Urban Rev (2009) 41:369–389
DOI 10.1007/s11256-008-0114-x

Motivations, Sacrifices, and Challenges: Black Parents' Decisions to Home School

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Published online: 6 December 2008

Abstract This study examines home schooling among Black parents by providing insight to Black families' beliefs, concerns, and desires for their children's education. To date, the literature remains void of empirical work related to home education among African American families. However, the present study directly addresses this void. Findings demonstrated that parents' motivations to home school included issues related to race and home-school interaction. In addition, Black parents reported that religious beliefs influenced their decisions to home school. But, unlike their Caucasian counterparts, Black home educators described a more liberatory form of religion.

Keywords Home schooling · African American education · African American families

Parental choice has been expanded through the accountability structure of No Child Left Behind, which supports options such as charter schools and vouchers. However, families have chosen to educate their children through home schooling to the extent that the number of children educated in the home is greater than the number of students participating in either school voucher programs or charter based schools (Apple 2006; Bauman 2001; Princiotta and Bielick 2006).

Reports on the total number of families that choose to educate their children at home vary, but all reports suggest a national trend toward increasing participation in home school. Nationally, estimates have suggested that approximately 1, 096, 000

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families chose to home school in the year 2003 (Princiotta and Bielick 2006). Using Census Bureau data, Bauman (2001) reported that approximately two million children in the U.S. were educated at home. The author further suggested that the number of home-schooled children is increasing as much as 15–20% each year.

Despite increasing trends toward home education, empirical research on the benefits and challenges of home schooling remains limited. The scant research available on home schooling tends to focus on White, middle class families. These studies document how well home school students perform academically (Rudner 1999; Wartes 1988), socially and psychologically (Medlin 2000; Shyers 1992). This work tends to report positive educational outcomes, which may partially explain the popularity of home schooling.

Van Galen's (1991) seminal work categorized home school parents into two groups: ideologues and pedagogues. The author reported that ideologues chose to home school to teach values to their children and strengthen family bonds. Previous studies identify the ideologues as the predominant group of parents who choose home schooling (Madden 1991; Mayberry 1988; McIntyre and Windham 1995; Wartes 1988). Conversely, Van Galen (1991) described pedagogues as families that were primarily concerned with academic achievement, and they reportedly left traditional public schools because the curriculum was not challenging their children. These parents reject the traditional school system and attempt to give their children a different education at great personal sacrifice (Knowles 1988; Madden 1991; Van Galen and Pitman 1991). Studies on pedagogues show that this group includes a large number of children who are gifted or have special needs (Knowles 1988).

Researchers have not specifically focused on the perceptions of Black home educators, how they made the choices to home school, and how these choices were tied to the outcomes parents desired for their children. As parents of traditionally marginalized groups gain mandated power to make choices for their children, it is necessary to study the choices that they make, such as home schooling, possibly the most extreme form of parental involvement. Such investigations contribute toward the understanding of schooling from the perspective of families.

This study examines home schooling, and subsequently family involvement, among Black parents by providing insight to Black families' beliefs, concerns, and desires for their children's education. Thus, this work offers an ethnological perspective of home schooling. Black parents have historically fought for equality of opportunity in the learning experiences of their children. However, their children remain the least served by public schools as exemplified by a persistent Black-White achievement gap (Princiotta and Bielick 2006), and disproportionate representation in both, remedial and gifted programs. In order to have a greater conception of parental choice and parental empowerment among African American families, this investigation explores what happens when Black parents assume full ownership of their children's education through the process of home schooling.

This paper presents a portion of the findings from a two-year study designed to address the issue of limited research that explicitly connects home schooling and perceptions of Black families. To address the extensive gap in the literature

regarding Black family's decisions to home school the following questions guides this study:

1. What self-reported factors influenced Black parents' decisions to home school their children?
2. What challenges do Black families experience in implementing their home school practices?

The study informs both the family involvement and the school choice literature. Additionally, this work begins to lay a foundation for continued empirical research in this area.

Conceptual Framework

At the height of family involvement in education, home schooling is the most intense and enmeshed practice families can undertake (Van Galen and Pitman 1991). Research aimed toward understanding home schooling among African American communities has the potential to inform the parental involvement literature. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study has been derived partially from family involvement research. Throughout this work, family involvement is operationalized as the commitment and voluntary action parents perform in designing educational content and pedagogy to educate their children.

This examination of Black parents' decisions to home school has been informed by a theoretical framework that extends Bronfenbrenner's (1986) socioecological model, which acknowledges the multiple contexts in which family involvement takes place. Additionally, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) combined psychological and social ecological conceptualizations to develop the parental role construction model. Simply stated, the model posits that overtime parents' decisions to be involved in their children's schooling are shaped by their beliefs and experiences related to the parenting roles, ability to influence their children's learning (parent self-efficacy), group norms (i.e. ethnic, community, school), and opportunities to be involved.

Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) recently applied the parental role construction model quantitatively to examine parents' decisions to home school compared to parents' decisions to participate in public schooling. The sample population consisted of primarily White mothers. The authors also developed a scale to assess factors that motivate parents' decisions to home school as found within the literature. The factors related to parents' perceptions of a school's capacity to teach their children, school teaching practices, parents' religious and moral value beliefs, their children's unique needs (i.e. academic, behavioral), and parents' perceptions of their ability to home school in terms of having the time and energy to do so.

As one might consider, findings from Green and Hoover-Dempsey's study indicated that home school parents believed very strongly that they should play a role in their children's education and that they had the ability to teach their own children effectively. Other findings, pertinent to the present study, indicated that home school educators held salient contentions with their public schools' ability to

address instruction related to values, meet the specific needs of their children, and to use appropriate instructional methods. Yet, when the authors conducted analysis on parental role construction and personal belief variables they found, "Home school parents appear to decide to home school not so much because they believe that public schools cannot educate their children, but because they believe that they are personally responsible for their child's education and that are capable of educating their children well in ways consistent with their priorities, Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007), p. 278. Therefore, decisions to home school were not always made in complete opposition to public schooling.

The current work utilizes the lens of parental role construction in a slightly different way with the use of interviews and focus groups. As suggested by Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) using interviews will, "…provide a richer and deeper understanding of the constructs involved and would allow further insight into how parents think about these constructs in making their decisions about home schooling, p. 282." The constructs identified by Green and Hoover-Dempsey have informed the analysis and findings of the present study.

To date, the literature remains void of empirical work related to home education among African American families. However, the present study directly addresses this gap.

Methods

This study used qualitative methods to examine home schooling among Black families located within a southeastern metropolitan area. Specifically, the study used a phenomenological approach to investigate the ways in which Black families experience and interpret their decisions to home school, which Creswell (1998) describes as a study of "….the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (p. 51). Participating families made the decision to home school individually rather than as a collective. Therefore, data analysis began at the individual family level. Next, cross-case analysis resulted in a clustering of themes, which were then developed into a structural and contextual understanding of the ways in which Black families interpreted their decisions to home school. Themes were presented, discussed, and at times debated within three focus group sessions. The objective of this study is to understand the phenomena of home school through the eyes of Black families.

As researchers of African American heritage, the authors of this study had to balance two, sometimes contentious, positions in relation to the participants. Banks' (1998) topology of cross-cultural researchers offered insight. According to the topology we were positioned as indigenous insiders as well as indigenous outsiders within our study. On the one hand, African American families embraced and entrusted their voices to us as fellow African Americans and mothers. On the other hand, their impassioned quest for meaningful educational opportunities for their children seemingly conflicted with our roles within teacher education and our commitments to prepare pre-service and in-service public school teachers. As Alridge (2003) found, we existed in a state of double-consciousness. Because we

had not disconnected ourselves from the Black community or the struggle for equity in schooling experiences for all, the families placed tremendous confidence in our ability to tell their stories accurately. Our researcher training along with classroom experience and commitment to public schools fostered insightful inquiry and contributed to the "…systematic and balanced examination, Alridge (2003, p. 26)", we have offered in this article.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data were gathered from three sources for this study, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, to compile a panoramic view of the home education. The survey provided demographic and descriptive background data for each family. Second, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with at least one parent representing the home school family. Three fathers participated in interviews; two simultaneously with their wives and the other as the sole representative of his family. Interviews ranged from roughly one and a half hours to three hours in length. Finally, three focus groups sessions provided deeper understanding and clarification of patterns found among the data. Focus group sessions were conducted approximately six months apart within the two-year study, and participants consisted of 10–12 mothers with some mothers participating in more than one session. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the research process as suggested Creswell (1998).

Data were analyzed using a process as described by Merriam (1997). The process entailed an initial coding of parents' narratives regarding their decisions to home school. Next, codes were collapsed into common patterns among families, which were then developed into reoccurring themes. The results of this analysis guided the focus group discussions on topics such as the juncture of parenting and teaching roles, the concept of caring among school teachers, and the role of race in parents' decisions to home school. Data generated from each of the three sources have contributed toward the understanding of African American parents' attitudes, beliefs, and motivations related to their children's schooling.

Participant Selection

A community nomination process, as described by Foster (1997), was used to identify participants. Outside contacts who knew Black home educators identified initial nominators in three communities surrounding a major metropolitan area to begin the nomination process. These initial nominators served as the gatekeepers to three separate participant pools. Applying the nomination process in multiple settings yielded a sample of 24 Black parents, each representing a different family. Two parents represented single-parent families. Table 1 demonstrates the demographic diversity of the families represented in this study.

As seen in Table 1, a majority of the home educators in this study have earned a bachelor's degree. However, four parents had not completed their undergraduate degrees (two high school graduates and two parents held associate degrees). Conversely, three parents had exceeded the undergraduate level; two of the parents

Table 1 Home school family demographics $N = 24$

Home educators' education (mother)	Household income	Home educators' age	Length of time as a home educator	Number of children home schooled
Undergraduate = 14	$35,000/year or less = 6	31–36 years = 4	<1 year = 2	1 child = 6
Associates degree = 3	$35,001–55,000 = 7	38–42 years = 11	1–2 years = 4	2 children = 4
High school grad = 2	$55,001–$75,000 = 6	43–46 years = 5	3–5 years = 4	3–5 children = 11
Masters degree = 2	$75,001 or more = 5	47–51 years = 4	6–8 years = 6	6 children = 4
Law degree = 1			9–10 years = 4	9 children = 1
			12–16 years = 4	

held master level degrees and one parent had a law degree. In addition, $55,000 per year served has a dividing point among household income levels for the families represented with 12 families reporting household incomes below this point and 11 families reporting household incomes above $55, 000. The self-reported household income levels ranged from less than $15,000 per year to more than $75,000.

Home educators ranged in age from 31 years old to 51 years old. Home educator moms had a mean age of 41 years old and a median of 42. Further, the parents in this study represent a wide range of experience as home educators from less than a year to 16 years of home schooling. Of the 24 home educators interviewed, 14 parents reported that they had been home schooling their children for more than 5 years. Most parents had 2–4 children. Families in this study pulled their children out of public schools, private schools, as well as Christian school in order to home school them.

For the most part, mothers assumed most of the responsibility of home education within the families represented in this study. According to mothers' self-reports fathers assume responsibility for teaching their children as well usually in a particular area, or for reinforcement.

To assume the role of home educator, mothers left careers in a variety of fields. Slightly more than one-third (nine) of the home educators worked clerical, retail, or entrepreneurial roles prior to beginning to home school their children. In addition, a third of the group (eight) previously held positions in businesses including computer program analyst, marketing managers, and accountants. Three home educators represented in this study reported being stay-at-home moms prior to starting home education. Additionally, home school moms among this study included former lawyers, musicians, and registered nurses. The majority of the home educators in our study were not formally trained teachers. Only two of the 24 home educators represented in this family reported having a career as a teacher prior to the start of home schooling. Additionally, four parents in this study continued to manage their own businesses or worked a part-time basis as they home schooled.

Table 2 Entry points into home schooling

Point of entry (grade level)	Number of families
From birth	7 Families
Early elementary (K-2)	10 Families
Upper elementary (3–5)	4 Families
Middle school (6–8)	3 Families

Black parents in this study entered into home schooling at varying stages of their children's learning experiences. These points of entry provided insight towards understanding families' motivations to home school. Table 2 below demonstrates the range of entry points found in the study.

As seen in Table 2, families made the decision to home school as early as birth and as late as entrance into middle school grades. Parents that chose to home school at birth based their decisions primarily on their religious and parental role and responsibility beliefs. Conversely, a majority of the families (10) decided to home school their children during the early elementary years (K-2). These parents reported that they had intended to have their children educated through a public or private institution.

However, differences between parents' pedagogical beliefs for the early years and their perceptions of school practices led to changes to parents' original intentions. Families perceived that emphasis on pence to paper activities rather than play represented a trickle-down effect of today's testing pressures. Special education experiences and a perceived lack of focus on their children's needs contributed to four families' decision to home school in the upper elementary school years. Finally, three families made the decision to home school during the middle school grades due to their perceptions increased peer pressure, increased exposure to negative influences (drugs, sex, and alcohol etc.), and a lack of a nurturing environment.

Use of the community nomination process for participant sampling yielded a diverse set of home school families. Families varied in income level, educational level, structure (two-family and single-parent), and their point of entry into home schooling. Their participation in this study has provided insight toward understanding the factors that influence Black parents' decisions to participate in home education and the challenges they face as a result of their decisions.

Findings

Mrs. Charles, a Black home educator of three children disclosed, "Sometimes it gets kind of frustrating because you're not only a homeschooler, but you're a Black homeschooler." The results presented in this section illuminated some of the factors that underpin this sentiment. Similar to findings from previous studies, parents in this study based the decisions to home school their children on prior experiences in public or private schools. Further, media reports of failing public schools, whether substantiated or not, also heartened parents' decisions to home school. However,

findings from this study also revealed that parents' motivations to home school included ethnological factors related to their roles as parents of Black children.

The findings have been divided into four sections. The first section presents themes found related to the role of ethnicity in Black families' decisions to home school. Next, I present the findings related to the role of religion in parents' motivations to home school. The third section highlights findings related to the sacrifices families made in order to home school. Finally, the fourth section presents families' self-reported challenges faced as home educators.

The Role of Ethnicity in Deciding to Home School

Black families' perceived that institutional norms and structures within schools created destructive, rather than supportive, learning environments for children of African descent. In turn, these perceptions prompted their decisions to educate children at home. Specifically, of the 24 Black home educators interviewed, 19 attributed their decisions to home school on perceptions of, or experiences with, inequities, prejudice, discrimination, or racism in public and private schools. Data from three focus group sessions corroborated these findings among Black home educators.

Black home educators believed that school norms and structures sometimes work against Black children; they expressed heightened concern for their Black boys in particular. For example, reflecting on the norms of public schools, Mrs. Howard shared, "My husbands' theory is that by the time the children become aware of how the world sees them [as Black people] and subsequently as not being high achievers then it won't affect our boys. There isn't any preconceived notion of them not being able to achieve, and everyone around them has been affirming them." Further, Mr. Richards explained,

> In the back of my mind, I see our actions [decision to home school their son] as being racially motivated because of the history of Black males in the school system, especially the school system in this city. They have the lowest graduation rate for African American men, so I can't help but to think that that had something to do with it because the structure wasn't in place, whether it was because of resources, teaching – whatever it may be. . . I don't think they could deal with that type of personality and person. His learning style is not based on sitting down and being lectured to. He's more of – a lot of interaction, on-hands type, you know learning styles.

Similarly, Mrs. Sharp, home educator to three sons and twin daughters, expressed,

> I have African American boys and I think *particularly* African American boys are very distanced in school often, especially if they're not that typical bright student and they're immediately tagged as being slow or maybe they need to be in a special education class. So, having African American boys I just wanted them to be freer, I wanted them to take the initiative more and be creative and critical thinkers and I just don't think these are things they

> necessarily accept even in many private schools. You can't expect that from the schools.

In each of these representative quotes, Black home educators situated motivates to home school in the sociocultural issues related Black male school experiences. Mr. Richards' perspective was derived from his child's school experiences while Mrs. Sharp's perspective developed prior to the birth of her children.

In addition to concern for Black boys in particular, home educators indicated concerns that schools adhered to a monocultural approach to education with no provisions for variations in Black students' learning styles, behaviors, or needs.

Interestingly, one-third of the families represented in this study (eight) shared that at least one of their children received special education services, while two additional families reported that school personnel has at some point recommended their children for referral to special education. Black home educators sometimes associated teachers' referrals to special education with racism as suggested by Mrs. Blackwell, "I know my oldest is very active, but teachers said he's ADHD. But we didn't want any of that kind of labeling. So, I think what has been nice, [with home schooling], is that the boys have been able to achieve, without the negativity associated with our race."

Similarly, Mrs. Johnston expressed concerns with school personnel's responses to and interactions with Black children. She shared,

> Home schooling means we are free of the negativity associated with racism. In the school, children of color tend to not be expected to excel. I think sometimes some negative behavior, if it is handled correctly, can be diffused, but I think the school environment can go overboard making it more destructive. It's not a perfect world. I don't expect that, but I do take every advantage I enable my kids to grow up with a good sense of who they are in this world without people dumping on them.

Along with referrals to special education services Black students received very little consideration of the possibility that they were not being challenged by their school work even when they completed the work early. Parents reported that school personnel had labeled their children troublemakers and they insisted that the issue was low expectations and teachers' refusals to provide differentiated instruction for their children. Teachers' focus on punitive responses to perceived "off task" behavior, rather than higher expectations for their children contributed to parents' decisions to home school.

Additionally, although Brown v. Board of Education passed in 1954 mandating the integration of public schools, Black families in this study reported that home schooling offered greater access to fully integrated educational experiences for their children. Schools in the southern portion of the school district primarily represented in this study had predominantly Black student populations. Mrs. Peters' remarks exemplified parents' views toward the contemporary segregated communities in which they live and the decision to home school,

> We moved from the suburbs of New Jersey to Georgia, and realized that the school system here was very segregated so where race is concerned home schooling was one of the decisions we had to make because of the segregation. In our neighborhood, many children are bussed north where the schooling is better, but they travel over an hour just to get to school. That wasn't an option for us.

It is important to note that schools in the northern portion of the school district tended have predominantly White student populations, based on the demographic statistics provided by the district and state websites. For these Black parents, home schooling became the vehicle through which their children could participate in integrated learning experiences. Parents reported that their children experienced integrated learning through activities sponsored by home school associations such as field trips and co-ops. Co-ops were usually developed by parents to provide children with a variety of classes, which were taught by the parents themselves. In addition, Black home educators enrolled their children in home school schools, which employed certified teachers to provide an array of courses including advanced science, math, English as well as art classes. Integration also occurred through recreational and competitive level sport programs, which home educators believed they had more time for outside of the public and private schools due to the release from tremendous homework loads.

Moreover, the lack of, or limited, representations of African American perspective found Within school curriculum also influenced Black parents' decisions to home school and subsequently informed their home school practice. As a home educator explained,

> I mean if they read a textbook, they've got to see little White kids in the textbook instead of seeing themselves…It's important for your children to succeed if they see other people that look like them in those positions and when everybody you see who has accomplished something is White, it's kind of hard to…. How can I achieve that when it's only them up there?

In all, 19 families reported that they intentionally infused an afrocentric or Black American focus into their home school practice. Demonstrating how they connect their ethnicity to the curriculum, Mrs. Flemming stated,

> For example, if we are teaching math, a lot of times people show mathematicians and they are always White people shown as the leaders or authorities in math. But, then we'll take them back to Egypt and we'll take them back to Samaria and we instill in them, Ok, these were the first people that were the mathematicians. These were the first people that developed science. So we do that for them so they can understand that this is the transition from Egypt to Greek and from the Greeks, down here and that's where it's all coming from.

Similarly, when Black home school families instinctively selected, or modified, curriculum to reflect Black historical and contemporary perspectives they typically do so to rectify what they deemed as lacking in the more traditional school contexts

and their curriculum, but necessary for their Black children's well-being and positive self-identity.

In sum, Black families decided to home school as a means to escape the perceived tendency of traditional school structure and culture to impose negative stereotypes and images on their Black children, particularly Black males. In this study, some examples of school structures and culture included implementation of the special education process, teachers' expectations in general, and the curriculum. Families deemed public, private, and Christian school curriculums as too narrow in focus, monocultural, and their environments tended to destroy children's joy of learning. Instead, Black families sought home schooling in order to foster their children's thinking abilities, rather than just improving test scores. Most importantly, Black families sought home schooling as a refuge from the subtle, yet subvert messages of racism that they perceived would be directed at their children within the more traditional forms of schooling.

The Role of Religion

A majority, (21), home school families reported that religious beliefs influenced their decisions to home school. However, parents differed in the role in which religion played in their home schooling decision. Only six families directly shared a belief that God had actually led them to home schooling. For example, after attending a home schooling exposition at the invitation of a friend, Mrs. Brown reported that she and her husband, "…prayed about it and the Lord definitely said, I brought you home to do this", which Mrs. Brown interpreted as the Lord led her to leave her career in order to home school and raise her children.

In contrast, fifteen families described home schooling as a complement and support to their religious beliefs. In interviews and focus group sessions, parents shared Scriptural passages that they believed not only coincided with their beliefs regarding parent responsibilities, but also supported their decisions to home school. Offering an explanation of the role of religion in families' early decision to home Mrs. Dunlap remarked,

> That [religion] was a part, but initially it wasn't major. It became major when my husband and I looked over how were raised and what we desired for our children. In public schools, religion and schooling are to be separate. But, home schooling gives us an opportunity to be more in line with our beliefs.

In this way, religion played a supporting role to parents' decisions to home school. Another home educator of two children explained the relationship between her families' decision to home school and religion,

> I have never had a problem picking up and going…and, I think God knew that home schooling my children would be a perfect solution for my mentality and my lifestyle because now their stability comes from me and not from a school environment so I have never had to worry about uprooting them from this school and going to another school and starting all over again. So we've never had a problem moving like in most cases with children moving around tends to

> promote a sense of instability in their lives because they are constantly uprooted. But fortunately, God provided us with the opportunity to still provide a sense of stability and confidence in them through home schooling regardless of how many times we moved.

Seven families shared this perspective of the relationship between religion and home education; these families moved as frequently as every two years due to careers such military, corporations, or the trucking industry. Overall, Black home educators' described a primarily liberative role of religion in connection to their decisions to home school, which differed from the Ideologues described by Van Galen (1991). Instead of, and sometimes in addition to, having a primary focus of home education as a fulfillment of God's will for Christian parents, Black parents indicated that their religious beliefs empowered their decisions to home school.

Differences in Black parents' perspectives on religion linked to previous research on the role of religion and African American communities. Hill (1997) synthesized the literature on African American families and identified a strong religious orientation as a prominent strength among Black families. Historically, Black churches have been one of the cornerstones of African American schooling (Anderson 1988; Hill 1997). More recently, according to Hill (1997) previous research found positive relationships between religion and positive educational outcomes.

Sacrificing Education

The home education movement has made significant sacrifices to work in the home and teach their children. The obvious financial sacrifice required adjustments of great proportions. Participants explained while their family income would be considered middle class, it took creative and strategic budgeting to live on one income instead of two. In addition to financial creativity with limited budgets, some parents paid for additional classes to intensify their child's learning experiences. Sandra, a home school mother of two, described the importance her son attending classes at one of the local colleges to support his growing interest in engineering, "We had to pay $900.00 for him to go to the three week class, but It was well worth it. Now he has a taste of college campus life and I think he's going to push himself harder". Parents would not only sacrifice their careers and second income, but they also invested more money to encourage stimulating learning experiences.

Most parents interviewed for this study had previous work experience in professional fields, for example a lawyer, certified public accountant, and realtor. Sacrificing their income to stay home and teach has been a classic argument among women who debate continuing their professional careers versus becoming a stay at home mom. At times the decision to stay home fed negative reactions from family members and friends. Mrs. House provided a poignant example of the sacrifice women made when deciding to forgo a career to become a home educator. She shared,

> I was raised by my grandmother in New York City. She had struggled so hard to make sure that I stayed on the right track to go through college, even if it

> meant working more than one job. When I told her that I was homeschooling the children said couldn't understand. She said, "You home? You're not working? But you were a tax examiner for the IRS. You had this position and this job and I could just see you moving on in the corporate world. You just gonna waste your education"?

Mothers' decisions to leave behind career, in one regard, became the abandonment of hopes and dreams of two generations. Further, from a woman's right perspective, Black home educators' decisions to home school might appear to be an abandonment of the rewards obtained from a long struggle toward equality in the workplace. But for these Black home educators, the role of race justified the sacrifices made in order to secure a better future for their children.

Families, peers, and others in their local areas judge home school parents through the sacrifices that have made. Many African Americans perceived that schools underserved their children (Shujaa 1994). The contention builds when some Black parents recognize that their children are the least served by conventional schooling and attempt something different like that of home education instead of challenging the school and advocating for change. For example, Sandra states that she has people who seemed to resent the fact that she has chosen to home educate. She further explained, "I think that people know sometimes what they should be doing and they're not doing it. And when you're doing it, there's a little bit of jealousy." Sandra described her experiences with other Black parents who have questioned her decisions on home education. In turn, she challenges the opposition's notion of responsibility to their children. She repositioned the notion of sacrifice to question directly those who doubt or dislike parents' decisions to home educate. To what extent should parents continue to sacrifice their children's education to a public school system they believe will deficiently instruct and negatively impact their children's learning? And is the sacrifice of keeping your child in such systems for the sake of improving education for everybody else and to follow in the footsteps of the Civil Rights Movement that campaigned for equitable education? *Brown v. Board*, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Right Act, desegregation cases, sit-ins, marches all played a significant role drawing societal attention on inequities in education. Is it every Black person's responsibility to continue in this struggle, even when many do not believe that equitable education will ever be attainable in public schools? Sacrifice played a critical role in assessing the dilemmas associated home schooling and intricately weaved in the participants' perceptions of education and future expectations.

Challenges

Parents' decisions to home school led to challenges characterized as systemic issues, lifestyle changes, logistical issues, and home educator praxis. Systemic issues found in this study refer to home school families' struggle to gain access to services provided by public schools. Families required access to services related to special education such as testing and speech therapy. Other public services home school families sought included access to participation in athletic experiences and

extracurricular activities. Teresa's school district hired someone to serve in the capacity of home school liaison. She described her experience with the home school liaison when she requested speech therapy for her daughter,

> She [home school liaison] gave me a hard time and I had to remind her that I am still a tax paying citizen. There is a vacant desk in that school, you still have my books, and you have everything you need as if my child was sitting in that school. After that she did what she needed to do to let me have access. She was counting it as extracurricular, and I wasn't trying to get involved in sports or anything, sometimes, they're a little prejudice. You know, if our kids are doing well, then they don't get the credit.

Smith and Farris (2007) analyzed the legality of home school families' access to public school services. They found that home school laws vary from state to state. As of this writing, 17 states mandated public schools to provide home educators access to classes and services. Only one family resided in one of these states. Smith and Farris (2007) captured the tension that exists between home school families and state lawmakers, even in states that mandate home school access to public services. Nationally, when states enabled home school children to access public school services, they also mandated an extra burden of proof placed on the family to demonstrate student achievement even if their state does not require such documentation as part of the home school process itself.

Challenges also represented several aspects of the lifestyle change required of home educators. For example, home educators reported that their decision to home school caused them to work harder to balance between household responsibilities, marital role, and schooling their children. As one home school mom put it, the challenge is, "…the whole balance and dance with cooking, household management, being married, and then on top of that, home schooling the children."

Home educators also discussed the challenge of having to balance the different ages of their children. Most parents had to manage instruction for children with two to three years age difference between the children. To accomplish this, home educators employed a variety of strategies. Most often, home educators with relatively large families (four or more children) reported that they promoted independence among their children by requiring them to seek assistance from siblings while mom worked with a particular child or children uninterrupted. Individualized instruction was fostered by the spaces parents created in their home that resembled classrooms. Sometimes the spaces were partitioned by subject matter, or by activity. Families simply turned their kitchen table into a home school area as well.

Strategies used to accommodate children's grade levels also included having students study the same topic, but at different levels with the older children studying the topic in more depth and with higher expectations. Though parents reported some sibling rivalry in the form of younger children who wanted to do the same work as their older brothers and sisters, ultimately, this situation motivated younger siblings to continue to want to do the work in order to reach the higher level. In addition, home schooling had to occur around infant and toddler schedules.

Along with the challenge of how to structure the learning process, home educators also faced challenges in understanding their children's learning process and fostering a love of learning in their children. As an example, one parent of three shared that it took her two years for her to discover her children's learning styles. She explained,

When we learned their learning styles it was a plus. Even though [son and daughter twins] are in the same grade, I knew they learned differently, but the first two years I wanted it easy for me. You teach the same thing because it's easy. You deal with how they learn it on the side. Then, I would struggle trying to understand why they didn't seem to be learning as well as I thought they should. Now we are using the same curriculum, but we teach them differently.

> [Her daughter] is very visual and very hands-on when it comes to math. But [her son] can hear it and he's got it. My little seven year old [youngest of the three], he is very good at listening and getting the information which I learned when I had him in the kitchen playing on the floor with pots and pans and cars. He appears not to be paying attention, but I will ask him something and he will answer correctly.

Understanding their children's learning styles presented a challenge for many home educators who also reported having to learn to teach in a way that was different from their own learning styles and even their own personalities.

Teaching their children at home also presented a challenge to home educators who strove to keep learning fun for their children in order to achieve parents' overall goal of instilling a love of learning in their children. In an exemplary response to a question about challenges one home educator stated,

> Keeping learning interesting and fun [is a challenge] because I know there is going to be a time when I'm no longer her official teacher and directing her learning. I don't want her to ever stop learning, or to not be inquisitive and not seek out more information about whatever.

Further, instilling the love of learning and keeping it fun reportedly became more challenging for home educators as the students advanced in grade level. Parents' own schooling experiences influenced the situation as demonstrated by this home educator's remarks,

> When they get up into 6th grade and above, there is this change in the curriculum and what's available to you. It almost becomes more boring. So, the challenge I think is not getting caught up in how boring some subjects can be, or how boring I remember them being. I hated science until I became an adult, now science is so cool to me. There's so many things that you didn't even realize were science, like basic everyday things, because it was made to be so boring. History the same thing, so I think keeping it interesting is my greatest challenge.

Home educators' attempts to instill the joy of learning in their children were further challenged by limitations on parents' ability to be patient with both themselves and their children. As one mom disclosed, "The biggest challenge for

me has been having the patience for myself, and them, in knowing that I wasn't going to jack them up. You know, overcoming the feeling of not being able to do it." Parents' reported that they frequently felt overwhelmed by the process of educating their own children. However, home educators stated that membership in home school groups assist with overcoming such challenges. In addition, many home educators relied on their faith to address this challenge.

The negative reactions and general lack of understanding from family members as well as strangers was another factor frequently listed as a challenge among home educators. Every home educator in this study reported that they have to overcome initial negative comments from family members, friends or strangers. Some of the remarks endured by parents were aimed at their abilities such as, 'But, you didn't go to school to be a teacher'. In other cases, home school moms reported that their families, particularly their parents or caregivers as children, demonstrated disappointment in their decision to stay home to teach their children. For example, Sandy's grandmother who raised her responded, "You're home? You're not working? But you were a tax examiner for the IRS. You just gonna waste your education"? Sandy explained that her grandmother had sacrificed tremendously in order to provide her with a college education. However, as with each of the participants, acceptance from family members and friends often developed after several years of home schooling.

In conclusion, this study found that Black families decided to home school at different points in their children's education and for a variety of reasons. Families choose to leave public, private, and Christian schools due to factors related to perceived racism, or because they perceived the school represented destructive environments for Black children. Their decisions to home school led to multiple challenges and sacrifices. Parents were willing to endure these consequences on behalf of their children and through their faith. These findings will be further explored in the next section.

Discussion

Though Black home school families are diverse demographically as well as in their approach to education, they are united in the belief "that parents can and should be deeply involved in the education and development of their own children" (Lines 2001). This study found parents' motivations for home schooling similar to those described in the literature. In particular, the parents stated they are better able to facilitate students learning, choose appropriate curriculum, regulate scheduling and teach moral, ethical, cultural and spiritual principals. Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007), Ray (2000), Thomas (2001), Van Galen (1987) all stated similar issues when studying populations of home educators.

However, as Pedroni (2007) found with African American parents participating in voucher programs, the narratives of African American families that home school do not necessarily represent the 'Conservative Right', ideologue, or pedagogue images typically associated with home schooling in the literature. Where the African American home educators in this study diverge is their concern for the

negative influences associated with racism perceived in schools, negative responses of families and their desire for more positive role models for their children. African American parents represent a new category of home educator, which we call Ethnological because they are concerned with negative stereotypes and labels within schools that are used to identify Black children. While parents talked about institutionalized racism, they described their motivation to home school as a way to protect their children from the limited possibilities and opportunities schools seemingly present to them.

Parents believed that both boys and girls are judged harshly, but they indicated that school structures and climates were especially destructive for Black males. There is evidence that supports that Black males face even more negative perceptions (Kunjufu 1990, 2005; Madhubuti 1991; Oyserman et al. 1995; Taylor 1991). Researchers state that while young African Americans in general confront a peculiar negotiation of self-conceptualization, there are differences between the socially-constructed identities of African American males and females (Oyserman et al. 1995). African American boys and men have the added burden of being labeled as dangerous, deviant, dumb, and deprived (Madhubuti 1991; Taylor 1991). Parents in this study started home schooling their children because they perceived that their boys, and girls, encountered unconventional and unfair treatment including low expectations and an unwillingness to consider the children's possible giftedness. Teachers' focus on behavior issues instead of promotion of higher academic standards may contribute to the overrepresentation of Blacks students in special education services (Klingner and Edwards 2006).

Recent changes to the federally mandated approach to special education may, in theory, have the potential to begin to reverse the overrepresentation of Black students in special education. Specifically, Response to Intervention (RTI) establishes a pyramid of phases teachers must work through prior to making special education referrals (Fuchs and Fuchs 2006). Although implementation of RTI varies state to state, and sometimes school to school, an underlying benefit of the approach is the shift in focus from students' deficits to an investigation of the classroom environment. Teachers become researchers of their own classrooms collecting data that may suggest a need to modify instructional methods or other aspects of the classroom to meet student needs. As well intentioned as RTI appears, Klingner and Edwards (2006) stress the importance of ensuring that all students have ample opportunity to learn. They state, "This concept of adequate opportunity to learn is a fundamental aspect of the definition of learning disabilities as part of its exclusionary clause: When children have not had sufficient opportunity to learn, the determination cannot be made that they have a learning disability, p. 109." Adequate opportunity to learn requires implementation of cultural responsive instruction. Klingner and Edwards (2006) outline the features of culturally responsive instruction in the field of reading. However, many of these features apply to instruction in general. For example, the authors espouse, "culturally responsive teachers make connections with their students as individuals while understanding the sociocultural historical contexts that influence their interactions, p. 109." Black home educators' perceptions that school environments are destructive to their Black children may have been fed by a lack of consideration of

sociocultural and historical context of African American schooling as well as teachers not making connections for their children.

Frasier et al. (1995a) presents a framework for identifying giftedness, which provides a potential solution to some of the schooling issues raised by this study. Frasier's Talent Assessment Profile (F-TAP) utilizes 10 attributes of giftedness based on characteristics of gifted children found in the research literature. Humor, motivation, interests, insight, and problem-solving ability are among these characteristics. F-TAP is intended to provide a more equitable approach to identifying gifted and talented students than historically used methods of identification, which Frasier et al. (1995b) found created barriers to identification for ethnic-minorities, English as second language students, and low-income students. Traditional methods of identifying gifted and talented students rely largely on teacher observation and referral (Frasier et al. 1995b). However, Frasier et al. (1995b) found that the largest barriers to identification among low-income and English as a second language students included test bias and teachers inability to recognize potential in these groups of children. Utilizing equitable and culturally relevant strategies such as the F-TAP approach to identifying giftedness would empower teachers to look beyond their preconceived notions and possibly begin to recognize and value giftedness in children of color.

In many ways the home school families engaged in this research echo previous studies in voicing their concerns with time commitment, limited personal time, and limited finances due to living on one household income (Knowles 1988; Mayberry 1988; McIntyre and Windham 1995). Families noted that these sacrifices are an integral part in the nature of choosing home education. Nevertheless, the unique position of African American home schoolers also raised some unexpected and unrecognized circumstances that further detail their experiences with sacrifice. Many of the parents described how they choose not to sacrifice their child's education by remaining in the schools to fight the significant problems in schools that affect many African American children.

While trends suggest people are voting with their feet and moving toward an alternative educational method as a way to improve their children's educational experience in doing so their actions affect the larger school and community. Do parents who choose alternatives to public schools consider the students and school system they have left behind? Some African Americans believe home schooling to be an unacceptable educational alternative (Llewellyn 1996). Withdrawing from school to receive private education is viewed by some as undermining the collective effort African Americans have historically exerted for school improvements (Torry 1992). This is seen as a breakdown in the solidarity that has historically existed among Black people (Crosby 1976). However, many public schools have not lived up to their promise to provide equal educational opportunity.

Frustrated with the longstanding negative issues in public schools, some African American families are pursuing educational reform through the refusal of public schooling and home schooling. The families engaged in this study were unwavering in their responsibility to educate their children, however most mentioned they debate with family, friends and community members their issues with the expectation that they were to sacrifice their child's education to struggle with

inequitable schools for the sake of the saving everybody while protesting for better education.

In connection with the parents' description of the challenges presented in home schooling, this study confirmed several findings from other works related to this issue. Gaining access to services, balancing household responsibilities, understanding children's learning styles, working with several children at one time, developing patience, and making learning fun were general comments made by parents in this study and widely noticed in the literature (Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007; Knowles 1988; Llewellyn 1996; Mayberry 1988; Ray 2000; Thomas 2001; Van Galen and Pitman 1991).

In closing, this data adds to existent literature on home schooling by defining components that present challenges and sacrifices but also empower parents to continue home schooling. Through the participants stories this research adds to our knowledge that African American parents have similar concerns of all parents who value their child's educational experience. However what remains strikingly different is that African American parents are motivated to home school because of negative stereotypes they perceive as perpetuated by more traditional school policies and procedures. This distinctive characteristic emphasizes a difference within the home school population, and adds clarity to home school parents' desires to teach their own children.

Acknowledgements The authors are grateful for a Spencer Foundation Small Research Grant that supported the project presented in this article. The statements made with the article however, do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Spencer Foundation.

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