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SCHOOL SHOULDN'T END WHEN THE BELL RINGS: AN EXPLORATORY HOMESCHOOLING STUDY

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SCHOOL SHOULDN'T END WHEN THE BELL RINGS: AN EXPLORATORY
HOMESCHOOLING STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

Homeschooling has experienced significant growth over the last several decades, yet little to no research has explored the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system. Being the first to explore this relationship, the current study collected and examined data from 3 semi-structured interviews and 15 online homeschooling blogs in order to understand the growth of homeschooling in Ontario and the relationship between homeschooling and the public education system. The results of this study reveal the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system varies significantly over time and locale, the challenges within each system and the difficulty of transitioning in and out of both systems for students, professional educators, and parents. Results suggest there is a lot to be learned from both forms of education and that there are possible benefits of a blended model of education.

Keywords: Homeschooling; public education; alternative education; Ontario; transitions

Introduction

Within the last few decades, there have been significant debates questioning the effectiveness of public education. This has arguably contributed to the educational choice movement, where alternative forms of education have become a viable and sometimes preferred option for parents who question the efficacy of the public education system. Alternative forms of education have expanded, leading way to the privatization of education (Aurini & Davies, 2005). These forms of education include, but are not limited to: private schools, charter schools, homeschooling, unschooling, and rogue schools. Of these, homeschooling is perhaps the most private affair given that families tend to be hidden from public accountability (Belfield & Levin, 2015). This is particularly the case in Ontario, where there is little to no government regulation of homeschooling. Homeschooling is growing substantially while simultaneously becoming more mainstream. Increased public acceptance and more flexible legislation have both contributed to its growth over the years (Luffman, 1997; Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007; Van Pelt, 2015).

In some cases, parents homeschool for pedagogical, moral or religious reasons (Luffman, 1997). This arrangement is favoured by families who wish to incorporate their beliefs and values into the curriculum, who prefer their child to learn in a non-formal setting, and who are concerned that not enough learning takes place in the classroom (Luffman, 1997). Homeschooling supporters also argue there are several benefits for children: they may, for example, learn at their own pace, make the most of individual strengths and weaknesses, pursue special interests, and avoid the competition and peer pressure of the classroom (Luffman, 1997). One of the main reasons for homeschooling is parents' perception that public education cannot adequately serve their children (Lubienski, 2000).

Homeschooling can also serve as the solution for a child who, regardless of the reason, does not fit in a regular classroom and is falling behind socially, academically or both (Luffman, 1997).

Critics, however, question the average parent's ability to cover all areas of the curriculum, the availability of appropriate program materials and the potential absence of social interaction (Luffman, 1997). They also raise concerns over homeschooling threatening the existence of public schools, as it reduces the potential of public education to serve the common good (Lubienski, 2000). Although homeschooling is legal in each province in Canada, no province has regulations regarding the qualification of parents to teach.

While the literature on homeschooling has steadily increased over the last few decades, researchers have focused largely on the reasons for homeschooling, its efficacy, and the pros and cons of the practice. Besides from Johnson's (2013) study on the relationship between homeschoolers and public schools in the United States, relatively little is known about this relationship in general or in Canada. To address this gap in the literature, this study explores the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system in Ontario. Drawing on data collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with 3 participants and publicly accessible online data sources such as homeschooling blogs and the Canadian Homeschool Conference, this paper is an exploratory examination of the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system in Ontario. This analysis allows me to address the following research questions:

1. How has homeschooling changed over time and locale?
2. What are the discourses among educators/homeschoolers surrounding the growth of homeschooling?
3. What is the past and current relationship between homeschoolers and professional educators?
4. What are some of the challenges of both systems and in what ways are they interrelated?

This research paper is divided into the following sections. The first section explores current and past research on homeschooling. Here, I will discuss the history of homeschooling, as it is an integral component to set the context for the rest of the literature review. Without solid knowledge of what homeschooling is and its relevant history, it would not be possible to understand the next section, which reviews the growth in homeschooling over the last several decades. Next, I will discuss the regulations surrounding the practice of homeschooling to help readers understand it is heavily regulated in some areas, while other regions do not regulate homeschooling at all. After reviewing this, it is essential to understand a little about the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system, as they have not always seen eye to eye. The following section outlines the methods used to investigate the research questions and the ways in which the data was qualitatively collected and analyzed. Lastly, the final section of the paper addresses the findings related to the above research questions in detail. This study is intended to not only generate a greater understanding of the growth of homeschooling over the last few decades and the relationship homeschoolers experience with the public education system, but also to produce ideas for future research and to help key stakeholders in the public education system think about ways to possibly improve the current system.

Literature Review

What is Homeschooling?

Homeschooling is part of a broad social movement in which parents control their children's education. Whereas 50 years ago it was dominated by a coalition of experimental 'unschoolers' and religious fundamentalists (Aurini & Davies, 2005), a number of subgroups have emerged in recent decades with very different goals ranging from meeting special educational needs (Collom, 2005), to deliberately rejecting the institutional education system (Murphy, 2012), to simply seeking out a superior form of education (Aurini & Davies, 2005).

According to Statistics Canada, a child is considered to be homeschooling when his or her education is at home rather than attending a public, private, or other type of school (as cited in Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007). Other scholars such as Luffman (1998) argue homeschooling is when parents or guardians assume the responsibility of educating their child where they might develop their own curriculum guidelines, and often use the support of local and virtual education resources as they see fit. Often families develop a heavy reliance on 'networks of like-minded' homeschoolers, with the most informal networks being 'support groups' that meet in homes, on playgrounds, and/or online for mutual encouragement and information swapping (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). While there is no all-encompassing definition of homeschooling, recent definitions seem to cohere with earlier ones and highlight that parents take responsibility for their children's education rather than accept, or defer to, the responsibility of others, whether those others are independent educational organizations or agents of the state (Van Pelt, 2015). For the purposes of this paper, homeschooling is defined as the approach to education where parents choose not to

educate their children in an institutionalized setting, but rather a home setting (Murphy, 2012).

Just as the definition of homeschooling varies, so do the methods and reasons for homeschooling. As Dolnick (2010) notes, the term ‘homeschooling’ today evokes a number of images with the most prevalent being children sitting around a kitchen table learning from their mother. While this might still be common, the methods of conducting ‘classes’ vary quite drastically just as the reasons behind parents’ decisions to homeschool do (Dolnick, 2010). For instance, some parents choose to homeschool because their children have been bullied (Lois, 2009), have learning disabilities (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001), or because their children have different learning styles not being accommodated in the public school system (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007), to name a few.

Much of the academic research on reasons for homeschooling comes from the United States context, however. The U.S. homeschooling movement began during the 1960s from the libertarian political leftists (Collom, 2005; Lyman, 1998). Educational critics came to believe the public education system could not be reformed. One critic in particular, John Holt, sparked the homeschooling movement when he published a book titled *How Children Fail*. The book gained mass attention where people began to question the importance and effectiveness of compulsory education (Field, 2011). His book describes how traditional compulsory education disrupts the natural learning process in children. Garnering national media attention, Holt’s theories about homeschooling put him on the TV talk show circuit and in *Life* magazine (Field, 2011).

These educational critics began encouraging parents to teach their children at home (see Holt & Fromme, 1964). This group is now known as the ‘originals’, who early

researchers label as pedagogues to underscore their interest in improving the instructional process of education (Van Galen, 1991). Early scholars such as Knowles (1991) concluded that parents formulate pedagogical beliefs about homes being better places for learning than schools because of contemporary problems with the educational environment and practices at school. He also found parents refer to their own negative school experiences, which they do not want their children to replicate (Knowles, 1991).

Despite the many reasons for homeschooling, it is important to highlight the decision to homeschool is not usually a thought which simply occurs overnight. In fact, Arai (2000) found the decision for homeschooling tends to be a long process for most parents. Drawing from semi-structured interviews, parents' reasons generally related to problems they saw at school such as low academic standards, poor school environment, or moral/religious conflicts. Other scholars have found that while some homeschool parents view themselves as part of a broader social movement directly opposing institutional schooling, many others simply see their choice as an alternative approach to educating their children (Collom & Mitchell, 2005; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013).

Within the alternative educational choice movement, some researchers (i.e., Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Aurini & Davies, 2005) have grounded their work in the parental involvement literature to also examine why parents decide to homeschool their children. For example, Green and Hoover-Dempsey (2007) found that parents decide to homeschool for very similar reasons to those that motivate many public school parents' to be involved in their children's education. More specifically, they found homeschooling parents believe they have the ability to help their child(ren) succeed in school learning, believe they should play

an active role in their children's education, and perceive contextual factors in their lives make involvement and/or homeschooling possible.

One of the problems associated with homeschooling, however, is that the curriculum and practice grow increasingly complicated as children grow older (Kunzman, 2009). As a result, older homeschool children tend to report feeling more isolated than their younger peers (Kunzman, 2009). Additionally, as instruction becomes more complex for parents homeschooling their children, this could influence the parents' decision to place their children back in the education system where a more skilled educator can take over (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013).

The practice of homeschooling also varies considerably across families as it can be very structured or completely unstructured in form. For example, Kunzman and Gaither (2013) point out the two options garnering the most attention have been the 'classical' curriculum, which is an adaptation of the medieval Latin trivium, and the 'Charlotte Mason Method', which seeks to engage the child by way of nature study and 'living' books (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). On the unstructured side of homeschooling, there is a group of individuals known as 'unschoolers'. Gray and Riley (2013) define unschooling as a branch of homeschooling where parents do not send their children to school nor do they teach them at home. Despite this broad definition, the homeschooling community considers unschooling a completely separate phenomenon than homeschooling. While homeschooling is generally practiced in the home environment, following a set or unstructured curriculum, unschoolers tend to create their own curriculum. They learn primarily through everyday life experiences, which are experiences they ultimately choose and that therefore automatically match their interests, abilities, and learning styles (Wheatley, 2009). For a lack of better words, it is

child-led learning. Whether one wants to do structured or unstructured homeschooling, a now-common theme is that parents should try a mixture of different methods to find the one suitable for their child (Aurini & Davies, 2005).

The form of homeschooling is also shaped by the province or state one resides because of the regulations surrounding the practice. For example, Ontario does not have any homeschooling regulations aside from the requirement that parents provide ‘satisfactory instruction’ to their children. Alberta, on the other hand, mandates parents to document their children’s work and follow the provincial curriculum, which grants families less freedom. Most provinces require that homeschooling parents comply with the Education (or School) Act in each respective province. In practice, this generally means the provincial government suggests the homeschooled child receives ‘satisfactory’ instruction from their parents (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007). Additionally, most provinces require parents to register their children with their local school or school board. Despite the differences in regulations for each province, homeschooling is legal in all 10 Canadian provinces (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007).

Growth of Homeschooling

The growth of homeschooling as a social phenomenon over the last 50 years has been considerable both in its momentum and visibility (Knowles, Marlow & Muchamore, 1992). Contemporary academic research on homeschooling is much more diverse as scholars in more established academic institutions are designing studies around an increasing array of focused topics (Van Pelt, 2015). While previous research on homeschooling has been critiqued for lacking rigour and sound empirical methods (Murphy, 2014), new evidence suggests this is no longer the case as current studies are smaller-scale and robustly controlled

(Van Pelt, 2015). Obtaining an accurate count of homeschooling in Canada is difficult. Without uniform regulations or counting procedures, traditional data collection methods are not easily utilized to study homeschooling as procedures to track homeschoolers vary by province and state (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Homeschooling research is predominately based on samples that are non-representative and vulnerable to self-selection and sampling biases (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Murphy, 2014). In addition to provincial differences in regulations and reporting requirements, some families even operate as ‘private schools’, therefore eliminating the requirement to register with the government as ‘homeschooling’ (Murphy, 2014). Moreover, little is known about ‘part-time’ homeschoolers, which are families who register with public or private schools for only certain subjects (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Other families are transient, moving between a variety of different schooling methods including regular public schools, private schools, and homeschooling (Aurini & Davies, 2005). As a result, all of these might lead to an underreporting of homeschooling. Nonetheless, the available statistics clearly indicate homeschooling is on the rise in North America (Aurini & Davies, 2005), and especially Canada.

The growth of homeschooling in the United States has been remarkable, even when using the most conservative estimates available (Murphy, 2013). Previous homeschooling data indicates an estimated annual growth between 11% and 40% (Ray, 1994). In the 1970s, only 10,000 to 15,000 children were being homeschooled. From 1985 to 1995, the number of homeschooled children grew substantially to between 500,000 and 750,000 (Lines, 2000; Basham, 2001). This number made a very large leap in 2010, at which time homeschoolers were estimated to be around two million in the U.S. (Murphy, 2013), making up roughly 2%

of the entire student population. Today, homeschoolers are estimated at between 3% to 4% of all American students, which amounts to around 2 million students (Van Pelt, 2015).

In Canada, older sources argue the number of homeschooled children increased from 2,000 to 18,000 between 1979 and 1996 (Luffman, 1997; Basham, 2001). More recent estimates show 21,662 students were registered with provincial authorities as homeschooled, whereas just over 5 million students were enrolled in public schools in Canada. Other sources even suggest there are approximately 47,500 to 95,000 homeschooled children in Canada (The Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents, n.d.), because some families simply do not register with the government. Nonetheless, Van Pelt (2015) conducted a large review of homeschooling in Canada and found homeschool enrolments from 2006/07 to 2011/12 have increased by over 29% (Van Pelt, 2015).

While proportionately more students in the United States are enrolled as homeschooled compared to Canada, some scholars (Gaither, 2008; Murphy, 2012) suggest the massive growth in homeschooling experienced in the U.S. from the 1970s to the early 2000s might have peaked, and even be declining a bit. Although some reports may vary, it is evident that homeschooling is growing. This growth has attracted the attention of various scholars, policy-makers, and parents (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Homeschoolers are expanding alongside other private education alternatives as well and they are gaining legitimacy by winning legal victories and have grown more diverse and have attracted more parents from the mainstream (Aurini & Davies, 2005).

Regulations of Homeschooling

Homeschooling has not always entertained a positive public image, but recent changes in legislation indicate it is experiencing a new level of legitimacy (Aurini & Davies, 2005).

Prior to 1980, homeschooling in the US was illegal in 30 states, and it was not until 1993 that homeschooling was legalized in all 50 states (Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn, 2007).

Scholars have assessed the legal recognition of homeschooling and developed a classification system to capture the variation across states and provinces (Donnelly, 2012; Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn 2007; Van Pelt, 2015). For example, Donnelly (2012) offers an organized outline of homeschooling's international legal recognition by using a typology to map out the national or subnational jurisdictions. He argues homeschooling can be classified into one of five categories: no regulation, low regulation, moderate regulation, high regulation, and homeschooling not permitted.

Jurisdictions with “no regulations” do not require a parent to initiate contact with the governing authority in place and include countries such as Finland, England, Mexico, Peru, and various American states (Donnelly, 2012). Places with “low regulations” require parents to notify the authorities and provide them with minimal information (Donnelly, 2012). Countries with low regulation include various Canadian provinces, Philippines, Russia, and various US states. Moderate regulation jurisdictions require parents to notify authorities and complete a number of additional requirements such as keeping records and conducting regular evaluations of their child's performance (Donnelly, 2012). Lastly, high regulation jurisdictions are similar to moderate regulation requirements, but they also require parents to apply for and receive approval before they begin homeschooling.

In Canada, while it is legal to homeschool in all ten provinces, the regulations are quite different, ranging from relaxed with little to no regulation (i.e. Ontario), to highly regulated (i.e. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec). While Donnelly (2012) offers an international typology for homeschooling, Van Pelt (2015) developed a Canadian typology to

differentiate the regulations across provinces, which range from low regulation to high regulation. All provinces in Canada require homeschool parents to register or notify the authorities that they are homeschooling (Van Pelt, 2015). There are four provinces with low regulation (British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland & Labrador) that require little more than notification of homeschooling (Van Pelt, 2015). Provinces with moderate regulation, which requires some reporting of student progress or submission of an educational plan, are Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island (Van Pelt, 2015). The provinces that fall under high regulation (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec) require submission of an educational plan, some form of approval of the program and/or the progress of the homeschooled student, and periodic evidence of student progress (Van Pelt, 2015).

Compared to the past, it is now much easier to homeschool in Ontario (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Due to a new policy (Policy/Program Memorandum No. 131), boards of education are permitted to deem children as receiving satisfactory instruction at home by simply accepting notification from parents (Aurini & Davies, 2005). The provincial government now recognizes homeschooling as a ‘viable alternative to public education’ that offers educational experiences that can be unique to each family, instead of requiring homeschoolers to follow traditional schooling methodologies (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Public funding for homeschooling is now available in three provinces, although the funding structure is not uniform across the provinces. These provinces include British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan (Van Pelt, 2015). Additionally, universities can now receive provincial funding for homeschooled youth, and are coming up with admission policies to accommodate these applicants (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Overall, these policy changes have been touted as a ‘major victory’ by homeschooling associations (Aurini & Davies, 2005). As

provincial legislation in Canada continues to allow for homeschooling, and more recent detailed regulations and policies now offer parents funding (Van Pelt, 2015), homeschooling is becoming more mainstream and gaining legitimacy each year.

Homeschool/Public Education System Relationship

Although homeschooling is gaining legitimacy and becoming more mainstream, the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system has been very complicated over the years. Despite favourable legislative and judicial outcomes rendering the practice legal across North America, homeschoolers still continue to face opposition from professional educators and the government today in the United States (Johnson, 2013), but less is known as to whether or not this is the case in Canada.

Historically, it was normal for parents to teach their own children prior to compulsory education laws implemented around 1918 (Johnson, 2013). However, once compulsory education laws came to dominate the United States, most Americans agreed that children should attend 'school' to become productive citizens (Kunzman, 2012). Unsurprisingly, as school attendance became compulsory, the role of parents in the education of their children naturally diminished (Mayberry, 1989). It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s when idealists and religious fundamentalists questioned the pedagogical soundness of the public education system, to which it fell under scrutiny for a variety of reasons (Johnson, 2013), and families began homeschooling their children. In the eyes of school administrators, to question the efficacy of public schools was to question the very fabric of society (Knowles, 1989). In the face of this opposition, homeschoolers began to work together throughout the 1980s to establish and regain their legal right to homeschool their children (Johnson, 2013).

While homeschooling parents are sometimes critical of the education system, expressing dissatisfaction with the academic and environmental quality of institutional schooling, public school officials also share similar sentiments about homeschooling (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Johnson, 2013). For example, opponents debate whether or not the schooling of children should be left entirely in the hands of parents (Reich, 2002). In the United States, the National Education Association (NEA) tends to disapprove of homeschooling and supports increased regulation, whereby home instructors would need a teaching license, and they also want to prohibit homeschoolers from having access to all public school extracurricular activities (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Other homeschooling critics argue its growth can even threaten the destruction of public schooling, which Apple (2000) labelled as something capable of being ‘disastrous’.

Despite this, homeschooling supporters argue it is a bold choice that can serve as an educational alternative to public education and challenges public education more than any other school alternative, and can even result in a massive net financial saving to provincial governments (Bauman, 2002; Hill, 2000; Aurini & Davies, 2005; Van Pelt, 2015). While some public school officials disagree with the practice of homeschooling, others are friendly in their interactions with homeschoolers, offering a variety of resources and opportunities within their local school district (Johnson, 2013). For example, some homeschoolers are known to accept public school offerings through online or charter schools, which allow children to remain at home while completing public school curricula (Johnson, 2013). Others have gained the right to access public school extracurricular programs such as high school sports (Johnson, 2013). Not all homeschoolers agree on the importance of participating in

programs offered by public schools, however, and Johnson (2013) argues it is likely that instances of both cooperation and confrontation will continue between the two.

While some interactions between homeschooling families and schools are friendly, in other cases, they are much more confrontational and can even lead to lawsuits and jail time (Johnson, 2013). Much of the issue has to do with the historical legal status of homeschooling, which varies by state and province. In the past it was fairly commonplace for parents to face legal battles if they attempted to homeschool their children when the practice was illegal. For example, a bill proposed in the state of Iowa's legislature in 1988 made it seem likely that homeschooling parents being charged with truancy could also be charged with child abuse, in which case their children would immediately be removed from their homes (Leslie, 2004 as cited in Johnson, 2013). Six parents in Iowa state in 1986 were imprisoned for their decision to homeschool (Johnson, 2013).

On a brighter note, because the majority of costs associated with homeschooling are born by parents, families educating their children at home saved Canadians \$256.4 million in 2011/12 (Van Pelt, 2015). However, given that most schools are funded based on enrollments, as more children are homeschooled and public school enrollments continue to decline (Van Pelt, 2015), some are concerned that homeschooling could threaten the survival of the public education system.

Methodology

The purpose of the current research paper is to better understand the growth of homeschooling in Ontario over the past few decades and to examine the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system. To do this, semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted and data from online homeschooling blogs were collected.

The content of both data sources were then coded and analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. How has homeschooling changed over time and locale?
2. What are the discourses among educators/homeschoolers surrounding the growth of homeschooling?
3. What is the past and current relationship experienced between homeschoolers and professional educators?
4. What are some of the challenges of both systems and in what ways are they interrelated?

This paper focuses primarily on the analysis of qualitative data from 2 Southwestern Ontario educators, 1 homeschooling institutional member and 15 Canadian homeschooling blogs. This focus is intended to highlight and gain insight into the complex relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system in Ontario. Interviews were conducted in person by members of the research team using a semi-structured interview guide. They lasted an average of one hour. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

A written Research Consent Form was distributed to each participant prior to the interview. Participants were asked to complete the Research Consent Form which required their printed name, signature, and the date. The participants are referred to with a pseudonym throughout the paper to ensure confidentiality.

The recruitment of participants was conducted through passive snowball sampling. The investigators used established personal connections to identify potential key informants who were not known to the researchers. The researchers' connections were asked to contact potential key informants either by giving them a flyer or by forwarding e-mail correspondence provided by the researchers that explained the purpose of the study, what would be required, as well as provided the email address and phone number of the Principal Investigator. The researchers' connections were not informed about who agreed to participate

in order to protect their anonymity. Although the investigators are personally acquainted with the individuals in the community who will be asked to pass on study information, they do not hold any power or authority over them.

Two other online sources of data were used in the current study: 1) The Canadian Online Homeschool Conference, and 2) online homeschooling blogs. Both are publicly available via the internet. After joining the Canadian Online Homeschool Conference, I identified a large web bank of Canadian homeschooling blogs, which included participants and sponsors from the conference. I then visited all of the homeschooling blogs in search of data to explain the homeschooling parents' perspective on their relationship with the education system. Keywords were used to search within the blogs such as education system, public school, Catholic school, transition(s), support, relationship, and challenges to hone in on the relevant topics within the blogs. From there, I read over 200 blogs posts and their comments. While reading each blog and the comments, I pulled all relevant information relating to my research questions and added them to an Excel document for further analysis. All data was placed into an individual cell for cross-comparison and to easily cite throughout the paper. For example, passages from data in the results section will be referenced as "Theme 1, B2", where the theme number represents the excel sheet number, while the letter and number represent the data's corresponding cell location.

To analyze the data, the investigators followed an inductive approach and grouped like homeschooling blog posts and interview transcription data together. More specifically, transcriptions from the interviews with all key actors and passages from the homeschooling blogs were reviewed relentlessly until themes began to emerge, corresponding to the research questions addressed above. All themes were reviewed by both investigators. Once all key

themes were found and coded, they were then subdivided to ease the process of analysis. The benefit of the using the excel sheets was its ability to allow for a simple comparison of themes, as it displays all of the data in a single sheet.

Although much of the data examined will focus on Ontario, this study will serve as a starting point to bring together different voices to gain a better understanding of the relationship experienced between homeschoolers and the public education system. Further research can continue to compare cross provincially to understand whether or not the same results exist under different macro policy contexts elsewhere in Canada.

Results

Theme 1: Time & Place

“You can get anything from hostile to friendly” (Institutional Actor, Patrick, Theme 1, C12)

Regulations

In discussing the relationship between homeschooling and the public education system in Ontario, participants interviewed spoke to great lengths about how much the relationship has varied over time and locale. Within the last several decades, the law has played a significant role across provinces, sometimes even invoking fear among families who practice or want to practice homeschooling. A member of a national homeschooling organization elaborated on this, indicating that:

depending on the law ...you know in Quebec it's certainly the case, too many [homeschoolers] don't register because they're afraid of persecution and so they don't register for different reasons perhaps, so there are more and more homeschoolers and so they're running into more and more school boards that haven't dealt with it before or more and more officials, or maybe just new officials, come along and are just unfamiliar,

so yeah there's an education process that's ongoing, you know it really depends where you are (Institutional Actor, Patrick, Theme 1, B12)

A similar response was shared by an Ontario homeschooling blogger who indicated that (unbeknown to her) there are places around Ontario where homeschoolers are currently or have been regularly harassed by the local school board authorities (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 1, B2). As a result, organizations that support the interests of homeschooling families (such as The Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents) asked the government to clarify the relationship with homeschoolers. Eventually, the government of Ontario created a memorandum (known as Policy/Program Memorandum No. 131), to help school board officials recognize the rights of homeschoolers and to educate them on the limits of their authority (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 1, B2). Additionally, over the years a large number of websites and organizations that display and share the legal rights of homeschoolers across provinces have become increasingly accessible via the internet. Legal organizations such as the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) have also developed over time to protect the rights of homeschoolers and ensure that local school boards are properly educated on the homeschooling laws of their respective provinces. Some organizations, such as the HSLDA, began with a group of homeschooling parents who, in this case, pooled their resources to hire a lawyer to defend their rights in court and were successful in gaining the recognition that families have a fundamental legal right to educate their children. As a result, despite the legal hiccups while paving the path for homeschooling, it is currently legal in every province and territory in Canada, which can largely be attributed to the HSLDA and its supporters.

Despite the efforts of homeschooling organizations, there are still great differences in the regulations of homeschooling across provinces. As noted earlier, the regulations can

range from relaxed with little to no regulation (i.e. Ontario), to highly regulated (i.e. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Quebec). In Ontario, for example, a participant argued some counties are welcoming of homeschooling at the school board level, while others are not. This suggests the relationship between homeschooling and the public education system is complex with a variety of factors contributing to the relationship. Quebec was highlighted as a unique province for homeschooling because it has different (and much more strict) rules surrounding the practice. The province went as far to hire their own homeschooling research expert to inform the government's position on the practice. Compared to Ontario, where homeschooling experiences little to no regulation, the government of Quebec is very involved in regulating home education. This is not to suggest that Ontario is fully supportive of homeschooling. For example, in some counties of Ontario it was noted:

at the school board level they're like, you know we know you're homeschooling, if we can offer you any services, we want to offer them to you, come and be a part of our school, for whatever part of the day you want to be, you're welcome sort of thing. And then others are decidedly less friendly [laughs] and it just depends, I think it depends a great deal on how many homeschools there have been over the years and also perhaps just on the individual who is responsible within the school board (Institutional Actor, Patrick, Theme 1, C12)

In sum, there is a great deal of variation within the relationship between homeschooling and the education system across time and place. The law can also play a significant role in the experience of families and whether or not the relationship is positive or negative, which is evident from the Ontario and Quebec distinction noted above.

Change Over Time

The data in the current study suggests homeschooling has come a long way over the last twenty to thirty years in Canada. In recent decades, homeschooling has been seen as taboo, or

something limited to religious fundamentalists. The public was often very judgemental of the practice for a variety of reason and there were also strong government regulations surrounding homeschooling where school boards, truant officers, and child protection workers would intervene (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 1, C7). As a result, this fueled a number of homeschooling families to advocate for their legal rights, which is largely the reason why homeschooling legal organizations were created. Homeschooling has become a lot more mainstream over the years, however, and data suggests its relationship with the public education system is changing.

The educators interviewed viewed homeschooling in a positive light. In fact, both educators who were interviewed encouraged homeschoolers to come forward and build a relationship with the public education system, perceiving that both can learn a lot from one another. One educator went as far to say that she would like to homeschool her own children because she sees the benefits of homeschooling and does not agree with how the public education system in Ontario is currently run. Speaking to her perception of homeschooling as an educator, Noelle stated:

I think if the [homeschool] parents have a sense of what needs to be taught, if they have a set, if they are fairly skilled in their own writing and fairly skilled in math overall, and things, or are able to seek out sources for people when they're not strong in an area, then I think homeschooling can be an amazing thing because it lets kids work at their own pace (Educator, Noelle, Theme 1, E3)

Another educator, Margaret, suggested how beneficial it would be if parents participated in part-time homeschooling, noting:

So I kind of wish in a perfect world that the homeschooling movement would continue to gain momentum and then branch out to say, here is how you can do your part, part-time homeschooling. Throw in two nights a week, you know, make a summer plan, the idea of

getting parents involved and understanding how their kids learn because when I go to a parent who works with their kid, and they say I know how frustrating it is when he can't process [information] and I'm like, you get it (Educator, Margaret, Theme 1, F3)

Margaret is not suggesting that parents actually homeschool their children, but rather that they are involved in their children's schooling. By being involved in their children's education and understanding how their children learn, parents can, in turn, communicate effectively with educators to ensure they are prepared to teach the child by knowing how they learn. In order for this to work, however, educators must be willing to work with parents and communicate with them when necessary. A recent survey in Ontario found that parents are not receiving adequate updates on their children's progression or even on how they can support them better at home (TVDSB, 2018).

While the growth of homeschooling is quite evident, less is known about how it might impact the public education system in the long run. One respondent argued that the relationship between the education system and homeschoolers is changing for the better, at least for right now, but if it grows even more it could threaten the public education system (Institutional Actor, Patrick, Theme 1, B12/13), which currently operates under a per-pupil funding model. In other words, if homeschooling continues to grow and the public education system keeps losing students, the relationship between the two could change drastically and become more hostile. Because schools are funded based on the number of students who attend, this could possibly lead to a less friendly relationship between the public education system and homeschoolers in the future.

Theme 2: Challenges of the Systems

“There is no EA (educational assistant) support in here [the classroom] even though there are all these special needs kids” (Educator, Margaret, Theme 2, E17)

Resources

The amount of frustration voiced among the educators who were interviewed was certainly not something the investigators intended to discover. Both educators raised a serious concern regarding the lack of teaching support in their classrooms, including the issue of overcrowded classrooms. Having a classroom full of twenty five or more children can be very overwhelming for educators, and often too much to manage for one teacher, especially if there are disruptive students in the classroom or ones who require more individual attention. These frustrations are similar to the results found in a previous study where families have expressed concerns with specific aspects of the education system, such as classroom overcrowding and a lack of individual attention given to their children (Arai, 2000). This was something that came up when the educators explained some parents were very demanding of them, but there was only so much they could do without the help of educational assistants. One educator interviewed went as far to say she felt the education system was becoming a ‘conveyor belt’:

Pushing them through is good, but we lack the support. I’m all for it if we were to support students effectively, but we just don’t. We just shove them in the regular classroom and expect teachers to accommodate or modify for them. I don’t have the time to just sit down with that kid who can’t read in the grade 8 level and talk them through with what we’re learning. I stick them with an audiobook because that’s what my skill level is in trying to meet them and try to break that line. 40 minute period, if you figure that out, you have essentially one minute per student and 10 minutes of instructional and wrap up time. You just don’t have that time, so you either have to leave your high achievers to fend for themselves, and work with your low achievers, or leave the low achievers and meet the needs to your high achievers. It’s this game and I feel like it’s such a disservice to all of the students right now, I don’t even feel like we’re really teaching our kids anything, it just feels like a conveyor belt, we hold them there for 10 months and they’re bored out of their minds most of them, because it’s a repeated curriculum, they’re

learning about Canadian history over and over and over and over again. It's drill and kill.
(Educator, Noelle, Theme 2, C18)

Noelle suggests that educators do not have the teaching support or time necessary to help students learn effectively. Consequently, she feels her duties as an educator are limited to a 'drill and kill' approach, whereby students are getting 'bored out of their minds' because the curriculum is so repetitive. Given this, perhaps it is not too surprising that more families are taking their children out of the public education system each year. However, it also gives context to the professional educators' perspective in the classroom, as they simply do not have the time or support necessary to perform their job at an optimal level. While several educational critics and parents have been quick to attack teachers for not doing their job adequately, it could perhaps be a problem with the education system itself, and not the teachers.

Another educator laughed when asked about the average age of teachers at her school. The respondent answered, "we have a slightly older staff, what I find more and this is why I'm potentially looking to move, and my admin know this and so do most of my peers, it's a group of people that are very content to do what they have been doing for the last 15 years. There is a lot of pull out my binder on minerals and do what I have always done" (Educator, Margaret, Theme 2, E18). What this suggests, is there might be a lack of institutional motivation to retrain educators who become comfortable with teaching methods which may be incongruent with the multiple learning styles of children. Clearly, Margaret voiced frustration over her colleagues for sticking to the traditional methods of teaching, which she argued does not work anymore. As she pointed out, "the day of the Blackline Master is gone, it's done".

Another problem within the education system that arose during the interviews was the lack of math skills among educators themselves, which could be linked to a possible lack of training from the Ontario College of Teachers. It is no secret that the math scores in Ontario have been declining for the last few years. Numerous attempts have been made to improve the scores by forcing educators to focus their attention to ‘drill and kill’ students with the basic math skills, but this is at the expense of teaching other important subjects such as English and Science. Despite the Ministry of Education’s attempt at improvement, math scores keep going down. One possible answer, which came from an interview conducted in this study, suggests that not all teachers know their basic math skills:

I had to express to my principal again, as I do every year, frustration with the lack of understanding of what the math means and he said okay well let’s try some stuff. So he walked into our staff meeting with a giant clothesline, put a zero in the middle, and a positive one on one end and a negative one on the other end, and he handed all of the teachers cards and said ‘just go put your card on the number line where it goes’. Our entire Junior division thought that the fraction $1/2$ went to the left of zero because it wasn't a whole, at which point the four intermediate teachers banged our heads on the desk and went “there's the problem” (Educator, Margaret, Theme 2, F17).

The participant went on to ask her colleagues whether or not they could be overdrawn by \$4.50 in their bank account, to which they replied yes, and she laughed sarcastically. The issue, comes down to the educators only being required to know math up until the grade that they teach. For example, if you teach grade 4 math, you most likely only have to know up to grade 4 math because that is all you are required to teach. Obviously, the teachers probably learned much more complex math in high school or university and possibly even teachers’ college, but the Ontario Teacher’s College does not have an exit exam to ensure their

graduates, who are Ontario's future educators, are well equipped to teach the future generations.

Another challenge of the public education system mentioned by the educators is its inability to provide the resources necessary for children with special needs. As Patrick outlined, "...there's limited resources, so children with special needs need, um, not necessarily unlimited resources, but they need allooooot [emphasized word] and it's hard for the school system to provide that but parents can provide, um, you know that one-on-one direction and instruction that uh helps children with special needs to thrive" (Theme 2, C36). Coupled with this is a request from Ontario principals, who are recommending children with special needs be taught at home, at least for part of the day (People for Education, 2018). People for Education, which is an independent, charitable organization that works to support and advance public education, recently published an annual report, which included an extensive audit of Ontario's publicly-funded schools. Included in the audit was a section on special education whereby the majority of principals surveyed (over 1100) cited safety as the primary reason for their recommendation, while others reported they did not have adequate resources to address the students' needs (People for Education, 2018). It is evident that resources are a serious concern in publicly-funded schools at the moment, which could be contributing to the rise of homeschooling and principals requesting parents pull their child out of school because they might do a better job educating them in a home-based environment. Accordingly, there might be more of an issue with the allocation of resources within publicly funded schools, as opposed to only a problem with the education system itself. To make matters worse, the People for Education (2018) also outlined that certain areas with smaller schools have fewer resources, meaning they are struggling to provide

adequate infrastructure to support the learning environment. This suggests the funding formula for Ontario's schools might be in need of revision, as the inequities widen between schools.

Homeschool Challenges

“Why was I emulating something I disagreed with?” (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 2, D5).

Similar to the public education system, the data in this study demonstrates a number of challenges faced by homeschooling families. The early history of homeschooling saw parents attempting to replicate the traditional schooling model because they were worried any other type of model simply would not work. This could be in part the result of a large portion of homeschooling parents not having a professional education background, so they begin their homeschooling journey following a structured system, which tends to replicate or be similar to the public education system. Data from the current research study suggests that most homeschooling parents regret this decision because they usually intentionally pull their children from the public education system for a reason. As one homeschooling blogger put it, parents should meet their child's needs, not the book's needs (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 2, C6).

Another blogger spoke about a number of homeschooling mistakes, one of which was recreating school at home. So many individuals during their first year of homeschooling believe that it needs to look like traditional schooling where you have the students sit at individual desks, follow the traditional school schedule and routines, and do the pledge of allegiance (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 2, D3). While this may work for some families, as noted by this particular blogger, she argued that it does not work for the majority of families she knows. Moreover, it can even lead to burnout. In particular, one homeschooler indicated:

Our very approach to education, the conveyor-belt method, is built to raise blue-collar workers who follow the rules and do exactly what their told. But I want more than that for my kids! So why am I comparing my kids to the very system I lost so much faith in? I knew this in my head but when it came time to the daily grind of homeschooling, I continually went to my old patterns of schedules and lists and checking off the boxes (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 2, D5).

This is very similar to what Noelle, a professional educator, was talking about in regard to the conveyor belt approach of schools, which she felt doesn't work in either the public education system or the homeschooling environment. We cannot drill and kill without consequences, it simply is not as effective as it might have once been. What was interesting about this blog post, however, was that homeschoolers might emulate the traditional education system at first because they do not know any different. But, once they realize it does not work, they need to come up with their own methods and individualize the learning experience for each child.

Theme 3: Connections Across Systems are Challenging

It's OK to send your kid to school... Do what is right for your child. Whatever that will end up looking like (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 3, B4).

The results from the present study suggest those who turn to alternative forms of education do not necessarily make a clean break from the public education system. Instead, families reassess their educational situation throughout their homeschooling journey and do what is in the best interest of their child. As one participant outlined, 'for most families I think you'd find it's not always a long term decision, it's more of a we're going to do it this year because we think it's best for this child, um or for our family, and then we'll see next year' (Institutional Actor, Patrick, Theme 3, B18). Homeschooling is therefore not always an end all be all solution and active rejection of the public education system, but rather a deliberate

choice made by parents to suit the best interest of their children at that particular time that may often be revisited and re-evaluated.

Furthermore, in some families, homeschooling might work for one child but not all of them. According to data from homeschooling blogs, some homeschooled children even ask their parents if they can go to public school to try it out. In the event that homeschooling is not a viable option for some children, parents may purposefully place their children back into the public education system. Regardless of the reason(s) for doing so, transitioning back into the education system is not always an easy task for the previously homeschooled child or for educators. From a teacher's perspective, children who come into the education system that were previously homeschooled can be ahead in certain subjects and lagging behind in others. For instance in Ontario, because homeschoolers are not required to follow the provincial curriculum, some families choose to follow it, while others do not. According to one blogger, grade levels can be meaningless for homeschooling families:

The thing about homeschooling is that really, you start where you start. If it's preschool, you start there, middle school, there. Same with high school. You identify gaps, and current learning plateaus, and start there. Grade levels are kind of irrelevant (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 3, B6).

While this can be beneficial for establishing a love of learning in a child, it can also be extremely difficult for teachers when the homeschooled child is placed back into the education system where there is a set curriculum and way of doing things. Consequently, it can force educators to play 'catch up', where they are stuck trying to establish and identify what grade level the homeschooled child is performing at, and where they are supposed to be in relation to their classmates.

A common theme amongst homeschooling parents in the current study was their lack of confidence in teaching the high school level curriculum, so some decided to place their children back into the public education system. As courses increase in rigour parents may no longer have the confidence or teaching skills to educate their child and at that point, the child may re-enter the education system. One blog post from a secondary public school teacher indicated she homeschooled her children for a while, but noted it became increasingly difficult leading into the high school years. She also spoke to the need for socialization, high school sports, and extracurricular activities that homeschooling does not always offer unless you join a good support group. Such transitions are not always easy. This blogger wrote about her children's difficult transition back into the education system after being homeschooled. She wrote, "I am speaking as a secondary teacher who had children that were homeschooled and came back to public school. They were behind the rest of the students in my class, they had developed very lazy habits and expected they should not have to work to think and make good grades" (Theme 3, C3). Similarly, another homeschooling blogger spoke to the frustrations she experienced when transitioning from being homeschooled to the public education system:

"Transitioning from being homeschooled to public school was hard. I went from feeling safe and secure and focusing on nothing but school work and fun, to a land where nothing was familiar. I remember being SO TIRED! Literally falling asleep on my desk half my classes, living off slushies at the canteen to try to get through my classes. Getting up early and spending all day at school, coming home and staying up late to do homework and repeat. It didn't make a lot of sense to me considering I could generally get all my school done in just a morning or afternoon!" (Theme 3, C5).

Similarly, a participant in the study who is an educator spoke to the same context, outlining:

I think it is because when I've talked to parents and eventually said so why the change, I know there are obviously some issues, but why? And usually it is because Mom was uncomfortable or dad was uncomfortable with the math, they didn't have access to the same kind of resource supports, field trips, and in class equipment and all that kind of stuff or they wanted to give the kids a social group getting ready for high school (Educator, Margaret, Theme 3, D11).

Both passages indicate that for some, homeschooling can be a better fit in the early phases of education, but as it becomes more complex and parents are not always able to provide the same resources as a school, some choose to place them back into the system. The current study found, however, that placing a child back into the education system after they have been homeschooled is not a seamless transition.

Theme 4: A Blended Model

“Homeschoolers, unschoolers, and public school educators share the same goals. That we take divergent paths to these goals should be seen not as an obstacle but as an opportunity to explore -- in a cooperative spirit -- the unique discoveries each path offers” (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 4, B4)

It is clear that both homeschooling and the public education system have their flaws, but they also have certain characteristics and approaches that can benefit the other. In order for this to happen, however, there needs to be greater dialogue between homeschoolers and public school educators. While the two public school educators interviewed in the current study were overtly welcoming of homeschoolers, this is likely not the case for all educators in Ontario. More research is needed to explore educators' perceptions of homeschooling, especially across provinces given variations in legislation. Historically these two groups have not had much contact or shared resources, and some suggest this is unfortunate. As one blogger outlined:

Rather than being threatened by homeschoolers and unschoolers, who will always be a small minority, educators would do well to see us as colleagues and sources of information on the nature of learning and motivation. (Homeschool Blogger, Theme 4, B4)

Homeschooling families and their practices could serve as a resource for educators as they develop their own teaching techniques and cater to their children's unique needs. One educator interviewed even admitted, almost guiltily, that she found a notebooking technique from a homeschooling website that she now employs in her classroom. She also uses a number of resources from homeschooling websites because she acknowledged 'a lot of people had gone to a lot of work to find a way to document their kids learning' (Margaret, Educator, Theme 4, B7). Homeschooling websites could be a valuable resource for educators to look for more materials to supplement what they are already teaching, or at least make it more creative. The same can extend to homeschooling parents, because as the results from the current study suggest, many parents who begin homeschooling are not always comfortable with teaching their child(ren) as it is a daunting task. Opening lines of communication could also help with the transitions back into the education system if parents feel it necessary to place their child(ren) back into the system.

Speaking to the transitions experienced by homeschoolers when they re-enter the public education system, one educator emphasized the need for teachers to be told they are receiving a homeschooled child (Margaret, Educator, Theme 4, C7). As Margaret explained, this would be much more effective as teachers would be able to match the child with someone who can work with the child no matter what their learning style, saving time and allowing educators to prioritize their time based on the demands of the classroom. Additionally, it would be very useful if professional educators were supplied with EA's to

assist them in the classroom. By having additional support, students would be able to learn much more effectively as teachers would be able to spend more time with students one on one, to ensure they are learning. As Margaret pointed out earlier, the contemporary classroom cannot functionally operate with Socratic students anymore because each child has a different learning style. Likewise, the conveyor belt method of education that Noelle pointed out is clearly not working anymore, and it needs to be addressed and fixed.

Additionally, the data from the current study indicates that some children learn at different rates, and have various learning styles, meaning the conveyor belt method does not necessarily work effectively for all students. If students fall behind because they are not learning at the rate they are supposed to, it can name and shame those who do not perform as well as their classmates, and create a snowball effect where the proceeding grade level might be too advanced for them. Consequently, they will continue to lag behind the other students in certain areas without their learning challenges being diagnosed appropriately. On the other hand, the beauty of homeschooling is that children can move at their own pace and be at different grade levels for each subject, because this is okay, and quite frankly, normal. If the public school system acknowledged students learn at different rates, they might be able to hone in on areas that need work, and not cause students to fall further and further behind.

Both homeschoolers and public educators can learn from one another and improve the face of education in the coming years, but to do so it is necessary that both systems develop a stronger relationship to ensure all children are getting the best possible education. Because homeschooled students tend to transition in and out of the public education system, there needs to be ongoing communication between homeschoolers and public school educators. This will also help homeschooled students successfully transition between the systems

without problems, as both parties could pool together their information and resources to prepare accordingly.

Ultimately, the results of this study speak to some of the reasons for the growth of homeschooling over the last several decades and the relationship experienced between homeschoolers and the public education system. Regarding the latter, it is evident that homeschooling is becoming much more mainstream as even professional educators are praising it, voicing they want to home educate their children. With this being said, homeschooling is not an end all be all choice, as most families take it year by year. Some homeschooled children transition in and out of the public school system, which can often be very difficult for them, the teachers, and parents. If concerns regarding the public education system remain or grow in the future, homeschooling may pose an increasing threat to the public education system as more families pull their children from the traditional schools.

Discussion

Although there is existing research regarding the growth of homeschooling, the reasons for homeschooling, and the pros and cons of the practice, there has been a lack of investigation into the relationship homeschoolers experience with the public education system. This study is among the first to explore this relationship in Canada. The present study has analyzed this relationship by drawing from semi-structured interviews and online homeschooling blogs to address this gap in knowledge.

Among the findings of this study, four common themes emerged from the data. First, results suggest the relationship between the public education system and homeschooling varies significantly over time and locale. Because education falls under provincial jurisdiction in Canada, the regulations surrounding the practice of homeschooling are entirely

different across provinces. While previous scholars (Van Pelt, 2015; Basham, Merrifield, & Hepburn 2007) have developed typologies to classify the homeschooling regulations in Canada, which range from low to high, the current study took this one step further to examine experiences homeschoolers face in light of these regulations. For example, depending on the province or area, the reaction that homeschooling families face from school boards can vary from hostile to friendly. Respondents suggested that many homeschoolers in provinces such as Quebec do not register with the government because they fear persecution, which can partially be explained by the high regulation of homeschooling in the province. While this fear may be less common in provinces like Ontario, which have fewer regulations surrounding the practice of homeschooling, certain school boards, particularly in rural areas and locations where homeschooling is uncommon, can still be hostile towards home education. These findings parallel results from Johnson (2013), who found the relationship between homeschoolers and the public education system in the United States can be either cooperative or confrontational. This research goes beyond existing studies to suggest that local contexts may be equally important as regulations at the state or provincial level for shaping families' experiences.

Data from the current study also suggests that educators' perspectives on homeschooling may be changing. In previous decades, professional educators have critiqued homeschooling by questioning the average parent's ability to cover all areas of the curriculum, the availability of appropriate program materials, and the potential absence of social interaction (Luffman, 1997). Critics have also raised concerns over the threat that homeschooling poses for the existence of public schools, as it diminishes the potential of public education to serve the common good (Lubienski, 2000). While the practice of

homeschooling has been critiqued for many reasons, the data in the current study suggests these sentiments might be declining. As homeschooling becomes much more mainstream, even some professional educators voiced their support for homeschooling, would consider homeschooling their own children, and encourage parents to participate in part-time homeschooling. In fact, both educators interviewed expressed growing concerns with the public education system and the limitation of resources they have (i.e. no educational assistants). With scarce resources and overcrowded classrooms, the educators interviewed in this study expressed frustrations with teaching, as they cannot always teach as effectively as they would like to. This highlights the need for greater assistance in some public school classrooms or and/or reduced class sizes to ensure educators can do their job effectively. Consequently, the educators expressed concern that the classroom becomes a place for ‘drill and kill’ lecturing rather than an environment that stimulates a passion for learning. One educator went as far as to say the public education system is becoming a ‘conveyor belt,’ which is simply ineffective and incongruent with the growing demands of students and their parents. These types of limitations on educators’ abilities to teach may also contribute to families concerns with public education and their decision to homeschool their children.

Ironically, the data indicated that some homeschooling parents mimic the conveyor belt system during the early phases of their homeschooling journey. However, many soon learn this method does not work well with their children, and because they have the flexibility to change their approach, are able to try a variety of teaching methods to find the best suited approach for their children. Overall, studies suggest that in general homeschooling parents recognize that a one size fits all method that they perceive as the

approach of the public education system does not work for all students (Aurini & Davies, 2005).

In addition to the well-identified challenges facing homeschooling families, such as time constraints and finding opportunities for social interaction, this research suggests that, the connection across the various education systems is another major challenge both for homeschooling families and for educators. Most notably, the data indicated that transitioning in and out of the systems (i.e., public education and homeschooling) was quite difficult for students, educators and parents. Families who turn to alternative forms of education do not necessarily make a clean break from the public education system. Indeed, most families continually reassess their child(ren)'s needs and choose to do what is in the child's best interest. This can result in a number of transitions both into and out of public education. Upon re-entry, homeschooled students may not be used to a classroom of twenty-five or more students, therefore making it difficult for some to transition away from one-on-one learning with their parent(s). Likewise, the same difficulty is felt by educators with limited resources, who tend to become frustrated when re-entering homeschooled children do not transition smoothly into the public education system. Because there is no model for integrating the various forms of education, there is little guidance for parents or teachers facing these transitions, which are likely quite common among the homeschooling community and present a challenge for all involved.

Because this study was limited to a few exploratory interviews, future researchers should interview more educators and homeschoolers in order to better understand the relationship between the two. Studies should be done in each province to cross compare and see if the results are similar, or if they differ depending on the regulations of homeschooling

in each corresponding province. A longitudinal study of families over time would also be very beneficial to analyze the detailed nuances of the transitions in and out of the systems. Relying on data from homeschooling blogs is a great alternative, however, following students over time would expose more information and provide a better understanding of the transitions students face.

Overall, the homeschooling movement is growing, and its current existence needs to be recognized. As it remains a viable alternative to traditional public school learning, it is and will continue to be, an essential option in education (Luffman, 1997). Both homeschoolers and the public education system share the same goals, so it will benefit both parties to act more diligently to create and maintain a lasting relationship in the coming years.

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