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**CONTINUING AND DISCONTINUING HOME SCHOOLING:**

**MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN**

**by**

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**Post Baccalaureate Diploma, Simon Fraser University, 1991**

**Bachelor of Education, Simon Fraser University, 1987**

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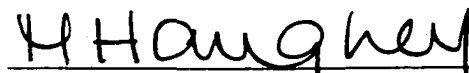
  
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## Abstract

Parents who home school their children have high levels of motivations, considerable expectations, and a variety of home schooling experiences. Their perceptions of home schooling are positive and they have varied perceptions regarding the public school system. The purpose of this study was to investigate connections between the motivations, expectations, and experiences of current home schooling parents and those of parents who have discontinued home schooling and their respective decisions to continue or discontinue home schooling.

Thirteen individuals, representing both categories, completed questionnaires. Interviews were then conducted with six of the respondents, three continuing home schoolers and three who had discontinued home schooling. The interviews were transcribed and these data, with the questionnaire data, were qualitatively analyzed. The motivations for, expectations about, and experiences of home schooling, as well as the perceptions each group held of home schooling and of the public school system were examined.

Home schooling parents and discontinued home schooling parents were found to be homogeneous in their overall motivation for home schooling, which was to meet the needs of their children, but to be heterogeneous in all other aspects. The motivation for discontinuing home schooling was homogeneous in that parents discontinued home schooling to meet the needs of their children, but heterogeneous in that the needs varied from family to family and, in many cases, from child to child.

The implications of this study are threefold. This study has shown that home schooling families do not necessarily believe only in home schooling; therefore it is

important that links be established between home schooling families and the public school system. Second, this study has political implications following the finding of considerable heterogeneity of home schoolers. There may be a need to re-examine legislation which regards all home schooling parents as one group, either uniformly capable as in the case of British Columbia's liberal home schooling legislation or, uniformly in need of detailed guidance, as in the case of some restrictive American state legislation. Finally, this study has implications as to how information is extrapolated from the educational literature. The great heterogeneity among home schooling families illustrates the difficulties in attempting to make broad summary statements.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Tables.....	ix
Acknowledgments.....	x
Dedication.....	xi
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Theoretical Background.....	2
Rationale.....	7
Research Problem .....	9
Significance of the Research .....	9
Research Questions.....	13
Chapter Summary .....	14
CHAPTER TWO .....	15
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
Motivations .....	15
The Political Values of Home Schooling Parents.....	15
Power and Control .....	16
The Economic Values of Home Schooling Parents.....	19
The Moral Values of Home Schooling Parents .....	20
The Cultural Values of Home Schooling Parents.....	22



Beliefs Held by Home Schooling Parents about Teaching and Learning	23
Expectations and Experiences .....	26
What Public School Represents to Home Schooling Parents .....	26
What Home Schooling Represents To Home Schooling Parents .....	28
Conclusion .....	29
CHAPTER THREE.....	31
STUDY DESIGN.....	31
Description of the Community .....	31
School District Number 57 .....	33
Procedures.....	38
Locating the Participants.....	38
Study Participants .....	40
Questionnaires .....	42
Interviews.....	43
Data Analysis .....	49
Limitations of the Study Design .....	52
Summary of the Chapter .....	54
CHAPTER FOUR.....	56
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS.....	56
Initiation and Continuation of Home Schooling.....	56
Motivations .....	57
Academic Performance.....	57

<b>Behavior Concerns.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Lifestyle Values .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Autonomy.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Expectations.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Confidence .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Help Their Child(ren) .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Difficulties and Concerns .....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Time Frame.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Experiences.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Description of Past and Present Home Schooling Families.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Support.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Decision Making.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Models of Home Schooling .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Challenges of Home Schooling .....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Achievements Attributed to Home Schooling .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Summary of Home Schooling as Described by the Study Participants</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Perceptions of the Public School System .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Critique of the Public School System .....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Benefits of a Public School System .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Desired Changes to the Public School System .....</b>	<b>88</b>

<b>Summary</b> .....	91
<b>Discontinuation of Home Schooling</b> .....	93
<b>Summary of Reasons for Discontinuing Home Schooling</b> .....	95
<b>Summary of the Chapter</b> .....	96
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> .....	101
<b>DISCUSSION</b> .....	101
<b>Understanding A Curricular Position</b> .....	101
<b>Understanding the Curricular Position of the Home Schooling Families</b>	103
<b>Philosophy</b> .....	104
<b>Program</b> .....	104
<b>Homogeneity and Heterogeneity of Home Schooling Families</b> .....	106
<b>Limitations, Implications, and Future Research</b> .....	111
<b>Limitations</b> .....	111
<b>Implications of the Research</b> .....	112
<b>Future Research</b> .....	115
<b>Summary</b> .....	116
<b>References</b> .....	118
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	122
<b>Appendix B</b> .....	124
<b>Appendix E</b> .....	134
<b>Appendix F</b> .....	135
<b>Appendix G</b> .....	136

Appendix H.....	138
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## List of Tables and Figures

### Table

1	_____	40
2	_____	50

### Figure

1	_____	32
2	_____	map pocket

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## **Dedication**

**This work is dedicated to the parents who have worked to meet the needs of their children, both by home schooling and by discontinuing home schooling. Your openness and experiences have taught me so much and yet, have only opened the door to what remains to be learned.**

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

No lunch kits, no back to school outfits, no concern over bus schedules or carpools; this is the year round reality for some families of school-aged children. This new reality is due to the parents' decision to home school their children. Yet other families find themselves caught up in the back to school rush as their previously home schooled children enter or re-enter the public school system. Examining the connections among parents' motivations for, expectations about, and experiences of home schooling, their perceptions of public schooling, and their perceptions of home schooling, and the decision to discontinue home schooling was the purpose of this research.

For this study, home schooling was defined as an educational program which is provided within the home of the student, by a parent and through the parents' choice. The program may be a government correspondence course, a correspondence course from other institutions, or a program designed by the parent(s) in compliance with local legislation. Not included in this definition was the schooling at home of students who had been forced to leave any school or school system for reasons designated by the school or the school system.

The term motivations refers to the incentives or reasons that caused parents to take action. Expectations are the outcomes parents anticipated from home schooling. Experiences are the actual day to day home schooling activities and events as described by the home schooling parent.



### Theoretical Background

Children have always received some of their education in the home. However in the mid-eighteenth century in North America, the responsibility for basic education began to shift from the home to state or church controlled school systems. Parents were apparently willing to give up some control over their children's education and for many years the general population seemed reasonably satisfied that the schools were providing training, not only in basic skills, but also in values. However, as schools became further removed from not only the home, but also from the community, with centralized decision-making and control and many levels of bureaucracy, some parents began to be concerned, and eventually resisted participating in the system (Kirschner, 1991). Home schooling began to be seen not only as an option for families in remote or foreign locations but also as an opportunity to take back control of the education of children. Within the last ten to twenty years, home schooling by parental choice has become more common, but remains, in many jurisdictions, controversial. Admittedly, home schooling is more controversial, more publicized and more researched in the United States than in Canada but a review of the literature from the two countries showed striking similarities.

The review of the literature for this study found that there are five types of values and beliefs of home schooling families that contributed to their decision to home school. These are: (a) political values, (b) economic values, (c) moral values, (d) cultural values, and (e) beliefs about teaching and learning. In addition, the

review examined what public school represents to home schooling parents and, what home schooling represents to home schooling parents.

Research on the political views of home schooling parents reveals that home schooling parents are affiliated with a wide variety of political parties and beliefs (Hill, 1989; Knowles, 1989; Mayberry, 1988). Despite their variance in political party affiliation, a common theme emerged in the views held by home schooling parents regarding the role of government in areas such as education. The political theme of the individual's right to power, control, and decision-making versus state power, control, and decision-making was revealed in the literature. Home schooling parents made it clear that they feel it is their right to home school (Hill, 1988; Mahan & Ware, 1987; Rakestraw & Rakestraw, 1990). This was further evident in parents' desire for control of the home schooling process.

Economic commonalities of home schooling families were also described in the literature. These commonalities were not expressed as market philosophies such as capitalism or socialism, but as lifestyle and occupational choices. Home schooling parents tend to work in occupations where individual decision making is necessary and lauded. They often live in areas where self-reliance is needed. Two-parent families with the mother not employed outside the home are typical of home schooling families. Typically, many home schooling families reside in small towns or in rural locations (Hill, 1988; Mayberry, 1988; Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990). Home schooling parents also tend to be more educated and more secure economically than the general population of the area or the national population (Mayberry, 1989).

Moral values of the family, such as character development, family cohesiveness, and religious commitments, appeared in the literature as motivations for home schooling (Audain, 1987; Mayberry, 1988; Pitman, 1987; Van Galen, 1987). There was not a common set of moral values among home schooling parents, but what was common was the belief that the morals of the nation, as represented in the school system, are not what home schooling parents believe or wish to pass on to their children (Mahan and Ware, 1987; Mayberry, 1988). Van Galen (1986) calls those parents who home school predominantly for moral reasons "ideologues". Ideologues, according to Van Galen (1986) are motivated by what they believe is or is not being taught in schools, in contrast to what the ideologues believe should be taught. Frequently, ideologues have strong religious views and some feel that it is their biblical duty to educate their own children.

References to maintenance of culture or language as motivations for home schooling are few. However, in maintaining family values, culture is also maintained, and keeping children at home to avoid the culture of the public school is another way of maintaining family culture (Pitman, 1987). Home schoolers may also share a commitment to maintaining their families' cultural values, albeit values that may differ from one family to the next.

Parents who are motivated to home school predominantly because they believe the methods used to teach their children in schools are inadequate or inappropriate make up the group Van Galen (1986) calls "pedagogues". The beliefs that parents have as to how children learn often are not articulated but can be inferred from the style of teaching used. There is great diversity of teaching styles and beliefs

about learning represented within the pedagogue classification. Some parents use a child-led, child-centered approach, letting the child's interests direct the learning (Nicol, 1993). Other parents operate a "school" within their home, keeping to strict timelines and time allotments, often following guided study programs such as the Calvert Home Instruction Course or American Christian Education programs (Charvoz, 1988). Regardless of their theoretical perspectives, these parents believe that they are better able than a school system to meet the intellectual needs of their children (Nicol, 1993; Van Galen, 1986). Home schooling parents, as with other educators, each have their own curricular orientation although they may not be able to link their own orientation with any of the well known curriculum theorists such as Ralph Tyler or Jerome Bruner.

Home schooling parents are very diverse in their thoughts about the public school, more so than they are about some other issues. Some parents have negative feelings about public schools (Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990). Some have had bad experiences or conflicts with the public school either as parents or as students themselves. Other parents are in opposition to what they see as "the immorality, the dress, the attitudes, the speech" (Divoky, 1983, p. 396), or, as Priesnitz and Priesnitz (1990) found, the "secular views," and "anti-Christian" (p.3) attitudes in the schools. Yet others oppose the "Christianity, capitalism and consumerism" of public schools (Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990, p.3). Some parents are indifferent or conditionally positive towards public schools, feeling that there is a need for public schools but that public schools are not appropriate for all children, and in particular, not their children, at least not at that point in time (Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990).

In contrast, there is a commonality of responses among home schooling parents with regard to what home schooling means. Home schooling is seen as necessary to “ensure quality education” (Hill, 1988, p.3) and to provide “an environment that allows youngsters to be self-directed” (Divoky, 1983, p. 397). Themes of family togetherness, family values, individualized learning, and excellence of education permeate the descriptions of what home schooling represents.

Studies in the home schooling literature address many aspects of the home schooling experience. Implicit in these studies is the understanding that at least one parent is available to provide the home education. Economically, this is not an option for many families, although some studies (e.g., Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990) refer to sacrifices made by some families to ensure that one parent is available. Studies indicate that home schooling is a rapidly growing phenomenon, with the number of known home schooled children in British Columbia increasing from 2,450 in 1990 to 4,917 in 1996 (British Columbia Ministry of Skills and Training Report Number 15550).

The growth in home schooling is fueled by factors such as dissatisfaction with the public school system, a fervent belief that it is the right of parents to educate their children, and, for most parents, the belief that they can better address the educational, cultural, social and moral needs of their children than can a school system. Furthermore, many parents are motivated to home school by the desire to preserve the autonomy of the family. Generally, they share an unwillingness to surrender control of their children’s education to the state. Whatever the reasons for

selecting home schooling, the message seems clear - home schooling parents do not feel that the needs of their children are being met within the public school system.

### Rationale

The motivations of home schooling parents must be high in order to give them the will to resist the "status quo" and even, in some instances, to enter into legal disputes with the government or school board. The American home schooling literature cites many such cases, most notably Meyers v. Nebraska (1923), Pierce v. Society of Sisters (1925), Farrington v Tokushige (1927) and Wisconsin v Yoder (1972). These four cases are believed by Richardson and Zirkel (1991) to form the constitutional backing against which American home schooling cases are examined. Richardson and Zirkel (1991) list over eighty home schooling legal disputes, in what is by no means an exhaustive list, and is a list which does not include any Canadian cases. Although many parents who enter into home schooling are aware of the potential for legal disputes, they remain convinced that the experiences of home schooling compensate for any inconvenience or legal battle that they may need to endure. An analysis of the literature revealed patterns of beliefs supporting the decision to home school. These beliefs encompass political, economic, moral, cultural, and pedagogical issues. These commitments further support the notion that home schooling parents are strongly motivated to control their children's education. However, despite the strength of their motivation, some parents who once made the decision to begin home schooling, choose to discontinue the practice.

In one instance observed by the researcher, a parent enrolled her home schooled upper intermediate child in the public school where the researcher was working. The child had been educated in a public school, then home schooled, and was now re-entering the public system. Yet a younger sibling of primary grade age, was not being registered. This seemed to indicate that the parent continued to believe in the practice of home schooling but was still choosing to return her older child to the public system. According to the documentation from the independent school where the older child had been registered and assessed, the child had been very successful in the academic areas that were listed in the documentation. Home schooling must have been effective. This raised the question as to why the parent was discontinuing home schooling for the older child.

To the researcher, who is also a parent, an elementary school teacher, and administrator, the unexamined assumption was that home schooling was a very difficult task. Teaching one's own children the times-tables, in the researcher's experience, is infinitely more frustrating and challenging than teaching an entire class the same tables. When the researcher's sister home schooled her son for one year and then discontinued the process, her decision made sense. She was a very busy person and the home schooling responsibility seemed onerous.

However, in an examination of the literature, with the exception of Home School Burnout (1988) by Raymond Moore and Dorothy Moore, there was little reference to any home schooling difficulties, other than legal issues. There was also little reference to reasons parents might choose to discontinue home schooling. Given the strength of parents' convictions regarding the value of home schooling, this

lack of discussion about difficulties and discontinuation of home schooling was striking.

### Research Problem

The purpose of this research was to consider the decision made by parents regarding the continuing or discontinuing of home schooling. Possible connections were sought between the parents' decisions and the motivations, expectations, and experiences of home schooling, their perceptions of the public school system, and their perceptions of home schooling. No effort was made to debate the merits of either decision. Rather the focus was on understanding the decision.

### Significance of the Research

Understanding the discontinuing of home schooling is important from an academic point of view as this is not addressed in the research literature. It is also important from political, financial, and pedagogical perspectives in the province of British Columbia. Here, as elsewhere, the public school system is under siege, pressured to do more, for more, with less.

Political implications. Politically, this study has implications of three kinds. By providing the basis for politicians, educators, and the electorate to understand the motivations, expectations, and experiences of home schooling parents as well as those of the discontinuing home schooling parents, and the perceptions both groups have of public schooling, support of the British Columbia home schooling legislation may be more forthcoming on both the local and provincial level.

The British Columbia legislation regarding home schooling is regarded by some home schoolers in North America as model legislation. Critics maintain that it



is legislation that requires little accountability from home schooling parents. A Guide to the School Act of British Columbia states that the legislation provides for the registration of all home school students with a school of the parents' choice, which includes independent, correspondence, and public schools. The British Columbia School Act, as published in the 1994 Manual of School Law specifies the educational program requirement for home schooled children as:

an organized set of learning activities that, in the opinion of the parent [not the school board or the Minister of Education] is designed to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy. (p. C14)

Politically, the School Act recognizes the jurisdiction of the parents as exceeding that of the local school district or the provincial department of education. If politicians understand the driving forces behind home schooling and the reasons for discontinuing home schooling, they may be better able to understand the underlying issues when parents relinquish control of their children's education. With understanding could come the dialogue some of these parents currently feel is lacking.

Financial implications. There may be financial implications of this research for both the school system and home schooling families. To understand the possible financial implications it is helpful to understand what the current trend is with respect to home schooling registration and, to understand how schools are funded.

Based on the Home School Registrations for the past six years (1990-1996 inclusive) compiled by the British Columbia Ministry of Skills and Training (Report Number 15550) the number of home schoolers in British Columbia has more than doubled from 2,450 in 1990 to 4,917 in 1996. In 1990, 61% of the registrations were with independent schools, but in 1996, that number rose to 86% of all registrations. However, this trend does not seem to hold true in the Prince George area as in 1990 there were 58 home schoolers registered with 55 (95%) of them registered with the independent system. In 1996 there were 43 of 77 (56%) registered with the independent system. In the Prince George area, registered home schoolers totaled 58 in 1990, climbing to 197 in 1993, and falling to 77 in 1996. The reason for the large increase and then large decrease is not evident. What is not known is how many Prince George home schoolers are registered elsewhere in the province and how many home schoolers are not registered at all. The total enrollment in the Prince George School District (District Number 57) in September 1996 was 19,801 but there is no way of establishing definitively how many school-age children in this district are receiving their education at home.

These statistics indicate that, in British Columbia, home schooling is on the rise and, for much of the province, independent schools are the place of choice for registration. This means that as funding for independent schools registering home schoolers is increased, the neighborhood public school's funding is decreased. This is because both public schools and independent schools (in categories 1, 2) which register and service home schoolers receive provincial funding on a per student basis. The funding for home schooled students is a percentage of what is granted for

students in full time attendance. The very fact that funding is granted to schools registering home schooled children brings with it the implication that these schools have some responsibility to the home schooling families.

There is the expectation that, in accordance with the School Act, home school children registered at a school which receives provincial funding for the students, will receive support, if requested, in the form of evaluation and assessment services to assist parents in determining the child's educational progress. Parents are also entitled to the loan of the same educational resource materials that would be loaned to students in attendance at the school. The level of awareness that home schooling parents have of these entitlements is not known, nor is it known how readily available schools make the services and materials. Other than anecdotal comments there does not seem to be a means of tracking whether or not schools comply with requests for support, nor how much support is requested.

This study will describe the level of assistance provided to the home schooling families of this study by the public school system and will also outline the types of assistance that these families desire. The financial implication may be that parents learn that they could access more materials through the school system, reducing the level of financial outlay by the family. An alternate financial implication of this research could be that school systems discover that by providing service and support to home schooling parents, parents may choose to later register their children in the public system. If more support were provided, parents who experience difficulty home schooling, may feel comfortable enrolling their children

in the public school system. The financial implication would be that school districts would gain revenue.

Pedagogical implications. Experience shows that home schoolers both leave and re-enter the public system. It would seem to be pedagogically beneficial for both the school system and the home schooling parents to have some form of dialogue to discuss the past experiences of the home schooler and the expectations of the public school as held by both the returning home schooler and his/her parents. It may also be useful for school personnel to have an understanding of the types of educational experiences a home schooled child is likely to have had and may require upon re-entry. This information would facilitate decisions regarding curriculum and teaching methodology. This study provides a window into the world of home schooling, a view that could serve to stimulate changes in the ways in which school systems accommodate formerly home schooled children and in how the school system supports home schooling families.

### Research Questions

This study addresses the issue of why some home schooling parents choose to discontinue home schooling by examining the following four questions:

1. What have the motivations, expectations and experiences been of parents who continue to home school?
2. What were the motivations, expectations and experiences of the parents who have discontinued home schooling?

3. What are the perceptions home schoolers and discontinued home schoolers have of home schooling?
4. What are the perceptions home schoolers and discontinued home schoolers have of the public school system?

### Chapter Summary

This chapter provides the purpose and rationale of this study. An examination of the literature, presented in the next chapter, reveals a widespread belief system underlying parents' decisions to home school their children. However, there is a notable lack of research describing the discontinuation of home schooling and it is this issue that this study will address. This study may prove to have political, financial and pedagogical implications not only for the public school system but also for parents who continue to home school and for those who have discontinued home schooling.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the literature that forms the background for this study is discussed. The study focuses on factors influencing the decision-making of home schooling parents. These factors are defined, for this study, as motivations, expectations, and experiences, as well as perceptions of home schooling and of public schooling. The literature revealed a broad range of values and beliefs that are associated with the motivation to home school, but much less relating to expectations of home schooling and experiences of home schooling. As well, previous research shows what public schooling represents to home schooling parents and, what home schooling represents to home schooling parents. The literature review serves as a background to the motivations, expectations, and experiences of parents who are home schooling or who have home schooled.

#### Motivations

The motivating factors as found in the literature have been organized in this study as follows: (a) political values, (b) economic values, (c) moral values, (d) cultural values, and, (e) beliefs about teaching and learning. The literature is then reviewed according to these factors.

#### The Political Values of Home Schooling Parents

The term political values is used to refer to the perceptions home schooling parents have of government and its role with respect to power, control, and individual

rights. Political values is not a reference to any particular political party or affiliation; the literature reveals that home schooling parents represent all political affiliations and viewpoints (e.g., Mayberry, 1988; Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990). Knowles (1989) cites qualitative survey studies that describe American home schooling parents as representing a cross-section of American society ranging from the “religiously conservative and right-wing oriented family to the liberal left” (p.397). Within this spectrum, Knowles (1989) found “the poor and the rich, the non-intellectual and the intellectual, the uneducated and the educated” (p.397). Mayberry (1989) described the political affiliations and viewpoints of the home schooling parents she studied in Oregon as more conservative than the general population. She also described this group as having less confidence in a variety of social institutions and desirous of less government interference and control. Other literature illustrates a change in the perception of what types of families home school. Common and MacMullen (1986), in a Canadian article, make reference to the changing population of home schooling parents. They describe early home schooling parents as extremists, -- either extreme religious fundamentalists or extreme secular radicals. According to Common and MacMullen (1986), the American home schooling movement is being taken over by more moderates while Canadian home schoolers continue to be found in the ranks of the more radical groups and the geographically isolated.

### Power and Control

A desire for personal power and control, defined as the right to make family or personal decisions based on personal beliefs rather than societal mores or

government standards, emerged not only in Mayberry's Oregon study (1989) but also in the work of several other researchers, both Canadian and American. Hill (1988), in a report to the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, wrote "Many home-schooling families will fight under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms any [home schooling] policy be it [sic] written or unwritten that infringes upon these issues: where children learn, what children learn and who will teach them" (p.14). Audain (1987), a Canadian supporter of home schooling, refers to home schooling as "an antidote to the heavy intrusion of the state into our lives" (p.21). This sentiment is echoed in the United States as Divoky (1983) describes home schooling on the political level as:

an act both revolutionary and reactionary: revolutionary because it flies in the face of the established social order, reactionary because it means turning one's back on the larger society and on the time honored assumption that parents and society share in the rearing of the young. (p.397)

Other American researchers, Mahan and Ware (1987) and Rakestraw and Rakestraw (1990) report that home schooling parents feel that the right to educate their children at home is a constitutional right. Parents in studies done by Van Galen (1988) and Mayberry (1989) view home schooling as not only a right but also as a moral duty and a Biblical command.

Power emerged as a political theme in Mayberry's (1989) study of home schooling parents in Oregon. Parents in this study believed in the importance of the development of close family relationships and expressed "resistance to child-socialization functions becoming increasingly a professional task outside the realms



of family influence" (p.215). Knowles' (1989) study of home schooling parents in Utah revealed that control, protection, self-actualization, and closeness were four central themes of the Utah home schooling families. To these families, home schooling represented the ultimate power of parents over the education system.

Political views of home schooling parents, whether they are American or Canadian, center around the themes of control, power, and rights. Control, as expressed by the Saskatchewan parents, (Hill, 1988) is control over what is taught, where it is taught and by whom it is taught, thereby eliminating government control in favor of family control of the education of children. Power is seen as the ability to eliminate forces from outside the family unit and to get rid of bureaucracy. Home schooling families, irrespective of their political affiliations and viewpoints, appear to be willing to make sacrifices in order to gain power and control over their children's education.

Rights are viewed as the liberty or freedom of parents to make choices for the education of their children without government interference or restrictions. Many of the court cases cited by Richardson and Zirkel (1991) involved home schooling parents citing the Fourteenth Amendment of the American Constitution as a defense for home schooling. According to the interpretation of this amendment, home schooling parents have the right to choose how their children are educated, subsuming the rights of the state (Richardson and Zirkel, 1991). Whether parents are American and invoking the Constitution or Canadian and referencing the Charter of Rights, home schooling parents seem to be committed to providing an education for their children, irrespective of government interference.

### The Economic Values of Home Schooling Parents

The term economic values refers to beliefs that home schooling parents hold with respect to financial lifestyle and financial status. Not surprisingly, given home schooling families' desire for control and independence, self-employment was well-represented among home schooling parents.

In Pitman's (1987) study of an American New Age community of home schooling families, she describes the lifestyle as "downwardly mobile ... a simple economic life ... searching for a home-based business to sustain them for the future" (p.80). Being downwardly mobile was not a characteristic of home schooling families in other studies but there were other common economic characteristics. Owning a home based business, working in a small organization, or having an occupation with a great deal of personal autonomy were common characteristics of fathers of home schooling families. Another common characteristic was the preponderance of mothers at home full time (Mayberry, 1988; Ray, 1994). Priesnitz and Priesnitz of the Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers (1990) and Hill (1988) reported that two-parent families with the mother at home full time is the usual situation in home schooling families. Priesnitz and Priesnitz (1990) and Mayberry (1988) found that home schooling families live predominantly in small towns or in rural locations as opposed to large urban centres. A second Mayberry study (1989) described home schooling parents as likely to be more educated and economically secure than the general or national population. While the economic status of home schooling families varied, their economic values showed several commonalities across families. Economically, as politically, home schooling families strive for

control and autonomy. They frequently live in rural areas or small centres where self-reliance is necessary and valued, and work in occupations where individual decision making is necessary and lauded. This seems to be true of home schooling parents whether they are farmers in Saskatchewan, New Agers living communally in the eastern United States or business people in small towns in Canada or the United States.

### The Moral Values of Home Schooling Parents

Moral values refers to the belief system held by home schooling families with respect to what is held to be right or wrong, and good or evil. Moral values are often, but not necessarily, linked to religious beliefs. For many home schooling families there is a direct and causal link between their moral values and their decision to carry out home schooling.

Van Galen (1986) uses the term ideologues to describe those who are motivated to home school because “they object to what they believe is being taught in the public and private schools, and seek to strengthen their relationships with their children” (p.4). According to Van Galen, the ideologues quite often have fundamentalist beliefs and very specific notions as to what they want their children to learn, frequently including religious doctrine. They stress that the family is the most important institution in society and they want their children to know this. Frequently, ideologues stress that it is God’s will and command that they home school and that God is personally involved with their home schooling. The education of children is seen as a moral, natural and legal obligation. As Priesnitz and Priesnitz (1990)

quoted one parent: "The Lord gave us our children and it is our responsibility to raise and train them"(p.3). Van Galen (1987), referring to home schooling for religious reasons, wrote: "The parents view this responsibility for teaching their own as a biblical mandate, the moral equivalent of other obligations outlined in scripture" (p.5). This sentiment is echoed in research by Mayberry and Knowles (1989) and Mahan and Ware (1987).

Religious beliefs are not the only moral beliefs to emerge. Moral values of the family, such as character development and family cohesiveness, are described by Audain (1987) as goals of home schooling families. The impetus for home schooling for some parents is the desire "to protect their children from perceived divergent societal values and a 'degenerate morality'" (Mayberry and Knowles, 1989, p.218). Van Galen (1987) describes the belief of some parents that the public school system cannot provide an environment that promotes positive social development of their children. Similarly, Mahan and Ware (1987) make reference to concerns about negative peer pressure and competitiveness. New Age parents feel that their personal values differ from those represented in the public schools and they want to avoid exposing their children to the cultural influences of public schools (Pitman, 1987). The New Age parents feel that their commitment to holism, creativity and self-reliance will not be upheld in the public school system.

Although home schooling parents may differ in their moral standards and values, they are unified in their conviction that the moral values taught or reinforced in the school systems are not what they want for their children. They are certain that "parents can and should be deeply involved in the education and development of their

own children” (Mahan and Ware, 1987, p.2). Home schooling parents believe that the family is “America’s smallest school” (Barton and Coley, 1993, p.4), and seek to have control both over which moral values are imparted to their children and how these values are taught.

### The Cultural Values of Home Schooling Parents

Cultural values are defined as the beliefs, traditions and characteristics revered by a particular group of people, a community, or a country. References to cultural values or maintenance of culture as topics in the home schooling literature are conspicuously absent. However, the inference can be made that in maintaining family values, one is also maintaining one’s culture.

In Pitman’s (1987) study of a New Age community, members of the community indicated that they elected to home school their children as they wanted to avoid the cultural influences of public schools. The same could be said of religious fundamentalist families who home school as a way of preventing messages contrary to their beliefs from reaching their children, and as a way of reinforcing the moral and cultural values of the home. Although maintenance of culture is not given as a theme or reason for home schooling, a link between home schooling and cultural values is established by Knowles, Marlow and Muchmore (1992) when they write that: “children’s learning from parents is a cross-cultural phenomenon and a natural occurrence within family contexts .... Education was viewed as inseparable from life” (p.201).

Home schooling parents value their beliefs, traditions, and customs to such a degree that they are anxious and willing to assume the control over the education of their children as a way of preserving these beliefs, traditions, and customs. Although not stated in the literature, the inference can be made that when parents home school to preserve beliefs, traditions, and customs, they are home schooling to maintain and control the cultural values of their family unit.

### Beliefs Held by Home Schooling Parents about Teaching and Learning

What home schooling parents believe about how children learn impacts both the reasons they have for home schooling and the teaching methods and materials they use. Van Galen (1986) uses the term pedagogues to refer to the parents who are motivated to home school by their beliefs about how children learn. She characterizes pedagogues highly independent, and as having a strong belief in assuming responsibility for one's own life and a high level of respect for the creativity and intellect of children. She says that pedagogues do not feel that schools are able to meet the needs of the individual either socially or intellectually. Many pedagogues view themselves as being "on the leading edge of education, boldly innovative and able to perform educational endeavors not possible in traditional schools" (Nicol, 1993, p.25).

To be sure, not all home schoolers articulate their beliefs about how children learn, and frequently those who articulate their beliefs do not cite known theories of learning or teaching but speak intuitively or from experience. When research is cited by home schooling parents, frequently it is the work of Holt (e.g., 1981) often

regarded as a leader of liberal school reform, or the work of Moore and Moore (e.g. 1979), proponents of a conservative religious fundamentalist perspective. Despite their differences in perspective, Holt and Moore and Moore are united in the belief that schools do not meet the needs of children. Holt argues that learning should not be an activity scheduled for certain hours in certain places, involving formal teaching. Rather, learning should be part of everyday life, with self-motivated students learning by doing.

Moore and Moore (1979) promote a later school start. They cite Piaget, Halliwell and Rohiver as sources supporting their argument for waiting for the integrated maturity level, that time when a child is emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially mature enough to benefit from being in a group situation in a structured learning environment. Moore and Moore believe that most children attain this level between the ages of nine and twelve. Moore and Moore feel that prior to this age, the child's social and emotional development is best developed through intensive contact with stable role models, preferably the parents. Moore and Moore advocate manual work, service activities and, at the appropriate age, guided learning.

By their decision to home school, home schooling parents are in tacit agreement with the claims of Moore and Moore (1979) and Holt's (1981) regarding the failure of schools to meet children's needs. Some home schooling parents question whether their children learn best taught by a professional in a school setting (Avner, 1989). Others feel that learning should be an integral part of the day and believe that the best learning takes place when the child is curious and wants to learn. Other parents, perhaps influenced by the work of Moore and Moore, feel that children

under the age of eight or nine are not yet sufficiently mature to be in large group settings. These parents believe that the best environment for their children is the home with the parents as models.

Common and MacMullen (1986) report that some parents feel that “if you want it [education] done right you must do it yourself” (p.5). There is not, however, agreement among home schoolers as to the best way to provide instruction. Some parents use a child-led, child-centered approach, with little formal structure, waiting for the teachable moment. Other parents use various correspondence or guided study programs such as provincial or state correspondence courses or programs such as the Calvert or American Christian Education program. Some parents find that they begin with one approach or the other but as time passes they become more eclectic, drawing from a variety of sources (e.g., Charvoz, 1988). The starting point for many parents is a structured program but as their confidence increases, they may turn to a more child-centered approach. Charvoz (1988) cited a home schooling parent of seven children stating “structured curriculum causes burnout for many parents” (p.86). Moore and Moore, in their book, Home School Burnout: What to do About it and How to Avoid It, also make reference to the possible negative effects of a tight and rigid program. Cautions aside, many parents report a high degree of satisfaction with structured programs while others report great success with an open, free and easy method of instruction.

The methods that parents use in instructing their children are indicative of what they believe is the best way children learn. The literature reveals great diversity in methodology and materials, yet, regardless of the differences in theoretical



perspective and the resultant variation in approaches, virtually all home schooling parents believe that they are providing an education for their children that is superior to that which any school can provide. This belief reinforces the conviction that it is both necessary and wise for parents to control the education of their children and for parents to have the power to influence their children.

### **Expectations and Experiences**

The perceptions home schooling parents have of public schooling and of home schooling shape their expectations of the home schooling they provide for their own children. It might be anticipated that parents would expect to encounter some difficulties while home schooling but there is little evidence in the literature regarding expectations and experiences of home schooling parents. Issues relating to social development, academic development, and potential for child neglect are only infrequently addressed by the parents who have been researched in the literature. This is in spite of the fact that it would seem reasonable to determine what parents view as potential and perceived problems with assuming the responsibility for schooling their children.

### **What Public School Represents to Home Schooling Parents**

Home schooling parents represented in the literature vary greatly in their opinions of public schooling. However, they agree that the public school is unable to provide what their children need. Audain (1987) uses phrases such as "politics, hidden agendas, lack of responsiveness, vague standards, .... concern over discipline,

abuse, incompetence" (p.18) to exemplify how some home schooling parents describe public schooling. Other parents decry "inadequate religious instruction, overcrowding and the breeding of mediocrity" (Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990, p.4).

One parent, in reference to a question dealing with Canadian public schools wrote:

[We] dislike 'status quo' indoctrination of public school - in particular Christianity, capitalism, and consumerism. Also the school yard is a terrible place for a child, very negative, repressive, and destructive. We have different views about family, self-sufficiency, etc. We would like our son to survive the mess the world is in. (Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990, p.3)

Fifty-five percent of Priesnitz and Priesnitz's (1990) respondents had a negative opinion of public schools, giving philosophical and religious reasons and citing factors such as overcrowding and mediocrity. Experiences that parents had had with public schools predictably colored their opinions of public schools. Gray-Grant (1993) quoted one parent; "We just didn't have a good experience with school and felt that we could do a better job ourselves" (p.6). Knowles (1989) found similar responses in his research. One couple described their experiences with public schooling as "a lifetime of devastating experiences with formal education, both as students and as adults" (p. 399). Divoky (1983) quotes a couple as rejecting public schooling due to "the immorality, the dress, the attitudes, the speech" (p.396).

Not all parents condemn public schools so strongly. Priesnitz and Priesnitz (1990) found that thirty-one percent of respondents had an indifferent or conditionally positive attitude to public schools, feeling that schools were necessary but not appropriate for all children. This sentiment appeared more in the Canadian

literature (Priesnitz and Priesnitz, 1990; Ray, 1994) than in the American studies, perhaps because there has not been the long history of confrontation and conflict with Canadian public school authorities that there has been in American jurisdictions. There has been relatively little Canadian research on home schooling, however.

Although some home schooling parents are tolerant of the existence of public schools, the majority seem to agree with Knowles' (1989) statement that "[historically] public schooling could be seen as an action against the family unit" (p. 395). Home schooling parents are adamant in their belief that the family unit is paramount in importance. Their belief is so strong that they are willing to both seize and exercise the power to control their children's education and in so doing, provide an education that they believe is superior to that of the public school system.

#### What Home Schooling Represents To Home Schooling Parents

The home schooling literature seems fairly unified on this topic. Although home schooling looks different from one family to the next and each family has its own reasons for home schooling, parents use themes of family togetherness, family values, individualized learning, quality control and excellence of education to describe what home schooling represents. Home schooling parents cited in Hill's (1988) report to the Saskatchewan School Trustees, made comments referring to home schooling as representing "rejection of school philosophies and practices, ... quality control of education, ... positive experiences, ... recreated enjoyment in learning, ... renewed commitment to God, the Earth and Mankind" (p.12 ).

What keeps many home schoolers going is their belief that home schooling is the only way to preserve the integrity of the family unit and values and to ensure that their children will be ready to face whatever the world has to offer. Van Galen (1987) quotes one speaker to a group of home schooling parents, who referred to home schooling as "... a means of resistance to the radical secularism and moral relativism – not to mention the mediocrity – which have captured educational philosophy ...” (p.13). Home schooling represents the opportunity to control both the learning environment and the content in addition to taking power back from the various levels of government, and putting this power squarely in the hands of the family.

### Conclusion

This chapter has been a discussion of the beliefs identified in the home schooling literature as factors associated with families who choose home schooling. The beliefs discussed were: political values, economic values, moral values, cultural values and, beliefs about teaching and learning held by home schooling parents. Also discussed was what public schooling represents to home schooling parents and, what home schooling represents to home schooling parents.

What is evident is the belief of home schooling parents that it is their right, duty, and obligation to educate their children and that this process is best done within the environment of the family. The family emerges as a strong unit, one which supersedes the state. Indeed, the power, control, and rights of the individual are seen by many home schoolers as taking precedence over those of the state. The typical home schooling family seems to be a two parent family, often with the wage earner

self-employed or in an occupation which values independence. Within home schooling families, there are two broad types: ideologues, those who home school due to what they believe is taught or should be taught in public schools, and the pedagogues, those who home school due to the way in which they believe children learn or should be taught. Regardless of whether the families fall into the ideologue or pedagogue category, they are united by their belief that the public school system is representative of what they do not want for their children and that home schooling provides the best opportunity to provide their children with a meaningful education.

What is absent from this chapter and from the literature is research examining the home schooling experience for those who found it to be less than satisfactory, or of those who have had discontinued home schooling. This study examines two groups of home schooling families, one group which is continuing to home school and one which has discontinued home schooling. The original motivations to initiate home schooling will be examined for both groups, as well as their expectations and experiences of home schooling and their perceptions of both public schooling and home schooling. In so doing, this study may provide insight into the decision to discontinue home schooling.

## CHAPTER THREE

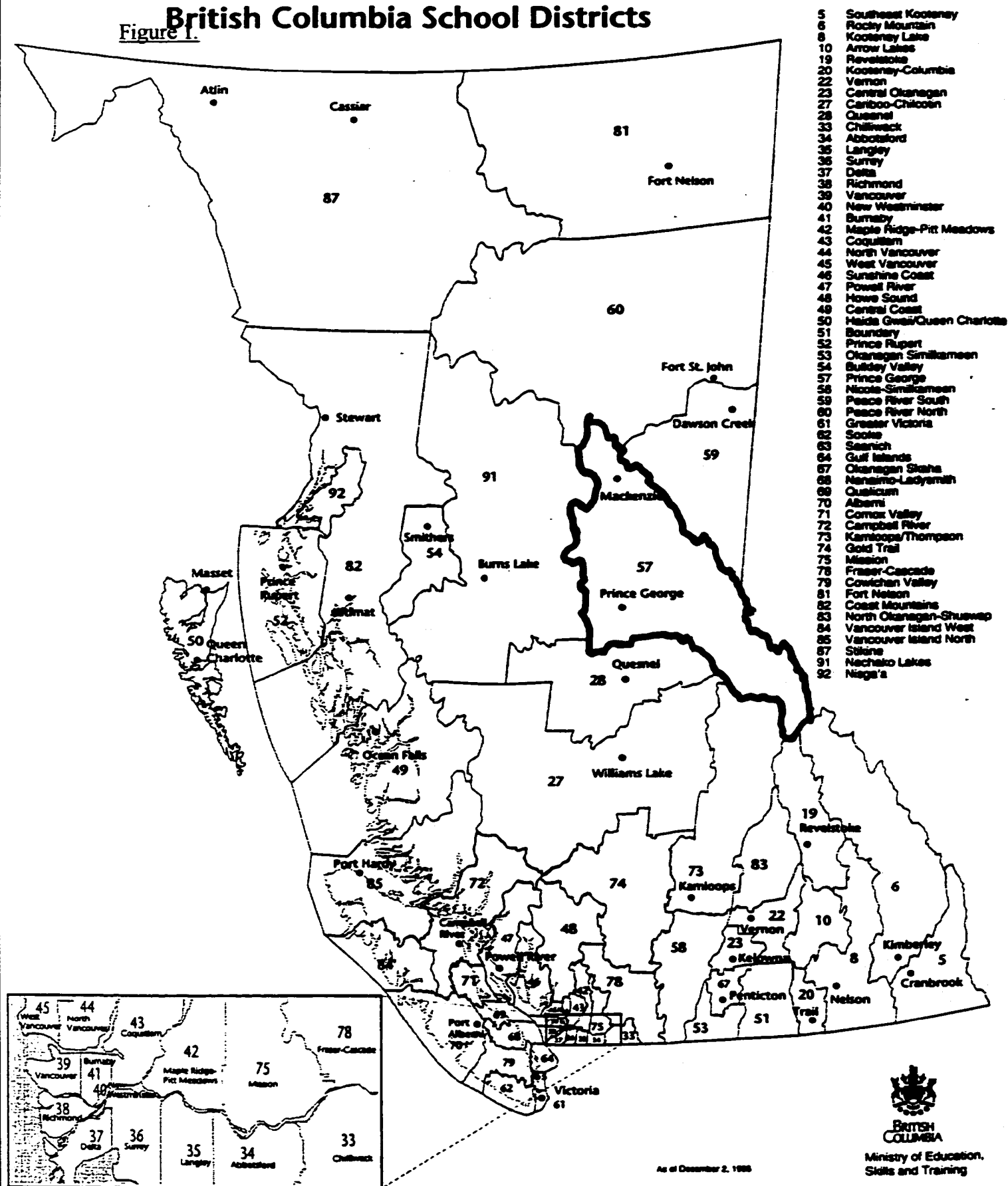
### STUDY DESIGN

The purpose of this study was to consider the decision made by parents whether to discontinue or continue home schooling by examining parents' motivations for, expectations about, and experiences of home schooling, as well as their perceptions of the public school system and of home schooling. This chapter begins with a description of the community in which the study took place. This is followed by a description of the participants and then the methodology.

#### Description of the Community

This study took place within the area defined by the boundaries of School District Number 57 of British Columbia. These boundaries coincide with those of the British Columbia Regional District of Fraser Fort George. Included within this area are the city of Prince George, the municipality of Mackenzie and smaller centres such as McBride, Valemount, and Hixon. The western boundary of the district extends west to Bednesti, the southern boundary stops short of Strathnaver, the northern boundary is just north of Mackenzie, and the eastern boundary extends to Tete Jeune Cache (see Figure 1). Much of this area is rugged terrain and is still largely unsettled. The public school population for the district is approximately 20,000 students in kindergarten through grade twelve. Although efforts were made to have participation from all parts of the district, the most heavily represented area was Prince George and surrounding area with several areas lacking representation.

# Figure 1. British Columbia School Districts



### School District Number 57

The seat of School District Number 57 is the city of Prince George (see Figure 1). Prince George is located in central British Columbia, approximately seven hundred and fifty kilometres from Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and Edmonton, Alberta. Located at the junction of the Fraser and Nechako Rivers, the city has its origins in the fur trade but its mid-twentieth century development and growth are attributed to the logging and pulp and paper industries. Many residents of the communities of Prince George and Mackenzie and, indeed the Fraser Fort George Regional District were lured to the area by the opportunities for employment, meant to stay for only a few years, but, happy with the lifestyle, elected to make this area their home. People in this area often pride themselves on their friendliness, their resourcefulness and their hardiness in the face of rugged terrain, long distances to major centres, and a somewhat intemperate climate.

Within the school district there is great diversity in the number and size of the public schools. There are fifty-three public elementary schools, ranging in size from ten students in a one class school to more than four hundred fifty students in a dual track French Immersion school. There are eleven secondary schools, three of which are junior high schools enrolling grades eight to ten. There are several alternate secondary programs offered within Prince George. The Central Interior Distance Education School is also located within Prince George. The bulk of the district's schools are located within Prince George city limits but there are schools in the smaller centres of Mackenzie, McBride, Valemont, and Hixon. Very small centres



such as Dunster, Upper Fraser, Bear Lake and McLeod Lake also have school district schools. The student population is ethnically, economically, culturally, and geographically diverse. The researcher has observed a sizable First Nations population as well as a fairly large Indo-Canadian population with representation from any other nationalities and cultures.

Economically the Fraser-Fort George District has a high per capita average income but unemployment and underemployment continue to be issues as does the great number of children who live in poverty. Specific schools deal, on a daily basis, with large numbers of students who are underclothed, undernourished and lacking basic care. The problem exists, to a lesser degree, in many of the other schools in the district.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1970s and early 1980s great population growth occurred and many schools were built. School District Number 57 was an innovative district and within the province was often regarded as a lighthouse district, that is, a leader in education. The district, backed by adequate provincial funding, was committed to doing its best to ensure that all students in its care, regardless of location, received the best possible education. Despite the district's commitment to quality education, the good economic times and the great distances to major centres were contributing factors to a high drop-out rate, especially among males, as they saw that they could make good money with a driver's license and a logging truck or with a job at one of the mills.

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<sup>1</sup> These conclusions are based upon the researcher's personal experiences as an educator in the district for over twenty years.

The College of New Caledonia, established in 1968, offered university transfer courses and trades programs. Despite the establishment of the college, the number of students who continued on to university was well below the provincial average. This was a concern not only in Prince George, but in smaller centres throughout the district. In the mid-eighties, a provincial recession had a serious impact on the resource-based industries of the Fraser Fort George region. Economic growth stalled and provincial funding for education began to be reduced. Programs such as swimming lessons, the district strings music program, most school enrichment classes and special district events such as Problem-Solving Challenge, Elementary Student Leadership Conference, and Writers' Day were eliminated or dramatically reduced. The support system for schools in the ten years since the mid-eighties has been greatly downsized. Program advisor positions have been eliminated, meaning that there are no centralized supports for programs such as language arts, science, languages or physical education. The disappearance of the support systems has come about during approximately the same time that new curricula and programs have been mandated for implementation in public schools. The bright light in education in the Fraser Fort George Regional District, and indeed across north central British Columbia, has been the recent establishment of the University of Northern British Columbia, an institution which is serving to attract people committed to education to the region. This is the educational environment of the community from which this study's participants have been drawn.

## Study Design

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop an understanding of the factors and reasoning behind the decision of home schooling parents to discontinue or continue home schooling. This was done by examining the motivations parents had to begin home schooling, the expectations parents had of home schooling, the experiences of home schooling, the perceptions of public schools, and the perceptions of home schooling and the decision to continue or discontinue home schooling. It was assumed there would be differences between the continuing and the discontinuing home schooling families. However, there was no notion of where such differences might lie, and the five factors listed above were chosen to provide a broad survey of the home schooling experience.

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this research. The sensitive nature of this topic and the relatively unexplored area of parents who home school and also those who discontinue home schooling called for a methodology that would enable the stories of the participants to be told, heard, and understood. Marshall and Rossman (1995) state that one of the strengths of qualitative research is its suitability for research that is "exploratory or descriptive, that assumes that value of context and setting, and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon" (p. 39).

With exploration and understanding as purposes, the use of both questionnaires and interviews was planned. With language as data it is essential to recognize not only the words of the participants but also, to be cognizant of the significance of body language or kinesics. and paralanguage (Poyatos, 1983), that is,

tone, silences, and utterances that are sounds but not words, such as “uh”. During interviews the researcher must use all of this information and paralinguistic to determine whether or not to probe, to extend or to change course. Paralinguistic is important in transcribing as it may indicate a participant’s comfort level with the topic, the amount of thought required for a response, or affirmation or negation of the interviewer’s comments i.e. “umm, uh, nnnn,” or use of a tone of voice that may serve to emphasize or negate the participant’s words.

Marshall and Rossman, (1994) describe the researcher in a qualitative study as the “instrument,”(p.59) that is, the collector of the information and the interpreter of the information. This role poses special challenges. Not the least of these challenges is the importance of interpersonal skills such as “building trust, maintaining good relations, respecting norms of reciprocity, and sensitively considering ethical issues” (Marshall and Rossman, 1994, p. 65). Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to the importance of “theoretical sensitivity”, that is, “the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t”(p. 42). They list literature, professional experience, and personal experience as sources of theoretical sensitivity. The way in which the interaction occurs with the data is, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), also a source of theoretical sensitivity, as the researcher’s level of insight and understanding of the topic being studied increases as the researcher works with the data. In this study, great effort was taken to ensure that the participants would feel respected and that their words were read or heard with an open mind and that their privacy would be maintained. The theoretical sensitivity of this researcher

was developed through reading, informal discussions with home schooling parents, and professional experience as an educator.

### Procedures

There were two parts to the study, each part requiring its own particular methodology. The first was a questionnaire, and the second, interviews with half the respondents to the questionnaires.

#### Locating the Participants

Locating the potential subject pool of home schooling and discontinued home schooling parents was a challenge as not all home schoolers wish to be identified or known. Fortunately, a member of a local home schooling support group was interested in furthering research related to home schooling. She agreed to speak to the group about the study after some group members expressed concern about possible difficulties that could occur if an outsider such as the researcher was to address them. She briefly described the study and handed out envelopes for interested group members to self-address. The envelopes were later collected by the researcher. The researcher inserted letters of informed consent (Appendix A), questionnaires (Appendix B), and pre-addressed, stamped return envelopes. Each envelope of information was then mailed. Names of additional potential participants were provided by colleagues and friends of the researcher who asked possible participants for permission for the researcher to make initial contact by telephone. In the telephone conversations, the study was briefly described and, if individuals remained interested, envelopes containing letters of informed consent, questionnaires,

and return envelopes were mailed out. During the telephone conversations and at the home school support meeting, it was made clear to the potential participants that if, upon receiving the envelopes, they determined that they were no longer interested, they could simply choose not to participate any further. Twenty-one packages were mailed out and thirteen were returned, a return rate of 62%. As the envelopes were returned, the envelopes and their contents were coded A-M in order of their date of return. Pseudonyms corresponding to the A-M coding were also assigned. The thirteen individuals who returned the questionnaires and letters of informed consent formed the data bank for this study (see Table 1).

Table 1

## Description of Study Participants

Participant Letters	Pseudonym	Two Parent Family at Time of Home Schooling	Number of Home Schooled Children	Discontinued Home Schooling
A	Anne	Y	4	✓
B	Bonnie	Y	2	
C	Corinne	Y	1	✓
D	Diane	Y	4	
E	Elaine	Y	2	
F	Fiona	Y	2	✓*
G	Gloria	Y	4	
H	Hannah	Y	3	
I	Irene	Y	4	
J	Jackie	Y	1	
K	Karen	Y	2	✓
L	Laura	Y	4	✓
M	Monica	Y	1	✓

\* Fiona continues to home school one of her children. The other returned to the public school system.

Study Participants

The thirteen participants in this study were self-selected from an identified population of twenty-one home schoolers and discontinued home schoolers. Possible participants were identified through a local home school support group, by colleagues

of the author, and through the author's personal experience. The participants ranged from individuals who had begun or discontinued home schooling within the six months previous to the study to individuals who had begun or discontinued home schooling over ten years ago. The range of experiences among the participants was considerable. Some had home schooled for more than five years, others for only a year. The majority of the home participants had home schooled more than one child at a time but some had experience only with one child. Many of the participants had home schooled only within the Fraser Fort George Regional District but some had also home schooled in another province and, in one case, in the United States. Although there were no questions in either the questionnaire or the interview pertaining to religion or educational background of the parent, information regarding religion and the educational background of the parents did emerge.

At least seven of the thirteen study participants self-reported religion as a significant factor in their lifestyle. Educational backgrounds of some of the participants emerged during the interviews. Of the six interview participants, two were trained teachers, two worked or had worked as teacher assistants, and one had worked as a nurse.

Due to the diversity of participant responses it is believed that the participants in this study are a reasonable representation of the experiences of the actual home schooling population. However, the characteristics of those who did not accept or return a questionnaire or who were not contacted in any way are not known.



### Questionnaires

The questionnaire (Appendix B) was designed and then piloted with one discontinued home schooler who lived outside of the Fraser Fort George Regional District. Pat (a pseudonym) was made known to the author by a mutual friend who was confident that Pat would be frank in her opinion of the questionnaire. Pat received the questionnaire and then, via a long distance telephone call, Pat worked through the questionnaire answering the questions orally. Pat made suggestions regarding both the questions and the design of the questionnaire. Her suggestions were given careful consideration and many of them were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed to fit onto two pages (8.5" x 14") to lessen the likelihood of respondents feeling overwhelmed by the length of the questionnaire. The initial questions were demographic and were designed to take very little time to answer. Subsequent questions were more open-ended, requiring lengthier answers and more thought. The questionnaire purposely did not ask about the reasons for discontinuing home schooler. This omission was deliberate. Given that some of the questionnaire respondents would then become interview participants, the researcher did not wish to be influenced in the selection of interview participants based on their reasons for discontinuing home schooling. The final question on the questionnaire then asked participants if they were willing to be considered for an interview. Twelve of the thirteen participants answered in the affirmative.

Purposive sampling calling for the selection of participants for specific reasons, was used to obtain what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as a maximum

variation sample. The six participants selected for the interviews were chosen to represent as much variety as possible in the two groups, continuing home schoolers and discontinued home schoolers. Variety was sought in terms of the number of children home schooled, the length of time the home schooling had occurred, the ages of the children when they were home schooled, whether or not there had been school system participation prior to home schooling, and the type of program used during the home schooling. Six questionnaire respondents were selected: A(Anne), B(Bonnie), I(Irene), K(Karen), L(Laura) and M(Monica), three of whom continued to home school and three who had discontinued home schooling. The six women represented a wide range of experiences. Some had home schooled only one child at a time, others had home schooled as many as four children at one time. Some home schooled only in the elementary years, others only during the secondary years. For some, a correspondence course was the source of the home schooling curriculum, for others the curriculum was self-designed.

Each woman was contacted by telephone and her continued willingness to be interviewed was ascertained. It was carefully explained that there was no obligation to consent. Each of the six women selected by the researcher agreed to be interviewed.

### Interviews

The second part of the study was the interviews. Interviewing had been chosen as a technique to enable the researcher to obtain more in-depth information about various aspects of the research questions. Kvale (1996) describes the aim of the qualitative interview as “obtaining uninterpreted descriptions” (p.32), that is, the

aim of the interview was to have the interviewees describe as accurately as possible their experiences and actions. In the interviews with those who had discontinued home schooling the decision was deliberately made to refrain from asking participants why they had discontinued home schooling. There were two reasons for this decision. First, there was concern that a direct question might be viewed as threatening, or serve to terminate the discussion. Further, the goal of the study had been to examine the discontinuing of home schooling in light of the motivations, expectations, and experiences of the study participants. Finally, following the theory of broad-based interview protocol, it was anticipated that the issue of discontinuing home schooling would emerge - which it did, in all three interviews. Kvale (1996), discussing the value of "uninterpreted descriptions" (p. 32) states that "the question of why the subjects experience and act as they do is primarily a task for the researcher to evaluate" (p.32). Therefore, the question of why home schooling was discontinued was not directly asked. It was also felt that by directly asking why home schooling had been discontinued there was the danger of foreclosing discussion and reflection. It was believed that the issue of discontinuing home schooling would naturally emerge during the course of the interviews.

Location. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the intention had been to conduct all interviews at the University of Northern British Columbia but the final decision regarding the interview location was left to the individual participants. Monica and Irene elected to use the university location; the others invited the author into their homes.

**Preparation and equipment.** In preparation for each interview the researcher used a checklist of the necessary equipment, an interview protocol sheet and interview guide,(Appendix D). The interview protocol sheet was a list of reminders to the interviewer of the technical aspects of the interview. The interview protocol sheet served to remind the interviewer to do things such as review the letter of consent with the participant, make sure the tape recorder was on, and to thank the participant at the conclusion of the interview.

**Process.** Upon meeting for the interview the participant was provided with the context for the interview. Each participant was thanked for her interest and participation to date. The purpose of the interview was briefly described and each individual was given a letter of information (Appendix E) to be retained by the individual. Each participant was also given a letter of informed consent ( Appendix F) to sign if she was still willing to be interviewed, as each of the selected six indicated she was. It was explained that the interview was being audiotaped but that confidentiality would be maintained. Videotaping had been considered but was rejected as being too intrusive for a subject of such a sensitive nature and, perhaps not needed for this type of interview. For the audiotaping a small, unobtrusive recorder and small stereo microphone were used with high quality standard size ninety minute audiotapes. Use of the tape recorder, as opposed to taking notes only, ensured that the researcher would be able to be attentive to the interviewee and that the pace and the tone of the interview could be maintained (Patton, 1990).

The interviews were semi-structured (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and “theme oriented” (Kvale, 1996). That is, the researcher and the participant were discussing a

topic or theme of mutual interest. An interview guide (Appendix D) was used to provide consistency in questioning from one interview to the next and to ensure that pertinent points were covered. The interview guide also was used as "a descriptive analytical framework for analysis" (Patton, p. 376). The questions on the guide were selected to pursue themes that had emerged from the questionnaires. Specific aims were to obtain a more in-depth look at the motivations, expectations and experiences of these six individuals, to learn how each of these individuals perceived the public school system, and to discover how each perceived home schooling. In each interview all of the questions listed in the guide were raised although not necessarily in the same order, or using the same wording. In many instances one response would lead naturally to further questions on the interviewer's part or to elaboration on the part of the participant. There were, of course, differences in the amount of depth to which different individuals responded to the questions. Many side-issues and some off-topic comments also emerged. The interviews were not restricted solely to the questions on the interview guide.

From the interviewer's perspective, it seemed that a rapport between each participant and the interviewer was established. Given the concerns that had been expressed by some home schoolers and discontinuing home schoolers regarding the study, sensitivity and high level of integrity on the researcher's part were essential. There had been concern expressed that, given the researcher's employment as an elementary school administrator with School District No. 57, the perception might be that she was representing the district. This was not the case and the issue was addressed in the initial letter to participants, however, this concern highlighted the

need for tact and sensitivity. The researcher took special care to ensure that participants were given adequate time for responding, and to give participants the opportunity to address any issues that they felt should have been raised but had not been addressed by the interviewer.

Interview climate. From the researcher's perspective, the climate of the interviews was very friendly and positive. The intention had been to make field notes, but as the interview unfolded, field notes were not taken as the tone of the interview was more like a conversation between friends and there was no desire to impair that tone. Three of the women served tea in their homes as the interviews took place, and, at each of the homes where interviews were conducted, the researcher met at least one other family member, and, in some cases, a pet. The interviews conducted at the university were also relaxed, occurring in a small research room with soft chairs and a small table and sunlight coming through the window to the rear.

At the conclusion of each interview (usually slightly more than an hour), each participant was asked if she had anything further to add or if there had been any questions that she had anticipated but that had not been asked. These questions, or topics, if any, were then addressed. The interviews were concluded by thanking the participants.

Later, each participant in the study was sent a card extending thanks for her participation. Participants were also advised that they would be informed once the study results were available to the public.

**Transcription.** After each interview the tape was copied and the batteries of the tape recorder were recharged. Each tape was transcribed into a word processing file. The transcriptions were verbatim. Non-standard English was included, for example “mmm-hmm,” which was understood as a sound of acknowledgment. Changes in tone and volume were also transcribed. Transcription conventions are described in Appendix G. Despite recognition of the importance of facial expressions and other types of body language serving as cues during the interview to guide the researcher’s participation in the conversation, these were not recorded. Field notes of body language were omitted in favor of maintaining an open and friendly atmosphere.

Part of this methodology has been the decision to omit provision of the preliminary data analysis to the participants who provided the data. Provision of the preliminary data to the participants is often done in qualitative research for the purpose of obtaining clarification, revision or extension of the data (Kvale, 1996). However, in submitting verbatim transcriptions of oral language to the participants, there is a risk that the participants may find that the transcriptions of their speech cause them to sound less than coherent or well-spoken. They may then feel that they no longer wish to be involved in the project. Given that there was already a climate of uncertainty and apprehension for some of the participants in the study, omission of the process of returning the data to the interviewees was consciously done. Any future researchers in this area would be well-advised to give serious consideration to the cycle of returning the data to the participants for feedback and confirmation. However, the triangulation of questionnaire responses and interview data enabled the researcher to be reasonably confident that the data was accurate.

In using excerpts from the transcripts, every effort has been made to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees and to ensure that the excerpts do not give an unfair representation of either the individual or the group. In addition, the tapes and transcripts have been securely stored, labelled only by the pseudonym letters.

### Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaires were entered into word processing files. Family data from the questionnaires were summarized. (See Table 2). The questionnaire data was used as source of information for the selection of interview participants and for the development of interview questions. The combined questionnaire and interview data was coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61), or analyzed. The coding involved a line-by-line analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.72) necessitating, at times a word by word approach, and at other times, sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase analysis.

The thematic analysis was done by beginning with broad categories. Strauss and Corbin, (1990) define categories as classifications of concepts, discovered when concepts are compared to each other and appear to relate to a similar phenomenon (p.61). The initial categories were the terms used in the research questions: (a) motivations, (b) expectations, (c) experiences, (d) perceptions of the public school system and (e) perceptions of home schooling. All data which seemed to pertain to each of these broad categories were organized under the category heading, a process that Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to as "categorizing" (p.65). The data were then re-organized into smaller, more specific, researcher-generated categories which were inductively labelled and defined. The data in each category were then re-examined to



Table 2

Home Schooling Information by Participant

Respondent	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	Total
Mother is H.S. parent	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	13
Previous H.S. experience	(yes) N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	11N 2Y
Male children home schooled	(no) 3	1	0	4	1	2	3	0	4	0	1	3	1	23M
Female children home schooled	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	3	0	1	1	1	0	11F
Yrs. of H.S. per child	4 4 2 1.5	3 3	1.5	1 2 3 5	3 1	3 1.5	1.5 2 1.5 1.5	2 4 3 1	1.5 1.5	1	0.5	7 7 8 8	3	
Entered public elementary school	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	5
Entered public secondary school	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	6
Entered private elementary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
Entered private secondary	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

determine whether or not they met the criteria of the definition, or in Strauss and Corbin's terms (1990) whether the data had the "attributes or characteristics pertaining to a category" (p.61). If they did not, either the data was moved or the definition was changed. It was necessary to ensure that all data in a specific category met the criteria of that category but at the same time was distinct from any other category. The resultant categories are shown in Figure 2 (map pocket) and each is linked to one of the five large categories. From the many sub-categories, themes and patterns became more apparent. These themes and patterns lead to the re-assembling of the data into the larger, more general categories of practical and theoretical, different from the initial ones, a process described by Miles and Huberman (1994) as pattern coding. The two new categories constructed in this study were Practical and Theoretical. The complete conceptual structure is displayed in Figure 2 (see Map Pocket) and examples of each category are provided in the results.

Trustworthiness of the Study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify four constructs against which a qualitative study can be measured to determine its trustworthiness. The four constructs are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Marshall and Rossman (1995) explain credibility as one of Lincoln and Guba's constructs "in which the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described" (p.143). This study has credibility in that the particular setting, subjects, and theoretical framework have been carefully identified. Transferability, or the ability to generalize from the study has been addressed through data triangulation. Marshall and Rossman (1995) define triangulation as "the act of

bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (p.144). Data triangulation also contributes to the credibility of a study. In this study the questionnaire results and the interview transcripts were used as a reliability check on each other. This was done by referring back to the questionnaires to determine if respondents’ interview statements were consistent with viewpoints or statements given in the questionnaires. There was a very high degree of similarity between the questionnaire results and the interview transcripts for the six individuals who were interviewed. In addition, the questionnaire responses of the non-interviewed individuals were closely aligned with both the interview responses. Dependability was secured through the use of the research journal and triangulation. Confirmability was addressed through the use of “debriefing” with the thesis supervisor, maintenance of a research journal, and keeping all data in an organized, secure, but retrievable location. The study design has been explained in detail and the instruments used are available to others who may wish to replicate the study.

### Limitations of the Study Design

The literature forming the background for this study serves to highlight the difficulty in working in a sensitive area. The small amount of literature available on this topic, especially Canadian literature, and the number and type of researchers who have written on the topic are also limitations. The limited number of researchers has meant that the findings of two or three researchers may assume unrealistic importance. The type of researcher refers to the individuals with close ties to particular organizations, such as the Home School Legal Defense Association, or the

Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers. The study of Canadian home schoolers done by Priestnitz and Priestnitz (1990), as part of a research project by The Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers and the Canadian study done by Ray (1994) of the National Home Education Research Institute are examples of research done under the auspices of a special interest group. Studies such as these highlight the importance of understanding the background of the researchers and of then interpreting their study results accordingly.

With respect to methodological limitations, there were several. One limitation of the methodology was that the sample may only be presumed to have been representative of the home schooling and discontinuing home schooling population. There is also uncertainty about the actual extent and nature of both the home schooling and discontinued home schooling population. Within the sample there was no definitive way of establishing the degree to which those who were willing or who were selected to be interviewed were representative of those who were not willing or who were not selected. There was no way of knowing whether or not questionnaire respondents answered the questionnaires independently. Use of the audiotape recorder with no field notes is another limitation in that there is no record of the body language or kinesics although the attention to tone of voice and paralinguistic structures is somewhat compensatory.

The omission of the question "Why did you discontinue home schooling?" may be viewed by some as a limitation of the study design. The omission of the question on the questionnaire was noted and commented on by Anne, a study participant. In an additional comment to the questionnaire she wrote: *But nowhere*

*do you ask the reasons why our children are no longer home schooled. From this questionnaire, you can know that my children entered public school at a certain time, but you can only surmise why. And I don't wish that to happen (QA).*

However, its omission was deliberate. The question did not appear on the questionnaire because the researcher did not wish to be influenced by this reasoning when selecting the discontinued candidates. There was also the belief that information pertaining to the decision to discontinue home schooling would emerge during the interviews, as indeed it did. Kvale (1996) describes the task of the researcher in qualitative research as “that of obtaining descriptions so they will have relevant and precise material from which to draw their interpretations” (p.33).

### Summary of the Chapter

The data for this study were collected from a small group of participants within a large geographic and political region. In this chapter the region, and especially the characteristics pertaining to the educational context, were described.

The community of home schooling and discontinuing home schoolers has been described as one in which there is still apprehension regarding those who are outside the home schooling community. The thirteen participants of this study may or may not be representative of the Prince George community of home schoolers and discontinued home schoolers. A major consideration in the study was to respect the privacy and anonymity of the respondents and of home schoolers generally. By demonstrating respect for privacy and anonymity, the groundwork may have been set for a broader population base for future researchers.

The methods used for collecting, organizing and analyzing data were described in this chapter. Also described is the thematic analysis approach used to bring into focus the motivations, expectations and experiences of the home schooling and the discontinued home schooling parent and to look for possible connections. The thematic analysis has also served as the vehicle to examine the perceptions of the public school system held by the two groups. Attempts to verify the data have been described as have the limitations of the methodology.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the results of the study in order to address the research questions. The first part of this chapter deals with the motivations, expectations, and experiences of home schooling as described by both continuing and discontinuing home schooling parents. Perceptions of home schooling are intertwined with these motivations, expectations, and experiences. Perceptions of the public school system as held by both continuing and discontinued home schoolers are discussed separately.

In the second part of the chapter the discontinuation of home schooling is discussed. Here, motivations, expectations, and experiences are not addressed separately due to the intrinsic intertwining of these factors. The conceptual organization of these results is shown in Figure 2 (See map pocket). Table 1 (p.40 ) provides a summary of the participants' pseudonyms and their status as continuing or discontinuing home schoolers.

#### **Initiation and Continuation of Home Schooling**

This section discusses the reasons why both continuing and discontinuing home schooler groups began and continued home schooling. Their experiences while home schooling are also discussed. As well, the perceptions of both groups regarding home schooling and public schooling are discussed.

### Motivations

Motivation, for the purposes of this study, was defined as incentives or reasons that caused parents to take the action of home schooling. From the questionnaire and interview data, five types of motivation were identified. Each type has been defined and then described from the perspective of families who are currently home schooling and of families who have discontinued home schooling.

### Academic Performance

Academic performance as a motivation for home schooling was defined as the real or perceived lack of scholastic achievement by the children or the belief that scholastic achievement would not be maximized within the school setting. Home schooling mothers referred to the quest for academic excellence (QB)<sup>2</sup> (belief that the children would receive *a better rounded education being home schooled*<sup>3</sup> the confidence that *we could give them [the children] a good education at home* (QG). One mother, Irene, who home schools three children who have learning disabilities, described her motivation as *Poor achievement by my students. They just never had any success; it was always negative. Priority is, number one: that they begin to experience that learning new things is good, that it's fun . Number two: that they are able to experience that if they want to know something they can figure it out, there's*

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<sup>2</sup> Q refers to questionnaire as source. B (or any other letters following Q) refer to the pseudonym initial.

<sup>3</sup> Italics are used for quotations from the raw data; both questionnaire and interview.



*a way, there's places they can go. And number three: that they begin to motivate themselves instead of being pushed (II 7)<sup>4</sup>*

Fewer parents who had discontinued home schooling discussed academic excellence as a motivation for originally deciding to home school, although Gloria and Karen began home schooling in response to academic difficulties their respective daughters were having at school and which the parents felt were not being adequately addressed. One of the reasons for the home schooling of Karen's son was to provide him with an academic challenge (IK 3).

### Behavior Concerns

Behavior concerns, defined as negative traits exhibited by children, was the second type of motivation. It was a factor for two parents, one home schooling parent, and one who had discontinued home schooling. Monica, who was home schooling at the time of the study, made her decision to home school when her son was two years old. Recognizing that he had ADHD (attention deficit, hyperactive disorder) and choosing not to put her son on Ritalin, (a brand name for a drug used in the management of ADHD), Monica, speaking of her decision, said: *I thought 'There's no way this kid can go to school, not for the first few years anyway' (IM 1).*

Anne, a parent who had discontinued home schooling, wrote of seeking *a way to bring calmness into my older children's lives. My children were becoming*

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<sup>4</sup> I refers to interview as source. I (or any other letter following I) refers to the pseudonym initial. The number refers to the transcript page number.

*pushy and bossy (daughter)<sup>5</sup> and too reactive and distracted in school (son hyperactive). I felt that I could provide a calmer and less distracting atmosphere for them (QA 1).*

### Lifestyle Values

Lifestyle values, defined as the belief that many aspects of a child's development can best be done within the family unit while serving to enhance family living patterns, was a form of motivation for nine of the thirteen study participants. Many of the continuing home schoolers had comments such as Jackie's who wrote *everything can be school (QJ)*. Hannah wrote: *Home Schooling is just an extension of every day life with ups and downs topped with a splash of academics. She also wrote of the importance of my children needing to be nurtured by their family (QH)* without outside influences and peer pressure. A desire to spend more time with her sons and to influence them herself was described by Fiona. Diana and her husband felt that the home schooling lifestyle *was what would best suit our family and beliefs (QD)*. For Irene, her prime motivation was *to be able to educate my children in a way that enhanced our family life, not jeopardized it (II 7)*.

Although religious values seemed to underlie several of the responses, Bonnie, Jackie, Hannah and Fiona were the only participants to make direct reference to religious beliefs. Bonnie wrote that she *felt like God was calling us to home school (QB)*. Jackie wrote that it was her responsibility *given by God to mold my*

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<sup>5</sup> ( ) found in original text of questionnaire response.

*children, to teach them our faith and God's ways, to shield them especially at the younger ages, from philosophies that we do not agree with and that are contrary to God's word (QJ).*

When the discontinued home schoolers discussed lifestyle values with respect to their original decision to home school, they made mention of some of the same things the continuing home schoolers had discussed. Anne spoke of *certain family things* (IA 17) that had been happening that could be better handled by home schooling. She said that she felt strongly that home schooling had been right for her family at that time. Anne also stated that if she were to consider home schooling at the present time, a primary reason to choose home schooling would be for the teaching of moral values which she feels should be taught at home, not in schools. Anne also spoke of her belief that life skills such as self-care, cooking, and cleaning could best be developed within the home, as could self-assurance and socialization skills. Laura wrote of choosing home schooling as a way to build family cohesiveness, family unity, and a way to maintain family time. She also described the development of independence in children within the comfort of the family as one of the major factors in her family's decision to home school.

#### School Environment Issues

School issues, the fourth aspect of motivation, was defined as academic, social, moral, financial concerns related to having children in a school environment. School environment issues were cited by many study participants as reasons for home schooling. The continuing home schoolers expressed their concern with school issues with clarity and often in detail. Bonnie wrote: *School was wasting all our*

time (QB). Hannah described the school environment as *not an environment I wanted my children to have to be involved with* (QH). Gloria wrote that: *We went to public school for 2 yrs. was unhappy because of the education and their drug and sexual teaching in kindergarten [and] grade 1* (QG). Jackie did not feel comfortable with the public school and the curriculum that was in place in the public schools. The cost of private schools was prohibitive for both Jackie and Gloria, who then chose to home school. Irene spoke of her sons' experiences in both the private and public schools. She said: *My children weren't thriving in the school system, in the school structure. Both emotionally and educationally. They were falling behind and the stress on our home trying to accommodate the way they learn, within the system just was terrible. My children didn't have any friends in school either* (II 2).

Monica commented: *I had decided to home school .... Having subbed in the public school system, I'd seen how kids like him fared in the classroom and on the playground* (IM 1).

Parents who had discontinued home schooling also described concerns about the school environment, primarily relating to social issues and lack of academic support within the school system. Karen could not obtain the one-on-one academic support she felt her daughter needed. Neither Anne nor Karen was happy about the social environment their children faced at school. Anne described the playground behavior as *brutal* (IA 1) and Karen's son was teased and bullied to the extent that the parents feared he was becoming an introvert. Fiona felt that the lack of bullying and peer pressure would be a definite advantage of home schooling (QF).

### Autonomy

The fifth aspect of original motivation for home schooling to be identified in the data was autonomy. Autonomy was defined as the ability to function independently without interference from any institution, group or individual. Five of the continuing home schoolers raised the issue of autonomy. Elaine cited autonomy as one of her reasons for home schooling. Diane chose home schooling in response to a desire for *freedom and flexibility*. (QD) Bonnie gave the example of being able to *say no to things like the CAPP [Career and Personal Planning] curriculum* (IB 3) while Jackie sought control of what her child learned. Of the discontinued home schoolers, only Anne addressed autonomy. She said:

*We chose to do this for our own private family reasons, you know, and we didn't feel like we were answerable to anybody although accountability, accountable, yes to give our children a good education but, but yeah, a little bit on the independent side there* (IA 20).

### Summary

Continuing home schooling parents home schooled because they believed that their children could receive a better education within the home than within the school system. They were also motivated by a desire to help their children with behavioral difficulties. For some continuing home schoolers, home schooling was a response to what they viewed as their God-given responsibilities for molding their children and for shielding them from philosophies contrary to those of the home. Continuing home schoolers have cited the school environment as a motivating factor, describing

a system in which their children were not able to succeed, either educationally or emotionally. The curriculum of the public school system was also a concern for some continuing home schooling parents, e.g. CAPP etc. Many continuing home schoolers expressed a desire for freedom and flexibility, and control of what their children learn, and gave this as a reason for home schooling.

Discontinued home schooling parents often home schooled in response to specific academic or behavioral difficulties or in order to provide an academic challenge. Discontinued home schoolers were motivated by a desire to assist in the development of positive behaviors and by a desire to develop independence in their children and to teach them life skills while providing for family time and unity. Discontinued home schoolers also cited concerns with bullying and peer pressure in addition to a perceived lack of academic support for students with learning difficulties as motivations for home schooling. Most discontinued parents did not specifically mention autonomy, but one parent did stress the value of not being answerable to anyone, yet still accountable for providing the children with a good education.

The differences between the motivations for the original decision to home school for continuing home schoolers and discontinued home schooling parents were slight. What did appear as a difference was the focus cited in the motivations. Continuing home schoolers were more likely to mention the importance of home schooling in maintaining the family's beliefs and values, and the desire for autonomy while parents who had discontinued home schooling were more likely to cite the needs of their children.

### Expectations

After examining the motivations of home schoolers and discontinued home schoolers, the expectations that these individuals held of home schooling were explored. For the purposes of this study, expectations were defined as the outcomes of home schooling that were anticipated by parents.

#### Confidence

The first type of expectation was the that of confidence, defined as the belief or expectation that parents held in their ability to teach their children. An expectation of home schooling was that the parents believed that they were fully capable of teaching their own children and expected that they would be successful in this endeavor. Four of the study participants, two continuing home schoolers and two discontinued home schoolers described their confidence. Hannah and Gloria, continuing home schoolers, had confidence that their children could receive *a good education at home* (QG). Anne and Laura, discontinued home schoolers, drew upon their teacher training which gave them the belief that they could teach their children at home.

#### Help Their Child(ren)

The second commonly held expectation was the belief that through home schooling, children could and would be helped. Parents in both groups elected to home school in the belief that they could help their child(ren). Helping the child(ren) was defined as the expectation that home schooling would assist the child(ren) in any

or all of a variety of ways; academically, socially, emotionally, and morally. Hannah, a continuing home schooler, expected that her children would be brought closer to each other and to her. Irene, also a continuing home schooler, expected home schooling to bring her family back to normal, once the stresses of public or private schooling were eliminated. Fiona, another continuing home schooler, expected that home schooling would keep her son *safe from bad influences at public school - drugs, alcohol, swearing, homosexuality, mischief, bullying, etc.* (QF). Monica expected home schooling to assist in social and academic development.

Of the discontinued home schoolers, two, Karen and Corrine, expected home schooling to assist academically and with self-esteem. They expected that their children's academic difficulties would be addressed through home schooling. This would result in improvements in both their academic achievement and their self-confidence. Anne believed that home schooling would *bring calmness into my older children's lives* (IA 1).

### Difficulties and Concerns

The third category of expectations was that of difficulties and concerns. Some parents who began home schooling anticipated or expected some possible difficulties or concerns. Difficulties or concerns were defined as negative outcomes or problems that parents feared might occur due to home schooling. Parents generally expressed these concerns in response to the question, "What surprised you about home schooling?" Several continuing home schoolers (Hannah, Fiona, and Jackie) commented that they had been concerned that home schooling would be



difficult and were surprised by *how easy it is to do* (QF). Bonnie initially had concerns about the level of difficulty of the math. Gloria, another continuing home schooler, was worried that her children would lack social activity. This concern was shared by Corinne, a discontinued home schooler. No other discontinued home schoolers expressed any concerns that they may have had prior to beginning to home school.

### Time Frame

The fourth element of expectations to emerge was that of a time frame, defined as the length of time that parents were willing to or planned to commit to home schooling on both a daily and long term basis. On a daily basis, Diane and Gloria, continuing home schoolers, were in accord with Laura, a discontinued home schooler, in their opinion that home schooling took much less time than they had anticipated.

In describing their long term plans, continuing home schoolers Bonnie and Irene made it clear that they are in *for the long haul* (IB15). *When I made the decision to home school I saw it as being straight through to post-secondary education* (II 11). Monica, speaking of her primary aged child, said: *If I had my way he'd just have adapted to home schooling like that and we would have gone on like that until high school* (IM 3).

Some discontinued home schoolers, such as Karen, also had long term plans. Anne differed though, by looking at home schooling on a year by year basis, taking

into account the views of the children and the parents. She said, *I knew at some point they would enter the school system* (IA 1).

### Summary

There were no expressions of expectations by either the continuing or discontinued home schooling parents that home schooling would be a negative experience for the children. The continuing home schoolers were confident that the children could receive a good education at home while the discontinued home schoolers expressed confidence that they could teach their children. The continuing home schoolers had greater expectations of home schooling in that they felt that not only would family unity be enhanced but also that social development would be aided and that the children would be protected from negative influences. Continuing home schooling parents had more concerns prior to beginning home schooling than did the discontinued home schooling parents. Members of both groups felt that home schooling took less daily time than they had initially expected and, similarly, in both groups there was representation from those who were or are prepared to home school for an indeterminate length of time.

Differences in the expectations of the two groups were slight. The difference that is perhaps the most interesting is that discontinued home schooling parents recalled having fewer concerns prior to home schooling than the continuing home schoolers recalled.

## Experiences

Experiences of home schooling were defined as the realities and day to day occurrences during the time home schooling was part of family life. In examining the descriptions of home schooling as it was for the participants in this study, eight sub-themes emerged. The sub-themes were: (a) description of past and present home schooling families, (b) support, (c) decision making, (d) materials, (e) models of home schooling, (f) challenges, (g) achievements, and (h) attitudes.

### Description of Past and Present Home Schooling Families

No experiences section would be complete without a description of the people who are or were home schooling. Understanding the people who home school or have home schooled enables one to recognize that, for the most part, these are ordinary people. Albeit, ordinary people who have made, for at least a time, a decision that is outside the realm of experience for most parents. Table 2 shows commonality but also diversity in the population of home schooling and discontinued home schooling parents who participated in this study.

Having an understanding of the participants and their family circumstances may assist in understanding why the participants made some of the decisions they did with respect to home schooling materials, and models, how they accepted challenges, and what they regarded as achievements.

### Support

Support was defined as assistance in any of a variety of forms including, but not limited to, monetary, moral, or learning resources. Such resources were extended

to the primary home schooling provider from a) within the family, i.e. spouse, nuclear family or extended family members or b) outside the family, i.e. friends, support groups, community organizations, schools or levels of government. The third category c) was that of lack of support, followed by d) desired support.

Within the family. In all cases in this study, the mother was the primary home schooling parent. The role of the spouse or partner in continuing home schooling families was basically that of providing emotional and moral support, and encouragement. Among the study's respondents there was the occasional mention of the spouse taking on responsibility for sports, outdoor activities, or reading to the children. Extended family support was mentioned only by Bonnie, who commented that once the grandparents became accustomed to the idea of home schooling, they took advantage of the flexibility to spend long periods of time with their grandchildren.

Discontinued home schoolers reported somewhat similar experiences. The role of the spouse was one of support, described by Laura and Anne as assistance with reading, field trips, and giving the home schooling parent a break. Karen's extended family fully supported the decision to home school and assisted in the evaluation of possible home schooling materials.

Outside the family. There was great diversity with regard to support from outside the family. Bonnie made special mention of the library and museum in Prince George and the considerable support offered by these two facilities. She also described the group activities that home schoolers organized for their children. Irene remarked on an offer of support from a school. One school offered her the use of

their photocopier and access to materials. They also offered her the opportunity to consult with the learning assistance teacher and expressed willingness to help her with anything else she needed.

Anne and Laura, both discontinued home schoolers, valued the support of home school groups while Karen had only minimal involvement with a home school group, feeling that the activities took too much time. Community resources such as the library and city sports organizations were seen as supports by some discontinued home schoolers. Some had also received offers of support, not always accepted, from schools. One private school offered a monetary rebate, opened their library to the family, and offered to include the children in physical education classes. Karen and Corinne used the British Columbia Correspondence Branch materials and found that the correspondence program offered ample support in terms of materials and teacher support. Teacher support from the correspondence school was found to be especially good at the elementary level. At the secondary level there was full support at Karen's child's local high school, with the option to enroll in classes that were of interest.

Lack of support. Support for home schooling was not always part of the home schooling experience, creating the sub-theme lack of support. Lack of support was characterized by the absence of assistance for the primary home schooling individual, from any of a variety of sources. Interestingly, only two study participants, one a continuing home schooler and the other a discontinued home schooler, commented on lack of spousal support. One continuing home schooler, Monica, described a lack of support from all sources. Laura, a discontinued home schooler, indicated that her extended family was simply not involved. Karen, a discontinued home schooler,

found that some of her friends were quite incredulous about her decision. Anne, another discontinued home schooler, found that some of her family and friends expressed feelings of guilt based, Anne felt, on the belief that home schooling would be something that a good parent would be prepared to undertake.

Several continuing home schoolers made reference to lack of support from the school system. Monica, a continuing home schooler, felt that the level or existence of school support was dependent on the school principal. Bonnie described the type of support offered by the school as entirely inadequate, limited to an offer of construction paper, in one instance, and testing using text-based tests, texts that were not the same as the ones Monica's children were using. Discontinued home schoolers had few comments about lack of support from schools.

Desired support. In discussing the type and level of support the study participants desired there was diversity in the responses. Participants sometimes referred to the support that they would have liked or that they feel should be available to them. Desired support was defined as the level of assistance, if any, wanted by the primary home school provider from any of a variety of individuals, organizations or institutions.

Several continuing home schoolers, such as Bonnie, were emphatic that funding would be the most useful type of support. She said, *In a word, one of the problems for us is that we pay everything.... But we pay taxes too and the government has a free ride on our shoulders. In other words, I'm saving the government \$6000 or something like that per child. I don't get income tax [deductions]. I can't claim the books, none of that.* (IB 12) Access to standardized

testing, accompanied by an interpretation of the results of the testing, was also discussed. Diane expressed the need for access to her local school library and for the use of school science equipment. Gloria felt that the opportunity for children to join activities such as band or sports at their local school would be beneficial. Jackie expressed her need for support as *just the freedom to feel you're not robbing the public schools just because you choose to home school your children.* (QJ)

For some participants, the desired support was to have no support at all. Several continuing home schoolers expressed views similar to those of Elaine. Elaine wrote: *One of the reasons we home school is the autonomy we have. We don't need anyone else's help!* (QE)

Discontinued home schoolers offered suggestions for support that were similar to those of the continuing home schoolers, namely a desire for support in terms of funding, testing, and materials. Karen felt that opportunities for children to take part in extracurricular activities, to take subjects not offered through home schooling, and to use school libraries would be useful supports. Anne requested *real support, not just lip service from the school authorities.* (QA)

### Decision Making

A major part of the home schooling experience was the decision making by the home schooling parents. Parents who take on the responsibility of providing an academic education for their child(ren) are continually making decisions, not the least of which are decisions regarding curriculum and materials. Curriculum, in this context, was used to refer to not only a series of courses, or program of studies, but

also included the selection of methodology, and the experiences that the learner has in view of meeting educational objectives.

Home schooling parents, such as Irene, use a variety of materials, *materials selected for interest, ease of presentation and the ability to fit it into our style* (QI). Bonnie described the use of an eclectic mix of materials selected in consultation with her children and after referring to home schooling reference books and scope and sequence types of guides. The scope and sequence guides were found to be useful as they provided a listing of skills and suggested order of instruction. Jackie and Fiona both use Christian materials but from different sources. Diane began home schooling using the British Columbia Correspondence Branch materials but *hated it* (QD). She felt that the program was not suited to families home schooling more than one child. Diane also expressed her feeling that in using the correspondence materials she was teaching curriculum, not children. Diane's present program comes from many different sources. She uses math manipulatives, readers containing stories with morals, workbooks that reinforce spelling, grammar and vocabulary, and a unit study program which *focuses on character traits* (QD). Hannah selects unit studies and curriculum that are geared to home schooling. Irene makes reference to Ministry of Education curriculum guides but is *working on patching up holes* (II 1) so she is using an assortment of materials selected to meet the needs of her children. Four of the continuing home schoolers made reference to Bob Jones University in the United States, as a source or possible source of materials. When a specific math program was named, it was the Saxon math program, from the United States.



The parents who have discontinued home schooling also described a variety of materials. Karen, Anne, and Corrine used British Columbia Correspondence Branch materials. All reported a high level of satisfaction with the materials and the available support, especially at the elementary level. Karen and her family had examined a Christian based correspondence program but decided *It was far too Americanized, ... we found it was far too much 'Obey your parents at all costs, no matter what,' and we didn't like that either... we found that it was below the grade level as well. So we thought that it would be far too easy and just not appropriate.* (IK 3)

Anne used British Columbia Correspondence Branch materials for two years when her family lived in the lower mainland of British Columbia. They then lived in the United States for a period of time and used American materials selected in consultation with a relative who was a teacher. Upon her family's return to British Columbia she was denied the use of the Correspondence Branch materials as her geographic location was not deemed sufficiently isolated so she *scrounged* (IA 5) for materials, used the library, and supplemented and adapted the materials she had from the United States. Laura drew upon her background as a teacher to assist her in material selection and, with the assistance of her husband, researched what materials were available. She used a specific spelling program and selected a math program from the afore-mentioned American source, Bob Jones University. Home schooling more than one child, she used a combination of thematic unit studies that all of the children could work on at their own level and individualized programs.

### Models of Home Schooling

Models of home schooling, defined as descriptions of the way home schooling looked, were provided by the interview participants. The descriptions were notable for their diversity. However, what was not diverse was the goal of the home schooling parent to set up a structure that was suited for her child(ren). Bonnie, a continuing home schooler, spoke of the *exceedingly relaxed* way in which home schooling occurs in her home (IB 5). Housecoats are often the uniform of the day which begins with a leisurely breakfast and free reading. Her teenagers then go to do keyboarding, math, science and formal language arts. Reading goes on all day and Bonnie commented of her children *They read like crazy* (IB 6). Bonnie's children are involved quite extensively in the planning and marking of assignments, as well as in the selection of materials. Bonnie sees her role as that of a guide or supporter rather than as a teacher. She commented that when she began home schooling she was *trying to reproduce school at home* (IB 7) with set times and allotments for subjects. She found that that wasn't very efficient, and that it was much easier to let the child spend as much time as needed or wanted on a subject and to then move on.

Irene, also a continuing home schooler, concurred with Bonnie, saying: *You're not trying to create school at home, you're trying to create something different and that was what I tend to focus [on] more.... Mine is not what you would call loosely structured because my children are so loosely structured themselves they have to have some kind of a ...focus. They have to have some kind of a structure within which they work* (II 12). Irene designates two to three hours for structured learning time and has two rooms set aside for home schooling purposes. She has

found that she is able to provide everything that is in the school system by using or adapting materials from her home.

Monica said that she knew what she wanted her son to learn and that his attention span was about twenty minutes. So she organized her materials based on the desired learning outcomes to create twenty minute blocks of teaching/learning time followed by ten minute breaks. She spent the mornings working this way, permitting her son to select the order in which topics would be covered.

Discontinued home schoolers also provided a look at what home schooling had been like in their respective homes. Laura said: *When we first started home schooling I tried to make it kind of a little classroom and that wasn't necessary .... I didn't need to recreate a classroom setting for this kind of a setting.... I had to learn that and pull back. I also found that when I first started home schooling, I probably, ... scheduled too much for the day, ... and I pulled back on that (IL 4).* For a period of time, Laura home schooled all four of her children. She used two planners, one for the older two children, the other for the younger children and would plan for a week at a time. Laura kept to the traditional September to June calendar but if the children had completed a topic prior to the end of June, they did not go further. The school week was altered somewhat with Tuesday frequently being a family day to work in with the father's free day. Laura found that the younger children would have directed study for two hours with additional time for play with manipulatives and other playthings. The older children would do three, sometimes four hours of work.

When Karen home schooled her daughter she kept to the regular school day, nine to three, with recess and lunch breaks. At the suggestion of the correspondence

branch they used a rotating daily timetable and had specific blocks of time for the various subjects. She found that her daughter needed her presence and one on one attention most of the time. Karen did some daily marking but at the end of the module work was sent in to be marked by correspondence personnel. When Karen's son was home schooled she was much less involved. He set up his own timetable, worked at his own rate and sought assistance through the correspondence branch "help line" and through teachers at his local high school.

Anne's daughter, one of the four children Anne home schooled, spoke of the definite change in the home environment during the time schooling occurred. She said: ... *but when we were learning, Mum was teacher and there was a very specific learning environment then .... I wasn't confused as to what was supposed to be going on at what certain time. I knew* (I Aa 14). Anne found that she was able to integrate family responsibilities such as chores, baking bread, grocery shopping, and piano practice into the daily routines of her children.

### Challenges of Home Schooling

The challenges, or concerns and/or difficulties of home schooling experienced by the families of this study were articulated by both continuing and discontinued home schoolers. Elaine, a continuing home schooler, wrote, "*It occurred to me that as long as I home school I will not have the daytime to myself!*" (QE) Irene spoke of the importance of organization and of the necessity for the home schooling parent to make home schooling a priority even at the expense of foregoing a second income or an out-of-the-home job. She also described feeling concern over knowing when and if a child is ready to enter back into the school system. Jackie, Bonnie, and Hannah

expressed financial concerns. Jackie also described some concern regarding curriculum choices and wondering whether or not she had made the most appropriate choices. Monica spoke of the "*huge time commitment*" (IM 4) and the great level of patience required for home schooling to be successful and the special amount of patience needed for working with a hyperactive child.

Discontinued home schoolers also described challenges. Anne spoke of the financial aspect, that the home schooling parent can't have a job and still home school. She also described the challenges of taking children out during school time and being questioned as to why the children weren't in school. Organization and dealing with the children's reactions to mum as teacher, being able to "switch hats" from the typical home expectations to home school expectation were other challenges that Anne described. Anne also described the special amounts of patience and understanding needed when working with a very active and emotional child. Providing opportunities for social interaction with other children was a challenge for Karen and Laura. Laura also described the workload as a challenge while Karen found the shortage of time to complete the correspondence course trying at times, as was the lack of immediate help for secondary level coursework.

Although the challenges or difficulties of home schooling were varied and numerous no one expressed regret over their decision to home school. The individuals in the study appeared to be very adept in meeting the challenges of home schooling.

### Achievements Attributed to Home Schooling

The achievements or accomplishments attributed to home schooling were organized into three types: (a) academic success, (b) attitudes to learning, and (c) lifestyle attitudes.

Academic success. Academic success was defined as scholarly achievement. Five continuing home schoolers described the academic success experienced by their child(ren). Fiona wrote: *I believe my son's education (the R's) is a much higher standard/quality than that of the public school system* (FQ). Several continuing home schoolers commented on the fact that their children were able to have their learning requirements met. Bonnie expressed the belief that if her children had to go into the school system they would be greatly advanced. Irene feels that her sons may take longer to reach an educational endpoint but that they will be better educated because they will have stuck with a concept until they understand it.

Discontinued home schoolers also cited the academic achievements gained through home schooling. Anne wrote of scholastic achievement upon the children's return to school, based for three of the children on the solid foundation provided through home schooling; Corinne wrote of her daughter's *ability to complete assignments, and achieve better grades* (QC). The skills of thinking, analyzing, making decisions, drawing conclusions are examples of the skills that Anne's daughter directly attributes to her home schooling experience. Karen commented that, during home schooling, her daughter was able to achieve at levels she had not attained at school. Corinne found that her daughter was able to complete assignments and achieve better grades while being home schooled and that her

academic performance upon returning to school was better than it had been prior to being home schooled.

Positive attitudes to learning. Positive attitudes to learning, that is the perceptions that children had of their ability to learn and their interest in learning, were touted by some study participants. Continuing home schooler Bonnie felt that because her children are home schooled, they feel free to learn, and to follow their interests without being given negative labels by peers. For Irene, having her children enjoy learning and express their belief that they can learn was an important result of home schooling.

Discontinued home schoolers also described the positive attitudes developed, they believe, as a result of home schooling. Laura wrote of children retaining their joy of learning. Anne described how, through home schooling, she was able to rekindle her daughter's love of reading.

Lifestyle attitudes. Lifestyle attitudes, defined as self-esteem, personal and social skills were described by both continuing and discontinued home schoolers as being linked to home schooling. Continuing home schoolers commented on *positive social skills*, (QG) *positive family interaction*, (QH) *quiet peaceful contentment within the family and the freedom for the children to spend time with extended family members ... self-esteem* (QB).

Discontinued home schoolers described *growth in self-confidence, self-satisfaction*, (IK 8) *self-esteem and happiness*, (QC) and *the freedom to maintain more family time* (IL 1). Also described was the feeling that children became more

manageable and that their mother was having significant input into the children's lives (QA).

There were many achievements or accomplishments attributed to home schooling by the home schooling parents. Several commented on the ability to provide an education that met the needs of their children. Others felt that the home education was superior to that which could be achieved in the school system. Lack of peer pressure and the development of positive attitudes to learning and the development of appropriate social skills and family ties were also touted as attributable to home schooling.

Discontinued home schooling parents commented on the scholastic achievements of their children and that their children learned to believe in themselves as learners. Growth in self-esteem and family happiness were also described by the discontinued home schoolers.

The achievements or accomplishments attributed to home schooling were numerous and virtually every respondent cited something positive that she attributed to home schooling. The positive achievements were often seen as something that would or did stand the child(ren) in good stead if or when the return to a school setting took place.

#### Summary of Home Schooling as Described by the Study Participants

For both groups, continuing and discontinued home schooling parents, the mother was the parent providing the schooling. Spousal support was primarily that of moral support, encouragement, and in one case was non-existent. Extended family



support and support of friends seemed to be limited for both groups, although the discontinued home schooling parents appeared to have had more support and a greater variety of supports. Among continuing and discontinued home schooling parents there was a desire for support in terms of funding, testing, materials, and access to school libraries and school equipment. However, there was a small faction of continuing home schooling parents who did not desire any support and valued their autonomy. Among the continuing home schoolers there was more use of Christian based and American programs of study than among the discontinued home schooling parents. Many of the respondents in both groups indicated that making the decision regarding materials and, by extension, what philosophy of teaching to follow, was a challenging process.

Both continuing and discontinued home schooling parents often switched programs and, from one year or one child to the next, made adaptations and changes. Not only materials and programs were changed but so too did the way in which the home schooling was done.

The three continuing home schooling parents who were interviewed were in agreement that they were not trying to re-create school at home but that they needed something that was suited to the individual needs of their particular children and that was congruent with the values of the family. Continuing home schoolers tended to tell of moving away from a rigid structure resembling school to a more relaxed, child-centred structure. Discontinued home schoolers also recognized the need to not have to recreate the school structure within the home but still seemed to have more decisions made by the home schooling parent with less input from the children. The

three discontinued home schooling parents interviewed each used quite tightly organized and structured systems and their home schools tended to bear more resemblance to a formal school.

Finances and organization were described as challenges by both home schooling and discontinued home schooling parents. Discontinued parents were more apt to also cite lack of social interaction for their children as a challenge.

Members of both groups cited many achievements that they attributed to home schooling. The academic success of their children, enjoyment of learning, enhanced self-esteem, and more family time were achievements attributed to home schooling by both continuing and discontinued home schoolers.

Within the experiences of home schooling there were not clear differences between the current home schooling families and the discontinued home schooling families. The differences tended to be between individual families, not between the continuing or discontinued home schooling groups. Home schooling looked different for each of the families in the study but each family's home schooling was characterized by a mother who tried to ensure that the environment was conducive to optimal learning by the child(ren) as well as an arrangement that would allow the mother to use her strengths to the best advantage.

### Perceptions of the Public School System

The perceptions the study participants held of the public school system were included as part of this study in an effort to determine what, if any, effect one's perception of the public school system would have on the decision to discontinue

home schooling. Perceptions are defined as the beliefs about the public school system held by the individuals in this study. These beliefs may have been based on their own experiences and/or the experiences of their children or what they had heard or read about public schooling. Study participants were not directly asked for their perceptions of the public school system. Inferences were made from comments written as responses to questionnaire questions and from the responses that interview participants gave to two key questions. The interview participants were asked what they felt were the greatest benefits and/or detriments of the public school system. In addition, they were asked what they would do to change the system. Perceptions of the public school system deal both with beliefs about the system as a whole and also with beliefs about very specific aspects of the system. With this topic there was also diversity in response within each respective group.

### Critique of the Public School System

Speaking in general terms about the public school system some continuing home schoolers referred to it as *very stressful* (QI). Jackie wrote that she and her husband *weren't comfortable with public school* (QJ). Diane described the public school system as a *peer dependent environment* (QD) while Gloria referred to public school as *most of it is a babysitting service* (QG). Others referred to their belief that a public school education is inferior to a home school education (QB, QF).

Some discontinued home schoolers indicated dissatisfaction with a particular school (QC, QF) citing, in Corrine's case, *lack of support and understanding for a learning disabled child and poor elementary teacher and principal*. Fiona wrote that

her child *was complaining about the kids at school*. Anne and Laura pointed out that the time commitment, at least at the high school level, was greater but less productive at school than when being home schooled (IA, IL).

Curriculum issues. There was much written or said relating to the curriculum of the public school system. Continuing home schooler Monica, expressed her belief that *a lot of their [the public school's] curriculum is out of touch with the real world* (IM 8) Bonnie, also a continuing home schooler, expressed her view that the CAPP [Career and Personal Planning] curriculum was inappropriate, dealing with matters that should be the domain of the home and that ungraded curriculum [such as was espoused by the Year 2000 Primary Program] was unworkable in the public school system, but possible in a home schooling environment (IB). Another continuing home schooler, Irene, expressed her disappointment with the lack of hands-on, experiential learning in the public school system. She also expressed concern over *Who is it and what gives them the wherewithal to say that that's the best way to teach...?* (II 14) Anne's daughter, who was both home schooled and public schooled, referred to the *different kind of learning* (IAa 12) that is expected in the school system. She felt that much of her public schooling made no demands of her to think critically, to analyze problems or to make decisions, all of which had been expected of her during her home schooling days. Discontinued home schoolers generally did not have criticisms of the curriculum of the public school system, understandable in view of the fact that several of them made use of provincial correspondence courses. Anne, though, did comment that she disagreed with some of the values teaching that was now part of the curriculum.

Resources of the public school system. Resource adequacy or lack thereof, was raised by both the home schoolers and the discontinued home schoolers. Irene, a continuing home schooler, expressed her belief that school resources are *not even probably even on par with what most children have in their home* (II 12) and that there is nothing that the school supplies that cannot be replicated at home.

Karen, a discontinued home schooler, described her discovery that the resources of the public library, even in a small centre, were superior to those of the high school library. She also pointed out a need for more textbooks and for more current technology, citing school computers that were greatly inferior to the systems that many students had at home.

Public schools and children with special requirements. Study participants gave examples of their perceptions of how the public school system deals with children with special learning requirements. The responses of Irene and Monica were representative of the sentiments expressed by some other home schoolers. Irene found that the assistance her children needed and that she expected from the public school was not forthcoming. Monica felt that the public school system had only limited resources to deal with students such as her child and, from what she had seen, she had no confidence in the school's ability to deal with her child, nor for her child to adapt to the system.

Two discontinued home schoolers, Corinne and Karen, described their frustration with the lack of support for a child needing extra assistance. This frustration was the catalyst for their home schooling experiences.

Other negative aspects of the public school system. Other negative aspects of the public school system were described by the study participants. A major concern of many continuing home schoolers was the pupil-teacher ratio. Peer pressure, bullying, and playground behavior were also mentioned. Irene expressed her conviction that the greatest detriment of the public school system is *the need to have everybody be the same to make the system work....* [The school system] *has a mandate to make everyone equal, you know, to assimilate everybody, everybody no matter what their needs has to be assimilated and what it means is that we have mediocrity for everybody... the children with special needs aren't having their needs met, the children with learning disabilities aren't having their needs met, and the child who learns in an average way, I feel, is not being challenged enough...* (II 9).

Other continuing home schoolers expressed concern with the way in which they felt attitudes and values, provinces of the home, were imposed on children by the school system.

Discontinued home schoolers cited as concerns the high number of children per class, the improper social skills frequently used, the teasing, the bullying and other cruel child-to-child behavior. Anne, a discontinued home schooler remarked that although the teaching of moral values had not been a primary motivation when she began home schooling, the way in which issues such as homophobia are addressed in the school system now would cause her to choose home schooling.

### Benefits of a Public School System

Given the criticism of public schooling by the study participants, it was interesting to look at what were seen as benefits of the public school system. The benefits given were fewer, and often, as in the case of one continuing home schooler, given only after considerable thought. Irene's comment was: *The greatest benefit of having a public school system is that every child gets to experience education, to experience learning new things, and, if you have a thirst for knowledge, you will find it [knowledge] in the public school system* (II 9). Another continuing home schooler, although critical of many aspects of the public school system, expressed her belief that the public school system is strong in its ability to teach that which can be tested, for example, English or Economics.

Discontinued home schoolers spoke of *wonderful teachers* (IK), confidence in the public school system (IA) and the social interaction opportunities, particularly group discussion skills, that exist for students in the public school system (IK). Other discontinued home schoolers referred to their belief that their children would re-enter the public school system (IA) and their basic satisfaction with the public school system. (IL) The universal availability of an education and the efforts of the system to provide equal opportunities for all students were seen as benefits by Laura, a discontinued home schooling parent.

### Desired Changes to the Public School System

Interview participants were asked what sort of changes they would make, if any, to the public school system. Changes, for the purpose of this discussion, were

viewed as any alteration to the philosophy, curriculum, timetable, physical or internal structures of schools within the public school system.

Among continuing home schoolers' responses there was both diversity and commonality. Irene suggested that change should begin with a united community view as to what education should be. According to her, the community presently is split between viewing the goal of education as providing students with the credentials to get a well-paying job and that of developing educated citizens with the desire to continue learning (I I). Irene's belief is that these two goals must be resolved so that there is a common focus and goal.

Predominant among the other suggestions for change were the issues of size and choice. Size of classes - the need for a reduced pupil-teacher ratio, size of schools, and a need for smaller, more personal schools were seen as ways to improve student learning, social skills and self-esteem.

Although good teachers, good schools, and good results were never explicitly defined, the study participants made comments pertaining to good teachers, good schools, and good results. A recurring theme with the continuing home schoolers was that of having choices. Many saw giving parents and students not only a choice of schools but also a choice of teachers and the choice of which courses to take at which times as a necessary change.

Choice of school and teacher were seen as part of a market-driven model whereby teachers and schools that produce good results would be rewarded with full enrollments and less successful schools and teachers would be identified by their lack of enrollment. Bonnie described the present model as government-driven, built on the



idea that *We the government know what is best for you, the masses ...* (IB 16).

Bonnie further commented that ... *it's almost like choices are being made without you having a choice in them, with public education. And I think that it's a dinosaur in some ways and if it [public education] doesn't change, it'll be bypassed* (IB 16).

Irene cautioned that *any school that is structured in, along the lines of the school system, the way it is now, is just going to be a repetition of the same thing* (II 10) and cautioned against establishing special schools for special interests as the quest for funding would then become a divisive element in the community. Monica also wanted a system with choices but with access for all students, without user fees. She went on to express her view that it should be a system in which boys and girls would be schooled separately.

A change that Irene felt would be necessary is the use of something other than age as a determinant for academic placement of a child. She expressed it as: *And moving them along, according to age, means that you hinder some and you push others past what they are able to do which becomes a very negative thing because if you can't succeed at what you're doing, self-esteem becomes just zero, you know and if you really want them to take it in, to be (pause) intellectual, to to think, to want to know things, to challenge, to say 'how does this work?' they have to feel like they have some power and they have some control over where they go* (II 10).

Continuing home schoolers felt that the keys to a successful public school system would be an environment designed for learning, staffed by people with a passion both for teaching and for their area of expertise. A major emphasis in a

changed system would be both extensive parent and community involvement in the education of children.

Discontinued home schoolers did not have as many suggestions for changes to the public school system. Laura and Anne both see the public school system as a reflection of family values. Anne felt that strong families will be what improves public education and, to this end, families must be supported, even to the extent that parenting classes are provided. Laura said: *I think public schools naturally deteriorate as parenting deteriorates; as the home life deteriorates, public schools are going to deteriorate* (IL 6) and she too calls for support of families. Karen spoke of the need to get parents involved in their children's education and the importance of making parents feel comfortable in their child(ren)'s school and knowledgeable about what is happening in the school and the school system. Up-to-date materials, computers in every classroom and a reduced pupil-teacher ratio by having two adults, a teacher and a teacher assistant, in every classroom were additional suggestions as to how the public school system could be changed.

### Summary

Continuing home schoolers tended to be quite critical of the public school system, referring to lack of materials, lack of standards, interference in domains of the home, inability of the school to provide for the special learning needs of students, issues of attitudes, self-esteem and social pressures placed upon children. They were, however, aware that the public school system did have a role and that, it did offer an opportunity for all children to learning.

Discontinued home school parents also had criticisms of the public school system. Inefficient use of the students' time, lack of use of critical thinking skills, and lack of decision making opportunities were highlighted. A need for current technology and resources, as well as the inability of the public school to meet the needs of students with special learning requirements were described by discontinued home school parents. These parents were also concerned with what they view as the inappropriate social skills frequently displayed in the school system. Some discontinued home school parents cited their basic satisfaction with the school system and the efforts of the system to meet the needs of all students.

Continuing and discontinued home schoolers were united in their belief that the public school system needs to be changed. The continuing home schoolers cited the need for larger, more dramatic changes; a change in philosophy, focus, and attitudes in addition to the more grounded changes in materials, school and class size. Discontinued home schoolers spoke of elements such as family values that are beyond the scope of the public school system, but they too spoke of changes such as materials, technology, and pupil-teacher ratios. Although the two groups differed in their suggestions, the suggestions could not be definitively separated according to group. There was diversity not only between the groups but also within the groups. The points raised were points that are worthy of consideration by all levels of the public school system.

### Discontinuation of Home Schooling

The researcher's belief, at the inception of this study, had been that there were likely differences in motivations, expectations, or experiences as held by parents who continued to home school and those who discontinued home schooling. Or, at the very least, it was thought that there would be differences between the two groups in their perceptions of public schools or of home schooling. As has been evidenced in this chapter, there are not great differences between the two groups in any of these areas. However, careful examination of comments regarding the discontinuation of home schooling provide some insight into that decision.

The study participants who had discontinued home schooling for one or all of their children described the return of the child(ren) to a school system. Corrine's daughter had been home schooled for a year and half in response to a perceived lack of support for her academic needs. Corrine wrote that her daughter did very well during the time that she was at home and that she subsequently entered a private high school. Her return to a school system was *smooth and very much looked forward to* (QC). Fiona wrote that her son who had been in the public school system before being home schooled, *liked it [the return to school] because he went to public school before being home schooled so he missed the interaction with the other kids* (QF). Fiona's son returned to public school even though she continued to home school a younger child.

Karen home schooled both her daughter and her son but at different times and for different reasons. Despite her willingness to home school them indefinitely, both children chose to return to school. With their daughter, Karen and her husband *left*

*the decision up to her and she missed the social ... and we felt 'okay' we'll give her a try, maybe she's ready and she did quite well in grade seven (IK 2).* With their son, Karen and her husband discussed his desire to return to school and soon realized that it was the high school socializing that he missed, so the enrolling and organization of classes was left up to him. He was quite willing to make all of the arrangements and so he returned to school after being home schooled for just over a year.

Anne home schooled four children, the older two having had school experience prior to being home schooled. Each of the four children entered the school system and each for his or her own reason. Anne's eldest child re-entered school in grade eight. Anne and her husband did not feel that home schooling would be as successful for the high school years, specifically because of the sciences, and their son had been asking to enter school for about a year so, at the beginning of grade eight, he returned to school. His younger sister, a very social individual, asked to return to school at the same time and Anne and her husband thought: *Yeah, she can, it's good, it's the right timing for her (IA 11)* So for a year Anne home schooled the two younger children. After completing kindergarten and grade one, the third child requested to go to school for grade two. *We honored that request. He's done super. (IA 2)* Anne described the youngest child as likely a *late bloomer (IA 3)* but found that she was making little academic progress with him so, after discussions with the local school principal and kindergarten teachers, she entered him in the public school system. She commented that *in May, just before he was, he would have been seven in September, he started to show readiness right at the end of*

*kindergarten* (IA 3). When asked if his entry into the public school system was successful, Anne responded, *I believe it was* (IA 3).

Laura also home schooled four children. Her older children had also had some public school experience before being home schooled. Each of Laura's children entered the public school system for their high school years, although Laura and her husband did investigate high school home schooling programs and options of part time attendance for specific subjects. However, she said that *for us it just worked out that it was the most natural thing for them to go into the public system when they hit high school* (IL 9) and each child did enter school upon reaching high school age. Another catalyst was the strong interest their eldest child had in the sciences and the feeling that sciences could best be done in a lab setting. Laura also described the belief that she and her husband shared that *we felt that our children were getting to the age where they were really developing into independent, resourceful young people and I wanted them to try their wings while they were still at home and explore whatever they were going to explore and that worked out to be a real positive thing as well* (IL 9). Both Anne and Laura made the point that the option to return to home schooling was still there but, although at times their children mentioned returning to home schooling, no one really became adamant about wanting to be home schooled again.

### Summary of Reasons for Discontinuing Home Schooling

Each of the parents who discontinued home schooling seemed to be motivated to do so by the needs and desires of their children. For Corrine, she felt that her daughter's academic needs had been addressed and that she was now ready to re-

enter a school system. Fiona's son returned to public school, in part, because he missed the social interaction. Karen's daughter returned to school as a result of her desire for socialization and because her parents felt that her academic difficulties had now been somewhat remediated. With their son, the decision was primarily social, as had been the reason to home school. Each of Anne's children entered school for a different reason and at a different time. Each of Laura's children entered school at approximately the same time and for primarily academic reasons although experience in a larger environment was also a factor.

Parents who had discontinued home schooling did not indicate that they had done so due to any disillusionment with the process or results of home schooling. Rather, they had discontinued home schooling because they were committed to meeting the needs of their children and at a particular time it seemed that those needs would best be met within the school system.

### Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter motivations, expectations, experiences, and perceptions of home schooling as held by continuing and discontinued home schooling parents were addressed, as well as their perceptions of public schooling. Then the decision of the discontinued home schooling parents to return their children to a school system was discussed.

Motivations for home schooling were grouped according to : (a) academic performance, (b) behavior concerns, (c) lifestyle values, (d) school issues, and (e) autonomy. The differences in motivation between the discontinued and continuing

home schooler groups was slight. The continuing home schoolers were more likely to cite the importance of home schooling in maintaining the family's beliefs and values and the desire for autonomy than were the discontinued home schoolers. The parents who had discontinued home schooling more often cited the desire to meet the needs of their children as a motivation. There was, however, greater diversity among the individuals of the two groups. Being a member of either the continuing or discontinued home school group was not a strong indicator of the motivation for home schooling.

The expectations for home schooling were grouped according to : (a) confidence, (b) helping the children, (c) possible difficulties and concerns, and (d) time frame. There was diversity and commonality among the individuals in this study with respect to their expectations. Representative of both groups discussed their confidence that they would be able to successfully home school. There was also representation from continuing and discontinued home schoolers that they had expected some difficulties and that there had been some thought given to the length of time they planned to home school. What was apparent from the responses was that there was both homogeneity and heterogeneity of response both within and across the two groups.

The experiences of home schooling were grouped into eight sub-themes: (a) description of past and present home schooling families, (b) support, (c) decision making, (d) materials, (e) models of home schooling, (f) challenges, (g) achievements, and (h) attitudes. Within each of these sub-themes there was, once



again, great heterogeneity, both within and across groups of continuing and discontinued home schooling parents.

In both groups, mothers were the primary home schooling parents. Members of both groups cited various levels of support and expressed a need for various levels of support. There was a desire in terms of funding, testing, materials, and access to school libraries and equipment. Although this type of support was cited by both continuing and discontinued home schoolers there were those who valued their autonomy and sought no support.

The range of programs used and the decisions regarding materials and teaching methodology was great, not only within groups but also between groups. Parents in both groups described changing their approach, changing their materials, and changing the way in which they organized their home schooling. The continuing home schoolers who were interviewed described a movement away from a rigid approach to a very child-centered approach, while the three discontinued home schooling parents had used more tightly organized and structured systems.

The challenges of home schooling were primarily finances and organization and were cited by members of both groups. Other challenges that were described dealt with social interaction and were more prevalent among the discontinued home schooling parents although not limited to them.

There was homogeneity across the two groups when describing the achievements of home schooling and the attitude to home schooling. There was agreement that home schooling was a very worthwhile endeavor improving the

academic performance of the children, developing a joy in learning, enhancing self-esteem and providing for more family time.

The perceptions of the public school system were grouped into sub-themes: (a) critique of public school system, (b) benefits of public schooling, (c) desired changes to the public school system. Members of both the continuing and discontinued home schooling groups had criticisms of the public school system.

Understandably, the continuing home schoolers were more critical, citing things such as lack of materials, lack of standards, interference in the domains of the home, inability to provide for special learning needs, and issues of attitudes, self-esteem, and social pressures. Discontinued home schooling parents gave criticisms such as inefficient use of students' time, lack of opportunities for critical thinking, and inadequate technology. Although there was diversity between the groups and among the individuals in their criticism of public schools there was unity in the belief that public schools have a role to play.

The benefits attributed to public schooling were varied, according to the individual respondent. Continuing home schoolers found fewer benefits but did feel that a public system was necessary. Some discontinued home schoolers described their basic satisfaction with the public school system.

There was cohesiveness between the groups as all interview participants felt that there should be changes made to the public school system. There was heterogeneity between groups and among individuals with regard to the exact nature of needed changes.

The analysis of the data for this study has shown that home schooling parents are not a homogeneous group. They have in common their decision to home school but their motivations, expectations, and experiences, and perceptions of public schooling differ from each other, as well as from those who have discontinued home schooling. Furthermore, discontinued home schooling parents cannot be viewed as a homogeneous group. They collectively shared the decisions to home school and to discontinue home schooling but their motivations, expectations, experiences, and perceptions of public schooling varied with the individual, as well as from the individuals who continue to home school. Discontinued home schooling parents appeared to be committed to making decisions centered on meeting the needs of their child(ren) at any given time.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to first discuss the findings described in Chapter Four. Then, the limitations of the research, the implications of the research, and suggestions for future research are considered.

All educational processes represent a curricular position. The curricular position may be explicitly developed or articulated, or, more probably, be implicit.

#### Understanding A Curricular Position

A curriculum framework is a way of looking at all the component parts of curriculum and how they interrelate. One use of such a framework is to see how educational practices are connected to political, economic, and moral belief systems, among others. The inclusion of a generic curriculum framework such as Lindsay's (Appendix H) is useful for its role in helping to make sense of the categories which emerged from the data. Frameworks such as Lindsay's describe all elements found in curriculum and from this type of framework the political, moral, cultural, economic, and learning theory elements can be taken, as was the case in this study where those elements were used in an examination of the home schooling literature.

Typically, public school systems are organized according to a Tylerian curriculum framework. Lindsay's curriculum framework (Appendix H) is comprised of two primary parts: the philosophy and the program. According to Lindsay (1998), the philosophy may also be thought of as a worldview, ideology, or curriculum

position. Examples of a philosophy or worldview include: logical positivism, existentialism, conservatism, liberalism, post-conservatism, and post-liberalism. The rationale, mandate, policy, or mission statement is a more concrete expression of the philosophy. A rationale has two sections: values and beliefs, and theory. Both values and beliefs, and theory, to Lindsay, include economic, political, cultural/social, spiritual/humanistic, psychological, epistemological, linguistic and moral strands. The rationale is the values and beliefs and theoretical positions that underlie programmatic decisions. For example, an individual who holds the theory that learning should be child-centered and child-driven would be unlikely to select a rigid, closely scheduled program of study. However, many people, including educators, are unable to clearly articulate their philosophy or worldview. Also not uncommon is a lack of congruence between expressed philosophy and observed programmatic decisions.

The second part of the curriculum framework is the practical or the programmatic section. In the programmatic section are the elements that are most commonly thought of as comprising education: the aims or objectives, the scope and sequence, curriculum guides, teaching strategies, assessment and evaluation tools and techniques, resources, and long and short range plans.

The analysis in Chapter Four described continuing and discontinued home schooling parents' perceptions of home schooling along 17 different dimensions. Examining these 17 dimensions suggests how they may be further conceptualized. The 17 dimensions are shown in the small red and blue boxes in Figure 2 are (a) academic performance, (b) lifestyle values, (c) behavior concerns, (d) school issues,

(e) autonomy, (f) confidence, (g) difficulties and concerns, (h) help their children, (i) time frame, (j) support, (k) models of home schooling, (l) challenges of home schooling, (m) decision making, (n) achievements attributed to home schooling, (o) critique of public schooling, (p) benefits of public schooling, (q) desired changes.

Subsets of these categories are linked to the category by broken lines (i.e. Support is the primary category with Desired Support, Lack of Support, Within Family, and Outside Family as subsets of the larger category). These dimensions can be seen as either theoretical or practical in orientation and are boxed in red if the dimension is theoretical or in blue if the dimension is practical. Two additions to this designation are the subsets Curriculum Issues and Desired Changes. Both are subsets of the category Critique of Public Schooling which is linked to Practical. However, Curriculum Issues and Desired Changes are theoretical aspects of the Curriculum Framework and are therefore linked to Theoretical whereas the other subsets of Critique of Public Schooling are practical and through their links to Critique of Public Schooling are linked to Practical.

#### Understanding the Curricular Position of the Home Schooling Families

The participants in this study generally did not discuss the use of a curricular framework, yet the data collected from this study, once organized into the above 17 categories, could then be grouped according to the two broad aspects of curriculum: the theoretical or philosophical, and the practical or programmatic. This grouping is shown by the lines leading from the boxes to theoretical or practical (Figure 2).

### Philosophy

The values and beliefs of the parents represent the philosophical component of the home schooling curriculum. The elements within the philosophical position of the home schoolers' curriculum were: (a) lifestyle values, (b) autonomy, (c) decision making, (d) achievements attributed to home schooling, and (e) desired changes to public schools. (See Figure 2 - in map pocket.) In analyzing the data contained in each of these dimensions it became apparent that parental responsibility for their children's education was a belief shared by both groups, but within and across groups there was diversity in how this belief was composed. For example, within the group of current home schooling parents, some parents, such as Bonnie, and Fiona, did not cite a desire for autonomy as a reason for home schooling. Other home schooling parents, such as Elaine, were very definite in their belief that one reason home schoolers home school is due to the desire for autonomy. Within the discontinued home schooling group diversity was also evident. An example of such diversity is in the area of desired changes to be made to the public school system. Karen described desired changes in terms of funding, materials and staffing. Anne's desired changes involved supporting families through counseling and self-help groups because she believes that the success of the public school system is inextricably linked to the success of the family. Diversity is even more apparent when looking at the programmatic dimensions.

### Program

In any curriculum the program is the concrete expression of the philosophy. The categories of data that combined to form the program component of the home

schooling curriculum are: (a) academic performance, (b) behavior concerns, (c) school issues, (d) confidence, (e) help their children, (f) difficulties and concerns, (g) time frame, (h) support, (i) models of home schooling, (j) challenges of home schooling, (k) critique of public schooling, and (l) benefits of public schooling.

Philosophically, there is homogeneity between groups and among individuals with respect to home schooling. Both continuing and discontinued home schoolers educated their children in a way that they felt was in harmony with their beliefs about their children, and their beliefs about their children's learning styles.. For example, continuing home schoolers such as Bonnie and Irene described an eclectic, child-centered approach while Elaine and Fiona each selected directed programs, similar to correspondence programs. Discontinued home schoolers were equally diverse. Anne and Laura basically developed their own programs while Corinne and Karen used government correspondence courses.

The number of children being home schooled, their ages, the materials and programs used, and the experiences of the parents, all contributed to the great diversity within each group as to what model of home schooling was described. Bonnie, with her older children, described a very relaxed environment. Irene, with four younger children, spoke of the need to impose structure because her children lacked internal structure. Within the discontinued home schooling group, Anne described being able to incorporate household and self-care routines into the day. Karen, for one of her home schooled children, centered her own household chores into a time and space that enabled her to be accessible, but not obviously supervising her child. Examples such as the preceding illustrate the point that the values and



beliefs of discontinued home schoolers, as translated into programmatic decisions, were not distinguishable from the programmatic decisions of continuing home schoolers, apart from the decision to discontinue home schooling.

In summary, it may be stated that home schooling and discontinued home schooling families share a common philosophical position, the belief that the needs of children can often best be met within the home. However, the specific ways in which this belief is enacted may be, and frequently are, very different among the individuals within the two groups. The families in this study showed homogeneity in their central belief that it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that the educational needs of their children are met. For each of the families in this study, this belief led them to provide their children's education at home. The reasons behind their belief in home schooling were and are diverse as is the programmatic implementation of this belief. Each family made independent programmatic decisions, in some cases, different programmatic decisions for different children within the same family. In turn, it was this basic belief in the importance of meeting children's needs that ultimately led some of the parents in this study to make the decision to discontinue home schooling.

#### Homogeneity and Heterogeneity of Home Schooling Families

The literature, as reviewed in Chapter Two seemed to indicate that home schooling families were, as a group, quite homogeneous. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, it is possible that the small amount of research as well as research that has been done by individuals such as Priesnitz and Priestnitz (1990) and Ray (1994)

who are or were closely connected to home schooling may have contributed to the appearance of homogeneity amongst home schooling families. The appearance of homogeneity led to the expectation which formed the basis for this study. The expectation was that families who discontinued home schooling might differ in some particular way from those who had not discontinued home schooling. It seemed reasonable that if home schooling families were a relatively homogeneous group, families who had chosen to home school and then to discontinue home schooling might differ in some particular way from those who had not chosen to discontinue home schooling. The study took a broad perspective examining motivations, expectations, and experiences of both groups in order to pursue this issue. However, at least in this study, such a difference did not appear. Instead, considerable heterogeneity across and within groups appeared. To pursue this issue further, a return to the literature was made with a view to examining both families in the literature and those in this study.

As with the home schoolers in Knowles' (1989) study of American home schooling parents, the participants in this study represented many sectors of the general population. Within this study, the bulk of the participants were what Common and MacMullen (1986) would have described as moderates. They did not describe themselves as activists, actively protesting or demanding change within the public school system. Instead, they protested by removing their children or not enrolling them in the public system and some returned their children to the system.

Hill (1988) wrote of the strong feelings home schooling parents in her Saskatchewan study had regarding their right to home school. Individuals in the

current study generally did not express such vehement feelings. However some study participants do belong to the Home School Legal Defense Association, an international organization dedicated to maintaining the rights of home schoolers.

With respect to power, many of the parents in this study resembled those in Knowles' (1989) study of Utah home schooling parents in which self-actualization, protection, control, and family closeness were the themes. These themes were also found in the comments of parents of the current study.

Referring to economic values or status, the literature (e.g. Mayberry, 1988; Ray, 1994) indicates that home schooling families are usually two parent families, able or willing to afford to have one parent, usually the mother, at home to do the home schooling. In the current study, in all thirteen cases, the mother did the home schooling, even to the extent of taking a leave of absence from a job to home school. As with the literature, the fathers in the current study whose occupations were known, frequently worked in occupations where individual decision making was necessary and valued, such as ministerial positions, agriculture, and logging.

Van Galen (1996) found that home schooling for religious and moral reasons was one common motivation for home schooling. In the current study, religious and moral reasons were also given as reasons for home schooling. Family cohesiveness was a factor in both this study and the literature. However, the emphasis on moral development and protection of the young from intemperate influences was not as great in this study as in the literature. Parents in the current study are more like those in Mahan and Ware's study (1987) believing that parents should be greatly involved

in their children's education. This is true of parents who continue to home school and of those who have discontinued home schooling.

The participants in this study did not refer to cultural values or influences as reasons to begin, continue, or discontinue home schooling. They, like some of the parents in the literature, see or saw home schooling as a way to attain and maintain close family ties and, in so doing, maintain their family culture.

The participants in this study held varying beliefs about teaching and learning as exemplified by their choices of materials, their teaching styles, and their observations about public schooling. A shift in approach after some experience was not uncommon among the study participants. This was similar to what was described in the literature.

When looking at the literature in order to determine what public schools represent to home schooling parents great diversity of opinion is found. Some parents are extremely negative, others see the system as more of a necessary evil, and still others regard the system as satisfactory but not for their children. The participants in the study also had diverse views of the public school system. Not surprisingly, those who discontinued home schooled had more moderate views regarding the public school system, although they also had many suggestions as to how the system could and should be improved.

Home schooling was, understandably, highly regarded by the families described in the literature. Parents in Marchant and MacDonald's study (1994) cited the superiority of home schooling in the areas of academics, and social interactions. Among this study's participants there was also high regard for home schooling.

Many of the parents in this study who had discontinued home schooling also had very high regard for home schooling and had discontinued, not due to disenchantment with home schooling but, due to factors pertinent to individual children.

This re-examination of the literature has resulted in two observations. On a theme by theme analysis, this study's participants closely resemble those in the literature suggesting that, on the broad issues, the participants in this study are also relatively homogeneous. However, what this study revealed which is not apparent in the studies reported in the literature is the heterogeneity or diversity apparent in particular aspects of the home schooling experience.

A second observation is that the literature gives the impression the home schooling parents believe that home schooling is the only way to achieve their goals. However, this might be an artifact resulting from the lack of inclusion of discontinued home schoolers in home schooling studies. What this study has shown is that home schooling parents can and do return their children to public schools.

Individual views and a feeling of doing what was right for their family or a specific child at a particular point in time rather than a blind belief in home schooling guide decision-making. This feeling was more obvious with the parents who had discontinued home schooling as each of these parents had already had to make the decision, in some cases, several times, to discontinue home schooling. In fact, the programmatic decision to discontinue home schooling was a continued expression of their belief in the necessity of meeting the needs of their children.

### **Limitations, Implications, and Future Research**

The purpose of this section is to describe the limitations, and possible implications of this study. Also outlined are possible directions for future research in the area of home schooling and discontinued home schooling.

#### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study is the small number of study participants. It seems clear that there are more than twenty-one families in the Fraser-Fort George Regional District / School District Number 57 who are either current home schooling families or who have home schooled in the past but locating that subject pool and obtaining sufficient interest from those contacted was not easy. With research of this nature it is not possible to know how representative the participants are of the actual larger group of those who currently home school or who have home schooled.

A second limitation is that this study focused only on the parents, specifically the mothers, of the home schooling or discontinued home schooling families. The perceptions of the fathers or of the children may well be very different.

Omitting the step of taking the data back to the participants is also a limitation. Further information is often forthcoming in such an interchange. However, taking the words of participants back to them may be an anxiety producing situation. Given that there was already some concern about the reasons for this study, it seemed prudent to avoid causing any further anxiety. This omission was somewhat compensated for by the use of both questionnaires and interviews.

The degree of confidence that the study participants felt in the researcher's ability to look at the issue on an academic level rather than in connection with her

position within the school district may have been a limitation. The perception that there may have been other than academic interest on the part of the researcher influenced, to some degree, the design of the study. It was a contributing factor to the omission on the questionnaire of the question, "Why did you discontinue home schooling?" It was also a contributing factor to omitting to take the data back to the respondents. Also, according to one home schooling parent, it was a contributing factor to the decision of some home schooling parents to decline to participate in the study. It is, however, important to note that recent developments in School District Number 57, with respect to support for home schooling families, have occurred independently of this study. At no time was the researcher involved in determining district direction, nor was the data from this study used in any way other than for this research paper.

### Implications of the Research

This study has several implications. Given the apparent homogeneity of home schooling parents, when viewed through the literature, and their clearly marked act of schooling their children outside the public system, it might be easy to conclude that home schooling parents believe only in home schooling. This study has shown otherwise.

It is impossible to state that all parents currently home schooling their children will continue to do so indefinitely. They, individually, may find that circumstances necessitate making the decision to discontinue home schooling. Circumstances could include financial factors, social factors or as Laura and her

husband felt, the feeling that the secondary curriculum can best be taught within a school setting and that they wish to give their children the opportunity to test their wings within a less protected environment while the home is still there to provide immediate support and encouragement.

Continuing home schoolers may also find, as Anne did with one of her children, that their effectiveness as educators is lessening. They may then wish to have their children experience another teaching style in another environment.

If home schooling was done to assist with learning difficulties, parents may feel that these problems have been adequately addressed and that the child is ready to return to school. This was the case with Corinne and her daughter.

Continuing home schoolers may also be faced with the same situation as Karen, and Anne who were willing to continue home schooling, but whose children decided that they wished to return to school. In respecting the wishes of their children, they became discontinued home schoolers.

Just as continuing and discontinued home schoolers are united in their motivation to begin home schooling to provide the best for their children, so too might they find themselves united in discontinuing home schooling, to provide the best for their children, at a particular time.

The pedagogical implication then, for school systems is to ensure that home schooling families who wish support receive it and that the opportunity to work co-operatively with home schooling families is provided by the public school system. Guidelines outlining procedures to provide support for families making the transition from a school system to home schooling as well as procedures for support for the



transition from home schooling to a school system would be well advised. The guidelines should be established involving both school district personnel and home schooling parents.

A further pedagogical implication of this study is that by understanding how the public school system is perceived by those who have left the system it may be possible to make changes or improvements to the system that would benefit all students. Making more choices available to parents and children, truly listening to parents and valuing their input, and providing classroom environments that are more focused on individual needs would be a starting point. By gaining an appreciation for the beliefs these parents have regarding families, learning styles, resources, and teaching strategies, and considering critiques such as those offered by the parents in this study, the education system can be enriched for all students. Understanding and valuing home schooling may also lead to more partnerships between home schoolers and school districts. Home schooling may also serve as an informal laboratory for studying how children learn, and what types of learning environments are best suited for children of various ages and abilities. The impact of distance or correspondence education on the learning of children could and should also be studied.

An implication with political overtones, relates again to the perception of homogeneity among home schooling families. Legislation, depending on the state or the province, often seems to assume that all home schoolers are either very competent in making home schooling decisions (as in the case of British Columbia's legislation which requires no accountability, beyond registration, of the home schooling parents) or uniformly incompetent (as in the case of some very restrictive American state

legislation). As this study illustrates, there is great diversity among home schooling families and it is important that policy makers consider this diversity if meeting the needs of all families is their mandate.

The third implication involves an awareness as to how information is extrapolated from the educational literature. As has been demonstrated in this study, there may be homogeneity in general terms regarding home schooling families, but an intensive look at home schooling families reveals great heterogeneity in motivations, expectations, experiences, beliefs, and perceptions. This points to the difficulties in attempting to make broad summary statements on educational issues and also illustrates the importance of understanding the sources of the studies. Education is a complex human process and educational researchers need to remain keenly aware of this fact.

Overall, this research implies that diversity and heterogeneity exist in the home schooling and discontinued home schooling populations and, as such, efforts to generalize from this population will not likely serve to meet the needs of this population of parents and students. Therefore, legislation, support, and programs will need to be diversified and have the capacity for individualization.

### Future Research

There are many as yet unexplored avenues of research in the field of home schooling. One of the more valuable types of research would be a longitudinal study of children who are home schooled. Following these children, and their parents, over a period of twelve to fifteen years would yield valuable information regarding

longevity of home schooling, how children perceive themselves, and the academic, social, and emotional development of the children. This type of study would also give an indication as to the percentage of families who discontinue home schooling and further reasons for choosing to discontinue home schooling.

Another type would be research including the perceptions of fathers of home schooled children and the home schooled children themselves. For example, Anne's daughter, who was present during part of the interview, had comments about her experiences as a home schooled child that were extremely interesting and did not always present the same picture that her mother recalled. Should the proposed School District Number 57 program of support for home schooling families be implemented, research into how or whether the needs of home schooling families are being met by these programs, should be initiated.

### Summary

Home schooling is a growing trend and a trend that has come to be regarded as more of a mainstream option. There are advertisements in newspapers for materials geared to home schooling families. Department stores are stocking more and more home education items and home school fairs are held in which publishers promote their products. Home schooling, it would appear, is here to stay and as such needs to be addressed with respect and with a view to learning more about the alternate forms of education that can occur within the home. Home schooling also needs to be addressed not only as a separate entity from the public school system, but also as a way of combining the best of two worlds, with options such as partial attendance, teacher support, or video or computer link-ups between home and school.

This study, in its attempt to determine why some people discontinue home schooling, casts doubt on the stereotype of the home schooling parent. In an attempt to find a definitive factor or factors for discontinuing home schooling the discovery was made that the decision to discontinue home schooling is as individual as, not only the parents but, the children. Parents, in this study, were not uniformly driven by particular political or moral agendas to begin home schooling, and they discontinued home schooling, for the same reason they had begun it - to meet the needs of their children in the best possible way at a given time.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent**

#### **Home Schooling Research Project**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank-you for accepting a questionnaire. I greatly appreciate the time and effort you will take to complete it. You will notice that there is a consent form attached to the questionnaire. Please complete the consent form and return it and the questionnaire in the stamped envelope provided for your convenience.

The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself to you and to provide information regarding this study . I am a graduate student completing a master's thesis in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George. I am on a self-funded leave from my position as an elementary school administrator with School District 57 (Prince George). My selection of home schooling as the topic for my thesis is no reflection of any policy, or position of the school district. My interest in home schooling stems from experiences family members have had with home schooling as well as the recent publicity surrounding home schooling.

As I began to research home schooling I found that much of the research was American with Canadian home schooling families underrepresented. Most of the research dealt with profiles of home schooling families and with successes of home schooling. The literature typically does not discuss the day to day challenges that home schooling presents for families. The purpose of this study is to examine the motivations, expectations and experiences of home schooling families - both families

who are continuing to home school and those who have discontinued home schooling some or all of their children. It is hoped that this research will lead to a better understanding of why some families continue and others discontinue home schooling.

If you choose to participate in this study you are asked to fill out the questionnaire and the tear-off consent form at the end of this letter and return both to the university in the enclosed envelope. If you wish, your involvement may end there. However, you will notice that the final section of the questionnaire asks if you are willing to be interviewed as a follow-up to the questionnaire. If you are willing to be considered as a possible interviewee you are asked to provide your name and telephone number. Persons who are selected as interview subjects will receive a second letter of consent.

The questionnaires will be read only by myself and my supervisor. Strict confidentiality will be maintained in the handling of data and reporting of results in order to ensure your anonymity. Should the use of any names be necessary, code names will be used.

This study will be conducted according to the university's guidelines for ethical conduct of research.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact me at 964-7876.

Sincerely

**Appendix B****Participant Consent Form****Home Schooling Research Project**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the research project on home schooling as described in the attached letter from Lynda Stoppler. My signature below indicates that these data may be used for research for a master's thesis in Curriculum and Instruction as described in the letter.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Questionnaire

#### Home Schooling Research Project

**Please complete and return by \_\_\_\_\_.**

As you complete this questionnaire you will notice that the questions are directed to families who continue to use home schooling, families who have discontinued home schooling and families who have some combination of schooling arrangements.

#### **Instructions**

Please complete each answer as thoroughly as possible. If insufficient room has been provided please use the extra sheet provided for you. Either writing or printing is fine. If you prefer to type or word process your answers, that is fine but please make sure that your numbers match mine. If you exclusively home school you will find that the questions relating to the discontinuation of home schooling are not applicable. Please put NA(not applicable) in the answer slots to those questions.

***Remember: all answers are confidential.***

#### **Demographic Information**

1. Each line is used to represent one of the children presently or previously home schooled. Please circle M or F for the gender of the child and then below each of the age markers put the year the child was home schooled. I have done one example.

Age:		5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18+												
	M / (F)			79/80	80/81		81/82					85/86	

[illegible]

2. If children ceased to be home schooled did they: \_\_\_a) enter a public elementary school \_\_\_b) enter a public high school \_\_\_c) enter a private elementary school \_\_\_d) enter a private high school \_\_\_e) enter a post-secondary institution \_\_\_f) enter the workforce or military \_\_\_g) other (please specify)

**(If you are responding for more than one child please indicate child 1, child 2 etc. on the appropriate line(s) ).**

3. The parent or family member primarily responsible for the home schooling in your family is/was \_\_\_\_\_ because

4. The role of the spouse in the home schooling is/was

5. Had you or your spouse had any personal experience with home schooling prior to home schooling your own child(ren). \_\_\_\_\_ If so, please describe.

6. How did you learn that home schooling was an option?

7. What attracted you to home schooling?

8. Please list any authors, speakers, or public figures you feel influenced you to home school. What was there about their message that appealed to you?

9. Please try to recall and describe the process you went through in making the decision to home school.

10. What was the deciding factor in your decision to home school?

11. What type or types of program or curriculum do/did you use? How did you decide to use these materials?

12. What are/were the things about home schooling that give/gave you the most satisfaction?

13. What are/were the things about home schooling that give/gave you the most concern?

How do/did you deal with this concern?

14. What surprised you about home schooling?

15. What supports does the public school system offer home schooling families in this area? Are there any (other) supports that should be in place? If so, please describe.
16. If you have had the experience of having a child enter a school after being home schooled, please describe how the entry was arranged. (i.e. did you have to have any meetings, or present any type of records etc.)
17. How did your child(ren) handle the adjustment to the school environment?

Thank-you for making time in your busy life to complete this questionnaire.

If you are willing to be considered for a follow-up interview please fill in the information below.

**The information below is to be completed only by those people willing to be considered for a follow-up interview that I will conduct. If you have questions regarding a possible interview please call me (Lynda Stoppler -964-7876)**

---

I am willing to be considered for a follow-up interview (of approximately forty-five minutes to an hour) to be done at the University of Northern British



Columbia. All interviews are conducted according to the Code of Ethics of the university and data is strictly confidential.

I understand that completing this form is not a consent form for an interview but merely a way of indicating my possible interest.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_

**All indications of interest will be kept confidential.**

**\*\*\*Please return the questionnaire in the stamped, self-addressed envelope by**

\_\_\_\_\_.

**Appendix D**  
**Interview Protocol**  
**Home Schooling Research Project**

**1. Briefing**

During the briefing the participant will be thanked for attending, and talk will be aimed at setting the person at ease. Confirmation of consent will be done and I will again explain that the purpose of the interview is for me to gain additional understanding and knowledge of their home schooling experiences. I will remind the participant that the interview is being audiotaped. I will also explain that I will be making field notes as we go along. I will ask if there are any questions and then will begin with the questions.

**2. Questions**

These questions are for guidance only and may not all be asked. Additional questions emerging from the questionnaires may be included. The more spontaneous the interview procedure the more likely I am to obtain lively and spontaneous answers (Kvale, 1996).

- i) What is your present status regarding home schooling?
- ii) Can you tell me about your decision to home school?
- iii) What were the main reasons you selected home schooling?
- iv) What, if any, other types of formal educational experiences had your children had prior to being home schooled?
- v) What does a typical home school session in your home look like?

- vi) Has it always looked like this? What have you changed?
- vii) Did/do you ever have moments when you wonder if you've made the best decision? What do you do to reassure yourself?
- viii) If I wanted to start home schooling what advice would you give me?
- ix) How were your experiences different from your expectations of home schooling?
- x) What is the most challenging aspect of home schooling?
- xi) How do you deal with that challenge?
- xii) Is home schooling appropriate for all families? Why or why not?
- xiii) What relationship, if any, do you or have you had with the local schools, either public or private?
- xiv) What advice would you give a task force that wants to improve public schools/
- xv) What community and/or school support is there for home schoolers? Is it adequate? What should it be like?
- xvi) What were the reactions of extended family members when you began to home school? Have their reactions changed?
- xvii) When you first began to home school did you have a timeline in mind? (i.e. I'll do this for five years) If yes, did you stick to the timeline? If not, what caused the deviation from the plan?

From this point on the questions relate to the act of discontinuing home schooling

- xvii) What was the catalyst for your decision to discontinue home schooling?
- xviii) What process did you go through when you decided to discontinue home schooling?

- xix) Was it the same for each child?
- xx) In retrospect, was discontinuing home schooling the appropriate decision for your children? For you?
- xxi) Did you ever consider part time attendance? What led you to disregard that option?
- xxii) What have you noticed about your children since discontinuing home schooling? To what do you attribute this?
- xxiii) If I was considering discontinuing home schooling what advice would you give me?
- xxiv) Are there any questions that you thought that I would or should have asked?
- xxv) Is there any additional information that you would like to give me?

### 3. Debriefing

During the debriefing I will sum up some of the key points, and ask for confirmation that the interviewee has been correctly understood. I will again thank the participant for assisting me and state that the interview is now concluded.

## Appendix E

### Letter of Information - Interview

#### Home Schooling Research Project

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank-you for indicating your willingness to be interviewed as a follow-up to the questionnaire you completed on home schooling. The purpose of the interview will be to further explore various aspects of the home schooling experience. The interview, of about forty-five to sixty minutes, although additional time will be available if participants desire, will be conducted by me at the University of Northern British Columbia and will be audiotaped. I plan to also take some notes throughout the discussion. The tape of the interview will be transcribed and used as further data for my thesis. All information will be kept confidential. Should the use of names be necessary, code names will be assigned.

The interview will be conducted in accordance with the university's guidelines for ethical conduct of research. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you should choose to withdraw, your data would be destroyed.

Please complete the attached consent form and return it in the enclosed envelope. You will then be contacted to arrange a convenient interview time.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 964-7876.

Sincerely

**Appendix F****Informed Consent - Interview****Home Schooling Research Project****Participant Consent Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in the interview portion of the research project on home schooling as described in the attached letter from Lynda Stoppler. My signature below indicates that these data may be used for research for a master's thesis in Curriculum and Instruction.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix G**

### **Transcription Conventions**

**“Transcription involves translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules.” (Kvale, 1996, p. 165) The purpose of this appendix is to detail the conventions that were used in translating the audio taped words of the interviewees to the written transcript.**

**Verbatim - the interviews were transcribed word by word, including repetitions and pauses. Emphases in intonation were noted, as were indications of emotion such as sighing, laughing, or rising pitch.**

**Sentence - was identified as a complete thought and by a break in the intonation, and coded by use of a capital letter at the beginning and by final punctuation, a period, a question mark or an exclamation mark. A less definite break was indicated by a comma.**

**Line - a complete thought ending without a period indicated that the speaker was interrupted.**

**Tone - coded when changes in tone occurred and noted by a notation in parentheses.**

**Volume - words spoken loudly were transcribed in capital letters.**

**Ellipses - i.e. .... Indicated that a speaker's words trailed off.**

**Mmhmm - series of letters used to denote the sound of neutral affirmation made by the interviewer.**

**Uhm - series of letters used to denote a sound often made by interviewees as they were responding, usually as they seemed to be giving thought to their answer.**

**Response Time - noted as (immediate response) or (Pause) or (Long Pause) to indicate if the time taken to give a reply to a question was shorter or longer than the usual response time of the interviewee.**

**Laughter - noted as (laughter) or (shared laughter) if the interviewer was also laughing. Chuckles- noted as (chuckled) meaning less than an actual laugh and as (rueful chuckle) if the context and tone indicated that the interviewee did not really think that the situation or comment was funny.**



## Appendix H

### Curriculum Framework

#### **PHILOSOPHY/ RELIGION/ WORLDVIEW/ IDEOLOGY/ METAORIENTATION<sup>6</sup> CURRICULUM POSITION**

e.g. logical positivism, existentialism, ecological interdependence, conservatism,  
liberalism, post-liberalism

#### **RATIONALE/ MANDATE/ POLICY/ MISSION STATEMENT**

##### **Values/Beliefs**

- political
- cultural/social
- intellectual
- religious/moral/civic
- epistemological
- linguistic
- psychological  
(e.g. learning, development, teaching)
- geographic/economic

##### **Theory**

- political
- cultural/social
- intellectual
- religious/moral/civic
- epistemological  
(e.g. organization of knowledge -  
Bloom's taxonomy)
- linguistic
- psychological  
(e.g. learning, development  
teaching)
- geographic/economic

#### **GOVERNANCE/ ADMINISTRATION**

- organization of administrative structures
- organization of communication
- organization of physical structures

---

<sup>6</sup> Italicized text indicates terms used by curriculum developers

## **PROGRAM**

### **Aims**

#### ***Scope & Sequence/ Curriculum Guide***

- goals
- objectives
- learning outcomes

### **Teaching Strategies**

- organization of students  
(homogeneous, multi-age, large group, small group, individual)
- organization of communication  
(e.g., IRE)
- organization of topic  
(e.g. general → specific; discover; part-whole; immersion)

### **Resources**

- setting
- teaching materials
- activity protocols  
(e.g. journal writing, writing process)
- assessment and evaluation materials  
(e.g. checklists, norms, standards, benchmarks, reference sets)
- assessment and evaluation protocols  
(e.g. observation, running records, portfolios, tests)
- people

### **Plans**

#### ***Long Range Plans***

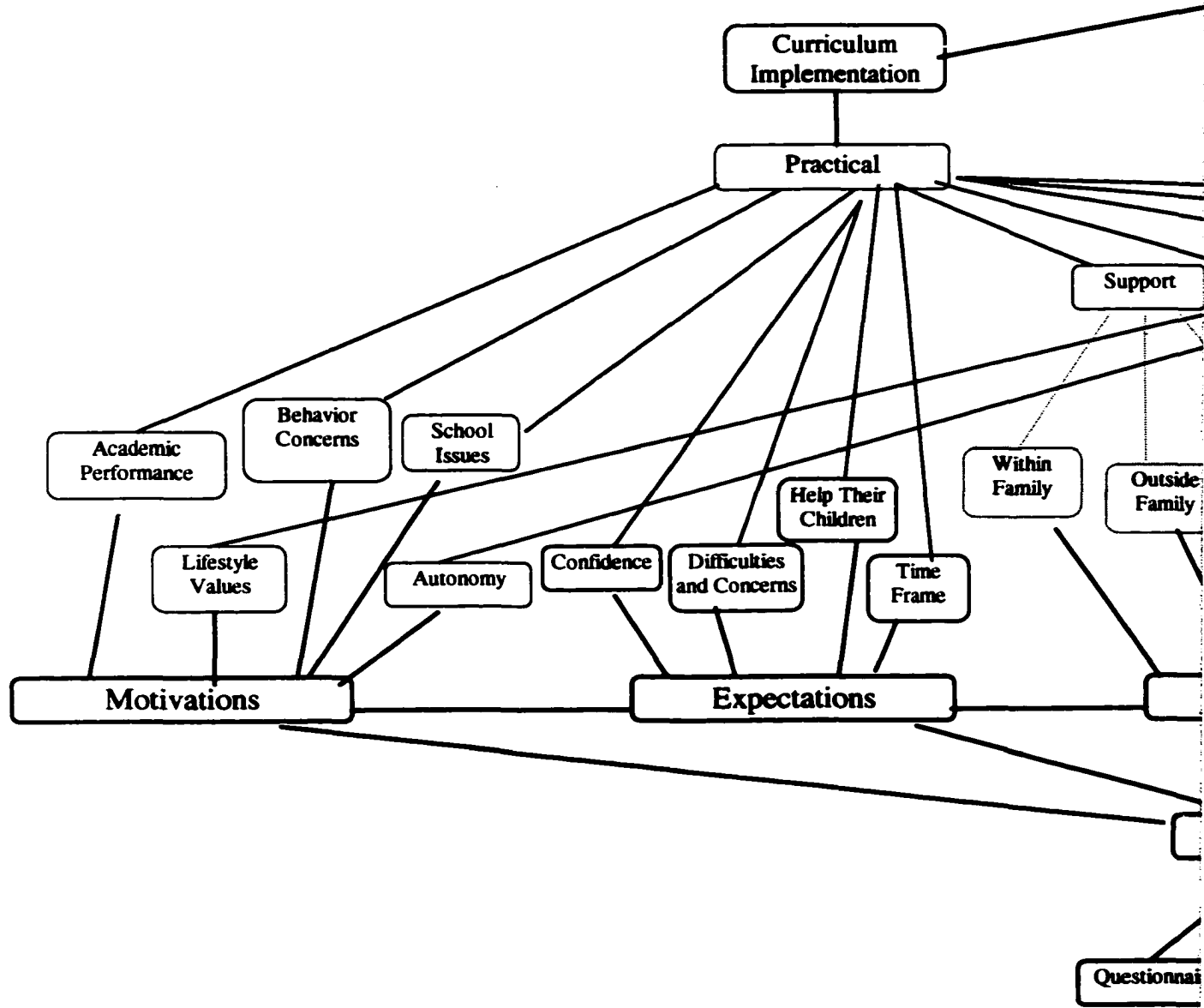
(e.g. teaching guides, manuals, timetables)

#### ***Short Range Plans***

(e.g. day plans, activity plans, lesson plans)

(A. Lindsay, March, 1998)

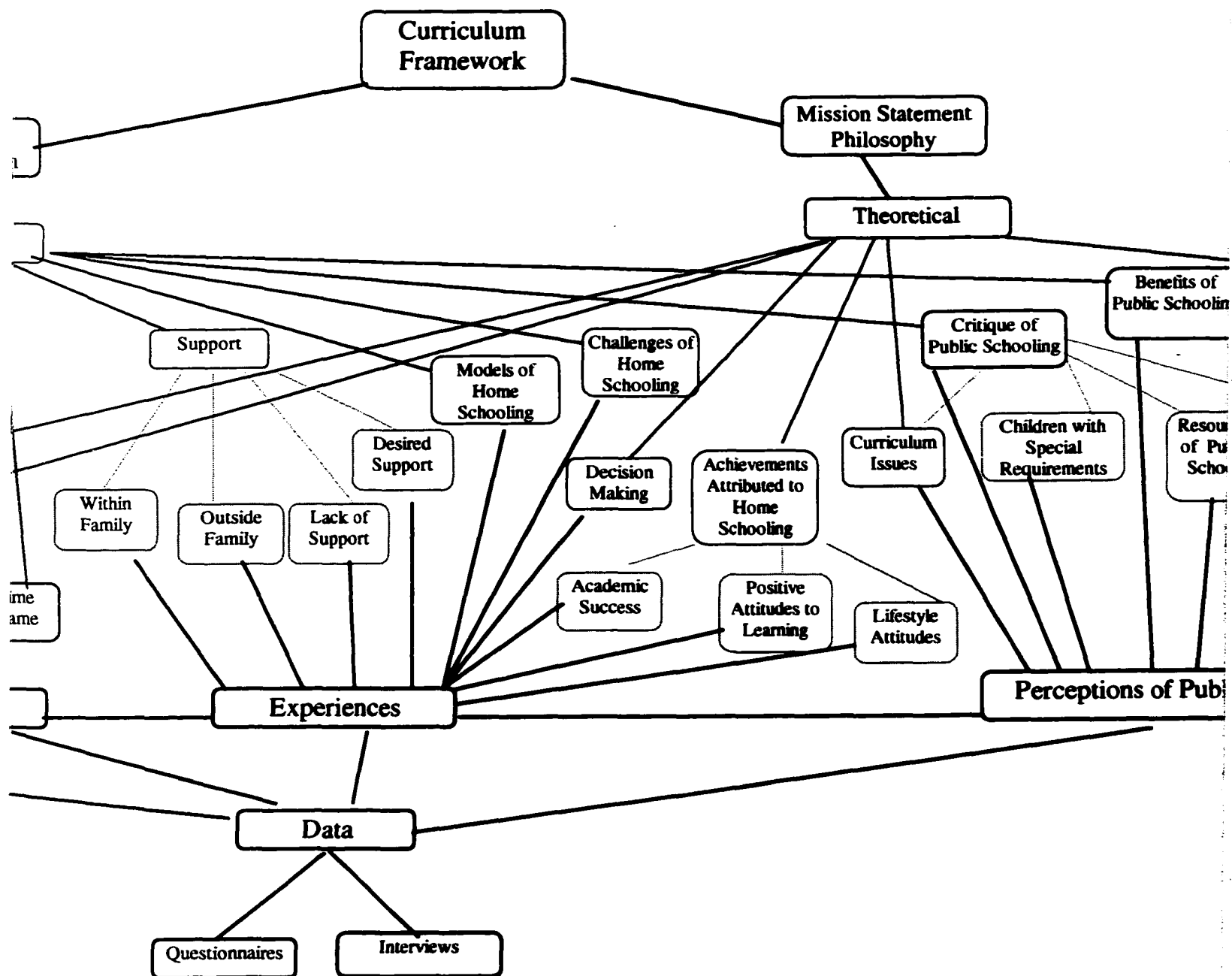
Figure 2.



**Legend**  
Blue: connects to practical  
Red: connects to theoretical  
—: connects sub-categories to larger categories



Figure 2. Data Analysis Linked to Curriculum Framework





is Linked to Curriculum Framework

