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EDUCATIONAL COOPERATIVES AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF HOME EDUCATION: FINDING BALANCE BETWEEN AUTONOMY, SUPPORT, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Abstract

Four families' experiences in an educational cooperative and the impact on their home schools are detailed in the study. Results indicated that the families were highly dependent upon the cooperative. The cooperative signified a compromise for the families between the freedom of home schooling and the accountability and support provided by a school. These findings are important for traditional education. Just as home schools are evolving and developing institutions that look something like schools, schools can change too. One way is for the traditional school to operate as a family and community resource rather than the sole purveyor of knowledge.

Keywords: homeschooling; nontraditional education; parent involvement; parents as teachers; partnerships in education

Introduction

Education performs multiple roles in societies including socialization, teaching academic skills, and the preservation of "the cultural heritage of the nation." (Perry & Perry, 1991, p. 312).

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Dewey (1944) concluded that the development of writing and complex societies resulted in the need for schools. He posited that education was necessary for the continuation of society and in America the role of education was entrusted to the schools. Public education in America was specifically envisioned as providing a "common experience and a common heritage for the diverse children of the nation" (Greene, 2007, p. 1). When most people think about education they think of traditional schools, but in the past few decades some have resisted the norm in education and have chosen to home school.

Their reasons vary, but two studies highlight the major reasons families state they home school. Princiotta and Bielick (2006) reported that the number one reason for home schooling was the environment of other schools (31%), followed by to provide religious and moral instruction (30%) and dissatisfaction with academic instruction of other schools (16%). Collum (2005) identified four major reasons that reinforce Priciotta and Bielick: dissatisfaction with public schools, academic and pedagogical concerns, religious values, and family needs.

The number of students home schooled rivals the number of students who attend charter schools, the movement that is often cited as the one making significant changes to the way children are taught in America (Bruce, 2009). Brian D. Ray, President of the National Home Education Research Institute estimated that the number of home school students in the United States in 2010 was between 1.7 million and 2.3 million (Ray, 2011). This number is in line with another estimate made by the National Center for Educational Statistics that there were 1.5 million home school students in 2007 (Bielick, 2008). The Brookings Institute reported that there were 4,900 charter schools operating in 39 states in the United States serving 1.6 million students (Dynarski, Hoxby, Loveless, Schneider, Whitehurst, & Witte, 2010). Both movements continue to grow and offer parents and communities alternatives to traditional public schools.

Educational cooperatives and the changing nature of home education: finding balance between autonomy, support, and accountability

As home schooling has grown various innovations have emerged in home school family practices. One central to this study is the home school cooperative. As Hill (2000) predicted, many home school families have formed organizations that look something like schools. As committed as many home school parents are to the freedom of the home school environment, why do they choose to relinquish some autonomy to the cooperative?

These home school groups and cooperatives play a variety of roles. Safran (2009) identified 3 types of home school groups. The first is the Co-op. It "gives shape and purpose to the home education practice," sets goals and timelines for students, and "requires a big commitment" (p. 26). The second is the timetabled group. It is less formal than the co-op and helps parents learn from each other's practice and share resources. Finally, there is the support group. It is the least formal of the groups with no formal meeting place or organization. Its purpose is to support others who are home schooling as needed. According to Safran, all of the groups help parents learn to home school. Safran (2010) further commented that home schoolers as a group are a community of practice "with a joint enterprise of home educating children" (p. 111). What other roles can home school groups perform? What does participation in a home school cooperative look like? This study provides an in-depth description of the role the home school co-op played in the operation of four families' home schools. The goal of the study was to provide an in-depth study of one type of home school group; the cooperative or co-op. The study is important because it extends the idea of home school group as a support to a provider of curriculum. It also attempts to identify home school practices that could inform education in traditional school settings.

Methodology

Research Design

The study sought to fill a gap in the literature on home schooling by exploring the role of a cooperative in home school operations. It was part of a larger study of home school family motivations (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010), home school operations (Anthony & Burroughs, 2012), curriculum choices, and challenges. The study was a collective case study from a subtle realist orientation (Hammersley, 2002). This is important because the research is not an attempt to "reproduce" reality, but to "represent" it, recognizing that the goal of the researcher was to represent the phenomena of homeschooling with a goal of getting as close to reality as possible with the data collected from the participants (p. 74). Data collection was guided by the research question: What role does the cooperative play in the operation of the families' home schools?

Sample

Four home school families that were active in a home school organization that operated in the southeastern U.S. agreed to participate in a two year study. The criteria for choosing the families were that they (a) had at least three years of home school experience, (b) had children they were currently home schooling, and (c) had at least one child who had completed the home school education and had moved on to college or into the work force. These criteria were chosen to insure a study cohort with extensive experience with home education that was willing to candidly discuss their home schooling experience.

Table 1

Sample demographics

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

The researcher used purposive homogeneity sampling from a home school group of conservative religious families in order to find a sample that would provide a rich detailed description of the research problem. This narrow sampling increases the depth of the findings of

the study but limits the transferability to other groups who differ from the sample. Table One provides demographic data on the sample families. The original goal was to identify four families in the local area who homeschooled their children. The first family contacted indicated that they were a part of a homeschool group and thought that other families there might be interested in participating in the study. At the time, the researcher did not know the nature of the homeschool group (i.e. that it was actually a cooperative) or the significant role that the cooperative would play in the operation of their homeschools.

The role and importance of these families' religious and philosophical beliefs are discussed in depth in earlier research (Anthony & Burroughs, 2009; Anthony & Burroughs, 2012; Anthony, 2013). In short, their beliefs influenced their goals for education. As one parent explained, "Our responsibility is to raise godly children." It is also important to understand their view of society and how it influenced their decisions about education. At the top of society is God as revealed through scripture; next is family, then the larger society (Anthony, 2013, p. 6). Because of this, their educational decisions were based on what they felt was best for their family as revealed in scripture. Their beliefs also influenced who is responsible for making key educational decisions. The parents felt that they were the primary decision makers in their lives of their children. Of course, this did not exclude the children from making decisions or exercising freedom and agency in educational choices, as the parents felt they were preparing their children for life and the ability to make their own choices.

Procedures

Data for this study were gathered through (a) interviews with the parents and children, (b) informal discussions during and after periods of observations, (c) observation of the families at home, (d) observations of home school group activities, (e) collection of artifacts (student work

samples and weekly logs), and (f) observation of the students at the cooperative. Interview protocols were scripted using open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, comprehensive dialogue from the participants. Observations were conducted in the homes of the homeschoolers and at the home school cooperative site in an effort to "gather data about the 'lived' experience of participants" (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 125).

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

The original domains created to analyze data were motivations to home school, home school operations, support systems, and curriculum choices. As data was collected through observations and interviews, themes and patterns within the original four domains emerged. One of the first patterns that emerged was the cooperative. It was situated within motivations, operations, support systems, and curriculum choices. This was not expected. It soon became evident that the cooperative was an integral part of their homeschools and critical to understanding the families' homeschool experiences. See Table 2 for sample themes that

emerged from the data and their relationship to the cooperative's role in the families' homeschools.

Table 2

Nodes and themes from data analysis

Original domains	Emergent themes
Motivations to homeschool	Social
	Religious*
	Family
	Conflict with schools
	Financial
	Flexibility*
	Cooperative*
Homeschool operations	Teaching strategies*
	Parent-student interaction*
	Nature of the instruction environment*
	Day to day activities*
	Distractions
	Household duties
	Difficulties*
	Frustrations
Support systems	Outside resources
	Cooperative*
	Books
	Other resources
Curriculum choices	How decision are made
	Concerns about homeschooling*
	Challenges*
	Nature of curriculum*
Autonomy	Family*
	Learner*
	Societal*
	Curriculum*
	Influences on*
	Tools of*
	Results

Note: * indicates role of the cooperative or a connection to the cooperative that emerged during analysis

Results

Cooperative

The families participated in a Christian-based classical education cooperative. The cooperative has been operating in the area since 2001. Several families came together to help teach and provide group academic and social activities to their children. Cooperative meetings were held in a local church, but the cooperative was not affiliated with the church. A few members of the cooperative were also members of the church, which was how they were able to negotiate use of the facilities. The cooperative met in a building that once was used as a children's education facility. They also had access to the church gymnasium and a room adjacent to the gymnasium that they used for a lunch room.

The curriculum was based on the classical trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Joseph (2002) defined the constituent parts of the trivium: "Logic is the art of thinking; grammar, the art of inventing symbols and combining them to express thought; and rhetoric, the art of communicating thought one mind to another, the adaption of language to circumstance" (p. 3). To help understand the nature of the curriculum, consider the following explanation of the purpose of the trivium by Joseph:

> The function of the trivium is the training of the mind for the study of matter and spirit, which altogether constitute the sum of reality. The fruit of education is culture, which Matthew Arnold defined as the knowledge of ourselves [mind] and the world [matter]. In the sweetness and light of Christian culture, which add to the knowledge of the world and ourselves the knowledge of God and of other spirits, we are enabled truly to see life steadily and see it whole. (p. 8)

On their website, the cooperative declared that students no longer know how to think. The goal of the cooperative was to help teach their members' children how to think by using the classical trivium. The cooperative met on Fridays. Monday through Thursdays, the children were taught at home or in other arrangements made individually by the families. The high school students also met on Tuesday afternoons, because there was not enough time to get all of their tutorials in on Friday.

Fathers rotated as headmasters for a Friday, and as part of the cooperative agreement, families agreed to teach two classes per year. The teachers included doctors for science, lawyers for logic and rhetoric, engineers for science, pastors for theology and history, and an author and editor for composition. There were also parents with experience teaching in public and private schools and college. Not all parents had the professional background to teach a particular subject or teaching experience. An example of this was the astronomy teacher who took astronomy in high school and re-taught herself in order to teach astronomy at the cooperative.

The cooperative divided the course work along the classical trivium lines. Kindergarten through sixth grade was the grammar stage. In the grammar stage, the courses available were Latin, history, science, grammar, literature and composition, and art and music appreciation. Junior high was the logic stage. They took the grammar stage classes available but at a more advanced level and a logic class. High school was the rhetoric stage. They took the logic stage classes at an advanced level and a rhetoric class and a choice of science courses. All students could choose from four sciences: biology, chemistry, astronomy, and physics. Students had the flexibility to pick and choose some courses or to not take a course. The core of the curriculum was the history curriculum which had four strands that they rotated through each year. If a student attended the cooperative for all twelve years, he or she would have received the full

curriculum three times. The four strands were Ancient history, Christendom, Early America, and Modernity.

Parent-teachers posted their syllabi and assignments on the cooperative's website. They taught their tutorials on Friday, and the students worked on their assignments at home from Monday through Thursday. The parent-teachers also administered and graded tests. Parents were free to use the test grades in evaluating their individual student's progress but were not required to do so. Parent-teachers and students communicated by e-mail and also via postings on the web site.

Families applied to participate in the cooperative. Included in the application was the question: Can you give testimony of your conversion to Christ? This indicated the importance of religion in the cooperative. Other questions addressed how the family planned to help improve the cooperative and what the family expected to receive from the cooperative. The cost of participation in the program was listed as $80-$100 per year. This included the costs of classroom supplies, a science lab fee, and an art instruction fee. Required textbooks must be obtained at additional costs.

The nature of the cooperative was important in several ways. The first way was that it linked to the idea of home schooling becoming more like traditional schooling. Hill (2000) predicted that "as home schooling families learn to rely on one another; many are likely to create new institutions that look something like schools" (p. 21). This cooperative was one of these new institutions. Families abandoned some of their aversion to traditional schooling and struck a compromise, moving from home schooling independent of any outside agency to limited cooperation with others who have similar educational goals. Unlike many public schools where the family has to participate in all or nothing that the school offers, the families of the

cooperative formed a limited social contract and were free to pick and choose what they wanted from the cooperative. The freedom to join the cooperative and participate at will is directly linked to their view that family is the primary social organization within society to make education decisions for children. They were willing to give up some of their agency to make decisions to the cooperative because it respected their primacy in educational decisions. They were also willing to give up some of their autonomy because their goal was not to eliminate all structure in education, but rather to eliminate structures that they felt impeded their ability to raise and educate their children as they saw fit.

The classical nature and purpose of the cooperative's curriculum was qualitatively different from what was available in other traditional education environments in the area. The stated goal of the cooperative was to teach students to think and live as whole or complete persons. They were less focused on teaching and training skills for a particular purpose or job. They felt that a liberal and classical education would prepare students for anything they might choose to do in life. There was also a decidedly Christian worldview in their curriculum. By participating in the cooperative the home school families were provided a powerful tool to enable them to exercise curricula autonomy and teach not only different subject matter but with different methods than would be available in either public or private education in their home towns.

Within-case analysis

Smith Family and the cooperative

The home school cooperative was the source of most of the curriculum that the Smiths used in their home school. The cooperative supported their efforts in two ways: first, it provided support to the parents' teaching efforts, and second, it provided support to the learner by

providing opportunities not available at home. The first thing that the cooperative provided the Smiths was a rich variety of curriculum choices that would be difficult to provide alone at home. The cooperative provided the Smiths access to both elementary and secondary classes except for mathematics. The Smiths took advantage of most of the courses. It also provided curriculum expertise, which Jane highlighted when she said, "you can find other people to teach certain things, so it is a tradeoff." An example of this was the new government class at the cooperative that was taught by a parent who graduated from college with a political science degree.

The second thing that the cooperative provided the Smiths was shared accountability. In some ways, the Smiths gave up some of their autonomy to the cooperative and the other parent-teachers, but in their view, this was a good thing. They had some trouble home schooling their oldest son, Jonathan, until they joined the cooperative. Jack commented: "We struggled for years. But it was different with a co-op. That schooling system was different. He was able to get with peers and adults in the teaching environment." The cooperative provided another instructional environment that helped both Jonathan and his parents' educational efforts. The cooperative was difficult for Jonathan, but the more difficult environment and the opportunity to be in class with other students at least one day a week played a positive supporting role. His father continued, "He got low scores, but really was working harder. Now he knows how to study and learns." The cooperative also reduced some of the pressure on Jane to be the sole educational authority figure:

> It lets them have another authority over them that they may work harder for. Whereas they may argue with me about doing something, if they have to do it and turn it in on Friday, they just have to do it.

The third thing that the cooperative provided the parents was support for lesson preparation. Jane did not have to prepare multiple lesson plans for her children because those were provided by the teachers at the cooperative. She only had to prepare lessons for the classes that she taught at the cooperative. She also had help with grading and assessment. The teachers at the cooperative gave and graded tests that Jane could use to evaluate her children's progress. She also conducted assessment at home, but usually these were assessments provided by the teacher at the cooperative. This assessment help also provided some independent evaluation of her children's progress.

The cooperative not only provided support to the parents but also to the students. The primary benefit that it provided the students was the opportunity to be in a classroom environment. Jane pointed out that the students had to prepare for the classes at the cooperative. The classroom experience also helped their oldest son, Jonathan. Joseph commented that the difficult classes at the cooperative were good because they prepared him for college: "College is almost easier than that. It taught me how to study, especially in history class" and "there is a really good writing program." Joseph also indicated that the cooperative was good because it gave him an opportunity to be in a class with other students. When asked what the best thing about the cooperative was, he answered, "Cracking jokes in the classroom." Though meant as a joke, it shows the importance of social interactions with both a teacher other than his mother and other students. Both children indicated that they enjoyed their time at the cooperative.

The cooperative was the most important resource that the Smiths had because it helped to overcome some of the handicaps that are systemic in home schooling including, the parents' inability to teach all subjects and the students' lack of classroom experience. It also provided the children with an opportunity to socialize with children and adults outside of their immediate

family, a constant criticism of home schooling (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998). The cooperative required the family to give up some of their curricular autonomy, but what they received in return was very important to the Smiths' ability to conduct their home school.

Johnson Family and the cooperative

The cooperative was an important resource for the Johnson family because it was the source of most of their curriculum. In response to a question about the importance of the cooperative, Cynthia said,

> Um, wow. In every way, I'd say because it's not one person doing all the work and then everyone just following like sheep. What we have is a bunch of strong willed, opinionated home schoolers. Hopefully, we have found each person's strength and interest. So that they can pour out their knowledge and love of a subject into my children and there's no way with four kids, used to be six, I could love and be as interested and well-informed in every subject for every single grade level.

Her comment showed how important the cooperative was to the operation of their home school. It allowed the Johnsons to provide a wide range of curriculum choices with minimal input. Cynthia and Chris did not have to prepare all of the lesson plans for the classes for the four children they were teaching. They only had to prepare for the classes that they taught at the cooperative. Their children were taught by a medical doctor in science, an editor and author in composition, a certified English teacher in literature, and a lawyer in rhetoric. Calvin said, "That's mainly what the coop is for. It's just enlarging upon the material we've already done." Cynthia described how the cooperative changed the operation of their home school when she said, "We did not have the coop for the first two years. Just figuring it out was hard. I had to

figure out how to teach four children all the subjects each day." Then they joined the cooperative because, "we wanted to teach logic and I didn't want to learn it and then teach it so we found a friend who studied logic in college and started it for us."

The cooperative also provided socialization opportunities for the children. Chris stated in response to a question about socialization, "And I am sure Cynthia's touched on before, they are involved in a large community. First, the coop, and then also with the larger home school community, and we do activities with the other families." Cynthia added, "There are over a hundred families in our home school group." When discussing some of the negatives of home schooling the older children indicated that not being around other people as much was one of them. They also said that the cooperative helped overcome this problem because they could see their friends at the cooperative.

Another purpose that the cooperative played was accountability. Calvin said, "I have some accountability with the coop, but I really am a procrastinator, and I'm sure that if I didn't have the coop, I'd get a whole lot less done." He said that he got further behind with his studies before the family joined the cooperative. Besides keeping the children accountable to someone other than their parents, it also helped the parents evaluate their children. When asked how he got graded, he said, "That's what our coop is for. Usually we turn in the tests to the teacher there (the cooperative) and they do the grading." Cynthia backed this up with, "In most of their classes they have tests and so you can tell if they get it or not, because they'll do well on the test if they get it and they're flunking if they don't. And that's with most of our advanced cooperative work."

The cooperative also provided classroom experiences to the children. The teachers at the cooperative ran their classes like traditional classroom teachers. Caitlin's *Bible* class teacher had a syllabus and class rules. The rules were very similar to those found in traditional classrooms.

The teachers provided the students with their daily assignments, tests, and weekly instruction in a class room. The cooperative allowed the Johnsons to balance the independence of their home school experience with the classroom experience they would need if they went to college.

The cooperative provided unique out of classroom learning opportunities. When they were studying the medieval period, the families in the cooperative put on a medieval fair. Caitlin's literature teacher also invited all of her students over for an overnight party so they could watch the movie version of *Ivanhoe*. Some members of the cooperative also got together and attended a Creation Science seminar at a local church and tied their science instruction at the cooperative into it.

Harbor family and the cooperative

The most important resource that the Harbors had was the cooperative. Rachel explained that "I don't have to go and prepare a whole curriculum, a whole lesson plan for astronomy and one for composition and all that." The cooperative helped expand the curriculum options for the Harbors and at the same time reduced their workload. The cooperative provided a balance between the traditional setting provided in a public school and the strictly home school setting that Rachel started she when began homeschooling. It also provided courses that she did not have the expertise to teach, including Latin and astronomy. The cooperative addressed one significant concern that Rachel had about home schooling and that was activities that Randy and Ray missed including sports. The cooperative offered both fencing and cross country to the students. The final thing that the cooperative provided was accountability. Rachel was always concerned about whether she was teaching enough, and she was worried that she was not teaching the right material. The combined efforts of the cooperative helped her to feel that she was providing her children with a quality education.

Riley family and the cooperative

Like the other families in the study, the most important resource was the cooperative. The cooperative provided the majority of Matt's course work, freeing Mary from the burden of preparing multiple syllabi and weekly lesson plans. It also added flexibility to the courses that the Riley family was able to study. The most important thing that the cooperative provided was the classical education that Mary could not find in a private or public school setting. When asked how the cooperative supported her educational efforts, Mary responded,

> It is incredible. We have a physician teaching our kids biology, chemistry, and physics. Subjects that I'm not equipped to. Our kids learn Latin. An editor and author teaches literature. Chris Johnson teaching too. All the talents together. We are all raising our children different and go to different churches, but are all on the same page for what we want in classical education, in the Christian way.

Not only did the cooperative provide classes taught by other parents that Mary would not be able to provide, but it also provided social and moral support. She said, "We have the best of both worlds. On Friday they have interaction with other students: It's a good group of kids. Moms are being supported by each other's prayers. Everyone cares for each other's family and children." The children got social time with other children, and the mothers supported each other through prayer. The cooperative served as a learning community. It helped bridge the gap between totally independent home schooling and traditional schooling. The cooperative helped Mary reach her goal of curriculum freedom for her children.

Cross Case Analysis

Each of the families identified the cooperative as their most important resource. The families indicated that the cooperative freed them from preparing and teaching lessons for every

subject and enabled them to avoid teaching subjects that they did not have the ability or desire to teach. The subject families' efforts with the cooperative extend findings by others about home school families forming support groups to help with instructional challenges (Griffith, 1998; Klicka, 2002; Martin, 1997).

The cooperative provided the families with social activities, field trips and athletic activities including fencing and cross country. Sports were particularly important to the Harbors. The cooperative helped the families overcome the social isolation that can result from home schooling. It also allowed the families to socialize their children with same age peers who shared similar belief systems. Rather than viewing this as a negative, the families felt it was their responsibilities to safeguard their children from negative socialization that might happen in a traditional school.

A significant addition to the literature was the idea that the cooperative in many ways was the reason that at least two of the families continued to home school their children. The Johnsons and Rileys indicated that the classical nature of the home school was what drew them to home school, because it helped them achieve their goal of providing a classical education to their children. They both indicated that they would consider sending their children to a private school that had a classical curriculum. The cooperative allowed these families to provide their children with an education not available in local public or private schools. The cooperative was a significant motivator and resource for these families.

The families acknowledged that participation in the cooperative was not all positive. They each pointed out that there was a loss of autonomy when they joined the cooperative. This was mostly a concern to the Harbors. The Johnsons and Rileys were instrumental in beginning the cooperative and had initial input in the curriculum, so they were less concerned about a loss

of autonomy. This initial input and influence did not mean that the Johnsons and Rileys were happy with everything at the cooperative. Neither of them liked the writing course and unsuccessfully worked to have it changed. Jane Smith also did not like the writing course. There were disagreements over the way the theology course was taught. Because of this, the Harbors, Smiths, and Rileys did not participate in the theology class the second year of the study.

There were some things that the families could not receive at the cooperative. Two significant things were mathematics and modern foreign language courses. The families used some form of commercially produced program for mathematics. The Rileys and Johnsons also used a for-profit educational corporation to provide advanced math instruction. In the Johnson and Harbor home schools, the father also assisted with mathematics instruction. The cooperative did teach Latin, but the Harbors wanted their children to study a modern foreign language. Rachel used a computer based language program to teach Chinese.

The loss of autonomy was voluntary, and the families did not have to participate in all activities or courses that the cooperative provided. The Smiths did not attend a Creation Science seminar, and each family missed cooperative social and academic activities. Though there was the loss of autonomy, each of the families indicated that the benefit of participating in the cooperative outweighed the costs. Some of the costs included an hour drive for the Smiths and a 30 minute drive for the Harbors.

The key role that the cooperative played in each of the families' home school is an important finding. These families created an institution that looked something like a school and engaged in a community of practice that as Safran (2010) explained amounted to "a joint enterprise of home education children" (p. 111). They had a governing body, a set curriculum, teachers, and syllabi. They even had extracurricular activities. The cooperative gave them what

they would describe as the best of traditional schooling and home schooling. They participated in classroom instruction on Fridays from other parent-teachers, which provided them with outside accountability and classroom experience, but they had the freedom to study at home at their own pace from Monday to Thursday. The cooperative provided just enough structure to help the students prepare for a future that might include college classrooms. It also addressed social needs.

A significant addition to the literature is the irony of the cooperative. These families rejected the outside authority of traditional schools when they decided to home school, but in their practice they not only joined a cooperative but relied on it for 90% of their curriculum and instruction. In many ways, they traded one authority for another. One explanation is that these families have direct input into the nature of the curriculum of the cooperative, and it is more responsive to their concerns than traditional schools. Additionally, these families were not looking to exercise complete autonomy and independence in education. They wanted to provide a certain type of education to their children. They felt that traditional schools were too rigid as well as provided limits on the fundamental role of parents in their children's education. The cooperative was acceptable because it respected their beliefs about the primacy of the family in educational decisions (Anthony, 2013). Within the cooperative they were able to act on what they believed was their scripture mandated role in raising their children without the outside influence of schools.

Finally the cooperative was in essence "a joint enterprise" (Safran, 2010, p. 111) that truly required participation from all families in order to effectively operate. Unlike traditional schools in which parents are often relegated to a peripheral role and not seen as vital to the operation of the school and the process of education, the cooperative magnified the role of the

parents in education. In the cooperative, parents exercised curricular choice and participated in the core function of education- teaching.

Discussion

The results of this study provide a detailed description of what the "shape and purpose" (Safran, 2009, p. 26) of an educational cooperative look like, including the types of goals and timelines provided, and the size of the commitment required. It also extends those findings. Not only did cooperatives give shape and purpose, but the families' home school operations were dependent upon the cooperative. It enabled them to provide the classical education that they wanted for their children. It also relieved the burden of preparing and teaching lessons in every subject. The cooperative helped address some of the concerns and challenges that home schooling poses for families, including social isolation, the ability to teach difficult subjects, and accountability. The cooperative also signified a compromise for the families between the almost total freedom of home schooling and the accountability and support provided by a traditional school. It gave the families what they felt was the best of both worlds.

The idea of the cooperative as a compromise between the rigidity of traditional schooling and the freedom of unschooling is important to understand. Families choose to homeschool for a multitude of reasons, and these reasons by default will impact the curriculum choices these families make and the nature of their homeschools. When these families made their transition from traditional schooling to homeschooling, they were not looking for complete autonomy for themselves or the children, but more freedom than was afforded them by the rigidity of the traditional schools available to them in their communities (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010). This is important because homeschooling as an educational treatment can afford families and children varying degrees of autonomy. These families' concept of the role of parents in the education of

their children (Anthony, 2013) influenced the way they operated their homeschool and the amount of freedom afforded the children in decisions. Ultimately, they believed that parents had a God given responsibility to shape the education of their children.

Understanding the role of the cooperative is important because as Hill (2000) predicted, these families had become part of an organization that looked something like a school. The cooperative was instrumental to the parents' ability to provide a classical education. It also helped address some of the problems associated with home schooling. This study is important because it illustrates that families addressed the challenges they identified associated with homeschooling and adapted their educational practices through organizing educational cooperatives. Though these families wanted to break from the rigidity and control of traditional schools, they were willing to voluntarily give up some autonomy because they were giving up that autonomy to an organization that they were an equal partner in and that respected the role of the family in education. Finally, critically important is that in the cooperative, the families were full partners in developing curriculum and teaching their children. They had come together to accomplish core education tasks that are normally conducted in a school setting.

When discussing freedoms afforded the families within these homeschools, it is important to note that the parents exercised a significant amount of the freedom relative to the students when it came to making curricular decisions. Within this parental control, the children in the families were able to make decisions about what to study including course selections at the cooperative. Outside the cooperative they had the option to follow their own interests by studying topics not identified by the cooperative or their parents as a part of the curriculum. The curriculum was fluid, and both parents and children were involved in making curriculum decisions. This freedom even extended to allowing children to decide whether the students

attended a public school, private school or remained homeschooled in the case of the Riley family. The nature of curriculum decisions was analyzed and reported in earlier research (Anthony, 2012) and not a significant part of this study in that the goal of this study was to focus on the role of the cooperative. Finally, though the freedom exercised within these homeschools might be somewhat less than exercised in other homeschools, the nature of freedom exercised by both parents and students was significantly more than would have been found in any other educational setting in the area. In the context of their communities, these families would be educational radicals.

Conclusion and Implications

The home school movement is not a monolithic movement. There is much variance in the way that home school families conduct school. This is important to understand for two reasons. First, it is difficult for those in traditional education to draw important conclusions about how to teach based on any perceived success home school families have had, but with that in mind, the second point becomes more salient. Because home school families conduct school in such diverse ways, they provide potential models to those within traditional education that are looking for new ways to organize and operate schools. The freedom that home school families have in operating their schools allows them to tailor their home schools to the needs of their children. They have broken out of the mold of place based schooling and have focused their efforts on identifying what needs to be taught (or learned) and how to teach it. This is one of the reasons they have organized cooperatives and other formal and informal groups to help meet their specific educational goals. The children do not exist for the cooperative, the cooperative exists for the children.

Educational cooperatives and the changing nature of home education: finding balance between autonomy, support, and accountability

The ability of the families to assume the core functions of education in a voluntary organization has implications for traditional schools. These families are just four of many who have assumed greater responsibility over their children's education. Traditional schools can learn from these families' success and ability in assuming these core functions and begin to see parents as equal partners in education. Traditional schools have much to gain from leveraging the resources, concern, and energy that parents can bring to process of education. Too long have schools assumed that they are the sole experts in education. These families' experiences and others like them who homeschool are an indication that schools can rebalance the amount of control over a child's education. Of course, this means giving up some control to the family when it comes to key decisions about education which will necessitate a much more individualized education for all students.

The families in this study provide one example of how education can be tailored to focus on the learning needs of the students using a hybrid form of schooling in which students receive some direct instruction from teachers combined with a significant amount of individual based learning. This individual based learning includes both choice in the courses taken and choice of topics to study within the courses taken. The traditional model of education described by Dewey (1944) and Greene (2007) was based on an industrial society when families had limited access to educational resources. We live in a time of unprecedented access to information. The Sloan Consortium (Picciano & Seaman, 2009) reported that in the 2007- 2008 school year, 75% of public schools had students enrolled in either a blended or fully online course. With the freedom of access to information and the growth of online learning comes the opportunity to divorce education from the place based mindset of the modern industrial educational establishment.

This study and others on home schooling indicate that parents can assume a greater role in the education of their children. This is relevant to traditional schools because improving educational outcomes is dependent on increased parental involvement directly in education at home. The growth of the home school movement has indicated that there is a small minority of parents who are willing to take total control of their children's education. Traditional schools do not need to fear this, but see it as a reset of the power and responsibility balance between the school and home over education.

Perhaps Holt and Farenga (2003) were right in their assessment that our schools are handicapped by the very environment of the school and our institutional intransience against moving from an industrial model of education to a model of education that takes advantage of changes in society and technology to create a new model of education. If traditional school personnel are interested in creating a new model, the home school movement is rich with many examples of how learning can occur outside of the school with increased parental involvement, but maintaining the structural advantages of schooling. The model of the home school cooperative described in this study is one such example.

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