COLLABORATIVE LEADERS' EXPERIENCES WITH STUDENT SUCCESS IN

HOMESCHOOL CO-OP EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Mandie Jeanne Koroi

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of collaborative leaders at homeschool cooperatives (co-ops) in North Carolina. The theory that guided this study is Chrislip and Larson's theory on collaborative leadership, as it explains that changes made for the success of educational institutions are better achieved when many different groups, such as teachers, parents, administrators, counselors, and students, work together to decide and enact those changes. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach was used to analyze data collected from ten homeschool co-op leaders' individual interviews, focus groups, and blog posts provided by adults who participate in the leadership of homeschool co-ops. Through reviewing this data, themes were created, and textural descriptions of the lived experiences of collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops and how their collaboration leads to students' success were devised. Through data analysis, inferences for recommendations for future research were discussed. Findings revealed that homeschool co-ops were made up of leaders who often had a life long passion for education. These leaders come together under their homeschool co-op with a common goal of using their passion to invest in young people. Secondly, homeschool co-op leaders had a student-centered education method in which they identified students' individual needs and reacted with in-depth, hands-on, and real-life learning experiences. Finally, homeschool co-op leaders successfully lead homeschool co-ops by maintaining their vision for their homeschool co-op. Participants did this by having multiple roles in leadership to enact different tasks and learning from previous issues that appeared within the homeschool co-op.

Keywords: collaborative leadership, homeschool, homeschool co-ops, student success, informal educational settings

Copyright Page

Dedication

To my grandmother, Jeanne Wainwright Park, for being the legacy I strive to live up to daily.

To my husband, Benedict Koroi, for listening for endless hours about every minuscule achievement I have had in this journey (And then proudly telling everyone he knows about it later).

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Although homeschool education has been on the rise in the last several years, the risks and benefits surrounding homeschool education are lacking (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020). Recent literature has insinuated that homeschool methods, such as homeschool cooperatives (co-ops), can produce more academically, psychologically, and socially successful students than normal educational methods (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Yet, the validity of this hypothesis and reasons leading to why homeschool co-ops could produce more successful students over traditional education is widely unexplored (McCabe et al., 2021; Ray, 2013; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). Nevertheless, researchers agree that the answer to equitable education for all is the involvement of multiple groups to foster student success (Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022; Schlebusch, 2020; Tahili et al., 2022). Therefore, exploring collaborative leaders and their roles in creating student success in homeschool co-ops is essential. Chapter One is an introduction to this transcendental phenomenological study that aims to describe collaborative leaders' experiences in striving for student success in homeschool co-ops. This chapter provides a background of this topic, introduces the problem and purpose statements, addresses the significance of the study, outlines the proposed research questions, and defines key terms. Finally, this chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

Background

Homeschool education has been a popular alternative to formal education in the United States for approximately 60 years due to the ability to offer a more tailored education for families by homeschooling. Due to COVID-19 and political and social issues, homeschooling

has continued to increase (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Lapon, 2021; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Sumroy, 2022). As a result, researchers and educators have heightened the exploration of new home-based educational methods, such as online schools and homeschool groups (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022).

Homeschool education varies in legislation because there are no federal laws on homeschooling, with regulation being up to the state (Carlson, 2020; Dills, 2022; Hamlin, 2022; Permoser & Stoeckl, 2021). Furthermore, homeschooling can be made of tight-lipped communities who fear being ostracized for their choices to homeschool (Carlson, 2020; Dills, 2022; Hamlin, 2022; Permoser & Stoeckl, 2021). Therefore, research on homeschool education lacking in terms of what methods within homeschooling lead to student success (Carlson, 2020; Tilhou, 2019). Homeschool groups use a community effort to create an educational experience linked to student success. Examining the adults who collaborate to maintain homeschool groups may be the first step in understanding how to create a better educational experience for American students (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; McCabe et al., 2021). The following is a review of the historical, social, and theoretical contexts to better understand homeschooling education as it pertains to this study.

Historical Context

Homeschool education is an educational model focusing on the family as the primary source of education (Preethi & Lawrence, 2021; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020). Students learn outside the traditional public school in non-formal settings, such as homes, libraries, museums, or community centers (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020). Globally, this method has become controversial due to the lack of government regulation of homeschooling (Carlson, 2020; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Renzulli et al., 2020). However,

especially in the United States and other western countries, homeschooling is not uncommon and continues to grow (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Purwaningsah & Fauziah, 2020; Sumroy, 2022).

As an alternative education model to formal education, homeschooling was developed in the 1960s by John Caldwell Holt. Holt felt that the regulation of education took the passion out of learning. Thus, homeschooling gained interest because of its promise of academic passion for learning in the real world, not simply replicating the public-school model at home (Contos & Tadros, 2022; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020).

By the 1970s, every state in America had families educating their students at home (Carlson, 2020; Rahmi & Fadhil, 2022; Ray & Shakeel, 2022). During this time, reasons to homeschool began to bloom. Researchers, such as Dr. Raymond Moore, promoted homeschooling when some considered lowering the age for which children would begin to attend school. Through his works, Moore drew the interest of Christian groups. Similarly, Holt also wrote books describing alternative education methods in the mid-70s, claiming that he received thousands of letters from families requesting information on homeschooling. In the 1980s, humorously, America saw its first homeschooler who was raised on a goat farm, be accepted into an Ivy League college (Heuer & Donovan, 2021).

From then on, homeschooling methods increased through the 1990s (Lapon, 2021; Ray et al., 2021). As technology advanced, more families and educational institutions found increasingly new ways to educate from home (Lapon, 2021). Yet, from the early 2000s to approximately 2016, homeschooling mysteriously became stagnant with no significant growth in numbers (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Lapon, 2021).

In 2020, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, such as politics, created unrest in the United States' education climate. Some parents turned to homeschooling to integrate their religious beliefs into education, often banned in public school settings (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Lapon, 2021; Li & Mathis, 2022; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Sumroy, 2022). Parents also continuously choose to homeschool because they are unsatisfied with public or private school options (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Li & Mathis, 2022; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020). Regardless of the reasons, homeschool enrollment continues to rise (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022).

Social Context

Due to the onset of COVID-19, education has completely changed, and homeschooling has taken on a new mass of students (Dwyer, 2022; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). As schools closed indefinitely to thwart the spread of COVID-19, most families had no choice but to take on some form of schooling from home (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). As a result, educators and parents have experimented with new precedents for homeschooling and have had to address some long-standing social issues surrounding homeschooling (Valiente et al., 2022).

A social issue families involved in homeschooling may face is the stereotype of socialization or lack thereof. Homeschooled students often contradict the assumption that they are less socialized than students who have attended public school. In recent research, homeschooled students have repeatedly been more psychologically and emotionally sound than their public-school counterparts (McCabe et al., 2021; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). However, researchers have found that the sentiment of socially stunted homeschooled children could derive from parents' perceptions who worry that they are not providing enough

socialization opportunities for their children (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Sevier & Pope, 2022). Homeschooling families can be protective of their educational choices in the homeschool process for their children, which has limited several critical contributors from participating in vital research to further the understanding of homeschooling, as parents are often cautious to participate in studies (Carlson, 2020; Dills, 2022; Hamlin, 2022; Permoser & Stoeckl, 2021). Therefore, significant gaps in homeschool education research include understanding student achievement in homeschool education and the cultural elements that lead to that achievement (Carlson, 2020; Tilhou, 2019).

There are also concerns raised by society that the possibility of a lack of socialization in homeschooled students may also leave these students unprepared to transition into higher education or employment settings (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). However, while homeschooled students may not have the same social or educational experiences as public-school students, in research, homeschooled students show no statistical difference in post-secondary academic achievement compared to their formally educated counterparts (Hamlin & Cheng, 2021). Homeschool students transitioning into college tend to participate in more diverse activities and are more likely to maintain vital leadership roles than students who had a traditional classroom education .

This study could help researchers, educators, and legislators better understand the stigmas and worries that should be addressed, as homeschooling grows as a vital educational method. Understanding collaborative leadership in homeschool co-ops may help portray how those leadership skills relay to their students to succeed better after transitioning out of secondary school. Finally, this research may contribute to further the true scope of how socialization methods in homeschooling differ from those of formally educated students and how that

socialization affects the outcomes of homeschooled students' futures in adulthood.

Theoretical Context

Homeschool co-ops depend on the collaboration of parents, educators, and stakeholders to effectively deliver education to students through various experiences often outside of a traditional classroom (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Sahlin, 2023). The collaborative leadership theory is critical in this context because it theorizes that working together can better meet the needs of a community (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Extensive research reveals that collaborative leadership in an educational institution can inspire people to work prolifically toward resolving complex matters when they can collaborate with others (Sahlin, 2023; Torres, 2019).

Recent studies on homeschool groups most often explore the context in which homeschooling occurs. The many reasons for homeschooling have been discussed. These reasons may include religious preferences, where parents may choose to incorporate religious practices in their child's education, as public schools do not allow these practices (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Tilhou, 2019). Parents may also choose homeschooling for family flexibility, such as if parents need a better balance of career and family time. Homeschooling may also be a choice for families of children with special needs if the family feels that formal school setting may not be adequate for the unique needs of their student (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; McCabe et al., 2021; Tilhou, 2019). However, research rarely covers how homeschooling occurs as an educational entity (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Additionally, although parents have often been investigated for their abilities to facilitate education, there has been no acknowledgment of the diverse adult leaders contributing to homeschooling groups (Burke, 2022; Tilhou, 2019).

However, as the essential feature of homeschool co-op education is the encouragement to work together on a leader and a student level. In homeschool co-ops, parents may take turns

teaching different courses or work together to host group classes taught by a third-party expert. Leaders may also encourage older students to lead classes or be assigned to mentor younger students. However, there is little research about how collaborative leadership theory relates to homeschool co-ops. This study could help further understanding of what collaborative methods in homeschool co-op leadership are effective, how different stakeholders can help collaboration in leadership methods, and how collaborative leadership can lead to student success in homeschool co-ops (Contos & Tadros, 2022; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021).

Problem Statement

The problem was that although experts recommend a variety of collaborative support for students in educational settings, homeschool families may struggle to develop or access meaningful collaborative relationships to foster the success of their students (De Jong et al., 2019; Dobosz et al., 2023; Letzel et al., 2020). Parents are typically the primary teachers in homeschool settings, but collaborate with counselors, subject experts, and members of the community to offer their children a multitude of educational experiences, breaking away from the confines of classrooms and textbooks (Martini et al., 2020; Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020). For the homeschool community, one way of building collaborative relationships is through homeschool co-op education (Collier et al., 2020; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). As approximately 31% of homeschooled students are involved in homeschool co-ops, these co-ops have been shown to produce well-behaved and academically motivated students who may be just as, if not more so, socially, emotionally, and scholastically developed as their formally educated peers (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Although collaboration is occurring in homeschool co-ops, how collaboration in

leadership is used to foster the success of students involved in these co-ops is not yet known (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Tilhou, 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand and describe the experiences of collaborative leaders in their journey to foster student success in homeschool co-ops in North Carolina. For the purposes of this study, homeschool co-op education will be generally defined as a method of education outside of formal education. In this method, families of children meet regularly in homes, libraries, or other community spaces to collectively educate their students in various academic and life-skill areas (Valiente et al., 2022).

Significance of the Study

In this study, participants described their experiences as collaborative leaders involved in homeschool co-ops and hopefully create a picture of common elements in their leadership that lead to student success. This study revealed vital methods in homeschooling to validate further the method in the education field and encourage further regulation of the educational method (Carlson, 2020; Renzulli et al., 2020). However, the overall picture could be significant in unveiling ways to provide an educational experience that can appropriately encompass more students and their learning needs (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Tilhou, 2019).

Theoretical Significance

This study used Chrislip and Larson's (1994) collaborative leadership theory. These researchers theorized that leaders should work together to do what is best for the community instead of one leader or a limited group enacting their rulings on the community they lead . In education, Chrislip and Larson theorized that leaders who work together have better success at fitting the needs of students and achieving educational reform. Research also found that

collaborative leadership provides equality in education for all students, leading to a wider net of students who can succeed academically (Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022; Schlebusch, 2020; Tahili et al., 2022). As homeschool groups, such as homeschool co-ops, have become popular for their collaborative nature, describing the experiences of collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops could confirm the validity of this theory and extend it by linking this leadership style to students' success (Valiente et al., 2022).

Empirical Significance

This research aimed to fill a gap in the literature surrounding collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops and how their collaboration leads to student success. This study can help further research to understand how relationships between leaders can lead to student success and achievement in homeschool settings (Carlson, 2020; Collier et al., 2020; Egitim, 2021; Nanquil, 2021; Schlebusch, 2020; Tilhou, 2019). The empirical significance of this study may contribute to the phenomenological research of alternative educational methods, further validating homeschool education to be regulated and facilitated as a significant educational source to meet student needs. This study could also reveal how collaborative leadership in homeschool co-ops meets community needs. Furthermore, this study may demonstrate the viability that collaborative leadership is a critical factor in educational reform and equity, rather than education policies falling solely to politicians or economically motivated stakeholders (Teräs et al., 2020).

Practical Significance

The practical significance of this study was that the results of this study may empower homeschool co-op leaders to properly fit the unique needs of their students. Homeschool co-op leaders can understand the validity of their roles as parents, facilitators, counselors, and more to seek the appropriate pathways to work together utilizing the collaborative leadership theory

(Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Understanding their significance in being educational leaders concerning their homeschool co-op's success can inspire participants to make positive changes within their communities within and outside of educational institutions. Finally, participants' experiences might help other parents consider homeschool co-op education, empowering parents to form or strengthen homeschool co-ops.

Research Questions

The following research questions are aligned with the problem and purpose statements. These proposed research questions were derived to support this study. The central research question focuses on understanding the experiences of collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops. Sub-question one addresses a segment of the central research question to understand how leaders collaborating in homeschool co-ops creates student success. Sub-question two addresses the theoretical factor of the research by exploring how collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops contribute to the needs of their community.

Central Research Question

What are the collaboration experiences of homeschool co-op leaders in North Carolina?

Sub-Question One

What are the strategies used by homeschool co-op leaders to foster student success in North Carolina?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of homeschool co-op leaders working together to meet the needs of their community in North Carolina?

Definitions

1. *Collaborative leadership* – leaders work together to address the needs of the community (Chrislip & Larson, 1994).

2. *Collaborative leaders in homeschool cooperatives (co-ops)* – parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, and other professionals who work together to deliver an education to students within a homeschool co-op (Martini et al., 2020).

3. *Homeschool cooperative* – democratic organizations that serve the interest of a particular group of people and aligns with the values parents seek to teach their children (Valiente et al., 2022).

4. *Student success* – students achieving a well-rounded education outside of the traditional classroom (Martini et al., 2020; Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020).

Summary

By describing the experiences of collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops, this research examined the problem that, although experts recommend that educational settings offer various collaborative supports for students, homeschool families may find it challenging to develop or access meaningful collaborative relationships to foster the success of their students. This chapter provided background context, the problem and purpose statements, research questions, and an explanation of the significance of this study. Studying this phenomenon attempted to fill the gap in research regarding collaborative leadership contributing to student success in a method of education that is rapidly increasing in the United States.

There are five chapters in this dissertation. Chapter One introduces the problem that is to be researched and provides context for the issue. Chapter Two reviews literature related to the study. Chapter Three lays out the methodology in which the study will be conducted. Chapter

Four provides the findings of the research. Chapter Five will give a summary of the study, as well as recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore the problem of collaborative leadership in the facilitation of homeschool co-operative (co-op) education and how collaborative methods in leadership affect the success of students in the program. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. The theory relevant to collaborative leadership in homeschool co-op education, namely the collaborative leadership theory, is discussed in the first section, followed by a synthesis of recent literature about collaborative leadership in different education methods, problem-based education methods, non-traditional educators, third-party adult interventionists, and student success in homeschool co-ops. Then, a discussion is provided from the literature on how collaborative leadership methods can raise the self-efficacy of the facilitators in homeschool co-op education programs and, in turn, raise student achievement. Finally, the need for the current study is addressed by identifying a gap in the literature regarding how collaborative leadership methods lead to the success of students enrolled in homeschool co-op education programs.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of collaborative leadership is a concept that leaders work together to address the needs of their community (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Researchers Chrislip and Larson originally constructed this theory in the context of a community and its leadership, theorizing that a community does not simply want to be governed by a higher power. Instead, citizens yearn to be a part of their local government and take part in solving issues alongside each other . After observing leadership in local governments, businesses, and groups, the researchers discovered a

trend that problems were more likely to be solved, and a group's performance was more likely to improve as a whole when collaboration was present in the decision-making entities.

Chrislip and Larson (1994) recognized educational reform as a complicated endeavor. This complexity seems related to the fact that leaders in charge of school systems try to enact change based on how they believe change should occur. As a result, other leaders who have different ideas block these changes. Thus, the cycle of reform attempts and failures continues. However, educational leaders are becoming more aware that change is effectively implemented when parents, students, administrators, teachers, school boards, and communities work together to create change.

Additionally, Chrislip and Larson (1994) recognized that family units in the United States have steadily disintegrated. As community programs are cut, schools, churches, and community centers no longer aid American families effectively. Therefore, neighborhoods have seen a rise in poverty, drug use, and violence that deters leaders from helping children and their local educational systems. Chrislip and Larson found that the lack of collaboration between the United States () Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services inhibited realistic solutions to help American families. As a result, their declining communities significantly impact local schools and students by deterring good educators and willing stakeholders. If governmental departments worked together to create integrated family-centered communities, children could thrive in their educational development.

Current literature revealed that collaborative leadership can positively impact the entire educational institution (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Egitim, 2021; Poom-Valickis et al., 2022; Sahlin, 2023; Schlebusch, 2020). Educators are more likely to combat complex issues in schools regardless of the school's socioeconomic status or achievement status when a collaborative

leadership atmosphere is present (Sahlin, 2022; Torres, 2019). The collaborative leadership

theory has positively affected administrator and teacher attitudes about their school, student

engagement, and student and educator retention in schools. This theory has also been highly

utilized in encouraging parental involvement with collaboration as researchers deem that parent

involvement closely links to student success (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Kim, 2020; Lara &

Saracostti, 2020). Additionally, researchers have found that students who witness collaboration

in leadership better understand skills in working together in school environments and can apply

these skills in the workforce in the future (Berkowitz et al., 202; Iachini et al., 2019). Although it

may take great effort to unify many different ways to build a collaborative educational

environment, collaborative leadership can create a culture of trust, dependability, and

consistency that becomes the cornerstone of resolving issues in an academic setting and

addressing a community's needs (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Sahlin, 2023).

This research study used the theoretical framework of collaborative leadership to

understand how leaders work together in homeschool co-op education and its impact on student

success. Homeschooling options, such as co-op education, give students unique opportunities to

learn from various people (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Sahlin, 2023). Furthermore, one of the

critical attributes of co-op education is that students are encouraged to work together to solve

problems (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). However, little is known about effective collaborative

leadership methods, how third-party interventionists can help with the collaboration process, and

how collaborative leadership within homeschool co-ops can affect student success (Contos &

Tadros, 2022; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021). The collaborative leadership theoretical

framework was used to understand further how adults can work together to promote student

success in an educational method growing in popularity, strengthen the empirical evidence of

collaborative leadership practices, and further research in the validity of alternative educational methods for school-aged children (Carlson, 2020; Collier et al., 2020; Egitim, 2021; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Schlebusch, 2020; Tilhou, 2019).

Related Literature

The purpose of this section is to present an analysis and synthesis of research related to collaborative leadership in the homeschool co-operative education (co-op) approach and how that collaboration impacts student success. The themes identified in this research are collaborative leadership, collaboration in homeschooling, and the benefits of homeschool co-op education. Collaborative leadership in education outlines the role of adults working together in educational leadership and specifically examines parents' interactions with various collaborators in homeschooling education to create a well-rounded educational experience for everyone involved. Homeschool collaboration reviews meaningful connections made to ensure a successful homeschooling experience. Observing the benefits of co-op education can contribute to understanding a limit in research where the focus has been on singular reasons why families join co-ops rather than revealing how democratic co-op environments could lead to stronger academic communities. Literature assessing collaborative leadership in education, specifically in homeschool co-op education and the culture of co-op education, will better understand how collaborative leadership tactics can mold co-op education into educational institutions that benefit modern education and students.

Collaborative Leadership in Education

Collaborative leadership theory has gained notoriety in education because it has sustainably improved many challenges within educational institutions (Abellán, 2020; Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022; Sahlin, 2023; Schlebusch, 2020; Tahili et al., 2022). In academic institutions,

leaders often feel that the responsibility for student success is solely up to them (Lambrecht et al., 2022; Martini et al., 2020; Schlebusch, 2020). Administrators think they must be singularly accountable for the leadership in their schools (Martini et al., 2020; Poom-Valickis et al., 2022; Sahlin, 2023; Schlebusch, 2020). Teachers often feel they are alone in authority over their classrooms. Parents often fail to facilitate their child's learning at home (Martini et al., 2020; Schlebusch, 2020).

However, this isolation among groups contradicts the democratic roots of educational leadership (Egitim, 2021; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022). Education relies on an intricate network of collaboration from all levels of leaders in the system (Lambrecht et al., 2022; Martini et al., 2020; Schlebusch, 2020). Furthermore, working with all stakeholders causes potential solutions to evolve. For example, in a case study of Durham University in the United Kingdom (U.K.), Tony Fawcett was appointed Head of the Department for the Sciences programs. He immediately made a goal to make sure his students' and staff's opinions were reflected in the development of the curriculum. However, he insisted that to see growth in the school, each respective department, student, and staff needed collaboration between all departments, staff, and higher leadership. Doing this, the Durham University community focused on shared interests in teaching, learning, and community needs. As a result, in 2018, Durham University was rewarded gold status in the teaching excellence framework in U.K. education. The university was particularly noted for its "institutional culture that facilitates, recognizes, and rewards excellent teaching and is embedded across the provider" (Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022, p. 138).

In contrast, educational institutions that choose to determine solutions from a few people are only sometimes practical (Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022). For example, Egitim (2021) observed English classes in secondary schools in Japan when Japan pushed to have graduating students

entering university-level educational institutions with a high level of English fluency. Japanese secondary schools depended on the teachers' expertise to effectively teach the students English and standardized exams, producing English-proficient students. However, Japanese students lacked the high level of communicative English that Japan desired them to have upon entering tertiary education. Yet, according to this study, Japanese educational institutions have been resistant to deviating from their teacher-centered, standardized testing practices, despite evidence of collaborative methods possibly yielding higher results in English proficiency.

Educational institutions that use collaboration within leadership have seen significant improvement in students' academics (Egitim, 2021; Schlebusch, 2020). Collaborative leadership has been attributed to raising academic success in under-achieving schools by attaining goals through working with diverse groups within the school systems (Tahili et al., 2022). Students immersed in a culture where they witness shared responsibility and support boost their self-confidence (Iachini et al., 2019; Torres, 2019). Furthermore, students see how their voice can matter to make democratic and critically thought-out decisions, a skill set they will take with them beyond the school setting (Iachini et al., 2019; Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022).

These schools have found this success in their student population by identifying strong leaders in different departments (Tahili et al., 2022). School systems create solutions that satisfy the majority by strategically aligning other groups of people and supporting them to collaborate (Iachini et al., 2019). As staff feels that their needs are seen and met, they can further support students on spiritual, social, and academic levels more deeply (Iachini et al., 2019; Tahili et al., 2022).

Parents, teachers, advisors, administrators, and district leaders all must be involved in education to result in the success of students (Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022; Schlebusch, 2020;

Tahili et al., 2022). Although there is a positive correlation between collaborative leadership and students' success within these institutions, how adults use their power still needs to be discovered (Egitim, 2021; Schlebusch, 2020). In addition, collaborative methods may fail due to a lack of knowledge of effective collaborative strategies. For example, in a study, the collaborative leadership methods of a school district in Indonesia was analyzed, finding that many school leaders in failing schools were very interested in or had attempted to initiate collaborative approaches among leadership. However, because these leaders did not have proficient knowledge in creating strategies, they failed to develop the culture and success they desired in their school's community (Tahili et al., 2022).

Although literature revealed the uses for collaborative leadership leading to student success, many research gaps still impede successful relationships between adults in this educational leadership setting (Collier et al., 2020; Egitim, 2021; Nanquil, 2021; Schlebusch, 2020). Further investigation is necessary to discover what counseling parents can take to become oriented in creating a school culture at home and how they can make learning habitual within their family's routine (Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021). Teachers or subject experts and their relationship with homeschooling parents must be observed and strengthened. Other investigations to reinforce collaborative leadership concerning homeschooling co-ops include the role of administrators or group leaders in co-ops. These leaders may be the key to connecting all collaborators for optimal educational gain among students (Collier et al., 2020).

Teacher Collaboration

Teachers can epitomize what makes or breaks student success within a school system. Although teachers are the authority in the classroom, they often are overlooked as leaders in their profession (Hargreaves, 2019; Schlebusch, 2020). Nevertheless, teachers are often expected to

become their classrooms' sole problem-solvers and initiators (Bagwell, 2019; Egitim, 2021; Hargreaves, 2019; Schlebusch, 2020). Outside of this isolation, teacher collaboration often focuses on ideas for the classroom passed through casual conversation (De Jong et al., 2019; De Jong et al., 2020; Hargreaves, 2019). Therefore, the knowledge potential of teacher collaboration needs to be improved (De Jong et al., 2019; De Jong et al., 2020).

However, teachers have successfully used the collaborative leadership theory (De Jong et al., 2019; Egitim, 2021; Hargreaves, 2019). In situations where school systems do foster collaborative leadership in teachers, their students scored higher in reading and mathematics compared to the classrooms of isolated teachers (De Jong et al., 2019; Hargreaves, 2019). Teachers also have a higher sense of self-efficacy and understanding in their roles (Egitim, 2021; Lin, 2021).

This high confidence is connected to collaboration, remolding how teachers understand their roles in the school (Egitim, 2021). Teachers are the leaders of their classrooms and should be considered significant leaders in the school (Hargreaves, 2019; Schlebusch, 2020). When teachers feel like their voice is heard in making the decisions at school, they begin to reflect on themselves and their teaching methods (De Jong et al., 2019; Egitim, 2021). As a result, teachers' identities in leadership strengthen as they nurture a new commitment to their craft, cultivating a willingness to develop effective learning habits that benefit their community, making teachers the critical factor in the drive to change or improve schools (Egitim, 2021; Meyer, 2023).

Administrator Collaboration

As teachers are essential to change in an educational institution, administrators are the support structure to help bring positive innovations to fruition (Egitim, 2021; Meyer, 2023). However, like teachers, administrators often feel isolated within their school system. Although,

instead of feeling alone in classroom management, administrators make decisions that can affect

an entire school system (Bagwell, 2019; Egitim, 2021; Hargreaves, 2019; Schlebusch, 2020).

Additionally, administrators are left responsible for enacting change to improve their schools

(Bagwell, 2019; De Jong et al., 2020; Poom-Valickis et al., 2022). As the literature points out,

administrators are integral to supporting positive school instruction and culture, so new

leadership methods are needed (Bagwell, 2019; De Jong et al., 2020; Schlebusch, 2020).

Educational stakeholders recognize that to accommodate their diverse school systems, a

more collaborative atmosphere must take effect (Bagwell, 2019; Egitim, 2021; Schlebusch,

2020). Administrators should recognize different leaders throughout the school system to create

collaborative atmospheres, especially teachers (Bagwell, 2019; Schlebusch, 2020). If

administrators develop leadership skills in teachers, teachers will have the confidence to

contribute accurately and collaboratively to the overall development of the school (Egitim, 2021;

Schlebusch, 2020).

Parent Collaboration

Parents can be considered educational leaders, as parent involvement in their student's

education is regarded as one of the essential elements of student success since parents often

facilitate and support the recommendations of teachers to ensure their child's success (Berkowitz

et al., 2021; Gerdes et al., 2022; Lara & Saracostti, 2020; Kim, 2020; Rissanen, 2022). This

involvement includes successful collaboration with other school leaders by parents participating

in school events, volunteering in school, attending parent-teacher meetings, and many other

school-related matters that cannot take off without the participation of parents (Berkowitz et al.,

2021). Parents become the crucial link between home and school life, casting a broader net for

growth in students according to how involved they are in their student's education, improvement

in students' self-esteem, and students' perception of schooling (Gerdes et al., 2022; Lara & Saracostti, 2020).

Over the past 60 years, the meaning of parent collaboration with other leaders has shifted in focus in the United States (Gerdes et al., 2022; Kim, 2020). In the 1980s, the United States saw a spike in divorce rates, leaving the nation reconfiguring parent involvement in their students' education with a larger group of single parents (Lara & Saracostti, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). Hence, the rise in initiatives, such as the early 2000s act, No Child Left Behind, encouraged more parent involvement in their students' education. In the last decade, rather than a push for more parent involvement, parent-school partnerships have now seen parent involvement is a pinnacle in school success (Lara & Saracostti, 2022; Zhang, 2022). Although, more recently, parental involvement in school has taken a turn in its impact on homeschool systems (Ceglie et al., 2022; Kim, 2020; Nanquil, 2021).

Community Collaboration in Educational Practices

Collaboration is creating a culture within a community by working together towards a common goal (Fauziddin, 2022; Tahili et al., 2022). Community involvement in education may come in several forms, as public interests arise in one issue or another, and how the instruction is executed is decided in the community as a whole (Rahman et al., 2022). Additionally, when a community is involved in education, members become aware and collaborative in cultural acts. Identifying the cultures within a community is essential to see a community adequately achieve desired outcomes surrounding common issues (Catalano & Morales, 2022; Fauziddin, 2022).

Especially in the United States, many communities boast of having people from various cultures. For the community to be able to educate the public on the many vibrant cultures, communities have often turned to the arts (Catalano & Morales, 2022; Reason, 2023). Engaging

the public in skills, such as dancing, music, or theatre, generates discussions on diverse topics and helps brings the issues of marginalized groups within the community to light (Catalano & Morales, 2022). While these artistic expressions in the United States can often be overpowered by political or hierarchal views or be tangled in ever-changing perspectives of culture according to the times, they become essential in unifying a community (Catalano & Morales, 2022; Fauziddin, 2022; Reason, 2023).

When thinking of community involvement in education, one may find it synonymous with public libraries, as they have been the source of knowledge exchange and hosts of public cultural events for centuries (Begum et al., 2021; Hernandez-Perez et al., 2022). Community members may come together in libraries to endorse community needs, such as learning technology through workshops or hosting language classes for community transplants (Begum et al., 2021; Grossman et al., 2022). A variety of public services at a little to no cost include research labs, book lending, public activities, and making education more equitable and diverse in a community (Begum et al., 2021).

To educate the public on their resources, a community may work together to develop, maintain, or improve local attractions, such as parks or historical sites (Nugroho & Numata, 2022; Rahman et al., 2022). Communities near natural areas that may be protected can be at risk for a failing economy if the natural protected areas' wildlife is affected by a lack of human knowledge for care or susceptible to natural disasters (Rahman et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022). Educating the public about their surrounding environment and teaching them how to care for it has become an effective way to stimulate economies in impoverished communities, as attributes upkeep in their town may attract tourism.

Overall, while the context of this proposed study is homeschool education, the practice of collaborative leadership in educational settings provides a robust understanding of how different leadership groups work together to meet the needs and find success in their educational institutions or communities. Understanding concepts, such as leaders collaborating within a school or in their community, may be helpful when examining the full potential benefits of using such collaboration methods within a homeschool co-op. Thus, the collaboration in leadership found within homeschool co-ops may contribute, in part, to understanding the potential of homeschool education for future learners by revealing new leadership strategies in teaching and closing many of the gaps in empirical research surrounding homeschooling as an alternative educational form.

Legislation Surrounding Homeschooling

Public school is a relatively new concept created to offer equitable education in the United States and has been the focus of the government's legislation to ensure it remains such (Kunzman, 2022). However, the United States has always favored the ability for families to choose their pathway to education, whether through public or other less conventional options (Bennett et al., 2019; Renzulli et al., 2020). Regardless of the method of teaching, the legislation of K-12 education often falls under the jurisdiction of the state (Carlson, 2020; Renzulli et al., 2020).

Homeschool education is often seen as a controversial educational method due to its lack of regulation (Permoser & Stoeckl, 2021; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Renzulli et al., 2020). Although public school students can face the consequences of lack of attendance, poor scores on standardized tests, or low grades, homeschooling families may assess learning through different methods or only conduct education a few days a week. Furthermore,

homeschooling gives the parent absolute power over their children's learning. Where public school students are exposed to options to choose their ideals and beliefs, homeschool families often propose aligning their children with a belief system devoid of other options (Breger, 2022). However, homeschooling families must comply to differing rules on how they may portray their chosen perspective under state law (Renzulli et al., 2020).

Legislative branches also favor homeschool families when their schooling choices are challenged regarding religious or parenting beliefs inserted into their homeschooling methodology. For example, in 1972, the United States Supreme Court decided in the case of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* that parents' religious practices should be protected from the state's interference (Renzulli et al., 2020). This legislation revealed that states seemingly prefer issues that may make education unequitable if it were a public-school situation where parents have less ability to choose how or in what context their student is educated (Carlson, 2020; Renzulli et al., 2020). Furthermore, although regulation is constantly bearing down upon public schools, the height of focus of laws on homeschools peaked in the early 2000s, and homeschooling did not see a significant effort in legislation from states in the 2010s (Renzulli et al., 2020). No legislation exists for homeschooling on a federal level, as federal courts often feel the whirlwind of random laws in the states surrounding homeschooling are too varying to set a consistent precedent on a national level (Carlson, 2020; Renzulli et al., 2020).

As there is a large spectrum of legislation between each state, many states do not provide accountability for homeschool families (Carlson, 2020; Dills, 2022; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Renzulli et al., 2020). Homeschool families can get away with doing things their way despite state law. Additionally, homeschool families often bristle at any interference from the government in their educational methods, pushing that parent choice in

educational practices is a fundamental right (Carlson, 2020; Cheng & Hamlin, 2023; Dills, 2022; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Permoser & Stoeckl, 2021).

These issues raise concerns from state law makers if homeschooling families are providing a well-rounded education where law makers worry about the isolation of homeschooled students or that homeschooling focuses on experiences over foundational education (Carlson, 2020; Dills, 2022). As homeschooling has steadily risen over the past several years, lawmakers also question the safety of more students staying home for their education (Dills, 2022). However, the lack of supervision of homeschooled families means that research on how to regulate homeschooling is severely lacking to ensure that homeschool methods are held to an adequate standard (Carlson, 2020; Ray & Shakeel, 2022).

In 2020, COVID-19 left the field of education scrambling to accommodate students forced to learn at home (Dwyer, 2022; Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). As parents feared for the safety of their children, they began to turn to homeschool options (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Preethi & Lawrence, 2021; Valiente et al., 2022). In the 2021-2022 school year, the rate of homeschooling families in the United States more than doubled and continued to maintain a popular option during the 2022-2023 school year, as public schools reopened (Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Ray, 2023). As more families turn to possibilities outside of public school, including many marginalized groups, the focus on homeschooling legislation is slowly coming to the forefront of stress, as a new age of educational standards unveils in the wake of COVID-19 (Carlson, 2020; Renzulli et al., 2020; Sevier & Pope, 2022).

Barriers of Homeschooling

Regulation and legislation of homeschooling come from many topics being widely undiscussed in research (Carlson, 2020; Ray & Shakeel, 2022). Therefore, significant risks

potentially exist that can prohibit homeschool methods from coming to the forefront of modern education (Dills, 2022; Green-Hennessy, 2023; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022). Concerns in research surround child abuse, equitable access, and the efficacy of non-traditional educators (Alarifi et al., 2021; Shofwan et al., 2021; Squire, 2021; Stewart & McCracken, 2023). Many rebuttals to recent literature argue that data surrounding the efficiency of homeschooling concerning safety, equity, and efficacy is not significant to consider in homeschool legislation (Duvall & Mason, 2022; Shakeel & Ray, 2023). Confirmation on whether or not these concerns significantly impact homeschool education would be essential to address.

As circumstances surrounding how one is educated essential to determining how the rest of their life will turn out, equitable education is necessary to make sure every student has a fair chance at academic achievement (Alafiri et al., 2021; Auxier & Anderson, 2020; Letzel et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 unveiled many areas of home education that need to be improved upon to make the future of home education substantial (Ceglie et al., 2022; Heuer & Donovan, 2021; Letzel et al., 2020; Lynch, 2020; Squire, 2021). Most schools, tutoring services, and home education options from formal schooling institutions used some form of technology to school students from home, and already heavily technology-based homeschool options more than tripled as public schools' reactions to the pandemic left parents unsatisfied (Ceglie et al., 2022; Heuer & Donovan, 2021). Additionally, researchers found that many of the families that were choosing to school from home, were low-income families, as these families had higher anxiety towards their health, being that they may have less access to healthcare (Ceglie et al., 2022; Kaya & Eroglu, 2021; Musaddiq et al., 2022).

Yet, this surge in homeschooling or remote learning in low-income families posed several issues (Auxier & Anderson, 2020; Ceglie et al., 2022; Callahan, 2021; Mussadiq et al.,

2022). About 17% of low socio-economic students in the United States did not have reliable access to technology at home during the pandemic (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). Furthermore, only about 50% of public schools in America could provide their students with technology at home during this time (Cahoon et al., 2021; Mussadiq et al., 2022). Even if a student was able to educate from a computer at home during the pandemic, 35% of school-aged children, primarily students of color, lived in a house that could not afford high-speed internet access, leaving them to have to seek out public internet access or use their caregiver's limited data (Auxier & Anderson, 2020; Ceglie et al., 2022).

During the pandemic, the government, alongside schools and local businesses, attempted to make sure that students, regardless of who or where they were, had access to the technology needed to learn from home (Alarifi et al., 2021; Cahoon et al., 2021; Squire, 2021). State-funded schools were able to install internet routers in parking lots so that students with limited internet access could drive up and use the internet to complete their work (Dale, 2020; Squire, 2021). Over 800 internet service providers provided families of school-aged children learning from home with free or low-cost internet to complete their studies (Dale, 2020; Edgerton & Cookson, 2020). Yet, 22% of families schooling from home during the pandemic accrued some financial responsibility to specifically attempt to help their students learn during the pandemic, significantly as the severity of the pandemic waned, and these essential services disappeared (Becker et al., 2020; Cahoon et al., 2021; Edgerton & Cookson, 2020). As many families are chose not to return to public school after the pandemic, it is essential that empirical research and legislation can help regulate these disparities and consider services that proved necessary during the pandemic so that all students have a fair chance in education in the United States (Cahoon et al., 2021; Ceglie et al., 2022).

Another barrier in homeschooling is the conflict between the education level of the primary facilitator of the education: the parent. As the rate of homeschooling rises, parents must have some higher education level to support their student's learning from home (Doyle, 2020; Kaya & Eroglu, 2021). Yet, low-income families are more likely to choose to homeschool over others (Ceglie et al., 2022; Kaya & Eroglu, 2021). Not only are these families speculated to likely not have adequate access to learning materials, extracurricular resources, or the time to educate their children effectively, but they are likely not to be highly educated themselves (Ceglie et al., 2022; Doyle, 2020; Kaya & Eroglu, 2021). As a result, homeschooled students of parents who did not receive a higher education degree are less likely to graduate college themselves, especially in homes where the mother lacks education, as mothers are more likely to be the child's educational facilitator (Bennett et al., 2019; Carlson, 2020; Ray, 2013). This limitation in homeschooling is shown to negatively impact the development and well-being of a child, even over other factors, such as the student's program or learning environment (Kaya & Eroglu, 2021; Ray, 2013). Researchers propose that the government consider the ethicality and equity of letting undereducated parents fend for themselves in educating their children (Bartholet, 2020; Dwyer, 2022).

Perhaps the most heatedly debated topic in empirical literature surrounding homeschooling is the subject of abuse (Alarifi et al., 2021; Duvall & Mason, 2022; Shakeel & Ray, 2023; Shofwan et al., 2021; Stewart & McCracken, 2023). While some researchers argue that child abuse in homeschool settings is a significant concern that needs to be addressed through legislation to make homeschooling a legitimate alternative to traditional schooling, others say, in response to these studies, that these studies are unfounded. Issues, such as largely

unreported abuse in homeschooling, lack of homeschooled participants in studies, and lack of

research on current and prospective homeschool policy make it difficult to pinpoint the answer.

In recent years, homeschooling has been highly publicized in the media. Extreme abuse

cases, such as the one of Mathew Tirado, an autistic teenager who starved to death at the hands

of his mother while enrolled in a homeschool program, have been in newspapers nationally

(Dills, 2022; Stewart & McCracken, 2023). Examples of abuse like this have helped reveal that

32-37% of families who take their children out of public school to homeschool already have a

history of mistreating the children in the home. Other significant examples of abuse are

highlighted in highly publicized television shows such, as *19 Kids and Counting* and the more

recent documentary *Shiny Happy People* (Crist & Nason, 2023). These docuseries portray

parents, Michelle and Jim Bob Duggar, using a homeschool curriculum based on their beliefs

according to their sect of religion, the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP) (Averett & Lacy,

2021; Crist & Nason, 2023; Menicucci, 2014). In these examples, the Duggar parents were

revealed to teach children strict responsibilities, such as teaching their daughters to raise younger

siblings once they were weaned from their mother (Averett & Lacy, 2021; Crist & Nason, 2023).

In 2015, the most prominent spotlight of this reality show family was revealed to be the ongoing

abuse inflicted upon various girls by the oldest son, Josh Duggar, and the fact that the family

covered up the various scandals since 2002 (Crist & Nason, 2023).

In most cases of documented abuse in homeschool families, such as the Duggars, these

families have more than one instance of reported child abuse against them (Dills, 2022; Stewart

& McCraken, 2023). Additionally, conservative religious families, especially if they believe in

evil, are highly likely to impose corporal punishment upon their children (Averett & Lacy, 2021;

Mahoney, 2010). In public schools, staff must report the abuse of students to government

institutions, but there is no such law for homeschooling parents where a mere 5% of parents are likely to report abuse (Dills, 2022). Therefore, the speculation has been that because of the lax regulations on homeschooling, abusers are getting away with even more unreported abuse and using homeschooling as a veil to continue the abuse (Dills, 2022; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Stewart & McCracken, 2023).

Other than physical abuse, the abuse of ethicality comes into question in literature (Averett & Lacy, 2021; Moreira et al., 2022). While the United States values the parents' right to choose how their children are educated, some researchers question if homeschooling can become an act of control over the child by the parent, eliminating the child's autonomy (Averett & Lacy, 2021; Moreira et al., 2022; Smith, 2022). There is concern that homeschooling enables parents to train their children from a narrowed point of view, which, in a democratic society, such as the United States, can disintegrate social unity in a community (Bartholet, 2020; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022).

Among many issues, the lack of literature impedes proper legislation for homeschooling for this educational method to become more legitimized in society. Abuse, parent education efficacy, and educational equity in home education are issues that have been raised by researchers, legislators, and advocates (Alarifi et al., 2021; Shofwan et al., 2021; Squire, 2021; Stewart & McCracken, 2023). Researchers widely debate whether these topics are significant when considering law-making for homeschool education. Therefore, a conclusion must be made through empirical research (Alarifi et al., 2021; Dills, 2022; Dwyer, 2022; Dwyer & Peters, 2019; Showfan et al., 2021; Squire, 2021; Stewart & McCracken, 2023).

Socialization in Homeschool

The significant stigma surrounding homeschooled students is that homeschooled students may be socially stunted in some way (McCabe et al., 2021; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). The sentiment on socialization is partially because research finds that educational institutions prioritize socialization (Byrd & Legette, 2022; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Sevier & Pope, 2022). Furthermore, social success is directly linked to academic success (McCabe et al., 2021; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022). However, many people, educators, and researchers view all homeschooling as using the same methods without considering that there are different types of homeschooling, such as virtual school or homeschool co-ops, whose purposes often surround not only sharing a wealth of information but resources in ensuring their children have the right social opportunities needed to develop cognitively (Cheng & Hamlin, 2021; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022).

As water and air are basic physiological needs to survive, socialization is a basic need for psychological well-being, as research shows (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022). Without healthy social development as a child, a person is at risk of lacking the understanding of responsibility in being a contributing member to their society, in addition to having poor academic skills and behavioral issues (Byrd & Legette, 2022; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Khojanazarova, 2022). This skill necessary for everyday life is why it is necessary to understand the growing influence of education methods.

However, recent research revealed that the misconception of inadequate socialization may be due to how parents envision their childrens' homeschool experiences (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Kingsbury, 2022; Sevier & Pope, 2022). Studies also showed that the limitation of socialization is purposeful by parents, as they wish to limit their children's contact to what they distinguish as harmful social experiences from influences. Reasons homeschool parents may

choose to limit social experiences include dissatisfaction with the culture of public school or actively seeking more tailored social events, such as religious activities or activities that promote the awareness of the family's ethnicities (Burke, 2022; Jolly & Matthews, 2020; McCabe et al., 2021; Sevier & Pope, 2022; Sumroy, 2022).

Currently, research is conceptualizing social interactions within homeschooling to be restrictive. On the contrary, if families must make an effort to socialize to fill the absence of public school, their actions become much more meaningful (McCabe et al., 2021; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). Homeschool families seek socialization in specified groups, such as religious groups, sports teams, or family groups (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Qureshi & Ali, 2022). Furthermore, groups, such as homeschool co-ops, are purposefully created to encourage working together and cultivate a social culture that is missed from not attending public schools (Valiente et al., 2022). As a result, homeschooled students may find a more enriched social lifestyle and become more emotionally and psychologically sound than their public-school counter parts (Gatewood et al., 2022; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022).

Although it seems that research points towards social success in homeschooling, homeschoolers can still be subject to isolation in some cases (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022). Religion is often the main factor that makes philosophers worry that homeschool students may face isolation (Averett & Lacy, 2021; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022). This attitude is because many popular religious sects, such as Christian fundamentalism, tend to reject mainstream ideas and teach a possibly narrowed viewpoint to the child (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022). However, more recently, religiously affiliated homeschoolers are making more effort to socialize, formulating their gatherings and faith-based events (Burke, 2022; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Jolly & Matthews, 2020).

The Concept of Unschooling

Although about 77% of homeschool parents use structured curricula to teach their children, some may choose a countercultural method called *unschooling* (Valiente et al., 2022). Unschooling is a concept derived from the belief that traditional teaching methods may be too dependent on teaching to a certain standard and limit intellectual independence. As a result, homeschooling parents may let their children learn in the world and focus on subjects that interest them (O'Hare & Coyne, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Parents who choose this method also delve into support groups, literature, conferences, and other sources to try their best at unstructured learning (Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). However, families involved in unschooling have children who are low academic achievers (O'Hare & Coyne, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Researchers suspect that low achievement may not mean the student lacks valuable education. Researchers think appropriate analysis of the scope of achievement homeschoolers in less structured methods needs to be reassessed to warrant accurate results (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Neuman, 2020). Until then, unschooling families are at the mercy of stereotypes from mainstream culture, often receiving negative judgements for their choices (O'Hare & Coyne, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Yet, these families prevail in their beliefs of learning outside usual educational norms .

Difficulties in Understanding the Outcomes

Throughout this literature review are statements that little research exists or that the exact implication is unclear, as well as some very mixed opinions on major topics of study as homeschooling gains interest in the scholarly community (Carlson, 2020; Hirsh, 2019; Neuman, 2020; Ray, 2021; Ray & Shakeel, 2022). The multitude of independent variables that contribute to the outcome of homeschoolers, such as learning goals or family needs that require

homeschooling, attribute to the wide spectrum of opinions from researchers. These variables often create holes in the methodology of studies on the subject of homeschooling (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Neuman, 2020; Ray, 2017). In the question of academics and how well homeschoolers perform, as compared to their formally educated counterparts, the data differs because of the various teaching goals of different homeschool scenarios, but research often focuses on homeschooling as a whole (Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Neuman, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). Some homeschool scenarios have had outstanding academic outcomes, especially in highly structured curriculums. However, other homeschool scenarios that may utilize the concept of *unschooling*, or parents letting their children focus on the education that interests them, with no real alignment to any specific curricula, often result in lower academic achievement . Moreover, research rarely focuses on data from the student's perspective, which would be vital, as it is their academic success that researchers strive to understand (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Neuman, 2020).

Homeschool parents can be reluctant to participate in research for fear of being judged for their ways or their data used against them (Neuman, 2020; Ray, 2017). An example of judgment may be a researcher or public attitudes to the parents' choice to educate based on spirituality or philosophy, whereas mainstream culture focuses on standardized measurements for academic adequacies (Ray, 2017; Valiente et al., 2022). Furthermore, some research can be conducted biasedly, as the samples are often chosen out of homeschoolers who have already proven successful. These homeschoolers' data are usually collected by means of a survey or self-report, which limits the ability to analyze homeschooling through its enormous scope of various factors and only focuses on certain biases of the researcher or participant (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Valiente et al., 2022).

Researchers suggested a few different methods to better validate the results of homeschool research. Structured interviews would better reveal themes that could be further researched. These interviews could reveal a more robust understanding in why and how parents choose to homeschool their children (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Valiente et al., 2022). Also, looking at what literature parents review when selecting the methodology for teaching their children would be vital to understanding parent's way of thinking in navigating their child through home education (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). Focusing research on the student's perspective will better disclose proper measurements of their achievements within homeschooling (Neuman, 2020; Valiente et al., 2022). Overall, as homeschooling has risen in popularity as a method of education in recent years, the trend has caught the eye of researchers. However, it is vital to assess how researchers collect and analyze data to ensure accurate results (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Sumroy, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022).

Collaboration in Homeschooling

Parents who choose alternative educational methods outside conventional schooling must partner with various people to ensure success (Li & Mathis, 2022; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Tilhou, 2019). Collaborative homeschooling can be a significant endeavor because educational planning in a coordinated way can be time-consuming for adults (Paliska & Gonzalez, 2019). Parents can also become overwhelmed with single-handedly being responsible for their child's education (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020). Therefore, partnerships help parents become confident in facilitating education, give their children emotional and social needs outside of traditional schooling, and find solutions within homeschooling that fit their student's

individual needs (Collier et al., 2020; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Ray & Shakeel, 2022;

Tilhou, 2019).

Parent Collaboration in Homeschooling

Parents have a unique role in homeschooling. In any schooling setting, parent

involvement has proven to be integral to student success (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Kim, 2020;

Lara & Saracostti, 2020). However, in homeschool situations, parents often become the pinnacle

of leadership and the central figure in their child's education but often have little to no training

(Nanquil, 2021; Rahmi & Fadhil, 2022). Parents are in charge of providing the materials with

which their child will learn, teaching most of the courses if they are affiliated with a group or co-

op, and building connections with other collaborators, such as tutors, counselors, or co-op group

leaders (Carpenter & Gann, 2016; Nanquil, 2021; Rahmi & Fadhil, 2022). When choosing to

homeschool their children, parents have a unique opportunity to customize their child's

education using various methods and techniques (Ceglie et al., 2022; Nanquil, 2021).

However, adult figures in the home may often have difficulty facilitating home education

(Letzel et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Rahmi & Fadhil, 2022). Without collaboration, the added

stress of the responsibilities of facilitating their child's education can become overwhelming.

Homeschooling can become a part-time job on top of everyday parenting life (De Jong et al.,

2019; Letzel et al., 2020). Additionally, if a child has a learning disability, resources are not

readily available for a homeschooling parent at the level of access they may have in a public

school. Parents are not trained in the specialties they need to ensure their child's success (Dobosz

et al., 2023; Letzel et al., 2020). In addition, the role of a teacher comes on top of the myriad of

responsibilities that parents already have that can interfere with the quality of education they give

their children (Martini et al., 2020). Parents may need help separating the roles of parent and

teacher to their children and facilitating curriculum at home. They can also find it challenging to

analyze the potential curriculum for the values they seek to exhibit. They may also fear being

isolated on their homeschooling journey without guidance from others (Martini et al., 2020;

Tilhou, 2019). Therefore, parents often seek various collaborators to help their students succeed

in their alternative education methods or seek out homeschooling groups, such as co-ops. These

groups help empower parents in their student's education as they seek out and share materials

and activities with each other (Dwyer, 2022; Mahendra, 2022; Nanquil, 2021; Rahmi & Fadhil,

2022; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022; Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022). Parents who

form solid communal bonds with other educators can help relieve the pressure to do what is

suitable for their children, including training courses or planning strategies with teachers or

counselors (Contos & Tadros, 2022; Zhang, 2022).

Counselor Collaboration in Homeschooling

One significant source homeschooling parents may pursue is professional counseling.

Although public schools have many counseling options, homeschooling families do not have

access to such counseling and must seek it out independently (Contos & Tadros, 2022). Research

on homeschool counseling reveals that counseling can effectively teach parents problem-solving

methods and help foster students prepare for life outside school and college (Contos & Tadros,

2022; Martini et al., 2020). With guidance, parents can create a school culture for their children

at home and integrate the vital interactions children may miss outside of a large school

environment (Collier et al., 2020; Martini et al., 2020). Furthermore, parents of special needs

students necessitate a framework to adapt education for their children (Collier et al., 2020).

Subject Expert Collaboration in Homeschooling

Another essential collaborator for parents is subject experts, namely teachers or other educators. Although relationships between parents and teachers positively impact student success, parents and teachers often need help maintaining working relationships (Collier et al., 2020; Roesminingsih et al., 2020). Teachers often lack self-efficacy, feeling insecure in their abilities to guide parents in the subject matter (Hargreaves, 2019; Schlebusch, 2020). Furthermore, research suggested that a supervisor or administrator is required to oversee the bonding of parents and subject experts, revealing another important character in the community (Collier et al., 2020).

Homeschool Co-op Education

Parents worldwide choose to take their students out of public or government-funded schools and into alternative educational programs mainly for less governmental on political input in their students' education (Jolly & Matthews, 2020; Mahendra, 2022; Sumroy, 2022). In addition, as COVID-19 kept many students indefinitely at home and kept the fate of returning to a typical schooling environment up in the air, many parents chose to support students at home (Sumroy, 2022; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Homeschooling groups, such as co-ops, have grown in popularity because they are democratic organizations that serve the interest of the group of people and better align with the values parents seek to teach their children (Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Families come together in homeschool co-ops to share resources and responsibilities in their commitment to enriching their children's lives as they take control of their children's education (Mahendra, 2022; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Homeschooling co-ops also offer supplemental learning environments instead of students strictly learning from home (Tilhou, 2019). Nevertheless, although co-op attendance makes up to 31% of

homeschooled students, more needs to be known about the framework of homeschool co-op education or what motivates families to pursue homeschool co-op education (Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022).

Relevant conversations and studies often surround the idea that homeschool co-ops can often be a more wholesome or religiously aligned method of education (Sumroy, 2022; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). There is also much debate if co-ops genuinely focus on student achievement or if they are becoming another educational trend that will fall subject to the motivations of stakeholders (Sumroy, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). Researchers seem quick to outline the fallacies of the hierarchy or politics of public education and focus on a central viewpoint that brings families together within co-ops.

However, as alternative education methods are on the rise, focusing on students' success and how collaborative leadership contributes to that success could reveal how democratic leadership can strengthen modern education (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Lewis, 2022; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Sumroy, 2022). Homeschooling groups, such as co-ops, have produced more emotionally sound and academically successful students than public schooling (Tilhou, 2019). Nevertheless, the reasons why are widely unexplored (Nanquil,2021; Tilhou, 2019). Adults working together to gain student success could open the doorway to more equitable education for many groups of learners. Research should focus on the betterment of a whole community rather than how co-op education benefits the viewpoints of a few (Sumroy, 2022; Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022).

Student Benefits in Homeschool Co-ops

Homeschool students are often stereotyped as isolated within their families (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Ray, 2013). Homeschoolers are also

misconstrued as students who receive limited knowledge in education from their families (Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020). However, homeschool co-ops provide many benefits for students outside formal education (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020; Martini et al., 2020; Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020).

Homeschool co-ops eliminate the possibility of students being lost in the crowd. Instead, students benefit developmentally from being in a close-knit group of people (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020). These small groups can spend more time ensuring students understand the assigned tasks. Therefore, students often become more active in the learning environment and confident in their actions, as they often make course decisions (Martini et al., 2020; Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Tilhou, 2019).

Finally, students in homeschool co-ops are exposed to various other ways of learning, whereas students in traditional schooling are limited to a classroom (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Tilhou, 2019). Part of the allure of homeschool co-op education is the opportunity for students to learn from many different non-traditional educators, from parents to subject experts (Martini et al., 2020; Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Tilhou, 2019). Students also have the flexibility to learn outside the home, such as in museums or libraries (Tilhou, 2019). These non-traditional methods can benefit students with unique learning needs (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Tilhou, 2019).

Proven Success in Homeschool Co-ops

Understanding the outcomes of homeschooling and how the outcomes compare to other forms of education is widely unexplored (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Ray, 2013; Sevier & Pope, 2022). There is a concern that students will grow up unprepared to appropriately navigate higher education, employment, and other trials of adulthood due to the perceived isolation of homeschooling methods. Other concerns are the reasons parents choose to have control over the

experiences of their children in homeschool, such as religion, as these views may cause formerly homeschooled adults to have narrowed ideas of society (Bartholet, 2020; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). However, some studies showed a promising start in revealing the authentic results of homeschool education on its former students (Medlin, 2000; Sevier & Pope, 2022; Sutton & Galloway, 2000).

Many parents put their children in various extracurricular activities to meet the social interactions that may be missed from not being in a public school (Burke, 2022; Jolly & Matthews, 2020; McCabe et al., 2021; Sevier & Pope, 2022; Sumroy, 2022). In adulthood, formerly homeschooled students are more likely to be interested in various activities than public or private schooled students. Therefore, these adults are more likely to participate in more activities than formerly traditionally educated adults (McCabe et al., 2021; Ray, 2013; Sevier & Pope, 2022). Although previously homeschooled adults who were homeschooled for religious reasons are found less likely to be as adventurous in pursuing extracurricular activities in adulthood, studies suggested they still may have superior interpersonal skills and are highly independent (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Rubin et al., 2002; Sevier & Pope, 2022). This independence may be due to many homeschool groups and co-ops regularly initiating leadership within their student body. Formerly homeschooled adults are also more likely to ascertain and maintain leadership roles within their communities (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Medlin, 2000; Sevier & Pope, 2022).

Formerly homeschooled students also portray the ability to be more open to new experiences and thoroughness in completing the activities they participate in, especially in college (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Medlin, 2000; Sevier & Pope, 2022). The diversity of their activity in adulthood may be linked to the fact that many students formerly in homeschool

groups and co-ops had the opportunity to participate in sports teams, unique trades, and even international conferences related to the homeschool group (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Sevier & Pope, 2022). Many of these events for homeschoolers offer socialization between different age groups and backgrounds. In addition, many formerly homeschooled adults were subject to moves if their parents were relocated during military service or mission trips (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022). Overall, these social and life familiarized students with a broader variety of people, and, although some situations made it difficult to have wider friend circles, many formerly homeschooled adults feel that they maintained friendships of a higher quality that way (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Sevier & Pope, 2022).

Academically, studies vary on the success of formerly homeschooled people (Bennett et al., 2019; Cogan, 2010; McCabe et al., 2021; Ray, 2013). Mostly, homeschooled students have been noted to be equivalent with scores and GPAs when entering college with their traditionally educated peers (Bennett et al., 2019; McCabe et al., 2021; Ray, 2013). There is also some speculation that students who have been homeschooled scored higher GPAS and graduation rates in college (Cogan, 2010; Ray, 2013). However, academic success cannot be tethered to simply how the student was previously educated. Many other factors are allocated to the success of adults in college, such as social, emotional, and psychological development regardless of education type, as well as the education level and socioeconomic status of the parents of students going (Bennett et al., 2019; Ray, 2013). Therefore, it is not easy to gauge the significance of continuing education academic success of adults based on only the method by which a student was educated in grade school.

Summary

Homeschooling has traditionally been an alternative method of education for families who feel that public and private educational institutions do not align with their personal beliefs. Recently, more families have turned to homeschooling, as the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe. As homeschooling rises in popularity, many families have joined homeschooling co-operative education groups (co-ops). These collaborative homeschooling groups use a combination of classroom instruction and real-world experiences to educate students. They are often led by a blend of parents, subject experts, and even older students.

Although recent literature revealed that homeschooling is on the rise, and homeschool groups such as co-ops show benefits in a well-rounded education for students, little is known about the factors that contribute to the increase in popularity of these homeschool methods or how they could benefit education as a whole in the future. Educational leaders who collaborate hold a significant impact on their school systems. Therefore, examining leaders in homeschool co-ops is a crucial place to start to discover what leads to student success in co-ops and how this correlates with the rise of homeschool groups.

Throughout empirical research, it is clear that homeschooling needs more research to fill the many gaps due to the failure to regulate this educational method and the weariness of homeschool families of the implications of this research. Any research done in this subject area can reveal where legislation is needed to make homeschool education a destigmatized and equitable method of education to continue to be better organized since the onslaught of COVID-19. Focusing on collaborative leaders adds to the research on effective leadership in education, revealing that this method should be considered in other educational settings, such as public schools, to meet the standards of student success.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to understand the experiences of collaborative leadership on student success in homeschool co-ops for students at homeschool co-ops in North Carolina. A homeschool co-op is a group of students who work together in a non-traditional setting to solve a common problem (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020). Homeschool co-ops are increasing significantly (Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Yet, minimal research reveals why parents join co-ops or how collaborative leadership in these organizations affects student success (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). Participants were adults over 18 collaborating within a homeschool co-op, participating from their own homes or community spaces where the homeschool co-op exists. This chapter discusses the research design, questions, settings, participants, and researcher positionality. It also states the interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, and role of the researcher. A data collection plan and analysis are explained for the individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires carried out in this study's data collection phase. A data synthesis plan, examination of research trustworthiness, declaration of ethical considerations, and summary complete this chapter.

Research Design

This phenomenological study utilized a qualitative methodology to examine the lived experiences of collaborative leaders involved in home school cooperatives (co-ops). Parents, subject experts, administrators, and counselors collaborate in homeschool co-ops to create a tailored program for their children or students without having a traditional educational background (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020). Qualitative methodology was selected to capture the

essence of what it is to be an adult collaborating with other adults to ensure students' success in an informal educational setting.

Qualitative research involves actions that immerse the observer into the world of their case (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This method of analysis involves interpretive practices that make situations come to light. As a result, these practices change the subject into situations of collectible data, such as interviews, recordings, and representations . This study provided in-depth descriptions of collaborative leaders involved in homeschool co-ops' experiences to not only appropriately describe the phenomenon but reveal how their experiences in this leadership can better the future of informal educational settings.

The phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study as the study emphasized specific individuals' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Adults involved in homeschool co-ops are essentially the leaders of their school systems and are in charge of students' success. Instead of the traditional roles of the principal or vice principal in educational leadership, the leaders in this scenario are parents, subject matter experts, or counselors, often meaning that parents are at the forefront of being responsible for their children's education (SilalahI & Hutauruk, 2020). Without being traditionally trained or qualified in educational leadership, adults involved in homeschool co-ops must work together to implement effective learning strategies for their students (Collier et al., 2020; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Tilhou, 2019). Using transcendental phenomenological methodology throughout this study pursued the lived experiences of these adults working together in homeschool co-ops. Through the process of epoché, I strived to understand the reality of these adults while using reduction methods to rethink my own biases and appropriately portray the research results (Moustakas, 1994).

The transcendental phenomenological design was utilized in this study. Edmond Husser's (1961) definition of phenomenology is the "unity of sciences" (p. 2). Thus, phenomenology is about coming together to discover the meaning in everyday life instead of focusing on differences of opinion (Beck, 2020; Husserl, 1961). Although other philosophers discussed the elements of phenomenological study, Husserl became known as the forefront philosopher on this topic. He pinpointed epoché and reduction concepts as the main factors in phenomenological studies (Beck, 2020). Epoché is the act of withholding judgment, while reduction means the researcher turns off their beliefs while assessing the researched data (Beck, 2020; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl surmised that epoché and reduction cause a researcher to have a transcendental experience or to perceive the research experience in their mind (Beck, 2020). Therefore, a researcher using transcendental phenomenology studies a situation's appearance (Beck, 2020; Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology was appropriate for this study because I researched the lived experiences of collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops and their perception of how their collaboration leads to student success through the lens of the participants' experiences rather than simply interpreting the participants' experiences. It is important to note that these institutions may often be classified as hybrid schools or homeschool groups (Hirsh, 2019).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to direct this qualitative study and reveal the experiences of collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops pertaining to student success:

Central Research Question

What are the collaboration experiences of homeschool co-op leaders in North Carolina?

Sub-Question One

What are the strategies used by homeschool co-op leaders to foster student success in North Carolina?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of homeschool co-op leaders working together to meet the needs of their community in North Carolina?

Setting and Participants

This study examined the collaboration between homeschool cooperative (co-op) leaders. Instead of meeting at a school in a formal setting or working exclusively at home, as in single-family homeschooling, homeschool co-ops may gather in various places to accommodate different learning scenarios. Additionally, homeschool co-ops are not often taught by certified teachers or run by traditional school administrators. Parents and other adults are responsible for contributing to the homeschool co-op. This section will outline the setting and participants of this study.

Setting

The setting of this study occurred in communal places and online meeting places. Participants regularly conduct their group meetings at churches, libraries, and meeting places in North Carolina where this collaborative leadership occurs. Homeschool co-ops meet in multiple locations because classes may include visiting education sites, meeting in a communal place that can accommodate numerous students, or traveling to the home of the person teaching the class that day. Rather than limiting education to a classroom, homeschool co-ops value learning in the world around them (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020).

Homeschool co-ops that participants are involved in had a program for 6-12th grade students and had the opportunity for students to meet at least once a month. The homeschool co-

op also had at least three families with at least one student each involved in the co-op. These participants were involved in one of the 288 individual or 23 statewide homeschool organizations in North Carolina (McCabe et al., 2021). Homeschool co-ops offered academic course meetings, such as meetings for history or science, or extracurricular meetings, such as theatre groups or culinary arts. The homeschool co-ops may have also offered a combination of both academic and extracurricular courses or activities.

Participants

Participants for this study were adults involved in a homeschool co-op who were over the age of 18. Participants were either parents with a student involved in the homeschool co-op or a stakeholder that works within the co-op. If the participant was a parent, they must have had at least one child between the ages of 11-18 enrolled in the homeschool co-op. The participant's child attended a class facilitated by the homeschool co-op at least once a month. The participant also contributed to the homeschool co-op by facilitating instruction, planning meetings, or coordinating events with other leaders.

Participants who were not parents of students, but administrators, counselors, or subject matter experts contributed to the leadership of the homeschool co-op for at least one year. To ensure that there was a varying range of participants, there was no restriction on demographics, such as gender or ethnicity, to ensure maximum variation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This variation was ideal to capture the full scope of participants with lived experiences in collaboration in homeschool co-ops (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I relayed materials necessary for the participant's involvement in the study via email. Interviews for this study were conducted via the video and transcription services of Microsoft Teams.

Researcher Positionality

My research followed a pragmatic paradigm. I have worked in a small project-based private school for four years. Two and a half of those years, I was appointed as the organization's assistant director. Working with students who were neurodivergent made me realize that typical public-school education is lacking in the success of all types of learners. Therefore, I developed a passion for leading the school and finding a different educational methodology to suit the wide range of grade school students.

While teaching an evening art course, I met several other students in a homeschool co-op. I was impressed with the level of conversation I had with them on knowledgeable topics and how they took courses that seemed very advanced. Hearing about these students' experiences in their homeschool co-op interested me, as they seemed to have a high level of learning in one of the most informal settings, often taught by parents or their peers. Therefore, I was eager to investigate how adults who are not educational leaders or trained in education collaborate in this environment to deliver a high level of education to their students and how this may help construct the future of education.

Interpretive Framework

In pragmatism, a researcher seeks the liberty to do what they see fit to analyze data instead of pledging to one method (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I am a pragmatist because being an educator and a budding researcher has taught me that, in some cases, the best solution to a problem for everyone involved is a practical solution over what I may want to enact due to my ideals. I wished to understand *what works* in informal educational settings to determine why many families choose them over traditional public schools (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). This way of thinking requires freedom to explore philosophy to solve the

problem of little research on why families choose to leave public schools in favor of homeschool groups. I aimed to let the participants' data reveal multiple realities through different tools to find the best solutions to this problem (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Within my pragmatic viewpoint are three assumptions: ontological, epistemological, and axiological.

Philosophical Assumptions

This section describes my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, revealing my ideals. I used a pragmatist lens. Through this pragmatist lens, I portrayed my views on reality through multiple perspectives, how I know this reality, and how I gain value in this knowledge.

Ontological Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2017) describe ontological assumption as the nature of reality. Essentially, a researcher is answering the question, "What exists?" Therefore, they observe events, processes, and relationships, measuring these aspects by which they perceive them. Ontological assumptions cannot be empirically confirmed, adopting the concept that ontology is an ongoing exploration. One may discover their perceived nature of reality, only to discover new ideas the next day that their assumptions are rendered obsolete by new findings (Smith & Ceusters, 2010). As a researcher, I wished to pay attention to participants' information and understand their perceptions to compare beliefs. Multiple perspectives that challenge the singularity of our perspective are the beauty of research and bring us closer to perceiving reality.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions are the standards by which we can gain knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2017). A researcher retrieves subjective evidence by spending time with participants in the field to understand the context in which the participants think and operate.

Essentially, the researcher eliminates being outside looking in by engrossing themselves in a subject's environment to understand how the "knowledge is known" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 21). As an educator, I am pleased to spend time with my students to understand how they learn. I believe that the most significant wealth of knowledge is gained by one who can understand the perspectives of others and use that perspective to create effective changes and policies within a community. This trait was an asset as I researched, as I dedicated time with my participants to understand their personal views. Interacting with participants personally elicited the most accurate information, as I decipher the reality of the matter.

Axiological Assumption

Creswell and Poth (2017) characterized axiological assumptions as researchers bringing their values into a study. Researchers must understand their values and biases and how they relate to their interpretation of the information gained from their research. The researcher's lens relays what the participants display . I have the privilege of working with many neurodivergent children. These students are often misunderstood, as neurotypical people who do not understand other avenues of thinking outside the norm. However, my values include being open to perspectives outside the typical. As a researcher, I hoped to understand what leaders in homeschool co-ops do differently from other educational leaders as they collaborate to lead to student success. Through this understanding, I can best portray a description of their leadership that will help others understand how to progress to a future of new education standards.

Researcher's Role

I was the human instrument for this study (Moustakas, 1994). I conducted all individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires to reveal the participants' lived experiences,

developing themes. I understand that I potentially brought bias and assumptions to this study. Aiming to bracket out my bias and assumptions begins with acknowledging them.

Growing up in a Christian home, my family seemed to have diverse viewpoints on homeschool education. Many of the children in my generation within my family were homeschooled. However, I remember my mother once explaining that she was expected to homeschool her children but was already a full-time teacher. The only homeschool group in the area was another denomination that did not align with my family's belief system. The difference between educational methods created a clear divide between the other children in my family and me, insinuating that there was something *wrong* with others choosing to homeschool. The decision to go to public school also made me susceptible to understanding stereotypes of homeschooling, such as home school students being strange or undereducated as they are subjected to the niche of their parent's beliefs.

Although my parents did opt for public school, they were still particular in their beliefs. Therefore, I was often not allowed to participate in certain events in school, such as Halloween or reading popular books in which the protagonist used witchcraft. These were choices with which, as an adult, I cannot entirely agree. However, when speaking to students I have who are part of a homeschool group, I find that many have rules similar to what I had when I was growing up. This resemblance makes me feel pity toward them, as I believe a child should be free to understand situations and cultures outside of their belief systems. I also tend to hold feelings of contempt toward their parents because they limit their children from a complete worldview in their education.

As the research setting was not a specific location, as research was conducted through online platforms, I did not have any personal investments in the environment. The participants in this study had no previous relationship with me. I in no way had any authority over them.

I withheld these judgments when conducting my research. I bracketed, or withheld from judgment, my personal beliefs (Moustakas, 1994). I did so by continuing to reflect on my judgments and biases of homeschool. By doing so, I accurately described the lived experiences of my participants without interfering with my past experiences. I interpreted themes from the collected data through individual interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. Through a pragmatist paradigm, I strived to portray their experiences through their lens.

Procedures

This section outlines the permissions I received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and a plan to recruit participants. A detailed discussion of the three data collection methods, interviews including questions, are outlined so that future researchers may replicate them if necessary. The section is completed with a description of how I analyzed the data collected and a data synthesis plan.

Permissions

Before conducting this study or recruiting participants, I sought the permission necessary from Liberty University's IRB (see Appendix A). Consent forms were emailed to potential participants, allowing them to have a virtual conversation addressing any questions, clarifications, or reservations (see Appendix B). This online document gave their consent to the study. No data was collected before consent was confirmed. As my data were collected online and not in a physical location, site permissions were not applicable. Emails to send consent

forms and other materials were collected from school leaders after initial inquiry made either through a familiar acquaintance or homeschool co-op website.

Recruitment Plan

The snowballing sampling method, a method in which potential participants may know other potential participants who have information that is rich for the context of the research, was used in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Snowball sampling is an ideal method for this study because members of homeschool co-ops could be considered a *hard to reach* population because part of the reason that little research exist in many areas surrounding the topic of homeschooling is that potential participants may be reluctant to be involved in fear of being judged (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Neuman, 2020; Ray, 2017). I recruited adults (18 and older) who were involved in working with other adults to run a homeschool co-op. These adults could have been parents or others involved, such as counselors, administrators, or subject matter experts. These participants were located anywhere in North Carolina. They were not restricted by religious practice, race, or other qualities of a particular homeschool group.

There are about 2.3 million homeschooled families, and 31% of these families are involved in homeschool co-ops (Hirsh, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). Each of these homeschool groups can average about 225 students, with the number of adults involved on average being 23 or fewer, with a quarter involving less than 11 adults (Hirsh, 2019). About 311 of these homeschool co-ops exist in North Carolina (McCabe et al., 2021). Additionally, regulations on what classifies any homeschool situation lack significantly (Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020).

As I had few limitations on the type of adult involved in a homeschool co-op that should qualify as a participant, I used a snowball sampling method to make the recruitment process as simple as possible while acquiring candidates that other participants will deem ideal. I contacted

established homeschool co-ops across North Carolina. Ultimately, I recruited at least 10

participants until saturation was achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Saturation was achieved

when no new themes manifested during data collection or when the same themes repeatedly

appeared (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data Collection Plan

This qualitative study included three data collection methods from adults involved in

homeschool cooperatives (co-ops). First, individual interviews were conducted to retrieve unique

stories from the adults. Then, a questionnaire in the form of a blog post was enacted to further

investigate the participants' perception of their role. Finally, artifact analysis was used in which

participants were asked to bring a physical item to their interview that represents where the

participant perceives their place to be within the homeschool co-op. These data collection

methods were suitable for collecting data about the participants' lived experiences in the

phenomenon of collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The steps

that took place first helped to understand the individual perspective of participants, then inspired

more thought processes in participants' positions within the co-op so that they give as much

creative and inspired data as possible in the data collection. These data collection methods

helped me to understand the lived experiences of adults collaborating in homeschool co-ops and

provide triangulation to improve the validity of the results in this transcendental

phenomenological study .

Individual Interviews

An individual interview is an interaction rooted in a conversation to increase information

about a specific topic (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Iachini et al., 2019). Creswell and Poth (2017)

elaborated that a qualitative research interview is when an interviewer tries to understand the

interviewee's point of view and what it means to live in their experience of the subject. Thus, an interviewer asked the interviewee questions based on the topic to gather information. This data collection method was essential to understand how leaders collaborate in homeschool co-ops, deliver education in a nonformal setting, and how these leaders' participation leads to students' success within the homeschool co-op.

The interviews for this research occurred via Microsoft Teams. The online discussion was recorded and transcribed through this program. Participants interviewed in the comfort of their homes or at the communal places they meet to facilitate education, such as a church or community building. Participants were adults who may or may not have students within the program but contribute to the leadership of the homeschool co-op in some way.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your journey in becoming involved in homeschool co-op education. CRQ

2. Please describe your position within the homeschool co-op and any background that may have led you to participate in facilitating everyday learning. In addition, please indicate if you have students involved within the co-op. CRQ

3. Describe your reasons for participating in a homeschool co-op versus other education methods. CRQ

4. What are the challenges you face in being involved in a homeschool co-op? CRQ

5. How do you and other leaders collaborate in the co-op? CRQ

6. What practices have you found successful among yourself and other leaders in your co-op? CRQ

7. In terms of education, what do you think are the needs of your community outside of your homeschool co-op? SQ2

8. How have you and your peers addressed these needs? SQ2

9. What have you learned from other leaders that have helped you feel confident in your contribution to the co-op? SQ2

10. What resources can the organization provide that may make collaboration better for you? SQ2

11. What roles do you think are essential to collaborating in leading a successful co-op (parent involvement, counselors, subject experts)? SQ1

12. What practices do you think collaborative leaders in your co-op have that result in student success? SQ1

13. Describe a time when you witnessed student success related to collaboration between you and your peers. SQ1

14. What new policies or practices would you enact if you could be the head of your co-op? SQ1

15. How do you think the collaborative practices of leaders in your co-op will contribute to educational success in the future? SQ1

16. What else would you like to contribute to this discussion that may be vital to understanding your experience? CRQ

These questions have been included first to discover the role of adults participating in the study. As the study aimed to understand how collaborative leaders contribute to student success, questions have been included to know how this collaboration happens. They also elicited the participants' views of their contribution to the co-op. Participants were made to reflect on how leadership has contributed to student success from events they have personally experienced. In

addition, they were able to reflect on how the leadership may improve to reap more excellent student results.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed through Microsoft Teams. Data analysis of the individual interviews were based on Moustakas' (1994) procedures of epoché, horizontalization, reduction, and imaginative variation to devise the phenomenon's essence. When collecting and analyzing data, the researcher must exercise withholding judgment, which is also known as epoché. Then, a researcher must set aside biases and preconceived ideas. Only then can a researcher assess important data accurately . During my data analysis process, I first bracketed everything directly related to the research questions . Then, I horizontalized or isolated essential and relevant data to the research. Horizontalizing is treating all information as equally valuable . Significant statements centered around collaborative leaders in homeschool co-ops and how that leads to students' success. I then coded data, creating codes for data, such as personal bracketing, significant statements, or textural descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Data clusters were created by identifying common themes or ideas and separating information into themed groups. All other information that did not fit into these clusters were disregarded, as they were redundant or irrelevant (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). After this process, I used these themes and patterns to begin creating a textural description of the participants' lived experiences that continued to develop as subsequent data was analyzed (Moustakas, 1994). Textural descriptions include creating a narrative based on the verbatim explanations of the phenomenon from the perception of each individual participant (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). Participants were invited to review the textural description of the data to ensure that their viewpoint was accurately described once this process was complete.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a systematized set of questions developed to give support in a study (Billups, 2020). In qualitative studies, questionnaires can also be writing prompts . Furthermore, questionnaires can be a list of simple questions for participants to answer or open-ended questions upon which they can expand.

In this study, I asked participants to imagine they were blogging. They wrote a short blog post in which they assumed the position of head of a homeschool co-op. I explained that they should write a one-page blog depicting how they run their homeschool co-op and the benefits to the student body regarding the blogger's choices. This data triangulated the perception of a true leader in homeschool co-ops and the perception of success among students in the eyes of the participant.

Questionnaire Questions

You have assumed the role of the head leader of the homeschool co-op. You are writing a one-page blog post describing how you run your homeschool co-op and how that leads to your students' successes.

With an emphasis on your experiences, please answer these questions in your blog post:

1. How do you run a homeschool co-op effectively? CRQ

2. How does your leadership benefit students in the co-op? SQ1

3. How does collaborating with other adults help you achieve your view of success within the co-op? SQ2

These questions inspired participants to ponder what they would do if they were in charge of the entire homeschool co-op rather than simply being a participant in running the co-op. This blog post revealed new information about how participants felt a homeschool co-op should be

run. The blog also showed what collaboration must occur between adults for the homeschool co-op to achieve the participant's vision.

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

As in the previous data analysis sections, I used the pattern of epoché, reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). As this was a hypothetical situation, special attention was paid to any new information or language used in the blog posts to unveil new perceptions of the participant's ideas of their roles in leadership in the homeschool co-ops. With the possibility of new data, I took the time to ensure that the standards of withholding judgment and biases were met when reviewing this data. Based on significant findings, I coded data accordingly. I then clustered and thematized the data from each participant before adding to each participant's textural description with the information rendered from their blog posts .

Student Success Artifacts

Artifacts are audiovisual items that represent a concept (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Artifacts help expand a participant's narrative instead of complex explanations during the research (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). These items may be physical items, such as pictures or objects that a participant may relate to the study context. These items may also be non-physical, such as audio clips or content on a social media platform. Artifacts may help to add culture to the research through non-textual data collection .

In this study, I asked participants to bring to their interview a physical artifact that represents a moment when they felt their contribution in collaboration, among others, contributed to a significant moment of student success. I explained that they can bring an item that may be sentimental, such as a gift a student gave them after achieving success. Or, this item could be more formal, such as a copy of a policy the participant contributed to enacting within the

homeschool co-op. Participants were asked to discuss why the artifact represents the topic imposed. If the artifact was in a physical form, pictures of the artifact were collected. The participants were requested to send a copy of the artifact in a digital format. This helped to triangulate the perception of a true leader in homeschool co-ops and the perception of success among students in the eyes of the participant. Triangulation entails using multiple forms of data to research a question in hopes to find similarities between the data methods that will further validate the findings (Heale & Forbes, 2013).

Physical Artifacts Data Analysis Plan

I first examined the artifact by itself. I wrote a description of the object by itself. Reviewing the transcripts from the meeting with the participant, I also analyzed data and clustered the data into themes found in the participant's description of the artifact and what it meant to them. Finally, I continued to add to the textural description of the phenomenon with a description of the artifact and its meaning based on my finding in other literature and the context of analysis of different forms of data within the study (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023).

Data Synthesis

Synthesizing data is the process of combining the findings of multiple sources to derive new knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The data from the individual interviews, focus groups, and questionnaire analysis was synthesized to develop the essence of the phenomenon as a whole using Moustakas' (1994) methods of epoché, horizontalization, reduction, and imaginative variation. These data collection methods revealed the practices of those involved and how they related to each other to understand the participants' lived experiences fully. Through compiling data to create themes, I made a textural description through the narrations of participants' view of the phenomenon. Textural descriptions were taken from verbatim excerpts of the participants'

given data to express their viewpoints as clearly as possible. These textural descriptions enabled me to visualize an imaginative variation of the participants' experiences and create a structural description of the lived experiences of adults collaborating in homeschool co-ops and how their collaboration affects student success. From here, I completed a composite description of the phenomenon per the design .

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the reliability of research on phenomena in their natural settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness of qualitative research has long been debated in academic research, as narrative data can appear less reliable than statistical data. However, qualitative data can offer vital information on different phenomena in many fields of study through the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, it is essential to help reviewers understand the reliability of qualitative data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four criteria to help solidify trustworthiness in qualitative data. These criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability .

Credibility

Confidence and acceptance that the truth has been accurately portrayed in the study's findings is credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In my research, I used three techniques to establish the credibility of my data. I used triangulation, or the assessment of the validity of data, by merging it with information from the three different data collection methods that I employed (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). I also used prolonged engagement or engaging with participants for enough time to build trust . Using my strengths in speaking to people to make a bond, I was able to develop more reliable information and detect more of the actuality as participants grew to trust me. Finally, I used member checking to share the research findings with the participants . To

acquire the most accurate information, I used my relationship with the participants to invite them to honestly review my textural description before I constructed my structural description, in hopes that they confirm that my representation was accurate to their viewpoint.

Transferability

Transferability reveals that the research finding can apply to other circumstances, as shown through thorough data descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I demonstrated transferability in my study by describing my findings as richly as possible and proposing how these findings will be useful in other informal education scenarios. This study aimed to determine the lived experiences of adults collaborating in homeschool co-ops and how this collaboration affects students' success in the program. Through this study I hoped to reveal how the methods of cooperation validate different styles of education outside of the traditional classroom.

Dependability

Dependability proves consistency in the findings, so much so that the procedures of a study could be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In my dissertation, I robustly and accurately depicted all information, procedures, and finding to the best of my ability. This depiction revealed the process as able to be recreated by other researchers if necessary. I kept an audit trail, which is a plan in which a review of all major steps in the process of the study that is available for review by interested parties (Carcary, 2020). Peers of the doctoral community experienced in qualitative research were solicited to review my dissertation manuscript. These steps were done with the understanding that a review process took place by a dissertation committee at Liberty University.

Confirmability

Confirmability is how confident a study is based on the participants' narrative without the influence of potential bias from the researcher's perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established confirmability in my research by exercising three techniques. I used triangulation, as I did with credibility, to compare data to different sources to check that my biases have not intervened in the data description. I exercised reflexivity, or the ability to derive the truth and to make ethical decisions through the complexity of the participants' narratives and experiences. As I practiced epoché and suspended my judgements, I kept a journal of my thoughts throughout the process and reviewed its content to make sure my findings were absent of my biases. Finally, I used audit trails to be as transparent as possible in my findings and data analysis (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). In my descriptions, I ensured the reviewer understands how I concluded my findings through a transparent and ethical pathway.

Ethical Considerations

I followed these ethical considerations to maintain the ethicality and integrity of this research study. I obtained site and participant access from the owners of such spaces. Each participant whose information was utilized in this study consented in writing after I clearly described the study in which they participated, the confidentiality that they have in my descriptions, and the rights they have to withdraw from the study at any time. The participant was informed that they have a pseudonym and the details of the location or specific identifying features of their homeschool co-op will be withheld. I informed the participants where their data will be kept on my Microsoft Teams account and a password-protected USB drive. Participants were made aware of others reviewing the data they give me, such as my dissertation chair and scholarly peers that were invited to review my work. Any other potential risks were discussed in detail before collecting participant data. Participants understood that, unless the findings are

deemed helpful to future studies, all data will be destroyed in three years (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Summary

To conclude this chapter, this transcendental phenomenological study aimed to ascertain the lived experiences of adults collaborating in homeschool co-ops and how that collaboration contributes to student success. These adults were parents of students who contribute to the co-op in some way, administrators, subject experts, or counselors. Data was collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and artifacts to provide thorough information on participants' experiences. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) epoché, horizontalization, reduction, and imaginative variation. Textural and structural descriptions were rendered to discuss the phenomenon of the lived experiences of adults collaborating in homeschool co-ops. In conclusion, a discussion on how ethicality and trustworthiness was maintained throughout the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of leaders working together in homeschool co-ops and how their collaboration leads to student success. The participants' demographics to participate in the study are reviewed in this chapter, including a discussion ofthemes and subthemes that became apparent during the participants' individual interviews, descriptions of artifacts, and answers to questionnaires. Outliers are also noted. The research questions are answered in this chapter. Finally, a summary concludes this chapter.

Participants

Ten homeschool co-op leaders participated in the study. Participants were all females, and each had a child currently involved or previously involved in homeschool co-ops. Three of these leaders were invited to become a leader in a previously existing homeschool co-op, while six leaders created their homeschool co-op. Four homeschool co-op leaders were involved in religiously affiliated homeschool co-ops, two were secular homeschool co-ops, one catered to entrepreneurial goals in teenagers, one was part of a national youth group that facilitated the creation of the group, one homeschool leader was involved in a homeschool co-op that catered to a specific interest of music, and one explicitly catered to military families. Participants in the study had been a part of the current homeschool co-op that they led or helped lead for at least one full year and as much as 15 years. These participants were recruited randomly from the internet; some were contacted as a result of snowballing sampling methods from other potential participants. The following table and paragraphs introduce each participant based on my

interactions with them via individual interviews, questionnaire responses, and artifacts

accumulated during June and August of 2023.

Table 1

Participants

Participant	Years in Homeschooling	Years in Current Homeschool Co-op	Age Range	Position Within Homeschool Co-op
Danika	23	11	50s	Director
Tiffany	15	15	40s	Creator/ Parent
Lorraine	1	1	40s	Creator/ Parent
Deborah	7	4	50s	Director/ Parent
Candice	31	7	60s	Creator
Janet	8	3	40s	Creator/Parent
Lacey	16	2	60s	Creator/Subject Expert
Jasmine	13	2	40s	Creator/Parent
Bonnie	18	4	40s	Associate Director/ Parent
Blair	2	2	40s	Associate Director/ Parent

Danika

Danika is an administrator at a long-running and successful homeschool co-op. Earning a

Bachelor's degree in Nursing, she started her nursing career while always finding opportunities

to teach and learn. However, after developing autoimmune issues, she had to leave nursing

altogether. Danika began tutoring, as well as having the opportunity to homeschool her own two

children since 2000. Soon, parents sought her tutoring services for their children more often. Her tutoring expertise earned her a position in her current faith-based co-op. After a year of teaching math and science for the homeschool co-op, she was approached by the members about becoming the face of the co-op as its director. Danika has been with this homeschool co-op since 2012. Although she no longer has children involved in homeschool education, she stays with the homeschool co-op because she loves investing in young people. Her homeschool co-op offers classes from pre-school to high school and meets two days a week.

Tiffany

Tiffany was formerly a teacher at a local private Christian school and a leader in the children's ministry at her local church. Being pregnant with her third child, she realized that her family was not financially equipped to send her children to private school. Therefore, her husband suggested she homeschool the children. Soon, the family became involved in their first homeschool co-op. However, the group did not seem to meet their needs. Tiffany wanted a homeschool group that had more activities and field trips, as well as being affordable. She started her own homeschool co-op nearly 15 years ago, drawing on her previous leadership and educator skills in her community. Currently, over 200 students visit her homeschool co-op weekly. Her youngest two children, who are still school-aged, attend the group.

Lorraine

Lorraine is the wife of a public-school teacher, and together, they were committed to public school education for their children. However, the new educational opportunities created by COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 made her wonder if she should explore other educational options for her children. Lorraine became concerned that her children may grow out of childhood creativity if they did not explore the right educational path as a family. As a Christian, Lorraine

wished her children to maintain as much creativity as possible to effectively investigate all the possibilities God had in store for them. With this in mind, Lorraine began a homeschool co-op with the foresight that she and other families would need to home-educate collectively and that students would fare better with individualized attention to be successful in their education. Lorraine began her homeschool co-op, which she leads with another mother. The homeschool co-op meets three days a week for five hours each session. There are currently eight families attending the homeschool co-op. Her children also attend the co-op.

Deborah

Deborah is the director of a homeschool co-op formulated under a national youth program focusing on youth development and reaching their full potential. Deborah had started her career, intending to become a certified teacher. However, life events caused getting the certification to become unrealistic. Deborah became interested in homeschooling when her oldest child struggled emotionally at public school through bullying. Deborah's family decided to try homeschooling. Her husband was able to homeschool their oldest child for a year, after which they re-enrolled him in public school, hoping for a better experience. Her younger child is very outgoing and thrives in public school. Yet, it was obvious after a few years that their oldest child's success would be hindered further as he progressed in the school system. The family decided to homeschool once again. The success of both of their children was instantaneous. Deborah took the children to several homeschool co-ops. However, she wanted more activities than what they could offer. Right before the COVID-19 pandemic, her family joined their current homeschool co-op. They appreciated the evolving accumulation of activities and leadership opportunities the homeschool group provided their children. During the pandemic, the homeschool co-op leader stepped down. Deborah, who never intended to go into leadership in

her homeschool journey, took over. Her homeschool group meets once a week and caters to all ages.

Candice

After raising her seven children in homeschooling, Candice wanted to continue to invest in homeschooling. Therefore, after her children graduated, she opened her homeschool co-op on a farm, focusing on self-directed education and entrepreneurship. She is passionate about teaching and learning with older teenagers and creating a program that others may replicate to invest in the future of her community. Students meet two to four days a week.

Janet

Janet is a former teacher and military spouse who created her homeschool co-op for socialization opportunities for her children and to help other military families have a significant educational and social experience in the short time they may have in a city before being based elsewhere. Her family moved from a vibrant homeschool co-op community across the country to a military town with limited educational opportunities. She did not want other military families to feel as bewildered as she did in moving while choosing the best schooling option for their children. Therefore, she works to provide military families with a foundation in homeschooling that they can carry on throughout their journeys. Her homeschool co-op is the only one in the surrounding area. She hopes to build a model that can be maintained as her family continues to be based elsewhere. Her homeschool co-op caters to all ages and meets once a week.

Lacey

Lacey has been a leader of multiple homeschool co-op groups and still contributes to the collaboration in leadership, although her children are now adults. Lacey considered homeschooling because she had a highly intellectual child with health problems. Therefore, her

child missed school and was often left alone while teachers focused on other children who needed more help with their schoolwork. At the beginning of her homeschooling journey, Lacey was hesitant to join homeschool groups, as her child's health would mean that they may not be able to be as committed as they should be. They tried virtual schooling for a while. However, the endeavor became too expensive and could not cater to gifted children. Lacey began building confidence in putting together her materials for her child and began using homeschool groups to socialize, although these groups were very far away. Over the years, she contributed to several homeschool co-ops. These groups were often hours away. Eventually, Lacey started her own Christian-oriented but openly inclusive homeschool group, which she no longer leads. This group still meets once a week. Since her homeschooled child graduated, Lacey continues to teach writing courses. She collaborates with other homeschool leaders to formulate curriculums for several homeschool co-ops in the surrounding areas and educates her community on public issues, such as drug use.

Jasmine

Jasmine is the mother of two children who have a 16-year age gap. Her first child was very taciturn and could complete school work efficiently on their terms. Her second child thrived in the social atmosphere of pre-k and other large group settings but paid little attention to academics. Jasmine found educating her second child at home via the public school system during COVID-19 shutdowns miserable. However, she disagreed with how the public school system handled education after returning to in-person. She sought different learning opportunities through like-minded groups until an old acquaintance approached her about starting a homeschool co-op. Jasmine and her co-leader run the homeschool co-op for all ages

one day a week and switch between extracurricular or life-skills-based and core academic classes each semester.

Bonnie

Bonnie has been involved in leadership in multiple homeschool groups. She began homeschooling when her oldest child struggled with being left behind academically in school but did not become involved in homeschool co-ops until her second child showed interest in music, in which Bonnie had an educational background. Bonnie and her second child joined a homeschool group of several elite choirs for homeschooled children who have been running for over 30 years. Bonnie teaches one of the intermediate choirs and a musical theatre class for this group. Until the fall of 2023, Bonnie led another faith-based homeschool co-op to cater to her third child. However, she is taking time off to focus on other interests of her children. The musical homeschool group, which Bonnie has been a part of for four years, serves all school-aged students homeschool students every weekday.

Blair

Blair had a successful educational career, including teaching in public school and obtaining a Ph.D. to work in a university. Therefore, she understood the issues within the educational system. When she had her first child, she thought about the best avenue for their future education. Blair wanted her children to be in an inclusive and accepting secular environment. A friend was homeschooling their children and looking into joining a homeschool co-op. Although Blair doubted how inclusive the homeschool co-op would be, she took her then four-and-a-half-year-old child to try it by signing up for a class one day a week. They fell in love and enthusiastically committed to homeschooling. Blair volunteered to be the membership

director in her second year with the homeschool co-op. The co-op currently welcomes 127 families with children of all ages to come together twice weekly for over 25 classes.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

The individual interviews, artifacts, and questionnaires provided abundant information for emerging themes and subthemes. These various forms of data allowed for the triangulation of themes to validate their value to the study. After each interview, I documented the time, date, and reason I chose the participant to create an audit trail for transparency (see Appendix I). I also made a short journal entry after each interview, specifically outlining my biases or personal feelings that may have occurred during the interview (see Appendix I). Interviews and the participant's verbal description of the artifact were transcribed using Microsoft Teams. Participants emailed me pictures of the artifacts they presented during their interviews. Questionnaires were answered in written form by the participants through Google Forms. The transcriptions of the interviews, transcriptions of the descriptions of the artifacts, and the written responses of the questionnaires were uploaded to the qualitative coding software Delve. Through Delve, I highlighted and coded vital words and phrases to begin developing common themes using qualitative analysis methodology. The methodology used to do so was Moustakas' (1994) four steps of epoché, horizontalization, reduction, and imaginative variation. This chapter comprehensively describes the main themes and subthemes based on the interview questions, artifacts, and questionnaires that outline homeschool co-op leaders' experiences and how they work together to find student success. The themes, subthemes, and codes that were found during data analysis are in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	Codes

Goal of Investing in Young People		*Investing in Student Passions* *Listening/Respecting Students* *Relationships with Students* *Teacher Values Learning* *Teacher Passion*
Student-Centered Education	*Long-Term Passion for Education in Leadership*	*Previous Participant Interest in Education* *Previous Experience in Education* *Other Leaders with Previous Education Experience* *Former Educator Parents* *Long-Term Relationship with Other Educator*
	Parent Participation	*Parent Essentialism* *Parent Volunteers* *Parent Teachers* *Parent Resources* *Parent Leaders*
		Working Together *Student Leadership* *Student-Led Organization* *Working at Their Own Pace*
	Individual Needs	*Needs to be Accommodated Before Homeschool* *Physical Needs to be Accommodated During Homeschool* *Learning Needs to be Accommodated During Homeschool* *Strategies for Accommodating Needs*
	In-Depth Education	*Games* *Field Trips* *Unique Educational Methods* *Off-Campus Learning Experiences*
	Participation in the Community	*Volunteering* *Service Projects* *Community Volunteers* *Life-Skills* *Leadership Passion for Community Service*

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
Maintaining a Vision		*Leadership Collaboration* *Maintaining Authority* *Organization* *Utilizing Leader Gifts* *Listening to Teachers/Parents*
	Multiple Leadership Roles	*Chain of Command* *School Board* *Having Multiple Positions*
	Growing Pains	*Learning from Past Mistakes* *Developing Policies* *School Year Reflection* *Sudden Growth* *Collaboration in Modifying Rules* *Collaboration in Maintaining Operation*

A Goal to Invest in Young People

The central theme of the study is that every participant collaborated with other adults within the homeschool co-op with the goal to invest in young people. Candice, who used to be a secretary, prides herself in providing an abundance of feedback to parents every day so that she and the parents can work together to raise students' "bar with academic, social, and community goals."

Tiffany proudly explained her process of working with new homeschool parents to make them feel confident about taking charge of their children's education:

We try to support any new family. We will go out of our way to sit down with them. After talking to their kids and seeing what kind of learners they are . . . I go into their house the first couple of days of homeschooling, and I will teach their kids for them and let them just sit back and watch. I make a schedule and things like that to make it not be as overwhelming because I think once they see it in action and see that you don't have to use everything and every curriculum.

Janet stated on her questionnaire, "Ultimately, that is the goal of any co-op group, meet-up group, or homeschool community: to build a child's desire to be a solid citizen and serve those in their community." Participants portrayed a passion for educating young people throughout the data collection process. Participants identified this passion as a feature of a successful homeschool co-op. Therefore, two subthemes became apparent under this theme through the participants' data. The first subtheme, long-term passion for education in leadership, showed that eight out of ten participants had a long-standing passion for educating their youth before becoming involved in homeschool. The second subtheme, parent participation, revealed that participants believed that success in their educational goals for their students could not be possible without parents contributing their time and expertise to the homeschool co-op.

Long-Term Passion for Education in Leadership

A subtheme emerged that each leader in this study had a long-term interest in teaching before they became involved in homeschooling. Codes that revealed this subtheme was previous participant interest in teaching, previous experience in education, long-term relationship with other educators, other leaders with previous education experience, and former educator parents. Deborah is an example of a participant with a long-term interest in teaching. Deborah's goal in college was to become a teacher, receiving a bachelor's in English. While she could not complete the certification due to moving states, after a career in corporate America and having children, she decided to pursue her dream of teaching by volunteering for her children's homeschool group.

Participants' collaborative counterparts also tended to be formerly involved in education or a similar background. Lorraine said that she often gets validation in her choices for her children and her homeschool co-op by discussing her ideas with her husband, who "is a public-

school teacher and taught for over 20 years." Throughout her interview, Blair expressed how her four-year tenure in her music homeschool group was a novice level compared to the woman who started the group "30-something years ago." Many members of her group were former teachers and professors with multiple decades of experience in education.

Over half of the participants had been involved in homeschool education for over a decade. Danika, Candice, and Lacey continue to serve their homeschool communities, although their children are now adults. Most participants had formal teaching experience before becoming involved in homeschool co-ops or an educator spouse. Danika and Lorraine were married to educators. Lorraine felt that being married to a supportive public-school educator of 20 years validated her need to involve her family in homeschool education. Referring to her husband, she stated, "As a public-school educator, he said we need to homeschool. I thought, 'Ok, we have to do this then.'"

Janet, Bonnie, Danika, and Blair each pursued degrees in education. Janet stated, "I have a teaching degree and taught for a very brief time." Bonnie was also teacher-trained in the public school system before she became involved in homeschooling. Bonnie noted, "I had some really good mentors both through college and then in my first five years in teaching." Blair earned a Ph.D. in education and taught other teachers at a university before becoming a mother and choosing to homeschool her children. One of the facts that validated her choice in homeschooling was how many moms in the group are former educators.

Tiffany had a similar experience with the parents involved in her homeschool co-op, stating, "We have probably a third of our moms who are previous educators, so that has been quite beneficial to our homeschool community." Janet reveled in her students being able to experience education from parents who were formerly P.E. or English teachers. Bonnie also said

some of her colleagues in her home school group were retired teachers or professors and had been involved in the group for decades. "We got a drama teacher who's got over 40 years of experience," she commented.

The two participants, Candice and Jasmine, who had no educational experience previous to homeschooling, had taken steps to better themselves as educational leaders for the long-term. Candice did not have any background in teaching before her journey in homeschooling. However, being a 30-year homeschool veteran, she still "strives to be a better mentor" and regularly takes courses to improve her knowledge of methodologies. Jasmine periodically meets with her co-leader, who teaches her how to effectively communicate with parents and the community to draw in subject experts and former educators to teach hands-on courses to her students. Although a conventional background in education is not essential to leading a homeschool group, it seems that a long-term passion for education becomes a vital part of leadership in homeschool co-ops.

Parent Participation

The second subtheme was parent participation, as participants in this study unanimously underlined that their ability to lead a homeschool co-op would not be successful without the involvement of parents. Regardless of their educational background, homeschool co-ops often require parents to teach a class. However, participants revealed that parents are much more integral to the inner workings of a homeschool co-op than simply teaching the course their child is in. As Jasmine stated in her short answer questionnaire, "Without parent involvement, the homeschool co-op would not function."

Participants spoke on how family involvement strengthened their homeschool co-op. Deborah said, "In addition to taking some of the burden off myself and the other Admins, [having parent participation] ensures that each family is invested in our program."

Lorraine shared in her questionnaire about the importance of parent involvement in homeschool groups:

We could dramatically change communities, cities, and states, and on and on if parents are just more empowered. Even though I have a vision for where [the homeschool co-op] should go and what it should be . . . ultimately, I think the family unit is the most important unit in society.

Many participants discussed how parent involvement becomes key in roles of leadership, teaching, event planning, and maintaining the learning space. In her interview, Blair talked about the importance of parents in different positions in her homeschool co-op:

It's really a matter of . . . parents stepping up into these leadership roles and saying, "You know, I'm gonna do this." This is not paid; it's all on a volunteer basis. And that's a huge piece of it is if the parents don't step up . . .to be on the board, to offer these classes, to host events, and run events . . . they're not gonna happen.

Jasmine reflected on her appreciation for parents who made the effort to be involved even though they may not have felt they had the talent to teach or the time to commit during the school day:

We had people that were like, "I can't teach, but I will come in every day at 3:00 p.m. and will clean up everything that you've done the whole day." We had other parents that were like, "I can't [teach], but if you give me papers, or whatever, to take home, I will cut things out for you." Then one semester, we had an ice cream party and the parents were

like, "I don't want to teach kids, but I will totally come in and I will scoop ice cream and do all of that stuff." So, we never had a shortage of people that wanted to do stuff.

Participants were thankful for having other parents involved in various positions within their homeschool co-ops. Some participants, such as Janet, Danika, and Blair, considered their homeschool co-ops completely parent-led and run. These participants commented on how parents reflect the importance of family involvement in a child's education and open up many other resources and skills to help make a homeschool co-op thrive.

Student-Centered Education

Student-centered education was a significant focus for participants' educational methods in their homeschool co-ops. Codes that led to this theme were working together, student leadership, student-led organization, and working at their own pace. Lorraine explained about letting her students explore their education by allowing them to be in charge of planning events and projects:

> So, it's getting them to this place where they can see that they are capable of these things and really letting them take ownership of it so that they learn to be the directors of their own education. That's a large part of what we do in our program . . . putting it back on the child and letting them be in charge of their education.

Candice was also adamant about contributing to her students' agency in their education, saying:

> I like to push against boundaries of freedom and autonomy so that they can be empowered to know they are capable . . . Giving the young people their own voice and creating relevant learning material all contribute to successful progress. My observation

is that humans need connection. If they believe you genuinely care about them and like them, they will relate positively back to you.

Each participant had a different approach to student-centered education, whether facilitating a wholesome faith-based education, unschooling, or a hands-on nature-based experience. Nevertheless, participants expressed their desire to let the students explore and fall in love with knowledge on their terms. Along the way, participants discussed how they helped students by focusing on their individual needs, giving them a more meaningful education outside the classroom, and teaching them how to participate in their community as successful entrepreneurs, leaders, academics, and citizens. These three focal points became the three sub-themes of individual needs, in-depth education, and participation in the community. The sub-themes are discussed in detail below.

Individual Needs

The start of many participants' journeys into homeschool education began with the specific educational needs of their children. A more traditional school setting left their children unsuccessful in academics due to bullying, neurodivergence, or hyperactivity. Many participants saw homeschooling as a way to educate by incorporating their child's needs and voice into engaging routines instead of forcing the child to sit still and listen to a lesson. They now endeavor to share that revelation to show others how homeschooling can address individual student needs. Janet pointed out, "[Prospective homeschool parents] will say, 'My child has an IEP or a 504 . . . how do I facilitate this at home?' And [homeschool parents] all kind of have the same responses: Homeschool is literal individualized education."

Participants described how they learned how to create an effective learning environment for other students in their homeschool co-ops. For example, Tiffany, who loves group projects, had an experience in teaching a student with autism:

He's got autism and he was really having a hard time when we would do group projects and things like that. My kids in American History had to build their own colony and he would not work with the group. He was just having a hard time because of his autism and stuff. So, I joined the group with him and then we had another mom who was an assistant coming and joining the group. And when we did that with him, he started to really open up with his ideas and things like that. The nest group project I gave them . . . and for the rest of the school year, he was comfortable enough because we had made that transition easy for him.

Jasmine, who had a miserable time homeschooling her very social and active child during COVID-19, humorously described how her homeschool co-op helped her learn to manage education around her child's enthusiastic personality:

My daughter spends six hours a day doing homeschool. Two of it doing work and four of it getting a snack, eating, doing cartwheels, running around the house, taking a break, talking to things, watching a video . . . but that's just how it works . . . If your kid learns by standing on their head and reading their book upside down, then your kid learns by standing on their head.

Lorraine also voiced her thoughts on learning to work with specific students' needs:

I think if you can find the ability to turn that light bulb on in the child, then that really makes a big difference in how they're gonna approach their own learning. Ultimately, believe in each child's ability to learn.

Lorraine went on to describe how she is conscious about individual needs in her learning space. She often incorporates opportunities for students to take breaks and move their bodies. Along with Lorraine, other participants reported other strategies for individual learner's needs, such as keeping the lights low, keeping learning groups small, and limiting stimulants. Participants explained that catering to many individual needs in a small way made a huge difference for students in these homeschool co-ops without sacrificing the vision or activities participants planned for their students.

In-Depth Education

The second subtheme was that participants expressed that homeschool co-ops offered their families an in-depth educational experience. In addition to homeschool co-ops being suited to individual needs, participants said it also allows them to give students a more profound education. Deeper education meant beyond the classroom and textbooks to gain hands-on and real-world experiences. Codes that illustrated in-depth instruction were games, field trips, off-campus learning experiences, and unique educational methods.

Some participants expressed how they created these moments through the artifacts they presented as a part of the data collection. Notably, Tiffany, who shows up in a historical costume for every history class, shared an artifact that was a toolbox that she had converted into Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad:

> We made a house with a little kitchen and dining room set and a bedroom, and then underneath when you open the toolbox, we put a railroad piece to represent the Underground Railroad and made a bed for the slaves . . .So with that, the kids remembered the Underground Railroad and everything about it. When the kids would be

picked up, the parents were like, 'What is that toolbox for?' And you would just hear the delight in the kids when they were telling the whole story of the Underground Railroad.

Figure 1.

Outside of Harriet Tubman's Toolbox

Figure 2.

Inside of Harriet Tubman's Toolbox

"[We have] the kid's makers market, which we have one coming up, where the kids like make arts and crafts and sell them," Bonnie said when talking about teaching socialization and communication. She also commented on how her youngest is taking a class called "STEM Fairy Tales, where they read a fairy tale and then they have some kind of engineering math or science activity."

Jasmine explained how she often played games in her math classes and even enacted a finance project where her students had jobs and bills to teach them how to budget. Candice takes her students on city-wide scavenger hunts so that they learn how to navigate and follow directions. Lacey, who is a former reporter, taught her students about current events by having

them follow murder trials. These unconventional activities give time for the student to develop an interest and explore the topic more thoroughly because, according to Lacey, "That's what [students] are interested in and they really dive deep into something that they love versus having to stay on track."

Participation in the Community

Community participation is another critical piece in participants' collaboration experiences with their homeschool co-op. Participants described that a part of their homeschool co-op culture is teaching their students how to be a part of their community. Therefore, it is common practice that participants organize community volunteer and service opportunities as a part of their homeschool co-ops routine throughout the school year. In her interview, Candice said, "I want my kids to know that volunteering is meaningful . . . hope that they will grow up to be adults that will consistently volunteer in their community."

Deborah also described how leaders in her co-op specifically "look for opportunities where they can grow and become good citizens. So, we do service projects." She went on to explain that her students regularly volunteer to plant flowers at churches or collect goods for animal shelters. When asked to bring an artifact representing Deborah's input into the collaboration of her homeschool group as a part of the data collection for this study, she presented a jar of handmade laundry detergent. Making laundry detergent was originally a part of a "community service themed co-op class." Now, her student regularly made it to hand to underprivileged people in the community so that they could wash their clothes at a local laundry facility that offers free laundry washing once a month.

Jasmine proudly recollected how her students have organized car washes to benefit people experiencing homelessness and collected food for food banks. "We took them to the post

office and. . . sent stuff to soldiers who can't be home for Christmas." She continued about her experience in prompting her children and students to do acts of service in the community, "It was just doing things that we would never do at home . . . It was so much more encompassing for them and it was great because it's learning different things and meet different people."

Jasmine especially noted that volunteering in the community or having community members teach a lesson to the students often meant that students had to interact with adults. She observed that students had the opportunity to learn how to introduce themselves and ask more comprehensive questions to the adults. "It's just skills that a lot of kids don't have now," Jasmine commented in her interview, "because, in the public schools, you're just sitting and they tell you what to do and you're not interacting with adults on the same level."

Each participant had some community interaction as an integral part of the operation of their homeschool co-op. According to participants, being able to collaborate within the community was essential to not only teach their students how to be good members of society but also for participants to be able to draw from the most resources to help further their homeschool groups and communities thrive. Some participants even expressed their desire to collaborate with other homeschool groups to pool resources to address community needs. In her short answer questionnaire, Janet commented, "the biggest lesson children learn in a homeschool co-op is learning to be a part of a community." With that, participation in the community becomes a key feature in homeschool co-op leaders' perception of student success.

Maintaining a Vision

The final theme was maintaining a vision. As homeschool co-ops maintain a highly collaborative atmosphere within their leadership, there can be many different ideas and opinions. Even though each participant had a different vision for their homeschool co-op, a common theme

was that each participant expressed the importance of maintaining a shared vision when making decisions collaboratively within the homeschool co-op leadership. Keeping a vision became essential to strengthen the group and its educational practices by addressing leadership responsibility, managing parent demands, learning from past mistakes, and enforcing family participation.

"We've tried to kind of have a vision for the co-op and where that's going and make decisions that are in line with that vision with our growth," Bonnie commented in her interview. Bonnie talked extensively that the vision for her group was "to be inclusionary" and a safe space for all students. One of her homeschool co-op's tough decisions this year was to "cap membership." Drawing the interest of many families in the area, the homeschool co-op used to be 164 families. However, limiting families was essential to keep their learning space at the local recreation center and continue the integrity of the group because the recreation center was a free primary resource. As a part of their inclusive vision, Bonnie and other leaders decided to limit their homeschool families to slightly less than they could manage, which was 125 families. Bonnie explained that they chose to do this in case they had emergency requests to join from families facing extreme discrimination from other educational institutions.

Jasmine stated in her questionnaire, "[Everyone] should have the same vision for the homeschool co-op and work together to make it successful." She described the process of arriving at her homeschool co-op's joint vision of being ultimately parent involved, as parent involvement had been an issue in the first year of the homeschool group. Lack of parent involvement caused stress on leaders. Jasmine commented, "You have to be there at all times." As a result, Jasmine and other leaders started prompting parents to think about what passions they would want their children to learn about to get parents to commit to the operation of the

homeschool co-op. She told parents, "Start thinking about what you like, and then we'll figure out a way for you to teach that to kids." Jasmine also implemented new programs, such as a nursery program so that parents with toddlers and infants could have the opportunity to be involved in their school-aged children's education.

> Contributing to what we were doing . . . that was essential because one of the things that [my leadership partner and I] were concerned about it like, we are not only gonna be administrators, but we're also gonna be doing all of this. And so having parent volunteers . . . was essential for us.

Participants described how they created and maintained visions for their homeschool groups. Throughout their discussions, they explained how developing multiple leadership roles within the homeschool co-op was necessary to support smooth operations. Participants also described how they had to learn to fix issues as their homeschool co-ops developed. Therefore, the subthemes for this category are Multiple Leadership Roles are Essential and Growing Pains.

Multiple Leadership Roles are Essential

Many participants expressed the importance of having multiple leadership roles. Most participants were founding members of their homeschool co-ops, so they discussed how decisions and plan execution could often fall solely on their shoulders. Participants described how they understood this is not fruitful for their long-term homeschool co-op. Janet mentioned in her questionnaire short answer, "Ultimately, a successful group needs collaborative leadership to survive . . . If only one person is leading, planning, and organizing, the group will fade away when they leave."

Some participants have a formal chain of command in their homeschool co-ops. "It's not

one person making all the decisions . . . there's a treasurer, there's a secretary. And then the roles

of a President, Vice President . . . ," Blair said about the roles in her homeschool co-op.

Bonnie's group also had official leadership roles:

We now have like very specific job descriptions written up. We have a class day

coordinator who deals with all the classes that are being brought in and how to kind of

schedule them and put them in different classrooms and all of that. We have an event

coordinator. We have a board and then like a field trip coordinator.

Other participants described forming a collaborative bond with a few members with

different strengths so that each leader's skills complimented the others. Jasmin works closely

with another woman. In her questionnaire, she described that:

One partner should be the creative idea person, while the other partner should handle the

organization side. I find the best way to run a homeschool co-op effectively is to work

with a partner that has complementary skills to your own.

Lorraine, who had the youngest homeschool co-op and least experience in

homeschooling out of all of the participants, also understood the importance of finding more

members who were willing to take on roles of leadership other than herself. Even though she

says she has "a good team of volunteers and a paid staff member," she has yet to find other

people who will step up to align with her vision:

You need another person to be really in leadership with you. It is a lot to own on just one

person, and so, I'm looking for that other person who would really share in the vision and

keep it going.

Whether their homeschool group has a formal chain of command or has a few

committed leaders, participants understood that their homeschool group's long-term operation and vision depended on collaboration from multiple leaders. Therefore, it becomes crucial for these participants to learn how to delegate tasks and leadership roles. Having various leaders ensure that no one person bears too much responsibility is an example of how the homeschool co-op should work together.

Growing Pains

The final subtheme in Maintaining a Vision is Growing Pains. As with any organization, evolving as a group means developing from issues that may have occurred in previous terms. Participants mentioned that as they do not have legislated standards to maintain as other educational institutions do, they have had to figure out how their homeschool co-op should be run independently to support what they had in store for the group. In the initial formation of their groups, participants experienced an occasional unexpected issue that had to be addressed to operate smoothly. Although participants may have had a student that became an issue in the past, as can be expected in any educational institution, many participants claimed that discipline in their student body does not often become an issue. However, participants discussed that matters in their homeschool co-ops most often lay in learning to maintain the homeschool co-op's vision over meeting the needs of families.

For example, Lorraine recalled having to let more experienced leaders depart from her group at the end of the first year because they disagreed with the fledgling homeschool co-op having to limit how flexible it can be and what individual needs it can accommodate:

> Often [other homeschool co-op families] expect, even in a group setting, to have those
> needs met, and that's not always possible in a group setting. So, there is a very big
> tension of holding on to the ideals of the program and keeping that intact while meeting

the needs of the people. It's a hard thing for somebody like . . . otherwise you're gonna

just destroy your program because it doesn't have the consistency and integrity it needs to

keep moving forward.

Other participants discussed difficulties in understanding the legalities of their

homeschool co-op. Therefore, they were presented with unpleasant surprises when their presence

within their community became apparent. Danika described having to learn about the legal

expectations of her homeschool co-op as it grew:

We didn't realize that we need to be incorporated to protect [the homeschool co-op]

legally…we wanna make sure we're dotting every "i" and crossing every "t" . . . We

became independently contracted and we'd meet in a church. And all of a sudden we

were told, "You know that you are an individual business. If you meet at a church, you

can threaten their tax exemption" . . . so we had to go through a lot of paperwork, talk to

a lot of attorneys.

Participants mentioned issues, such as coordinating meeting days with other

homeschool groups, finding learning opportunities in a rural area, or finding a space to manage

their ever-growing homeschool co-op. Sometimes, hard decisions had to be made to mend these

issues. Yet, participants relied on their leading collaborators to help understand each case and

create a comprehensive resolution path.

Outlier Data and Findings: Making Exceptional Education Financially Attainable

During this data collection and analysis, a significant unexpected finding was

homeschool co-op leaders' desire to keep their education financially feasible for families.

Participants often discussed what a family looks like in their homeschool co-ops. Tiffany

explained that families in her homeschool co-op are "families who are on one income, who

cannot afford a lot." Candice also mentioned, "That's why co-ops are so popular . . . because money is tighter."

Therefore, part of being a leader in a homeschool co-op is understanding how to make education as cost-effective as possible. Participants described how they do this by managing resources within the homeschool co-op and how they receive help from the community. Participants went above and beyond what was required to create an equitable educational experience for their students despite their socio-economic status.

Resources within the Co-op

Although participants did not collectively express a particular way that they keep costs down, each of them had a plan that they specifically worked on to offer low-cost education. Bonnie, Candice, and Blair each offer scholarships funded by local businesses or more affluent families. Even so, most participants charged less than $150 per family per year, with Debora charging the least tuition at only $10 per family.

A few participants discussed how parents felt more inclined to volunteer their time if they did not have to pay high tuition fees or buy abundant supplies. Jasmine heard parents say, "If I don't have to pay for anything, I am happy to teach." As a result, parents are more willing to teach most of the courses or lead clubs voluntarily. Jasmine said the leaders at her homeschool co-op were "taking the pressure off of the parents . . . they didn't want to teach because they assumed it would be like public school and they would have to buy their own supplies."

Other homeschool co-op parents donated crafts and school supplies their children did not use the year before. Therefore, Jasmine found it essential to have donated supplies well stocked. She and her other homeschool co-op leaders also budgeted for any other materials they may need throughout the school year.

Participants were also reported to be thrifty with their curriculums. As there is no legislation regarding what regulation homeschool families must use when educating their children in North Carolina, homeschool co-ops in this study often encouraged parents to choose a curriculum that was best for their child. Participants, such as Blair, Janet, and Jasmine, set up meetings for "swapping resources" to help parents obtain curriculum suitable for their children. "You could bring in curriculum that you had used, that you were willing to let someone take and use if it looked interesting," Janet explained in her interview on what she has done in the past. Other participants, such as Tiffany and Lacey, write a curriculum that caters to specific students and interests.

Resources from the Community

Participants also use their community resources to keep costs low in their homeschool co-ops. Participants reported that their primary locations to meet with their groups are often free community spaces, such as churches, recreation centers, libraries, and parks. "It's a big thing," Bonnie commented about the recreation center that hosts her 127 homeschool co-op families each week, "it's free to us."

Many participants also work with local businesses and organizations who support the homeschool co-op's cause. For her artifact, Blair proudly displayed a logo she had designed herself that was screen printed on a t-shirt. She had printed various shirts and sweaters for only the cost of materials for her students to wear on group trips after discussing what the shirts were for with the owner. On the other hand, Lacey often made it a habit to call businesses to see if they would host a free or discounted field trip, such as to the planetarium or movie theatre. "It wasn't something they advertised, but many places will work with you," Lacey recalled.

Participants reported regular visits to police departments, fire departments, farms, and gardens for discounted or no cost to their homeschool co-op or their families. Experts within the community also volunteered their time to teach courses for the homeschool co-ops. Danika had computer courses taught by a professional web designer. Last school year, Jasmine had a professional videographer teach classes on script writing and filmmaking. "We have a martial arts instructor who gives his time," Bonnie said about courses in her homeschool co-op, "We've got a professional writer teaching creative writing courses that fill up fast."

In conclusion, participants displayed that homeschool co-op leaders put a tremendous amount of effort into keeping their costs down in their homeschool co-ops. They do this because they understand the demographic of their families who may be at an economic or geographic disadvantage. Participants strive to prove that abundant exceptional educational resources can be provided at a lower cost than other educational methods.

Research Question Responses

The central question of this research centered around the experiences of homeschool co-op leaders collaborating in North Carolina, deriving from the theory leading this research. Two sub-questions focused on leadership collaboration strategies that foster student success and how homeschool co-op leaders are working together to meet the needs of their communities. Responses to these questions resulted from findings from the individual interviews, questionnaires, and artifacts presented by each participant.

Central Research Question

What are the collaboration experiences of homeschool co-op leaders in North Carolina?

The experiences of homeschool co-op leaders collaborating in North Carolina start as a parent seeking personalized educational opportunities for their children. Pursuing these

opportunities evolves into becoming leaders in a multi-faceted network of like-minded parents and community members who wish to create a well-rounded learning experience for their children. The themes used to answer the central research questions were A Goal to Invest in Young People, Student-Centered Education, and Maintaining a Vision.

All ten participants started homeschooling to cater to their children. For example, Lorraine felt that traditional education could dim her children's creativity and sought "more hands-on learning" opportunities outside of a conventional classroom. Lacey needed a more flexible option for her gifted child, who had health problems. Blair's child expressed interest in a musical theatre future, bringing them to their current music-based homeschool group. Bonnie was looking for "things like sensory play" for her youngest child.

Eight out of 10 participants either started or became leaders in their current homeschool co-op due to becoming involved in homeschool groups for their children. Danika and Candice were the only two participants who became involved with or created their current homeschool co-op after their children became adults. Six of the 10 participants created their current homeschool co-ops to best suite their family's needs. Of those six, Lacey is the only participant who no longer leads the homeschool she started, as her children have graduated.

Participants maintain their homeschool co-ops by networking within their homeschool co-op, and in their community, homeschool co-op leaders can deliver unique learning opportunities, provide sufficient learning resources to parents at home, and foster unity within families and their community. In the words of Janet, "It's nice to provide people a starting point to just say, 'Come in, get resources, and, if your people are here, you're welcome to come in and find them.'"

Sub-Question One

What are the strategies used by homeschool co-op leaders to foster student success in North Carolina?

The strategies used by homeschool co-op leaders in North Carolina to foster student success are catering to individual needs by assessing their learning styles and environmental requirements, as well as reacting with impactful hands-on and real-world educational experiences for the student. Participants use these strategies to ignite a passion for learning in students through a student-centric environment. The theme used to answer this research question was Student-Centered Education.

Lorraine commented on learning about her growing group of neuroatypical learners and what kind of learning environment they need:

> For example, for the child who had sensory processing, he needed to… something very physical with his body. So, just having that opportunity in limiting the stimulants, smaller groups, no fluorescent lighting, low light, limiting all the extra stimulants . . . and then being able to do more hands-on learning on all levels.

Jasmine described how she began to learn about her students' learning styles, saying, "We've shown people you can be very successful by playing games and doing learning that way." This realization led her to experiment with other stimulating and unconventional learning techniques. "I had a lady who did search and rescue dogs that taught them how to search for things in the woods." She understood that real-world experiences let her students learn to communicate with different people and grow closer as a community as they learned to interact.

Homeschool co-op leaders often passionately commit to this higher level of learning to shape well-rounded future leaders of their community. As Lacey stated in her questionnaire regarding student success in her homeschool co-op experience, "Not only do the students get

interview how collecting food for the food banks and creating gift boxes for deployed soldiers have been significant projects for her homeschool co-op around Christmas. Lacey also described one of the most popular volunteering events she plans for her students is creating cards for senior citizens for Valentine's Day.

Some participants discussed working with other homeschool groups or educational institutions to maximize their vocational skills and service projects. Lacey commented on work with other academic groups in her community:

The more viewpoints and ideas shared within a coop or other educational settings, the more educational opportunities the students will have. We encourage everyone to share anything they found out about with any other groups.

Lacey and Deborah both discussed working with other educational groups to gain more opportunities to meet the community's needs. In addition to more student field trip opportunities, Lacey commented on how other educational groups can sometimes have better resources, such as more parent drivers or people affiliated with more extensive projects in larger towns. Therefore, she can collaborate with these groups to provide quality volunteering opportunities.

Deborah also communicates with other groups to determine how they best incorporate community activities into their operations. She developed this as a vital part of homeschooling within her community after she felt it was challenging to get people to participate in volunteering and community needs. This difficulty was a result of there being too many homeschool groups that created conflict for each other. Now, she can communicate with other homeschool groups on what volunteer opportunities they are planning and direct her homeschool families to options that could best use their strengths.

Summary

Through the individual interviews, questionnaires, and artifacts, 10 participants shared their experiences collaborating with other leaders in homeschool co-ops in North Carolina to gain student success. The themes from this data were a) A Goal of Investing in Young People, b) Maintaining a Vision, and c) Student-Centered Education. There was one outlier theme in which participants unanimously expressed their desire to keep the educational experience of their homeschool co-op cost-effective for families.

The central research question and sub-questions were answered, highlighting that homeschool co-op leaders rely on an intricate network of parents and community members to attain a shared vision. With an all-around understanding of this vision, homeschool collaborators can create a well-rounded education for students by focusing on the individual needs of students. These groups of contributors work together, giving their time, talent, and resources to create future solid citizens in these students.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aims to describe the experiences of leaders collaborating together to contribute to student success in homeschool co-ops in North Carolina. The problem was that homeschool families may struggle to gain meaningful collaborative relationships to achieve student success, as experts recommend collaborative support for students in educational settings (De Jong et al., 2019; Dobosz et al., 2023; Letzel et al., 2020). Data were collected from 10 homeschool co-op leaders from various homeschool co-op settings. Data were collected through individual interviews, questionnaires, and artifacts. Moustakas' (1994) four steps of epoché, horizontalization, reduction, and imaginative variation were used.

Discussion

In the conclusion of data analysis, the findings revealed that the 10 participants indicated that having a goal to invest in young people, having a student-centered educational approach, and maintaining a vision are essential elements to collaborating in a homeschool co-op. Five major subsection sections are discussed, which include a) Interpretation of Findings; b) Implications for Policy or Practice; c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; d) Limitations and Delimitations; and e) Recommendations for Future Research.

Summary of Thematic Findings

In an exploration of leadership collaboration to foster student success in homeschool co-ops in North Carolina, the predominant viewpoints expressed by the participants from the data analysis revealed the themes, having a goal to invest in young people, having a student-centered education, and maintaining a vision for the homeschool co-op were essential elements. In response to the research questions for this study, three themes were found. The first theme was

that running a successful homeschool co-op achieving student success begins with leaders to have a common goal to invest in students. Subthemes revealed the leadership that contributed to this goal was made up of leaders who had long-term passion for education often extended before their homeschool journey. Parent involvement was also vital to running the homeschool co-op effectively. The second theme from the data analysis was that homeschool co-ops focus on student-centered education to foster student success. Participants discussed how they created a student-centered environment through catering to individual needs, creating more in-depth learning experiences for students, and instigating students to participate in their community. Finally, to successfully operate a homeschool co-op requires leaders to operate by maintaining a vision. To maintain a vision in the homeschool co-op, participants stated that having multiple roles in leadership was essential, and they needed to strengthen the operations of their homeschool co-op by learning from their growing pains or issues that arose in starting a homeschool co-op. These findings presented a discussion on the interpretation of the study. A summary of the thematic conclusions and a series of significant reflections are discussed in Chapter Five.

Critical Discussion

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of homeschool co-op leaders and how they work together to achieve student success. The results yielded many valuable points rich in clues to help formulate a better educational experience for the next generation of students regardless of their educational setting. The findings of note include: unconventional education is effective, homeschool co-ops create diversity, inclusivity, and equality, and homeschool co-ops may not need much regulation. These three points may contribute to resolving issues within North Carolina's educational systems and seeing students

succeed in their academic careers through a better understanding of homeschool co-ops as significant educational pathways.

Unconventional Education is Effective

Today, the world is significantly progressing in understanding learners who may not learn well in a conventional way, contained in a school building or a classroom (Gatewood et al., 2022; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022). Therefore, more uncommon learning methods have become acceptable, as further information becomes available about how students who may not have been labeled highly intellectual in the past can learn through different methodologies (O'Hare & Coyne, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). The link between unconventional education and the success of students with varying learning capabilities revealed, through the participants, collaborating in a homeschool co-op is an exciting new horizon in understanding how academic success is measured in a world that is slowly accepting students of varying styles of intellects. Though measuring academic success on a grading scale was not discussed in this study, the participants' enthusiasm to discuss their students' successes through unconventional learning methods in academics, vocational, and extracurricular skills implies that tests cannot measure their perceptions of success. Instead, success is measured by students becoming capable of applying what they have learned to real-life situations. Research shows that scholars agree that less structured methods of analysis on student achievement are necessary to assess homeschooled student's academic successes, as traditional tests show them to be low academic achievers (Green& Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Neyman, 2020; O'Hare & Coyne, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022). This untraditional method of homeschool co-ops assessing student achievement through applying their knowledge to the real world could be a detrimental key to a more accurate picture of students' successes in unconventional learning styles.

Participants achieved this perception of assessing success by not limiting academics to a classroom and believing that any child, regardless of learning capabilities, can learn. Instead, they created hands-on experiences, such as one of Bonnie's teachers teaching Bonnie's daughter how to build boats to sail under the Three Billy Goat Gruff's bridge in a STEM Fairytales class. Participants also organized field experiences, such as Lacey taking her students to the farm of a pair of friendly "dooms day preppers" so that they could teach her students about electrohydraulic dams for their science class. According to participants, the most crucial aspect of educational success was the students' ability to be a part of a community, insinuating that education based in the community is vital to fortifying successful students. Therefore, many of the homeschool co-ops' learning activities centered around life skills, such as mixing age groups so students are exposed to different types of people or community services, such as making free soap so that people experiencing homelessness can wash their clothes.

Participants were not afraid to flaunt their unique learning methods, constantly justifying their actions by explaining how their lessons would improve their students in future real-life scenarios. The growing number of families joining these homeschool groups suggests that communities may increasingly believe that educating children cannot be contained to core subjects in a classroom. Instead, families would prefer a more well-rounded educational experience for their children, including vocational and life skills, in addition to learning traditional subjects taught in a way in which students can connect the lesson to skills useful in real life. Furthermore, working together to make alternative educational experiences come to life strengthens a homeschool co-op community and brings families and communities closer together.

In the collaborative leadership theory, Chrislip and Larson (1994) recognized that communities fail because family units are disintegrating. Communities cut out schools, community programs, and community centers, as they no longer seem to serve families, as crime, drugs, and violence elevate . However, the unconventional learning methods of homeschool co-ops can only work through the survival of these vital community programs. Not only do homeschool co-op leaders collaborate to achieve student success, but they must also reach out and work with the community for resources. Homeschool co-ops put community centers and community programs to work as they find unique learning spaces and experiences to give their students engaging lessons. Although maybe not the type of collaboration that citizens may envision in bettering their community, homeschool families and homeschool co-ops could keep vital parts of community elements going.

Furthermore, when community offerings can thrive, families outside of homeschool co-ops can continue to utilize them. Literature suggests that when families have this kind of access to resources in the community, they become aware of the cultures and needs within their society and begin to promote equitable learning experiences through low-cost public services, such as research labs and libraries (Begum et al., 2021; Grossman et al., 2021; Hernandez-Perez et al., 2020). Thus, in a cycle, strengthening the family units becomes vital in maintaining the community.

Using unconventional learning methods could significantly change student achievement in North Carolina and beyond education. Reassessing how student success is measured by monitoring how a student progresses through their abilities to apply what is learned in the real world versus evaluating their knowledge learned through a test may lead to higher student success. Additionally, reassessing how student success is measured may help educational

institutions of any variety mold future adults of many different honed capabilities who can tremendously contribute their skills to better their communities. Thus, borrowing methods from unconventional learning environments, such as homeschool co-ops, can make future adults proficient in cultivating a better world.

Homeschool Co-ops Create Diversity, Inclusivity, and Equality in Education

Admittedly, one of my biases at the onset of the study was that, growing up in a Christian home, I knew the stereotypes of homeschooling well. While I have not been homeschooled, many of my family members and friends from church were. Therefore, stereotypes, such as homeschooled students, were odd and unsocialized Christian children were well known to me. In my research, journals confirmed that many people often feel that homeschooling can restrict socialization and their belief systems. However, research also concluded that there was a great misconception of a population that was thriving in a variety of socially and culturally forward opportunities for students (McCabe et al., 2021; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). However, keeping my biases aside with this new outlook, I was still worried that I would only accrue Christian perspectives. I thought that most homeschool co-ops would cater to religious groups. However, as a pragmatist, I wanted to make sure that I found practical solutions to the problem and purpose stated in this study through as many varying perspectives as possible.

To my surprise, I found many different types of homeschool co-ops that each catered toward a specific demographic. Some homeschool co-ops catered to specific denominational and non-denominational religious students. Other homeschool co-ops catered towards students with a particular interest, like music. Then, there were homeschool co-ops to make sure that the workings of their group made students of different ethnicities, genders, sexualities, abilities, and beliefs were safe and included. These findings in varying environments aligned with the

literature suggesting that homeschool families seek different homeschool groups to create personalized experiences for their children (Cheng & Hamlin, 2022; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Valiente et al., 2022). Homeschool co-op leaders understand this desire from families and reflect the different religions, people, and activities to which families want to expose their children (Tilhou, 2019; Valiente et al., 2022).

The theme that became apparent was that no matter what beliefs different homeschool co-ops affiliated with, they all had the same goal: to passionately educate students to become significant members of their community. Homeschool co-ops do this by tirelessly working to create equitable educational opportunities for all students. Homeschool co-ops also encourage students to work in diverse groups and include each other in their projects and discussions. This way, students begin to see how their voice matters, an experience essential for them to make critically thought-out decisions in the future (Iachini et al., 2018; Nolan & Hutchinson, 2022). As a result, homeschool co-op leaders find little conflict with families or colleagues, as well-behaved, confident, academically passionate, and well-spoken students emerge.

Additionally, literature suggests that homeschooled students are more likely to invest in their community as adults, becoming strong, socialized, dynamic leaders (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Medlin, 2000; Sevier & Pope, 2022). Hence, if collaborative methods from homeschool co-ops are applied to other educational settings, future leaders can come together to comprehensively find practical solutions for their community without discourse, regardless of differing faiths or ideas. Overall, there are many lessons to be learned from homeschool co-ops on how to direct a dynamic secondary education that could resolve current issues in the field of education if only stakeholders begin to view homeschool co-ops as significant educational institutes.

Homeschool Co-ops May Not Need Much Regulation

One of the controversial topics surrounding homeschooling, according to literature, was the lack of legislation surrounding homeschooling (Permoser & Stoeckl, 2021; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Renzulli et al., 2020). Not having many rules regarding homeschooling makes onlookers worry about the quality of education, socialization, and safety homeschooled students may be experiencing (Carlson, 2020; Dills, 2022; Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Renzulli et al., 2020). It may be necessary to regulate the circumstances in which individual families homeschool, such as submitting documentation of students' progress throughout the year, as public schools must (Berger, 2022; Renzulli et al., 2020). However, this study revealed a new perspective that may favor minimizing regulation in homeschool co-ops. The commitment that participants explained to their homeschool co-ops indicates that these types of educational institutions may not need much interference from the government.

Each participant in the study demonstrated that their commitment to maintaining a legitimate educational setting was sincere. Participants thoroughly discussed their homeschool co-op operations through organizing a board, delegating tasks to leaders, legalizing their homeschool co-op as a business, training parents to teach and facilitate learning, budgeting, and fundraising, and collaborating with their surrounding community. While many homeschool groups rose in the wake of school shutdowns due to COVID-19, those that were temporary or unstable have now stopped operation, according to participants, and further research into homeschool co-ops still open in North Carolina (Auxier & Anderson, 2020; Ceglie et al., 2022; Callahan, 2021; Mussadiq et al., 2022). Therefore, homeschool co-ops that intend to last in the long run are growing, as more families leave public education in favor of the benefits offered

through homeschooling while the homeschool co-ops continuously collaborate to strengthen their programs.

Throughout this study, participants mentioned that homeschool co-ops have little to no benefits from the government. They receive no financial help and are not recognized as educational institutions that may benefit from legislation for schools. Many participants stated that they could not refer to their homeschool co-op as a school or offer educational services to families not exclusively enrolled as a homeschool. However, regardless of these issues, some participants said they prefer not to be interfered with by governing bodies.

In explaining how they determinedly search for resources and maintain an entire organization with low membership fees and no paycheck to take home, participants revealed that accepting finances or benefits from the government meant the government had a say in how they ran their homeschool group. Government interference could mean restrictions on curriculum or adherence to educational qualifications for leaders within the homeschool co-op that would not align with the homeschool co-op's vision. For example, participants who were involved in faith-based homeschool co-ops expressed their joy in being able to pray with students on issues that they faced. This privilege is illegal in public school systems in the United States. Additionally, with the proof of government regulation consistently bearing down on other educational institutions as apparent in literature, the homeschool co-op would be subject to many rules, fines, and legalities that would result in the group being unable to operate, including no longer being able to cater to homeschooled families (Renzulli et al., 2020).

Much of the literature surrounded whether or not homeschool should be regulated because it may limit the exposure the student has to perceptions outside of the family's beliefs (Berger et al., 2020). Onlookers argued that public schools offered much more exposure for

students to varying ideals. Many believe that, in homeschooling, parents have absolute power over what their students can learn, potentially limiting their children to narrow viewpoints . It could be argued that, regardless of the belief system, students have more exposure to different attitudes and beliefs in a homeschool co-op atmosphere. Irrespective of whether a homeschool co-op was religiously affiliated or affiliated with another purpose, each participant had a plethora of experiences for their students. From mixing groups to holding classes in unconventional spaces to having students frequently interact in the community, homeschool co-ops offer possibly more experiences for students to develop their beliefs than public schools.

  Research shows that the United States government often favors a family's right to choose how to educate their children (Carlson, 2020; Renzulli et al., 2020). Therefore, governments should recognize homeschool co-ops as legitimate educational institutions so that other educational institutes could accept findings like those in this research to create educational reform where needed without overstepping parents' desires to choose how best to educate their children through over-regulation of homeschool co-ops. Furthermore, it is understandable that an academic setting with so little regulation would cause concern to the public. However, there is strength in unity within homeschool co-ops among leaders, families, students, and the community that strives to authentically create a unique and complete educational experience for students. Therefore, controversial as it may be, homeschool co-ops may not need to be subject to legislation. They can continue to operate where they currently lie in policy without the need for concern, or else there may be a dire risk to the elements that make homeschool co-ops desirable and necessary for everyone involved. Instead, an alternative may be simply regulating homeschool families so that they may prove to governing bodies that their children receive quality education, interactive activities, and learn in a safe environment.

Implications for Policy and Practice

   This study identified implications for policy and practice, which led to recommendations for homeschool co-op leaders and their communities. As homeschool co-ops are independent entities from any legislative or higher educational committee, policies and practices will only be implied for entities close to the homeschool co-ops. Below is a discussion on these implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

   This study's findings have policy implications. In exploring collaboration in leadership within homeschool co-ops, the findings from research show that family participation was essential for a student's success (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Gerdes et al., 2022; Lara & Saracostti, 2020; Kim, 2020; Rissanen, 2022). Family involvement proves integral to facilitating students' educational achievements, and family involvement became critical for leading and planning activities and the contribution of funds and supplies . Participants confirmed that parent involvement is essential to student success and the homeschool co-op's everyday operation.

   In this study, some participants expressed that it was difficult to get parents to participate in founding the homeschool co-op. Exploring different homeschool co-ops in search of potential participants showed that many homeschool co-ops required parents to stay with their children throughout learning sessions to help teach classes and prepare activities. Therefore, a policy suggested for homeschool co-op leaders is to require family involvement to be accepted into the homeschool co-op and to create an organized plan each week or month of enlisting each child's family members to participate in teaching, planning events, or collecting supplies for the homeschool co-op. This policy will enact the vital element of family involvement and hold them

accountable to collaborate in gaining their students' success as a homeschool family instead of leaving everything up to homeschool co-op leaders.

Another suggested policy is for communities to have a more visible campaign for free and low-cost activities in the community. They should also encourage citizens to express educational opportunities they can offer more publicly. Part of homeschool co-ops' ethos is encouraging learning from real-life activities outside of the classroom (Tilhou, 2019). Many participants expressed that they had to put in effort to find activities for their students. In some cases, participants said they had to travel long distances to access worthwhile educational activities and field trips for their students. Other participants described calling random businesses or other groups to organize their activities. Therefore, communities should make a tremendous effort to publicize what educational activities they can offer locally and offer an incentivized program for community members to provide other educational activities. For example, if a community member has a farm, they might receive an incentive for letting students come and learn about the daily workings of the farm. The heightened awareness and cultivation of these activities would benefit homeschool co-ops and anyone looking for supplemental educational activities for their children.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings, this study also has practical implications. Throughout the study, it was evident that student-centered education was essential to student success. Student-centered education culminated around addressing individual needs, often of a neurodivergent capacity, and creating student interest in topics through in-depth practices. Although many participants expressed the different kinds of learners they had to accommodate, one of the participants expressed feeling uncomfortable accepting students with autism or dyslexia into her smaller

homeschool co-op. She explained many of her collaborative leaders did not understand how to accommodate these students and felt that this inexperience hindered learning for other students. However, many homeschooled families turn to homeschooling because of the individual needs of their children (Collier et al., 2020; Martini et al., 2020; Nanquil, 2021; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). Where more formal educational settings may have leaders who have training in different student needs, homeschool co-ops often have untrained leaders who learn as they go (Martini et al., 2020; Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Tilhou, 2019).

Therefore, homeschool co-ops may implement practices surrounding student-centered education to foster this student success. Homeschool co-op leaders should practice helping teachers, parents, and other adults to identify children's unique needs (Silalahi & Hutauruk, 2020; Tilhou, 2019). For example, a few participants discussed learning to identify particular sensory needs in their students, such as low lighting in their learning spaces. Leaders should also practice teaching others how to handle different scenarios regarding student needs. One participant said that learning a little about many different types of students' needs can significantly impact a student's education because sometimes a tiny change solves many problems. An example would be a hyperactive student who may have gotten in trouble often in a more formal educational setting and may need a five-minute break to move their body to continue concentrating on the lesson. Therefore, homeschool co-ops must practice understanding student needs and implementing strategies to help these students learn to the best of their capacity.

Several participants mentioned their strategies to getting resources to parents on days when the parent is facilitating education at home, as homeschool co-ops often only meet once or twice during a week or even the month. Tiffany mentioned that she goes into the home of all new

homeschooling families that join her homeschool co-op and shows parents how to teach their children, organize their school day, and acquire resources. Other participants explained their use of online platforms to direct parents to resources for their students. It seemed that some homeschool co-ops practiced making sure that the families involved were fully capable of facilitating their children's education. Homeschool co-ops could practice allocating leaders to be responsible for helping parents obtain any educational resources they may need when they are educating their children from home. Homeschool co-op leaders may do this by maintaining online social media pages with organized resources for parents or holding workshops geared towards raising parents' confidence in homeschooling their children. Additionally, homeschool co-ops could keep a list of educational opportunities outside in the community for families to explore on their own.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The essence of experiences of homeschool co-op leaders collaborating to achieve student success elicited themes to emerge from this research study to corroborate Chrislip and Larson's (1994) theory of collaborative leadership and empirical works that were essential to the framework of this study. Theoretical implications include the validation that citizens want to be involved in deciding in their community, and family is at the center of community success. Empirical implications include authentication of adequate socialization, student benefits in homeschool co-ops, and collaboration's importance in addressing community needs. This study also potentially added to the literature to imply that collaborative educational settings engaging with families and the community may result in financially equitable exceptional education opportunities for students regardless of socioeconomic background.

Empirical Implications

The findings of this study both supported and potentially added to and extended empirical literature. Among other practical topics reviewed for this study, socialization is a topic of interest amongst researchers, as there is a high social stigma insinuating that homeschool students do not receive a sufficient amount of socialization in their homeschool settings (McCabe et al., 2021; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Tilhou, 2019). However, recent research shows that the opposite is likely true, with researchers finding that not only are homeschooled students just as sufficiently socialized as their public schooled counter parts, but homeschooled students gain more meaningful interactions tailored by their parents (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Kingsbury, 2022; McCabe et al., 2021; Qureshi & Ali, 2022; Ray & Shakeel, 2022; Sevier & Pope, 2022; Tilhou, 2019).

This contradiction to social stereotypes became apparent in data analysis. Many participants brought up the topic of socialization and the interaction their homeschool co-op provides. Within the homeschool co-op, leaders discussed tactics, such as mixing age groups and keeping groups small to encourage student bonding. Some participants even held life-skills classes to help facilitate interactions with new people when the homeschool co-op was expected to take an educational trip. Participants allowed students to interact in everyday society, including conversing with other adults, hoping these interactions would help the student become an influential community member. Ultimately, homeschool co-ops help underline the responsibility of contributing to society through socialization, as research suggests is crucial to a child's upbringing (Byrd & Legette, 2022; Hamlin & Cheng, 2022; Khojanazarova, 2022).

Another empirical element evident in this study is the importance of collaboration in addressing community needs. Research reveals that when a community is involved in their local education opportunities and other activities, members of that community become more aware of

the culture and traditions within their community (Rahman et al., 2022). Therefore, when citizens are aware of the needs of their community by understanding the type of people that reside there, they can adequately work together to resolve issues effectively (Catalano & Morales, 2022; Fauziddin, 2022).

Each participant expressed in some way that they believed it was their duty to cultivate a sense of responsibility to their communities. Participants work on molding their students to be citizens by taking them out into their community to gain hands-on educational experiences and recruiting community members to show students what valuable skills and resources are within their community. Participants also often engage students in community service and volunteer opportunities, pointing out different groups that make up their community and the needs they may have. Therefore, students often find passion in service and volunteer activities, such as making soap for a monthly free wash day at a local laundry mat for people experiencing homelessness or centering volunteer opportunities around their local homes for older adults. Homeschool co-op leaders understand the importance of contributing to their community and envelop collaboration in addressing the needs of their community as a crucial part of their curriculum.

An unexpected finding in this study was that most participants tirelessly worked to make their homeschool co-ops low-cost or free so that families could afford to join. Furthermore, participants described how they utilized resources from families and their communities to keep costs down for their homeschool co-ops. For example, participants enlisted parents or community members with experience in specific subjects to teach courses voluntarily, or participants asked for donations of school supplies from parents and local businesses. Although only one participant described her area as affluent, others were mostly from rural and low-

income areas and understood that many families within their homeschool co-op could be on a single income due to one parent raising and homeschooling their children.

Homeschooling has seen a surge in these low-income areas over the last few years due to health-related concerns due to COVID-19 and unsatisfactory public-school experiences following the pandemic, making low-income families most likely to choose homeschooling over any other socioeconomic group (Auxier & Anderson, 2020; Ceglie et al., 2022; Cahoon, 2021; Kaya & Eroglu, 2021; Mussadiq et al., 2022). However, low-income families in these areas still struggle to educate their children from home because the parent facilitating the education is often undereducated, alongside the family does not have adequate access to learning materials, extracurricular resources, or time to educate (Ceglie et al., 2022; Doyle, 2020; Kaya & Eroglu, 2021).

According to the findings in this study, homeschool co-ops often work to assist these types of families in gaining a substantial educational experience cost-effectively. Participants described their woes in buying expensive curriculums only to find that it was not well suited for their child at the beginning of their homeschooling journey. Therefore, as they became leaders in their homeschool communities, participants often created curricula tailored to specific students for free, even volunteering to visit students' homes and teach parents how to facilitate the curriculum. Some participants also described curating curriculum swaps where homeschool families could come together and exchange old or unused curriculums. Homeschool co-ops even used online resources to spread knowledge, creating and maintaining local homeschool Facebook groups where members could share free resources for homeschooling families.

In the operations of the homeschool co-op, collaborative leaders found that the less parents had to pay, the more they were willing to invest their time and donate resources to the

homeschool co-op. For example, one participant noticed that parents who did not have to pay a high fee for membership to the homeschool co-op or buy school supplies for their child were more willing to teach a class for the semester for free. It was common to hear participants discuss how they put extra effort into recruiting community members to volunteer their time and collaborate with local businesses or educational opportunities to secure free or low-cost field experiences for their students.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework that led this study was the theory of collaborative leadership (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). These researchers theorized that a community does not simply want to be governed by a higher power. Still, citizens wish to be included in local government, working alongside each other to solve problems in the community. This theory also had a component in which the researchers acknowledged that collaboration from teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders is essential to resolve issues within educational systems effectively. Additionally, a family-focused goal in this collaboration was vital to the practical development of children's educational experience.

In addition to literature underlining the importance of collaboration in communities and education, many participants spoke about their passion for preparing their students to be well-rounded community members. True to Chrislip and Larson's (1994) theory, participants found it integral to integrate leadership, service, field, and volunteer opportunities to teach their students how to collaborate within their community. Moreover, it was common for participants to reach out to their community to gain resources and valuable learning experiences to mold the success of their students.

Participants' actions also aligned with the family-centered element of the collaborative leadership theory, with a few participants underlining how they believed that families participating in their student's education was essential to not only the student's success in academics but to strengthen the bond of the family, which may result in benefits for the community. Overall, exploring the experiences of homeschool co-op leaders collaborating to achieve student success confirmed the benefits for communities and school systems the collaborative leadership theory proposed. This confirmation may inspire utilizing collective leadership in other communities and educational institutions to resolve essential and long-standing issues within their environment.

Alignment with other theories appeared throughout the findings of this study. The transformational leadership theory is one in which leaders focus on the success of all members involved in the process. Through establishing a common goal, leaders identify the strengths and struggles of each member and work with members of their team to find solutions to weaknesses, as well as a purpose for strengths to see the entire organization's success (Bass, 1995). In this study, participants demonstrated transformational leadership by developing a vision for their homeschool co-op to find student success. To carry out their vision, they identified strengths in other leaders to enact them to carry out specific goals, such as teaching or planning events. Participants also identified weaknesses within the homeschool co-op. Specifically, they worked with other leaders to resolve these issues so that the homeschool co-op could succeed.

Another theory that was present was the parental involvement theory. This theory underlines that parental involvement is essential to their children's educational success (Harris & Robinson, 2016). Literature serving as the foundation of this study also confirmed the benefits of parents being involved in their children's education (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Gedes et al., 2022;

Lara & Saracostti, 2020; Kim, 2020; Rissanen, 2022). Participants explained that parent involvement was essential to their student's success and the success of a homeschool co-op. Participants explained that parents contributing to almost every role in the homeschool co-op, such as leadership, teaching, planning, or maintenance, was the most crucial reason the homeschool co-op could continue to operate. Some participants, along with many other similar homeschool co-ops, required parents to participate regularly to ensure that the many roles within the group could be effectively carried out, and collaboration could occur smoothly.

Limitations and Delimitations

The beginning of this study articulated three prospective limitations: parents involved in homeschooling can be secretive, various independent variables that contribute to student success, and differing perceptions of student success. However, participants had linear ideas of student success and the variables surrounding it and were willing to speak openly about their viewpoints, other limitations manifested throughout this study. Ethnicity, gender, and differing perceptions of the definition of a homeschool co-op were limitations in this study. Three main delimitations to this study were that there would be no specific limitation on participant's gender or ethnicity, participants needed to be over 18, and they must collaborate within a homeschool co-op.

Limitations

Three limitations in this study were differing perceptions of the definition of a homeschool co-op, race, and gender. Although a varying sample of different types of leaders, regarding their role in the homeschool co-op and specific groups of students that the homeschool co-op catered towards, all ten participants were white females. Recent research on homeschools suggests that a significant population of different ethnicities is turning to homeschooling for their educational needs (Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022). During the search for prospective

participants, homeschool co-ops were found that cater to specific ethnicities. However, none of their leaders responded to the invitation to participate in this study. Therefore, perspectives regarding student success and other elements may be biased.

Participants were also all females. Although most educators are female and home education is likely to fall to the mother, as males take on the traditional role to support the family, this may have limited the full perspectives (Lois, 2021). It could be argued that females offer a sufficient view. During recruitment, many homeschool co-ops and online homeschool resources were geared toward addressing the mother as the educator within the family. Some homeschool co-ops were even found only to allow mothers to participate for the comfort of their members. Very few men or other identifying leaders were found during the recruitment process. While qualifying people other than women were invited to participate when they met the requirements, none responded.

Finally, there may have been varying ideas of the definition of a homeschool co-op. At the same time, it has been stated in this study that the definition of a homeschool co-op may vary and could also fall under labels, such as a homeschool group or virtual school. Some participants had a definitive description of what a homeschool co-op should be that contradicted with more open ideas. Notably, participants who had not been involved in homeschool co-ops for a long time tended to believe that their homeschool co-op more rigidly followed what they perceived to be rules that would justify their group as a homeschool co-op over other homeschool groups. For example, one of the less experienced participants believed that a homeschool co-op should be defined as a homeschool group focused on student-centered education. However, she seemed to discredit other groups as homeschool co-ops that she could collaborate with because she believed hers was the only homeschool co-op with student-centered education.

On the contrary, most participants identified student-centered education as critical to their homeschool co-op. Also, more experienced had a more fluid idea of a homeschool co-op and let it develop into whatever their students needed it to be rather than following suit of other homeschool co-ops. Overall, the varying perceptions of what a homeschool co-op should entail may limit participants understanding of how they collaborate to create student success.

Delimitations

There were three main delimitations to this study. First, there was no specification on gender or ethnicity in this study, so varying viewpoints could give the best possible reality. The participants were all white females. Participants needed to be over the age of 18. The age range of participants was between 40-60, with most participants in their 40s. Finally, participants must collaborate within a homeschool co-op. Nine out of 10 participants were current leaders who collaborated with other leaders, with one participant having been a former leader but currently contributing as a subject expert.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study reveals several recommendations for future research based on the study's findings and limitations. A significant limitation of this study was that all participants were white females. While white females may attribute to the bulk of experiences within homeschool co-ops (Lois, 2021), there is evidence that other groups could also offer more insights into the impact homeschool co-ops could have in education. Many families from various ethnicities are joining homeschool co-ops due to injustices they may face in other school systems (Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022). Alongside this, a couple of the homeschool co-op leaders in this study emphasized their desire to be diverse and inclusive, implying that there may be many other significant experiences from non-traditional families.

Another topic for further research would be how homeschool co-ops fund their education for their students. While some participants expressed that they wished to maintain the independence of regulations from the government by investing in their homeschool co-op on their own, others sought funding and donations from parents and the community, as they are not privy to educational grants the government may offer non-public schools. During the study, it was found that most participants purposefully strived to make their homeschool co-ops as financially minimal as possible for their members. Therefore, further research is needed to understand what strategies and sources homeschool co-op leaders use to fund their homeschool co-ops to better understand how these skills may be applied to other non-public educational settings supplying education to low-income communities. Moreover, understanding the workings of educational entities that have no government funding or interference may lead to revealing benefits of educational leadership practices not bound by legislation.

Students with special needs were often brought up in conversation during data collection, as many participants had students who joined their homeschool co-op due to public schools being unable to attend to their specific needs. Participants also expressed that it usually took little adjustments to impact students' needs in a big way. For example, simply having a smaller class size may mean a student with a learning disability gets extra attention. Research should expand upon the methods used by homeschool co-op leaders to help aid these students so that these methods may be applied to other educational settings, and students with different needs can learn effectively.

This study focused on the experiences of leaders in homeschool co-ops in their journey to foster student success. To further validate the finding of what elements participants deemed lead to student success, several other studies can be formulated. Further research could be done on

students' perspectives with finding success in homeschool co-ops. Parents who are not significant contributors to the homeschool co-op could also be studied to gage their perception of the success of their children in homeschool co-ops.

Another element that would be integral to measuring the success of students in homeschool co-ops would be to ascertain the perspectives of universities, vocational schools, or places of work. Feedback on how well former homeschool co-op students actually put their skills and academics learned from the homeschool co-op to use may further validate homeschool education. These studies may be a good framework for quantitative studies to assess how students subjects, such as retention rate, academic success, or job efficiency of formerly homeschooled students.

Finally, a point that was not discussed but apparent in the data collection process was that homeschool co-op leaders were passionate about their role and had committed a significant amount of their lives towards it. Today, United States is experiencing a teaching shortage in public school settings, with about 43% of passionate teachers explaining their imminent departure from teaching due to dissatisfaction with how the school system, families, and the government treat them (Gillani et al., 2022). In contrast, most participants were involved in homeschool education for over a decade. They had created their homeschool co-op to share the benefits of homeschool education with others. Participants discussed that issues between other leaders, parents, or students were minimal and quickly resolved. Many participants did not view conflicts within the homeschool co-op as an issue.

Additionally, participants expressed the closeness of their homeschool community and the good behavior of their students and students they have interacted with in other homeschool co-ops. Research should further investigate if homeschool co-op leaders are experiencing higher

satisfaction in their roles and why that satisfaction exists compared to the satisfaction of public-school educators. This research could help to understand how to resolve teacher shortages in North Carolina due to dissatisfaction with their experiences in public schools.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand and describe the experiences of collaborative leaders working together to achieve student success in homeschool co-op in North Carolina. A transcendental phenomenological research design was used to ascertain the essence of the lived experiences of homeschool co-op leaders. Chrislip and Larson's (1994) theory of collaborative leadership served as the theoretical framework of this study. Data were collected from 10 homeschool co-op leaders from North Carolina through individual interviews, questionnaires, and artifacts. These data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) four steps of epoché, reduction, horizontalization, and imaginative variation. Many significant takeaways from the analysis of participants' experiences revealed many possible implications for future policies, practices, and empirical works, while the data also continued to validate the theoretical framework. Overall, the most significant insinuation may be that education must be centered around the student, engaging their interest to learn regardless of who they are, where they come from, or their capacity to learn. Cultivating a student-centered outlook in education may result in a future full of diverse, inclusive, and passionate leaders able to maintain their society successfully through effective collaboration.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 19, 2023

Amanda Furrow
Kristy Motte

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-2 Collaborative Leaders' Experiences with Student Success in Homeschool Co-op Education: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Amanda Furrow, Kristy Motte,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d): Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard.
Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If

you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Title of the Project: Collaborative Leaders' Experiences with Student Success in Homeschool Co-op Education: A Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Mandie Jeanne Koroi, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age. You must be either a parent or a stakeholder who contributes to the homeschool co-op. If you are a parent, you must have at least one child between the ages of 11-18 enrolled in the homeschool co-op. They should attend the homeschool co-op at least once a month. If you are not a parent, you must have contributed to this homeschool co-op for at least a year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand collaborative leaders' journey to achieve student success in homeschool co-ops.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Complete a one-on-one interview, via the video conferences software Microsoft Teams. This interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The interview questions will consist of topics about collaborative leadership in homeschool co-ops and academic success.
2. Complete a questionnaire in the form of a fictional blog post shared with the researcher via Google Docs. Completion of the questionnaire will take 20-30 minutes. The participant will write 500 hundred words or less. Questions will consist of a hypothetical scenario in which the participant is the head leader of a homeschool co-op.
3. Bring an artifact to the one-on-one interview. Participants will be asked to describe why the artifact represents a moment the participant felt their contribution in collaboration with other leaders led to a significant moment of student success. The participant will also take a photo of the artifact and email it to the researcher.
4. Review the interview transcripts for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include empowering homeschool co-op leaders to fit the needs of students and to fill a gap in research surrounding collaborative leadership.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data from you may be shared in future research studies or with other researchers.
- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data collected from you will be stored on the researcher's computer in a password-protected file. Data will also be backed up on a USB drive that will also be password protected and stored securely in the researcher's home office. After three years, [all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years and then deleted/erased. The researcher and members of their doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the participation in the individual interview, blog post, and artifact explanation, participants will receive a $25 Amazon gift card. Email addresses will be requested for compensation purposes; however, no details on the data collected will be revealed in emails to the participant to maintain confidentiality.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Mandie Koroi. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at ████████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Kristy Motte, at ██████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio and video record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix C

Research Question Examples

Phenomenological Research Questions:

Central Research Question

What are the collaboration experiences of homeschool co-op leaders in North Carolina?

Sub-Question One

What are the strategies used by homeschool co-op leaders to foster student success in North Carolina?

Sub-Question Two

What are the experiences of homeschool co-op leaders working together to meet the needs of their community in North Carolina?

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your journey in becoming involved in homeschool co-op education. CRQ

2. Please describe your position within the homeschool co-op and any background that may have led you to participate in facilitating everyday learning. In addition, please indicate if you have students involved within the co-op. CRQ

3. Describe your reasons for participating in a homeschool co-op versus other education methods. CRQ

4. What are the challenges you face in being involved in a homeschool co-op? CRQ

5. How do you and other leaders collaborate in the co-op? CRQ

6. What practices have you found successful among yourself and other leaders in your co-op? CRQ

7. In terms of education, what do you think are the needs of your community outside of your homeschool co-op? SQ2

8. How have you and your peers addressed these needs? SQ2

9. What have you learned from other leaders that have helped you feel confident in your contribution to the co-op? SQ2

10. What resources can the organization provide that may make collaboration better for you? SQ2

11. What roles do you think are essential to collaborating in leading a successful co-op (parent involvement, counselors, subject experts)? SQ1

12. What practices do you think collaborative leaders in your co-op have that result in student success? SQ1

13. Describe a time when you witnessed student success related to collaboration between you
    and your peers. SQ1

14. What new policies or practices would you enact if you could be the head of your co-op?
    SQ1

15. How do you think the collaborative practices of leaders in your co-op will contribute to
    educational success in the future? SQ1

16. What else would you like to contribute to this discussion that may be vital to
    understanding your experience? CRQ

Appendix E

Questionnaire Questions

You have assumed the role of the head leader of the homeschool co-op. You are writing a one-page blog post describing how you run your homeschool co-op and how that leads to your students' successes.

Please answer these questions in your blog post:

1. How do you run a homeschool co-op effectively?

2. How does your leadership benefit students in the co-op?

3. How does collaborating with other adults help you achieve your view of success within the co-op?

Appendix F

Artifact Request

You will be asked to bring an artifact to your individual interview. This could be any item, such as a book, a drawing, or even an audio segment. The purpose of this artifact is to represent a time when you felt your contribution to the collaborative leadership within your homeschool co-op led to student success.

-You will be asked to spend a few minutes verbally describing your artifact before your interview.

-You will also be asked to take a picture of this artifact and email it to apfurrow@liberty.edu. You may do this before or after your interview.

Remember that it is imperative to keep your confidentiality throughout this research. Therefore, pictures of this artifact will be kept in a separate password-protected file from other data. Any defining scripters of your artifact such as names, faces, or school emblems will not be used in the research to maintain your confidentiality.

Appendix G

Participant Survey Form

Survey form for the study: Collaborative Leaders' Experiences with Student Success in

Homeschool Co-op Education: A Phenomenological Study by Mandie Koroi

Are you over the age of 18?

Yes/No

Are you a parent that contributes to the homeschool co-op in which at least you have one child

enrolled OR a stakeholder who has worked with other leaders of the homeschool co-op for at

least one year?

Yes/No

Does your homeschool co-op facilitate education to 6-12th grade?

Yes/No

Is your homeschool co-op located in North Carolina?

Yes/No

How would you describe the area in which you homeschool co-op exist?

Urban

Rural

Neither

Is your homeschool co-op affiliated with a certain group or methodology? This can include

religious affiliation or interest groups. Please describe below.

Yes/No

If yes, describe:

Please state your first name and email below. You will be assigned a pseudonym for the course

of the research. The results from this survey will be stored in a separate pass-word protected

folder from other data to ensure you confidentiality.

'

Appendix H

Examples of Audit Trail and Personal Journal Entries

Danika:

Date: 7/28 Time: 19:15

Reason I Chose Participant: I chose Danika because she was a leader in a homeschool co-op who did not have children involved and was appointed rather than created her own group like so many others.

Experience: Her love for her students largely depends on her ability to utilize what is important to her in order to connect with them.

Bias: She wanted to speak to me because she is an LU alum. Faith also has a large part of her role in homeschooling. At this point, I am worried my study would focus too much on faith-based experiences. I wanted to find varying groups so that the themes and results become more valid as they appear across many different facets of homeschool co-ops.

Janet:

Date: 8/9 Time: 15:30

Reason I Chose Her: I chose Janet because her co-op is specifically geared towards military families, which I had not heard of before and I thought was genius. I used to live near where she is and am familiar with the need for educational facilities in that area, so I was interested to hear her perspective on the matter.

Experience: The idea that someone can effectively create a homeschool co-op to cater to military families even though it is clear from the start that they won't be around forever. She had some

really effective plans in place to make sure that the co-op would continue after she is gone and

that it can maintain itself with the constant change in families.

Bias: I had to remind myself to pretend that I was not familiar with the area that she is in because

my former job was specifically looking at that area to open a school. So, I did not want to

assume that I knew what the educational issues of that area were.

Appendix I

Social Media Recruitment Post

Are you an adult involved in a homeschool co-op?
Are you interested in sharing your experiences to further research in homeschool education?

Hello! My name is Mandie Koroi, I am a Ph.D. candidate for the School of Education at Liberty University. I am currently recruiting participants for my study entitled: Collaborative Leaders' Experiences with Student Success in Homeschool Co-op Education: A Phenomenological Study.

Purpose of Study: To understand collaborative leaders' journey to achieve student success in homeschool co-ops.

Who You Are:
- Over the age of 18
- A parent with at least one child enrolled in grades 6-12th in a homeschool co-op
  OR
- A leader (teacher, administrator, subject expert) within a homeschool co-op
- Have been involved in your homeschool co-op for at least a year

What You Will Do:
- Participate in an individual interview
- Write a short blog
- Bring an item to your interview that represents a time that your contribution to the homeschool co-op resulted in student success
  (This can all be completed at the same time in under an hour!)

What You Will Receive:
- You will receive a $25 Amazon gift card once you have completed all three data collection methods!

Sound interesting? Respond to this post or email me at ███████████████ !