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Five proposed characteristics of academically successful homeschooling

Diane Marcia Stover
San Jose State University

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FIVE PROPOSED CHARACTERISTICS OF
ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL HOMESCHOOLING

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Education

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Diane Marcia Stover

December, 1994

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APPROVED FOR THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Robin L. Love
Dr. Robin Love

Stephanie Steffey
Dr. Stephanie Steffey

Deborah Wood
Dr. Deborah Wood

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

Serena N. Stanford

ABSTRACT

FIVE PROPOSED CHARACTERISTICS OF ACADEMICALLY SUCCESSFUL HOMESCHOOLING

By Diane Marcia Stover

This thesis is a preliminary study to explore the presence of five characteristics informally identified by the Monterey County Independent Study Program as those which appear to lead to academic success in homeschooling. The presence of these characteristics was explored in five homeschooling families deemed by county personnel as being academically successful. The five characteristics are:

- 1) A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities.
- 2) Accountability between the home and other educators (the Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis).
- 3) Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher.
- 4) Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:
 - a. providing a study area for the student,
 - b. incorporating learning into the daily life,
 - c. taking regular trips to the library,
 - d. displaying the student's work in the home.
- 5) Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994).

The main finding of this study was that the majority of these characteristics were present individually and collectively in the five families interviewed.

DEDICATION/ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to gratefully dedicate this thesis to my husband, Jeffrey Lee Stover; and to my children, Jenny Lea Stover, Joshua Glen Stover, Katie Marcia Stover, and Krista Lynn Stover, without whose patience, help, and understanding I would not have been able to accomplish this research study. Their constant encouragement and support gave me perseverance to continue to pursue my educational goals.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Meg Johnson, a New Jersey mother, speaks for many families in the homeschooling movement when she says,

I can't see why I should give up my children at five or six to be reared by others just when they are the most fun. And when you add to that the support of research, and the risks in many schools today, it doesn't leave Doug and me any choice. (Raymond & Dorothy Moore, 1982, pp. 2-3)

Families across America, dissatisfied with public schooling, are looking for alternative forms of education. One such alternative form is home-based education, otherwise known as "homeschooling." Homeschooling has become the fastest developing educational movement in America (Moore & Moore, 1982). It has been the researcher's experience that homeschooling can have many benefits and this study describes positive aspects.

Before 1975 it was rare to find parents teaching their children at home rather than sending them to public or private schools (Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990). However, by 1986, it was estimated that there were between 120,000 and 260,000 homeschooled children in the United States (Lines, 1987). In 1991, it was estimated that between 250,000 and 1,500,000 children were being taught at home in the United States, with a parent as the primary teacher (LaRue & LaRue, 1991).

While homeschooling is a growing educational movement, it is not a new educational practice at all (Moore, 1982).

During America's colonial and early national period, homeschooling was the predominant form of education (Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990). The primary responsibility for education clearly rested with the parents and the home, and American education remained a task of the home and church until the late 1800's. It was not until after the Civil War, that a majority of states passed legislation establishing free public education. Even then, according to Arons (cited by Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990), public education was regarded as a service to families, an opportunity to which all children were entitled, but not a requirement to be imposed. By 1918, every state had a compulsory attendance law in effect and the relationship between schools and family changed. The focus of responsibility had shifted from the family to the institutionalized school which was state operated (Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990).

With this background in mind homeschoolers believe that the ultimate responsibility for educating children belongs to parents (Avner, 1989; Mayberry, 1989; Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990). Homeschoolers feel that President Reagan voiced this opinion when he stated in 1984 that, "The primary right, duty and responsibility of educating children belongs to parents. Their wishes should be heeded." (Reagan, 1984, p. 6)

According to Avner (1989), every state allows some form of homeschooling. However, the legal definition of

homeschooling varies from state to state. Under California law, parents may establish their home as a private school through the county office of education or may affiliate voluntarily with a school district through an independent study program (Lamson, 1992). According to M. K. Sgheiza (personal communication, June 21, 1994), parents do not need a teaching credential in order to teach their children at home. Their curriculum may come from the county office or directly from curriculum companies of their choice.

According to the research listed in Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) from 1984 - 1994, research has been done on homeschooling topics such as the history of homeschooling, demographics of homeschoolers, why families chose to homeschool, philosophies of homeschooling, and the benefits of homeschooling; but there has been little or no research concerning the characteristics of homeschooling which contribute to a successful educational program. Therefore, this research project will be a descriptive study to look at proposed characteristics of academically successful homeschooling.

Background

Homeschooling describes the practice of educating children in the home setting with the primary teacher usually being the parent (Avner, 1989). According to Piini, former president of Salinas Valley Home Educators from 1990-1993, families who choose to educate their children in the home setting may affiliate themselves with a

private homeschooling support group which may provide a newsletter, field trips, testing services, workshops, and accountability to others within the group by weekly meetings (L. Piini, personal communication, July 6, 1994). The homeschooling family might also choose to be a member of an Independent Study Program (ISP), in which the family affiliates with a school district or private school (Lamson, 1992). According to Lamson, the school district provides a resource teacher to counsel with the family on a monthly basis; and access to teaching materials, educational seminars, and field trips.

Success in homeschooling has been defined by the Monterey County Independent Study Program using the following criteria (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994): the student is making progress as determined by resource teacher observation of the student; by student test scores, both CTBS (California Test of Basic Skills) and curriculum chapter tests; by the student completing curriculum; and by resource teacher observation of student work samples contained in the individual's portfolio.

A spokesperson for the Monterey County Independent Study Program has identified, for the purposes of this study, characteristics of homeschooling considered to be academically successful. These characteristics have been informally identified by the county as those which seem to lead to academic success, although no study has been conducted to determine their presence in the families

enrolled in the program, or to explore whether these characteristics do indeed lead to academic success. The five characteristics are:

1) A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities.

2) Accountability between the home and other educators (the Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis).

3) Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher.

4) Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:

- a. providing a study area for the student,
- b. incorporating learning into the daily life,
- c. taking regular trips to the library,
- d. displaying the student's work in the home.

5) Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994).

Problem Statement

Homeschooling is a growing educational movement; the parents who homeschool believe that it is their right to educate their own children. A search of the literature

revealed reasons why homeschooling families choose to homeschool (Mayberry, 1988; Pitman, 1987; Van Galen, 1987; Wartes, 1984, 1987), and differing philosophies governing homeschooling educational approaches (Hood, 1990), yet there has been little or no educational research to identify characteristics of academically successful homeschooling programs.

This is a concern to administrators overseeing homeschoolers as well as parents. L. Piini (personal communication, July 6, 1994), a former homeschooling support group administrator, receives from one to five phone calls a month from families seeking advice concerning characteristics which will make their educational programs successful. They ask questions about curriculum that has proved successful, and inquire about scheduling, legalities, teaching multiple siblings, discipline, and teaching techniques. Piini also receives many calls from families who are already homeschooling and have many of the same questions. Piini finds some of these questions difficult to answer because of the abstract characteristics of successful homeschooling.

Homeschooling families are provided a resource teacher by their district. The teacher is responsible for meeting with students and parents at least once a month--and more often if necessary or requested by the parents (Lamson, 1992; M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994). According to Lamson and Sgheiza, this resource teacher and

the district coordinator of the program are responsible for counseling a parent when the home program does not seem to be meeting the educational needs of the child. However, not all resource teachers are able to help parents to meet these needs. C. Boronda (personal communication, June 22, 1994), a parent formerly in the North Monterey County Independent Study Program, stated that her resource teacher was not able to answer her many questions and instead recommended that she discontinue homeschooling because it had proven unsuccessful for her children. Boronda continued to homeschool her children another year after the resource teacher made that suggestion. Boronda stated that she continually struggled with the question of how she could successfully teach her two children at home.

Therefore, due to the apparent lack of research in this area, including the lack of research by the Monterey County Office ISP, this will be a preliminary descriptive study for the purpose of exploring the characteristics which appear to lead to academic success in homeschooling.

Purpose Statement

Although a recent review of the literature has not revealed the characteristics of academically successful homeschooling, such a set of characteristics has been proposed through the Monterey County Office of Education. It is the purpose of this study to determine if these characteristics are present in homeschooling programs that

are deemed academically successful by the Monterey County Independent Study Program.

Interviews will be done with five families which have met the criteria of academically successful homeschooling as outlined by the Monterey County Independent Study Program. These interviews will be for the purpose of a preliminary exploration of the presence of the following five characteristics:

1) A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities.

2) Accountability between the home and other educators (the Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis).

3) Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher.

4) Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:

- a. providing a study area for the student,
- b. incorporating learning into the daily life,
- c. taking regular trips to the library,
- d. displaying the student's work in the home.

5) Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994).

The data collected in the interviews will be analyzed in order to identify the presence of those characteristics which appear to be successful. The questions which will be used in these five interviews will be based on five proposed characteristics and generated through a pilot study, consisting of an interview with one parent, L. Piini (personal communication, July 6, 1994), who was the president of Salinas Valley Home Educators, a private homeschooling support group, during the years of 1990-1993, and who has been homeschooling three children.

Definition of Terms

Homeschooling: describes the practice of educating children in the home setting. The primary teacher is usually the parent (Avner, 1989). It can be accomplished in one of two ways. The first is the Independent Study Program (ISP) in which the family affiliates with a school district or private school (Lamson, 1992). According to Lamson, the school district provides a resource teacher to counsel with the family on a monthly basis, and access to teaching materials, educational seminars, and field trips.

The second way is to establish the home as a private school, registered with a county office of education. Many of these families choose to affiliate themselves with a private homeschooling support group which offers many of the same services as does the Independent Study Program (L. Piini, personal communication, July 6, 1994).

Characteristic: a distinguishing trait, quality, or property (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1975).

Success: Success in homeschooling has been defined by the Monterey County Independent Study Program using the following criteria (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, July 6, 1994): the student is making progress as determined by resource teacher observation of the student; by student test scores, both CTBS (California Test of Basic Skills) and curriculum chapter tests; by the student completing curriculum; and by resource teacher observation of student work samples contained in the individual's portfolio.

Significance of the Study

This study will increase effectiveness and efficacy in the planning of homeschooling programs and aid in implementing them. The research will be an aid to administrators of independent study programs, resource teachers in independent study programs, board members of homeschooling support groups, parents who are considering homeschooling, and parents who are presently homeschooling.

Finally, the overall significance of the study is the benefit it will provide to the homeschooling students themselves. As families implement characteristics which seem to lead to academic success, the students themselves will benefit accordingly.

Summary

Homeschooling is the educational practice of educating children in the home setting with the parent as the primary teacher. It is a growing educational movement in the United States today (LaRue & LaRue, 1991). A review of the literature failed to reveal characteristics of academically successful homeschooling. The Monterey County Office of Education has informally identified a set of five characteristics which they believe lead to academically successful homeschooling. The purpose of this study will be to conduct a preliminary exploration of the presence of these five characteristics in academically successful homeschooling programs. This study will utilize interviews

with five families who have been deemed as academically
successful by their homeschooling personnel.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

History of Homeschooling in the United States

During America's colonial and early national periods homeschooling was the predominant form of education. The the primary form of education clearly rested with the parents (Bailyn, 1960; Cremin, 1961; Mayberry, 1989; Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990; Ravitch, 1983). It was only after the passing of the Tenth Amendment in 1791 that education became a function of the state. American education was a private and religious effort until the late 1800's (Mayberry, 1989; Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990).

During the nineteenth century, the state's interest in education grew until, after the Civil War, the majority of states passed legislation providing for free public education. Every state established public schools by the early 1900's. Nevertheless, public education was regarded as a service to families, an opportunity to which children were entitled, not as a requirement to be imposed (Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990).

By 1918, every state had compulsory attendance laws. Subsequently, states gradually shifted toward control of the school curriculum as well, instituting standards for local school systems to follow.

From family-based education to large state systems, in the twentieth century the traditional relationship between families and schooling has been significantly altered. The

role of parents in education has substantially diminished (Mayberry, 1989). Educational historians suggest that the educational history of the United States be interpreted as a process of institutional expansion and contraction; the expansion of school functions has resulted in the contraction of the educational role once performed by the family (Cremin, 1961; Ravitch, 1983). Homeschooling in the United States is a vivid example of an increasing number of families attempting to reverse the history of their diminished control over the education of their children (Mayberry, 1989).

The United States Supreme Court accepted the states' role in promoting educational consistency in the schools, but on several occasions the Court prevented states from denying parents educational choices (Avner, 1989).

In a decision concerning a challenge to Oregon's compulsory attendance laws, which mandated that children must be educated in public schools (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 1925), the Supreme Court ruled that the child is not the mere creature of the state; but in fact, those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to prepare him for additional obligations. The Court again ruled in favor of parental choice in 1972, when it handed down a decision in "*Wisconsin v. Yoder*," supporting the choice of several Amish families to remove their children from school after completing the eighth grade (Avner, 1989).

Currently, every state has been allowing homeschooling in some form or another, although its definition varies from state to state (Avner, 1989; Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990). Since 1982, thirty-two states have changed their laws to be more accommodating--a sign that although homeschoolers might not be particularly visible right now, the homeschooling movement is very organized. Sometimes, homeschoolers have to register with or receive permission from local school districts. In other states, no registration of any kind is required (LaRue & LaRue, 1991).

Demographics of Homeschooling

The actual number of children who are being homeschooled in the United States is unknown, but national estimates range from 250,000 to 1,500,000 (LaRue & LaRue, 1991). It is the fastest growing educational movement in the United States today (Moore & Moore, 1982).

Gustavsen (1981) sampled 150 families from the Hewitt-Moore Foundation's mailing list. This foundation serves a religiously-oriented population of homeschool families throughout the United States. Gustavsen (1981) found that 75 percent of the families had at least one parent who had attended college and 23 percent had attended graduate school. In Gustavsen's study (1981), the median family household income was reported to be \$15,000 to \$20,000 with the male parent typically employed in professional or skilled occupations, while the female parent was likely to be a homemaker. The 1981 study showed the majority of

Gustavsen's families lived in cities with only 15 percent living in urban areas. These families were regular churchgoers (64%) and primarily members of small Protestant denominations (Gustavsen, 1981).

The largest homeschooling survey was conducted in Washington State for legislators who requested information on homeschool families prior to drafting a new compulsory attendance law. Wartes (1984) implemented a statewide study which involved 441 homeschool families who responded to a written questionnaire. In this 1984 study, Wartes found that Washington homeschool fathers were employed as professional or skilled workers, while the mothers were homemakers. Most parents had some college education (nearly 80%), half had graduated from college and 17% had completed a Master's degree. One-third listed their income as between \$20,000 to \$30,000, while another third listed their incomes as \$30,000 or above. Warte's 1984 study showed that 27% lived in small rural communities of 5,000 people or less while 30% lived in communities of 10,000 to 50,000. Warte's study (1984) did not report on the group's religious characteristics.

Mayberry (1988) conducted a statewide survey of homeschool families in Oregon. The findings of the study suggest that homeschool families, when compared to the general Oregon population, tend to be more economically secure, more educated, and more likely to live in small residential areas (Mayberry, 1988). Parents tend to work in

either professional or technical fields, many are either self-employed or employed in small-scale organizations that offer a relative degree of job autonomy. Families were more religiously committed and more likely to attend church on a regular basis. Mayberry (1988) also found that their political affiliations and viewpoints are more conservative than the national population.

The studies reviewed above provide a general description of contemporary homeschooling families in the United States. Generalizing from these studies, the profile that emerges suggests that homeschooling families are well-educated and more likely to reside in small towns and rural areas, the males are employed in professional or skilled occupations (Gustavsen, 1981; Mayberry, 1988; Wartes, 1984). Homeschooling families typically belong to small Protestant denominations and are generally politically conservative in viewpoint.

Beliefs Influencing Choice to Homeschool

Van Galen conducted a qualitative study of homeschooling in a state in the Southwest over an 18 month period in 1984 and 1985. Interviews were conducted during an 18 month period with 16 families and 10 additional interviews with state and local education officials and others who were involved with monitoring or regulating homeschooling in the state.

From this and other data, Van Galen (1987) categorized and analyzed the homeschoolers' reasons for choosing this

method of education. Her conclusion was that the specific circumstances leading to the decision to homeschool vary from family to family. Parents were sometimes actively seeking alternatives to public schools, either because their children were experiencing academic or emotional difficulties or because they objected to what was being taught in the schools. Others simply wanted their children to learn in a less formal setting. A small number of parents could no longer afford the tuition at the private schools their children had attended. Still other parents had decided before their children reached school age that their children would not attend school (Van Galen, 1987).

Van Galen concluded that becoming a homeschooler is not only a pedagogical decision. It is also a public declaration of the parents' beliefs in the institution of the family. Parents assuming responsibility for the education of their children strengthens the family relative to other institutions in the children's lives (Van Galen, 1987).

The Wartes study of Washington state homeschools in 1986-1987 also reported a variety of reasons why families choose to homeschool. The top seven reasons listed by families were the following (in order of most important first): religion or philosophy, to avoid peer pressure, for greater parent-child contact, to enable better self-concept, to avoid peer competition, for more personalized learning, and to accomplish more academically (Wartes, 1988).

Pitman (1987) and Mayberry (1989) identified the two general categories of parents who choose to homeschool: the ideologues and the pedagogues.

The ideologues, described as religious and New Age parents, choose homeschooling for ideological reasons (Mayberry, 1989). Religious homeschooling parents are strongly committed to Judeo-Christian principles and believe that, as parents, they are responsible to cultivate Christian values in their children. These parents view homeschooling as a means to protect their children from unwanted secular ideologies prevalent in the public schools and as a means to insure that their children are raised with a belief in the authority of the Bible (Mayberry, 1989).

New Age parents also are guided into homeschooling because of strong ideological commitments (Mayberry, 1989). Homeschooling provides them the opportunity to give their children an educational experience which reflects the philosophy of the New Age (Mayberry, 1989). According to Pitman who conducted her 1987 study of 12 New Age homeschooling families in a rural community of homesteaders in the northeastern United States, New Age philosophy emphasizes world peace, bioregionalism, decentralization, home birth, alternative medical care, sustainable agriculture, land trusts, spirituality, Green politics, and a commitment to well-being on both the planetary and personal levels.

New Age parents seek to reinforce their personal values and create a strong community. Raising consciousness to nurture themselves and their planet with an overriding commitment to holism, which includes being nonpolluting and nonwasteful are what these parents see as their contribution to the raising of children in the twentieth century. They desire to encourage the development of unique individuals who are creative and self-reliant, spiritual, and who live simply and peacefully (Pitman, 1987).

To these families, homeschooling simply makes sense. What does not make sense is to send their young children off to an institution to join dozens of other youngsters in a round of activities largely unrelated to their lives at home in order to learn information that can be learned at least as well or probably better in their own environments (Pitman, 1987). Both religious and New Age parents want to avoid the cultural influences of the public schools and say that their values are at variance with these schools.

The second group is the pedagogues; they are divided into socio-relational and academic homeschoolers. Socio-relational homeschool parents are less concerned with the ideological practices of public schools and more concerned with the pedagogical environment in public schools (Mayberry, 1989). According to Mayberry, these families are committed to family unity, spending time with their children during the early years, nurturing their children, and letting them bloom at their own rate. Socio-relational

families want to protect their children from possible negative peer influences and damaging socialization processes (LaRue & LaRue, 1991; Mayberry, 1989).

Academic homeschooling parents are most concerned with their children's academic success and, like socio-relational families decide to homeschool for pedagogical reasons (Mayberry, 1989). Findings by Mayberry in her 1988 study and by Charvoz in her dialogues with Utah homeschooling parents in 1988, show that academic homeschooling parents are concerned with the lack of academic standards in the educational programs of public schools, rather than their educational environment. Charvoz quotes Judy Schieffer, a kindergarten teacher in the Salt Lake School District, who speaks for the view of these academic homeschooling parents,

Homeschooling seems to take care of several of the problems with which public schools have to contend. These problems include grouping children according to their academic standing and then labeling them according to their group membership. These are some of the reasons people are unhappy with public schools (1988, p. 94).

These academic homeschooling parents believe that one-on-one instruction allows children to learn at their own pace and to develop individual styles of learning (Mayberry, 1989). Academic homeschooling parents argue that letting children learn at their own pace and develop individual styles of learning motivates them toward high levels of academic achievement.

There are themes common to both the ideologues and the pedagogues: desire for family unity, desire to protect their

children from unwanted ideologies or influences, and desire to either reclaim or not relinquish control of their children's education to public schools (Mayberry, 1989).

A study by Mahen and Ware (1987) seems to summarize the beliefs of most homeschooling parents as listed by the above studies. Mahen and Ware (1987) surveyed thirty-three parents and listed the top five reasons why parents choose to home school. These reasons were, in order of most important first: 1) the desire to incorporate one's religious or philosophical beliefs into the educational program, 2) a parental desire to be involved with their child's academic education, 3) the negative effects of peer pressure in traditional schools, 4) a desire for family life to be home-centered rather than revolving around school activities and schedules, and 5) the belief that children are better socialized by parental example than by other children. Homeschooling, for these parents, seems to provide a structure for accomplishing these goals.

Practices of Homeschooling

Hood's 1990 study on the contemporary philosophical influences on the homeschooling movement divides these educational philosophies into four approaches and gives a picture of what methods and practices homeschoolers use, based on their philosophical approach.

Essentialism, the first philosophical approach, is described by Hood as a return to traditional education. This philosophy assumes the existence of a basic central

body of knowledge. Therefore, every child learns some essential information. This approach advocates a preservation and promotion of traditional values and uses a subject-centered curriculum. Homeschooling parents who favor this philosophy would use textbooks to cover subject material (Hood, 1990).

Perennialism, which has grown steadily since 1984, is similar to essentialism in that it assumes there are timeless concepts which return year after year. This approach emphasizes the teaching of these timeless concepts by the reading and discussion of the classics, which would form the basis for the entire curriculum. To the perennialist, this intellectual stimulation will focus the student on the desire for learning (Hood, 1990).

Progressivism, which according to Hood is the least pronounced among homeschoolers, is a philosophical approach which promotes the individual's growth in harmony with society and the environment. Being very pragmatic, its goal is to prepare the student to live in society. Parents who follow this approach would favor unit studies rather than textbooks. This approach uses integrated activity-based curriculum such as KONOS or the Weaver Curriculum (Hood, 1990).

The last philosophical approach to homeschooling is existentialism. This approach began at the end of World War II and gained fuel during the 1960's with such writers as Paul Goodrich, Jonathan Kozol, George Dennison, and John

Holt (Hood, 1990). This philosophy advocates incidental learning. In other words, knowledge is that which is created by the individual and it only becomes knowledge when the individual is cognizant of it. It is the parent's job, as facilitator, to open the doors and let the students discover this knowledge for himself. This approach would be student-directed and project-centered with a very loose learning structure (Hood, 1990).

Thus, homeschooling practices can vary considerably, in curriculum chosen, in daily scheduling, and in teaching styles, according to the philosophical approach favored by the parent. The Monterey County Office of Education (1991) in its parent handbook agrees with this portrait of a homeschooler by stating that there is no typical homeschooling day, since each family follows activities and materials that work best for the individual parent and child.

The Benefits of Homeschooling

Just as parents have differing philosophies about homeschooling, so do they perceive different benefits. Virginia Seuffert, a homeschooling mother in Oak Park, Illinois, perceives the great variety and diversity of educational options that homeschooling can provide to be her family's greatest benefit (1990). Seuffert writes that unlike conventional schools, which all seek to provide the same service with varying degrees of success, homeschooling is based on diversity. The great variety of options

available assure that motivated parents can find, or design, an educational program that will satisfy their children's needs or family philosophies. The typical public school tries to be all things to all parents (and children), whereas the homeschool teachers can concentrate on exactly what they want.

McMillan (1985) elaborates on the benefit of diversity in homeschooling, especially for gifted children. She writes that the advantages of homeschooling center around the atmosphere of love and trust, freedom from time constraints, and flexibility in schedule and curriculum not generally available in a traditional mass education system. There are opportunities for community involvement through mentorships, special interest classes, service projects, and extensive use of community resources, and what is extra for the school child may become core subject for the homeschoolers as they pursue topics of interest in great depth.

Meighan traced the early struggles of the homeschooling movement in the United Kingdom (1984). Meighan lists the benefits of homeschooling as: more parental contact with the child, faster progress in learning due to the tutor-like learning situation, lessons geared to the individual child, less time is wasted at school, a more relaxed learning atmosphere, competitive pressures removed, and a lack of negative socialization and peer pressure.

Morgan and Rodriguez (1986), in their study of forty homeschooling families in south central New Mexico, described the parental perceptions of homeschooling benefits. These families would fit into the ideologue category, since they were all of a Protestant religious faith, and the desire to impart their Christian faith and values was an important part of their decision to homeschool. The benefits they perceived were several: the quality time they spent with their children produced "good Christian children," the sheltering of their children was a positive thing, they saw a positive development of socialization skills, school work concentrated in the morning hours gave time for family chores and related interests, and their year-long teaching schedule better prepared their children for university work.

Mahen and Ware (1987) listed a number of benefits associated with homeschooling. Their study listed twenty benefits in the areas of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. In addition, Mahen and Ware wrote that homeschooling has provided parents with an opportunity to educate their children according to their personal values and convictions.

Webb carried out a study of people who were wholly or partially homeschooled (1982, 1983). Webb concluded that all those who attempted entry to further and higher education courses were successful in achieving this; there was no evidence of prejudice against the homeschooled. In

the area of employment, the same seems to be true; the importance of personality attributes gained through homeschooling was apparent. The socialization of homeschooled students is often regarded as a problem by the uninformed, but Webb's study showed that, on the contrary, homeschooled people may be much better prepared socially than some of their schooled peers.

Academic Success of Homeschooling

Although homeschoolers perceive benefits from homeschooling, Frost (1988) states that presently there is an active debate as to the value and effectiveness of the homeschool. Frost cites three studies conducted in 1981-1982, wherein groups of homeschooling students were administered standardized achievement tests. Two of the studies were conducted by advocate groups of homeschooling: Hewitt Research Foundation and Christian Liberty Academy. The fact that these studies were conducted by homeschooling advocate groups was a significant criticism of the studies (Frost, 1988). The third study and possibly the most authoritative, was a study undertaken by the Alaska Department of Education. All three studies were primarily administered by parents, which is another significant criticism, according to Frost. The results of each of the three studies reflected the relative academic success of homeschooling, with homeschoolers consistently outscoring their public school counterparts, often by two or three grade levels (Frost, 1988).

In 1986, Frost conducted his own study by administering the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to seventy-four students, representing fifty-eight homeschooling families. These families were drawn from a five-county area in northeastern Illinois. Each test was administered by an outside researcher to secure a sample of test scores that would be valid and reliable, according to Frost (1988).

The students were divided into three groups for comparison purposes. The first group included all the students who participated. Their scores were compared to the national norms for all students taking the test. The second group consisted of the homeschooled children whose parents indicated that the student would be in a private school if they were not homeschooling. These students were compared with national norms for Catholic school students. The third group included students who could be considered high socio-economic homeschooled students. This group was used in comparison with national norms of high socio-economic students. Frost's findings during this 1986 study seemed to corroborate the previous (1981-1982) studies' findings that homeschooled children do score well comparatively on standardized tests. A look at the individual tests that included the areas of vocabulary, reading, language skills, workstudy skills and mathematics reveal that these homeschooled students outperformed their traditionally educated counterparts in almost every area. Frost stated that there does seem to be growing evidence

that homeschooled students are not disadvantaged academically by their homeschool setting. If anything, a case could be made for their relative academic success.

Summary

According to Avner (1989) and Rakestraw and Rakestraw (1990), homeschooling was the original form of education in the United States and continued to predominate until the late 1800's. By 1918, every state had a compulsory education laws (Avner, 1989) and responsibility had shifted from the family to the state (Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990). However, the Supreme Court continued to uphold the parental rights over the education of their children (Avner, 1989). Today, every state allows some form of homeschooling, although its definition varies from state to state (LaRue & La Rue, 1991).

Concerning the demographics of homeschoolers, the surveys by Gustavsen (1981), Wartes (1984), and Mayberry (1988) showed homeschooling parents to be well-educated; of a middle income level; the fathers were professionals or working in technical fields, while the mothers worked in the home; and the families more often lived in small communities or rural areas. These studies also showed that homeschooling families were often regular churchgoers and members of small Protestant denominations, and they were politically conservative.

Regarding the reasons why families choose to homeschool, Mayberry (1989) divides homeschoolers into two

groups: the ideologues and the pedagogues. The ideologues are those religious and New Age families who choose to homeschool in order to impart their Judeo-Christian values or lifestyles to their children and protect them from the secular influences of the public school. The pedagogues choose to homeschool for educational reasons: the socio-relationals want to nurture and protect their children from negative peer influences, while the academics believe that one-on-one instruction and individualized curriculum can raise their children to higher academic levels. Mahen and Ware (1987) listed five reasons why parents choose to homeschool which coincide with the characteristics of homeschooling families that Mayberry listed.

The practices of homeschooling included Hood's 1990 study describing four philosophical approaches toward educational practices which determine what homeschoolers do. The essentialist approach advocates a return to traditional education as a way of teaching an essential body of knowledge, while the perennial philosophy favors teaching the classics because they present timeless concepts which return year after year. The progressive approach is pragmatic, utilizing unit studies which would prepare the student to live in society; and the last approach, that of existentialism, favors student-directed activities, viewing knowledge as only that which is created by and important to the individual. Thus, homeschooling practices are varied,

depending largely on which philosophical approach to education the family favors.

The following benefits of homeschooling were listed in the literature: a diversity of educational opportunities (Seuffort, 1990), a flexible schedule and wide range of activities and curriculum (Meighan, 1984), a close family relationship and the imparting of parental values and lifestyles (Morgan & Rodriguez, 1988), a lack of negative peer influences and an enhanced self-esteem (Mahen & Ware, 1987), successful integration into adulthood (Webb, 1989), and academic success (Frost, 1988).

Frost, as a result of his study in 1986, concluded that there was growing evidence that homeschooled students are not disadvantaged academically by their homeschool setting, but instead, a case could be made for their relative success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

According to La Rue and La Rue (1991), between 250,000 and 1,500,000 students are being homeschooled in the United States today and homeschooling is a growing trend. The purpose of this preliminary descriptive study is to explore the presence of five characteristics of academically successful homeschooling as informally identified by the Monterey County Independent Study Program (ISP) (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994). When interviewed, the personnel of Monterey County ISP felt that these characteristics lead to academic success, although they have never conducted a study to determine the presence of these characteristics in any of their families, nor do they include these in their handbook as suggestions for achieving success. These five characteristics are:

- 1) A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities.
- 2) Accountability between the home and other educators (the Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis).
- 3) Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher.

4) Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:

- a. providing a study area for the student,
- b. incorporating learning into the daily life,
- c. taking regular trips to the library,
- d. displaying the student's work in the home.

5) Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child.

To obtain data concerning the presence of these characteristics, five homeschooling families which were deemed academically successful by homeschooling personnel were interviewed.

Population and Sample

The research for this study was conducted in Salinas, California. Salinas is located in central California, 106 miles south of San Francisco and 375 miles north of Los Angeles in Monterey County, 17 miles inland from the Monterey Peninsula. It has a population of approximately 119,000. Salinas is an agricultural community and is known as the "salad bowl of the nation."

The five families participating in this study were selected by M. K. Sgheiza (Monterey County Independent Study Program Coordinator) as being academically successful,

having met the criteria of success as outlined by Monterey County Independent Study Program (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994). Success has been defined by Monterey County ISP as the following: the student is making progress as determined by resource teacher observation of the student, by student achievement test and curriculum chapter tests scores, by the student completing curriculum, and by resource teacher observation of student work samples contained in the individual's portfolio.

According to Sgheiza (M.K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994), these five families were selected on the basis of student outcomes. The students in these families all made progress in the 1993/1994 school year as verified by resource teacher observation, scored at grade level or above on their CTBS (California Test of Basic Skills) achievement tests in the spring of 1994, and successfully completed their curriculum as verified by chapter tests and/or by resource teacher observation of student work samples contained in the individuals' portfolios.

Instrumentation

A pilot study was conducted with one homeschooling family. From this pilot study, based on a review of the literature, and the set of five proposed characteristics of academic success informally identified by the Monterey

County ISP, the questions for sample group interviews were derived (see Appendix A for interview form).

Interviews included 10 questions designed to elicit demographical data concerning families' educational backgrounds, occupations, and number of years of homeschooling; six questions designed for the purpose of identifying the presence of the five proposed characteristics of academically successful homeschooling; and one secondary question concerning educational philosophy. This additional question was created because a review of the literature suggests that the characteristics may be governed by the educational philosophies of the parents.

Data Collection

Due to the fact that the primary instrumentation in this study is a series of interviews with five homeschooling families, the pilot study was an important tool in determining the nature of those interviews. This interview took place in the home of the interviewed family. The mother, the primary teacher, was interviewed while the children were in another room. The interview lasted about two and one-half hours. The interview was taped and later transcribed at home by the researcher to aid in determining the questions to form the sample group interviews.

Information from the pilot study was combined with the literature review and the set of five characteristics informally identified by Monterey County ISP to formulate the questions for the sample group interviews.

Because the five families were selected by a spokesperson from the Monterey County Office Independent Study Program, this spokesperson also secured permission from the families for their participation in the study.

Each interview, lasting approximately an hour and one-half, was conducted in the home of the family being interviewed. In each family, the mother is the primary teacher and was the only person interviewed. The father and children were not a part of the interview and were not present, except in the case of Family E where the children were playing in the same room (see Appendix B for a sample interview transcript). Each interview was taped and later transcribed at home by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Data generated by the interviews was examined to explore the presence of the five characteristics informally identified by the Monterey County ISP. The data from each question was analyzed separately as a preliminary descriptive study to explore the presence of these five informally identified characteristics which seem to contribute to academically successful homeschooling.

Although not a primary focus of this study, the educational philosophy of the families was reviewed because a review of the literature suggested that the educational philosophies of the parents may govern the characteristics of successful homeschooling.

The researcher first asked ten demographical questions designed to elicit information about family background (see interview form, Appendix A). These questions included questions on educational background, occupation, and number of years homeschooling. Then followed the primary body of the interview, the six questions designed to elicit data to explore the presence of the five characteristics.

Characteristic 1--A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities. The question used in the interview to elicit this data was, "How many hour per day are spent in educational activities?" As a sample answer, Family A stated that they spend about five hours per day in educational activities. In comparing this answer with the characteristic, the researcher noted that the characteristic is present in Family A since they spend more than the minimum of four hours per day in educational activities.

Characteristic 2--Accountability between the home and other educators. The Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly

or otherwise determined basis. The question asked to elicit this data was, "Do you meet with a resource teacher? How often?" Family B answered this question by reporting that they meet with their resource teacher once a week. By comparing their answer with the characteristic, the researcher noted that the characteristic is present in Family B.

Characteristic 3--Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher. The question asked to elicit this data was, "Do you take part in field trips, workshops, and programs?" Family C answered this question in the affirmative, saying that for them it is really an important part of their school activities and their socialization process. In comparing this data with the characteristic, the researcher identified the characteristic of field trip, workshop, and program attendance as being present in Family C.

Characteristic 4--Learning is a priority in the home. This characteristic is evidenced by four elements which were analyzed separately: (a) providing a study area for the student, (b) incorporating learning into the daily life, (c) taking regular trips to the library, and (d) displaying the student's work in the home. Three questions were asked to elicit the data for the first three elements (study areas, learning in daily life, and regular trips). Evidence of the

display of student's work was gathered by researcher observation.

The first element (Characteristic 4a), evidencing that learning is a priority in the home, is that of providing a study area for the student. To elicit this data the researcher asked, "Do you have a designated study area?" Family D answered that they do not study in any one place. They start out in the kitchen and then use the living room; they study outside in warm weather, and even in the car at times. Therefore, the researcher concluded that this element of characteristic four is not present in Family D.

The second element of characteristic four (4b) is that of incorporating learning into the daily life. The question asked to elicit this data was, "Do you find that teaching and learning carry over into the rest of your day?" Family D said that learning definitely carries over into the rest of their day. They went on to list several examples, including getting out the books again with the father in the evening and going places that trigger something that they've been learning about. In comparing their answer with the second element of the characteristic, the researcher concluded that this element is present in Family D.

The third element of characteristic four (4c) is that of taking regular trips to the library. Data was elicited by asking, "Do you make regular trips to the library?"

Family D said that they do take regular trips to the library. They use both their local branch and the main branch once a week. Therefore, this element is present in Family D.

The fourth element of characteristic four (4d) is that of displaying the student's work in the home. This data was collected by the researcher's observation of the home during the interview. In the home of Family D, the researcher observed children's work displayed on a large bulletin board in the kitchen, as well as on the refrigerator. Because of this observation, the researcher concluded that this element of characteristic four is present in Family D.

Characteristic 5--Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child. Because the researcher did not want to lead the participants to answer in a given way, the researcher used the following question to elicit information about interaction between parent and child: "How do you know where your student is academically and where the next step is?" Family E answered this question by explaining that as she (the mother) works with her child closely, she can see right away where her daughter is lacking and what she doesn't know how to do. The mother also gets ideas from her conversations with her daughter. By these conversations, the mother can see what her daughter needs to work on and what she's already mastered. Using a

portfolio system also helps to know where her daughter is and where she has been. By comparing this response with the characteristic, the researcher concluded that Family E frequently interacts together as an ongoing process. Therefore, this characteristic is present in Family E.

Educational philosophy--because the review of the literature suggested that the educational philosophies of the parents may govern the characteristics of academically successful homeschooling (Hood, 1990), the researcher was secondarily interested in this area. To elicit data concerning the educational philosophy of the parents, the researcher read to the participants a paragraph describing four educational philosophies common to homeschoolers (see Appendix A for a copy of the paragraph listed in the interview form). The participants were then asked the following question, "With these definitions of the four philosophies in mind, where do you think you fit?" In the analysis, the researcher described which educational philosophy each of the families most closely aligned themselves.

Summary

This study was conducted in Salinas, California, an agricultural community of approximately 119,000 people on California's central coastal area. The specific sample to be studied were five homeschooling families deemed

academically successful by a spokesperson from the Monterey County ISP.

Using this sample and general population, the focus of the study was the data collected from interviews containing open-ended questions. These interviews were preceded by a pilot study in which one homeschooling family was interviewed. The interview was conducted in the participant's home and lasted between two and three hours. Information from this pilot study was combined with a review of the literature and the set of five characteristics informally identified by the Monterey County ISP to formulate questions for the interviews. The interviews consisted of 10 demographic questions, six questions for the purpose of identifying the presence of the five proposed characteristics which lead to academically successful homeschooling, and a secondary question derived from the review of the literature. The interviews were conducted in the participant's home and each lasted approximately an hour and one-half. Each interview was taped and later transcribed by the researcher at home.

The researcher first analyzed the demographic data to describe family backgrounds. The data collected on each family included their educational backgrounds, occupations, and number of years homeschooling.

To explore the presence of each of the five characteristics, the researcher asked the participant a question designed to elicit data about the characteristic. The data collected from this response was then compared with the characteristic to identify its presence in the homeschooling family.

The researcher ended the interview with a secondary question, suggested by a review of the literature, concerning the educational philosophies of the parents which may govern the characteristics of homeschooling. The researcher asked a question to elicit data on this area and then described each family's response.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to identify the presence of five characteristics of academically successful homeschooling as informally identified by the Monterey County Independent Study Program (ISP) (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994) and secondarily, to look at educational philosophy suggested by a review of the literature. Five homeschooling families were identified by Mary Sgheiza, coordinator of the Monterey County ISP, as being academically successful according to the county's definition of success. These five families were interviewed to explore the presence of the following five characteristics:

- 1) A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities.
- 2) Accountability between the home and other educators (the Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis).
- 3) Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher.
- 4) Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:

- a. providing a study area for the student,
- b. incorporating learning into the daily life,
- c. taking regular trips to the library,
- d. displaying the student's work in the home.

5) Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child.

Family Backgrounds

The families who were interviewed have been given pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The first family interviewed will be known as Family A. Both parents are college graduates. The father is a national sales manager for AT&T Language Line and the mother is a homemaker. They are homeschooling two boys, who are in the fourth and second grades respectively. They have been homeschooling for four years. They categorize themselves as conservative politically and as committed Christians.

In the second family interviewed, known as Family B, the father is a college graduate, having completed eight years of college in all, and the mother has an AA degree, with an additional two years attended, but without a BA. The father's field is agricultural research and the mother is a homemaker and piano teacher. They are in the sixth year of homeschooling their son who is in the fifth grade. Their two other adult children attended public school. They

consider themselves committed to their church and to teaching family values.

The third family, Family C, have a varied educational background. The father is an x-ray technologist with a technical school background, and the mother, a homemaker, is a college graduate. They are beginning their third year of homeschooling three of their four children (the fourth is only three years old). The oldest son is in the ninth grade, the second son is in the sixth, and the third son is in the third. They categorize themselves as committed Christians.

Family D includes six children: a son, sixth grade; another son, fourth grade; a daughter, second grade; and three preschoolers. The father and mother both completed the equivalent of two years of junior college. The father is a store manager for Payless and the mother is a full-time homemaker. They consider themselves to be politically conservative and committed Christians.

In Family E, both father and mother have attended two years of college, while the father has an AA degree and additional credits. The father is a service writer for Ford and the mother is a homemaker and an artist. They are in the second year of homeschooling their daughter who is in the second grade. They also have two sons, ages four and six months. Politically they categorize themselves as

Libertarian, conservative, and as environmentalists; and their religion is Roman Catholic.

Some common characteristics of the backgrounds of the five families are that all are two-parent homes, all mothers in the study are full-time homemakers, and all parents had graduated from high school and had at least two years of college education.

Some differences include the number of years of homeschooling, the types of occupation of the fathers, and political and religious preferences. One family had been homeschooling for two years, one family for three, one family for four years, and two families for six years. Two fathers were sales managers, one father was in research, one in a technical field, and one in a blue-collar job. Three families considered themselves committed Christians, one was committed to its church and family values, and one classified itself as Roman Catholic, but open to other beliefs. Two families were conservative Republicans, one was a conservative Libertarian committed to environmental issues, and two felt that their political category was non applicable.

In summary, all five families were well-educated, both parents having at least two years of college; all males were employed in professional or skilled occupations; and three of the five belonged to Protestant denominations and were

politically conservative. See Tables 1 and 2 for summary of parent educational level and years of experience in homeschooling.

Table 1

Educational Level of Parents

Years of Education	Number of families
B.A. and graduate school	1
B.A.	3
Two years of college	3
Two to four years of college	3

Table 2

Years in homeschooling

Number of years	Number of families
Six years	2
Four years	1
Three years	1
Two years	1

Characteristic 1--A Minimum of Four Hours Per Day in
Educational Activities

When asked how many hours were spent in educational activities per day, Family A stated that it varied from between two and one-half hours to three hours on bookwork at the table and an additional two hours or more on other activities which the mother considers educational. For instance, they might read together a classic or a book related to a subject they are studying. They might go on a field trip or work in the garden. The mother stated that there were a few bad days where this didn't happen, but not very many.

Family B stated that they took the four hours very seriously. They have promised to spend that amount of time. However, in reality, they spend day in and day out on learning. From the minute they get up to the minute they go to sleep, the mother and the father are constantly teaching and learning with their son. They use every opportunity as a teaching and learning experience.

Family C reported that they spend about six hours per day on an average. The younger child doesn't spend that long, but the older child often studies more than six hours. Also, they spend a lot of time on day-long learning, such as family outings and field trips, just seeing different places, which they also include as educational activities.

Family D always spend a minimum of four, but on the average spend six or seven hours on educational activities. When they first began homeschooling, they would usually homeschool during the morning hours, but now it kind of flows into the afternoon time. At dinner time and after, Dad gets involved in the learning process, and before they know it, the books are out again or they're watching a video about a subject they're interested in.

Family E spend five or six hours in educational activities every day. When they go on field trips, they might spend over six hours, but it wouldn't be in bookwork.

In summary (see Table 3), all five families feel that they spend far more than the four hours minimum. The lowest average spent in educational activities was five hours. Three families reported spending six or seven hours, and one family feels that the whole day concentrates around educational activities. From this data, we could state that these academically successful homeschooling families spend more than four hours per day in educational activities.

Characteristic 2--Accountability Between the Home and Other Educators

The Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise

Table 3

Parent Report of Number of Hours Spent in Educational Activities

Number of Hours	Number of Families
Five hours or more	1
Six to seven hours	3
The entire day	1

determined basis.

When asked how often the family meets with their resource teacher, Family A stated that they meet every other week for about an hour. The mother doesn't feel meeting with her resource teacher is of substantial benefit to her, but she doesn't mind meeting with her. Her teacher basically informs her of upcoming events; brings some craft, science, and social studies ideas; and keeps paperwork on the children. Often, the children will present something to their resource teacher and she will interact with them.

Family B meet with their resource teacher for an hour on a weekly basis. The mother thinks her time with the teacher is greatly beneficial. She uses this as a time for her son to present something, maybe a project done on the computer, or a piano piece. The greatest benefit of the resource teacher time for Family B is the one-on-one time that the son spends with another adult teacher. Their resource teacher is also a great help in bringing materials, keeping them up on county activities, and keeping their student progress reports.

Family C meet with their resource teacher usually once every two weeks. They mostly use her for information on what's going on in the program. She goes over the children's work and the children present their current projects to her. They see her as just one more positive

influence in their lives and one more person with whom to interact.

Family D also meet with their resource teacher once every two weeks. Her greatest benefit to them is in bringing arts and crafts ideas. They appreciate her good ideas. They use her to search out resources for the units they're studying. She also has been helpful in providing incentive programs when the children have lacked motivation in an area.

Family E meet with their teacher the most often. Perhaps this is because they have been homeschooling the shortest amount of time (two years). They meet with their teacher once or twice a week. They also keep in contact with their resource teacher by phone when they have questions or needs. The mother reports that her teacher keeps her on track and encourages her. Her teacher also steps in and takes her daughter to events if she doesn't have a baby-sitter for her two younger children.

It appears from the data that these parents have varying views about the usefulness of the resource teacher (see Table 4). All of the parents meet with their resource teacher at least every week or every other week, identifying this as a common characteristic at least. Most use this teacher to provide resources that they might not be able to seek out for themselves. Others use this meeting time as a

time of interaction between their children and another adult to further develop social skills. They all saw their resource teacher as a liaison between themselves and the county program.

Table 4

Parent Report of Perceived Benefits from Resource Teacher

Perceived Benefit	Number of families
Provides resources to enhance curriculum	5
Liaison between parents and county program	5
Keeps records	5
Provides interaction for child	3

Characteristic 3--Field trip, Workshop, and Program

Attendance as Verified by the Resource Teacher

Family A reported that they take part in all of the field trips and workshops that the county offer and are involved in a private homeschooling support group as well. The mother feels that socialization for her children in these large group activities is important, although she wants it to be under her control. She also feels the need to be with other homeschooling mothers. She attended both an art and weaving workshop last year which were designed as a "Mother's Night Out". The children were not included in

these workshops as it was an opportunity for enrichment and support for the mothers. She gained new ideas to try and thinks that the interaction with the other mothers was very beneficial.

Family B stated that they try to attend everything that the county has to offer, which the mother feels is quite extensive. She feels that it is important for both of them. She likes to talk with other mothers and fathers about their experiences with homeschooling educational activities. She finds that she learns what pitfalls to avoid and what books and activities to add to her curriculum by interacting with other parents who have already covered certain areas. She also has found many of their outings to be special learning experiences. In addition to the county activities, Family B are very involved in their church and with their son's baseball team. They report their son as having a very full schedule.

Family C also feel that taking part in field trips, workshops, and educational programs is really important. The mother views the independent study program as her children's school and thus she feels that her children should take part in all "school" activities. She sees it as a priority. She feels that these activities provide involvement with other children and opportunities for interaction outside the home setting. Consequently she

finds that the criticism often leveled at homeschoolers about their children not having enough large group interaction and socialization is unfounded. In addition to the activities that the county provides, Family C go many places on the weekends as an entire family and they see that as an important part of their educational program. She stated that the more they do, the more they're aware of how their learning relates to the outside world.

Family D also take full advantage of field trips. The mother made the observation that the families which she sees taking advantage of field trips and extra educational activities are the ones who stay in homeschooling longer. She continued by saying that they're the ones that are not just out there on their own; they need the adult interaction. Her only concern about field trips and workshops is that they often appeal to the younger students. She finds that her older children need more challenges to be brought forth and she is not finding those opportunities. Family D are also active in their church, in 4-H, and in community sports activities.

Family E try to participate in every activity that the county offers that is age appropriate. The mother was part of the field trip committee. She enjoyed being a part of the planning because she was able to meet other parents and find out what sorts of activities they were interested in.

She also ran two art workshops which were well-received. Although the mother feels that field trips are important, she looks at their benefit more from a learning experience point of view. She is not so concerned about her children's socialization skills because she believes that children learn negative socialization skills--slang, peer pressure, poor self-esteem, and rampant consumerism--from their peers.

All five families participate extensively in field trips, workshops, and educational programs and so this characteristic was present in each (see Table 5). All feel that interaction between themselves and other homeschooling mothers is important and four out of five feel that interaction is important for their children as well. Other perceived benefits of field trips include providing extended learning experiences and educational challenges for children; aid for parents in choosing curriculum, implementing new ideas, and warning about educational pitfalls to avoid; and enabling parents to have better teaching skills. One mother feels that this interaction between families encourages them to continue homeschooling longer.

Characteristic 4--Learning is a Priority in the Home

Characteristic 4 is composed of four elements. Each of these elements will be analyzed separately.

Table 5

Parent Report of Perceived Benefits of Field Trips

Perceived Benefit	Total
Interaction between themselves and other mothers	5
Enabling parents	5
Encouragement for parents	5
Providing extended learning experiences	5
Sharing curriculum, ideas, and pitfalls	2
Interaction between children	4
Providing educational challenges	1

Characteristic 4a--Providing a study area for the student. Family A reported that they do have a room designated as the school room. This room contained a large bulletin board of student work, roomy worktable, floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, piano, and charts in a well-lighted setting. It also contained an alcove with washer and dryer, and the mother explained that this set-up allowed her to get some housework done while supervising schoolwork.

Family B do most of their studying together at the kitchen table. The son reads a couple of hours each day on the living room couch. The computer where he writes is in the guest bedroom. He also studies in their cabin in the backyard. Mother and son spend much time learning together in the garden. Thus, they do not feel that they have one specific place in which they learn.

Family C reported having no designated study area. The children are each sent to different rooms to do their studying each day. They do not work well together; they all need their quiet space so that they will not distract each other. Last year, the two older children did work well together on history in the living room each day. The mother keeps the youngest child working close to her so that she can facilitate his learning better. The others are given assignment sheets at the beginning of the week and then each

day work independently in different parts of the house. The mother encourages this independence.

Family D do not have a designated study area. They start out the morning in the kitchen at the table to facilitate writing. Then activities flow between the kitchen and the living room. In warm weather, they spend a lot of time outside. Last year, they spent a lot of time doing schoolwork in the car while commuting to activities. However, the majority of their school time is spent in the kitchen and living room. The older ones might be doing history in the living room while the younger ones are working with mother in the kitchen.

Family E also do not have a designated study area, although they wish that they did. They use the kitchen for most of their schoolwork. The daughter also has a desk in her bedroom where she can study quietly. The mother is frustrated with her lack of storage space for books and learning materials.

This data shows only one out of five families having a designated study area. Therefore, this not a common characteristic. Four of the five families study in several places throughout the day. However, it could be stated as a common characteristic that all five families utilize their homes well for study purposes.

Characteristic 4b--Incorporating learning into the daily life. Family A, when asked if learning carried over into the rest of their day answered by saying that most of the time it does. The mother feels that the whole point of homeschooling is to present all of life as a learning experience and all of the day to be a part of this experience. She feels that her reading material especially is an example of this. She said that what they are reading continually comes up in conversations during the entire day. She explained that often they are involved in field trips around what they are studying or in doing day-long projects and that facilitates making learning a life experience.

Family B feels strongly that life is a learning experience and so learning must take place during the entire day. She gave as an example the two ducks that her husband brought home recently. The family then went to the library and got books relating to their particular breed. They studied about the ducks and observed them and continually talked about them. They did a similar project with soil testing in their backyard garden. Their family is always learning and growing and contributing together. They feel that learning takes place from morning to evening.

Family C also find that teaching and learning carry over into the rest of their day. Even the husband gets involved when he is not at work. They think it is important

to grab every opportunity to use as a learning experience. The mother finds that because she is involved in her children's learning, she is more aware of applying events in their day to what they are learning. She gave teaching history as an example. The children liked history last year because they made it real. They found novels that corresponded to what they were studying, they watched movies about the periods of history, they went on related field trips, and the thoughts, motives, and feelings of the people they were studying came alive.

Family D agreed that learning carried over into everything they were doing. They found that even when the family decided to take a day off from regular schoolwork they would usually end up doing activities that they had been doing all week long. Often, something that they were doing triggered an idea about what they had been learning about, and before they knew it they had done another full day's worth of school. Family D concluded was that learning is just a part of life. As a result of this type of thinking, they don't take the full summer off or the entire Christmas break. Life and learning has truly become synonymous to them.

Family E also find that teaching and learning carry over into the rest of their day. The mother explained that often they would be learning about some subject and a

question would come up about it at the dinner table and they'd have another complete discussion centered around it. Then maybe they will be on a trip and the subject will come up again. On family outings, they're constantly stopping and learning about something. Family E think that learning is much more than book learning; it involves hands-on learning, discussing, and exploring a little bit. The mother used a recent trip to a living history farm as an example. She finds those types of experiences to be real learning.

Thus, it would appear from this data that these academically successful homeschoolers do not separate their days into school time and normal life time. They see all of their day as a teaching and learning experience and want to take advantage of every opportunity.

Characteristic 4c--Taking regular trips to the library.

Family A go to the library every few days because the children read so fast that they are soon out of books. The boys are reading books with a challenging vocabulary and they find themselves at the library about every three days. Family A also enjoy reading children's classics together as a family on a regular basis.

Family B reported that they visit the library at least once a week. They are also frequenters of book sales, and father and son make a special treat of reading the Sunday

paper together. All members of the family, especially father and son, are avid readers.

When asked about the regularity of their visits to the library, Family C reported that they walk to the library at least once a week or more. The mother feels as if they are continually at the library. They use the library as a major source of curriculum resources, as well as to foster reading for enjoyment. She can't imagine teaching without a library. Family C also buy a lot of books because the mother feels that teaching out of textbooks is boring; to her, other books are more interesting and textbooks should only be used as a base.

Family D use their small branch library once a week and visit the main branch once a week also. The children read for enjoyment, and library books provide a large part of their curriculum.

Family E visit the library on a regular basis, although the mother did not mention how often. They also make use of a toy lending library, which provides many of their learning manipulatives. The mother is considering buying a used encyclopedia set. She stated that homeschoolers will use any resource they can get their hands on because they're very resource-oriented. Family E collect books and have an extensive library in their home.

All five made regular trips to the library, four of the five reporting that they went once a week or more. A further characteristic of these academically successful homeschooling families is one of making reading and books a priority in their homes and of constantly seeking out new learning resources.

Characteristic 4d--Displaying the student's work in the home. During the interview, the researcher observed in the home to identify the presence of this characteristic.

Family A had a large bulletin board full of student work hanging in their schoolroom. They also had children's work hanging on their refrigerator.

Family B displayed their son's work in different locations in their home. There was a bulletin board of their son's work in the kitchen and work was also observed hanging in the computer room.

The researcher did not observe children's work hanging in the home of Family C. However, the mother described her children's work and shared stories about their projects.

The kitchen is the place where the children hang up their artwork and have learning charts in Family D. The researcher observed a large bulletin board containing children's work and additional work hung around the walls.

In the home of Family E, the refrigerator is covered with children's artwork and there is also a large bulletin board filled with children's work in the hall.

The researcher observed that four of the five families in the study made a point to display their children's work in the home and all five had much to share about their children's educational accomplishments.

Characteristic 5--Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child. In order not to lead the participants to answer in a given way, the researcher asked the following question to elicit data on parent/child interaction, "How do you know where your child is academically and where the next step is?"

The mother of Family A admitted that this is an area that she struggles with. She stated that standardized tests assured her that the children were somewhere in the ballpark of where they should be. When she receives the test results, she addresses right away the areas wherein they are lacking. For instance, last summer they attacked their times tables when the test scores pointed out that they were weak in that area. She also uses graded materials, so the next step is usually what comes next in the curriculum. The chapter tests often show her when she missed something or when they didn't understand a concept. In addition to the curriculum and the various testing they do, constant

interaction between her sons and herself, while they are doing their schoolwork, keeps her instantly aware of their weak points. When she sees they're not doing well in an area, she zeros in on that area until they get it or until they get tired, in which case they come back to it later.

Family B also mentioned the standardized testing that they do each year as being helpful in determining overall academic progress. It helps the mother to know if they are on track. Her resource teacher can also help her to know what she can reasonably expect her child to be doing at a given level. Parent and child move through the curriculum systematically, doing every step together, so it is easy to see when there is a problem and they need to slow down or pull in enrichment, or when they can speed up and skip the extra practice.

Family C again mentioned both standardized and chapter tests as being useful in assessing the children's progress. The mother feels it to be equally important to just keep up with them each day--talking to them about their studies, and going over their writing or whatever they are doing. She said that this lets the parent know what the children might be having a hard time with or where they need to be challenged. She explained that one of the most positive points about homeschooling is that the parent is always aware of where their children are in their learning

processes because the parent is always with them. When she notices a problem, she immediately stops and works to clean it up. She added that it becomes obvious where they are lacking when you are working with them so closely everyday.

The mother of Family D admitted that assessing where her children are and where they should be going next is probably the hardest part of homeschooling for her. She normally has them tested at the end of each year to make sure that at least they are on track for their grade level. She added that there has never been a problem about them scoring well. She also makes a point of pulling out the county brochure on grade level expectations several times a year just to compare it with what they've covered and what they have planned. However, this can be confusing for her because her children never match the grade level expectations. They are working ahead of where the county says they are supposed to be according to their ages and they are on different levels in different subjects. Basically, each child does not fit into one grade level. She has handled this problem by starting each child at their current level and moving them along the path of a curriculum. Then, as she interacts with them and assesses their work, they move along step by step.

The mother in Family E stated that she was not very confident concerning her own abilities to assess her

daughter's academic progress. She finds that sometimes the resource teacher can pick up on this for her. Generally however, her child's academic needs become apparent as they work together each day. For instance, as the mother observes her daughter's writing, she might notice that she is not capitalizing letters where she should, so they might concentrate on that for a while. In math, she might see that her daughter is not understanding the subtraction process, so they'll back up and go back over the concept. As she introduces new concepts, she also reintroduces the old. It's a continuous process as she interacts with her daughter and observes her work. The mother does not believe in tests; instead, she uses the portfolio system. She can look back at what her daughter has done and look forward to where she wants her to go. The mother also gets an idea from her conversations with her daughter and from what her daughter reads, what she needs to work on, and what she doesn't really need to concentrate on anymore.

Based on looking at assessment, it appears that all mothers are continually involved in interacting with their children about their studies. While four of the five depended partially on standardized or chapter tests to assess their children's academic progress, they all heavily relied upon personal day-to-day interaction to catch the problems that need to be addressed in their children's

learning. A characteristic of these academically successful homeschoolers would appear to be the continual interaction between parent and child which enables them to immediately address academic needs.

Secondary Characteristic: Educational Philosophies

A review of the literature on homeschooling revealed four educational philosophies which may govern the characteristics of academically successful homeschooling. The researcher read a paragraph describing the four philosophies and asked each mother which philosophy she thought best fit her family. The paragraph read is as follows:

Essentialism assumes that there is an essential body of knowledge that the student needs to learn. Thus, the teaching is subject-centered and often favors a traditional textbook approach. It advocates the preservation and promotion of traditional values.

Perennialism assumes that there are timeless concepts that return year after year. Teaching centers around a reading and discussion of the classics.

Progressivism emphasizes the need to prepare the student to live in society. It advocates the individual's growth in harmony with society and the environment. It favors a unit study approach or integrated activity-based curriculum.

The last of the philosophies is existentialism which assumes that learning is incidental. Knowledge is created by the individual and only becomes knowledge when the individual is cognizant of it. The teacher is simply a facilitator who opens doors to let the student discover knowledge for themselves (Hood, 1990).

Family A sees themselves as fitting in three of the four philosophies. The mother does not feel that she is

governed by existentialism at all. She could see the other three philosophies combined in her approach. Primarily, she thinks that she most practiced the first philosophy of essentialism. She explained that they use a textbook-centered approach because she does feel that there is a body of knowledge that they need to know. She enjoys teaching the classics as enrichment. Also of importance to her is the ability of her children to fit into society. She does not want her children to see themselves as an isolated group that does not need to fit in with other people. Therefore, she utilizes unit studies as an important aspect of homeschooling, even though she finds these more difficult to incorporate. Therefore, Family A is governed by essentialism, perennialism, and progressivism in their homeschooling practices.

When asked the same question, Family B stated that they are governed by all four philosophies, however, not so much by existentialism. The mother is primarily governed by essentialism. She likes working from an outline and enjoys using a textbook approach to learning. She utilizes the classics and unit studies for enrichment. She will add in a unit study on a subject in which her son is especially interested. Occasionally she allows her son to create his own knowledge, such as when he is writing on the computer, but they don't do too much of that as yet. Basically, she

sees knowledge as an essential body that needs to be learned.

The mother of Family C sees herself as being motivated by the essentialist and progressive philosophies. She feels that there is a core knowledge that one needs to know because one lives in a closed society over which the individual has no control. Therefore, the parent must prepare the child by giving him the necessary knowledge that he will need in order to survive in society. She finds the textbook approach boring, however, and perceives the unit studies approach to be much more stimulating. She believes it is possible to mix the two approaches. She especially advocates utilizing the unit studies approach with younger children. When children reach junior high or high school, then she believes a textbook approach becomes more effective in teaching them the core knowledge they need to know in order to prepare for college or to enter their chosen professions.

In Family D, the mother characterizes herself as being motivated most by the progressive and the essentialist philosophies. She does not enjoy teaching the classics because she is unfamiliar with them and she feels that her children are too young to practically use the existential approach. She feels that there is a body of knowledge that her children need to know in order to survive in this world.

Yet the unit studies approach is most efficient and practical for her family because of their multiple ages and levels. With this approach, she finds that she is able to teach all of her children one subject at the same time, but they're all learning different concepts at different levels. Therefore, she sees herself as governed by a mix of the two philosophies, essentialism and progressivism.

The mother in Family E described herself in three of the four philosophies. While she didn't discount existentialism, she was unable to explain her practice of it. Instead, she went on to describe her educational practices as governed by the other three philosophies. She said that she received textbooks from the county which dealt with a core knowledge that her daughter needed to learn. They've also picked up the classics now and then. As far as unit studies are concerned, she enjoys writing her own which integrate math, reading, drawing, maps, charts, and graphs. She especially uses them to add to the math textbook. In addition, she has used some of the county's unit studies. She feels that a well-rounded educational philosophy would incorporate use of core knowledge learning, classics, and unit studies.

In summary, these academically successful families all feel that there is an essential body of knowledge that needs to be taught. However, they would advocate a varied

approach to teaching and learning. They all favor the use of unit studies in addition to textbooks and use many resources for enrichment.

Summary

Using five homeschooling families which have been deemed academically successful by county personnel, this preliminary study explored the presence of five common characteristics which have been informally identified by the Monterey County Office of Education (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994) as those which appear to lead to academically successful homeschooling.

Some common background similarities of the five families are 1) all are two-parent families, 2) both parents have had at least two years of college, and 3) all fathers work in skilled or professional occupations. They vary in 1) the amount of years they have spent in homeschooling, and 2) the number of children they homeschool, and 3) their political and religious preferences.

The following common characteristics have emerged from the interview data concerning their homeschool practices:

Characteristic 1--A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities. All families reported spending more than four hours per day in educational activities.

Characteristic 2--Accountability between the home and other educators (the Monterey County program accomplishes

accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis). They all met with their resource teacher at least twice a month, although they differ in their perceptions of the benefits of these meetings.

Characteristic 3--Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher. The five families were involved extensively in field trips, workshops, and educational programs and each considered these a priority in their educational programs.

Characteristic 4--Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:

Characteristic 4a--Providing a study area for the student. One of the five had a designated study area, but all five utilized their homes to provide appropriate study areas and to prioritize learning.

Characteristic 4b--Incorporating learning into the daily life. None of the five separated their day into school time and normal life time. All consider learning a part of life and try to incorporate learning opportunities into all of their daily activities.

Characteristic 4c--Taking regular trips to the library. All five families visit the library at least once a week. All five reported constantly seeking out resources to

enhance their programs. All five families place reading as a priority in the home.

Characteristic 4d--Displaying the student's work in the home. As evidence of the priority of learning in the home, the researcher observed children's work hanging in four of the five homes. All five families had stories to share and work to show concerning their children's educational accomplishments.

Characteristic 5--Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child. Four of the five families utilize standardized and curriculum tests to assess their children's academic progress. All five consider the constant interaction between themselves and their children as the best way to assess their children's immediate learning needs.

Concerning the educational philosophies which may govern their homeschooling characteristics, all five consider that there is an essential body of knowledge that their children need to learn. They all favor using a variety of teaching methods and curriculum to achieve this learning.

In summary, the five families, individually and collectively demonstrate the majority of the five characteristics proposed by the Monterey County Office of Education as leading to academic success.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

Homeschooling is a growing educational movement; parents who homeschool their children believe that it is their educational right to educate their own children. A search of the literature revealed reasons why homeschooling families choose to homeschool and differing educational philosophies which govern the practices of homeschooling families, yet little or no educational research was revealed to identify characteristics of academically successful homeschooling programs. Therefore, due to the apparent lack of research in this area, this study was an initial attempt to discern the characteristics which appear to lead to academic success in homeschooling.

Although the researcher's recent search of the literature did not reveal the characteristics of academically successful homeschooling; such a set of characteristics has been informally identified through the Monterey County Office of Education (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994). Due to fact that the county assumed that these characteristics would lead to success, but had never studied whether these characteristics were present in the families enrolled in their program, it was the purpose of this study to determine if these characteristics are present in homeschooling programs that are academically successful.

The researcher conducted interviews with five families who were selected by the Monterey County Independent Study Program (ISP) personnel as having met the criteria for academic success as outlined by the county. After asking demographic questions which were derived from the literature, the researcher sought to determine if the following characteristics, which were identified by the county, were present in each of the five homeschooling programs:

- 1) A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities.

- 2) Accountability between the home and other educators (the Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis).

- 3) Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher.

- 4) Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:

- a. providing a study area for the student,
- b. incorporating learning into the daily life,
- c. taking regular trips to the library,
- d. displaying the student's work in the home.

5) Frequent and ongoing interaction between parent/teacher and child.

The researcher also asked one secondary question concerning educational philosophy because a review of the literature suggested that the educational philosophies of the parents may govern the characteristics of academically successful homeschooling.

Demographic Characteristics

The five families interviewed in the study are characterized by the following common demographic ingredients: two parents are present in the home, parents have attended at least two years of college, mothers are full-time homemakers, and fathers work in skilled or professional occupations. It appears from this information that academically successful homeschoolers have a stable home environment from a financial viewpoint. The mothers are financially able to stay at home to educate their children, with the fathers playing a supportive role, usually in the evenings or on weekends.

These ten homeschooling parents have at least an adequate education themselves and this may also be a necessary ingredient in the academic success of their children. Parents lacking this may have to compensate by acquiring additional schooling or hiring tutors for their children in areas they lack. This is also an area in which

the resource teacher assigned to the family might be able to give advice or offer the necessary resources and supports.

The five families all seemed to be somewhat conservative in their political views and tended to be religious, as was also found in the review of the literature. However, the researcher was not able to see any relationship between their political and religious views and their academic success in homeschooling.

The five families in this study vary in the amount of years they have spent in homeschooling, in the number of children they homeschool, and in their political and religious preferences. Therefore, these do not appear to be factors which influence their academic success.

Common Characteristics Concerning Homeschooling Practices

Several common characteristics were identified as being present in the five homeschooling families. However, the researcher found that not all of the characteristics informally identified by the coordinator of the Monterey County ISP (M. K. Sgheiza, personal communication, June 21, 1994) as leading to academically successful homeschooling were present in all five families. One characteristic was lacking in four of the five families.

Characteristic 1--A minimum of four hours per day in educational activities. All five families reported spending much more than four hours in educational activities. All

spend more than five hours, and four out of five families spend seven hours or more. Therefore, it appears from the interview data that academically successful homeschoolers spend a major portion of their day in educational activities.

Characteristic 2--Accountability between the home and other educators. The Monterey County program accomplishes accountability by having the student and his primary teacher meet with the Independent Study resource teacher on a weekly or otherwise determined basis. All five families meet with their resource teacher at least twice a month. Two of the five families view this as an integral part of the program. They feel their resource teacher to be of vital benefit to the success of their program. The other three do not see the resource teacher as vital, but they enjoy her relationship with their children, and appreciate the resources she is able to bring them. The researcher feels that the relationship between the resource teacher and academic success is inconclusive. Some families need the academic support and accountability that a resource teacher brings and some families receive that support from other sources. For instance, all families reported using the library for the majority of their extended curriculum and all reported receiving and enjoying support from other homeschooling families. From the county's point of view,

the resource teacher is necessary as a liaison between themselves and the homeschooling families.

Characteristic 3--Field trip, workshop, and program attendance as verified by the resource teacher. The five families are extensively involved in field trips, workshops, and educational programs and each consider these a priority in their educational programs. They perceive varying benefits to themselves as a result of their involvement. Some rated the social interaction and emotional support for both themselves and their children to be the greatest benefit. All seem to appreciate the extended educational opportunities these activities provided. Some receive additional educational and curriculum ideas from their participation in these field trips and programs. One parent felt that the families who participated fully in the field trips, workshops, and programs tended to remain homeschooling longer. Therefore, from this data, it would seem that participation with other homeschoolers in field trips, workshops, and programs is one of the characteristics present in academically successful homeschooling, and involvement in these activities may even lead to longevity in homeschooling.

Characteristic 4--Learning is a priority in the home as evidenced by the following elements:

Characteristic 4a--Providing a study area for the student. The researcher found that only one of the five families has such an area. The rest of the families organize their homes in various ways to provide both quiet and group places of study. They also use their home in practical ways to facilitate learning. For instance, they might work where they can easily watch younger siblings or do kitchen work as well as school work. In addition, in keeping with their philosophy of not separating school time from the rest of their lives, most families spend time learning outdoors, in their gardens, and even in their cars. Because of this data, the researcher would not consider having a designated study area as a common characteristic of academically successful homeschooling, nor does having such a place seem to be an evidence of prioritizing learning in the home.

Characteristic 4b--Incorporating learning into the daily life. All five families consider learning a part of life and try to incorporate learning opportunities into all of their daily activities. None of the five separate their day into school time and normal life time. These homeschoolers literally place learning and education as a priority in their lives and this seems to be necessary in achieving academic success.

Characteristic 4c--Taking regular trips to the library.

All five families visit the library at least once a week and are constantly seeking out resources to enhance their programs. The families all seem to place great importance on reading and make it a priority in their homes. The researcher concludes that regular visits to the library is an evidence of reading as a priority in the home, which in turn is a characteristic of academically successful homeschooling.

Characteristic 4d--Displaying the student's work in the

home. The researcher observed children's work hanging in four of the five homes, and all five had examples of children's work and stories of their children's educational accomplishments to share. It would seem that encouraging and praising children by displaying and sharing their work would be a characteristic of academic success in homeschooling.

Characteristic 5--Frequent and ongoing interaction

between parent/teacher and child. To identify the presence of this characteristic without leading the participants to respond in a given way, the researcher asked each family how they know where their children are academically and how they determine where the next step is. Four of the five families utilize standardized tests and curriculum tests to assess their children's academic progress, but all five consider

the constant interaction between themselves and their children to be the best way to assess their children's immediate learning needs. All five mentioned that when they find an area of need, they immediately stop and address that need and give it concentrated effort as long as appropriate. From this study, it would seem that academically successful homeschoolers do not allow their children to spend long amounts of time working independently without interaction and assessment. Academically successful homeschooling requires constant interaction between parent and child in order to best facilitate learning.

Educational Philosophy

Because the review of the literature revealed four educational philosophies which may govern the characteristics of academically successful homeschoolers (essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, and existentialism), the researcher described the four philosophies to the five families and asked them where they thought they would fit. All five considered themselves essentialists and progressivists predominantly and three of the five considered themselves perennialists as well. In other words, all five believe that there is an essential body of knowledge that their children need to learn (essentialism). They favor using a variety of teaching methods and curriculum to facilitate this learning. They

also consider themselves to be progressivists, in that it is important to them to teach their children to live in harmony with their environment and society. They want to teach their children necessary life skills and they use a unit study or activity-centered approach to accomplish this. Three of the five, as perennialists, teach the classics for enrichment, believing that these teach timeless concepts which are important for their children to learn.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

This study was very limited in scope. The major focus of the study was to identify the presence of the five characteristics of academically successful homeschooling informally identified by the Monterey County Independent Study Program (ISP). The study was limited to the five families selected by the Monterey County ISP and to the mothers' own assessments of their homeschooling programs. The study was further limited by the fact that the researcher was required to use Monterey County ISP selected families to participate in the study. Further studies need to be completed to determine whether these characteristics are present in the larger population of academically successful homeschooling programs. A study involving large random samples would be desirous.

There may be other significant characteristics which were not identified by this study which contribute to a

successful academic homeschooling program. Another limitation of this study is that it was limited to the five characteristics informally identified by the Monterey County ISP. For instance, it might be important to look more closely at curriculum, at the effect of multiple siblings on homeschooling, at factors of discipline, at homeschooling co-ops, and at families who have older high school students.

Due to the lack of research in this area and the growing number of families who attempt homeschooling, more research needs to be done to determine whether the characteristics identified in this study do indeed contribute to academic success. These studies need to involve larger numbers of families. This study included only five families and only those who were involved in a county ISP. Other research might focus on a larger group of families in a county ISP program and should also include families in private homeschooling programs or in school satellite programs.

Future studies could examine what causes families to drop out of homeschooling. Studies should examine the negative aspects of homeschooling in order to determine pitfalls to avoid. It would be interesting to see what characteristics distinguish those families not doing so well.

Longitudinal studies also would be illuminating. Negative and positive effects of homeschooling may be cumulative, and significant characteristics which lead to long term academic success may not be apparent until the child is older. The length of time spent in homeschooling and its effect on academic success would be another issue to explore.

Should these suggestions for further research be implemented, more would be known about characteristics of academically successful homeschooling. Homeschooling seems to be an educational trend which is here to stay; more research is needed to enable these families to be an academic success.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW FORM

Introduction

It has been estimated that between 250,000 and 1,500,000 students are being homeschooled in the United States today. Research has been done concerning the history of homeschooling; the demographics, beliefs, and practices of homeschooling families; and the benefits of homeschooling. Studies have been completed which show the academic success of homeschoolers. However, a review of the literature did not reveal any research on the characteristics of homeschooling which lead to its academic success. This study is for the purpose of identifying proposed characteristics of academically successful homeschooling.

Demographics

1. Husband:
2. Husband's occupation:
3. Wife:
4. Wife's occupation:
5. Educational background of parents:
6. Children (names, ages, and grades if applicable):
7. Number of years homeschooling:
8. Address:
9. Political category:
10. Religious category:

Questions

1. How many hours per day are spent in educational activities?
2. Do you meet with a resource teacher? How often?
3. Do you take part in field trips, workshops, and programs?
4. Do you have a designated study area? Do you make regular trips to the library?
5. Do you find that teaching and learning carry over into the rest of your day?
6. How do you know where your student is academically and where the next step is?

Secondary Question

The research revealed four major philosophies of education among homeschoolers. These are essentialism, perennialism, progressivism, and existentialism.

Essentialism assumes that there is an essential body of knowledge that the student needs to learn. Thus, the teaching is subject-centered and often favors a traditional textbook approach. It advocates the preservation and promotion of traditional values (ABeka, Bob Jones, Gregg Harris).

Perennialism assumes that there are timeless concepts that return year after year. Teaching centers around a reading and discussion of the classics (Susan Schaeffer McCauley, Charlotte Mason).

Progressivism emphasizes the need to prepare the student to live in society. It advocates the individual's growth in harmony with society and the environment. It favors a unit study approach or integrated activity-based curriculum (Hewitt Moore, KONOS, Weaver).

The last of the philosophies is existentialism which assumes that learning is incidental. Knowledge is created by the individual and only becomes knowledge when the individual is cognizant of it. The teacher is simply a facilitator who opens doors to let the student discover knowledge for themselves (John Holt).

1. With these definitions of the four philosophies in mind, where do you think you would fit?

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW - FAMILY A - AUGUST 2, 1994

Demographics

Husband: Name withheld

Husband's occupation: National sales manager for AT&T
Language Line

Wife's occupation: Full-time homemaker

Educational background of parents: Both are college
graduates

Children (names, ages, and grades if applicable): first son,
9, just finished the third grade; and second son, 7, just
finished the first grade

Number of years homeschooling: four

Address: information withheld

Political category: conservative

Religious category: committed Christian

Questions

Researcher: (After reading introductory paragraph) How many
hours per day do you think you spend in educational
activities?

Mother: That's not just your time where you sit down at the
table with the books, it would be everything, right?

Researcher: Right. It would be everything.

Mother: Well, it's supposed to be four hours a day, so let's
see ... it varies between two and one-half and five,
somewhere around there. The time at the table is between
two and three hours and then we have other books that they
read on their own and that I read to them and then other
activities that I consider educational which takes another
two to three hours.

Researcher: So, two and one-half to five hours you'd say
then, a little more than five altogether.

Mother: Yes, somewhere in there each day, on a good day that
is. There are a few bad days.

Researcher: Do you meet with your resource teacher?

Mother: Yes, once every other week.

Researcher: How long do you spend with her?

Mother: About an hour.

Researcher: What kind of things does she do?

Mother: Well, she brings me papers, some of our little newspaper things that our group puts out, and some science and social studies things. She tells me about activities that are coming up. She fills out her paperwork that she has to do. Frankly, sometimes I don't feel that it's necessary for me, but there are benefits that I feel I get from being in the program and part of the program is having her come. It doesn't do me any harm and she's really a nice person.

Researcher: Does she give you ideas sometimes?

Mother: Some.

Researcher: Do you take part in field trips, workshops, and programs? Have you done that sort of thing?

Mother: Yes, we do. Part of it is that last year they had more programs and things and we enjoyed those. We had some meetings last year just for moms and of course, I'm involved with another support group as well. We also take part in those field trips. I do think that the socialization part is important, that it's under my control, but they still need it. I don't want them to be by themselves. I need to be with other people, other moms. I need to have them be with other people, so they're not just relying on me and on each other for interaction, but that they have other people to play with and learn from. So we try to go on quite a few field trips and programs and things.

Researcher: What are some of the mom's things that you did that were really helpful?

Mother: They had an art workshop one evening last year that was interesting. I don't know that I really came away with new ideas to do, but I guess I got a couple of new mediums to try. I'm not an artist, I'm not crafty, I don't even like to do art projects. I learned some new mediums that we hadn't tried before, like beeswax and pastels. It was fun to do a couple of things from that. I just think that it's good for me to meet other moms and interact with them.

Then we had one workshop where the kids went and did some weaving. Our teacher, Barbara, taught that workshop. She was our teacher for three years and last year we got a

new one. Anyway, she taught them basic weaving with cardboard and the boys really took off on that. They made little yarn mats that were about 10" by about 6" and they made about 25 each of them.

Researcher: That's neat! Did you give them as gifts?

Mother: No, actually we didn't do anything with them. They're all just sitting in a drawer, but it kept them busy on our car trips!

Researcher: This is an obvious question, because I can see the answer all around, but a question I had planned to ask was if you have a designated study area. (We were sitting in the school room which contained a piano, a large worktable and three chairs, a floor-to-ceiling bookshelf, and a large bulletin board. There was a mural of the solar system that the children had done and alphabet letters and other charts hanging on the walls. The room was very sunny because the worktable was placed in front of a large picture window which looked out on their back yard.)

Mother: Yes, obviously we do have a designated study area. I just cleaned off the bulletin board yesterday. It got so jammed with stuff, I thought that I'm in the mood for clearing everything off. I get ruthless with it. Hopefully the kids don't come in while I'm doing it because they'll start looking through everything, I know, and start pulling stuff out. If they didn't see it, they would never even notice that it was gone.

Researcher: Do you make regular trips to the library?

Mother: Yes, we go very often. My son reads too fast. He finishes his books really quickly. They read the Hardy Boys. They started that a few months ago and they read one a day. So we'll pick three and he's done in three days. It's interesting because the vocabulary is pretty challenging.

Researcher: Do you find that teaching and learning carry over into the rest of your day?

Mother: I wouldn't say every day, but a lot of times, especially when we're out traveling around, going to museums, or we're doing things that pertain more to their studies. Especially our reading material, I love our reading material. It comes up all the time - it's Bob Jones. Yeah, I'd say it does. When they're out playing

their games, then they're not necessarily learning, playing pool doesn't carry on their learning very much! But, yeah, that's the whole idea of homeschooling, you want your whole life to be learning and all of your day to be part of your learning experience. You don't want it separated.

Researcher: How would you know where your sons are academically and how do you plan the next step?

Mother: That's one thing I struggle with. Well, we did the standardized testing which assures me that we're somewhere in the ballpark. We're not in first grade when we should be in fourth grade. Also, the materials that I'm using are pretty much graded so we're doing third grade work when we're supposed to be doing third grade work and if they're doing O.K. then I assume we're alright. I just kind of follow along and when we finish one book, I do the next one. The next step is whatever comes next in the curriculum. I use a curriculum because, especially with language arts I wouldn't know when to introduce which grammar rule or points or even to know what they are; to decide what to cover, I wouldn't even think about it. By having books that I think are really good, they help me cover more than I would think needs to be covered. Then tests sometime show me if they didn't get everything. You know, if they don't know a verb from a noun or something.

When I get back the standardized tests, I address right away the areas where they are lacking. For instance, if I see they are doing very poorly on a math skill like multiplication - this summer I want to make a concentrated effort to work on times tables. We need to at least get the 2's down. We've got the 0's and the 1's. So, we're going to work on the 2's and hopefully get that down. Then we'll go on to the 3's. When I see that they're not doing well, I kind of on the spur of the moment decide to attack this. I zero in on it until they get it or until I get tired.

Researcher: (Reads second paragraph on the interview form concerning four educational philosophies of homeschoolers) With these definitions of the four philosophies in mind, where do you think you would fit?

Mother: Well, I don't fit in four at all (existentialism). But the first three, I can see a little bit of all of them in my approach. Primarily, I'd say the first one. Quite a bit the second one because I do, I feel really good, it's one of the things I feel best about, and I've mentioned this before, is the books we read together. I feel pretty strongly about that. So I'd say the majority of our time is

spent bookwise on the essential stuff because I do feel there is a body of knowledge that they need to know. The other stuff is fine. We read The Hobbit together and the boys loved that and we read Robinson Crusoe and we've had a great year of reading. We read Arabian Nights and some of the stuff I've never read, but I thought would be good. It's been fun and now I'm kind of wondering what to read next.

And then the third one somewhat. I just find that it's harder to do. But I feel like some of our stuff that's maybe less planned as far as helping our children fit into society or something like that, I feel that's a real important aspect of homeschooling. Especially with our beliefs, they need to be prepared to have their beliefs and be firm in those and still be able to function in the world. So I feel that we need to be able to address facts so they don't become just isolated groups that can't fit in with regular people. They need to be able to fit in, so I think that that's part of it, whether it's safety or facing strangers or health types of things or social things, that's a real important aspect of homeschooling. So I feel I use all of the first three.

Researcher: Well, you've covered all of my questions. I thank you for your time. I really enjoyed it.