

EXPERIENCES OF HOMESCHOOL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL PLAN: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY

by

Melissa Lyn MacConney

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

Sarah J. Pannone, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Timothy R. Nelson, Ed.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. The theory guiding this study was Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as it relates to learning and development and the interaction of the learner with the environment. Ten participants were identified from the Local Homeschool Association which serves families in 13 counties in the state of Georgia. The study sought to answer this central research question: What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study? Sub-questions included: (a) What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their academic educational plan of study and their role in course selection? (b) What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the process of choosing settings for learning academic content and their role in this process? (c) What are the experiences of homeschool high school students related to the impact of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as part of their educational plan and their role in choosing these activities? Data collection involved questionnaires, individual interviews, and physical artifacts. Data were analyzed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method described by Moustakas, and five themes emerged through the data analysis process: abundant academic options, individualized and customized instruction, development of life skills, family relationships and values, and significant social opportunities. A discussion regarding implications of findings as well as recommendations for policy, practice, and future research were provided.

Keywords: homeschooling, homeschool, home education, high school, educational plan

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Dedication

To my mom and dad, who instilled in me the value of family, faith, and education. As a child, they often joked that maybe one day my name would be followed by M.D. I guess they will have to settle for Ph.D. instead.

To my children, Matthew and Micah, my favorite students. For nine years, I was able to teach and facilitate your learning in our home. I am thankful for the time we had learning together, and I am excited to see how God will use you to grow His kingdom.

To my husband, Mike. Thank you for all of the love and encouragement you have provided over these last few years as I completed the coursework and dissertation phases of this degree.

To my Savior, Jesus Christ. I am thankful for Your love, grace, mercy, peace, and joy. Most importantly, thank You for the gift of salvation.

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I also want to say a special thank you to my participants and their families. Parents, thank you for allowing your children to participate and share their homeschool experiences. Students, spending time with you and getting to know you through the data collection methods brought me such joy. Thank you for volunteering your time and being open to share the impact homeschooling has had on you. I am excited to see how God continues to work in each of your lives.

Thank you to Liberty University for providing faith-based, online education opportunities and encouraging students to pursue God's calling in all areas of life.

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List of Abbreviations

Declaration of Intent (DOI)

Grade point average (GPA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Although homeschooling is legal in all 50 states, laws vary significantly from state to state (Cook et al., 2013; Hirsh, 2019; Kreager, 2010). Some states are considered homeschool friendly, while others are more restrictive (Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.). In Georgia, there are few requirements for homeschooling (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.), and an abundance of opportunities and support groups exist which can benefit homeschooling students and families. While homeschooling is growing at an unprecedented rate (Deangelis, 2020; Eggleston & Fields, 2021), relatively few studies have been conducted regarding this form of school choice. Many families are homeschooling their children through high school graduation. Previous literature regarding homeschooling has been mostly focused on parental motivation (Neuman, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2017, 2019; Ray, 2015; Spiegler, 2010; Thomas, 2016a) or curriculum choices and the level of structure within the homeschool setting (Bell et al., 2016; Guterman & Neuman, 2017) and has been presented from the parents' point of view (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2021), leaving the voices of the students, those who are currently experiencing the phenomenon, unheard. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their educational plan of study. This study is guided by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. This chapter discusses the historical, social, and theoretical background of homeschooling and presents the problem, purpose, and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with the central research question and sub-questions, pertinent definitions, and a brief summary.

Background

To understand the context of this current study, it is essential to examine the historical context of homeschooling in the United States and changes which have taken place, especially in the past decade. Additionally, understanding the social context of homeschooling as it relates to education and society must be understood. Finally, the theoretical context must be examined.

Historical Context

Homeschooling was once commonplace in America, with families educating their children at home (Cook et al., 2013; Gloeckner & Jones, 2013) until compulsory attendance laws were enacted, beginning in 1852 with Massachusetts (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). These laws spread and were adopted by all states by 1918. This represented a shift in how education was viewed, both how instruction should be delivered and who should control the education of children, and the practice of teaching at home with the parents leading instruction virtually disappeared in the United States. However, in the 1970s, some families chose to begin homeschooling their children, mostly for religious reasons or dissatisfaction with curriculum and instructional methods of schools. This modern homeschooling movement began with just a few thousand students (Gloeckner & Jones, 2013).

In recent years, the number of children being educated at home has grown rapidly (Deangelis, 2020; Eggleston & Fields, 2021; Hanna, 2012; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Martin-Chang et al., 2011). The motivational reasons for parents to homeschool has grown and changed too. Although families still homeschool for religious and instructional reasons, families also state that concerns about school safety (Watson, 2018) and bullying (Neuman, 2019) have caused them to consider homeschooling. Within the past two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has also influenced families to consider homeschooling, many for the first time (Deangelis, 2020;

Eggleston & Fields, 2021). It is important to note that online public school is not homeschooling, as homeschooling is parent-led or parent-directed education (Ray, 2021). Additionally, it is a form of school choice and a deliberate choice to provide an alternative to traditional school settings (Gaither, 2017). Although it is difficult to know how many families are homeschooling (Watson, 2018), it is estimated that more than two million children are being educated at home with their parents directing their education (Neuman & Guterman, 2019). Based on these numbers, more children are being educated at home than other forms of school choice, including Christian schools, charter schools, and students attending alternate schools with vouchers (Murphy, 2014). Yet, compared to other forms of school choice, homeschooling is understudied (Hirsh, 2019) and continues to be controversial (Carlson, 2020; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Medlin, 2013).

Social Context

The homeschool setting impacts not only the academic development but also the social and emotional development of children. Homeschooling offers families the opportunity to develop deep and meaningful relationships with other family members (Neuman, 2020a), and it has been noted that parents value the time they are able to spend with their children (Pannone, 2017a). Homeschool students also have the opportunity to interact with people of different ages rather than being educated with mostly same-age peers (Neuman & Guterman, 2021). For African American families, homeschooling allows parents to teach Black culture and history which may be minimized in other school settings (Mazama, 2016; Ray, 2015). Through the study of African civilizations, these families are able to increase racial self-confidence and pride (Mazama, 2016). Research also suggests that barriers such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status may be lessened in the homeschool environment (Murphy, 2014). Another significant

benefit which is frequently reported in the literature is the ability to individualize instruction, meeting the individual needs of each child (Anthony, 2015; Hanna, 2012; Pannone, 2017a; Thomas, 2016a).

Over the years, homeschooling has become a connected community, and research suggests that families are taking advantage of available opportunities (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). The internet enables families to access a broad array of educational resources (Clemmitt, 2014; Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Families are able to collaborate online and share ideas and resources (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Support groups abound (Thomas, 2019), and families take advantage of opportunities offered by churches, libraries, museums, zoos, and colleges (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Mazama, 2016; Thomas, 2016b). Cooperatives are also available in many locations which allow families to connect with others and provide support, academic enrichment, and additional interactive experiences (Hirsh, 2019).

Theoretical Context

The topic of homeschooling has its roots in a variety of theories. These are generally reflected in the motivations of parents to homeschool, something which has been discussed extensively in the literature (Neuman, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2017, 2019; Ray, 2015; Thomas, 2016a). As the modern homeschooling movement began in the 1970s, parents generally chose to homeschool for one of two reasons, either for religious and social reasons or due to concerns about educational processes and methods (Dennison et al., 2020; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Van Galen, 1988). Although a variety of motivations are now evident in the homeschool community, these two initial categories are still evident, and much of the current literature continues to focus on the motivation of parents and presents homeschooling from the perspective of parents (Neuman, 2020a).

For those who are dissatisfied with pedagogical practices in traditional school settings, Kolb's experiential learning theory may be evident. This theory, which has been influenced by other key educational figures including John Dewey, Carl Rogers, and Paulo Freire, emphasizes aspects of meta-cognition (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). These families recognize the need for children to learn how to learn, enabling them to apply strategies to not only current situations but also future encounters throughout life. Other families may implement elements of differentiated learning theory, developing curriculum and modifying instruction to meet the needs of their individual children (Tomlinson, 2014). Unrestricted by state standards or benchmarks in many states, families can tailor curriculum and instruction based upon the strengths, weaknesses, and interests of their children (Anthony, 2015; Neuman & Guterman, 2019). Learning, not curriculum coverage, is the goal (Tomlinson, 2014), and parents, who are responsive to the needs of their children, can adjust instruction as needed in order to best support learning (Smets, 2019).

The setting in which learning takes place must also be considered. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of language and social interactions on learning and development. Through interactions with others and the environment, children, as active participants, develop meaning and understanding about the world around them. In the homeschool setting, families are able to individualize instruction (Anthony, 2015; Cheng et al., 2016), keeping children working in the zone of proximal development, another key component of Vygotsky's (1978) theory. Homeschool students also have more opportunities to interact with people of various ages than those in other settings (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). In the setting for this study, families have access to an abundance of resources for high school students. Through this research study, I investigated the process families use to choose learning settings described the experiences of student involvement in the decision-making process.

Problem Statement

The problem is that, although homeschooling is a legal, viable form of school choice, this educational option remains controversial (Anthony, 2013; Carlson, 2020; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Hamlin, 2020; Marks & Welsch, 2019; Medlin, 2013). There is an ongoing debate regarding the value and quality of a homeschool education and the ability of this form of school choice to prepare students for life after high school. Fueling the debate is the underlying question of who is ultimately responsible for the education of children, parents or the government, which leads to polarizing views on the topic of homeschooling (Hamlin, 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Kreager, 2010). Educational plans for homeschool students vary significantly from family to family and student to student within the same family (Cheng et al., 2016; Dennison et al., 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Thomas, 2016a), making it difficult to evaluate academic and social outcomes among homeschool students. Current research regarding the long-term academic, social, and emotional benefits have reported mixed results (Ray, 2017), with many suggesting positive effects, and some suggesting neutral or negative effects.

Although the homeschool movement is growing, little is known about how families develop educational plans for their high school students or how homeschool high school students are involved in the development of their educational plan. Despite the tremendous growth in homeschooling, relatively few empirical studies have been conducted (Dennison et al., 2020; Hirsh, 2019). In the past, many homeschool students were fairly isolated from their peers, but that is no longer the case (Guterman & Neuman, 2017; Hamlin, 2020). Families currently choose from a variety of educational opportunities (Thomas, 2016a), and the social settings in which learning occurs varies significantly from family to family (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Research is needed to further examine how educational plans and various settings impact the experiences of

high school homeschool students. The studies which have been conducted are mostly focused on parental motivation and the parents' role in the process of home education (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2021), and almost nothing is known about homeschooling from the perspective of the students, although they are the people who will be impacted in the long-term (Neuman, 2020a). There is a significant need to understand how educational plans are developed, the social context of learning in the homeschool environment, the role of students in the development of an educational plan, and the impact of homeschooling on the development, achievement, and success of current high school students both academically and socially from their perspective.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. Because this includes the role of students in the process of course selection (what will be studied), the settings (when and where learning will occur), and the social context of learning (how and with whom learning will occur), an educational plan will be generally defined as the academic courses, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities which impact student learning and development (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Academic courses include those required by the state of Georgia, which include mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and reading and any other courses which are chosen by the family. Co-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, courses and activities such as computer science, foreign language, art, or music. These types of courses are frequently part of a school day in a traditional school setting. Extra-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, activities such as athletics, clubs, organizations, and volunteer or paid

work experiences which generally occur outside of school hours in traditional settings. The theory guiding this study was Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory as it relates to homeschool settings and the interactions between the learner and the environment.

Significance of the Study

The aim of this study was to contribute to the theoretical, empirical, and practical knowledge related to homeschooling. Theoretically, aspects of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory as it relates to homeschooling was examined. This theory emphasizes the interaction between the learner and the environment. Homeschool families incorporate many different settings into their educational activities (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Hirsh, 2019; Mazama, 2016; Thomas, 2019). Because of this, homeschool students are interacting with various environments and with different people on a regular basis. Vygotsky (1978) also recognized the impact various learners can have on each other. Unlike traditional school settings, homeschool students often find themselves in settings with students of various ages and grade levels, and parents have the ability to individualize instruction to meet the learning needs of their children (Anthony, 2015; Cheng et al., 2016). This study examined how families choose settings and how students describe the impact of these various environments on their development and the role students play in the selection of various settings as part of their educational plan. This study also extended Vygotsky's theory to include the interactions between homeschool learners and their environment as well as describe how families and students choose the environments in which they learn and develop academically and socially.

Empirically, through this study, I helped to contribute to filling a gap in the literature by giving a voice to students who have previously been unheard, seeking to understand the development of an educational plan at the high school level and the role of the students in the

selection of settings for academic and social development. Although previous studies have examined parental motivations to homeschool (Neuman, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2017, 2019; Ray, 2015; Thomas, 2016a) and the level of structure and curriculum choices which families use in the homeschool setting (Bell et al., 2016; Guterman & Neuman, 2017), these studies have relied on the perspectives of parents. Some researchers have gained insight into the perspectives of those who were homeschooled but are now adults (Neuman, 2020a; Pannone, 2017b). However, I sought to describe the experiences of current homeschool high school students.

Practically, the knowledge generated from this study is significant for several reasons. First, it may help homeschool families in Georgia, specifically in the counties from which participants were selected, to learn about opportunities in the area which they may not know about. Currently, opportunities for academic, co-curricular, and extra-curricular participation exist for homeschool high school students, including Beta Club, National Honor Society, math teams, Science Olympiad, robotics teams, and cyber security competitions, among others. There are also multiple co-ops in the area in addition to small group opportunities offered through the homeschool association. Homeschool students are able to enroll in state-funded dual enrollment courses during their junior and senior years (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Additionally, the area is home to an association which sponsors multiple homeschool athletic teams. Second, because families incorporate many different types of opportunities into their learning (Carpenter & Gann, 2016) it may help colleges, universities, and community resource providers understand the types of programs which may benefit the community. Third, by understanding the perspectives of students, the Local Homeschool Association may be able to make decisions and improvements to the way it supports homeschooling families. Fourth,

homeschool groups and associations in other parts of Georgia may be able to use the results of the study to make improvements to their own programs. Finally, the results can impact a discussion regarding school choice, alternative methods of instruction, and school reform (Neuman & Guterman, 2021).

Research Questions

This qualitative study sought to address a central research question and three sub-questions. The goal was to gain an understanding of how homeschool educational plans are developed and the setting or social context in which learning occurs from the perspective of high school students who are currently experiencing the phenomenon. Framed by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, the interaction of the learner with the environment was a focus.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their academic educational plan of study and their role in course selection?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the process of choosing settings for learning academic content and their role in this process?

Sub-Question Three

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students related to the impact of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as part of their educational plan and their role in choosing these activities?

Definitions

1. *Academic courses (as part of an educational plan)* - Courses required by the state of Georgia, which include mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and reading (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.) and any other courses which are chosen by the family
2. *Co-curricular activities* – Activities which include, but are not limited to, courses and activities such as computer science, foreign language, art, or music (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.) which are frequently part of a school day in a traditional school setting
3. *Extra-curricular activities* – Activities which include, but are not limited to, activities such as athletics, clubs, organizations (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.), and volunteer or paid work experiences which generally occur outside of school hours in traditional settings
4. *Homeschooling* – Parent-led, or parent-directed, home-based education (Ray, 2021); a “deliberately chosen alternative to institutional schools” (Gaither, 2017, p. 216)
5. *More knowledgeable other* – A teacher or peer with more knowledge or ability in a given area than the child (Vygotsky, 1978)
6. *Scaffolding* – The provision of support which enables a child to learn within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978)
7. *Zone of proximal development* – The area between the student’s current level of functioning which they can achieve independently and their potential level (Vygotsky, 1978)

Summary

Homeschooling continues to grow at a tremendous rate, with millions of children learning at home under the direction of their parents (Hanna, 2012; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Martin-Chang et al., 2011). Yet relatively little research has been conducted to examine this form of school choice (Hirsh, 2019). Knowledge about homeschooling in the United States is “sparse and varied” (Thomas, 2017, p. 2) and is generally related to historical information and not educational decisions. The research which has been conducted relies almost exclusively on the perspectives of parents (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Neuman & Guterman, 2021) or adults who were previously homeschooled (Neuman, 2020a; Pannone, 2017b). The problem is that, although homeschooling is a legal, viable form of school choice, this educational option remains controversial (Carlson, 2020; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021; Medlin, 2013). Although the students will be impacted for their entire lives, little is known about the development of their educational plan, and the voices of homeschool high school students who are currently being homeschooled have yet to be heard. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore homeschooling as a form of school choice and to investigate the perceived impact individualized instruction has on the development and educational achievement of homeschool students. This chapter presents a review of the literature related to homeschooling. In the first section, sociocultural theory is discussed. This is followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding the modern homeschool movement, parental motivation, individualized instruction, and the potential overall benefits and drawbacks of homeschooling. In the end, the limitations of current research are discussed, a gap in the literature is identified, and the need for the current study is presented.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation of sociocultural theory developed in Russia shortly after the Russian Revolution. Vygotsky (1978) sought to understand how children learn by examining how they use language and social interactions to construct meaning. Sociocultural theory prepared the way for later constructivist theories (Jaramillo, 1996). Just as tension and conflict brought about change to Russian society, Vygotsky (1978) believed that similar tension and conflict bring about change and learning among children. Sociocultural theory is built upon the idea that social experiences shape the way children think and create meaning about their world. Homeschool students learn in an environment which is different from that of traditional educational settings. Therefore, it is necessary to understand sociocultural theory and social interactions and the role this plays in the homeschool environment.

According to sociocultural theory, language is the key to learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Language is the tool that humans use to share social meanings among one another (Jaramillo,

1996). Through social interactions with others and materials in the environment, children are able to progress in their understanding of the world around them. Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning does not occur in prescribed stages at particular times, as stage theorists including Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson have proposed (Myers & Dewall, 2016), but rather, he believed learning occurs in nonlinear fashion in response to social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). He also believed that language and thinking must be viewed as a relationship rather than two separate aspects to be understood (Mahn, 1999). Vygotsky believed that social interaction is essential for learning and the development of perception, attention, memory, and thinking (Demirbaga, 2018).

Through language and interaction with others, children learn not only the meaning of words and concepts, but they also apply meaning, or sense, to the concepts. While the meaning of a word may remain relatively constant, a child's sense will continue to grow and change over time and through experiences. Vygotsky also believed that there is a connection between the mind and body which can be observed as children interact in their environment (Jaramillo, 1996).

Sociocultural theory emphasizes an environment in which students are active participants (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this student-centered environment, the role of the teacher is to facilitate learning. Learning does not occur simply because a student encounters information or knowledge. Instead, learning occurs as a result of interaction between a student and the environment (Neuman, 2020a). Teachers and peers with more knowledge serve as guides as students are involved in active learning experiences. When Vygotsky's work was translated into English, schools were beginning to move from the idea of teacher-directed learning to teacher-facilitated learning. Vygotsky's theory began to be implemented in schools, and students were no longer listeners and passive participants. Students became much more involved in constructing meaning through active participation in lessons and activities.

In addition to active learning, sociocultural theory has several major tenets. The first of these is the concept of the zone of proximal development. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning must occur within this zone, which incorporates the area between the student's current level of functioning which they can achieve independently and their potential level. To keep students learning in this zone, teachers must incorporate two other tenets of the theory. To keep students moving toward their potential, teachers and more knowledgeable others provide guidance and support. Students learn from those who are more knowledgeable about the topic being investigated, and learning is facilitated among peers or through student-teacher interactions. Additionally, the teacher may model or scaffold instruction as needed so the child is working within the zone of proximal development. Scaffolding provides the necessary support children need to stay in the zone of proximal development and to move toward their potential.

In traditional school settings, all of these aspects of sociocultural theory may be incorporated into any learning activity. In the homeschool setting, the tenets are also evident, although they look different than they do in the school setting. Parents in the homeschool setting can create a customized educational plan of instruction to meet the students at their current level of functioning (Thomas, 2016a). Parents then remain involved and facilitate the learning of their children. Throughout the school year, parents continue to monitor their students' progress and choose from a variety of opportunities and settings to help their students advance at a rate which is individualized, making adjustments to keep their children challenged to reach their potential (Anthony, 2015; Cheng et al., 2016; Thomas, 2016b).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory informed and guided this study in multiple ways. First, the theory shaped the research questions, incorporating the interaction of the learner with the environment into the investigation of the development of educational plans for high school

students. As participants described their educational plans, they also described the role of various settings on their learning and development. Additionally, this study expanded Vygotsky's theory to include the role of students in the process of course selection (what will be studied), the settings (when and where learning will occur), and the social context of learning (how and with whom learning will occur).

Related Literature

Understanding the current state of homeschooling in the United States requires a brief historical overview and a review of changes which have occurred in recent years. A review of the current literature provides evidence of parental motivations to homeschool their children (Dennison et al., 2020; Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Some of these motivations have remained constant over recent years while new motivations have surfaced in relation to educational, societal, and medical influences (Ray, 2015; Watson, 2018). In the homeschool setting, there is a recognition of individual needs and an emphasis on the importance of individualized instruction (Cheng et al., 2016; Dennison et al., 2020). Research suggests that families are choosing from a variety of educational opportunities and settings to fully customize instruction (Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Thomas, 2016a). This personalized approach leads to perceived benefits for all students, including those who are gifted, twice-exceptional, or those with disabilities (Cheng et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2013; Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Research suggests possible academic, social, and emotional benefits of this form of school choice (Ray, 2017).

Homeschooling in the United States

Homeschooling was commonplace among early settlers to America, and in Colonial America, all families taught their children at home (Cook et al., 2013; Gloeckner & Jones, 2013). The education of children was viewed by parents as both a right and a responsibility (Tilhou,

2020). Children learned at home from their parents and with their siblings. Education and learning were fully integrated into everyday life rather than a compartmentalized component of the day. The concept of government-controlled education is a relatively new idea (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Beginning with Massachusetts in 1852, states slowly enacted compulsory attendance laws (Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Jolly & Matthews, 2018). This created a shift in the view of who should be responsible for education, with more people allowing the government to decide what is appropriate (Kreager, 2010). Compulsory school attendance spread throughout the United States until it became the law in all 50 states by 1918 (Kreager, 2010; Tilhou, 2020). At this time, homeschooling almost disappeared until experiencing a resurgence in the 1970s.

Although the modern homeschool movement is growing in many parts of the world, this considerable growth is most obvious in the United States (Guterman & Neuman, 2017), where it “is not only growing but flourishing” (Heuer & Donovan, 2017, p. 7), and the homeschool population is expanding rapidly (Duvall, 2021). Homeschooling has been legal in all 50 states for the past three decades, and each year more families from all walks of life are choosing to homeschool (Carlson, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Gloeckner & Jones, 2013; Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Beginning with just a few thousand students in the 1970s, the modern homeschooling movement has grown significantly in the past several decades (Collom, 2005; Cook et al., 2013). The current number of students being homeschooled in the United States is estimated to be over two million (Neuman & Guterman, 2019), with an annual growth rate between 2% and 8% (Ray, 2021). However, the accuracy of exact numbers and rates has recently been questioned (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). According to the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau survey, 11.1% of households were homeschooling in the fall of 2020, which is significantly more than what has been previously reported in the literature (Eggleston & Fields, 2021).

Homeschool policy varies among states in regard to accountability, notification requirements, and access to public-school resources (Carlson, 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Hirsh, 2019). Because homeschooling laws vary from state to state, it is difficult, or maybe impossible, to gather complete records and to know how many families are homeschooling (Carlson, 2020; Gaither, 2017; Watson, 2018), and it is possible that the number of children being homeschooled is underestimated (Martin-Chang et al., 2011). Although not everyone agrees on the rate of growth or the numbers, all do agree that there has been rapid, significant growth in recent decades (Hanna, 2012; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Martin-Chang et al., 2011), and there is a consistent trend of growth (Watson, 2018). These numbers indicate that more children are educated at home than in other forms of school choice, including Christian schools, charter schools, or those attending alternate schools with vouchers (Murphy, 2014). However, compared to these other forms of education, homeschooling is understudied (Hirsh, 2019). Unlike homeschooling in colonial days which happened out of necessity or as an extension of everyday life, modern homeschooling is a matter of school choice (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). The U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld the right of parents to educate their children at home (Carlson, 2020).

Now that homeschooling is legal in the United States, the debate has shifted from legality to regulation (Thomas, 2016a). There is great variability in how home education is regulated among states (Anthony, 2013). As homeschooling grows, it continues to be controversial, and it serves as a catalyst for further debate regarding the relationship between the family and society. It stirs up conversations concerning who has the rights and responsibility for the education of children and who should control education—the family or society. Some argue that homeschooling allows parents to place the needs of their children over the needs of society

(Anthony, 2013). In addition to arguing that more oversight is needed, the National Education Association believes homeschooled students should have to meet the same requirements as students in public schools and believes parents should be required to obtain a license to teach their children (Clemmitt, 2014). Unions also recommend increased regulation. The Home School Legal Defense Association holds the opposite view, stating that government regulations violate the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit (Clemmitt, 2014; Watson, 2018). Most parents who homeschool their children believe that homeschooling provides something better than what is offered in traditional school settings (Spiegler, 2010).

Another point of debate is democracy and diversity in education. Critics argue that isolating children into homeschool communities where the majority has similar viewpoints undermines the purpose of a diverse democracy in education which encourages people with a wide range of perspectives to work together (Clemmitt, 2014). Some would argue that homeschooling families are sheltering their children and not exposing their children to other beliefs and viewpoints, while the families would say that public schools are indoctrinating children, presenting information from an opposing worldview (Anthony, 2013). Proponents argue that homeschooling provides a positive impact on society by developing strong relationships.

Parental Motivation to Homeschool

During the early years of the modern homeschooling movement, families could generally be divided into two categories (Dennison et al., 2020; Jolly & Matthews, 2018). Parents either chose to homeschool for religious reasons, or they disagreed with the academic and instructional approaches of the schools. This division was accepted for several decades. However, changes in culture and society have created new motivations for parents to educate their children at home,

and some families homeschool for a variety of complex reasons (Dennison et al, 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017).

Historical Classification

Homeschooling can be defined as parent-led, or parent-directed, home-based education (Ray, 2021). In the past several decades, more families have begun to choose homeschooling as a form of school choice (Neuman & Guterman, 2021) and an alternative to the traditional school setting (Anthony, 2015). The modern homeschooling movement began in the 1970s for a variety of reasons (Anthony, 2015; Pannone, 2017a). Social and political changes during this time led some parents to begin homeschooling (Cook et al., 2013), and although families choose homeschooling for many reasons, historically, they have been divided into two categories: ideological, those who primarily homeschool for religious and social reasons, and pedagogical, those who are most concerned with the educational process and methods (Cook et al., 2013; Dennison et al., 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Martin-Chang et al., 2011).

Ideologues. Ideologues, dissatisfied with the lack of religious instruction in schools, choose to homeschool due to their religious values, believing their religious values and family needs can be better served in the homeschool setting (Anthony, 2015; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Thomas, 2019). Ideological homeschoolers believe they are improving society and the common good by raising their children to be different than the majority, increasing diversity in society. These parents feel that it is necessary to impart knowledge and skills from a worldview which is different from that which is seen in traditional settings. Some also desire a deeper understanding of what their children are learning and a more active role in their children's learning (Ray, 2002). They desire to be separate from the influence of society and believe the role of education is the

responsibility of parents and is a God-given right. Religious beliefs influence their decisions and their educational goals for their children (Anthony, 2015; Collom, 2005). These parents feel they are the ones who are primarily responsible for decisions related to their children. They also emphasize the value of the family and its role in society (Thomas, 2019).

Pedagogues. Pedagogues homeschool for academic reasons (Thomas, 2019). They are dissatisfied with their public schools or have concerns about curriculum and instructional methods (Anthony, 2015; Collom, 2005; Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Neuman, 2020b). They feel that schools are not capable of meeting the individual needs of children and hinder learning (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). More families are choosing to homeschool because the needs of their children are not being met in public schools, including minorities, gifted, and students with disabilities. Some believe that learning is stifled when children are required to follow predetermined plans which are dictated by adults.

New Classifications and Reasons to Homeschool

Recent research has continued to investigate the motivation of families to homeschool and suggests that a simple, two-category classification does not adequately describe the complexity of the reasons that parents choose to homeschool their children. Recent research indicates families frequently cite both reasons (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). Dennison et al. (2020) describes the motivations of diverse families as “complex, varied, and multidimensional” (p. 22). Most families cite multiple reasons for homeschooling which often change over time (Ray, 2015; Watson, 2018). As the number of homeschooling families increases, the extremes, with ideologues on one end and pedagogues on the other, tend to be less extreme (Thomas, 2019). Similarly, Hanna (2012) found that while parents initially identify with ideological or pedagogical views for homeschooling, over time, the motivations of some families

become a combination of these belief systems. Over time, families realize that homeschooling is much more than an educational choice. It is a lifestyle choice as well, with school becoming a part of parenting and everyday family life (Pannone, 2017a). In other words, homeschooling is both pedagogy and lifestyle (Neuman, 2020a). For these reasons, the two-category system cannot account for the current, complex motivations of parents, nor can they adequately describe how, what, or where families choose to homeschool (Jolly & Matthews, 2020).

Expanded Definitions. Families continue to homeschool for religious and academic reasons; however, they also include new elements of these motivational aspects. Families cite inadequate teacher-student ratios and time used for classroom management rather than instruction as reasons to homeschool (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). The concern of parents regarding the limited amount of time which is dedicated to learning has also been noted (Neuman & Guterman, 2021). Parents also criticize the way in which school structure prevents instruction to be individualized and the use of methods which are not suited to the needs of their children. Unmet academic needs and incompatible educational philosophies have also been reported (Neuman & Guterman, 2019). Parents have also listed moral values, the quality of the curriculum and instruction, and class size as motivations to homeschool.

School Safety. Another issue revolves around school safety issues (Duvall, 2021). In 2021, 91% of parents listed safety, drugs, and negative peer pressure as motivations to homeschool (Watson, 2018). Some families want to protect their children from sex, drugs, alcohol, and school violence (Ray, 2002) or negative peer pressure (Fink-Glass, 2016). In other research, security issues, peer issues, and bullying have been discussed (Neuman, 2019, 2020b; Ronksley-Pavia et al., 2018). Neuman and Guterman's (2019) study revealed some of the issues

which were most concerning to parents about traditional school options included school violence, negative influences, and negative experiences.

Family Reasons. Current research suggests homeschooling families seek to develop strong, meaningful relationships among family members (Neuman, 2020a). Research has also reported that there are a variety of motivations, including the child's interests, community resources, experience, faith, family reasons, special goals, and special needs (Thomas, 2016a). Finances, travel, distance, and a desire for time with family are also motivations (Fink-Glass, 2016). Parents also value the time they are able to spend with their children, the flexibility that homeschooling offers, and the ability to individualize and customize instruction, which allows them to adapt to the learning abilities of their children and complete curriculum at their own pace (Pannone, 2017b). Parents have stated that lack of relevance to the real world, separating children from adults, and dividing students by age cause concern (Neuman & Guterman, 2021). Others believe the task of educating all children to a level of proficiency cannot be accomplished using the current public educational system with age-level groupings, fragmented daily schedules, and current curriculum (Clemmitt, 2014). Measuring student achievement and success based on standardized testing may be an inferior approach. Homeschool research indicates parents are also interested in other areas of development which are more difficult to measure (Cheng et al., 2016).

Diversity. When the two-category system was developed, the majority of homeschool students were White, came from two-parent homes, and were from families of higher socioeconomic status, but this is no longer the case (Dennison et al., 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Heuer and Donovan (2017) state, "Homeschooling has actually been rapidly closing some of these diversity gaps" (p. 10). Just as diversity is growing in the

public-school setting, similar changes are being seen in the homeschool setting, mirroring the diversity seen at the national level (Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Hirsch, 2019). The homeschool community is becoming more diverse, including families from various religious backgrounds and families from multiple socioeconomic levels (Thomas, 2019). Pannone (2017b) notes that the homeschool population is becoming more diverse demographically and in motivational reasons to homeschool. In addition to reasons given by other subgroups, African American families, who now account for approximately 8% of homeschoolers, cite racism and limited opportunities for their children as reasons to homeschool (Hirsch, 2019). Interestingly, those who fought so hard to gain access to the public school system during the Civil Rights Movement are now abandoning it for some of the same reasons. African American families are withdrawing their children from schools in order to protect them from the physical and emotional effects of racism (Watson, 2018). Other African American parents have stated their desire to teach their children Black culture and history (Dennison et al., 2020; Mazama, 2016; Ray, 2015). Mazama (2016) found that parents also desired to increase racial self-confidence and pride through the study of African civilizations. Increasing numbers of Native Americans and Hawaiian natives, who desire to teach tribal values, are also turning to homeschooling (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Jewish and Muslim families are also increasing in the homeschool population. Hispanics comprise a significant portion of the homeschool population (Hirsch, 2019). While the 2020 U.S. Census Bureau survey reports that 29% of homeschooling families are Hispanic (Hamlin, 2020), almost no research has been done to understand the motivations of these families.

Results from research suggest that homeschooling helps students overcome barriers such as race, gender, parents' level of education, and socioeconomic status. The so-called great divides—race and class—do not seem to affect student achievement in the homeschool setting

(Collom, 2005). Homeschoolers from low-income families perform above national norms while those in public school tend to score below the same norms (Murphy, 2014), and socioeconomic status does not seem to be a factor affecting success in the homeschool setting (Almasoud & Fowler, 2016). This is also seen regarding the level of education of the parents. Homeschooled children with parents who have lower levels of education score at national norms while their public-school peers do not. In other words, these factors contribute to scores, but “homeschooling appears to damp down the negative effects” (Murphy, 2014, p. 256). Ray’s (2015) causal-comparative study found that reading scores were affected only by the type of schooling (traditional or homeschool) but not gender or socioeconomic status. The study also found that African American families created a supportive learning environment and held high expectations for their children.

COVID-19. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, schools across the nation were forced to close and implement remote learning, or learn from home, strategies. While some students thrived, others struggled, and some families were dissatisfied with both the delivery and the curriculum of the public school system (Deangelis, 2020). There is evidence that a significant number of families became first-time homeschoolers during the 2020–2021 school year. Deangelis (2020) reports that some school districts were reporting lower rates of enrollment compared to previous school years, and many states were seeing a record number of families filing to homeschool. The U.S. Census Bureau conducted the Household Pulse Survey to estimate the percentage of families with school-age children who chose to homeschool in 2020 and to examine the effects of the pandemic (Eggleston & Fields, 2021). In the spring of 2020 (April 23–May 5), at the beginning of the pandemic, 5.4% of households reported homeschooling. This percentage increased to 11.1% for the fall of 2020 (September 30–October

12), more than doubling the number of families choosing to homeschool. This increase was seen across demographics, although African American families represented the largest increase, from 3.3% to 16.1% of families choosing to homeschool for the same time period. Duvall (2021) believes counting parents, not students, is a better way to gauge the growth of homeschooling due to the pandemic. The number of parents who were homeschooling pre-pandemic was 3.2 million. This number grew to five million in the fall of 2020. When considering that 72% of families have more than one student, the true number of students currently being homeschooled in the United States could easily exceed 5 million.

School Choice. Homeschooling is a deliberate choice made by families to educate their children in a setting other than a traditional school setting (Gaither, 2017). Dissatisfaction with traditional school settings causes a discussion regarding school choice. Homeschooling is a growing school choice option (Morse, 2019), and it is important to include homeschooling in discussions about educational reform (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). The success seen in alternative models could improve the current educational system in the United States (Tilhou, 2020), and “there are many innovative components of homeschooling that could be replicated in the traditional school environment” (Heuer & Donovan, 2017, p. 4).

Individualized Instruction in the Homeschool Setting

Homeschooling has changed significantly in recent years. As technology has increased, families are taking advantage of multiple learning opportunities and are able to better network with other families. Homeschool students learn in an environment which is different from students in other settings. Students may be learning material from different grade levels simultaneously, and it is common for students of many ages to learn together (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). This naturally places students in groups with those who may be more or less

knowledgeable about a particular topic. Without being restricted to particular standards, parents are able to provide individualized learning opportunities which are based on student interests and abilities. Parents can choose from diverse curriculum options (Carpenter & Gann, 2016), and families are able to supplement curriculum and formal instruction with real life experiences (Pannone, 2017b). Homeschooling offers the opportunity for students to individualize course selection and for parents to tailor instruction to the needs and interests of their children (Dennison et al., 2020). In the homeschool setting, more time is spent on instruction and less time addressing behavior or classroom management issues (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). Families choose different curriculum and methods, based upon motivation and reasons for homeschooling (Elliot, 2019), and some implement an interdisciplinary approach (Neuman & Guterman, 2021).

Parental involvement and a desire of parents to be involved in the education of their children has been shown to be beneficial for student success (Morse, 2019). Parental involvement plays a key role in the homeschool setting and creating an individualized plan of instruction (Thomas, 2016b). Thomas (2016b) states that this “has proven to be a key factor in terms of the effectiveness of home education curriculum and instruction” (p. 236). One of the benefits of homeschooling is that parents can develop their own curriculum and determine the design of the instruction for their children (Thomas, 2016a). Parents are not limited to a set of benchmarks or standards based on testing requirements, and personal motivation can dictate the curriculum. Parents can also use a variety of resources, which enhances flexibility. Homeschooling allows parents to provide customized instruction that is designed individually for their children and to create an environment which provides the flexibility to meet their individual needs (Hanna, 2012; Pannone, 2017a). Some parents choose to homeschool when they feel the schools are unable to provide for the individual needs of their children (Jolly & Matthews, 2018).

Why Instruction Should Be Individualized

Traditional school settings implement a one-size-fits-most approach to education. However, many recognize that mass education is not capable of meeting the needs of all students (Almasoud & Fowler, 2016). With the addition of differentiated instruction, special education services, and gifted education programs, and considering the normal distribution curve, it is likely that public schools can meet the needs of the majority of children, but this does not mean it is providing the best fit for the majority, and some students are left behind or remain unchallenged to meet their potential. Homeschooling allows parents to provide individualized, customized educational opportunities. The freedom which comes from homeschooling allows parents to tailor curriculum and instruction to the needs of their children (Anthony, 2015) by incorporating and blending multiple resources (Thomas, 2016b). Parents, who control the overall schedule, can make adjustments as needed to accommodate family needs and create a quality learning environment (Thomas, 2019). At home, parents are able to respond to the needs of their children (Ray, 2002). Parents know their children better than anyone else, enabling them to implement curriculum and methods designed to meet the needs of their children in a way that traditional education is not capable of doing (Cheng et al., 2016). At home, children may work at a faster pace with individualized instruction, allowing more time for other activities (Hamlin, 2020). With the flexibility of time, students can take advantage of opportunities or field trips, volunteer opportunities, internships, or jobs related to their talents and interests (Ray, 2002). Families may also incorporate methods which help their children develop their talents in addition to academics (Mazama, 2016). Homeschooling also allows for differentiated instruction, or customization, of curriculum and instruction as well as the learning environment.

Depending on their general philosophy, parents may take on the role of a teacher, choosing curriculum, coordinating activities, and providing direct instruction (Carpenter & Gann, 2016). For other families, parents serve more as managers, directors, or facilitators who oversee the daily activities, create schedules, keep children on-task, and make sure they complete their work (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). At other times, parents serve as advisors and counselors, determining academic and learning needs or verifying graduation requirements (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Parental motivations also help to determine educational decisions and the focus of the curriculum (Neuman, 2020a). Parents may focus on socialization, or how students will contribute to society, acculturation, including family values, morality, and beliefs of the culture, or individualization, focusing on how to help their children reach their individual potential and self-fulfillment (Neuman, 2020a; Neuman & Guterman, 2017).

Homeschooling allows a broader socialization than what traditional formats provide (Ray, 2002) and is perhaps more like the real-world, as homeschool students are not learning and socializing with just their same-age peers (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). Considering individual personalities, it is possible to tailor not only academic but also social experiences, and students are often active participants in this decision-making process (Medlin, 2013). Homeschool students have reported that they have more time to develop interests and talents which place them in varied settings (Lee, 2016). Elliot's (2019) research corroborates previous studies suggesting that homeschooled students are prepared for college and learn appropriate socialization skills that enable them to navigate life beyond high school. Homeschooling incorporates concepts of Vygotsky's theory, but in ways that may be different than other settings. Homeschoolers may teach multiple grades at one time, which allows those who are more knowledgeable to help younger or less advanced students. In both home and cooperative settings,

there are many opportunities for students to assist each other. This gives them opportunities to use skills they have learned. It also helps them learn to communicate with people of all ages, not just those who are the same age or in the same grade level, as is the case in more traditional settings.

How Instruction is Individualized

Homeschooling is not a static environment. Families are free to redesign, restructure, try new approaches, and form new partnerships at any time (Hirsh, 2019), and it is becoming a more connected and diversified community (Gann & Carpenter, 2019) with families seeking support from others and the opportunity for collaboration (Tilhou, 2020). Unlike traditional settings, homeschool students are not required to learn specific material on particular timetables (Clemmitt, 2014). Families demonstrate great diversity which goes well beyond demographic differences to include their motivations which drive curriculum and instruction (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Families are able to unify learning with naturally occurring events and life experiences throughout the day, making the best use of instructional time (Thomas, 2016b), and students may have extra time during the day, allowing them to participate in additional learning opportunities in settings outside of the home (Lee, 2016).

Although some states have regulations stating what subjects must be covered, most families still have the opportunity to adjust curriculum and instructional methods to accommodate their children's needs (Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019). In Georgia, homeschools must incorporate mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and reading; however, families are free to choose their own classes, curriculum, scope, and sequence (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Bell et al. (2016) found that when parents adapted instructional methods to meet the needs of their children, engagement and motivation resulted. Some families

incorporate student-centered, personalized learning opportunities which are directed by the interests of students and their current level of performance (Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019). This research suggests that families are implementing a bottom-up approach, where the parent-teacher acts as a facilitator of academic content and instruction in multiple learning settings (Jaramillo, 1996), a key component of sociocultural theory.

Many families implement both adult-driven and child-driven approaches (Mazama, 2016) and often view curriculum as a process rather than a product. As parents discuss material with their children, students develop a deeper understanding of what they are studying, and their confidence increases. As active participants, children are more engaged in their work and enthusiastic about learning (Jones, 2013). This leads to children learning for the sake of learning, rather than just to earn a grade (Lee, 2016). Homeschooling provides many opportunities for parents to observe the strengths and interests of their children (Elliot, 2019), and parents can adjust the level of difficulty or provide new information as their children display readiness (Ray, 2002). According to Gredler (2012), Vygotsky would oppose education which forces students to cover content quickly to address standards, which is common in today's public schools. Unlike the one-size-fits-all approach in traditional school settings, homeschool families can customize instruction and develop unique learning plans for their children (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). In the homeschool setting, parents are able to assess the developmental abilities of their children and allow them to study fewer topics more deeply. Research suggests fewer families are implementing fully packaged curriculum, choosing to adjust curriculum options to match the child's ability and interest or the level of importance determined by the parents (Mazama, 2016). Families may also choose to spend less time on direct instruction of subject matter and more time accessing community resources (Hamlin, 2020). Homeschooling allows children to learn in

natural settings and engage in opportunities that are not available to others with rigid time constraints. Homeschool parents can carefully choose both curriculum and instructional methods (Hanna, 2012), and school schedules can be based on interests, opportunities, goals, and needs (Thomas, 2016a).

Parents make choices and develop routines that best fit their family (Thomas, 2016b). Families are incorporating flexible, eclectic mixes of methods, resources, and places for learning to occur (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Results from research conducted by Jones (2013) suggest that homeschooled children take ownership in their learning and develop strong relationships with family members and friends. Parents know their children better than anyone else, as they have watched them grow and develop from birth, and even though they may not have formal training as educators, this enables parents to know how to teach and provide feedback to their children (Ray, 2002). Jolly and Matthews (2018) found that although parents did not have formal training in the field of education, this did not hinder them from being able to implement appropriate instruction for their children.

Improved Opportunities and Technology. Current research suggests that families are taking advantage of a variety of opportunities which are available. Community connections have become a vital part of homeschooling (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Homeschooling does not mean everyone stays at home, as expanding community resources and improving technology allow families to take advantage of many opportunities (Carpenter & Gann, 2016). While it is easy to identify the learning materials in traditional school settings, homeschool families often incorporate a variety of materials from multiple sources, often to fill a specific need (Thomas, 2017). In a longitudinal study, Hanna (2012) found that parents now have more choices in curriculum publishers, educational materials, access to the internet, and networking with other

families. Families can evaluate the options which are available to them and then choose the options which best fit the needs of their children (Anthony, 2013; Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019). Families identify goals and objectives and then choose from an abundance of options to address them (Anthony, 2013), and many families choose an eclectic approach (Thomas, 2017), and although some have the option to use textbooks from their local schools, many choose to use other materials because they believe that the school's materials are "inadequate, limited, and biased" (Hanna, 2012, p. 621). Parents can choose from a variety of options and modify resources which are commercially available to meet the individual needs of their children (Hanna, 2012).

The Internet is a resource which has revolutionized homeschool pedagogy (Jolly & Matthews, 2020). In the past, some parents may not have felt equipped to teach more advanced material, but the Internet now plays a role in education (Clemmitt, 2014; Cook et al., 2013), and families have access to a variety of online educational resources (Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Among the options are live enrichment, online college courses, and video tutoring (Hamlin, 2020). Parents have many options and can choose to create structured environments, unstructured environments, or something in between. Technology has likely played a significant role in the increasing number of homeschoolers and their ability to connect with other families and growing sense of community (Hamlin, 2020; Thomas, 2019). Families have implemented technology as a method to share resources with other families (Thomas, 2017). Every state has online resources for homeschool families, and some can help people find local groups. Families are also able to collaborate and learn from each other through internet resources, including online forums, social media, and Facebook groups (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Jolly & Matthews, 2020).

Improved Networks. Perhaps one of the things fueling the growth and strength of homeschooling is the increase and emphasis on the formation of support groups (Thomas, 2019) and supportive communities (Morse, 2019). Families have stated that the availability of support groups influenced their decision to homeschool (Morse, 2019). Groups provide support for parents as they supplement home instruction (Tilhou, 2020). Research emphasizes this development of networks of advice and support as vital for families and something they seek (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Homeschool families do not function in isolation but rather have access to a wide range of resources (Thomas, 2016b; Tilhou, 2020), and depending on location, this may include access to teachers and tutors and part-time access to public schools, private schools, and colleges. Modern homeschoolers can join with other families as educational partners. There are also a growing number of homeschool associations and homeschool groups which families can choose to join (Thomas, 2019; Tilhou, 2020; Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019). These groups allow families to collaborate and share knowledge which can lead to improved instructional practices (Tilhou, 2020).

There are many possibilities for curriculum extensions within communities (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Depending on location, families have access to community resources including churches, libraries, museums, and concerts. Other resources include private schools, tutors, libraries, museums, community centers, zoos, clubs, and colleges (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Mazama, 2016). Others have access to a variety of extracurricular activities including music groups and sports teams. Thomas (2016b) also noted that families took advantage of community centers, clubs, and special classes. When families make choices about what resources they will use, this is generally guided by the goals and values of the parents and the interests of the child (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Some families incorporate these activities into their everyday

learning experiences, blurring the line between what is curriculum, co-curricular, and extra-curricular (Thomas, 2016b). Some families are choosing to participate in a traditional school setting on a part-time basis, sometimes referred to as a hybrid model, while maintaining the overall control of their students' education (Hirsh, 2019; Thomas, 2019).

Some families choose to participate in a cooperative, or co-op (Anthony, 2015; Gann & Carpenter, 2019). The 2016 National Household Education Survey reported 30% of families had some connection with a co-op or other homeschool organization as a source of some instruction (Hamlin, 2020). In several recent studies, all of the participants participated in a co-op (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019) with some also participating online courses and accessing tutoring. In another study, the majority of families were participating in a co-op so their children could learn with and from others (Mazama, 2016). In a co-op, parents with similar educational goals work together for the benefit of all of the children (Anthony, 2015). Parents within the co-op usually have shared religious, social, or academic values (Tilhou, 2020). This provides a balance of freedom, structure, and accountability. It can support the parents, providing opportunities that would not be possible for individual families, or providing expertise in areas in which parents feel unsure. It can also reduce the workload for parents. Co-ops allow for parents to collaborate, share ideas, and support other parents, while students are able to take classes or participate in enrichment activities (Hirsh, 2019; Tilhou, 2020). Anthony (2015) found that some families do not desire to eliminate all structure, but "to eliminate structures that they felt impeded their ability to raise and educate their children as they saw fit" (p. 47). Co-ops provide a learning community, and families have input into what their children study and their social activities. It can also support students, providing a classroom experience and opportunities to socialize with others outside of their family. Co-ops can expand the options available to families in both

experiences and courses. Increased parental involvement can improve educational outcomes (Anthony, 2015), and co-ops provide the opportunity for parents to provide direct input into what and how their children learn as well as being responsive to needs and concerns that arise.

In addition to local support groups, there is support for homeschooling at the state and national levels. States have their own homeschool association or organizations which can provide guidance to families in understanding the state's homeschool laws. All states have at least one homeschool association which gives families access to numerous other organizations for support (Carlson, 2020). Each state provides regulatory information on the state department of education website. Providing advocacy at the national level, the Home School Legal Defense Association was founded in 1983 (Carlson, 2020).

Potential Benefits for Special Populations

Creating a customized approach to education and selecting from a variety of curriculum, opportunities, and settings can potentially benefit all learners. However, individualized instruction can be especially beneficial for several subgroups of students. Research has investigated the potential benefits of homeschooling for students who are gifted or twice-exceptional and students with disabilities.

Gifted Students. Gloeckner and Jones (2013) reported that parents can become frustrated with the learning opportunities for their gifted students in traditional school settings. In such settings, gifted students may have access to enrichment opportunities, accelerated learning options, or special programs (Falso, 2016). However, in the homeschool setting, a talent development approach may be used. When skills and talents are identified, families can provide guidance and a path to develop their potential through authentic experiences and developing their skills and abilities. Through homeschooling, gifted students receive encouragement and guidance

from their parents to advance at their own pace, study subjects in a deeper way, and take advantage of opportunities in the community and online (Ray, 2002). Parents of gifted students tend to turn to homeschooling after attempts to work with the school are not successful (Jolly & Matthews, 2020). Some families of gifted students initially view homeschooling as a short-term solution after schools appear unwilling to address specific learning needs, which results in a general lack of learning (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). Differentiated instruction is sometimes not enough to meet the needs of gifted students (Jolly & Matthews, 2020). At home, parents can create a personalized educational experience by adapting, adjusting, and modifying curriculum, instructional methods, and structure (Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019). In the homeschool setting, parents can tailor instruction to individual needs, and children can progress to new topics when they have mastered their current material at their own pace (Ray, 2002). Students can spend more time in some areas and less in others, and they are never left waiting for others to catch up. Homeschooling allows a child to take the lead and decide the content and rate of instruction (Jolly & Matthews, 2020).

Students With Disabilities. Although more money is going to the school systems for special services, outcomes for students with disabilities have not improved (Cheng et al., 2016). Homeschooling is an alternative setting for students who struggle in a traditional classroom (Clemmitt, 2014). Homeschooling enables parents to set goals and implement curriculum and instructional methods designed to help their children reach these goals (Cheng et al., 2016). Families have the freedom to choose curriculum, set the pace, and establish routines (Cook et al., 2013). There is very little research regarding the effectiveness of homeschooling, making it difficult for parents to make informed decisions. Parents may not be familiar with methods and practices designed for particular disabilities or learning needs and may lose access to the team of

professionals they would have at a public school. More research is needed regarding the impact of homeschooling for these students.

There are some things which are known about homeschooling and students with disabilities. Research participants who homeschooled children with disabilities felt that the formal education setting offered by the local school was not an appropriate or acceptable environment for their students (Hanna, 2012) or failed to meet the needs of their children (Cook et al., 2013). Some families believe schools are not effectively implementing inclusive practices or do not provide the support needed for their children with disabilities to experience success (Maxwell et al., 2020). Homeschooling provides an environment known to improve performance, including low student-to-teacher ratio (Cheng et al., 2016). One-on-one interactions can increase student performance and confidence (Ray, 2002). In the homeschool environment, children can progress at their own pace, use materials that fit their learning needs, and avoid bullying (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). It also provides individualized instruction by parents, who are motivated to see their children succeed (Cheng et al., 2016). Homeschooling enables students to progress in each area of development at a pace that is effective for learning, and children are never left behind (Ray, 2002). Cheng et al. (2016) sought to evaluate whether homeschooling can adequately meet the needs of students with disabilities and compared the levels of satisfaction reported by parents regarding special education services in a variety of school settings. Using data from the National Household Education Survey, the researchers were able to examine 2,000 households in the United States. Results indicated that homeschooling parents were more satisfied than those with children who attended public schools.

Twice-Exceptional Students. Despite more recent research regarding twice-exceptional learners, many times, their needs remain unmet in schools (Josephson et al., 2018).

Homeschooling can be beneficial for children who are twice-exceptional, as these students present with unique educational needs. These are students who have been identified as gifted and have also been diagnosed with a disability (Reis et al., 2014). Academically, research indicates that schools have difficulty addressing needs related to both giftedness and disability simultaneously (Besnoy et al., 2015; Josephson et al., 2018; Park et al., 2018). One significant issue is that while twice-exceptional students frequently receive services addressing their weaknesses, their strengths are often overlooked or ignored (Yssel et al., 2010). This suggests that “there may exist an underlying inadequacy in our educational system” to understand and address the complex needs of twice-exceptional students (Foley-Nicpon et al., 2013, p. 176). Research suggests that teachers do not have the training they need, causing them to focus too heavily on the giftedness or the disability (Rubenstein et al., 2015). Often, twice-exceptional students receive services for their disabilities while their strengths are either overlooked or ignored. However, many believe that developing the strengths of twice-exceptional students is “the most critical aspect of their education” (Reis et al., 2014, p. 225). This is important because “when teachers focus on strengths rather than weaknesses, social and academic success is indeed possible” (Yssel et al., 2010, p. 55). Rubenstein et al. (2015) found that this was especially true for twice-exceptional learners with autism whose asynchronous development and inability to respond and communicate in an appropriate way made access to gifted services difficult. Even when parents are involved and act as advocates for their children, continuing frustration can lead some to choose to homeschool. At home, parents who are familiar with their children are able to provide an appropriate balance between supporting needs and validating strengths. In the homeschool setting, parents assume responsibility for the academic success and growth toward the potential of their child (Neumeister et al., 2013).

Overall Perceived Impact of Homeschooling

The individualized approach which is possible in the homeschool setting creates a learning environment for students which is different from what they would experience in a traditional setting. This leads to the opportunity for students to develop academically in relation to their abilities and interests, and various settings and independence in learning can lead to social-emotional growth. Research provides information regarding the academic, social, and emotional development of homeschool students and the potential benefits and drawbacks of this form of school choice.

Perceived Academic Impact

Research provides insight into both potential benefits and possible drawbacks of homeschooling and its impact on academic development. While the results of many studies suggest a positive impact, others suggest a neutral or negative effect. There are also conflicting reports.

Potential Benefits. With little regulation in many states, homeschool students often develop a love of learning, which can increase academic engagement (Bell et al., 2016). This stands in opposition to traditional school settings which are burdened by increasing control and standards and testing requirements which can cause a decline in academic engagement. Some families allow students to make choices regarding what and how they will learn, allowing them to study diverse topics which are interest based and relevant (Neuman, 2020a). According to Medlin and Butler's (2018) study, both individualized instruction and students of multiple ages working together may help children develop thinking skills. Pannone (2017b) also found that homeschool students develop diverse thinking skills. Research suggests that allowing students to

make decisions related to their own learning has a positive impact on academic self-concept and academic independence (Medlin & Butler, 2018).

Data collected from college admission officers provides insight into the perceived academic benefits of homeschooling (Gloeckner & Jones, 2013). Considering the perceptions of these university officials, 78% expected homeschooled students to be overall as successful or more successful than those who graduated from traditional settings. As officials who evaluate college readiness, their perspectives suggest that homeschooling has long-term academic benefits. More recent research has been able to corroborate these findings. Elliot's (2019) study indicated homeschoolers are at least as prepared as their peers who were educated in other settings. This study also supports the concept that parents can provide effective instruction for their students through high school even though they may not be trained educators. It provides evidence that parents can educate their children as well as or better than the public schools at a fraction of the annual cost that public schools spend on each student each year. Fink-Glass (2016) discovered that many homeschool students use multiple options for earning college credit while in high school, including dual enrollment and CLEP, and some are able to earn an associate degree during high school. Earning college credit while in high school could be considered a sign of academic success. In another study, African American students performed as well or better than the national average for all races, suggesting that homeschooling positively impacts the academic achievement of Black students (Ray, 2015).

Neuman and Guterman (2021) state that education and achievement should encompass more than content. Other areas, including creativity, should be considered. Parents have criticized the educational system, believing that the current system leads to mediocrity rather than high standards and excellence (Mazama, 2016; Neuman, 2019; Neuman & Guterman,

2021). Parents are striving for excellence (Neuman & Guterman, 2017). Also of concern in the school system is an emphasis on memorizing facts rather than understanding (Neuman & Guterman, 2021) and teaching to the test, which results in “mere regurgitation for the sake of a grade” (Mazama, 2016, p. 40). While academic achievement should not be the only measure of success, evidence suggests that homeschoolers perform at least as well as their peers (Murphy, 2014). Homeschoolers do well on standardized tests and college entrance exams.

Possible Drawbacks. Regarding the academic achievement of homeschoolers, the majority of studies suggest a positive effect, while a few suggest mixed or negative results (Ray, 2017). Some research indicates that homeschooled students perform better than their public-school peers on a variety of standardized tests, including the ACT and SAT, COMPASS, and ITBS (Murphy, 2014), with conflicting information from other sources saying this is inaccurate (Gloeckner & Jones, 2013). Yu et al. (2016) found that homeschooling was neither an advantage nor disadvantage when it came to high school grade point average (GPA), SAT scores, first-year college GPA, or college retention rates from the first year to the second year. Similarly, the study conducted by Bennett et al. (2019) suggests there is no academic difference between homeschool students and students from traditional settings at the college where the research was completed. This is not to say that either group was unprepared, but rather, suggests homeschool students were equally well-prepared for college academics. Heuer and Donovan (2017) report that SAT scores of homeschoolers are higher than the national level and ACT scores are higher than public school students but lower than private school students. Gaither (2017) reports that there is little to no difference in the academic performance between homeschool students and those educated in other settings or some small margins for some variables. Coleman (2021) reports that a math gap exists for homeschool students, with students scoring higher on the verbal portion of the

SAT than the math sections. The research suggests that parents may find it easier to teach reading and language arts or feel more comfortable teaching these subjects, leading to higher SAT scores for homeschool students in these areas. Research conducted at a university with a STEM emphasis found a statistically significant difference in the overall GPA at the time of college graduation between homeschool graduates and those who attended public or private schools during high school, with homeschool maintaining a higher overall GPA (Almasoud & Fowler, 2016). It is possible that varying degrees of academic success could be influenced by the level of structure in different homeschool settings (Martin-Chang et al., 2011).

Perceived Social and Emotional Impact

Overall benefits and drawbacks of homeschooling must be understood in terms of the social context in which learning occurs. It can be difficult to determine the impact of homeschooling in relation to the setting because families have access to many different settings, opportunities, and resources (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Jolly & Matthews, 2020; Thomas, 2017). However, current research can provide some insight into the impact of homeschooling on the social and emotional development of students.

Potential Benefits. Research reveals multiple perceived social and emotional benefits of homeschooling, with the majority of studies suggesting a positive effect of homeschooling (Medlin, 2006; Ray, 2017). Research suggests that homeschool students are socially, emotionally, and psychologically as well as or better prepared than those in traditional settings (Ray, 2010). Homeschoolers are active in their communities and social events. They exhibit leadership and communication skills and confidently interact with those of many different ages, not just their same-aged peers (Murphy, 2014). They have fewer behavior problems and score higher than their peers on measures of self-esteem. Indications from research reveal that

“homeschoolers are not isolated, disengaged citizens” (Murphy, 2014, p. 250), but able to develop socially at least as well as their peers. Thomas (2016b) reported that homeschool students in the study participated in various educational activities and learning opportunities and were able to effectively connect with available community resources, and Ray (2017) found that homeschool students are engaged in activities which develop leadership skills. Elliot (2019) found that homeschool students can integrate into the college environment and live happy, productive lives after graduation.

Homeschoolers often view their educational experiences in a positive way (Medlin, 2013; Murphy, 2014), and former homeschool students are generally happy about being homeschooled and their experiences (Fink-Glass, 2016; Medlin, 2013). Several studies have investigated the social impact of homeschooling on students. While researching the influence of a home education on the lives of adults who had graduated from college, Elliot (2019) found that homeschooling is an effective method of education, as participants transitioned to college and were successful after their years of homeschooling. Fink-Glass (2016) explored the personal experiences of homeschool graduates and their transition to college. Graduates discussed how religious convictions, family values, and academics all impacted their college choices. The results from this research suggest that homeschooled students are similar in many ways to their non-homeschooled peers when dealing with the transition to college. All students must face increased independence and uncertainties that the college environment brings. Students must handle new responsibilities and increased workload while being exposed to ideas and worldviews which are different from their own. Students must address social, emotional, and academic issues and decide how to best resolve them. Research also reveals that having a

supportive network of family and friends is vital for students as they move into adulthood, regardless of what previous educational environment they experienced.

Homeschooling may also help students learn important non-cognitive skills which are beneficial to overall student development. In a collective case study, Pannone (2017b) investigated the impact of homeschooling on entrepreneurial activities later in life. Participants noted that homeschooling taught them to be self-directed and independent in their work. Homeschooling fosters and helps students develop independent learning and enables them to become more responsible for their own learning (Mazama, 2016). Neuman (2020a) noted that homeschool students exhibited confidence, became independent learners, and developed critical thinking skills. Pannone (2017b) found that homeschool students were confident and comfortable with taking risks and risking failure. Individualized instruction, with goals designed with the child in mind, can lead to self-regulation, self-respect, independence, confidence, curiosity, and happiness (Neuman & Guterman, 2017).

Possible Drawbacks. Guterman and Neuman's (2017) research indicates that several factors influence the number and quality of social encounters for homeschool children. They found that children with structured learning schedules also had a great number of social interactions. The study also found that parents who were extroverted tended to provide a wider variety of social opportunities for their children. Others have reported that there are only slight or no differences between homeschoolers and students in traditional settings (Gaither, 2017).

Opponents of homeschooling often cite the lack of socialization as an issue of home education (Carlson, 2020). They believe homeschool students have reduced opportunities to socialize with those outside the family and believe homeschooled children will not develop the same level of social skills as their peers necessary to become productive members of society

(Murphy, 2014). They believe that homeschoolers, due to lack of exposure to diversity, become indoctrinated, isolated, social misfits with few friends and no opportunity for identity formation. Proponents disagree on every point with evidence from research supporting their views. Modern homeschoolers are not isolated (Hamlin, 2020). In the past, social interactions were mostly limited to families and small communities; however, this is no longer the case, and students have many opportunities to interact with others outside of their homes (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Interestingly, proponents do not view socialization as a concern (Carlson, 2020), and the majority are satisfied with the level of socialization their children receive (Medlin, 2006).

Limitations of Homeschool Research

It is difficult to study homeschooling families (Murphy, 2014). Currently, rigorous empirical studies are scarce (Dennison et al., 2020), few studies exist which give children the opportunity to describe their perceptions, and there are limited longitudinal studies. Limitations include small sample size, response bias, and lack of diversity among participants (Jolly & Matthews, 2018). Problems controlling variables, nonrepresentative samples, non-random assignment, self-selection and sampling bias, and the inability to control for other explanatory variables are also limitations (Gaither, 2017; Murphy, 2014). Most studies rely on self-selection. However, nonprobability sampling methods are frequently used for “populations that are hard to locate or very limited in size” (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 107), which is descriptive of the homeschool community. Selection bias results in samples that are not representative of the homeschool population is also an issue (Watson, 2018), and it is impossible to know if a sample accurately represents the U.S. homeschool population (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). This also makes it impossible to compare homeschool students to all students in all educational

settings. However, narrow sampling, while it limits transferability, can increase the depth of understanding on a topic (Anthony, 2015).

Another recurring problem is the lack of diversity in research samples (Fink-Glass, 2016). Until very recently, most participants in homeschooling current research are Caucasian and homeschool for religious reasons (Clemmitt, 2014). Children who are homeschooled are frequently raised in two-parent households (Dennison et al., 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017) with well-educated parents (Fink-Glass, 2016). On average, homeschoolers are also from larger households (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). However, as more families choose to homeschool, the population is becoming more diverse (Pannone, 2017b), but as of yet, few studies include diverse families as participants.

Researchers admit that it is not possible to control all background variables related to the study of families, homeschooling, and social science research (Ray, 2002). A variety of factors can influence academic achievement, including socioeconomic status (Fink-Glass, 2016), but studies which have controlled for variables such as gender and socioeconomic status have found that these variables are not necessarily significant (Ray, 2015). This includes variables such as income, education, occupation, marital status, parent support, and previous achievement (Murphy, 2014). No control means it is impossible to say whether outcomes are a result of homeschooling or other variables. Further complicating the issue is that fact that homeschoolers rely on many resources, some which overlap with students educated in other settings (Carlson, 2020). However, studies do reveal that homeschool students generally do well in terms of academic, social, and emotional growth. Flexible schedules, one-on-one instruction, continuous feedback on performance, and parental involvement can also increase performance levels. Research suggests that income, parent education, structure, and parental involvement could all

play a role in increased test scores which reflect academic performance (Martin-Chang et al., 2011). However, Bennett et al. (2019) found that the level of education of the parent did not affect academic performance, and as the homeschool population has increased, the educational level of parents is closer to the national average (Heuer & Donovan, 2017).

With the number of children being educated in the home in the United States increasing, homeschooling is a topic which needs to be studied more. Murphy (2014) states, homeschooling is the “most robust form of educational reform in the United States today” (p. 245), but more evidence is needed to support this claim. Future studies should continue to corroborate existing research regarding the homeschool population. Although homeschooling is becoming more widespread and accepted, very little research has been conducted (Dennison et al., 2020; Thomas 2016b). The majority of current research focuses on homeschooling from the perspective of parents (Pannone, 2017b), and a significant gap exists in understanding this form of school choice from the perspective of students. Research is also needed to examine how the various social structures in modern homeschooling affect overall student success.

Summary

Homeschooling has experienced a resurgence in the United States since the 1970s with rapid growth in recent years (Guterman & Neuman, 2017; Jolly & Matthews, 2018; Pannone, 2017b). Although families choose to homeschool for different reasons, generally, parents are seeking to provide a better education for their children than what they can experience in other settings. Sociocultural theory, which examines how children learn and construct meaning, is not well understood in the homeschool setting, as children are learning in an environment which is much different from that of a traditional school setting. Individualized instruction is frequently seen in homeschool settings, meeting the needs of each child (Anthony, 2015; Hanna, 2012;

Pannone, 2017b). Because it is highly customizable, homeschooling can meet the individual needs of students which often go unmet in traditional settings. Using a variety of methods, parents create a supportive learning environment by adjusting both the social and academic environment in which their children learn, enabling them to not just survive, but thrive, resulting in increased perceived academic achievement during their school years which leads to overall success. However, current research results regarding the impact of homeschooling on the academic, social, and emotional development of homeschool students are mixed.

Despite the tremendous growth in homeschooling, relatively few empirical studies have been conducted (Hirsh, 2019; Marks & Welsch, 2019), and previous research does not adequately account for the growing diversity within the homeschool community (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). In the past, many homeschool students were fairly isolated from their peers, but that is no longer the case (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Families currently choose from a variety of educational opportunities (Thomas, 2016b; Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019), and the social settings in which learning occurs varies significantly from family to family (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Mazama, 2016; Thomas, 2016b, 2019). Research is needed to further examine how these various settings and systems affect learning and perceived academic achievement among homeschool students. The studies which have been conducted are mostly focused on parental motivation and the parents' role in the process, and almost nothing is known about homeschooling from the perspective of the students, although they are the people who will be impacted in the long-term (Neuman, 2020a; Pannone, 2017b). What is known about homeschooling is generally the story of parents (Neuman, 2020b). Additionally, little is known about the role which students, particularly those at the high school level, play in determining their educational plan. There is a great need to understand the social context in which learning

occurs and the impact of homeschooling on the development, learning, and success of students from their perspective. Many studies lack a theoretical foundation (Spiegler, 2010), and there is a “paucity of empirical evidence derived from methodologically strong research paradigms” (Carlson, 2020, p. 10). However, this study was built upon a theoretical framework and conducted with strong methodology, contributing to knowledge related to homeschooling and how the interaction between the learner and environment affects student development and extending Vygotsky’s (1978) theory by discussing how settings for learning are chosen. A voice was given to students who have previously been unheard. The knowledge generated from this study may benefit other homeschooling families as they develop educational plans for their high school students and may be beneficial in discussions regarding school choice and school reform.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. This chapter describes the research design and methodology, the setting and participants, and researcher positionality, including the interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, and the researcher's role. This is followed by a description of the procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, and a brief summary.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach. A qualitative study was appropriate because of the topic of study under investigation. Qualitative studies allow for investigations into real-world situations (Patton, 2015), and qualitative methods can increase the understanding of a phenomenon by examining the lived experiences of participants, capturing and describing how people experience the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). "Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). Gaining a deep understanding of a narrow topic of interest can be accomplished through qualitative methods of research.

Through phenomenology, a phenomenon which has been experienced by the participants can be investigated (Moustakas, 1994). "The value of phenomenology is that it prioritizes and investigates how the human being experiences the world" (Patton, 2015, p. 115). Through multiple data collection methods, participants had the opportunity to describe homeschooling and

the development of an educational plan, a lived experience which the homeschool high school students have in common. Significant statements and themes were identified through data analysis so what was experienced by the participants and how they experienced it could be described. Data analysis for this study was accomplished with the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental phenomenology allows researchers to explore the lived experiences of participants and to develop a composite description of those experiences without adding personal interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the researcher, it was necessary to epoché my experiences, setting them aside, in order to view the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This type of phenomenology was appropriate to use to contribute to filling a gap in the literature by giving a voice to students who had previously been unheard.

Although the key text for transcendental phenomenology is Moustakas's (1994) *Phenomenological Research Methods*, the origin of phenomenology began much earlier. The underpinnings are evident in the philosophical works of Descartes, and later, Husserl (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). The concepts of intentionality and intuition presented in these foundational works incorporate both the phenomenon and the underlying meaning which was further developed by Moustakas. The result is a process which researchers can follow to prepare for and conduct transcendental phenomenological research.

Early philosophical influences are seen in the multiple steps described by Moustakas (1994), including epoché, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and a synthesis of meanings and essences. Epoché involves setting aside personal experiences and perceptions about a topic so it can be viewed in a fresh way and from the perspective of the participants. Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction includes horizontalization, a

recognition that all statements have equal value. As all nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements are recorded, inductive analysis and observations of the data allow categories to emerge as patterns are discovered (Patton, 2015). Statements are then combined into meaningful units, or themes (Moustakas, 1994). The process of Imaginative Variation is an acknowledgement that a phenomenon can be viewed from multiple perspectives, and textural and structural descriptions can be developed. The experiences of participants can be combined into a composite description of what was experienced and how it was experienced. This results in a Synthesis of Meanings and Essences.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their educational plan of study?

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their academic educational plan of study and their role in course selection?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the process of choosing settings for learning academic content and their role in this process?

Sub-Question Three

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students related to the impact of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as part of their educational plan and their role in choosing these activities?

Setting and Participants

The setting for this study was east-central Georgia. Participants were identified from 13 Georgia counties, with initial participants being sought from the Local Homeschool Association. Families in this area have access to a wide range of educational opportunities for homeschool high school students.

Setting

This study took place in east-central Georgia. In Georgia, the Department of Education plays a “very limited role related to home school” (Georgia Department of Education, n.d., para. 4). Families are required to provide an educational program which includes, at a minimum, mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and reading. Families can choose their own curriculum. Parents, who must have at least a high school diploma or GED, must submit a Declaration of Intent (DOI) form annually and must write an annual progress report for each required academic area. The school year must include 180 instructional days of four and one half hours each, and a nationally standardized test must be administered at least every three years beginning in third grade. However, assessments are not submitted to the state (Carlson, 2020). Other than the annual DOI, no other documentation needs to be sent to the state (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).

The Local Homeschool Association in this area serves families in both Georgia and South Carolina; however, only Georgia residents participated in this study, so all families are required to follow the same homeschooling laws. The homeschool association serves families in 13 Georgia counties. While all homeschooling families are welcome to join and participate, and there is no connection to a particular church, doctrine, or denomination, the directors and coordinators, who are all volunteers, sign a profession of faith. The association website lists four

primary benefits of membership—testing, fellowship, communication, and graduation. The annual cost to join ranges from \$30 for those who are willing to volunteer for one event during the school year to \$65 for those who do not want to volunteer.

This setting was appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, the association serves families in urban, suburban, and rural areas of Georgia. Second, many opportunities are available to families in this area, and the study sought to describe both how families develop educational plans for homeschool high school students and how they choose the social context for learning. Although all families were following the same homeschooling regulations and had access to the same resources, they made different choices related to the development of educational plans.

Participants

Ten participants enrolled in this study. Study enrollment continued until evidence of thematic saturation was apparent. Saturation is reached when nothing new is being learned from additional participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Therefore, it was possible that the number of participants would range from 10 to 15. The search for participants began with the Local Homeschool Association. To reach more participants, snowball sampling was used to locate more participants from the same 13 Georgia counties that the association serves. Snowball, or chain, sampling involves asking participants for other contacts who may be interested in participating in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Selecting participants from the same area with access to the same opportunities and following the same homeschooling laws was helpful to identify similarities and differences among families and students related to the research questions and phenomenon under investigation. The criterion for participation in this study were the following: current homeschool high school student in ninth,

10th, 11th, or 12th grade, a resident of one of the 13 Georgia counties served by the Local Homeschool Association, and a student in at least their second year of homeschooling. More than one high school student in a family meeting the criterion could participate.

Every effort was made to recruit both male and female students. Students who enrolled in the study ranged in age from 15 to 17. Participants were identified from three of the Georgia counties served by the Local Homeschool Association who live in urban, suburban, and rural areas of these counties. Although I hoped to identify students from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, participants lacked diversity in these areas.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, it is imperative that I disclose the interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions which guided this study. In qualitative research, the researcher is a human instrument in the study. Therefore, the framework and assumptions, as well as my role, must be explained.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework which guided this study was social constructivism. Individuals seek to understand the world around them and “develop subjective meanings of their experience” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Meaning is constructed by individuals through “interaction with their social worlds” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Learning and development is a result of interactions between individuals and their environment (Vygotsky, 1978), and people interact in a network of relationships (Patton, 2015). Subjective meanings are influenced by interactions with the physical environment and people as well as historical and cultural norms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These multiple, subjective realities can be combined to understand and describe shared meanings of the experiences related to the phenomenon (Patton,

2015). As a transcendental phenomenological study, participants had the opportunity to describe their experiences with the phenomenon under investigation (Moustakas, 1994), and I set aside my own experiences to fully focus on the participants, their experiences, and their perspectives (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015).

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are a lens through which people view the world (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This lens affects how any topic is viewed, interpreted, and understood.

Philosophical assumptions are beliefs which influence a researcher's action, research approach, methods, data collection, and analysis. This includes the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions.

Ontological Assumption

The ontological assumption relates to reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I hold a biblical worldview and believe absolute truth is found in God's Word. However, perception is subjective, and the study sought to understand the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants. The realities of the participants became evident through data collection and analysis.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption relates to knowledge and the relationship between the participants and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research seeks to obtain data in the form of thick descriptions from which understanding can be developed. In this study, I bracketed my experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) in order to gather, analyze, and synthesize the subjective experiences of the participants.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption addresses the role of values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Children are a gift from the Lord (*New King James Version Bible*, 1982/2021, Psalm 127:3), and parents have the responsibility to teach (Deuteronomy 6:7) and train (Proverbs 22:6) their children. Parents choose educational settings for their children where values and beliefs are developed. In the homeschool setting, parents pass on their values and beliefs to their children. This influences their motivations to homeschool and the choices they make regarding curriculum and instruction. As the researcher, my goal was to disclose my values and experiences with the phenomenon and then bracket them to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants.

Researcher's Role

As a researcher, it is essential to describe my background and experiences with the phenomenon under investigation. Currently, I am a fifth-grade teacher at a local Christian school. I have a total of eight years of full-time teaching experience in a Christian school setting. I have earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education, a master's degree in special education, and an education specialist degree in curriculum and instruction. I am a former homeschool parent. I homeschooled both of my children from fifth grade through their high school graduation. I was a member of the homeschool association from which the participants were selected while I was homeschooling, and I served as the new member coordinator for the association for several years. This involved sending new members information about the association and local opportunities when they joined.

As a researcher, I am a human instrument in this study. Conducting a transcendental phenomenological study required me to set aside assumptions or preconceived ideas in order to

accurately report the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994) and to make every effort to keep any biases from influencing data collection and analysis. I have a previous role in the setting and had past interactions with some of the participants. As an active member in the local homeschool community for nine years, I already knew some of the participants. My children were very involved in many local activities and clubs with other homeschoolers, and some current high school participants know my children. My children graduated from high school in 2020 and 2021. I hold a positive view of homeschooling, although I do not believe that every family should homeschool. One of my children has multiple disabilities, and the other is gifted, so I have homeschooled children with various needs and interests. Although I have a positive view of homeschooling, my perspective is that of an educator and a former homeschool parent. My role in the study was to gather and analyze data to effectively describe homeschooling and the development of an educational plan of study from the perspective of high school students. Because this is a transcendental phenomenological study, I set aside my experiences as a homeschool parent, collected data from participants, and analyzed the data by using significant statements to discover themes (Moustakas, 1994).

Procedures

The procedures described here include the permissions for the study. Additionally, the recruitment plan is included. By providing sufficient descriptions throughout, it is possible for the study to be replicated.

Permissions

Approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received before this study is initiated. See Appendix A for IRB approval. After receiving IRB approval, I contacted the Local Homeschool Association and informed them of the study and asked for the

recruitment letter to be sent to current members through the email chain (Appendix B). No recruitment of participants began until IRB approval was received. Additionally, no data were collected from a participant until informed parental consent and minor assent (Appendix C) or adult consent for students over age 18 (Appendix D) was obtained using the form approved by the IRB.

Recruitment Plan

This study sought a minimum of 10 participants, and recruitment of participants continued until thematic saturation was reached. Saturation is reached when nothing new is being learned from additional participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Therefore, the number of participants could have ranged from 10 to 15. Purposeful sampling, specifically criterion sampling was used. Criterion sampling is an effective way to identify people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, participants are purposefully selected because they can provide data related to the phenomenon. Such participants are considered to be “information rich” and able to “offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2015, p. 46). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 157). Snowball sampling was also be used, as needed, to identify enough participants for the study.

In order to locate participants, an email was sent through the email chain to all current members of the Local Homeschool Association. See Appendix B for site approval, which was the recruitment letter that was approved by the Local Homeschool Association for distribution. This initial contact was with parents who needed to provide consent for the students to participate. If parents had students who were interested in participating, the parents and students

were provided with the consent and assent form. There are currently approximately 200 families who are members of the association. Based on the size of the graduating classes of 2020 and 2021, there are about 40–50 students at each grade level. This means there were approximately 160–200 potential high school participants from the Local Homeschool Association. All high school students were currently homeschooled and in ninth, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade and residents of Georgia. All students had to be in at least their second year of homeschooling. More than one high school student in a family meeting the criteria could participate. If fewer than 10 participants were identified or if thematic saturation was not reached with members of the Local Homeschool Association, then snowball sampling would be used. Saturation is reached when nothing new is being learned from additional participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Snowball sampling was used, and the same criterion applied. Selecting participants from the same area with access to the same opportunities and following the same homeschooling laws helped to identify similarities and differences among families and students related to the research question and phenomenon under investigation. Families were asked to provide evidence of homeschooling by providing a copy of the DOI form which was submitted for the current academic year. This form records the names, ages, and addresses of homeschooling families (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.) and is a sufficient way to verify homeschooling status and state of residence. Before data collection, I also verified through email that the participant met the qualifications for participation. Parental consent and participant assent were gathered for each participant using the form approved by the IRB. See Appendix C for participant consent/assent form and Appendix D for the adult participant consent form.

Data Collection Plan

Data collection consisted of three methods for this study: questionnaires, individual interviews, and physical artifacts. This triangulation of methods demonstrates consistency at different times and across different methods (Patton, 2015). Following Moustakas's (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method provided a systematic process to collect and organize data.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix E) allowed me to gather initial data related to the research questions and to begin to develop an understanding of the phenomenon. The first section of the questionnaire was used to collect some basic demographic information. However, the majority of questions were open-ended and served as the first data collection method. The open-ended questions were similar to those which would be asked during the interviews (data collection approach #2). According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), questionnaires may include closed-ended questions which can support what is in the literature, and open-ended questions can help to explore deeper meanings of the topic. This first method, as a written form, gave the participants plenty of time to think about and reflect on their educational plan, their roles in the process, and the impact of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Writing can also be used as preparation for an interview (Patton, 2015). There is no pressure to think of an answer at an exact point in time, and participants can answer questions in any order. Participants could return to questions to add more information at any time before they returned it to me. The questionnaire was sent by email, giving students with busy schedules the opportunity to complete the form at their convenience, at one time or at various times throughout

the week. The instructions encouraged students to think about all the various settings where learning occurs throughout the week.

The questionnaire was sent and returned through email. For the first section, participants were asked to provide some basic demographic information. For the second part, participants were instructed to think about all the various settings of their education plan. Participants were encouraged to complete the questionnaire over a one-week period, answering questions in any order, and returning to questions throughout the week as they reflected on their educational plan. Participants were reminded that their educational plan includes academic courses, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities. For participants who did not return the questionnaire after two weeks, I contacted the participant to see if they still wanted to participate in the study. If they did, I waited an additional week before following up again about the questionnaire completion.

Questionnaire Questions

1. Part I

- a. Who provides most of the instruction for your homeschool program?
- b. What is the highest level of education of each of your parents or other caregivers?
- c. Do your parents or other caregivers work outside of the home? If so, what are their occupations?
- d. For how many years have you been homeschooled?
- e. Have you ever been educated in another (non-homeschool) setting? If so, please explain.
- f. How old are you? What grade are you in currently?

- g. How many siblings do you have who are also homeschooled? What are their ages?
- h. On average, how many hours each day do you spend on academic work or participating in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities?

2. Part II

- a. Regarding your homeschool experience:
 - i. What do you like most about being homeschooled?
 - ii. What do you like least about being homeschooled?
 - iii. Describe your homeschool schedule.
 - iv. Describe the input you had in developing your schedule for this school year.
- b. Regarding the academic courses for the current school year:
 - i. Please list the academic courses that you are currently taking.
 - ii. Why were these courses chosen for this school year?
 - iii. Describe how you learn academic material. (Does a parent or other adult teach the material to you? Do you complete classes online? Etc.)
 - iv. In what ways does homeschooling have a positive effect on your academic development?
 - v. In what ways does homeschooling have a negative effect on your academic development?
 - vi. If you had the opportunity to talk with someone who is critical of homeschooling and its impact on high school academics, what would you want to tell them?

- c. Regarding the settings for these academic courses:
- i. Where does instruction for each class that you already listed occur?
 - ii. Why were these settings chosen for this school year?
 - iii. What do you like or dislike about these settings?
 - iv. In what ways does homeschooling have a positive effect on your social development?
 - v. In what ways does homeschooling have a negative effect on your social development?
 - vi. If you had the opportunity to talk with someone who is critical of homeschooling and its social impact on high school students, what would you want to tell them?
- d. Regarding your co-curricular activities for the current school year:
- i. Please list the co-curricular activities that you have participated in during this school year. Co-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, courses and activities such as computer science, foreign language, art, or music.
 - ii. How were these courses or activities chosen?
 - iii. Where do you go to participate in these activities or classes?
 - iv. What do you enjoy most about these activities?
- e. Regarding your extra-curricular activities for this school year:
- i. Please list the extra-curricular activities that you have participated in during this school year. Extra-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, activities such as athletics, clubs, organizations, and

volunteer or paid work experiences.

- ii. How were these activities chosen?
- iii. Where do you go to participate in these activities?
- iv. What do you enjoy most about these activities?

Part I served the purpose of gathering demographic information and provided general information regarding the educational experiences of the participants and the level of structure within their homeschool setting. Information about the level of education and occupation of parents and caregivers can be used to estimate socio-economic status (Neuman, 2020a). Information about basic educational experiences and the level of structure in the homeschool setting could be compared with what is reported in the literature (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Part II moved into open-ended questions which could both support current literature and explore deeper meanings related to the phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), building descriptions related to the central research question and each of the three sub-questions. The questions in this part of the questionnaire were similar to the questions which would be discussed during the interview and followed the same general sequence. This writing served the purpose of stimulating thinking related to the phenomenon and preparing participants for the interview (Patton, 2015).

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

Analysis of the questionnaires allowed me to begin to “get a sense of the whole” (Patton, 2015, p. 525). The initial steps of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994) were evident in this stage of analysis, including epoché, the reduction of data to significant statements, and initial theme development for each participant. Imaginative Variation was also evident as textural and structural descriptions for each participant were beginning to be developed.

Memoing began the audit trail process, which is documentation of the thinking and understanding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018) leading toward the discovery and development of themes (Gall et al., 2007). Memoing is a process to keep track of thoughts and speculations throughout data analysis and coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This creates an audit trail which allows themes to be traced back to the original data later during the synthesis process (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Coding is a method to inventory, organize, and label all data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Usually, a code is “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 5).

NVivo, a computer assisted data analysis software program, was used to help manage and organize data. The analysis process began with Epoché as I prepared to examine and view the phenomenon from a new, fresh perspective without preconceived notions, allowing knowledge to originate from the data and where “nothing is determined in advance” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87). NVivo also allowed me to make notes and form initial codes with data stored in one location. Phenomenological Reduction, including bracketing and horizontalizing, also occurred during this stage of analysis as the initial data for each participant was collected. All statements were viewed as having equal value, and I began to construct initial themes for each participant.

Individual Interviews

Interviews are a method of data collection which is interactive in nature (Moustakas, 1994). Individual interviews are a method for in-depth inquiry regarding the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). In-depth interviewing is “the major way in which qualitative researchers seek to understand the perceptions, feelings, experiences, and knowledge of people” (Patton, 2015, p. 27), therefore, this method of data collection was an essential part of this study. Interviews

allowed me to “enter into the other person’s perspective” and find out what cannot be directly observed (Patton, 2015, p. 426), including behaviors, feelings, and interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through individual interviews, I was able to gather information related to the central research question and all three sub-questions. Unlike the questionnaire, interviews allowed me to ask participants follow-up questions or ask them to clarify or further explain their answers. Probing questions were used to seek important information while follow-up questions added an exploratory aspect to the interview (Patton, 2015).

Semi-structured, open-ended questions allowed the participants to provide detailed descriptions and for me to collect quotes about the perspectives and experiences of participants. The interviews were conducted with a standardized set of questions. All participants were asked the questions on the interview guide (Appendix F) in the same sequence and with the same wording, making it easier to compare and analyze responses (Patton, 2015). This process created a systematic approach, but the open-ended questions allowed participants to respond in their own words. Follow-up and probing questions were incorporated into the interview based upon the responses of the participants and included asking for details, clarification, or examples (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Prior to data collection, the interview questions were reviewed by committee members who are experts in the field.

Interviews took place in-person or online and lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded so they could be transcribed verbatim. In-person interviews took place in a public location, including the local library and a local Christian school. I conducted one online interview through Zoom for a participant who was unable to meet in-person.

Individual Interview Questions

1. How long have you been homeschooled? If applicable, are your siblings homeschooled?

2. Describe your favorite homeschool memory.
3. Why are you homeschooled? CRQ
4. Describe a typical school day. CRQ
5. Describe your plans for after high school. CRQ
6. In what ways is your educational plan preparing you for your goals after you finish high school? CRQ
7. Describe the academic courses you are currently taking. SQ1
8. How did your family decide upon this course selection? SQ1
9. How does your family choose curriculum? SQ1
10. Explain the input you gave into the selection of courses or curriculum choices. SQ1
11. If you have a sibling(s) who is/are (or was/were) homeschooled, how is your course selection similar to or different from theirs? SQ1
12. How has your homeschool experience impacted you academically? SQ1
13. Describe your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your current academic courses and your role in selecting them. SQ1
14. If you could make changes to the courses, what changes would you make? Why? SQ1
15. Describe the various settings in which you learn academic content. SQ2
16. How did your family decide upon these settings? SQ2
17. Explain your role in selecting settings for various academic subjects. SQ2
18. Describe the interactions you have with others in these settings. SQ2
19. If you have a sibling(s) who is/are (or was/were) homeschooled, how are your academic settings similar to or different from theirs? SQ2

20. Describe your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your current learning settings and your role in selecting them. SQ2
21. How has your homeschool experience impacted you socially? SQ2
22. If you could make changes to these settings, what changes would you make? Why? SQ2
23. Describe any co-curricular activities in which you are involved. Co-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, courses and activities such as computer science, foreign language, art, or music. SQ3
24. How long have you been involved, and why did you choose these activities? SQ3
25. Describe any extra-curricular activities in which you are involved. Extra-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, activities such as athletics, clubs, organizations, and volunteer or paid work experiences. SQ3
26. How long have you been involved, and why did you choose these activities? SQ3
27. Explain the role you and other family members play in the selection of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. SQ3
28. Why are these activities important to you? SQ3
29. Explain why, if at all, you have eliminated or replaced an activity or why you do not participate in an activity which interests you. SQ3
30. What else you would like to tell me about your high school homeschool experience?
CRQ

The first two questions were intended to be an ice-breaker (Moustakas, 1994) and to establish rapport with the participant. Rapport involves a demonstration of neutrality as someone who will listen without judging (Patton, 2015). Rapport also involves showing that I cared about what they had to say and demonstrating that what they had to say was important. Building

rapport with participants could help them to feel comfortable enough to provide honest answers to the questions, which strengthens the trustworthiness of the study (Shenton, 2004).

The purpose of Questions 3-6 was to gain an understanding of the general structure of the homeschool setting and the central research question. Additionally, these questions began to explore the goals of each participant and how the educational plan may be designed to reach these goals. Research suggests that families individualize instruction based on needs and interests (Hanna, 2012; Pannone, 2017a; Thomas, 2016a), and these questions further explored this topic with homeschool high school students. These questions also explored motivations to homeschool. While this topic has been heavily explored in the literature (Anthony, 2015; Jolly & Matthews, 2020; Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Mazama, 2016; Neuman, 2019; Ray, 2015; Thomas, 2019; Watson, 2018), this study sought to understand motivations from the perspective of students.

Questions 7–14 explored SQ1 and gathered information related to the academic content of the educational plan of homeschool high school students. While the state of Georgia only requires that mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and reading be taught (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.), these questions investigated how families are including these subjects in their educational plan. An educational program includes both curricula, including resources, materials, and lesson plans, and methods related to learning (Thomas, 2017). These questions explored curriculum and instruction and how and why families include other subjects as part of the educational plan and the role that the students play in making these choices. Because the state of Georgia gives families the freedom to choose their own curriculum, this was investigated as well.

Questions 15–22 addressed SQ2 and explored the social context of learning academic content for the participants. Students also evaluated how homeschooling impacts them socially. Current research regarding the social development of homeschool students suggests development can be influenced by various factors (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). Research also suggests that homeschooling has a positive effect on social and emotional development (Guterman & Neuman, 2017; Murphy, 2014; Neuman, 2020a; Thomas, 2016b). Sociocultural theory emphasizes the environment and how it impacts learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978). These questions were intended to explore not only how students interact with their environment and the “interrelationship of the person and the environment” (Neuman, 2020a, p. 575) but also to expand the understanding of sociocultural theory to include how families and students choose the environment in which they will learn. These questions also helped develop an understanding of how key components of sociocultural theory, including scaffolding, zone of proximal development, and the role of more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978), are evidenced in the educational plan of participants.

Questions 23–29 addressed SQ3 and explored how co-curricular and extra-curricular activities were incorporated into the educational plan of homeschool high school students. In this study, co-curricular activities included content which would normally be included during regular school hours in a traditional school setting but are not required according to Georgia homeschool law (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). This may include, but is not limited to, computer science, foreign language, music, and art. Extra-curricular activities are those which are voluntary and generally occur outside of regular school hours in a traditional school setting. This may include, but is not limited to, athletics, clubs, and organizations. For homeschool students, this may also include volunteer or paid positions if they are related to the educational plan. These

questions further explored how other opportunities may impact academic and social development and expanded an understanding of sociocultural theory to include additional settings which homeschool families incorporate into their educational plans and affect learning and development.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The analysis of qualitative data recognizes that each participant has something to contribute to the understanding and description of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). As a first step, the analysis involves “being true to, respecting, and capturing the details” (Patton, 2015, p. 47). Using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994) provided a systematic process for organization and analysis. Analysis of the interviews again incorporated the first two steps of this method, including Epoché and Phenomenological Reduction. This involved describing my personal experiences with the phenomenon and bracketing them, so the focus was on the participants and their perspectives. Analysis further reduced the data to significant statements, which includes all nonoverlapping statements. Such inductive analysis and observations of the data allowed categories to emerge as patterns were discovered (Patton, 2015). Statements were combined into meaningful units, or themes, for each participant (Moustakas, 1994) which were later synthesized across data collection methods and across participants. With this second form of data collection, Imaginative Variation was also evident as the data were viewed from multiple perspectives and as I continued to develop the textural context and structural context for each participant. NVivo was used to store, organize, and manage data. Analysis continued to include memoing and coding and the use of NVivo to continue the audit trail.

Physical Artifacts

Physical artifacts such as photo elicitation can help participants reflect on the phenomenon (Patton, 2015), and photo elicitation can supplement in-depth interviewing. Similarly, participants can be asked to take pictures which represent the phenomenon, a technique called photovoice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, this process involved photographs with narrative paragraph descriptions compiled into a presentation developed by each participant. In this study, this method provided additional data related to the settings and interactions with others which are incorporated into the educational plan.

Instructions for the completion of this activity were given to participants at the conclusion of the interview or sent by email (Appendix G). Participants were asked to either take photos or find photos to represent the various settings in which their educational plan occurred. Instructions were given that photographs should not include people's faces or other identifying information. Samples were provided and instructions were reviewed at the end of the individual interview. Ideas included a photo of their workspace at home, desks in a classroom at their co-op, a trail that they run for cross country practice, etc. Participants were reminded that their educational plan includes academic courses, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities. Each photo was to include a description by the participant regarding what the picture represents, the role they had in choosing that setting, and the impact that setting has on their learning and development. Participants were given options as to how this information was to be submitted to me, but options included a Word document with the photos and written description or a PowerPoint presentation with speaking notes for each slide. When completed, this was sent to me through email. For participants who did not return the activity after two weeks, I contacted

the participant to see if they still wanted to participate in the study. If they did, I waited an additional week before following up again about the completion of this activity.

Physical Artifacts Data Analysis Plan

The submissions of each participant were divided into four groups based on whether they depicted the central research question or one of the three research sub-questions. Memoing and coding followed the process in the previous data collection methods using NVivo. As with the other data collection methods, epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation were evident (Moustakas, 1994). Textural and structural descriptions for each participant continued to be developed and refined. This third method of data collection created triangulation for each participant through cross-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) and corroboration (Gall et al. 2007; Patton, 2015).

Data Synthesis

Phenomenology recognizes that there is an essence which can be shared regarding the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). This study used the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994). Memoing and coding were evident at each stage of analysis for each data collection method. Core meanings were discovered by comparing, analyzing, and synthesizing the experiences of the participants (Patton, 2015), suggesting answers to the research questions. At each stage of data analysis for each data collection method, significant statements were identified and coded, and initial themes were developed. During synthesis, these initial themes were combined to represent overarching themes evident across data collection methods and across participants (Moustakas, 1994). A textural description, what was experienced, was developed. A structural description, including settings and context, or how it was experienced, was developed. Finally, the “composite textural-

structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122) was constructed.

Trustworthiness

While quantitative research uses internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity as criteria for trustworthiness, qualitative research uses parallel criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Trustworthiness, or rigor, in qualitative research can be met through the demonstration of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Valid and reliable research must also be conducted in an ethical manner (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

Credibility is the process of verifying that the realities of participants have been represented appropriately and the analysis and interpretation from the data sources are believable (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). It is one of the most important factors required to establish trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004) as this establishes how well the findings match reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, credibility was established through triangulation of data and member-checking.

Triangulation

Triangulation of data involves collecting data in multiple forms (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Shenton, 2004). This cross-checking of data involves multiple data sources and multiple collection methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Because each individual method has strengths and weaknesses, using a variety of sources and methods of data collection helps to build upon the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of any individual method (Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004). For this study, this involved questionnaires, interviews, and photos with narrative text from each

participant. Triangulation also involves collecting data from multiple sources, which allows information to be verified across participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Shenton, 2004). This is a process of corroborating evidence from the different sources and participants to help understand perspectives and develop themes, providing evidence of validity for the findings of the study (Gall et al., 2007; Patton, 2015).

Member-Checking

Member-checking is a process of seeking participant feedback (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is “the process of having research participants judge the accuracy and completeness of statements made in the researcher’s report” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 644). Member-checking is a continuous process throughout the study and seeks “reactions of respondents to the investigator’s reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77). It is possibly the most significant way to increase credibility (Shenton, 2004). Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were emailed to participants to read and acknowledge accuracy. This also allowed for clarification, if necessary, to ensure that the statements and stories of the participants were accurately transcribed. When the study was complete, participants were emailed a copy of the dissertation. This process increases credibility, as each participant verifies the content and accuracy of their data.

Transferability

Transferability involves providing sufficient information to effectively describe experiences and to allow others to determine potential generalizability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Generating thick, rich descriptions is a strategy for validation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This involves writing extensive details, including meanings and intentions (Gall et al., 2007). Developing a narrative with thick descriptive data may allow others to determine “the extent to

which working hypotheses from that context might be transferable to a second and similar context” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 248). This study developed thick, rich, narrative descriptions, allowing readers to understand the situations and context and enabling them to determine transferability (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

Dependability is achieved when a study is able to be replicated (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Guba and Lincoln (1982), “a study ought to be repeatable under the same circumstances in another place and time” (p. 247). In this study, this was accomplished through a thorough description of the procedures, including the planning and execution of the study (Shenton, 2004). Dependability was also established through the dissertation process and reviews by the dissertation chair, committee, and qualitative director.

Confirmability

Bracketing my own experiences and removing any bias or prejudice led to a level of neutrality. This means the results reflect the participants’ experiences rather than my own preferences (Shenton, 2004). This study incorporated multiple techniques for establishing confirmability, including triangulation, audit trails, and reflexivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). As already explained, triangulation was achieved through multiple means of data collection. Triangulation is an effective method to reduce bias (Shenton, 2004). An audit trail is a documentation of the process which was used throughout the study to discover themes (Gall et al., 2007). It also documents the materials and procedures of the study. An audit trail can effectively demonstrate that “each finding can be appropriately traced back through analysis steps to original data, and that interpretations of data clusters are reasonable and meaningful”

(Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 248). Memoing as a validation strategy creates an audit trail, which documents the thinking process and the development of understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Validity “is an ethical relationship with research participants through such standards as positioning themselves, having discourses, encouraging voices, and being self-reflective (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 258). I explained my role as the researcher and disclosed how the topic relates to my personal experiences as an educator and former homeschooling parent who has helped students develop an educational plan. These experiences were bracketed so the focus was on the participants and their perspectives which allowed the phenomenon “to be known naively and freshly” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85) and allowed me to remove biases, prejudices, and predispositions as much as possible.

Ethical Considerations

No part of this research plan was implemented until approval from the Liberty University IRB was received. Throughout the study, participants were treated with dignity and respect. I obtained consent from parents and assent from students using the form approved by the IRB. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

Because the participants in this study were minors, additional safeguards were in place. First, the initial contact with information about the study was sent through the Local Homeschool Association email chain. This email went to parents who could then talk to their children about possible participation before contacting the researcher. Second, all general communication with participants which occurred through email had a parent copied so they were also able to view the communication between the researcher and the minor participant. This included communication such as setting up a time and location for the interview. Because some students were able to

drive themselves to the interview, parents received an email with the date, time, and location of the interview. Third, the researcher did not have any contact with participants on social media. Finally, all in-person interviews were conducted in public places, including the public library and a local Christian school.

To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were given to all participants. Additionally, a pseudonym was used for the homeschool association. Member checks allowed participants to review interview transcripts for accuracy, and participants received a copy of the final dissertation. All data collection forms and data were stored on my password-protected, personal computer.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have described the research design and methodology and provided evidence to support transcendental phenomenology as the appropriate design to describe the experiences of the participants and to address the research questions. Descriptions of the setting and participants and my role as the researcher, including the interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions which guide this study, have been presented. I have explained how triangulation was achieved through questionnaires, individual interviews, and physical artifacts and how the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Moustakas, 1994) was used to systematically organize, analyze, and synthesize data. The trustworthiness of this study and the ethical considerations were also presented.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. This chapter presents the results of the study and begins with participant descriptions. The themes and sub-themes that emerged through data analysis and triangulation of data from questionnaires, individual interviews, and physical artifacts, are discussed, followed by a presentation of outlier data. Responses for the central research question and each of the three sub-questions are also offered. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Participants

Ten participants were identified through purposeful, criterion sampling. This sampling allowed students to be identified who could best enable me to explore and better understand the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To locate participants, the recruitment letter which had been approved by the IRB (Appendix B) was distributed to the current members of the Local Homeschool Association through their email chain in early April 2022. Snowball sampling was also used as initial participants shared information about the study with friends. Study enrollment continued until evidence of thematic saturation was apparent.

Table 1 presents a summary of the participants for this study. The 10 participants represent eight families, with data collected from two sets of siblings and six individual students. Five females and five males, who ranged in age from 15 to 17, participated in the study. Three participants disclosed disabilities or learning differences. Data collection occurred as students were finishing their academic year or in the early part of the summer after finishing their school

year. Participants were completing or had just completed ninth, 10th, or 11th grade. Students reside in three Georgia counties that encompass urban, suburban, and rural areas of the study setting. The parents of the students have all earned at least a two-year college degree, with the majority having earned a four-year degree or higher. All of the families in the study were members of the Local Homeschool Association for the academic year.

Table 1

Participants

Participant	Age	Highest degree earned by dad and mom	Years homeschooled	Grade completed
Alex	17	Master's, Bachelor's	12	11th
Bailey	15	Master's, Bachelor's	10	9th
Christine	16	Master's, Master's	3	9th
David	17	Bachelor's, Bachelor's	12	11th
Evan	16	Master's, Bachelor's	11	11th
Faith	17	Master's, Associate	12	11th
Grant	17	Master's, Associate	12	11th
Hannah	16	Master's, Master's	11	10th
Isabella	16	Bachelor's, Bachelor's	11	10th
James	16	Bachelor's, Bachelor's	12	11th

While Table 1 presents a visual summary of participant information, the following is a description of each participant for each individual student. This narrative summary of each participant presents both what was experienced and how it was experienced, and the incorporated

quotes from each participant allow the summary of students' experiences to be understood in their own words.

Alex

Alex is a 17-year-old high school junior who has been homeschooled his entire life. He has an older brother who is a homeschool graduate, and a younger sister, Bailey, who is currently homeschooled and also participated in this study. He reported that he spends between four and six hours daily on activities related to his educational plan. His core academic classes and co-curricular courses were completed either in a co-op setting or through dual enrollment with a Christian university in the state of Georgia. In his questionnaire, when asked what he would want to tell someone who is critical of homeschooling and its impact on high school academics, Alex stated:

I would explain that homeschooling, as a concept, is neither negative nor positive.

Instead, it is a tool used by parents to teach their children lessons they deem valuable.

Under the right conditions, which I believe I am under, homeschooling can encourage self-exploration, internal motivation, and allows for a parent's personal intervention in the child's life.

Alex described himself as an introvert who may interact with fewer people than students in a traditional setting but said "that is fine with me." In both his questionnaire and interview, Alex acknowledged the need to "make a conscious effort to hang out" with friends and stated, "It has forced me to be proactive with the friendships in my life." He participated in several co-curricular activities through his co-op and a small group setting and an extra-curricular club that focused on service projects which allowed for interaction with peers. He is looking forward to participating in on-campus dual enrollment classes in the fall at a local public university and is

considering rejoining an athletic team after a two-year break.

Bailey

Bailey is the youngest of three siblings and is Alex's sister. She is 15 years old and a high school freshman. She, too, has been homeschooled her entire life. She spends between six and seven hours each day completing activities related to her educational plan. All of her academic courses and several co-curricular classes were taken at a local co-op. A second co-op was added to allow for two additional co-curricular activities.

When asked what she would want to say to someone who is critical of homeschooling and its social impact on high school students, Bailey shared:

Sometimes being exposed to a lot of people isn't a good thing. They could be bad influences on children and teens. But most homeschoolers come in contact with lots of people depending on what activities they do, just not every day.

Bailey feels like she gets "a good amount of social interaction" with her two co-ops, which allow her to learn with others a total of three days each week. She is also involved in several extra-curricular activities which also allow her to spend time with friends. Her volunteer activities have allowed her to serve the local community as well as give her experience working with children with special needs. These are both important to her because she hopes to pursue an occupational therapy degree in the future.

Christine

Christine is a 16-year-old ninth grade student who is the youngest of four children. She is the only child in the family who has been homeschooled. Christine has been homeschooled for the past three years and previously attended both public and private schools. As the only participant educated in a non-homeschool setting for part of her education, when asked what she

liked about being homeschooled, Christine replied, “I like learning from home,” and “It makes me happy to learn with mom.” During her first year as a homeschooler, Christine had a teacher, but now her mom is her main teacher at home. Christine reports spending three hours a day learning and several more hours daily on co-curricular and extra-curricular activities which frequently take her into the community.

Christine’s needs and interests drive many of her learning activities, and her educational plan is tailored to meet them. Homeschooling allows educational tasks to build necessary skills at her current level of performance while helping her progress in key areas. Access to community resources is vital to Christine, who participates in 4H cooking club, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and Special Olympics. She also enjoys her interactions with others at the Teen Center and serves in her church by greeting people and helping with children. After high school, she wants to “help people” and become a teacher.

David

David is a 17-year-old high school junior and is the youngest of nine children. His eight siblings are all homeschool graduates and range in age from 20 to 32. David has been homeschooled for all of his education. He spends an average of seven or eight hours daily on activities related to his educational plan. This year, six of his academic classes were dual enrollment courses which he took on campus at a local public university. His other class was an AP English class which he completed online. In his questionnaire, when discussing ways homeschooling has had a positive effect on his academic development, David wrote:

It has definitely allowed me to focus on my love for certain subjects, and really pursue my strengths. It also has allowed me to not experience the stress of needing to have a constant output every day, and allows me to take breaks, catch back up, and attack school

the way I would approach regular life.

David participates in a variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities throughout the year. One was held at a local Christian school while others were held in the homes of several homeschool families. He also completed an internship with a local engineering company. Athletics are also important to David, who has been competing with homeschool teams since elementary school. He stated that these various activities “are sort of the regular routine, but they were chosen for building transcript, need for exposure to the workplace, and for fun.”

Evan

Evan is the oldest of four children. He is 16 years old and just finished his junior year of high school. He spends six to eight hours each day on academic work and extra-curricular activities. Except for a few months in first grade when his family was moving from one military station assignment to another and temporarily living in a hotel-type area, Evan has only been homeschooled. While the other participants have extensive homeschooling experiences in the state of Georgia, Evan has been homeschooled in various states, each with their own homeschool laws and access to resources. When discussing extra-curricular activities, Evan stated, “We lived in different states where homeschool options are very limited.” He and his family have lived in the study setting for the past three years.

When asked about academics and his current educational plan in his interview, Evan spoke about how dual enrollment is helping to prepare him for his goals of going to college and earning a business degree. He stated:

I’m getting ahead on all my courses. So, when I can go to college, I don’t have to worry about all the first ones you have to take like English and some of that stuff. And I can just go ahead and start into business and work on it and get it finished with.

Outside his academics, Evan recently started a job at his church as a member of the facilities management team. He stated that in addition to earning money, he is learning the value of hard work and interacting with others.

Faith

Faith is a 17-year-old high school junior who has been homeschooled her entire life. She has two older brothers. The oldest is a homeschool graduate, and the other brother, who is currently homeschooled, also participated in this study. Faith reported that she spends six to 10 hours daily on activities related to her educational plan. While academics are important to Faith, she also values the opportunities to learn other skills through homeschooling, including how to care for a home and a family. She stated, “A Biblical woman is important for the future,” and “I feel like I’ve grown a lot more in a lot of different ways than people who actually go to school, traditional school.”

Faith’s educational plan occurs in a variety of settings, and she enjoys being able to learn through experiences. Courses are completed at home under the supervision of her parents, in small groups with friends, and in a local co-op. Faith is also involved in a fine arts class at a local Christian school and serves in her church on a regular basis. In the interview, when asked what she would like to share about her homeschool experience, she shared:

What I would say honestly, is being able to balance how to be in a home, have a social life, and an academic, educational life all at once is very eye opening. Because I know people who go to school and know nothing about the home, how to interact with the family, or even interact with teachers.

Grant

Grant is a 17-year-old junior. He has been homeschooled his entire life. His older brother

is a homeschool graduate, and his younger sister, Faith, was also a participant in this study. With his academic, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities, he spends an average of 11 hours daily on his educational plan. His future plans currently include going to college to study accounting. He also hopes to continue to explore opportunities for filmmaking, which is something he greatly enjoys.

In addition to academics, faith, family, and baseball are important aspects of Grant's life. This was summarized when he described what he liked most about being homeschooled, sharing:

It is easier to concentrate on assignments because there are not as many people around to distract you. It also opens up the freedom to get ahead in work so that you have time for more extra-curricular activities. My parents also have the availability to sharpen us in God's Word.

Grant has been playing baseball for many years and currently accesses various opportunities to play year-round. He hopes to play baseball in college.

Hannah

Hannah is 16 years old and just completed 10th grade. She, along with her older sister who is a homeschool graduate and her younger sister, has always been homeschooled. While Hannah's academic courses are completed entirely at home, she has multiple co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in which she is involved. She spends an average of eight to nine hours daily on activities related to her educational plan. Hannah plans to go to college and eventually do something related to marine biology.

Faith is an integral part of Hannah's life. In her interview, Hannah stated, "My faith is pretty much my whole life. I mean, if not to live for Jesus, then what for?" This statement is evident in the academic choices her family makes as well as decisions related to outside

activities. When discussing her American history course this year, Hannah shared, “It’s also biblically based, so that was also giving us a good foundation for history because that kind of changes your worldview” and “It’s a creation-based science course” when describing her biology course. She spoke a lot about Beta Club and the opportunity to serve the community as well.

Hannah shared:

I think it’s really important to have young people serving others because a lot of the time we think, oh yeah, when I’m retired one day, then I can go volunteer at the soup kitchen or whatever. But it’s really important that we get in the community and share God’s love with others in that way because it’s a really great asset to bless people.

Isabella

Isabella is a 16-year-old student in the 10th grade. She has been homeschooled her whole life and has a younger sister who is in middle school and is also homeschooled. Her academic courses are completed at home using a variety of sources, and she participates in several co-curricular courses in a small group setting. She spends at least eight hours daily on activities related to her educational plan.

Isabella frequently used the term “well-rounded” to describe her academic and social experiences. She shared:

I feel like my parents have chosen and have helped me to choose things that are very well-rounded. So, I have opportunities to work with my studies, but then also to get out there and try new things and to serve in the community and just get to know people.

Isabella loves serving others which is evident by her involvement in several different extra-curricular activities which offer the opportunity to serve the local community, including a homeschool high school service club and volunteer opportunities at her church. She shared, “I

love to serve. The Lord calls us to serve. It is a privilege to be a part of these organizations. I enjoy getting to know people and trying new things.”

Isabella also loves baking. She has been able to incorporate this interest in previous science projects. She is also choosing courses which help her learn more about food and baking. She plans to go to college and earn a degree in business and possibly a culinary degree and hopes to open her own bakery in the future.

James

James is 16 years old and is a high school junior. He has been homeschooled his entire life. He has two younger siblings who are also homeschooled. This year, his academic courses were completed mostly online, and he added in a variety of extra-curricular activities to his schedule which allowed him to spend time with friends and serve the community. He reported spending six to eight hours daily on activities related to his educational plan.

Although most of his classes are online this year, the online platform provides many opportunities for students to connect with each other, both during class and outside of class times. James enjoyed planning his schedule and choosing classes that would meet or exceed the requirements for the university he hopes to attend. His class choices this year were also interest based, allowing him to study material closely related to the degree he plans to pursue in college.

When discussing the academic impact homeschooling has had on him, James shared:

I think the biggest part is the ability to be mostly self-paced, and kind of be able to pick how I learn with curriculum and procedure, just learning, being able to decide all those variables has just helped a lot of stuff stick.

James also likes the multiple social opportunities he has through co-curricular and extra-curricular activities which allow for the both the development of friendships and opportunities to

serve the community.

Results

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. Participant data, which included 10 questionnaires, 10 individual interviews, and 10 physical artifacts, were analyzed to answer the research questions. NVivo was used to manage and organize data. Following the steps of the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), inductive analysis of the data allowed patterns and categories to emerge, and statements and codes were combined into meaningful units or themes. Table 2 summarizes the themes and sub-themes which emerged through this process.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Frequency
Abundant academic options	10
Community groups and resources	10
Online resources	7
Dual enrollment	5
Individualized and customized instruction	10
Various curriculum options	9
Flexible pacing and schedules	10
Interests, needs, and future plans	10
Development of life skills	9
Family relationships and values	9
Significant social opportunities	10
A sense of community	7
Impact of activities	10
Potential social pitfalls	6

Abundant Academic Options

All 10 participants described the abundant academic options available to them. Hannah shared that homeschooling is “different for a lot of people. That’s kind of the beauty of

homeschooling, how it's not one set way." When discussing his teaching providers, Evan stated, "My non-college instruction comes typically from a variety of homeschool resources." Grant also described access to a variety of academic options when he wrote in his questionnaire, "I like the freedom homeschooling yields to the student. Being able to mix and match variables like curriculums and online schooling organizations has been a massive factor in helping me learn in the best way that I can."

Participants also shared why classes were chosen to be included in the academic plan. Faith's courses were chosen because "each course was required to have a complete transcript for a college bound student." Grant's course schedule reflected graduation requirements. "I needed to take these courses in order to graduate." Isabella mirrored these statements with her own, "These courses are required courses and/or will meet requirements for my high school transcript." James's classes were also chosen for transcript building for college. He shared:

So, we've done lots of research into like the kind of baseline requirements of like, what they want, what they look for. We kind of take what I've done with dual enrollment and extra classes and stuff and we've kind of molded my schedule, my class schedule on my transcript so far, to kind of fulfill every need, not to just the bare minimum, to just kind of give me a solid foundation for what they look for.

Similarly, Alex's courses were chosen "to complete graduation requirements and to earn college credits." He also described the access to not only abundant academic options, but also abundant co-curricular and extra-curricular options when he shared,

I think I would just highlight the, especially around here, the amount of choices you have. There's so much, so many sports, so many clubs, so many classes to be taken and a normal homeschool high schooler has a lot of agency in that. And they can kind of

choose what they want to do, and I think that's really helpful, especially going to college where it's all up to you to kind of figure out what you want to do. So, I think that's a really good thing about homeschooling is that there is really no curriculum forced on you. You just kind of have to figure it out and choose for yourself. So, I think that's the best part for me.

Community Groups and Resources

All 10 participants described their access to community resources, including local co-ops, small group instruction, tutors, and a fine arts program at a local Christian school. Participants included photos and descriptions of these settings in their physical artifacts. In all three data collection methods, participants described having minimal involvement choosing which curriculum was used or course sequence for academic courses, leaving most of the choices for core academic subjects to their parents. Evan emphasized:

Like, I guess there's so many homeschool options that people don't have to, like, just go in there and think they have to teach their kids. Like, there's so many options that, there's curriculums that teach them without the parents teaching them. So, there's so many other options that make homeschooling so much easier.

David described how his family chooses which groups and resources to access for various courses.

So, depends on, science classes, it depends on our resources, because if you're taking like a lower-level science class, it doesn't really require a lot of labs, you're more likely to take it at home. But if I'm taking chemistry or physics where it requires a lot of lab equipment, it would just be easier to take it at [the local public university]. That's where we go ahead and take it at [the university], and also whether my teacher, my mother, is, is

experienced in those areas. My mom's probably not going to teach me in Calculus 3, just because she, she took it, but she doesn't really, she's not an engineer. So, she's not really used to that. So, like an English class, the reason why I take that [through an online] academy on the online stuff is because my mom is pretty experienced in English but, so if I have problems, I can just go to her and I don't have to deal with the trouble of going through the online course to get to my teacher. But with [the local university], I probably want individual professors, just who are experienced in those fields to be able to just deal with those classes.

Five students discussed their experiences in co-op. Alex stated his co-op "is a strong Christian community that provides a variety of in depth classes along with adhering to the core principles of home schooling." Co-ops played a significant role in the educational plan for Bailey as most of her academic coursework was provided through her co-op. It was the first time her family had participated in this co-op, which was mostly a decision her parents made, a point which she emphasized in her physical artifacts. She said her favorite part about the co-op was "mostly the people" who she described as "very nice" and her "friends." The co-op provided classes which freshmen typically take and what she viewed as "what I needed as graduation requirements" and "needed for college." For the other four participants who were involved in a co-op, the co-op played a more limited role. Faith enjoyed her co-op because "Co-op is an excellent practice to complete subjects with the accountability from your assigned teachers and pupils."

Evan did not participate in a co-op for his core academic courses and shared his reason for participating in a co-op on a limited basis when he stated, "Geography and art classes were chosen, and they were in a co-op atmosphere so that I could interact with kids my own age."

Faith had both positive and negative things to say about her co-op experience. “I loved the teacher especially, but it was harder to interact with the classmates because you only had 50 minutes and it’s kind of stressful.” In this classroom type setting, Faith recognized the value of a good teacher.

She’s been on mission trips to learn Spanish and teach Spanish basically. She’s been teaching Spanish for a long time. And honestly that, like that caused a desire to be a missionary in Spanish speaking countries, because I really enjoyed it. So, it was fascinating to me. I love the culture. I love the food. You know, it’s just really awesome.

Seven students were involved in small group classes with other families or classes with tutors. Students described having more involvement in these decisions. While some of the subjects covered were core academic courses, others were electives. Faith and Grant were in a geography class with friends. Grant described the class:

It was, that was more interaction in a group. We kind of, we had a subject and we all kind of talked about it and everything. Our teacher would lead everything, discussions, but we’d all kind of talk about it, and then she’d leave room to ask questions and everything. And then we’d usually do an activity or something.

Faith added, “We would just do a lot of activities. We would talk about the units.” Faith described this environment as being a comfortable place to learn. “So, the interactions there, it’s just like, I feel comfortable if I have questions.” She described her friends who were her classmates in this setting as “really nice and not judgmental.” Evan described his geography class with eight to 10 people as being “like a classroom atmosphere.” For his smaller class though, the interactions were different.

There's like three kids in the class, including me. It was a very small class. The interaction was just between us, so it was more of a small classroom atmosphere. The interaction was just the same as going over to your friend's house.

In addition to her geography class, Faith had a chemistry class that her mom taught, and a few other people came to her house for the class once a week. During the class time each week, she shared, "We would just kind of look over the lessons, do an experiment. And then our assignments would be read a couple of chapters, answer the questions, and do a lab and report it." Her physical artifacts included photos to represent these settings. Although Isabella enjoys her classes at home, stating, "We like our curriculum," she participated in a small group geography class because she "was invited to join." She also had a Spanish class with a tutor, who is a native Spanish speaker. Isabella was able to take this class with her mom and sister. She shared:

We had begun taking a Spanish course, but we did not like that Spanish course, and so we asked our friend to teach us, and she was thrilled to do that. And so she taught my sister and I and then also my mom because my mom wanted to learn alongside us and be able to speak Spanish with us as well.

Isabella liked that these classes provide accountability and the opportunity to learn with others for some classes.

Fine arts participation was an important aspect of the school year for two participants who chose to enroll in a chorus and drama class at a local Christian school. Both participants shared photos of this setting in their physical artifacts. David shared, "Some of my older siblings have done chorus at [the local Christian school]. That's honestly the reason why I got into it,

because I wanted to do the play. Faith enjoyed the interaction with a wide range of students and adults in this setting.

I was in a chorus class. So that means middle school, well, yeah, elementary, no, not elementary, but middle schoolers, could be there. And I guess fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, 10th, 11th, 12th. All of them were there, but also, there were adults there, the teachers. And so, I would be able to interact with the little kids but also my own age and then adults all at once. And that was really interesting how you can balance that out not to hang out too much with the little kids but not be gossiping with the high schoolers, you know. And then being able to have like, really great conversations with the teachers.

Online Resources

Seven students discussed the use of online resources, either live or recorded, in their educational plan. For some, the online curriculum was the choice of parents, but for others, it reflected student choices and input related to individual interests. Christine utilized online resources to participate in speech therapy and occupational therapy for several hours two days each week, activities which are important to her academic development. Hannah utilized both math and science online resources. For math, she worked mostly on her own, asking her older sister or mom for help when she needed it. Access to the science course online was important both because the worldview was in line with her family's beliefs and for the completion of the lab portion of the class:

It's a Creation-based science course on biology. And I read the textbook and answered the, like study questions, but I do watch the experiments because we weren't able to get like the microscope and like dissection kits. So, I'll watch those and learn as much as I can from the videos.

Isabella also took biology and said it “was not my favorite science course.” Unlike Hannah, she was able to complete the labs at home. She shared:

I did not really enjoy the dissections in the labs. That is not really my thing. I, I am a hands-on person when it comes to learning, but I do not enjoy the messy aspect with the lab aspect of science.

However, like Hannah, there were aspects of biology which she did enjoy. She offered, “I enjoyed the curriculum. The teacher was really great, and he brought everything to life from a biblical worldview, which I love.”

David chose to take an AP English class online instead of taking Composition at the local university “because I knew, one, the communication with English professors at [the local university] is not the best, just heard that from experience with my friends. But two, I thought I’d have a better experience online. I would deal with it better.” His English class offered live meeting times, which were optional. James described his experience with his online courses, which provided instruction from professional teachers and live classes. He wrote:

When working on my schedule, I selected the classes I wanted/needed to take, and I picked one of the several available class times. I then mapped out my average week and saw what days or times I would be free for the extra-curricular activities I was interested in and moved forward from there.

In his interview, James expounded on the interactive nature of his learning platform:

And it’s pretty much just like a Zoom call. I’ll hop in, and then the classes for the most part are an hour and a half, kind of just the lecture. There would be a chat box with the function to be able to like ask for a microphone and ask questions. And so, it was really interactive, pretty much just a classroom experience, but at home on the computer.

On the other hand, Faith, did not enjoy her live, online experience, sharing, “I honestly wouldn’t change that much except not being in online classes as much just because I didn’t learn that much.” She expounded:

I would not recommend online, well, especially for a person like me. Online I don’t learn as much as if in person, I’ll be able to ask a question and I feel like she’ll have more time to answer. And online, I think there’s just a lot of stress because technical glitches or something like that. It’s just entirely different. And I prefer in classroom with the teacher or with my mom and dad, not online. And you don’t get to talk to your classmates that much because once class starts, class starts.

Dual Enrollment

While many of the community groups and resources are unique to the study setting, dual enrollment is accessible to students residing anywhere in the state of Georgia. The number of dual enrollment courses taken by study participants ranged from two to six classes. Dual enrollment allowed participants to take courses that may not otherwise be available to them, such as higher-level math and science courses or courses in specific fields of study. David’s family adds in dual enrollment when it will benefit him. He explained:

It just depends on what credits I need to get to compete high school. And if we can see an opportunity where I can get some college credits that can be applied to maybe my major, we’ll do that too.

Three of the participants completed online dual enrollment courses utilizing a Christian university in the state of Georgia. For Evan, this university was chosen because it aligned with his family’s Christian beliefs. He shared, “We knew it was a Christian school, so what I would be taught is along our beliefs.” He described how dual enrollment plays an important role in his

educational plan, stating:

I'm homeschooled so that I can get ahead on my courses, and so I can graduate earlier, I guess is the best way to say it. I can take college courses, which really helps to get me ahead of the game.

Grant mirrored this sentiment, stating, "I started dual enrolling this year, and that's just preparing me for college and whatever comes after college." Evan expounded, "I get a huge head start on college material which will enable me to graduate high school with my freshman year of college finished." Alex added to this, explaining why online dual enrollment was chosen, saying it allowed for the "completion of high school and college credit simultaneously while allowing for flexibility," and Grant enjoyed completing classes online, stating, "I do like that I can watch it multiple times until I understand it." Alex did express a dissatisfaction with the limited amount of interaction with peers in the online college setting, and Grant stated, "I do not like that you cannot ask any questions in class for online courses, although you can email the professor." James also took a dual enrollment course. However, he did not use state funding. Instead, he took the class through his online provider which has a partnership with a university to award the college credit.

Like his older siblings, David completed on-campus college courses at a local state university rather than online. David shared, "I like dual enrolling. It really meshes well with my study habits." Alex plans to take courses at this university as well instead of online for the next school year for a different reason. He offered:

I know I'll probably go to college, but this coming semester, I'm going to be dual enrolling at [the local state university] for all of my classes. All in person...I'm hoping to

kind of get a read on if I want to go to [the local state university] after I graduate, or maybe, maybe not. I don't know. It will be kind of a test period.

Individualized and Customized Instruction

All 10 participants described various ways in which their educational plan has been customized. While Georgia requires homeschool families to incorporate mathematics, English Language Arts, science, social studies, and reading into the education provided to their children (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.), there are no rules or regulations dictating how this is accomplished, allowing families to make choices based on a multitude of factors which ultimately leads to an individualized education approach. David commented, “The customization of my learning experience that homeschooling has allowed has really just been a big boon.” This individualization was reflected in the incorporation of various curriculum options and flexible pacing and schedules throughout the school year for all participants. Students also shared how their interests, needs, and future goals affected choices related to their educational plan.

Various Curriculum Options

In addition to choosing from various community resources, online resources, and dual enrollment, families can choose from a plethora of options, enabling them to individualize instruction for their children. One way in which families individualize instruction is through curriculum choices. Nine participants described how various curriculum options played a role in the development of their educational plan, however, curriculum choices were mostly influenced by their parents. Faith's chemistry curriculum had very little math and labs were focused on cooking or practical application: “Anything practical that kind of is everyday life type experiments, we did.” When discussing curriculum choices and decisions, Faith added:

Yeah, so, my mom sort of decided. She's the one who does all that. But she kind of just pays attention how I've learned in the past. And she's gotten encouragement from other people saying she should take this, or [Grant] should take that, you know, and so that's really what she does. And then she kind of researches different curriculums and see what the reviews are.

Faith's brother Grant mirrored these statements when he described the differences in curriculum choices:

They're a little different. My brother and I kind of learn similarly. And then [Faith] learns a little bit differently than us. She's more of like auditory and hands on. And then [my older brother] and I, we're like auditory and visual. So, she did a lot more, her sciences were a lot more experiments. And ours was a lot more like reading and math and everything. So, we just, my mom pretty much knows how we learn and then gave us curriculums and everything, according to how we learn.

Isabella shared about using one math curriculum since she was in elementary school, but her family is now adding in supplemental material to enhance her math class. She shared:

We have used one math curriculum all my life, and I love that math curriculum, but some of the concepts are not as easy to understand the way that they teach it. So, we have supplemented with another Algebra 2 course and kind of combined both to give me a better knowledge.

She also shared how her family pulls from a variety of sources to develop a course of study.

That was, my literature was generally with geography, but I know a lot of public schools, their English and language arts is all lumped together. So, we take bits and pieces from different curriculums and piece it all together, and that's our language arts.

Students also described the value they place on curriculum written from a biblical world view. In her questionnaire, Isabella wrote, “My faith doesn’t have to be hidden. Much of my school curriculum is Christ-centered.” Hannah also described her history classes:

And it’s also biblically based so that was also giving us a good foundation for history because that kind of changes your worldview. So, it had the Bible integrated into American and world history for the different courses so that it kind of showed you how from a biblical point of view how, why everything happened and the basis for all that. Faith added, “I have time to gain understanding of most subjects, and I have a foundation of Biblical standards which is important to me and my family.”

Participants also shared how their families make curriculum changes for various children in the same family. Students shared how parents considered their children individually and sought to find curriculum that would best address their personality and preferences. Faith shared that she has tried several different math options to find one that works best for her. One she described as “all over the place” and “didn’t work out for me,” and then another one they tried for just a few months. These were both online options. She has found that a video option works for her when her dad can help her make connections. She shared:

I have just been not good at math. Just how my brain works. I’m more of like, have my dad sit next to me and we watched the video or whatever... he helps with the steps and kind of just helps me see the big picture and then individual steps.

Isabella shared how her experience will influence curriculum choices for her sister, who is two years younger than her, when she offered:

She’s doing most of the same things that I did. Some of the things, we have learned, I took the course, and then we learn we like this part of the course but not this part, or we

want to read this book but not this book. And so, some of the things, after my learning them and experiencing them, we're going to change them up a little bit and do them differently or choose different curriculum to use for her.

Student choice was most evident in elective curriculum choices and academic settings. Hannah discussed how she chose what she wanted to study to meet her foreign language requirement. She shared, "I did some Spanish, and it just wasn't my thing. Like I didn't know if verbal language was going to be something I could learn well, and I thought sign language was cool. It was something different." She was able to complete a sign language course using online materials." James also discussed choosing a foreign language to study.

So, off the bat, when I knew I had to pick a language to do for two years in high school, I just for some reason, I knew I didn't want to do basic Spanish or French or anything. I wanted to do something higher up. But then my dad used to be an Arabic linguist, and so I just thought it would be pretty fun and wanted to try and ended up liking it a lot, so I stuck with it.

Christine discussed making choices as well. She shared, "My mom helped me choose classes that will help me read and write. We choose based off classes I need help with." Her learning settings also add to the individualization of her educational plan, with learning taking place at home, online, and in the community. She included multiple photos representing these settings in her physical artifacts. Regarding settings, Grant offered, "Yeah, well, I told them [my parents] for certain classes that I wanted to be in the classroom and then we knew tutors that were offering that subject or certain subjects and my parents have just sent me in those classes." Faith described how different setting are beneficial for different content areas. She shared,

“Home is best for math and other subjects to set my own pace and to have correction done right away when necessary.”

Flexible Pacing and Schedules

When asked what she liked most about being homeschooled, Bailey wrote, “The flexibility,” and Faith said, “I would say that homeschooling is the best because of its flexibility.” Hannah added:

I enjoy the flexibility of the education. Being able to choose what time of day I do my schoolwork, my parents deciding what curriculum I use, and the opportunities to learn in ways I wouldn’t be able to in public school are all important to me.

Isabella also loves the flexibility that homeschooling offers. She offered, “I have the ability to complete my work on-the-go. I have the ability to choose my classes and offer input on my schedule. My teacher [mother] is accessible and able to offer extra instruction.” This flexibility is frequently seen in both the pace and schedule for homeschool high school students.

Pacing refers to the rate at which students progress through a course. All 10 students talked about how flexible pacing was an important part of their homeschool experience. David shared:

I would say that the thing that I like the most about homeschooling is the fact that it allows you to continue at your own pace, whether that is faster or slower than normal. It also allows for a lot of creativity in the student’s life.

Faith mirrored this, sharing, “I thoroughly enjoy the flexibility and the freedom of going at your own pace.” Similarly, Isabella enjoys this aspect of homeschooling as well. “I can learn at my own pace. I can spend more time studying. I have one-on-one instruction with my teacher.”

Several students added how the pace changes throughout a particular course, as needed.

Hannah shared, “It lets me go at my own learning pace, whether that be accelerated or taking it slower if I’m struggling with a certain lesson or chapter.” Later, she added:

I think it gives me a chance to learn the material better than I might have in a public school where I slow down and work on one section a lot more than I would if I didn’t get it as much you know. So, I could spend more time on it versus having to keep up with the rest of the class.

James stated that he likes that the pace can be adjusted to allow for breaks when needed, sharing, “Homeschooling has many pros towards academic development. For one, I have noticed that I can focus more on school in spurts. This wouldn’t be possible without the freedom that homeschooling provides.” David also noted that occasionally, it is reasonable to change the pace of learning altogether to accommodate for outside events and activities. He shared:

It has allowed me to go at my own pace. You know, there’s kind of, you have busy seasons. Like public, public schools, sometimes not, the regular way of schooling is sometimes not representative of what’s like actually in the real world, like, it’s not just like, one constant effort. Homeschooling has allowed me to kind of go through my busy seasons, but I know that there’s like an easy season ahead. So like, I’ll have my hard months, my hard weeks, then my easy weeks, and like, I know that I can push through that.

For Faith, this flexible pacing allows her to learn material well and in a way that is meaningful to her, allowing her to grow and progress academically.

Well, as I said, with my learning glitches, I feel like taking my time and having, not like being slow at all, but just having my time, being able to learn how I really need to learn to understand something has been very important and has impacted me a lot because I

can look back my sophomore year and be like, Wow, I was totally different than I was this year, or this last year, whatever, last school year. And then I feel more prepared for my last high school year.

This flexible pacing was also essential for Christine so that she could progress in key areas of academic development, including reading and writing. Christine can spend more time on classes where she needs more help or instruction. She shared that her mom “teaches me how to read which I need more help in this subject.”

Other students enjoyed the ability to progress more rapidly through material that has already been mastered in order to learn something more specialized. Grant wrote, “It also helps you learn at a reasonable pace that suits you, and you could focus on something more specialized if needed.” Some are able to complete higher levels of subject areas by progressing at an accelerated pace. David shared:

I think it’s really allowed us to kind of like go ahead, not be really hampered by the regular public-school curriculum and be able to really play towards our strengths and build those up. And it’s helped us yes, just kind of helped us go at our own pace. Get some of those college classes early. Yeah, I think it’s really helped us play towards our strengths.

Evan offered, “I would say that I’ve been ahead of the game. I’ve been able to take more advanced courses and been able to kind of manage my own schooling.”

Flexible schedules, or the ability to complete work in a different order or at a different time rather than at a set time, was discussed by all participants as well. For Christine, her schedule was mainly determined by her mom and events which occur at set times. This allowed her to focus on her academic work three days a week and enabled her to access a variety of

community resources on the other two days. Similarly, James's schedule was somewhat predetermined based on the live component of his online classes. He shared, "My schedule revolves around my online class schedule. My online classes did allow me to have a lot of flexibility with scheduling other things, due to the varying class times." Hannah, however, controlled most of her schedule on a daily basis, stating, "I pretty much decide my everyday schooling schedule, unless my mom has a specific assignment she needs me to finish at a certain time." For Alex, this was one of the aspects of homeschooling he enjoyed most. In his questionnaire, he wrote, "I personally enjoy being able to control my own schedule and managing my own time." Evan added, "I also like the ability to kind of manage your own courses where you have your own courses, you can go at your own timeline." James added, "The comfort of home lets me do things other students can't, like taking breaks at my own discretion and being able to be with family a lot." Bailey shared, "On non co-op days, I usually don't have schedule and just do homework in the order and time I want." She enjoys the flexible schedules and setting which homeschooling allows "especially because I get headaches so much. So just not having to go in to school every single day. It's very nice." James discussed how his schedule varies from day to day, sharing:

So, it's like kind of, I'm always doing stuff. So, I'll wake up, do my classes, go do my events or whatever, come home, do homework. It's really freeform, just depending on what the day looks like. Since it's not all the same every day.

Students also described other benefits of flexible scheduling, including the opportunity to learn different things or spend more time with friends and family. Grant shared:

It's given me opportunities to be with friends and be able to create like more personal relationships with other people because one of the great things about homeschooling is

we can kind of make our own schedule. We still get everything done. But we don't necessarily take all the breaks that schools do. We can kind of make our own break, so it's left room for us to be able to see people more and get to know people, but then it's also helped us just be able to be at the house and get everything done that we need to.

Hannah further described these benefits, stating:

I've learned things that I wouldn't have gotten to learn like being outside a bunch and just learning a lot of stuff just through that. And learning from my parents and just being around them. And about social skills. And with my dad's job, I was able to like, go with him places and learn things with him about different animals that I wouldn't have been able to if I was in public school and had that strict schedule.

Evan mirrored these statements, sharing:

My homeschool schedule is flexible meaning I can go ahead five weeks if I wish or take a week break for vacation. Typically, I get most of my work done in the mornings and afternoon which also helped me to get a job.

Flexible scheduling allows students to continue working into the summer if necessary.

This was discussed by several participants. Evan is taking a dual enrollment course online this summer. Isabella is taking the opportunity to add in more co-curricular opportunities to her learning plan over the summer months, working through both a nutrition course and a photography course. She explained why she is taking the nutrition course, sharing:

I did not have time to do that this past school year. So, I've just started it, and I really enjoy it so far. I think it's something that'll be interesting to learn and also a good thing to learn with the baking, a culinary career. I think that will be something good for me to, to incorporate into that.

She is taking the photography course because it is something that interests her. She shared:

It's something I really look forward to. I enjoy taking photos and to be able to learn how to find the light and the angles and all that those things. It's, how to take the perfect photo, that excites me.

For Faith, continuing her math course through the summer is essential for her learning. She shared, "I'm actually still working on it because, you know, summer. I have to do math over the summer, or I will forget it." Although Christine is taking breaks for vacations and camps, she is continuing with her regular schedule throughout most of the summer. During her interview, which occurred during the summer, she shared, "Tomorrow, I got speech, OT [occupational therapy, and I got to go Teen Center. Go field trip tomorrow. We're going bowling tomorrow at 1:30. And then after that, Friday, go swimming, go get ready, go Teen Center."

Interests, Needs, and Future Plans

All participants described how their customized educational plan was influenced by their personal interests, needs, and future plans. Regarding interests, Grant shared, "Some courses are chosen out of my own interest, and some are required for high school." James had a similar response, writing:

Classes like the co-op physics, Arabic, literature and English, and history, were just a part of my general required classes for high school, but classes like the College Math and the Java programming were to help build my transcript for a more diverse set of classes.

Hannah needed to fulfill her physical education requirement, so she chose archery "because it is a sport I enjoy and compete in throughout the year." In her physical artifacts, she shared a photo and described archery as an activity that "represents hard work and part of my family's legacy." David added that homeschooling "just has allowed me to pursue the things that interest me."

James, when choosing a history class this year, decided on U.S. military history because it was something that interested him. Isabella described how she has been able to incorporate her interests into other subjects. She recalled, “I had a science fair project, and I got to do my science fair project on baking. So, I baked 48 miniature pound cakes and had people taste test them and then came up with data.” Isabella also enjoys interacting with others that she meets in everyday life, which has influenced her decision to study Spanish as her foreign language. She shared:

I would love to be able to speak it fluently. The U.S. is becoming more and more populated with Spanish speakers. And so I would, into my adult life, I would like to be able to carry my knowledge of Spanish with me so I can carry on conversations with people in everyday life.

As her schedule has become busier, Faith added the need to prioritize opportunities and “just making sure what I want to do is kind of what I can make time for.”

Individual needs also influence course selection. This year, Hannah’s course selection included driver’s education so she could “complete requirements to obtain my driver’s license.” Other students described different needs that affect course selection. For Christine, this involves working at her current level of performance and building from there, progressing at her own rate. Her courses included traditional subjects like math, reading, writing, and science, but expanded to include a host of other courses like cooking, speech therapy, occupational therapy, social skills group, and a reading tutorial class. Special Olympics and Youth Leadership Training also helped her gain leadership skills and practice teamwork. Faith’s family combined several math courses together to provide a better sequence for her. She shared, “We just put, combined it together, and we’re just doing that to help because I am a little bit behind because I started later in math because of my learning glitches.” The course delivery was also tailored to her needs. In math,

frequent feedback helps her learn the material, so for this subject, her dad worked through the material with her. She stated, “Yes, the feedback. Yeah. To know what I am doing right and what I’m doing wrong and the different things of why I’m doing it or something like that.”

Students shared how their future plans affect course selection. Christine shared, “We picked these classes to help me for college.” Grant commented, “My whole education has pretty much been gearing me towards higher education, like college and everything.” Alex described dual enrollment as “a good stepping stone for college for sure.”

Other participants provided more detail describing how specific subjects and courses are preparing them for their future plans. Participants described how they discuss options with their parents and work together through the decision-making process. David shared his future plans, stating:

I want to go into the house, real estate development kind of housing development business. So, I’ve been looking at pursuing a degree in either business or engineering. Just because that’s kind of an avenue which you go into it.

Because of this, he chose to add in higher level math and science course into his educational plan. Hannah is still undecided about a future career, but individualized instruction “allows me to follow my interests and spend more time on what I might want to get a degree in at college.”

Hannah is still undecided regarding her exact future path, but right now, she is considering something related to marine biology, so she is “definitely focusing some more on science-minded things.” She later added:

And just doing some extra math. I know we were planning on me taking a lot of math courses before I actually go to college just so that I have that base and I don’t have to do as much once I get to college because I’ll already have that math base for the job.

Grant and his family considered multiple things when making course selections. He shared:

So, we looked at what I wanted, some possible majors that I wanted to do, and we looked at some colleges I want to go to, and we kind of just looked at the classes that matched and what I have to get out of the way. Then we looked at the classes that would transfer to those colleges. Then we just picked according to that.

Development of Life Skills

Nine students discussed how homeschooling has helped them develop responsibility, communication, time management, and other life skills. Time management and the responsibility that comes with managing their own schedule was something that these teens enjoyed and believe is preparing them for college. Bailey commented, “Time management . . . definitely prepares you more for college.” Alex, who had some co-curricular co-op classes wrote, “Beside specific class times, the schedule of the curriculum was my responsibility.” Grant added, “It teaches you time management and how to accomplish things thoroughly. It helps you see projects all the way through, and you learn how to accomplish things by yourself.”

Several students described details of how they manage their daily schedules. Hannah shared, “Math is my least favorite subject, so I usually do that first when my brain is the freshest and just get it out of the way.” Faith planned out her schedule at the beginning of each week. “On Sundays, I lay out all my subjects and syllabi on the table and start writing my schedule out for the next week’s subjects.” Because Grant’s classes list what work is due each week, his strategy was to “divide up my homework evenly between the school days.” Bailey planned out her schedule one day at a time. She stated:

I usually, like depending on how much work I do, I have to do, like, I usually write up what I have to do for each day. So, I’ll look at it before I go to bed and decide when to

wake up. So, depending on that, I'll wake up and usually just do my school. Like there's not really a schedule, which classes I do before others though usually I do literature last because I like to read at night.

While Faith had a strategy to plan for the week, she also had a daily strategy, sharing, "I prefer doing the harder and more time-consuming subjects first."

Closely related to time management, students shared how they are learning accountability and taking responsibility for their learning and schedules. Some believe this is a valuable aspect of homeschooling. Grant shared:

It's allowed me to be able to make my own schedule. When I was given an assignment, I was able to plan it out and able to conquer the whole thing. And I think that homeschool has helped me a lot with that. Because if I was in a class or something, they give me the daily thing, but this is preparing me a lot for college and everything when I have to make my own schedule and everything. And it's also, my parents were able to help me with the things I was doing.

Faith, who participated in a small group class and a class at a co-op, added, "There's a lot of responsibility on the students to complete their homework on time and send it in." Later, she added, "And let me see, more accountability too, more responsibilities have been really helpful to see what it would be like in a college class. So that has impacted me a lot." She believes the "responsibility and accountability there is very different than at school." She prefers this because, "I feel like I've grown a lot more in a lot of different ways than people who actually go to school, traditional school." James noted the need to be responsible and accountable to focus on schoolwork and avoid possible distractions at home, writing:

I haven't seen or experienced any decline in my academic development over my years of

homeschooling, but I have found out that being home all the time can bring up frequent distractions. With the freedom of homeschooling, comes the easy access to distracting factors such as other family members causing noise, your phone being readily available, or YouTube being a click away. With time, these factors become less severe.

James also used the word “autonomy” multiple times in his interview, describing the responsibility he takes on himself to make choices and complete his school work.

Communication is another important skill which homeschool students develop through various experiences. Grant described how taking dual enrollment courses has helped him with this when he shared, “It helps with communication, because I have to communicate with my parents and professors what I have to get done each week.” Evan also shared how he and his parents discussed his options for courses.

Normally they just go with the same curriculum for everyone. But for college courses, it’s a little bit different where we kind of sit down and talk and try to decide which ones are going to benefit me the most at this moment.

Later, he added more detail, sharing:

It was like, they would say, here’s the courses you can take. And then I’d be like, “Well, I don’t want to take this course. I want to take this course,” and they’d be like, “Okay, you can do that, but this course might help you more in your high school journey.” So, it was a little bit of balance, and then just deciding which one was better for right now.

James made similar comments during his interview, stating, “We kind of, my mom and I, went through the platform that we’re going through to see what classes would fit under the, what we’re trying to build my transcript to be.”

Isabella appreciates the many opportunities she has to interact with others through a

variety of activities, offering, “I have opportunities to reach out to more people who are outside my age group. I have the ability to carry on a conversation with an elderly individual. I can converse about many subjects outside of an electronic device.”

Responsibilities related to the home were also described by participants. Christine enjoyed the opportunity to learn to cook and bake as part of her educational plan. Throughout her interview, she listed the many foods she has learned to make, and she also shared photos on her phone while commenting, “I make the banana pudding.” She participated in a cooking club where she can expand her skills. She shared another favorite, “cake.” Faith shared how caring for a home is an important part of her homeschool experience, “Not only that, homeschoolers learn basic skills for their future like managing a home and a job, while having an excellent academic [experience].”

Employment provided additional opportunities to develop essential skills for several participants who chose to take on part-time jobs during the school year and into the summer. Five students described their experiences with various jobs. While they each said one benefit of a job is earning money, they also recognized additional benefits. Evan discussed his part-time job with the facilities management team at his church. He said, “It was decided upon because I needed a source of income that could also teach me hard work.” He reiterated this point in writing in his physical artifacts and also in the photo he shared. Hannah is currently working at two locations, the local library and a small business. She shared:

But it’s also a way to get out of the house and just learn new things and get experience and stuff like that before I go off to college and one day get a job, to have that experience of working with different people and bosses and things like that.

She further described her work at the local library in her physical artifacts, sharing a picture of a row of books and writing, “Working at the library has helped me learn valuable work lessons and improve my social skills.”

Family Relationships and Values

Nine participants shared how homeschooling has impacted their relationships with those within their family. This includes relationships with both their parents and siblings. Participants also described how Christian values are developed within the context of homeschooling. For many, these relationships and values are intertwined. Faith summarized:

Okay, so, personal, my family and I don't really care for the traditional public school schooling curriculums. You know what they're teaching these days. It's kind of unnecessary, and it doesn't grow you spiritually, mentally, emotionally. It's just not a good foundation. And when you're at the home, you learn how to take care of a home.

You learn how to interact with the family, and you're getting educated at the same time.

Grant, Faith's brother, added:

I'm homeschooled because my parents wanted to put me in an environment where I was, where I could grow in the Lord, and they could mentor me in the Lord and they could also, so I could just be close with my family, because the family is what lasts the longest in life. And they just wanted to put it us in an environment where we could be with our family and all grow with each other and still have time for friends and everything but to just be able to grow with one another and grow in the Lord.

Through the three data collection methods, participants continued to expound on the impact homeschooling has on family relationships. In his questionnaire, Grant wrote, “It helps improve family dynamics and relationships.” David shared, “It's really allowed me to stay close

to my family. You know, just being able to be in the presence of my siblings for a very long time. They've had big influences on me. They're my best friends." David further described his experience:

I'd say being able to interact with my siblings throughout my schooling was really a special thing because, like I got taught by some of my siblings. I mean, with eight siblings, your parents can't teach each one individually at the same time. I really liked that because it really helped me grow close to my siblings. Like, my oldest sister's 15 years older than me. I'm still really close to her. I think the reason why that is, is because like in a regular thing, we would probably be, like in regular public school, we might be going to completely different campuses or something. And in the homeschool environment, we're all in the same room, quite literally.

James noted the influence of his parents on his life throughout his education when he shared:

Being homeschooled since the very beginning, it would be safe to say that my parents played the biggest part of building me up as a person in the early stages of life. This contrasts with kids who go to school all day every day and are surrounded by children who can end up being bad influences or just limit one's maturity. Having been guided by my parents more than my peers, I have grown in some substantial ways.

Christine, who likes having her mom as her teacher, repeatedly talked about her relationship with her mom, sharing "My mom cares about me," and that she enjoys "spending time with her."

Alex shared how homeschooling allows his parents to be involved in his education.

I think just to have some agency in my own education, instead of just like sending me off to learn from somebody else, even though I do have other teachers obviously. Still, I think it's just, have a direct effect over what I'm learning.

Bailey enjoys having her parents involved in her education as well.

But then also more like, you know, you have your parent there at all times who knows this stuff. I assume most kids in public school, like their parents don't really know what they're learning...So just like having a parent there who knows what to do. It's very nice when you're stuck.

Isabella shared about her experience with her Spanish class this year. Both her mom and her sister took the class with her from a friend who is a native Spanish speaker.

It's nice because they're, we're able to speak some Spanish at home and ask for help.

Like, "Hey, I don't remember this from the class, could you remind me of this?" So, we can kind of bounce things back and forth and get insight from each other.

Two students described how homeschooling has impacted their relationship with their dad.

David shared:

My dad works from home, so that, me homeschooling and him working from home, really allowed, like I mean, my dad was always there. So, like it wasn't as if he was working a nine to five and I couldn't see him until he came home. Whenever I needed him, I could just go right to him, so that's been that's been a big bonus.

Grant's favorite homeschool memory from this school year revolves around spending time with his dad this year when taking College Algebra. He shared, "That was a lot of fun. He's really good at that stuff, and it was fun to be able to do that with him, something he enjoys."

Students also described how older siblings initially influenced their decisions to participate in various activities. Hannah stated, "Yeah, so again, I feel like all my stuff was from my older sister doing it. I guess that's the way siblings work though." However, Hannah now continues these activities because they have become important to her. David shared similar

sentiment regarding his activities, “They’re all activities that I wanted to do, and was influenced by my older siblings doing them, but at the end of the day, it was my choice to do it.”

During the interview, when asked why they are homeschooled, five students stated that spiritual or religious reasons at least partially affected their family’s decision to homeschool. Having so many faith-based participants may have skewed the study results. Christian values were highlighted by the majority of participants, including participants who did not list faith or religion as a homeschool motivation, with several describing how this heritage significantly impacts their own values. This was especially true for Hannah, who shared:

So, it’s definitely important, since the Bible tells us to worship with other people and be in that community and stuff, so to do that definitely. My parents taught me from a young age that we go to church on Sundays.

She shared a photo of her church and description in her physical artifacts, stating, “I have learned to serve others, put God first, and interact with people of all ages.” She described how now it is more than her parents’ faith, but something that she has made her own, stating, “I really enjoy, I get to see people that I know and other believers and strengthen my faith that way.” Hannah added, “Serving the Lord is something that has always been a priority in my life and studying His word with other believers is very important to me.” She also shared, “My family has always been very active in church and now I choose to be a part of my youth group and volunteering with the church.” She also described the impact this has had on her in multiple areas of life.

Being raised in a Christian home, I am fully capable of sharing the Gospel and respecting those in authority over me. I know how and when I should speak up for myself when needed and how to respond to conflict, however I am not perfect and make mistakes. Failing is how people mature and learn.

Faith also described how homeschooling allows for significant opportunities to develop relationships with family members as well as growing in her faith that is different from students in traditional educational settings.

You know, but they're at school all day, every single day almost. So, and then the weekends they're with friends instead of their family, and I think it's amazing to also have a relationship with the Lord and not just being academic, you know, or something like that. And being able to have the Lord work in my life and in my heart to realize the home is important.

She went on to describe how this affects what she wants for her future, stating:

And I feel like for me, I'm like, Yeah, I want to have a career. And I want that, but I also want to have a family one day. I also want to stay in touch with my family instead of going off to college and feeling like I can't see them again.

Significant Social Opportunities

While participants interact with others through academic avenues, it is co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that allow for significant social opportunities. Involvement in these activities took students outside their home on a frequent basis. Participants were highly involved in choosing activities as part of their educational plan. Participants were involved in at least three co-curricular and extra-curricular activities throughout the school year. Some were involved in as many as nine activities. Participant involvement in multiple settings throughout the community was emphasized through the photos and descriptions shared in their physical artifacts.

A Sense of Community

Academic, co-curricular, and extra-curricular settings all impacted the development of deep friendships and a sense of community for the study participants. James wrote:

I enjoy these activities so much, because even with the short time that I've spent in these different communities of interest, I've made so many great people and made so many friendships that having these opportunities are such a blessing.

Evan, whose interaction with peers was limited to mostly co-curricular classes in a co-op setting, stated, "I might know less people, but I have a deeper connection with them as well."

Isabella mirrored this statement when she described why she loves homeschooling, stating, "There's more community. I know in public schools, you have a lot of people around you, but homeschoolers are generally closer." David added, "My hometown has a strong homeschool social network, and I meet new people all the time and have many close friends. I would almost say that I am better at social interactions than most of my public-school friends."

Several students shared how they can participate in various activities and accomplish a project or serve others while spending time with friends simultaneously. Hannah shared, "I get to serve my community and spend quality time with other homeschoolers and friends." Grant added, "I enjoy seeing projects through and hanging out with others while I do so." When describing her involvement in extra-curricular activities, Bailey offered, "I enjoy them and get to hang out with other friends who participate in them as well." She also enjoyed "getting away from school for a bit to do other important activities with friends." Isabella further described how friendships were built within a small group.

We do service projects, like we went to a nursing home, and we made cards for them and little bags, like gift bags for them. Sometimes we'll just, we had like a Jeopardy, and we played games together. We had a National Day of Prayer/Bring Your Bible to School Day where we talked about our favorite Bible verses and our testimonies and were able to pray.

David, whose family has been homeschooling for more than two decades, was able to offer insight into how the homeschooling community has changed over the years. He described his family as having “a strong lineage” in the homeschool community. He shared, “We’ve gone through the different generations of homeschooling.” He continued to describe his family’s homeschooling:

They weren’t like the first pioneers, but we’ve gone through the, there’s definitely been a cultural shift. Like, viewing homeschooling, like when my eldest siblings did it, it was a really weird thing to do. I would say, technology has really helped homeschoolers mesh more.

He also added that in the past, “there wasn’t all this like, intermingling.” He also recognized that this may vary based on location, sharing:

I would say it’s, you know, it depends on where you live, because we have a very, a really strong homeschool community here in [my city]. Like I don’t know if it’s bigger than any of the other cities, but it’s really well interweaved.

Impact of Activities

Participants described their involvement in multiple co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, detailing how these activities impact their social development. They discussed how these activities are not only fun, but also help them develop friendships. Grant shared, “I also enjoy the relationships I make along the way.” David stated, “I enjoy the social interaction, the competitions, and the actual festivities of all of these activities.” Christine, who is frequently in the community, shared, “It helps me to learn how to get along with everyone.” Later she added, “It’s fun. It helped me make friends.” Grant enjoyed these activities because “I can make friends in clubs and teams that have a common interest.” Faith shared the impact in her life, “Socializing

and meeting new people as well as growing in new areas. Having more accountability in my subjects.”

Students described how these activities allowed them to develop new skills or gain new experiences beyond a traditional classroom or academic setting. Christine shared, “It’s super, super, super fun. I get to learn new things.” For James, “These activities were chosen because they were all great opportunities to get in touch with many new people, they required attention at areas I’m strong at, and they all would serve as new experiences to me.” He later added, “I enjoy the fact that these activities are an interesting alternative to the usual classes students take.”

Hannah noted, “I get to learn new things that are useful in life,” and “I have learned many new skills.”

Participants also noted how these activities bring people of all ages together. Hannah shared, “it also gives you more chances to interact with different people, different groups, especially with Beta Club where we’re serving a bunch of other people, but I’m also doing it with people my age.” Isabella added, “I have the ability to interact with people of all ages. I have taken part of my day to work with special needs kids or gone to visit a nursing home. I have the time and people skills to do that.” Faith shared the impact this has on her, stating, “Definitely how to interact with younger kids, my age, and adults all at once was my favorite.” Hannah noted the value of flexible schedules when it comes to extra-curricular activities, noting, “It also gave me more time than the average student to dedicate to serving people in my community during day-time hours, which allowed me to learn how to interact with a variety of people.”

Serving is an important outcome of extra-curricular activities. Faith stated she likes “spreading God’s love through voluntary services.” Grant shared, “I also really enjoy serving. I believe that serving helps a lot with just making you a better student and athlete as well.” Isabella

shared, “I enjoy the ability to interact with others and to serve. And so, to be able to do both things that I love at the same time is wonderful to me.” She added:

Serving is something that I love, and it’s also what Jesus called us to do. Jesus called us to be the hands and feet of Jesus. And so, with those different organizations, I have the opportunity to serve all different types of people and to make an impact in our community. And then also to get to know those around me.

Isabella reiterated these comments with an accompanying photo in her physical artifacts.

Christine enjoyed “standing up” and the opportunity to “say good morning” as she greets people at her church. Isabella also served on her church’s greeting team. She shared:

I greet every week and open doors, and it gives us a chance to talk with people and just to be a bright, welcoming face when they walk through the doors. And I love doing it. I love to serve, and the longer I have served with the ministry, because I’ve served with the ministry for two years now, I see regular people who come in. I see them smile, and they’ll say good morning, and like the little kids will wave, and I, it’s wonderful to see just the impact you can have on other people.

Potential Social Pitfalls

While participants expressed how homeschooling has impacted them socially in a positive way, they also recognized potential pitfalls which they intentionally needed to avoid. Participants first noted how they do not interact with peers on a daily basis. Hannah wrote, “Unlike in public school, I don’t get to see my friends/classmates every day.” She repeated this in the interview, sharing, “You just don’t get to see people your age, like a bunch of people, every single day that you would in a public school or private school.” Evan added, “I would say socially, it’s not limited, but it’s been harder to get to talk with people.” James mirrored these

sentiments, writing:

The only thing I would say is that being homeschooled does mean being home a lot. This means less time around other kids than traditional school. That being said, over the years I have made it a priority to take advantages of opportunities that come my way to still be out and about and still have a social experience that is not so different in comparison to traditional school.

Grant specifically stated a potential danger of working independently when he shared, “Although being independent has its perks, homeschooling could make you always want to work alone and not be a part of a team effort.”

Participants also described how academic work is often completed alone. Hannah stated that homeschooling “can be somewhat isolating,” and Alex added, “It has limited the amount of social learning, as most of the schoolwork is completed in solitude.” However, the students also shared that they have the same number of social opportunities as students in traditional school settings. Isabella shared, “Some might say I don’t interact as much with my peers as other students do. I do sometimes prefer to interact with those who are older or younger.” David said, “I mean, in terms of social interactions, I think I probably have about the same amount of social interactions as a normal public schooler.” Evan stated that access to group classes and co-op settings allow for “a bunch of interaction with people. . . . So there I would say it’s just the same.”

Hannah summarized:

Yes, if you don’t get involved in activities with other homeschoolers then it can be very isolating and have a big impact on your social life. But if you get involved in Beta Club, 4H, National Honor Society, or co-ops, then you can have many opportunities to interact

with others and have a very active social life.

Several students pointed out other potential pitfalls. Alex described how maintaining friendships requires intentionality, stating, “It has forced me to be proactive with the friendships in my life. Since classes and schedules change drastically, the people from social events will never be seen again without active participation in the connection.” David described another danger, describing homeschooling as an echo chamber in two data collection methods. In his questionnaire, he wrote:

It does have a certain aura of not exposing me to the real world and has the danger of becoming an echo chamber. I have to search out people who I don't agree with and be exposed to what I will meet in the real world, and homeschooling is sort of an obstacle in that regard.

In his interview, he added:

It does sometimes put you in an echo chamber, especially here. You're only surrounded by people who kind of have the same ideology as you, are kind of the same people as you, so that, that does have an interesting social impact, where you aren't exposed to different people as much.

Outlier Data and Findings

During data collection and analysis, three outlier findings were identified. One of these findings represents significant statements which were associated with only one participant in the study. The other two findings, while mentioned by two or three participants, were identified as having a major impact on one participant.

Adjustment to External Schedules

When describing his academic development, Alex shared that homeschooling “has improved my planning skills, strengthened my love for knowledge, and fostered independence.” This sentiment was shared by most of the other participants in this study. It has also been documented in current literature as well. Current research suggests that homeschooling helps students become self-directed (Pannone, 2017b), more responsible for their own learning (Mazama, 2016), and independent (Neuman & Guterman, 2017; Pannone 2017b). Alex, however, also shared how this can also have a negative effect. He described his struggles with external schedules, stating, “The lack of regular schedule has increased the difficulty to adapt to an external schedule when one is needed.” Later in his questionnaire, when discussing his co-op classes, Alex added, “The classes were phenomenal but the external schedule, specifically early in the morning classes, was a huge adjustment.” These statements suggest that the flexibility of schedules in the homeschool setting made integrating with traditional settings more difficult for him.

Possible Academic Limitations

Jolly and Matthews (2018) found that a lack of formal training in the field of education did not prevent parents from implementing appropriate instruction for their children. Hannah felt that sometimes her learning experience can be affected without having access to the same science materials that are available to those in traditional school settings. She shared:

Sometimes it can be hard to get a good in-class experience. For example, I don't have a lab at house, where a public-school students would have access to a lab and an in-person teacher who was an expert in science.

However, one student discussed an even deeper concern regarding how having one parent as the primary teacher could potentially negatively affect academic development. David shared:

I would say that the negative part of homeschooling for me is the lack of diversity of teachers. You aren't being taught in each class by a specialist in that field, you're just being taught by one person for all of your classes. This means that you will usually inherit your parent's strengths and weaknesses in the academic field, and not be as well-rounded. I would say that's the biggest negative effect that I've seen, is that my skills are concentrated where my teacher's skills are.

This description was especially interesting because David has had multiple people serve as teachers. During his early educational years, David's main teachers were his older siblings and his mother, but now, most of his instruction is provided by university professors through dual enrollment.

David also shared frustration regarding being recognized for accomplishments, He offered:

The worst thing about homeschooling is the lack of opportunity compared to public schoolers and private schoolers. I've felt this problem a lot in my athletic and academic life, where it's much harder to be recognized or rewarded for achievement and work because of my homeschool status.

Impact of COVID-19

In March 2020, many daily routines and everyday occurrences came to an abrupt halt due to COVID-19, and multiple reports provide evidence for an increase in homeschooling in the fall of 2020 due to the pandemic (Deangelis, 2020; Eggleston & Fields, 2021). None of the families began homeschooling for this reason, as all of the families in this study were already

homeschooling, and participants were either in middle school or high school freshmen at the beginning of the pandemic. Interestingly, only three participants included COVID-19 in any data collection form. Hannah mentioned it in passing during her interview as if it were only an inconvenience or minor interruption, stating, “I know COVID kind of messed some stuff up,” and she went on to describe how the pandemic helped her family narrow down activities that were most important to them. Isabella mentioned it in her interview. She shared, “And so COVID interrupted the co-op classes, so everything moved to Zoom. And the year after, the co-op was meeting at a church, and the church, based upon the guidelines that the church was regulating, the co-op decided not to meet.”

However, COVID-19 had a much bigger impact on Alex. When asked to describe his favorite homeschool memory, he offered, “Well, I don’t know if I could say one specific memory, but I can say cross country,” which he began doing in middle school. He continued, “Well, I didn’t like the running part, per se, but I enjoyed the community.” Later in the interview when discussing extra-curricular activities, Alex discussed how track season “kind of died immediately” in the spring of his freshman year due to COVID. This led to him “getting out of the groove” and then he “just wasn’t very motivated to go back.” He also added that if COVID had not happened “definitely, I would have stayed with it longer. I am thinking about doing it again. Or at least track. Specifically, track next year.” Giving up an activity that he described as being part of his favorite homeschool memory provides evidence of the impact the pandemic has had on his life.

Research Question Responses

Using the themes developed in the previous section, this section offers answers to the research questions which will be discussed in Chapter Five. The answers to the central research

question and the three sub-questions provide the composite textural and structural descriptions for these participants.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study? Families are accessing the resources available to them to develop highly customized educational plans. These educational plans meet the state's requirements for homeschooling families as well as college and career preparation requirements. Yet, at the same time, these plans take student interests, needs, and goals into account and emphasize the ability of homeschool families to create a plan for each student which expresses their individuality. David summarized:

Homeschooling has its faults, just like any form of schooling, but its ability to adapt to each student's needs is unparalleled. It allows the gifted to be unrestrained in their learning and allows the impaired to not be left behind in the learning process.

Hannah added:

Homeschooling has a ton of benefits, from a personalized learning pace to everyday lessons on time management and finding your strengths, plus being away from all the distractions and hardships of being around peers all the time.

Isabella offered:

I guess I would just say homeschooling has been really good for me. And I think it's something, something that not everyone can do, but I think that it's something that can really have a significant impact on you. And for the better . . . I would just say it's been really good for me, and I feel like I've had more of an opportunity and a chance to grow

and get to know people and be more of myself than I would have in a public-school setting.

Sub-Question One

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their academic educational plan of study and their role in course selection? Academic plans are generally based on the requirements for graduation or what postsecondary institutions require for admission. Faith stated her courses “were required to graduate from high school.” At the same time, students have multiple options to customize their learning opportunities. Isabella summarized:

I would say that I feel like I am more well-rounded. I have the opportunity to have an input on my curriculum, to choose things that I love, but then also to learn new things and to try new things. That I, some people don't have the opportunity to.

James added, “While homeschooling is not for everyone, in most cases, the extremely vast selection of education sources that can be chosen for homeschooling leads to more interesting and beneficial learning opportunities than traditional schooling.” Families are incorporating community resources such as co-ops and small groups, online resources, and dual enrollment opportunities to customize academic instruction.

However, participants described great variability in how their academic plan was developed and how much input they gave in this area. Those involved in co-ops had little input regarding curriculum choices, and others completed the same curriculum that older siblings used. Hannah, a 10th-grade student shared, “My mom kind of has it set out the way my sister did it through high school.” Younger students described more limited choices. Hannah described when it came to foreign language, “my mom just kind of left it up to us what language we wanted to

choose.” She also described the option to choose from various books to read as part of her literature course. Similarly, Christine stated, “I pick my own science projects. I pick my own library books out.”

As students progress through high school, evidence that the educational plan becomes more individualized was noted, with juniors describing much more involvement in course selection. Alex noted an increase in his role in course selection throughout high school, saying, “The past few years, in high school especially, I got to pick classes.” David offered:

I’d say course curriculum, a lot more of my older siblings just did the traditional homeschool, school at home, just using the homeschool curriculum. Then as it’s gotten closer to me, we do the regular homeschool curriculum up until like our sophomore year, and then junior year, we mostly do dual enrollment classes, and that’s kind of been the trend for us youngest five siblings.

The high school juniors often discuss options with their parents and rely on their guidance for final decisions. Grant described the guidance his parents offer when he is making academic decisions, stating, “They usually recommend the classes just because they know what I need.”

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the process of choosing settings for learning academic content and their role in this process? Because homeschooling is parent-led or parent-directed, the most influential setting for homeschool students is their home. However, families are also accessing a variety of settings including those offered within the community such as co-ops, small groups classes, and tutors. Older students are incorporating both online and on-campus dual enrollment courses. Like the academic courses, the experiences of students varied, with older students describing more control over where and how they learned

academic content. Christine, a freshman shared, “I had no role in this decision,” while Grant, a junior, offered, “I have always been pretty involved in selecting my classes, whether doing them online or in person.” Data suggest parents and students work together to make settings decisions. David described having input, but the final decision being determined under the guidance of his parents, stating, “They were chosen because my parents believed that the classes at these settings would be the best for my learning experience.”

One setting which was discussed by the majority participants was online courses, which Hannah described as “a pretty good fit for me.” As a group, participants recognized both the positive and negative aspects of learning online. James, who completed most of his courses online, offered:

Online school definitely has its pros and cons. The good thing about online school is that the class times vary so widely due to the school’s international reach, and it is easy to find a class time you like. It is also a very fun opportunity to meet great people all over the world.

Sub-Question Three

What are the experiences of homeschool high school students related to the impact of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as part of their educational plan and their role in choosing these activities? Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities play an important role in the educational plan of homeschool students and the participants of all grade levels and ages were highly involved in choosing their activities, which serve multiple purposes. James summarized:

The common misconception is that all homeschoolers are sheltered 24/7 and have no experience in the outside world, but the reality is that there are so many ways to be social

outside of going to a school building 5 days a week. While many days are spent at home doing school, there are so many ways to get out into the community that makes it easy to connect with others and have a good time.

Co-curricular courses allow for exploring interests and spending time with friends. Extra-curricular activities allow additional opportunities for homeschool students to spend time with friends. In many cases, students chose to become involved in particular activities due to the influence of family or friends. Faith stated, “Many friends and family encouraged me to participate,” and Hannah shared, “My older sister did it and I wanted to join when I got into high school.” Additionally, serving the community was an important outcome of extra-curricular activities. Many of the participants are in an extra-curricular club with service as a central tenet, which Alex said “provides a simple way to serve the community with like-minded individuals and looks good on a college transcript.” In this club, Hannah enjoys that “you can be with your friends while you’re serving.”

Students also described how these activities allowed them to explore and investigate possible future careers. Bailey hopes to pursue occupational therapy in the future. Serving at her church and caring for children with disabilities gives her the opportunity to explore this field now. She shared the benefits of this opportunity, stating:

Just like, being around special needs kids to like learn about it. And especially like in the summer they have like a VBS for them, and the [local hospital] occupational therapists come and help. So that’s like watching and like learning about how they do stuff. That’s also good.

David shared his similar experiences, responding:

I've done some internships with engineering companies. I did one with a structural and civil engineering company recently. My extracurriculars are kind of focused on Science Olympiad, math type stuff, all types of stuff that relates to the field of engineering.

Christine, who volunteers with the children's ministry at her church, has the opportunity to develop skills related to her future goals. She shared, "I help the kids at church. I want to go to college and become a teacher."

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. Findings gleaned from data collected through questionnaires, individual interviews, and physical artifacts were presented. Five major themes were discussed: abundant academic options, individualized and customized instruction, development of life skills, family relationships and values, and significant social opportunities. These themes, along with multiple sub-themes, provided insight into the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia. Outlier data which were not associated with themes were discussed. Finally, through data analysis and participant quotations, answers to the central research question and each of the three sub-questions were offered.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. This chapter begins with a discussion of identified themes and an interpretation of the findings. This is followed by a discussion of implications for policy and practice as well as theoretical and empirical implications. The chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of the limitations and delimitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a brief summary.

Discussion

The central question guiding this transcendental phenomenological study was: What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study? As a phenomenological study, this question proved valuable in developing the essence of the experience of the participants. Three sub-questions followed this central question. These questions are as follows:

SQ1: What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their academic educational plan of study and their role in course selection?

SQ2: What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in the process of choosing settings for learning academic content and their role in this process?

SQ3: What are the experiences of homeschool high school students related to the impact of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as part of their educational plan and their role in choosing these activities?

Interpretation of Findings

Ten current homeschool high school students in Georgia completed a questionnaire, participated in an individual interview, and submitted physical artifacts. An analysis of the data revealed that abundant academic options, individualized and customized instruction, development of life skills, family relationships and values, and significant social opportunities were all pertinent to their homeschool experience. This section discusses the study's findings in light of the identified themes.

Summary of Thematic Findings

This study examined the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. Through data analysis, five themes were identified, which included *abundant academic options, individualized and customized instruction, development of life skills, family relationships and values, and significant social opportunities*. Within the theme of *abundant academic options* were three sub-themes: *community groups and resources, online resources, and dual enrollment*. Within the theme of *individualized and customized instruction* were three sub-themes: *various curriculum options, flexible pacing and schedules, and interests, needs, and future plans*. Finally, within the theme of *significant social opportunities*, there were three sub-themes: *a sense of community, impact of activities, and potential social pitfalls*.

A Buffet of Academic Resources. A buffet is perhaps the best analogy to describe the options available to homeschool families. Families are free to partake of a variety of experiences and incorporate multiple options into their homeschool academics. They are also able to make changes at any time or stop using a resource that no longer benefits their children. Unrestricted by benchmarks and grade-level standards, parents are free to choose from diverse learning

options for their children (Carpenter & Gann, 2016), allowing motivations to drive curriculum and instruction (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Hannah shared factors which influence curriculum choices made by her mom, stating:

I know she was just looking for a good, she doesn't like history books just to be a bunch of words because she knows it's harder for people to learn and this one, there's a lot of illustrations and pictures, a lot of pictures and like, things that keep you engaged.

Hannah's family also considers the worldview from which curriculum is presented, which was also true for several other participants as well. However, some students who stated they were homeschooled for both religious and academic reasons did not seem to focus as much on the worldview presented in their curriculum. Thomas (2016a) found that educational decisions are determined by considering a multitude of factors, including community resources, student interests, experience, faith, family reasons, and individualized goals or needs. While this study supports these findings, it expands the understanding to include the experiences of students themselves in educational decisions. Students reported having at least some involvement in the decision-making process for core academic courses which increased as students progressed through high school. Significantly more student involvement was noted for elective courses for all grade levels than for core classes.

Previous researchers have discussed the variety of resources available to families, including online educational resources (Jolly & Matthews, 2020) and live enrichment, online college courses, and video tutoring (Hamlin, 2020). The use of online resources was evident in this study, with nine of the 10 participants describing their use of such resources as part of their educational plan. While some students used prerecorded instructional materials, many accessed live instruction. The Internet is a valuable asset to homeschooling families (Jolly & Matthews,

2020). Access to online resources allowed Christine to participate in speech and occupational therapy. Both David and James had live, online high school level courses. Alex, Evan, and Grant were able to take dual enrollment courses from a university in another part of the state.

The homeschool community is a connected community (Gann & Carpenter, 2019), and families seek support from others and the opportunity to collaborate (Tilhou, 2020). The results of this study corroborate these findings. Students accessed a variety of courses and opportunities throughout the community. Co-ops played a role in the educational plan of multiple participants which allowed parents to share the responsibility of teaching different subjects. Small group instruction was an important part of their academics for the majority of participants. Community resources can also help provide additional STEM opportunities for homeschool students (Gann & Carpenter, 2019), a finding in current literature which is also supported by the findings of this study. In addition to online opportunities, activities sponsored by the Local Homeschool Association allowed several participants to participate in different STEM related groups, including Cyber Patriot, Science Olympiad, science courses and labs, and math teams.

Dual enrollment is another academic option for high school students in Georgia. In Georgia, high school juniors and seniors are eligible to take college classes for both high school and college credit at participating postsecondary institutions (Georgia Student Finance Commission, n.d.). Some 10th-grade students are eligible if they choose to take career, technical, and agricultural education classes and meet the required testing score. Of the six juniors who were eligible for state-funded dual enrollment, four participated this year and described their experiences with dual enrollment courses. The state of Georgia will pay for up to 30 credits and covers the complete cost of the course, including tuition, fees, and books. One additional high school junior accessed dual enrollment through another provider rather than through state

funding. This is also an option for students who exceed the limit allowed by the state. Students also have the option to take additional courses in Georgia but have to pay the cost for any additional credits beyond 30. Dual enrollment is a valuable asset that allows high school students to earn both high school and college credit simultaneously. This can save students both time and money. Dual enrollment also enables students to take courses which may be difficult to complete at home. Dual enrollment is also an avenue to access higher-level courses or specialized courses which may not be available through other providers.

Individualized Instruction. With the abundant resources available to them, homeschooling families can tailor instruction to the needs and interests of their children (Dennison et al., 2020). This customization allows families to develop unique learning plans for their children (Heuer & Donovan, 2017). David stated, “I have a customization of courses,” and the majority of participants echoed this statement. Student choice was minimally seen for core academic courses for freshman and sophomore participants, with most students following a traditional progression through courses, similar to what is seen in traditional school settings. Beginning in the junior year, participants described greater variation and more customization of courses with students progressing at various rates in different subject areas. Flexibility in pacing allowed instruction to match student needs. The interests and future goals of participants also influenced course decisions. While this was evident for all grade levels, it was most apparent for the high school juniors who made selections in multiple subject areas as well as electives.

Instruction is also customized through settings. Participants completed some of their work at home, under the direction of their parents. For other courses, they accessed community and online resources. These variations were dependent on both the student and the subject. Faith completed math at home using online material with additional support from her dad. For science,

her mom facilitated a small group in their home. For English, Faith participated in a live, online class, and for Spanish, she attended a co-op. The choice of settings was influenced by her needs in different subject areas. Grant also described how he changed settings for science to better meet his perceived needs in this subject. He shared:

This year was the first year where I've enjoyed all the settings for everything. In previous years, I've taken certain courses online that, like sciences online, that I didn't really benefit a lot from because I just learn better when I have like, an actual tutor, and I can ask questions and everything. And the sciences I was taking, it didn't really have room to ask questions or anything. But now the dual enrollment classes I'm taking, I can email my professor and everything. And the science and geography, I'm taking them in class, so I can actually ask questions.

Christine's learning settings were heavily influenced by her learning needs. Much of her instruction for core academics occurred at home where she receives one-on-one instruction allowing her to progress at her own rate. Other settings allowed for specialized instruction where she can develop academic, practical, and social skills.

Parental Motivations. Current literature suggests multiple parental motivations to homeschool. Historically, families were divided into two categories, depending on their motivation. Ideologues homeschool mainly due to their religious values (Anthony, 2015; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Thomas, 2019). They also emphasize the value of the family. Pedagogues homeschool for academic reasons (Thomas, 2019). Current research also indicates families often cite both reasons (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021) or the motivations become a combination of both belief systems over time (Hanna, 2012). This combination of motivations was evident in this study. When asked why they are homeschooled, six students stated they are homeschooled

for both religious and academic reasons. David shared, “It was really for my parents to be able to see what spiritual education we were getting, and what actual education like math, science and all that.” Isabella stated, “Where I live, the public schools are not the best, not the best people, and my parents, when I was born and then came to school age, they really felt the Lord leading them to homeschool. And they’ve just chosen to homeschool us.” Parental motivations may influence educational decisions and the focus of the curriculum (Neuman, 2020b). Having so many students with faith-based reasons for homeschooling in this study may have skewed the results as the religious and academic reasons to homeschool become intertwined.

Other participants demonstrated more varied and complex reasons for homeschooling, corroborating previous results which suggest homeschooling motivations are diverse, complex, and multidimensional (Dennison et al., 2020). While Faith cited both academic and religious reasons for homeschooling, she also added her need for flexible curriculum and pacing to address her learning needs, sharing, “I have learning glitches, so I can go at my own pace, and how I kind of, my own way to learn it, to learn it better than at a traditional school. So, that’s why I’m homeschooled.” Similarly, Christine is homeschooled to address learning needs, but she stated her primary reason for being homeschooled was bullying, supporting research reporting concerns regarding multiple aspects of school safety (Duvall, 2021) and specifically bullying (Neuman, 2019, 2020b).

For these reasons, the results of this study support the position that the simple two-category classification cannot adequately account for the complexity of factors which contribute to homeschool motivation. What once may have been two extremes on a spectrum are now a unique blend of factors which vary for each family but are impossible to separate from one another. Homeschooling is not just pedagogy but also a lifestyle (Neuman, 2020b). There is no

longer a clear delineation of when learning is occurring and when it is not, as learning experiences continue throughout the day and across various settings.

Role of the Parent in the Homeschool Setting. Depending on their philosophy, parents assume various roles in the homeschool setting. This may include taking on the role of a teacher, choosing curriculum and providing direct instruction (Carpenter & Gann, 2016). Isabella talked about the instruction her mom provides, stating, “We have the opportunity to succeed. We have teachers who want to teach us and help us succeed.” In this study, very few participants were being directly taught by their parents, which may be the result of multiple factors. First, parents may reduce the amount of direct instruction they provide to allow students to assume more responsibility for their learning. Second, parents may need to spend more time with other children in the family, especially those who are younger. Third, parents may feel less equipped to teach some high school level content. James described how the role of his mom as the provider of direct instruction changes in his family as children progress through grade levels.

So, since the very beginning, leading up to pretty much high school, that’s when it kind of changed, my mom would have a curriculum, where she would sit me down and she would teach me directly from her. And then it got to a point where she could no longer teach the content, and she needed somebody else to do that. And with having the two other kids that she needed to teach, we decided to try online so that I could kind of, so I can have some autonomy and kind of do it, my school. And it ended up working so well, after freshman year, that we just stuck with it.

Later in the interview, James added that his mom continues to do all of the teaching for his eight-year-old brother and half of the teaching for his sister, who is in middle school. This suggests that parental roles may shift and change over time.

At other times, rather than teaching content, parents serve as managers or facilitators of learning (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Multiple participants shared how their parents offer additional instruction or explain concepts that are difficult to understand. Hannah discussed how she mostly works through her online math program on her own, but if she needs help, she goes to her mom or older sister to “ask them and see if they can explain it a different way.” For Faith, this was especially important for her to understand math concepts. She shared how her dad is able to help in this area, stating that he is able to sit with her and “it’s better explained.” She continued, “I feel like the steps in math need to be explained more. And the transition between one formula to the next needs to be clearer.” In this role, parents are a valuable resource for students to turn to for additional instruction or support. Scaffolding, a component of sociocultural theory, is also evident, as parents provide the necessary support for the student to be successful.

Parents also assume the role of a guidance counselor, determining graduation requirements and addressing learning needs (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Gann & Carpenter, 2019). While the state of Georgia does not specifically list graduation requirements, participants described building an academic transcript which would prepare them for post-secondary education. Isabella believes being homeschooled is helping her to become more “well rounded” as she can incorporate a variety of courses and experiences into her educational plan. David, however, would prefer to focus more on courses which align with his goals and future plans. He shared:

I’d probably like to take more science and math courses, just instead of some of these courses, which I probably won’t wind up using. Like history courses. Like, I have to have a World History credit. I know world history, like me and my brother are big history

buffs, like, just because I haven't taken this history course, I have to shove aside like a science course or something in order to do that. So, yeah, I would like to be able to kind of play towards my strengths and interests.

Although families seek opportunities to fulfill expectations of post-secondary institutions, they are also allowing their children to select unique and varied course options. Five different foreign languages are part of the educational plans of the study participants, including Spanish, French, German, Arabic, and American Sign Language. Some traditional school settings do not offer this number of options for foreign language. Because they are not required to teach specific standards for particular grade levels, parents are able to adapt core academic course selection to the needs of their children. The high school juniors in this study completed various math courses which ranged from Algebra 1 to Calculus 1. This level of flexibility and adaptability may not be possible in traditional educational settings.

Student Choice. While previous research has described how parents allow their goals and values to influence choices about what resources to use in the homeschool setting (Gann & Carpenter, 2019), this study adds the students' perspective on the decision-making process. Participants had varying level of involvement in choosing core academic courses. Evan described having the most input of the participants, sharing "I got to decide what courses I wanted to take." David's role in course selection was a little more limited, although he does "have input on what dual enrollment classes I'll take." His choices tend to be the selection of a course within a particular category. "I have an option between college biology, chemistry, advanced physics, that's like, it's limited choices, I still have options there that I do get to choose." Other students described how they choose courses based on their future goals and plans. Grant stated, "I was given the option last semester too to take statistics or precalculus.

Accounting doesn't require super high maths. So, I figured statistics would probably help more. So, I ended up taking statistics over precalculus.”

Decisions related to core academic courses were frequently settings decisions. Evan plans to take dual enrollment courses from a different post-secondary institution for the upcoming school year because his current university “had a little bit of a limited option for the sciences, and [the other college] had a little bit more of an option for those.” Alex is planning a similar change, but his reasoning is to allow for more in-person classes. David is currently making a decision related to this for his upcoming math class.

Like with my math classes, I am still trying to decide whether I'm going to take Calculus 2 in person or virtual just because that's a class which I think I could do just as well virtually as in person.

Allowing students to make academic choices gives them a sense of ownership over what they are learning and may increase motivation.

Student choice was also evident in the selection of electives or co-curricular courses as participants made choices that were influenced by their interests. This was observed most frequently with foreign language selection, and student choice affected not only course selection but also the setting. Five foreign languages were discussed during the interviews and the courses were completed through multiple providers—prerecorded and live online resources, a local co-op, and in-person and online dual enrollment. Students also made choices which addressed their interests in the areas of music, drama, and art. Participants described how their parents offered guidance regarding the choices available, but allowed the students to make the final decision.

For extra-curricular activities, participants described almost complete control over their involvement in these choices. Evan described his experience, “My parents bring up the options. I

kind of pick and choose which one I want, that kind of thing.” Others were influenced by older siblings or other family members. Hannah shared, “My mom originally got us started in 4H, but as time went on, each year I chose to continue doing it.” The majority of participants were members of various athletic teams. They were also involved in activities in which they actively served the community on a regular basis, suggesting that homeschoolers are not isolated, disengaged members of a community but rather active citizens who show considerable concern for the well-being of others. Many were also active in local churches in children’s ministry, greeting ministry, and music ministry.

Development of Noncognitive Skills and Life Skills. Non-cognitive skills include teamwork, motivation, independence, self-advocacy, organization, and study strategies (Mitchell & Gansemer-Topf, 2016; Nagle et al., 2015). Results from this study indicate homeschooling offers many opportunities for students to develop these important non-cognitive skills which are beneficial to overall student success. Taking ownership of their own learning may help students develop strong relationships with family and friends (Jones, 2013). Most participants described the responsibility they have to manage their schedules and what needs to be accomplished each day. Several described how this is preparing them for college. Bailey shared, “Just, like preparing for college with like, time management and stuff because like, as a homeschooler, you’re not given a schedule.” Grant added:

It’s very beneficial in preparing you for college, whether it be through your scheduling or just being able to learn things, not on your own, but be more independent in your work and being, having people where you can go to for help, but also being able to learn on your own.

Grant also noted that his co-curricular and extra-curricular activities allow for opportunities to interact and work with others in a group setting, developing skills in working in a team. All of the participants were involved in a variety of activities outside their home. Several also described leadership roles they have in activities, clubs, and jobs in which they participate. Findings also support previous literature suggesting homeschool students exhibit high levels of motivation and independence (Medlin & Butler, 2018).

The development of life skills was also noted throughout the study. These skills include managing a home and interacting with others. Faith discussed how learning to care for a home was an important part of her homeschool experience. Similarly, Christine incorporated learning to cook a variety of foods into her weekly schedule. Isabella, who loves baking, was able to develop her skills and knowledge through coursework and experience. Hannah had the opportunity to learn from her mom, stating, “It gave me the chance to observe my mom and see the ways she interacts with other people.” Hannah now has opportunities to apply what she has learned in her leadership role in a club and through her part-time jobs. Because students are at home during the day with a parent, they are able to learn these life skills in natural settings from a trusted adult who is invested in their overall development.

Social Implications. A lack of socialization is a common concern of those who oppose homeschooling, while proponents of this method of school choice do not view socialization as a concern (Carlson, 2020). Socialization refers to the ability to function competently in society (Medlin, 2013). Current research indicates that homeschool students are not isolated but have many opportunities to interact with others outside of their homes (Guterman & Neuman, 2017; Hamlin, 2020). Students in this study are active in their communities and social events, with all participants involved in a significant number of activities outside their homes. This allows

students to develop leadership skills and interact confidently with people of many different ages (Murphy, 2014). Participants in this study are rarely, if ever, in groups of students who are only in their same grade, and several hold leadership positions in the clubs in which they are involved. Bailey noted the value of practicing leadership skills, describing it as “very important.” She also described her experiences learning to be a follower who respects the leader, indicating that students are learning to assume different roles in different situations and settings. The majority of students also described their opportunities to participate in activities with friends while serving the community.

Previous research also indicates that most parents are satisfied with the level of socialization their children receive (Medlin, 2006). Students in this study agree. Findings suggest students are content with the amount of social interaction they have with peers. Alex shared, “With enough extra-curricular activities and a core group of friends, a healthy social awareness can thrive.” Evan stated, “By giving homeschool students at least one outlet in which they interact with others they will learn to be just as sociable as non-homeschool students.” These statements suggest that participants believe they are getting a healthy amount of socialization. With her co-ops, Bailey learns with others three days each week and has additional extra-curricular activities. She shared that she did not need to see her friends every day and even preferred her intermittent interaction with them throughout the week, sharing, “Most people say that like homeschooling is bad for socially because you don’t see many people. . . . I don’t want to have to be forced into an environment of a lot of people every single day.”

Homeschooling provides an opportunity to foster family relationships. As home-based education, the home is the most important learning setting. Parents play a major role in the socialization of their children (Medlin, 2013). Current research suggests homeschooling families

seek to develop strong, meaningful relationships among family members (Neuman, 2020a), and results from this study corroborate these findings. Pannone (2017a) found that parents value the time they can spend with their children, and this study supports those findings from the students' perspective. Participants described how they learn from their parents and siblings. Many noted the strong relationships they had with family members, even with siblings who were significantly older than them. Grant spoke about the value of his relationships with his family, stating that one of the benefits of homeschooling is "getting to know your family a lot better because that's one thing that will stay with me forever." David was highly involved in co-curricular and extra-curricular decisions, but he valued the guidance of his parents in this regard, sharing:

I believe that it allows my parents to surround me with people who share my values and allows me to become more mature and not be exposed to some of the bad influences that I might meet at school. It allows me to develop in a good direction socially.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Homeschooling as a form of school choice is growing in the United States. Stakeholders include advocates of school choice or school reform, homeschool associations and support groups, current and future homeschool parents, and students themselves. It is essential to discuss both implications for policy and implications for practice.

Implications for Policy

While five of the six juniors included dual enrollment courses in their educational plan, four relied on state funding to access their classes. In 2020, Georgia revised its dual enrollment eligibility requirements and funding, limiting access to state-funded dual enrollment to 11th- and 12th grade students, and in some limited cases, 10th-grade students (Georgia Student Finance Commission, n.d.). The state also limited funding to 30 semester hours of credit. Previously, all

high school students potentially had access to dual enrollment, and funding was not capped at 30 credits but was unlimited. While these new regulations could save the state money, it may negatively affect high school students. Ambitious students must seek alternatives to higher level courses that are not offered at their high schools, or in the case of home school students, may impact what courses students are able to access. This could further impact students of lower socio-economic status who may not have the financial means to take advanced classes once their state funding is exhausted. Limited dual enrollment funding may also negatively impact students who reside in areas with failing schools that may be limited in their ability to provide advanced courses that other schools may offer. This could potentially widen the existing achievement gap among students based on socioeconomic status or location.

Implications for Practice

Both individualized instruction and students working with others of multiple ages may help children develop critical thinking skills (Medlin & Butler, 2018). This is frequently seen in homeschool settings. However, this rarely occurs in traditional settings. Grouping students by age and teaching with fragmented daily schedules may not be the best way to educate all students to a level of proficiency (Clemmitt, 2014). It may be beneficial for schools to evaluate options that would allow opportunities for students of multiple ages, grades, and abilities to work together more frequently and for extended periods of time. Current legislation requires that students with disabilities, who were once educated separately, have access to the general curriculum and mainstream settings (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). Integrating students with disabilities into regular education programs has resulted in academic, social, and emotional benefits for both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Simón et al., 2022). Budget cuts in many districts have forced gifted students to remain in the classroom as well

instead of receiving pull-out services. Schools are accustomed to teaching students of multiple abilities in a single classroom. It is possible that mixing ages and grades could produce similar benefits for students, both academically and socially.

In the homeschool setting, parents are highly involved in the education of their children. Participants described both active and passive roles assumed by their parents. In each case, at least one parent was present throughout the school day to teach concepts or assist students as needed. This stands in contrast to traditional school settings where parents “are often relegated to a peripheral role and not seen as vital to the operation of the school and the process of education” (Anthony, 2015, p. 56). Parental involvement can improve educational outcomes (Higgins & Katsipataki, 2015), and allowing parents to assume more substantive roles in traditional school settings may be beneficial.

The Local Homeschool Association helps area homeschool families connect with one another. Participants were involved in a variety of classes, co-ops, and activities within the study setting, emphasizing the value of activities, courses, and events outside their home. The Local Homeschool Association offers many opportunities for families and students to get involved and connect with one another. The findings of this study support current literature regarding the value of connections within a community (Gann & Carpenter, 2019). Other homeschool associations or those that are forming may learn valuable lessons from the Local Homeschool Association and other associations to create connected communities which support the needs of their members.

Results of this study suggest that both current and future homeschool families can be confident in their decision to education their children at home. Beginning the homeschool journey can be a daunting task, and some parents may be concerned that they will not be able to

provide an adequate education for their children. The findings of this study suggest students can be well prepared for post-secondary education as the five students taking dual enrollment courses have been successful in their endeavors. Students also described how their older siblings have experienced success in college and their careers, indicating their homeschool experience prepared them academically for life after high school. All of the students in this study described their overall satisfaction with being homeschooled.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This study supports previous research suggesting the major tenets of sociocultural theory are seen in the homeschool setting (Elliot, 2019; Whitlow-Spurlock, 2019). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory places a heavy emphasis on the environment in which a student learns. According to this theory, knowledge is constructed through interactions with the environment, which can include both the learning setting and the materials within the environment, and interactions with peers. Traditional school settings require students to fit into an environment which may not adequately address all of their learning needs. Rather than forcing students into pre-existing settings, homeschool families create environments which enable their children to grow and develop as an individual and at an individualized pace and sequence. Families deliberately choose settings that will give their children the opportunity to grow and thrive both academically and socially (Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Hirsh, 2019; Mazama, 2016; Thomas, 2019), and in this study, students were involved in the decision-making process. Multiple environments allowed students to interact with a variety of people of various ages. Most participants were involved in settings which encompassed four or more grade levels simultaneously. Faith enjoyed the opportunity to "interact with people through different settings

and atmospheres for my academics.” She also explained the impact of settings with students of multiple ages, sharing:

We had really good conversations, and it was so, I loved it because it was just so interesting how you can balance it out to be kind of like a light to the little kids but also be mentored by the older, older kids and then the teacher.

Similarly, Hannah stated, “I get to learn how to interact with people that are older, or kids, or people my age.”

Sociocultural theory also emphasizes the active participation of the learner (Vygotsky, 1978). Participants noted various ways in which they engage with the curriculum and others throughout their school day. Even students who completed multiple courses online described opportunities to interact. Additionally, student responses from this study suggest that families are incorporating a student-centered approach to learning and indicate homeschool families incorporate student-centered learning opportunities, allowing both student interests and current level of performance to influence decisions related to the educational plan. This bottom-up approach, with the parent-teacher serving as a facilitator of academic content and providing multiple learning settings also incorporates elements of sociocultural theory (Jaramillo, 1996). Parents served as the more knowledgeable other when choosing curriculum and planning lessons, but participants took on this role when participating in small group classes and activities with peers. In the homeschool setting, students could work at their own pace, allowing them to continuously work within their zone of proximal development, progressing more rapidly when material was mastered and slowing down when content was challenging. Families can choose curriculum which addresses the current needs of students (Thomas, 2016a), but by monitoring their students’ progress, parents are able to make adjustments and allow their children to remain

challenged (Anthony, 2015; Cheng et al., 2016; Thomas, 2016b). The abundant academic options available to participants, including community groups and resources, online resources, and dual enrollment helped make this possible.

This study extends Vygotsky's theory to include the role homeschool high school students play in the development of their educational plan and their learning environment, including what they study, when and where they learn, and how and with whom they interact. In a traditional school setting, students have limited choices regarding when, where, and how they will learn, with the majority of activities occurring within an established setting. Participants in this study described how they choose learning settings and their experiences in the decision-making process for both co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Isabella shared, "The electives, I picked out." Christine mirrored this statement with her own, "I picked these because I like them." Alex shared, "These classes were things I was interested in and were being taken by good friends." In this study, student choice related to academics increased as students progressed through high school, with high school juniors describing more control over academics than freshman and sophomore students. Student choice was evident at all grade levels in the areas of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Empirically, this study supports current research in multiple ways. It reinforces topics identified by previous researchers. Previous research has described homeschool students as autonomous learners (Anthony, 2013) who perform academically as well as their peers who are educated in traditional school settings (Bennett et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2016). Findings from this study support both points, with students describing their control over their own learning and schedules. Those who are taking college courses did not describe any difficulties being accepted into dual enrollment programs and several stated they had earned As in their college classes.

Findings from this study suggest parents are heavily involved in their child's education, especially concerning core academic course choices, and they access a variety of resources to provide what their children need. This corroborates previous research which found that parents carefully design an instructional plan and choose curriculum, match pedagogical methods to student needs, and are highly motivated to see their children succeed (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Cheng et al., 2016). Each of these elements were described by participants, and because the participants are students, a new perspective was gleaned regarding the development of instructional plans. Findings from this study also corroborate current literature suggesting that families have overlapping motivations for homeschooling their children (Collom, 2005; Jolly & Matthews, 2020).

Information gleaned through this study differs from current literature in several areas. Carpenter and Gann (2016) described parents as mostly assuming the role as parent-teacher, and this study diverges in this regard as most of the parents were serving more as facilitators and providing guidance to their children rather than providing direct instruction on a regular basis. Several students stated that their parents previously provided more direct instruction, but now, at the high school level, little direct instruction from parents is occurring for study participants. Thomas (2019) found that those who homeschool for religious reasons are less likely to enroll in a public-school program. While participants in this setting are not able to enroll in public school on a part-time basis, they do have the option to choose public and non-religious private schools for dual enrollment. Religious preferences did affect dual enrollment choices for some participants, but not the majority. Their choice of post-secondary institutions for dual enrollment was based more on what courses were being offered.

The themes identified through data analysis closely align with themes identified in a study conducted in Israel. Neuman (2020a) conducted interviews with participants who ranged in age from 16 to 22. Neuman identified similar perceived academic advantages of homeschooling, including academic choices, interest-based studying, the ability to study diverse or advanced topics, and flexibility. Similar social themes were identified as well, with participants knowing their own strengths and weaknesses, developing strong family relationships, and becoming independent learners. However, other themes identified by Neuman were not present in the current study. Participants in this study did not describe difficulty taking exams or making choices for themselves. In fact, participants in this study described their experiences with making many choices related to their educational plan. Neuman also found several social disadvantages, including lack of approval, feeling different, not having enough friends, and not being prepared socially. None of these themes were evident in the current study. In contrast, participants described confidence socially and having plenty of friends outside of their home. Assuming roles of leadership in clubs and working part-time jobs also provides evidence that participants are prepared to interact socially with others.

Although significant literature exists which discusses the experiences and motivations of homeschool parents, there is a gap in the literature regarding the perceptions and experiences of homeschool students. Therefore, the most crucial stakeholders have had limited opportunities to share their lived experiences. This study contributes to filling a gap in the literature by giving a voice to current homeschool high school students who have previously been unheard. Through questionnaires, individual interviews, and physical artifacts, homeschool high school students in Georgia have had the opportunity to share their experiences.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are several limitations, or potential weaknesses of this study that could not be controlled. First, this study has a small sample size. The 10 participants may or may not adequately reflect the experiences of homeschool students in this setting. Additionally, with differing access to activities and varying homeschool laws in other states, transferability to other locations may be limited. Second, while multiple researchers have discussed the growing diversity within the homeschool community (Dennison et al., 2020; Heuer & Donovan, 2017; Jolly & Matthews, 2020), this diversity was not seen in the participants for this study. While participants were diverse in some areas such as gender, age, grade level, and disability status, they were not diverse in other areas of demographics. Although the study was open to any students meeting the criterion for participation, the participants lack diversity in several areas. Nine participants were Caucasian, and one was African American. All participants live in two-parent families. Using the highest degree earned by each parent and considering the fathers' vocations, it is estimated that all students represent similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, nine of the participants have been homeschooled for all of their educational years. In some ways, this required participants to hypothesize what traditional school settings are like or for them to develop an understanding of other settings by hearing about them. Grant commented, "I don't know, I haven't really gone to school before. I don't know the differences that much. But I do think that homeschooling was the best for me." While participants could have come from 13 Georgia counties, the students who chose to participate reside in just three of these counties. Due to proximity, it is easiest to access in-person academic options and social opportunities in these locations. Students living in other counties would have to travel a greater

distance to attend. This study was also limited by me as the human instrument in the study. As a human instrument, there is always the possibility of error.

Delimitations, or purposeful decisions to define the boundaries of a study, are necessary to limit the scope and focus of the study. To give a voice to students who had previously been unheard, transcendental phenomenology was chosen. This method presents findings without adding interpretation, allowing the participants' experiences to be shared completely from their perspective. Participation was limited to current high school students as they are old enough to express their experiences and share their thoughts and opinions about homeschooling. By only enrolling participants in Georgia and only those living in the 13 counties served by the Local Homeschool Association, it was possible to see how families and students choose from the available options and everyone was working under the same homeschooling laws.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue to explore homeschooling and the impact this form of education has on students. Because participants in this study reside in one area of the state of Georgia, research should seek other homeschool high school students in areas with similar options and opportunities as well as those in areas with less access to outside, in-person activities to continue to add to the understanding of the academic and social impact homeschooling has on high school students. Researchers should also seek more diverse participants, including those who have been homeschooled for fewer years and were educated in another setting who can offer insight and compare the homeschool setting with traditional settings. Research should continue to investigate how national, state, and local agencies can best support homeschool families. Additionally, new homeschooling families could benefit from the experiences of others, but the logistics of getting them connected to their communities and opportunities available

remains underexplored. In addition to phenomenology, a multiple case study design could offer valuable insight into homeschooling and its long-term impact, with each case being a family unit with parents, homeschool graduates, and current homeschool high school students.

Conclusion

Although homeschooling is legal in all 50 states and is a viable form of school choice, this educational option remains controversial. Despite the growing number of families choosing to homeschool their children, relatively few research studies have been conducted, and little is known about how families make educational decisions for their high school students. Almost nothing has been presented from the perspective of the students themselves. The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study. This was accomplished by asking the central research question: What are the experiences of homeschool high school students in Georgia in the development of their educational plan of study? Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the interactions between the learner and their environment, provided the theoretical framework for this study.

Ten current homeschool high school students in Georgia participated and provided data via questionnaires, individual interviews, and physical artifacts. Through data analysis, five themes emerged which included *abundant academic options, individualized and customized instruction, development of life skills, family relationships and values, and significant social opportunities*. Results suggest families are accessing the resources available to them to develop highly customized educational plans. These educational plans meet the state's requirements for homeschooling families and college and career preparation requirements while taking student interests, needs, and goals into account. Students are active participants in the decision-making

process for their educational plans. Findings support current literature while contributing to filling a gap and giving a voice to students who are key stakeholders in education.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 30, 2022

Melissa MacConney
Sarah Pannone

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY21-22-795 Experiences of Homeschool High School Students in the Development of Their Educational Plan: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Dear Melissa MacConney, Sarah Pannone,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: March 30, 2022. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Homeschooling Families,

I am a former homeschooling parent and was a member of the [REDACTED] throughout our homeschooling years. During that time, I also served as the new member coordinator for several years. My youngest child graduated from high school last year. Currently, I am a teacher at [REDACTED] School and a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University. I am conducting research for my dissertation as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of this email is to invite current homeschool high school students to participate in my study. The working title of my study is “Experiences of Homeschool High School Students in the Development of Their Educational Plan: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study.” I hope to give a voice to homeschool students regarding the impact of homeschooling on their lives and their role in the development of educational plans.

In order to be eligible for participation, students must meet the following qualifications: (1) family must be a current member of the [REDACTED], or living in a Georgia county which is served by the [REDACTED], (2) student must be in 9th, 10th, 11th, or 12th grade, and (3) the student must be in at least his/her second year of homeschooling.

Participation in this study will be comprised of four steps: (1) for screening purposes, provide a copy of your Declaration of Intent for the current school year, (2) complete a questionnaire, (3) participate in an interview (and then check the transcript for accuracy), and (4) create a photo narrative presentation which represents the settings in which learning currently takes place. It should take approximately 4 hours and 25 minutes to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. I will email you an Informed Parental Consent/Assent form (for students under 18) or a Consent form (for students 18 and older). This document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to allow your student to participate or choose to participate (for students 18 and older), you will need to sign the Parental Consent/Assent or Consent form and return it as well as a copy of your current Georgia Declaration of Intent form through email.

Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card for their participation and completion of the procedures listed above.

If you have any questions about this study or your possible participation in it, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached by email at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Melissa MacConney
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Appendix C

Informed Consent/Assent Form

Title of the Project: Experiences of Homeschool High School Students in the Development of Their Educational Plan: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Melissa L. MacConney, PhD Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

Your student is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be residents of Georgia, currently homeschooled, members of the [REDACTED] or living in a Georgia county which is served by the [REDACTED], in high school (ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade), and in at least their second year of homeschooling. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow your student to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their educational plan of study, including their role in the process of course selection and the settings or social context of learning. At this stage in the research, an educational plan will be generally defined as the academic courses, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities which impact student learning and development.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to allow your student to be in this study, I will ask him or her to do the following things:

1. Complete a questionnaire. This will take approximately 30-45 minutes. This questionnaire serves demographic and data collection purposes. The questionnaire will be sent and returned through email.
2. Participate in an interview about the development of his or her educational plan of study. The interview may be conducted face-to-face or through Zoom. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be video and/or audio recorded.
3. Create a photo narrative depicting the settings in which the educational plan takes place. This will involve taking or finding pictures which represent current educational settings and a description of the photo. Depending on the number of settings for the current educational plan, this will take approximately 1-2 hours. This will be sent to the researcher through email.
4. After interviews have been transcribed, participants will be asked to read the interviews for accuracy and to correct any misunderstandings. This procedure should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a better understanding of homeschooling and the development of a high school educational plan of study from the perspective of homeschool high school students.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The researcher is a mandatory reporter for child abuse and child neglect.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected as part of this study may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from the participants is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Participants will be encouraged to remove identifying information from documents. However, if identifying information is obtained, only the researcher will have access to this information, which will remain confidential.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will participants be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card after they complete all aspects of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your student to participate will not affect your or his or her current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to allow your student to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your student from the study or your student chooses to withdraw, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw her or him or should your student choose to withdraw, data collected from your student will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Melissa L. MacConney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sarah Pannone, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your student to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and/or video-record my student as part of his/her participation in this study.

Printed Child's/Student's Name

Parent's Signature

Date

Minor's Signature

Date

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form (Adult)

Title of the Project: Experiences of Homeschool High School Students in the Development of Their Educational Plan: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Melissa L. MacConney, PhD Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be residents of Georgia, currently homeschooled, members of the [REDACTED] or living in a Georgia county which is served by the [REDACTED], in high school (ninth, tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade), and in at least their second year of homeschooling. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of homeschool high school students in the development of their educational plan of study, including their role in the process of course selection and the settings or social context of learning. At this stage in the research, an educational plan will be generally defined as the academic courses, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities which impact student learning and development.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

5. Complete a questionnaire. This will take approximately 30-45 minutes. This questionnaire serves demographic and data collection purposes. The questionnaire will be sent and returned through email.
6. Participate in an interview about the development of their educational plan of study. The interview may be conducted face-to-face or through Zoom. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will be video and/or audio recorded.
7. Create a photo narrative depicting the settings in which the educational plan takes place. This will involve taking or finding pictures which represent current educational settings and a description of the photo. Depending on the number of settings for the current educational plan, this will take approximately 1-2 hours. This will be sent to the researcher through email.
8. After interviews have been transcribed, participants will be asked to read the interviews for accuracy and to correct any misunderstandings. This procedure should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of homeschooling and the development of a high school educational plan of study from the perspective of homeschool high school students.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The researcher is a mandatory reporter for child abuse and child neglect.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected as part of this study may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from the participants is shared, any information that could identify them, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Participants will be encouraged to remove identifying information from documents. However, if identifying information is obtained, only the researcher will have access to this information, which will remain confidential.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will participants be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon electronic gift card after they complete all aspects of the study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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.

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Melissa L. MacConney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Sarah Pannone, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

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., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

The researcher has my permission to audio-record and/or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Participant's Printed Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix E

Questionnaire

Instructions: Please complete this questionnaire over a one-week period, answering questions in any order and returning to questions throughout the week as you reflect on your educational plan. Your educational plan includes academic courses, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities. When you have finished, please return this questionnaire to me by email

████████████████████ by _____ . If you have any questions, please let me know!

3. Part I

- a. Who provides most of the instruction for your homeschool program?
- b. What is the highest level of education of each of your parents or other caregivers?
- c. Do your parents or other caregivers work outside of the home? If so, what are their occupations?
- d. For how many years have you been homeschooled?
- e. Have you ever been educated in another (non-homeschool) setting? If so, please explain.
- f. How old are you? What grade are you in currently?
- g. How many siblings do you have who are also homeschooled? What are their ages?
- h. On average, how many hours each day do you spend on academic work or participating in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities?

4. Part II

- a. Regarding your homeschool experience:
 - i. What do you like most about being homeschooled?
 - ii. What do you like least about being homeschooled?
 - iii. Describe your homeschool schedule.
 - iv. Describe the input you had in developing your schedule for this school year.

- b. Regarding the academic courses for the current school year:
 - i. Please list the academic courses that you are currently taking.
 - ii. Why were these courses chosen for this school year?
 - iii. Describe how you learn academic material. (Does a parent or other adult teach the material to you? Do you complete classes online? Etc.)
 - iv. In what ways does homeschooling have a positive effect on your academic development?
 - v. In what ways does homeschooling have a negative effect on your academic development?
 - vi. If you had the opportunity to talk with someone who is critical of homeschooling and its impact on high school academics, what would you want to tell them?

- c. Regarding the settings for these academic courses:
 - i. Where does instruction for each class that you already listed occur?
 - ii. Why were these settings chosen for this school year?
 - iii. What do you like or dislike about these settings?
 - iv. In what ways does homeschooling have a positive effect on your social

development?

- v. In what ways does homeschooling have a negative effect on your social development?
- vi. If you had the opportunity to talk with someone who is critical of homeschooling and its social impact on high school students, what would you want to tell them?

d. Regarding your co-curricular activities for the current school year:

- i. Please list the co-curricular activities that you have participated in during this school year. Co-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, courses and activities such as computer science, foreign language, art, or music.
- ii. How were these courses or activities chosen?
- iii. Where do you go to participate in these activities or classes?
- iv. What do you enjoy most about these activities?

e. Regarding your extra-curricular activities for this school year:

- i. Please list the extra-curricular activities that you have participated in during this school year. Extra-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, activities such as athletics, clubs, organizations, and volunteer or paid work experiences.
- ii. How were these activities chosen?
- iii. Where do you go to participate in these activities?
- iv. What do you enjoy most about these activities?

Appendix F

Interview Guide

1. How long have you been homeschooled? If applicable, are your siblings homeschooled?
2. Describe your favorite homeschool memory.
3. Why are you homeschooled?
4. Describe a typical school day.
5. Describe your plans for after high school.
6. In what ways is your educational plan preparing you for your goals after you finish high school?
7. Describe the academic courses you are currently taking.
8. How did your family decide upon this course selection?
9. How does your family choose curriculum?
10. Explain the input you gave into the selection of courses or curriculum choices.
11. If you have a sibling(s) who is/are (or was/were) homeschooled, how is your course selection similar to or different from theirs?
12. How has your homeschool experience impacted you academically?
13. Describe your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your current academic courses and your role in selecting them.
14. If you could make changes to the courses, what changes would you make? Why?
15. Describe the various settings in which you learn academic content.
16. How did your family decide upon these settings?
17. Explain your role in selecting settings for various academic subjects.
18. Describe the interactions you have with others in these settings.

19. If you have a sibling(s) who is/are (or was/were) homeschooled, how are your academic settings similar to or different from theirs?
20. Describe your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your current learning settings and your role in selecting them.
21. How has your homeschool experience impacted you socially?
22. If you could make changes to these settings, what changes would you make? Why?
23. Describe any co-curricular activities in which you are involved. Co-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, courses and activities such as computer science, foreign language, art, or music.
24. How long have you been involved, and why did you choose these activities?
25. Describe any extra-curricular activities in which you are involved. Extra-curricular activities include, but are not limited to, activities such as athletics, clubs, organizations, and volunteer or paid work experiences.
26. How long have you been involved, and why did you choose these activities?
27. Explain the role you and other family members play in the selection of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
28. Why are these activities important to you?
29. Explain why, if at all, you have eliminated or replaced an activity or why you do not participate in an activity that interests you.
30. What else would you like to tell me about your high school homeschool experience?

Appendix G

Physical Artifacts Instructions to Participants

Instructions:

Please consider all of the settings in which your current educational plan takes place. Remember that your educational plan includes academic courses, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities.

For this activity, please take photos or find photos to represent the various settings in which your educational plan currently occurs. Whenever possible, photographs should not include people's faces or other identifying information. Possible ideas include a photo of your workspace at home, desks in a classroom at your co-op, a trail that you run for cross country practice, an instrument you play in the band, etc.

After you have your photographs, add a narrative paragraph description for each picture and compile them into a presentation. In your narrative paragraph description, include a description of what the picture represents, the role you had in choosing that setting, and the impact that setting has on your learning and development. This activity may be submitted to me in the format you prefer, which may be a Word document with the photos and written description or a PowerPoint presentation with speaking notes for each slide. If you have another preference for how you create this presentation, let me know.

When you have finished, please return this activity to me by email

████████████████████ by _____ . If you have any questions, please let me know!