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Educational activities and the role of the parent in homeschool families with high school students

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Using a qualitative case study approach, this study looked at the educational activities that constitute a typical day in a homeschool family and the role that the parent has within those activities. Three homeschooling families with high school students in a single community in a southern state in the United States participated in the case study. Data was collected using observations, field notes, interviews and artifacts. Analysis of the data pointed to an eclectic mix of instructional modalities and activities used by families. Students often participated in a variety of instructional activities such as online courses, private tutors, and self-taught classes through the use of a flexible daily schedule. Parents were seen to be more of a facilitator or director of educational activities for their children rather than the direct providers of instruction in the homeschool setting.

Keywords: homeschool; homeschooling; educational activities; parent role

Introduction

Although the recognition of homeschooling as a legal educational choice on an international scale is a recent trend, the modern homeschool movement began in the 1970s as parents began exercising their freedom to educate children at home (Isenberg 2007). Parental motivation for homeschooling may come from: (1) a dissatisfaction with public schools, (2) academic or pedagogical concerns, (3) religious reasons, and (4) family needs (Collom 2005). Despite research into the background and experiences of homeschooling, the movement has often been categorized by a series of preconceived notions about what it means to "homeschool" a child and what effect this type of education can have on children. Myths surrounding homeschooling include the thought that homeschooling produces "social misfits," that homeschooling does not produce good citizens, that homeschoolers have difficulty entering college, and that most people homeschool only for religious reasons (Romanowski 2006).

In the United States, figures from the National Center for Educational Statistics reveal that over 1.5 million children are homeschooled, and probably more have been homeschooled at some point during their educational career (Geary 2011). Statistically, more children have experienced a homeschooled environment than those that have been enrolled in charter or voucher schools, two of the more recent educational reform movements. Some have even called homeschooling the "most robust form of educational reform" in the United States today (Murphy 2014, 245).

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The outcomes and effects of homeschooling have far reaching outcomes including the effect on communities, the impact on schools, the impact on families, and the effects on children including academic achievement and social development (Murphy 2014).

In the United Kingdom (UK), recent estimates place the number of homeschooled children between 50,000 and 150,000 (Conroy 2010), although these estimates are considered conservative as the registration and monitoring system is difficult and the number of homeschooling families seems to be rising (Badman 2009; Hopwood et al. 2007). As homeschooling continues to grow in Europe, concerns arise about the difficulty in registering and monitoring homeschool families, as well as what constitutes an appropriate curriculum for homeschool students in the twenty-first century and how to monitor parents' delivery of that curriculum (Badman 2009; Blok and Karsten 2011; Spiegler 2009).

Problem statement

Despite the potential impact of homeschool, very little research exists about homeschooling and school reform. Difficulties due to diversity and limited access make these studies difficult (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). Issues with sampling, non-representative groups, lack of experimental design and little empirical evidence bring questions of quality into the research that has already been conducted (Murphy 2014). Most research has focused on parental motivation, homeschooling outcomes related to student achievement, socialization, curricular choices and parental pedagogical practices (Kunzman and Gaither 2013).

Recent studies have revealed large gaps in investigations regarding how parents go about homeschooling on a day-to-day basis (Thomas 2013). Gaps in homeschool research are not surprising given the obstacles of homeschooling investigations. First, homeschool families are difficult to research because their statistics are absent from normal national data gathering techniques and strategies since they are not part of a formalized school system (Isenberg 2007). In the UK, data is difficult to gather as the registration system for homeschooled families is difficult, and many local authorities lack an appropriate monitoring strategy (Badman 2009). Second, there is no uniform curriculum standardized for or used by homeschooling families, providing limitless options and methods for them to follow (Hopwood et al. 2007; McReynolds 2007). Finally, many different activities fall under the label of "homeschool" (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). However, some studies, including surveys, observations, and interviews, offer background into the curriculum and daily practices of homeschool students.

In general, homeschool parents employ many modalities for educating their students (Hanna 2012; Hopwood et al. 2007). Studies that have been done show a wide range of curricular choices, a reliance on a "like-minded" support network, and an eclectic nature of educational options for each child, including cooperatives (co-ops), where students attend classes taught by other parents or paid tutors, and online courses. The reliance on a network for education, instead of solely relying on family, is especially seen in older homeschooled children (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). Parents have a wide variety of curriculum to choose from for their students. Curriculum developers provide access to lesson plans, online self-paced courses, and live online classes. The diverse options for curriculum selection provide opportunities for research to focus on parents as teachers and the interactions that occur in

the daily activities of a homeschool student. While parents may be considered the "teachers" for their students, survey data from previous studies suggest that parents often act more like advisors or managers who use a variety of opportunities to provide instruction for their children instead of actually delivering instruction themselves (Hanna 2012).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the typical homeschool educational activities of families of high school students in a community in the southern United States. This study sought to capture information of the current educational activities of a select group of homeschooled students and parents for a typical "school" day. The research focused on the parental viewpoint as teacher of their child and what role the parent played in activities associated with delivering instruction, coordinating educational activities, choosing curriculum, and working with the child as their student on a typical school day. Two research questions guided this study:

(1) What were the educational activities chosen by a parent of a high school homeschooled student?
(2) What was the role of the parent in the educational activities?

General review of literature

The following review of relevant literature examines international research trends from both the United States and the UK regarding curricular choices, methods, and the role of the parent in a homeschooling environment. While homeschooling is not limited to the United States and UK, the two countries constitute the bulk of current research in homeschooling methods (Jamaludin, Alias, and DeWitt 2015). Internationally, homeschooling is growing in numbers, especially in countries such as the United States, Canada, and the UK (Hopwood et al. 2007; Jamaludin, Alias, and DeWitt 2015; Murphy 2014). Many other countries are moving towards a more legalized and accepted form of homeschooling and continuing to develop appropriate systems for monitoring and registering homeschool students (Blok and Karsten 2011; Spiegler 2009). The United States and the UK have standardized, well developed systems for homeschooled processes whereas other countries are still developing similar systems to ensure accountability of a homeschooled environment. All systems for homeschooling environments require further investigation of quality teaching and learning activities (Badman 2009; Hopwood et al. 2007).

Parental motivation and curricular choices

In a series of studies central to homeschooling, parental motivation and interactions within a homeschool environment, Van Galen and Pitman (1991) isolated two motivational reasons for parents to homeschool their child. They described two types of parents, "ideologues" and "pedagogues." Ideologues chose to homeschool for religious or ideological reasons, while pedagogues chose to homeschool as a response to formalized public schooling (Van Galen and Pitman 1991). Motivation reasons carried with them a perspective on curriculum development. Ideologues usually followed a more formal teaching style, trying to replicate the classrooms in formal schooling, while pedagogues were more likely to promote creativity and individual learning as a holistic experience (Van Galen and Pitman 1991).

Newer perspectives on parental motivation research emphasize the belief system behind parent involvement in homeschool. In terms of belief systems, most homeschool parents share three similar beliefs: (1) the belief that they should play a role in their child's education, (2) the belief that they have the ability to educate their child, and (3) the belief that contextual factors, such as finances, allow homeschooling to be possible. Authors concluded that homeschooling parents were involved in education but in a non-standard and misunderstood way (Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007). Understanding how parents are involved in their students' education in a home-based environment requires the need for more involved research techniques.

General curricular practices of homeschoolers

Despite limitations in the homeschool research base, some studies began to focus on how parents choose curriculum and use it for their students. In a survey of homeschooled families in South Dakota, 72.5% of the respondents stated that they used a published curricula verses prepared materials them self (Boschee and Boschee 2011). Findings could indicate that parents followed a scripted curricula without providing much freedom for students (Meighan 1995), although another question in the survey indicated that parents felt they were able to be flexible and customize the curriculum (Boschee and Boschee 2011). Finally, in terms of testing, parents reported using a combination of assessments including tests from a school district, tests from a curriculum, standardized tests (such as the California Achievement Test), or some parents developed their own assessment (Boschee and Boschee 2011).

In looking at parents who choose to homeschool children with special needs in the UK, Parsons and Lewis (2010) concluded that most parents did not follow the National Curriculum even though the description of activities they provided were very similar to the academic subjects listed in the National Curriculum. Instead, parents opted for a more flexible approach to homeschooling which relied on some preplanning of subjects and instruction but also incorporated children's preferences and accommodations (Parsons and Lewis 2010).

Hanna (2012) conducted a longitudinal study of 250 homeschool families over a period of 10 years. Two surveys were administered to the same families 10 years apart who were still engaged in home-based education practices. Interviews were used to help further understand the survey data. The survey focused on aspects of instruction, materials, and curriculum. Conclusions indicated an increase in six areas of homeschooling: (1) use of prepared curriculum, (2) use of more textbooks from local schools, (3) use of the public library, (4) use of technology within education, (5) use of consulting teachers, and (6) a greater networking ability among parents. The findings from the study indicated that parents, over the 10 year period, had diversified their choices for pedagogy and the ways they delivered instruction (Hanna 2012). Moreover, homeschool parents changed and adapted their instructional delivery based on new information and new resources from curriculum and technology advances, and parents were willing to use an eclectic mix of educational practices within the homeschool environment. Many of the studies relied heavily on self-reported survey data to draw conclusions about the curriculum choices.

Methods of homeschooling

Several studies have taken a more personal approach to investigate homeschooling daily interactions and schedules of homeschool students through observations and interviews. In the South Dakota study, most parents indicated that their children spent at least four to six hours each day in formal learning activities (Boschee and Boschee 2011). Seibert (2002) conducted research that looked into what a homeschooling environment looks like on a daily basis by using a combination of surveys and home visits. The study demonstrated a wide variety of different styles of homeschool environments ranging from a scheduled "school-at-home" method to a highly unstructured "unschooling" where students had remarkable freedom during their studies (Seibert 2002).

Another curricular method found in the homeschool community is the use of a homeschool co-op. A homeschool co-op is a group of parents who gather to collectively teach courses. These courses can range from typical school subjects to electives and athletics. Many times the teachers in these groups are other homeschooling mothers or community members (Muldowney 2011). Muldowney (2011) performed a qualitative study on the use of co-ops as a method for homeschooling. The study contained the basic description of the co-op, and found that most parents provided classes to supplement the curriculum offered by the co-op (Muldowney 2011).

Swanson (1996) investigated what homeschooling methods might look like on a daily basis by using interviews with 39 different families. This study concluded that parents used several different methods of instruction. Some parents stated that they had a more traditional, school-like setting in their home while others emphasized the use of one-on-one instruction and independent study, especially for older students. Further, most parents stated that they chose strategies based on the needs and learning styles of the children (Swanson 1996).

In conversations with homeschooling parents in the UK, Winstanley (2009) and Kraftl (2013) both found that parents saw learning in the homeschool setting to be flexible and designed to meet the needs of students. With gifted students, the instruction could be individualized and challenging depending on the students (Winstanley 2009). Parents were also able use the natural patterns and relaxed schedule of the day to provide avenues for children to pursue interests and to immerse children in an educational experience that often transcended specific times and location but was rather a natural part of all their activities (Kraftl 2013).

Parents' role in the homeschool environment

In the homeschool setting, the parent assumes the role of the teacher in terms of their child's education. This role places parents in a unique position of fulfilling parental responsibilities and also meeting the requirements necessary for teaching. A qualitative study by Lois (2006) encompassed three years of fieldwork with homeschool mothers and showed most homeschool mothers saw their role of teacher and mother to be intricately related (Lois 2006).

Port (1989) presented a detailed account of two parents who sought to homeschool their son despite having little formal education and having limited resources. The parents were convinced that homeschooling was the best option for their child. The case study detailed their struggles with the local school board to accept homeschooling as a valid alternative. Ultimately, Port (1989) concluded that the parents were able to create the necessary environment and fulfill the role of teacher for their

child effectively (Port 1989). Blok (2004) corroborates this finding in his review of literature on homeschooling where he concludes that parents who choose home-based education are able to provide a successful academic environment for their children (Blok 2004).

Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer (2011) focused on homeschool students and how they felt in terms of their parents fulfilling the role as teacher. The qualitative, multiple-case study investigated students' perceptions of parents during homeschooling. The findings indicated that home educators (parents) were convinced they were making decisions in the learners' (students/children) best interest, yet without the knowledge or accommodation of their children's needs (van Schalkwyk and Bouwer 2011).

Ortloff (2006) used interviews, focus groups, and observations to outline how parents learned to perform the role of teacher and educate their child at home. Ortloff (2006) concluded that most parents learned to homeschool individually and experimentally, often times having to reframe conceptions from a traditional classroom setting that were not applicable to the homeschool setting. This corresponds with conclusions from Kraftl (2013) whose conversations with parents showed parents moving from a more traditional style of homeschooling to a more children-led form as they experimented with methods, with a relationship developing between the learner (child) and the educator (parent). Danley (1998) also determined how parents provided support for homeschool students. The results emphasized that parents often considered themselves active learners in the homeschool process and that the traditional lines between teacher and learner were often blurred for parents and students (Danley 1998).

In summary, the studies demonstrate that the role of a parent as teacher in a homeschool environment is neither a well-defined nor a well-understood role, even for the parents themselves. However, parents often indicate that they were able to overcome challenges and felt confident in fulfilling this role for their children (Lois 2006; Ortloff 2006). This study will examine the parental involvement in the homeschool process by focusing on a small sample of parents and how they chose activities for their students and what role they played in those activities. While the findings are not meant to generalize to all homeschooling parents, this case study provides an idea of the nature and texture of parental support that may be present within a homeschooling environment.

Methods

Sampling and data collection

This research used a qualitative case study approach to provide a detailed description of the strategies used in the homeschool environment of a small sample of families. Case study research revolves around a bounded system (Creswell 2013), and the information gathered during this study fits directly into that definition by focusing on the educational activities and interactions of homeschooled families with high school students. The goal of this study was to produce detailed, rich, context-based descriptions in order to capture the essence of homeschooling activities of three families in a community in the southern United States.

Because of the nature of this research, the researcher needed to have a good relationship and rapport with the parents and families in order to gain access to the home environment, a key component of this type of research (Spradley 1980). Because of this criterion, the researcher pre-selected a homeschool co-op learning

group, which the researcher had been involved with over the past year and a half. The relationship already established within this community helped give the researcher the rapport needed to conduct this research.

Participants were purposefully selected from the homeschool parents within the co-op learning group (Creswell 2013). Three parents were purposefully selected from the co-op because they had at least one student taking high school level courses. Purposefully selected parents identified themselves as homeschooling their children, and their students could not have been attending any type of formal school institution. Parents in the co-op were designated "teachers" for their high school students and therefore coordinated the homeschool activities for their high school students, whether by teaching the students themselves or coordinating the child's educational activities.

Once parents were selected, they were then provided and signed an informed consent document providing detailed information on the study data collection and timeline, allowing the researcher access to data sources. Participants were observed to obtain information about their homeschooling environment and practices. During the observations documents, archival records and physical artifacts were collected. Follow up interviews were conducted to verify observations and obtain information on their practice (Creswell 2013). To protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms are used throughout this article to refer to the participants.

To establish trustworthiness, the researcher used triangulation of data sources by relying on interviews, observations, field notes, and documents to provide multiple sources of data for comparison (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Member checks were also used to establish credibility, and a research journal was kept to document the process.

Data analysis

Data analysis and data collection were simultaneous activities in this study (Merriam 1998). Interviews and observations were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using qualitative techniques (Creswell 2013; Creswell and Miller 2000; McMillan and Schumacher 2014; Stake 2010). First, the observations and field notes provided documents and physical artifacts for data categories within each theme using elements for validity measures of sub-themes. Initially, themes were found based on the literature. Follow up reading from member checks provided sub-themes within themes. Themes and sub-themes were then provided in follow up member checks based on transcripts, codes and themes.

Next, the follow up interviews went through verbatim transcription, coding, theme, member checking and sub-theme development. Transcripts, codes, themes and sub-themes were provided to participants for follow up member checking to ensure authenticity and validity of data (Creswell and Miller 2000; Erlandson et al. 1993; Miles and Huberman 1994). Collected documents and artifacts were also used to verify codes, themes, and sub-themes.

Results

Description of participants

The Thomas Family

Dottie Thomas was a middle-aged mother of two girls, Christina and Belle. Christina was a junior in high school, and Belle was an eighth grade student at the time

of data collection. Belle was enrolled in multiple high school level courses as well because of her abilities and so she was included in the study as a high school student. Dottie began homeschooling Christina in second grade after Christina had first begun attending public school. They lived in an older home in a middle-class neighborhood in one of the larger cities in the southern United States. Dottie ran a local church homeschool and a co-op learning group, which both her students participated in regularly.

The Brown Family

Cheryl Brown was a middle-aged mother of four children, two boys and two girls. Her two girls were in high school; Allie was a senior, and Cassie was a sophomore. The two younger brothers were in elementary and middle school. All four of them were homeschooled. Cheryl began homeschooling Allie in seventh grade after Allie began asking to homeschool like some of her friends even though she had been attending local public school. Cheryl started homeschooling Cassie in sixth grade with the thought that both girls would have a year at home together before Allie returned to public school for high school. However, the family chose to continue homeschooling even through high school. They lived across town from the Thomas family in another middle-class neighborhood in the same city, and they were enrolled in church homeschool and the co-op group run by Dottie Thomas.

The Boyd Family

Glenda Boyd was a middle-aged mother of two children: Martha, her sophomore daughter, and a younger son in middle school. Martha was in tenth grade and had been homeschooled since she was in eighth grade. Up to eighth grade, Martha was enrolled in a local private school. The Boyd family chose to move from their affluent suburban neighborhood and build a house across the street from a government housing project in order to be more involved within the community. They also live in the same city as the other two families. Martha was enrolled in the local church homeschool run by Dottie Thomas, and they also participated in the same co-op learning group.

Presentation of findings

During data analysis of interviews, observations and documents, four main categories arose that connected directly to the purpose and research questions for this study. The first category was the diversity and flexibility of the curriculum and instructional choices of homeschool families. The second category was the flexibility of the daily and weekly schedule of homeschool families. The third category was the use of a network to assist in instruction. The fourth category was the role and responsibilities of the parent-teacher, in this case the mothers, in the education of her children. Each of these categories will be described in the following sections.

Eclectic mix of modalities of instruction

All families used a mix of modalities for delivering instruction to students, and all parents reflected on the flexibility with which they approached the choosing of the

modalities. A single student may have three to five different methods of receiving instruction for the different courses they were taking. The main forms of instruction were: (1) the use of online courses, (2) the use of an outside tutor, (3) the use of the co-op, (4) self-taught courses, and in two cases, (5) the mother provided direct instruction.

Online courses were used by all parents in order for the students to receive instruction. Some parents utilized online resources extensively. Cheryl noted about her older daughter: "Allie, most everything she's doing is online. She's doing her calculus online, her literature, history, Bible, computer. All of those are online." Some online courses were delivered live at set times each week, which often times took up a good portion of the day as Cheryl notes: "Allie's classes online are on Tuesdays and Thursdays so she is online for four and a half hours." Other courses provided a schedule of assignments, and students were allowed to move at their own pace through, as was seen with the course Dottie described Belle taking: "[*Belle*] does history and the other half of theology on a self-paced course through Veritas Press Scholars Academy. It's not live, it's all kinds of videos that you watch and they quiz you."

All parents used at least one outside tutor to provide instruction for their students, usually through scheduled weekly meetings. Tutors provided instruction, scheduled readings and assignments, and offered forms of assessment for students. Tutoring came in different forms. First, tutors came to students' houses in order to provide instruction, as seen with Glenda. She describes in her interview:

> And [*Math tutor's name*] does geometry. And she comes Monday and Wednesday so two days a week. And it's an hour each time, and she instructs her [*Martha*] and she also gives them a semester schedule which tells them exactly what lessons have to be prepared each time she comes, and it tells Martha when she's expected to take a test.

Other times the student actually went to a different location to receive instruction, such as Christina who went to a local art studio once a week for a course. Two students, Cassie and Martha, participated in a tutoring group at a friend's house where they received instruction for multiple subjects from an outside tutor three days each week.

Besides tutoring and online courses, another source of instruction came from the co-op learning group that all three families participated in each Friday. All five of the students mentioned in this study participated in at least one course offered by the co-op, in most cases the science labs. Martha and Cassie both took Chemistry through the co-op, Christina took Physics, Belle took Physical Science, and Allie participated in Advanced Biology. The co-op was run by Dottie Thomas, and she sought homeschooling mothers or members of the community to come each Friday and conduct classes and labs for the students. Course offerings ranged from foreign languages to science to physical education and baking classes. Cheryl Brown summed up her feelings regarding the use of the co-op, especially in the case of science labs:

> We like the co-op … I love the co-op … . It would probably be a really good day for my high schoolers to stay home and be able to do schoolwork, but I really love the science labs, and I just think that they get so much more from that then they would trying to get it on their own.

While the online courses, tutors, and co-op classes exposed students to outside instructors, a couple of the mothers also delivered instruction to their own students.

Dottie taught Belle grammar and spelling most days of the week using a provided curriculum, and she also taught Christina American Government through the co-op class. During an observation, Dottie delivered instruction to Belle by first teaching her a lesson, then helped her through guided practice, and checked her work on an individual assignment. Cheryl Brown had also begun teaching a course in Bible to Cassie, Martha, and another student they met with regularly for tutoring.

Finally, all of the students had some courses in which they were completely "self-taught" with no assistance from online professors, tutors, or others. In these courses, a syllabus came with the book or curriculum materials. Dottie created schedules for both her daughters to follow. Students may have had access to recorded lectures or other resources through the curriculum, but in terms of receiving instruction, the students were solely responsible for learning in every aspect of these courses. Allie took a health course in which she was completely self-taught, Christina followed a grammar curriculum for English, and Belle taught herself Algebra 1 using a provided curriculum.

Flexibility with curriculum and instructional choices

Besides seeing a large range of instructional modalities within these families, the mothers also expressed in their interviews the flexibility they felt in choosing and modifying curriculum for their students. The mothers commented on the ability and need to adjust the curriculum to meet the needs of each of their individual students. As Dottie said in her interview, "It was what ever met the needs of my kids at that time is what I did. And it didn't scare me to try something new, and it didn't work because I knew I could change." In organizing the curriculum, the mothers also felt flexibility in moving subjects around or spreading subjects out across the year and into the summer. To help them, the mothers relied on the tutors to provide guidance and feedback about which courses and subjects their students needed to take as well as referring back to state guidelines.

In reflecting on their curriculum choices, the mothers seemed to balance the needs of the students in terms of credits required by the state with the wishes and desires of their students. Each mother pointed out that it was her student, many times, who chose to take a particular course or chose a particular type of instruction. As Cheryl pointed out in her interview, "This year with Allie, we … she's the one that chose to do the calculus class online and another friend is doing it as well so they're in the same class even though it's online."

Flexibility in daily scheduling

Just as the instructional modalities displayed a wide range of choices and flexibility across families and even individual students, the daily schedule of a homeschooled high school student, as seen in these three families, also reflected that same mix of activities and flexibility. In fact, when the mothers were asked to describe a "typical" homeschool day, most of them asked for a minute to think about it and replied, "… there's no such thing as typical …". While each day was different and flexible, patterns did emerge across the three families in terms of the activities that the students participated in on a daily and weekly basis. These activities were witnessed in observations as well as discussed in the interviews. The primary theme throughout the patterns was the flexibility that came with a homeschooling schedule. The

patterns seen in the daily schedule were (1) instructional activities specifically for the students, (2) family activities or extra-curricular activities that did not revolve around schoolwork and (3) activities that the mother did throughout the course of the day while the high school students were working.

The main instructional activities for the students revolved around scheduled instructional time with tutors, online courses, or co-op classes and independent study time. Scheduled instruction time was considered any time during the day or week, which was blocked off on a regular basis in order for the student to receive instruction, similar to a traditional class or lecture. Allie, Christina, and Belle, for example, login to online courses at set times each week and received instruction from lives professors while also being able to ask questions and chat with other members of the class. Martha and Cassie both went to a friend's house three days a week for three hours in order to receive instruction from a tutor, and then they also met with a math tutor twice a week. Finally, all the students attended courses through the co-op group, which met every Friday morning for 10 weeks during both the fall and spring semesters. The scheduled times represented the least flexibility in the daily schedule of students since someone outside the family was involved with the instruction.

When they were not participating in scheduled instruction time, usually the students were studying independently. They were following a weekly schedule set by their mother, as was the case with Christina and Belle. They created a daily schedule for themselves based on what they needed to accomplish. Glenda presented an example:

> On Tuesday's, in a nutshell she [*Martha*] will make her schedule for the day and she'll usually show it to me or we'll just orally talk about it if I don't actually look at it. And she will spend Tuesdays doing most everything by herself.

Cheryl also stated her students, Allie and Cassie, "… decide though during the day kind of how their day goes, what they work on first, how long they work on it and things like that." During the observations, a large amount of independent study time was provided for most of the students. Christina and Belle both spent time in their rooms working individually on assignments, Martha stayed in her room most of the observation following a schedule she had written, and Cassie sat in the family living room to work on her assignments independently.

Outside of instructional activities, all the families also participate in different types of "family activities" throughout the course of the day as well as extra-curricular activities. The family activities exhibited a wide range of behaviors but ultimately all of them revolved around the family members spending time together not focused on schoolwork. Some examples of these types of activities were reading a book together in the mornings, having a devotional time at breakfast, going on a walk or playing in the backyard, or simply having spontaneous discussions about current events. These types of activities appeared throughout the day, sometimes at scheduled times such as breakfast and other times that were initiated by a family member for no apparent reason except for family interaction or possibly a break from school work.

Extra-curricular activities such as sports or various types of lessons were also present across the homeschool families. Most of families had at least one (or more) student who was highly involved in team sports such as softball, basketball, and volleyball. These sports required time spent traveling to practices and games, often

times during the time frame of a traditional school day. The Brown family also took music lessons at scheduled times during the week. However, the families did not let these activities detract from their schoolwork time, rather they displayed the flexibility of a homeschooling schedule by working around practices and music lessons as Cheryl Brown's comment demonstrates:

> Well, their [*music*] lessons are later like they're at 2:15 and 2:45 so it's kind of towards the end of the day except when you're homeschooling you don't really have homework, you just continue doing. So if you didn't get your work done earlier you still have to come in and do it after that. There's no end to it.

It is also important to note the activities that the mothers, who were considered the teachers for the students, were participating in while their students are taking an online course, receiving tutoring, or studying independently. Two patterns emerged regarding activities that had occurred across the three participating families. The patterns were seen in the observations and discussed in interviews.

First, the mothers spent time delivering instruction to other, often times younger siblings. Allie and Cassie, for example, had two younger brothers. During the observation at their home, Cheryl spent most of her time in a different room teaching the two brothers. When asked what she does during the school day, Cheryl commented, "I'm working with the boys." Martha also had a younger brother, and during the observations at the Boyd residence, Glenda helped the younger brother with an assignment while Martha studied upstairs. The mothers spend time instructing siblings and mentioned that they also take time to help their high school students study for tests, edit papers, or administer exams. During the Thomas family observation, Dottie first taught Belle a spelling lesson, and then worked with Christina on revising a speech. While the mothers spent time providing direct instruction to younger siblings, they also made time to assist the older students with work as well. This aspect will be dealt with further in the section about the parent-teacher's role.

Second, besides school or instructional related activities the mothers mentioned that they tried to get some of the housework done during the day as well. This meant anything from loading the dishwasher, doing laundry, making lunch or breakfast. Dottie even mentioned that since she required so much from her daughters, Christina and Belle, academically, she tried to be the one to maintain the housework. Despite the daily tasks of maintaining a home where the children were present throughout the day, the mothers also emphasize that they did not let housework get in the way of being available for their children.

Use of a network

Throughout the data, another theme that emerged was the way mothers used a network of people to help them find curriculum resources and help them deliver instruction to their students. All the mothers mentioned ways that talking with others with experience in homeschooling, either informally through friendly conversation or formally at homeschool conventions, helped them choose curriculum, find online courses, or locate a local tutor. Cheryl commented, "You know, it's kind of neat visiting with other homeschool moms, and you find out even, I think, when you've homeschooled for a long time, you still find out new things from different moms." Glenda also stated that she sought advice from others as well:

> I usually, you know, ask a couple of other people who are also homeschooling, whether it will be a parent or someone who already homeschool their kids just to see. So I'll usually bounced it off a couple of people.

A network of people was used by the mothers to provide the daily or weekly instruction their students needed in different courses. This network has already been discussed in detail with the use of online courses, local tutors, and other mothers or community members at the co-op. The tutors used by Cheryl and Glenda were members of the community they found through personal contacts. The studio where Christina took art was run by a long-time friend of Dottie's who agreed to create a curriculum for homeschool students. The people and the network were responsible for the daily instruction of students while the mothers took responsibility for finding people and courses that met the needs of their students. The mother maintained control of the education of the student; the network of community members met the daily instructional needs of the students. This idea of the mother's roles and responsibilities are discussed in the next section.

Parent-teacher's role and responsibilities

A key feature of the homeschooling environment was the role and responsibility of the parent in the homeschool setting. In all three of the families, the parent who took on the role of educating the children was the mother. All three families were part of a local church "umbrella school", which served to satisfy local and state homeschooling requirements. The policy manual for the church homeschool recognized the role of the parent by referring to parents as "parent-teachers" throughout the document. This term described the role the parent participants of this study maintained during observations and interviews. The mothers primarily acted as parents to their children, while also taking on the responsibilities managing the children's education.

First and foremost, the parents were the mothers of their children. As Dottie commented in her interview, "In the end I'm just mom and I'm just the one that adores them and wants to give them the best chance so of leaving my home ready for the world." Most often the mothers described themselves as involved in school related activities that parents of students in traditional schools may also be doing. Mothers also said that they help with the traditional student homework types of activities such as reviewing for tests or reading and editing papers. Glenda gave an example about how she worked with Martha, "I help review with her the questions before tests. Call it out to her. Help her with her projects and edit and help her write papers."

The term "parent-teacher" also implied that that not only are the mothers fulfilling the typical role of parent, but also they had also accepted responsibilities as the "teacher" for their student. However, as has been presented earlier, most instruction for homeschooled classes came from outside sources such as online courses or tutors. Dottie did teach grammar and spelling to Belle, and Cheryl had recently begun teaching Bible to Cassie, but overall the mothers were not the ones who delivered instruction. Therefore, the term "teacher" in this case took on a new meaning. The mothers were the "teachers" in that they were the ones managing and assisting with their child's education but not necessarily the ones providing instruction. The mothers were the ones who found courses, tutors, and curriculum for their

students, assisted the students with completing assignments and tasks, and then maintain accurate records and grades. Dottie described her role: "I'm their facilitator, I guess. In that, you know, I keep them going." Cheryl echoed this sentiment: "I guess I would be, for Allie kind of an advisor may be more of … I don't know what I would call it. I just assist them." Ultimately, as outlined by the policy manual, the mothers were responsible for calculating and reporting their student's grades. Given these aspects, whether the mothers in this case study served as the "teachers" for their students through direct instruction is dependent on how "teacher" is defined. In this case, by the definition provided in the policy manual, the mothers served as "teacher".

Discussion

What are the educational activities of a homeschool family with high school students?

The educational activities of the homeschool families in this case study displayed an eclectic mix of flexible instructional activities in the daily and weekly schedule of students. The findings were in line with similar findings of other studies of homeschool families (Hanna 2012; Hopwood et al. 2007; Seibert 2002). All the high school students in this study were involved in some type of scheduled instruction time each week, including live online courses, individual or group tutoring sessions, and courses taken through the co-op learning group. Besides the scheduled activities, the remainder of the daily schedule displayed great flexibility as students pursued independent study based on schedules from tutors or schedules they created for themselves. Students also participated in family activities such as daily book readings, devotionals, and also participate in extra-curricular activities such as sports and music lessons. The mothers also felt flexible in how they chose and scheduled instructional activities based on the needs of their students.

What is the role of the parent in the educational activities?

In the church homeschool policy manual, the parents were referred to as "parent-teacher" for their children. While this is an accurate description of the role of the mothers in this case study, the meaning of the word "teacher" took on more of a management role than the traditional perceived definition of a teacher. Some of the mothers provided direct instruction to students as part of a class, but in most of the courses, students received instruction from tutors, online professors or other community members. Rather than being the providers of instruction, the mothers acted as managers and directors of student education by finding tutors and courses to enroll students in and then assisting them along the way by helping their students study, review, or write papers.

The importance of a network for homeschooling families has been pointed out in previous research studies (Kunzman and Gaither 2013), and the same findings are true for the parents and students in this case study. Each mother relied on a network of people to provide advice, offer guidance on choosing curriculum and provide instruction to her students through tutoring or co-op classes. Other homeschooling mothers and community members taught the co-op courses, and the tutors were often friends or local contacts within the community.

Implications and recommendations

The implications are far reaching for this study in that educators outside the homeschooling community may develop a positive perception of homeschooling based on the actual goings on provided. Those involved in homeschooling will gain a deeper and more robust understanding of the parent role in a homeschooled environment given the context of participants of this study. There are varied definitions of what it means to be or do "homeschooling" (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). This case study clearly shows "homeschooling" for this particular set of participants included many different instructional modalities such as online courses, private tutoring, and self-taught classes. "Homeschooling" is typically viewed as students staying home to learn, but the reality is that technology and local community contacts are expanding the opportunities of students and families who choose not to participate in a traditional school environment, such as the ones detailed in this case study.

Also interesting to note is that the implications for the parent as "teacher" is an evolving definition in the homeschooling community. Depending on how "teacher" is defined, the participants of this case study viewed themselves as facilitators of learning and not direct practitioners as some perceive the role of the teacher. The implications for what it means to be "teacher" as a homeschooled parent should be clarified in the homeschooling community to ensure consistency in parent as teacher preparation, practice and assessment of their work as parent "teacher" with their child (children) as student.

This case study also shows that for those in the homeschooling community or those who are looking to homeschool their student, as a parent must realize that there are resources such as online courses, prepared curriculum, and even local co-op groups that are available for them should they decide to pursue homeschool. Homeschooling families should take advantage of connections and resources they have in their local communities in order to discover accessible resources to help with the education of their students.

Since this study investigated only three families located in a southern state in the United States in one community, further research should include homeschool families from different locations, both in the United States and internationally, to compare and contrast different methods of homeschooling as they relate to different areas. This study, along with others cited herein, have pointed to the eclectic mix of instructional modalities of homeschool families. Based on the findings from participants in this study and past research findings, the literature on homeschooling should be further supported with more work on the investigation of the instructional and curricular choices of homeschool families. Future research will further expand the understanding of the homeschool environment and potentially contribute a more robust literary foundation that support best practices for this educational genre. Finally, this study investigated the activities families were using, not how those activities had transformed throughout homeschool from primary, to middle, then on to high school. A couple of mothers in this study were seen providing more direct instruction to younger students, therefore, further research is needed to investigate instructional activities at multiple age levels.

Final conclusions

The research for homeschooling, especially in the area of curriculum and instructional practices, remains scarce (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). As mentioned

earlier, there are needs in the homeschooling literature to study how parents go about homeschooling on a day-to-day basis (Badman 2009; Kraftl 2013), which was the primary purpose behind this study. This case study included three homeschooling families in a southern state in the United States. Data for this case study clearly points to the eclectic nature of homeschool and the use of a variety of resources by the parents in this study in order to provide education for homeschooling students. This case study also described the nature of the role the parent played in the planning, preparation, use and assessment of instructional activities. Families used a mix of instructional activities, such as online courses, local tutors, and learning groups, to provide education for their students. While the mothers in these families were considered the "teachers" for their students, their role as teacher was more akin to a facilitator of learning, a manager of the learning environment or an advisor of student progress as each parent found resources and people who could meet the academic needs of their students.

Further research is needed to continue to expand on these findings and provide a more thorough understanding of homeschooling as a form of school choice for families. Given the sample size, further case study research should be done in other states in the United States and in other countries where homeschooling is done as an education practice. Further research is needed in defining what role the parent as "teacher" is and how effective their role is on student learning.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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