

The Hidden Curriculum of Home Learning in Ten LDS Families

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved November 2012 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2012

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the hidden curriculum of home learning, through participant observation of ten families, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), who chose to educate their children at home. The term “hidden curriculum” is typically used to describe the values and behaviors that are taught to students implicitly, through the structure and organization of formal schooling. I used the concept of hidden curriculum as a starting point for understanding how the organization and process of home learning might also convey lessons to its participants, lessons that are not necessarily an explicit object of study in the home. Using naturalistic inquiry and a multiple case study method, I spent a minimum of ten hours each with ten families, five who homeschool and five who unschool. Through questionnaires, taped interviews, and observation, I documented typical home learning practices and purposes. These families were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling to reflect a diversity of approaches to home learning. Key findings were organized into four main categories that incorporated the significant elements of the hidden curriculum of these homes: relationships, time, the learning process, and technology. The study offers three main contributions to the literature on home learning, to families, whether their children attend public schools or not, to policy makers and educators, and to the general public. First, in the case of these LDS families, their religious beliefs significantly shaped the hidden curriculum and specifically impacted relationships, use of time, attitudes about learning, and engagement with technology. Second, lines were blurred between unschooling and homeschooling practices, similar to the overlap found in self-reports and other discussions of home learning. Third, similar to families who do

not home school, these families sought to achieve a balance in children's use of technology and other educational approaches. Lastly, I discuss the significant challenges that lay in defining curriculum, overt as well as hidden, in the context of home learning.

This research contributes insights into alternative ways of educating children that can inform parents and educators of effective elements of other paradigms. In defining their own educational success, these families model the kind of teaching and learning advocated by professionals but that remain elusive in institutionalized education, inviting a re-thinking of and discussions about the "one best system" approach.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my vast family for their support, especially my husband, Gary, along with the ten families who participated with me in this research project. It was particularly enjoyable to work on this doctorate following our son-in-law, Jason, and at the same time that our sons Ryan, Kevin, and Tim were working on theirs.

I likewise could not have succeeded without the encouragement and guidance of wonderful committee members, Drs. Elisabeth Hayes, Christian Faltis, and Kellie Rolstad.

Dr. Hayes sought special permission to be my advisor and her assistance was invaluable and positive patience legendary. Dr. Faltis agreed as emeritus faculty to serve on my committee at a difficult time. Dr. Rolstad's class on unschooling sparked the fire of interest in this research. Thank you all.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the most universally recognizable institutions is that of school. “The prevalence of mass education is a striking feature of the modern world,” claim Boli et al. “Education has spread rapidly in the last two centuries, becoming a compulsory, essentially universal institution” that involves nearly one-fifth of the global population (Boli et al., 1985, p. 145). Everywhere appearance and function are remarkably consistent and coherent: school is a place where students and teachers gather for a specific learning purpose commonly called a curriculum.

Curriculum originally referred to one’s “course of life”, or calling – presumably from a higher source – to pursue a higher path or vocation (McKnight, 2004, p. 105; see also Eisner, 1979; Ellis, 2004; Marsh, 2009; Pinar et al., 1995). The definition transformed over time to mean specific content areas to be studied such as math, science, and history, or the collection of subjects in a course. According to educator and author Parker Palmer there was also a shift from inner, personal meaning to “a spectator sport with little internal relevance” (McKnight, 2004, p. 105). Particular subjects came to be regarded as sources of power and prestige that were financially or academically advantageous which in turn narrowed and deepened the scope until each subject was self-contained and separately administered and eventually accepted as an official school curriculum (McKnight, 2004).

The “common”, or public schools of nineteenth century America, however, were instituted and promoted on an entirely different type of curriculum, a binary platform of religious and civic instruction designed to shape attitudes, behaviors,

and beliefs of young citizens in the face of failing homes and churches and societal upheaval associated with immigration (Cremin 1982; Gaither, 2008a; Gatto, 2006; Glenn, 1988; Kaestle, 1983; Kirschner, 1991; Spring, 2008; Tyack, 1974; Vallance, 1973/1974).

Historical events such as the Civil War, industrialization, and the space race of the twentieth century presented continuous opportunities for reformers to wrangle over political and curricular control of schools and push for compulsory attendance. The ideological focus of early public schools was not replaced but simply remained the source of social control through attitude and behavior management as the overt curriculum of content areas was layered on top. Submerged under increasingly complex and numerous academic subjects, the original school purpose consequently became referred to as the “hidden curriculum” which Jackson sums up as *crowds, praise, and power* (1968, p. 9). The hidden curriculum consists of the “unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through the underlying structure of meaning in both the formal content as well as the social relations of school and classroom life” (Giroux & Penna, 1979, p. 22). The lessons learned are not only academic but behavioral – waiting, obeying, speaking only with permission, and acquiescence.

Through the hidden curriculum are transmitted clear messages regarding what counts, what is valued, and what matters, not just in learning but in the students themselves. Although it is not part of the lesson plan nor formally acknowledged, the hidden curriculum is integral to the structural functionalism of schools (Hansen et al., 2007).

A significant amount of attention has been directed at the hidden curriculum of schools, what it is, what it means, and what it does, particularly to

children (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Hansen et al., 2007; Jackson, 1968; Reynolds & Webber, 2004). Not surprisingly, there are unintended consequences to imposing on children the unnatural behaviors of crowding, sitting still for long periods of time, public evaluation, categorization, and absolute, authoritative control by strangers. Significant is the reconstruction of a child's sense of identity (Burke, 1991; Hammond, 2009; Hogg et al., 1995; Schacter & Ventura, 2008; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker, 1968; Thoits, 1991) and incursions on creativity, curiosity, learning desires, and beliefs (Bach, 2009; Gatto, 2006, 2005, 1996; Holt, 1982, 1983; Lightfoot, 1978; Olson, 2009; Pope, 2001).

Problems

When "private choices based upon conscience and beliefs are subject to the approval of the majority," and enactment of a publicly sponsored orthodoxy is imposed upon the captive children of the nation's schools, conflict is inevitable (Arons, 1983, pp. ix). The battle for America's curriculum has become a permanent aspect of institutionalized education (Arons, 1983; Cutler, 2000; Gatto, 2006; Kliebard, 1994; McKnight, 2004). Predictably, as official curriculum shifted from a Christian perspective to secular humanism, Christian conservative families were troubled. Libertarians chafed at increased State interference. Advocates of humane and democratic treatment of children rebelled. Parents, as "educational vigilantes," took matters into their own hands and homes (Richardson & Zirkel, 1991, p 159). State by state opponents of institutionalized schools battled for the right of parental control over their children's learning, a victory claimed in 1993 (Arons, 1983; Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Gaither 2008; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Klicka, 1995; Lines, 1994b; Richardson & Zirkel, 1991; Stevens, 2001; Witte, 2002).

This was the beginning of a new war, however, brought on by those concerned about unsupervised, unregulated, and unmeasured learning of an unnumbered quantity of children throughout the land (Apple, 2000, 2005, 2007; Baxter, 2010; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Blokius, 2010; Evans, 2003; Hamilton, 2010; Lubienski, 2000; Reich, 2004; Ross, 2010; West, 2009; Yuracko, 2008). Controversy continues over curriculum content and underlying practices relative to parental control, indoctrination of specific religious and moral beliefs and behaviors, and socialization practices.

Many studies investigate achievement, socialization, activities, and rationales of families who educate at home (Bauman 2002; Belfield 2005; Isenberg, 2007; Lines, 2000; Lyman, 2000; Mayberry, 1988; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003, 2009; Princiota & Bielick 2006; Ray 2011, 2005, 2004a, 2002, 1997; Ray & Wartes 1991; Rudner 1999). What has escaped significant study – due largely to the necessity of in-home observations of families already suspicious of scrutiny – is the hidden curriculum of home learning families, or “homelearners.” Other than Kunzman’s 2009 case studies with six Christian homeschooling families and Kirschner’s 2008 dissertation on unschoolers there is little research that involves observing the underlying beliefs, attitudes, and enactments of the hidden curriculum within the home.

In this study, I refer to families who pursue an overt curriculum as homeschoolers and those who follow a child-led learning path without curriculum or schedule as unschoolers. The umbrella term I use to include both learning styles is that of homelearners, or families who learn at home.

One problem with discussing hidden curriculum relative to home learning is that rationales advanced by families who choose to educate at home are very

overt. Justifications for rejecting the universal model of school are widely discussed both publicly and within families. Ideological and behavioral attitudes and actions are vetted in the decision to learn at home. The moniker of hidden, or unrecognized and unstated, would not, then, seem to fit.

There is additional controversy regarding the application of the term curriculum, or course of study, to unschooling practices. By generally accepted definition, unschoolers reject curriculum in favor of the child's interest-led learning. It would appear, then, that neither overt nor hidden curriculum are appropriately used in connection with unschooling.

Also important is that the label "hidden curriculum" (also referred to as reproduction theory in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 244) has changed meaning for many in the field of education to designate the practices in schools that stratify students, protecting privilege and knowledge for some groups that advantage them over less powerful groups. While overtly declaring to provide equal education for all students, preferential educational practices are afforded relative to socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, gender, or other distinctions. Hidden curriculum, then, has become for some a political as well as an academic term, carrying a negative connotation.

However, as "hidden curriculum" is still used broadly in education to mean the inculcation of values and behaviors that are inherent in the way schools are structured and function, I use it in my research in the traditional sense, described by Peter McLaren (1994):

The hidden curriculum deals with the tacit ways in which knowledge and behavior get constructed, outside the usual course materials and formally scheduled lessons. It is part of the bureaucratic

and managerial “press” of the school—the combined forces by which students are induced to comply with the dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behavior, and morality (p. 191).

My rationale for continuing this research despite these issues lies in studying *how* practices reflective of philosophy are manifested in these homes. Through the observation and questioning I learned along with parents that there are some unexplored behaviors and ideas that have not been consciously defined and evaluated. These I consider to be hidden. And, I adopt Eisner’s (1979) view that all learning may be described as curriculum, regardless of approach, including child-directed learning. To be specific, I use the term hidden curriculum to refer to the practices and beliefs that occur in the homes of these families that are generally parallel to aspects of the hidden curriculum as characterized by Jackson: *crowds*, *praise*, and *power* (1968, p. 9). By *crowds*, Jackson means the daily forced association with large groups of people, not of one’s choosing: “in a sense, a prisoner” (ibid.). *Praise* refers to the public and constant evaluation based on narrow and primarily behavioral dimensions, with the child “as a target of praise or reproof” (ibid., p. 11). Children must also tolerate power distribution between weak and strong without the legitimacy of intimacy, where, in an “unnatural state of affairs” (ibid., p. 16), the child must adjust to delay, denial, interruption and social distraction (ibid., p. 17).

LDS Influence

As I noted in the introduction, all of the participants in this study were active members of the LDS Church. This factor was very significant in the kinds of practices I observed related to home learning, as well as to the beliefs and values expressed by the parents. Accordingly, I provide here a brief overview of

key tenets of the Church that are relevant to understanding the families and findings.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose members are often referred to as Latter-day Saints (LDS) or Mormons (from the belief that the *Book of Mormon* is an additional testament of Jesus Christ), teaches that “We are all spiritual children of a loving Heavenly Father who sent us to this earth to learn and grow in a mortal state” (Mormon.org/what-do-mormons-believe, 2011). Individuals lived with God where they were taught and prepared before coming to earth (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 138:56).

According to LDS doctrine, the object and design of existence is happiness in mortality and joy in the presence of God and Christ forever (Smith, 1976, p. 255). Life on earth is viewed essentially as a school of mortality (Cook, 2011). The purpose in obtaining a physical body with which to experience life - both joy and adversity – is to use agency, time, knowledge, and talents to bless humanity. LDS beliefs include the idea that individuals come to earth with distinct timing, identities, gifts, and purposes, among which are to learn and become more like God, experiencing peace and happiness thereby (“The family: A proclamation to the world”, 1995). Central to life’s mission is the creation of new families and the nurture of eternal family relationships. Church president Ezra Taft Benson declared that “the family unit is the most important organization in time or in eternity” (1970, n.p.).

As the name of the Church indicates, LDS members consider themselves to be Christians who believe that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world” (Mormon.org/what-do-mormons-believe, 2011). LDS members believe that like Him and through Him, all people will be resurrected and live

forever, as taught by the Apostle Paul: “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Through faith in Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God and Redeemer of mankind, LDS individuals seek to live saintly lives of faith, making and keeping covenants to love and serve God and others that thereby they may return to His presence where they continue to progress. Thus, for the LDS community, how people love, the way they spend their time and resources, and the things they learn have eternal meaning, purpose, and consequence.

From the Church’s founding in 1830, education has been emphasized and continues to be stressed by Church leaders. Although persecution by mob violence drove early members from state to state and eventually outside of the United States, in each new settlement, schools – often including adult education classes – were a priority (Darowski, 2008; Monnett, 1999). Led west by Brigham Young in the mid-nineteenth century, Mormon pioneers established headquarters in the basin of the Great Salt Lake, eventually organizing towns throughout the West such as Las Vegas, Nevada, San Bernardino, California, and Mesa, Arizona, as well as more distant places like Hawaii, Canada, and Mexico. Church schools continue to operate in various Pacific islands and Mexico, with universities located in Provo, Utah, Rexburg, Idaho, and Laie, Hawaii.

I was surprised, upon moving to Utah, to discover that home learning is commonplace among LDS families there. Although only about four percent of children are homeschooled in Utah (Zeise, 2012), this is approximately one-third higher than the national average (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). The Church has no official position regarding home learning, and in a fairly homogenous state where about sixty percent of the population shares

religious belief, there would seem to be fewer reasons for bringing one's children home to learn. This research contributes to understanding why LDS families choose home education even in such a presumably supportive social environment.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of my research was to investigate the hidden curriculum, or underlying philosophy and value system, in ten LDS families and how it unfolds in home learning. My purpose was to investigate how children are socialized, ways that attitudes and actions reflect beliefs, and the methods parents use to transfer culture, information, skills, and philosophy through home learning practices.

Research Questions

Through my research I attempted to answer three questions:

1) *What is the hidden curriculum of homeschooling and unschooling in these LDS families?*

2) *How does the hidden curriculum enjoin the educational practices of homelearners, in ways that either contradict or reinforce the beliefs of the home?*

3) *How does digital media factor into both the decision to educate at home and the ongoing facilitation of home learning practices?*

Overt curriculum selection is dependent on parental values and what counts as learning as reflected by the time, resources, and attention allocated to various educational pursuits. I wanted to discover the motives and methods of inclusion or exclusion of types of knowledge and skills. Since parents are not restricted by district-mandated content or timelines and move without assessments and benchmarks, how do they determine what their children are to

study, when, and why? What drives their teaching and learning efforts each day and how are plans made and executed? How is success measured? The answers to these questions are partially embedded in the hidden curriculum.

In addition, technology is an increasingly important tool in learning and offers many options for homelearners, but access to electronic media is equally dependent on the belief and behavior structures of the home. My purpose was to discover what the families claim to believe and the resulting actions and interactions that govern home learning practices.

Methods

Naturalistic inquiry using case study methods is regarded as the optimal method of studying behavior, as time observing authentic practices and conversations allows the researcher to see how people structure the world they live in and what symbols, meanings, and personalities emerge from the interaction (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Simmons, 1996; Stake, 1988).

As a stranger, in most cases, I was allowed to watch, listen, take notes, and ask questions in the intimate setting of the home. However, there were challenges in attempting this type of research. One was to find families willing to open their homes to an unknown investigator who would be publicly evaluating their practices, particularly given the history of hostility, both State and public, to home learning. Once participants agreed to my presence, my task was to connect expressions and attitudes with actions and interpretations without benefit of prior relationship or understanding of the family dynamic.

To guide my research I used sociocultural theory, which posits that individuals' actions can only be understood in relation to the society around them – the people, context, tools, history, culture, and environment. Additionally, I

considered the family to be a community of practice with each member holding a legitimate place within the family unit and an assumed purpose of gradually acquiring knowledge, skills, and behaviors for self-actuation.

Data was assembled and distilled into ideas, patterns, and categories which I then analyzed through the lens of Jackson's definition of hidden curriculum to derive conclusions and implications about foundational beliefs that are evident in the practices of these families.

Summary of Findings

Although none of the families in my study indicated religious belief as a primary reason for homeschooling, it was obvious that religious ideology was foregrounded in their educational practices, principally in three areas: relationships, use of time, and attitudes about learning. Even technology use was filtered through their faith. Thus, my first claim is that religion forms the basis of the hidden curriculum in these homes and as such guides attitudes and behaviors of both parents and children. My second assertion is that although homeschooling and unschooling are philosophically distinct in the literature, in actual practice many lines are blurred. A third claim is that while technology is not essential to learning, electronic media are very useful tools on several levels when used within time and content restraints. I also discuss the challenges of applying the term curriculum to home learning.

Significance

In the continuing debates about education reform, homeschoolers and unschoolers quietly skirt the skirmishes and enact their own reforms as they adjust each year to the family dynamic, personalities, needs, and circumstances. Through it all, the focus remains on the child as part of the larger family

community rather than programs, politics, and platitudes. While these families do not seek a public voice for their practices they do model many of the strategies endorsed by educators such as working with children at a younger age, low student-teacher ratio, individualized attention, positive affective conditions and high expectations for success (Levin & Rouse, 2012; Mayberry, 1993).

In addition, this research extends the literature on home learning practices by including homeschooling and unschooling families along with expanded understanding about the role of technology in home learning. New insights derive from focusing on the hidden curriculum of families who educate at home and how beliefs drive practices in these homes.

Overview

I begin in chapter one with a review of the literature that covers the history of the hidden curriculum and elaborates on the characteristics and impact it has had in the way the American education system is structured, functions, and evolved into ideological status generally. I then discuss the controversy that centers on issues of curriculum, school environment, and parental rights. Rationales are then presented for the home learning approach to educating children. I follow by defining homeschooling and unschooling, two diverse philosophies. Sociocultural theory, as a framework for my research, is explained along with my argument for the family as a community of practice. I also elucidate why technology is included in this study as increasingly important in education with particular relevance to home education.

In the methods chapter that follows I detail the design and timeline of the research and how participants were selected, characteristics of the families, and the settings in which the observations occurred. I explain how I analyze the data

and what limitations and challenges are involved along with my particular point of reference as the researcher.

The third chapter contains the findings about the underlying beliefs held by these families that constitute the hidden curriculum. The findings are clustered into themes of relationships, time, the learning process, and technology and compose the central body of the research. Each of these themes includes several subthemes presented through words and actions of the participants giving readers a view into what these ten families do and why they do it.

The fourth chapter presents the discussion and implications of the findings. I elaborate on three general contributions my study makes to the understanding of home learning and how technology is influencing home education. I explain the difficulties encountered in the definition and application of the term curriculum, both overt and hidden, to home learning. I include in this chapter the implications for further research and implications for practice. A concluding summary precedes the references and appendix.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I present in this chapter the history of what is known today as the hidden curriculum, how it functioned originally as the official curriculum in public schools but has since been covered by layers of content and political conflict, and yet how the philosophical core of the hidden curriculum is contributing to the growing movement to educate children at home. I discuss the ideology that motivates families to learn at home and how their practices reflect their beliefs. I will then define and discuss sociocultural theory as the theoretical perspective that illuminates and informs my research.

I provide a critical review of the literature that informs this study. I also examine the role of technology in facilitating home educational practices and then summarize my research.

History of Hidden Curriculum

Historians and educators have voluminous records from which to explain the origins of American public schools - the philosophical basis, the religious purposes, social advantages, and the intentions toward civic responsibility – in other words, the hidden curriculum that began as the overt, or official, purpose (Gaither, 2008a; Gatto, 2006; Glenn, 1988; Kaestle, 1983; Kliebard, 1994; Spring, 2008; Tyack, 1974; Vallance, 1973). In the years following the American Revolution, Americans in general viewed themselves as God-fearing, liberty-loving people who wanted educational endeavors – whether texts or tutors – to contribute to that identity. Early nineteenth century advocate of the “common,” or public school, Horace Mann, assured the populace that the dual curriculum of generic religious instruction and education to create a uniform profile of American

citizenry would compensate for declining faith and faltering families to generate strong moral character in each child and homogenize an increasingly diverse population under the new republican way of life (Cremin, 1982; Gatto, 2006; Glenn, 1988; Kaestle, 1983; Kliebard, 1994; Tyack, 1974; Vallance, 1973/1974).

What is noticeably absent from that description is academic curriculum. The reason is that by the 1800s nearly everyone, particularly in the northern half of the country, was proficient in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Tyack (1974), Kaestle (1983), Gatto (2006), Gaither (2008), and others claim that the literacy rate throughout the new nation was estimated to be higher than 90% among most of the antebellum population as it was culturally imperative to read the Bible (literacy) and “do figures” (numeracy). Why, then, the need for public or “common” schools in the first place?

A rare historical consensus reveals that early collective educational advocates claimed that churches were failing (although part of New York was labeled the “burned-over” district due to incessant religious revivals and a dramatic increase in new churches of various denominations), that families were falling apart, and that immigrants would destroy the tenuous cohesion of the young country with its republican form of government. Thus it was claimed that a systematic inculcation of moral, social, and nationalistic interests through schools would preserve peace, prevent crime and delinquency, and maintain cultural stability (Cremin, 1982; Gatto, 2006; Glenn, 1988; Kaestle, 1983; Kliebard, 1994; Tyack, 1974).

In other words, public schools were established as a means of social behavioral control (Ross, 1969, 1900). Emphasis on social order and moral uprightness permeated the establishment of institutionalized instruction

(Vallance, 1973). A significant issue then as now was whose version of morality and politics should be taught. Churches contested state assumption of their religious and moral mandate. Families and communities continued their usual learning practices as there was no perceived need for change. Thus, Horace Mann and those who supported the common school ideal attacked the problems on two fronts. First, was to create a moral curriculum that was inoffensive (or politically correct in modern parlance) by removing any “fanaticism” such as the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Glenn, 1988, p.166). The second was to use monies collected from the sale of state lands to pay for schools and then coerce attendance through law enforcement, a carrot and stick approach.

As explained by education historian, David Tyack (1974), over succeeding decades, additional efforts to bolster support and solidify control followed: approved textbooks and organized curricula, professional cadre of teachers and normal schools (teacher colleges), consolidation of schools into districts, and the addition of administration (principals, superintendents). A “body of doctrine, a set of serviceable myths” were promulgated as an ideological foundation that would become part of the hidden curriculum: 1) education was a “unique governmental function;” 2) only professionally trained and certified educators were “proper guardians of the educational function;” 3) citizens should “not be influenced in their own responses to educational questions by their structured associations or organizations [such as PTA]...or as members of a political party;” and 4) “political parties and politicians are institutions not to be trusted” (Tyack, 1974, p. 146). Tyack continues, “Thus the common school, a prime agency for the perpetuation of democracy, was led by persons who made it a matter of principle to distrust one of the central institutions

of democratic government, the political party” (Ibid.). A second irony was in supposing that a tax-supported, compulsory government monopoly would champion limited government (particularly non-intervention in families), laissez-faire capitalism and freedom of choice that were foundational civic concepts (Gatto, 2006).

Dramatic increases in immigration during the 1800s were perceived as threatening to the national identity. The onset of industrialization with corresponding decrease in the agrarian economy, a zeal for efficiency, and the enthronement of science as the ultimate authority of truth, further shaped public schools. Once again schools were hailed as societal saviors to help children adapt to modernized occupational demands, respond to increasing social distress, and at the same time perpetuate the American identity. Most obvious was the overlay of secular instruction with an emphasis on economic purposes such as job training and college, scientific methods, and systematic, efficient curriculum and pedagogy. All of these newly official curricula were layered upon the organizational and behavioral control of the original curriculum, rendering it all but invisible and thus “hidden” (Jackson, 1968).

Continuing Controversy

The evolution of the public school system that resulted from these conflicting reform efforts by classes and interests groups among traditionalists and revisionists, intellectual elites and local communities, is the focus of Kliebard’s *Struggle for the American Curriculum* (1994) and Stephen Arons’ *Compelling Belief* (1983). They lament the displacement of classroom practices and student learning as casualties of the ideological war waged by bureaucratic

and political factions in the conflict for power and control over the minds of young people.

Another fatality was the nearly unshakeable faith Americans possessed in the ability of the public schools to save society (Gaither, 2008a; Glenn, 1988; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Public education became the whipping boy of disillusionment in the twentieth century. Frustration with inequality, racism, consumerism, and other social issues were thematic in education and media (Anyon, 1980; Lareau, 1989; Spring, 2008). Joseph Kirschner declared that the “American love affair with public schools and their civic mission has ended” (Kirschner, 1991, p. 137).

The disenchantment that grew out of the anti-establishment, anti-authoritarian movement of the 1960s and 1970s incubated a growing discontent among families with both the structure and function of public schools. The exclusion of religion, particularly publicized in debates over prayer and creationism in schools, fomented conflict especially evident in fundamentalist Christian families and churches (Klicka, 1995). The restrictive physical and mental environment disturbed the libertarian-minded as schools were likened to prisons (Cooper & Sureau, 2007; Holt, 1982, 1983; Illich, 1971; Jackson, 1968; Llewellyn, 1996). Politically conservative parents chafed at what was perceived as “progressive” propaganda being forced on children while social liberals mourned the lack of action to rectify the injustices prevalent in the system (Apple, 1985; Spring, 2008). In the end, there were many reasons the “one best system” as Tyack (1974) puts it, lost disillusioned adherents in favor of home learning.

Largely overshadowed in the battle for curricular and professional power was what for many ultimately defined the core issue: who “owns” the children

(Kream, 2005; Lines, 1994b; Richman, 2006). This once taken-for-granted, commonsense, non-issue of family identity is the central focus of William Cutler (2000) as the constant negotiation of advocate-versus-adversary relationship of parents with schools following the incremental transfers of control from families to state institutions. What “parents wanted” for their children had been created in the hegemonic discourse of those who had access to media voices. And, it appears that so long as schools’ hidden and official curricula aligned with perceived general philosophical, religious, and political beliefs, the battleground for differences was local school districts rather than the courts. Absolute “refusers” were often obliged to conceal their act of civil disobedience in educating their own children by moving to isolated places (Gaither, 2008a, 2008b).

Scholars and educators continued to wage the war of opinion and legality over whose right it is to educate children and whether that is a parental or State responsibility (Apple 2007, 2004, 2001, 2000; Baxter, 2010; Blokhuis, 2010; Cibulka, 1991; Dwyer, 1994; Klicka, 1995; Merry & Karsten, 2010; Reich, 2005; Richman, 2006; Witte, 2002). Through the early 1990s, homeschooling was held to be illegal in thirty states despite the fact that in 1925, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* that private schools have the right to exist and that the right to the upbringing and education of children belongs to parents (Somerville, 2005; Witte, 2002). Challenges to parental rights have been seen to solidify public opinion against state control while failing to muster anti-public-school sentiment. They also served to unify diverse homeschooling networks and galvanize political action that made an impression on lawmakers, both state

and federal. As a result, by 1993, homeschooling became officially recognized as a right in all fifty states (Gaither, 2008a; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

It is estimated (but impossible to get an exact count due to residual distrust among homeschooling families of government “meddling”) that there are over two million homeschoolers and it increases at double-digit percentage rates annually (NCES, 2008; Ray 2011).

The Home Learning Approach

Unschooling. As the battle raged some families began quietly refusing public schools in favor of organic and “humane” educational practices that allow children to continue the same natural approach to education that follows the child’s instinctive curiosity and learning practices that began before the child was of school age. These are the unschoolers, led initially by John Holt and bolstered by the philosophies of Ivan Illich, A.S. Neill, and Raymond and Dorothy Moore. Unschoolers reject any overt, predetermined curriculum; learning is directed by the child’s interests. This movement has been characterized as countercultural, resistant to authority and liberating for children as responsible learners able to pursue their own curiosity (Bach, 2009; Dodd, n.d.; Hern, 1996; Holt, 1982, 1983, 1996; Holt & Farenga 2003; Illich, 1971; Kirschner, 2008; Llewellyn 1993, 2001; Olson, 2009; Priesnitz, 2007).

In many unschooling families, political ideology tends toward liberal or libertarian and religion is a non-issue. The underlying philosophy of unschooled learning embraces the agency, dispositions, and inclinations of each child rather than mass-information curriculum distribution by public schools that is sometimes seen to treat children as products rather than individuals (Gatto, 2005). Some

academics have criticized the unschooling approach as overly child-centric and promoting self-interestedness (Apple, 2005, 2000; Reich, 2005; West, 2009). In a society acculturated to believing that true education happened only in public schools, the contrast of home learning is startling. Unschooling has been viewed by many to be at best benign neglect and probably catastrophic for the child's future (West, 2009).

The originator of the term "unschooling," John Holt, spent many years as a classroom teacher. He had no children of his own and was not motivated by religious belief to mobilize parents against state-run education; instead, he professed his belief that teaching children who have not asked to be taught harms them by robbing them of their agency as learners (Holt, 1974). He believed children should be allowed to "learn anything one needs or wants to know when one needs or wants it (Holt & Farenga, 2003, p. 283)." This naturalistic and individualized learning philosophy, sometimes referred to by critics as the cult of the child (Gaither, 2008b, p.226), is reflected in the ideology of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Thomas, 2006), Charlotte Mason (1906), and Maria Montessori (1913).

Upheaval. A more public contest of opinions about education reform took place on two fronts, instigated by both foreign and domestic events. One front was academic, the other moral.

In 1957, Americans had been shocked by the Soviet Union's success in sending up *Sputnik 1* and thus "winning" the space race. Another source of angst was a series of alarming government reports and books such as "A Nation At Risk" (1983) and *Why Johnny Can't Read* (Flesch, 1955), decrying the failure of the public schools. (See also Cremin, 1962; Gatto, 2006; Kaestle, 1983;

Kliebard, 1994; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1997.) The confluence of Sputnik and reports of educational failure triggered a public debate of reform hyperbole among educators themselves on how to improve lagging scholarship (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Philip Jackson (1968), Jean Anyon (1980), Maxine Greene (2000), Jonathan Kozol (1991), Mortimer Adler (1982), and others became vocal critics of public schools but only a few such as Raymond Moore (n.d.), John Holt (1983, 1982), and Ivan Illich (1971) advocated total abandonment of institutionalized education.

The moral controversy was perhaps a natural consequence of sorts of the free-love, God-is-dead dicta of the turbulent decades of 1960 through 1980. Controversies related to sex-education, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and gender discussions created a division of opinions about what should be taught in schools versus in homes by parents. The concurrent removal of overt religious symbols and practices from school – prayers, posting of the Ten Commandments or other Biblical references, the teaching of divine creation as the origin of the universe – disturbed many of the same families. The distinction of “secular” versus “sacred” became a public issue of the Moral Majority, James Dobson’s Focus on Families, and other political and moral action groups (Kunzman, 2009; Sikkink, 1999; Stevens, 2001). Many traditional Christian families felt that their voices were lost in court-ordered impositions of what they considered to be minority values (Gaither, 2009).

Homeschooling. Fundamentalist Conservative Christian churches, in particular, called on parents to accept their God-commanded role to teach their children (Klicka, 1995; Kunzman, 2009). Church schools proliferated in response but were mostly short-lived. The enduring effect was the homeschooling

movement (Gaither, 2008a). Many of these parents, goaded by the “obvious” division between the evils of public schools and the good of home learning, discovered home learning to be a very rewarding endeavor on several levels, not only for religious reasons (Gaither, 2008a; Klicka, 1995; Kunzman, 2009; Lyman, 2000; Stevens, 2001). Their children’s academic success astonished those who saw public schools as the only legitimate source of education.

Despite findings for high scholastic achievement among homeschooled students as shown by Ray (2011), and studies that document that these children score highly on standardized tests, are more actively involved in community and political causes, and do more volunteer work than public school students (Ray, 2011; Rudner, 1999; Sikkink, 1998; Smith & Sikkink, 1999), critics persist in claiming that home educated children experience deficits in socialization, civic education, diversity, and exposure to all the opportunities that public schools offer (Arai, 1999; Belfield, 2005).

Scholars have provided insights into understanding why families choose to educate at home (Gaither, 2008; Kunzman, 2009; Lines, 2000, 2004; Ray, 1997; 2011; Stevens, 2001; Thomas and Pattison, 2007; Van Galen & Pitman, 1991). With the exception of Kunzman, their work is largely the result of detailed and multiple interviews and surveys, questionnaires and focus groups.

Opponents of homeschooling continue to contest these claims while asserting dangers presumably associated with homeschooling such as abuse, respected agency, inadequate health care, and others (Apple, 2000, 2001, 2004, 2007; Blokhuis, 2010; Reich, 2005; West, 2009).

Many books have been written by homeschooling parents and self-select and report their experiences (Klicka, 1995; Holt & Farenga, 2003; Guterson,

1992; Lyman, 2000). Christopher Klicka (1995) is an attorney for the Home School Legal Defense Association who claims that home Christian education is a legal parental right as well as a duty of Christian parents and is necessary to counteract the perceived pervasiveness of the secular humanism found in public schools.

Guterson (1992) presents interesting ideas viewed through his dual lenses as public school teacher and homeschool parent, and compares his experiences homeschooling his children with teaching children in schools. Lyman's brief account is filled with anecdotes - mostly not her own - as she defines and elaborates basic information others might find interesting and helpful.

Extended in-home observations following Lareau's (2003, 1989) model are rare and revealing. However, her educational examination is on families in traditional schools. Kunzman's (2009) focus on six fundamentalist Christian homeschooling families is insightful, particularly as he re-connects a year later to complete in-home observations and update readers on developments. His admitted bias as "left of center" both politically and theologically is evident (and interesting) in his writing (Kunzman, 2009, p. 8).

Donna Kirschner (2008) conducted case studies research of unschoolers for her doctoral dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania. She spent time observing six families and drew on her intimate knowledge of their home learning practices to describe their thinking and practices. She analyzed the data through an anthropological lens and framed unschooling as a counter-cultural movement.

Another recent dissertation of interest is that of Albert Andrade (2008) whose research studied the role of technology among homeschooling families.

His methods, however, did not include in-home observations to chronicle family practices that include technology.

To my knowledge, there are no studies that combine home observations of homeschooling with unschooling practices and technology use into one body of research for analysis. With the exception of Kunzman and Kirschner, participation with home learning practices is limited to personal experiences of the author or anecdotal sources. Personal observation has the potential to record not only occurrences, but the ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) or context of the behaviors. The observer filters the action through “new” eyes and may comprehend activities and conversations in ways often invisible to participants due to familiarity. Thus, a researcher scrutinizing performance patterns is sometimes able to detect the “sweet water” Robert Stake refers to when new connections are made and fresh understandings are arrived at (1988, p.402). In so doing, answers to questions of why and how may be illuminated.

The Trouble with Curriculum

The difficulty of settling on a simple, single definition of curriculum is demonstrated by the multitude of books written by scholars who categorize, divide, explain, and challenge all attempts to state precisely what is meant by the term (Eisner, 1994; Ellis, 2004; Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Hewitt, 2006; Longstreet & Shane, 1993; Marsh, 2009; Pinar, 2004; Pinar et al., 1995; Reynolds & Webber, 2004; Wilson, 2005).

The idea of curriculum is not only an evolving, dynamic concept; it lacks definitive agreement even among educators (Longstreet & Shane, 1993, p. 47). Originating from the Latin infinitive *currere*, meaning both to run and to travel, and from which the word “curriculum” derives, it connotes a course or path to be

pursued (Marsh, 2009; Pinar, 2004; Reynolds & Webber, 2004). Curriculum is commonly accepted among the general public as “any and all subjects offered” in schools (Marsh, 2009, p. 1). Students may see the curriculum more as a race in which a series of obstacles must be overcome in order to finish (ibid.). Parents might consider curriculum to be a “complicated conversation” while educators think in terms of a course syllabus or list of books to be read (Pinar, 2004, p. 185). In an exhaustive discussion of curriculum perspectives, Pinar et al., (1995) conclude that curriculum is a “highly symbolic concept” (p. 847), a definition comfortably vague enough to embrace a variety of descriptions.

There are important difficulties related to applying the concept of hidden curriculum to home learning. One challenge is the differentiation between the official, or overt curriculum, and the “kinds of learnings children derive from the very nature and organizational design” of the learning environment (Longstreet & Shane, 1993, p. 46). Since life is considered to be the curriculum by some authors, another question is whether everything may also be considered part of the hidden curriculum, and whether “curriculum” is an appropriate term to use in a nonschool setting. These are compounded by the larger issue of disagreement surrounding the definitions of curriculum in general, and the hidden curriculum in particular.

The application of these two concepts to home education may appear *prima facie* to have equivalent meanings to school counterparts. Homeschooling families, at least, engage with formal curriculum of various types and the choice and practice of teaching children at home are anchored in philosophical and pedagogical purposes. However, the foundational beliefs of homeschoolers and unschoolers seldom remain unstated or unacknowledged. In fact, they are often

foregrounded and emphasized by the very fact that learning is outside of mainstream practices. How, then, can the ideology that serves as the hidden curriculum in traditional schools be considered unrecognized in home learning? Is curriculum more unitary when enacted in homes rather than schools? In my study, I attempt to address this as a question rather than assume that home learning universally communicates stated or overt beliefs.

The premise of unschooling, that learning be led by the child's interests, might seem incompatible with any concept of curriculum, overt or hidden. However, the very philosophy of unschooling can be construed as a curriculum in its own right. Furthermore, as my findings will indicate, parents rarely abdicated any role in guiding their children's learning, and their choices shaped the direction of their children's learning in both overt and covert ways. While such loosely directed home learning is clearly different from a government-dictated, teacher-directed curriculum, it nonetheless offers powerful lessons for children and merits further study.

For this research, then, I take Eisner's advice that those concerned with curriculum "need to release [them]selves from the grips of traditional stereotypes about what schools should be, how teaching is to proceed, what appropriate curriculum content entails" (1994, p. 89) and to assume, as Pinar et al., believe, that curriculum is evident in "people with ideas, working on problems" (1995, p. 4).

Sociocultural Theory

My research examines and compares the philosophies and practices of these families through a situated sociocultural conceptual framework that includes viewing the family as a community of practice.

Sociocultural theory stresses the interaction between the individual and the group of people to which the individual belongs and with whom there is a relational and defining dimension, such as geography, language, purposes, kinship or philosophy (Blumer, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cole, 2005; Driscoll, 2005; Hammond, 2009). Societies possess distributed knowledge and abilities that have the potential to improve the lives of all those who are connected to them. The culture that develops in a society is centrally involved with “helping things to grow” (Cole, 2005, p.196). That would, of course, refer to things – people, tools, ideas, institutions - that are valued in the society. By the same token, things considered detrimental, threatening, harmful or useless would be eradicated or at least untended so as to inhibit growth.

Meaning and purpose of societal practices are mutually constructed and mediated by tools, environment, and culture. Awareness, or cognition of those meanings, is situated within the context of the community (Brown, et al., 1989). Understanding how to engage information in the service of growth in societal circumstances is an essential cognitive tool. Creating or taking advantage of conditions that optimize progress and being able to develop and transfer understanding and use of tools in new environments is considered one of the distinctive achievements of humans (Gardner, 2004).

Both tools and activities are framed in the domain of the culture in which they are constructed and continue to be shaped. Activities cohere meaning and purpose, negotiation and use in authentic cultural practices (Brown et al., 1989). Extracting and decontextualizing information from situated practices voids meaning and blurs application by interrupting the construction process (Gee, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Resnick, 1987b; Rogoff et al., 2003). By both

excising contextual nature of information and imposing an irrelevant and unhelpful school culture onto learning, schools “deny students the chance to engage the relevant domain culture” (Brown et al, p. 34).

Sociocultural theory acknowledges the interactive learning that Lev Vygotsky promoted as the relationship between the individual, society, and the tools that mediate and are mediated by the culture (Driscoll, 2005). On this view, learning is situated, contextualized, and requires both intra-and interpsychological processes, meaning internal and social (Wertsch, 1985.) My research assumes this theoretical perspective - that learning is more than just individual, internal cognitive processing. Rather, meaningful knowledge is acquired and defined by the internalization of the surrounding community culture. “[T]hrough enculturation into the practices of society and the acquisition of the technology, signs and tools; and all forms of education” (Moll, 1990, p.1) the human mind, habits, behaviors, and ways of being and being seen are developed.

Interconnected aspects of ongoing social processes at many levels of specificity and generality are part of the learning processes. The environment of learning is not solely physical. It is a combination of mind, body, environment, views, values, artifacts, and behaviors defined and practiced in the community. These result from historical accumulation of practices and information, enacted and developed skills, tools, and distributed knowledge within the society (Driscoll, 2005; Moll, 1990).

Learning as a social function requires critical thinking, problem-solving, negotiation and adaptability as new circumstances arise. As individuals want and need to participate more fully, through observation, modeling, participation at

graduated levels and talk – the “cultural processes” – membership into the larger cultural group is accessed (Gee, 2004; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff et al., 2003; Wenger 1998). In so doing, a new identity of belonging is created.

Communities of Practice

As social beings, humans congregate for survival, improvement, and to serve the inherent social nature. People form communities based on likenesses in a variety of ways, principally attitudes and beliefs, kinship, language, religion, and interests (Eckert & Wenger, 2005; Wenger, 1998). Society as a whole is subdivided into smaller groups for functionality, connectivity, and organization. The smallest social unit is the family. Individuals and families organize into self-selected communities that congregate according to interests, practices, and proximity. Families as communities of practice mutually engage in joint enterprises with shared knowledge, tools, actions, histories, beliefs, and culture (Gee, 2004; Wenger, 1998). They are “bound by intricate, socially constructed webs of belief” understood only in the culture through which they were woven (Brown et al., 1989, p.33). Culture determines the creation and use of tools. Thus, “learning is...a process of enculturation” (Ibid.). For the purposes of my research I consider the family to be a legitimate community of practice.

A common and natural purpose in these communities is the reproduction of community life through sharing accumulated knowledge and skills – a transfer from experts to novices and the gradual changeover from one generation to the next. This often includes new methods and expanded ideas, but practice is grounded in community life and central to learning. It is, in fact, a way of defining learning. Participation in communities of practice links new generations, tools, and concepts with competent practitioners for stable transition and perpetuation

of the society (Eckert, 2006; Eckert & Wenger, 2005; Gee, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Liedloff, 1985; Shaffer, 2005; Wenger, 1998).

A core feature of communities of practice is the situated nature of the learning. Practice is always authentic and done in context. It begins as peripheral participation with competent and experienced community members possessing expert skills but such apprenticeship is nevertheless recognized by the community as legitimate, necessary, and expected (Eckert & Wenger, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Members of the society recognize authentic exercise of a novice towards a regime of competence through transparent practices in which meaning, tools, and purposes are always visible (Eckert & Wenger, 2005).

Rather than taking place in isolation, understandings, new skills, appropriate discourse, and required knowledge are part of the daily, situated experience of intentional focus on what needs to happen and ways the experts accomplish the tasks (Rogoff et al., 2003). Also negotiated are value and innovation in the reproduction of the community's practices. Learning is mediated by and mediates the culture and society. Power and knowledge are a shared community resource and each citizen is a legitimate and recognized participant.

All members of the community are continually involved in multiple communities of practice as part of daily life (Wenger, 1998). Communally-created meaning is inherent in each activity and newcomers to any given practice begin with observation, simple tasks and low-risk involvement that move toward the central performance of tasks as the regime of competence increases. Interestingly, little direct instruction is typically given; the emphasis is in

participatory practices and expanded experience in task performance because of the way they contribute to understanding and purpose. Access and power accompany movement along a trajectory of full participation. All of this occurs in the normal course of existence rather than designated times, subjects, places, or curricula.

This contrasts sharply with current school practices in modern societies where discrete skills are isolated from meaning and context, knowledge is passively received via lecture, goals are often prescribed in vague, someday-you'll-need-this claims, and there is an overall alienation from involvement in and satisfaction through tangible accomplishments (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A teaching curriculum with limited resources, executive control, and partial meaning are substituted for a learning curriculum of shared engagement in a valued practice leading to increased responsibility and eventual competence (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Legitimate peripheral participation in authentic context has been recognized as a valid social theory of learning but is difficult to execute in institutionalized education. It is impossible to individualize and situate such practices for each child in a school setting where efficiency is measured in dramatically different ways and with significant consequences. One consequence involves identity development (Gee, 2004). In communities of practice, "learning and a sense of identity are inseparable: they are aspects of the same phenomenon" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 115).

The education literature regarding sociocultural constructs of learning (Bandura, 1969; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Brown et al., 1989; Cole, 2005; Moll, 1990), identity (Burke, 1991; Desrochers et al., 2002; Hammond, 2009; Gee,

2004, 2008; Illeris, 2009; Merry & Howell, 2009; Schacter & Ventura, 2008; Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker, 1986, Stryker & Burke, 2000; Thoits, 1991, Woodward, 2002), and communities of practice (Lave, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Resnick, 1987b; Rogoff, 2003; Wenger, 1998) generally tends to discuss these important components of learning with the goal of incorporating them into the public school experience as John Dewey (1938) attempted to do. All of the home learning families in my research construct meaning from and through their learning practices as part of their daily living.

Technology

A relatively recent topic in the educational debate regards the use and value of technology in learning. Parent and educator opinions range from fear and avoidance to passion and what some even term over-indulgence (Bauerline, 2008; Clark, 1983; Ebish & Immel, 1984; Jackson, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Turtel, 2004). A central position is that technology offers the potential of a remarkable asset to discovery and learning in any area of interest. My use of the term technology includes all digital media, and the internet.

There are strong arguments for including technology in school instruction, typically citing the importance of technology in job preparation for the future. Others emphasize the potential for enhancing learning on an individual or collaborative level in ways that elicit complex cognitive thinking in solving virtually authentic challenges (Christensen et al., 2011; Gardner, 2004; Gee, 2007; Gee & Hayes, 2011; Salen, 2007; Salen, et al. 2011; Shaffer, 2005, 2008; Squire et al., 1998). In addition, motivational levels are high, anxiety levels low, participants control timing, amount, level and interest of instruction and information, participation can assume multimodal forms, and there is a global platform to

potential benefit participants (Bennett, 2008; Gee, 2007; Jenkins, 2006, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Salen, 2007; Salen, et al. 2011; Schacter, 1999; Shaffer, 2005, 2008; Sun & Pyzdrowski, 2009; Turtel, 2006; Zimmerman, 2009).

Technology offers enticing ways to rehearse math facts and early reading skills while also providing in-depth knowledge and skill-development practice of more advanced content demands. These advantages depend greatly on the type of interaction, including guided involvement by adult mentors such as teachers and parents (Gee, 2007; Jenkins, 20011; Johnson, 2006; Salen, 2007; Shaffer 2005). Elite universities such as Yale, Stanford, and MIT along with other high tech sites offer vast open and free coursework in a variety of disciplines (Myers, 2011).

Technology is not neutral in that it involves a commitment of resources and time that might be otherwise expended (McLuhan, 1964). Some see advantages of technology in terms of concept reinforcement and extension through motivated practice while others view technology as a distraction from learning, and potentially dangerous to children who may fall victim to cyberstalking or privacy issues (Cuban, 2010, 2001, 1996; Jackson, 2008; Turkle, 2004).

There are frequent and dire warnings of the cognitive and social dissipation technology invites, the false perceptions of effectiveness of multitasking, the unequal access to technology that is predicted to lead to an expanding digital divide between the wealthy and the poor, and the never-ending expense in continually upgrading hard and software, retraining teachers, adapting physical facilities to accommodate technology use by teachers and students, and what to do about unused and misused digital tools (Apple, 2007;

Bates, 2009; Bauerlein, 2008; Cuban, 2010, 2001; Dretzin & Rushkoff, 2010; Hess & Monke, 2012; Jackson, 2008). Increasingly, the public is being made aware of potential dangers and inappropriate social behaviors as news media broadcast stories of technology use gone wrong among children.

Albert Andrade's doctoral dissertation (2008) focuses on the use of technology among homeschoolers. He concludes that digital media devices and the internet play a significant role in both supporting the decision to learn at home and the practices of homeschooling families. Research is ongoing specific to this application of technology but a quick perusal of homeschool networking sites on the internet yields a great harvest of available resources, many of which are curricula specifically designed to be used in home learning, including a significant number of technology-based or technology-enhanced materials. Just as in published curriculum, online curriculum geared toward home learning is big business in the U.S. (Stevens, 2001).

Summary

The research literature provides ample evidence that the movement toward public schools in the nineteenth century emphasized ideological and behavioral control over students through establishing what some scholars characterize as a state version of religion that would be inculcated along with shaping attitudes about government as the official curriculum (Erickson, 2005; Glenn, 2012; Meyer, 2000; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As society moved toward industrialization and reform movements undertook to prepare children to enter the workforce, academics and skills replaced social control as the official curriculum while retaining the management of attitudes and behaviors as the hidden, or ideological curriculum of institutionalized learning.

Efforts to find “the one best system” (Tyack, 1974) resulted in more than a century of struggle over curriculum and education reform, ideology, and control. The result was the diminution of faith in public education as a civil savior that would remediate failure in homes, churches, and communities. As disenchantment increased so did public voices challenging the government monopoly of education, a concept that itself had come to be accepted as a public good and part of the hidden curriculum (Apple, 2005; Evans, 2003; Howell, 2003; Lubienski, 2000; Reich, 2005).

A movement to educate children at home grew from those who saw traditional schools as serving hegemonic interests and as hostile to the natural learning environment of the home where cognitive development flourishes during the formative years of a child’s life. Dr. Raymond Moore, an educator, superintendent, and college president, and his wife, Dorothy began advocating for home learning in the early 1960s to meet individual needs of children and allow them to develop at their own pace (Moore, n.d; Home School Legal Defense Association, n.d.). While most homeschooling parents teach academic lessons to their children, unschooling families eschew formal instruction. These unschoolers avoid prescribed curriculum and accept learning as part of living and participating in family and community life. Their education is described by unschooling advocates as delight-driven, interest-led, and attentive parent-facilitated (Dodd, n.d.; Llewellyn, 1996; Priesnitz, 2007; Van Gestel et al, 2008).

Homeschoolers choose curriculum but organize their learning styles to match individual needs of family members (Duvall, 2005; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Hart et al., 2012; Van Gestel, 2008). They are flexible with time, pace, and space as parents are responsive, involved, and seek to provide a

healthy learning environment. Advocates of fundamental Christian conservative values, due in part to their organizational skills, rose to leadership of the growing homeschool movement and led the political fight for legalization of home learning. They continued to argue in courts for parental rights and control of children until 1993, when every state allowed parents to teach their children, albeit with varying degrees of regulation (Gaither, 2008a; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

Sociocultural theory frames learning as situated in contextual references of other people, time, history, and culture. It includes the environment and tools used by community members, the beliefs and values that shape practices, and the ways society perpetuates itself and progresses. Central to these ideas are what, why, how, and by whom children are taught.

One significant view of sociocultural theory is that communities engage in practices particular to their culture, beliefs, knowledge, and skills. Members move from being novices to experts through gradual levels of increasing participation and are accepted as legitimate practitioners during the learning process. Learning is a natural part of participation in the family and community.

Online instruction is the education reform *du jour*. Although there is general consensus that technology is increasingly significant in both our society and the global community, educators, politicians, curriculum providers, and technology companies battle over the use of digital tools in schools. Home learners avoid the controversy and choose electronic media that match their particular preferences and needs.

In the next chapter I will describe the methodology I use to address the issues of hidden curriculum in the home and how learning is shaped by the

ideology of families. I also examine the role of technology in home learning practices.

Chapter 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study to research the hidden curriculum of home learning resulted from a desire to understand what families employ in shaping children's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in educating at home. In this chapter I describe the process of selecting an appropriate research method, data collection, and analysis used to explore the ideology of ten homeschooling and unschooling families and how that informs their practices and selection of technological tools.

Overview

In the last decade public opinion about home learning has changed considerably to enjoy greater acceptance (Cooper & Sureau, 2007). There are many people who continue to be adamantly opposed to home education and also some people for whom it remains a mystery. Published research is a means of offering a view, or even a fresh viewpoint, of practices that may be difficult to access otherwise.

This chapter describes the research study design, the selection process of finding families willing to participate in the study and the methods of data collection and analysis. I explain some of the challenges and limitations of the research and present my standpoint as the researcher. I conclude by summarizing the processes.

I examine family learning employing the framework of sociocultural theory with the family viewed as a community of practice in the educational process. The second section contains the rationale for using case studies as a naturalistic inquiry approach in a qualitative research design.

The third section presents a brief overview of the participants and settings of the study that includes characteristics of the homeschooling and unschooling families, education level and occupations of the parents and age and gender of the children. A summary of the methods and procedures constitute the fourth section of this chapter followed by a fifth section on data analysis. In the following two sections I discuss the study limitations, challenges, and the standpoint of the researcher. A summary of the process of designing an appropriate study, finding participants, gathering data, analyzing the data, and explaining some of the limitations concludes this chapter. Using these procedures I leave an audit trail (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that will assist the reader in comprehending both what I learned and the interpretations and meaning they have for me.

I explore the fundamental function the hidden curriculum learning plays in the formation of values and behaviors and provides a framework for the ways learning is enacted. The research questions are:

1) *What is the hidden curriculum of homeschooling and unschooling in these LDS families?*

2) *How does the hidden curriculum enjoin the educational practices of homelearners, in ways that either contradict or reinforce the beliefs of the home?*

3) *How does digital media factor into both the decision to educate at home and the ongoing facilitation of home learning practices?*

Undercurrents of hidden curriculum, as the socialization process for behavioral and thought control, are present in families as well as public institutions. Hidden indicates unidentified, concealed, or out of sight and as such

families may be unaware of their own construction of meaning behind their educational practices or the ways in which beliefs are manifest by behaviors, conversation, the types of learning and knowledge that are valued, and the tools used to achieve those. A common criticism of home learning is precisely that it is private and inaccessible to view, depriving the public of the open scrutiny available in social institutions (Apple, 2000, 2005; Reich, 2005; West, 2009). Through the medium of a researcher, private enactments of home practices allow public access, albeit limited and filtered, to authentic home learning experiences.

My research centers at the confluence of two major trends: home learning and digital educational opportunities. Each option offers a new paradigm both in how children and learning are viewed. Each has the potential to disrupt the current educational system and enable child-centric education rather than “monolithic instruction of batches of students” (Christensen et al., 2011, p. 12). Combined, they create yet an additional dimension that I seek to explore and understand.

My research is framed by a sociocultural approach, the investigation of what is happening, what criteria motivate choices and how these choices are enacted in the context of the experience. “[P]ersons acting and the social world of activity cannot be separated,” according to Lave (Illeris, 2009, p. 201). Likewise, Bronfenbrenner is critical of research involving “*strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time* [emphasis original]” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.513). Sociocultural theory recognizes that people learn from one another and in the situatedness of the tools, time and culture of their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, 1974; Brown, et al., 1989; Gee, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Liedloff, 1984; Rogoff, et al.,

2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Thus, the study of home learning warrants observations within the homes of families by observing their practices, noting their tools, and listening to their philosophies.

Research Design

This type of personal, unscripted research necessitates a qualitative approach where the focus is on daily interactions, relations, and viewpoints to glean understanding (Denzin & Lincoln 2000; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Silverman, 2010; Tesch 1990). Through the families I observe I attempt to comprehend how they see their learning experience and the underlying perspectives that mold behaviors and guide the selection and interpretation of curriculum, including technology use.

Employing a qualitative research approach permits me to examine sociocultural forces at work, explore how belief systems are enacted, and scrutinize ways behaviors and artifacts affect interaction, meaning-making and development of learning practices in the home as they spontaneously occur. The complexity of engagement is on display, yielding deep and broad data for analysis representative of ideology and culture, exposing issues, timing, perceptions, feelings, values and meaning in situated practice (Athens, 2010; Denzin, 1971; Hammersly, 2010).

For over a century education has been shaped by law to occur in a structured classroom setting so that the public school model became the common and, essentially, only recognized way to obtain an education. Families who learn at home have reconfigured learning into a community of practice as they work, read, discuss, write, and interact in a variety of ways with each other and the resources of the home and community.

Thus the methodology is to engage in naturalistic inquiry where participants enact their daily learning practices in their typical environment with as little interruption as possible from the observer (Athens, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Denzin, 1971; Hammersly, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Erickson (1977) suggests looking for:

social meaning as residing in and constituted by people's doing in everyday life. These meanings are most often discovered through fieldwork by hanging around and watching people carefully and asking them why they do what they do, sometimes asking them as they are in the midst of their doing (p. 58).

A naturalistic inquiry approach seemed best suited to this type of research to pursue the holistic, contextual exploration and inspection that provides a frame of reference as well as a method (Athens, 2010; Denzin, 1971; Hammersly, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An approach provides perspective which in turn focuses the theoretical lens that clarifies what is important and engages attention with those things (Athens, 2010; Hammersly, 2010). Pursuing naturalistic inquiry alerted me to processes, purposes, settings, timing, relationships and tools of sociocultural interaction (Denzin, 1971). Although homeschooling brings to mind the picture of children gathered around the table I have heard mothers complain, ironically, that the problem with homeschooling is that they're never home. While that may be true, my investigation focused on the praxis within the home context with reference to some of the typical field trips and activities as described to me by the families.

The most appropriate method for my research was case studies, the "primary vehicle for emic inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 359). Each family

became a case to illustrate the construction of meaning in their home learning environment (Erickson, 1985). These cases formed the foundation for qualitative research into how identity, relationships, time, resources, and valence informed their learning. A fairly large number of cases permitted me to sample, compare, and derive a broader view of homelearners.

Case studies allow me to look at “people’s doing in everyday life,” ask questions, and examine different ways families construct meaning through their home learning procedures. This provides an ideal research platform in that case studies give voice to the participants, engage readers on a different level than numbers, and present multiple perspectives (Simons, 1996). Case study design expands flexibility, giving additional space for multiple constructions of understanding and prompting researcher and reader to probe their own beliefs and practices (Simons, 1996; Soy, 1997; Stake, 1988; Yin, 1994, 1989).

Through case studies I am able to capture slices of living and snapshots of doing that provide useful insights into various world views and resulting beliefs and behaviors. Readers also are engaged in analysis through the conversations and expressions of philosophy through enactment and comparisons with other experience.

Case studies have the advantage of providing boundaries for the researcher, which along with the analytical framework create a “practical, historical unity” of what is happening, who the actors are, and a theoretical perspective through which to make meaning (Thomas, 2011, p. 513). Yin further advocates case studies as a design that logically allows appropriate data to be drawn that can then be linked to conclusions which suggest a course of action (Yin, 1989, 1994).

An additional advantage of case studies is the ability to study contemporary, contextual, authentic events beyond control or manipulation of the researcher (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, Schwandt, 2001). A situated view of real-world behaviors provide researchers with new insights and information with which to compare and re-evaluate existing research.

My research design methods began with identifying subjects through which to gather data to illuminate the research questions and connected to theory, thus providing structure for the research (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 1994). I initiated a process of purposive sampling to select a variety of families to observe as case studies (Simons, 1996; Soy, 1997; Stake 1988; Tesch, 1990).

I began with a pilot study a year prior (2010) that included interviews with fifteen families, several of whom I observed in their homes, asking questions, recording and transcribing interviews, taking notes, and seeing the artifacts used in their learning. Some actors participated long-distance through email and or phone conversations. This created a background with which to frame my research and orient my understanding. At that time I applied for and received IRB approval for the research. However, at the expiration of that year of research I was obliged to update the forms and request an extension. This resulted in receiving an exempt status from the IRB board for as long as the research project continued.

An necessary but inconvenient move to Utah presented new challenges just as I was beginning my search for study participants, and this had a significant impact on this study in many regards. Introducing myself to new people and explaining my project invariably elicited suggestions of families I should talk to, which I followed through. As part of the selection process I asked

questions about rationale, practices, curriculum and philosophy in order to identify prospective participants. I was interested in including as broad a spectrum of practices and perspectives as I could find in this homogenous community so I intentionally searched for families with divergent views, curriculum and learning approaches. I therefore asked homeschoolers about curriculum and unschoolers about experience and about why they chose unschooling over homeschooling, since it is a less common choice. With both groups I inquired about learning attitudes and activities and approaches. I pursued leads in different sections of the state of Utah and even in nearby states. Additionally, I probed to discover how they defined their learning methods and whether they categorized themselves as unschoolers or homeschoolers or where they would place their family on the spectrum of control over child activities and behaviors. . Some were unaware of the distinctions between homeschooling and unschooling and made decisions based on descriptions I provided compared with their own praxis but I accepted their self-categorization. In some cases I did preliminary home visits to observe and ask questions in order to determine if families matched my research needs of children under age eighteen who learned primarily at home.

Some participant families were solicited from emails sent out either by website administrators or with administrator permission through homeschool group websites describing my research and seeking families who would be willing to participate. Invitations were posted on three homeschooling social networks which resulted in positive responses from two families who volunteered to be subjects for my study. Thus, participants were found using both purposive and snowball sampling (Denzin, 1971; Marshall, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

With each type of contact, I followed up with an email or phone call informing them of my research protocol and asked permission to discuss preliminary questions about their home learning and then provided additional information about what participation would entail. I then sent a written explanation of the study and my need for at least ten hours of in-home observation, filling out questionnaires, and taping an interview with me as part of the research. This gave them time to consider before volunteering or declining. Every respondent who reached this point agreed to participate and is included in my research. There were other families who expressed willingness but complications of time and travel made it necessary to postpone their involvement for future research. Students in one family that volunteered spent the majority of learning time in formal classrooms so I did not include them. I was pleasantly surprised that people would open their homes to a stranger for scrutiny and judgment. Not all of the families were equally enthusiastic about the intrusion but agreed to have me come and were very generous in their time and personal space and gracious in helping me learn.

In addition to more than ten hours observing each family in a variety of learning situations I conducted in-depth interviews with parents (or guardian) and several children. The transcriptions of these interviews were added to the field notes collected in each home. I also used questionnaires to collect demographic and background information, much of which was specific to digital tools used besides what I observed and conversations about technology use. This provided a triangulation of evidence through my observations, writing answers to specific questions, and explanation (Stake, 1995). Supplemental to that were the various on-going conversations, written reflections, follow-up calls and emails and even

some informal return visits. Using email, I sent “reports” about ideas and initial theories and later the findings chapter, inviting their elaboration or correction.

After data had been collected I treated the family as the unit of analysis to “gain deeper or more accurate insight into what a phenomenon is like....the discovery of the ‘meaning’ of the phenomenon” (Tesch, 1991, p. 228). To better understand I examined the data for identifying, unifying or conflicting themes and to discern patterns, types, and concepts (Blank, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002, Tesch, 1991).

Participants and Settings

In order to further investigate the hidden curriculum of the home it was necessary to gain access to families who were willing to permit observation of “ordinary” daily educational practices as they occurred. I had been cautioned that this might be very difficult. However, I discovered that families were very open and welcoming.

These families lived in various parts of two western states, Utah and Idaho. Six live in very small, rural communities with populations under 5,000, three in different towns of about 15,000 people each, and one in a city of approximately 50,000. A few are natives of the area where they reside; most are transplants from various parts of the country. Their reasons for home learning are diverse as are their practices.

All of the families belonged to the LDS church, as this is part of the western region settled by Mormon pioneers in the last half of the nineteenth century and remains predominantly LDS. The families were large by most standards so that even though I focused my observation on children of public school ages, five through eighteen, I observed thirty-one children. Although this

was not a selection criterion, it happens that all of the families had both parents in the home and more children than the national average, as is typical of homeschooling families (Lines, 2000; Princiotta & Bielick, 2006; Ray, 1997, 2011). Although only one father worked from home, all of the fathers were actively connected to the learning process according to family members. I visited with five of the fathers in the homes over the course of my observations. Another father I have since had occasion to meet; the other four I had no interaction with. One family consisted of a young teenage girl living at the time with her sister and brother-in-law as her temporary legal guardians. She had come to help her sister with a new baby and shortly after the study she returned home to be with her parents. I met the brother-in-law and interviewed the sister in lieu of the parents who live in another state. Table 1 lists demographics of the five homeschooling families. Table 2 displays information about the five unschooling families. I did not ask for financial data, assuming educational and occupational information would make the case that these are middle class families, although four of them mentioned “tight” referring to their current financial circumstances in interviews or conversations. The two doctors and the attorney live in small towns in middle class or rural neighborhoods and may not necessarily be assumed to generate income typical in larger metropolitan areas.

Table 1

Homeschooling Families

Family	Father, Education level, employment	Mother, Education level	Participating children by age and gender	Names*
Bates family, (7 children)	Randall Attorney	Anna Master's	Female, 16 Male, 14 Male, 12 Male, 9 Female, 5	Lanie Jacob Clayton Heber Hillary
Grandon family, (8 children)	Greg, M.D.	Elizabeth Bachelor's	Male, 15 Female, 14 Female, 12 Male, 8 Female, 6	John Bethany Natalie Jimmy Shara
Gonzales family, (8 children)	Antonio Bachelor's, engineer	Chrissy 2 Master's degrees	Female, 10 Male, 9 Male, 6	Lisa Evan Alan
Kidder family (11 children)	Post high school, telecommunications	Post high school	Female, 13	Haylee
Kaplan family (9 children)	Dick, M.D.	Amber Bachelor's	Female, 15 Male, 13 Male, 10 Female, 9 Female, 6	Anika Ethan Thomas Alicia Annelle

Table 2

Unschooling Families

Family	Father, Education level, employment	Mother, Education level	Participating children by age and gender	Names*
Herman family, (3 children)	Terry Master's, technology	Esther Bachelor's	Female, 9 Male, 6	Holly Robbie
Payne family, (6 children)	George Master's, engineer	Amanda Post high school	Female, 16 Female, 13	Maddie Mia
Rodriguez family, (6 children)	Steven Bachelor's, engineer	Ruby Bachelor's	Male, 16 Male, 13 Male, 9	Ian Nate Alex
Sanders family (4 children)	Justin Associate's, technology	Lila Bachelor's	Male, 9 Male, 6	Marty Patrick
Southwick family, (3 children)	Jared Bachelor's. technology	Beth Bachelor's	Female, 12 Female, 9 Male, 7	Cheyenne Jenna Qwynn

*Names are pseudonyms without a written request by the family to use actual names.

Methods and Procedures

Ten families were selected through a variety of means categorized as purposive, convenience, and snowball sampling. Two responded to emails sent out by members of different homeschooling networks and volunteered to be part of the study. The rest were recommended by mutual acquaintances upon hearing about my research focus. I had never been in any of their homes before although I had previously met three of the families. Prior to my visit, communication was primarily by email and telephone. I advised each family that I had questionnaires for them to fill out and would need time for a audio tape recorded interview. Given the busy conditions of the home I assured them that I did not require uninterrupted, private time.

After a pre-screening battery of preliminary questions and even some limited observations that allowed the families to identify themselves as homeschoolers or unschoolers, I asked and received their permission to come into their homes. Over the course of six months I spent a minimum of ten hours in each home, sometimes living with families for a few days to gather data. This participant-observation process was in the tradition of ethnographic research (Bogden & Biklen, 2003; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I tried to remain unobtrusive during the first visit, asking few questions and taking copious notes of the home, the family members, the behaviors and activities, and capture as much of the environment as possible. I first wanted to experience their family learning without “leading” or injecting my perspectives or questions. The purpose was to restrict interference in normal processes of the construction of learning in ordinary context – the situated nature of sociocultural theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Liedloff, 1985. I watched interactions, noted curriculum, and tried to comprehend what was transpiring in the homes of these families as they built their own style of education. These procedures are consistent with naturalistic inquiry tradition (Denzin 1971; Erickson, 1977; Hammersly, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). On successive visits I asked more questions of both the mother and the children, and when possible, the father as well.

At the end of the first observation I gave the families questionnaires (APPENDIX A-D). Separate questionnaires had been prepared for homeschoolers and unschoolers, as some questions asked of homeschoolers such as those pertaining to the study of content areas wouldn't apply to unschoolers. For each type of home learner I gave child and parent versions of

the questionnaires to see how they evaluated their own technology use. I also invited the children to elaborate on what they would tell their friends about their own type of education as well as asking for reasons and opinions of home learning. Although I left enough questionnaires for each participating child to have one the children were allowed to fill it out as they desired. Consequently, not all children completed questionnaires, especially younger children. The parent version focused more on family background for educational practices and expanded questions about technology use.

Following each observation I had time to reflect on what I had seen and heard and wrote reflective paragraphs that included questions I wanted to ask, clarification I needed, particular items of interest, and an overall impression of my experience. More of these types of comments were gleaned from the field notes I took on my notebook computer as I watched and listened and interacted. Subsequently I have contacted the families for elaboration about particular points and have sent each family a brief summary of my theoretical position. All families have expressed interest in reading this research.

After spending parts of at least three days with each family for a minimum of ten hours of observation field notes I sat down with the mother and in some cases both parents with an interview form consisting of six open-ended questions (see Appendix E). These questions probed reasons and opinions for why they chose home learning, ways it had affected their families, how their views influenced the curriculum they chose, and both positive experiences and disappointments, especially relative to expectations. I also asked how digital capabilities figured into their decision to learn at home and ways they felt it facilitated what they wanted to accomplish.

I also spent time interviewing children of various ages. Consequently these interviews were simpler, free-form and fitted to the child's level. I transcribed these interviews as well and added them to the data files. I also inserted email responses for a complete compilation of information and interaction.

This data collection process, then, involved three tools for triangulation purposes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman 1994). First, were observation field notes and responses to contextual questions. In addition, I handed out a participant questionnaire that supplied demographic information, some background on their rationale and experience with home learning. It also asked for types and usage of digital tools. The third data set derived from tape recorded interviews with a parent and often one or more of the children. These interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. After transcribing them I used all three types along with email, conversations, follow-up communications, reflections, and sending the findings to each participating family for review in the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Following the observation phase of descriptive field notes on conversations and family interactions as they learned together, I pored over hundreds of pages of notes and worked to condense the data systematically and deliberately (Blank, 2004). Through repeated iterations I distilled and extracted ideas, themes, and patterns from the content, "trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully" (Stake, 1995, p. 75). The goal was to classify connected concepts into broader categories as defined by the attributes of the events (Bogden & Biklen, 2003; Carlile & Christensen, 2005).

I began the data analysis by combining the observation notes with the transcribed interviews and the questionnaires. I watched for acts and activities, meaning in language and gestures along with definitions particular to their culture and the participation and relationships in the home setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As I pored through each set multiple times, making notes in the margins each time, it became apparent that there were duplicated or emphasized behaviors and attitudes these families shared relative to living their view of education. I began assigning descriptive names to these repeated themes as codes. Discernible patterns such as references to time, the emphasis on the importance of relationships, and how both parents and children enjoyed learning and spending time together emerged as obvious and consistent themes (Creswell, 1998). Through multiple iterations the assortment of temporary codes merged into broad categories through which I could link the patterns yielded by these constructs with the individual and social lives of these families (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The next step was to pull from the patterns in the data descriptions that matched categories (Aurbach and Silverman, 2003). The nature of the themes and the meanings held for each family suggested the use of ideology as a lens through which to view their experiences. With that perspective I gathered responses to my research questions.

Research Questions 1 and 2:

1) *What is the hidden curriculum of homeschooling and unschooling in these LDS families?*

2) *How does the hidden curriculum enjoin the educational practices of homelearners, in ways that either contradict or reinforce the beliefs of the home?*

Philip Jackson (1968) summarized the hidden curriculum as crowds, praise, and power. I chose to use his terms to evaluate what I observed as the hidden curriculum of the home. Table 3 groups behaviors and attitudes into these categories. I sorted data into these three subsets to organize what the hidden curriculum involved and how it was enacted among the participants. Homeschooling was evaluated separately from unschooling and then cross-analyzed for similarities and differences. I looked for evidence of crowds, praise, and power in each of the family situations and these data then were collapsed into main themes of relationships, time, learning, and technology use (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman 1994).

Table 3

Hidden Curriculum Characteristics (Jackson, 1968)

Crowds	Praise	Power
Adult/child ratio	Success	Love
Interaction child/child, adult/child	Motivation	Intimate mutual knowledge
Participation rate	Cooperation	Negotiation, distribution
Attention	Encouragement	Interests
Awareness	Intrinsic/extrinsic	Ideology
Family belonging	Expectations	Curriculum
	Work	Self-control (active, passive)
		Technology use
		Time

In other words, how were behaviors and attitudes connected in and to the family group? In what ways were family members motivated and encouraged to comply with family values? How was power negotiated between family members and

manifest in the selection of curriculum, technology use, and in the exercise of choices?

Because of the quantity of information gathered from the ten families excerpts were selected to represent both typicality and exceptionality. These examples serve to present the culture of the families and portray their view of learning as a holistic part of living rather than as a separate institution that dominates the landscape of time and space.

The data further acts to demonstrate meaning-making and mutual construction of knowledge that corresponds to the background of their ideology and goals. The culminating step that “provides the bridge between the researcher’s concerns and the participants’ experience” consisted of weaving together the actions, beliefs, and occurrences with the abstract theoretical concepts through a chronicled account (Aurback & Silverstein, 2003). Although I am instrumental in telling the story I use direct quotes from family members and from field notes for a realistic narrative of what these families do, how and why they do it.

The third research question is *How does digital media factor into both the decision to educate at home and the ongoing facilitation of home learning practices?*

Technology has been praised by many educators as the classroom of the future, and coming paradigm of learning, or at least an essential skill to be part of the academic experience in preparation for life in this century (Christensen et al., 2011; Gee & Hayes, 2011; Gee, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Johnson, 2006, Moe & Chubb, 2009; Nardi & Harris, 2006p; Salen et al., 2011; Turtel, 2006). As with other learning tools, however, homelearners engage with technology at different

levels. To analyze the data I searched for recognizable patterns of use or the lack thereof, for reasons for and against using digital tools, and for the ways in which every family, on some level, incorporated technology in their learning experience.

In my examination of data related to technology I coded instances of use and comments about digital access by attitudes and beliefs pertinent to technology, when and for what purposes it was used, what was valued or avoided, and criteria for inclusion or exclusion. Just as constraints of time, beliefs and interest dictate curriculum choice and are connected to the hidden curriculum, they are important in deciding if and when and in what ways technology is part of the learning experience. Here much of the data is the domain of parents who make decisions determining availability and limits. Parental opinion spans the spectrum of attitudes and some admitted that the questionnaires handed out brought a realization of their position, practices and purposes. For others, concrete rationale and rules had been thoughtfully decided on and adhered to for many years.

I also took notes on traditional curriculum, the type and content used among the homeschooling families. For both homeschoolers and unschoolers I documented many of the internet sites and functions they applied to their learning and the digital tools employed. I took what opportunities there were to scan the texts and sometimes query about content or watch as children “took classes” online.

Study Limitations and Challenges

Statistics gathered by homeschool researchers indicate that a disproportionate number of homeschooling families are white, Christian, and two-

parent with large families (Lines, 2000; Princiotta et al., 2006; Ray, 2011). The location of this study as well suggests a fairly homogenous population. Only two of the families have varied ethnic heritage. All of the ten families consisted of traditional two-parent families (although one subject was living temporarily with a married sister) and all are active members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (often referred to as LDS, or Mormon) and therefore have a consistent foundational faith that underlies their attitudes and actions. Lacking, then, is the diversity found even among various types of Christian denominations as Kunzman (2009) and Stevens (2001) described. An additional narrowing characteristic of the study is the middle class socioeconomic status that these families have in common.

Research on unschoolers highlights pedagogy and demonstrates an ideology typically less defined by religion (Gaither, 2008a; Gray 2011; Kunzman, 2009; Stevens, 1994; Stevens,2001; Van Galen & Pitman, 1991, Weil 2003). The unschooling families in my study emphasize both religious and pedagogical underpinnings as a hidden curriculum.

In many ways these families fit some of the traditional stereotypes of LDS members: large families who are health-conscious and civic-minded. This provided an advantage of many children and every school age to observe. Because there were many people working and interacting at once, tape recording the conversations was problematic and even worse was trying to transcribe all of the conversations happening at the same time with ambient noise of movement. A video would have been much more serviceable in permitting a view of what was happening to contextualize dialogue and track movement from one

interaction to another. However, videotaping introduces a somewhat more invasive element which may affect families' willingness to participate.

Researcher Standpoint

A personal note on the researcher standpoint: an unexpected move to Utah at the beginning point of this research resulted in two unanticipated consequences. First, was my welcome into a very active homeschooling community. The second was a homogenous selection of families to study. While was not my intention to restrict my study to LDS families, all respondents and referrals were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (LDS) as am I. Another connection from my background is that I have family members and acquaintances around the country who have engaged in home learning or are currently doing so. My own experiences in homeschooling gave me some insider experience and perhaps facilitated my entry into this new homeschooling community. Three participants I had met previously but had never been in any of the homes.

Summary

Patton (2002) claimed that, "Qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities: the capacity to learn" (p. 1). Qualitative research is an optimal approach to studying sociocultural practices and how meaning is constructed by individuals involved with each other and mediated by the tools and circumstances of their environment. A naturalistic inquiry into how families create meaning and understand their interaction as they learn together in a community of practice offers an inside view to the hidden curriculum of home learning and gives voice to the values and purposes of a small sample of home learners.

To accomplish this, case studies of ten families were compiled through a series of observations, interviews, questionnaires, conversations, and follow-up contact. Case studies are an optimal method of researching, letting “us peer deeply into the heart of an issue” (Stake, 1988, p. 402).

I discussed how participants were selected and provided a brief overview of the homeschooling and unschooling families studied. I then explained the methods used to collect data and procedures of coding, categorizing, comparing, and analyzing the information. I then disclosed the limitations and the researcher stance.

Through the generous participation of these and other families I gained understanding of what curriculum – hidden and overt - looks like to these unschooling and homeschooling families, what is valued in learning and why, and the role of technology in facilitating what happens in the home. One of the new insights was how the view of ideological identity forms a foundation in the way they approach everything and is especially instrumental in shaping learning.

The next chapter focuses on the findings of my research, presenting the themes of relationships, time, love of learning, and technology use. Vignettes and comments that narrate experiences and attitudes relative to each theme are positioned together to give the reader a clearer understanding of how home learners enact and view each of the categories. Participants constructed their own meaning of learning, I simply collected and organized them by patterns into themes to illuminate the hidden curriculum.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Overview

The hidden curriculum has been identified as the inculcation of values that shape behaviors and perpetuate culture (Eisner, 1979; Ellis, 2004; Firoux & Penna, 1979; Giroux & Purpel, 1983; Jackson, 1968; Marsh, 2009; Pinar, 1995; Reynolds & Webber, 2004; Vallance, 1973/1974). The concept became popularized by Jackson (1968) in the context of public education and the practices of perpetuating social control, moral ideology, and, as Gramsci noted, the “hegemonic status quo” (Burke, 2005, n.p.). My research investigates the hidden curriculum of homeschooling and unschooling families to learn what constitutes the belief system that underlies practices and purposes of the learning that occurs in these homes.

Many people, including a few practitioners of homeschooling, conceptualize the practice of home learning as doing school at home by following set routines of reading commercially prepared textbooks, completing assignments, and taking assessments in distinct content areas. In studying mother burnout among homeschoolers, Lois (2006) found, however, that this schooling approach is difficult to manage, stressful, and usually results in a return to institutionalized education. The reality for the families in my study is a relaxed and largely self-managed movement through a variety of curricula that includes and revolves around family life.

Unschooling is a concept further along this spectrum of learning styles in that there is no intentional curriculum. Learning is delight-driven and facilitated by attentive parents who nurture sparks of interest and consider life as the

course of study. “Unschooling allows each child to take their own unique learning path,” says unschooling mother and author Nanda Van Gestel (Van Gestel et al., 2008, p. 18). Sandra Dodd (n.d.) claims that “People learn by playing, thinking and amazing themselves. They learn while they're laughing at something surprising, and they learn while they're wondering, What the heck is this!?” (n.p.). Unschooling learning is simply, as Earl Stevens (1994) puts it, “doing real things” (n.p.).

This method is counter-intuitive to a society that has internalized the structure of the current public education system, including the hidden curriculum, as *normal* and *essential*. The distinction between that view and the position unschoolers take is that pursuing one's own interests and needs while learning at a pace conducive to application of new knowledge in authentic activities is *natural* and receiving unsought instruction is not only unnatural, but harmful (Holt, 1982).

One perceived task of education is to transform individuals (or masses of individuals) both intellectually and morally in ways consonant with personal and cultural identities (Purpel & McLaurin, 2004). I look for ways that the beliefs and behaviors in these homes impinge on family learning practices, the selection of curriculum, and technology use.

Digital tools are becoming increasingly accessible and functional in the pursuit of learning; indeed, technology is considered by most to be an important supplement to learning. Some consider digital tools as having the potential to eventually transform public education (Christensen, 2011; Moe & Chubb, 2011; Turtel, 2006). Because there is great diversity of opinion among educators as to the value of technology in schooling (Apple, 2007; Bates, 2009; Bauerline, 2008;

Cuban, 2010, 2001) and because the extensive options for use of electronic media are constructed differently in home venues, I examine how these families perceive and use technology as part of their hidden curriculum and learning.

Homeschoolers find electronic media and tools increasingly attractive on two levels. First, it replaces the professional teacher as the repository of knowledge, thus shoring up confidence, currency, and accuracy in home learning. Second, technology is becoming increasingly affordable. The majority of the fathers in my study work professionally with technology and their homes are bountifully equipped with access to digital media, including programs specifically designed to help children learn school content. In charter schools, families may be offered reimbursement for online classes and equipment in exchange for enrollment, allowing families to still learn at home and continue preferred approaches in a way some parents see as a means of recouping some of their tax money to educate their own children.

Originally, I intended to cross-analyze data between the two types of family learning. However, given that all of the families share a belief system as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, or Mormon), there are fewer contrasts and distinctive viewpoints in the hidden curriculum than I had anticipated. For this reason I combine the findings of both learning approaches, pointing out occasional distinctions.

In this chapter, I display only a small portion of the findings as representative of my experience in observing and visiting with these ten home learning families. The examples and conversations are typical of the perspectives of these families and the education, values, experiences, and personal belief systems found in their homes. Through these glimpses of daily

engagements and attitudes in the homes I study are seen parents who are exceptionally dedicated to their families, their faith, and the happiness and success of each other through enactments and practices that reinforce views of what learning should look like and how progress toward goals is directed.

In combing through hundreds of pages of observation notes, interviews, questionnaires, reflective notes, follow-up conversations, and electronic communications, I systematically distil the information into categories and eventually collapse them into four main themes that gather the significant elements of the hidden curriculum of these homes: relationships, time, the learning process, and technology. Each theme is supported by subthemes - principal ideas and salient examples indicated by quotes from participants. In addition, each theme begins with a brief explanation of LDS dogma that undergirds the hidden curriculum.

Relationships

Relationships in these homes are founded on a belief that families are forever – an eternal unit for whose failure no other success can compensate (McCulloch, 1924). This concept is rooted in the belief that “ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny” and that “the divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave” (“The family: A proclamation to the world,” 1995). Further, all people are held to have lived as pre-mortal beings with distinct identities and came to earth to receive a physical body and gain “experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize their divine destiny as heirs of eternal life” (ibid.).

This belief that “[t]he family is ordained of God (ibid.)” is central to the attitudes and behaviors I observe and expressions and patterns of commitment embodied in these ten homes. Study participant Amanda Payne reports that she taught her six children,

This family - you chose to come with this family. I don't know how it works up there [in heaven] but you came down [to earth] to this family and the best friends that you will ever have are the [siblings] that you came with. And they will be here. Friends will come and go. They'll move, they'll die, they're never there. They come and go because they change loyalties. This family loves each other. We are each other's best friends and we will back you up no matter whatever happens.

This orientation toward family relationships also explains the curious collection of papers taped to the wall in the Herman family room. Each paper has an alphabet letter written on top and generations of extended family have been added next to the letter that begins their name – a unique and personal family alphabet chart created by the children.

A close feeling of connectedness or intimacy is not automatic; rather it must be worked toward daily on a multitude of dimensions and an array of areas (Bronson & Merryman, 2011; Merry & Howell, 2009; Stinnett & DeFrain, 1989). Dr. Gordon Neufeld (2005) cites the lack of intimacy, or attachment between parent and child with its unconditional love, acceptance, and nurture as a tragic scar with profound consequences. Without exception, these families expressed that learning at home contributes to the quality of family life and relationships. They believe, as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) asserts, that families who stick together are in a “better position to help their members develop a rich self” (p. 179).

While these families are not among the “[m]any parents [who] cite intimacy as one of their reasons for deciding to educate at home,” parent participants in my study would agree with researchers Merry and Howell that “[i]t seems intuitively obvious that home education is conducive to intimacy because of the increased time families spend together” (Merry & Howell, 2009, p. 363).

They would likewise support Merry and Howell’s assertion that:

...intimacy is both a good in itself and a source of other important goods. Further, it is an essential and irreplaceable good, like life itself or basic nourishment. That is, it cannot be traded against other goods, i.e. more money, popularity, health or educational opportunity cannot compensate for the loss of intimacy (ibid, p. 364).

Every mother echoes that conviction at some point during my time with the families.

I have defined four subthemes that illustrate ways the family relationships are elevated and cultivated as part of the focus on family learning. I use quotes from participants as subtitles. “The real source is from the Lord” captures the spiritual foundations and prism through which the importance of the family is foregrounded as part of God’s plan. This is followed by “I did not have a personal relationship with my child,” illustrative of the perception of a difference in the quality and nature of relationships these mothers feel as a result of being present with their children in the home. Issues of family harmony and conflict resolution that are magnified by the amount of togetherness is the focus of “We have to talk about this or we’ll be here all night.” “She could not remember Jan’s name” highlights the impact of intimate personal knowledge that these parents consider to be profoundly important in the learning process.

“The real source is from the Lord.” Given the spiritual foundation of the hidden curriculum in these families, it isn’t surprising to hear them speak in terms of *mission, vision, blessing, and inspiration*. The mothers I watch are earnest in their desires and efforts to create an environment that nurtures spiritual and emotional growth as well as intellectual and physical health. In this endeavor they consider themselves partners with God.

Beth Southwick, an unschooling mother, is pleased that her husband takes the time to interview the children about their own feelings and goals. She mentions repeatedly their family vision – what they want their family to be and become.

What I’ve noticed is that we’ve made a conscious effort in our family to have a vision of family, that families become a core unit whereas before it wasn’t quite so much the focus. It was kind of taken for granted that we are a family and get along with each other. Where now, the goals that we make are very much – we talk about family goals, we talk about family vision, about where we want to be as a family in twenty years.

This vision of family unity is not a simple task. “In one sense, because we are together all the time, I hear Cheyanne say, I need a break. I need a break from the family. And so it’s learning to appreciate that in each other,” Beth tells me.

There’s certainly – Cheyanne and Jenna are best friends and they’ve been that way forever - so that’s been a huge blessing so they don’t have distractions, especially as Cheyanne reaches the teen years that she’s not being pulled away from her by what I think would probably be a natural pull if we were in a different situation.

Beth adds, "I think that Cheyanne and I are closer than we've ever been and working toward getting closer and that's been a real blessing to me."

Weekly interviews appear to be somewhat of a pattern in the quest for family unity. In the Bates family, Anna meets individually each week with her children to discuss learning goals. When I ask her about curriculum she tells me:

It could be whatever I feel is important for them in their goals and where they're headed. It kind of goes back to my philosophy of these children are my stewardship. God gave them to me and I am still being a co-creator with Him as I help my children create their lives of who they are. And so, I draw from, if it's scripture, if it's music, whatever it is. So with that in mind, curriculum can be very broad.

Dick Kaplan also holds a weekly conference with each child in addition to the myriad other things Mom and Dad do to build close family relationships.

Amber includes the Lord as part of the dynamic:

I think that I rely a lot on prayer and a lot on the Spirit to help me, because I'll pray and I'll say, I don't know how to handle this situation and I don't know who to ask, so please inspire me to know how to deal with this and how to make it all come out right. Or how I can be more efficient. Or how I teach this. And I think that's become more my source of help than other moms, 'cause that's what I have time for and that's where I can get some answers from Somebody who really knows.

Although her bedroom is full of books on parenting and she enjoys getting ideas from other mothers, Amber believes:

The real source is from the Lord. And He's the one that can help me to know for each child how to handle situations and how to help them

and what I need to be doing as a mother to help them develop their talents, to help them to prepare for their future role in life, to help them prepare for their mission that He has in mind for them. So I think I've learned to rely more on the Lord instead of on other people.

Not only do I hear the families speak frequently about prayer, I am privileged to be alluded to in several family prayers. I am impressed as six-year-old Shara Grandon prays that we will be able to "make friends out of strangers." It is touching to hear the Kaplan children thank the Lord "that Marlene can be here."

However, the unity isn't limited to ethereal dimensions. Lila Sanders' comment is representative of others:

Where I feel like where we're doing homeschooling, we're doing family learning, family work, family activities, family cooking, family eating together all the time. And if someone is going to do an activity, it's more, OK, all the family goes to basketball practice. You know, sometimes. So we're doing it more as a unified unit rather than all of us going our own separate ways, which is very much, I felt like, how our family was before. Dad works, mom works, the boys go to school. We all just do our own thing and we don't really share in what brought us joy.

The desire to be with her brother turned out to be stronger than the pull of friends and activities at school for unschooler Holly Herman. Twice she tried going to school but each time it was "very hard 'cause I missed [Robbie] a lot and I would cry during rest time." Her mom, Esther, likewise enjoys having the children around:

I like the fact that we're home together. I think that especially with their early years that it's important that they be around each other and develop that close relationship. I like that I'm with them and I can see them and I think that it was really hard for me when Holly went to kindergarten for a little bit just because I liked having her home.

"I did not have a relationship with my child." I notice that these mothers perceive a difference in the quality of relationships between the togetherness of home learning and typical lifestyles of children going to school and mom working. They talk of a deeper dimension of connection and sensitivity that has resulted from investing in motherhood as a primary focus.

Even though they always had a good parent-child relationship, Lila tells me it is "so different now." In her "before unschooling" life, Lila worked full or part-time, often from home, and felt very connected and involved. She participated frequently in her eldest son's class, organizing parties, going on fieldtrips, busy with the PTA, and sometimes substituting. Marty, in turn, loved school, his friends, his teachers, and the academics. He was the model student with the ideal supportive mother. What could be better? Losing her job? Losing her son's preschool? Quitting public school?

Although she wouldn't have believed it at the time, Lila insists that these factors made her life immeasurably better. She didn't know life could be any other way. She considered working part-time to be meaningful and fulfilling. She had only one model, one ideology, she says. She realizes now, however, that she was "far angrier" and "yelled."

It was no big deal, but it WAS a big deal, because it was taking a lot of my time and energy and taking me away from what I felt was being

present with my kids. It's OK. I'm fine, thinking that I was being a really, really good mom, but really, I wasn't being present with them. So when I understood how to be present it opened my eyes. Honestly. It just changed my life. I totally saw God's hand in it because I would have never quit.

How do I explain, other than I worked a lot. I worked full-time and then I worked part-time so I was able to be in [Marty's] classroom a lot more, but I still worked, and so when he was home or whatever I would still be, like, OK, go do your own thing. I'm doing my own thing. It seemed like it was more of a -- it wasn't as unified. We were maybe more like we had our own separation. We weren't as unified.

Lila recognizes a difference in how she parented before home learning. "Rather than just hurrying them because of time restraints," she is now focused on "developing and nurturing relationships."

Really, what unschooling has done for our family has been a relationship solidifier. A transformation of family values. A transformation of how we interact with one another, and really a transformation of ourselves, like our way of being. Especially as parents. Especially for me. So I feel like having the kids at home, having this responsibility or whatever you want to call it. I guess responsibility, but I don't want them to feel like it's a chore, per se, but it has transformed us as a family. And so we could have never, I feel like, have gotten this when I just sent my kids out the door.

Lila elaborates on the difference she feels now that she's spending both her time and attention solely as a mother, something that escaped her understanding when she was working. From thinking she was a "really, really good mom" to feeling that she can now be "present and engage with [her children], and focus on them," she describes the joy she feels now as being a transformation, something she was unaware was missing.

"The other day," she recounts,

I was with a bunch of moms who do send their children to public school and we were talking about their Christmas vacation. They're just like, 'I cannot WAIT to send them back.' And it made me so sad, like to the point I was trying not to cry in front of them 'cause it made me really sad. I'm like, 'Just look at what you're missing!' You know, I was the same way.

Chrissy Gonzalez describes her relationship with her children before she became a full time mother. She explains that unless you homeschool you don't understand the intimacy of the connection that develops. She describes it as:

[a] tight bond I feel I would have been denied if I'd just shuttled them in at age four and five to a public school system. And I see it with all other parents. And they don't understand. Their kids are lost to them a lot of time, and the relationship is not there. This, even one or two years' worth, makes a huge difference in relationship.

And the reason I say that, when I worked, I worked at the FBI and I had my first baby and I wasn't gonna quit work. Period. And I thought I cared about my baby. But I remember after my third baby when I quit and I stayed home, I realized I did not have a relationship with my child. It

was a PROFESSIONAL relationship, but I THOUGHT it was great. You don't know until you spend time with them and you go through successes and failures and you learn together and all that. And so I don't begrudge that. I mean, that's the biggest benefit of this. And you give that up when you sign them over to someone else and you get into the lifestyle. So that's been the biggest plus.

Haylee agrees that family relationships can change when children leave home school for public school. Although she has maintained a closeness to her mother she finds her relationship with her siblings is different. "When we were all homeschooled I spent a lot of my day with my brother," Haylee says. "And I still do even though when we were going to public school I spent quite a bit of time with him but I was usually with my friends and not hanging out with him."

I am told by Beth Southwick that a fundamental divide in attitude exists between mothers who are relieved when the children head out the door to school and those for whom having the children close around all day is a joy. She says that "she 'LOVES, LOVES' having the children at home and having the time to build their family relationship. It's the most important foundation" (field notes, January 17, 2012). Beth was a teacher and lived her dream of teaching at the same school her children attended and even having eldest daughter, Cheyanne, in her class. Even that, however, is not as rewarding as all of them coming home together. "[Beth] says the home is so much more peaceful now. She LOVES having the children home with her" (ibid.).

Beth describes the desire to learn at home with feeling a fire inside and states her opinion that, "People bring their kids home [from school] because the

family's suffering in some way, even if you don't really know it. The difference I see is our own family's vision." She further adds that she is:

delighted with our strength in family. With our vision. And I'm grateful to see the growth, whatever growth that is. I love the fact that you can seize every teaching moment because they're with me all day. There is something that happened to me when that fire took hold.

A problem with public schools, homeschooling mother Anna Bates tells me, is that "there's no permanency to any of the relationships and yet you're spending so much time there." Instead, her boys are playing Duplo blocks with their five-year-old sister as the family learns and talks together. Jacob Bates, age fourteen, writes "I get to spend more time with my family" on his questionnaire and twelve-year-old Clayton cites "my teacher" as one of his favorite things about homeschooling.

The personal time and effort invested by parents in their children and on their children's learning does not seem to be lost on the children. Elizabeth Grandon's teenage son tells me "I developed a respect for who [Mom] is and how much time she spent with me trying to help me develop myself. You lose that when you're at school." I see several instances of children exhibiting behaviors that signify contentment such as the six Rodriguez children gathering around their mother while she stirs the spaghetti sauce for a group hug. They seem to be drawn to her like magnets as we visit. I notice the Gonzalez children seeking Mom's attention and the Kaplan kids snuggled against Mom as she reads. The socialization in these families may appear to an outsider to be a unique kind of normal and mother appears to be at the center. Haylee tells me, "My Mom was always my best friend."

“We have to talk about this or we’ll be here all night!” A common challenge for families – large ones in particular – is dealing with interpersonal conflict. Learning at home is not a panacea for contention but to these families it does seem to magnify the necessity of finding ways to deal with it, since there is no escape from being together. However, parents take time to implement methods they feel are effective for the children and appropriate to the situation as opposed to protocol directives for conflict that must be implemented in institutionalized education.

“When kids fight you can either make them spend more time together or less,” Dick Kaplan, father of eight homeschoolers tells me.

You know, if you fight, you can separate them. If you go off to your separate school classes you don’t have to deal with lot of issues that you’re struggling with. Homeschool kind of forces you to have them spend more time together and I think that’s how they work through problems.

The Kaplan family has tried both public school and homeschool. Amber thought “it would make life easier” if daughter Ashley went to school, as they sometimes butted heads. Amber noticed that instead of improving relationships Ashley “lost interest in siblings and began to see the emotional games and interactions that occur in schools among large groups of peers – jockeying for influence and acceptance” (field notes, October 24, 2011).

But then I realized that relationships are some of the most important things and this is not helping this relationship, just to send her off for a few hours every day (laughs). My job is to learn to work with my daughter even if she’s a challenge for me and very strong willed and

doesn't respond in ways I would like her to. So, are we going to take that challenge on and keep her home?

Amber laughs as she describes the realities of cultivating interpersonal harmony. "You either have to figure out how to work it out or you kill each other," she says jokingly. She continues to chuckle as she describes her method of dealing with contention:

If they fight I have them sit together until they've worked it out – sit together on the same bench until they can say what they did wrong themselves, not the other person's wrong. And they can resolve it with the other person. The other night when Thomas [age ten] and Alicia [age nine] were upset at each other, 'Licia would say, "I don't like this idea. I don't think it works at all!" And Thomas would say, "Licia, Mom's done this with all the other kids. I've been in this situation many times. There's no getting out of it. We have to talk this through. Mom's not going to let us get out of this chair until we've worked it out, so don't close me off and not be willing to talk to me. We have to talk about this or we'll be here all night!"

Dick feels that spending most of their time together is "an advantage:"

I think kids learn. It's not that they're fighting less – and I'm sure our kids fight and squabble as much or more than anybody else's kids. But they don't have the opportunity to really nurse and continue with bad feelings. I mean, they have to work things out. I think that they all really like each other and get along well, but they certainly have regular fights. No doubt about that, having to share bedrooms (laughing)!

Weekly meetings offer Anna Bates an opportunity to listen to each child and explore each child's goals. Finding ways to improve relationships with each other is a major focus. Anna tells me:

One really clear example is I have one son - he just really struggles with having positive interactions with his brothers and sisters. And we had just had, he and I, this little mentor meeting or conversation, and in it we had talked about how are your relationships, so he had talked about, 'Well, they're good except for with one. One of my siblings.' So I said, 'Well, what could you do this week that might make a difference in that relationship?' So he had a chance to think about it. And so we talked about relationships, what makes a good relationship, and then I had just taken time to affirm him. 'You know, you're doing a really great job with this and I see how you've been doing with this.' Just honest, positive feedback. And he felt like, 'Gosh, Mom listens to me. Mom understands me. Mom loves me.' Anna concludes:

And just exactly after we finished he went outside and I was just a little bit behind him and there was an incident that ensued between him and one of his siblings. And normally that incident – he would have exploded and he would have lost it. But I watched him handle it in a positive, good way, and I know it was because his bucket had just been filled. We had just talked about relationships and he was able to manage it. Now that's one in a hundred, but it worked that time. So I think that it's been really fun to watch how my fourteen-year-old plays with the five-year-old. They have a break, they're on the trampoline together. They're

doing stuff together. They have projects together. Those kinds of things.

So I think, all in all, we're a normal family.

Normal seems to include, in most families, a degree of learning to get along. As Ruby tells me, she has one son in particular who makes it "his job to annoy. He's gifted at it. He knows all the right buttons to push to make his siblings crazy." What is typical, although perhaps not normal, is the fact that "they let him. I've explained to them all that he is SPECIAL." The type of love that binds families together, Thomas (2006) maintains, is the impetus for dealing with differences in a way that enhances relationships.

"She could not remember Jan's name." "It is only when we take seriously the role of having children in the lives of adults," says Syracuse University philosophy professor Laurence Thomas (2006), "that we can see how much contributing to the flourishing of another is such a fundamental feature of what it is to be a human being" (p.11). These home educating parents see the extended interaction with each other through home learning as contributing to this flourishing by increasing the ability of parents to mediate all types of learning because of the intimate connections, love, and personal understanding (Thomas and Pattison, 2007). While children learn continuously in diverse contexts and through limitless experiences with countless individuals throughout their lives, there is no equivalent, in the thinking of these homeschooling parents, of the power to facilitate learning that can happen through family engagement.

Learning is tightly intertwined with love and profound interpersonal knowledge.

Just as Ruby is aware that her son knows "which buttons to push" and Anna Bates understands her son's struggle with turning negative interactions into positive ones, these parents feel that personal and intimate knowledge of each

other is an integral part of learning together and a dimension that can't be replicated in other circumstances. During their weekly one-to-one discussions Anna tells me that the focus, rather than being centered on assignments, grades, or behaviors, is the holistic well-being of the child:

I'm looking at their whole being, about what they need. And then, not only do I think about that on my own, but then I also take time to talk with my child. 'How are you? What are you really excited about? What are you struggling with? What would you like to accomplish with school or what would you like to do? How are your relationships this week?'

Similarly, Chrissy Gonzalez tells me that nine-year-old Lisa's music is therapeutic for her – essential to her very soul. Chrissy is also attuned to Lisa's need for emotional support:

She could take my full attention twenty-four hours a day. I love her for it. She's an intense kid. She'll give me everything I ask her for and more, but I can't do that, so we've worked through some tears and we've worked through how to make it more satisfactory for her. Part of that is her violin. It is the love of her life. She loves to play. That's a gift she has. She loves to serve that way.

Before long and without any discussion, nine-year-old Lisa stands before me with her violin and beguiles me with a Vivaldi piece full of expression and emotion.

Several mothers express this view that learning to work with their children in ways conducive to personalities and proclivities is part of the process of home learning and something they are inclined to take advantage of. Lila Sanders tries to be aware of her boys' sparks of interest. Beth Southwick joins Cheyanne in an

ancestor search project or working through a concept on the Kahn Academy lesson website. Esther Herman refrains from suggesting anything resembling a school assignment because she has discerned a negative attitudinal alteration in Holly when she does so.

Elizabeth Grandon laughs as she contrasts that degree of intimacy with a parent-teacher conference she had with the teacher of her older daughter when that child attended a public school after a disruptive move to a Midwestern state. In order to simplify their lives, Elizabeth tells me,

I just signed the girls up for sure 'cause I thought at least they'll get to know some friends. But I went in to talk to Jan's teacher, Mrs. J____, bless her heart, she was retiring that year. She could not remember Jan's name, after I don't know how long it had been. But here's my little fourth grader and I'm dropping her off for eight hours of the day and this person could not remember her name. I told Greg, 'I can't believe that they could be with somebody that long and not know who they are.' And Jan is so bubbly and her nature is very gregarious. It was just so funny to me. She couldn't remember her name. We talked about her and she wasn't even sure who she was. I think by the end of the interview I was like, I should have brought her with me so you knew who my child was (laughing).

Although Elizabeth is able to laugh about that incident, she recognizes the importance of knowing and understanding children in order to relate to them and learn with them.

In the family there are so many blessings in your relationships with each other. I think that's part of the reason why you miss them so much

when they go because you have interactions with them every day. You know, they come and talk to you. You know exactly what they're thinking about or what they're worried about or what they're studying, how they're growing, or you feel excited for them because you see that they're learning different things that you would want them to. And [as you work together all day] there's just more chance to talk and to interact with them even as they get older. I think those are the blessings – that relationship definitely is – they know you and you know them really well, what's most important.

These parents are fully aware of the circumstances of each child's life and feel that they have the potential advantage of integrating both content and methods in ways that support the interests, experiences, and learning preferences of each child through learning at home. Even more powerful is the reciprocal element of love that is the motivating factor in learning together and cements relationships in ways not otherwise attainable. Researchers Merry and Howell (2009) explain:

Without mutual knowledge, two people could not effectively help one another; without affection, they would lack motivation to help in a sustained way; without communication, they could not maintain mutual knowledge; without trust, they would be unwilling to share sensitive personal information.

Besides providing the foundation for mutual care, intimacy is also the source of other important goods. Lack of intimacy breeds loneliness, increased stress and accelerated physical deterioration; intimacy does the opposite, providing a buffer against life's indignities and

disappointments. Intimacy also contributes to the flourishing of children. Family intimacy makes children feel secure and is strongly associated with healthy social development (pp. 365-366).

Summary. Sociology professor Gary Wyatt (2007) claims that all rationales for homeschooling are tied to the concept of the importance of relationships. There is a basic premise that familial relationships take precedence over cultural and subcultural associations experienced outside the home. His thesis, that homeschoolers claim a deeper familial bond of supportive and positive relationships, is consonant with views expressed by the families in my study (see also Merry & Howell, 2009).

Schools, on the other hand, have as a fundamental purpose that of estranging children from parents and each other, asserts Harvard professor Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (1978). Schools, she claims are “intent upon *excluding* families from school life. They seem to want to establish an exclusive, isolated environment, free from the intrusions of parents” (pp. 78-9). She further asserts that the child-parent discontinuity that schools create are a lever for modifying relationships to enjoin social change (ibid., p. 38; see also Bemis & Slater, 1969; Cutler, 2000, Lines, 1994b):

Schools are environments that must support and encourage the child’s movement away from the emotional and dependent constraints of family. Teachers build relationships that are qualitatively different from parent-child interactions; that are based on different criteria of evaluation and judgment. Their adult role is more neutralized and restrained as they apply generalized, universal expectations and visible rules (ibid., p. 187).

“Home education provides a kind of insurance against such disruption,” say Merry & Howell (2009, p. 373.) These families prefer the emotional and physical accessibility that contributes to family intimacy. Their enactment of sensitivity, warmth and humor, and a willingness to explain and reason with their children about behaviors, along with the sincerity with which they interact, are evidence of the kind of authority that invites compliance and tends to lower levels of stress. The result is often reduced conflict in the home (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Merry & Howell, 2009; Smetana, 1999).

I am consistently impressed with the relationships and interaction I observe. Three things stand out to me. First, the pleasantness of conversation and association that is pervasive. My field notes are peppered with comments about smiles, laughter, and good-humored teasing. I never sense any sort of tension between parent and sibling or between siblings, with the exception of three small quarrels among young children that are quickly resolved. Second, is the mutual respect between family members. No child speaks rudely to a parent or sibling, nor parent condescendingly to a child during my visits. Children play and work happily together and in several instances assume roles of authority as the teacher, taking turns guiding each other. The third concept is the apparent attitude of acceptance and compliance with the family values. It is as though the children all believe that the way their family functions is in harmony with their individual thinking and life is just as it should be.

Time

Brigham Young, a nineteenth century LDS prophet, referred to time and the power to use it as “capital,” or the property bestowed by God to His children: “The property which we inherit from our Heavenly Father is our time, and the

power to choose in the disposition of the same. This is the real capital that is bequeathed unto us by our Heavenly Father..." (Eyring, 1993, n.p.). Church members are taught that they are held accountable by God for their use of time, having the duty to "invest it to produce returns for eternity" (ibid.). Two of the time investments with the greatest potential dividends for these families are relationships and learning.

The view that each individual is a steward of time and its expenditure is significant in LDS culture. While these families do not seem rushed, they are relentlessly engaged in activities they see as having value and accept Solomon's pronouncement that there is "a time for every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, King James Bible). Church leaders counsel that while the home is populated with children the family purpose is nurturing and teaching each other. "Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children" ("The family: A proclamation to the world," 1995).

In this segment I investigate attitudes about time in three sections. The first is the idea that "Time is the most precious possession," and the influence of this belief on accountability and practices that endeavor to optimize the advantage of having the children home each day. The second, "The time thing is the hardest," contains comments and examples of how parents struggle to balance their expectations connected to home learning with the reality of large families. In the third section related to time, "The whole rhythm of life," I present their views of how time is connected to learning in a variety of ways.

"Time is the most precious possession." "Time is the most precious possession we have and the one thing we are held accountable for (by God),"

Amanda Payne tells me, “so we have to use it wisely.” Relationships, like learning, require significant time expenditure and focus and are foregrounded in these families. The importance of time is emphasized in conversation but does not dominate the landscape of the day nor dictate the learning or interaction of each hour. Part of the flow of homeschool is the focus on family life.

Amanda says that flow changed for them when Mia was born with Down Syndrome. The children rallied around their baby sister to assist with therapy. It is touching to watch sixteen-year-old Maddie playfully challenge Mia as her rival for the prime position in the affections of Maddie’s boyfriend. They exchange jests while Maddie fixes breakfast for Mia and helps her with papers and Halloween projects.

Spending time together results in increased feelings of connection, Maddie claims.

Your friends aren’t the kids you see every day that are down the street. They’re your siblings. So the people you play with and interact with are your siblings. Instead of going to play with other people all day and having to come home and be with your siblings, IT’S YOUR SIBLINGS! They’re your playmates.

Amber Kaplan tells me that her homeschooling began as simply setting aside “Mommy time” to focus on her first baby. Her child’s academic skills emerged naturally as the result of Amber pointing out letters and numbers and colors and reading lots of books and singing – the kinds of things Amber continues to do with her children in a relaxed and cheery way. The learning is the outgrowth of the time spent together to build relationships.

Despite the demands of a large family, busy medical practice, community and church commitments, the Kaplans frontload their schedule with activities designed to increase their family's love and harmony. Dick takes a child to lunch each week, interviews each child weekly, and checks the science and math of the older children each evening and re-teaches unclear concepts. Amber has "popcorn talks," focused on one child at a time, taking a bowl of popcorn and a child onto her bed to discuss items of interest to the child. In addition, each child has a night every other month to stay up late with Mom and Dad and do an activity of her choice. The family takes learning vacations to visit history sites or other cultural attractions, backpack together in the mountains, and attend family reunions. Somehow they find time to support each other in musical productions and sporting events, including sixty soccer games in six weeks.

Amber also sees homeschooling as an asset in having more options. "Where they're not having to spend as much time in school they can still take advantage of some good things there," she tells me, "and then have more time to develop their talents or pursue their own interests or do things that they want to do. They have a couple more extra hours at home every day.

Her children have loaded up on music, drama, sports, scouting, and church activities. Evenings are available for listening to Mom read stories while the children fold laundry or other quiet enterprises. The children are assigned to help each other and contribute to success in the home through chores and developing talents. They have morning devotional together, reading scriptures, singing hymns, praying, and planning the day. Amber says their focus as a family is personal preparation – temporal, spiritual, academic, and that their home is not simply a *refuge but a fortress*.

Likewise, more important than academic instruction to Anna Bates is character development and the quality of relationships. She explains the value of time in developing those:

And it seems that the more important thing would be to learn the right and wrong, the good and bad in the context of family relationships, working and playing together. And when conflict does arise, because it does, that becomes the lesson of the hour or the lesson of the day or the lesson of the moment. You can kind of just brush it under the rug and say, 'Just get over it,' or you can take the time to talk about it and teach about it and teach the children to repent and to change their heart.

And so relationships have been, I think, in our home much, much stronger because of what we do. Especially MY relationship with the children because I take time conscientiously, on a weekly basis, to think about where they are and what they need and what they need to be doing. And that might mean that they need time to talk. It doesn't necessarily mean that they need to learn how to do the multiplication tables. I'm looking at their whole being. I also take time to talk with my child.

Perhaps of greatest worth to Beth Southwick – judging by the number of repetitions – is working on what she refers to as their family vision. They are defining long-term family goals of being, doing, and working together toward those aims. Central to that are the weekly interviews Dad has with the children, one of the “certain things that make such a difference that we just didn't either see the importance of or catch the vision of before or feel like we had the time,”

Beth admits. “And I think that’s huge. THE TIME IS HUGE writ large! That we can just relax and take the time versus trying to fit it in. There’s a difference.”

A principal reason for the weekly interviews conducted in many families is scheduling individual time for each child. Other mothers try to find some time every day for each child while frankly admitting that being together all of the time presents challenges. Esther Herman, mother of three unschoolers, tells me:

They’re all home, but I have set aside a time for each of them each day. And it doesn’t happen each day based on what we’re doing or based on whether or not Jack is taking a nap, but I like the fact that we’re home together. It does mean, on the good side, that they get a lot of play time together, and on the bad side that they don’t have a way to escape from each other.

Haylee thinks homeschool is advantageous in allowing her to go at her own speed in each subject. “Because Haylee is very task-oriented, she gets these things done on her own and gets frustrated if her math, for example, that she has chosen (Saxon) is too difficult to work through on the time-table she has set for herself” (field notes, November 1, 2011). Still, she says, “I’d just rather be at my own pace...I just like homeschooling better.” One reason is, she claims,

I think public schools want you all to be at the same speed...Like, if you’re too far behind then they want to catch you up, or if you’re too far ahead then they want to hold you back. They don’t let you go at your own pace and you don’t really have individual time with the teacher, usually, unless you go in and wait and wait and wait until they’re done with all the other kids who - like the after-school program and stuff - that time you have to wait for help.

Elizabeth Grandon confides, “I don’t know how people do it when the kids are gone all day because after school they’re always busy in other activities and it seems like there would hardly be any time as a family.”

Elizabeth’s contention that the likelihood of finding time for each child would be even more difficult when most of the day is spent away from home in traditional schooling resonates with Chrissy:

It’s a challenge because I’m busy. You can see that. There are ten requirements per second on my time; I have to be constantly prioritizing. It’s exhausting, but I’m getting better at it, I think. We are getting a little more order out of the chaos. It’s going to be a process. It’s going to take me another thirty days [to iron out difficulties]. The hardest part is getting personnel. And now through the internet I can get resources. So it’s a time question.

“The time thing is the hardest.” These homeschoolers perceive themselves as having ownership over their time rather than being controlled by it. Clock and calendar are aids instead of dictators. Learning time can be expanded to suit interest and extended until comprehension and mastery are achieved. Projects can get finished or delayed to suit circumstances. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that life is languid. Mothers in home learning families take on the role of educator and facilitator in addition to their normal family care, increasing demands on time (Hecht, 2001). Contrary to participant Esther Herman’s original perception that unschooling is “a justification for not doing anything,” the families I observe adhere to the admonition in LDS scripture that people “should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will” (Doctrine and Covenants, 58:26).

Esther also sees the ability to manage time as an important life skill she wants her children to master. Holly's efforts as practice toward that end are left up to her:

Holly sometimes says she needs a little bit more structure. Last year in particular she said she wanted to come up with more of a structure. So she comes up with her own structure. She hasn't for a couple of months, but she comes up with her own schedule: 'OK. At 11:00 I want to do math. At 10:00 I want to read. At 9:45 I want to be outside doing recess.' That's a very traditional school mentality, so that really bothered me, but I told her she could have that schedule and suggested that she be a little more lenient in terms of the time restraints and also made it very clear that I was not going to assist that schedule (laughs). If she wanted to do it, that needed to be something that she was going to do. I could remind her of it but I was not going to enforce it. So I'm hoping that by not structuring their day for them so much that they can learn to structure their time themselves.

Ruby Rodriguez has similar ideas. She sets deadlines for accomplishing chores at home but the accomplishment is left to the boys' own management of time. "THEY are in charge of making that happen and controlling the time to do that." She is pleased with the strong work ethic and time management skills her older children have developed and expects nothing less from the younger boys.

Time is smooth and peaceful as the children move from one interest to another as they desire in the Southwick home. I write, "They are flexible in their learning...day flows" (field notes, January 17, 2012). Beth asks Cheyanne and Jenna if there is anything they'd like her to spend time with them on. "We learn

together,” comments Beth. “The teaching moments are coming all the time because you’re with them all the time. You have the time to avoid being thinned out with the overwhelming amount parents THINK happens in school.”

A former school teacher turned unschooler, Beth tells me that her pre-home learning perception was that the people who homeschool have a problem and that is why they pull their children out.

But that’s interesting because I hadn’t considered that in my view that there was a reason why I pulled my kids out. Just for the opportunity of having them home. What we can do together, in my view, is a lot more than what they could have experienced in all those hours [at school].

Elizabeth Grandon has plenty to say relative to time and learning. At home, “there’s more that I can give. My time that I have I can give to this child. I can help these children learn and understand.” She contrasts that with school and “the rush that you feel in school! The next class is coming up so you better get this done. You’re always fighting the clock.” She tells me that her husband is helpful in managing time to get things done. I see him come in and finish the breakfast dishes so she can begin the morning’s lessons. That night he helps the family bottle nearly a hundred quarts of grape juice. Every mother attributed at least part of the success of the family learning endeavor to the father’s participation and support.

“So we have to use [time] wisely. As for the group in this house the students own their time to plan and work as they wish. After they reach the age of accountability that depends on the child,” Amanda Payne shares. To help the children understand the concept of accountability she had them report on their learning. “The children in the early years have time with me to plan their morning

then the opportunity for them to self-lead their day, being accountable to Mom at the end. Reporting in is important all our life, so it is a good thing to do.” Her mantra on education: “I wanted learning to be every day, every moment. They used to come in the door and the first thing I would say, ‘What did you learn today?’”

In the Payne home now, I see this accountability originate not in the mother, but in Maddie, as she enthusiastically demonstrates her mastery of her new computer photography program to her mother, showing enhancements and changes. They discuss preferences and other options together and tell me how Maddie’s brother, a university student, has facilitated her new photography business.

Time is a significant factor in Chrissy Gonzalez’ decision to assume the additional responsibility of educating her children for two reasons. One is that her earlier experiences were positive. “It was beautiful. I loved the time I had with my kids. There was nothing they couldn’t grasp.” She also admits she had fewer children and was younger with more energy. She is still working on finding her rhythm teaching four children at once, “but getting there requires a lot of time.”

She admits it isn’t easy. “The least favorite [thing about homeschooling] is my inability to spend time with each one individually.” Even so, she feels this is a better situation for her children than public schools. “So in my own home, I’m hoping now to circumvent the trash which has become institutionalized. It’s a challenge, because I’m busy. You can see that.” She rejects “big, clunky government – government has to do everything; can’t do it for yourself. Slow, plodding, waste of time. Question: why do schools do it? Wasting time.”

Finding individual time to spend with each child is a major obstacle for Chrissy and the most troubling aspect of homeschooling. Thinking about working with a room full of thirty students, she quips, “You couldn’t possibly, could you?”

One thing that bugs me. Every kid deserves full attention and I’ve got FOUR. So I consciously think in the morning, ‘Who’s getting the shaft today and who’s getting my full attention?’ And I try to be fair. But those are the days Lisa has a bad day. The days I’m with her it’s a GREAT DAY! Evan will work out his own core and I’ve been abusive [of his patience]. But today, now, he’s finally feeling it, and he wants Mom.

The Gonzalez children mirror their mother’s energy. They race around a nearby golf course for fun when they aren’t playing soccer or practicing their violins or pianos. Evenings are spent reading and discussing literature rather than hanging out at the mall, watching television, or playing video games. This pattern seems to be consistent across these homeschooling and unschooling families.

Rather than having the evening hours constrained by homework, making family time difficult to fit in, the Southwicks are able to manage Jenna’s, Qwynn’s and Cheyanne’s karate classes, music classes, church activities, and “different things.”

And so it just feels sometimes that there’s no time. And in the evening they’re consumed because that’s when the after-school kids can do things. And so it’s our days that I really feel like we get stuff done. Then we have time in the evening with Dad that we try to make quality. But there are some days where I just feel like, we need more time! So I don’t know how we did it when we went to school. Well, we DIDN’T do it. We didn’t do what we’re doing now. It was very different.

“The whole rhythm of life.” In the perception of these home learning families, schools’ timed system limits learning in significant ways. By appointing a given number of minutes per subject or skill development, the practice or exposure necessary to master the concepts is bounded by that schedule. The calendar dictates success in terms of time: it sets the limits through start and stop dates of determining a child’s success or failure. The school rationale of a linear and systematic exposure to a wide variety of subjects demands scheduling and time rationing and restricts thorough exploration. The intent is that children will emerge as adults with a vast array of knowledge upon which to build success and function as active citizens in a healthy society.

These homelearners reject a clock and calendar-driven frame for learning as irrational; it is nearly impossible to determine the beginning, ending, or linearity of learning, and therefore it cannot reasonably be timed. Further, these families maintain that simply coming in contact with facts creates neither real comprehension nor a love of learning that engenders a lifetime pursuit of knowledge. There is no expiration date or finish line on education.

Insufficient time is incongruous with unschooler Ruby Rodriguez’ belief that children are compulsive and proficient self-learners who will pursue knowledge out of self-interest. But what about the gaps that people worry about? “Everyone has gaps in their learning,” she tells me. “No one knows everything.” Time is required to figure things out and search for the information, answers, and skills all people need. Allowed to control their own time, Ruby feels that children will do just that.

Concordant with her emphasis on individual creativity development, Ruby eschews interrupting children’s processes and projects. “I believe that ruins the

whole rhythm of life,” she tells me. Children need the “bigger freedom” to just “fit everything in yourself.” Certainly there are things that have to be done but she does not allow time to regiment learning, believing it is counterproductive to arbitrarily interrupt something a child “is really into” in order to push their learning in another direction. She recalls manipulating the schedule as a school teacher to allow her students to enjoy the satisfaction of completion, noting that the tyranny of time limits was a constant frustration to her and the children.

I DO think that there is an advantage as far as education goes, because the way it is done in public school has a tendency to dampen a child's interest in topics. JUST when the learning gets going and fun the time crunch makes a teacher say, ‘Okay, we must put that away now and we'll try to get back to it in a couple of days because we HAVE to do social studies now.’ I always did think that was ridiculous. Why not just finish the project?

Ruby did not, then, push her children to learn to read at an arbitrary age, helping them only when they were interested and principally allowing them to just figure out reading and writing on their own, which they have done. The boys clearly enjoy telling me about the books they are currently reading.

Another former school teacher, Beth Southwick, tells me,

I think in one sense that I have an advantage because I am able to see – I was able to follow so many different students. One thing I realized is that one-on-one time was BY FAR the best. And so in that sense, because they have me one-on-one with them versus one-in-a-classroom and they can move at their own pace and not reach a frustration level where I have to just keep plowing through. But we can

take a step back so they develop or even keep that love of learning that comes naturally.

For participant Haylee, time seemed to shift in value when she began attending public school. “When we were homeschooled there was always something to do,” Haylee assures me. She describes the change for her: “And so, when we started going to school we were like, ‘Home, oh it’s so boring! I’m bored.’” Time was no longer an asset to satisfy curiosity and learn; it had become a burden.

Esther Herman writes on her questionnaire that one of the benefits of unschooling is the “rhythm of our family” and like Chrissy Gonzalez, defines success as happiness among family members.

Summary. A common phrase among educators is “time on task” where the assumption is that spending time on a concept is the equivalent of learning it. The idea of discrete skill standards further presumes that if something is not mastered the first time, it should be taught again until learning happens. This, says former Harvard professor Frank Smith (1998), is part of a fabricated, flawed theory of learning because simply repeating instruction that did not work the first time is not helpful. Instead, a different approach should be taken.

Learning is made unnecessarily complicated, say Bransford et al., when learners are “faced with tasks that do not have apparent meaning or logic” (2000, p. 58). Without a meaningful context for learning, students are little motivated to spend the “major investments of time” – 50,000 to 100,000 hours, (or 10,000 hours according to Gladwell, 2000) – to truly master complex information or skills (Bransford et al., 2000, p. 56). Even more problematic is the fact that knowledge is an accumulation of new information connected to prior experience,

understanding, and practice, therefore advantaging children who have spent time already learning corresponding skills and information while marginalizing students who may have a less-advantaged pool of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977; Bransford, 2000; Guterson 1992, p. 175; Lareau, 2003, 1989; Driscoll, 2005).

In an interesting argument for increased time in school, Gabrieli's primary claim to the success of some practitioners is the increased individualization of time and instruction that extending time in school allows (Cuban & Gabrieli, 2012). Several of my research families mention the decreased amount of time they need for academics because time isn't wasted waiting for other students, for the teacher's attention, and simply waiting in lines.

Unschoolers have "unmanuals", "not-back-to-school camps", and myriad ways to unlearn the negative messages that are prevalent in our society; these unlearning resources include many references to the freedom of controlling one's own time (Dodd, n.d.; Llewellyn, 1996, 1993; Priesnitz, 2007; Van Gestel et al., 2008). Children need time – alone, if they like - just to make sense of things, sort out emotions, reflect, hypothesize, and ask and answer their own questions (Holt, 1983, 1982, 1996; Hunt, 2008; Storr, 1988). Children are patient learners, says Holt, but schools are not. They do not reward or even allow time for children to be curious, gain competence, and create meaning (Holt, 1983).

Abundant sources are available - including innumerable blogs, websites, books and curricula, and conventions - about regulating time in homeschooling, primarily emphasizing that goals, schedules, and structure last about two weeks "and then we loosen up" (Bauer & Wise, 2004; see also Dobson, 2001; Griffith,

1999; Guterson, 1992). The families in this study manage time differently but with the same attitude that learning is a full-time, lifetime pursuit.

The Learning Process

A significant benefit of homeschooling, in the opinions of the families I observe, regards attitudes about learning. One of the most oft-repeated phrases I hear from homelearners is that their children develop a deep “love of learning.” While knowledge and skill levels vary, an emphasis in these homes is a lifetime desire to learn rather than what they view as the schools’ specific time frame to retain facts.

In addition, for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, or Mormon), “education is not merely a good idea—it’s a commandment,” says Church leader Dieter F. Uchtdorf (2009, n.p.). “We are to learn ‘of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad’” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 88:79). The Church is credited with being among the first organizations to begin adult education, which they did shortly after being organized in 1830 (Monnett, 1999). Classes continued as the membership was driven by persecution from state to state and finally into the western deserts, where schools were consistently one of the first matters of business as Brigham Young organized settlements throughout the Southwest during the last half of the nineteenth century (Ibid.).

Church members are admonished in doctrinal canon to “[o]rganize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish...a house of learning” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 88:119). Later specific counsel is added: “[S]tudy and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues

and people” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 90:15). Further, Church members are taught that,

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 130:18-19).

As my purpose was to observe the learning practices of these families, and given a belief in the eternal value of improving one’s intellect, this section is expanded into six subthemes. Combined, they demonstrate families whose goal is not an academic grade but the expansion of curiosity, discovery, and a lifetime love of learning. Theme number one, “You become a facilitator to a child’s mind,” manifests the significance these parents feel in what they are doing. The second theme, “They will not harm you,” captures the benefits these families find valuable in working with children with exceptionalities. The multiplicity of approaches used to facilitate learning is the focus of theme number three, “You just listen but you don’t learn anything.” Some of the pathways and purposes encompassed in the home learning processes are apprehended in the fourth theme, “The joy for her to learn.”

This is followed by a contrast between institutionalization of attitudes and beliefs of education and family avenues to learning that many of these families found through experience, shared in theme number five, “I just want you to tell me what to do.” The desire for high academic standards and a consistency of values are part of the homeschooling rationale in these families. They also want their children to understand the connections of learning with living as opposed to

artificially fragmented school subjects. Theme number six, “We don’t want...a compartmentalized view” expresses their attitude that learning encompasses all of life, life embraces all types of learning, and the pursuit is intrinsically rewarding.

Subsequent to the section on the process of learning is a summary of relationships, time, and the process of learning as three dimensions of the hidden curriculum of home learning before turning to the role of and philosophy about technology as a tool.

“You become a facilitator to a child’s mind.” A salient reason people pursue teaching as a career is the desire to help others. And while teachers are pleased when students reach benchmarks, the “daily grind” of school (Jackson, 1968) often takes a toll and the stressful pressure of high achievement and annual yearly progress often reduces the altruistic satisfaction that teachers expect to feel.

A similar process occurs in children. Initially excited to go to school, when faced with learning as a set of procedures and lack of perfection as a degree of failure, they may experience a diminished sense of accomplishment and increased uncertainty and anxiety (Burke, 1991). Many parents of children in traditional schools not only do not participate, they often are only peripherally aware of what their children are learning. This detachment likewise produces muted satisfaction in their children’s educational progress.

The concept that learning has eternal value magnifies the sense of importance, diligence, and joy in the pursuit of knowledge. These parents who have chosen to educate at home express a heightened awareness of accomplishment and fulfillment in the learning that occurs because they share in

the process and see more than report cards and test scores. Children likewise enjoy increased feelings of self-efficacy that result from efforts leading to achievement (Bandura, 1977, 1969; Berliner & Calfee, 1996; Dweck, 2007a; 2007b; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Ray & Wartes, 1991; Zimmerman, 2009). The parents I observe are patient with the practice necessary for acquisition and deadlines are non-existent or self-constructed by the children, not the adults. Because parents and children work together, success is mutually shared as part of the home learning process.

Amanda Payne tells me,

When we thought about home schooling, it was such a new idea in our head and I really don't know why we ever thought about the worth. It was more like, we're keeping them home. It's been a great experience watching them. We want delight-directed learning so they learn things they love and that they're interested in. Everything leads to something else.

A practitioner of unschooling, or what she refers to as "delight-directed learning," Amanda shares some of their learning adventures. One is the fiber art expertise that began as a 4H sewing project for her girls, luring them to the state fair where they came upon experienced practitioners happy to share their knowledge. Amanda and her three older daughters were literally hooked and now demonstrate for school children how they spin Angora rabbit fur straight from their sleeping rabbit and show the sweaters and scarves they've made from it. Daughter Heather weaves into the presentation her love for Beatrix Potter that she developed as she read about rabbits.

Another project grew out of an interest in hiking. The girls decided they wanted pack animals for their hiking gear which led them to a specific breed of pack goats that must be purchased young, raised, and trained to pull specially designed carts. The girls researched and carried out their plan to acquire the goats, funded their purchase, and built the necessary leather harnesses and packs. Neighbors refer to them as “the goat girls.”

My personal favorite is Amanda Payne’s son’s interest in dinosaurs, piqued by learning that dinosaur bones had been discovered in their area. He announced his intention to begin his own digs and invited his sisters to participate. Since their property is a farm, he was faced with a considerable amount of work. Amanda suggested that an organized grid would make their efforts more efficient so they staked and roped and systematically began excavation. Although no bones were uncovered, the paleontological interest turned to archeology as shards of Oriental-looking pottery were unearthed. To reward their curiosity, Amanda took the children with their “finds” to the nearest university for consultation with a professor. He told them Asian immigrants had taken jobs in that area as migrant shepherders when Idaho had been a world leader in wool production. This step led the children to an interest in history, geography, and zoology to learn more about sheep (“an animal looking for a way to die”), New Zealand, the Basques, Chinese, and Native Americans. Their study of local historical narratives generated a persistent love of Native American history and culture.

Anna Bates emphasized to me that in their family learning,

she wants to teach children to ‘capture.’ Not just read, not just understand, but really CAPTURE it. Not just underline, journal it, but

actually write down thoughts, feelings, meaning, application in life. She tries to teach this to her children and her students. She wants to return to that better. She used to do it more thoroughly and wants to get back to it. She says if she does nothing more than capturing the scriptures, that's her goal (field notes, December 13, 2011).

Anna also appreciates the knowledge of self that children develop at home – that children come to know themselves better. One of her most rewarding aspects of homeschooling is to watch the older ones do so well in different environments: “They know how to take something and tackle it.” They know themselves, where their weaknesses and strengths are, acknowledge both, get help for the one and use the other to serve. They have a good work ethic. “They know how to work hard. That's one thing that's part of our homeschool curriculum. We want them to be able to work and be known for being good, hard workers.” Another of Anna's goals is for her children to “maintain the love of learning through life” (field notes, December 14, 2011).

In learning at home, Lila Sanders has discovered an unanticipated sense of fulfillment that she's glad she didn't miss out on. She shares that through the example of her son learning to read.

We were working on the letters. He knows all the letters but it's really been great and he's just taken off on the little McGuffey readers. So all of a sudden, and I don't know what changed, was he ready? Was it my attitude? Was it the timing? You know what I'm saying, you know, just to see when it clicked when Patrick started reading! And all of a sudden he could get into his McGuffey! I mean, I was almost in tears inside. I was trying not to cry when I saw that he could just get it! And he

was getting through that. So rewarding! Like when your child walks. I kind of feel like it was a little dance of all of that and now we're flowing instead of stepping on each other's toes. It's a dance. I love to dance. Oh! I just love that! It was a far greater reward, really, than what I expected.

I am profoundly impressed with Elizabeth Grandon's discussion of how home learning affects her self-perception. "I think your feelings of significance in your home and in their lives changes. So your feelings of 'what my value is' every day changes because you're actually helping to do something that doesn't have to be re-done."

Dishes have to be re-done every single day. The clothes still have to be washed every single day. But when you teach a child something that they have – the first time they understand multiplication. Like we were saying, Shara when (laughs) she raised her hand, "I CAN READ!" Like she had watched Jimmy figure it out and she couldn't quite figure out how he'd done that. And she kept working and working at it and finally she did it really early [age four], and when she got it, it was just so exciting to her and to see that joy in her eyes and to recognize that we had helped facilitate that little child and she'll always have that! So I think it changes your perspective as a mother. All of a sudden you don't become just the cook and the taxi driver and the maid because you're constantly cleaning up. You become a facilitator to a child's mind.

"They will not harm you." Several participants, adults and children, included on their questionnaires that home learning provides a safe environment. This feeling of security is emotional, spiritual, and physical in nature as family

members are treated with respect. They feel free to learn at their own pace, ask questions, and exercise their agency. As Grusec and Goodnow (1994) explain, learning is enhanced by “a sense of self, ability to self-regulate, and [feelings of] attachment” (p. 29).

Dr. Steven Duvall, a public school psychologist for over twenty years writes that three things are critical for learning, particularly when there are exceptionalities: active child participation rather than passive, rapid response time by the instructor, and a very low student-teacher ratio (Duvall, 2005). Home learning parents, even without special education training and certification, feel they have the potential of providing these three elements in greater abundance than can happen in schools. Additionally, they possess both the intimate knowledge of the child and the impetus of love to augment their abilities.

Several families I observe have children likely to be classified as special needs or labeled as requiring resources were they enrolled in public schools. While I see evidence of each mother’s patience with the learning process for all her children by working calmly with them until a concept is understood or a task completed, there is no evidence that any child is isolated as needy, struggling, or singled out for particular exceptionalities. Every child is encouraged along as mothers adapt learning to ability and respond to gifts they see in each individual without drawing particular attention to levels of performance.

Amanda Payne not only has experience working with special needs children, but also struggled through school with low literacy skills as a child. Having severe dyslexia herself, she feared that by teaching her children at home she might do something wrong. She found, with two of her children also being

dyslexic, her familiarity with learning disabilities facilitated her ability to help them find success as readers.

Typical of Amanda's energetic approach to life, she enlisted the children's help in aggressively pursuing Mia's therapy and learning. Although Mia is enrolled in school at the time of my visit, Amanda assures me that it is entirely a social experience; all real learning happens at home. I watch as Amanda has Mia read and do worksheets, providing a more structured learning environment that children with special needs often need. Mia draws a picture of the moon on the chalkboard as they talk about it, spell, read, and remember watching the moon together. Mia's Halloween projects absorb all the space on both the kitchen and dining room tables. In an update from Amanda, I learn that Mia has returned home full time because of a conflict with the school and her mother continues to work with her.

One of her children needs extra time, says Elizabeth Grandon. This child "is a year behind in her school work, partly her personality, partly lack of focus on academics. I wonder if part of that is her undemanding nature – she gives her time to others rather than taking Mom's." Regardless, homeschooling allows the luxury of moving at each child's ability level. "I feel in homeschool you can take a little more time," Elizabeth remarks. In these homes children are not defined by labels or low self-esteem but are enveloped in a "home of learning" where they can be constantly reinforced and supported with individual attention, active participation, and real-time responses to needs and opportunities.

One young participant wrote on her questionnaire, responding to what she would tell others about homeschooling: "You have good teachers who are your parents. They know your weakness and help you get better at them," she

writes. "I like home school because you can't get embarrassed. The people around you are your family. They love you. They will not harm you." Her mother agrees:

I think there's a security or a sense that you're loved. There's a nice, loving environment that you're in and so it's so much easier to learn because your environment is safe. And you're able to, instead of worrying about what someone's going to think about you who's sitting next to you, you're able to think and learn and grow instead of being concerned about all of the social. I think that's a HUGE advantage.

Elizabeth affirms that each child has special needs in some sense:

We need to come up with something else. So, you know, it's constantly a process of on your knees asking what exactly is the best thing for this child and how much school does he need and how much, you know, of the other. Sometimes one child needs a little more one-on-one and another child needs a little more time learning to be independent. What's the balance? Trying to figure that out.

There are many bonuses to learning at home asserts Amber Kaplan. One is that there is flexibility and the demand varies to suit the child's capacity and capability. She tells me, "Typically, we've decided on what they can handle, which is different for different kids. Like [one child] can handle one page a day in some workbook whereas another child can handle two."

Singing, reciting, and responding together in their little group of siblings, it is difficult for me to discern a difference in learning abilities but Amber's intimate knowledge of personalities and capacities allows her to build on strengths and

support areas that need extra focus and set alternate and realistic goals with each child while not focusing on deficiencies. She finds this a compelling benefit:

But probably my favorite thing that ties into our philosophy of education is that I love learning with my kids and them learning together with me. And I think my kids are happier that way. They still do their math on the computer and writing assignments and things like that, but the strength of our learning is sitting together.

Like the Paynes, the Rodriguez family has several children who pushed through dyslexia to become proficient readers. Ruby, who taught fourth grade for several years, maintains that her children just needed time for their brain to “figure it out.” She tells me that she just kept reading to the children until eventually it clicked in their heads and they were able to master literacy on their own. When I ask her if she ever got concerned, she tells me that her faith in her children to eventually decode text in a way compatible with the architecture of their own brains gave her confidence that each would learn to read even when outsiders expressed anxiety over her children’s reading delays.

Instead, Ruby cherished the time the children had to be creative in their learning and expressions. I drew the following excerpt from my notes:

During lunch they told me about how they love to paint rooms. They have theme rooms – space ships, fish. Once in the basement they glued games on the ceiling – partially played chess games and strewed game pieces so it looked like children had been sitting on the ceiling playing and had walked away. They had also painted railroad tracks and other appropriate figures on the ceiling. Dad said the glue would pull off

the drywall but mom said they'd had a good time, it was worth it. They love painting as a cheap, fun medium (field notes, October 3, 2011).

In addition to dyslexia and severe allergies dispersed among her six children, Ruby tells me that one of her sons has Asperger syndrome. Ruby characterizes him this way:

He IS annoying but he is also adorable. He is so innocent of what he does. He can say he KNOWS right and wrong. But, when he gets an idea in his head - the Aspergers won't let him NOT DO IT until he has a stopping place. I AM HIS stopping place. It is what it is. A huge challenge – but a blessing, too. No matter what awful things he does, I will get to keep him forever in the end. THAT is the redeeming gift. [He] LOVES TO SING. He sings and sings and sings. It's how you tell if he's feeling content.

She confides that this son is not even aware of his uniqueness and that other family members create a patient and helpful support group.

Professor Carolyn Sofia (2010) quotes her son, also autistic: “Being labeled makes people approach you in a way that limits how they see you.” These families appear to see each child as an individual who merits special attention simply because he or she is a beloved part of a family, both theirs and God's. For these families there are no labels, no failures, no limits. Without outside assessments and diagnoses and interventions they feel that they can provide the best learning environment that includes a carefully framed IEP (individual education plan) for *each* child.

In all of these families educational philosophy is inextricably woven with theological threads. LDS doctrine teaches that all people came from a heavenly

home to earth to gain a physical body, learn, and develop divine attributes - what some have likened to the boarding school of mortality (Cook, 2011). And for each, this is an individual process. “But you know, what’s really hit me recently, though, is regarding our time here on earth,” Lila Sanders tells me.

We’re all here on our own spiritual education plan. And mine doesn’t look like yours and mine doesn’t look like anybody else’s. And I have to learn in my own time, in my own way, and with my own books and my own circumstances, events, experiences. All those things. And I thought, why would our education here on this actual earth, whatever you want to call that – our scholastic education – really be any different? Right? I mean, I’m still having to say right, right? But I’m starting to believe it.

“You just listen but you don’t learn anything.” While the hidden curriculum of public schools includes the need to sit and pay attention, these homelearners don’t think those two necessarily go together. In fact, many of them would argue that having to sit for extended periods of time is counterproductive to learning. I see children move about freely in the course of their day’s education.

As I watch Amber Kaplan teach her children, I am interested that they play quietly together on the couch beside her or at her feet. It seems way too calm and easy as I watch the laughter, music and movement. The children don’t even have to sit still and pay attention! I note:

Her kids love it all. No testing in Sonlight until 7th grade unless one requests it. So they aren’t learning to reproduce it for an outside party but rather discuss and think and reason. Her children are reasoning

and relating it to their lives and what's happening here now. As long as they love learning they will always be learning and no worry if they don't cover everything. She agrees with those mothers who learn more homeschooling than in her four-year university degree (field notes, October 24, 2011).

In a follow-up conversation, I inquire about children being attentive to the material in order to learn. Amber says the children are happier participants when their hands are busy with quiet things but draws the line at word activities that compete with stories, songs, poems, and discussions.

Desks and tables are seldom the scene of academic work and I never see restrictions on movement or speech. In fact, mothers encourage their children to take breaks. Shara and Jimmy race upstairs and down several times while Mom times them – right in the middle of a lesson. Chrissy Gonzalez invites the children to take frequent breaks to play soccer or run around the golf course. One of my visits is cut short at the Herman home because this unschooling family has signed up for PE and music classes at school.

A large homeschool group sponsored a science fair and the Sanders family discussed a variety of projects they could do. The day before the event one of the boys mentioned making cheese. Lila says they never could have or would have ventured into that ordeal had they not had the time together and the technological assistance of YouTube. Like most of the families in this study, they eat healthy, organic foods and had available to them the raw milk, sufficient time, and good instructions required for making cheese. Marty brings me several crackers on a plate with a spoonful of the soft cheese. It is remarkably delicious.

Lila shares this as an example of being able to spontaneously follow a “spark” - an interest indicated by one of the children.

The most interesting learning arrangement takes place in the kitchen of the unschooling Herman home as Esther Herman spends more than an hour making pancakes in a way that deeply engages her boys, ages three and six. Robbie, the elder of the two, is perched on a high stool next to his mother and the counter while Jack sits on the counter surrounded by eggs, oil, whole wheat flour, leavenings and other ingredients. I am treated to a remarkable math-in-action demonstration as Robbie reads the recipe and “translates” it. By this I understand that the recipe is either being increased or decreased and each amount proportionally adjusted, a number negotiated and measured out by Robbie with assistance as needed. Jack’s job is dumping the measured amount into the large bowl and stirring the batter. Esther elucidates the difference between a small t (teaspoon) and a large T (tablespoon) and the equivalency. The boys learn about dry and liquid ingredients and their function in the pancakes. (Esther laughs that being a physicist, she is able to answer many of the hard questions like why the sky is blue but the children never ask.)

The recipe (“translated” version) calls for six eggs. Jack opens the egg carton and counts the eggs. Esther asks him how many eggs will be left if they use six of them and they count six eggs as she removes them. Jack begins counting the eggs and Robbie whispers the answer loudly. Esther accuses Robbie of being a cheater and they laugh. She patiently answers questions and allows the boys to do everything but cook the pancakes. Eventually, breakfast is ready. The assessment portion of the morning’s learning takes place at the table as the children consume their culinary creation.

Nate Rodriguez likes going to a class of religious instruction, enjoys the teacher and the content, but “the other kids are not excited to learn because they have been forced to learn things they aren’t interested in,” Ruby tells me, “So they turn their brains off and don’t even want to be there. They’re sick of school and they’re sick of sitting.”

Maddie Payne finds this to be the case as well. Her experience in secular as well as religious classes is that homelearners “have a very different attitude than the public schoolers. The homeschoolers are interested, engaged rather than bored and trying to entertain themselves” (field notes, October 4, 2011). Similarly, Lanie Bates admits that in her class “there’s no interaction between the teenagers and the teachers.”

Maddie tells me her “greatest education” in history was through American Girl dolls because it was multi-modal, including foods, clothes, music, world events, artifacts, and culture. Holistic education that brings the reality of living and learning and working together – like the physics of laying irrigation pipe with her dad last week – is most effective in her opinion.

While she straightens the living room, Maddie teaches me about the various fiber types and uses as she returns the errant strands the cats have clawed from baskets by couches and chairs. One brightly-colored ball of fiber is made from bamboo, which surprised me. Maddie laughs as she mimics my ignorance, exclaiming, “Bamboo is a tree! You can’t make clothes out of a tree! Only Peter Pan wears trees!” But blended with wool it is very soft and a preferred fabric on sunburns.

John Grandon, who is sixteen and has learned at home most of his life, now takes several classes at high school. “The students haven’t developed a

love of learning,” he states. “They just want to sit through it: ‘You teach us, let us just absorb passively.’” He claims that homeschooled students love learning.

“When we were homeschooled there was always something to do,”

Haylee informs me. She adds,

And when you go to school you sit there all day and you learn things if you want to. If you don’t want to learn anything you just listen but you don’t learn anything. And you sit there all day and then you go home, and because you’re so used to sitting in one spot listening to someone else talk to you, you don’t know how to make something out of your life when you’re at home.

“The joy for her to learn.” Learning is considered a source of satisfaction, growth, and self-efficacy, including the confidence gained through success at an endeavor. And, as in most worthwhile endeavors, achievement comes at a cost of effort and persistence. These parents in this study express the opinion, however, that the rewards of learning are not reserved for a future day when children become *real* people but can be experienced on a daily basis (Lightfoot, 1978) because children already ARE real people. Participating parents also say that the sense of fulfillment from learning is connected not to remembering isolated facts for a test but rather to the discovery and implementation of expanded knowledge and skills.

Esther Herman found that even the suggestion of any school-like activities was met with resistance once her daughter, Holly, returned home to learn. She illustrates with the interest in Braille Holly picked up from reading a biography about Helen Keller. “I thought, OK. Here. I’ll just give her some

assignments. We'll write sentences and she can translate into what the Braille alphabet looks like." But then Esther thought better of it. She recounts:

I decided that I was going to trust the unschooling and try really hard to restrain myself from giving any kind of assignments. I was going to leave it alone and see if this worked or not. And so she was interested in it. One night she punched about 300 holes in a piece of paper. Completely random. They had no pattern to them and she couldn't get the holes thru the paper at first because she had a piece of paper lying on a desk. So I got her a piece of cardboard and then she was able to punch through on to the cardboard. So I guess that's kind of scaffolding as well. It's being able to look at something, and they may not be able to figure out the problem right now, and helping them find solutions when they're not finding their own solutions. So she did that and showed me: 'Look! This is my Braille.' And we were able to talk about how on the other side you could feel the bumps and that is what it is. It's not actually the hole on the one side; it's the bumps on the other side. So when she was done with her interest in Braille, she was done.

And all of a sudden out of the blue, a couple of months later she asked me to find the Braille alphabet again. So I brought it up on the computer and I went back to reading to Robbie because I was reading to him for his nap. I came out and she had spent 45 minutes going back and forth from the kitchen table to the computer – probably about 25-30 feet. She had written these little tiny books about animals – they're probably three or four pages long with really simple sentences. She'd made them simple on purpose. She's capable of more complex, but she made them simple and then she was translating each

book into Braille. She drew the dots. I still have them. So it was then that I realized that if I had made an assignment for her to do something, to translate a sentence into Braille those two months before when I thought that was a good idea, she wouldn't have revisited Braille most likely. She would have left it alone forever because it would have been an assignment and something that kind of destroyed the joy for her to learn about it. It would have just been some school thing that – 'OK. I'm done and over with that until Mom assigns it to me again and I have to revisit it.' So that's how we fell into the unschooling. It's easier for me now, but I'm still having to restrain myself from making assignments. But it's easier for me now.

Esther's daughter, Holly Herman, is a competent, confident nine-year-old who spends one morning reading a thick Calvin and Hobbes comic book, sharing the best ones with her mother, and another morning reading a biography of Marie Curie and discussing science with her mother. Holly decided that she wanted to volunteer in a school to read to the children. Her mother tells me it was quite a process finding a school willing to have a young unschooler participate in the classroom but Holly finds it enjoyable and goes each week. I query her on learning at home. She responds:

Well, learning at home helps me because I can go at my own level. It was hard at school because I was a different level than other people. Sometimes higher, sometimes lower and it was difficult because sometimes they would teach things I already understood or teach things that were a little bit complex and here it's easier to work at my own rate. And for me, here at home also means I can sit on the couch instead of on a chair to learn which is really nice. I can talk to my Mom when I need to,

which that is really fun, too, and go through what things mean 'cause I'm kind of shy to talk to teachers. I guess it just benefits different people in different ways. My mom said that some people have a hard time doing school at home, but for some people, it really helps them.

As I walk into the Sanders home I pass a short bookshelf with assorted rocks on top. At breakfast, Patrick prays for the wife of their dear friend, a geology professor, who just passed away. The professor was a mentor for Marty's interest in rocks, particularly geodes, and as the family eats breakfast Marty proudly explains the display of rocks he has collected from various rock shows and on his own. They open up some of their books on rocks and minerals that elucidate types of rocks with accompanying information. Lila tells me that before homeschooling, she would have thrown the collection in the trash. Now it is one of the children's "sparks" that they all pursue together. Lila describes her discovery of other ways that children engage in learning:

This semester we just kind of played and just did a lot of fun things where we just played downstairs. I had the closet and we did whatever. And if somebody started to get the marbles back out for the 45th time and I was going, 'Oh my gosh! What are we going to learn from marbles?!' You know, but they're playing and all of a sudden we were graphing what happened during the marble game and there was like statistics and probability coming out. So it helped me understand that we can learn that way.

For Christmas the Sanders parents looked for gifts that went beyond "the fluff."

We ended up buying things like the magnetic blocks with geometric shapes and different things like that. And even a dartboard, a

magnetic dartboard. And I thought at first, Ahh, it would be kind of fluffy.

You have never seen Marty do more math in his life than having a dartboard competition.

This type and style of learning contradicts traditional expectations emanating from normative views of what education looks like and children's attitudes about learning. It is not uncommon to hear that children won't learn anything if you don't make them (Haberman, 1991). These parents don't seem to find it necessary to artificially create interest or desire. The curiosity has always been part of their nature.

Part of this rhythm of learning is that parents include their own favorite interests with their children. Parents are not only the child's first teacher but the most constant model of engagement with educational pursuits and primarily responsible for academic success whether in school or at home (Lareau, 1989, 2003; Thomas and Pattison, 2007). Their own joy in learning is evident to their children.

Beth Southwick takes advantage of the opportunity to share her love of American history during devotional each morning, "So I have my time to kind of put in certain things that I would like to learn with them." But "the rest of the day is theirs" and "they are free to choose how they use their time." Another benefit of teaching children at home is the ability to connect topics or content with life and therefore meaning. She tells me that schooled students don't see science and social studies as related. She also admits, "I've learned more reading and discussing with my children than in my college degree" and admits to using a very different approach than she used in the classroom.

Dick and Amber tag team in expressing satisfaction with having time to teach the children things that are dear to the parents' hearts. Dick feels that one advantage of learning at home is that knowledge isn't compartmentalized. He confesses,

We also have our own pet topics that we like. Just for our own personal reasons we feel like they're more important. Amber really emphasized music with the kids and it doesn't have to be so for everybody, but it's just what we like. I really like ancient history and things like that so I kind of integrate that with the kids.

Amber: Latin.

Dick: Right.

Amber: Biblical history.

Dick: Antiquity. And we can spend more time with that than they would if they were in school, so another advantage.

Dick, who had serious doubts about homeschooling initially, elaborates on his view of what characteristics are needed to be a good teacher:

To be educated doesn't necessarily mean a formal education of any kind. I think as long as the parents love learning and enjoy learning and first of all set an example for their kids that they LIKE learning, then that's probably the most important. Now, if you have a parent who really hates reading and doesn't like to learn new things and really sees this as a burden and wants to do whatever they can to get out of it, then that's probably the exception to that philosophy. But as long as a parent enjoys learning and feels like they WANT to educate their kids, I think that's really the only qualification you need.

Amber sees her friends taking classes for self-improvement but claims that happens daily for her as she learns and re-learns with her children. Like Beth Southwick, Amber insists that greater learning happens at home for her than through her university degree.

Elizabeth Grandon is another parent who finds the learning as rewarding for her own fulfillment as it is with the children's progress. She tells me,

I learn. I'm doing history. Even with the K-12 history program [that they tried earlier] I would just be like, 'Let's do the next lesson and find out what happens' because it was exciting to me to learn along with them. I'm reviewing English – reminding myself what all these different parts of speech are. I'm reviewing math constantly. 'OK. Let's look and figure out what it means when we're multiplying and dividing fractions. We've got to flip this. Remember when we're dividing?' So there're always constant things as a Mom you get to review again and re-learn as you're helping your child and that's a wonderful thing. It's a wonderful thing to learn along with them. It fills your brain and keeps it growing and thinking so it doesn't stagnate.

Elizabeth and Greg decided early on to have a "home of learning" and make an effort to impart the love for learning both parents enjoy, particularly "your ability to connect things" as she did when linking the process used by ancient Egyptians to make wine with the grape juice they had bottled the night before.

So we're talking about one thing and all of a sudden they'll go over to this and you remind them, 'remember how we talked about' - like we

were talking today and I can't remember – it tied into some other thing that we've covered and I just think that happens all the time when you're teaching because you are aware of the things that they're working on. You can draw connections.

Greg loves so many things. He would see some exciting thing in *National Geographic* and I would be wanting to stay on a schedule and he would be telling the kids for an hour about Mount Everest and explaining to them about Sir [Edmund] Hillary and all of the different climbers that mounted and all they had to do to get the expedition ready. He has such a desire for learning, I've learned a lot from him. Whenever he hears a word that he does not know, he's right in there looking and telling me what it means. If there's something that we're talking about and we can't remember exactly which battle - we were discussing the Battle of Midway and why was it that all of the fighters, the torpedoes got all destroyed – why. Then we had to read about, well, they got there too late. So he wants to find out. And it helps me to see it doesn't matter how busy you are or what you have if your desire to learn is TO LEARN, you'll go and seek it and you'll add that dimension to your life. It just makes life so enjoyable.

Daughter Bethany's comments are evidence that her mother is right. The contrast to a passive attitude about learning is evident in fifteen-year-old Bethany's appraisal of history.

I love HISTORY! I do that at home as well. Sometimes it's just for fun and sometimes it's actual - just trying to do it from our books - but usually I'll find a story of someone that I don't really know about and I'll

study what they did in history and how that helped other people and then I'll write something about them.

It's more like my fun study. Like, I like doing it. They'll just basically teach you the history things about the World War. But when they say a name and they will go into it, I think that's interesting. By going to the internet, I go to Wikipedia and it tells you about things. And I'll search their name and I'll just find out what they did and usually it's kind of just like an encyclopedia. They'll just tell you things about them, mostly the basics. Sometimes I find a couple of stories that are actually good – that I like. And then I find more about that person and I write what I thought they were for, what they did for us and what they did for other people and I just write that [in a notebook].

Amanda Payne, whose own learning style is not conducive to seatwork, encourages her children to be out and about discovering the world.

I wanted all the girls and guys to love learning and I wanted them to find that learning is not just something you do from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon or from the beginning of September to the end of May. I wanted learning to be every day, every moment. They used to come in the door and the first thing I would say, "What did you learn today?" And not because they were at school, because they were outside playing. What did you learn today? People used to take hula hoops or string and lay it in the school yard and they would look at all the little things in that area, but oh! there's so much to the world, if we only looked at that one little circle, where would we be?

And so, to me, they've had the freedom to feel curiosity about what was beyond one. What was beyond that hill? And I said, 'Well, let's pack you up a lunch. Here's the flashlight, here's the compass, try to get home before dark, dears, and I gave them a walkie talkie and sent them up the hill. And they found an old house and an old car. An old, old model A car. Their exploration was part of their learning and we'd come back and discuss it. And then one day, they all said, 'There are anthills – ginormous anthills! Come and see them.' And so we all hiked up to this one area and they found these huge colonies of ants. And I said, 'Well, let's find out what's in them and so we dug down and looked at the layering and looked at the structure of the town – the ant town, you know – and it was fascinating.

So learning is right now, whatever we're doing. It doesn't take a book to say, now you can learn about this. You might need it someday. But the curiosity and learning you have inside you is more important and I don't want someone telling them what they have to learn. I want them to know when they're ready and what they need to learn. And they learn better and they retain it better. Do I believe in essays? To a point. But more importantly, I believe the child needs to be writing the things they're interested in and things they're learning about. And if they're writing in their journals and they're writing their family history on their own and they're writing things they're curious about, they're going to learn so much more and they're going to retain it so much better. That's really the crux of why we're doing it.

“So my view of what I do in my home is that I’m creating an environment that will help my children to reach their potential,” Anna tells me after I watch her pull a bunch of bananas over to help demonstrate a math concept for Heber.

It really is. And I just feel that I have that stewardship and I have that right to inspiration for them and to seek out what’s best for them.

And the goal isn’t just to go out and get a job. The goal is – yeah, you need to provide for your family, you need to have an education – but it’s also to serve humanity with your gifts and your talents. And as you do that, generally the money comes along with it.

“I just want you to tell me what to do.” Deschooling is a term that is used to refer to the adjustment of moving from public school where behaviors are constantly directed and monitored by a person of authority to a home atmosphere where children take responsibility for their own learning. This is typically unsettling for a while, especially for those children for whom official learning experience has been limited to the institutionalized environment. Often these children feel a bit adrift and directionless, accustomed as they are to the structured control paradigm of schools. For a while they feel more comfortable being told what to do.

Children who weather this interlude are generally rewarded with an increase in curiosity, creativity, responsibility, closeness to family, and satisfaction in learning, according to the families I meet with who have experienced this. Conformant to literature, they grow accustomed to having their own interests and abilities validated and seeing themselves as legitimate owners of their own learning and agency (Bhave, 1996; Holt, 1996, 1983; Llewellyn, 1996; Llewellyn & Silver, 2001; Tolstoy, 1996). According to Neufeld, “The

difference between children who become curious, engaged learners and those who become performers is that the curious and engaged children had parents who acted as buffers between them and society and the educational system” (Laucius, 2012).

Cheyenne was going into sixth grade when she accepted the chance to homeschool, but it was very difficult to leave friends and routines. For several months she puttered aimlessly about the house until she developed interest in skills and ideas and began pursuing them on her own. I watch her spend hours writing, doing math, and searching genealogy records, all on the computer. I type quickly to capture what Beth is telling me about their home learning model and summarize her comments in my notes:

If they can love learning, read well, then she’s not worried about specific times for learning a particular skill. Her focus is to inspire learning. With their interest they will move along on their own. Learning is forever, so she’s not worried about artificial standards of the system. But taking on attitude of learning and having a love affair with learning is her primary concern (field notes, January 17, 2012).

Beth is less interested in labels than lifestyle. She defines what they do “as their own ‘system’ –part of their experimentation process. A large part is Mom “learning to step back and trust the process and allow them to step up.” The children choose what they want to study; they are catching the vision of why they’re home. It isn’t to learn a given amount in a year but to “prepare them to be who they were born to be,” Beth says. She sees that integrated into life lessons, how they treat each other. Building skills together and being aware of their

blessings is success in life. This has “boosted the spirit” in their home. Beth describes the changes:

I think for Cheyanne and Jenna, they have to remember or re-learn what it means to love learning, where it used to be something that came very naturally. Especially for Cheyanne. And somehow that stifled out and we’re trying to get back to that core part. Once they get that love back, that will propel them forever in their own education. And that’s what I’m hoping - they’ll take ownership of that versus just being ‘tell me what to do.’ And that was interesting when we actually first started homeschooling. That was one of Cheyanne’s biggest complaints: ‘I just want you to tell me what to do. I don’t want to make my own decision.’ And that’s not the point. The point is for them to discover what they want to learn and get that love back. So that was an interesting thing. And I think that they’ve come to really appreciate that they do have that freedom.

Children are recognized as having a legitimate mission to discover themselves, their interests, their happiness, their purpose. Attending to that mission is a stewardship of each child, facilitated by attentive parents and encouraged as part of their learning. Haylee’s comments reflect this attitude:

And so, when we started going to school we would like, ‘Home, oh it’s so boring! I’m bored.’ And my mom would be like, you NEVER said you -- like, when we were homeschooled we ALWAYS knew what to do. We’d just go play outside because there was a LOT of things to do and there’s STILL a lot of things to do. We just don’t think of them because of how in the habit we are of going and sitting in one place and having

someone else entertain us. And so, that was one of her [complaints]: 'I don't like that they come home and say that they're bored when they know that there are things to do, they just don't think of them and they don't think they're as much fun because their friends aren't with them.'

Parents who are accustomed to having their children in public schools may also become inured to the "tell me what to do" mentality as they simply do with their children as directed by the school. For a variety of reasons they may accept whatever course is mandated by the system regardless of the particular characteristics of their child, sometimes even limiting the learning that occurs.

"There was no reason I needed to homeschool," Lila Spencer tells me, adding:

I was perfectly happy with the teachers. I was PTA everything. I ran all sorts of activities down there. I volunteered in the classroom. I even substituted for the teacher a couple of times. I could see the interaction. I was happy with them and happy with where he (Marty) was going other than the fact that I felt like OK, well, he's gotta kinda slow down because they can't really do much more for him or whatever. You know. Which is fine. But I wasn't - there was nothing - there was no fire in my pants. You know, like, I've gotta get this done! It just seemed like it was fine.

Her obvious intensity causes me to challenge her on her satisfaction with Marty's stifled progress. She responds,

Yeah, it didn't seem to bother me very much. I didn't try to do anything at home very much, other than the requirements that they asked at school. I didn't even, like, really even encourage him to go much

farther. I was OK with mediocrity, I guess, because I thought that's what we were supposed to do. You know, we'd just do the minimum. We'd just do what they were asking us to do and they tell us. And that's what I believed. I was really on the conveyor belt. I didn't understand.

Anna Bates chose to bring her children back home to learn for the express purpose of allowing creativity and choice. Like Ruby Rodriguez, Anna values individual expressiveness and saw frustration in the demands of rigid classroom schedules. She was further disappointed in the lackadaisical learning environment she encountered as a classroom volunteer.

Ellen was just really very creative. I brought her back home again [from school] because I didn't want her to lose her creativity. The teacher would say things like, 'Well, I don't really need you to come tomorrow because we're not doing very much and it's OK if you don't come.' I thought, if you're not doing very much why should I send my child? Like when she was eight, she was just painting, [then suddenly exclaimed], 'OH! I have a poem!' She runs and writes down a poem. I mean, she's just been like that since forever! She's kind of an eccentric person. She's just so creative. But she also has this base of classics where she hasn't been pigeon-holed into 'these are the right answers, this is the way you're supposed to think, this is what your teacher wants to give you.'

Perhaps this freedom contributed to Ellen's award-winning success now as an adult student in design school.

"We don't want...a compartmentalized view." My research participants want their children to understand that learning is holistic, relevant, and interconnected to life and other parts of learning rather than a collection of

disparate facts. This is important for comprehension and mastery. Parents feel that their children are able to focus and attend to the learning at hand better without the distractions that are part of school culture.

I am impressed that parents spend relatively little time criticizing public schools when they obviously feel that institutionalized education does not provide the same kinds and amount of learning that happens in the home. This corresponds with Mayberry's findings that parents "identified more often reasons that were related to the benefits offered by the home school setting than to the problems they perceived in public schools" (Mayberry 1993, p.65). The appraisal of public education is part of the hidden curriculum in the sense that is a component of underlying philosophical attitudes about best learning practices for their families. Although Chrissy Gonzalez feels a little overwhelmed teaching four children at once, she persists because, "I want education, a high-grade academic experience but not in a values vacuum. I don't want to say vacuum. There are definitely values in the public school system, just not MY values. I want an extension of the values I'm teaching at home. I want a reinforcement of that in addition to a high academic requirement."

Clear messages about power negotiation and values are sent between parents and children in the interaction between parents and children. Lisa confronts mom with her language assignment: "I would be so fine if I didn't have to use examples from the story," Lisa says, to which Chrissy replies, "Then use your 'so fine' way." They discuss how to weave Lisa's ideas into the story, which is pretend. Mom grimaces at the word, pretend, which makes Lisa giggle. Then Alan, age six, starts giggling. Mom tells him "If you can write while you make silly sounds, I'm fine with that." Mom compliments them in French. She times the

children's work. Alan begins imitating the gravelly voice of Roz from *Monsters, Inc.*: "For 2 years I've been cross, and cross is boss!" Chrissy asks, "Do they say that?" "No," Alan replies. "I made that up." Playful interaction is part of every day's learning.

Academic and moral values are also a part of every day's learning. "I TEACH MY VALUES AND I STRIVE FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AS FAR AS I KNOW WHAT THAT IS," Chrissy insists. She claims:

But I know what the world has to offer. I don't remember everything. I'm just honest with my kid when I say I don't remember the punctuation rule for that. I use it as a look-it-up experience. We both look it up. That's the best I can do. Would I love to have other teachers and people I could turn my kids over to at times? Yeah, I would.

But Chrissy is of the opinion that schools are bereft of either high academic or moral standards. The low standards are expressed in fashion, homes, and physical appearance. She tells me that "physically, you have to look like a Hollywood star" to fit in at school. As for academics she believes that there is "No real requirement whatsoever. This is the lowest I've ever come across and I grew up in Detroit, Michigan."

The Kaplan family tried out public schools, joy schools (organized learning activities, usually in a home), co-ops and various types of homeschool methods and curricula. Amber now knows what her kids are missing by not going to school – bullying, boredom, frustration with what was and wasn't taught - and is "grateful they are missing it!" Ashley, sixteen, who had been opposed to the idea of homeschooling and wanting to attend public school, reported to Amber when she went to class in 9th grade, "I guess they don't really like learning. They would

rather cheat than do an assignment. And the teachers don't really care what they're learning. They don't even grade their papers." Now the girls go to the high school only for music and religious instruction.

"We don't want our kids growing up with a compartmentalized view of knowledge and learning," Dick Kaplan explains. Amber emphasizes that "school [time spent learning] is life-long in that it's a lifestyle." Amber continues:

It's not just a nine to three thing. It's something that we talk about later on in the day or when I'm reading to the kids at night. We don't have to just tuck it into that time period. It becomes a FAMILY lifestyle, you know, where we can talk about current events or things that we've learned that day or things outside of the typical school hours.

Public school students typically think of learning as a school activity. Among homelearners, children often fail to distinguish what counts as learning because of the unbounded nature of both time and what counts as education though not measured in terms of school work. Anna Bates reports the following conversation with nine-year-old Heber who has always been schooled at home:

Anna: "What's your favorite part of [our home]school?"

Heber: "Well, does cello count as school?"

Anna: "Of course! Do you like it when Mom and Dad read to you?"

Heber: "Oh, yeah! But that's not part of school because we might do it at night. We might do it in the day. Just whenever."

Anna: "I said, 'Oh, Heber, that is SO part of our school!'"

Heber: "Really?"

Anna: "Yeah!" Then she adds, "He doesn't get it, that the whole day is his school (laughs)."

These parents want their children to connect learning with life, with joy, and with a sense of obligation and responsibility because, according to LDS belief, they will take their learning with them into eternity.

Summary. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the family in shaping a child's learning. According to the Coleman Report, "family background was the factor of greatest importance in determining how a student performed in school in the United States (Christensen, 2011, p. 9-10). Of particular interest is that much of the cognitive architecture that enables the brain to learn effectively happens before school age. "There is an overwhelming body of evidence, however, that starting at age five in kindergarten is much too late. Indeed, our experiences in the first eighteen months of life largely shape our intellectual capacities" (ibid., p. 13; see also Balbernie, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995; Stamm, 2007). The parents in this study who have toddlers include them in the family educational practices, acculturating them early to view the home as an important place to learn and as a natural part of what families do together.

A crucial component of healthy cerebral development lies within the domain of the home where children develop a sense of identity, community, security, and an understanding of how life works (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Kotulak, 1997; Stets & Burke 2000; Thoits, 1991). Most families, regardless of their particular faith or cultural values, nurture their children in these same ways. Unfortunately, it does happen that schools may disrupt children's secure development when there is a mismatch between the home and school values. In these cases, homeschooling may continue to provide the support children need to grow and thrive as members of their cultural community.

The families I observed demonstrate a particular view of family life and relationships and assign value to both time and learning relational to their religious belief through the hidden curriculum of their home learning practices. These perspectives are congruent with research that attributes mental and emotional health to strong feelings of commitment, attachment, belonging, consistency and shared cultural beliefs that are mutually supported and enacted (Desrochers et al., 2002; Hammond, 2009; Hogg et al., 1995; Schacter & Ventura, 2008; Stryker, 1968).

The learning atmosphere in these homes provides a foundation of academic expectations, orderly and stable environment, and high morale that contribute to healthy learning conditions (Lightfoot, 1978; Mayberry, 1993). The emotional connections add meaning to learning. “Children in the family are treated as special persons, but pupils in school are necessarily treated as members of categories,” says Lightfoot (1978, p. 22). “Children are viewed in schools as having *future* value [emphasis original]” (ibid., p. 24).

When, as author Wendy Priesnitz says, children of school age are trusted and encouraged to learn in a safe home environment, curiosity itself will motivate and stimulate them to learn (Priesnitz, 2007). With parents who are themselves insatiable learners and eager facilitators of children’s gifts and interests, it is no wonder that these families feel satisfied with the way learning is enacted in their homes.

“For me,” Elizabeth Grandon explains, “It’s really important that they have a really good understanding of a love for learning.” She continues:

And the three things that are really important that they understand are a good concept of math, a good understanding of language so they

can write, and that entails literature and all of those things. And then science, of course, is super important, but I feel like history teaches us so much about ourselves. It just extends our minds to see what other people have gone through. And science is so wonderful to understand the earth. To understand all the things around us, how things work, open up children's eyes to why things work a certain way is so enlightening to them and helps them understand and love to see things.

The biggest concept is that they love to learn. It seems that they WILL come, they WILL enjoy, kids will always pick up books, think about things, they'll explore things on their own if there's a desire there for them to learn. They have that inside them - so much a part of them that they WANT to learn - then it will affect forever who they are because everything will be interesting to them.

Technology

Although technology and education are currently considered by some to be not only compatible but inseparable (Bennett, 2008; Brady, 2012; Gee, 2007; Gee & Hayes, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Turtel, 2006), educators in professional settings and parents of homelearners may have differing views as to the proper amount and kind of engagement. Despite an increase in both availability and use of digital media, gains in achievement scores in public education do not consistently correspond positively (Richtel, 2012). There is controversy about cost, use, and value of digital tools in schools (Bauerline, 2009; Dretzin & Rushkoff, 2010; Hess & Monke, 2012;). There is even criticism from school professionals of the conceptual and pedagogical accuracy of Salman Khan, an

icon among homelearners for his free online courses, particularly in math (Kamenetz, 2012).

At home, however, families find technology useful in supplementing funds of knowledge, helping with typically daunting areas such as math and science, and providing a wealth of free or subscription programs that parents choose from to match the needs, personalities, and levels of their children. Technology provides entertainment, including ways to practice information for mastery, and connections through social networks. Brady's statement that, "No longer will the computer at home be viewed simply as a device for games and communication needing regulation by parents. It will now also be seen as a device for learning inextricably tied to a child's education (Brady, 2012, n.p.)" is already a reality.

Andrade reports in his research that "A large majority of [home learning] participants ($n = 25$) reported they relied on modern technologies 'somewhat' to 'heavily'" (Andrade, 2008, p. 90). Additionally, "All participants ($N = 27$) reported using the internet and a majority use email, educational, and productivity software [such as Microsoft Word] regularly" (ibid., p. 91). Similarly, every family in my study affirms using the internet although they are cautious in their engagement. They particularly praise the immediacy of the internet for looking up information on search engines, supporting their learning with information and ideas and resources, and email and other social networking sites for communication. In addition, with the possible exception of the Rodriguez family, they see involvement as increasingly expansive and useful. Tables 4 and 5 indicate families' estimates of technology use numerically. Tables 6 and 7 list the digital tools used by these families, and Tables 8 and 9 give the estimates of

average weekly use in hours by parent and child/ren. That number is followed by a numerical reliance or use rating.

Table 4

Technology Use by Homeschooling Families

Values indicated numerically from 0 (no use) to 5 (essential, constant use)

	Bates	Grandon	Gonzalez	Haylee K.	Kaplan
Social networking (email, blogs, IM, Facebook, etc)	0	3	5	3	3
Support group networking (advice, collaboration)	0	2	0	1	2
Finding resources & curricula (lessons, ideas)	4	3-4	5	2	1
Learning legal requirements & standards	2	1	0	1	0
Finding information of interest	5	3	3	3	3
Customize curriculum, develop own activities	5	4	3	2	0
Finding community resources & engaging	4	2	3	0	1
Watching video demonstrations, lectures	1	4	2	0	0
Pursuit of degree/certificate; conferences-parent	1	4	0	1	0
Online coursework for children	2	5	5	0	0

Table 5

Technology Use by Unschooling Families

Values indicated numerically from 0 (no use) to 5 (essential, constant use)

	Herman	Payne	Rodriguez	Southwick	Sanders
Social networking (email, blogs, IM, Facebook)	1	5	3	4	4
Support group networking (advice, collaboration)	3	2	0	2	2
Finding resources & curricula (lessons, ideas)	0	2	1	2	3
Learning legal requirements & standards	1	3	0	3	1
Finding information of interest	3	5	3	4	5
Customize curriculum, develop own activities	-	5	1	4	5
Finding community resources & engaging	2	5	2	3	3
Watching video demonstrations, lectures	0	5	2	3	5
Pursuit of degree/certificate; conferences-parent	0	5	1	5	2
Online coursework for children	0	5	5	5	1

Table 6

Digital Tool Use by Homeschooling Families

	Bates	Grandon	Gonzalez	Haylee K.	Kaplan
Blog		x	x		
Cable/satellite		x			
Education	x	x			x
Email		x	x	x	x
Gaming	x	x		x	
Internet	x	x	x	x	
PDA		x		x	x
C Phone		x	x	x	x
Photos					
Podcasts	x	x		x	
Social		x		x	x
Video	x	x	x	x	x
Word processor	x	x		x	x

Table 7

Digital Tool Use by Unschooling Families

	Herman	Payne	Rodriguez	Southwick	Sanders
Blog		x	x	x	x
Cable/satellite		x			
Education		x	x	x	
Email	x	x	x	x	x
Gaming		x	x	x	
Internet	x	x	x	x	x
PDA		x		x	
C Phone	x	x	x	x	x
Photos		x			
Podcasts		x	x	x	x
Social	x	x		x	
Video	x	x	x	x	
Word processor	x	x	x	x	

Table 8

Homeschooling Families Average Weekly Technology Use in Hours/Reliance or Use Rating (0=none; 5=essential, constant)

	Bates	Grandon	Gonzalez	Haylee K.	Kaplan
Parent	10/2	10/2-3	30/4	--	5/3
Per child	3/2	2/2-3	-/2	15/7	4 /3

Table 9

Unschooling Families Average Weekly Technology Use in Hours/Reliance or Use Rating (0=none; 5=essential, constant)

	Herman	Payne	Rodriguez	Southwick	Sanders
Parent	- /3	2/5	2/2	4/3	15/4
Per child	7/3	20/5	7/1	10/2	4/1 + piano

Using their words and experiences, the supporting ideas of this segment will illustrate their estimation of the importance of technology. “It’s HUGE,” is where the families discuss the benefits and advantages, options, and resources gained through digital access. “I can see how it would hurt me” deals with the cautionary limits some parents impose to avoid distractions and potentially harmful influences that they perceive as possible via the internet, including the absorption of time. And finally, “So long as there is a balance” sums up the majority opinions and practices in finding the right mix of traditional and technological educational tools as these families warily welcome the advantages of technology into their learning environment. An overview of what technology is and is becoming in homeschooling communities summarizes the findings section.

“It’s HUGE!” The families report that technology provides significant support and multiple benefits in four ways. One is that the internet replaces inadequate funds of knowledge with immediate and seemingly infinite and usually current and accurate information.

Historically, societies are perpetuated and progress is made through routine interaction as well as through deliberate instruction where knowledge and skills were disseminated and acquired. Teaching was often a natural part of this process rather than a specialized profession. Tyack (1974) reports that one method the public school movement used to gain support was to popularize the concept that professionally trained teachers possess exclusive knowledge and instructional methods.

One result of this “serviceable myth” (ibid., p. 146) is the perception that home educated children will not learn as much or as well as children in public

schools. Another is that parents experience self-doubts about their ability to teach their own children. Teachers have been touted as repositories of knowledge with “sage on the stage” status such that even parents with college degrees in areas other than teacher education often feel inadequate in sharing what they know. The idea that certification alone provides competency has become part of the accepted culture of education. Technology challenges that in significant ways.

Access to the internet equips users with immediate information that is nearly boundless. Families now have an educational smorgasbord available on demand that provides not only knowledge but a variety of learning approaches, methods of practice and application, and diverse opinions and representations or expressions of topics. Considering the freedom of time from bureaucratic oversight of content and lesson plans, home learning families may have the advantage of greater access to information and instruction than is possible in institutionalized classrooms. Although not everyone agrees with Tyack that “much ‘education’ takes place outside schools” (Tyack, 1974, p. 9; see also Resnick, 1987a, 1987b) technology has great potential for reforming education, and digital tools provide significant academic and emotional support for home learning families (Moe and Chubb, 2009).

There is no doubt that these ten families are very engaged with technology and see it as a valuable resource. These children are commonly seen using digital tools as part of their learning whether working through online coursework or searching the internet for information. While many parents express concern or at least vigilance in engaging with technology they unanimously find it to be helpful and most view it as increasing in utility.

In the Bates home the internet is used for both teaching and taking online classes in pursuit of education. Anna Bates, who teaches youth classes and coaches other homeschooling parents online tells me, "online education is a HUGE, new and upcoming thing. It's HUGE! I only see myself getting better and drawing on it more and more." She is being mentored online to strengthen her technical skills and hopes to add classes both for young people and parents. Electronic media support their family as students, teachers, and entrepreneurs.

"There's all kinds of places that have free resources that are excellent," Anna tells me. Khan Academy "totally" is a favorite site for them as for most of the other families. "There're all kinds of places that have free resources that are excellent," she adds. Daughter Lanie takes online classes in addition to working through ALEKS math.

Amber Kaplan tells me that for them the internet has basically replaced the library. "I don't really use the public library as a source of information," she says. "We can go to the internet or look at books we have at home whereas before, to write a report or research paper, you kind of needed to go to the library to find several books on a topic." Her husband, Dick, agrees that "it does improve accessibility to information. I think that's really helpful. I've enjoyed having access to Wikipedia. You can get a pretty authoritative article with ease whereas it would take a lot of looking to find it."

Another advantage of using technology to learn, Elizabeth Grandon claims, is that it is always current. She says:

So having to search out, going and finding an encyclopedia or going and finding something that's up to date right now that will tell us about Afghanistan or whatever we're trying to learn about, technology

keeps up with what's happening in the world, so science is up to pace, and that it's convenient. We have it in our hands, our iPods, our iPad or our iPhone or whatever we have that's close.

As Turtel (2006) advocates, the Southwick children use the internet search engines to explore. "It's been a good thing to actually focus on it with your questions," Beth reports,

Because I didn't really place a whole lot of value on it, but we use it A LOT! It is an integral part of our learning, especially when they do Khan Academy on it. It's WONDERFUL. It's a WONDERFUL program. I'm grateful for it. It's the only regular program they do. They're doing all their research on it. They Google a lot of things. They do Google Earth a lot and that's just something they love to explore. We're always on just Googling different questions, just to find information. So in that sense, it's definitely an integral part of our learning.

Lila Sanders sees the computer as a tool to legitimize parents teaching their children at home and missed it during a recent storm that left them without electricity for most of a week. She tells me:

I personally like the computer because I do use it as an educational tool every day. There's probably never a day that I don't use it. So when it was down, you know, power outages, I did feel a little bit handicapped. And so, which tells me, I don't know what it tells me actually, other than that I use it! And I do use it. But I can't be all-knowing. I can't possibly know every single thing. And I think that's the expectation I've sort of put on myself. Well, you should KNOW how to do all this if you're teaching your kids! Which is what I'm getting from my

pediatrician, you know? That I should be the all-knowing repository of knowledge. So if you had to ask overall, I respect technology.

Lila Sanders tells me they access digital tools in their learning. “Oh yeah, very much so. I feel like that is a very big crutch. I call it a crutch because I know it’s there. I know I can use it. I know it’s quick.” She gives me an example:

I made Indian food on Monday night because we’re trying to do more cultural type things like that and I wanted to have Indian music playing so I had that. You know, with Pandora. Right there. When a child asks, ‘Where is India, Mom?’ ‘Oh, let me show you really quick.’ Lila tells me of another time when,

All of a sudden Marty is like, ‘So what’s this thing called on the outside of the atom?’ And of course, I can’t think of the name of it and of course I just run over and type it up. Or, how do we spell this word and of course I just run over and oh, it’s this way.

Lila shares other examples of the children using the computer to learn recipes, keyboarding, and personal interests such as animals. She adds:

And Marty [age nine] asked yesterday to go on - that so I felt good. Recently he just asked me if he could go to Lego.com ‘cause they were kind of inspired over at Disneyworld at this Lego store and he’d like to save some money and buy a Lego set or Lego people or something. So I’ve noticed that he was starting to learn how to navigate.

One of the most valuable aspects of digital tools is the way they enable the family to nurture sparks of interest the children have. She connects the

immediacy of attending to her child's "spark" with the availability of help via technology. As an example, Lila shares:

Orin just randomly asked [how cheese was made] during devotional on Wednesday morning. Science fair was Thursday night (laughs). So we just did a couple of YouTube videos and figured it out and everybody wanted to make cheese and so I said, OK. So that afternoon, after went to piano, we stopped and grabbed some buttermilk and made cheese that night.

You know, at 11 o'clock at night or in the morning, I want to know how to make cheese. Oh, perfect! Let's hop right on. Let's do it right now. I'm a little bit torn in the way of technology, like how much to use it, but then at the same time I really think it's a valuable asset in our family. The example of how to make cheese. There was a spark. I was able to nurture it right then, right there, and get it to grow a little bit bigger so that we were able to do more with it later that day and then the next day and continue nurturing that.

Then, say I hadn't nurtured that spark. I had no idea how to make cheese. I didn't have time to run to the library right that very second. I didn't know anyone who had made cheese that I could have called right that very second, and so for me it was a really huge asset to be able to have done that. And so I love to use it [the internet] for that reason. If I didn't have that instant access, like the cheese example, what would I have done? Try to find someone who's made cheese. I would have marched down to the library. It might have been a couple of days, a week even, before I could have tried to nurture that spark.

Another advantage of electronic media access is compensating for content areas that are often daunting to parents, typically math and science. Families can choose among countless sites for instructions and information that support learning. They can also choose between subscription courses or the free resources that are abundant.

“I’ve found a lot of really beneficial technological things that I feel have helped us,” Amber Kaplan claims. “Math can be so much more interactive and fun on the computer than in a workbook.” Some of the younger girls practice math facts using computer programs, but I don’t see signs of fun as I watch Anika focus on her Teaching Textbooks algebra, only concentration. She listens while reading text on the screen about reducing variables. There is a window showing steps of what is being done while a voice explains the concept and process. Anika does the work with pencil and paper. She has made a grid on her lined paper, each box the space for a problem.

Twice I hear the computer voice say “That is actually not true. We can…” and re-explains the procedure. Anika keeps moving the screen between “pages”, back and forth, and her eyes are also moving between her work on the paper and what she sees on the screen. She has control and takes the time she needs to practice, going back and forth between text and paper to listen, watch, and self-correct. I ask her if she likes this program. “Yeah. It’s good,” she says. She knows her Dad will check her work when he gets home as he does for her brothers Ethan and Thomas who likewise do math with Teaching Textbooks. Dick also reviews the children’s work in science.

One of the most daunting issues of homeschooling for Chrissy Gonzalez is access to resources, particularly finding teachers who can help them with

content. "And now through the internet," she proclaims, "I can get resources." She also tells me about a neighbor who bought high-tech equipment for his son to pursue his electronic interests on his own, rather than spending time in social science classes that he perceived to be of less value, and adds:

The internet is huge; Khan Academy for math. That's my weak spot. That's a gift from God. That fills in the blanks. My boy in high school comes home, he says, 'I can't understand a word my teacher said.' It's the Khan Academy. He sits down for ten minutes and it's like, 'Oh! Why didn't the teacher say so?' So I'm starting to realize we don't need the school system." Chrissy elaborates:

TECHNOLOGY is going to be it. My husband's in high tech. He says they're not hiring these traditional kids that went to Stanford or whatever. They're hiring these kids who are computer hackers in their own basements. Now, I'm not a computer person but my kids have a great interest in it. I'm trying to somehow, not knowing what I'm doing, if I could find a fabulous technology teacher, now I'd [hire] this person, and I expect to do that, especially if my first boy starts being home. I'm going to tag onto what this neighbor's doing [investing in technology for his son]. Get him to university level and go straight to technology. I'm not going to go through all this rigmarole about global warming and monkeys [roaming] in the mountains and in the fields and training humans. I want to cut through all that and get right to the technology. So I expect that will be an even bigger role. Not in terms of their whole day, but that's definitely where we're going. And it allows me to do what I do.

The K12 course keeps three computers occupied simultaneously by the Gonzalez children as they work through the material. Chrissy catches me up during a recent rendezvous, telling me that the children got into the rhythm of K12 and did very well, scoring high on the tests. She feels the structure was helpful for her in teaching her children during a very stressful year.

Sixteen-year-old Maddie Payne spends the morning on her laptop learning to manipulate photos using a new Gimp program while text messages summon her frequently to reach for her phone to reply and Josh Grobin croons softly in the background, as Maddie says, to “keep me focused”. She is beginning a photography business with her brother’s donated camera and the help of a new computer program. Using the new program, she inserts and deletes items, changes color and shades, brightens and darkens and does with the touch of a button things that are impossible to do in a darkroom. Her business also benefits from her experience with spread sheets, proficiency with word processing, and the ability to share information and examples of her work through social media. On the arm of the chair is a heavily tabbed GED preparation book, but Maddie’s mother assures me of Maddie’s competency in academic areas.

Use isn’t restricted to math and science. The Herman children search for ideal dragon pictures that match the stories they are writing. Since Lanie Bates’ class is online and live, I merely watch through the glass door as she participates in her literature and world events class. Beth and Cheyanne Southwick spend an hour with heads together and fingers sharing the keyboard searching immigration records of ancestors.

Parents are also learning as online students. Steven Rodriguez is working towards his master's degree in engineering and Lila Sanders shows me a writing sample from her online leadership education class. Anna Bates both teaches and receives instruction via technology and plans to expand the number of classes she is teaching online.

A third benefit of electronic media is its ability to reduce difficulties of time and distance. It connects people with both live and written resources that provide support and guidance, thus helping to obviate challenges of isolation, especially for people in rural settings, and find encouragement and suggestions for dealing with challenges. Through the internet home learning families learn law and policy governing their home learning situation and have access to legal opinions that support their practices. Although none of the ten families in this study discussed this with me in great detail, other home educating families have told me this is significant and helps them comply with education laws.

Many curriculum publishers advertise through electronic media and often allow trial-based access to their products, some of it online. From available texts homeschooling families will often choose portions or entire programs that meet their criteria. In addition, charter schools cater to homelearners, allowing families to fashion customized programs using a variety of curricula. Social connections are invaluable in getting recommendations, positive or negative, from prior users. At least seven families of the ten I observe connect their home learning practices to shared experiences of people they've spoken with or read about.

Only the Gonzalez family chooses a complete online curriculum, K12. Chrissy Gonzalez finds it an academically challenging for her three children in a positive way. Elizabeth Grandon and Amber Kaplan also report trying K12 but

didn't like the isolation of the children working all day alone in front of the computer. Each family has customized their learning through inclusion of electronic and traditional text along with a smattering of public school classes. Amber's children learn Spanish from Rosetta Stone, practice keyboarding with an online game, and work through Teaching Textbooks math. Both families have older children attending school for some classes.

Two families in this study, one homeschooling and one unschooling, have drawn largely on ideas from *A Thomas Jefferson Education* (2012). Recommending classical literature and offering owner-authored books, this site, like others, gives foundational rationale and implementation suggestions that buttress home learning practitioners.

In addition, internet homeschool networks are active resources for families to share, explain, advise, recommend, and organize. Some parents, particularly novices, seek out mentors like Anna Bates for guidance. Networks connect diverse families with varied experiences on which to draw, decreasing the type of isolation felt by Amber Kaplan's mother when she began homeschooling her children many years ago. Still, remarks Amber, "having support groups isn't as helpful to me. It is kind of a lonely path [without support groups]. But I think the internet support groups are great. I just don't have time to be involved in them."

Unschooling families with no formal curriculum often use the internet itself as curriculum, "Googl[ing] and Yahoo[ing their] kids' education" (Turtel, 2006) to some degree as they follow interests. The Rodriguez boys attempt to make a kite following YouTube instructions. Unfortunately, they are less successful than the Sanders family who also rely on YouTube as a guide to make cheese. Holly

Herman “got the perfect page” when she typed in “Horses” on Wikipedia.

Amanda Payne minimizes feelings of isolation from the rich cultural environment of many large cities through virtual tours of historic sites on the internet and enjoys the culture of *Les Miserables* and *Reduced Shakespeare* through electronic media. Occasionally, the family watches local news and PBS shows together in the evenings.

Some unschoolers belong to general homeschooling networks while others have a smaller, local unschooling group or belong to both. Through these networks, members exchange ideas and products, schedule group activities, broadcast opportunities that might be of interest, offer classes, and encourage each other, often sharing experiences and advice. Several of my participants select from proposed activities those that fit their circumstances and others keep abreast of conferences and colloquia of interest. Two of my families were respondents to my requests sent out through networks seeking participants.

The Herman children discuss with their mother which of the fall activities offered by the homeschool network they prefer. I attend a Halloween party that had been planned and coordinated online, with the Kaplan children and their homeschooling associates. Two-year-old Louisa Grandon knows which buttons will speed dial a telephone call to her sisters away at college to keep them connected. Haylee estimates that she spends from one to two hours per day connecting with far away family and friends through email and Facebook – all examples of ways these families connect via social electronic media. In addition, Bethany Grandon gives violin lessons to a friend in the Midwest via Skype. It’s not ideal, she says, but is the best option for them right now. Having

lived far from family and in a rural area, Elizabeth Grandon is glad for the support of online teachers, and tells me:

And then, I also really appreciate, like we talked about, teachers from remote areas being able to help monitor or encourage or that the kids are responsible to so that it helps me in my job. I'm not having to be the only one they're accountable to. They also have another teacher and I think that facilitates homeschooling and that's so nice to have. 'Cause, I wouldn't have had them before unless you hired a neighbor to come over (laughs), you know. To have the internet, somebody that's out there that's able to do that and specializes in that area, can help them with questions.

Lanie Bates tells me her two best friends are members of her online class. Unfortunately, since they live in distant states, their association is limited to technology and a yearly summer experience sponsored by the school. Technological advancements and creative applications are instrumental in helping home learning families deal with resources and initiate and maintain friendships.

The fourth benefit that is significant for the families I observe is the convenience and fun associated with computers. Proponents of technology use for education frequently emphasize the alluring aspects of educational games or programs whose designs promote good learning on several dimensions. Jenkins reports "that an increasing number of young people are dropping out of school not because they are incapable of performing what's expected of them but because they are bored" (Jenkins, 2011, n.p.). Educational software designers seek to embed information in interesting activities.

Children like to have fun and enjoy the novelty and variety offered by games and good game designers understand principles that keep players engaged (Gee, 2007; Salen et al., 2011). Parents in my study look for games that they see as congruent with their values and that entice children to practice skills requiring automaticity such as math facts and sound-symbol and word recognition for reading.

Parents also recognize the value of digital tools such as games or social networking as extrinsic motivation and leverage. In the Kaplan family, that comes in the form of an hour and a half of free-choice gaming time that is often spent playing World of Warcraft. The younger children enjoy learning games and art and science DVDs. Amber tells me that electronic media is used to reinforce music learning, scripture stories, and American history. As do other parents of teens, she finds communication devices that allow her to reach her teen or vice versa can be beneficial for peace of mind. At the same time Amber refuses to allow her own phone to interrupt learning time, answering only calls from family members until her convenience in the evening when she returns calls.

Like the Kaplan boys, the Bates boys also have time each week to engage in computer games. Hillary Bates likes to practice her math facts through computer games. The Sanders boys play computer football with their Dad once a week and really seem to enjoy practicing their electronic piano. Marty often provides background music on the piano as I visit with his mother and I am treated to a mini-recital by the boys.

During my visits I watch Cheyanne regularly situated on the couch with a laptop. I smile as she hands it off to her brother who asks for a turn and immediately pulls out from under the couch an iPad and continues working.

Cheyenne tells me that she likes Facebook. Mom Beth corrects, “Cheyanne LOVES Facebook. That’s what she does after she learns something. She loves that and I think that’s been good for her.”

Dad Jared Southwick works all day long with technology – a “tech geek” - and Beth is a frequent and competent user, she tells me. But Cheyanne? Beth assures me:

She’s got her dad’s genes. She’s definitely savvy. It’s her interest. She likes to figure out how things work. Just any program, even like putting the pictures on something. You know, she just figures it out and then says, ‘Oh mom! I figured this out.’ And there’s things that even Jared says, ‘Oh! I didn’t know about that.’ So it’s absolutely her interest and talent.

Beth laughs and says,

OK. I have to just tell you this. Last night – one of [Cheyanne’s] jobs is to sweep the kitchen floor - she was vacuuming and Jared said, ‘Just bring the vacuum over here.’ And then I heard her say, ‘Dad, Mom is so old-fashioned. She uses a broom!’ (laughs). So anything with a motor – you know – they tease me about it. But I am definitely old-fashioned in that area. I don’t really care to know more.

Elizabeth Grandon appreciates both the convenience and the fun. She laughs as she describes her husband’s enjoyment of group strategy games, dividing up family members and friends into teams to outwit the others. She also asserts that “the nice thing about technology is its convenience.”

“You have EIGHT computers! How do you use them as part of your learning?” I ask Amanda Payne. Of the ten families I observe, seven of the

fathers work in technology-related jobs, four of them as engineers. Amanda's husband, George, is one of them. As Amanda begins telling me about the early educational applications they enjoyed, Maddie amuses us with her description of a typing program that dispensed compliments like, "Look out world, here comes a great typist!" but perpetually insisted she try it ONE MORE TIME.

They used computers for learning foreign languages, to listen to audio books, as encyclopedias, and Maddie laughs as she describes her Freddie Fish game where she solved puzzles from clues and an empire-building game. That begins happy chatter between mother and daughter as they reminisce about the family playing computer strategy games in teams competing against each other. In addition to reports and essays Amanda tells me they "do a lot of different contests."

"I can see how it would hurt me." Technology presents enormous advantages for learning but also has the potential to be destructive in many ways. Cyberstalking, bullying, sexting, and hacking are potential dangers. Although parents appreciate and use technology as a powerful learning tool, they feel that pornography, security risks, and the lure of inappropriate entertainment (YouTube, music, gaming) and social networking compose a threat to the integrity of the family and to individual development. They try to help their children "see how it would hurt" themselves and their family. In their view such distractions and perils impede personal growth, serve as a barrier to self-actualization, and result in becoming "less than themselves." Families establish usage rules to maintain mastery over technology as a helpful aid in their educational process and as a limited form of entertainment and social interaction.

While technology is perceived as offering multiple benefits it is not without challenges. Issues of security and control are ubiquitous (Creno, 2012; Monke, 2011; Perkel & Yardi, n.d.; Turkle, 2004). While Apple (2007) sees technology as cruel, uncaring, and depersonalizing users, other researchers find data demonstrating that an unintended consequence of assisting some students to gain access to electronic media not only failed to help them academically but rather magnified problems such as increased technology time used for entertainment and social networking and less time on academics and sleep (Richtel, 2011; Cuban, 2001). Richtel further claims that parents are sometimes ill-equipped to know how to regulate computer use with their children.

Cibulka (2011) warns that “technology has eroded privacy” (p. 2) and reiterates Turkle’s (2004) claim that computers change the way we think – decreasing our capacity for profound logic and cogent argument – and alter our expectations of surveillance and privacy and the way we perceive life and progress. People become accustomed to the authority of disembodied websites and thus susceptible to blurred views of right and wrong. Monke (Hess & Monke, 2010) adds that young people, without comprehending the power of technology, can do serious damage to themselves and others through irresponsible behaviors.

Even though only two families in my study do not yet have teenage children, all of the parents share concerns connected with electronic media and take steps to keep control of technology. As Amber Kaplan tells me, they seek to control the environment, not the children. These families accept and comply with Church counsel to recognize danger and use technology in ways harmonious

with Gospel principles of seeking out things that are “virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy” (Article of Faith 13).

Two particularly harmful influences are inherent in the internet and electronic media. The first and primary issue for these parents is security, physical and spiritual. All of them have content filters to block sites deemed inappropriate for parents as well as children. Specifically targeted is pornography but includes violence, illegal and “malicious sites” (<http://www.cybersitterlists.com/>). Computers are typically in high traffic areas of the home, or places where parents frequent rather than in children’s bedrooms. Families agree on acceptable websites and children are cautioned about chat rooms, posting personal information, or communicating anything not aligned with Church and family values.

“My husband works for homeland security and he works with computers, so he is especially aware of the dangers of technology,” Ruby Rodriguez tells me, and continues:

We believe that eventually they are going to be adults and they will have to choose to avoid those dangers or not. But as children and as parents of those children we feel it is our job to do everything we can to protect and keep them safe from the scary things that are addictive. Pornography is addictive. Many addictive things out there. So we do our very best. It’s still the children’s choice – they have free choice - but we do our very best to protect them while they’re young until they are able to truly, with the information at hand, make decisions on what would be best for their life.

Dick Kaplan, praising technology for the potential savings of time and effort still argues about the overall benefits. “Technology in and of itself is really

morally neutral but even though good things come from it I think the bad things are more easily assimilated by people," he tells me. "I consider the worst would be things that ruin people's lives, mostly pornography, on the internet. That's bad. I think it's pretty hard to argue that there's anything NOT bad about that." He says other things that encourage inappropriate relationships threaten families. These media also make it difficult to make a case for being more beneficial than harmful. If he had to take all or none, he'd take none.

Other problems, Dick asserts, "are things that encourage inappropriate relationships – communication devices, which is cell phones, texting..."

Amber: "Where you are texting things you would never say..."

Dick: "There're SO MANY ways that that kind of communication has harmed relationships that never existed before those devices were available."

Elizabeth Grandon agrees:

I just feel like there are a lot of sites out there that are NOT beneficial. I'm just cautious about allowing them in there [on the computer] and I try and be in there. The rule has always been to have another sibling in the computer room with you so somebody's not in there by themselves.

She reiterates, "I'm a little more cautious about monitoring" to avoid [websites] that pose emotional, social, or spiritual danger.

As a result of the monitoring and rules like no cell phone before age 16, Bethany Grandon, who is 13, tells me,

I still don't have a cell phone but I'm not worried about getting one until I'm 16 'cause I think that if I'd gotten one when I was younger, I think it would have changed me somehow. 'Cause I have seen people and how they work with cell phones and Facebook and sometimes it's made

them less than themselves. I don't know how to explain that but their personality seems to change and they act differently...They'll just say something on Facebook that I'm like, Whoa! Did you really want to say that?

Bethany views the seeming addiction to technology, the inability to get along without cell phones, large texting bills, posting things without careful thought, and the need to hide things from parents as harmful and yet easy to get caught up in. Because of family rules, she says, "I'm kind of glad I won't get anything that will totally suck me into it...Like, I can see how it would hurt me."

Haylee writes about her technology use, "I don't have restrictions but I don't do bad things just 'cause I care."

A second major concern is the time component. Parents are anxious about the potential to waste time that is prevalent in technology use whether through gaming and entertainment, socialization via email or on sites like Facebook or blogs, internet surfing, or a variety of uses that claim hours without what they feel are worthwhile results. They feel that spending time with such pursuits even when engaged in activities that are not inherently wrong or bad prevent family members from being with each other and strengthening family relationships in addition to accomplishing worthwhile and productive things.

Elizabeth Grandon explains how their family has worked out the issue of time believing that there is "the temptation to spend a great deal of time, particularly with social networking." She explains, "I've known some kids spend too much time on Facebook or they spend too much time and they're not able to interact with the family as much." She realizes that spending excessive amounts

of time with electronic media “affects our relationships, we’re not spending enough time interacting with each other.”

We have the kids’ time – they have a certain time. They have all been – especially with K12, you know - they could just get on any time. But the homeschooled kids we limited a half an hour when they could get on either Facebook or email. And then if they wanted to get on the computer like they’ll do homework or they have to do some research, then we just log them in for a certain amount of time. But that’s the only way we could come up with a reasonable response to just free time ‘cause it ended up hampering our family time, taking away from it. But the younger kids I think, should have pretty much free access - just my ability to go in and be with them and monitor the sites that come.

Bethany accepts family rules and laments:

people who have become different as they have emailed and Facebooked and just become addicted to other things, spending less time with their families and more time with their friends until their families don’t even know them any more very well. I like being close to my family a lot more than I feel better about being close to my friends. I love my friends, but I think my family, since I’m going to be with them for eternity, is a lot more important than my friends.

It’s nice for “parents to get a hold of their kids whenever they want,” grants Dick Kaplan. “That’s OK. That helps. But children have used it in FAR excess in the other direction.” Besides the issue of danger, Dick says,

Then the other things you could say that are bad are just things that are a waste of time. You know, there’s nothing wrong with a little

diversion once in a while, and all of us have things we like to do that aren't necessarily productive. But again, it's really easy to REALLY spend a lot of time in things that aren't productive and I think technology really encourages that and makes it easier to do.

In the Kaplan home, then, the girls are given a slim ten minutes each day to check in quickly on Facebook or email even though Amber tells me there is a lot of pressure on the girls for them to participate more fully in various forms of social interaction. Even the parents are on restriction. They don't allow a computer or TV in their bedroom, as it would "make it so we didn't have any couple time." Amber would be watching the news. "Dick [would] be on a computer in our bedroom." The bottom line is, "It prevents us from talking."

There is another perceived threat that is not discussed and perhaps largely unnoticed but worth mentioning. From Esther I glean new perspective on educational developments involving online learning that seem to be very popular in Utah. Nearly all of the families I observe and talk to include an element of online coursework to some extent. Esther tells me that most people consider any kind of learning done at home to be homeschooling.

However, the 'homeschooling purists' distinguish their practice of independence from State influence or regulation from the deal-with-the-devil arrangement of enrolling homeschoolers in charter schools to receive financial benefit from the taxes they've paid for public education. Many parents accept this as fair since they are taxed for education; they are simply recouping some of their own money for doing the work themselves. They even feel it worth compliance with other state interventions such as standardized tests and medical requirements that accompany any collaboration involving tax monies.

However, Chris Cardiff (1998), president of the California Homeschool Network, worries that the allure of resources, including technology and online courses, will snare homeschoolers back into state rolls, paving the way for government retraction of laws allowing parents to educate at home. In addition, testing requirements that accompany charter school enrollment entails the gradual inclusion of undesirable elements of comparison, structure and fragmentation, and traditional teaching and testing techniques that come with enrolling in classes even though they are done at home.

“So as long as there is a balance.” Advocating a “balanced media diet” that includes “old technology” such as books, Greenfield (2009, p.69) emphasizes cognitive advantages to both using technology and leaving laptops closed. Even the older media of radio and television are reported to have increased average levels of intelligence among all groups over the last eighty years (ibid.; Johnson, 2006). However, research also shows that multitasking – using multiple media during the same time – actually decreases learning and reduces retention significantly (Dretzin & Rushkoff, 2010; Greenfield, 2009).

The participants in my study also see balance as a healthy way of working with technology in a variety of ways. Virtual learning needs to be balanced with face-to-face interaction. Digital tools should not be allowed to crowd out work, play, creativity, or interaction with real objects such as nature. They balance being home with participation in activities outside the home.

Anna Bates, appreciating the advantages of technology for her teenage daughter, sees the importance of working with younger children face-to-face:

I think that, at the end of the day, nothing really substitutes for great teaching. Great teaching has a certain environment where the

mentor is present and the mentor is really gauging where the student is and responding to the student and I don't know if technology can ever do that.

Homeschooling helps children learn to work, claims Ruby Ramirez. She tells me her children have a choice of playing educational games like those on *Wii*, but NOT working is not an option. Part of their education is the doing. Ruby claims that her children:

have such good work ethic, and are so wanting to learn more and do more. I believe that comes from homeschooling. They don't want to be lazy. They don't learn to not care what they're learning [the way children may do at school]. They want to learn because they're learning what they're interested in and they're interested in everything. There's not even a comparison.

Work, says Anna Bates, is part of their curriculum. As a result, "they can go and do just fine in a variety of environments, and they have a good work ethic. They know how to work hard," she assures me. "That's one thing that's part of our homeschool curriculum. We want them to be able to work and be known for being good, hard workers."

Maddie Payne takes care of farm animals, lays irrigation pipe, helps re-roof barns, cooks, sews, and helps care for her younger sister in addition to helping provide care for a severely disabled young neighbor. At age sixteen she is seeing success with her photography business.

Although play may not be scheduled in, I notice the Bates boys take turns playing on the floor with five-year-old sister Hillary's Duplo blocks when Mom is helping another child understand a concept. Amber Kaplan views the children's

quiet entertainment with Legos, small toys, or coloring as conducive to their learning while they read and sing and talk together. The Herman children learn as they work/play finding dragon pictures on the computer and learn how to use technology to find, select, and print pictures and write stories. Elizabeth Grandon instigates spontaneous races up and down the stairs to help her children use energy and refocus on the material at hand.

Ruby Ramirez tells me her children are welcome to play with the *Wii* or other educational games:

We have a lot of computers. One time, I don't even remember - was it Sunday school? – you guys remember? One of my children, we were talking about computers and they told somebody how many computers I have and they said, "Wow, you must be rich!" We laughed and laughed and laughed. We have so many computers because my husband is into computers and we keep the old ones and my husband keeps them running and they run the old software. So we have lots of computers and we bought a *Wii*. We bought a *Wii* a couple of years ago 'cause the children really, really wanted one and so we bought a *Wii* and we have educational software for that and again they're only allowed to do it as a reward and sometimes I say, "You can play the *Wii* but you can only play educational software" and they're like "Ohhh" cause there are fun games, too. And I say, "You don't have to. You are welcome to NOT play educational software and go do something else." And generally they end up going down to play the educational software 'cause they'd rather do that than NOT play the *Wii*. So they enjoy it when we do it. They would just rather play games. But I'm mean and I won't let them.

“I think they’re so creative as children and the minute you teach them to read they’re reading books – which is great – but they can read all the books they want once you teach them to read,” says former school teacher Ruby. “And I love that when they’re young they are doing creative play and imagination games and making up games and playing with each other and doing all these wonderful creative things.” I notice thirteen-year-old Nate working on some type of game he is creating with cardboard, Styrofoam, paper, tape, and other supplies. Ruby says technology is fabulous but she doesn’t want boys wasting time when they could be creative.

Education professor Lowell Monke (2012), arguing against using technology in education because it is decontextualized from reality, stresses the importance of children interacting with nature and the objects that surround them. “There is a huge qualitative difference between learning something [virtually], which requires that the learner enter into a rich and complex relationship with the subject at hand (p. 319). These families would likely see the irony in applying that logic to technology and not public schools as well. Nevertheless, they agree that a balance in learning approaches is worthy.

I see a great deal of evidence of hands-on engagement with realia. The Bates children play with Frito the guinea pig and a large white rabbit while listening to Mom read from *Pollyanna*. Bananas on the counter become an impromptu part of Heber’s math lesson. The curriculum for the Southwick children includes service to others as they tend a neighbor’s children during one of my observations. The Grandon children help with meals, bottle fruit juice, and do household chores. Implements used in weighing and measuring are part of the Gonzalez’ children’s science lesson. Haylee rocks her nephew to sleep as

we visit. Learning at home for these families is seldom devoid of hands-on, real objects and people both inside and outside the house.

Part of the balance I notice is an impressive degree of participation in activities away from home. Science fairs, soccer games and other sports, drama, music, multiple kinds of dance, writing groups, martial arts, Church and Scouting activities, and volunteering fills portions of days during my visits. The pattern seems to be home learning in the mornings and outside learning in the afternoons followed by more home learning in the evenings.

As we visit about technology Lila Sanders describes her search for balance. She is ambivalent except when talking about gaming which she now detests. She tells me she didn't give it much thought when she was working. The children entertained themselves watching television. Lila recalls:

Marty would get up in the morning and the first thing he would do is play a video game. He would do it every morning before he went to school. And it was OK 'cause it was kinda like I was getting ready for work and he was doing this and whatever. But he has admitted to me later, he's like, 'Mom, I was really starting to get addicted to video games.' He was what, six, seven, eight? It was too much. And so we pulled the plug completely on video games.

Now the boys play a virtual football game an hour a week – Friday or Saturday – with Dad. Otherwise, they don't even ask any more. Lila tells me they NEVER watch shows like "Sponge-Bob or other goofy shows at all." Other than occasional family movies on Friday night or National Geographic and other nature shows television is rarely viewed. Eliminating television and video games,

the children are allowed computer access when they ask, which is rare. This seems to be a pattern among nearly all of the families I observe.

Lila loves having technology but a hesitancy remains. “This is the only thing I’m trying to figure out. Is it making my kids, ‘So, everything’s at my disposal. If I want to know something I’ll just find it out.’ Is it making them expect that of the world?” It seems to be easy “intellectual gratification” on some level to her. She concludes that God has blessed them with technology to use for beneficial purposes and that should guide their engagement.

She finishes the discussion on technology on a more peaceful note indicating that the answer lies in balance. “So as long as there is a balance. Thank you for helping me work through that ‘cause I really needed to work through that recently.”

Participants in my study express an attitude that digital tools are valuable when used with discretion and time limits so as not to consume more important aspects of family life and learning. Interaction with each other is a primary reason for homeschooling. Their educational approach relies heavily on time spent together discussing ideas and engaging in activities designed to extend understanding, relationships, and discovery. So for each family the challenge seems to be finding the right mix of technology time and type with non-electronic engagement.

Summary. The advent of ubiquitous electronic media has effected profound changes in the lives of most Americans, directly and indirectly. As an educational tool it is likely to become more embedded both in homes and schools, often the former before the latter. Still, there is disagreement about the value and use of technology in learning.

In 1984, MIT professor Seymour Papert predicted that “There won’t be schools in the future; I think that the computer will blow up the school” (Ebish & Immel, 1984, p. 38). Twelve years later Papert lamented, “Despite frequent predictions that a technological revolution in education is imminent, school remains in essential respects very much what it has always been” (Hess & Monke, 2012, p. 316).

What has changed in schools is the amount of money that continues to be invested in equipment that too often is underutilized, abused, and requires frequent and expensive maintenance and upgrades in both hard and software, including teacher retraining. Unchanging are the expectations of significant achievement as measured by standardized tests and the difficulty of trying to integrate an individualized tool into the school model of control, structure, and tasks (Christensen et al., 2011; Cuban, 1996; Papert, 1996, 1998).

The promise of freeing up teaching time and allowing for “more creative exploration” (Hess & Monke, 2012, p. 317) as students work in virtual groups unrestricted by categories such as age remain peripheral. Thus, families who value digital tools as effective, customizable, just-in-time and engaging are less likely to depend on schools to either teach or use technology as effectively as can happen at home (Papert, 1996).

My participants all find technology serviceable and are willing to take advantage of the good and restrict the bad. They define “good” as a wholesome repository of current information from which they add to knowledge and skills. Besides accessing Wikipedia and using Google to gain information, family members find programs that teach content areas often considered to be daunting to be particularly useful and used. In addition I see Maddie learning Gimp for

photography, Cheyanne focusing on family history, Lanie taking virtual classes, and the Gonzalez children working through K12 curriculum online.

Social networking serves these families in finding curriculum and educational opportunities in the community and social activities with each other. However, using the computer to find resources and connect with other homeschoolers is limited because it is perceived as a less valuable use of time in these homes. On the other hand, they recognize and respect their children's desires for social connections and for entertainment such as gaming or YouTube through digital tools. Thus, technology becomes another example of negotiated power distribution and a reflection of the parents' hidden curriculum.

"Bad" sites are those that pose emotional, spiritual, or physical danger for individual members and the family as a whole. Time figures into their evaluation of technology use and they typically seek to limit time spent on electronic media because they value time spent together. It is part of the perceived balance between various learning approaches of face-to-face interaction, new and old technologies, work, play, and activities within and outside the home.

The following chapter discusses the conclusions regarding hidden curriculum in these homes and the importance of ideology in shaping behavior and learning practices. I discuss three major contributions of my study to literature about homeschooling, unschooling, the hidden curriculum of home learning, and technology use in home learning.

Further, I review implications for both research and practice presented by this study of the home learning and technological engagement of these ten families.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The hidden curriculum, or ideological foundation, functions in schools as an organizational framework that defines purposes, practices, and what education *is*. It envelops the “highly ritualized methods” that form “boundaries to include control of the individual’s behavior and worldview” (Boli et al., 1985, p. 149). The hidden curriculum, as opposed to official content, is the learning implicit in institutionalized education that is generally unquestioned, unrecognized, and unacknowledged, but nevertheless vital to the constitution and functioning of schools.

Overview

Just as ideology plays a crucial role in formal schools, families who learn at home also have a “hidden curriculum” that shapes behaviors, attitudes, and organization. It is much less explored than that of public schools. The purpose of my study was to examine the underlying philosophical underpinnings of home learning that shape what is valued as education and how learning is enacted in family settings.

Home educating families first of all, regardless of whether they are religious or secular, homeschoolers or unschoolers, reject the concept of formal school as being the only legitimate form of learning. They typically dispense with many of the functions of public schools such as standardized curriculum and assessments, tightly structured schedules, and rigid behavioral norms like raising a hand before speaking.

However, in actuating education at home, families unavoidably also effectuate a hidden curriculum of their own by both resisting the accepted norm

of public schools and inculcating their own views of what qualifies as legitimate learning, appropriate approaches, and beliefs and behaviors constitutive of education in their domain. Through constant and intimate association, values and culture are transmitted, knowledge is constructed, and beliefs enacted within an ideological framework and a controlled environment.

My research, then, addresses three questions regarding the underlying philosophy of home learning: 1) *What is the hidden curriculum of homeschooling and unschooling in these LDS families?*

2) *How does the hidden curriculum enjoin the educational practices of homelearners in ways that either contradict or reinforce the beliefs of the home?*

I also examine the particular role of technology and how families view digital tools for my third research question:

3) *How does digital media factor into both the decision to educate at home and the ongoing facilitation of home learning practices?*

My research was carried out with ten families, five of whom homeschool and five who are unschoolers, all of them active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also referred to as LDS, or Mormon. Theology plays a major role in their learning for a variety of reasons. It shapes their identities as individuals and their relationships within the family. Their view of learning is also molded by ideological beliefs, as are their concept of time and their regard for technology. It serves as the foundation of their “hidden curriculum.”

I examined how these families view the affordances of home learning in allowing choice, fostering interest, and selecting curriculum. I devoted particular attention to the increasing role of technology in homeschooling

practices and how engagement with digital tools, like all practices in the home, is influenced by religious beliefs.

I used sociocultural theory as the framework of my research because the transmission of beliefs, knowledge, and culture is a social phenomenon mediated by history, context, and tools as well as other people (Brown et al., 1989; Dewey, 1938; Driscoll, 2005; Gee, 2004; Lave, 2011; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll, 1990; Resnick, 1987a, 1987b, 1989). I included the concept of the family as a community of practice in the process of moving infants into adulthood equipped with skills, beliefs, identity, experience, relationships, and expertise (Eckert & Wenger, 2005; Gee, 2004; Liedlof, 1985; Wenger, 1998).

Research of behaviors is best served by naturalistic inquiry (Athens, 2010; Denzin, 1971; Hammersly, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2010). My study of family learning practices in the home necessitated a case study approach to spend time observing in situated context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Simons, 1996; Soy, 1997; Stake, 1988; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 1994). Through volunteers responding to homeschool listservs and snowball sampling I selected ten families who were willing to allow me to observe in their homes for a minimum of ten hours, tape an interview, and fill out questionnaires.

Once data was collected it was coded topically and merged into categories (Aurback & Silverman, 2003; Blank, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2010). These were then distilled into four themes of relationships, time, the learning process, and technology, each with subthemes for dimension and organization. I analyzed the data using comparisons with relevant literature, in particular Jackson's concepts of hidden curriculum.

In this chapter, I identify three major contributions of my study to the literature on homeschooling, unschooling, and the hidden curriculum. I discuss these findings compared with existing research while adding to the body of literature on home learning practices. I also discuss the value of a sociocultural perspective in framing interpretations and suggesting new perspectives over the course of my research and analysis. In this framework the family is considered to be a community of practice in forming identities and mediating tools and interactions with others in the context of home learning.

In further sections of this chapter, I focus on the implications for research by discussing the unanswered questions that remain and can guide future research. I also discuss the limitations of my study and how these might be addressed in further studies. The implications for practice connect the findings in these homes with pedagogical applications on other levels that are the focus of continuing research in education. Just as parents learn from schools, alternative models of education can provide insights and options for learning practices in many areas. Of particular interest is addressing implications for other parents whose children learn at home. I then present some conclusions about the significance of what I see happening in these homes and the importance I attach to what families do to advance learning of various types and in diverse ways.

Contributions of the Study

My research illuminates how a hidden curriculum is enacted in these ten families who homeschool or unschool. The concept of a hidden curriculum was developed by Philip Jackson (1968) to describe the underlying learning implicit in the ways schools are organized but is useful as well as a tool for discovering the equivalent way parents conceptualize the benefits of learning at home that

extends beyond curricular content. My study makes three main contributions to our understanding of the hidden curriculum and the role of technology in homeschooling and unschooling. First, my research illuminates the significance of religious ideology in shaping the hidden curriculum of these LDS families. Literature on homeschooling such as Stevens (2001), Gaither (2009), Kunzman (2009), and Van Galen and Pitman (1991) discuss in detail the role of religious belief and the desire to incorporate faith as part of the curriculum as a primary rationale for many families who educate their children at home. Although the families in my study do not identify religious ideology as the salient reason for electing to learn at home, fundamental principles of the LDS church are central to their learning practices and otherwise support their children's education.

Second, my study indicates that the practices of homeschooling and unschooling, ostensibly two philosophically diverse types of home learning, are less distinctive in actuality than in theory. This blurring of lines across authentic home learning practices could be attributed in part to the common LDS belief structures that undergird the hidden curriculum, such as organized family scripture study each day. Also blurred are lines defining curriculum and how families shape their own definitions in ways that may not align with scholarly concepts.

A third contribution of the study is to expand understanding of how home learning families negotiate the complicated terrain of digital technology, striving to achieve balance among concerns about their children's safety and inappropriate material, with the benefits of access to useful information and tools. In addition, my study demonstrates the value of a sociocultural approach to studying the nature of home learning.

It is also necessary to discuss the issue of defining curriculum, both as official and as a foundational belief system, due to the variety of opinions and perspectives that exist among scholars. Another difficulty that presents itself is in applying the term curriculum to unschooling practices and using the label of hidden in discussing home learning.

Religion as Hidden Curriculum

Religious belief within the hidden curriculum of home learning families is manifested particularly in three areas. The first is the impact on relationships. The fundamental relationship these families seek to instill and perpetuate is that all people are children of God. Additionally, they believe that “the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children” (“The family: A proclamation to the world,” 1995). The understanding that family relationships are eternal is pervasive in LDS writings and teachings (Hawkins et al., 2012). One of the earliest songs these children learn is, “I am a child of God and He has sent me here/ Has given me an earthly home with parents kind and dear/ Lead me, guide me...teach me all that I must do to live [again] with Him some day” (*Hymns*, p. 301).

Daily religious devotionals and the inclusion of Church tenets in interactions, discussions, activities, and guidelines for using technology foreground the position of religious ideology in these homes. Additional evidence is seen in the emphasis on using time wisely and gaining an education as important to becoming what God wants them to be.

The beliefs of these families reflect a particular stance towards intimate interaction consistent with research and literature about family connectedness (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Clery, 1998; Merry & Howell, 2009; Smetana, 1999;

Stinnett & DeFrain, 1989). They feel strongly that both the increased association with each other because of home learning and the absence of the influence of school “crowds”, in Jackson terms, favorably advantages the primacy of the family. Schools are unable to share family values, experiences, and identity that bond families together (Bemis & Slater, 1969; Lines, 1994b; Lightfoot, 1978; Merry & Karsten, 2010).

Interestingly, mothers employed outside the home were surprised to discover that, like school, their employment also interfered with their relationships with their children, something that escaped their notice before becoming stay-at-home mothers. After quitting their jobs, they discovered increased feelings of satisfaction and intimacy with the ability to focus on their children (Erickson, 2012; Erickson & Aig, 2004; Jacob, 2009) that also contributed to their justification for home learning (Lois, 2009; Merry & Howell, 2009). These families perceive that learning at home contributes to family intimacy in that neither mothers nor children are otherwise distracted. They are convinced that no other success is as important and rewarding as that of family relationships (McCulloch, 1924; McKay, 1957; Thomas, 2006).

It may be argued that most parents desire and work toward healthy family relationships and value equally with these families a high degree in intimacy in their homes. However, few families, relative to the number of families with school-age children, choose to learn at home. Among these families there is an overt emphasis on the eternal nature of their relationship as a family.

A second area shaped by religious ideology is the perception of time. The belief that time is an inheritance from God and that individuals are held accountable by God for their use of time (Eyring, 1993; Arden, 2011) creates a

different paradigm than that of being restricted by the “artificial demands of planner and clock” that moves the emphasis from relationships to efficiency (Bahr et al., 2012, p. 218). This may differ from home learning families who appreciate the increased freedom of time without the equally compelling obligation to answer to God for how it is used. A sense of ownership and control over time is a significant benefit in the view of these families in allowing them to shape their learning and participate in activities and associations they believe to have eternal value.

Additionally, LDS dogma teaches that each person has a purpose on earth and that time is to be used to accomplish one’s mission. These parents encourage their children to take time to prepare themselves to serve others and to discover and fulfill their lifework. Education serves a central role in achieving that purpose. Learning is not defined by time; learning is never finished and is understood to endure beyond mortality.

This attitude about time informs practices in these families such as technology use, curriculum selection, and perceptions of success. In addition, time used in promoting relationships - attending family reunions, volunteering, working and playing together, and traveling - is seen as having greater value than seatwork. Having control over one’s time is a tremendous source of satisfaction and power in the view of my participants.

The third area connected to the faith of these families is that of learning, explaining both *what* and *why* education is important. Like relationships, learning is enduring and has an eternal purpose in that “[w]hatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection” (*Doctrine and Covenants*, 130:18). Through LDS perspective, the value of learning is

magnified in that it has eternal consequences. The scope of learning - what is valued - is expanded to include all knowledge and skills that are beneficial to improving life. Education employed in the service of others takes on eternal significance and meaning.

Learning is also organized differently in the homes of these families than in classrooms. Whereas benchmarks and assessments of isolated content that is constrained by time define education in schools, these parents see such narrow boundaries on learning as artificial and arbitrary. Further, performance on school tasks in formal classrooms influences attitudes both of self and others' perceptions about children as learners in ways that are incongruent with the ideology that all individuals possess equal and inherent worth as children of God regardless of state-mandated criteria. Families view learning as a pleasurable endeavor, intrinsically rewarding and not limited to numeracy and literacy. They sense a personal obligation to discover and develop talents and gain knowledge that will enable them to serve others and God as they fill their mission on earth.

Religious faith imprints a particular self and world view in the learning practices of these families, shaping the construct of and value assigned to relationships, use of time, and learning. These parents support learning practices in the home through curriculum selection, personal involvement, and activities that align with ideological belief. This study does not compare these families with other families who educate in or out of school. The purpose is rather to illuminate what these families believe and do in their home learning.

Blurred Lines

A second contribution of the study is to suggest that the philosophical differences between unschooling and homeschooling do not necessarily yield

distinct educational practices. My research reveals a blurring of differences that would ordinarily distinguish how learning is fostered by parents in unschooling families where learning is considered a natural function of life and is child-directed, and homeschooling families where content area is typically adult-directed and pursued in a more structured approach. However, among the ten families I observed, the diverse educational styles are blended by ideological perspective.

There are several elements of the hidden curriculum that are consistent in all of the families regarding the inculcation of LDS theology. The underlying ideological viewpoint appears to be equally practiced in both homeschooling and unschooling families through regular, structured family devotionals as well as discussions and applications that draw on religious tenets. Another example is the belief that individuals come to earth with talents and gifts that should be respected, developed, and used to bless others and fulfill one's mission in life.

Another persistent practice I observed is that of the mother's focus on the children. Regardless of whether the mother is instructing the children in content areas or whether the children are pursuing their own curiosity, the mother's attention is directed to the children and their interests and activities. Mothers play an active role and are attentive and involved whether the learning is child-led or parent-initiated.

An additional constant between the diverse practices is that children exercise significant agency in their learning, setting their own goals, determining the time they will devote in a particular area, and negotiating with parents in decisions about their education. Even in the homeschooling families, children's agency and desires are respected and responded to in ways that diminish

distinctions between unschooling and homeschooling stances. Children set their own learning goals and are encouraged to discover and pursue their own purpose in life.

A final invariant is that technology use is guarded for what is considered to be appropriate content and security. Although time use varies significantly, it is dependent on personal parental preferences rather than ideological or pedagogical inclinations. Interestingly, unschooling families are at both ends of the spectrum regarding freedom and time involving technology use.

There is some predictable distance as well in the structure and approach between the families who consider themselves unschoolers and those who homeschool. Homeschoolers spend time each day addressing content and typically work through a defined curriculum whereas unschoolers, following family devotionals, tend to pursue an activity together or individually at home or take advantage of an opportunity in the community, sometimes with other unschooling families. They have no defined curriculum but engage with math, writing, science, history, and reading skills as informal learning in the course of their daily life activities and demonstrate learning through conversations and projects of their own.

I notice also that some unschooling families share relatively little interaction with others outside the home other than Church-related functions. Others are involved in volunteering, co-operative learning with other unschooling families, and formally structured lessons such as music, drama, and art. Overall, my study finds that although homeschooling families tend to participate in a greater number of organized classes than do the unschoolers, this too, is a spectrum that finds unschooling families at both ends.

The homeschoolers, then, negotiate and adapt to children's individual proclivities and preferences in ways resembling unschooling, while unschoolers participate in structured family devotional time as do their homeschooling counterparts. Further, learning practices are shaped in some families by children with special needs, resulting in relaxed expectations for some homeschoolers with learning challenges or increased structure for special needs children in unschooling families. However, although each family varies in their approach and methods, children in each home appear to enjoy learning and want to participate in whatever learning practices the family prefers.

A Balanced Approach

A third contribution of my research is in relation to the use of technology for homeschooling and unschooling. More specifically, my research suggests that these families, for the most part, desire to find a balanced approach in using technology as a learning tool. They are concerned about issues like safety, overuse of technology, and access to inappropriate content. While these are also issues for most families, and educators in formal schooling, the most significant point may be in regard to what issues are *not* of concern in these homes that persist in institutionalized education. There is ongoing debate about the use of technology in education that emphasizes cost and effectiveness in addition to safety and appropriateness (Bates, 2009; Creno, 2012; Greenfield, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Report, 2008). Although many educators concede the potential for positive outcomes are significant through a medium that appeals to children, customizes instruction, and provides immediate feedback, schools face an enormous challenge in providing and monitoring the use of digital tools on campus, whether

personal or school-provided. Acquisition and implementation of changes, updates, and new programs available through technology that require extensive financial and time investment to research and implement in school systems are relatively easy to negotiate in homes.

Home learning families take advantage of an increasing number of technological tools without significant additional financial outlay. Purchases are often limited to a few subscription or online classes that supplement home learning, particularly in areas where parents feel less confident or children have a special interest. Nor does professional development to train teachers on newly acquired programs require additional time and funding. Instead of parents teaching children to use electronic tools, children generally lead in technological acumen and often end up teaching the parents.

The families I observe all use technology, although, as Andrade (2008) discovered in his research on homeschooling and technology, digital tools are such a part of life that parents typically aren't cognizant of the extent to which their learning practices incorporate access to technology. They all admit to using search engines for information, social networking for connections to resources and support, sites like YouTube for instruction or enrichment, and content-specific lessons such as Kahn Academy to augment learning.

Parents and children appreciate the immediacy of technology in searching for knowledge, getting feedback on practice, and discovery of unique and interesting ideas and activities in every area. They appreciate access to information on demand and at the level and quantity suitable for their preference and ability. Parents use technology to individualize each child's learning to optimize proclivities and interests in an appealing format. "Our experience

teaches us that we all learn at our own pace, learn best in various ways, [and] not all learning is equal for all people in all ways,” says Christensen et al. (2011, pp 23, 24.). Gardner endorses educational options offered electronically as a way of addressing various intelligences and learning preferences (Gardner, 2004; see also Armstrong, 2003), something also valued by parents to customize learning with their children.

These parents exercise control over access to electronic media and scrutinize use for safety and appropriateness. Every family has a content filter to help parents monitor use as there is significant potential for finding material that is incompatible with religious standards. They also express concern over safety issues that persist in electronic media such as cyberstalking, bullying, sexting, and public disclosure of information that parents feel should remain private. These problems are much more difficult to monitor in a school setting where attitudes about privacy rights and appropriateness may be conflicting. The parents in my research appreciate the power they have to safeguard their children from perceived potential harms that can accompany electronic media in ways consistent with their preferences, while maximizing the learning benefits that technology provides.

Most participant families also incorporate time limits they feel are warranted, particularly with teens and social media. Although children in my study may have unlimited access to “educational” sites, time spent gaming, internet surfing, and on social sites is typically restricted. Time with technology is also an issue in institutionalized education but in a different way. Some complain that in schools the amount of time students engage with digital tools is too minimal to warrant the expenditure (Cuban, 2011; Moe & Chubb, 2009).

Additionally, students without access to computers outside of schools get little benefit from classroom computer instruction as their skill level may be too low to keep up with the class, while students proficient with digital devices are rarely on task because the coursework is too easy. Either way, the greatest application of technology for educational purposes is generally done at home (Lenhart et al., 2001).

Although the logistics of fitting a new educational model (technology) into an archaic and monolithic structure (public schools) is problematic (Christensen, 2011; Cibulka, 2011; Moe & Chubb, 2009; Papert, 1996), some homeschooling families are accessing technology through hybridized learning venues offered by charter schools wherein children take online classes at home without charge by enrolling in charter schools. Although Apple (2007) finds using “public” money to educate home learning children disturbing, some parents find this to be helpful in taking advantage of a variety of educational tools while seeing it as a way to recoup some of their own tax money paid into education.

Unschoolers in my study do not participate in charter school hybrid programs, but like homeschoolers, their technology use aligns with their needs and preferences. The parents in my study say that technology is not essential to learning but has much to offer families when used appropriately. A sense of balance and safety appear much easier to attain in the home with “student-centric technologies” than at school, with its massive bureaucracy of “monolithic technology” (Christensen et al., 2011, pp. 11-12; see also Greenfield, 2009). These families feel comfortable learning at home with digital support but agree with Hess that technology is “a tool, not a miracle cure” (2010, p. 330).

Curriculum Issues

Difficulties. In the opening chapters of this dissertation, I acknowledged the challenges of applying the term “hidden curriculum” to home learning. Here I revisit these issues, based on the findings of this study. More specifically I address the fact that ideology, rather than being unrecognized, is amplified and emphasized to the point of structuring all else that happens in the family. Philosophical preferences for learning at home rather than the commonly expected traditional school approach is nearly always carefully rationalized and weighed. Thus it becomes the overt curriculum while at the same time functioning as the structural and functional underpinnings. As such, it is anything but “hidden” or unacknowledged. And yet, it serves the same function as a tool in organizing and effecting home learning as the hidden curriculum does in schools. As such, it is the home equivalent of a hidden curriculum.

Unschoolers, who use no formal curriculum and yet hold explicit philosophical beliefs that would ordinarily comprise part of the hidden curriculum, may be confused by the application of curriculum to their practices in any sense. However, families are not equally aware of all beliefs, behaviors, and artifacts that lend meaning to their home learning. A few days’ time spent in observations is inadequate to identify what these might be.

Eisner (1979) points out that the lack of organized curriculum, as typified by unschooling, constitutes a curriculum. In fact, he lists unschooling as one of five basic curriculum orientations. Part of the curriculum is “the primacy of personal meaning” (p. 57) and the value of actual participation and investment in the learning process. These, along with additional belief that children want to learn and are capable of self-direction, that all of life experience is educational,

and that a child's agency deserves to be respected are often vocalized and discussed within the home as an overt curriculum. It is logical to suppose that perceived benefits of unschooling would be weighed conversationally against other educational options, yet despite parents' careful consideration of learning choices, the actual practices of home learning that they adopt may reflect unspoken or unexamined assumptions and values.

More recently, some researchers have reapplied the label of hidden curriculum to refer to an intentional effort on the part of schools (or the powerful classes of people who control schools) to disguise the role of curriculum in perpetuating class distinctions, racism, sexism, and stratification on social, intellectual, and economic platforms. Even as the system advocates for equality and transformation, practices ensure hegemony and exacerbate inequity, reproducing and reinforcing the injustices the system purports to remedy. As a result, the term is also used in a political and negative sense. These implications are not associated with my research generally. And, as my research involved a very homogenous group of families, it does not address issues of class, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic distinctions in how the hidden curriculum is enacted, or how home learning might reinforce existing social stratifications. The parents in the families I studied appear to be well-educated and comfortably middle-class, and thus are likely to be passing on the cultural advantages of their status to their children.

In schools, the hidden curriculum would comprise everything from the architecture and structure to peers and personalities. In addition to what is taught and how, says Eisner (1979), what is avoided or left out also composes a curriculum, relaying a sense of importance and an agenda of belief. In totality,

the hidden curriculum involves all levels of society, especially family life - organized around school and its culture - even including that which is excluded. The foundation of traditional education is an ideology of what schools mean to society and what counts as learning.

Awareness. Just as the sterile efficiency, from furniture to discrete skills planned years in advance transmit the implicit values in schools, family culture and beliefs are represented by all that is familiar, comfortable, and personal in the home. As such, they may be part of a hidden home curriculum. The difficulty is in evaluating each aspect of the home and intimate associations for their influence. My investigation restricts hidden curriculum to things that are explicitly connected to the “overt” curriculum of home learning, whether determined by the parents or as it emerges from the interests of the children.

Further, the ideology that undergirds institutionalized education in a covert way is openly espoused in homes, not only as evident but salient. Convictions about what matters most in these homes are reinforced by what these families do as daily life. That which is discussed, how time is spent, associations and activities, and negotiation of power are more, rather than less, overtly associated with intent, instruction, and practice. The preeminent value of the individual, the family, time, and learning is infused in the daily enactments of living in ways that are anything but concealed or unacknowledged.

These parents intentionally transmit religious belief as the richest form of cultural capital and yet financial return on learning is mentioned among these family members only in connection with providing for their families, consistent with their philosophy about the purpose of life. The greatest reward of learning in these homes is to see ideology reproduced in the form of behaviors. Holt, Gatto,

and others would argue that the same is true of schools, except that the ideology is diametrically different, although Gatto (2006), Meyer (2000), Eisner (1979), Erickson (2005), Glenn (2012), Tyack and Cuban (1995), Purpel and McLaurin (2004), and Haberman (1991) each refer to education as a religion, and draw parallels in structure, function, and language.

The parents in my study are very clear about their value systems rather than feigning neutrality or objectivity. They accept what they view as God-given truths to be universal, eternal, and immutable. Home learning is approached within the context of these accepted verities, as parents hope to transfer values and reproduce behaviors they esteem as optimal for happiness here and hereafter. Many of the practices engaged in align with middle-class values of agency, independent management of time and resources, and varied experiences as opposed to the tight regimentation and ubiquitous worksheet-type learning typical of working-class schools (Anyon, 1980; Lareau, 2003).

Mirroring schools. Another interesting issue in the study of the hidden curriculum in home learning is in how public school practices might be reproduced unconsciously in the home. For many families, the value of “classical” literature is espoused. Nearly every family in my study talks about math and emphasizes it as important, most of them working through a math curriculum of their choice. These families share an assumption that children will continue their education in college or university, that higher organized education is beneficial, and that adequate preparation is necessary. They recognize that a diploma or certificate has meaning and assume it will be advantageous.

Theoretical Framework

In researching the hidden curriculum of home learning, sociocultural theory provides a useful and supportive perspective for examining how the family, as a community of practice, learns together and shares the culture of their ideology, family, environment, and tools. “‘Culture,’ or the total shared way of life of a social group” (Marriott, 1970, p. 182), transmits values and a frame of reference that includes symbols, definitions, and ways of seeing the world.

These families have a unique world view situated in religious belief. It shapes their relationships, their ideas about education – what is valued and why - and forms a construct of time that affects their choices every day. It is through the lens of their religious faith that they interpret their lives and purpose, which in turn directs how they approach and interpret family and education and make meaning of their activities.

A community of practice, as referenced by Lave, Wenger, Eckert, Liedloff, and others is composed of a larger social group that transmits the knowledge and skills of the culture to members through engagement first in peripheral and then increased participation until mastery is acquired (Eckert & Wenger, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Liedloff, 1985; Wenger, 1998). I apply this communal participation to the family as a microcosmic community of practice in which children observe practices modeled by other family members and gradually assume increased knowledge, responsibility, and expertise in the vast array of skills necessary for creating a new family community of their own.

Implications for Research

Although home learning is the subject of many books and articles and is receiving greater (and more positive) media attention, a significant amount of the

literature focuses on descriptive statistics, defense of home learning, both legal and personal, and families' rationales for educating their own children. There is still much to be explored about how their learning is enacted and how their practices connect to beliefs and culture.

My research is unique in that both homeschoolers and unschoolers are documented in their various approaches to education through in-home observations. However, it is limited by the homogeneous nature of the families' religious ideology, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, due principally to the locale in which the research was conducted. Further research comparing homeschooling and unschooling among a more diverse population may be useful to find more distinct lines between learning practices. Expanded study to include greater diversity is needed to enrich the understanding of why and how families learn at home.

Another question that deserves to be explored is the contrasting views of appropriate socialization that continue to perplex homeschoolers and disturb opponents of home learning, both in defining socialization and investigating the differences and outcomes of the diverse types of socialization that occur.

My research suggests that an additional understanding of identity development among homelearners needs to be considered along with ways identity is reshaped in schools by investing the greater part of a child's life in an institutionalized social control system (Jackson, 1968; Neufeld & Maté, 2005; Schacter & Ventura, 2008; Stets & Burke, 2000). Lightfoot observed that,

Between the two worlds [of home and school] are the children, who must experience the painful bargain—the discomforts of not belonging in either sphere and the guilt of abandoning those ones [sic]

loves for vague promises of a better world. One can imagine how these daily assaults on a child's vulnerable status might inhibit his learning in school and have a distorting influence on his self-image (1978, p. 194).

Among the results of the disruption of formal schooling in a child's life, adds Lightfoot, is the "recognition, after assimilation and denial of one's parentage, that one has become disconnected and rootless" (ibid.).

Hopefully, families are becoming less hesitant about allowing researchers to observe their practices as home learning becomes increasingly viewed as a positive educational venue. This will permit wider investigation and promote greater awareness of home learning as an authentic alternative for educating children.

Implications for Practice

After nearly two centuries of searching for "the one best system" (Tyack, 1974), many Americans are now acknowledging that a single, rigid approach is inadequate for educating every child. Families are currently offered expanded educational choices, chipping away at the increasingly centralized government monopoly on schooling. Decades of research are providing a greater pool of data regarding the viability of these options as legitimate and successful ways to transmit knowledge and skills to children.

Technology is adding to educational choice, offering compete curricula or nearly limitless ideas and support for customizing learning and connecting to resources. Parents are proving to be better equipped at taking advantage of technological applications than are schools. My findings indicate that many homeschooling parents are choosing a hybridized approach that is dynamic and adaptive to family circumstances. Public and charter schools are demonstrating

a willingness to partner with home learning families (Lines, 2000). This triad of resources is invaluable in integrating the most critical elements of success in educating children and provides a new learning model with significant implications for evolving solutions to challenges faced by public schools. Research is needed to investigate this shifting paradigm and provide a framework for progress.

Personally, watching these families learn at home presented a new paradigm for teaching one's own children. The atmosphere was happy, relaxed, free from criticism, laden with praise, and yet focused with a particular eagerness for and earnestness in the learning at hand. This was far different than my experience with children in desks with texts, tasks, tests, and time limits. Where the attraction of school to most children is the social interaction (which is increasingly restricted), these families seem to truly enjoy learning and being together.

I was amazed at the intuitive way parents worked with children who would likely be placed in resource classes at schools. They managed well the balance between inclusiveness with attention to specific needs, including greater or decreased structure and expectations.

Perhaps most significant to me was the in-tact sense of identity these families – particularly the children - project; there is no need to “falsify [their] behavior” (Jackson, 1963, p. 27) to fit into a crowd, to gain favor, praise, or escape punishment, or to succeed in “doing school” (Pope, 2001) in an institutionalized way. Behavior is guided by this sense of identity rather than being regulated by policy and enforced by authoritative strangers.

I was left thinking that part of the hidden curriculum of schools is to overtly embrace collaboration, higher-order thinking skills, and negotiation of power in establishing classroom rules, while at the same time imposing increased demands through standards and testing that undermine the “best practices.” Teachers who enter the profession to make a difference in children’s lives are limited in their ability to mollify the harshness of the system (Jackson, 1968, p. 154).

This research juxtaposed natural learning with normalized educational processing of children in a way that clarified to me its arbitrariness, contradictions between actual practices and those which educational and cognitive psychologists understand, supported by neuroscience, about how the brain works and learning is most efficient.

Eisner (1994) reminds us that senses, all of them, including those undervalued in schools, are the “primary information pickup systems” (p. 61). He suggests a “need to release ourselves from the grips of traditional stereotypes about what schools should be” (ibid., p. 89). My participant families helped me relax my grip and see through new eyes.

Summary

“The oppressed,” said Freire (2004), “in order to become free, also need a theory of action” (p. 183). An increasing number of families in America are freeing themselves from the ideological boundaries of public schools and choosing alternative learning paradigms as a theory of action. They would agree with Foucault as well, that without agency one cannot act; but becomes merely a passive receptor (Martin, et al., 1988, p. 40), a position that inherently limits learning.

The rationalizing, systematizing, and institutionalizing of education has come to have great power in the minds of most Americans who have been taught, as Illich (1971) suggests, to equate school with learning. Increasing criticism notwithstanding, most families cling to public schools as the only and ultimate way to teach the next generation. However, says Wyatt (2007),

There is a time to admire the grace and persuasive power of an idea, and there is a time to fear its hold over us. The time to worry is when the idea is so widely shared that we no longer even notice it, when it is so deeply rooted that it feels to us like plain common sense. At the point when objections are not answered anymore because they are no longer even raised, we are not in control: we do not have the idea; it has us (p. 9).

“Our faith in education has become a surrogate” for traditional sources of strength as religious and familial influences have weakened, writes Tyack (1974, p. 289). Indeed, public education may have contributed to the “serious breach” in family values and solidarity (ibid., p. 237). “Substantial segments of this society no longer believe in centralism as an effective response to human needs,” Tyack claims, and many citizens “no longer trust an enlightened paternalism of elites and experts” (ibid., p. 291) to know and do what is best for their children’s education. For these families, home learning provides a framework in which to effect the methods and curriculum, including “hidden,” that they judge to be beneficial for themselves.

Consonant with this belief, these families are making choices that align with their own ideological preferences. The home learning format maximizes

opportunity to strengthen relationships, pursue interests and talents, and use time and technology in ways they view as optimal.

While I had some experience with homeschooling prior to this research, unschooling was new to me and incomprehensible in my typical education-looks-like-public-school mindset. I've learned that for each of these families, learning is *about* families – children, parents, individuals – exploring the world and finding joy in the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Although public schools serve many children well in their academic pursuits, an increasing number of children are being left behind despite federal programs to the contrary (Bushaw & Shane, 2012; Levin & Rouse, 2012). An additional unknown quantity of children are learning at home in practices concordant with family philosophy and in ways that may foster family relationships, allow them to use time as they choose, and learn without risk or boundaries. Technology is a useful tool in many regards but parents often choose to guard against potential problems such as inappropriate sites and excessive amounts of time.

My inclination is to agree with Tyack (1974) that there is no “one best system” that benefits all children equally. Educational choice, then, makes a great deal of sense in allowing parents to make decisions about their children’s academic health much as they do about their physical health. Like schools, homes are imperfect, but there is no doubt that in general, parents know their children best, love them most, and work to facilitate their children’s self-actuation. In these families, education really is all about the child.

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APPENDIX A
HOMESCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE PARENTS

Parent Portion

Background and demographics

1. Name: Father _____ Occupation _____
Education: high school some college bachelor's teaching certificate master's doctorate
Mother _____ Occupation _____
Education: high school some college bachelor's teaching certificate master's doctorate
Marital status _____ Either parent homeschooled as child? _____
Primary planner/instigator/s of homeschooling _____
Primary teacher/s _____
Primary reasons for homeschooling a) _____
b) _____
c) _____
Number of years spent homeschooling _____

2. Children currently being homeschooled along with age and gender:

Name	age	gender	years	Remarks: learning S'ed attributes/specialties (opt.)
1) _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2) _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3) _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. Please place checkmark beside typical weekly activities engaged in:

sports art music/dance church volunteering
 scouts library special interest classes (drama, cooking, science, etc) playing other _____

Technology Integration

4. Please check which devices you use in the home: internet/World Wide Web cell phone email blogs social networking sites (facebook, etc) educational software instant messaging PDA (e.g. Blackberry) word processor/spreadsheets desktop gaming publishing/design (e.g. photoshop) video/DVD podcast/MP3 broadcast/satellite/cable Other _____

5. Please check which devices your children use in the home: internet/World Wide Web cell phone email blogs social networking sites (facebook, etc) educational software instant messaging PDA (e.g. Blackberry) word processor/spreadsheets desktop gaming publishing/design (e.g. photoshop) video/DVD podcast/MP3 broadcast/satellite/cable Other _____

6. Please rate reliance on computer and digital devices using following guide:
for parent _____ ; for child/ren _____

- 0 – never use digital communication or computer technology;
- 1 – minimal usage; rarely used by parent, mostly restricted for children;
- 2 – occasional use-parent, careful supervision of children;
- 3 – moderate use-parent, some restrictions & supervision for children;
- 4 – heavy use-parent, little restriction or supervision/site checking for children;
- 5 – constant use-parent, unrestricted, no limits whatever for children.

Comments _____

7. What role, if any, did technology play in your initial decision to homeschool?
___ none; unnecessary ___ barely considered ___ somewhat important ___
very important; dramatically enhances homeschooling ___ crucial factor;
wouldn't/couldn't homeschool without it

Comments _____

8. Parent technology use (please indicate importance by writing a number from 0 to 5 in the blank, 0 being no value and 5 meaning essential):

- ___ social networking (including email, blogs, IM, social sites)
- ___ support group networking – advice, encouragement, collaboration, group activities/enrichment
- ___ finding/connecting, gathering curricula, resources, lessons (and practice such as worksheets)
- ___ learning legal requirements connected to home education including standards
- ___ discovering information relevant to a particular interest
- ___ to develop own curricula or recreate/personalize learning activities
- ___ planning, organizing, finding community resources
- ___ watching video demonstrations/lectures pertaining to curricula or education
- ___ pursuing educational coursework, conferences, certificates, degrees, etc.
- ___ online/distance learning coursework for children
- ___ other: _____

9. Most frequently accessed sites (education-related) a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

10. Parent- average time per day engaged with technology ___ none ___ 1-2 hours ___ 3-5 hours ___ 6+ hours

11. Children technology use – ways and time

- ___ educational information ___ social networking (including email, blogs, IM, social sites)
- ___ educational games ___ entertainment (gaming, music, YouTube)
- ___ lessons/practice Other: _____

12. Average time per day engaged with technology ___ none ___ 1-2 hours ___ 3-5 hours ___ 6+ hours

APPENDIX B
HOMESCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE CHILD

Student Portion

Name _____ Your age ____ gender ____

1. Favorite things about homeschooling a) _____
b) _____ c) _____

2. What learning is most important? a) _____
b) _____ c) _____

3. Best subjects a) _____ b) _____

4. Most challenging a) _____ b) _____

Technology use

5. Computer use: ____ never use it; ____ use it a few times a week ____ use it about once a day ____ use it several times a day

6. What do you use the computer for? ____ connect with friends ____ read about something interesting ____ play educational games ____ art
Other _____

7. Please check which devices you use in the home: __ internet/World Wide Web __ cell phone __ email __ blogs __ social networking sites (facebook, etc) __ educational software __ instant messaging __ PDA (e.g. Blackberry) __ word processor/spreadsheets __ desktop __ gaming __ publishing/design (e.g. photoshop) __ video/DVD __ podcast/MP3 __ broadcast/satellite/cable Other _____

8.. Please rate your use of computer and digital devices by checking a number:
____ 0 – never use digital communication or computer technology
____ 1 – minimal usage - mostly restricted by parents
____ 2 – occasional use - careful supervision by parents
____ 3 – moderate use - some restrictions & supervision
____ 4 – heavy use - little restriction or supervision/site checking
____ 5 – constant - unrestricted, no limits whatever

Comments _____

9. How do you spend your computer time? ____ educational information
____ social networking (including email, blogs, IM, social sites) ____ educational games
____ entertainment (gaming, music, youtube) ____ lessons/practice
____ distance learning/online coursework Other _____

10. Common favorite sites and functions - most frequently used digital places/tools/activities a) _____
b) _____ c) _____

Average time per day engaged with technology ____ none ____ 1-2 hours
____ 3-5 hours ____ 6+ hours

Education perspectives

11. What do you think about getting your education at home? What would you tell other people about it?

APPENDIX C
UNSCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE PARENT

Parent Portion

Background and demographics

1. Name: Father _____ Occupation _____
Education: high school some college bachelor's teaching certificate master's doctorate
Mother _____ Occupation _____
Education: high school some college bachelor's teaching certificate master's doctorate Marital status _____
Either parent homeschooled/unschooled as child?
Primary planner/instigator/s of unschooling _____
Primary teacher/s _____
Primary reasons for unschooling a) _____
b) _____ c) _____
Number of years spent unschooling _____ How did you learn about unschooling? _____

2. Children currently being unschooled along with age and gender:

Name	age	gender	years	Remarks: learning US'ed attributes/specialties (opt.)
1) _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2) _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3) _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. Please place checkmark beside typical weekly activities engaged in:

sports art music/dance church volunteering
 scouts library special interest classes (drama, cooking, science, etc) playing other _____

Technology Integration

4. Please check which devices you use in the home: internet/World Wide Web cell phone email blogs social networking sites (facebook, etc) educational software instant messaging PDA (e.g. Blackberry) word processor/spreadsheets desktop gaming publishing/design (e.g. photoshop) video/DVD broadcast/satellite/cable podcast/MP3
Other _____

5. Please check which devices your children use in the home: internet/World Wide Web cell phone email blogs social networking sites (facebook, etc) educational software instant messaging PDA (e.g. Blackberry) word processor/spreadsheets desktop gaming publishing/design (e.g. photoshop) video/DVD podcast/MP3 broadcast/satellite/cable Other _____

6. Please rate reliance on computer and digital devices using following guide:
for parent _____ ; for child/ren _____

- 0** – never use digital communication or computer technology;
- 1** – minimal usage; rarely used by parent, mostly restricted for children;
- 2** – occasional use-parent, careful supervision of children;
- 3** – moderate use-parent, some restrictions & supervision for children;
- 4** – heavy use-parent, little restriction or supervision/site checking for children;
- 5** – constant use-parent, unrestricted, no limits whatever for children.

Comments _____

Approximate number of hours per day using digital devices: ___ 0 ___ 1-2
hours ___ 3-5 hours ___ 6+

7. Parent technology use (please indicate importance by writing a number from 0 to 5 in the blank, 0 being no value and 5 meaning essential):

- ___ social networking (including email, blogs, IM, social sites)
- ___ support group networking – advice, encouragement, collaboration, group activities/enrichment
- ___ finding/connecting, gathering curricula, resources, lessons (and practice such as worksheets)
- ___ learning legal requirements connected to home education including standards
- ___ discovering information relevant to a particular interest
- ___ to develop own curricula or recreate/personalize learning activities
- ___ planning, organizing, finding community resources
- ___ watching video demonstrations/lectures pertaining to curricula or education
- ___ pursuing educational coursework, conferences, certificates, degrees, etc.
- ___ online/distance learning coursework for children
- ___ other: _____

8. Most frequently accessed sites (education-related) a) _____

b) _____ c) _____

9. If use of digital tools is restricted, please explain why and in what ways

APPENDIX D

UNSCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE CHILD

Student Portion

Name _____ age _____ gender _____

1. Favorite things about homeschooling a) _____
b) _____ c) _____

2. Special areas of interest a) _____
b) _____ c) _____

3. Things you're really good at a) _____
b) _____ c) _____

Technology use

4. Please rate your use of computer and digital devices by checking a number:

___ 0 – never use digital communication or computer technology

___ 1 – minimal usage - mostly restricted by parents

___ 2 – occasional use - careful supervision by parents

___ 3 – moderate use - some restrictions & supervision

___ 4 – heavy use - little restriction or supervision/site checking

___ 5 – constant - unrestricted, no limits whatever

Comments _____

5. Please check which devices you use in the home: ___ internet/World Wide Web ___ cell phone ___ email ___ blogs ___ social networking sites (facebook, etc) ___ educational software ___ instant messaging ___ PDA (e.g. Blackberry) ___ word processor/spreadsheets ___ desktop ___ gaming ___ publishing/design (e.g. photoshop) ___ video/DVD ___ podcast/MP3 ___ broadcast/satellite/cable Other _____

6. How do you spend your computer time? ___ educational information ___ social networking (including email, blogs, IM, social sites) ___ educational games ___ entertainment (gaming, music, youtube) ___ lessons/practice ___ distance learning/online coursework Other _____

7. Common favorite sites and functions (most frequently used digital places/tools/activities) a) _____
b) _____ c) _____

8. Average time per day engaged with technology ___ none ___ 1-2 hours ___ 3-5 hours ___ 6+ hours

Education perspectives

9. What would you tell friends about unschooling? _____

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please explain your view of education in the context of what you do in your home.
2. How are your family relationships connected to and affected through your decision to homeschool/unschool? How does/has your home learning experience affected your sense of who you are (your self-view as a parent) and who your children are?
3. How does this view affect your selection of the curriculum you use and what you teach?
4. Please describe the process of your initial and continuing decision to homeschool or unschool (including any personal or past experiences you want to share).
5. How does the lived experience (reality) of home learning fit in with your expectations? How do you deal with differences? What are some of the results of home education you are most pleased or least satisfied with?
6. How do you view and value the availability and capabilities of technology as part of your home learning experience?