

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN OF CHRISTIAN K-12 HOMESCHOOL FAMILIES IN  
CENTRAL NORTH CAROLINA: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the instructional design approaches for Christian kindergarten through grade 12 homeschool families in central North Carolina. The theory guiding the study was Jerome Bruner's cognitive development theory of instruction, focusing on knowledge construction and a spiralized approach to learning. As a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the qualitative methodology utilized 12 Christian North Carolina parents of kindergarten through grade 12 home-based learners. Data collection came from a triangulated method of individual interviews, focus group interviews, and writing prompts. Multiple phases of analysis created synthesized themes as the raw data described the lived experiences of the phenomena. The four themes presented within the study are (a) a conviction to homeschool, (b) a focus beyond academics, (c) individualized instruction, and (d) knowing the student. The results of this study corroborated several relevant studies in the field of home-based learning, as the implications provided commonalities of a preference for aligning content with a biblical worldview, separation from public or traditional learning, preferring to offer an individualized approach per student based on their needs, and ensuring that academics expanded beyond traditional learning content to include necessary life skills.

*Keywords:* homeschool, home-based learning, individualized education, Christian education, instructional design

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!

To my parents, who gave me moral lessons on discipline from an earlier age.

To my husband, who encouraged me through my educational journey.

To my children, may you pursue knowledge throughout your lives.

To my homeschool friends, may you continue to use God's grace through your educational journey.

To my editor, Dr. Susan Stanley, thank you for blessing me with your support.

To my committee member, Dr. Jason Sigler, your expertise was appreciated.

And to my supervisor, Dr. Holly Eimer, who was the guiding light every step of the way as I researched for this dissertation.

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**List of Abbreviations**

Kindergarten through Grade Twelve (K-12)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Homeschool is a growing form of education in the United States, with over 3.2 million students registered and recognized by the National Center for Education in 2021 (NCES, 2023). School choice from the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1992 (NCHE, 2023; Newman, 2021) prompted families to evaluate individual circumstances and select the appropriate educational path for their children, whether it was a proactive or reactive decision (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). This qualitative study presented the perception and lived experiences of Christian families of kindergarten through grade 12 learners in the central region of North Carolina. The study aligned with Jerome Bruner's (1964) cognitive development of instruction theory and presented the current research on home-based learning, Christian education, curriculum, and instructional design.

### **Background**

Home-based learning has roots extending to biblical times, and without government-directed schools in the early United States, the responsibility of education fell on the parents of young children (Dill & Elliot, 2019; Hamlin, 2020; Smith, 2020). Being taught within the home, focusing on individualized content relevant to daily lives, maintaining a biblical worldview, and utilizing a family-style learning environment are not new concepts, nor are the concepts strictly designated as valued within the United States (Duvall, 2021; Hamlin, 2020). Home-based learning became a legal option for students in all fifty states when President Bill Clinton signed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1992 (NCHE, 2023; Newman, 2021); development of the act transpired from parental tension over compulsory schooling decisions. This study expands upon the lived experiences of Christian parents who have dedicated time, energy, and

resources to their child's education by homeschooling in North Carolina. The historical importance, the social aspects, and the theoretical context of the study highlighted in the coming section displayed the essence and relevance of this form of learning to a significant percentage of the population in the United States.

### **Historical Context**

There have been times when home-based education was not necessarily implemented out of choice but out of necessity and deemed the only option, with the responsibility falling on parents (Walton, 2021). Often, children would learn through Bible readings and lessons from their parents because the historic way of life was different; survival and thriving in a new country was deemed a greater priority, and government-supported school was not an option until the beginning of the common school movement in 1837 (Newman, 2021; Smith, 2020). Families took on the task of teaching their children. Parents emphasized topics important to the family's lifestyle, such as the primary content of reading, writing, arithmetic, moral teachings from the Bible, and various life skills imperative for the next generation to succeed (Walton, 2021). Homeschooling is often viewed as a lesser option or against social norms (Valiente et al., 2022). Still, home-based learning was the standard when the country was clinging to family values and developing its own way of achieving success.

The historical significance of homeschooling should focus on why families select this option and how parents implement the educational practices. By focusing on the instructional aspects of Christian homeschools in North Carolina, this study aimed to discover a better understanding of the perceived importance of constructed learning experiences, the knowledge acquisition away from a teacher-centered approach, and practices not scripted or dictated by authorities attempting to arrange all children into a normal range of academic achievement.

Though the educational aspects of a standardized education also have an essential role in the country and provide a necessary service for many of the population (Lewis-Spector, 2022), this study values the historical context of home-based learning for its place in our nation's culture and a growing educational option (NCHE, 2023; Newman, 2021).

### **Social Context**

Though many professional educators frequently deem homeschooling a controversial practice, describing the act skeptically (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021), the social trend has flourished recently (Duvall, 2021). Once perceived as outcasts and those categorized as religious fanatics (Lewis-Spector, 2022), the growth of homeschooling reached a climax in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the United States public school system to shut down in-person learning. Remote schooling became the new requirement but met with numerous roadblocks due to the expansive digital divide, the disparity of technology tools (Duvall, 2021; Williamson et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020), inconsistent childcare options, and health scares from the COVID-19 virus (Price et al., 2021). The technological struggles were not the only reason parents withdrew from government-organized education. Duvall (2021) postulated that time stood still with lock-down protocols as families had extensive time to spend with their children. The educational process changed for many young students, and parents individually began to witness the exposure of daily academic functions (Duvall, 2021; Letzel et al., 2022). The number of families registered as homeschooled learners in the United States nearly doubled (Duvall, 2021). For various reasons, parents had chosen to remove children from learning in an established or organized setting and instead decided to be the instructor (Duvall, 2021; Firmin et al., 2019; Green-Hennessy & Mariorri, 2021; Letzel et al., 2022; Nueman, 2020a, 2020b; Nueman & Oz 2021; Valiente et al., 2022; Xu, 2019). The social importance of this study is

evident in the number of families impacted by this learning style; communities all over the United States comprise homeschooled learners.

Not all families experienced educational changes from the COVID-19 pandemic; 3.2 million parents were already implementing instructional practices as previously registered home-based learners (IES, 2023). This study included the parental perspective of first-choice and reactive-choice homeschoolers residing in North Carolina. Following the extreme pandemic changes, home-based learning fluctuates back to pre-pandemic standards. Parents have also been bombarded with societal pressure to accommodate a liberal agenda within the educational system provided by public schools (Lewis-Spector, 2022; Newman, 2021), such as acknowledging homosexuality in sexual education classes and promoting gender fluidity. A distrust in organized, government schooling also prompts conservative and religious families to support the homeschool journey and implement curriculum choices and academic opportunities (Newman, 2021). The study used current research to support the parental perspectives based on personal reasons for choosing home-based learning for their children. Still, it primarily focused on the educational process Christian parents implement and how they construct academic experiences to promote cognition.

### **Theoretical Context**

Extensive research on why parents have decided to homeschool primarily focused on reasons such as a reaction to a poor school experience, special needs students receiving insufficient care based on parental desire, bullying, peer pressure, and fears of an unsafe public environment (Green-Hennessy & Mariorri, 2023); yet research remains limited regarding how homeschool parents select appropriate curricula or learning programs, how lessons become designed to increase student knowledge, and how student success is perceived. This study was

designed to align guiding educational principles from Jerome Bruner's (1964) cognitive development theory of instruction to support the concept of utilizing instructional practices to aid current cognition by understanding the learner, expanding comprehension through a supportive environment, and presenting information in a spiralized approach.

The known practices of a constructivist approach and empirical research on home-based learning provided a framework for this study to understand the parental experience of Christian families as they design and implement the academic journey for K-12 learners. By following a constructivist principle through an approach to learning, the data collection of the study aimed to gather insight into the process for students engaged in home-based learning. The National Center for Education recognized over 3.2 million students as home-based learners in 2021 (IES, 2023), with a top reason for home-based learning cited as a desire for a nontraditional approach to education (NCES, 2023); yet the instructional habits are under-researched (Firmin et al., 2019). The context of this study linked the cognitive development theory of instruction, spiralized learning approach, and current literature on home-based learning while aiming to bridge the gap in the instructional design of Christian homeschooling.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is the instructional design utilized within Christian kindergarten through grade twelve homeschool families is under-researched and underrepresented. A lack of published research on parental perspectives of homeschool education is expressed (Firmin et al., 2019). To elaborate on the unknown home-based learning strategies, the school administrator (the parents or guardians) developed instruction and supported it through the designated curriculum programs parents deem appropriate for their students (Neuman & Oz, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). To the researchers' knowledge, the instructional aspects, such as a front-end analysis, design of the



content, development or modification of the content, the implementation process, and the analysis of student understanding, are not present within the current empirical literature. A gap existed surrounding the academic methods homeschool instructors utilize effectively; instead, research often focused on the family or parental reasons for selecting homeschooling (Dill & Elliot, 2019; Firmin et al., 2019; Hamlin, 2020; Neuman & Oz, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). With more students leaving or avoiding the public school system, homeschooling has become a popular choice for education in the United States; the National Center for Education Statistics estimates over 1.4 million K-12 students are registered as homeschooled (IES, 2023). Aspects of the family dynamic, the reasons for selecting this method of education, and the curriculum utilized are known to influence the homeschool experience. This hermeneutic phenomenological study focused on the instructional design Christian families implemented with kindergarten through grade twelve students as they cultivated academic success.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the instructional design approaches utilized by Christian homeschooling parents in rural North Carolina. At this stage in the research, the instructional design of Christian homeschooling is generally defined as educational practices conducted by the parents or guardian and not dictated by a school organization (Firmin et al., 2019; Lewis-Spector, 2022; Nueman, 2020a, 2020b; Nueman & Oz 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). The theory guiding this study was Jerome Bruner's (1964) cognitive development theory of instruction and aimed to answer underlying questions about the lived experiences of homeschool parents and how instructional experiences become implemented effectively. The aspects of this theory aligned with the guiding principles of

educational experiences for kindergarten through grade 12 learners, as instructors sought to support and ensure learning progress and success.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Theoretical**

The study's theoretical significance came from the expansion of Jerome Bruner's (1964) cognitive theory of instruction. Family and mixed cooperative group style learning supports a spiralized curriculum design. The instructional methods that evoke students' constructing knowledge highlight positive outcomes for families deciding to homeschool (Bruner, 1964; 1986; Firmin et al., 2019). The learning environment for K-12 students is often regarded as either supportive of constructive learning or remains teacher-centered (Bruner, 1985). This study expanded Bruner's (1964) theory of best practices for extended cognition when the individual learners are the targets of designed instruction.

#### **Empirical**

Homeschool has become an increased form of education in the United States since the opportunity for freedom of choice in the 1990s (NCHE, 2023; Newman, 2021). Numerous research studies focus on the impact of homeschooling and the trend increased from the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed for in-person learning (Duvall, 2021). However, most of the available literature focused on why families have selected to forgo public education or classroom learning and very little on how parents facilitate a child's academic progress (Dill & Elliot, 2019; Firmin et al., 2019; Hamlin, 2020; Neuman & Oz, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). Societal pressure to maintain a social learning environment for children prompts parents to keep children in government education (Lewis-Spector, 2022). Yet, Firmin et al. (2019) described various opportunities for families to benefit from small-group learning while maintaining a

home-based learning format. Within each homeschool, parents can select the curriculum and tailor the instruction for each child (Hamlin, 2020). Seizing the opportunity for educational liberty seems to significantly increase when expecting a biblical worldview amongst subject areas, especially science and history content (Guthrie, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). However, the issue of instructional design, such as pedagogy and implementation practices, is rarely described in education, leaving a gap in current research (Dill & Elliot, 2019; Firmin et al., 2019; Hamlin, 2020; Neuman & Oz, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022).

## **Practical**

The study's significance was to understand the design parents choose to instruct homeschooled children. The plan for accomplishing the hermeneutic phenomenological study with Christian homeschool parents was to find the essence of their experiences on how they taught their children. As a homeschool parent, this author frequently evaluated the process and made modifications when necessary. Frustration is observable when current research goes over the emotional or seemingly political reasons why parents choose to homeschool or make attempts to compare a standardized test from public education to the homeschool experience of unique individuals. The goal was to delve into the parents' lived experiences and find themes for implementing educational practices. Proverbs reads, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it" (The Holy Bible, 2001). This study may influence a percentage of households currently homeschooling and desire to homeschool children in the future; the shared parental goal is to prepare children to become independent as they grow and emerge into society as competent adults.

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Research Questions**

What instructional experiences are utilized by Christian kindergarten through grade 12 families through their homeschool journey?

### **Sub-Question One**

How do the parent's lived experiences influence the design of instruction as they relate to the homeschool experiences of their children?

### **Sub-Question Two**

What instructional methods are perceived by parents as effective with students of Christian K-12 homeschools?

### **Sub-Question Three**

How does evidence of cognition drive the constructive experiences of Christian K-12 homeschool learning?

## **Definitions**

1. *Adolescence* - The period between childhood and adulthood, school-aged, typically before completion of school and independent living, aged 11-20, could be an interchangeable term between youth, teenagers, teens, and young adults (Wickramanayake, 2021).
2. *COVID-19* – A respiratory disease from the SARS-CoV-2, known as coronavirus, discovered in China in late 2019, which spreads rapidly through respiratory droplets from an infected person as they cough or sneeze (Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).
3. *E-Learning or Online Learning* – The process of learning (instructional or training techniques) through a virtual platform or electronic-based device and being an active participant (Branch, 2009)

4. *Homeschool (also home-based learning)* – A parent-directed educational experience taking place at home (Valiente et al., 2022); children learning at a designated site, amongst small groups, through various online learning platforms, and perhaps a combination of other options (Hamlin 2020; Tilhou, 2020); learning not directed by a school (e.g., public, private, charter) and the parents are responsible for the education (Firmin et al., 2019; Hamlin, 2020).
5. *Hybrid Learning* – A student learning and actively participating from multiple formats to include virtual and in-person experiences as their academic setting, also termed a blended approach to learning (Shin & Park, 2019).
6. *Instructional Design* – Creating instruction to close a performance gap due to a lack of knowledge, skills, student maturity, and development. Instructional design is also termed the system of instructional delivery, how instruction and activities are provided to the learner (Branch, 2009).

### **Summary**

The hermeneutic phenomenological study on the homeschool practices of Christian families in central North Carolina focused on the instructional design parents implement with their kindergarten through grade 12 learners. The qualitative study aligned with the guiding principles of applying Bruner's (1964) cognitive development theory of instruction, focusing on knowledge construction, a spiralized approach to learning, supporting current levels of cognition, and expanding upon learner cognition. The historical significance of homeschooling in the United States has changed with government policies and societal pressures, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study has focused on the shared perspective and lived experiences of homeschool parents as they navigate the instructional practices that support their

children's learning.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the instructional design utilized by Christian homeschool families of kindergarten through grade 12 learners in the central region of North Carolina. Chapter Two offers a review of the research on this topic. The first section will discuss the theory of cognitive development within constructivism, followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding home-based learning and foundational Christian education. Lastly, a literature review surrounding knowledge representation, individualized educational goals, and spiral curriculum options will be discussed. A gap in the current literature regarding the design of homeschooled learning will be identified in the instructional design of homeschooled Christian families of K-12 learners.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study, highlighting the instructional design approaches utilized within Christian homeschool settings, has been grounded in constructivist theory, particularly the cognitive development theory of instruction (Bruner, 1964). The initial principle connecting with homeschool practices showed students are more capable of comprehension when learning opportunities support active experiences for constructing meaning (Bruner, 1985; 1997). A second guiding principle is the belief children should be exposed to spiralized instruction (Bruner, 1964). A third guiding principle for the research study on homeschool learning was students can better acquire knowledge with a tailored approach for a more individualized education (Bruner, 1985; Xu, 2019).

### **Cognitive Development Theory of Instruction**

The cognitive constructivist approach to learning supports introducing problem-solving through curriculum organization, constructing new knowledge through prior knowledge and exploration. Bruner's (1977) cognitive development theory of instruction focuses heavily on acquiring, transforming, and evaluating knowledge impacting instructional design practices. The theory asserts learners must be able to actively explore through various physical acts to facilitate cognition based on the experience outcomes (Stapleton & Stefaniak, 2019). Jerome Bruner (1977; 1985), a distinguished psychologist, later developed a theory on scaffolding in 1964, influenced by Lev Vygotsky's (1980; 2017) work on social situations, and updated the cognitive model of a learner in 1985 to include scaffolding (Bruner, 1977; 1985). The cognitive development theory encourages building learning experiences and a spiralized approach to curriculum to expand student grasp of the concept and boost situated cognition. Content is continuously exposed through reinforced activities until mastery occurs to facilitate active learning and motivate students (Bruner, 1985). The natural desire of children to learn and manipulate objects through hands-on activities should encourage educators to create experiences in a sequence facilitating cognitive development.

There are four components of Bruner's (1964) theory of instruction: predisposition, the structure of knowledge, optimal sequencing of material, and reinforcement. The predisposition of young learners to have internal motivation and engagement in tasks can keep students focused on problems needing solutions (Bruner, 1997). By supporting the navigation process only when necessary, instructors can step away from the task and allow students to understand the material, organize the concept, and transfer knowledge to new situations for further exploration (Bruner, 1985). The knowledge structure begins simplistically, and as the learner grows to a more advanced stage, the content sequence becomes more meaningful. Bruner described the three



knowledge representation modes as enactive, iconic, and symbolic (Bruner, 1964). Enactive representation is likened to muscle memory, where the individual becomes familiar with experiences. Iconic representation takes the visuals and perceptions, transforming them into mental images. The symbol system uses representations to construct an arbitrary design using either imagery or language for productiveness in retaining the information.

In the cognitive theory of instruction development, Bruner (1964) postulated that any implementation system can be effective with an appropriate internalized counterpart so learners can organize sensorimotor acts into perceptions and form thoughts. As thoughts become memories, the storage of memories comes second to retrieving the relevant information. Memory processing transforms past experiences through coding, taking acquired knowledge through refining. The learning structure is essential to assist with memory transferal later; skills towards mastery allow for future layering of facts processed as scenarios within a new context (Stepleton & Stefaniak, 2018). A spiral approach to learning supports an individual's level of comprehension, as further information transforms into increasingly more advanced scenarios (Xu, 2019).

The conditions supporting the course of cognitive growth through adolescence were described by Bruner as being under-researched, claiming that little is known about how imagery representation grows based on environmental interventions and parental interactions (Bruner, 1964). The claim in his 1964 version of the theory later became modified to include a greater emphasis on the models of a learner and a hierarchical classification of internalized language. Language skills assist the transformation of knowledge as it turns into problem-solving skills when the learner gains maturity, experience, and intellectual growth. Unlocking learning capacity is significant in developing intellect; techniques come from exposure to various

environments and are individualistic to the learner. In a hermeneutic article, Bruner (1985, p. 8) expressed:

There is not *one* kind of learning. ... any learner has a host of learning strategies at command. The salvation is in learning how to go about learning before getting irreversibly beyond the point of no return. We would do well to equip learners with a menu of their possibilities and, in the course of their education, to arm them with procedures and sensibilities that would make it possible for them to use the menu wisely.

These foundational principles of Bruner's theory support the study, as learners thrive when instruction is presented in a spiral system and utilized with active learning strategies (Stapleton & Stefaniak, 2019). Fostering the exposure of relevant content through a spiralized approach is ideal for a more individualized or small group experience when the instructor can genuinely know the current level of student understanding (Bruner, 1985). Homeschool allows for this form of instruction because of the opportunity for flexibility, ensuring content is absorbed and experienced by the learner as they work towards mastery and not just completing the material or assignment. Motivation and engagement are necessary to ensure the student achieves cognition; the instructional methods can foster the learners' achievements by reinforcing the authenticity of the learning experience (Bruner, 1964; Stapleton & Stefaniak, 2019). Reinforcement with extrinsic reward and praise helps motivate the learner, but more importantly, as the level of interest peaks, learners naturally shift towards intrinsic rewards of self-satisfaction and pride (Bruner, 1964).

### **Related Literature**

While researching current literature regarding the instructional design utilized by homeschool educational experience, themes emerged. The two initial themes were the lack of a

complete definition of homeschooling and how the instructional methods of faith-based learning correlate to the parental desire to avoid secular encroachment. When seeking the definition of homeschool learning, it is essential to know what qualifies a student as a home-based learner and how parents make this commitment (Firmin et al., 2019; Lewis-Spector, 2022; Nueman, 2020a, 2020b; Nueman & Oz 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). The instructional design and implementation of Christian values pivot on the instructional materials and the overall values of the parents, guardians, and instructors facilitating learning for K-12 homeschool students (Dill & Elliot, 2019; Firmin et al., 2019; Hamlin, 2020; Neuman & Oz, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022).

### **Home-Based Learning**

Homeschool education has no clear or complete definition; a collective translation of home-based learning has numerous facets. Valiente et al. (2022) defined homeschooling as a parent-directed educational experience taking place at home. While this might be the case for most homeschooled families in the United States or abroad, Neuman and Oz (2021) described the phenomenon as the education children receive when they are not in school. The second definition leaves room for interpretation based on the location; for example, children could learn in their home, at a designated site, amongst small groups, through various online learning platforms, and perhaps a combination of other options (Hamlin, 2020; Tilhou, 2020). Two common aspects consistently defining homeschooling are learning is not directed by a school (e.g., public, private, charter), and parents are responsible for the education (Firmin et al., 2019; Hamlin, 2020).

### ***The Evolving History of Education in the United States***

Education was not a primary focus when America began as an independent nation. Life was challenging during pre- and post-revolutionary times; family support and survival were

imperative. Families sought to educate their children independently; community schools were rare (Rollings-Magnusson, 2010; S. Smith, 2020). Reading, writing, and arithmetic were secondary to learning skills and trades. Common school reform was first discussed in the 1840s, promoting tax-funded nonsectarian education hopeful of creating informed generations of citizens to support the republic and reduce crime and poverty (Newman, 2021; S. Smith, 2020). Compulsory school laws were not in place until Horace Mann's election in 1837; Mann was the Secretary of Massachusetts' first Board of Education (Firmin et al., 2019; S. Smith, 2020). Laws were also created in each state by 1918, requiring students to attend schooling from kindergarten through sixth grade (S. Smith, 2020). The perceived advancement of formal education through the postmodern era introduced professional educators, state and national standards for teaching goals and objectives, expanded subjects and extracurricular activities, and annual standardized assessments. Eventually, states began adapting their laws and allowing families to homeschool their children with approval, with all fifty states recognizing homeschooling as a legal option by 1992 (NCHE, 2023; Newman, 2021).

**Native Americans' Relationship with Government Education.** Even before the independence of the United States, the New World was inconsistent in the treatment of educational opportunities. The colonization of the new land by both the Spanish and English settlers greatly impacted the lives of Native Americans (S. Smith, 2020). Unfairly viewed, the Native American population was collectively considered uncivilized or aggressive and often deemed lesser beings. The tribal groups were reduced forcibly by the government through harsh relocation requirements (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020; S. Smith, 2020). One requirement was the federally instituted education programs attempting to convert Indigenous children to Christianity by developing boarding schools, such as the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, established in

1879 (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020). As generalized cultural groups, the relationship between the tribal groups and the English settlers became strained due to cultural differences, language barriers, religious beliefs, and customs (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020; Stancui, 2021). Some native values revolved around respecting and preserving tribal lands, as well as their tribal and family structure. With no written language, many Native American tribes became receptive to the offers provided by Christian missionaries as groups began outreach efforts for a formal education while maintaining peaceful efforts (S. Smith, 2020). However, the American experience most native people received was harsh due to the government's relocation efforts, with the Indian Removal Act taking effect from 1830 - 1850 (Sumida Huaman, 2020; S. Smith, 2020). The Trail of Tears, an ethnic cleansing, moved the natives to the west side of the Mississippi River to allow White settlers to seek land and opportunity on the east side (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020; Stancui, 2021). Reservations were created for Indigenous people by the government to maintain controlled areas (Stancui, 2021).

Until the completion of the academic program, the forced educational practices subjected adolescents to be taken from their families and stripped of their cultural identity. Students were no longer permitted to speak their native languages, were given English or Christian names, and were forced to cut long hair, which became a traumatic experience for students (McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020; Walters et al., 2019). The altered identity of students was a disadvantage for the adolescents, and the academic experience was not nearly as beneficial as leaders of the educational organizations had hoped (Cech et al., 2017; McCoy & Villeneuve, 2020; Stancui, 2021), thus forcing the students to either struggle with rejoining family and tribal groups because of the new appearance and heritage shift or to struggle with leaving the reservation to gain independence in the workforce (Cech et al., 2017). While good intentions might have existed by

government officials instilling the policies and orders, the educational opportunities were not appropriately aligned with the Native American population's cultural heritage, confirming a one-size-fits-all approach does not always apply to school-aged students. The historical significance of the Indigenous people's oppression shows relevancy that not all academic settings support students as a whole; everyone is unique with an individual set of needs. The history of the education system deserves review and consideration when evaluating current and future policies and structural progress, especially as it relates to individual families selecting a different educational path. Christian parents consistently cite government education as oppressive to their religious values, enforcing overreaching standards and attempting to push secular trends as academic norms (Newman, 2021). As historical examples, the de-Christianization of America is recognized through removing biblical moral teachings, urbanization, science pushing evolution, humanism as a religion, other religious indoctrination practices, and, more recently, the teaching of critical race theory.

**Financial Disparity and Child Labor.** Though colonists established schools in some areas of the United States, not all children of school age could attend (Johnson, 2020; Seeley, 2016). Wealthier families could afford to send their children to school. In contrast, poorer families needed their children to work at home caring for younger siblings, find other employment opportunities, or tend to the family farm. According to a 1900 census, nearly 12% of children aged 10-15 had employment in urban areas, and 22% in the same age group were employed in rural agricultural regions (Shanan, 2023). Seasonal schooling opportunities assisted farming families, where students would only attend classes when farming duties were lighter, and families were not as invested in managing land and livestock. Students would walk to school independently, with parents or older siblings, because of a lack of reliable transportation. A

Canadian history of pioneer schooling cited the distance to opened schoolhouses would differ based on the region and population of the area (Rollings-Magnusson, 2010). Attending an academic program was not a simple or convenient task for many families, and it was common for children to drop out of school to pursue other options (Rollings-Magnusson, 2010; S. Smith, 2020).

If parents were skilled with reading, the family could learn together through scriptural readings and traditional storytelling. Yet, many immigrants came to the United States unable to speak or read English; this impacted the families and often forced them to stay close to established cultural groups (Rollings-Magnusson, 2010). The United States was nicknamed the ‘melting pot’ because of the many immigrants from diverse countries and cultural groups (Seeley, 2016). The language barrier restricted options for schooling, and there was a stigma that students could not join other students to gain academic understanding. The workforce needed capable beings and would allow children to work until the United States (U.S.) Congress began restricting juvenile labor laws in 1918 and 1922 (Shanan, 2023). Even when schools were available, not all children enjoyed the luxury of attending school for various reasons. Child labor was acceptable and practiced until the Fair Labor Standard Act of 1938, which restricted child labor nationwide. However, new research on child labor policies and restrictions is under evaluation due to juveniles gaining income as social media influencers (Masterson, 2021). Additionally, net income for homeschooled families does not determine the capabilities and academic outcome of home-based learning (NCES, 2023).

**African Americans.** Racial injustice against African Americans has also been a stain on the history of America. African Americans were not allowed the same rights as White citizens and were excluded from educational opportunities (Anderson & Span, 2016). The Black

population, forced into slavery or servitude, was stripped of the same experiences afforded to many in the free country. The signing of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 eradicated slavery (Allen, 2022; Anderson & Span, 2016; Johnson, 2020). While the population believed the Emancipation Proclamation to free the enslaved people, the lives of many individuals did not immediately provide children or adults with freedom, opportunities, the support of jobs, or an education (Anderson & Span, 2016; Seeley, 2016). Segregated schools were available for African-American school-aged children, yet they struggled while living in poverty, requiring children to assist families financially (Allen, 2022). Educational opportunities were limited based on geographic location, a lack of community support, and harsh financial burdens.

Segregated schooling ended in 1954 with the Brown versus Board of Education Supreme Court ruling (Anderson & Span, 2016; Griffen, 2020). Yet, the African-American population perceived the change at a slower progression due to underlying fears and racial tensions (Allen, 2022; Johnson, 2020). Academic progress, schooling experiences, and economic differences due to race continue to be a focus of research and policy changes to reduce disparity (Johnson, 2020). The National Center for Educational Statistics cited in the 2020-2021 school year, 5.1 % of homeschoolers in the United States were African-American (NCES, 2023). Marginalized families of color have less research surrounding perception and experiences (Dennison et al., 2020). Black homeschool families express the historical significance behind educating children independently, seeking to avoid the adverse impacts of discriminatory and inequitable practices.

**Internment Camps.** Another historical event determined to alter the educational experience of many was the War Relocation Authority of over 120,000 Japanese-Americans (Foster, 2015; Wenger, 2012; Yamashiro, 2022). The development of internment camps was due to the response to World War II and the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 (Foster, 2015;



Yamashiro, 2022). Americans feared another terrorist attack, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt concluded all Japanese-Americans should relocate to the western and middle states as a precaution. These camps not only removed families from homes and adults from careers but also removed children from schooling. Internment camps, designed to protect the country, restricted the lives and opportunities of a large population strictly based on race. The event altered the American experience of many and consequently impacted the lives of the Japanese-American population when released to resume their daily lives. Educational opportunities were limited for students in the camps due to abrupt shifts in location and services, a lack of resources, lapsed time waiting for student academic records to be received, and an inadequate student-to-teacher ratio (Foster, 2015; Wenger, 2012). Upon closing the internment camps, educational opportunities were also problematic due to families needing to merge back into society, potentially starting over financially, and experiencing xenophobic undertones from the community (Foster, 2015; Yamashiro, 2022).

**Females' Role.** The role of females in society has changed significantly since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, giving women equal employment rights (Griffen, 2020). Before societal shifts, women were viewed as wives, mothers, and homemakers, making it nonessential for females to receive an education like male students and reducing employment opportunities (Kanter, 1977). The disparity of educational opportunities restricted females from attending certain schools, attending school past a certain age, or forcing them to seek costly private tutoring for academics (Rollings-Magnusson, 2010; S. Smith, 2020). These initial restrictions kept many females from gaining an appropriate education and would restrict opportunities as they reached adulthood, keeping women in the cycle of remaining wives, mothers, and homemakers. Gender gaps in student achievement remain inconsistent and are frequently

analyzed with socioeconomic factors while focusing on subject areas, such as English language arts, mathematics, and STEM-related content (Reardon et al., 2019; Reinking & Martin, 2018). Again, the history of educational opportunities in the United States subsequently removed the freedom and opportunity of another subset of individuals for an extended period until policies eventually changed to support a quality learning experience for all citizens.

**One-Room School House.** When evaluating the history of educational opportunities in the United States, it is essential to emphasize the first established schools were community-supported, often based on Christian values, funded by independent townships, and held in a one-room schoolhouse (Rollings-Magnusson, 2010). The signing of the Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647 in Massachusetts showed the significance of parents having children educated, ideally to ensure Bible reading and understanding of scriptural references (Newman, 2021). Trained in academic pedagogy or simply willing participants, teachers were responsible for establishing order, delivering lessons, managing limited supplies, and keeping the community pleased with student progress with various aged students in a single room. The academic relevance of this teaching style can be likened to home-based learning, where content, such as language arts and mathematics, was taught to a specific level until the students reached the highest level, pursued a further degree at another facility, or began specific training for skilled labor.

### ***Current Trends***

Education has also become privatized with secular and religious-based options, such as tuition-based learning, charter school options based on location or lottery acceptance, and a homeschooling alternative. Though the United States founded principles of freedom, it was not until 1992 that all fifty states supported plans for school choice and religious freedom (NCHE, 2023; S. Smith, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic pushed the closure of nearly all public-school

buildings, expecting students and educators to perform similar academic tasks through supported electronic learning platforms. During this time, additional families chose to remove their children from the public-school registration and opted for homeschooled learning. Whether dissatisfied with the learning experience, the dictated curriculum, the child's ability to cope with the change in instruction, or for other reasons, researchers continue to study the drastic shift with school removal (Alismaiel et al., 2022; Letzel et al., 2022; McDonald, 2020; Watson, 2020).

Before the pandemic, a 2019 National Home Education Research Institute and U.S. Census Bureau survey showed 2.5 million students were registered as homeschooled in the United States (Duvall, 2021; NCHE, 2021). The number of households registered as homeschooled in the fall of 2020, during the COVID-19 Pandemic lockdowns, doubled to five million (Duvall, 2021; NCHE, 2023). Currently, 13% of the K-12 student population in North Carolina are registered as either religious or secular homeschoolers (NCHE, 2023). Each state can dictate rules, regulations, and requirements for being registered as homeschooled. North Carolina, where this study is conducted, has a Non-Public Education division within the Department of Administration; the registration site will not acknowledge a child as a homeschooler until they are seven, regardless of the child's academic grade level (NCPDI, 2023). Registered homeschoolers must receive annual testing from a nationally recognized standardized assessment and meet for at least 180 academic days for an anticipated five-hour block (NCDPI, 2023; NCHE, 2023). Audits can occur within homeschools based on undocumented information, necessary interventions, and random assignment. States dictate requirements to be qualified as a home-based learner, and compliance falls on the registered homeschooling families.

### ***Homeschool Parent Perspective on Traditional Schooling***

Parents and guardians are responsible for registering children as home-based learners, making choices based on personal prerogative (Neuman & Oz, 2021). Lewis-Spector (2022) postulated many parents had removed children from traditional schooling due to a polarized climate exacerbated by social media trends and pandemic politics. While other homeschool parents reported wanting a more individualized approach to learning, wishing to foster a rich family experience and establish a lifestyle of learning (Firmin et al., 2019). An Israeli study by Ari Neuman (2020a; 2020b) supported these same parental perspective findings, viewing the choice to homeschool as a lifestyle and a form of pedagogy. Interestingly, Israel has only legalized home-based learning as an active choice of education in the past few years, expanding the number of homeschooled students from a few dozen families to over 800 (Neuman, 2020a; 2020b; Neuman & Oz, 2021). A comparison with Western countries clarified that many areas find home-based learning a newer concept. However, Israel was prevalent with the practice in the pre-modern era and regained popularity in the postmodern era (Guterman, 2020).

A generic dissatisfaction with traditional schooling across the United States identifies and extends the parental perspective of government school avoidance. Several aspects of discontent have been cited, such as lack of school safety, bullying concerns, peer pressure, consumerism, reduced student identity and motivation, poor parent-teacher relationship, large class size, harmful labeling of special needs, and secular encroachment (Firmin et al., 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Of the identified complaints, educational professionals expressed the push for censorship of parental opinions, citing the opinions as being exploited through social media, which spread misinformation and appeared as an effort to dismantle the educational opportunities of those utilizing traditional academics (Lewis-Spector, 2022). Some homeschooling groups, mainly advertising their alignment with conservative groups, have supported removing standard school

practices to promote family values. The removal of students registered in U.S. traditional schooling, or the initial avoidance of public learning, cannot be narrowed down to a few reasons due to the vast diversity within our country's cultural makeup and geographical differences. Avoidance of public education influences marginalized groups as discriminatory practices are viewed as limiting future educational and economic possibilities (Dennison et al., 2020).

### ***Parental Decision to Homeschool***

Numerous factors impact the parental decision to homeschool; most recent research explains the most emerging themes are the desire for an individualized educational plan, religious freedom, overgeneralization of students, dissatisfaction with government schooling, and societal pressures, such as harmful social media influence, consumerism, and bullying (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2021). A 2019 survey from the National Center for Educational Statistics cited:

Top parental reasons for homeschooling as a concern about school environments (such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure), a desire to provide moral instruction, emphasis on family life together, a dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools, a desire to provide religious instruction, a desire to provide a nontraditional approach to child's education, child has a physical or mental health problem, child has a temporary illness, and other reasons (NCES, 2023, Homeschooling: Reasons for Homeschooling section).

Yet homeschool families are often reluctant or unwilling to participate in government surveys, choosing to remain privatized (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023); regardless of the factors leading the parents to choose homeschooling as an educational option, parents, guardians, and

instructors of adolescents in other educational paths are mindful of the same negative factors impacting school-aged children today.

**Social Media Avoidance.** An estimated 93%-97% of adolescents aged 13-17 years old hold a social media account and engage in daily use, averaging three hours (Vannucci et al., 2020). Research on the continued use of media platforms showed adverse effects because adolescents have a heightened connection with technology tools, mainly social media platforms. Academic settings, such as public schooling, show a decline in verbal skills and formatted written work attributed to consistent and continued social media interactions (Lambton-Howard et al., 2021; Vie, 2018). The homeschool experience remains under-researched (Firmin et al., 2019) but may also depict the same level of academic concern relating to verbal skill deficits. Social media communications have become so common and distinctive that interactions are now viewed as a specific language type, consequently harming social interactions when conversing in person (Lambton-Howard et al., 2021). Though social media does provide users with the convenient aspect of instant communication, brief written remarks or responses are deemed too condensed, sometimes in the form of visuals, such as memes, emojis, photos, and video clips. The repeated use of condensed responses has proven adolescents are losing the concept of structured or formatted writing, as it carries over in vocabulary knowledge and directly impacts verbal skills (Lambton-Howard et al., 2021). Parents can restrict a child's creation of social media accounts until a higher age or set strict limitations on the viewed or participated content (Zhu & Skoric, 2021). Social media outlets, such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube, permit users to create accounts at thirteen (Apple, 2023). Restrictions and monitored activity on such outlets based on parental decisions are more feasible for homeschooled families because the family naturally spends more time together and can preview interactions.

The parental fears of social media use are not limited to a reduced ability to conduct verbal conversations or a decreased quality of writing. Parental concerns featured in current literature show adolescents have a decline in attention span, addiction tendencies, poor mental health, online bullying, consumerism, and risky interactions with online predators (Alt, 2017; Kelly et al., 2018; Vannucci et al., 2020). While various platforms can offer enriching opportunities for individuals to learn from a wide variety of content and support creativity (Lambton-Howard et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2018), parents, guardians, and educators of adolescents should implement limitations and restrictions. Disruptive multitasking behaviors attributed to social media and other digital print programs show reduced adolescent learning experiences as the extensive use displaced time (Chen et al., 2021). Left unattended to engage in social media outlets independently, additional adverse outcomes have become apparent in adolescents, such as poor sleep patterns, lower self-esteem, reduced cognitive abilities, and addictive habits, ultimately impacting mental health and academic achievements (Lambton-Howard et al., 2021).

Viewing content for an extended period, previously listed as around three hours daily, adolescents show signs of depressive symptoms, including self-harm, loss of motivation, and reduced physical activity (Kelly et al., 2018; Vannucci et al., 2020). Risky behaviors are also practiced more frequently, such as communicating with strangers, sexual exploration, delinquent acts, victimization of others, and substance abuse (Vannucci et al., 2020). The current research on the negative aspects of social media use on adolescents described the harmful impacts on users not monitored and are allowed to seek entertainment independently; studies consistently cite greater odds of inappropriate or detrimental outcomes when not monitored by a parent or guardian (Alt, 2017; Kelly et al., 2018; Vannucci et al., 2020). Parental comments regarding the

preference for homeschooling consistently expressed the desire to deviate from social expectations and avoid standard practices (Firmin et al., 2019), particularly those restricting family and religious values (Newman, 2021).

**Avoidance of Constant Social Influence.** While greatly attributed to social media use, the parental fear of negative social influence is not explicitly linked with online media outlets, especially in recent studies of homeschooling families. Both social media and constant social gathering with impressionable peers are believed to have harmful influences when not monitored (Park et al., 2020; Vannucci et al., 2020; Wickramanayake, 2021). Social settings facilitate and often encourage concepts of consumerism, where peer influences from social groups encourage purchasing particular items or brands of clothing and the most up-to-date technology tools, such as phones, video game systems, and other electronics. Consumerism thrives in an environment where competition and peer approval are standard practices (Hendry et al., 2021), often most notably through social media platforms. Parents, educators, and adults working with youth have recognized the obsessive tendencies related to peer groups and social media use, having referred to the behavior as a ‘fear of missing out’ and an ‘influencer pedagogy’ (Alt, 2017; Hendry et al., 2021).

The engrossed tendencies of adolescents to be connected to social media has developed a genuine fear the individual will miss out on viewing content or acknowledgment of an experience (Alt, 2017). Social trends potentially present applicable content or relate closely to academics, but this particular level of constant distraction is developing into fear and is evidence of an unhealthy relationship with social media and peer groups (Alt, 2017; Kelly et al., 2018; Park et al., 2020; Vannucci et al., 2020). Social media influencers utilize their internet popularity to increase status and financial gain by displaying products to account followers. The



manipulated information on products by influencers was featured in an Australian study; researchers found the dissemination of misinformation dangerous and coined this phenomenon as the ‘influencer pedagogy’ (Hendry et al., 2021). Products or health trends featured on popular social accounts can include diet trends and supplements being depicted in a particular manner, often misleading, dubious, dangerous, and comes from unqualified individuals or organizations (Hendry et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020; Vannucci et al., 2020). The presented information from influencers had been designed to manipulate impressionable followers for monetary gain (Hendry et al., 2021). Direct and indirect messages delivered through media and influential peer groups are believed to be factual by adolescents yet harmfully impact decision-making skills and reduce the likelihood of seeking trustworthy informative platforms (Park et al., 2020). When adolescents are enrolled in a social setting and constantly surrounded by peer influences, negative outcomes become exacerbated as impressionable, easily manipulated adolescents lack parental supervision, support, and guidance (Vannucci et al., 2020; Wickramanayake, 2021). Homeschool parents frequently express concern about traditional schooling as a setting, creating students only capable of thinking provided thoughts (Neuman & Oz, 2020; Newman, 2021).

**Protecting Children.** Homeschool parents have also cited a strong desire to protect children from potentially harmful environments and experiences (Firmin et al., 2019). In 2018, departmentalized classrooms in North Carolina showed an average of 24.1 students in primary school classrooms, 24.6 students in middle school, and an average class size of 20.8 students in high school (NCES, 2023); larger class sizes subsequently make it difficult for instructors to monitor student behaviors (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023). Teachers, leadership, and school administrators only become aware of bullying situations when reported or witnessed. Nearly 20% of K-12 students have self-reported acts of bullying in a classroom setting (Dills, 2022).

Though cyberbullying is extremely common, verbal bullying from in-person situations and harmful physical attacks on individuals, have also gained attention from educators and parents. Bullying experiences are cited as a top reason parents desire to remove school-aged children from a social-academic setting (Firmin et al., 2019; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; NCES, 2023; Valiente et al., 2022). In the 2019-2020 school year, 1.4 million on-campus incidents were reported by students or staff, including violent acts, theft, and other forms of victimization (NCES, 2023).

Isolation from peers and trained adults, such as educators and guidance counselors, leaves concern for the well-being of homeschooled students. The Coalition for Responsible Home Education has pushed for stricter policies for homeschooling practices to ensure sufficient academic progress and to prevent potential abuse or neglect (Denisson et al., 2023). The reality of potentially harmful situations in a public educational setting either prompted parents to choose home-based learning or become a reactive result of an unfortunate experience (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023). While the desire to protect children and ensure safety is not a unique parental position, to homeschooling families it is simply one of numerous reasons parents have selected a home-based education.

**Parental Involvement.** Extensive research on K-12 parental involvement of public-school students shows the greater the support, the more likely students are to be academically successful (Cui, 2023; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2022; Lara & Saracostti, 2019; Lerner et al., 2022). While Lerner et al. (2022) determined that higher parental involvement was conducive to student learning across academic areas and even higher education learning, the level of control of the parent should be supportive and nurturing surrounding the abilities and interests of the student. Home-based learning requires the parent or a guardian to facilitate the instruction,

naturally transferring to a high level of parental involvement because of continuous interactions (Neuman, 2020a; Neuman & Oz, 2020). However, states like North Carolina allow other relatives or a paid instructor to be the primary facilitator in home-based learning experiences, meaning the school administrator or responsible party could remain the parent without sharing the role of the teacher. The instructor could potentially be filled by another individual assigned to the role (NCDPI, 2023). North Carolina requires registered homeschools to be accountable for their child's instruction but will permit one other student (related or unrelated) not residing in the household to join the academics. Foster guardians may also obtain special permission to homeschool, but the Department of Public Instruction explains these are permitted case-by-case.

When parents ultimately decide to homeschool, compliance falls on the children in the household (Neuman, 2020a). Most research labels the mother as the administrator and instructor of the students, regardless of choosing home-based learning as either an active or reactive option for education (Green-Hennessey & Mariotti, 2023). The parental role as a combined teacher/parent shows the most intense form of parental involvement, and the complex role involvement of the dual role is under-researched (Dennison et al., 2020; Neuman, 2020a). The strain of adding educational expectations to the position of being a mother, wife, with homemaking responsibilities can deplete mental health by causing stress and exhaustion (Baker, 2019). Though the public-school changes implemented during the pandemic have been cited as positive for parents seeking more time with family, many reactive parents expressed an appreciation for knowing the option of home-based learning has supportive resources and is feasible (Green-Hennessey & Mariotti, 2021).

### **Christian Education**

One prominent reason for choosing the home-based learning option is religious preference and the desire to instill particular values within family and cultural groups (Neuman, 2020a; Firmin et al., 2019). Yet, one study indicated religious homeschool groups have appeared stagnant in the past several years (Lewis-Spector, 2022). Instead, Firmin et al. (2019) cited differentiation and personalized approaches to learning have become the top goals of parents in the homeschool community. A study on Mennonite educational practices in multiple states likened this phenomenon to faith-based teaching because instructors, regardless of religion, instilled silent values (Yoder et al., 2021). To clarify this concept, the authors referred to teachers who practice religion as naturally displaying mannerisms and actions depicting their personal beliefs; the teachers' religious practices either supported the families' current values or deviated from them—in turn, prompting parents to decide if children would remain in those academic settings or move to a controlled classroom climate where parents became the guardian and instructor.

### ***Foundational Practices***

Bible-based learning, Christian epistemology, and teaching through a biblical worldview are standard terms for faith-based learning practices (Guthrie, 2019). Though religion comes in many forms and sects, the foundational courses remain the core of the instructional goals regarding religious education (Yoder et al., 2021). Christian brands' curricula offer a broad worldview supporting the biblical principle while nurturing academic practices across all content areas. A few popular brands of homeschool curricula are ABeka, Apologia, Master Books, Answers in Genesis, The Good and the Beautiful, My Fathers World, and Notgrass (NCHE, 2023). Holistic opportunities for all aged learners to integrate faith-based learning across content areas are encouraged by utilizing devotionals and scripture work through memorization and

handwriting practices, apologetic studies, church events for children and youth, and other constructivist-supported activities (Guthrie, 2019; NCHE, 2023; Yoder et al., 2021).

### ***Opportunities for a Christian Worldview***

As previously described, the definition of homeschooling has no clear outline, yet most require parents to be direct instructors. However, the facilitators in some cooperative learning programs are other parents. Cooperative learning programs have gained popularity in the homeschool community because they allow parents to collaborate and children to learn socially in a supported climate (Tilhou, 2020). Parents are the subject matter experts in many groups who become the instructors and facilitate the learning activities. An agreed-upon curriculum is designated to subject areas, and the students become organized by age, grade level, or other developmentally appropriate manner. Christian learning organizations utilize a program supporting a biblical worldview, often targeting science and history content (Newman, 2021). While some researchers, such as Lewis-Spector (2022) and Adamson and Galloway (2019) expressed a desire for a reduction of religious and educational freedom, others, such as Valiente et al. (2022), acknowledged the decisive role homeschool families feel religion plays in developing a positive learning environment.

**Avoidance of Secular Trends.** Homeschool, as an educational option, was previously perceived as strictly for religious opportunities, explaining parents were simply avoiding secular trends (Neuman & Oz, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). Current surveys declared only 58% of interviewed parents expressed religious values as a top factor in registering children as home-based learners (NCES, 2023). Secular trends dominate many social forums and have altered students' educational experience in government schooling in recent years by modifying curriculum standards to include topics, such as gender fluidity, homosexual content in sexual

health, and critical race theory (Newman, 2021). Christians cite the removal of prayer and reading of scripture, stemming from the development of compulsory government schools, as the reasons secular trends dominate classrooms and media coverage of adjusted classroom experiences. Though temporal trends are unavoidable, Christian parents expressed the desire to control the narrative, provide conversations on the topics as a family, and not allow an outside organization to present the liberal concepts as facts or new standards (Neuman & Oz, 2021).

### **Curriculum**

The curriculum selection opportunities are immeasurable, with extensive programs and textbook companies offering homeschool materials and supportive guidebooks (NCHE, 2023). Both religious and secular options for course approaches are available and marketed differently (Tilhou, 2020; Yoder et al., 2021). Individual households control the selection of academic curriculum per student, per grade level, per year, or per semester. No limitations or dictations are made on specific curriculum programs for homeschool families (Dill & Elliot, 2019; Hamlin, 2020). However, each state determines the number of credits expected within each subject area at the high school level (NCDPI, 2023). College admission requirements may also impact the selection of academic programs and vary from state to state.

### ***Opportunities for Variations and Growth***

Because the educational experience is controlled by the parents and not an outside organization, families may dictate the programs utilized (Dennison et al., 2020). Variation is essential to meet the multi-faceted needs of students, especially when the students in the household or school range in age, grade level, needs, and capabilities (Li & Mathis, 2022; Neuman & Oz, 2021). Each state's education division determines minimum subject requirements and credit hours (Green-Hennessey & Mariotti, 2021; NCDPI, 2023). In North Carolina, the

governing agency provides opportunities for supportive services for homeschool learners requiring special needs services, such as speech, physical, and occupational therapy; student inclusion within the public school system will not be denied even when registered as non-public students (NCDPI, 2023). For example, a child might be homeschooled explicitly by the parents for academic content yet attend a public school for supportive speech services weekly. Early college programs in different states are also an opportunity for learners entering high school. The students can take college-level courses while completing the assigned high school curriculum. North Carolina offers pathways, such as College Transfer Pathways (CTP), Career and Technical Education Pathways (CTE), and Cooperative Innovative High School Programs (CIHS), which outline the structured opportunities for high school-aged or gifted learners to attend tuition-free courses based on eligibility. The available classes and supportive programs for homeschool-registered students vary from state to state.

**State Supports and Limitations.** As previously stated, each state determines the laws and policies for homeschool opportunities. Student registration age, parental qualifications, assessment requirements, and documentation expectations are a few of the main components states have outlined for homeschooling families. Currently, states requiring no notice of intent and low regulations are Alaska, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Oklahoma, and Texas (HSLDA, 2023). Low regulations include minimal or no teacher qualifications, state-mandated subjects, assessments, or immunization requirements. States listed as having low regulations but require notice of intent are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. States with moderate regulations are Hawaii, New Hampshire,

North Carolina, North Dakota, Maine, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. States with high regulations are Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island (HSLDA, 2023; NCDPI, 2023; NCHE, 2023). High regulations would include stringent documentation requirements for immunization records, compliance with state-mandated subjects, and policies outlining the homeschool options impacting academic settings and instructor qualifications.

### ***Blended Learning***

Online curriculum programs have increased with the growth and availability of technology tools (Schrum & Summerfield, 2018). Applying a blended approach is possible in nearly all subject areas, with many curriculum brands offering print materials, digital, and opportunities for a mixed methods approach with supplemental games, activities, or teaching modules (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2022). A French study of higher education students tested the blended approach's impact on self-directed student learning; the study expressed how the blended environment was not as beneficial for students when the content was teacher-centered; students scored higher and reported a higher perception of knowledge when the content was student-centered (Adina & Mohib, 2020). Similarly, Ari Neuman (2020) determined a student-led design, particularly in content selection, may increase motivation and greater student satisfaction. A new term called *flexischoolers* is circulating when students complete in-person and some online courses, while most academic instruction remains with parents (Valiente et al., 2022). This trend supports blended learning, allowing homeschool parents to become the administrators, directors, or facilitators and not explicitly the instructors (Thomas, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022)



Learning with multimedia tools can greatly encourage students' focus, motivation, and engagement (Schrum & Summerfield, 2018). Utilizing multimedia in audio, visual displays, and digital interactions, educators can foster the cognitive capacity when the instructional design aligns with the needs and educational standards of the student (Bhakti et al., 2019; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2022; Schrum & Summerfield, 2018). Students may increase comprehension skills when incorporating technology devices, not explicitly utilizing viewing capacity but are capable of interaction and, in turn, developing additional media content based on the level of student understanding (Wilson et al., 2016). Critical thinking skills are improved when learners complete a pre-test and post-test of the material they covered, especially when the programs require them to identify and formulate the answers by reasoning, developing a hypothesis, making assumptions, and stating conclusions (Bhakti et al., 2019). While media devices offer a wealth of knowledge, Anand et al. (2020) expressed concerns over parental observation and guidance to ensure not only meaningful learning but also cyber security due to possible internet threats, also coined by the phrase Internet of Vulnerable Things or IoVT. A strong level of parental supervision is advised, while allowing the students to complete tasks independently with only necessary support is recommended (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., (2022).

**Financial Obligation.** Many states provide tax credits or tax breaks when families opt out of government learning (Lewis-Spector, 2022). Received funds can supplement homeschool curriculum prices or offer supportive tuition credit for charter and private school options. Lewis-Spector referenced removing students from public services as negatively impacting school systems due to the reduced tax funding dedicated to public schools, with increased funding poured into charter and private educational organizations. Yet, North Carolina does not provide financial support in the form of tax credits for those choosing to utilize non-public education

options; instead, financial obligations fall on the responsible party or the homeschool administrator for all curriculum, assessments, and required annual evaluations (NCDPI, 2023; NCHE, 2023). Curriculum prices vary based on the brand, curriculum format, and even subscription length. Homeschool families spend an estimated \$600 per student annually (Ray, 2023). The National Education Association estimates an annual average of \$16,446 of taxpayer responsibility covers one student within the public school system.

### **Instructional Design**

Most current research on homeschooling focuses on the reasoning for parents to select this educational option, the legal aspects within the United States and other countries, or the comparison of student standards based on academic results of public versus homeschooling (Firmin et al., 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). The study's primary focus was to determine the methods of instruction parents facilitate in their homeschool experiences with K-12 learners. The instructional design and teaching practices are often studied based on public school settings, higher education settings, or organization training programs (Kahlil & Elkhider, 2016). The National Survey of Science and Mathematics Education described science teacher's instructional time as broken into three styles: explaining instruction to the whole class, open discussion, or small group activities (P. Smith, 2020). Unfortunately, the same study also indicated that 2018 self-contained K-3 classrooms averaged 18 minutes of daily science instruction. Disparities across subjects, grade levels, and instructional styles remain in public school learning and home-based teaching. The difference is the level of instructional freedom and reduced accountability to conform to assessment requirements (McDonald, 2020; Watson, 2020). Often, standards-based reforms introduce policies that control government education and impact teachers and their instruction (Lewis et al., 2020).

With several opportunities and approaches to learning available, parents may find supportive tools from purchased curriculum guides, online support groups, and available county or state services, such as resources from public libraries and local colleges (Neuman & Oz, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). The instructional design methods are either a linear process where the instructor makes decisions based on academic checkpoints or cyclical through the material's analysis, development, implementation, and evaluation phases (De Hei et al., 2016; Kahlil & Elkhider, 2016). Early career teachers have expressed concerns over accountability pressure and curricular standards dictating the instructional procedures, which are remarkably inconsistent with teacher-training institutes (Frank et al., 2020). The verbalized concerns of trained professionals directly align with the concerns of home-based learning instructors, contradicting comments that parents are unequipped with sufficient teaching skills (Lewis-Spector, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022). Instructional practices should reflect the content and student needs, allowing for fluidity to ensure the greatest possible outcome of cognition (Neuman, 2020; Neuman & Oz, 2021).

### ***Individualized Learning***

Human Performance Technology strategies support individualized learning due to the format or design approach (Stefaniak et al., 2018). By conducting a front-end analysis, the current knowledge is determined and used to propel the anticipated or desired level of expertise (Gilbert, 2019). Needs assessments are imperative for a systematic approach to instructional design; an incomplete understanding of student capabilities is not conducive to a positive learning experience (Dill & Elliot, 2019; Harless, 2016; Stefaniak et al., 2018). Homeschool increases learners' opportunities with an individualized learning plan; every aspect of their academics can be tailored to their needs (Firmin et al., 2019). The unique elements of a

personalized learning plan come to fruition when instructors select curriculum options and complete the fundamental steps of an analysis; many curriculum brands provide a pre-test to determine the most appropriate level (NCHE, 2023).

Public, charter, and private schools require students to obtain the provided education based on cumulative learning and grade-level completion. It is not until entering high school when students are afforded options for an academic path, such as early graduation, college preparation, or career path programs (Valiente et al., 2022). Home-based learning does not comply with the same level of restrictions. Instead, homeschooled learners have freedom of choice, not a dictated academic path, supporting the experience and suggesting modifications to shift when necessary (Neuman, 2020; Neuman & Oz, 2021). Knowing the scope of the audience and individual needs allows the stakeholder (parent) to impact evaluation procedures and student understanding positively. With large classroom sizes, it is impractical for public school teachers to be capable of meeting the specific needs of all students (Firmin et al., 2019).

Evaluating the level of performance and prior knowledge is not a new concept and does not only benefit K-12 learners; these instructional strategies help all levels of learning, including higher education, varied organizations, and career training modules (Binder, 2017; Harless, 2016; Kang & Molenda, 2018; Neuman, 2020b). Despite the negativity towards unqualified academic instructors by Lewis-Spector (2022) and Valiente et al. (2022), society must recognize that though parents might not be subject matter experts or have a teaching degree, curriculums provide supportive resources. Quality curriculum programs provide guidebooks to segment and explain the instructional process and organize the materials with optional formats to ensure learners gain understanding and assess progress (Firmin et al., 2019).

**Standards and Assessment Opportunities.** States with moderate and high regulations will assign inspectors who work for the Department of Education, auditing homeschool families to ensure appropriate documentation and record keeping (NCDPI, 2023; NCES, 2023). Other countries have a similar position called a ministry of education, employing inspectors working collaboratively with home-based learning families to provide support, suggest resources, and approve conditions (Guterman, 2020). Content-related assessment opportunities are provided within curriculum programs, though some programs require supplemental purchases to access the reviews, varied formats of assessments, and answer keys (Firmin et al., 2019). The implementation and evaluation of the appraisal are contingent on the parent's insistence for students to complete the tasks, which could arguably be overlooked, or assistance could be provided to display an inaccurate representation of student content knowledge (Dennison et al., 2020).

Nationally recognized assessments, such as standardized achievement tests and other tests acceptable for college admissions, typically show home-based learners with a 15 to 25 percentile score higher than students from traditional learning facilities (Ray, 2023). Achievement tests measure areas of English grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics. The most commonly used achievement tests recognized on North Carolina's homeschool education site are the California Achievement Test, TerraNova, Woodcock-Johnson, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Stanford Achievement Test, and the Metropolitan Achievement Test (NCHE, 2023). The parents of homeschooled students' highest level of formal education or household income level have no significant impact on student achievement test scores (Ray, 2023). Aside from culmination testing, a shift towards a debate assessment style was also recognized to link real-life experiences and complied with a more spiral approach to unit content (Shrestha & Roffey, 2018).

**Spiralized Approach.** Spiral learning, as described by Bruner (1977), explained how smaller or segmented topics can be better absorbed when introduced slowly and reviewed frequently. More transformative learning with a constructivist approach to education would ensure students consistently displayed understanding in various manners, with segmented objectives and arranged according to development (Shrestha & Roffey, 2018). A spiral approach translates enough material for learners to form logical thoughts yet challenges students to seek advancement. The process ensures that the introduction of material will spark ideas to develop cognition of a more profound view within the same context, giving the learner a greater awareness of meaning. A simplistic approach to this method, even appropriate for young learners, is a literature retelling. Homeschool curriculum programs, specifically math and science, follow either a mastery or spiral approach to learning (NCHE, 2023). Spiral progression utilizes learner-centered or inquiry-based learning approaches (Garcia, 2021).

**Modified Learning Plans for Student Needs.** Individual learning plans can benefit students with diverse capabilities, including physical, emotional, and academic deficits and gifted learners (IDEA, 2023). A modified approach to learning supports the instructor's ability to make adaptations, be flexible with the process, utilize various resources, and frequently assess progress (Gelbar et al., 2018; Firmin et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2022). Students with special needs in public school settings must undergo a series of lengthy steps before having a developed and implemented Individualized Education Plan (Gelbar et al., 2018; IDEA, 2023; Wong et al., 2022). The Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis is unique and complex for educators because the diagnosis does not explicitly equate to special educational services; the disorder is heterogeneous in nature, and potential interventions are individualistic (Gelbar et al., 2018). Autism Spectrum Disorder is recognized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as a

neurodevelopmental disorder and receives a medical diagnosis but does not necessarily require an educational classification (Gelbar et al., 2018; IDEA, 2023). A Malaysian study determined one of the most crucial factors in special needs education is instructors with a motivated attitude that do not challenge the implementation of Individualized Education Plans (Wong et al., 2022). The difficulties present in the process of gaining special needs services in government schooling supported the National Center Educational Statistics survey findings from 2019, where 23% of parents cited a child with special needs and 15% of parents cited a child having a physical or mental health problem as being a critical factor in choosing to homeschool (NCES, 2023).

Homeschool students with special needs are also eligible to receive supportive and therapy services at public schools based on medical and educational diagnosis; services fall under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and must be provided to homeschoolers by the local school district (HSLDA, 2023). Homeschool families report having a disconnect with provided resources, as specific student needs are frequently marginalized in a classroom setting by teachers, and required services are inconsistently implemented due to time constraints and staffing issues (Dennison et al., 2020; Firmin et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2022). Within the United States, in the school year 2020-2021, more than 7.5 million infants, toddlers, children, and youth received early intervention or special education-related services (IDEA, 2023).

### **Summary**

Homeschool registration is increasing for kindergarten through grade 12 learners across the United States for various reasons as researchers acknowledge the unique opportunity for families to expand and differentiate their academic experiences through instructional design approaches (Firmin et al., 2019; Neuman, 2020a; Neuman & Oz, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). Because home-based learning is an option for educational freedom, the researcher sought to

determine how conservative Christian families selected and implemented their instructional design for their K-12 learners. Current research has featured aspects of constructivist theories through cognitive development, knowledge representation, spiralized curriculum, individualized learning goals, project-based tasks, and learners' motivation (Bruner, 1964; 1977; 1985; 1997; 2004). A gap in the literature showed Christian families could provide valuable insight into what design they utilized, why they selected this approach, elaborate on the processes used, and explain how these aligned with personal values by sharing their experiences.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this chapter, as a hermeneutic phenomenological study, was to present the research design, procedures, and data analysis plan. This study focused on the instructional design methods utilized within Christian-based kindergarten through grade 12 homeschools in the central region of North Carolina. The phenomenological aspects of the research design are described in detail, including the design method, plans for the settings and participants, the researcher's positionality, and the procedures. The data collection plan included all the open-ended questions implemented within the individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts while expressing their relationship to the central research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The analysis plans outlined provide clarity on the processes utilized. The trustworthiness of the study presents criteria met to support the accuracy and authenticity of the study and addresses the ethical considerations necessary for qualitative research (Shenton, 2004).

### **Research Design**

The study of the instructional design of Christian K-12 homeschools in rural North Carolina aligned with a qualitative research method because of the naturalistic and interpretive approach taken to find meaning in the experiences of these families (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative inquiry drove the study to find the essence and interpretive descriptive meaning in each family's academic process in their children's educational journey (Moustakas, 1994). The study used a hermeneutic approach to clarify how parents develop instructional opportunities for home-based learning families. The goal was to provide beneficial information for others in similar situations and future homeschool families. By selecting a phenomenological research design, the study featured the general aspects of this method, such as interpreting the

participant's past and current lived experiences from educating their children in a home-based setting. Psychologist Moustakas (1994) postulated the phenomenological approach in studies is unique because individuals who have had first-hand accounts or currently experience the phenomena are studied to share personal experiences, not professionals or experts making assumptions based on observations. The overall goal of a phenomenological study is to remove the individual experience, composite their truth, and find a universal essence of the human experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The participant's perceptions provide a sense of the phenomena of homeschool instruction. Collecting their perceived experience involves gathering comprehensive descriptions portraying their essence before completing a reflective structural analysis (van Manen, 2016). The perception of the concepts provided from the consciousness of the participants aid in identifying themes and determining the essence of the experiences of those involved. The knowledge synthesis occurs from the current research and the subsequent analysis phase of the data collected from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The value of knowledge, described by Husserl (2012), expands upon one's consciousness through self-evidence and the perceptions of the participants and author of the study, ensuring new insight will be gained through relevance. Following van Manen's (2016) hermeneutic methodology, the author bracketed lived experiences and insight into the instructional design experiences gained through years of home-based learning practice. The interpretation was used to unmask hidden objectivity surrounding homeschool education. Most current research focused on the emotional or political aspects of why families selected the option of home-based learning. This study aimed to elaborate on the academic process of home-based education.

### **Research Questions**

## **Central Research Questions**

What instructional experiences are utilized by Christian kindergarten through grade 12 families through their homeschool journey?

### **Sub-Question One**

How do the parent's lived experiences influence the design of instruction as they relate to the homeschool experiences of their children?

### **Sub-Question Two**

What instructional methods are perceived by parents as effective with students of Christian K-12 homeschools?

### **Sub-Question Three**

How does evidence of cognition drive the constructive experiences of Christian K-12 homeschool learning?

## **Setting and Participants**

The setting of this qualitative phenomenological study was in a rural county, Trade County (pseudonym), in central North Carolina, consisting of 12 participants. The participants were selected based on self-identification as Christian parents of K-12 homeschooled children. According to North Carolina's Division of Non-Public Education, the number of families in Trade County (pseudonym) homeschooling their children in the 2021-2022 academic year was 3,620, with 100,904 households as a state total (NCHE, 2023).

### **Setting**

The setting for the qualitative study was a local church in central North Carolina. The church, Till Creek Baptist (pseudonym), was selected due to its accessible location in Trade County and willingness to support homeschool families. This location was purposefully chosen

because it had been the home to a cooperative learning program for four years and offered outreach services for those in the community needing counsel, supportive services, and mission opportunities. Till Creek Baptist Church was founded in 1856 and served over 300 members, with three leadership pastors and an office administrator on staff. While some of the participants belonged to the cooperative learning program, this organization was designated as the site primarily due to the central location in the community and to accommodate the selected participants.

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were Christian homeschool parents of K-12 learners in central North Carolina. An estimated number of participants for the study ranged from 12-15 or higher and would continue until thematic saturation or redundancy was achieved; saturation was met at 12 individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Per Liberty University standards, no fewer than 10 participants were to be involved. Participants comprised of female parents, with ages varying from 25 years to 55 years. Participants agreed to sign an informed consent form (See Appendix D), providing them with information on the research being conducted in the study, as well as their decision to participate voluntarily in the research and their ability to withdraw from the research process at any time if they no longer wish to participate. The ethnicity within the group of participants had a large portion of White Caucasians. Still, the group had other demographics who self-identified and a direct representation of the community. Additional considerations of the participants were their socio-economic level, years of education received, and professional status; these were also self-identified. North Carolina allows homeschool settings to register as either religious or non-religious; this is a private family choice and does not reflect their religious values or relationship with Christ, nor does it impact their participation in the study (NCDPI,

2023).

### **Recruitment Plan**

Purposive and potential snowball sampling impacted the recruitment plan. Due to the privatization of homeschooling, purposive sampling was the only acceptable form of initial recruitment and the ideal method to inform the researcher about the research problem under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2014). The predetermined individuals are known from local cooperative learning programs and local church affiliations. An estimated 12-15 individuals were recruited (See Appendix C). However, the goal was saturation and ultimately determines the appropriateness of the sample size (van Manen, 2016). To assess the acceptability of the recruits and determine their demographics, the interview protocol of a phenomenological study dictated a screening process was necessary (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Only the profiles created by those qualifying for the study may contribute; the profile also provided essential demographic information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The individuals completing the screening process complied with the following questions to show their eligibility:

1. Are you over the age of 18?
2. Are you a parent/guardian and instructor for a K-12 learner(s) registered as a homeschooled student in North Carolina?
3. Are you a professing Christian?
4. Are you willing to share your experiences with homeschool instruction?
5. Are you comfortable sharing homeschool instructional plans in an individual setting as well as a group setting?
6. If in-person interviews are not possible, are you willing to participate in an interview via Microsoft Teams to describe your experiences related to

homeschool instructional design and how Christianity might impact those instructional designs?

Individuals meeting the criterion to participate in the study were communicated via email, phone call, or text message from the study's investigator (See Appendix C). Individuals agreeing to participate in the study received an informed consent document (See Appendix D). The purpose of the study, all procedures, the potential benefits and/or risks associated with participation, and the voluntary aspects were communicated to those selected for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants' identity and information was protected and confidential throughout the study. All data was stored on a password-protected computer file only accessible by the researcher and stored for five years, then destroyed. Any papers or documents related to the study are held in a locked file cabinet. The interview data and time was established when the participants sign the informed consent forms. The consent forms reference the location and a summary of the expectations for the participants (See Appendix D).

First, the participants completed an individual interview (See Appendix F). Next, the focus group (See Appendix G) meeting occurred at Till Creek Baptist Church. Upon completion of the individual interviews and focus groups, the transcriptions required member checking to confirm the accuracy from the participants. The third and final instrument, a written journal response (See Appendix H), was completed and returned to the researcher. Other potential forms of data included observations and field notes. The participants expected an estimated two-hour commitment for interviews and a half-hour commitment for the written response.

### **Researcher's Positionality**

This section articulated the researcher's motivation for conducting the study on the instructional design utilized by K-12 homeschools in a rural community in North Carolina. The

hermeneutic phenomenological study featured aspects of homeschool instruction and faith-based learning for which I am passionate. The goal was to expand upon current knowledge of homeschool learning, bridge the gap of recent research on instructional design, and provided beneficial insight into the essence of home-based learning experiences for future educators. An interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions to include ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, and my role as a researcher provides further elaboration.

### **Interpretive Framework**

As an educator, I am closely aligned with the social constructivist approach when conducting research. Social constructivism, also called interpretivism, explains why those following this framework seek to interpret meaning through various situations, contexts, viewpoints, and historical settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Though this framework also boasts a social aspect, I tend to avoid broad cultural norms and interpretations in my epistemological assumptions. Feeling as though society makes too many attempts to deviate from biblical truths, acknowledging most cultural norms lean more towards secular standards and acceptance. The current position is conservative research as a method of aligning phenomenological studies to assist with understanding situations in axiological assumptions. Research is a learning process for all involved. A constructivist framework aids in solving dilemmas with thoughtful reasoning by adjusting one's experience to fix misconceptions and develop a shared understanding.

Ephesians 6:11 states believers should use the whole armor of God, so they are empowered against the devil's schemes (The English Standard Version, 2001, Eph. 6:11). As previously stated, Christians can become outnumbered in organizations and settings, and societal trends often become swayed towards a secular standard. Yet scripture says truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, peace, and our readiness to serve our heavenly Father will guard us as we fight

for our Lord with the sword of the spirit (The English Standard Version, 2001). As a Christian educator, evidence of practicing faith is displayed through seeking reliable research, interactions with other, and the goal of a successful research study. The goal was to keep God at the center of this work, allowing Him to guide all involved to construct meaning and optimistic interpretations of the various phenomena encountered through the research process.

## **Philosophical Assumptions**

### ***Ontological Assumption***

Ontological assumptions revolve around an individual's perception of reality, viewing multiple aspects, and being confident in the relationship of varied meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an educator of young children, this author finds value in seeking the perspectives of those interacting with others. By checking for understanding often, students can interpret levels of knowledge and seek more profound answers as they gain interest in particular areas. Not only does this assumption encourage open dialogue and free discussion, but it also boosts confidence and self-efficacy. As a researcher, it is crucial to remain open-minded and reasonably seek answers to various practices, acknowledging the process might not reflect only one correct answer. Reporting from different perspectives is beneficial for finding common themes and relevant results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

Epistemological assumptions take shape as the researcher and the participants become actively engaged in the process or phenomena. Information gathered on individuals, specific organizations, or procedures should become subjective and well-observed when seeking a qualitative approach (Moustakas, 1994). Being informed allows the researcher to gain an insider perspective and seek the situation through a new lens of understanding. When working as an



instructor, it is required to observe the current level of cognition and then build upon the knowledge. The research includes understanding the group and its relationship with the content. For example, being confident in one's abilities to teach this topic or realizing one should gain a better understanding before giving instructions. This epistemological position ensures all involved have insight into the matter, learning actively centered around the individual, and each learner can confidently continue or move to the next level.

### ***Axiological Assumption***

Axiological assumptions shape the information by ensuring the researcher's values are included as a beneficial source (2018). A qualitative assumption expands upon knowledge beyond empirical evidence by taking a stance, providing personal insight, mentioning a specific view, and including personal bias. When taking an axiological position, an author incorporates personal values and shares their experiences and insights. This type of position can also bring a sort of relatability to the situation and comfort the participants as they begin to understand the role one places and the heightened value on the subject. Instructors can resource learners by studying nature and making judgments on values and ethics. This axiological assumption ideally works well when applying a biblical worldview because God values His children. Luke 12:7 describes how God is mindful of all the hairs on our heads, as He values and knows us (The English Standard Version, 2001, Luke 12:7), reminding Christians being appreciated is essential. One can prosper when placing values on things pleasing to God.

### **Researcher's Role**

The methodological process of a qualitative research study dictates the role of the author in the study as a human instrument in the research process (Moustakas, 1994). The author's responsibility in the study was to document and report the analyses of the findings developed

from the collected data. Multiple forms of raw data were collected, and protocol deems all forms of data managed with compliance to the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Liberty University standards. The participants in the study were parents or guardians of K-12 students registered as homeschoolers in North Carolina. The participants were selected based on the family's homeschool registration, location in the central region, and faith profession as followers of Christ. The facility utilized for interviews and focus group meetings was designated as a local Baptist church and housed a cooperative learning program; the participants were not required or expected to participate in joint learning programs. Though this researcher had interacted with most participants in the past, at no point has the author held an authority role. No data was collected before the Institutional Review Boards' approval.

The study gave the participants the opportunity and a safe space to share experiences with homeschool education. The participant's stories came from data collection methods supporting their story expansion, feelings, and candid conversations (van Manen, 2016). As a homeschool educator, I bracketed my experiences and bias from the questions and assumed the investigator's role as a neutral party (Husserl, 2012; van Manen, 2016). The transcriptions, observations, and notations regarding the participant's experiences directly relate to the home-based learning study. The research results are anticipated to broaden the understanding of the instructional design practices of Christian homeschool families of K-12 learners.

### **Procedures**

The study complied with all Liberty University policies and procedures for conducting a qualitative research study. The Institutional Review Board provided approval (December 8, 2023) before any data collection took place (See Appendix A). Site approval was obtained prior to the IRB approval to display feasibility of the study and ensure cooperation with the designated

organization (See Appendix B). The participants were recruited through a purposive process and were provided with a recruitment letter explaining the study and all participant expectations (See Appendix C). All participants were informed that participation was voluntary, and they could remove themselves from the study at any point in the research process. All participants remain confidential using pseudonyms. Digital documents remain secure by password protected technology. Physical documents remained secure in a locked file cabinet until the completion of the research study. The data analysis and synthesis of participants' lived experience as related to Christian homeschool instruction complied with hermeneutic phenomenological conditions outlined by Moustakas (1994), van Manen (2016), Husserl (2012), and Saldana (2021). Triangulation occurred by conducting individual interviews, focus groups, and independent journal prompts (Moustakas, 1994). Each method of data collection, data analysis, and data synthesis provided details within the appropriate written sections of the study to ensure the possibility of replication.

### **Data Collection Plan**

A minimum of three data collection forms to ensure a broad representation can be triangulated to form a generalized meaning was utilized for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). The data collection methods included individual interviews, focus groups, and independent journal prompts. Field notes and observations were included within the data collection process. Per Liberty University standards, no data was collected until the Institutional Review Board approved the research study (See Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews occurred during one-on-one meetings with the participants; focus groups maintained fewer than ten within the group to ensure comfortable conversations among participants. Interviews occurred in person at an agreed-upon location, such as Till Creek Baptist Church (pseudonym),

in a quiet environment free from distractions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln, 1995). When scheduling or transportation became a conflict, the individual interviews took place virtually for the convenience of the participants. Virtual interviews were conducted through a Microsoft Teams meeting. Each discussion was audio-recorded on two devices to reduce the risk of technical errors and ensure accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The audio recordings were transcribed digitally through an appropriate software program through Microsoft Teams. All interviews maintained the participant's privacy and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were utilized throughout, digital documents were password-protected, and physical copies were stored in a locked file cabinet. Qualitative data analysis software was used through ATLAS.ti to support the analysis process.

### **Individual Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews promote social interaction with the participants, allowing the researcher to collect data from individuals with a lived experience of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Open-ended questions encouraged the participants to share their knowledge, feelings, and recollections of events related to the research topic of instructional design in a home-based learning setting (Lincoln, 1995). The semi-structured interview method was selected to maintain the structure of seeking specific information and to be relaxed, as though the interview follows a natural conversation. The current literature supporting the research study has impacted the development of the interview and focus group questions (Moustakas, 1994). Each question displays the relationship to the central research question or the three sub-questions in the study.

The individual interviews for the study were conducted within four weeks of IRB approval. Each participant interview took an estimated commitment of one hour. The interviews

were recorded using a MacBook and an iPhone as a secondary precaution. Transcription of the interviews used the Microsoft Teams software program for interviews conducted virtually and for interviews conducted in person at Till Creek Baptist Church. Once the transcription was complete, member checking was undertaken to ensure the accuracy and credibility of all transcriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To expand upon the importance of interviews through qualitative research, the hermeneutic methodology described interviews to explore and gather narrative material considered a resource for a deeper understanding (van Manen, 2016). The participant responses provided a deeper understanding and gave meaning to the participants' lived experiences through the interview process. The analysis for the individual interviews were cyclical and continual, following essential human science conditions established by Husserl (2012) and van Manen (2016). The first phase of reading through the individual narratives were for making notes on specific words and phrases considered as values, emotions, and in vivo; these words and phrases were the first coding stage (Saldana, 2021). The additional phases and continued rereads combined codes from each interview as more raw data becomes collected. Manual field notes and observational comments were compiled into the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. The individual interview question instrument follow (See Table 1 and Appendix F):

### **Table 1**

#### *Individual Interview Questions*

1. Please introduce yourself, explaining how long you have been in a homeschool family, including the grade levels of current students. CRQ
2. To understand the family dynamic of your homeschool, explain if you are the sole instructor for your student(s) or if teaching is a shared responsibility with another. CRQ

3. Briefly explain your schooling journey. For example: What type of schooling did you attend (public school, homeschool, or a private setting, etc.)? What is your highest level of schooling completed? CRQ
4. What does a typical day of instruction look like for your school? SQ:1
5. How has your homeschool design changed from year to year as your children advance through grade levels? SQ:1
6. How individualized is your approach to student learning? Please be specific in your response to include each of your children. SQ:2
7. What level of input for curriculum or learning programs do you allow from your students? SQ:3
8. Explain in what manner your religious values influence your homeschool. CRQ
9. How frequently do you analyze the progress or needs of the student? SQ:3
10. What types of assessments do you use with your students? Why? SQ:3
11. Where do you find or access resources assisting in your academic approaches with your students? Please include any technology tools or online resources you might utilize. SQ:3
12. Describe all 'outside of the home' learning opportunities for your student, parent-led or not. For example, your children may attend a 4H club, and you are only the leader once a quarter. SQ:2
13. Explain any difficulties you have had with instructional approaches. For example, explain any mid-year curriculum or design switches or modifications. SQ:2
14. What outcome do you desire for your children by homeschooling? CRQ

Questions one through three were developed as introductory in nature, building rapport with the participants to gather details on demographics and to define the context of the interview

questions. These questions also assisted the researcher in determining the motivations of the parents becoming home-based learning instructors (Hamlin, 2020). Question two seeks to gather information on the family dynamics, inquiring if parents worked outside the home and if the teaching responsibility was shared. Question three provides insight into the primary instructor's educational background. Question four no longer sought background information on the participants and shifted the focus of the interview to the method of instruction, directly relating information to the central research question of the study.

Questions five through seven sought further information on the parents' instructional approaches for their school, including how they differentiated instruction based on the individual child (Tilhou, 2020). Questions five and six were designed to determine parental perceptions of the selected methods of educating their children. Individualized education plans support learners' cognition based on the appropriateness of the content; these questions gathered insight into their experience tailoring the child's academic journey (Xu, 2019). Question seven asked explicitly the participant if their children had a role in selecting educational choices. These questions also built context directly relating to the purpose of the study.

Question eight was designed to have the participants reflect on their religious values and how they influence homeschool instructional plans (Newman, 2021). The responses would likely provide insight into their household expectations, family dynamics, and the reasoning for selecting particular curriculum programs.

Questions nine and 10 seek to determine how the parents utilized academic data, as it directly relates to the instructional methods of the students (Firmin et al., 2019; Neuman, 2020b). Both questions were reflective, as they might inspire the participants to evaluate current analysis

methods. The responses may also reflect the parent's interpretation of their experience with this phenomenon (Neuman, 2020a; Valiente et al., 2022).

Questions five through seven and nine had the potential to have a response that admits the parents do not comply with these practices or show confusion with the practices of changing design annually, a lack of individuality or a restricted approach to student individuality, parents not allowing input from children or a lack of evidence using analysis tools. The questions sought honest responses from the participants to gather insight into the lived experience. A lack of an answer or literal silence is an acceptable response for the researcher. These acts allowed for a more reflective response, and silence can be viewed as a response (van Manen, 2016).

Questions 11 and 12 asked about outside resources and support services utilized. These encouraged the participants to reflect on research conducted to ensure the children had a quality education and exposed any potential gap in currently available resources. Question 12 also gathered data on the additional instructional opportunities the participants sought for the children outside the homes.

Question 13 gathered information on the participants' difficulties or obstacles with their lived experience. The question not only inquired about problems but also sought to find the parental perspective on how and what actions were taken to overcome the described challenges. Question 14 was designed to determine the parental perception of a desired outcome for children based on the choice to homeschool (Hamlin, 2020). This question did elicit an interpretive response of their past, current, and future experiences with this phenomenon and evoked responses for potential changes.

### ***Individual Interviews Data Analysis***



An initial, informal analysis began while the individual interviews were conducted. The researcher was immersed in the interview, actively listening to the responses and mentally constructing possible themes as a pre-reflection (van Manen, 2016). Phenomenological inquiry drove the pre-reflection and immersion through the study process by allowing the researcher to use the methodology to grasp the gift of meaning through the participants' narrations. After each individual interview, the raw data was transcribed. Member checking ensured accuracy and transparency while helping determine if additional questions needed to be asked for clarity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). The analysis of the collected data promptly began after the transcription to accommodate the continuous or constant comparison process as more data was gathered (Moustakas, 1994). At least three phases of a systematic analysis took place to categorize the findings, as themes and patterns emerge from the raw interview data. One line at a time of the transcriptions were analyzed. Each reread and analysis stage uncovered, transitioned, or expanded upon the previously established codes and themes, allowing for a more prosperous, condensed form of meaning (Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2021).

A qualitative procedure, horizontalizing, retrieved relevant words and phrases featuring a consistent or repetitive relationship (Moustakas, 1994). The determined statements from the horizontalizing step have the meaning assigned to them, and shared intentions or meaning units became clustered. As the clustered meanings and phrases grew, they emerged into categories of relevant and related patterns from the actions and statements of the study participants (Moustakas, 1994; Saldana, 2011). Categories can also be referred to as themes, as they become more textural descriptions of the participant's experiences; this step helped to reduce the overlapping of repetitive phrases (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenon's essence emerged when saturation took place from the individual interviews (van Manen & van Manen, 2021).

## **Focus Groups**

Focus groups also provided insight into the homeschool design phenomenon. Small groups met in person and were encouraged to have open dialogue while answering the predesigned questions. These questions were fewer but were created in an open-ended fashion, enabling the participants to respond as they deemed appropriate, evoking a comprehensive response (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016). An anticipated seven questions were asked of the group. The pseudonyms reflected the same participants as the individual interview responses. All participants participated in the focus groups, providing three forms of data through the collection process.

Focus groups met with six participants to ensure a comfortable atmosphere. Participants were prompted to reflect on the questions and answer as appropriate. The researcher was tasked with the role of ensuring all participants answered questions and was careful to observe participants potentially dominating the conversation within the group setting. The researcher also redirected the conversation to the questions if participants become conversationally off-topic. The focus group sessions occurred within two weeks after completing all individual interviews and meetings at Till Creek Baptist Church. Two separate focus group meetings were held to accommodate the number of participants; both groups responded to the same questions. The participants' time commitment was estimated at one hour. As a secondary precaution, both focus group meetings were asked the same questions and recorded using a MacBook and an iPhone. The raw data was transcribed with Microsoft Teams software and combined with the additional data collected. The focus group question instrument follow (See Table 2 and Appendix G):

### **Table 2**

#### *Focus Group Questions*

1. What does homeschooling your children mean to you as a Christian parent? CRQ
2. What instructional experiences do you feel are unique as a homeschool family? SQ:1
3. Now that you have had additional time to reflect upon our interviews, are there any other ways (not previously mentioned) you would like to share on how you differentiate your school based on your children's age/grade, subject, and interest levels? SQ:2
4. Express your thoughts on curriculum options and resources for teaching differentiated methods. Are there enough options? Follow up: Are you comfortable accessing supportive resources? SQ:3
5. How would your children cope if they were to transition to a public-school setting? Share your thoughts. SQ:2
6. What is your biggest challenge with instruction as the teacher and the parent? SQ:1
7. What is your most memorable success with homeschooling? SQ:2

One of the main goals was to facilitate a feeling of acceptance, where the participants were comfortable and confident in expressing their thoughts (Lincoln, 1995). Question one was designed as an introduction to the conversation, encouraging the participants to feel comfortable sharing details about their lived experiences. This question also featured aspects of their religion and how it contributed to the organization of their homeschool. Questions two, three, and seven focused on the individual homeschool experiences and how they tailor the academic plan for each of their students (Xu, 2019). The questions also prompted others to reflect and compare, encouraging recognition of differentiated strategies.

Question four was designed to seek the preferences of curriculums and supportive resources used to aid in the teaching process. This question determined if the group was more individualistic in educating their families or more like-minded in their approach. Question five

focused on a comparison of homeschool expectations and public education expectations (Neuman, 2020b). Question six asked the participants to reflect on their lived experience maintaining the parent and educator role (Neuman, 2020a; Valiente et al., 2022). The final question in the focus group elicited emotions and deep feelings from the participants. Ample time was provided to allow each participant to express their interpretation and parental perceptions. The responses also prompted follow-up questions.

### ***Focus Group Data Analysis***

As the second form of raw data collected, the focus group responses were analyzed according to phenomenological research methods and practices from Moustakas (1994), Husserl (2012), and Saldana (2021). The data collected from both focus group meetings go through a phase of analysis line-by-line before being combined with the data from the individual interviews in a second phase of analysis. Initially, horizontalizing took place to extract the relevant expressions, and notes were made whether multiple participants shared the same feelings or showed any form of agreement or potential disagreement (Moustakas, 1994). Reduction occurred to eliminate irrelevant or vague comments and combine overlapping expressions. The clustering of invariant constituents formed themes of the phenomena. The invariant constituents transitioned into emergent themes and became the developed essence of the phenomena of Christian homeschool instruction as expressed from the participants' lived experiences.

The data collection was systematically analyzed for similarities based on the individual interview responses regarding the instructional design of the participant's homeschool experience. This process of simultaneous coding ensured that meaning-rich units were consistent with the existing categories and themes within the data (Saldana, 2021). Emerging themes were coded as presented from the open-ended focus group questions and the relationship to the

different rounds of reading (Moustakas, 1994). The spiral of analysis activities were systematic through the coding process, similar to what was previously documented in the individual interview analysis plan. Coding methods developed through rereads; the conversational responses may be turned into summative statements. A causal chain of events might also be presented within the data collected from the focus group interviews due to the conversational flow of the inquiry (Saldana, 2021).

### **Journal Prompt**

Independent journal prompts were a third form of data collection. Journal writing in hermeneutics is also known as protocol writing, which became reflective of lived experience descriptions (van Manen, 2016). The prompt focused on the participants' experience and sought to gather insight into the individuals' feelings, moods, and emotions on homeschooling. The prompt was reflective, allowing the participants extended time to internalize thoughts and focus on their actions and methods to instruct their children (van Manen, 2021). There was no required format for the response; the participants could express themselves in paragraph form or bulleted thoughts. In addition to their written responses, if the participants chose, they may have created an illustration to depict their home-based learning setting or included a photograph if desired (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Photographs would not involve images of students.

The journal prompt elicited an emotional realization of recalled events and evoke the meaning of the phenomena as the participants felt best represented (van Manen, 2016). The blank copy of the journal prompt was handed to each participant upon signing the consent document, but the participants were asked to refrain from working on the journal until the individual interview had been completed. The delayed response were to eliminate any confusion on expectations or stress the participants felt prior to the individual interviews. The estimated

time participants spent on the journal prompt was around thirty minutes. However, the time may have been extended based on the individual's preference. The completed journal prompt was requested at the scheduled time of the focus group meeting or within one week from the focus group meeting to ensure enough time for the participants to complete the task. The researcher requested the journal prompts to be placed in a designated folder to ensure confidentiality and safeguard the instrument. The physical copy of the journal responses were locked in a file cabinet. The independent journal instrument follows (See Table 3 and Appendix H):

### **Table 3**

#### *Journal Prompt*

Please reflect on your experience as a homeschool parent:

- Describe your emotions, feelings, and thoughts concerning your experience as a homeschool instructor. CRQ
- What would you tell future parents about the instructional aspects of home-based teaching? CRQ

The prompt was designed to offer a period of reflection for the participants and should evoke memories, potential memories eliciting strong feelings, and an emotional response. Not only are the participants expected to reflect internally on lived experience, which might be rather extensive or a shorter period depending on the age of their children, but it also encouraged them to think of others. The researchers position on the style of prompted questions emphasized the role of both parent and teacher. These homeschool instructors demonstrated servant leadership roles within their household; by asking the participants to reflect on personal experiences, both positive and negative experiences may be expressed. Asking the participants to assist in preparing others did develop a more thorough, in-depth response. It was deemed appropriate by

the researcher to phrase the prompt in a manner that might help future homeschool parents because current research consistently depicted an opportunity for home-based learners to reflect on what they would have done differently or how they wish they knew certain aspects before choosing homeschool to plan more appropriately (Firmin et al., 2019; Hamlin, 2020; Neuman, 2020a, 2020b; Neuman & Oz, 2021; Tilhou, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). Participant responses expressed complexly through complete sentences, lists of words, or illustrations.

### ***Journal Response Data Analysis***

Like the individual interviews and the focus groups, the collected data continued to be coded in the analysis process through a constant comparison method. Multiple rereads, and construction of emerging codes were highlighted, as the essence of the participants' narrative developed a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the phenomena. Because the participants wrote this form of data, transcription were not needed. Instead, memoing occurred, as details were extracted through descriptive summaries and phrases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2021). New themes and textural descriptions emerged from the additional interpretations, as the data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and journal responses were compared and interpreted through the multiple analysis phases. The frequency of statements and phrases supported the coding process as comparative analysis occurs.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research methods elicit a large amount of data; these outcomes are primarily achieved from the open-ended questions collected from the individual interviews (Moustakas, 1994; Lincoln, 1995). When conducted virtually, the reflections and narratives presented within the raw data were transcribed with supportive software from the audio recordings of the individual interviews and the focus groups using the Microsoft Teams software program.

Transcriptions from in-person interviews and the focus group meetings also used Microsoft Teams software. Transcriptions were read multiple times as interpretations developed through the lengthy coding process (Saldana, 2021). As previously stated, the individuals verified participant responses to ensure accuracy; member checking also provided an opportunity for clarity if further understanding was necessary through follow-up questions.

The data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the data collection phase, the transcription process, and the entire compilation of the raw data. The hermeneutic methodology does not follow a script or technical format (van Manen, 2016); each research project provided a unique approach to the phenomena or case study. The process means interpreting a described experience; this study sought to understand and explain the parental perspective to capture the essence of the Christian homeschool experience. Though the methodology has not dictated structure, conditions established by van Manen on the structure of human science research was used to develop this study and continued through the research process. The six research conditions, as postulated by van Manen (2016), interplay dynamically throughout the study as the phenomenon was identified in a manner of serious interest, the experience investigated through the participants' lived experience rather than being conceptualized, essential themes reflect as they related to the phenomenon, the phenomenon became expressed through an artistic form of writing, the pedagogical relation was maintained, and the context of research considers parts and whole within the phenomenon.

Collection and analysis included marginal notes, drafting field notes, and memoing particular relationships between the recognizable categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021). A logical chain of evidence was connected through the continued coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The first cycle of codes from the three instruments merged and became



grouped into the second cycle of codes (Saldana, 2021). The researcher anticipated using value coding, in vivo coding, and emotion coding through the analysis process; each analysis method was ideal for qualitative research. The participants' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions were appropriately aligned with the process of value coding; the beliefs and perceptions of the participants were presented through questions requesting more information on the process of educating their children through their personal design. In vivo coding took specific words and phrases from the raw data to represent the participants' lived experiences; the phrases used by the participants emphasized their perceptions of the homeschool journey with their children and recurring similarities became present across the participants. Emotion coding was suitable for responses that reflected, inferred, or indicated any emotional reactions or verbalized stance on family dynamics, faith, educational development, and the participants' interpersonal or intrapersonal experiences. Faith and family dynamics were specific questions within the interview and focus group questions; the participants' verbal and nonverbal responses were recognized. The use of combination coding styles presented a more insightful representation of the lived experience of Christian homeschool families.

Supportive software, ATLAS.ti, was utilized in the analysis process to assist with the organization, management, and analysis as codes emerged from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data summations through this synthesis process was constructed, formulated, created, and revised by the researcher (Saldana, 2021). The developed codes were described as repeated patterns, stable indicators of the human element. Coding for patterns have been explained by Saldana (2018) as the five R's: people's routines, rules, rituals, roles, and relationships. Another example of deciphering codes will be identifying patterns indicating similarities, differences, frequencies, causation, and possible causation (Saldana, 2021).

Through the different stages of coding, categories were organized into appropriate themes directly related to research questions guiding the phenomenological study on the instructional design of homeschool learning (Moustakas, 1994). The repeated themes displayed the relationship between the participants' lived experiences and shared new insight into the teaching process of parents' home-based learning methods. As the repeated phrases and codes emerged into themes, they were compared with current research and the identified gaps (Patton, 2014; Saldana, 2021). The sorting and examination of the data became synthesized to show the finalized interpreted themes as the essence of the phenomena of homeschool instructional design developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was essential to qualitative research due to the large amount of raw data collected, the element of human interaction, and the interpretation of meaning through the analysis process (Lincoln, 1995; Schwandt et al., 2007; Stahl & King, 2020). Transparency should occur throughout the research process, ensuring the information gathered is shared and understood by those involved (Levitt et al., 2018). The participants met the study's requirements, knew the purpose, and were informed of the process before providing informed consent (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Any additional information pertaining to the study was also available upon request, showing transparency and providing a level of trust in the study (Levitt et al., 2018; Shenton, 2004). As dictated by Lincoln and Guba (1985; Schwandt et al., 2007), the trustworthiness of a qualitative researcher is evident through the necessary criteria applied to support the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

Qualitative research methods present credibility by interpreting results' accuracy by incorporating multiple data collection forms (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The data from each participant was triangulated from individual interviews, focus groups, and written journal prompts. Another way triangulation was achieved was through the contribution of varied participants; informants from different backgrounds can expand upon the contextual data relating to the phenomena (van Manen, 2016). Prolonged engagement with the home-based learning instructors takes place to develop trust and rapport between all parties; their honesty was requested during interviews (Shenton, 2004). Persistent observations during the individual interviews, focus group conversations, and written works from the participants not only provided rich detail but took place until saturation was achieved and no additional codes became evident; this verifies and validates data collection before the analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Shenton, 2004). Member checking supports the credibility of the study, as the participants had access to the transcribed content of their interviews, allowing them to dispute any information they did not feel accurate or appropriate (Candela, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). The participants continued to hold the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Peer debriefing took place to verify the authenticity of the study as it aligned with the investigator's concept and purpose; peer feedback was a welcomed opportunity to gain a fresh perspective (Candela, 2019; Shenton, 2004).

### **Transferability**

Though the study was defined by a specific context of Christian homeschools in the central region of North Carolina, transferability or generalizability is demonstrated through the works of the study. Stake (2010) explained even a small, unique group can provide an example of a broader group. Transferable references within the rich descriptive findings of the study should provide adequate detail for readers to determine if they apply in different home-based

learning environments (Flick, 2017). The research results yielded meaningful and relatable information on this phenomenon, applying beyond the participants, their experiences, and backgrounds (Amankwaa, 2016). The research questions and ventures discussed in this naturalistic study developed responses to harvest interpretations aligning with the contextual meaning and go beyond so generalizations could be made for future studies with similar contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Dependability**

Dependability in research is crucial to show reliability in the study's results. Detailed reports of the process allow for future replications to occur and verify the proper research practices were implemented (Amankwaa, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Overlapping methods of data collection and analysis by qualitative investigators, as emphasized by Lincoln and Guba (2010), demonstrate dependability and credibility can be achieved, and the results are not strictly tied to the study (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Through extensive explanation of the methods utilized within and consistency with the data collection, the repetition of the study may occur, ensuring the reliability and dependability of this phenomenological research (Morrow, 2005).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is another portion of trustworthiness that involves the confidence level of the participant's words from the data collection process and omits any researcher bias (Amankwaa, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Being a reliable source of information is crucial to the naturalistic approach of qualitative methodology; results should be confirmed and supported (Flick, 2017). Proof of evidence between the data collection, analysis phase, and the concluded interpretations comes in member checking, audit trails, peer debriefing, and expert reviews (Flick, 2017; Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Member checking emphasizes the goal of allowing the

participant's voice to be the driving source of data, as their experiences translate into the essence of the phenomena (Nowell et al., 2017). Audit trails keep the collected data, the researcher notes, and any modifications in plain view of those involved in the inquiry and present them within the appendices of results of the study (See Appendix I); audit trails aid in proving accuracy (Shenton, 2004). Peer debriefing and expert reviews offer a perspective from individuals not directly involved with collecting and analyzing the presented information (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are imperative for any research project. Ethics are applied to protect the participants, the setting or organization, and the researcher to ensure authenticity, integrity, and honesty (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Komić et al., 2015; Saldana, 2011). Early in planning a qualitative study, the researcher gained site approval and obtained informed consent from all involved. Informed consent included the interviewee's right to privacy, voluntary status, options for withdrawal from the study, and obscured names or titles for subject protection and confidentiality (Lincoln, 1995). The Institutional Review Board provided a beneficial checklist requiring compliance, safety precautions, and accuracy from the researcher as they begin to plan their study. Numerous safeguards are necessary to be in place for data safety, which would include all forms of data collected, meaning the content contained should be password protected if in a virtual capacity, as well as secured and locked if there are any physical hardcopies (Komić et al., 2015).

The data collection process, analysis, and study completion may take an extended period. The participants, their responses, and any related content should remain in a secured location throughout the research project. Within the consent forms, the participants were informed of any potential risks or benefits of the study; these may have impacted their willingness to remain or be

removed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is important to remember all aspects of the study should be authentic and safely conducted while upholding all ethical guidelines and safeguards to preserve the integrity of the research project. Proverbs 1:2-4 states, “To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the others” (The English Standard Version, 2001, Prov. 1:2-4). This verse aligns with the understanding that researchers need to show wisdom and heed ethical instructions to safely provide insight through the process.

### ***Permissions***

The first step to seek permission was to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board, ensuring the study would adhere to the ethical practices of conducting a study with human participants. Once permission was gained for the research study with backing from the IRB (See Appendix A), I proceeded with the plans for the qualitative phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). No data was collected until the IRB was approved. The site approval (See Appendix B) was gained on September 26, 2023, and signed consent forms (See Appendix D) were sent to all recruited participants of the study. All participants signed individual informed consent forms and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). All participants were over the age of 18 and were instructors of registered homeschooled kindergarten through grade 12 students in North Carolina. The recruitment letter and consent form included information on compensation for participants as reimbursement for the time spent completing all three instruments (See Appendix C).

### ***Other Participant Protections***

Other ethical considerations revolved around the human instruments of utilizing a phenomenological approach to research (Moustakas, 1994), such as specifying the voluntary

nature of the study for the involved participants. Participants had the right to remove themselves from the study at any point during the research process and were informed of their rights in the recruitment letter (See Appendix C) and the informed consent letter (See Appendix D). Risks and benefits of the study were also explained in the provided forms for the participants. Confidentiality of the site and participants were provided through the use of pseudonyms. All digital files were secured on a password protected private computer. All physical documents were secured in a locked filing cabinet. All documents will be destroyed after three years per Liberty University Institutional Review Board standards.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three highlighted the qualitative aspects of the study, aligned with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. The research design was described as a naturalistic and interpretive method to find the meaning of the lived experiences of Christian homeschool families (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative inquiry sought the essence and interpretive descriptive meaning of homeschool instructional design and how families design their children's academic journey (Moustakas, 1994). The data collection process included the triangulation of participant experiences through individual interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts (van Manen, 2016). Like all qualitative studies, this study was unique because the individuals provided a first-hand account of their experiences with the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis strategies, with the support of software, removed the individual experiences collected and composited their truth to find a universal essence of the human experience with home-based learning with Christian families in a rural community in North Carolina. Developed codes continued to emerge and became categories, then appropriate themes directly relating to the research study were interpreted as the essence of homeschool instructional design (Saldana,

2021). As presented in this chapter, the study complied with established criteria for trustworthiness in a qualitative methodology (Stahl & King, 2020).



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the instructional design methods utilized by Christian homeschool families in central North Carolina. Chapter Four aimed to briefly discuss the participants and examine common themes that emerged through the data collection process. Detailed descriptions ensured an understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This phenomenological study analyzed the experience of 12 participants, all of whom currently teach homeschool children within K-12, are professing Christians, and reside in North Carolina. The study results are included in this chapter and utilize data collected from one-on-one interviews, individual journaling, and focus groups. A presentation of the participants is featured in Table 4, followed by a discussion of the themes, subthemes, and research question responses.

### **Participants**

The research participants for this study included 12 homeschool parents, all above the age of 18, self-professing Christians, having taught at least one child as a K-12 homeschool student, and residing in central North Carolina. Although it held no bearing on the research, it should be disclosed that all participants in this study were females. At the time of the research, all participants had at least one student acknowledged by the State of North Carolina Division of Non-public Education as a K-12 homeschool student. A brief overview of each participant is listed below. To protect the identities of all participants involved in this study, pseudonyms were assigned randomly and are in no way connected to the participant's given name, gender, or race.

#### **April**

April was in the ninth year of homeschooling her children; she had a child in college and

teaches a son in fifth grade. April described the learning styles of both her children and expressed her process of analyzing student development, strengths, needs, and interests. She stated, “I think just identifying how your children learn is how to make them successful.” and “I am analyzing and constantly evaluating the progress of the child.” These sentiments were shared by many other participants in the study.

### **Betty**

Betty had been homeschooling her children for six years. She teaches sons in sixth grade and fourth grade. Describing her initial year of homeschooling as following a more “traditional approach to learning,” she explained the realization that this model did not suit her family. Betty elaborated,

As they [children] have progressed, I have put more and more thought into what I want for my children and their future. That has been more of a spiritual focus, which has become my priority. We have worked everything else around that for the last couple of years. I’ve really focused on areas that I felt like they needed more time to develop.

### **Eleanor**

Eleanor removed her child from public schooling and had been homeschooling for two years. Her student was a daughter in fifth grade. Homeschool was a journey Eleanor expressed as a desire for her family but did not partake in until her daughter showed signs of struggling in public education. She attributes her daughter’s success to knowing how she learns and being able to apply a more “visual approach to learning,” as well as staying on subjects as long as necessary to meet her needs. She referred to bullying and how it negatively impacted her daughter emotionally and academically. Now the child is described as “flourishing,” and Eleanor said, “I think being at home and instilling those [Christian] values has had a huge impact.”

**Faith**

Faith had been homeschooling her children for nine years. She has an eighth-grade student, a seventh grade student, and a fifth grade student. The curriculum selected for her children was a pre-recorded curriculum that requires student participation and challenges each learner. Her primary role was to supervise and support their learning, supplement when necessary, prepare for required student tasks, and arrange ways to reinforce their learning. The curriculum “does a good job of evaluating the student’s comprehension of the material they are learning.” However, she expressed the necessity of reinforcing concepts in a creative way that can be accomplished informally as a family. Her family views academic experiences as “every moment is a learning moment.”

**Jess**

Jess is a former educator who had homeschooled her children for 13 years. Her four children were in combination grades due to their abilities, explaining that one of her high school daughters was diagnosed with dyslexia, and her daughter in second grade had a visual impairment requiring daily vision therapy. She emphasized the flexibility of homeschooling to tailor instruction based on strengths, weaknesses, and areas of student interest, allowing them to “soar with their interest and passions.” Jess explained that throughout her students' education, she utilized one-on-one instruction and support for areas of weakness and subject matter challenging for the individuals. Selecting an appropriate curriculum based on design and student learning styles was elaborated during her interview; this was a shared sentiment with other participants. Jess also emphasized the importance of her children loving the process of learning and striving to encourage them as they navigated their academics and approach adulthood.

**Kalli**

Kalli was a former educator in a public school setting. She had homeschooled her children for a total of 20 years. Three of her children had graduated, and two remained homeschooled; a son was in 10th grade, and another son in seventh grade. When describing her approaches to instruction, she fondly reflected on earlier years with multiple students in multiple grade levels, stating,

Different kids have had different needs, especially when I was teaching four of them together. We worked together more as a family unit, and I adjusted the curriculum based on age and ability levels. But we all worked together, and I loved that. I loved the ability for all of us to be together, bounce ideas off each other, and just talk and learn from each other.

A family-style approach to learning was a shared sentiment with other participants, described as fulfilling, engaging, and a blessing.

### **Katie**

Katie had a daughter in kindergarten. Katie also provided a unique perspective of being homeschooled through her educational journey. She described methods used to keep her young student focused and how she monitored her daughter's "resistance levels," indicating a need for breaks and physical movement. Katie discussed her child's progress from the beginning, mentioning that pre-assessments were beneficial in determining the appropriate level to select, stating, "Now we are just tracking her progress in the particular curriculums." She utilized a flexible approach to course assignments where she modified based on her child's needs, and she referred to a brief struggle in math where she and her husband collaborated,

She was doing great for a while. Once she plateaued, I realized it wasn't working out, so I needed to figure out some other resources we could use. My husband is very good at

teaching her math, as well. He has a different approach with her...together they practiced daily things and work on those skills of counting, adding on, and subtracting things. We have just changed the math up a bit.

Modification and individualized approaches to learning were a shared sentiment with other participants.

### **Mandy**

Mandy had been homeschooling for eight years; she had one third-grade student and two older daughters enrolled in a private Christian preparatory school. Mandy explained her daughter's recent diagnosis of dyslexia as prompting a change in their homeschool routine and methods of instruction. One particular change was the introduction of private tutoring. Mandy expressed the conversation with her child, stating, "The way I explained to her [instructional changes], I just say, 'Mommy doesn't know how to teach the way your brain learns. Your [older] sisters learned differently.'" Frequent comments about modifications and "switching gears" emphasized Mandy's belief in looking at each child individually. She also referenced the benefit of cooperative learning programs for outside-the-home learning for her children and herself. With the newly instilled educational support, Mandy emphasized that her daughter is thriving academically.

### **Molly**

Molly is an immigrant to the United States and had been homeschooling her two daughters, who were in fifth and first grade, for five years. Molly was bilingual, and practiced Polish with her young daughters. She stressed the importance of remaining consistent with their daily school schedule to ensure the completion of coursework; however, she did reference flexibility, which is necessary and a privilege when sicknesses and other activities arise. She

expressed the differences between her two children as they age, they become more independent learners. Molly specified her children's curriculum was selected due to the organization and structure, aspects she preferred; she stated,

It is repetitive, so the girls are learning the same things over and over before they are introduced to enough material or new problems in the workload. The tests and drills [provided with the curriculum] are great tools, in my opinion, to see how they are progressing in their learning. If I see that they struggle with something in particular during the day, we practice more...we will work those problems with some extra practice until they are consistently understood. I am constantly looking for things that they struggle with and spend a little extra time making sure that they understand.

### **Rosemary**

Rosemary had twins in second grade and had homeschooled for three years; she was also homeschooled for the majority of her schooling due to her advanced academic success.

Rosemary explained her initial approach to teaching her twins as a combined learning activity with both children. She then articulated that as her children advanced, it became evident, "My two children have very different strengths and progress at different rates in different subjects. So, I often have to split up time and work with them one-on-one instead of letting them do it simultaneously." Rosemary described the need for flexibility, the importance of knowing her children's learning styles and habits individually, and the necessity of analyzing their progress.

### **Sarah**

Sarah had been homeschooling her children for 10 years; she had three sons in fifth, third, and first grade. Sarah explained, "The beauty of homeschooling" lies in realizing the learning habits of her children and tailoring the approach for best practices, stating, "I do see

differences in them like that” and how she would not force a particular learning style on them. She remarked, “Each year, I pick up more knowledge, and I feel more confident in picking their curriculums and knowing, ‘this is going to work for him, or this is not going to work for this one.’” Faith-based learning was emphasized in her interview, a sentiment shared with all participants. Sarah felt very strongly about her children avoiding a public education and expressed her conviction to homeschooling,

We are Christians, and I take that very seriously. The Lord is the one who has blessed me with these children. They are my responsibility to pour into them the word of God, to lead them by our faith, what we believe, and what we teach in this household...The Lord intended me to raise my children, not the world to raise them.

### **Tessa**

Tessa had been homeschooling for five years; she had a fourth-grade son and a daughter in third grade. Tessa described her learning approach as more individualized and student-led by “paying attention to them and where they are, what they need to work on, where they need to spend more time.” She emphasized the importance of knowing her students’ learning styles and asking for their input to ensure a sense of ownership. Curriculums with built-in reviews and benchmarks were beneficial, but conversations with her children and watching their natural progression were also crucial to reinforcing their success in learning. Life skills, enrichment activities, field trips, and applying real-world perspectives were also a focus, stating, “I really want to foster a love of learning and for them to be critical thinkers.”

### **Table 4**

#### *Homeschool Parent Participants*

Participant	Years Taught Homeschooling	Number of Current Students	Current Grade Levels
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April	9	1	5 <sup>th</sup>
Betty	6	2	4 <sup>th</sup> & 6 <sup>th</sup>
Eleanor	2	1	5 <sup>th</sup>
Faith	9	3	5 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> , & 9 <sup>th</sup>
Jess	13	4	2 <sup>nd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> & 11 <sup>th</sup> (combination grades)
Kalli	20	2	7 <sup>th</sup> & 10 <sup>th</sup>
Katie	1	1	K
Mandy	8	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Molly	5	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup>
Rosemary	3	2	2 <sup>nd</sup> (twins)
Sarah	10	3	1 <sup>st</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup>
Tessa	5	2	3 <sup>rd</sup> & 4 <sup>th</sup>

## Results

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the instructional experiences of Christian K-12 learners through the lived experiences of the parent-teachers residing in central North Carolina. The raw data collected from the one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participant journal entries were analyzed and coded to identify emergent themes. Supportive software, Atlas.ti, was used to organize and code the collected data. This chapter details the analysis process and identifies the four developed themes. Development of the themes gradually came to fruition through the coding and analysis process, as significant words, phrases, and participant statements became evident through the transcription phase of all three forms of data collected. A theme development chart provided essential statements



corresponding with the subthemes and themes (See Table 5). Following the theme development section is a narrative discussion aligning the participant's responses to the central and sub-research questions.

**Table 5**

*Themes & Subthemes*

<b>Significant Statements</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Themes</b>
I feel strongly about them having a biblical worldview; a Christian-based education is important to us, knowing that what they are taught aligns with our morals and worldview. (Rosemary)	Maintaining a Biblical Worldview	A Conviction to Homeschool
The priority in our family is that our children have a solid foundation that supports our beliefs, and they will follow that path through their lives. (Betty)	Laying Solid Spiritual Foundation	
I thank God daily I am able to be part of their life and we have such a strong family connection. (Eleanor)	Instilling Family Values	
There have been days when I have felt completely inadequate, and it is on those days that I know it is only by God's grace and wisdom can we accomplish anything. (Faith)	Questioning While Confirming	
Teaching from a whole life perspective – all of the family time, outside time, hands-on time, and real-world experiences. (Rosemary)	Goal of “Whole Person” Learning	A Focus Beyond Academics
I am beyond blessed to be able to stay home with my child and instill the life lessons and skills they will need one day to be a productive citizen in the world. (Eleanor)	Life Skills and Teachable Moments	
We spend a lot of time learning life skills, like how to cook a meal, do laundry, how to budget, and things that will help him succeed in life instead of doing bookwork. (Kalli)	Responsibility Towards Their Future	
Do not feel bad when you need to switch things up a bit; you are the biggest	Ability to Modify	Individualized Instruction

advocate for your child and you want them to succeed. (April)		
This individual approach allows me to tailor their educational experience, that will hopefully lead to a better understanding and retention of knowledge. (Molly)	Tailor to Learning Styles	
We have a lot of discussions in my home, so from our conversations I'm able to evaluate a lot of what's working, what's not working, what's challenging, and what's stressful. (Jess)	Benefits of Frequent Informal Evaluations	
If she is pushing back too much, that tells me she needs a break to run around a bit and play. (Katie)	Taking Necessary Breaks to Embrace Childhood	Knowing the Student
It's not necessarily an intelligence sort of thing; it's the drive to actually put the effort in. (Kalli)	Students Challenge Themselves	
I like to have good conversations with them about the things they want to learn about...whether that be different countries or languages or both. (Tessa)	Supporting Student Interests	

### **Theme 1: Convicted to Homeschool**

The first emerged theme in understanding the lived experiences of Christian kindergarten through grade 12 homeschool families in central North Carolina was the Conviction to Homeschool. The emerged theme indicated the participants followed their spiritual instincts to submit to their calling of instructing their children within their homes. Though a public school or private school setting was always an option, the participants displayed a strong stance on implementing home-based learning with their children. All 12 participants expressed how they felt “convicted by God, called, or driven to submit” to educating their children in the home. Mandy had her oldest child in a private Christian school until fourth grade and described “a conviction to bring her children home,” stating, “When you live outside of your convictions, you live a miserable, miserable life.” Even though she was pleased with her daughter's academic

setting, she knew homeschooling was the correct path to follow with her young children. Sarah expressed similar sentiments, asserting,

We are Christians, and I take that very seriously. The Lord is the one who has blessed me with these children. They are my responsibility to pour into them the word of God, to lead them by our faith, what we believe, and what we teach in this household. I take that very, very seriously. The Lord intended me to raise my children, not the world to raise them.

All 12 parent participants shared Sarah's sentiment, which is evident in all three collected forms of data. The theme of Conviction to Homeschool was expressed through the coding process 333 times. The four subthemes that supported the Conviction to Homeschool were (a) Maintaining a Biblical Worldview, (b) Laying a Solid Spiritual Foundation, (c) Instilling Values, and (d) Questioning While Confirming.

### ***Maintaining a Biblical Worldview***

The essence of Maintaining a Biblical Worldview was evident in their choice of selecting curriculum, especially for the subjects of science, history, and literature, providing "a worldview through the scope and lens of scripture" (phrase taken from Faith's interview). Rosemary's statement echoed these sentiments, "I feel strongly about them having a biblical worldview; a Christian-based education is important to us, knowing that what they are taught aligns with our morals and worldview." When conducting Focus Group B, all participants agreed it was important to provide the Biblical truth upfront, as opposed to "fielding what they are hearing and having to combat the information given" (phrase taken from Betty in Focus Group B). Betty expanded her concepts as "It is easier to find a lie and recognize a lie when you know the truth." Tessa explained homeschooling and "maintaining a biblical worldview allows parents to be more

proactive, as opposed to being reactive.”

### ***Laying a Solid Spiritual Foundation***

All 12 participants emphasized studying scripture, reading their Bibles, or reading devotional texts as essential and conducted daily. Betty articulated, “The priority in our family is that our children have a solid foundation that supports our beliefs, and they will follow the path through their lives.” All participants shared this sentiment, echoing the families' ability to use a curriculum that “intertwines, mirrors, and embeds” scriptural content. In the individual interview, Faith stated,

Our main goal is for them to have a strong, solid foundation with a biblical worldview.

The perspective of knowing that God is in control. He ordains our lives; our goal is to live for Him and to let Him shine through.

Katie reiterated those same concepts but also referenced her fear of a public education restricting her daughter’s relationship with Christ,

I want to make sure she has a good foundation, not just academically but spiritually. I also want to incorporate the memorization of the Bible into her schooling, and I know that will not happen in a public-school setting.

The essence of this subtheme was displayed through the participant responses amongst all three data sources.

### ***Instilling Values***

The subtheme of Instilling Values was referenced as both moral and family values. While the subtheme of laying a solid spiritual foundation primarily focused on faith-based values, instilling values focused on social and emotional learning to also reference values within the family structure. Jess referenced “establishing discipline early through quiet time and Bible

reading” to instill values as a child and transfer the practice into adulthood. The freedom to step back from a structured academic lesson was shared by all participants, with Kalli sharing,

There are days that it is okay to just curl up and read a book together. Sometimes you will accomplish more by snuggling up, reading together, and connecting with your children than you will be forcing a lesson that will leave everyone in tears.

The ability to focus on the family and quality time showed the essence of this subtheme; sentiments of spending quality time as a family were shared amongst all 12 participants across all three forms of data. The individual interview and focus group questions that showed evidence of this subtheme brought silent breaks from participants' reflective thoughts and displayed stronger emotions.

### ***Questioning While Confirming***

A repeated remark made by all 12 participants was they would periodically question themselves, eliciting phrases such as “questioning what we were doing;” “questioning my teaching ability;” “questioning if I was making the right decisions;” “critiquing myself;” “comparing to other homeschoolers or public-school kids;” and “I often struggle with those decisions.” The parental concern of “if they were doing enough” or “would I mess up my kids' education” was shared amongst Focus Group A and Focus Group B. However, each participant firmly asserted within all three data collection forms only during their “weakest moments” or “biggest challenges with their children” would they question their motives, intentions, or goals of home-based education. Phrases that reminded them of their convictions and confirmed their accuracy were shared expressed as “God confirms I am in the right place;” “I know He gave me the strength;” “God equips you;” “find a community that supports you and uplifts your families' journey;” and “my convictions confirm my choices.” To encourage those new to the journey of

homeschooling or are contemplating homeschooling, Faith wrote in her journal entry,

Ask yourself WHY you want to homeschool. Research and find the curriculum that aligns with your ‘why.’ Find what fits you and your child(ren), and don’t be afraid to ask questions. Yes, there will be days when you question your decision. On those days, remember to look at the big picture. With God’s help, you can do this....There have been days when I have felt completely inadequate, and it is on those days that I know it is only by God’s grace and wisdom can we accomplish anything.

The essence of this subtheme was evident from all 12 participants across all three forms of data collected.

### **Theme 2: A Focus Beyond Academics**

The second theme that emerged in understanding the lived experiences of Christian K-12 homeschool families in central North Carolina was A Focus Beyond Academics. Standard subject areas include language arts, mathematics, science, social studies or history, and various elective courses; the participants showed an emphasis on their ability to expand beyond those subject areas. Enriched content and exposure to a multitude of advanced curricula indicated the broad opportunity home-based education afforded learners. This theme was developed through phrases such as “freedom to go beyond the text, loving and trusting the experience, stopping for teachable moments, learning outside the ‘classroom,’ exploration, creativity, and learning life skills” and was evident across 385 codes. Rosemary explained her opinion that a main homeschool benefit is the ability to not conform to a fully structured day, explaining that her young children can be self-sufficient, explore nature, have daily time to be creative, and figure out how to interact independently. All participants shared these sentiments across all three forms of data collection, sharing how the freedom of homeschooling allows families to embrace

teachable moments and skills beyond the confines of county or state-dictated academics. The three subthemes that supported A Focus Beyond Academics were (a) Goal of “Whole Person” Learning, (b) Life Skills and Teachable Moments, and (c) Responsibility Towards Their Future.

### ***Goal of “Whole Person” Learning***

The goal of “whole person” learning was initially coded from Rosemary’s interview comment, “Teaching from a whole life perspective – all of the family time, outside time, hands-on time, and real-world experiences,” summarized this subtheme. Eleanor praised God for allowing her to stay home and educate her child. Statements from her journal include, “the doors to homeschooling are limitless;” “my daughter doesn’t need to be behind a desk all day;” and “my child gets everything a public school can offer and more.” Kalli affirmed, “Character is more important than curriculum.” Focus Group A spoke extensively on how they deemed instructional success as having little to do with academics but rather their child’s character. April, Sarah, Molly, Kalli, Eleanor, and Katie provided phrases such as, “My kids are often praised for being so well-behaved in public,” “My kids see other kids and realize that they are not getting something that we are” and “my child is empathetic and can realize what it is happening around her.”

### ***Life Skills and Teachable Moments***

The essence of the subtheme Life Skills and Teachable Moments was evident in phrases such as “real-world experiences, practical skills, necessary skills, productive members of society, volunteering in the community, preparing for adulthood, stopping for conversations, and balancing coursework and skills work.” April elaborated that “everything” is a teachable moment when it comes to homeschooling, explaining how her family enjoys traveling to visually experience the subjects they are studying. Katie and Tessa collectively expressed the importance

and value of taking their children on field trips, stating it is possible to “road school” at times and the joy of “learning through living.” Tessa also explained the importance of her children joining as parents accomplish everyday tasks, such as shopping and household management. She asserted, “Sometimes the tasks would be faster and completed better if you did it alone.” It is important to remember unless you are teaching life skills, “they will be 18 and go off to college with no idea how to handle these things independently.” An agreement was visually and verbally evident during both focus group meetings as participants referenced the essential nature of teaching their children necessary life skills and taking time to have conversations and teaching moments.

### ***Responsibility Towards Their Children’s Future***

In Focus Group B, Mandy expressed concerns for her daughter, stating she was academically gifted yet feared her daughter could potentially struggle to thrive in the real world. To combat this concern, she spent time teaching her daughter the necessary skills to prepare her for adulthood. She stated, “I became very intentional in having conversations and lessons, talking through our thinking and discussing why we made those particular decisions.” The sentiment of responsibility toward preparing for their child’s future was shared with all 12 participants across data collection forms. Kalli said, “We spend a lot of time learning life skills, like how to cook a meal, do laundry, how to budget, and things that will help him succeed in life instead of doing bookwork.” Sarah said her son’s learning habits have changed over the years, and how she looks forward to their future. She recalled times when she encouraged and supported her son’s strengths, stating, “I see this strength in you. I see how you enjoy this. Maybe this is a route or something that you would want to look into.” As homeschool students, Katie and Rosemary shared experiences and benefits of dual enrollment with a local community college during their



high school years. Each participant continued to pursue higher education until completing their degree path. Similarly, April described her oldest child's route by focusing on her future goals and graduating considerably earlier. Having four children who graduated from her homeschool, Kalli explained their paths and how her family has consistently supported their plans as they grew into adulthood. Each verbalized accomplishment within the focus group meetings prompted praise from the other participants.

### **Theme 3: Individualized Instruction**

Individualized Instruction was the third theme that emerged in understanding the lived experiences of Christian K-12 homeschool families in central North Carolina. Providing a customized approach for each student and each subject area showed the participants emphasis on differentiating instruction and offering a more tailored approach to learning. Participants agreed one of the primary benefits of this form of education is the ability to “modify, customize, differentiate, and tailor” their child’s instructional experiences to meet their needs. Most of the participants currently or previously had multiple children across grade levels, explaining that the grade levels were irrelevant. Instead, homeschoolers focused on their individual abilities. The freedom to select curriculum based on students' current knowledge and capabilities instead of grade level standards was attributed to pre-assessments provided by curriculum companies, internet research, viewing curriculum formats, free trials of programs, and trial and error. Mandy and Tessa expressed frustration as they found ways to individualize reading lessons by navigating new instructional territory. However, they were confident enough to try new things and ecstatic when progress was evident. The codes for this theme were recognized 503 times. Three subthemes supporting Individualized Instruction were (a) Ability to Modify, (b) Tailor to Learning Style, and (c) Benefits of Frequent Informal Evaluations.

### ***Ability to Modify***

Kalli fondly described her earlier years of homeschooling as following a family-style approach where she adjusted curriculum based on age and ability levels, stating, “We all worked together, and I loved that. I loved the ability for all of us to be together, bounce ideas off each other, and just talk and learn from each other.” While the family conducted this style of learning for various subjects, her students were still thriving in their courses due to her appropriate modifications. April wrote in her journal, “Do not feel bad when you need to switch things up a bit; you are the biggest advocate for your child, and you want them to succeed.” Katie explained how her kindergarten daughter plateaued in one subject, indicating she was not developmentally ready. She modified the academic approach to include more visuals and hands-on practices. She included the other parent to mix up the process, which proved effective in her daughter's learning. Sarah, Betty, Jess, Mandy, Tessa, and Kalli indicated that they were pleased with the ability to remain flexible with their child’s instruction and curriculum when they stopped one of the current curricula or programs and began another. They used phrases such as, “If it’s not working, it’s not working;” “It’s not worth the money, headache, stress or tears;” “The program's approach was not benefiting my child;” “We needed a mid-year switch;” and “I could tell this would not be a productive year if we remained with that particular curriculum.” While only a few participants confirmed their need to make curriculum changes, all 12 participants referenced seeking advice from other homeschool moms, conducting internet research, and utilizing supplements to incorporate with their child’s current academic programs.

### ***Tailor to Learning Styles***

All 12 participants verbalized agreement with the importance of determining their child’s learning style and tailoring their approach to suit the students; this was evident across each data

form. Molly wrote in her journal, “This individual approach allows me to tailor their educational experience, which will hopefully lead to a better understanding and retention of knowledge.” Tessa mimicked the sentiment, describing how she benefits by knowing the learning styles of both of their children and having “a pretty good idea of the direction we need to go.” For example, she referenced using visual, musical, and kinesthetic learning activities. She also stated, “I’m less stressed about following the curriculum exactly or staying with one, really paying more attention to how my kids learn and what best suits them as individuals.” Kalli, Sarah, Betty, Rosemary, Jess, April, and Mandy indicated that as a parent, “you can see the differences between your children,” “different kids have different needs,” “children learn at different speeds and different levels,” “there really isn’t a one-size fits all approach,” “I have to be flexible and meet them where they currently are,” “his brain is completely different than my brain,” “I am reevaluating constantly and trying to figure out how best to meet his needs” and “as homeschoolers, we don’t have to follow a traditional approach we can teach them based on their own unique styles.”

### ***Benefits of Frequent Informal Evaluations***

Many homeschool curriculums across subject areas have quizzes, benchmarks, tests, and frequent self-checks built into their program; all 12 participants referenced their preference for informal evaluations or assessments for their students. Jess asserted, “We have a lot of discussions in my home, so from our conversations, I’m able to evaluate a lot of what’s working, what’s not working, what’s challenging, and what’s stressful.” As a former public-school teacher, Jess had experiences with students displaying stress and anxiety around exam times; this was something she wanted to avoid with her own children. She also mentioned that some of her

top-performing students did not know or grasp the content well, according to the formal assessment results. Kalli, also a former public-school educator, stated,

I do this [informal assessments] fairly regularly, probably two or three times a month, to make sure I am staying on track and keeping him accountable.

I know their strengths and weaknesses because I work so closely with my kids. I don't have to do any formal assessments because I am constantly working with them and understanding their comprehension. The end-of-year assessment is used to check a box for state requirements, not because I need them.

Within the participant statement, she referred to a formal end-of-year assessment. For clarification, North Carolina requires all registered homeschool students over seven to complete a nationally recognized achievement test of the parent's choice (NCDPI, 2023). All 12 participants referenced the sentiment of relying on informal forms of gauging student progress across the data forms. The participants used phrases such as "I can quiz them as we are taking a walk as a family;" "I monitor their progress constantly;" "the embedded unit quizzes show me where my children need more support and extra practice;" "I can witness their comprehension;" "when I see struggles we immediately stop and focus our attention on those areas;" "I have never cared about testing or focused solely on grades;" and "my child's level of comprehension, success, and personal accomplishments are valued higher than a letter grade on a piece of paper." Due to the specification of student age for required annual testing, Rosemary and Katie have not had students experience these forms of assessments. The remaining 10 participants listed their yearly evaluation of choice as the California Achievement Test, Woodcock-Johnson, or Iowa Test of Basic Skills; no other assessments were listed.

#### **Theme 4: Knowing the Student**

The fourth emerged theme in understanding the lived experiences of Christian K-12 homeschool families in central North Carolina was Knowing the Student. The enhanced ability to have a strong relationship with the learners was described as a benefit, indicating a high level of parental involvement had produced a keen awareness of their children's social, emotional, and academic needs. This theme was evident in the coding process 431 times. Participants used phrases such as "watching them flourish;" "knowing when they are struggling with something academically or emotionally;" "offering choices;" "children are comfortable;" "my kids primarily work independently, I support and supervise the whole process;" "my children can work at their own pace;" and "finding what is fun and the best fit for the family." Betty, Sarah, April, Mandy, Molly, April, Eleanor, Kalli, Rosemary, Jess, and Tessa expressed how their homeschools looked differently from their first year and continued to change as their children progressed through the grade levels, referring to their teaching approaches, how they designed their learning programs, how they structured their instructional plans, and how they mixed curriculum programs. Mandy stated, "As you get more seasoned, you start figuring it out. I think as a first-time homeschool mom, it's very hard to think about piecing curriculum together. But as you get seasoned, you make more transitions." Rosemary mimicked those sentiments and described her feelings as a homeschool teacher with her twins initially starting their instructional time together. As she established their routine and the children progressed, she saw their strengths and realized she wanted to approach their instructional time with more one-on-one time to reduce confusion, unnecessary competitions, distractions, or hurt feelings. These sentiments support the notion of knowing the student because of the time home-based learners spend with their parent/teacher and how frequently they analyze instructional tasks and personal goals. The three subthemes for Knowing the Student are (a) Taking Necessary Breaks to Embrace

Childhood, (b) Students Challenge Themselves, and (c) Supporting Student Interests.

### ***Taking Necessary Breaks to Embrace Childhood***

Freedom and flexibility can be featured in other themes among homeschooling instruction; they can also be coupled with choices and having options. Within this subtheme, the participants highlight the importance of seeing when their children need to take breaks and are “blessed with the ability to be flexible with how we spend our days” (statement from Tessa’s interview). Phrases such as “step away from their desks;” “spend quality time with their siblings;” “learn from nature;” “go outside and explore;” and “be happy, healthy kids.” Family time was prioritized by all 12 participants across each form of data collected. Participants established family routines, reiterated how they could learn by being together, and how their immediate family was not the only positive influence on their children. Jess shared her children's experiences with their grandmothers and how they get to hone skills she practices with them. Mandy became emotional as she reflected on the recent passing of a loved one. Her children's time with this individual would not have been possible if they had been enrolled in a school. Betty also became emotional as she expressed her sons' special bond with each other and how they thrive when together. Both Focus Groups agreed that their children would have missed invaluable opportunities if they were not home-based learners.

### ***Students Challenge Themselves***

During Focus Group A, Kalli described a significant accomplishment of one of her sons, who could dedicate his time and energy to an extracurricular program. Yet, as a homeschooler, he was able to align his academics completely to nurture his passion for falconry work. This earned praise from the other participants within the group and prompted phrases such as “That is the beauty of homeschooling;” “It’s nice to have that level of freedom;” and “he wouldn’t have

been afforded the time to dedicate if he was in a school all day.” Kind expressions of appreciating their own student's natural gifts were shared amongst the group, while Kalli asserted, “It’s not necessarily an intelligence sort of thing; it’s the drive to actually put the effort in.” The sentiment of students challenging themselves was echoed by Mandy, who referred to a child with different learning needs, and Jess, who referred to her children who advanced through curriculums and continued to pursue additional credits. Mandy, Betty, Jess, April, Rosemary, Tessa, Molly, and Sarah referenced being members of a cooperative learning program that supported a family-style approach to science, history, and rotational life skills. During the individual interviews, they each mentioned the co-op and the level of difficulty the textbooks are written for the younger students. The emphasis was having a spiral approach to the content where students learned the material at a developmentally appropriate pace as they age through the program. Phrases such as “It is important to learn in this manner,” “The benefits of a co-op are that the gifted teachers there are breaking the information down for my kids in a cool way,” and “It can be difficult to modify for the students, but it helps our small class learn in a way that is beneficial to all of them;” “my kids are so excited to go and learn with their friends;” “we do the lesson reading and assignments at home, but they also get to create projects with their little friends at the co-op;” “I love getting involved with a co-op, us moms learn as much as the kids sometimes;” “co-op fills the void of socializing;” “my kids challenge themselves to be in our mixed co-op class;” and “co-op is a support system for the moms and the children; the learning never stops.”

### ***Supporting Student Interests***

The participants agreed that allowing student input within their learning was essential to foster respect, provided their instruction and capabilities continued to thrive. To show her

students that she values their opinions and interests, Tessa explained,

At the beginning of the year, the end of the year, or somewhere in the summertime, I like to have good conversations with them about the things they want to learn about...whether that be different countries or languages or both.

Having elementary, middle, and high school learners at home, Jess praised that her students were avid readers, allowing them to “select reading material as a continuation of what they are learning to access a greater depth of knowledge independently.” April and Kalli mentioned selecting reading material for their sons based on interests to keep them focused on the content. Rosemary had her children explore freely and helped provide them with science experiments based on their interests and science lessons. Many participants highlighted their children’s love of sports, nature, music, art, exercise classes, foreign language, travel, field trips, or farming programs as ways they support their students’ interests. These areas of interest seemed to balance their child's education and instructional goals while nurturing their independent forms of expression. Often deemed extracurricular activities, these programs can also be considered academic opportunities for homeschool learning and elective courses for high school transcript credits based on state standard requirements and specifications.

### **Outlier Data and Findings**

Outliers are unexpected findings that do not align with specific research questions. Outliers do not necessarily go against the research but are simply considered unique within the study.

#### ***Outlier 1***

Molly was the only participant with an educational experience from another country. Molly immigrated to the United States from Poland around 2001 as a young adult. She described



her childhood schooling experience and acceptance to a local university upon graduating high school. Family members remain in her home country, and she described her struggles with their negative criticism initially. During Focus Group A, Molly stated,

I was not only up against my own fears of ‘Can I do this? How will I do it? Will I succeed? Will I fail my kids?’ I had my family in a different country criticizing me, asking, ‘What are you doing? You are not educated to do this. You don’t have a teacher’s education. You can mess up your kids in the long run if you make a mistake.’ I was questioning myself, but I decided to do it anyway, and we found a way.

The five other participants agreed and shared similar feelings of feeling criticized, having family members verbally disapprove, and personally questioning their choices. Yet, Molly remained an outlier in this study due to her cultural differences, which gave her a unique perspective on how her life overseas impacted her experiences. As a follow-up question, she was asked if she knew of any homeschooling families growing up. Molly responded that it was not something she was aware of or only knew to take place when health or medical issues were involved during student recovery time. Molly was bilingual, and practiced Polish with her young daughters.

### ***Outlier 2***

Eleanor presented the second outlier within the study for her unique approach to the instructional design of her daughter’s academic subjects. Her daughter started public schooling but was removed from the setting due to underlying issues, including bullying, anxiety, academic struggles, and a lack of support from her classroom teacher. Eleanor described the challenge of determining what worked best for her daughter’s learning style using the phrase, “It was a learning curve.” Being described as a visual and kinesthetic learner, she selected a curriculum that provided learning instruction in the best possible manner. She supplemented activities, life

skills, and field trips to incorporate other methods into their instructional time. The unique approach she eventually selected was to focus on one subject for an entire month. In Focus Group A, she stated,

In the beginning [of their homeschool journey], it was very overwhelming. All of the information, what do I pick? How do I even do it? It's the learning curve of figuring out how she learns and all of that. We weaned through a bunch of things. We have always used Master Books, and she flourishes with that curriculum, but I was trying to cram every subject into each day. That didn't work; I saw that she wasn't retaining it. Then we tried to do weekly subjects, like science, on Monday and Tuesday. I would let her choose the schedule for what days and subjects she wanted. That didn't really work, either. So, this year, we have focused on one subject for the entire month. This month, it is all math. We go through it all; she has just flourished. She likes it a lot more; I can see her confidence skyrocketing. She says, 'I understand it now.' Before, she almost felt defeated and would question, 'Why don't I get this?'

While the sentiment of determining what works best, teaching at the child's level, focusing academics for their specific learning styles, and tailoring the instruction for an individualized approach is the essence of the established themes within this study, the focus of only one subject area at a time is significant in comparison to the provided responses of the other participants. Eleanor is proud of her daughter and knows that she is academically thriving with this approach to her instruction. She referred to times of questioning and comparing to other educational styles but asserted, "I sit and pray, and God always confirms we are right where we are supposed to be."

### **Research Question Responses**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the instructional design methods utilized by Christian homeschool families in central North Carolina. The research questions created for this study focused on how parents described providing a home-based education. Participants gave rich, descriptive accounts, which were triangulated through individual semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and an individual journal entry. A detailed explanation of the participants' responses to the central research question and three sub-questions can be found below.

### **Central Research Question**

What instructional experiences are utilized by Christian kindergarten through grade 12 families through their homeschool journey? The participants in this study consistently described their lived experiences through responses that displayed their honesty and raw emotions. Responses consistently overlapped and echoed similar sentiments of their homeschool journeys from their family experiences and their personal educational experiences. Their perspectives revealed synonymous experiences that contributed to emerging themes. The four themes were developed through data analysis and saturation. The identified themes in this study consisted of (a) a conviction to homeschool, (b) a focus beyond academics, (c) individualized instruction, and (d) knowing the student. The participants summarized that by maintaining a biblical worldview with strategically selected curriculums, the families can tailor the educational experience to support the individual learners, go beyond academics, and instill essential values and necessary life skills. A conviction to homeschool was evident through a significant response made by Sarah. In her one-on-one interview, Sarah said,

We are Christians, and I take that very seriously. The Lord is the one who has blessed me with these children. They are my responsibility to pour into them the word of God, to

lead them by our faith, what we believe, and what we teach in this household. I take that very, very seriously. The Lord intended me to raise my children, not the world to raise them.

### **Sub-Question One**

The first sub-question asked, how do the parent's lived experiences influence the design and implementation of instruction as they relate to the homeschool experiences of their children? These questions aimed to gain insight into how parents design learning activities for their children and understand how they implement them. This question aligns with the guiding principles of instructional development as it applies to Bruner's (1964) cognitive development theory, focusing on knowledge construction, a spiralized approach to learning, supporting current levels of cognition, and expanding upon learner cognition. The analysis brought forth a total of 13 subthemes. The subthemes that related to the design and implementation of instruction for the Christian home-based learners were: (a) maintaining a biblical worldview, (b) life skills and teachable moments, (c) responsibility for their future, (d) ability to modify, (e) tailor to learning styles, (f) students challenge themselves, and (g) supporting students' interests. Questions regarding the parents' instructional design and implementation processes developed responses from all participants, focusing on their child's individual needs, knowing and applying their learning styles, modifying instruction to simplify complex content, and challenging advanced learners. Most participants asserted that they would analyze their student's current skills and plan accordingly, referring to the freedom provided by homeschool practices to remain flexible with curriculum regarding their suggested schedules and plans. To clarify, parents were not overlooking the material; they expressed the ability to tailor the educational design to facilitate best practices and outcomes for their children. The participants also explained their learning

experiences and how they analyze their homeschool design yearly for each of their children.

With an educational background and twenty years of homeschool experience, in her interview, Kalli explained,

I think one of the things I have learned the most over the years is to stop teaching things how they are supposed to be taught [according to textbooks and teacher guides]. Having an educational background, I know how to teach. When I stopped doing it the way I was taught or the way the material said and started doing it the way my children learned instead, it was a game changer for me and all of us. Instead of fighting an uphill battle, it was me meeting them where they were at; they were able to learn and grow that way... My goal, truthfully, for our homeschool is to learn to love learning rather than learning dates and facts. I want them to know how to get information and to learn to love the process.

### **Sub-Question Two**

The second sub-question asked, what instructional methods are perceived as effective with students of Christian K-12 homeschools? While the question was designed to gain an understanding of effective methods, the true intent was to gather the parental perception of their effective methods without focusing on academic standards, grade level standards, or grading scores. A question regarding scores and evidence of cognition will follow in the next sub-question. This question also applies Bruner's (1964) cognitive development theory of instruction, focusing on approaches to learning. The subthemes that related to the effectiveness of instruction for the Christian K-12 home-based learners were: (a) laying a solid spiritual foundation, (b) instilling family values, (c) questioning while confirming, (d) the goal of "whole person" learning, (e) tailor to learning styles, (f) benefits of frequent informal evaluations, (g) taking

necessary breaks to embrace childhood, (h) students challenge themselves, and (i) supporting student interests. With overlapping and intertwined sentiments, the evidence of effective parental instructional methods spans subject matter, grade levels, challenging subjects, enrollment in cooperative learning programs, student interests outside of core academics, and the necessity of teaching life skills. The participants all agreed that the modifications and implemented methods that had shaped their home-based learning instructional experiences were contingent on remaining faithful and obedient to the Lord, having a strong relationship and bond with each of their children, genuinely understanding the academic strengths and weaknesses of their children, and consistently ensuring positive outcomes that benefit their children academically and spiritually. To support other homeschool instructors and solidify the importance of finding effective methods, in her journal entry, Tessa wrote,

...homeschooling is challenging, but it is a gift. In terms of instruction, choose the best learning path based on the child. Learning what style of instruction works best will take time, trial, and error. Don't be afraid to try different options if something doesn't work. Pull from lots of resources and try a multitude of things until you find what works best for your children and how your family functions. If possible, find a community of homeschoolers to support you and expose you to different schooling options. Remember, your school will not look the same as public, private, or homeschool families down the street, and be okay with that.

### **Sub-Question Three**

The third sub-question asked, how does evidence of cognition drive the constructive experiences of Christian K-12 homeschool learning? This question aimed to understand what forms of evidence the home-based instructors gathered to ensure student cognition and how it

impacted their teaching. This question applies Bruner's (1964) cognitive development theory of instruction, focusing on knowledge construction, supporting current levels of cognition, and expanding upon learner cognition. All 12 participants shared sentiments of seeing their students progress, flourish, succeed, and acknowledge high achievements. Likewise, all 12 participants also referenced times that required reevaluation, times students were not progressing as expected, and struggles with their students academically; some also referred to concerns with their child's development. The sentiments that showed ineffective methods were followed by phrases that affirmed their counter methods by targeting struggles, researching for instructional advice, gathering supplemental material, and seeking hybrid alternatives to their current activities. The continuation of praising the level of freedom to develop their own style of instruction and assessing the levels of comprehension was shown across all participant responses for the research questions, reflecting commonalities between the four themes. To further elaborate and offer clarification, homeschool academic standards vary from state to state. North Carolina only required a transcript of high school credits for graduation displaying a record of grade levels successfully completed, subjects taught, grades per semester, and the test scores from annual standardized testing. Different paths, such as college or career readiness, may impact the requirements or expectations of completed courses, including additional evidence of completion and applicable grades or scores (NCPDI, 2023), with many academic programs having reviews, benchmarks, quizzes, and tests built into the curriculums suggested plan, Rosemary reiterated the importance of selecting a program that effectively supports her children. In her individual journal prompt, she wrote

There are SO many amazing resources out there to provide as much help as you need or desire. Choosing a curriculum was overwhelming to me in the beginning, but there are

many fantastic curriculums that you can just open and teach from. I chose an “all-in-one” curriculum our first year, then branched out and researched others as I became more comfortable and confident in my ability to teach. There are also great options for co-ops, supplemental classes, hybrid school options, and online options. We all have strengths and weaknesses, so teaching your strengths and outsourcing other subjects is a great option to provide your child with the best education from home!

### **Summary**

Chapter Four introduced the 12 participants in this study, provided an overview of each, and described the results of the data analysis. The model of a hermeneutic phenomenological study was utilized for this study. Triangulated data was collected from the participants through in-person and virtual interviews, focus groups, and individual journaling. The analysis phase developed themes and subthemes from relevant words, meaningful statements, and reoccurring phrases. The four emerged themes were (a) conviction to homeschool, (b) knowing the student, (c) a focus beyond academics, and (d) individualized instruction. The lived experience and perspectives of the participants impacted their responses. The richly detailed responses were written in narrative form as the results within this chapter, reflecting the four themes.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the instructional design methods utilized by Christian homeschool families in central North Carolina. Chapter Five consists of the interpreted findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications. An explanation for the study's limitations and delimitations are provided for transferability. Recommendations for future research are also made. Chapter Five concludes with a summary.

### **Discussion**

This study examined Christian homeschool parents' lived experiences and perspectives of kindergarten through grade 12 learners residing in central North Carolina. Triangulated data was collected from one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and individual journal entries. The analysis phase developed four emerged themes describing the lived experience of homeschool families: (a) a conviction to homeschool, (b) a focus beyond academics, (c) knowing the student, and (d) individualized instruction. This section will discuss the findings in light of the four developed themes, the correlation between the results of this study, and the empirical and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

The thematic findings in this study reflected the participants' perspective of homeschooling their K-12 students in North Carolina. The emerged themes displayed the importance of maintaining a biblical worldview and instilling family values and moral character. The families emphasized that while some initially longed to provide a home-based education for their school-aged children, others eventually chose based on feelings of conviction. The

conviction to homeschool was evident through direct responses, and the importance of “following God’s conviction” was solidified by their emotional responses.

The families referenced their homeschooling experience as an investment into their children's lives based on time, emotions, and finances. The parent’s conviction and ability to facilitate their child’s home-based education was not implied as an easy task. Though the participants mentioned times of concern and questioning decisions, they replied they consistently received spiritual confirmation for their journey. Extending their children’s academic experience beyond a traditional approach to education by incorporating life skills, pausing for teachable moments, embracing changes or challenges in life as a family, and nurturing their children throughout as they develop at their own pace showed their appreciation of homeschooling. These concepts contributed to the aspect that parents had a desire and ability to spend abundant time building relationships with their children, fostering beneficial childhood experiences, supporting their interests, and encouraging the children as they challenged themselves in various ways. Individualized instructional experiences for their children were only possible due to the freedom and flexibility of home-based education. The parents stated the necessity of tailoring instructional approaches to accommodate special needs, to support each of their children as they presented different abilities, and how learning styles contributed to student knowledge retention. Another benefit of this approach was the minimal need for formal assessments. Instead, frequent informal evaluations provided parents with concrete evidence of their student's strengths and any potential areas of weakness.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The themes of Christian K-12 homeschooling in the central region of North Carolina contributed to the interpretations of this study. The determined interpretations were (a)

confidence in meeting the needs of the students, (b) the family relationship nurtures diverse experiences, (c) the freedom to value all learning, and (d) control over information and avoidance of public instruction.

### ***Confidence in Meeting the Needs of the Students***

The participants showed confidence in their abilities to meet the academic needs of their students. Uttered phrases such as “an abundance of resources,” “so many options for curriculums,” and “helpful hybrid programs” showed the various opportunities for parents to access supportive programs that outline the necessary academic skills per subject areas and stage of student development. Though parents indicated they would periodically question their skills and abilities to provide their children with “everything,” those feelings of doubt were fleeting, and they were confident their children were academically thriving. They expressed that their children were being educationally supported and afforded additional experiences that traditional classrooms could not. The possibilities of real-world perspectives, exposure through travel, unique elective focuses, and solid spiritual growth were some freedoms provided by a home-based education. The confidence level of the parents showed they were aware of their student’s individuality and how they could nurture their strengths and weaknesses independently. Continued remarks of ways they consistently sought research, accumulated supportive materials, differentiated their methods of instruction, introduced supplemental texts, viewed tutorial videos, and produced manipulatives for project-based activities asserted their capabilities to gather necessary instructional materials and outsource when current programs were not effective.

### ***The Family Relationship Nurtures the Diverse Experiences***

Not only did the findings of this study indicate the parental confidence in meeting the needs of their students through their comfort in accessing supportive academic resources, but it

also expanded the concept of parental bonding in a manner conducive of nurturing and contributing to the emotional needs, as well as the physical needs of their growing children. Several parents indicated the freedom in home-based schooling allowed students to approach their learning in developmentally appropriate ways, such as play-based learning, nature studies, and exploratory experiences. Being able to manipulate items physically, observe for an extended time, and journal or illustrate their findings incorporates a variety of skills into the learning process. The depth of student knowledge can be expanded without restrictive schedules. The children of these participants were described as “flourishing across subjects” and “challenging themselves.”; their parents displayed pride and confidence in the approaches that support and encourage home-based learning. Family togetherness was shown to balance academic practices in core subject areas and provide extended learning opportunities where students progressed in a natural environment with limited restrictions to their methods. The closeness of the family pivots on the concept that homeschooling reduces the time children are away from their families and increases the likelihood of a close family relationship.

### ***The Freedom to Value All Learning***

Similar to the previous interpretation, this finding implies homeschool learning experiences offer a flexible approach with minimal limitations. All participants in this study valued and appreciated the freedom to select instructional methods and content. While the parents emphasized the importance of the core subjects, such as language arts and mathematics, they also elaborated on the various interests of their children and how daily encounters or even dilemmas were essential teachable moments. Teaching their children to read was deemed a “daunting task” by several participants. Due to the participants' children's various ages and

developmental needs, some parents expressed they were working through the early reading readiness stages.

In contrast, others had surpassed the hurdles of teaching reading skills and expressed the ability to encourage their children to explore their passions through literature. Not only were children provided with the freedom to focus on areas of interest that they could physically experience, such as frequent field trips or an appreciation of athletics, but they were also prompted to learn more about their interests and passions by studying the history of the concept and expanding their current level of knowledge. Seemingly, the homeschool parents indicated that every aspect of their day revolved around learning regardless of the content. The implications of all moments being teachable moments corroborate the necessity of students gaining more profound levels of cognition and preparing for futures with the necessary skills.

### ***Control Over Information and Avoidance of Public Instruction***

The study results indicated that parents wanted more control over the information their children “receive as factual or required content.” Due to the study parameters requiring participants as professing Christianity, it was highlighted how religious values provided the outline for their academics, emphasizing their focus on consistently maintaining a biblical worldview. Their avoidance of public learning developed the implication that parents desired more control over the information their children would receive if they were enrolled in a public school setting. Asserting their desire to align all science and history curricula with biblical truths, the participants in this study also expressed an understanding that public educational standards are dictated by state and county policies, not specifically by the school or teaching staff. An apparent avoidance of public instruction implied their preference to control their children’s education and reduce their concerns by selecting their chosen curriculum and instructional

content. Concerns for their children being overlooked, forced to conform to societal standards, and extended school hours were evident. The avoidance of public learning was not only in regards to the academics but also other factors that would subsequently impact their child's learning experience, such as bullying, large class sizes, teaching approaches for one learning style, stressful testing, and long periods sitting at desks. The results of this study indicated that avoidance of a public, academic setting had numerous factors, and their conflicted feelings about enrolling their children in a public environment validated their convictions to provide a home-based education.

### **Implications for Policy or Practice**

The findings in this hermeneutic phenomenological study revealed the experiences of Christian homeschool parents of kindergarten through grade 12 learners in the central region of North Carolina. The results contain several implications for various stakeholders currently homeschooling or contemplating homeschooling, policymakers, and those within the field of education. This section will discuss the impact of this study on policy and practices.

#### ***Implications for Policy***

Homeschooling is regulated based on state specifications and varies across the country. While some states dictate several aspects of home-based learning, including course content, parent/teacher qualifications, number of instructional days, and frequency or form of annual assessments, North Carolina has moderate regulations. The state regulations provide a broader range of freedom in the lower grades until a transcript is required for high school students (HSLDA, 2023; NCDPI, 2023). While all participants within this study appreciated the flexibility provided through home-based learning, a few sentiments were made about confusion regarding high school transcripts and college or career path requirements. This study has no

implications for changes in North Carolina's policies for non-public education. However, it encourages prospective homeschool parents to research their state's regulations and policies before committing.

### ***Implications for Practice***

While the themes and results in this study were specified as emerging from Christian parents in the central region of North Carolina, the sentiments may also be shared by other parents of home-based learners regardless of religious preference or state of residence. Home-based learning experiences based on parental instructional design may also share similarities with the themes presented within this study. The ability to differentiate learning through an individualized approach may also benefit students seeking additional academic experiences outside of their provided educational courses. A focus beyond academics may also be fostered by parents of public, private, or charter students seeking to provide life skills training for children as they grow closer to their independence. Knowing the students and supporting their interests may also be favorable to preserving strong family relationships and values. Likewise, regarding policy, this study does not make implications for changes to home-based learning practices. Instead, the researcher encourages home-based instructors or potential instructors to research best practices and various instructional methods to approach their student's academics in whatever manner prompts adequate levels of cognition.

### **Empirical and Theoretical Implications**

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical and empirical implications presented within this study as they pertain to the instructional design utilized by Christian kindergarten through grade 12 homeschool parents in central North Carolina. The theoretical implications will be highlighted as they display relevancy with Jerome Bruner's (1964) cognitive

theory of instruction. This section will also refer to study results that display connections as well as divergences from the empirical literature from Chapter Two.

### ***Empirical Implications***

Families homeschooling with multiple children across grade levels likened the approach to a traditional one-room schoolhouse and showed an appreciation for the option of remaining a strong family unit that works together to accomplish tasks, including academics, needs around the home setting, and religious practices (Newman, 2021; Rollings-Magnusson, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic was a significant period of public learning withdrawals and increased registration for home-based learning (Alismaiel et al., 2022; Letzel et al., 2022; McDonald, 2020; Watson, 2020). None of the participants in this study determined home-based learning was an appropriate option due to school closures from the pandemic; however, one family did imply the removal from public education was a timely decision based on underlying issues within their child's previous learning facility. One significant implication established in this study was the marketing of homeschooling material, as the popularity of home-based learning has increased drastically. Multiple participants referenced the multitude of advertisements and marketing of so many curriculum options recently, alluding to the fact that home-based learning has increased in registration from the COVID-19 pandemic (Duvall, 2021; NCHE, 2021). Homeschooling families have noticed this impact in this study. While they appreciate the various options, they deem the abundance as more of a distraction, a ploy to make sales. They could ultimately make selecting a curriculum challenging for new homeschooling parents.

**The Homeschool Parental Perspective on Traditional Schooling.** Similar to established research, the results of this study yielded parental views of avoiding public learning for many reasons. Personal prerogative was featured in Neuman and Oz's (2021) study of Israeli



homeschooling. The sentiments were shared amongst participants in this study, echoing the feelings of a public education imparting knowledge and not skills of obtaining information, school activities being irrelevant to everyday life, and learning programs not supportive of the student's future. The themes and subthemes of this study indicated parents had a strong desire to instill the love of learning, prepare their children for the real world, and support students as they select topics of interest to study. While the removal of children from public learning prompted Lewis-Spector (2022) to develop an argument that home-based learning is an effort to dismantle the public education system, this North Carolina study features information that many states do not provide tax breaks or credits to those electing to abstain from public services (NCDPI, 2023; NCHE, 2023; Ray, 2023). Likewise, the participants referred to home-based learning as a "blessing and an honor" and an "investment, time commitment, and an expense," commenting that their tax dollars still support the education system, and they are personally obligated to support their child's learning experience financially.

**Public and Private Separation.** Homeschool parents deem larger class sizes as a potentially harmful environment (Firmin et al., 2019). North Carolina public records show an average of 24.1 elementary students per classroom (NCES, 2023); this study's results supported the parental desire to avoid large class sizes so their children do not become "overlooked" or "simply viewed as a number." The efforts homeschool parents make to remain privatized support the goal of an individualistic approach and a clear separation from public academics. Though social media avoidance was not discussed among participants in this study, the results showed the parents expected their children to have a reduced drive of consumerism, avoid peer pressure and societal standards, as well as allow children to embrace childhood (Firmin et al., 2019; Newman, 2021). One particular remark during a focus group interview expanded upon the

parent's desire to deviate from social expectations and standard practices, reiterating their choice to raise their children in a separate setting. While this study focused on the parental practices of their instructional design and implementation of educational activities, participants consistently mentioned their avoidance of public education for their children, asserting that “all things are related and impact a child’s ability to learn.”

**Curriculum and Setting with a Biblical Worldview.** This study focused on Christian homeschool families in central North Carolina, maintaining a biblical worldview strongly correlated with faith-based learning studies. Christian parents cite government education as oppressive to their religious values, enforcing overreaching standards and attempting to thrust secular trends as academic norms (Newman, 2021). The results of this study likened the article’s implications and references to the de-Christianization of schools, indoctrination practices, and other secular theories. The notion of teachers imprinting their personal views mimicked Yoder et al. (2021), as the article featured the concept of silent values, mannerisms, and actions depicting their beliefs. To clarify the connection to this study, participants in Focus Group B specified their appreciation for teachers. Yet, they understood their limitations due to standards beyond their control and the reality that the teachers spend most of the time with their children during long school days. The participants preferred to model religious and moral values as they instructed academic content.

While the academic instructor was viewed as necessary, it was not as significant as selecting a curriculum that follows a biblical worldview; parents emphasized the significance and listed a few of their preferred programs (Guthrie, 2019; NCHE, 2023; Yoder et al., 2021). Christian cooperative learning programs were referenced within the study, focusing on science, history, and life skills that promote Tilhou’s (2020) sentiment, as these programs encourage

socialization and project-based learning. Similarly, Valiente et al. (2022) acknowledged the vital role religion plays in a family's structure, which was a pivotal concept in this study. The participant's faith ordained them to minister to their children through their instructional content and family experiences. A profession of faith and faith-based learning was required for samples in this phenomenological study.

**Curriculum Guides the Individualized Education.** The sincere preference to spend time with their families and provide a tailored, unique learning experience for their children extended previous research (Li & Mathis, 2022; Neuman & Oz, 2021). The opportunities and variations were agreed upon by participants as beneficial and expanding their knowledge; growth was evident through their coursework and various informal evaluation forms. The state standards for non-public learning require course completion for specified subject areas, yet there are few limitations to areas of study (Green-Hennessey & Mariotti, 2021; NCDPI, 2023). With numerous options for curriculums and academic programs, this study emphasized the necessity of selecting programs aligned with their child's learning style and facilitating their cognition. Several interviews reiterated their appreciation for blended learning options that fostered different approaches, game-based instructional content, and supplemental activities to support various student needs (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2022; Schrum & Summerfield, 2018).

Shifting the methods of learning across subject areas was also referenced to allow the learners to be the center of the learning and not strictly guided by the parent instructor (Adina & Mohib, 2020; Thomas, 2019; Valiente et al., 2020). Parental comments about their student's focus, engagement, motivation, drive, and evidence of critical thinking skills enforced research on the importance of utilizing instructional design methods to facilitate student learning (Firmin et al., 2019; Kahlil & Elkhider, 2016; P. Smith, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). Another

commonality with research regarding the instructional design selected through home-based learning was that a front-end analysis was necessary when starting new learning programs and focusing on the student's current knowledge base instead of grade levels or textbook titles. Several participants supported and implemented methods of Human Performance Technology and a front-end analysis (Binder, 2017; Firmin et al., 2019; Gilbert, 2019; Harless, 2016; Stefaniak et al., 2018). Parental comments of differentiation among their students and between subject areas displayed an understanding that curriculum selection was not necessarily a linear process and should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the students. Students with special needs within this study were described as being provided with a differentiated approach, supportive supplements, and professional tutoring to ensure a positive learning experience (Gelbar et al., 2018; Firmin et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2022).

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This study was grounded in constructivist theory, particularly Jerome Bruner's (1964) cognitive theory of instruction. The study's interpretations align with the guiding principles in the theory as they support home-based learning, emphasizing active experiences and a tailored approach for a more individualized education (Bruner, 1964; 1985; Xu, 2019). The various aspects of home-based learning presented within the results of this phenomenological study displayed an ability to explore through activities to facilitate student cognition and actively emphasized the necessity of their children to explore freely and construct knowledge independently (Stapleton & Stefaniak, 2019).

As elaborated in Chapter Two, the four components of Bruner's (1964) theory of instruction have initial phases of learner predisposition and knowledge construction. The parents of younger students consistently referenced facilitating practices that allowed opportunities for

students to manipulate physical items and conduct hands-on activities, stating that these methods were sought out by their students in displays of internal motivation as they retained engagement on the task. Their children were described as seeking hands-on activities and more naturally inclined to stay engaged or focused. When evidence of focus was lost, the parents encouraged their children to “freely explore” or “play” for some time before regaining their attention to the coursework. Knowledge construction begins simplistically and progresses into an advanced stage through enactive, iconic, and symbolic modes (Bruner, 1985). The results indicated parents showed an awareness of their child’s progression and academic growth when they worked independently, displaying pride in their levels of knowledge as they advanced.

The theory's remaining components are optimal material and reinforcement sequencing (Bruner, 1864; 1977). The results showed parents were keenly aware of their student’s needs and consistently modified instructional approaches to meet their current developmental needs. The sequencing of materials was contingent on the student's age, current knowledge base, interest levels, and preferential learning style, which ultimately impacted the retention of knowledge. Participants emphasized the importance of concept mastery and did not progress through the curriculum until students displayed the appropriate knowledge retention. The results of this study corroborated Bruner’s (1964) theory of instruction regarding the four components of instruction.

However, the results of this study provided inconsistent recognition of an instructional approach utilizing a spiralized curriculum aside from the participants who described being in a cooperative learning program. The members of the particular learning program asserted elementary-aged learners conducted a family-style approach to science and history content, meaning all students were exposed to the same material, while the classes based on student age and development focused on appropriate projects and activities to facilitate scaffolded

information. One reference from a parent indicated that their child struggled to focus on excessively repetitive math activities. At the same time, another praised a spiralized curriculum format across all subjects as it contributed to her child's continuation of knowledge retention. One participant articulated a sincere preference for a family-style approach when her children were younger, as it provided stimulating conversations and displayed high levels of engagement and student cognition. Though sentiments for arranging a spiralized approach to learning were present within this study, it was not significant enough to imply this method being consistently supported and utilized by home-based education. It should also be stated that curriculum programs may present the instructional content within their materials in a spiralized form; however, it was not explicitly specified by the users or referenced in their interview responses.

Sentiments of participants regarding learning styles and various approaches to learning echo Bruner's (1985, p. 8) statements that "there is not one kind of learning," "equip learners with a menu of possibilities," and "arm them with procedures and sensibilities." The data analysis phase in this study presented so many shared sentiments within the research questions supporting Bruner's theory, they developed into the themes of knowing the student and individualized instruction. Bruner's (1964) theory emphasized the transformation of knowledge as students advance intellectual growth, gaining language skills that support their problem-solving. The results of this study presented parental perspectives where informal forms of evaluations, such as conversations, in addition to evidence through student work, are apparent signs of student cognition. Reinforcing authentic experiences and encouraging learners as they naturally shift towards self-satisfaction were also consistent theoretical implications.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses that cannot be controlled within a study. Potential

limitations of studies may include technology failures, withdrawn participants, and a limited sample based on gender, age, ethnicity, or geographical location. Delimitations are purposeful decisions based on the researcher's requirement to limit or define the study boundaries. This section will provide a rationale to explain potential limitations and purposeful delimitations within the study.

### ***Limitations***

Uncontrollable limitations within this study were present within the recruited sample. All recruited samples were Caucasian females. While this accurately represents most of the homeschool population in central North Carolina, it should be stated that the limitations of gender and ethnicity are evident. Their perspectives as homeschool parents are critical regardless of the restrictions presented in this study. The geographical boundary of the study was also evident and was based on the researchers' residence. The potential to have participants withdraw from the study was a reality; however, that did not transpire within this study.

### ***Delimitations***

Purposeful decisions to define the scope of the study were in place to restrict the recruited samples' age, state of residence, and religious beliefs. A significant delimitation of the study was only to represent professing Christians; all participants selected practiced faith within the Baptist denomination. The specific site for the focus group and in-person interviews may have also potentially restricted participation. Another restricted parameter of the study was selecting a hermeneutic phenomenological study instead of a transcendental one. The researcher had prior experience within the public school system and provides home-based learning instruction. A hermeneutic approach was the most appropriate method of qualitative inquiry, though it required bracketing to remove bias. These were all known delimitations and chosen purposefully by the

researcher.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Considering this hermeneutic phenomenological study's findings, limitations, and delimitations, recommendations should be made for future research. An expanded analysis of home-based learning based on diverse ethnic groups, instructor gender, religious preferences, and geographic location may provide beneficial information. Generalizability is imperative to qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2010). Consequently, replicating this study in different parts of the country may provide a unique or similar perspective through transferability (Amankwaa, 2016; Flick, 2017). Data collected from homeschools exclusively instructing their students through grade 12 would give a broad scope of the experience and a potential comparison to different academic settings and outcomes. Due to the delimitations and the researcher setting the parameters for this study, future research would be beneficial to focus on home instruction implemented by a sample that does not focus on academic content aligned with a biblical worldview. Future research might also offer a comparison for students starting in a public or private setting and switching to home-based instruction to provide a parental perspective and shift in student experiences. Current research has shown similar comparison studies focusing on college transitions from homeschooled students. However, a study on students of faith-based instruction as they transition to college learning may provide an additional perspective.

### **Conclusion**

This research study examined the lived experiences of Christian parents of kindergarten through grade 12 students homeschooling in central North Carolina. The purpose of this study was to gather an understanding of the parental perspective regarding the instructional design



implemented by the parents. Home-based learning has gained popularity for numerous reasons, including conflicts with public education, COVID-19 school closures, religious preference, more robust family connections, a more flexible learning experience, and a desire for a tailored approach to learning based on student needs. This study used Jerome Bruner's (1964) cognitive theory of instruction to highlight parent-teacher methods. Overall, most participants appreciated the benefits of the home-based learning experiences, though sentiments of challenges and the necessity of frequent modifications were also expressed. The participants provided an insightful look at the experiences of Christian home-based learning. Data from this study yields four themes: (a) a conviction to homeschool, (b) a focus beyond academics, (c) individualized instruction, and (d) knowing the student. The results of this study corroborated several relevant studies in the field of home-based learning, as the implications provided commonalities of a preference for aligning content with a biblical worldview, separation from public or traditional learning, preferring to offer an individualized approach per student based on their needs, and ensuring that academics expanded beyond traditional learning content to include necessary life skills. While this study focused on the instructional designs Christian parents utilized in North Carolina, it may also be likely that these opportunities would mimic homeschool experiences in other states.

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## Appendix A

### IRB Approval

[External] IRB-FY23-24-753 - Initial: Initial - Exempt

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

To: Eimer, Holly (Doctor of Education) <hdeimer@liberty.edu>; Holmes, Stephanie Banning <sbholmes1@liberty.edu>

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## LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 8, 2023

Stephanie Holmes  
Holly Eimer

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-753 Instructional Design of Christian K-12 Homeschool Families in Central North Carolina: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study

Dear Stephanie Holmes, Holly Eimer,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2. (ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

**For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.**



Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**

*Administrative Chair*

**Research Ethics Office**

## Appendix B

September 26, 2023

██████████  
Senior Pastor  
██████████  
██████████  
██████████  
██████████

Dear Pastor, ██████████,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Instructional Design and Technology. The title of my research project is Instructional Design of Christian K-12 Homeschool Families in the ██████████ of North Carolina: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology. My research aims to understand the educational approaches utilized by Christian homeschool families.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at ██████████ Baptist Church's facility. Research, in the form of interviews and focus group meetings, will be scheduled during cooperative school hours.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview, attend focus group meetings, and submit written responses. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, sign the approval form on the following page. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

████████████████████  
Stephanie Banning Holmes  
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

As Senior Pastor, I hereby grant Stephanie Banning Holmes permission to conduct her research study on [REDACTED] Baptist Church grounds. I understand the participants will be scheduled for interviews and focus group meetings, which will take place in the church facility. I also know all information surrounding the study participants, and location will remain confidential, and relevant documents will be secured.

Print: [REDACTED]  
Sign: [REDACTED]  
Date: 9/26/23

## Appendix C

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree to better understand a phenomenon. This research aims to understand the educational approaches utilized by Christian homeschool families. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must answer “yes” to the following screening questions:

1. Are you over the age of 18?
2. Are you a parent/guardian and instructor for a K-12 learner(s) registered as a homeschooled student in North Carolina?
3. Are you a professing Christian?
4. Are you willing to share your experiences with homeschool instruction?
5. Are you comfortable sharing homeschool instructional plans in an individual setting as well as a group setting?
6. If in-person interviews are not possible, are you willing to participate in an interview via Microsoft Teams to describe your experiences related to homeschool instructional design and how Christianity might influence those instructional designs?

Participants will be asked to take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person or virtual interview, take part in a video-recorded focus group, and reply to a journal prompt. It should take approximately three hours to complete the procedures listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please complete the attached consent form and return it by placing it in the provided envelope. If you meet my participant criteria, I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview, or you may contact me at [REDACTED] with any questions.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me within one week to schedule an individual interview.

Participants completing all three forms of data collection will receive a \$30 Chic-fil-a gift card.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Banning Holmes  
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

## Appendix D

### Information Sheet

**Title of the Project:** Instructional Design of Christian K-12 Homeschool Families in Central North Carolina: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study

**Principal Investigator:** Stephanie B. Holmes, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, a parent/guardian of a homeschool student(s), reside in North Carolina, and be a self-proclaimed Christian. 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.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of Christian homeschool parents, focusing on the instructional design of their academic procedures. The results of this study are anticipated to broaden the understanding of the instructional design practices of Christian homeschool families of K-12 learners.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. First task: Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour. Member checking will also take place to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interview responses, taking no more than ten minutes.
2. Second task: Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded focus group that will take no more than 1 hour. Member checking will also take place to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interview responses, taking no more than ten minutes.
3. Third task: Participate in a written journal prompt that will take no more than 30 minutes.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Potential benefits to society include a more comprehensive understanding of how Christian, homeschool families provide educational practices for their students.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

#### **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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and/or all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then erased. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

#### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Because participation in this research study is voluntary and the right to end participation is granted to individuals, incentives will be prorated. Per procedure, participants will receive a \$10 Chic-fil-a gift card, expecting a total \$30 gift card with completion of the three procedures (individual interview/focus group meeting/journal prompt). Payments will be dispersed upon completion of the data collection process. To clarify, should a participant choose to withdraw after completing only one procedure they would be compensated a \$10 gift card; should a participant complete all three procedures they would be compensated with a \$30 gift card.

Also, refreshments will be provided during the focus group meetings.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether 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 you do if you decide 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, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Stephanie B. Holmes. 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. Holly Eimer, at [REDACTED].

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your 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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto: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.*

## **Appendix E**

### **Research Questions:**

#### **Central Research Question**

What instructional experiences are utilized by Christian kindergarten through grade 12 families through their homeschool journey?

#### **Sub-Question One**

How do the parent's lived experiences influence the design of instruction as they relate to the homeschool experiences of their children?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

What instructional methods are perceived by parents as effective with students of Christian K-12 homeschools?

#### **Sub-Question Three**

How does evidence of cognition drive the constructive experiences of Christian K-12 homeschool learning?



## Appendix F

### Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and explain how long you have been a homeschool family; include the grade levels of current students. CRQ
2. To understand the family dynamic of your homeschool, explain if you are the sole instructor for your student(s) or if teaching is a shared responsibility with another? CRQ
3. Briefly explain your schooling journey. For example: What type of schooling did you attend: public school, homeschool, or a private setting? What is your highest level of schooling completed? CRQ
4. What does a typical day of instruction look like for your school? SQ:1
5. How has your homeschool design changed from year to year as your children advance through grade levels? SQ:1
6. How individualized is your approach to student learning? Please be specific in your response to include each of your children. SQ:2
7. What level of input for curriculum or learning programs do you allow from your students? SQ:3
8. Explain in what manner your religious values influence your homeschool? CRQ
9. How frequently do you analyze the progress or needs of the student? SQ:3
10. What types of assessments do you use with your students? Why? SQ:3
11. Where do you find or access resources assisting in your academic approaches with your students? Please include any technology tools or online resources you might utilize. SQ:3

12. Describe all 'outside of the home' learning opportunities for your student, parent-led or not. For example, your children may attend a 4H club, and you are only the leader once a quarter. SQ:2
13. Explain any difficulties you have had with instructional approaches. For example, explain any mid-year curriculum or design switches or modifications. SQ:2
14. What outcome do you desire for your children by homeschooling? CRQ

## Appendix G

### Focus Group Questions

1. What does homeschooling your children mean to you as a Christian parent? CRQ
2. What types of instructional experiences do you feel are unique as a homeschool family?  
SQ:1
3. Now that you have had additional time to reflect upon our individual interviews, are there any other ways (not previously mentioned) you would like to share on how you differentiate your school based on your children's age/grade, subject, and interest levels?  
SQ:2
4. Express your thoughts on curriculum options and resources for teaching methods. Are there enough options? Follow up: Are you comfortable accessing supportive resources?  
SQ:3
5. How would your children cope if they were to transition to a public school setting? Share your thoughts. SQ:2
6. What is your biggest challenge with instruction as the teacher and the parent? SQ:1
7. What is your most memorable success with homeschooling? SQ:2

## Appendix H

### Journal Prompt

Please reflect on your experience as a homeschool parent:

- Describe your emotions, feelings, and thoughts concerning your experience as a homeschool instructor. CRQ
- What would you tell future parents about the instructional aspects of home-based teaching? CRQ

## Appendix I

### Participant Journal Entry: Sample

One of the main and primary advantages of homeschooling for my family is the ability to customize the curriculum to meet the specific needs and interests of my children if that need ever arise. This individual approach allows me to tailor their educational experience, that hopefully will lead to a better understanding and retention of knowledge.

To all future parents that are considering homeschooling, I will say DO IT! It's not for everyone, it's a sacrifice, it requires financial stability, time-management, and persistence; but the benefits outweigh the sacrifice. The flexibility, academic benefits, efficiency, and opportunities homeschooling can offer are amazing. For our family, it is very important to provide my children with education and a lifestyle that's not based on minimum standards and a one-size-fits all approach. The freedom to teach my kids the way I want and to let them learn at their own pace is not something they will ever be able to get at public school. Freedom to live by my rules, my schedule, and freedom of spending more time with my children is also a huge advantage for me as a parent, beyond the fact it gives my kids freedom to soar ahead academically!

**Participant Journal Entry: Sample**

Being a homeschool parent has stretched me in so many ways. I am certain that it has taught me more about myself and my children than I have taught them. I am so thankful for the time I have with my children. I am thankful that I get to be hands on with their education and the majority of their time. I am thankful that I can choose curriculum that best meets their needs and that aligns with our biblical worldview. I love that we can slow down our days and focus on exploring so much more than 7 hours at a desk would allow.

Some days are overwhelming. Plenty of days I question if I am equipped to do this. But getting a front row seat to see them grow and learn, and knowing that we accomplished that together, is incredibly rewarding. I consider it a great privilege that I get to do this. Getting involved with our co-op, and having a group of like-minded moms for support, has been extremely helpful for me while navigating so many new things as a mom and a teacher.

For future parents, if the instructional aspect of homeschooling is all that is holding you back, go for it! There are SO many amazing resources out there to provide as much help as you need or desire. Choosing curriculum was overwhelming to me in the beginning, but there are many fantastic curriculums that you can just open and teach from. I chose an “all-in-one” curriculum our first year, then branched out and researched others as I became more comfortable and confident in my ability to teach. There are also great options for co-ops, supplemental classes, hybrid school options, and online options. We all have strengths and weaknesses, so teaching your strengths and outsourcing other subjects is a great option to provide your child with the best education from home!

## Appendix K

### Audit Trail

<b>Date</b>	<b>Entry</b>
September 26, 2023	Received permission from Till Creek (pseudonym) to conduct study.
December 8, 2023	Received IRB approval to conduct study.
December 9, 2023	Potential participants were contacted with a copy of the recruitment letter and provided with information sheet.
December 19, 2023 – January 17, 2024	Conducted all one-on-one and focus group interviews.
January 23, 2024 and January 30, 2024	Conducted Focus Group Interviews
January 11, 2024 – January 30, 2024	Collected participant journal entries
December 20, 2023 – February 4, 2024	Transcribed one-on-one and focus group interviews.
December 27, 2023 – February 4, 2024	Completed interview transcriptions and sent to participants for member checks. Received confirmation from participants.
February 9, 2024	Completed coding and identified four themes. Completed Chapter Four and submitted to chair for review.
February 9, 2024	Began writing Chapter Five
February 20, 2024	Completed Full Manuscript and submitted to chair for review.