for the children to possess only the ability to apply knowledge; they also must have the willingness to do so, and parents saw this as work ethic. The parents of the older children—the Evanses and the Franklins—were pleased with how their young adults who are now out of the house have developed in this area. Mr. and Mrs. Evans discussed how they taught work ethic and the result of that teaching in their two oldest children.

Mrs. Evans      The reason [Joel] moved up was because he has initiative, and we trained them that way. That’s fruit, there is fruit. We told them when they were little and we were having a housecleaning day, that you go do this, and when you’re done, come back to me and ask what’s next. Don’t go play, we’re not finished. And that’s the way we did it. And I’m not saying that’s the only way to make that happen, I’m just saying that when I saw [Joel] go out and get a job, and he would get frustrated with people who would only do the one thing that they were assigned to do and not look around to see what else needed to be done. But he was doing that, he knew that that was important. And I thought, “Well okay,

we accomplished that. Good!”

Mr. Evans        And Rebecca followed in his same footsteps. She doesn’t have the same personality that he does, but her work ethic in moving forward and trying to make things happen is similar.

The Franklin’s oldest two children were both currently serving in the military at the time of the study. In the children’s and Mrs. Franklin’s opinions, they were both successfully applying the knowledge and skills they learned in school to real life. Mrs. Franklin described an experience of her oldest son, who was 14 at the time, which helped him develop this ability and willingness.

At 14, my son refused to do any school. My husband was overseas and my son just rebelled. He wanted to work and provide for his family. That year was a learning experience for him because he worked hard to take care of us, building fences, digging gardens, mowing lawns. At a certain age, some boys just need to work. He picked up back to the academic part shortly after 15, but the lessons he learned [during] that year of “work” have been more invaluable to him than 5 years of English and math. He has such a great work ethic and that is far more important than calculus to him.

For most of the parents in the study, the ability and willingness of their children to apply knowledge in practical ways was the most definitive way of determining whether the education had been successful or not. In many ways, this area of practical application brought the study’s families full circle back to their underlying motivations for choosing to homeschool many years ago. They desired then to be the primary influence on their children’s education and to be able to provide their children with the knowledge and skills that would serve them well in practical ways over the course of their lifetimes. Mr. Aycock summed up the opinions of most of the

families during the focus group when he said, “We homeschool because we’re being intentional with the education of our kids . . . very intentional in teaching our kids and confirming that they’re learning what they’re taught, able to apply it, kind of an overarching thought.”

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I provided an overview of each participant family and a synopsis of the results of the individual case analysis I conducted on each family. The families were diverse in their original motivations for choosing to homeschool, covering the full range of the ideologue/pedagogue spectrum. There was also diversity in the families’ approaches to homeschooling, with one family choosing the unstructured method of unschooling, another strictly adhering to a structured classical model, and the rest falling somewhere in between. All of the families had similar success goals, though the learning environment that they created in their homes was often quite different.

I then presented my cross-case analysis findings as they applied to each of the two research questions. For the first research question, seven assertions emerged that addressed the families’ success goals. I organized these assertions in three categories—academic, social, and values-related. Academic goals included the achievement of academic excellence, the impartation of a love of learning and desire to be life-long learners, and the ability to think critically. Social goals were comprised of effective communication skills and the ability to have healthy relationships with others. Values-related skills encompassed the development of strength of character and the attainment of spiritual security, to whatever extent those spiritual beliefs are important.

The second research question pertained to how the aforementioned success goals influenced the learning environment. I organized the eight assertions that emerged within the

three constructs of Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated instruction—content, process, and product. Success goals influenced the content of the learning environment by the parents' choice of curriculum. The assertions related to process included the families' use of external educational resources, such as co-ops and field trips; the integration of academic subjects; the focus on teaching to the strengths and interests of the child; and the incorporation of in-depth discussion and deliberate questioning techniques. Finally, the assertions pertaining to the product, or assessment, of the learning environment included the importance of the child's mastery of subject matter instead of grades and standardized test results, the emphasis on the child's ability to function independently as an adult, and the child's ability and desire to apply what he or she has learned in practical ways.

While some of these findings may seem intuitive, many of them are indicative of a perspective of education that the participant families said was different from that seen in traditional education. In the next chapter, I will discuss these findings further as well as the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

In this final chapter, I provide a summary of the findings of the study, followed by a discussion of those findings and their implications in light of the theoretical framework and current literature. I will then talk about some of the limitations involved in the study and my recommendations for further research related to the study.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental multiple case study was to understand how a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. defines success as it pertains to their children's education. Additionally, the study sought to understand how homeschool parents' definitions of success influence the learning environments that they establish for their children, specifically focusing on what homeschool parents teach their children, how they teach their children, and ways that they assess the degree to which learning has taken place (Tomlinson, 2001). The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How does a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. define success as it pertains to their children's education?
2. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence the learning environment in their home?
  - a. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence what they teach their children?
  - b. How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence how they teach their children?
  - c. How do homeschool parents assess their child's progress in achieving success?

I selected eight families for participation in the study. Each family represented one case,

which I defined as a traditional two-parent family who was currently homeschooling at least one child and who had homeschooled no less than the previous four years. I ensured a level of diversity in the participants by screening them based on their motivations for initially choosing to homeschool, using Van Galen's (1991) descriptors of ideologues and pedagogues as the basis of classification. This resulted in four of the participant families identifying their motivations as being primarily ideological, three as being primarily pedagogical, and one as equal parts ideological and pedagogical.

I collected data from the families in four ways: an open-ended questionnaire, a semi-structured interview with the parents, a structured interview with the parent who was the primary educator, and a focus group at which both parents from most of the families were present. I conducted individual case analysis on each family using the methodology proposed by Stake (1995) followed by cross-case analysis on the collective set of cases using a procedure outlined by Stake (2006).

Seven assertions emerged with regard to the first research question that dealt with the families' definitions of success, which I organized in the three categories of academics, social, and values-related. The assertions related to academics were academic proficiency, love of learning, and ability to think critically. Communication skills and healthy relationships comprised the social assertions. The values-related assertions were strength of character and spiritual security. My analysis of the data as it pertained to the second research question resulted in the emergence of eight assertions that I categorized using Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated instruction constructs of content, process, and product. Curriculum choices were the only assertions pertaining to content. Process-related assertions included involvement with external educational resources, integration of subjects, focus on strengths, and discussion and

questioning. The assertions associated with product were mastery of subject matter, independence, and practical application. In the next section, I will discuss the implications of these findings in light of current literature and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Several points of interest arose over the course of the data collection and analysis that warrant further discussion. This discussion will serve to highlight some of the most significant findings and the overarching themes that ran throughout all of the findings, as evidenced by the number of times these topics came up over the course of data collection, as well as the passion with which the participants addressed these areas. The topics I will address include the all-encompassing role of the parent-educator, homeschooling as the participants' only choice, traditional education comparison, methodological choices, and pedagogical and ideological tendencies.

#### **The All-Encompassing Role of the Parent-Educator**

The study's participants were able to do two things consistently well: articulate their ideas about success for their children's education and describe the steps they took to accomplish their goals pertaining to their children's success. More than that, however, was the typically implicit message that the parents saw themselves as the gatekeepers to every identified area of their children's success. They viewed their roles as all-encompassing, both as parents and educators of their children. This self-assessment of their dual roles validated research conducted by Green and Hoover-Baxter (2007), who found that many parents were motivated to continue to homeschool because they possessed strong parental role beliefs as well as high self-efficacy for helping their children learn.

They also understood that their roles spanned the entirety of their children's education,



not just for a small number of subjects or for a few years. With only exceptions for things like music lessons and the occasional co-op teacher (which was usually for non-academic subjects), they saw it as their responsibility to meet their goals for their children in every area identified in this study, whether academic, social, or values-related. As Mr. Davis pointed out,

That's one advantage, the fact that we are the ones observing rather than the teacher. As the parent, we're going to have a lot more exposure and the ability to correct rather than putting that in the hands of public employees.

The parents based their convictions concerning their responsibilities to meet the success goals for their children in every area on more than just a belief that the education of their children was a job they took on when they decided to homeschool. These parents believed that they were the most qualified individuals to accomplish what they saw as the massive undertaking of educating their children. Medlin (2013) observed that parents "are very likely to have an enduring and reciprocal relationship with their children, an intimate knowledge of their children's individual needs, and a strong interest in their children's welfare" (p. 293). In other words, parents are often the most qualified individuals when it comes to understanding their children's unique zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1976), and the parents in this study believed this to be true of themselves. As I mentioned in my earlier discussion of the zone of proximal development in Chapter Two, in order for instruction to be effective, a teacher must know a child's actual and potential developmental levels, and the level of instruction must be within the confines of these lower and upper bounds (Mahn, 1999). The parents in this study believed two things in this regard. First, they knew better than anyone else did where the lower and upper boundaries lay for each of their children, thereby making them the best teachers for their children. Second, the type of instruction to which Vygotsky referred is all-inclusive and

covers the full scope of a child's education, which, in the context of this study, comprises academics, social skills, and values.

The parents believed one of the greatest advantages of homeschooling was their knowledge of their own children. They saw this aspect both from the perspective of a parent knowing their child and a teacher knowing his or her student. The parent-child/teacher-student relationship that is unique to homeschooling was the enabling factor that allowed them as parents and teachers to be intimately familiar with each of their child's strengths, weaknesses, needs, and desires. This relationship caused them to see their role as parent and teacher as encompassing every part of their children's education.

### **Homeschooling as the Participants' Only Choice**

Like all families in the U.S., the study's participants had access to a public school education for their children. The majority of the families could also have sent their children to private schools, had they been willing to prioritize their budgets differently. Instead of taking advantage of these options, these families chose to homeschool their children because they saw homeschooling as the best—if not only—way to accomplish their educational goals. They did so despite the significant sacrifices homeschool families make when choosing this educational option (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Klein & Poplin, 2008). Financially, the median amount homeschool families spend annually on education is \$400 to \$599 per child (Ray, 2010), yet these families contended that it was worth the cost in order to accomplish their goals.

Their reasons for this strong conviction tied directly into this study's two research questions. These parents believed that they were both responsible for and most qualified to set the goals for their children. They also felt that they were best able to establish a learning environment in order to accomplish those goals. During the focus group discussion on the

multifaceted nature of their success goals, Mr. Baker pointed out that if his children were attending a traditional school, professional educators would set the agenda during the time his children were in their classrooms. He noted,

If you relegate eight hours to get academic excellence only, then I only have X hours a day to get in the rest of the stuff. It's why I think we've all chosen to say, "No, we want all day to work on all of this."

Mr. Evans concurred and went on to say, "As parents, we have such a huge responsibility to build the framework upon which they will organize the rest of their lives." The framework to which he was referring spanned the extent of their success goals—academics, social, and values.

Both Mr. Baker and Mr. Evans articulated the consensus of the group, which felt that homeschooling was the best educational option at their disposal for them to achieve their success goals for their children. The parents based their choice to homeschool largely on their ability to set their own goals and to control the content, process, and product that comprised the learning environments in their homes. As Mr. Evans put it, "If we want to get all of these things in here, what choice do we have but to homeschool?"

### **Traditional Education Comparison**

Throughout this project, I made a concerted effort to ensure that the families stayed focused on the questions at hand and that the discussion did not shift into a homeschool versus traditional education debate. However, I cannot ignore the fact that just about every family voluntarily expressed their opinion of at least some aspect of public schools. This is understandable, given that the participant families' reasons for choosing to homeschool included their belief that they could give their children a better education at home, their objection to what schools were teaching, and their perception that the learning environment in schools was poor.

This seems to support current research on parents' motivations for homeschooling (Collom, 2005; Noel et al., 2013). The nature of the participants' observations of public schools is worth noting, as educators could glean some useful information during this time of frequent school reform initiatives.

The criticism of public schools spanned all three large areas of success—academic, social, and values-related. When we were talking about the importance of academics during the focus group, Mr. Baker noted, “It’s ironic that public school’s sole focus is academic excellence, when they’re not really achieving it.” During a conversation concerning her desire for her children to be able to self-teach, Mrs. Evans said, “I think a lot of times in public schools you’re spoon fed all the way through, and all you’re learning is how to pass a test. And you’re not really learning how to think and really research.” Mrs. Harris made a similar observation when voicing her perceptions about a lack of encouragement of creativity in public schools.

The participant parents expressed concern over several other areas. They felt that the type of socialization that occurred in public schools was undesirable, supporting literature that suggests that many homeschool parents view the socialization associated with public schools in much the same way as some in traditional education look at homeschool socialization (Apple, 2000; Basham et al., 2007; Lubienski, 2003) . Several noted an excessive emphasis placed on standardized testing that resulted in too much time being spent teaching to the test. Some perceived a non-academic agenda in public education, specifically as it pertained to breaking down moral values. Many also felt that an inflexibility of scheduling existed that resulted in all children being treated essentially the same. In all of these areas, the study’s participants felt that homeschooling was the answer because they had total control over what they saw as these drawbacks of the public school system.

This is not to say that all of the families had entirely negative impressions of public schools, with an initiative by the Grahams being a notable exception. Mrs. Graham taught a class on Shakespeare to homeschool students in her home. While conducting research for one of her classes, she discovered some work a public school teacher in California was doing in her area of interest, and she contacted him for additional information. This resulted in a collaborative effort on her and the public school teacher's parts to have their students—one from an informal homeschool class in Texas and the other from a public school class in California—write and evaluate each other's blog postings and interact via Skype to encourage learning in a unique way in both environments. This type of collaboration appears to be occurring more frequently as homeschooling becomes more mainstream (Johnson, 2013).

### **Methodological Choices**

A continuum emerged throughout the analysis of the data that pertained to the structure and lack thereof inherent in the learning environments the participants created in their homes. I noted earlier that the classically oriented Bakers represented the furthest point among the participant families on the structured side of the continuum, the unschooling Franklins represented the unstructured side, and the remaining families fell somewhere in between with a decided skew towards structure. The presence of this continuum among the participant families is in keeping with key findings of a study conducted by Martin-Chang, Gould, and Meuse (2011). While their study specifically examined the academic achievement of students learning in structured and unstructured learning environments (which was outside of the scope of this study), it did serve to acknowledge that such a continuum exists in homeschooling.

Several of the participant families—most notably the Bakers, Davises, and Evanses—embraced many aspects of a classical educational model. Five of the eight families incorporated

Latin as a second language for their children. This aspect of many of the participants' chosen methodology supported recent studies that indicate an increase in the inclusion of classical education in home education (Hahn, 2012; Sherfinski, 2014). On the other end of the spectrum, the unschooling Franklins validated that a minority of homeschool students do learn in an environment lacking the structure of traditional schooling (Holt, 1977, 2004; Martin-Chang et al., 2011), and, according to Mrs. Franklin, are doing so successfully.

Most of the families tended to analyze available curriculum choices and choose the best curriculum options for the subjects they planned to teach in any given upcoming year. While past usage of a particular curriculum may have played a role in that decision, it was not necessarily the driving force. This decision-making process reflected the extensive array of curriculum choices available to homeschool families (Hanna, 2012).

About half of the study's participant families incorporated homeschool co-ops into their chosen methodology, although most of those did not do so consistently. However, several of the families who moved here from other places noted that they were actively involved in co-ops prior to moving to this area. These participant families shared that they did not value the co-ops available to them in Texas as much as they did in other parts of the country. Given these families' past positive co-op experiences along with current literature that points to increasing involvement in co-ops and frequent resource-sharing among homeschool families (Gaither, 2009; McReynolds, 2007), I contend that the participants' less-than-enthusiastic response to available co-ops says more about the nature of the available co-ops and less about the validity of existing research on the subject.

Despite the availability of charter schools (Texas Connections Academy, 2014; Texas Virtual Academy, 2014) and a virtual public school (Texas Virtual School Network, 2012) that

would have allowed their children to study at home at no charge, none of the participant families chose to utilize them. In fact, none of the children in any of the families participated in any online classes aside from those that may have been required of the older children attending the local community college. None of the families indicated that they felt like they were at a disadvantage for not making use of such classes. This lack of participation in virtual education by the study's participants—who were all Christian—is not necessarily surprising, given that Klein and Poplin (2008) found that families who chose to attend virtual charter schools did so for pedagogical reasons and not for religious reasons.

All of the families participated in a variety of extracurricular activities, to include dance, drama, band, field trips to various locations, and frequent library visits. Willingham (2008) observed that homeschool families frequently utilize a broad array of activities outside of the home, and the participant families' active involvement in these types of activities lend credence to this observation.

The participant families' methodological choices generally supported the current literature on the subject, with the only exception being in their decisions not to participate in any form of virtual schooling. In many ways, these families' decisions regarding delivery of instruction typified those of homeschool families around the U.S.

### **Pedagogue and Ideologue Tendencies**

Tomlinson's (2001) methodology of differentiated instruction and Van Galen's (1991) research on pedagogues and ideologues both played a significant role in shaping many aspects of this study. A review of the literature did not reveal any studies that examined these two bodies of research simultaneously. While by no means generalizable to a larger population, an interesting correlation emerged that suggested a possible link between the ideologue/pedagogue

dichotomy and the content and process of differentiated instruction. Of the eight participant families in the study, four self-identified as ideologues, three as pedagogues, and one as half ideologue/half pedagogue. While I did not ask the participants whether they focused more on the content as opposed to process, it is possible to interpolate their thoughts based on the overall data, and one question that I did ask is helpful in doing so. In response to a question asking about their usage of hands-on activities versus worksheets, three of the four ideologues indicated that they leaned more towards worksheets to some degree, the only exception being the Davises, who have the youngest children involved in the study. All three of the pedagogues indicated that they leaned more towards hands-on, with the unschooling Franklins the most adamantly hands-on of all families. The half ideologue/half pedagogue Aycocks used more hands-on activities early in their children's education, but as their daughters have gotten older, they have moved away from those.

Throughout the study, the parents typically related worksheets and other similar instructional material to content, whereas they most often related hands-on activities to process. For instance, during a conversation about hands-on projects, Mrs. Franklin discussed her incorporation of animal husbandry and cooking in her children's education. Without realizing it, she was giving examples of "sense-making activit[ies]" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 79) that Tomlinson contended are central to the process of the learning environment. On the other end of the spectrum were the Bakers, whose primary focus was more on deliberately chosen content and less on process. It became evident during a conversation with them on their usage of hands-on activities versus worksheets that they relied almost exclusively on worksheets.

Based on my interactions with the families in this study, there was evidence that the families who were motivated to homeschool for primarily ideological reasons tended to gravitate



more towards the content. Similarly, families motivated for pedagogical reasons tended to focus more on the process. Just as there are some ideological and pedagogical aspects in all homeschooling families, regardless of their primary leanings (Van Galen, 1991), there was also some focus on both content and process in all of the families. The relationship that emerged through this study, however, seemed to suggest that ideologues tend to be content-driven and pedagogues tend to be process-driven. Researchers need to conduct further studies on this facet of homeschooling in order to verify this.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are weaknesses inherent to the study that are outside of the control of the researcher (Creswell, 2003). Perhaps the most significant limitation was the “hidden population” (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004, p. 195) nature of the homeschooling community and the potential tendency of this population to shy away from anything associated with structured academia. Homeschool researchers have frequently reported challenges in achieving both desired response rates and representative samples (Ray, 2010; Rudner, 1999; Smiley, 2012). A similar limitation held true for this study. The families who voluntarily participated in this qualitative study were potentially very different in nature from ones who would choose to educate their children without shining what they would consider an unnecessary academic spotlight on their efforts. I kept this characteristic of homeschool families in mind when considering the transferability of the results.

By using families’ motivations for initially choosing to homeschool as my means of ensuring diversity among participants, my hope was that the diversity achieved would also transfer into other areas, such as families’ philosophical approaches to education, use of available educational resources, and personal values and beliefs. I based this hope in part on the

premise that ideologues are typically associated with conservative Christians who, in the early years of homeschooling, would have subscribed to the teachings of the Moore's (1975), whereas the pedagogical side of the homeschooling movement has its roots in the more liberal teachings of Holt (1964). While I did achieve diversity with regard to motivations for homeschooling, I did not achieve the philosophical and values-based diversity that I wanted. All eight families were Christians, as supported by their beliefs, attitudes, and actions. They all incorporated a spiritual element—such as Bible reading and devotionals—in the learning environments that they created. They all actively participated in church. Many were involved in the community because of their spiritual beliefs, and they were training their children to do likewise. Most of the families had used, were using, or planned to use Apologia, which is a Christian-based science curriculum. Despite this, I am comfortable that the results of this study are meaningful, given that over 97% of homeschooling families in the U.S. claim to be Christian (Ray, 2010). Future researchers in the area should attempt to hear the voices of other families who are homeschooling for primarily secular reasons.

A review of the literature did not reveal any studies that indicated the racial makeup of the central Texas community, from which I drew my participants, represents that of the U.S. homeschool community at large. All eight of the participant families in this study were Caucasian, which is clearly not representative of the population of the community or the U.S. Ray (2007) indicated that homeschooling is rapidly expanding among all minority groups, citing studies that showed that minority groups—primarily African American and Hispanic—currently comprise as much as 25% of homeschooling families in the U.S. and could soon account for as much as 50% of the homeschool population. Future research should ensure that their participants represent a broader racial diversity.

A final limitation was the self-reported nature of the vast majority of data, which could have resulted in participants presenting an overly positive assessment of their situations. One of my jobs as a data collector was to build trust and establish open and honest communication channels, which I believe I accomplished. This mitigated some of this natural tendency to highlight personal and family strengths and diminish weaknesses so that I could present an honest and complete picture of each case.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Two veins of research that I recommend that others consider conducting after having completed this study are education-related and success-related. This study was a qualitative multiple case study. As such, it does not provide for the generalizability of findings to the larger population. However, researchers could easily use the results of this study as the basis of a related quantitative study. For instance, a correlational study investigating the relationship between homeschool families' definitions of success and some measurable outcome would prove useful in exploring how parents' priorities relate to performance. This would be even more interesting to include families utilizing public and private schools as well.

A recurring theme that came up during several of the interviews with the parents and the focus group was how the parents defined education. Many families—or even single parents within a given family—saw education as strictly academics, with everything else being important but in addition to education. Other participants saw education as encapsulating every area that they teach to the children, to include all interactions throughout the day as well as the late-night discussions. As Mrs. Aycock stated earlier, “I think [education] is way more encompassing than the 3R's, history, spelling, whatever you want to add in.” I believe that this difference of interpretation of exactly what constitutes education is more than just a question of

semantics; I believe that it addresses something fundamental to a family's philosophical approach to education, whether they are aware of that relationship or not. Further research exploring individual perceptions of education and the relationship between those perceptions and other constructs could allow educators to gain a more comprehensive view of education, if such a view does in fact exist.

This study was primarily about success, with the homeschool learning environment used as the context for the study. While research has been conducted on the nature of academic success (Conley & Wise, 2011; Kuh et al., 2006; Mullin, 2012; Sparkman et al., 2012; Vare et al., 2004; Zwick, 2007), the topic of success in broader terms warrants further examination. Researchers could conduct a variation of this study with any number of different contexts: traditional schools, church ministries, military training environments, corporate settings, and civic organizations, just to name a few. In every case, variants of this study's research questions would be applicable. Regardless of the context, each study should address one question on how the context's authority defines success and another question on how that definition influences what goes on in that context. Such research could be extremely beneficial to the organizations that the study uses as its context, just as homeschooling families can benefit from this study.

### **Recommendations for Homeschooling Families**

As I end this work, it seems fitting to speak directly to the group who stands to gain the most from this study in terms of practical application: homeschool parents. I encourage you to give the topic of this study as it applies to your unique situation some careful thought, especially how you define success for your children. This may seem intuitive, but I found that, until I asked these parents, few of my participant families had given the question deliberate thought. However, as Kianipour and Hoseini (2012) pointed out, teachers' expectations of their students

achievement can have a dramatic impact on what their students accomplish, and after undertaking this study, I contend that this principle holds true to all areas of your children's educations. I further contend that this principle holds true for your children in the short-term—such as understanding a math concept or demonstrating some desired character trait in an upcoming situation—as well as the long-term—such as the ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships or developing a lifelong love of learning. In other words, you will dramatically increase the chances of your child developing your desired success goals if you deliberately identify and communicate those goals to your children.

One of Covey's (2004) seven habits sums it up best: "Begin with the end in mind" (p. 95). If you plan to homeschool your children, but you have not yet begun the process, you are in an enviable position, because you can begin to develop your definition of success from the very start of their education. If you are currently homeschooling and have never given this topic much thought, it is not too late. Begin now to determine your success goals for your children, and then allow those goals to reshape what you are teaching, how you are teaching, and how you are assessing the degree to which your children are attaining those goals. Doing so will enhance their education and improve their chances of achieving your expectations.

The aforementioned recommendation has direct ties to this study's first research question on parents' definitions of success. My next recommendation relates more closely to the second research question on the learning environment. I noticed a tendency among my participant families to question—usually implicitly—whether they were doing things correctly. In keeping with both my literature review and their own experience, they were aware that there is a tremendous number of resources available to homeschool parents that help facilitate an effective education for their children, and they wanted confirmation that they were making the right

choices. Keeping in mind that I did not evaluate any quantitative measures of success of any child in this study, I can state with full assurance that there is no one-size-fits-all methodology of educating your children; there is no right way. Some of my participant families focused more on content and others more on process, but each of their respective learning environments was unique. In light of this study's findings, I recommend that homeschool parents constantly evaluate the needs of their children and use that evaluation to determine which content, process, and product-related resources will best meet those needs at any given time. If you find that a specific curriculum or involvement in a particular extracurricular activity is not enhancing some aspect of your child's education, find something else and move on, even if "everyone else is doing it." What works for others may not work for you, and there is nothing wrong with that.

Finally, I encourage you to keep in mind that you are not alone. At the conclusion of an interview with one of my participant families, someone made a statement along the lines of, "It's a shame it takes a project like this one to get us talking about a topic of this importance." Every homeschooling family is going through similar experiences as you are, despite the uniqueness of each of your situations. I recommend that you and other homeschool parents talk more with each other, assess what is working and what is not, discuss your success goals and what you are doing to achieve them; in short, have deliberate conversations about these and other topics of interest. I believe that everyone will benefit from such discussions, and your effectiveness as parent-educators will increase as a result.

### **Conclusion**

This instrumental multiple case study has addressed questions pertaining to how home educators views of success influence the learning environment that they create in their homes, using Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory as the theoretical framework and Tomlinson's

(2001) methodology of differentiated instruction as the conceptual framework. The findings indicated that the ideas about success held by homeschool families fall into three broad categories: academic, social, and values-related. The data also indicated that homeschool parents address all three areas of differentiated instruction—content, process, and product—even if they are unfamiliar with the methodology in formal terms.

It is my hope that both homeschool and professional educators will glean insights from this study that will advance the educational goals of children in any learning environment. It seems intuitive that there are benefits to educators knowing the indicators of success that are important in whatever environment they are teaching, whether in a classroom or a dining room. My hope is that this study has highlighted some of those success indicators for both home and professional educators, and that it will serve as encouragement for them to ascertain their own objectives for success. After they have identified their success goals, my desire is that they would use them wisely to create a learning environment that results in the achievement of all that they hope to accomplish.

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**APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 13, 2013

William Johnson

IRB Approval 1742.121313: A Multiple Case Study Investigating the Influence of  
Homeschool Parents' Perceptions of Success on the Learning Environment

Dear William,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**  
*Professor, IRB Chair*  
**Counseling**

**(434) 592-4054**



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## **APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT LETTER**

Dear Potential Study Candidate:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Education degree (Ed.D.), and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you choose to participate, I will ask that you complete four steps: work as a family to complete a four question open-ended questionnaire, participate in a family interview, participate in a one-on-one interview with the family's primary educator, and participate in a focus group with other study participants (only the primary educator need be present). It should take approximately one hour to complete the questionnaire, two hours for the family interview, two hours for the face-to-face interview, and two hours for the focus group, all of which will transpire over an approximately two month period. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be included in any reports, though I will include some descriptive data pertaining to your family (e.g., age and number of children, primary motivation for choosing to homeschool). I will replace all individual and family names in all reports with pseudonyms.

To participate, go to <http://www.surveymonkey.com/surveyidentifier> and complete the short screening survey. I will use this survey as a means for you to let me know you are interested in participating in the study and to ensure that you and your family meet all of the qualifications for participation in the study. If you are unable to access this survey for any reason or prefer a hard copy of the survey, you can contact me by the phone number or email address listed below.

I will provide you with an informed consent document after you complete the screening survey and I have selected you for participation. The informed consent document contains additional information about my research, and I will ask that you sign it prior to receiving the open-ended questionnaire.

If you have any questions about the study or the nature of your participation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

William R. Johnson  
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

## APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHICS AND MOTIVATIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is your family a traditional two-parent (husband and wife) family?

\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

2. List your children by age, grade, sex, and the number of consecutive years they have been homeschooled leading up to the present. For instance, if you have a child who is halfway through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and has been homeschooled since the start of 6<sup>th</sup> grade, you would enter 4 ½. Do not list their name(s).

Child	Age	Grade	Sex	Number of Years Homeschooled
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

3. Regarding motivations for choosing to homeschool, an *ideologue* is someone who is motivated by their desire to foster strong relationships with their children as well as their tendency to take issue with traditional school curricula. They desire to teach their own values and beliefs to their children, being concerned with character education as much as academics. A *pedagogue*, on the other hand, is someone who is primarily motivated for pedagogical and academic reasons. They believe that schools are not effective when it comes to educating their children, and they feel that they can do a better job. Indicate below where you would classify yourself on the ideologue/pedagogue continuum.



4. Preferred means of contact:

\_\_\_\_ Email. Please provide email address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Facebook. Please provide Facebook ID: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Phone. Please provide phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Other. Please provide appropriate contact information: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What would you consider the top three reasons you initially chose to homeschool? You may select from the choices below or fill in your own reason if the provided choices do not



adequately state your reason. List 1, 2, and 3 in the appropriate blank.

- ☐ Can give child better education at home
- ☐ Child has special needs/disability
- ☐ Child has temporary illness
- ☐ Could not get into a desired school
- ☐ Family reasons
- ☐ Object to what school teaches
- ☐ Other problem with available public/private schools
- ☐ Parent's career
- ☐ Poor learning environment at school
- ☐ Religious reasons
- ☐ School does not challenge child
- ☐ Student behavioral problems
- ☐ To develop character/morality
- ☐ To provide stability to my child due to frequent moves
- ☐ Transportation/distance/convenience
- ☐ Want private school but cannot afford it
- ☐ Other reasons: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other reasons: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other reasons: \_\_\_\_\_

Question 5 adapted from Bauman (2001), Table 5. Reasons Given by Parents for Choosing Home Schooling: 1996 and 1999 Home Schooled Children: NHES Surveys

## **APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

### **Letter of Consent to Participate**

A Multiple Case Study Investigating the Influence of Homeschool Parents' Perceptions of Success on the Learning Environment

William R. Johnson  
Liberty University  
School of Education

IRB Approval #1742.121313

You are invited to be in a research study that examines how homeschool parents define success as it pertains to their child's education and the effect that has on the learning environment they create in their home. You were selected as a possible participant because you meet all of the requirements for the study and you indicated, by completing the screening survey, that you are willing to talk openly and honestly about how you are educating your children. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by William R. Johnson, Principal Investigator, Liberty University Doctoral Student.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand how homeschool parents define success as it pertains to their child's education and how their definition of success influences the learning environment that they attempt to establish in their homes or other places at which the education of their children occur. Current research seems to imply that academic achievement and post-high school performance are the two primary measures of success of a child's education. This study seeks to examine the full extent of factors that are important to homeschool families and how those factors influence educational decisions. I will look at these issues specifically from the perspective of the content that parents teach, the process by which parents teach, and how parents assess the learning that takes place.

### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things in order to provide data for the study: an open-ended questionnaire, a family interview, a face-to-face interview with the primary educator, and a single focus group with other participants of the study. The total time required to complete all three steps should be no more than seven hours over an approximate two-month period.

I will use the open-ended questionnaire to get your thoughts on four general questions pertaining to how you view success and how that influences your homeschool. I will ask that you spend time discussing the questions together as a family and provide in-depth feedback on the questions.

A family interview will occur next, and it will involve both parents and, to the extent to which you are comfortable, your homeschooled children who are participating in the study. The feedback you provide in the questionnaire will serve as the basis for the family interview, and we will explore the same topics more in-depth in an informal, conversational environment. While I will not require your children to be present, their participation in the discussion will provide unique insight regarding the effectiveness of your communication and encouragement regarding their success. At a minimum, both parents must be present for the discussion. I will not have any discussions with your children unless you are present or you explicitly give me permission to do so.

An interview with the parent who is the primary educator will occur next, with the purpose being to discuss curriculum choices, extracurricular activities, co-op participation, and any other areas in which you have chosen to participate in order to see your children succeed. Both spouses may be present at the interview if desired.

Finally, at least one parent from each participant family will participate in a focus group, the purpose of which will be to discuss key ideas that have emerged throughout the study and provide a means for participants to verify the data. The families participating in the study and the primary researcher will be the only individuals involved in this collection of data. In addition to the final focus group, you will periodically have the option to review the data that I collect to ensure that it accurately represents your experiences.

Interviews and the focus group will be audio-recorded so I can ensure that I have an accurate record of your thoughts and experiences.

### **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The risks related to this study are minimal, meaning there is no more risk than you would encounter in everyday life. I will keep all data collected during the study confidential.

The benefits associated with your participation are primarily intrinsic in nature, as you will likely come to a better understanding of how you perceive success for your children and whether your actions are effectively bringing your perception of success to fruition. Your participation will also assist the academic community in understanding the uniqueness in how homeschool families view success.

### **Compensation**

Participants will not receive compensation for their participation in the study.

### **Confidentiality**

I will keep the records created through the study private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Digital records of

data (e.g., audio recordings, transcriptions, notes) will be used to the fullest extent possible, and I will secure all files on a password-protected removable storage device. All hard copies that prove necessary will be stored in a locked file cabinet. I will destroy all data related to the study—digital or otherwise—three years after the final date of data collection.

I will take all reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of the data collected. I will record and transcribe all interviews and focus groups, the files of which I will handle in the aforementioned manner. However, I cannot assure you that what is discussed in the family interview or focus group will remain confidential, since there will be multiple participants over whom I have no control. Rest assured, however, that I will handle all data with the protection of your confidentiality as a top priority.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. Additionally, the study will not affect any preexisting relationship between you and the researcher should you choose to participate, choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study.

### **Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is William R. Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at (omitted).

Additionally, you may contact the chair of this research project, Dr. Gail Collins, at (omitted).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

I (\_\_\_\_agree/\_\_\_\_do not agree) to allow all interviews and focus groups to be audio-recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I consent to my child/children participating in the above listed procedures.

Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX E: PERSONAL PERCEPTION OF SUCCESS AND ITS INFLUENCE**

In order to clearly articulate my personal perception about what success means and how it influences my children's learning environment, I will provide my wife's and my perspective on each research question that served as a guide for the study.

### **Question 1: Success**

*How do we define success for our children?*

From the start of our homeschooling, we have used this Bible verse as our guiding principle: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52, New International Version). This verse breaks the growth of Jesus into five areas: academic and emotional (wisdom), physical (stature), spiritual (favor with God), and social (favor with man).

To be successful academically, we want our children to do the best they can with each of their unique abilities. We are more concerned that our children's quality of the work represents them at their best. Knowledge, as is measured by standardized achievement tests, is certainly important; however, we are more interested in seeing them possess a quality work ethic and the ability to think critically, as those traits have greater life implications than the mere possession of facts.

Emotionally, we want our children to be self-controlled, resilient, and self-aware of their own emotional health as well as the emotional needs of others. This includes their possessing an understanding of the reality of forgiveness and redemption so that they can effectively deal with guilt and anxiety.

We want our children to be physically fit and active, understanding the importance of exercise. Good eating habits are important, and we want them to understand the value of a healthy diet and to avoid over-indulgence and gluttony.

Because we believe in the eternal nature of man, we believe that the spiritual dimension is of utmost importance. Spiritual success for our children means that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that this relationship is healthy and maturing as they get older. It requires that they know the difference between right and wrong and have the courage to take a stand when faced with difficult ethical situations. Success in this area also means knowing what they believe, why they believe it, and how to articulate their beliefs to others.

The importance of our children's social lives is not something we take for granted, and it played a role in our decision to homeschool. I can best sum up success in this area in terms of influence; we want our children to influence their social environments more than their social environment influences them. This involves communication skills that allow them to interact effectively with their peers, younger children, and elders, and it requires that they deliberately choose friends who both share their values and challenge them to consider different perspectives concerning various issues.

## **Question 2: Learning Environment**

*How does our definition of success influence how we shape the environment in which our children learn?*

We see our children's learning environment as being wherever they happen to be at any given time. Most of their formal learning takes place in one of two places: the home and a Christian-based homeschool co-op. Learning also takes place in a variety of other places, to include libraries, museums, historical sites, or the middle of the woods. I will address the learning environment in the context of the three primary constructs of differentiated learning theory that frame this study: content, process, and product.

What our children learn in any given year depends largely on their age, but in all cases, it

supports our five focal domains of academic, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social. When they were younger, we gave them choices of what to learn. As they got older, what they learned increasingly resembled what a traditionally educated student of the same age was learning. Because of my wife's education (B.S. in elementary education) and experience, we were able to set reasonable goals for our children during their formative years, which in turn set the stage for the continued identification and accomplishment of goals as they grew older.

Within the home, we gave our children considerable freedom concerning the completion of assignments, in terms of both process and location. We participate in a Christian-oriented homeschool co-op through which the children have taken music, language, and writing classes, which are just a few of the subjects offered. This participation has provided a means of allowing our children to engage socially with other children their own ages, and it has provided them the opportunity to take classes that they otherwise would not have been able to take. The process of learning also involves the time spent working on schoolwork. They typically start their schoolwork before breakfast, and on some days, one or more of the children will be finished with their work before lunch (typically the youngest) while the oldest might be working off and on throughout the day and into the evening. We emphasize effective time management and work ethic throughout their instructional time.

We assess the degree to which our children have learned as simply as possible. Because the nature of homeschooling allows for one-on-one, individualized instruction, the assessments are also adapted to the individual child and the subject we are assessing. We keep a record of grades only to monitor their progressions and to make it easier to communicate their strengths and weaknesses to colleges and universities when the time comes for them to apply for admission. They take end-of-year, standardized tests that serve as a measurement of progress, but



we place very little emphasis on preparing specifically for one of these tests. Our focus in terms of academic assessment is always to ensure they understand concepts, not that they get good grades.

## **APPENDIX F: SAMPLE COMPETED OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **A Multiple Case Study Investigating the Influence of Homeschool Parents' Perceptions of Success on the Learning Environment**

by Ron Johnson  
Open-Ended Questionnaire

The first phase of data collection involves you and your family discussing the following four questions and providing your answers to them. I will base the subsequent discussions (the interview with your family and the interview with the primary educator) largely on your answers to these questions. You can type your answers after each question below or write them by hand on another sheet of paper.

1. Describe how you define success as it pertains to your child's education.

For our family, a successful education is one that equips the child with the necessary skills to pursue their chosen field. (Whether that be higher education, entrepreneurship, or whatever their chosen field). This includes critical thinking, knowledge, and the tools needed to find answers to their questions. A child excited about learning each day is a measure of success on both of our parts. I'd like for my children to continue to seek out knowledge and education in whatever fields interest them as they grow, because essentially learning shouldn't ever stop. A love of learning is a great measuring stick for success.

2. What characteristics and attributes do you presently see in your child that indicates he or she is on the right track toward success?

With my oldest, we have always seen a certain level of auto-didactic behaviors. He doesn't let our limited knowledge in a certain field keep him from pursuing it, and that is a wonderful attribute. He spends time learning Greek and watching lots of robotic and engineering videos. He is very goal oriented and is quick to find out what is needed to accomplish those goals. That alone can put him on the path for success.

My second oldest has a more care-free nature. She is more of a kinesthetic learner and is quite personable. She has overcome different struggles with learning and has made leaps and bounds and recently moved up her math level to a grade above her age. She has learned to work hard and persevere. Her bedroom light will usually be on much later than the others because she is full of determination to succeed. She told me today to "(n)ot go easy on me, because I want to get into a good college." That attitude reassures me that she is on the right track.

3. What characteristics and attributes do you desire to see exhibited in your child at the conclusion of his or her homeschool education that would indicate he or she has achieved success?

I would like my children to confidently pursue whatever direction they feel called to without regard for anybody else's measurement for success. Our world is rapidly changing, education is changing, and I am excited to see how they grow. If my child calls me up and tells me about a great project, or idea, or book they have been reading, I will consider our endeavor successful. I honestly lay in bed at night and think I have the greatest job in the world. If they can one day feel the same about whatever it is they do, that's awesome.

4. What are you doing to ensure these characteristics and attributes develop in your child?

My primary job is to gather the tools necessary to help them learn. We have a small library in our house, tools, computers, and friends with talents that are different from our own. We encourage them to explore as many topics as they want. I personally try to read to them, with them, discuss all kinds of topics with them, and encourage them to find answers. We have a co-op at our home on Fridays with other homeschoolers and I use the Socratic Method for discussion to help them hear as many different view points as possible and to learn to evaluate them critically. I also try to give them plenty of time to just ponder, research, or explore whatever it is they are interested in learning.

## APPENDIX G: SAMPLE PARENT INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interviewer The first thing, and I'll cover this in the order that you wrote it, and I don't know if the order that you wrote it is necessarily your priority or not, but this is how it came out on paper, but the first thing is proficient in spelling, math, reading, and writing, and then understanding history. Which to me all rolls up under... Well, I'll let you elaborate on that and then we'll talk more. Are you talking strictly academics, or something more?

Mrs. Evans What was the question on the questionnaire again?

Interviewer Describe how you define success as it pertains to your child's education.

Mrs. Evans Okay, well, because that was the way the question was written, I was just thinking about education. I think things are what I said. They need to know how to read, they need to know how to write, they need to know how to research, they need to know how to do all those basic things. But then to be able to apply those things in the context of life, and if they can't do that, then we messed up somewhere. That's part of where the history thing is important to me, too. Because to me, if you don't have an understanding of history, then you're destined to repeat it. And if you don't understand your place in history, the times that you live in, you can't have a grasp on that and what's important about that if you don't understand history. Where we were, where we are now, so, does that make sense? Is that what you want?

Interviewer It's not what I want, other than to hear what you've got to say.

Mrs. Evans Well, a little more on that. I didn't like history in school. I hated it, because it was boring. It was all textbook. It was memorizing facts and dates and peoples with no context. And so I think that's a lot of the issues in our country that we have. We have all these kids coming out and they have no context of what they are learning. And I think that's important. I didn't really like history until college and when I started homeschooling. I've been learning with the kids.

Interviewer Do they like it?

Mrs. Evans Yeah. Both of the big kids, they understand it, they have a pretty firm grasp of what happened when.

Mr. Evans How that leads us to where we are now.

Interviewer Right. Because you talked about history quite a bit. And so, just a glance, I would tend to say that history seems to be a priority in your mind.

Mrs. Evans Yeah, I think it's a priority. Even in our Christian walk, I think it's important to understand church history. I think it's really fascinating to understand that whole progression, which goes into why I like the chronological study of

## APPENDIX H: SAMPLE PRIMARY EDUCATOR INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

- Interviewer How do you determine what to teach your child? By that I mean, is it kind of systematic, is it a logical approach when you're choosing your curriculum or is it emotional?
- Mrs. Davis My thought process was since we are homeschooling, we can do something different from what the public school system does. So that being said, I did want some kind of Christian curriculum. Something that was Christ focused. I've always been fascinated by the classical approach, the idea of teaching with history chronologically. That's always interested me, and I've always wanted to go that direction, so I was looking for something specifically like that. Also, again, the way history is taught, I wanted it to bring in biblical history alongside world history, so you see where that fits in. Some of that stems from the fact that I was never taught history that way, and I didn't like history. I want to enjoy history, and I've seen and talked with many people who have enjoyed learning history this way. This is one of the reasons I picked that. I've enjoyed learning along with my kids. That's definitely been a motivating factor.
- Interviewer Have you switched curriculum frequently, or have you pretty much stuck with the same thing?
- Mrs. Davis No, I think I've been using this one, this is my third year with this one, so we've been pretty consistent. It did take us a year or two to kind of figure out what we were going to use.
- Interviewer But it sounds very logically thought out.
- Mrs. Davis Yeah, I would say that. I did think through it.
- Interviewer Okay, the next question is describe the curriculum you use, if any, for each of the following subjects. This is for the unschoolers you were talking about, they're like, "Well, I don't really have a curriculum." So, I'm assuming...
- Mrs. Davis My OCD would just go out the roof.
- Interviewer We talked on the way over here...
- Mrs. Davis I just couldn't do that. I need structure.
- Interviewer We couldn't do that either. So starting with math.
- Mrs. Davis I'm using teaching textbooks for [Kaelee], I would be using them with [Danny], but they don't start until level III. With him, I'm using Singapore. I didn't love it with [Kaelee], because math is a little harder for her. But [Danny] has had no problem with it and he's doing well. So we'll finish that out, and then I'll transition him over to teaching textbooks next year.

## APPENDIX I: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

- Mr. Aycock      You can have academic excellence to an extent just by regurgitation, and you're a great memorizer and you take test well, so you can perform well on tests and score well, but that application, that how do I apply this to something that's not on the test, just everyday living, that I think is where a lot of us are looking at. How do we use that knowledge that were gaining?
- Mr. Baker      And it's ironic that public schools sole focus is academic excellence, when they're not really achieving it. My kids were reading some packaging the other day, can't remember what it was, whatever it was, it said unbreakable. One of them looked at it and said, "Really?" And we talked some a little about that one, that if anybody advertises something, it probably means that it's not. If you feel the need to throw that out there, then they're probably trying to compensate.
- Mrs. Evans      Of course all of our homeschool kids would say, I bet I could break that (laughter).
- Mrs. Graham      You know I think also as homeschool parents we tend to interpret academic excellence in a different way than, perhaps like a public school professional would look at it. It's beyond test scores, maybe eliminating the test scores, and going maybe more towards innovation as being academic and excellent. Take the example of like Singapore, you know they're blowing away all these math tests, but they haven't produced a single Steve Jobs. So there's something about, I think, innovation and creativity that links with that critical thinking that we might evaluate as being academically superior as a reason to continue homeschooling. They're different. You can't just say that the way we look at academic excellence is the same way as a public school educator would look at.
- Mr. Evans      I'm just looking at this wheel (referencing the initial version of Figure 2), and we mentioned that public schools focuses primarily on academic excellence. I'm looking at all the other categories on this wheel and thinking, public school cannot address many of these other things. They're prevented by law from addressing spiritual issues. Character is subjective. Relationships, very subjective, although they tried to deal with bullies. But all this other stuff, they don't have the means or there prevented from it, from doing it by law as a public institution. So therefore, if we want to get all of these things in here, what choice do we have but to homeschool?
- BREAK -----
- Interviewer      I've got one final topic. Final question is: in what ways you see your views of success as different than those of traditionally educated families? What is it that makes what we're talking about, what is it that makes homeschool families, generically speaking, unique? Is it true that public schools are focusing on academic excellence only? Is it more than that? What is it?
- Mr. Evans      Because we're the ones who get to set the agenda.

- Mrs. Aycock I would say that public schools do focus on more than academic excellence, especially as we are progressing, I guess it's progress, or not. There is very much a social agenda that I think is tied to public school. So like you said, we get to decide what our agenda is, what our values are, what we believe. So I don't think the public school is just academic excellence. I think there's very much a goal, producing a citizen, however that's defined, in the public education setting. So it's not an us against them, but guess what, we're doing the same thing. We do want our kids to do well academically, but we also have other things that we need for them to learn. We want them to be strong in character and spiritually secure at all these other things. That's what it looks like for us versus what it looks like coming out of the public school.
- Mr. Baker And they would all, public school families, would look at this and go, yeah that's what I want. They would emphasize different ways that they tried to achieve that.
- Mrs. Graham I would think that the benefit, also, of homeschooling is all of these can be redesigned to focus on that one particular child. You know in a public school, this is the schedule, and we're going to feed all these kids the same schedule at the same time and ship them through. I can crumble this up and take it however I need it, based on whatever child I may have. One may be way more into the love of learning, and some may not have many issues with their character. So we can focus on that individual.
- Mrs. Aycock And you also get to take where they are in life. You know, when he was deployed, school was different to us than when he wasn't deployed. But if you're sending them to school, I'm sorry. Life's hard, and school still looks the same for you.
- Mr. Aycock And when you PCS or go off to school or something, school travels with you. Were not in a brand-new school environment as well as living environment. Our home has changed, our state has changed, but school is still the same, the same textbooks we've been doing, so they have that continuity.

## APPENDIX J: RESEARCH QUESTION WORKSHEET

<b>Theme 1:</b> How does a select group of homeschool parents in the U.S. define success as it pertains to their child's education?
<b>Theme 2:</b> How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence the learning environment in their home?
<b>Subtheme 2a:</b> How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence what they teach their children?
<b>Subtheme 2b:</b> How do homeschool parents' definitions of success influence how they teach their children?
<b>Subtheme 2c:</b> How do homeschool parents assess their child's progress in achieving success?

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## APPENDIX K: NOTES WORKSHEET

<b>Case Identifier:</b> Baker				
<b>Synopsis of the Case:</b> Mr. Baker Education:     MS: Industrial Engineering Work:           Director of Corporate Engineering  Mrs. Baker Education:     MS: Public Relations Work:           Stay at Home Mom  Children				
Pseudo	Sex	Age	Grade	Yrs
Tyler	M	13	8	2
Michelle	F	12	6	4
Shannon	F	9	2	2.5
Makayla	F	5	-	-
Amanda	F	4	-	-
Ideologue/Pedagogue: Moderately Ideologue  Reasons: Poor learning environment at school To develop character/morality Religious reasons				
<b>Case Findings:</b> RQ1 Tags: Academic Excellence Comprehensive Worldview Formulate/Express Opinions Trivium Self-Learn Critical Thinking Interact with Others Ability/Willing to Do Hard Things Ability to Overcome Setbacks Practical Application Prepared for Life Prepared for College Character Love to Read Organized  RQ2a Tags Computer Programming				

Curriculum - Comprehensive - Sonlight Curriculum - Fine Arts - Draw 123 Curriculum - Fine Arts - Homeschool Band Curriculum - Fine Arts - Private Music Lessons Curriculum - History - Story of the World Curriculum - Literature - Charlotte Mason Curriculum - Literature - First Language Lessons Curriculum - Math - Math in Focus Curriculum - Math - Rod and Staff Curriculum - Math - Saxon Curriculum - Reading Curriculum - Science - Usborne Curriculum - Second Language - Rosetta Stone Curriculum - Second Language - Scratch Curriculum - Social Studies Curriculum - Writing - Writing With Ease Curriculum Choice - Logical Focus on Memorization  RQ2b Tags Classical Education/Trivium Encourage/Teach Memorization Encourage/Teach Reading Exposure to the World/Variety of Academic Subjects/Points of View Focus on Academics Hands-On Learning - Little to None Involved with Co-op Involved with Extracurricular Activities Reading Tied to History/Integration of Subjects School Together with Siblings Teach Communication Skills/Express Opinions Teach History Chronologically Teach Thinking/Problem Solving Skills  RQ2c Tags Grades - Informal Use Grades - Primarily for Transcripts Informal Assessment Mastery of Subject More Important than Grades Participate in Standardized Testing Standardized Tests Used for Validation of Methodology Think in Terms of Grade Level
<b>Relevance to Research Questions (RQ):</b> RQ 1: <u>X</u> RQ 2a: <u>X</u> RQ 2b: <u>X</u> RQ 2c: <u>X</u>
<b>Uniqueness of the Case:</b> - Most decidedly Classical Education oriented, with the most thought-out long term

<p>educational plan of any family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Several unique curricula: Draw 123 (Fine Arts), Homeschool Band (Fine Arts), First Language Lessons (Literature), Math in Focus (Math), Usborne (Science), Writing With Ease (Writing)</li> <li>- Only family to explicitly focus on memorization (during younger years) as part of the trivium</li> <li>- Parents are most educated of any family</li> <li>- Only family to deliberately include a classical preparatory school as part of the long-term educational plan</li> <li>- Most structured of any family</li> </ul>
<p><b>Possible Excerpts for the Multicase Report:</b></p> <p>“So academic excellence. We think our kids are bright enough to do well in school, and they ought to. Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily as unto the Lord.” So it just wouldn’t be acceptable to do less than your best.” (Mr. Baker, Parent Interview)</p> <p>“But if your country leadership or whatever presents something and you don’t have as a nation a young people rising up, the ability to ascertain truth in and of its own right—or right vs. wrong, or good vs. bad, or whatever those moral compasses are—then I think you’re in trouble.” (Mrs. Baker, Parent Interview)</p> <p>“[the spiritual] is probably the fundamental, core, river of everything that we do.” (Mrs. Baker, Parent Interview)</p> <p>“We want them to have a requisite amount of foundational biblical understanding, but we’re not, most of our curriculum is not purchased from religious curriculum houses where you’ve got to throw a verse on every page or somehow work everything back to... God created the physical universe and knows all about it, and so that’s going to weave itself into how we teach our kids science. But we don’t necessarily need to have Bible verses in the science texts. So I think that the spiritual components of what we’re doing with the kids are actually less structured than other parts of the academic world because we take it as we go.” (Mrs. Baker, Parent Interview)</p> <p>“We want the strengths to get stronger, but we also want the weaknesses to get stronger as well. We’re trying to raise the water level.” (Mr. Baker, Focus Group)</p> <p>“They need to be spiritually independent; they need to be financially independent, socially independent. It’s not a slice of the pie, it’s the big picture.” (Mr. Baker, Focus Group)</p>

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## APPENDIX L: MERGED FINDINGS WORKSHEET

Merged Findings	From Which Case(s)	Themes						
		1	1Ac	1So	1Sp	2a	2b	2c
The large categories of success common among all families are academic, social, and spiritual.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H	X	X	X	X			
Academic excellence plays a significant role in all participant families' views of success.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H	X	X					
Families assess academic excellence primarily informally.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H	X	X					X
The ability to apply what is learned is more important than any type of academic assessment.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H	X	X	X	X			X
Love of learning and the ability to self-learn is more important than specific subject areas.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G	X	X		X			
There is a spiritual element of success, most typically identified as a relationship with Christ, common to most families.	A,B,C,D,E,F,H	X			X			
The ability to formulate and express opinions, to include communication skills, is an important mark of success.	A,B,D,E,F,H	X		X				
Interaction and relationships with others	B,C,D,E,F,H	X		X				
Character matters, with academics often seen as	A,B,C,E,F,H	X	X	X	X			

a framework for instilling values.								
Ability to think critically is valued.	A,B,D,G,H	X	X					
All participant families use private music lessons.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H					X		
Curriculum is logically considered prior to use, with the exception of the unschooling family, whose curriculum rationale is more emotional.	A,B,C,D,E,G,H					X		
All families use some curriculum for math, science, language arts, and social studies, though some is custom (science and geography). Fine arts and second language curriculum is used by some. Co-ops and collaboration with other families are also used for some subjects.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H					X		
Latin is the most common second language (5 families). Other second languages include ASL, French, German, Spanish, and Greek.	A,B,C,D,E,F,G					X		
Cooking is an important component to applied education.	A,E,F,G					X		
Involved with Extracurricular Activities	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H						X	
Teach History Chronologically	A,B,D,E,G,H						X	
Encourage/Teach to strengths, gifts, abilities	C,D,E,F,G,H						X	
Involved with Co-op at some point in time	A,B,C,F,G,H						X	

Teach Thinking/Problem Solving Skills	A,B,D,G,H						X	
Discussion	A,B,C,E,F,G,H						X	
School Together with Siblings	B,D,E,F,H						X	
Reading Tied to History/Integration of Subjects	A,B,C,D,F						X	
There is a possible disconnect between some success goals and how families are achieving them. For instance, most families value love for learning, but only half explicitly encourage/teach towards that goal.	C,D,F,H	X	X				X	
Similarly, practical application is important to all families, but only four families explicitly address that in the learning environment.	A,C,F,G	X	X	X	X		X	
Similarly, communication skills are important by the majority (A,B,D,E,F,H) but only explicitly taught by a minority (B,D,E).	B,D,E	X		X			X	
Grades - Informal Use	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H							X
Informal Assessment	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H							X
Mastery of Subject More Important than Grades	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H							X
Think in Terms of Grade Level	A,B,C,D,E,G,H							X
Participate in Standardized Testing	A,B,C,E,F							X

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## APPENDIX M: ASSERTIONS WORKSHEET

Designator	Assertions	Related to Which Research Question	Evidence, Persuasions, Reference in Which Cases?
1	Academic excellence plays a significant role in homeschool families' views of success, but it is not the only—or even primary—measure of success.	1	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
2	Love of learning and the ability to self-learn are as important as the mastery of specific subject areas.	1	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
3	Homeschool families see the ability to think critically as one of the most important academic outcome of the child's education.	1	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
4	Effective communication—verbal, written, and listening—is a primary desired social outcome of a homeschool education.	1	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
5	Homeschool families value the child's ability to interact and socialize with others of all ages.	1	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
6	Character matters, with homeschool families often viewing academics as a framework for instilling values.	1	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
7	There is a spiritual element of success common to most homeschool families; they most typically identify this as a relationship with Christ.	1	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
8	Homeschool educators choose curricula that meet their needs and support their success goals; however, there was little emotional attachment to any specific curriculum, regardless of subject area.	2a	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H Exceptions: Apologia, Teaching Textbooks
9	Involvement with external education activities (e.g., co-ops, field trips, sports leagues) is dependent on the quality of the available activities and the educational approach of the homeschool family; there is no one-size-fits-all extracurricular model.	2b	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
10	Homeschool families typically view academic subjects—especially history and literature—as an integrated whole.	2b	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H

11	Focusing on each child's unique strengths, gifts, and abilities becomes increasingly important to homeschool families as the child ages.	2b	A,C,D,E,F,G,H
12	In-depth discussions and deliberate questioning techniques are an integral—albeit often informal—part of the pedagogical approach used by homeschool educators.	2b	A,C,E,F,G,H
13	Proficiency of subject matter is more important than grades; assessments of learning are usually informal, with standardized test results used primarily by the parents to indicate whether they are on the right track.	2c	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
14	The ability to function independently is a desired byproduct that incorporates all areas of success goals.	2c	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H
15	Homeschool parents view their children's ability and desire to apply what they have learned as their primary concern when assessing of all areas of success.	2c	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H

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