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The Home Schooling Mother–Teacher: Toward a Theory of Social Integration

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As a result of the findings emerging from a two-part research study, I have come to a very surprising and altogether unexpected conclusion concerning the majority of home schooling mother–teachers. They are closet feminists. Not feminists in the classic National-Organization-of-Women sense, mind you, but feminists nonetheless. Whereas the standard dictionary definition of *feminism* is "the doctrine advocating the same social, political, and economic rights for women as for men" (*Wordsmyth English Dictionary*, 1999), I believe that an appropriate definition of feminism—as operative for the home schooling mother—would read "the doctrine advocating the same social, political, and economic rights for home schooling mother–teachers as for the public and/or private educational system." As a group, home schooling mother–teachers are passionate about the education of their children,

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highly informed concerning their legal rights and obligations, unhesitatingly vocal in their opposition to any perceived infringement on or lessening of these rights, and generally suspicious and untrusting of established institutions (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995).

One would scarcely allow that such "radical" feminist-seeming attitudes might spring from a group known to be primarily conservative (77%), Republican (76%), and Christian (approximately 80%; Mayberry et al., 1995, pp. 38–39). Nevertheless, the results of a quantitative and qualitative research study on the perceived impact of home schooling on the family in general and mother–teacher in particular led to this conclusion. The results led in particular to the formation of a theory of social integration, of which the previously cited "feminist factor" is an integral part.

It is the purpose of the article to present—as briefly and concisely as possible—the details of the qualitative portion of this research study in terms of its (a) methodology; (b) research questions; (c) participant and site selection; and (d) analysis and interpretation of interview, observational, and document data. The final section includes appropriate conclusions and details the extrapolation of these conclusions into a theory of social integration.

Although the findings of the quantitative study are mentioned in the concluding section of this article, that particular portion of the research is not detailed here for the simple reason that its findings—although supportive of the qualitative study's findings—did not lead directly to the theory of social integration that is the subject of this article. In brief, the quantitative study indicated that the home schooling mother–teachers surveyed believed that the process of home schooling had a positive impact on both their families and themselves. Given its nature, however, the quantitative[1] study could only tell us *how* home schooling mother–teachers felt, not *why* they felt the way they did. It was the qualitative study, detailed in the following sections, that provided some fascinating answers to that question.

Methodology

Selection of Research Design

Qualitative research presents the ideal framework with which to investigate the perceptions of the mother–teacher regarding home schooling and its impact on both the family and herself, as one of the tenets of its research is the importance of letting the participants speak, and hearing the

[1]For a detailed look at the quantitative portion of this research study, please see McDowell (1998).

participants speak, in their own voices. As LeCompte and Preissle (1993) pointed out, ethnographers "who describe cultural and behavioral patterns as they are viewed by the group under investigation reconstruct the categories that participants use to conceptualize their own experiences and world view" (p. 45). As home schoolers are the ones dealing with and living with—in every sense of the word—the home schooling process, they were logically the ones to inform the researcher about its perceived impact on family structure, roles, responsibilities, and so forth.

Qualitative methodology is particularly conducive to this variety of research; the only question remaining is what specific type of qualitative methodology to employ. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), "Qualitative research may be conducted in dozens of ways" (p. 5). For purposes of this research study, a grounded theory qualitative methodology was used; this methodology employs a social anthropological approach to data analysis:

> [It] stays close to the naturalist profile ... extended contact with a given community, concern for mundane, day-to-day events, as well as for unusual ones, direct or indirect participation in local activities, with particular care given to the description of local particularities. (p. 8)

Grounded theory—in direct contrast to the quantitative portion of this study—is inductive in approach, as LeCompte and Preissle (1993) explained:

> In a sense, deductive researchers hope to find data to match a theory; inductive researchers hope to find a theory that explains their data. ... That is, inductive research starts with examination of a phenomenon and then, from successive examinations of similar and dissimilar phenomena, develops a theory to explain what was studied. (p. 42)

Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss are, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, "generally credited with having coined the term" (p. 205) *grounded theory*. It is "theory that follows from data rather than preceding them" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 204). Glaser and Strauss (1967), in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, explained that "the basic theme in our book is the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (p. 2). They elaborated on this concept further by explaining that

> [Theory] must fit the situation being researched, and work when put into use. By "fit" we mean that the categories must be readily (not forcibly) applicable to and indicated by the data under study; by "work" we mean that they must be meaningfully relevant to and be able to explain the behavior under study. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3)

Over the last several years, Glaser and Strauss evidently have become sharply divided in their individual beliefs concerning the true definition of grounded theory, especially as concerns the "readily (not forcibly)" element described previously. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), Glaser continues to clarify "his own strongly inductive, emergent approach as the true version of grounded theory development, and suggests that Strauss's later work should be called 'full conceptual description'" (p. 238).

Because this research study used a guiding research question, Glaser most likely would consider that a true and pure version of grounded theory was not employed. However, as Miles and Huberman (1994) so logically pointed out,

> Highly inductive, loosely designed studies make good sense when experienced researchers have plenty of time and are exploring exotic cultures, understudied phenomena, or very complex social phenomena. But if you're new to qualitative studies, and are looking at a better understood phenomenon within a familiar culture or subculture, a loose, inductive design may be a waste of time. ... As Wolcott (1982) puts it, there is merit in openmindedness and willingness to enter a research setting looking for questions as well as answers, but it is "impossible to embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit" (p. 157). (p. 17)

As I was researching within the framework of a very familiar culture, a somewhat "tighter" (as in using a guiding research question) as opposed to a "looser" grounded theory approach was called for and implemented.

Research Methods

To provide effective triangulation, the research methods chosen for this study included (a) interviews, (b) observations, and (c) document analysis (home schooling magazines, newsletters, and Internet web sites). Each of these elements is detailed in the following sections.

Interviews. The researcher interviewed a total of nine home schooling mothers, with the interviews taking place in a variety of locations, including the home schoolers' homes ($n = 5$), a large library at a church where two home schooling mothers worked part-time ($n = 2$), a conference room ($n = 1$), and a restaurant ($n = 1$). With the participant's permission, each interview was audiotaped, with the researcher privately dictating notes about

details of the interview (setting, impressions, etc.) into a cassette recorder immediately after each interview took place. To establish validity, transcripts of interviews were returned to participants for their approval.[2]

Observations. To conduct observations—the second element of the qualitative triangulated approach—in the most effective manner possible, a Checklist of Observational Elements was adapted from Merriam's (1988) *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach.* This checklist was not physically carried to either interviews or observations, but I did endeavor to maintain an awareness of its elements throughout the observation process. I also took to heart other recommendations offered by Merriam (1988):

- Observers should be relatively passive and unobtrusive, put people at ease, learn how to act and dress in the setting.
- Collecting data is secondary to becoming familiar with the setting.
- Keep the first observations fairly short to avoid becoming overwhelmed with the novelty of the situation.
- Be honest but not overly technical or detailed in explaining what you are doing. (p. 91)

The actual observations of home schooling families took place (a) during the interview process itself, (b) at the 11th Annual Family Resource Fair sponsored by the Smoky Mountain Chapter of the Tennessee Home Education Association, (c) during a visit to a church attended primarily by home schoolers (The Church with the Home Schooling Heart), (d) while attending two distinct "learning" seminars presented by another local church and aimed specifically at home schooling parents and children, (e) during the 13th Annual Middle Tennessee Home Educators Association (MTHEA) conference held at another local church, and (f) while participating in a home schooling group's skating party. Photographs were taken at the curriculum fair (the 11th Annual Family Resource Fair), the conference of the MTHEA, and the skating party. Out of respect for the participants—and the inappropriateness of photography in the midst of these events—no photographs were taken during observations that were reli-

[2]Each participant was assigned a code name/number containing essential description information about the interviewee. For example, the participant who was coded "P3-I&P-Info1" was the third participant to be interviewed ("P3"), gave both ideological and pedagogical reasons as being equally important in the decision to home school ("I&P"), and was the first informant giving names of other potential study participants ("Info1"). For ease of discussion, participants also were assigned appropriate pseudonyms.

gious in nature (i.e., attendance at a service of The Church with the Home Schooling Heart and the two "Learning How to Learn" seminars, which were offered as a part of a regular Wednesday night church service).

Analysis of documents. The analysis of documents included examination of newsletters distributed by three home schooling organizations ("Smoke Signals," from the Smoky Mountain Chapter of the Tennessee Home Education Association; "Heart"—an acronym for "Home Educators Are Rutherford's Treasures"—from a home schooling group in Rutherford County, Tennessee; and "Family Christian Academy Newsletter: Dedicated to Helping Home Educators," published by the academy of the same name in a middle Tennessee county). Also examined were several home schooling magazines, and 61 home schooling sites on the Internet (for the full text of the literature review, as well as a listing of the home schooling Internet sites visited, see McDowell, 1998).

Research Questions

The Guiding Research Question

The guiding research question for the qualitative portion of this research project was, as was noted earlier, What effect does home schooling, as perceived by the mothers–teachers engaged in it, have on the family in general and the home schooling mother in particular?

Research Probes

Selected study participants (i.e., the mother–teacher in the home schooling family) were asked some very general questions—of a variety appropriate for a grounded theory approach—intended to simply "get the participant talking" about home schooling. Following is a list of the primary questions asked each participant, although, to preserve the conversational "feel" of an interview, they were not necessarily asked in the order presented:

1. How many children do you have? How many do you home school?
2. How long have you home schooled?
3. Why did you decide to home school?
4. Please describe a typical home schooling day.
5. What do you like best about home schooling?

6. What do you like least about home schooling?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to say about home schooling?

Selection and Recruitment of Participants

Selection and Sampling

Although some research into home schooling finds that only "89% of parent/tutors are female" (Lines, 1991, p. 17), other data conclude that "mothers were virtually always the primary teacher" (p. 17). Mayberry et al. (1995) reported that

> the results of previous studies demonstrated that the tasks associated with running home-based education programs were almost always carried out by mothers not employed in the paid labor force (Gladin, 1987; Mayberry, 1988; Wartes, 1988). Our study supports that finding: 63% of the mothers that we surveyed are responsible for 90% or more of the day-to-day operation of the home school. (p. 32)

Clearly, the major figure in home schooling—other than the children, of course—is the mother. As a result, this study interviewed and observed home schooling families wherein the mother was the primary instructor.

From this group of home schooling families, three smaller subsets were selected.[3] Miles and Huberman (1994) termed this sampling strategy "stratified purposeful," in that it "illustrates subgroups" and "facilitates comparisons" (p. 28). The first subset, made up of three families, consisted of those whose primary reason for home schooling was given as ideological (religious/philosophical). The second subset, composed of four families, consisted of those who cited pedagogical (academic/curriculum) concerns as their primary reason for choosing to home school. The final subset, made up of two families, consisted of those who cited ideological and pedagogical reasons as being equally important and as bearing equal weight in their decision to home school. The first two subsets were based on data that indicated that all the reasons given by families for home schooling could be condensed into two basic categories—the ideological and the pedagogical (Kutter, 1987; Van Galen, 1986). The third subset was added as a result of actual home schooling mother interview experiences.

Another sampling strategy was implemented, in conjunction with the stratified purposeful strategy cited previously, that strategy being the

[3]It should be noted that all mother–teachers interviewed were White.

"snowball" or "chain" strategy. This sampling approach "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). Because it was my intent to sample as wide and as diverse a population as possible, I used the services of more than one informant and, as a result, had several small "snowballs" rather than one large one.

Recruitment

Despite admonitions similar to the ones other researchers have experienced—"drop the home schoolers because they are way too secretive and will never let you in" (Page, 1996, p. 107)—I felt confident of easy admission and acceptance into home schoolers' homes, organizations, and functions. The reasons for this confidence were based primarily on a close relationship with my sister, who has home schooled her son for the past 8 years. In the role of sister, friend, and aunt, I have on occasion accompanied my home schooling sister to home schooling curriculum fairs, meetings, and group field trips. I believe that the reason I was not perceived as an outsider with possible negative intent, but was accepted and trusted by study participants, was due to this relationship.

Selection of Sites

The settings for this study included (a) homes wherein home schooling took place; (b) a church library, wherein some home schooling took place on a limited scale; (c) a department at a business, which served as the primary site of home schooling for one family; and (d) the different places where home schoolers gather for group events (see previous section Research Methods). According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), "ethnographers must work in settings where behavior occurs naturally. They must go to their participants" (p. 95). The fact that the investigator conducted research on home schoolers in their own homes, at other places wherein home schooling took place, and at group events is evidence that this criteria was met in this research study.

Analysis of the Data

The data gathered in the qualitative portion of this study were analyzed using a tailored version of Wolcott's (1994) three-phase approach: description, analysis, and interpretation. Given the necessarily limited scope of this article, however, only the analysis and interpretation of data are presented and discussed here.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Interview Data

Analysis

As I studied, read, and reread the transcripts of these interviews, certain elements seemed to emerge again and again. Any subject or topic area that surfaced in more than one interview was considered an element, or finding, and is therefore presented as a microcategory. The larger categories—within which entire interviews clearly belonged and could be placed—are presented as macrocategories. The microcategories are detailed in the following section.

Microcategories. The 11 categories that emerged from the nine interviews conducted included (a) "Flexibility," (b) "Home Schooling as a Stress Reducer," (c) "Socialization," (d) "Children Actually Teach Themselves," (e) "Other Home Schoolers," (f) "The Public and/or Private Schools," (g) "Housework," (h) "Concerns Regarding Personal Shortcomings as a Teacher," (i) "Testing Home Schoolers," (j) "Attention Deficit Disorder," and (k) "Racial Tensions in the Public Schools." As was noted previously, each of these elements surfaced in at least two different interviews.

Macrocategories. When considering these interviews on a larger scale, clear similarities and some startling differences began to emerge and form two distinct categories of home schooling mothers, categories that I termed the *classic home schoolers* and the *pseudo home schoolers*. *Pseudo* was chosen as the appropriate term for the latter group because one of its definitions is "apparently similar" (Morris, 1985, p. 999). In that all of the participants interviewed were home schooling their children—at least in the technical sense—they are apparently similar. However, as the following discussion makes clear, several surprising and important differences existed between some of the participants interviewed.

Two of the interviews—the ones with "Cissy" (P7-Ped) and "Susie" (P8-Ped-Info4)—clearly had a different feel to them. Although both women were pleasant, neither one displayed the sometimes fervent, impassioned enthusiasm for home schooling evidenced by the other interviewees. Further meditation on these interviews—along with frequent review of the transcripts and field notes—revealed other ways in which Cissy's and Susie's interviews were similar to each other, but different from the other seven interviews. For example, when I interviewed all the other home schooling mothers, the children were eager to talk to me—showing me some of their projects, playing a musical instrument for me, voluntarily engaging me in conversation, and otherwise displaying

an open and friendly attitude toward "the lady who came to talk about home schooling." I could not help but notice the different attitudes displayed by Cissy's and Susie's children. Cissy's home-schooled daughter had informed her mother that she "didn't want to talk to me," and, when I actually met the daughter during the course of the interview, she would not make eye contact with me or respond in any way to my smile and greeting. Similarly, Susie's children—whom I met briefly before they left for other activities—although mannerly, clearly did not want to talk to me. They barely smiled, and everything about their facial expressions and body language fairly screamed, "Get me out of here—I don't want to talk to her."

I found this particular aspect of the interviews to be extremely interesting. Despite the fact that I stressed to all the participants prior to the interviews that I would be interviewing home schooling mothers only and would not be interviewing the children, almost all the children of the other seven participants were eager to show or tell me something about their schooling. Whereas Cissy's and Susie's children were, in effect, pushing me away, the other interviewees' children were almost—sometimes literally—embracing me. I might have thought this difference in attitude to be a factor of the children's age, as both Cissy's and Susie's children were teenagers, were it not for the fact that three of the other home-schooled children were also in their teenage years.

It also came to light during analysis of these interviews that, out of all 11 categories discussed previously, Cissy and Susie made comments only about 4, those 4 including opinions about the public schools (Cissy), other home schoolers (Cissy), racial tensions in the public schools (Cissy), and housework (Susie). None of the other most frequently raised topics (e.g., flexibility, home schooling as a stress reducer, socialization issues, etc.) emerged from the interviews with Cissy and Susie.

Another obvious similarity between Cissy and Susie is the fact that they both have full-time jobs, despite their home schooling responsibilities. Although several of the other interviewees worked on a part-time basis, their responsibilities in no way interfered with their ability to be home with their children on a consistent basis. "Laura's" part-time business was operated from her home, and both "Evelyn's" and "Blanche's" part-time positions at the church library included time to work with their children. Even "Janice," who managed to run a highly successful business, informed me that not only is she able to price her products at any time of the day or night as is convenient for her, but she also takes her daughters with her on business trips. It could be argued that Cissy's daughter is also with her mother for a better portion of the day, but the extent of Cissy's actual involvement with her daughter during the work day is unclear.

Perhaps the most profound difference in these two sets of interviews has to do with the actual reason for home schooling. Whereas home schooling was a choice carefully considered and ultimately decided on by the other home schoolers, Cissy and Susie seemed to find themselves, or at least to feel themselves, forced into home schooling. Cissy obviously felt great frustration with her daughter's progress in public school and saw home schooling as an option that she was more or less forced into by her daughter's poor academic performance. Whereas other home schoolers also experienced frustration with the public schools, they seemed to feel irritated with the schools, not with their children. In brief, Cissy seemed to feel that having to home school was her daughter's fault—that her daughter's lack of achievement had forced her into an educational alternative that, as she informed me, she had heretofore clearly disdained. One of Cissy's comments—that if her daughter did not do her work and tried to "call her bluff" again (by not doing well in school), she would "pull her butt out of school so fast it would make her head spin!"—even makes it sound as if she used home schooling as a form of punishment. That Susie was also forced into home schooling as an educational option is obvious, as her son was expelled from public school, and private schools—as she informed me—were less than willing to accept him as a result.

Obviously, then, both Cissy and Susie were forced—in one way or another—into home schooling their children. It is also interesting to note that the adoption of home schooling as the educational alternative of choice did not result in any immediately perceivable lifestyle change for either. Both continued their full-time occupations, presumably making minor adjustments as necessary to accommodate their new responsibilities. Such a schooling arrangement is a far cry from that of the other interviewees, for whom home schooling is more or less a full-time job in and of itself.

Clearly, Cissy and Susie form a very different class of home schooling mothers, a class that some home schoolers would likely argue does not even involve real home schooling. As a result, Cissy and Susie fall into the pseudo home schoolers category, and all the rest of the home schoolers interviewed fall easily into the classic home schoolers category, based on the similarity of (a) the interaction with the participant and their family and (b) the content of discussion.

In sum, the components emerging from analysis of the interviews included two major elements—the microcategories and the macrocategories. As noted previously, the microcategories are flexibility, home schooling as a stress reducer, socialization, children actually teach themselves, other home schoolers, housework, public/private schools, personal shortcomings as a teacher, testing home schoolers, attention deficit disorder, and racial tensions in the public schools; macrocategories are classic home

schoolers and pseudo home schoolers. How this analysis of the interview data may best be interpreted is addressed in the following section.

Interpretation

What is the perceived impact of home schooling on the family in general and the mother in particular, according to data gleaned from the interviews? From analysis of the interviews and their emergent categories, it is clear that those home schoolers who feel forced to home school their children (the pseudo home schoolers) are quite unlike the classic or mainstream home schoolers, and that this difference is reflected in both their children's demeanors and, possibly, in the quality of the relationship between parent and child. It is quite possible that an undercurrent of anger exists—in that the child somehow "forced" the parent to accept the additional responsibility of home schooling—and that this anger permeates the home schooling process and the parent–child relationship in a manner that is detrimental to both. Clearly, the manner in which the decision to home school is reached greatly influences the overall positive or negative "feel" of the home schooling process and, as a result, the perceived impact of home schooling on the mother–teacher and the family.

Most of the microcategories that emerged in analysis of the interview data deal directly with the perceived impact of home schooling on both the mother and the family. Insofar as the family is concerned—especially the children—the home schooling mother–teachers interviewed clearly believed that their children were positively impacted in terms of family flexibility; socialization; dealing with diagnosed attention deficit disorder; and the problems confronted in the public/private schools, including racial tensions.

In regard to the mother–teacher herself, although the elements of personal shortcomings as a teacher and housework were clearly concerns for many home schooling mothers, the other "jewels" (Janice—P1-Id) received from home schooling were obviously believed to outweigh these somewhat negative factors. These positive elements include, as previously set out, flexibility, children being able to teach themselves, and home schooling as a stress reducer.

In sum, then, the data gleaned from the interviews informed us that, despite any negatives discussed, many classic home schoolers find home schooling to be more of a stress-reducing, rather than a stress-inducing, educational alternative. The reasons for this include the flexibility ascribed by home schooling mothers to the adoption of home schooling, as well as the freedom from worry—worry about what might happen physically and/or emotionally to their children during the school day, worry about what cur-

riculum might be taught to their children, and so forth. Granted, concern about their children's learning continues unabated during home schooling, but at least the mothers know how and what their children are being taught. This combination of family flexibility and less worry concerning their children's welfare turns the process of home schooling—at least for many home schooling mother–teachers—into an actual stress-reducer.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Observational Data

Analysis

As noted, the six observations included attendance at and/or participation in (a) the home schooling curriculum fair in Knoxville, Tennessee; (b) a church service at the self-titled Church with the Home Schooling Heart; (c) a "Learning How to Learn" Seminar, Part I; (d) a second "Learning How to Learn" Seminar, Part II; (e) the 13th Annual MTHEA Conference; and (f) a home schooling skate party. During the observations, certain elements emerged consistently. These elements included noted characteristics of home schooling parents, as well as their home-schooled children.

At each observation, the home schooling parents were observed to be pleasant, relaxed, and friendly in their demeanor. These same characteristics were shared with their children, who were observed to behave in similar fashion in many differing situations (e.g., the curriculum fair, church services, the conference, skating party, etc.). In both the curriculum fair and the skating party observations, home schooling parents also proved themselves to be eager to help others.

Another characteristic of home schooling parents that emerged from many of the observations has to do with how very well-informed the vast majority of these people appear to be concerning home schooling regulations, legal issues, and research. Intelligent discussion of these issues and other pertinent matters could be overheard at the curriculum fair, the church service, and even the conference. The final characteristic that emerged is closely tied to this last one, as it has to do with the fact that home schoolers are not only very well-informed as a group, but they seem determined to remain well-informed. That this is true is evidenced by their willingness to attend the numerous informative seminars and workshops offered at the curriculum fair and the conference, as well as the seminars offered as part of a Wednesday night church service.

In sum, then, analysis of the observational data revealed that both home schooling parents and their children are consistently pleasant, relaxed, and friendly. Further analysis indicated that, as a group, home schoolers are

eager to be helpful to others, very well-informed, and determined to remain well-informed.

Interpretation

According to information gleaned from analysis of the observational data, home schooling parents and their children are consistently pleasant, relaxed, and friendly. These data coincide precisely with the interpretation of interviews advanced previously—that is, that home schooling acts for many as a stress-reducing agent.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Document Data

Analysis

The documents used in this portion of the research included three newsletters from three home schooling organizations, a literature review of home schooling magazines, and a visit to 61 home schooling web sites on the Internet. The one quality common to all these differing documents was their clearly informative purpose. All of the newsletters, magazines, and Internet sites were, first and foremost, providers of information regarding all facets of home schooling.

Another emerging element—the element of home schooling promotion—was seen most obviously in the professionally produced and nationally distributed *Family Christian Academy Newsletter*, although many of the home schooling magazines could be termed, arguably, as promotional as well. The importance of encouragement of home schoolers as an element also surfaced most notably in the magazines and occasionally on the Internet web sites.

Document analysis revealed, then, that the informational aspect of the documents was a universal one, that the promotional aspect could be found in both newsletters and magazines, and that encouragement as an emerging element could be found in both magazines and Internet sites.

Interpretation

Despite the presence of articles dealing with stress and similar issues in many of the magazines analyzed in document analysis, it does not necessarily follow, according to the interview and observational data, that home

schooling mother–teachers experience any more stress than the average individual living in modern-day America. In fact, many of the home schooling mothers, by their own admission, experience much less stress as a result of home schooling than they did beforehand.

Summary

In essence, the interpretation of the analyzed data from the interviews, observations, and data analysis confirms—or at least, in the case of document analysis, does not disallow—the basic finding that for many home schooling mother–teachers, home schooling acts as a stress-reducing educational alternative. An in-depth examination and detailed discussion of all the findings gleaned from the qualitative data is presented in the following section.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

What is the perceived impact of home schooling on the family in general and the mother–teacher in particular? In the qualitative portion of this research study, research in the form of (a) nine interviews with home schooling mother–teachers who chose to home school for a variety of reasons, (b) observations of six different home schooling events, and (c) analysis of documents (including three newsletters from different home schooling organizations, home schooling magazines, and 61 different home schooling web sites on the Internet) provides a solid basis from which to draw appropriate conclusions.

Data drawn from these three areas of research should serve to either confirm or repudiate the central thesis emerging from the data. In the classic triangulation of results, analysis of the interview, observation, and document analysis data should reveal similar—or at least not contradictory—findings. At first glance, the findings from all the research areas in this study do not appear to converge particularly well. I would argue, however, that they do.

As was noted earlier, the results of both the interview analysis and the observation analysis reinforce the finding that—at least for classic home schoolers—home schooling can act as a stress-reducing agent. The only research area that would not seem to confirm this finding is the document analysis, which included analysis of several magazine articles that dealt with issues of stress in home schooling. As was noted in the literature review, however, the number of articles, letters to the editor, and so forth detailing the stresses of home schooling was much lower than of those

proclaiming the joys and "pluses" of home schooling. Apparently, then, the presence of "stress" articles in home schooling magazines does not, in and of itself, bear witness to the fact that home schooling increases a mother–teacher's stress level. Such articles simply may seek to help the mother–teacher with the stresses she may encounter, although these stresses actually may be "less stressful" than those she encountered prior to adoption of home schooling.

In the final analysis, the data gleaned from analysis of the qualitative data provide the following response to the research question guiding this study (i.e., What is the perceived impact of home schooling on the family in general and the mother–teacher in particular?) and include the following elements:

1. Classic home schoolers (those who choose home schooling as their educational alternative and who do not work full-time outside the home) apparently experience home schooling differently and in a more positive manner than do pseudo home schoolers (those who feel "forced" into home schooling and who continue to work on a full-time basis outside the home).
2. Many classic home schoolers perceive home schooling to have a positive impact on their families, especially in terms of (a) family flexibility; (b) socialization; (c) dealing with diagnosed attention deficit disorder; and (d) the problems confronted in the public/private schools, including problematic racial tensions.
3. Many classic home schooling mother–teachers perceive home schooling to have a positive impact on their personal lives, in that the addition of home schooling apparently serves as a stress-reducing educational alternative. This positive aspect of home schooling obviously outweighs the negatives of housework problems and concerns about personal shortcomings as a teacher. Clearly, the element of control that home schooling introduces has much to do with the perceived lessening of stress levels.

Discussion

The quantitative methodology informed us, among other things, that the home schooling mother–teachers who participated in the survey judged the impact of home schooling on their families and themselves to be a positive one, while from the qualitative methodology emerges, among other things, a theory of home schooling as a stress-reducing educational alternative. If, indeed, home schooling can and does function as a stress-reducing endeavor for the mother–teacher, does this fact alone account for the overwhelmingly positive response from mother–teachers

concerning home schooling's impact found in the results of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies? Possibly, but not necessarily, and certainly not probably. One possible answer to this question can be found, I believe, in the highly empowering process of social integration.

Social integration involves and pertains to several aspects of an individual's life, the chief of which may be termed *social capital.* According to Coleman (1987), social capital is made up of "the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for children's growing up" (p. 36). It is a regrettable fact that the norms and values of parents are not always afforded the attention they should or could be by public school professionals when policies are decided and implemented, as Crowson (1998) noted:

> Despite many observations of progress in school-community relations, there remain indications, however, of a deeply significant and yet inadequately addressed problem. In a nutshell, the central remaining test in a successfully adaptive professionalism (vis-à-vis parents and the community) lies within a single construct ...: governance. (p. 57)

Crowson (1998) also discussed the lack of empowerment of parents by educational professionals, due, at least in part, to the fact that

> the need to preserve strong norms of professional discretion against privacy-minded parents and narrow-minded communities has been a theme of professionalism in education since the work of Waller (1932). Generations of school officials have been trained around the dangers of losing control to the politics of their communities. Even modern-day efforts to be much more inclusive (in recognition of the importance of parents for effective learning) have typically ended up as subtle sets of exclusions. (p. 63)

In undertaking home schooling, I believe that home schooling mother–teachers are simply taking themselves out of the sometimes tense, often antagonistic school–community equation. They are taking for themselves that which was not freely offered—that is, power, governance, and control as concerns important aspects of their children's education. In taking charge, however, mother–teachers not only assume control of their children's education, but they also assume a new level of control in their own lives, because home schooling affords them the opportunity to more fully integrate and implement into their lives their personal values, norms, and beliefs about their roles and the appropriate enactment of those roles. In sum, then, the element of social integration that home schooling can of-

fer can be an extraordinarily empowering one to the mother–teacher. It is the "feminist" element presented and discussed at the beginning of this article. This element, in combination with the stress-reducing aspects of home schooling, helps to explain, if only in part, the surprisingly consistent and overwhelmingly positive response from mother–teachers in regard to home schooling and its impact.

Conclusions

What can be concluded from this research study? Bearing in mind that both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the project are extremely limited in their generalizability—in that the quantitative survey was a nonprobability one that used a convenience-type sampling and that qualitative research is almost inherently nongeneralizable—the following conclusions may be loosely and generally drawn:

1. Mother–teachers perceive home schooling to have a positive impact on both their families and themselves. Indeed, some mother–teachers seem to indicate that home schooling acts as a stress-reducing educational alternative. It also may be argued that the element of social integration that the home schooling process allows can be a highly empowering one to the mother–teacher.
2. Insofar as survey response is concerned, there is no statistically significant difference in mother–teacher response by (a) reason given for home schooling, (b) income level, (c) number of children home schooled, or (d) number of years spent home schooling.
3. The major stressors in the lives of home schooling mother–teachers involve housework and concerns about their children learning what they need to be learning.
4. Those home schooling mother–teachers who are "forced" or who "feel" forced into home schooling experience the process of home schooling in a more negative way than do those home schoolers who would be considered traditional (classic) home schoolers.
5. Generally speaking, home schooling mother–teachers were found to be (a) pleasant, relaxed, and friendly; (b) eager to be helpful; (c) very well-informed; and (d) determined to remain well-informed; home-schooled children also were found to be pleasant, relaxed, and friendly.

There is little doubt that home schooling is an important and rapidly growing educational movement. Some observers of the educational establishment even predict that the influence exerted by this movement will not only increase but also spread into areas other than education, as Belz (1997) noted:

> What special interest group in American society right now may be most effective at lobbying the U.S. Congress? If you guessed that it's a band of educators, you'd be right. But if you picked the National Education Association—the very liberal union of public school teachers that is so active in public affairs—you might well be wrong these days. For according to Rep. William Goodling (R–PA), a 22-year veteran of Congress and chairman now of the influential Education and Labor Committee, the home schoolers of our country, and especially those associated with the Home School Legal Defense Association, have developed more expertise than any other group in getting the attention of our nation's lawmakers. ...
>
> I would suggest that Rep. Goodling's high praise of home schoolers for their ability to win points in Congress may represent no more than the tip of an iceberg—that it's only a precursor of other ways in which home schoolers may more and more shape society far out of proportion to their numbers and acceptability to the rest of society.
>
> That will happen only partly because of the effectiveness of the educational methodology these people are committed to. It will happen even more because of the kind of people they tend to be, and the things they believe about matters other than education. (p. 5)

Given the rapidly expanding size of the home schooling movement and its concurrently increasing influence on a national level, research into the many aspects and facets of the home schooling movement is essential. It is to be hoped that this study, which probed the perceived impact of home schooling on the family in general and the mother–teacher in particular, may shed some light, albeit a faint one, on the increasingly important and increasingly vocal home schooling family.

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