

2000

## Home schooling children with special needs: A descriptive study

Jane Grenfell Duffey

*William & Mary - School of Education*

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**HOME SCHOOLING CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:  
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

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**A Dissertation**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the School of Education  
The College of William and Mary**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**Of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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**by**

**Jane Grenfell Duffey**

**February 2000**

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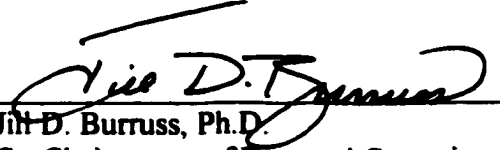
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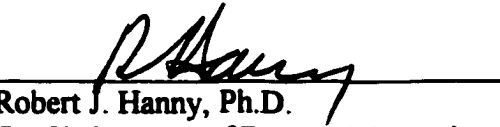
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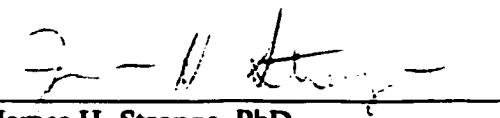
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## DEDICATION

*To my husband Tom whose unselfish support of me during the years of this work made it all possible.*

*To Cara, Alaina, Stephen, Seth, and all my other former students who provided the inspiration for this research.*

*"I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **HOME SCHOOLING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

**This descriptive study sought to extend the knowledge base on home schooling to include the population of families with special needs children. The author compared the results of this study on special needs home schooled children to previous studies on the general population of home schoolers and presented case studies of four families. Through a nationally distributed survey, data was generated that provided demographics, educational backgrounds of both parents and students, and information about the content and process of the home school. The second phase of the study provided an in-depth look into the lives of four families who home schooled at least one special needs child.**

**The results of the survey suggested that home schooling families with special needs children were similar to their counterparts within the general population of home schoolers. The most significant difference was in the number of years special needs children were conventionally schooled. Special needs children, whose parents are more likely to seek help from outside sources, are enrolled in conventional schools longer, and were more likely to participate in part-time services than regular home schoolers.**

**The study recommended the development and implementation of public access policies at the state and local levels for home schooling families. Also, the study suggested a need for a collaborative relationship between home schooling families and their local educational agencies. Since this study was exploratory and descriptive in nature, further research is needed to address the efficacy of the practice in academic and social terms.**

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**THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA**

**HOME SCHOOLING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:  
A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*I have homeschooled since my oldest child started kindergarten. I was not aware of the severity of my 10-year-old son's disability until this year. I had always assumed he would outgrow it. Wrong! I do believe that for me, his mother, to teach him is the best way to go. I can give him all the one-on-one attention he needs. I am also aware of his abilities and problems, where he needs work or remediation. He feels the most comfortable working with me. His self-esteem does not need to suffer from the reactions and comments he would undoubtedly get from his peers at school. Homeschooling is unthreatening in that way. We are involved with enough outside activities that he can succeed in areas outside the academic arena. He is good at sports and has been very successful in the Awana program, learning and reviewing Bible verses auditorily.*

**-Home school mother of a special needs child, California**

**Home schooling has been an educational practice in the United States since colonial times. Its popularity has ebbed and flowed over the centuries. Within the last two decades, the home schooling movement has been experiencing a resurgence and gaining momentum (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995). Current home schooling population estimates range from 500,000 (Lines, 1996) to 1.6 million students (Ray, 1998) with a current yearly rate of growth of about 15 % (Kennedy, 1997). Researchers have not yet established the number of children within that general population who require special education. However, it is apparent that there is a significant number of these students as evidenced in literature within the home school community, such as Home Education Magazine and Home School Court Report.**

**With the growing home school population, there are also tributes to its success in learner outcomes (Farris, 1997; Klicka, 1995; Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999). Duvall, Ward, Delquadri, and Greenwood (1997) even suggested that learning disabled students who are**



**educated at home experience greater academic success than their counterparts in a public school setting. The apparent legitimacy of home schooling as an educational practice as well as the increased success of home school advocates in garnering favorable state regulations have brought encouragement to the movement.**

**The atmosphere of success and relative acceptance of home schooling has brought about a number of consequences. More parents are continuing to withdraw their children, some of whom have special education concerns, from conventional schools to educate them at home (Dahm, 1996). However, at the same time, many of these parent-teachers are seeking access to conventional schools to enroll students on a part-time basis in academic courses and extracurricular activities, or to make use of resources and programs for both students and parents (Dahm; Lines, 1996; Terpstra, 1994). In Iowa, Dahm reported that a proportion of these families desiring part-time enrollment had special education needs.**

**In interpreting policy resulting from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education (OSEP) advised that school districts must include home educated children in their child-find activities (National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 1998). All children deemed eligible under federal funding provisions can be served through the public schools – whether in attendance there or in private or home settings (Klicka, 1995b). School districts must also determine ways to accommodate these students and include them in their accountability reporting. Additionally, a growing number of state legislatures are enacting regulations to accommodate home schoolers' access to public schools (Home School Legal Defense Association, 1997), and school**

**districts are developing programs to follow suit (Hawkins, 1996). Educators can develop programs and accommodations that will be effective if they have a greater understanding of the nature and needs of the population with whom they are concerned. This study provides descriptive information on the home school special needs population. Furthermore, it provides insight into (1) why parents of special needs students are choosing to educate them at home, (2) how those home schools are conducted, and (3) what the families' perceptions are of the success of their undertaking.**

### **Statement of the Problem**

**The purpose of this study is to provide a description of the factors that characterize special needs home schooling students along with their families and school settings. Additionally, a comparison will be made to the general population of home schooling students, including their families and school settings. Specifically, this study answers the questions:**

- 1. What are the demographic characteristics of the home schooling families with special needs children?**
- 2. What are the educational backgrounds and training of the teacher-parents of special needs children?**
- 3. What are the special education classifications of the home schooled special needs children?**
- 4. What are the rationales parents of special needs children give for choosing home education?**
- 5. How can the special needs home school be structured, what are the instructional practices, and what is the nature of the curriculum?**

6. **What are the home schooling parents' and students' perceptions of the home schooling experience concerning academic and social progress?**
7. **Do the factors that characterize the general population of home schooled children also characterize the population of home schooled special needs children?**

**Although there are numerous studies that have sought to describe various aspects of the home schooling movement, there are no research studies that have attempted to answer these specific questions. No researcher has endeavored to describe home schooled special needs students. The research base on home instruction has grown tremendously since the 1970s when researchers and educators investigated academic achievement and social development and issues in the legal and philosophical realms. Several studies (Lines, 1991; Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999; Wagenaar, 1997) made convincing attempts at providing population size and demographic characteristics of the home schooling population. To date, Ray's study is the largest nationwide project that examined the academic achievement, social activities, and demographic characteristics of home schooling families while assessing the relationships between student achievement and student and family variables. For that reason, Ray's results provide a basis of comparison for this study on special needs students.**

**Since the intent of this study is to provide descriptive data, the methodology is descriptive and exploratory. Accessing the population necessary to conduct this study was challenging in that the home schooling community is not formally organized and relies on a loose network of support, advisory, and resource groups to maintain its existence. Each state has its own regulations and requirements for the operation of home schools. There is no centralized record keeping. In light of this challenge, a survey**

instrument was disseminated through several of the support and resource groups to provide both quantitative and qualitative data. Additionally, selected individual home settings were studied through observation of the home school in progress and interviews with the family members. These two data-gathering techniques supplied the data necessary to answer the guiding research questions.

### Statement of Purpose

As noted above, the number of home schooling students presently represents approximately two percent of the population of schoolchildren in the United States (Ray, 1997). Since the home schooling trend shows an annual growth rate of 15 % (Kennedy, 1997), those numbers likely will continue to climb. The proportion of special needs children within that home schooling community is largely unknown, but informal reports from the Home School Legal Defense Association (C. Hurst, personal communication, February 24, 1999) and Kathi Kearney at Iowa State University (personal communication, February 26, 1999) indicate that this proportion is at least the same as the generally accepted proportion of 10 to 12 % of all schoolchildren nationally. If this trend and predicted numbers are accurate, educators should be concerned for two reasons. First, they should be interested in determining which families are leaving the traditional schools and why the parents are choosing home settings. Second, researchers and educators should be interested in studying the effects of the home setting on learner outcomes. Is it possible that the practice of home schooling can contribute to effective instruction and curriculum for children with exceptionalities?

The purpose of this study is to provide descriptive data on home schooled special needs children, their families, and home school settings and procedures. Such data can

contribute to the knowledge base needed by state and district policymakers and program developers either to adjust their own programs or to accommodate home schooling families that desire public school services and resources. Additionally, the data can extend the knowledge base on home schooling to include an important, but heretofore neglected, segment of the population. That segment, more than the general population, conducts its schooling process in relative isolation and relies on self-education and networking to inform itself of effective practice.

### **The Conceptual Framework**

In order to investigate an area with such a dearth of supporting research, it is necessary to work within the framework of the research and theory that might establish guidance for the exploration. Both Bloom (1984) and Walberg (1984) reported the powerful effect of tutoring or one-on-one instruction; this strategy may be the basic model for home schooling. Both Ray (1997) and Duvall et al. (1997) have indicated that the low teacher-pupil ratio in home schools contributes to the efficacy of the home school. This latter study also proposed that the tutoring model accounted for the apparent success of home instruction by parents untrained in special education as compared to professionally trained counterparts in the public schools. Considering students with disabilities, Glass and Smith (1979) found significant effects in academic achievement when class size was reduced.

Another benefit of the one-on-one or one-to-few teaching model is the ability to individualize instruction to the needs of the pupil. Walberg's (1984) meta-analysis of effective teaching strategies found that programs with such a feature produced greater student achievement. Special education is based upon the concept of individualization as

characterized by the use of the individualized education plans (IEPs). Although home schooling families have the option to choose packaged curricula, there are many who elect to customize their selections based upon the needs of the child. There is also freedom in the home setting to use a variety of teaching strategies.

Both Karweit's (1984) study and the Duvall et al. (1997) study cited the importance of time-on-task. Educators are in agreement over the effectiveness of the practice on learning outcomes. The concept of increased academic engagement time is also a logical outflow of the tutoring model where getting and keeping the attention of the pupil is more easily attained than in a classroom with the attending distractions.

The final consideration in addressing the home schooling setting is the impact of early intervention as suggested by Slavin (1996). Early intervention would particularly be an appropriate consideration in the case of families with several children. The influence of the teaching home on those children whose older siblings have begun the schooling process could be remarkable.

As important to the conceptual framework as these instructional models is the philosophical basis that underlies the modern home schooling movement. Parents' rationales for choosing home schooling seem to go beyond their ideological and pedagogical concerns (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991). At the heart of the matter is the struggle over who bears the ultimate responsibility for education: the state or the family. Home School Legal Defense Association has termed this struggle "the clash between parental rights and state control" (Klicka, 1995b, p. 26). The states established control over education by enacting compulsory attendance laws by 1918. Over the years since that time, many parents have asserted their right to control the education of their children

in both private and home schools. By 1986, every state authorized some form of home schooling (Dailey, 1999). Now, the issue that is arising is the access of home educators to instruction, resources, and services provided by conventional schools (Dailey, 1999; Duffey, 1999b; Hawkins, 1996). Families, especially those with students in need of special services, want to be in control of the decision-making (Kaseman & Kaseman, 1993). States, adhering to state policies and federal guidelines, also have this same desire. Therefore, the struggle between the state and the family continues.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

#### **Limitations**

Because of the lack of organization of the home school population, random sampling was not possible for this study. Finding groups of home schooling families with special needs children was possible, however. Use of these groups provided a sample that was both cluster and convenient; intact groups, such as home schooling special needs support groups, were used rather than individuals selected randomly. Their participation in the study was also voluntary which likely provided a biased sample of the target population according to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). Additionally, the use of case studies limits the generalizability of findings.

This study refers to past descriptive studies (Lines, 1991; Mayberry et al., 1995; Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999; Wagenaar, 1997) on home schooling to provide a basis of comparison. Although these studies have all been conducted within the decade, some of the circumstances that contributed to the findings may have changed within the time period. However, since the more recent studies, such as Ray's and Rudner's, seem to corroborate earlier studies, use of these studies seems to be an appropriate choice. Also, it

should be noted that both of those studies are written by or funded through home school advocacy groups. Ray is president of the National Home Education Research Institute and published his study through his organization. Home School Legal Defense Association gave sponsorship to the studies of both Ray and Rudner.

### Delimitations

Being a first attempt to investigate the special needs segment of the home school population, this study is descriptive and exploratory in nature. Its scope is limited to the available participants and their experiences. The study does not intend to draw comparisons between home schoolers and conventional school counterparts in areas such as academic achievement and social adjustment. Conclusions as to the efficacy of the home schooling practice are only speculative but will, hopefully, lead to further research into the effectiveness of home education in meeting the needs of students with exceptionalities.

As noted above, the choice of a mixed methodological design that includes case study research introduces problems in both the selection of the cases and the bias of the researcher. Purposeful sampling was used to select the families for the case studies. The cases were chosen on the basis of representativeness of the categories of special needs, geographic location of the families, and other socioeconomic factors that might produce a variation in the population. Inherent in a qualitative approach, researcher bias is also present. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) noted that the researcher is the primary “measuring instrument” and becomes personally involved with the phenomenon being studied. In qualitative research, the researcher subjectively interprets the participants’ perspectives in



contrast to the more objective measurement instruments used in quantitative research (Gall et al., 1996).

## **Definition of Terms**

### **Home Schooling**

Home schooling is the practice of educating children primarily at home in a family setting, with a parent or guardian as teacher (Reinhiller & Thomas, 1996). Legally, the term applies to children in the K-12 range who fall under their state's compulsory attendance laws. The Commonwealth of Virginia refers to the practice as home instruction (Virginia Department of Education, 1996). In the various popular news journals, educational journals, and support group literature, other names have appeared: home education, home-based or home-centered education and instruction, and unschooling (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998). There is no significant difference in the application and use of these terms. Therefore, in this paper, several of these terms will be used interchangeably.

### **Special Needs Children**

When referring to students with special needs, the term applies to those students who are eligible according to federal and state guidelines to receive special education services or those identified as having special needs. Special education is the specifically designed instruction that meets the unique needs of students that have been identified as disabled. The 13 categories of disabilities that make students eligible to receive special services are described in a series of federal laws. In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142. This law was amended and reauthorized in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Public Law 101-

476. In 1997, the law again was amended and reauthorized as Public Law 105-17. The categories contained within these laws are divided by some authors between high incidence disabilities (learning disabilities, speech or language impairment, mild cognitive disabilities, serious emotional disturbance, and developmentally delayed) and low incidence disabilities (severe cognitive disabilities, autism, hearing impairment, visual impairment, deaf-blindness, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, and multiple disabilities) (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Not necessarily included in that description, but often considered functionally disabled as defined through Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112), are students with significant attention problems. Students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may receive special education services under IDEA in the category of other health impairments or through Section 504 depending upon the nature of the disability (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Although many home schooled students are identified and deemed eligible for special education services through the public schools under the provisions of federal regulations, there are also children identified through private medical, psychological, and educational professionals. These private services often use other terms to reference special needs and might recommend similar services and accommodations.

Listed below are some of the more frequently cited categories of special needs that were assigned to the children of the participating families in this research study:

**Learning disabilities.** Students with learning disabilities have dysfunctions in processing information that is most often language based but can also affect the ability to compute. Performance on standardized tests is substantially below that expected for age,

schooling, and level of intelligence. *Substantially below* is usually defined as a discrepancy of more than two standard deviations between achievement and IQ (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994). The general intellectual functioning is within the normal range and the difference between ability and achievement is not due to any of the following: visual, hearing, or motor handicap; mental retardation; emotional disturbance; and environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. Included under this classification is the term *dyslexia*, which describes a serious reading difficulty both with decoding and comprehension of the written word (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Speech or language disorder. Speech is disordered when it deviates outside the range of acceptable variation in a given environment. Language is disordered when there is any difficulty with the production and/or reception of linguistic units, regardless of environment. Language disorders may involve form, content, and function (Friend & Bursuck, 1996; Nicolosi, Harryman, & Kresheck, 1989).

Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder. Autism is a spectrum disorder and one of the disabilities defined in IDEA: “a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, usually evident before the age of three” (Bauer, 1995). Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) are neurological disorders and share many of the same characteristics including a child’s inability to communicate, understand language, and socially interact with others. Children may be classified as PDD, or as having atypical autism, when they display similar behaviors but do not meet the criteria for autistic disorder (Bauer; Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

**Asperger's Syndrome or Disorder.** Asperger's Syndrome falls within the spectrum of autism. Its features are severe and sustained impairment in social interaction and the development of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities. There are no significant delays in cognitive development and curiosity about the environment as might be the case in autistic disorder (APA, 1994).

**Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD).** The primary feature of ADD/ADHD is a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity and impulsivity than is more frequent and severe than what is typical of individuals at a similar level of development (APA, 1994).

### **Compulsory Attendance**

Legally, all 50 states require that children, usually between the ages of six and sixteen, attend school. Based in the common law doctrine, *parens patriae*, states have the authority to enact reasonable laws for the common welfare of the citizens and the state (McCarthy, Cambron-McCabe, Thomas, 1998). One such law is compulsory school attendance. Not only are children required to attend school, but their parents may be prosecuted for failure to meet the obligations of the laws.

### **Internet Terminology**

Since use of the Internet played such a vital role in my methodology, several terms are defined herein (whatis, 1999):

**Internet.** The Internet is a worldwide system of computer networks in which users at any one computer can get information from any other computer. It is a public facility accessible to hundreds of millions of people worldwide. The most widely used part of the Internet is the World Wide Web.

**E-mail (electronic mail). E-mail is the exchange of computer-stored messages by telecommunication.**

**Listserv. Listserv is a small program that automatically redistributes e-mail to names on a mailing list. Users can subscribe to a mailing list by sending an e-mail message to the list they desire to join.**

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*I wanted to homeschool before I had children. I saw what was happening in public education and I thought I could do better at home. So when I knew my children needed special help, I researched the areas of special education and found answers.*

**-Home school mother of two special needs children, California**

Home schooling, as a recent movement, has received a great deal of attention in the field of education and among writers in the popular press. Educational researchers have conducted studies that reflect both qualitative and quantitative designs. However, it should be noted that overwhelmingly these researchers are also advocates of home schooling, some of whom are also home schooling parents. Narrowing the focus of home schooling to the population of children with special needs has proved to be problematic. The fact is that there is a scarcity of scholarly literature on this subject; there exist few published empirical studies. In light of that dilemma, this literature review includes not just research studies but also parent support group communications and popular press reports.

The sequence of the review begins with a description of the home schooling movement in general – its history, theory base, a profile of home school families, parents' rationales, and effects of the practice. Next, the review establishes evidence of sub-populations within the movement, specifically families with special needs children. Finally, literature is presented that addresses the characteristics and the effects of home schooling on this specific population.

## **Background of Home Schooling**

### **History of Home Schooling**

Although a subject of many recent popular press articles and educational journals, home schooling is not new. It was a mainstay of education when the United States was a young. Its popularity waned around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, largely because of urbanization, compulsory education, and the public school movement nation (Mayberry et al., 1995). There were concerns that children were not receiving an education that could provide for an educated citizenry. In response to this concern, states created schools with standardized curricula ensuring that children receive the basic skills necessary for productive citizenship. Furthermore, states enacted compulsory attendance laws to guarantee the presence of the children and penalties for their parents upon failure of attendance. By 1918, every state had enacted compulsory attendance laws (Dailey, 1999).

### **Legal Basis for Home Schooling**

Shortly after the enactment of compulsory attendance laws, court cases arose that challenged state control and regulation of education. In Meyer v. Nebraska (1923), the Supreme Court invalidated a state law that prohibited foreign language instruction to school children and reprimanded the state legislature for interfering with the power of parents to control the education of their children. In 1925, the Supreme Court struck down an Oregon compulsory education law which required attendance of school children at *public* schools. In Pierce v. Society of Sisters, the Court declared that the state law interfered with the rights of parents to direct the education of their children. Similar cases

(Farrington v. Tokushige, 1927; Prince v. Massachusetts, 1944; Griswold v. Connecticut, 1965) followed with decisions that continued to uphold parental liberties (Klicka, 1995b).

Since the inception of compulsory attendance laws until the 1970s, home schooling was limited to families who were geographically isolated and to children who were homebound because of chronic illness or physical disability (Mayberry et al., 1995). However, in 1972, the Supreme Court upheld the right of parents to home educate their children based upon religious convictions. In Wisconsin v. Yoder, the Court found that members of the Old Amish Order did not have to comply with the state compulsory attendance law after the eighth grade. The Yoder case became a landmark case for parents desiring home education, but the courts seldom extended the decision to parents without confirmed religious convictions (Mayberry et al., 1995).

During the 1970s and 1980s, parents desiring home schooling began to attack compulsory attendance laws basing arguments upon the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Ninth Amendment's protected right to privacy (Klicka, 1995b). Gradually, states began to allow home schooling through a number of court decisions (Scoma v. Chicago Board of Education, 1974; Perchemlides v. Frizzle, 1978; Delconte v. State, 1985) and ensuing legislative activity (Mayberry et al., 1995). By 1986, every state had authorized some form of home instruction (Dailey, 1999). (See Appendix A for a summary of state home schooling policies.)

At the heart of the evolution of home school laws is a philosophical debate: Who has the primary responsibility for educating children? Home schooling parents maintain that it is a parental responsibility (Klicka, 1995a; Klicka, 1995b) while state governments



have asserted their responsibility for ensuring that children receive a quality education (Dailey, 1999). Home schooling parents today reflect back to a time when parents were indeed in control of their children's education, a time prior to the enactment of compulsory attendance laws (Lukasik, 1996). This reflection has been the impetus for the development of the present home schooling laws and continuing struggle by home school parents to define the relationship with the public school system in which they reside (Dailey, Welner, 1999).

### Early Leadership

This modern home schooling movement has its philosophical roots in the late 1960s and early 1970s when educational critics such as John Holt (1969) and Raymond Moore (1975, 1979) began expressing dissatisfaction with public education. More educators joined the chorus of criticism that encouraged the growth of private and home schools. By the mid-1980s, parents began not only to withdraw their children from public schools at unprecedented rates but also to choose unconventional alternatives such as home-based education (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995).

Holt and Moore attracted a following of families whose beliefs reflected the backgrounds and lifestyles of these two home schooling leaders (Lyman, 1998). Holt, a humanist and former teacher in alternative schools, attracted those parents with a similar ideology – the counterculture left. Moore, a former U. S. Department of Education employee and Seventh Day Adventist missionary, drew a constituency of parents who chose home education to impart traditional religious values to their children – the Christian right.

Another home schooling pioneer, Pat Montgomery (1995), founded the Clonlara (Michigan) School Home Based Education Program in 1979. He offered the services of a fully functioning day school to home educators, a novel idea in those days. He has been highly involved in and watchful of the movement since the foundation of his program. He noted that public school officials have ceased the hostilities of the early years and seem to realize that home schooling is here to stay. Instead, they have changed their approach to include “wooing” parents and students back into the schools with offers of textbooks and enrollment in curricular and extracurricular activities. Additionally, he claimed that in some states

school officials have taken to sending certain students home with the admonition that they do home-based education (expulsion with a smile, so to speak). . . these students are not wanted in the schools; they are becoming “pushouts” . . . [to help] dropout rates go down and test scores stabilize . . . (Montgomery, 1995, p.13)

A recent article in The New York Times, “Where the Kitchen Is Also the Classroom” (Yarnall, 1998), portrayed home schooling as a positive “alternative to mediocre public schools and expensive private schools” (p. G1). The popular press has frequently featured stories of students educated at home, and, for the most part, these are success stories (Guterson, 1990; Seligmann & Abramson, 1988; Welter, 1997). However, this positive reporting has been a recent trend. In the years prior to the 1990s, the public and the media often viewed home schooling as a “subversive educational activity carried out by fanatics or idealists, often surreptitiously or underground” (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, & Marlow, 1995, p.10). Today, with its general acceptance as a movement that is well entrenched, it is rare to witness negative reporting.

To illustrate the growing trend of home schooling over the past few decades, a search using the descriptors, “home schooling” and “homeschooling,” in Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and other databases yielded the following numbers of references.

**Figure 1.** References to home schooling in educational and popular periodicals.

Database/ Descriptors	Number of references 1965-1979	Number of references 1980-1989	Number of references 1990-1999
<b>ERIC:</b>			
Home schooling	3	275	382
Homeschooling	0	4	38
<b>Education Abstracts:</b>			
Home schooling	0	46	185
Homeschooling	0	2	16
<b>Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature:</b>			
Home schooling	0	25	84
Homeschooling	0	0	12

It is apparent that the numbers of articles and research studies on home schooling are notably increasing.

#### Justification for Home Schooling: A Theory Base

Home schooling as an instructional practice with a supporting framework of theory has never really been established within the community of educational research. Rather, researchers have studied the nature of the families who choose to home school and the success of the participants academically and socially. Thus, home schooling seems to be a phenomenon that has served as the subject of research from sociological and political perspectives but seldom from a lens of educational and learning theory. In order to provide a conceptual framework, it is necessary to consider the features of home schooling and search out the appropriate studies that focus on those practices within the conventional school setting. Walberg (1984), Bloom (1984), and Karweit (1984).

conducted studies that considered small group or one-on-one instruction as well as other factors that might characterize the home school.

In order to determine the environmental factors that contribute to educational productivity for school children, Walberg (1984) developed a comprehensive framework. They proposed nine factors, such as learning engagement time, the home, peer group, and motivation, which would require optimization to increase affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning. These nine factors fell into three groups: student aptitude, instruction, and environment. Guided by this theory of educational productivity, Walberg and associates synthesized about 3,000 studies on academic learning (Walberg).

Statistical analysis of the studies produced an effect size, a statistic that indicates the strength of an independent variable, for each of the elements or practices within the categories. In instructional practices, large effects were noted in about 17 programs (Walberg, 1984). Eight of these programs are features in a typical home school: personalized instruction, adaptive instruction, tutoring, individualized science and mathematics, diagnostic prescriptive methods, and instructional time (Ray, 1997). Walberg also noted that programs to improve academic conditions in the home have “an outstanding record of success in promoting achievement. What might be called ‘the alterable curriculum of the home’ is twice as predictive of academic learning as is family SES” (p. 25). The programs to which Walberg referred are those that encouraged parental involvement in homework and other expressions of interest and affection in the child’s academic and personal life. Some of the programs studied had effects ten times as large as the average noted above. These programs were certainly not of the intensity of a home school, as they complemented the school rather than supplanted it. Walberg commented

that “since few of the programs lasted more than a semester, the potential for those sustained over the years of schooling is great” (p. 25).

As Walberg was conducting his investigations, Bloom (1984) was conducting research on the “two sigma problem.” Bloom cited the research of Anania (1983) and Burke (1983), who found that the average student taught under tutoring performed academically at about two standard deviations (sigma) above the average student in a conventional classroom. Bloom’s research sought to determine if the same result could be accomplished under “more practical and realistic conditions than one-to-one tutoring, which is too costly for most societies to bear on a large scale” (p.6). Obviously, large numbers of students could not be tutored within the conventional school setting, but tutoring is a prominent feature of home schooling.

One other study conducted during this same timeframe was that of Karweit (1984). Responding to demands for longer school years and school days, she analyzed time-on-learning studies. Not surprisingly, she found that only about half the time of the school day is ordinarily used for instruction. This finding has strong implications for home schooling where limited research has already suggested more academic engagement time occurs in a home setting (Duvall et al., 1997; Ray, 1997).

These results all were found in the context of the regular classroom in the conventional school; however, these studies did not include special education. Special education issues will be addressed later in the review through other studies. Also, the researchers probably did not intend for a comparison to be drawn to home schooling. However, the application of the findings to home schooling seems to be appropriate. These practices effect productivity in any educational setting. Furthermore, Walberg had

much to say about the value of parental involvement: “Educators can do even more by also enlisting families as partners and engaging them directly and indirectly in their efforts” (p. 26). Epstein (1997) later echoed these sentiments in her research into family-school partnerships and the subsequent academic and vocational success gained from parental involvement in education. Home schooling is certainly a direct form of parental involvement.

In summary, the results of these studies have strong contributions to the theoretical framework for home schooling. The tutorial model, Bloom’s (1984) two-sigma effect, perhaps provides the basis for the practice and accounts for its relative success. The programs cited by Walberg (1984) that promoted achievement and Karweit’s (1984) academic engagement time all result from one-on-one instruction. Of course, home schooling is set within the context of the home and parental involvement is the prominent feature, a factor Walberg found was a significant predictor of student achievement.

### **Home Schooling as an Educational Alternative**

#### **The Profile of the Home Schooling Family and Effects of the Practice**

##### **Population Size and Demographic Characteristics**

Lines (1991), Mayberry et al. (1995), Ray (1997), and Wagenaar (1997) have conducted descriptive studies of the general home schooling population. Most home schooling references draw from these studies since they represent the most extensive work completed thus far on home schooling population size and characteristics. The lack of national statistics and the variability among the states in their requirements for registration of home schooled students generally has challenged researchers.

Lines (1991), a senior research analyst for the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Research and Improvement, studied shipping lists from commercial distributors of curricular materials to estimate the number of home schooled students in the United States. She adjusted the numbers estimated from the shipping lists upon consultation with home school experts. Estimates at the time of the study were between 200,000 to 300,000 students. She later revised that estimate in 1996 to be approximately 500,000 students (Lines, 1996).

Conducting a review of contemporary studies of known groups of home schoolers, Lines (1991) also described the demographic characteristics. She found that the typical home schooling family was white, a two-parent family, of somewhat above average income and education compared to families nationally. Typically Protestant, religion was likely to be the most important reason for home schooling although seldom the only motivation. There were usually three children, and the mother was the primary instructor. Although this description was of the typical family, all races, socioeconomic groups, and religions were represented in the complete sampling.

Mayberry et al. (1995) conducted a two-year, federally funded study in three western states. Using quantitative survey techniques and in-depth interviews, they examined demographic data, rationales for home education, perspectives of public school superintendents, perceived needs and wants of home schoolers, and sociological perspectives. Their survey sample included over 1,900 families and 125 school district superintendents. Additionally, they interviewed 36 home schooling families. The demographic characteristics in this study confirmed those of the earlier study by Lines (1991), but broadened the description in establishing greater detail of the religious and

political characteristics of the families. Parents' rationales for choosing home instruction in the western states study also corroborated Lines's findings. As far as the perceived needs and wants of the home schooling families, the researchers found there is a common but cautious interest among home schoolers and professional educators to interact in cooperative ventures. Home schooling parents tend to be wary of programs that might compromise their autonomy in controlling their children's education (Ray, 1992).

A more recent study conducted by Ray (1997) of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) produced a higher estimate than that of the Department of Education. Claiming his research to represent the largest and most comprehensive study of home schooling ever undertaken, Ray collected data on 5,402 students from the years 1994 to 1996. The participants were randomly selected from home school mailing lists and home school support groups and networks in every state. Ray concluded that there were approximately 1.23 million children being taught at home. Based upon reports from state departments of education and state home schooling organizations, he has updated that estimate to 1.6 million children for the 1998-1999 school year (personal communication, February 15, 1999). However, it is unclear exactly how this number is derived; Ray offered no equation for the estimate.

Wagenaar (1997), of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), analyzed data from the National Household Education Survey of 1993. Gathering data via a random digit dial telephone survey of households, Wagenaar classified and compared 62 home schooling families with children five to seven years old out of a national sample of 6,117 children of the same ages. He concluded that home schoolers did not differ dramatically from the larger population on such characteristics as regional



differences, percent minorities and poverty in neighborhoods, overall health and father's labor force participation. However, they did differ on some demographic variables. The home schooling parents had higher levels of education and income, the families were larger, and the mothers were more likely to be married and less likely to be in the paid labor force (Wagenaar, 1997).

The findings from these studies and that of Rudner's (1999) noted below are presented also in table form. The two major sources of this research has been the federal government through the U. S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics and also home school advocacy groups funded mainly through Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). Data gathered on demographic characteristics and student achievement has generally been similar throughout all the studies. However, the population estimates have differed significantly, the home school advocacy groups claiming higher numbers consistently. However, it should be noted that reporting numbers of home schoolers is problematic in that states vary in their legal requirements, and there are no centralized means of registering students educated at home. Also compounding the problem are families who illegally teach their children at home; they prefer to "go underground" often when the legal atmosphere is "unfriendly" (Mayberry et al., 1995).

**Figure 2.** Selected recent home schooling studies.

<b>Researcher/ Sponsoring Organization</b>	<b>Year Study Released</b>	<b>Source of Data</b>	<b>Findings: Population Estimate</b>	<b>Other Types of Findings</b>
Lines U.S. Dept. of Education	1991	Publishers' shipping lists, survey	300,000	Demographic data, parents' rationales
Lines (USDOE)	1996	(adjusted '91 estimate)	500,000	--
Lines (USDOE)	1998	(adjusted '91 estimate)	1.0 million	--
Mayberry et al. (USDOE)	1995	Homeschool registration lists, Survey, interviews (WA, NV, UT)	--	Demographic data, religious & political characteristics, parents' rationales
Ray, NHERI, HSLDA	1997	Survey, shipping lists, support groups	1.23 million	Demographic data, social involvement, academic achievement
Wagenaar, NCES	1997	Telephone survey	1% of school age population (ages 5-7)	Demographic characteristics
Rudner, HSLDA	1999	Bob Jones U. Testing Service test scores, survey	--	Demographic data, academic achievement

### Parents' Rationales for Choosing Home Schooling

According to the numbers in several of these demographic studies (Ray, 1997; Lines, 1998), nearly two percent of the school age population in the United States is home educated and growing at a yearly rate of approximately 15 % (Kennedy, 1997). Why would parents choose to take on such a responsibility? Studies indicate that parents are deciding to home school for basically philosophical reasons.

Van Galen (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991) conducted a qualitative study of 16 home schooling families in North Carolina, publishing her work in 1986 as a doctoral dissertation. In the study conducted to examine the ideological framework within which parents make their decisions about home schooling, Van Galen found that their values and beliefs fell into two categories, which she termed "ideologues" and "pedagogues."

Ideologues home school their children because they object to what is being taught in schools, and they seek to strengthen their relationships with their children. Primarily, these parents were Christian fundamentalists. The second category included parents who teach their children for pedagogical reasons. Their criticisms of schools were not the content per se but what they considered inept teaching. They tended to have a broad interest in learning and were frequently educators themselves. Home schooling for these families was a symbol of independence from other social institutions.

Follow-up studies (Marchant & MacDonald, 1994; Cappello, Mullarney, & Cordeiro, 1995) to Van Galen (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991) have all suggested similar rationales: a desire for a more controlling and family oriented lifestyle, frequently with spiritual overtones; and dissatisfaction with pedagogical methods. (It should be noted that all of these studies were conducted through qualitative methodologies using small but purposeful sampling.) From respondents to a questionnaire for home schooling families in Ohio, Marchant and MacDonald interviewed 16 families to gather their data for analysis. Their findings extended Van Galen's study: although parents originally chose to home school for the same ideological and pedagogical reasons cited by Van Galen, Marchant and MacDonald found that the rationales for remaining in home schooling were quite different. Regardless of the initial reason for choosing home schooling, parents continue to home school because success establishes commitment to the practice. There also seems to be an evolution into a community and culture all its own.

Cappello et al. (1995) conducted case studies of four families in Connecticut. The researchers again corroborated Van Galen's (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991) work. The four

families had chosen to home school for three reasons: to obtain a quality education, to provide a better learning environment, and to strengthen family unity and Christian values. Conducting interviews of 12 families, Knowles (1991) suggested a unique interpretation to his findings: parents choose to home school because of their own negative experience with conventional schooling.

Lyman (1998), a news reporter, analyzed 300 newspaper and magazine articles about home schooling and determined the top four reasons parents chose home education. The reasons given were “dissatisfaction with the public schools, the desire to impart religious values freely, academic excellence, and the building of stronger family ties” (p. 65). Dissatisfaction with the public schools included concerns about safety, drugs, and negative peer pressure.

As the home schooling movement has gained momentum over the years, the rationales of parents choosing the practice have rather consistently remained the same throughout the various studies. However, the ranking of their reasons has changed somewhat over the years (“Home Schooling,” 1999). Where the earliest home schooling families were leaving conventional schools because of dissatisfaction with pedagogy or for religious reasons, more recent rationales have given priority to concerns over safety, poor academic quality, and peer pressure. In the wake of recent school violence, several news stories have appeared that indicate parents concerned over the safety of their children have been seeking information on home schooling (Schnaiberg, 1999; Sink, 1999).

### **Legitimacy of the Movement: Academic and Social Concerns**

**Academic achievement. It is generally agreed that there are substantial and growing numbers of home schoolers and parents who have a definite rationale for selecting the practice, but how legitimate is home instruction in meeting the educational and social needs of children? Advocates within the home school movement have claimed success in learner outcomes (Farris, 1997; Klicka, 1995a; Ray, 1997). With the reporting of findings, however, critics (Archer, 1999; Kaseman & Kaseman, 1999; Welner & Welner, 1999) have also been questioning the accuracy of the claims that are noted in the studies below. For the most part, the critics cite the sampling methods of the studies that draw overwhelmingly from a conservative Christian population and are underwritten by home school advocacy groups (Archer).**

**Data supplied by the Home School Legal Defense Association (Klicka, 1995a) showed that 16, 311 home schoolers outscored average public school students on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills by 23 to 29 percentile points across all subjects during a 50 state study in 1994.**

**Ray's study, released in 1997, took data from 5,402 students. He found that home schoolers outscored their public school counterparts on national achievement tests by 30 to 37 percentile points. Scores also increased in relation to the number of years a student had been taught at home. Further analysis of the scores provided some additional findings: a parent's educational background had no substantive effect on children's academic performance; math and reading scores for minority children showed no significant differences when compared to whites; and socioeconomic status was not a determinant of academic performance. Such findings indicate that home schoolers are**

outperforming their conventionally schooled counterparts and are doing so while defying some of the trends of test scores that are typically influenced by parental educational levels, race, and SES.

Another part of Ray's (1997) study focused on student activities and community involvement. On the average, home schooled children were involved in 5.2 activities outside the home, with 98 % engaged in two or more. Activities that ranged from scouts, dance, and 4-H to sports, field trips, and volunteer work demonstrated that home schoolers were not isolated in their communities.

The largest survey and testing program for home schoolers to date involved 20,760 students representing 11,930 families from all 50 states. Rudner (1999) surveyed home schooling participants taking the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency through Bob Jones University Press Testing and Evaluation Service, an assessment service provided for a fee to home school and private school students. Parents responded to questions concerning background and demographic characteristics; achievement test scores were analyzed in light of the survey responses. Major demographic findings were similar to results of the earlier studies: home school parents had more formal education than parents in the general population; the median family income was higher than that of all families with children in the nation; and almost all (97 %) home school students were in married couple families.

Achievement results were also similar to earlier research (Ray, 1997). The median test scores ranged from the 62<sup>nd</sup> to the 91<sup>st</sup> percentile in every subject and in every grade, well above both public and private school test results. Furthermore, 25 % of home school students were enrolled one or more grades above their age-level public and private school

peers. The longer a student was home schooled, the higher the level of achievement. Scores of students with at least one parent who held a state issued teaching license were compared to those students whose parents did not hold a license but did at least have a college degree. Results yielded no significant difference in the achievement levels. In reflecting upon study results, Rudner (1999) did note that home school families and students do not represent a cross-section of the U. S. population. Notable differences were a strong commitment to education and children as well as demographic discrepancies.

Rudner's (1999) study did receive criticism shortly after its release. Welner and Welner (1999) did not criticize the substance of Rudner's finding but rather his omission of discussing the source of his findings: the Bob Jones University Testing Service. They argued that Rudner's failure to state the population as a limitation of the study created an "erroneous picture of homeschooling" (p. 1). That picture drawn from a population that utilizes the testing service "is an inaccurate portrayal of homeschoolers as white, Christian, monolithic population" (p.1). The authors also stated that they did not necessarily disagree with Rudner's conclusions concerning academic performance, but they found the presentation weak in that "it fails to explain this limitation in a way that adequately alerts readers" (p. 2). Kaseman and Kaseman (1999) leveled even sharper criticism for similar reasons. They even went so far as to state that Rudner's work was detrimental to the cause of home schooling in that it has "the potential to undermine our homeschooling freedoms by presenting a very narrow and limiting stereotype of what a homeschooler should be" (p. 1)

**Social characteristics. Both Taylor (1986) and Shyers (1992) studied affective characteristics of home schooling. Taylor administered The Pier-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale to a random sample of home school children (n=224) nationwide and found that they scored significantly higher than the public school norm group on a global scale and all six sub-scales. Also addressing social development, Shyers compared home educated and conventionally schooled students on social adjustment measures. Both groups (n=70) chose somewhat passive responses on a written self-concept instrument resulting in positive self-concept scores that were above the national average for both groups. However, when the groups were observed at play by trained counselors, the conventional school students received significantly higher problem behavior scores than the home schooled children.**

**In summarizing these various studies, once again it should be noted that many studies are conducted by home school advocates. Ray's work and studies sponsored through Home School Legal Defense Association seem to have a purpose to present home schooling in a positive light. The sampling techniques are often adequate to ensure validity, but comparison to non-home school populations on various characteristics is questionable. The two groups are usually not matched; the socioeconomic status and educational levels of the home schooling parents is generally higher than that of the general population of schoolchildren. Another obvious factor not taken into consideration is the value parents place on education, which is evident in their decision to home school their children. Furthermore, researchers generally acknowledge the dominance of Christian conservative families throughout the home schooling population but seldom take that factor into account when analyzing data. Welner and Welner's (1999) as well as**



Kaseman and Kaseman's (1999) criticism are both some the first commentaries on that oversight. Such discrepancies should be figured into the results of studies that compare home schooling and conventional schooling children, since these factors can have significant effects on student achievement. Welner and Welner (1999) indicated that the need to keep research in home schooling as scholarly as possible to make genuine contributions to the knowledge base.

### Evidence of Sub-populations among Home Schoolers

Over the past two decades, researchers, home school advocates, and news writers have given home schooling broad coverage (Farris, 1997; Hawkins, 1996; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998). The above mentioned studies and articles should attest to that fact. Within this literature exists some evidence of sub-populations of home schooling students: gifted and talented students, as well as special needs students. There are scarcely any references to either group by educational researchers and only a few empirical studies, but there is an increasing amount of informal literature in the form of parent support group communications and personal testimonials. Much of this literature is found on the Internet where there are dozens of support groups or educational resource sites for parents who choose to home school both groups of children who have exceptional needs. The first category of home schooling students, gifted and talented, is mentioned here briefly to give evidence to the fact that there are sub-populations within the home schooling community.

### Gifted and Talented Children

Kearney (personal communication, February 17, 1999) of Iowa State University, who has worked with gifted home schoolers for the last 20 years, noted that she has

**“never seen such an exodus of gifted kids out of conventional schools and into home schooling” as in the past three years. Parents (McMillan, 1985; Michel, 1998; Tolan, 1990) overwhelmingly have cited dissatisfaction with the pedagogical offerings of conventional schooling and the lack of fit of programs to meet the needs of their children.**

**How well the needs of gifted and talented children are being met through home instruction is evidenced only through feature stories in the popular press (Kantrowitz & Rosenberg, 1994; Seligmann & Abramson, 1988) and parent testimonial in some of the gifted education journals (McMillan, 1985; Michel, 1998; Randal, 1996). All these reports depicted positive experiences with the practice of home schooling. There is one empirical study (Bell & Leroux, 1992), a single case study of a student highly gifted in mathematics who benefited greatly from a home instruction program. As is the case with home schooling families with special needs children, there is strong evidence of their existence but a clear lack of research on the characteristics of the population and effectiveness of the practice in meeting the academic and social needs of the children.**

### **Special Needs Children**

**A population with more attending literature than the gifted and talented is that of students with special education needs. There are support organizations and Internet sites specifically designed for families home schooling these children. Nationally Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network (NATHHAN) and Parents Rearing and Educating Autistic Children in Christian Homes (PREACCH) are two examples. There are also resources within some of the larger home school organizations dedicated to special needs students, such as the Special Needs Coordinator at Home School Legal Defense Association.**

Like the gifted and talented sub-population, the literature concerning the special needs children segment is largely informal. Informational pieces tend to be written from private experience and are testimonial in nature – as support group literature should be. There are several books (Hensley, 1995; Herzog, 1994; Sutton & Sutton, 1997) written by educators with a home schooling background for the purpose of assisting families with special education needs. Additionally, there are references to the special education population within feature articles (Dahm, 1996; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998). The two research studies on home educated special needs students consist of a legal review of litigation concerning these children (Reinhiller & Thomas, 1996) and an experimental study (Duvall et al., 1997) conducted to investigate the success of home schooling children with learning disabilities.

Size of the population: Guess and conjecture. Since none of the descriptive studies on the general population of home schoolers delineated the numbers into categories, the size of the special needs sub-population is purely speculative. Based upon the estimates of the U. S. Department of Education (1997), there are approximately 5.8 million special education students. The number of home schooled special needs students could range from 58,000 to 116,000 depending upon the estimates of Lines (1996) (one percent of the school age population) and Ray (1997) (two percent) – if the same proportion of special needs students are within the home school population. A review of membership applications at Home School Legal Defense Association (C. Hurst, personal communication, monthly from February, 1999 to January, 2000 ) yielded the following table of findings.

**Figure 3. Membership applications of families with special needs children at HSLDA.**

	1999 Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
<b>Special Needs Applicants</b>	90	107	85	58	118	80	196	313	174	137	110	1468
<b>Total Applicants</b>	630	791	634	716	1400	990	3065	2851	2255	928	795	15055
<b>Percent</b>	14.3	13.5	13.4	8.1	8.7	8.1	6.4	11.0	7.7	14.8	13.8	9.8

The percent of the total applicants that are families with special needs varies throughout the months. The cumulative percentage of families is 9.8. However, there is no indication of how many special needs children each family might have. If one child, 9.8 % seems to approximate the incidence of special education students within the conventional school setting (10-12%.) If the number of children per family matches the 1.4 mean as seen later in this study, then that overall percentage could be 13.7. As noted earlier, with no central reporting, these figures are clearly speculative.

**Parents' rationales.** For parents of special needs students, are the rationales for selecting home education the same as for the parents of students not of the category? Quite frankly, there is no study or report that addresses this subject. However, within the literature, home schooling researchers and advocates have offered opinions on this matter. Home Education Press (1993) published an informational booklet on learning disabilities featuring experiences of families who home schooled children with this diagnosis. One family expressed frustration over the handicap of the child that seemingly found no satisfactory support in public school. The mother declared, "Our family needed a break from this madness. We needed to be nourished. We needed to have time to regroup and learn to enjoy one another again . . . we began homeschooling" (p. 6).

**This mother's statement implied a need to gain control not just of the child's education, but of the family's health. Other parents have remained focused on the child's needs alone. In an earlier interview of a mother home schooling two sons with learning disabilities, I (Duffey, 1999a) found the rationale to be a desire to customize the education to the needs of the children. Hensley (1995) and Armstrong (cited in Bowman, 1996) affirmed this motive. A learning consultant and special education teacher, Armstrong reasoned that home schooling can provide "the opportunity of giving the child something very different than they were failing at in the schools" (p. 3).**

**In discussing home schools, Hensley (1995), director of an umbrella school for special needs home schoolers a home schooling mother of an autistic child, pointed out four major advantages of home schooling children with special needs. First, home schooling gives children a "safe place to learn and grow in their own way and at their own pace" provided by parents who know the needs of their children (p. 60). Second, home schooling can provide a truly individualized educational program. Third, home schooling provides one-on-one teaching. Finally, home schooling allows special needs children to achieve full inclusion and acceptance into their learning setting and among home school peers. Hensley characterized such inclusion as**

**the best of both worlds! What could be more inclusive than a family? If you have several children, your special-needs child is being provided with the good role models and stimulation that is supposed to make full inclusion the better alternative, but he can get the individual attention from you that he needs. (p. 63)**

**From the limited research, other non-scholarly literature, and support groups, it is apparent that there are numbers of home schooling families with special needs students.**

Parents who have expressed a rationale for the choice have cited frustration with conventional school settings and a desire to provide an education that suits the needs of the child and those of the family as well.

### **Home Schooling Special Needs Children: Modes of Practice**

Parents with special needs children have several options open to them when electing to teach their children at home. Modes differ with the legal climate of the state and school district and with the amount of organization within the local home school community. Under these various conditions, families choose to home school unassisted, totally on their own, or assisted by private consultants and professionals or the public school system. Another option is dual enrollment, whereby the special needs child attends conventional school part time.

### **Unassisted Home Schooling**

Most of the earlier home school families were “pioneers in the wilderness.” There were no resources or support groups to assist them in their endeavors. Many families still choose to go this route in home schooling – including families with special needs children. Every state permits home schooling and, generally, makes stipulations in the following areas: the qualifications of the instructor, the curriculum, the amount of time spent in instruction, measurement of progress, and reporting procedures (Reinhiller & Thomas, 1996). As long as the parents meet the requirements, they may proceed with their schooling plans.

Most states do not specify a different standard for special needs children (see Appendix A), although Reinhiller and Thomas (1996) reported that Arizona requires a different standardized test and Pennsylvania a certified tutor for home schooled students

with disabilities. Iowa's laws require a teacher, who is working with a home schooling family to report the family to the local education agency's special education director if he or she suspects a child to have a disability. Because of this law, many families will not work with certified teachers or even seek a private evaluation.

For those who choose to home school their special needs children unassisted, they are not totally on their own. Curricular packages that contain textbooks and workbooks of the traditional subjects and grade levels are available through publishers and private schools and colleges. As mentioned above, there are "how-to" books written by home educators specifically for those parents with special needs children. Home schooling families take advantage of the Internet with its resources for the students and for information for the parents on matters of curriculum and instruction (Hull, 1999). There are "chat rooms" for this specific group of home schooling parents – a sort of cyber-support group. A prominent characteristic of these parents is their willingness to read and conduct research on the nature of their children's disabilities in order to provide the necessary support (Educational consultant, C. Griffith, personal communication, March 9, 1998).

### Assisted Home Schooling

In contrast to unassisted home schooling families, assisted home schoolers enlist the help of both public and private services. Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) recommended that home schooling families with special needs children enlist the services of a private educational consultant or therapeutic program (HSLDA, 1995). HSLDA's rationale for the recommendation was not simply to aid the parent in the schooling process, but also to provide a legal defense if the home school were to be

challenged by school officials. Many parents do hire educational consultants and therapists as well as private medical professionals to help them in the total education of children with special education needs (Hensley, 1995).

Because of the expense incurred through professional assistance, some parents turn to the public schools for help. Through federal funding, eligible students can take advantage of services, such as speech therapy, at no expense to the family – other than their tax dollars. The Des Moines Public School System goes one step further. To families (some of whom have special needs children) enrolled in their assisted schooling program, the school district offers visiting teachers who give help in matters of curriculum, instruction, testing, and record-keeping. The district also offers various special education services to the families enrolled in the Home Instruction Program (Dahm, 1996; L. Dahm, personal communication, March 20, 1998).

### Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment refers to the practice of home school students attending conventional school part time. In other words, students take some of their classes at a conventional school, public or private, and the remainder in the home school. About one-third of the states allow home school students to enroll part-time for public school academic classes, extracurricular activities, or both (S. Dunn, HSLDA, personal communication, October 17, 1997). Students seeking special education services do not necessarily fall under these laws, but under federal provisions of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Whether families with children eligible for special education are taking advantage of this opportunity has not been formally reported; Dahm (1996) has indicated that dual enrollment exists in Des Moines for special needs students.



As the home schooling movement continues to gain ground and public acceptance grows, parents may increasingly seek services and dual enrollment within the public schools. Dailey (1999) reported on the emerging litigation that has arisen over parents' seeking public access. He also reviewed the public access policies of states that offer the option noting that successful arrangements usually include academic offerings and extracurricular activities other than sports: "Most school boards and athletic organization are not responsive to the notion of home schooled children accessing the public school system on an ad hoc basis, citing potential administrative burdens likely to result from that access" (p. 34).

The various options available to home schooling families with special needs children indicate that the practice is becoming not just more acceptable but also more inviting as an educational alternative. Although the families are not yet highly organized into the support groups that the general home schooling community utilizes, there are growing numbers of special needs support groups, consultants, and programs within the public schools to accommodate these students.

#### Home Schooling: Effects on the Basic Skills of Students with Learning Disabilities

Generally, studies on the effectiveness of home schooling have not singled out the special needs population. The only exception is a study on children with learning disabilities conducted by Duvall et al. (1997). One of the only home schooling studies employing an experimental design, the researchers selected four students and their instructors for the control and treatment groups (n = 4 each). Researchers matched the student groups on ten variables including specific area of disability. Administering a variety of pretests, posttests, and inventories, Duvall et al. conducted observations to

assess academic engagement time (AET). Study results indicated that the four children in the home schools received more individualized instruction than did the four children in the public school special programs. Academic engagement time rates were 2.6 times greater for the home school students. In general, the home school students made more progress than public school students did on standardized tests, including larger gains in reading and written language and equivalent gains in mathematics.

The stated purpose of the study was to determine if parents who were not certified professional educators could provide students with instructional environments conducive to the acquisition of basic skills. The researchers concluded that, even though these parents were not formally trained in methods to increase AET, they successfully engaged students at higher rates than did the special educators in the public school classrooms. Duvall et al. (1997) attributed this success to the low number of students in the home school. However, it should be noted again that the population used in this study was very small indicating no generalizability of results.

Although Home School Legal Defense Association (1997) has used this study to herald the success of home schooling for learning disabled students, Duvall et al. (1997) stated that the design of the study with its small sample size and number of learning environments limited the generalizability of the results. They further noted that the study was an exploratory investigation, and "a causal relation has not been established through these findings, although the pattern is clearly in that direction" (p. 169). The researchers recommended that larger numbers of children and home school instructional environments be studied using tightly controlled experimental design.

### Non-scholarly Claims of the Effects of Home Schooling on Special Needs Children

Although there is a lack of research on this particular aspect of home schooling, references to this phenomenon do exist in the popular press, home schooling magazines, and Internet publications. Newsweek recently produced an issue that featured articles (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998) on home schooling. Examples of home schooling families included one family that took their learning disabled son out of public school because they felt his academic needs were not being met there. The authors of the article did not indicate whether home instruction in this case was successful or not, but they did comment that “kids with special needs . . . are more likely than most to benefit from home schooling [according to researchers], but only if their parents have the right training and resources” (p. 69). The “researchers” were never identified in the article.

Home Education Magazine and Growing without Schooling are magazines published by and for home schooling families. The subjects of the articles are various aspects of home schooling and other issues that are of concern to subscribers. Feature articles are archived and published on the Internet as well. Both magazines have published articles written by parents about special needs children. The articles included reports of successful home schooling of chronically ill or disabled students (Griffith, 1995), autistic children (Sheffer, 1998; Wagner, 1998), and children with learning disabilities (Home Education Press, 1996). The reports all attested to the benefits of home schooling for the children. The common theme of the testimonies was that children learn in various ways, and traditional schools do not always enhance the learning process; some children respond better at home. Even though some of the authors were also

professional educators, they presented no empirical evidence of their claims nor gave any specific reasons for the success of their children.

The Homeschooling Zone Newsletter is an online publication for home schoolers. The newsletter published a series of articles (Van Camp, 1997) on the subject of children with attention disorders. Van Camp, a child development specialist, described her own experience as a parent who educates at home her two children diagnosed with ADHD. She contended that home is the ideal setting for these children. Although Van Camp presented some persuasive arguments for home schooling, she presented no quantified or qualified evidence in her essay.

These examples indicate that there is a population of home schooled special needs students. Although generally not scholarly, references to the endeavor have overwhelmingly been positive, including reports of learning gains, positive self-concept, and improved family dynamics. The lack of research into this phenomenon strongly indicates a need to conduct studies into the effectiveness of the practice.

#### Home Schooling and Special Education Models

Does the theory base for home schooling in general that emerges from the educational research within the conventional school context predict factors that account for the success of home schooling special needs children? As noted earlier, the studies of Walberg (1984), Bloom (1984), and Karweit (1984), suggested factors that might account for powerful learning environments for all students, including those students with special needs. These factors were increased academic engagement time, tutoring that includes one-on-one instruction individualized to the needs of the student, and parental involvement in the educational process. Individualized education and small group

settings that include one-on-one teaching are, of course, hallmarks of special education. Duvall et al. (1997) have already suggested increased academic engagement time within the special education context as an effective means to improve student achievement.

Are there any models specific to special education that might also indicate viability of the home schooling setting? In addition to the use of individualized education plans and optimal student-teacher ratios, early intervention programs might also indicate success for home schooling students. Casto and Mastropieri (1986) conducted a meta-analysis of early intervention programs and found a mean effect size of .68. In other words, early intervention was effective in improving student achievement about two-thirds of a standard deviation as compared to control groups not receiving early intervention. Slavin (1996) reviewed early programs aimed at improving reading skills. Selecting five programs that focused on prevention of learning problems and early intervention, he found impressive results: lower failure rates, higher achievement rates, and children not even entering special education. He termed this success “neverstreaming” in contrast to the term “mainstreaming” used when referring to placing special education students into the regular education classroom. The characteristics of these programs were the use of one-on-one tutoring and school-home collaboration. Another early intervention program, Missouri’s highly successful Parents as Teachers (Rouse, 1994), was built on the philosophy that parents are their children’s first and most influential teachers. The success of this program has accounted for its adoption in many other states (Rouse).

Determining the success of early intervention in a home school context would be problematic, however. Kearney (personal communication, February 17, 1999) noted

many families do not even realize that their children might be considered to have a disability if they have always home schooled them: “They are taught at their own levels, whatever those levels might be, in a relatively natural setting. Age and grade levels don’t mean a tremendous amount to most home schooling families.” This ungraded, unlabeled method is reminiscent of Slavin’s (1996) “neverstreaming.”

### Summary

How successful home schools are in providing for the needs of students who require special education cannot be determined from the current research. Although there are indications that home instruction is a fast-growing and successful practice for the general population of students, there is no real “evidence” that supports the same conclusion for the sub-population of special needs students. As a matter of fact, there is not even an indication of what the profile of a home school student with special needs looks like. In light of the lack of information, state and local education agencies are not sure about the role they should be playing in the midst of the emerging practice . The home school community itself has varying opinions about meeting the needs of these children within the context of the home alone or with outside help from public or private sources.

### Concerns of Educational Agencies

Although relations between the home schooling community and state and local educational agencies have improved in recent years as the practice has grown in strength and legitimacy, the relationship is not a perfect one, especially where special needs students are concerned. Reinhiller and Thomas (1996) reviewed litigation involving home schooling children with special education needs. They noted that state legislatures have greatly liberalized laws related to home schooling over the past decade, but there are

definite concerns with families of students with disabilities: “the philosophical and ideological desires of the parents must be weighed against the special needs of these children” (p. 16). Those needs may be met successfully at home, or “it simply may not be possible for a child with disabilities to make educational progress without attendance away from home” (p. 16).

Because all children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education according to federal law, the delivery of services to students who do not attend public schools, both private and home schools, can be confusing and sometimes misdirected (Opuda, 1994). Opuda reviewed federal statutes and rulings as well as court decisions applicable to this subject. He opined that, although there is ambiguity in directives from the U. S. Department of Education, public schools have obligations to children who attend school elsewhere. Parents and their children have specific rights under the law. Furthermore, the Office of Special Education has advised school districts to develop policies to include home schooled students in their accountability reporting (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1998).

#### Impact on Conventional Schools

At the local level, schools increasingly are dealing with the prospect of part time students or dual enrollment. Although state legislatures are opening up this possibility, the local school districts and the individual schools must enact the statutes. Setting policy has been controversial and met with resistance in some areas. Natale (1996) reviewed the practice of dual enrollment in some of the various states that have adopted it. She concluded that the negative public opinion is largely unfounded and seems to center around participation on sports teams. Very small numbers of home school students are taking advantage of dual enrollment and, when they do, the experiences are often

beneficial to the schools, the students, and the families. Educators or researchers have not documented whether students with disabilities have availed themselves of dual enrollment and if the practice has proven satisfactory. It seems likely that this situation will occur – with the improving legal climate and the continuing trend of home education.

### Concerns of the Home Schooling Community

Because the community of home schoolers maintains differing philosophies and rationales for choosing to educate their own children, they have varying opinions about how to meet their children's needs. "Hard core" home school advocates are convinced that parents can provide the total instruction for their children – even children with special needs. Other families realize they cannot do the job alone.

Besides advising other parents and home schooling her own special needs child, Hensley (1995) directs a private umbrella school for home schooling families with special needs children in California. The purpose of the school is to provide support and help for parents in their home schooling endeavor. Hensley stated that home schooling is appropriate for these children because they, "more than most others, need a safe place to learn and grow in their own way and at their own pace" (p. 60). As noted earlier, she also commented that home schooling provides special needs children with truly individualized educational programs and one-on-one teaching.

Parents are seeking help for their home school programs, but the source of that help depends upon the philosophical belief system of the parent and their personal finances. Help provided by "schools" like Hensley's and private consultants and therapists is too invasive for some families and too costly for other families. Obtaining



help from the public schools and opting for dual enrollment would place a home schooling family at the other end of the spectrum from the “hard-core” advocate. Ray (1992) conducted a study on the propriety of interaction between professional educators and home educators and found that home schooling parents were reluctant to interact with or receive guidance from conventional educators. The parents reported a desire for help, but

they would like the liberty to educate their children and seek out and use services at their own discretion. They desire freedom from pressure to use unsolicited help and freedom from overt interference, especially from those associated with the state or federal government. (Ray, 1992, p. 28)

Home School Legal Defense Association (1995) recommended private sources of help for member families. They cautioned against using the services of the public schools because of potential legal entanglements resulting from the “strings of regulation [that] come attached to these programs . . . the longer a family uses these programs, the tighter the strings of control become” (p. 5). There is truth to these words just as there are legitimate claims on the side of state agencies in some of the court battles with parents whose home schools were not only inadequate but amounted to neglect (Matter of James Milton Devone, 1987).

#### Need for Further Research

With or without research, the home schooling movement continues to build momentum. Although we cannot be sure if the growing population includes a substantial number of special needs children, it is evident that they exist. We also cannot be sure if these children are making adequate academic and social progress, as the general

population of home schoolers seems to be. Only one study and a great deal of opinion indicate that this conclusion might be warranted. Without further research, there can be no definitive indication of the viability and legitimacy of the practice of home schooling special needs students.

Educational researchers have laid the groundwork for research into this area. Based upon the work of Walberg (1984), Bloom (1984), Karweit (1984), and Slavin (1996), theory seems to predict the effectiveness of home schooling. These researchers suggested that tutoring, instructional programs customized to children's needs, academic engagement time, parental involvement, and early intervention all contribute to student achievement and effective learning environments. Hensley's (1995) rationale for the choice of home schooling special needs children addressed the impact of one-on-one teaching, individualized education, and parental involvement. Ray (1997) cited tutoring as a model that might explain home educated children's academic success. He also stated that greater academic learning time in home schools could account for this same success.

Along with the researchers focusing on the effective practices of the conventional school setting are those educators who have addressed special education programs and interventions. Duvall et al. (1994) focused on the importance of academic engagement time and cited numerous studies that have shown the improvement in academic performance with increased academic engagement time. The subjects of these studies were all students of the various special education categories. However, the Duvall study is the only one to consider the effect of the home setting as the independent variable.

Research into these home schools can provide us with data that can help determine if the same factors that account for the success of home schooling in general

**also contribute to a viable setting for the special needs child. To solve this problem, it is first necessary to identify and describe the special needs home school setting: the family, the teaching parents, the children and their special needs. Determining parents' rationales for choosing home education as well as investigating the structure and content of specific home school settings also contribute to this description. The end product of this study is both this description and an in-depth look into some special needs home schools.**

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

*We were led by the Lord to homeschool believing he would benefit from one-on-one instruction and make better progress than if we were to enroll him in school. Also, I wanted to protect him from other children making fun of him.*

-Home school father, New York

This chapter dealing with research methodology is divided into the following sections: (a) a description of a mixed design study, (b) a rationale for the use of a mixed design study, (c) a description of the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry and research design, (d) a description of the multicase study method, (e) a rationale for the use of the phenomenological approach and qualitative case study design to answer the guiding research questions, (f) a statement of bias, (g) a discussion of participant selection procedures, (h) a discussion of instrumentation and procedures, (i) a discussion of the data analysis procedures, (j) a discussion of verification of the procedures, and (k) a discussion of ethical safeguards.

#### A Description of a Mixed Design Study

A mixed design research study is one which incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, analysis, and report writing. Yin (1989) noted that “the design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions” (p. 28). Therefore, when the research questions require answers that can be quantified and reduced to numbers, then quantitative methods should be employed. Likewise, there are those questions that are best approached by qualitative

means. When a study contains both types of questions, then a mixed design of both quantitative and qualitative methods is appropriate. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) discussed the benefits of combining research methods: “Enjoying the rewards of both numbers and words . . . different approaches allow us to know and understand different things about the world” (p. 9).

### **Rationale for the Use of a Mixed Design**

The purpose of this study is to extend the study of home schooled children, their families, and home school settings to include the population of home schooled special needs students, their families, and home school settings. Specifically, this study provides descriptive data that answers the following questions:

- 1. What are the demographic characteristics of home schooling families with special needs children?**
- 2. What are the educational backgrounds and training of the teacher-parents of special needs children?**
- 3. What are the special education classifications of the home schooled special needs children?**
- 4. What are the rationales parents of special needs children give for choosing home education?**
- 5. How are home schools structured: what are the instructional practices, and what is the nature of the curriculum?**
- 6. What are the home schooling parents and students’ perceptions of the home schooling experience concerning academic and social progress?**

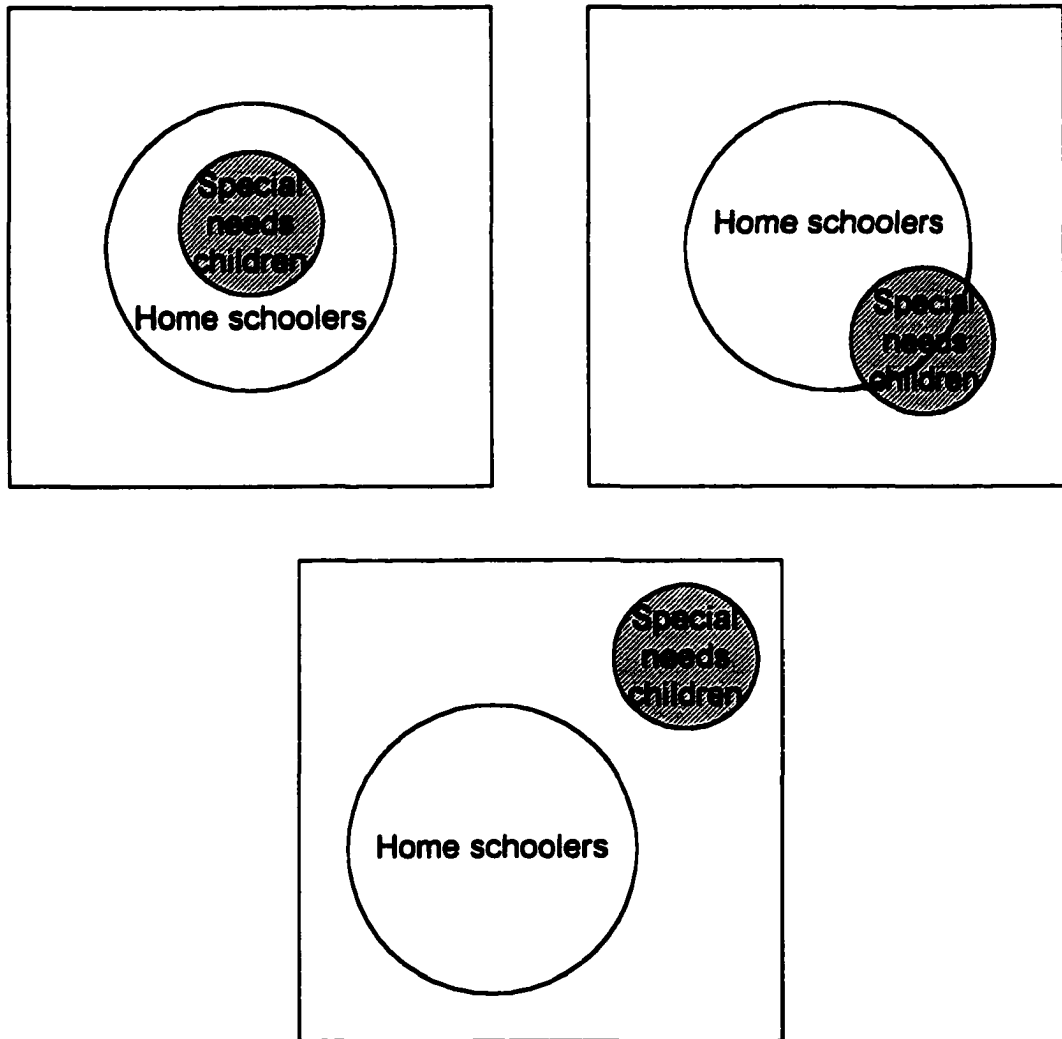
**7. Do the factors that characterize the general population of home schooled children also characterize the population of home schooled special needs children?**

**Since the guiding research questions of this study ask for data that can be quantified, such as many of the demographic characteristics, and data that requires narrative responses, a mixed design was the appropriate choice for this study. Since the intent of this study is to provide descriptive data, some of which refers to previous study results, it was necessary to select similar methodology to compare results to those studies. Therefore, the first phase of this study included questions from a survey instrument that contained closed-ended questions whose answers could be analyzed using descriptive statistics.**

**The results of these answers were then compared to the results produced most notably by the Ray (1997) study but also other home schooling studies as well. That comparison of data made it possible to answer the final question (see Figure 4). Do the characteristics of home schooled special needs children reflect those of the general population of home schoolers as in the circle within the larger circle? Or, is the experience and characteristics of home schooled special needs students unrelated to those of the general population as in the circle outside the larger circle? The third choice of overlapping circles in the model asks if the characteristics of the special needs group share similarities with the general population of home schoolers while presenting some of their own unique characteristics and experiences.**

**Figure 4.** Graphic representation of guiding research questions.

**Home Schooling Children with Special Needs:  
Where do they belong in relation to the general  
population of home schooling children?**



Do the factors that characterize the general population of home schooled children also characterize the population of home schooled special needs children? These factors include demographics, family characteristics, and the content and context of the home school setting.

The open-ended questions of the survey and the case studies produced information, then, that went beyond the picture presented by the statistics. This information offered an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of home schooling special needs children through the eyes of those who experience it: both the home schooling parents and their families including the special needs children.

### The Phenomenological Study

Creswell (1998) described a phenomenological study as a study that “describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept of the phenomenon” (p. 51). In such a study, researchers explore the meanings of individual experiences, how people experience a particular phenomenon. Phenomenology had its roots in a philosophical movement originated by Edmund Husserl. He believed that the starting point for knowledge was the individual’s experience of phenomena – the sensations, perceptions, and ideas that emerge in that individual’s mind when attention is focused on an object (Cresswell). Phenomenological data analysis consists of reduction of data, analysis of specific statements and themes, and search for all possible meanings. The researcher begins the process by bracketing previous experiences, i.e., setting aside all prejudgments and presuppositions.

As an approach to qualitative research, phenomenology represents several different philosophical camps depending upon the perspectives and backgrounds of the researchers, as well as their purpose of study. It has been used in sociology, psychology, nursing and health sciences, and education. Although preferring the psychological approach, Creswell (1998) summarized the major procedural issues that exist in using phenomenology regardless of the purpose and philosophy of the researcher. These issues



include the need for the researcher to understand the philosophical perspectives behind the approach, especially the concept of studying how people experience a phenomenon. The researcher must bracket his or her preconceived ideas about the phenomenon to understand it through the voices of the informants. Procedures followed by the researcher also include the following:

- ◆ The researcher writes research questions that explore the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks them to describe their everyday lived experiences.
- ◆ The investigator collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation.
- ◆ The data analysis steps generally consist of (1) dividing the original protocol into statements, (2) transforming the units into clusters of meaning, (3) tying the clusters into a general description of the experience.
- ◆ The final report ends with the reader understanding better the essence of the experience. (Cresswell, 1998, pp. 54-55)

### **The Multicase Study Method**

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) described case study research as “the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon” (p. 545). The phenomenon in this study is the home schooling of special needs children; the natural context is the home; and the participants are the family members involved in the process. Yin (1989) emphasized the importance of studying a phenomenon in its natural context. Specifically, this phase of the research was phenomenological in design with the emphasis on the phenomenon of home schooling children with special needs as seen through the eyes of four families.

Also defining case study, Creswell (1998) noted that it is “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Yin (1994) identified five types of studies: single, multiple, exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. As the names imply, the single case study features one case while the multiple case (or multicase) includes two or more cases. An exploratory study defines questions of a subsequent study or determines the feasibility of specified research procedures. A descriptive study offers a description of a phenomenon within its context while an explanatory study aims to provide explanations for the phenomena that were studied by looking for relational and causal patterns.

Phase Two of the study contained herein is a multicase, descriptive study using a phenomenological approach. Because of the range of diagnoses possible within the population of special needs children, multiple cases rather than a single case, were chosen to represent some of the variation possible. Creswell (1998) suggested the use of multiple cases showing different perspectives (and experiences) of the phenomenon. Because the intent of this study is to describe a population that has heretofore been neglected within the field of education, a descriptive study was chosen to carry out the purpose of the research.

### **A Rationale for the Use of the Case Study Method**

#### **With a Phenomenological Approach**

The qualitative approach using the case study method in the phenomenological tradition was appropriate to this study because of the nature of home schooling itself and particularly of home schooling children with special needs. Although the home schooling

movement has gained much recognition and a certain amount of respect and organization in recent years, it is still an educational alternative that is practiced in relative isolation. There may be networks and support groups that link families, but the individual family is still the center of the phenomenon. This statement is even more appropriate for those families with special needs children for whom there are fewer support groups and resources specific to their needs. One home schooling parent offered this insight into the experience:

What I need is support and information, and other than this list [Internet listserv], there is little to be found. I thank God for this list! There is very little information on homeschooling children with serious, significant “special needs.” And I wish desperately to connect with other parents who have chosen to nurture and educate their child at home, to share information, to bounce ideas at home, etc. (Mary C., personal communication; July 12, 1999)

That isolation is also a result of geographic location as another home schooling mother expressed:

Parents in West Virginia who are homeschooling special needs children are scattered throughout the state. We tried at one point to organize them, but it didn't work out. There are less than 2 million people in our entire state, so you can understand why this might be the case. (Kay P., personal communication; April 14, 1999)

Along with practicing home schooling in isolation, each family is also unique in its attempt to provide the education that is customized to the child's educational needs. For all these reasons, the use of case studies was appropriate to aid analysis and

interpretation of the numerical and narrative data gathered during the first phase of study. Furthermore, Yin (1989) recommended multiple forms of data collection to build an in-depth picture of the case. He referred to the forms of documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. The collection of survey data contributed to the picture presented in the case studies, which utilized participant observation and interviews.

#### **A Statement of Bias**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data-gathering instrument. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) stated that as observers, qualitative researchers consider their biases to be part of the observed phenomenon. In order to ensure validity, a statement of bias is offered to deal with possible observer effects. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) referred to bias as subjectivity and discussed its place in the process of research:

**My subjectivity is the basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is the strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person and as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as researcher . . . (p. 104)**

**As a teacher in Christian schools for 13 years, I became aware of the home schooling movement through interactions with students entering into the conventional classroom from a home school setting. Moreover, students also left the traditional classroom to enter into home schools. During the last nine years of teaching, I maintained association with those students and their families after their departure from the school. Most of these departing students were students with special needs. That fact attracted my attention to the phenomenon of home schooling families with special needs children.**

As a part of my doctoral studies, I pursued the interest in the topic of home schooling and specifically home schooling students with special needs. At this time, I read literature relative to the topic and contacted experts across the country to learn about the most recent findings and information on the home schooling movement. In this process, I established numerous contacts within the home schooling community. In the Tidewater, Virginia, area, these contacts were made through continued association with former students and their parents. Other contacts were established via the Internet and telephone communications. Initially, these home schooling experts or parents were identified through journal and magazine articles. Finally, relationships were forged through inquiries made over the Internet accessing home school special needs support groups and message boards.

During this time of research and establishing a network of home schooling contacts, I wrote several papers on home schooling and submitted them for publication to various professional education organizations. Three articles were published as a result of that initial research effort; one of those articles focused specifically on the options home schooling parents of special needs children had to exercise in educating their children. It is in this context that I conducted work on this present research study.

#### **Selection of Participants**

Due to the unique nature of the population, i.e. the lack of organization and difficulty to identify and access, selection of participants was conducted in a unique manner. There has been precedence set in trying to locate home schoolers to participate in research and solving the problem with creative solutions. Lines (1991) accessed

shipping lists from publishers of home schooling educational materials. From these lists, she formulated the first government estimate of the home schooling population.

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), selection strategy evolves as data is collected in qualitative research. Furthermore, the direction upon which the researcher finally settles will depend on the focus selected as both feasible and worthwhile. This method contrasts with subject sampling in quantitative research that relies on numbers and variety to “support the use of statistical techniques and the prospect of making generalizations” (p. 27). Although there are quantitative data produced through the survey, the participants were selected in a manner not compatible with the quantitative tradition. Rather, a strategy was selected for the purpose of “illuminating, interpreting, and understanding [using] the researcher’s own imagination and judgment” (p. 27).

#### First Phase Participants

Initially, survey participants were to be members of support groups for home schooling families with special needs children. I had made contact with several key home schooling parents who had agreed to distribute surveys to the membership of their respective groups. Additionally, an agreement was made with two support group publications to advertise a need for participants. However, what evolved was an Internet search for participants and a reliance on one home schooling parent to inform another – snowball selection. In describing participant selection, there will be duplication in the discussion of the process of distributing surveys. Finding research participants usually indicated an agreement to complete the survey, which then followed shortly thereafter.

After reading the book, Homeschooling Children with Special Needs, I contacted the author, Sharon Hensley, about a year prior to undertaking this study. Because of the

professional relationship established at that time, Hensley agreed to distribute surveys to her clientele later in the spring of 1999. I sent a mailing of 300 surveys (each with a cover and self-addressed, stamped envelope) to Hensley, director of Almaden Valley Christian School, which is a home schooling umbrella school for families home educating children with special needs. She distributed these surveys to the 100 families enrolled in her school and to other support groups she visited in California throughout June and July. I collected 165 unused surveys in October. The anticipated numbers of participants had not materialized in her site visits during the summer.

Another source of participants emerged from NATHHAN News, a newsletter published for members of NATIONAL cHallenged Homeschoolers Associated Network. I became a member of this support group in order to receive the newsletter, which listed local support groups. Ten of the 14 listed groups were active support groups; six of these groups responded to a request for participation. There was an overlap only of Almaden Valley Christian School with groups contacted through other means. Requests for surveys from the support group leaders ranged from one to 90. It is difficult to determine specific response rates since only those with addresses included to receive a summary of the research could be attributed to the original mailings.

Many of the home schooling parents with whom I spoke were very concerned about the possibility of a breach in confidentiality. Kaseman and Kaseman (1992) expressed the view of many home schoolers on research: "Research is an invasion of privacy, even if anonymity is guaranteed. Homeschoolers have been singled out for scrutiny . . . the demand for research is motivated by the desire to control homeschooling than by an attempt to truly understand it" (pp. 18-19).

In addition to members of support groups volunteering to complete surveys through contact from another member or leader of the group, other participants were enlisted through accessing Internet message boards and listservs. A message was posted on Forum for Home Educators of Special Needs Kids and a home schooling mother in Indiana, Karen Hillery, responded. She agreed to be the entry point for two Internet support groups to which she belonged: a group of home schooling families with children in the autism spectrum, AUT-2B-HOME; and a non-specific special needs support group, Special Needs Homeschooling. These support groups exist in cyberspace; parents join the listserv discussing issues related to their children's needs and parenting concerns. I sent a survey via e-mail to Hillery. She then sent it to members of the support groups who had volunteered to respond. Later, I joined similar discussion groups to solicit respondents. All of these support groups, both those from a geographic location and those existing on the Internet, are listed below (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Home school support groups accessed to solicit research participants.

<b>Name of group</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Almaden Valley Christian School</b>	<b>Umbrella school &amp; support group</b>	<b>San Jose, CA</b>
<b>Deaf Homeschool Network</b>	<b>Support group</b>	<b>Silverton, OR</b>
<b>DevDelayBand under Discussion Group</b>	<b>Discussion group (listserv)</b>	<b>www.onelist.com/listcenter.cgi?listname=DevDelayBandunder+yy=22860</b>
<b>Forum for Home Educators of Special Needs Kids</b>	<b>Message board</b>	<b>www.kaleidoscapes.com</b>
<b>GRACE</b>	<b>Support group</b>	<b>Chesapeake, VA</b>
<b>Home Education Magazine Discussion Board</b>	<b>Message board</b>	<b>Home-ed-magazine.com</b>
<b>Homeschool Language-Impaired Forum</b>	<b>Discussion group (listserv)</b>	<b>www.geocities.com/Paris/café/4057/lang.html</b>
<b>Homeschooling Kids with Disabilities</b>	<b>Discussion group (listserv)</b>	<b>www.egroups.com/group/HKWD</b>
<b>Homeschooling Kids with Learning Disabilities</b>	<b>Message board</b>	<b>www.weta.org/cgi_bin/donline/hslid</b>
<b>HomeTech Charter School</b>	<b>Charter school</b>	<b>Paradise, CA</b>
<b>OUCH Ohio's Uniquely Challenged Homeschoolers</b>	<b>Support group</b>	<b>Wickliffe, OH</b>
<b>Parents Instructing Challenged Childrenn (PICC)</b>	<b>Support group</b>	<b>Fulton, NY</b>
<b>PRAISE Parents Reaching Academically in Special Education</b>	<b>Support group</b>	<b>Grandville, MI</b>
<b>Special Children Special Blessings</b>	<b>Support group</b>	<b>San Diego, CA</b>
<b>Special Needs Support Group (Cape Cod area)</b>	<b>Support group</b>	<b>Brewster, MA</b>

Some of these support groups were identified by contacting local and state support groups for home schooling families in general. I located a listing of home school organizations by conducting a search on the Internet. Home School World ([www.homeschool.com](http://www.homeschool.com)) listed organizations by state. I contacted those with e-mail addresses, approximately one per state, introducing herself, discussing the research project and asking for knowledge of support groups that served families with special needs children. This search led to some fruitful contacts, such as the support group from Massachusetts. However, most of the responses were polite, interested in the work, but could not help.

Some groups or Internet discussion groups referenced required approval from the list manager. I was not admitted into some groups. Additionally, there were some home schoolers suspicious of motives and not willing to open their membership lists to “outsiders.”

In addition to the home schooling groups listed above, other surveys were distributed to families in the Tidewater, Virginia, area through GRACE, a support group for parents of home schooled special needs children. On May 22, 1999, I distributed surveys at a home school curriculum fair through the GRACE display. The director of GRACE, Coralie Griffith, also sent out surveys to her support group members. During the course of the curriculum fair, members of Home Educators Association of Virginia (HEAV) also agreed to distribute surveys at the State Home School Convention a month later. Neither of these distributions proved to be very significant in that the majority of attendees at these two events were parents who were investigating the possibility of home schooling their children rather than experienced home schoolers.

Finally, the strategy to place advertisements in support group newsletters as originally discussed in the research proposal did not materialize to meet expectations. One organization never responded after the initial agreement to publish and did not return any communications. The other organization, NATHHAN, accepted the advertisement for its summer newsletter. The newsletter has a large circulation (10,000) but a somewhat flexible publication schedule. Therefore, the summer publication was used for a back-to-school issue – after the cutoff date for this research. For the 21 families who responded after that date, the data was used to look for similarity in response and the occurrence of any notable outliers.

Finding respondents for participating in the first phase of this research project was challenging and required both perseverance and creativity. With a longer period of time and more resources, there might be the possibility of the involvement of more participants and therefore a greater response rate. However, the fact that participants were so difficult to locate and even more difficult to elicit a completed survey only served to confirm the findings within the data itself. Participating in support group Internet discussions and “listening” to discussions proved to give understanding and insight to the data gathered from the surveys. Moreover, the Internet proved to be the best source of participants in the first phase of the research. Of approximately a distribution of 400 surveys, there were 100 returned and completed surveys (therefore,  $n=100$ ) by the cutoff date, 26% that could be linked to the Internet respondents. Of the 21 later surveys returned, 11 were from Internet sources. Therefore, of the 121 total returned surveys (approximately 30% response rate), 37 (31%) could be attributed to the Internet.

#### Phase Two Participants

The top diagnoses (by frequency) of the special needs children in the first phase participant families were ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities (LD), pervasive developmental delay (PDD), and speech and language impairment. The four families selected for the second phase of the study were chosen based upon these educational diagnoses. Other factors that also determined selection were geographic location and accessibility. Varying geographic locales were selected to sample the differing home schooling climates created by state and local home school laws as well as the level of organization of home schooling families in an area.

Accessibility to the families was provided through my relationship with Sarah Olbris and Sharon Hensley, and through the Internet. Introduced by Olbris, I selected a family in a southeastern state. The two children being home schooled in the family had ADD and ADHD, both with chronic illnesses and one with speech and language impairment. Meeting through an Internet search, parents of three children in a south central region agreed to be observed. One of their three children was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. I was introduced to the other two families who are clients of Hensley. The first was a family in the mid-Atlantic region with three sons - one who has a learning disability and the other two with autism. The final family lives in Northern California, and the parents home school two sons with learning disabilities.

All but the Internet family were initially approached by Olbris or Hensley to ascertain an agreement to participate in the study. When I was notified of the assent, I telephoned the families and spoke to the mothers to complete the initial introduction and make arrangements for a visit. I telephoned the family in the south central region after a name was given to me during one of the initial Internet searches for home school special needs support groups. I spoke to the mother several times over the telephone before I approached her about the observations and interview to which she was agreeable. Just prior to my visit, she referred me to another family in the same locale as a job interview called them out of town during my visiting dates. Fortunately, the special needs child had the same educational diagnosis of the child in the original family.

#### **Instrumentation and Procedures**

Because of the mixed design of the study, several data collection sources were used to accomplish the purpose of the research. The first phase consisted of use of a

survey instrument to collect the demographic, family, and student information as well as note parental perceptions of the experience of home schooling children with special needs. As typical of qualitative studies, the researcher was the sole collector of data in the second phase of the study that consisted of observations and interviews of home schooling families.

### Phase One

#### Instrumentation

The survey (Appendix B) was self-developed and consisted of 25 items divided into two parts. Part A requested demographic information of the parents and family as well as the educational background of the parent-teachers. Part B was specific to information regarding the children and their educational needs and the content of the home school. This part contained four open-ended questions that asked for the parents' rationales for choosing to home school a special needs child or children.

Part A was developed after the model of Ray's (1997) questionnaire used in his study of home schooling families. Specifically, questions were taken from parts A and C of the Ray questionnaire, which addressed descriptive information regarding parents and family and information regarding the students. Questions were customized to the purpose of the study, i.e. describing the population of families with special needs children. Furthermore, Ray's questions were all of a forced-choice format with two or more choices. There were four pages of items per child. The survey used in this study consisted mostly of open-ended questions with a few forced-choice and was intended for family/parent response rather than focusing on the individual child. There was a question that addressed the individual diagnoses of the special needs children.

The survey instrument was submitted for review to seven experienced home schooling families with special needs children who live in the Tidewater, Virginia, area to provide feedback on item clarity. Additionally, Sharon Hensley and Sarah Olbris reviewed the survey as experts. Revisions were made in preparation for final data collection.

### Procedures

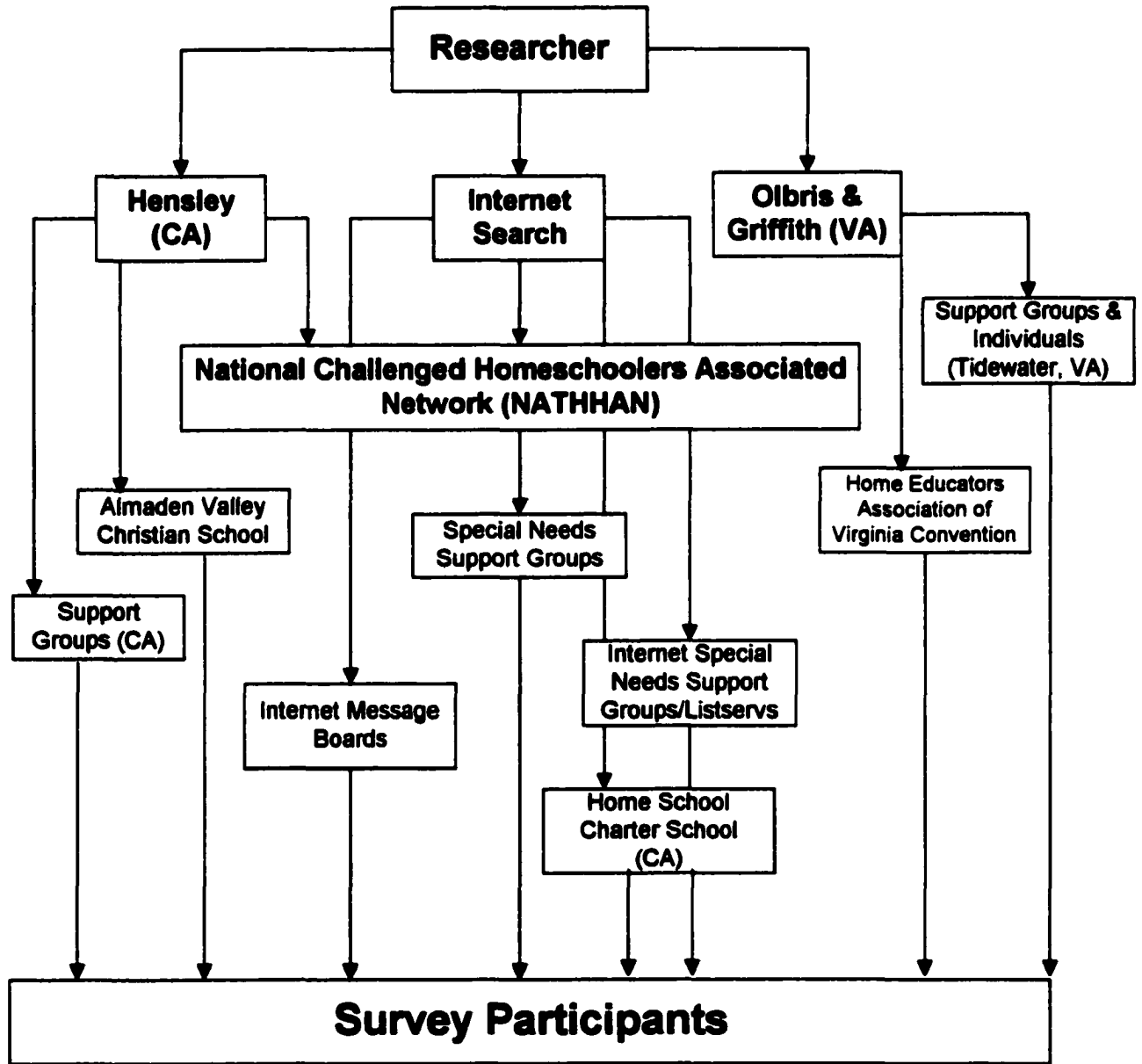
The procedures followed in Phase One of this study consisted of three stages: (a) pre-contact, (b) distribution of survey, and (c) follow-up procedures. Because of the mode of selection of participants in the first phase of this study, much of the discussion of procedures in participant selection is reiterated in this section. As noted earlier, initial contact was made with potential sources of participants through conversations with Sharon Hensley in California and Sarah Olbris and Coralie Griffith, both in Virginia. As a need for more sources of participants became evident, contact with additional support groups was made through National Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network and Internet searches.

Secondary points of contact emerged from the initial sources. Through Hensley, I accessed Tom Bushnell, director of National Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network. He and his organization were also referenced from Internet and various other home school sources. From his counsel, I subscribed to membership in the organization. Benefits of membership included receiving the newsletter with support group listings and the ability to place an advertisement to solicit survey participants. Olbris and Griffith both suggested possible local (Virginia) participants, and Griffith provided an access to a home school curriculum fair with the opportunity to distribute surveys. At this fair,

**contact was made with Home Educators Association of Virginia (HEAV), a statewide home school organization. Members of HEAV also agreed to distribute surveys at the Virginia Homeschooling Convention in June.**

**Initial searches on the Internet enabled me to discover a listing of all state home school support groups. Sending messages to those with Internet addresses brought referrals to special needs support groups, message boards, and listservs. Contacting these organizations by telephone and computer e-mail led to other sources of participants. Figure 6 shows the connections established and the sources.**

**Figure 6.** Graphic representation indicating the process of selection of survey participants and distribution of surveys.





Once participants were enlisted, surveys were sent accompanied by a cover letter (Appendix C). Surveys were distributed in person at the curriculum fair and Virginia State Homeschool Convention. These surveys also included a self-addressed, stamped envelope addressed to the researcher. Packets were sent to Hensley in Northern California and support groups in Massachusetts, Michigan, and Southern California; these surveys were distributed at meetings and also were accompanied with a self-addressed stamped envelope to be returned directly to the researcher. A mailing to a New York support group was made ready for mail with the survey, letter, and envelope enclosed; the support group leader there applied mailing labels. All of the completed surveys were mailed directly to me.

Participants contacted via the Internet elected to receive a survey and cover letter in a choice of three forms: (a) in the body of the e-mail, (b) as an attachment to e-mail, or (c) by sending a street address to receive a mailed survey. Those who received one of the electronic forms either completed the survey and returned it via the Internet or printed the survey and mailed it directly to me. The members of the AUT-2B-Home and Home Schooling Special Needs listservs received and returned their surveys through Karen Hillery who forwarded them to me via e-mail. These participants were particularly concerned about anonymity and wanted no possible identification of responses. When the NATHHAN Newsletter was published, respondents contacted me by telephone and e-mail and received surveys via the mail system of their choice.

Follow-up letters (Appendix D) were sent to Hensley and the NATHHAN coordinator in Massachusetts since their mailings were the largest and had little or no initial response six weeks into the study. After eight weeks, follow-up messages were

also posted on the Internet discussion lists and message boards since the members and visitors to these sites do not necessarily practice regular “attendance.” These follow-up measures did elicit a greater number of responses from all areas of contact. Messages to Griffith and Home Education Association of Virginia were also sent but failed to bring a response from those sources however. Occasionally, Internet respondents asked for greater clarification of research purpose and potential benefit for their participation (Appendix E) before they would agree to respond. These individuals required a response specific to the questions posed.

As noted earlier, the effort involved in distribution of the survey was much greater than had been expected. Not only was there the task of finding home schooling families who were eligible for the study, but also there was the effort to get the parents to agree to complete the survey and return it to me. Frequently, I had to respond to questions that emerged from a defensive posture of the home schooling community and mistrust of researchers and those who represent the world of traditional education. Relationships with key members of support groups had to be developed prior to asking for help in the research process. I had to become somewhat of an insider before members of the community would consider volunteering for participation in the study. Admittedly, my Christian school teaching background and prior experience with home schoolers was advantageous for entry into the community.

## Phase Two

### Instrumentation

Questions used in the interviews (Appendix F) were self-developed and similar to the questions found on the Phase One survey. After an introductory section of

demographic information, there were 12 open-ended questions focusing on various aspects of the home school experience. Although these questions comprised the formal interview protocol, there was opportunity to deviate from them during interviews to pursue opportunities for more in-depth responses. For the children, interviews consisted of a simpler protocol of six open-ended questions. These questions were basic guidelines since the interviews were dependent upon the age, ability, and approachability of the child.

During observations, the data gathering instrument is the researcher. As a researcher involved in phenomenological research, I prepared by bracketing my experiences and judgments made during the first phase of research and even prior to that time. This part of the research was particularly challenging since I had spent a prolonged amount of time devoted to the subject of home schooling and in the midst of home schooling families. By this point, I had already formed opinions and theories about home schooling in general and with families of special needs children. Nevertheless, I was determined to enter into the observation and interview phase ready to view the phenomenon from the experiences of the families I would observe.

To aid my observation, I followed the field observation protocol (Appendix H) taking field notes on the context of the home school, the participants' physical and behavioral characteristics, dialogue, and the process of the teaching/learning activities as well as contextual events occurring during the school day. Additionally, feelings and impressions were noted during and after the observations.

## Procedures

When I initially contacted the mother of each participant family, I introduced myself and described my research. In other words, I presented my “cover story” as suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p.32). During this introductory time, I also discussed what I hoped to do with the results of the research and gave a description of how the observations and interviews would proceed. I also noted that the research would be anonymous, confidential, and that it was properly sanctioned through the College’s Human Subjects Review Committee. Usually, these initial conversations were more than covering the necessities of the introduction; it was a time to establish a rapport with between the research participants and myself. To do so, I discussed my teaching experiences and my interests in home schooling referencing our contact person and any other mutual acquaintances. Being a mother, teacher, and having some insider knowledge of home schooling was definitely advantageous to gain entry to the homes of these families. During these conversations, I set up dates for the observations and interviews confirming again prior to the scheduled dates and times.

Interviews were held either before or after the school day dependent upon the schedule of the family. Each interview was audiotaped and later transcribed for member checking and data analysis. I conducted the two-day observations in the homes of the participants taking field notes on the second day as a participant observer, which meant I systematically experienced and recorded in detail the events within the setting. I also made notes of my own reflective thoughts during this time of observation.

## Data Analysis Procedures

Procedures used in data analysis must be appropriate to the type of data generated in data collection. Numerical data involves application of statistical techniques whereas narrative data involves a verbal analysis. Since instrumentation in this study generated both types of data, both quantitative and qualitative analysis procedures were applied to the data. The survey used in Phase One produced both quantitative and qualitative data while the observations and interviews in Phase Two generated only qualitative data.

### Phase One

Analysis of data was conducted using analysis appropriate to the type of data collected. Numerical data (e.g., number of years home schooling, educational levels of parents) was statistically analyzed. Means and standard deviations were computed for such data. For nominative data (e.g., occupations of parents, types of curricula used in home school), frequencies and percent of total responses were found. Data were entered by hand using SPSS for Windows (Version 6.1) (SPSS, Inc., 1994), a statistical program for the social sciences that was also used to perform data analysis. Findings were reported using tables and narrative summaries.

Open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis characteristic of the constant comparative method (Carney as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process takes information from data collection and compares it to emerging categories (Creswell, 1998). I interpreted themes and trends by identifying common and uncommon responses. First, responses were coded into categories of information that were segmented. Next, the themes and trends were identified by searching for relationships in the data. This analysis was also a point of reflection for the analysis carried out in the second phase of the study.

Findings were reported in narrative form and graphic models. The research questions with corresponding instrumentation and type of data analysis are displayed in Figure 7.

**Figure 7.** Research questions, instrumentation, and form of data analysis.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
<b>1. What are the demographic characteristics of home schooling families with special needs children?</b>	<b>Survey Pt. A Questions 1, 5, 6, 8-11</b>	<b>Descriptive statistics; means, standard deviations, frequencies</b>
<b>2. What are the educational backgrounds and training of the teacher-parents of special needs children?</b>	<b>Survey Pt. A Questions 1, 3-6</b>	<b>Descriptive statistics; means, standard deviations, frequencies</b>
<b>3. What are the special education classifications of the home schooled special needs children?</b>	<b>Survey Pt. B Questions 1-3</b>	<b>Descriptive statistics; means, standard deviations, frequencies</b>
<b>4. What are the rationales parents of special needs children give for choosing home education?</b>	<b>Survey Pt. B Question 10</b>	<b>Aggregating data by Common, uncommon responses; theme development</b>
<b>5. How can the home school be structured, what are the instructional practices, and what is the nature of the curriculum?</b>	<b>Survey Pt. B Questions 4-9</b>	<b>Descriptive statistics; frequencies</b>
<b>6. What are the home schooling parents' perceptions of the home schooling experience concerning academic and social progress?</b>	<b>Survey Pt. B Questions 11-14</b>	<b>Aggregating data by Common, uncommon responses; theme development</b>
<b>7. Do the factors that characterize the general population of home schooled children also characterize the population of home schooled special needs children?</b>	<b>Survey Pt. A all Pt. B questions 4,5, 8-10</b>	<b>Comparison of findings from present survey to those of Ray (1997) and Van Galen (1991)</b>

### Phase Two

Data analysis in the second phase of the study involved analyses of the interviews and observations of each case separately and then a cross-case analysis describing the emerging themes. Audiotaped interviews were transcribed and returned to the participants for member checking. Approved interview responses were then summarized in narrative form. Narrative accounts of the home schools were written based upon the field notes taken during observation. These accounts were reported in chronological order from the beginning to the end of my home visits.

After all home visits were completed and data summarized, a cross-case analysis was conducted. As with Part B questions in the survey, these narratives were also analyzed using thematic analysis characteristic of the constant comparative method. Again, I interpreted themes and trends by identifying common and uncommon responses that were coded into categories of information after being segmented. Next, the themes were identified by searching for relationships in the data. The final step was to develop and test propositions to construct an explanatory framework and reflect back to the findings of Phase One of the study (Carney as cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994).

#### Verification of Procedures

Creswell (1998) defined verification as “a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed” (p. 194). He recommended the use of at least two procedures to establish verification in a qualitative research study. Of the eight procedures listed by Creswell (pp. 201-203), seven were used in both phases of this study and are discussed below:

1. *Prolonged engagement and persistent observation* are means of building trust with participants and learning the culture. Although my four observations were of only two days length, I spent over two years building relationships within the home schooling community, attending group events, reading literature, and holding prolonged discussions with home schooling parents and students.
2. *Triangulation* is making use of multiple and different sources, methods, and theories to corroborate evidence. The use of three sources of data, survey, and interview were

selected in order to give different perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation.

3. *Researcher bias* was noted from the outset of the study to clarify researcher position and any biases or assumptions that might impact the inquiry.
4. *Member checks*, solicitation of informants' views of the credibility of the findings, were used after interviews were transcribed. The participants commented on the accuracy and credibility of the account adding information or correcting the transcript. One case mother telephoned later to update information she had previously supplied through the checked interview.
5. *External audit* is an examination of the process and product by an outside consultant to assess the accuracy. The purpose of the audit is to assess whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data. In this study, the doctoral dissertation committee reviewed the analysis of the case studies to assess the confirmability, dependability, and credibility. Additionally, Dr. Kathleen Hopkins, Director of the National Institute for Learning Disabilities, reviewed the process and product of the study providing the perspective of a special educator.
6. *Peer review or debriefing* is an external check of the research process provided by a peer to consult with the researcher on methods, meanings, and interpretations. During data collection and analysis, Sharon Chapman, a special education and early childhood expert, provided review and often extensive consultation on special education diagnoses and interpretation of findings. She also listened sympathetically to my concerns while providing insights into difficult areas of interpretation.



7. *Rich, thick description* describes in detail the participants and settings under study.

Such detailed description allows others to transfer information to other settings (transferability).

### **Ethical Safeguards**

#### **Phase One**

In order to conform to the regulations specified in Title 45 Part 46 (Department of Health and Human Services) and Title 34 Part 97 (Department of Education) of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46, 34 CFR 97) concerning the protection of human subjects involved in research, the survey and a written statement of purpose of the research was submitted to the School of Education Human Subjects Review Committee. The survey followed the guidelines established by the committee and was not distributed to participants until approval from the committee was given. No revisions were recommended from the committee prior to beginning the distribution of the surveys. The cover letter assured the participants of the anonymity of their responses and the voluntary nature of their participation. Pseudonyms were used when reporting the findings of the data including all the quotations contained herein.

#### **Phase Two**

In Phase Two of the research study, it was also necessary to conform to the regulations specified in Title 45 Part 46 (Department of Health and Human Services) and Title 34 Part 97 (Department of Education) of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46, 34 CFR 97) concerning the protection of human subjects involved in research. Therefore, interview questions, observation plan outline, field notes format, and a written statement of purpose of the research were also submitted to the School of Education

**Human Subjects Review Committee. The interview schedule followed the guidelines established by the committee, and observations and interviews were not conducted until approval from the committee was given. No revisions were recommended from the committee prior to beginning the second phase of research. Forms of consent/assent assured the participants of the anonymity of their responses and the voluntary nature of their participation. Pseudonyms were used when reporting the results of the data.**

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS: PHASE ONE

*We have made the decision to homeschool our son after six years in a private Christian school. The school is small and does not have the resources, staff, and time to give to the special needs children. He was lost in a class of nine children. Putting him in a public school class of 30+ in a small, upper middle class school, which staffs a full time police officer is not an option. I am apprehensive about my ability to give my son all he needs educationally but I know I can do as good or better than the school has been doing. He has been getting physical and occupational therapy through the public school this year and they are willing to do special math and language classes as well. If this does not work out, I will hire a tutor to work with him in these areas. The rest I feel I can handle. I am looking for a special curriculum to meet his needs. Our son's social life at school was not beneficial. He needs a more structured social environment, which we will be able to provide.*

**-Home school mother, Massachusetts**

**This chapter presents the results of data collection from the first phase of the research study. The results from the survey are summarized herein. These findings include (a) information regarding the family, such as demographic data, as well as educational background and professional training of parents in education and special education; (b) information regarding the children in the family including schooling information about the children with special needs; and (c) parents' rationale for choosing to home school their special needs children and parents' perceptions of the home schooling experience for their special needs children, their families, and themselves. Open-ended responses to each question were categorized. All responses were then analyzed according to the emerging themes.**

### **Information Regarding the Family**

**Phase One of the research study began with the distribution of surveys on May 20, 1999, at a home school curriculum fair and continued with postal service and electronic mailings until the end of July. The cutoff for returned surveys was August 5, 1999. At that time, 100 surveys (out of approximately 600) representing 100 home schooling families with 144 special needs children were returned. Those surveys that were returned after the cutoff date were examined to note any responses that did not support the findings presented below.**

#### **Family Demographics**

**Of the 100 families participating in the survey phase of this study, 97 (97%) were two parent families with the 3 (3%) single parent families represented by the mother. However, one of the single parent families did include information about the father. The participating families lived primarily in suburban settings (48%), followed closely by 44% in rural settings, and only 8% in urban settings. The racial/ethnic backgrounds of the parents are listed in Table 1, which shows that the parents are predominantly White with small percentages of the other races and ethnic backgrounds represented in this group of participants. It should be noted that two of the single mothers did not share racial/ethnic background information of the fathers of their children.**

**Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds of Home Schooling Parents of Special Needs Children Completing Survey (N=100)**

Race/Ethnicity	Father		Mother	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
White (not Hispanic)	87	88.8	88	88
Black	1	1	1	1
Hispanic	6	6.1	6	6
Asian	1	1	1	1
Pacific Island	1	1	0	0
Native American/Alaskan native	2	2	4	4
Total	98 <sup>a</sup>	100	100	100

<sup>a</sup>Two respondents did not provide race/ethnicity of father.

Parents were asked to state their primary occupation, profession, or trade. Their responses were then assigned to one of 17 categories that appeared on Ray's (1997) questionnaire. In terms of occupations, professions, or trades, 19% of the fathers classified themselves in Ray's Professional I category (as an accountant, registered nurse, social worker, actor, artist, or writer). Each receiving twelve percent were two other categories: Professional II (minister, doctor, lawyer, or college professor) and tradesperson (housepainter, plumber, carpenter, chef, or auto mechanic) (see Table 2). Mothers' declared occupations were compared to the question about employment outside the home since several mothers noted previous occupations before having children as well as the occupation of homemaker. Seventy-four percent stated that they were primarily homemakers/home educators while 10% classified themselves in the Professional I category (accountant, registered nurse, writer, social worker) (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Primary Occupations, Professions, or Trades of Home Schooling Parents**  
(N=100)

Occupation	Father		Mother	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Farmer, farm manager	2	2	0	0
Homemaker, home educator	1	1	74	74
Laborer (construction, farm worker, car washer)	8	8	0	0
Manager (sales, office, school administration)	5	5	2	2
Military (officer or enlisted)	4	4	0	0
Office worker (administrative assistant, clerk, bookkeeper)	1	1	2	2
Operator of machines (meat cutter, welder, cab/bus/truck driver)	9	9	0	0
Owner of small business, restaurant, contractor	3	3	2	2
Professional I (accountant, RN, engineer, banker, writer, social worker, actor, artist – not school teacher)	19	19	10	10
Professional II (minister, dentist, doctor, lawyer, scientist, college professor)	12	12	1	1
Protective service (police, firefighter, security)	3	3	0	0
Sales (representative, advertising, insurance, realtor)	7	7	2	2
School teacher (k-12)	2	2	2	2
Service worker (hair stylist, child care, waiter, domestic, maintenance)	3	3	3	3
Technical (computer programmer, medical technician)	7	7	0	0
Tradesperson (baker, auto mechanic, housepainter, plumber, carpenter)	12	12	0	0
Other	2	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Eleven percent of the mothers were employed outside the home, working a mean of 21.7 hours,  $SD = 9.84$  hours. The number of children in the participant families ranged from one to ten with a mean of 3.33 children,  $SD = 1.66$  children. Thirty-six percent of the families had four or more children. When the parents were asked later to list the children by age and gender, some of the parents did not list adult children. Therefore, the 333 total children of the 100 families were reduced to 290 children for purposes of rendering schooling information.

**Information Regarding Educational Background and Training of Parents**

The mean years of formal education of the fathers was 14.79,  $SD = 2.73$ . Forty-eight percent held bachelor's degrees or higher as compared to 41% of the mothers. The mean number of years of formal education for the mothers was 14.29,  $SD = 2.14$ . The percentage of the mothers contributing to the formal academic teaching of the children was 96% as compared to 66% of fathers. Ninety-seven percent of the fathers who were responsible for the formal academic teaching contributed 30% or less of the time whereas 80% of the mothers were responsible for 80% and greater of the time. Additionally, 27% of the families cited a variety of other family members or professionals sharing in the teaching process. The other teachers included tutors, family members, therapists, professional teachers and aides, and conventional schools. Table 3 shows the mean percentages of the teaching time of the parents and others. The large standard deviations indicate the large variability of the amount of time devoted to instruction by the teaching parents and others.

**Table 3. Percentage of Formal Academic Teaching Conducted by Parents and Others in Home Schools Participating in Survey (N=100)**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b><i>N</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b> <b><i>% of Total Time</i></b> <b><i>(100%)</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
<b>Father</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>12.23</b>	<b>14.92</b>
<b>Mother</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>86.55</b>	<b>18.28</b>
<b>Other:</b>	<b>27:</b>	<b>18.81</b>	<b>18.52</b>
<b>Tutor</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>Family member (sister, grandparent, uncle)</b>	<b>5</b>		
<b>Therapists (Speech, OT, PT)</b>	<b>4</b>		
<b>School</b>	<b>8</b>		
<b>Teachers/aides</b>	<b>5</b>		

Of the 98 fathers responding, 6 (6.1%) had been state certified teachers with 5 (5.1%) other fathers receiving training in the education of special needs children. The training experiences included completing a master's degree in special education (1), taking college courses (2), and attending workshops and conferences (2). Of the 100 mothers participating in the study, 12% had been state certified as teachers and 30% had received training in special education. Their training ranged from formal university coursework producing bachelor's (3) and master's (1) degrees in special education to self-education (4). In between these two ends of the training spectrum were mothers taking college courses, working as teaching assistants in special education classrooms, and attending conferences and workshops sponsored by special educators and organizations devoted to training in special education. There was a wide range of training options. Of the 30 responses, no two answers were the same and no particular pattern to participation in training was evident. Some examples of parent training follow below:

- "I attend any class that I can."
- "I taught at a private elementary school many years ago and I did extensive personal research at the local library on autism spectrum disorders."
- "Bachelors in MR, graduate work in LD and BD."
- "I have self-educated in this area by reading such books as *Teaching the Dyslexic Child* by Anita Griffiths and meeting with the social worker who has a masters in learning disabilities."

#### **Information Regarding the Children**

As noted earlier, the 100 families represented in the surveys had a total of 333 children. The parents later listed 290 children stating ages, genders, number of years



home schooled and conventionally schooled, and noted if receiving special education placement. Several parents noted that they did not include older children no longer of school age on the second question perhaps accounting for the 43 children not specified later. Table 4 depicts the results of that question. The ages ranged from infancy (assigned a value of 0.5 years) to 30 years, the mean being 9.8 years. The gender of the children was divided evenly, 50% (145) males and females. The mean number of years being educated at home was 3.8 years and for conventional schooling for home schooled children was 3.6 years. Of the 290 children, 220 (76%) were home schooled for some or all of their formal education. Of those 220 children, 115 (52%) had also been conventionally schooled at some time. Of these conventionally schooled children, 66 (57%) had received a special education placement in which they remained for a mean of 2.9 years. The families had 70 children (24%) who were never home schooled and attended conventional schools.

**Table 4. Age, Gender, Number of Years and Setting of Schooling Experience of Children in Participating Families.**

<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>N</i> responses</b>	<b><i>M</i> In years</b>	<b><i>SD</i> In years</b>
<b>Age</b>	290	9.81	5.36
<b>Number of years home schooled</b>	220 <sup>a</sup>	3.77	2.94
<b>Number of years conventionally schooled (home schoolers)</b>	115 <sup>b</sup>	3.64	2.46
<b>Number of years receiving special education placement</b>	66	2.93	2.22

<sup>a</sup>Not all children in families were home schooled.

<sup>b</sup>115 of the 220 had been or were enrolled in conventional schools.

Of the 290 children listed, 144 were children who were diagnosed with special needs. Eighty-three (57.6%) were males while 61 (42.4%) were female. The ages of the children ranged from one to 19 years with a mean of 9.0 years,  $SD = 4.1$  years. Seventy-

seven percent (111 children) were determined eligible for special education services by the public schools. The parents reported that 133 of their children had received an Individualized Education Program (IEP): 65% (87) through the public school, 5% (7) through a private physician, 6% (8) through an educational consultant, and 1.5% (2) developed by a parent. By a strict definition, an IEP is a document developed through professionals in a public school district as designated through P. L. 94-142. However, private physicians, educational consultants, and some private schools also prepare similar documents for special needs students and refer to these programs as IEPs. Therefore, some families responding to this survey claimed to have an IEP for their special needs children whether provided by the public school district or some private source. As far as the time the IEP had been received, parents only stated the date for 103 of those students that had been indicated as receiving one. The children ranged from having just received an IEP to having one awarded 14 years ago. The mean number of years was 4.3,  $SD = 3.68$ .

Parents were asked to state the special education diagnosis of their special needs children in the survey. The requested information included the specificity of the diagnosis, the place and time of diagnosis as well as if eligibility was determined by the public school system. Several problems arose in tabulating the results of that question. First of all, some parents gave medical diagnoses, such as fetal alcohol syndrome or Down syndrome. It was necessary then to look at other information given later in the responses (for example, therapies received) to determine the possible educational significance of the medical condition. Also, parents stated terms, such as *developmentally delayed* and *communication disorder*, which are broad terms and can refer to children

with several categories of disabilities. Because of the number of similar responses, the diagnoses were grouped into categories that are specified under federal guidelines, some that are recognized under these more general terms, and some under more specific terms. Also, as is frequently the case in special needs students, more than one diagnosis might be applicable. Fifty-three percent of these children had two or more diagnoses, the most frequent being the combination of attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD) and learning disability. Table 5 displays the frequencies of the diagnoses.

**Table 5. Frequency of Special Needs Diagnoses of Home Schooling Children with Special Needs Participating in Survey as Reported by Parents, (N=100)**

Category	<i>f</i> of Diagnoses					Total	Total %
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>		
ADD/ADHD	38	5	1			44	18.6
Learning disability	30	28	1			59	24.9
Visual impairment	3					3	1.3
Emotional Disturbance	4	2	2	1		9	3.8
Mental retardation (Down syndrome)	17 (12)	1	1			19	8
Orthopedic impairment	8	2	1			11	4.6
Speech & language impairment (communication disorder)	12 (6)	5	1	2		20	8.4
Hearing impairment	5					5	2.1
Other health impairment	5	3				8	3.4
Pervasive developmental disorder (autism specified) (Asperger's syndrome specified)	14 (5) (5)	5		1	1	21	8.9
Developmental delay	7	3	1			11	4.6
Multiple disabilities	1	2				3	1.3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>100</b>

When parents were asked where these diagnoses were performed, 98 parents responded. The most common response was a public school team (33.7%). Fifteen percent each were diagnosed through medical facilities while private physicians

diagnosed 13% of the children. Thirteen percent were also diagnosed at birth with congenital conditions. Of the parents who responded to this question, 52% stated that their children were found eligible for special education by the public schools (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Place of Diagnosis and Determination of Public School Special Education Eligibility, (N=98)**

<b>Place of Diagnosis</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Public School Eligibility <i>f</i></b>	<b>% Receiving Eligibility</b>
<b>Medical facilities (hospitals, children's hospitals, public health clinic)</b>	15	15.3	13	86.7
<b>Diagnosed at birth</b>	13	13.3	12	92.3
<b>Private specialist (child psychiatrist, neurologist, geneticist, audiologist)</b>	13	13.3	8	61.5
<b>Private physician (non-specific)</b>	11	11.2	7	63.6
<b>Special education institutions (Center for reading &amp; learning disabilities, preschool for language delayed, Davis Dyslexic Institute, United Cerebral Palsy Association)</b>	4	4.1	1	25
<b>Public School (including early intervention program)</b>	33	33.7	24	72.7
<b>Private school</b>	3	3.1	0	0
<b>Private service (reading specialist, tester)</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>Rehabilitation facility</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>College diagnostic center</b>	2	2	1	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>98<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>66</b>

<sup>a</sup>Two respondents did not provide place of diagnosis

### Home School Curriculum

In order to determine how academic needs of their special needs children were met, the home schooling parents in this study were asked to select the type of curriculum used from a choice of five types: curricular package, parent-designed curriculum, program provided by a school, correspondence course, and other – an open-ended choice. Additionally, parents could elaborate on any of the responses. All 100 parents selected at least one type of curriculum choice while 37% (37 parents) indicated another choice also. The most common selection (58%) for curriculum was a parent-designed curriculum where the components were selected by the parents. Several respondents discussed the different publishers used for the subject matter and programs. Twenty-three percent selected a packaged curriculum, such as offered by A Beka Publishing or Bob Jones University. Six percent used a curriculum provided by either a public or private school while 11% selected “other.” Of the 15 parents who checked the other category, ten were additional sources of curriculum and five were the sole source. These five designated “unschooling” as the curricular choice. Unschooling refers to the practice by some home schoolers to choose everyday life as the curriculum. The interests, needs, and abilities of the children dictate their approach. It is a child-centered, relaxed approach to education (Montgomery, 1995). Table 7 indicates the choices of curriculum.

**Table 7. Curriculum Choices of Home Schooling Parents for Their Special Needs Children, (N=100)**

<b>Curriculum Selected</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Curricular package:</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22.6</b>
<b>A Beka</b>	<b>10</b>	
<b>Bob Jones University</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Sonlight</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Rod &amp; Staff</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Alpha Omega</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Others</b>	<b>6</b>	
<b>Parent-designed</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>58.4</b>
<b>Program provided by local school</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5.8</b>
<b>Public school</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>Private</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Correspondence course (Seton Home Study, Hewitt, Christian Liberty Academy)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10.9</b>
<b>Unschooling</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Library books</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Other (cooperative parent classes, computer software, Internet, programs from special education institutes)</b>	<b>7</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>100</b>

A large majority of the families (91%) noted the use of computers in the home as opposed to 9% without. All of the computer-using families indicated an education-related use of the computer. The 91 families cited 141 ways in which the children made use of the computer from educational review, drill and games in subject matter to word processing and researching. The children also utilized the Internet and various programs specific to special needs and early learning. One child, "a six year old quadriplegic even used a touch window with mouth for educational and fun purposes." Computer use and

software purchased seemed to be specific to the age, ability, and need of the children within the respondent's family.

### Support Services

Parents were asked to indicate the number and kinds of support services their children received through the various types of therapies, part-time enrollment in a conventional school, or support groups, tutors, and consultants. As far as support services available through the public schools or a private setting, 76% of the parents indicated that their children received the various services available. These 76 families used 205 services in various combinations. The frequencies and options are indicated in Table 8 below.

**Table 8. Support Services Received by the Special Needs Children, (N=76)**

Support Service	Frequencies	
	Public School	Private Setting
Physical therapy	18	11
Speech/language therapy	32	33
Occupational therapy	24	26
Biofeedback therapy	3	1
Vision therapy	11	0
Psychological counseling	18	4
Learning disability therapy	5	4
Other (itinerant teacher, therapeutic horseback riding, sensory integration, behavior modification, audiologist, yoga)	10	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>84</b>



Twenty-four percent of the respondents (n=24) indicated that their special needs children were enrolled on a part-time basis in a conventional school. Twenty-three of the families indicated the specific classes or services their children attended. Table 9 lists those indications.

**Table 9. Classes or Services for Part-time Students**

<b>Classes or Services Provided by Conventional School</b>	<i>f</i>
<b>Physical and occupational math and language</b>	1
<b>Physical education</b>	1
<b>Kindergarten</b>	1
<b>Speech pathology</b>	1
<b>Speech class</b>	3
<b>Preschool home services</b>	1
<b>For various therapies(speech, OT, LD, biofeedback) – school setting is mostly for “babysitting” so mother can attend college classes</b>	1
<b>Reading</b>	3
<b>School for the deaf</b>	1
<b>Afternoon classes</b>	1
<b>Full-time public home school charter school</b>	1
<b>One class each quarter at a private school (art, science, etc)</b>	1
<b>Vocational training</b>	1
<b>Resource – English and math</b>	1
<b>Summer school for special ed.</b>	1
<b>Therapies</b>	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>

A large majority of the home school families (97%) availed themselves of a variety of support services and organizations. Of the respondents, only three indicated no involvement; one stated, “I am simply too busy to join [an organization].” However, it should be noted that this respondent’s survey was distributed through some sort of support group – whether one with a geographical setting or the Internet. Eighty-two percent of the families indicated involvement with a local or statewide support group. Fifty percent of the families joined a support group that is specified for families with

special needs children. Fourteen of these respondents indicated membership in Parents Instructing Challenged Children (PICC) in New York State. Since the coordinator of this group had distributed surveys to its membership, this citation was expected. Another large indication of membership (54%) is that in Home School Legal Defense Association. Table 10 displays the various uses of support groups and organization by the home school families.

**Table 10. Other Support Services and Organizations Used by Home Schooling Families, (N=97)**

<b>Support Service or Organization</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>	<b>% of respondents</b>
<b>Local or state home school support group:</b>	<b>82:</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Local</b>	<b>37</b>	
<b>State</b>	<b>22</b>	
<b>No specific affiliation noted</b>	<b>23</b>	
<b>Home schooling special needs support group</b>	<b>50:</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>NATHHAN</b>	<b>18</b>	
<b>PREACCH</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Other (PICC, Almaden Valley Christian School, Deaf Homeschool Network, Internet groups)</b>	<b>24</b>	
<b>None indicated</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Educational consultant</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Umbrella school</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Home School Legal Defense Association</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Tutor (academic subjects, speech, piano)</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Other:</b>	<b>20:</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Respite care and nursing</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>In-home aide</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Teachers</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Therapists</b>	<b>3</b>	
<b>Professional organization (Lighthouse for Blind, Society for Autistic Children)</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>No specific example given</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Total number of options selected</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>97</b>

### Extracurricular Activities

The final question on the short answer part of the survey featured extracurricular activities of the special needs children. Parents were offered 11 options and an “other” category. Ninety-nine percent of the families indicated an involvement in at least one activity for the students. Students averaged 4.14 activities per child. The frequencies of the selections, along with the various other choices, are listed in Table 11. The most frequently selected activities were Sunday school (77%) and field trips (75%).

**Table 11. Extracurricular Activities of Students with Special Needs, (N=99)**

Extracurricular Activity	<i>f</i>	% of respondents
Group sports	44	44
Sunday school	77	77
Field trips	75	75
Music classes/band	28	28
4-H	14	14
Youth group	34	34
Ballet/dance lessons	18	18
Art classes	21	21
Volunteer work	28	28
Scouts	17	17
Karate	10	10
Other (consisting of one or several of the below):	44	44
Horseback riding	7	
Swimming	6	
Gymnastics	12	
Various church, outdoor and social activities	33	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>99</b>

## **Parents' Rationales and Perceptions**

### **Parents' Rationales**

**When parents were asked why they chose to home school their special needs child or children, they provided reasons that fit into nine basic categories. These categories (and percentage of parents responded with that answer) included**

- 1. Dissatisfaction with conventional schooling (61%),**
- 2. Consistency with family dynamics (27%),**
- 3. Desire to follow and teach religious values (26%),**
- 4. One-on-one attention (19%),**
- 5. Customized curriculum and instruction (16%),**
- 6. Protection from others (10%),**
- 7. Best environment (7%),**
- 8. Health issues (5%), and**
- 9. Safety (3%).**

### **Dissatisfaction with Conventional Schooling**

**Fifty-one percent of the parents gave multiple reasons, combinations of the above categories, as their response to this question. Conversely, 49% cited a single category, the most common being dissatisfaction with their school system. Sixty-one percent of all respondents expressed their criticism. When analyzing the specific reasons for dissatisfaction, the responses were categorized in descending order. Note that there were overlapping categories. Therefore, the percent of responses is greater than 100.**

- 1. A negative experience in school (39%)**
- 2. Poor reputation of public schools (31%)**

3. **Non-compliance of schools to provide required services (23%)**
4. **Not enough attention (8%)**
5. **Not meeting student's needs (7%)**
6. **Unsafe environment (5%)**

**A negative experience.** Twenty-four parents cited a negative schooling experience for their children. Two examples of such dissatisfaction follow below:

**We chose to homeschool our children because of a teacher who was swearing, throwing items, was cruel and attacked lunchroom staff physically and verbally in front of children at lunchtime. We'd repeatedly reported this teacher. She's tenured. We quit.**

**I tried for a year and a half to get a good IEP and then to get it enforced by the school. The principal was non-supportive stating, "The slim rewards of teaching your child simply aren't worth the challenges she presents." She was illegally restrained and repeatedly punished for the manifestations of her disability. . . finally, I decided it would be easier to teach her than to teach the teachers and more effective in the long run.**

**Poor reputation of public schools.** For 19 of the respondents, they chose to not use the public school system because of a perceived poor reputation:

- **"I knew the local school district has poor results."**
- **"I was not impressed with the local schools. I didn't want her placed into the special education program because I didn't feel it could meet all her needs."**
- **"I don't have much confidence in public schools."**

**Noncompliance of schools to provide required services.** Fourteen respondents complained of services denied or not provided to their children as in the following example: “[We chose to home school] because the public school system refused to give her speech services to which she was entitled.”

**Not enough attention.** Five parents desired for their children more attention than they perceived was available in the public schools. One parent noted, “ We could not get adequate attention for her needs.” Another parent commented, “I decided that the teachers simply were not paying close enough attention to him.”

**Not meeting needs.** Four of the respondents specifically stated that their child’s need were not being met as in the following examples:

- “Their needs were not being met. The school had set below standard expectations and our children were performing to their low expectations. The school could not give the children what they needed to learn.”
- “Public school was not meeting her needs.”

**Unsafe environment.** For three parents, they chose to home school their children because of a safety issue. For these parents, their criticism of the public schools was a matter of not being able to provide a safe environment:

- “The public school simply cannot offer a safe environment for my children.”
- “Because we felt he would better off learning in a safe, familiar environment.”

### **Consistency with Family Dynamics**

Twenty-seven percent of the parents chose home education because the practice was in line with their family values. Often they were already home schooling their “regular education” children so that it was a natural progression to home school a child

even if there were a special need. One parent declared, “ I wanted to homeschool all of my children together. Isolating my deaf son by sending him to public school would have many negative effects on his self-esteem and family relationships.” Another parent noted, “I was already homeschooling his four older siblings, so it seems rather like the natural flow of things.”

Some of the respondents also felt that the home environment was a more stable environment for education, particularly for the special needs child. One parent stated this sentiment this way: “We felt . . . the family environment would benefit her and we wanted her to be a part of our learning environment.” Similarly, another parent answered by noting that home schooling provided “stability during family crises. Over time, children are more settled, quiet, assured. There is less pressure to perform and less risk for behavior problems.”

#### **Desire to Follow and Teach Religious Values**

The third most cited reason for choosing home instruction was a desire to teach or follow religious values and beliefs. This selection was often in conjunction with another reason (69% of the time), and parents generally did not expound upon their choice:

- “Schools were spiritually lacking.”
- “We want him to have a Christian-based education.”
- “It became a calling from God.”
- “Religious reasons”
- “God wants us to raise godly children.”
- “God-directed”

Only three of the responses specifically made reference to Christian values. Eight of the respondents felt that they were mandated by God to teach their own children at home, and that directive included all the children, no matter how challenging: “I believed from the beginning that it was God’s will for us to home school Robbie. This has been a source of great strength to me because it has not been easy.”

### One-on-one Attention

Nineteen percent of the parents were interested in providing the maximum teacher/student ratio – one-on-one instruction. Often they noted that the public school could not provide what they felt was this needed attention: “My son needed one to one instruction; the school did not address this.” Nineteen percent of the parents expressed this need as a reason to educate their special needs child at home. Typically, they expressed this instruction as one-on-one or one-to-one attention, tutoring, or instruction.

### Customized Curriculum and Instruction

Customizing curriculum and instruction to the needs of their special needs children was the rationale mentioned by 16% of the respondents. They expressed this reason by citing the ability to adjust to the learning style and pace of the child, as well as to the demands of the schedule of the child or parent. Five parents specifically cited adjusting the learning experiences to the pace of the child. Others discussed matching the teaching/learning experiences to the needs of the child:

- “I want to meet her needs . . . and design a curriculum to help fix the weak points and build up the strong.”
- “My children have one area, which means they need a lot of extra attention . . . they excel in other areas. There is no way that the school system could support them in the



area which they need assistance and let them move ahead in the areas in which they are gifted.”

- “They needed more living skills, less ‘this is a circle – color it red.’”

Other parents discussed the need to have a more flexible schedule due to meeting the needs of the child with support services; some children were missing time at school and having to make up work.

### Protection from Others

Several (10) parents expressed a strong concern over the issue of being able to shelter their children from teasing of other children in a conventional school setting. They often stated that they wanted to protect or build up their child’s self-esteem:

- “She was suffering from low self-esteem from other children in school who made her feel dumb.”
- “The real world does not tease and mock the weak. I didn’t want our daughter’s spirit and self-esteem hurt by the stupidity of her peers”.
- “My child was picked on and intimidated by other students. He needed . . . a safe environment which public schools couldn’t provide (safe environment = emotional safety, free from name calling like ‘retard,’ tripping intentionally by other students along with his ataxia that would cause him to fall naturally). . . protecting him from the emotional scars inflicted by other students.”

One parent noted that her child had even been physically and sexually assaulted in the public school. Another respondent objected to the special education label placed on the child, fearing for his self-image.

### **Best Environment**

Some parents saw home schooling as an opportunity to provide a way to help their child “excel to the greatest potential.” These seven parents gave positive responses that were not reactive to negative experiences a child had in a conventional school setting. Generally, they saw home schooling as a “superior education” or a practice they had wanted to pursue prior to having children. Three parents were counseled into home schooling after their children has been tested and evaluated for the special need:

- “Public school social worker believes child will thrive at home and not at school.”
- “A private child psychologist evaluated him and recommended homeschooling as an option.”
- “Due to the severity of his dyslexia, his testers told us that it was good he was not exposed to a regular school setting. He would have undoubtedly suffered emotional damage.”

### **Health Issues**

Because of some of the health issues of the special needs children represented in this survey, five parents chose to educate them at home. All but one parent mentioned the reason in general terms; one parent cited the fact that the student had an autoimmune deficiency.

### **School Safety**

Three respondents spoke to the issue of school safety outside the realm of emotional safety. One parent summed up the other responses by stating, “ The public school simply cannot offer a safe environment for my children.”

### Academic Progress of the Special Needs Children

In the next open-ended question, parents described the academic progress of their special needs children since beginning the home schooling process. Seventeen percent of the respondents had an opportunity to compare progress to a conventional school experience. However, since some parents had only educated these children at home, there was no basis of comparison to any other setting. As a matter of fact, one parent, seemingly misunderstanding the question, stated that “there was no comparison – have always home schooled.”

In general, there was an overall positive tone to the responses of the survey participants. A word count found the following frequencies of words associated with positive progress:

- *Progress* or *progressing*, as used in a positive connotation – 20
- *Good progress* – 5
- *Better* – 8
- *Improved greatly* – 4
- *Progressing well* or *doing well* – 18

Of the 100 responses, only three could be considered somewhat negative or neutral, as the above response, while 96 claimed a degree of academic progress. One response was not readable. The two responses that were toward the negative side were from parents of children with multiple handicaps. They reported academic progress was “very slow” and “limited – severely handicapped.”

The more positive responses claimed some degree of progress academically for their special needs child or children. However, these responses were on a continuum from

enthusiasm to a somewhat guarded optimism. The more enthusiastic claims of progress are represented by the following answers:

Where do I begin? Michele (6 – Downs syndrome) is about  $\frac{1}{2}$  way through the kindergarten program. She can visually spot A through Z (upper and lower case) pretty well, phonetically sound out 13 letters, 40 to 50 sight words, plus 20 or so phonetically sounded out words. She sits and reads our homemade books with four and six word sentences. Math skills – visually spot 1 to 10 and count random objects (1– 5).

Our oldest (LD) just finished sixth grade and is reading at the eighth grade level. Her writing is at the fifth grade and math at 5.5 grade-level. Our 7 year old (LD) finished the first grade and has severe reading problems but has been able to score in social sciences at second or third grade levels. Our kindergartner (autistic) is at mid-first grade in all subjects. Our son (ADHD) finished first grade in June scoring in all subjects at third or fourth grade level.

When I started, I was told my son (9 – Downs syndrome, ADHD) had no concept of math; now, he can add and subtract to the 7s, count to 20, recognize the numbers to 00, identify all 5 coins, know the values of penny, nickel, dime, and tell time to the half hour. He started out reading only 10 words; now he can read over 100 sight words. He knows approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the states, can write his name and is beginning cursive writing, can produce all isolated sounds and blends (still has trouble with sentences).

At the other end of the continuum, the responses were less enthusiastic and testimonial in nature: “It is slow going, but one can gauge the speed and introduction of material.” Another parent reported that the progress for one child with a learning disability was “very gradual” while that of another child with ADHD and autism came in “leaps and setbacks and then leaps again.” One respondent expressed frustration over a question that asked for progress, an element that is usually measured through numbers and test results: “I cannot claim to be doing a better job than the public school system. However, I know that I am not doing worse. I just feel it can’t be adequately measured. My dyslexic boys read very well considering their disability. They do not spell or write well, however.”

In between these two ends of the continuum, were responses that ranged from giving general evidence of progress to those answers that cited more specific progress.

Examples of general claims follow:

- “Our children have all progressed at a pace that is appropriate for their IQs and family situations.”
- “She is testing above her grade level now in most areas.”
- “All are making steady progress.”

More specific evidence is cited in the following responses:

He (11 year old with cerebral palsy, ADD, mental retardation) learned alphabet, sounds, and is now reading at a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level. He has learned to read and write numbers, add and do other 1<sup>st</sup> grade math. He completed a 1<sup>st</sup> grade spelling book and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade map skills this year as well as 1 ½ years worth of phonics and reading books.

**Michael (autistic) learned to read through a computer CD ROM program called Color Phonics when he was 7 years old. Before that time, he was sight-reading. After the program, he could read anything. His comprehension and abstract thinking are still delayed by about 2 years. Michael has a very high visual spatial ability (it would equate to a 200 IQ if splinter skills were counted as such). He is very good at certain math calculations but he has more difficulty with word problems so I keep him on grade level in math. He signed onto the computer at age 2 and has been reconfiguring it ever since. He wrote the alphabet at age 2 before he said his first word at age 3. He wrote in cursive when he was 4 and could draw anything perfectly with extensive detail. He has always been able to sit down at a piano and pick out a tune by ear, even when he was a toddler.**

**Reporting academic progress with special needs students does not always lend itself to test scores and traditional means of noting progress. However, 28 respondents did report either testing information or grade level placement. Tests cited for achievement levels were Iowa Test of Basic Skills (1), and California Achievement Test (2).**

**Otherwise, parents used the general term *test* and referred to grade levels achieved.**

**Examples of these responses include the following:**

- **“Two years ago he scored 1% on the California Achievement Test, this year he scored 22%.”**
- **“She is testing above her age level now in most areas.”**

- **“He went up two grade levels after one year of home schooling.”**

**Progress noted was generally in the traditional core learning areas like mathematics and reading. However, some parents did discuss more specific skills, such as “improved receptive and expressive language” and “fine motor and gross motor skills.”**

**Sometimes imbedded in the responses were references to issues that parents felt impacted the academic progress. One such area was the effect of attitude and self-esteem. Eight respondents expressed this perception as evidenced in these examples:**

- **“They have more confidence in themselves and are able to do a lot more schoolwork for themselves.”**
- **“My son is now working at grade level on all subjects, is able to read and learn new subject, has a willingness to try where it did not exist before.”**
- **“She has begun to like learning again for the most part and gets some satisfaction out of doing her schoolwork well and correctly. By the time we took her out of school, she disliked schoolwork and was apathetic about her performance.”**

**Another area of concern for parents of children with ADD and ADHD was the necessity of medication in conventional schools. Three respondents noted the need to adapt teaching methodology to child’s needs in order to ensure academic progress without use of medication.**

- **“She has discovered that she CAN learn and is learning on grade level, given visual stimuli for every lesson and allowing breaks and redirection, (ADHD).”**
- **“My child is off medicine and is able to do all subjects with help. Reading is hard but he has improved 2 ½ grade levels at home.”**

- **“The doctors diagnosed ADHD, but we did not want medication. I did research and allowed him to move and do his schoolwork (move small objects, tap foot, walk, rock his body). We also got a dog so he would stop touching us. He touched the dog all day (dog loved it – thank God !).”**

**Because many of the children represented in this survey are not evaluated for academic achievement through standardized tests as are their peers in regular education classes in schools and home schools, it is not possible to compare the progress of these students against their peers in conventional schools. Progress was reported through parental perception. Additionally, it was difficult to categorize responses to this question. There were such a wide variety of answers. Since each family had a unique situation as did each child considered for academic progress, the closest attempt to grouping common responses was as reported above. However, it became apparent that the parents participating in this survey were generally positive about the academic progress of their special needs children.**

### **Social Progress**

**When participants addressed the question of how they perceived the social progress of their special needs child or children, their responses generally could be placed into three categories: (1) average progress in relationship to the age, grade, or disability; (2) distinct improvement since home schooling; or (3) no improvement. All these responses were unique to the family situation and usually had concurrent issues that ran through them as parents relayed their perceptions.**

**Furthermore, it should be noted that 10 parents did not answer this question. Two respondents felt that the question needed clarification; two were offended by the question**



since the issue of socialization is a sensitive one with home schooling families. As a matter of fact, in a subsequent question dealing with the frustrations of the home schooling experience, it was precisely this issue that many parents cited. A survey respondent noted on a listserv communication this opinion:

I find it almost ironic that people worry so much about social issues and try and make parents feel guilty when they chose not to send their children to school. In a day where you can turn on the TV or radio at almost any given moment and hear of horrible things where kids are shooting, raping, stabbing, robbing, and everything else at the school itself. What kind of social skills are we making our kids have when they go to school as if it is a war zone?

Other parents did not answer the question at all or included the response in the academic category expressed as a general “progressing well.” One parent also voiced an opinion regarding the scope and intent of the questioning:

You ask for the academic and social progress. Are these the only areas you are interested in or are that they are the only areas you want to tackle in your study? What about the emotional and physical progress? What about the decrease of behavior problems which caused a child to get behind in his class (ADHD, etc.)?

### **Average Progress**

For those parents who did complete this section, 32 summarized their child or children’s social progress as meeting the expectations for a “normal” child of that age or grade – or in consideration of the disability. Often these children had no conventional school experience as a contrast. Typical of these responses were the following:

- “He has very good social skills. He has not had any problem in this area. Progress has been as would be expected of any child.”
- “Our daughter has continued to progress socially as any other kid her age.”
- “That of a normal 6 year old”
- “Our son is cooperative and age appropriate in behavior – behavior was not the issue.
- “No change”
- “Both children are exceptionally well behaved in social settings, outgoing and able to interact with people and children of all ages.”
- “He has few social skills. This has nothing to do with homeschooling. That is the way he is neurologically. He is slowly making progress.”

Eleven of these parents who cited average progress also noted that their children were able to interact well with children of all ages as well as adults. Typical of these responses is the following: “All are outgoing, curious and enjoy interacting with children and adults of all ages.”

Three parents noted that this ability to interact with others beyond their peer group was a benefit of home schooling and enabled their children not to be caught up in “heavy peer group identification.”

### **Improved Progress**

The majority of the respondents (48) considered their child or children’s social progress to be somewhat better than average as conveyed through the use of comparative adverbs and adjectives: *better, now, less, more*, and some form of *improve*. Usually, these parents were contrasting the social progress at home to that of a previous conventional schooling experience. As with the other questions in this survey, there are ranges within

the categories of responses in both the intensity and length. Some of the parents' perceptions of improved progress follow below:

- **“They have come out of their shells and are able to interact with people better.”**
- **“My oldest son had poor social skills, low self-esteem and was depressed. Now, he is very social, has good self-esteem and is happy. He plays with kids he does not know. He takes more risks to be sociable without feeling bad about it.”**
- **“Miraculous! We are complimented all the time on how good our children interact with other children as well as adults. Our boys could not function socially while in school – now, no one would believe it.”**
- **“He has improved in social situations because there is proper ‘set-up’ and ‘cool down’ between each transition. Given he is autistic, he socializes very little.”**
- **“She is very comfortable around people now – she doesn’t have to watch their every move like she did in public school. She was bit, hit, and kicked by other students in the public school setting. So she is doing better at home because she knows that nobody will hurt her.”**

As with the “average” progress group, five of the parents in the improved group noted that a part of that improvement was due to less pressure to conform to the peer group. One respondent voiced this opinion in this manner: “She used to take on the personality of children sitting near her. Now, she is developing her own personality, feels less pressure to ‘fit in’ with other students.” Another parent noted, “She does not deal with the ridicule of the other students and peer pressure for tasks she does not complete. She socializes after school where it is not noticed that things take her longer.

**TERRIFIC!!”**

### Needs Improvement

The third category, which had the fewest respondents (7), was the one where parents perceived a need for more improvement. Generally, the answers were briefly stated (“very slow” and “limited”) and often the response reflected the disability of the child:

- “The ADD needs some supervision in all social settings regardless of home school or not.”
- “They are both socially immature mostly from the ADD, not because there aren’t enough social activities.”
- “The [older child] chooses not to socialize, but I keep her in peer-related activities.”

Most of the respondents gave an answer that reflected a positive tone or an approval of the home schooling experience. However, one parent, although not negative in a reply, indicated that the need for more social progress was a reason to return to a conventional school setting: “More open to other children – but still needs to improve in this area actually. One of the reasons we decided to not home school next year.”

### Across the Categories

Benefits to the family unit. A distinct theme that ran through several of the responses (8) was the contribution of the home school experience to strengthening the family unit. Parents noted the improved family relationships, closeness, and greater love and respect that had resulted from the school choice. Below are examples of these parents’ views:

- **“Our children are very well socialized, and I feel even more than they were in the public school. In our family, there is no bullying, no name calling, and every child is valued because of who he is and not what he is.”**
- **“The biggest difference is in his attitude toward us, his parents. His love and respect and consideration of us has improved significantly.”**
- **“She is less stressed, which has led to a better family relationship.**
- **“Receiving the love and encouragement that only a family can really provide, Nathan has learned that a ‘friend showeth himself friendly.’”**

**Parental control. Another cross-categorical theme contained within the responses is the ability for parents to control the social education of their children. Eight parents mentioned the advantage of home schooling in allowing them to oversee this aspect of education: “We also have the opportunity to make suggestions and corrections in helping him with the social skills.” Other examples of parents who indicate a need to plan for social skills training include the following:**

- **“Social skills is a major deficit of children with autism and my son learns these slowly. However, being home, we are able to make use of a lot of one-on-one social skills training and that has helped him greatly.”**
- **“Billie has become a very polite boy who make great efforts to be pleasant . . . [he] has to be taught the social graces since he does not pick up on them intuitively like most of us do.”**
- **“Social skills for any child in a wheelchair is work. We constantly work with him in this area.”**
- **“We are using social skills curriculum so she is learning how to behave socially.”**

When considering the social progress of the children, as with the academic progress, it was a challenge to categorize the responses. Reporting progress is not only dependent upon the manner in which the parents perceive and express it but also upon the ability (and sometimes the disability) and environment of the child. Therefore, again, the individuality of the children and the families of each participant must be considered while looking for commonalities in responses.

### Satisfying Aspects of Home Schooling

Ninety-seven participants responded to the question, “What is the most satisfying aspect of home schooling your special needs child(ren)? (Consider self and family).” Three respondents left the question unanswered. The categories into which the responses fit had similarities with the categories of response in the previous questions. In descending order, the parent-respondents noted aspects such as (1) strengthening of family unit, (2) the joy of watching and being intimately involved in the teaching/learning process, (3) the educational benefits of flexible and customized instruction, (4) restoration of self-esteem and lessening of victimization, (5) fulfillment of religious convictions, (6) removal of stress and frustration, and (7) parental control. To a lesser degree, parents also mentioned the benefits to physical health and elimination of peer pressure.

### Strengthened Family Unit

Although seldom the only satisfying aspect of home schooling, forty parents did cite the benefits to the family home instruction brought to the experience. For seven families, this was the primary point of satisfaction. They mentioned the benefits of better relationships, better connections, and greater closeness. One parent stated, “I am able to

have all my children with me and able to teach them good character traits and how to interact lovingly with each other. They learn to respect others and interact more easily with other adults.” Two parents noted the benefits in relationship to their children’s disabilities:

- “Building healthy family relationships. (Many deaf children from hearing families don’t have that.)”
- “I love to help him since he struggles with speech and understanding. It has made the siblings closer to him being with him all day and [made us a] much stronger family unit.”

The other thirty-three families all cited similar responses: building healthy family relationships, strengthening family ties and interdependence, closer bonds, sharing, and restoring. One parent summed up many of the responses in this response:

The most satisfying thing for me is seeing how great my kids interact and get along together. If they were all going off to their different schools and classes, this would never happen. I love learning with the kids and it’s fun being excited together as we’re involved in a topic or project. We have fun and we’re all very close – despite everyone’s problems.

Another parent gave a new dimension to the contemporary term *quality time*: “The whole household had a rhythm: we accomplished chores, learning, and fun – a lot of quality time.”

### Involvement in the Teaching/Learning Process

As many parents who cited the above aspect of home education also cited the joy of being involved personally in the teaching and learning processes of their children. For

almost half of these parents (21) it was the primary satisfying aspect and for ten others it teamed up with strengthening the family. Typically, the responses were similar to those cited below:

- **“Seeing her grow and enjoy her own success.”**
- **“The moment they holler, ‘I can read! I can read!’ gives a satisfaction beyond pride. It is a joy to see you child to reach the milestones.”**
- **“Being with her and seeing the growth firsthand. I don’t have to wait for a progress report; I’m there. I have times when I cry with frustration because she just isn’t ‘getting it,’ but when she does succeed, that makes that success so much sweeter. I don’t want someone else to watch her grow up; I want to.”**

#### **Flexible and Customized Instruction**

Twenty-seven parents noted an advantage to home schooling was the ability to customize instruction to their children’s needs and to the demands of the family’s unique schedules. Some of the typical phrases noted in the responses included “flexibility,” “working at his/her own pace,” “adjusting schedule to fit the needs (learning, health, energy levels),” “adaptability,” “one-on-one attention,” and “learning style.” As with some of the other categories, this response was usually paired up with another aspect and only the primary choice of four parents. The following examples represent the primary choice parents. However, their sentiments were echoed by the other parents who simply expanded their answers to include other reasons.

**We have our own schedule and can do spontaneous learning. For instance, he spent one month working with his father learning a trade. We took our children to the beach to learn fossil hunting and identification.**



We know that our children are learning and can cater to the needs of each child rather than one set mold for everyone. If he needs a break, we take one. If the work we're doing is too easy or too hard, we can go onto the next item or take as long as we need without having to compete with others.

An example of a response, which cited more than one aspect of satisfaction with home schooling, is the following:

Susan has been nurtured and loved by her number one fans! I can move the educational, occupational, and speech therapies throughout the day instead of at a designated time schedule. I know Susan inside and out and I know when she is overwhelmed and when she is kidding me.

“Susan's” parent noted the benefit of being schooled in a family setting along with the flexibility and adaptability of home schooling. She also mentioned the advantage of intimately knowing the personality of her daughter that enabled her to meet her needs.

Another respondent expressed this idea in the following manner:

A teacher may go to college and be educated in teaching the “typical” child, textbook ones, but a parent willing to seek advice on techniques and do research can take the time to give their child the special attention they need.

### **Restoring Self-esteem**

The next most cited satisfying aspect of home schooling was the restoration of a sense of self-esteem and/or the fact that the child was no longer the brunt of ridicule or victimization in a conventional school setting. Sixteen respondents noted this benefit, five for whom it was the sole reason. This category was almost evenly divided between the

two variations of the theme: self-esteem and victimization. Self-esteem was expressed either in that specific term or as “feeling good about his or herself,” “self respect,” and “happy and self-assured.” Such answers tended to be briefly stated, such as the following:

- **“The fact that his self-esteem has been restored.”**
- **“I see in him a healthy self-esteem that I suspect would not be as positive were he in a traditional school where his disability would set him apart in a negative way.”**
- **“Seeing our daughter happy and self-assured again. Knowing that we have helped her to see she is of value even if she can never read past a certain level.”**

Responses that referred to being victimized in school used terms, such as “teasing,” “ridiculed,” “aggravated,” “being made fun of,” and “harassed.” Sometimes parents wrote in general terms:

- **“I know Matt will not be teased at home.”**
- **“They don’t have to deal with the ridicule and teasing that goes with special needs care.”**
- **“Your children are not being harassed, aggravated by adults.”**
- **“They are not being ridiculed for being ‘different.’”**

In contrast, some parents answered with references to specific situations in which their children had been involved:

- **“No more daily remarks or threats from administrators or teachers! Our time is focused on positives now. Self-esteem for our ten year old has been restored.”**
- **“Knowing he is avoiding the teaching and name-calling and physical assaults he received in the public schools.”**

- **“I’m no longer worried about what’s happening to her in school – if she is being publicly humiliated for her disabilities by the teachers (the kids were much kinder to her than the teachers). . . And, she has self-confidence now and has stopped telling us that she is ‘dumb’ and ‘stupid.’”**

### **Religious Convictions**

**Also in tandem with other satisfying aspects of home schooling was the idea that religious and moral values could be an integral part of the educational experience.**

**Thirteen respondents cited religious or moral reasons for finding satisfaction in home schooling. The terms used to denote this category were “God” or “God’s,” “moral,” “values,” “Bible,” “Christian,” “religious,” “secular,” and “Jesus.” Three of the thirteen participants cited this category solely:**

- **“Being able to influence them with God’s Word applied to all aspects of life.”**
- **“We can see some of the results now, of the promises of the Bible.”**
- **“We have been able to teach academic work within a Christian context; e.g., when we talked about Egypt, we were able to talk about Moses and his experience there.”**

**Other respondents teamed up this aspect with others, such as the strengthening of family relationships: “Having my children with me full time, being able to teach them about Jesus, strengthening family ties and interdependence.” Some parents paired this value aspect with adaptability of scheduling: “We can oversee her education more directly and direct it down a godly path. Also, we can adjust her schedule to fit her health needs. She has many doctor appointments and tires more easily than kids her age.”**

### **Absence of Stress and Frustration**

Sometimes, parents felt that the move to home schooling from a conventional school setting removed stress and frustration from the lives of the students and families as well. Eleven families noted this aspect when responding to the question. None of the responses cited this category solely. Terms used to identify the response were “stress,” “burden,” “frustration,” and “worry.” Responses briefly explained that there was “much less stress on all” or “less stress in homeschooling.” Other responses were more lengthy and gave reference to the situation that might have been the basis of concern:

- “We are no longer burdened by homework every single night and doing projects on weekends. We are free to attend functions, join sports for all three children and the stress level is gone.”
- “The homework would take two to three hours a night and I would be very frustrated with my son’s behavior and the school’s ignorance. Now I don’t have either problem.”
- “The stress caused by meeting a class full of children will make him seize. I have controlled much of his seizure activity by keeping his life calm and in routine. I wouldn’t think of it being any other way.”

### **Parental Control**

In the previous question determining social progress of the special needs children, one of the themes that emerged across the categories was the issue of parental control. That same issue arose again in the responses to this question on satisfying aspects of home schooling. Ten parents were pleased with the ability to be in control of their

children's lives and particularly their education. Some examples of these responses are below, and it is apparent that other aspects noted earlier are present as well:

- “Closer bonds, able to choose what she's exposed to, choice of positive influences in social circles, strengthening religious beliefs, matching tasks to energy levels.”
- “Not sending him to a place where they aren't servicing him properly and causing me headaches. I can fight the battles I choose and have control.”

One of the responses was very explicit about the depth and breadth of parental control in the home school:

I know exactly what my son can and cannot do. I can both protect him and can push him to be more challenged. I also have more control over “unhealthy” peer pressure. I know where he is, who he's with, what he's doing. I can teach him anything a “special ed” teacher can teach without having to share my time and attention with other students.

### **Peer Pressure and Health Benefits**

As noted in the above parent's statement, some parents (three) found that controlling or eliminating peer pressure was a satisfying aspect of home schooling. Another three parents appreciated the fact that home schooling benefited the needs of children with health problems. An example of the latter stated that “for a child with diverse needs, she can have her own schedule and therefore better health.”

Parent/respondents were generally very articulate when expressing the aspects of home schooling their special needs children they found satisfying. There was often an emotional quality to the responses, which might be expected considering the intimate

nature of the parent/teacher and child/student relationship. The special need issues only seem to add intensity to the emotions of the responses contained therein.

### **Frustration in Home Schooling Special Needs Children**

Although 97% of the participants were able to provide a satisfying aspect of home schooling their special needs children, a smaller number identified frustrations that might occur in the home schooling experience. Eight families did not respond to the question at all and four parents, who did respond, did not point to any sort of frustration other than not beginning the process earlier or conducting a full-time home school: "I would give anything to have Carla at home full-time again now. She is able to do so much more when she doesn't have the stresses from the school."

The other 88 families responded to the question that asked them to identify the most frustrating part of home schooling their special needs children. As with all the previous open-ended questions, the responses were placed into categories although the diverse answers were often challenging to categorize. Nevertheless, areas of frustration that were cited were the following listed in descending order:

1. The teaching process, particularly the challenges of working with a special needs child with its impact on the family;
2. Lack of personal time for the teaching parent;
3. Misunderstanding of home schooling a special needs child, even within the home schooling community;
4. Lack of money, resources, and support;
5. Isolation;
6. Dealing with the system; and

## 7. The need for patience.

### The Teaching Process

This first category was selected more than twice as often as any other category. Forty parents responded that there was some aspect of teaching that was frustrating to them. Often the respondents cited the frustration of teaching a child who had special needs, sometimes addressing the specific area of need. Reteaching and repetition was one of the main complaints:

- “Reteaching what I thought they already knew.”
- “Repetition in areas of academics.”
- “His progress is so slow, needs much repetition; he gets tired and frustrated so easily.”
- “When I started home schooling I didn’t know anything about learning disabilities and dyslexia. It takes a lot of patience and a lot of repetition. One step forward, two steps back. I have to change my expectations. Learning is much, much slower, and I don’t know what the future holds.”

Sometimes the respondents’ frustration was due to a short attention span and slow progress as well as other behavior related to the disability:

- “Getting our son to focus on the task at hand, to maintain attention.”
- “It’s so hard for them and they want to do well – but just don’t. Their attention spans are frustrating.”
- “Short attention span and oppositional behavior. I know my son’s peak learning hours so we can avoid these problems.”

For some parents, the frustration was exacerbated due to comparison to other children and especially those in the same family:

- “Comparing her to other children, my expectations of what she should learn and how she would learn it. Learning how to allow her to learn in her own way even if not conventional.”
- “Being the third child, the frustration of her ‘not getting it’ like her brother is very taxing.
- “They don’t get things quite as quickly as the other children did.”

Balancing the amount of time given to the child with a special need and to the others in the family was a cause of concern for other parents:

- “My son communicates in sign language. There are some things I can’t sign very clearly, especially when I am reading stories and taking care of the kids.”
- “My two year old is always in the way and very demanding.”
- “Balancing the needs of three children at different ages and stages of development.”
- “My daughter consumed time. She has one slow speed and it took time away from my son.”

Finally, some parents struggled with their own doubts about their teaching effectiveness:

- “Is he not understanding or looking to me to give him the answers?”
- “The biggest thing for me is self-doubt. There are days when there are slight regressions and you wonder if you really are doing the best thing.”
- “I can see things that do not carry through into their long-term memory. I am constantly looking for the key that will unlock this potential. Each one learns



differently and so those keys are not the same as I go from one to another. I wish there were some magical formula but there is not.”

- “The days when you feel you should be doing more. All the tons of research you do to make sure you’re not missing something.”

### Lack of Time

“Being there 24/7 with no time off” was the response that summed up this category. Parents in home schooling, particularly a child with special needs, realized that they had little time left to their own personal needs. Twenty-one participants cited this frustration. The following examples were very representative of the others:

- “Lack of time to do everything!!!!”
- “They are very needy. I don’t have a lot of time to myself at this point.”
- “The fact that I get very tired and I hardly have time for myself.”
- “The most frustrating aspect is the very (extremely) limited time away from Jessica. Teaching her is very time consuming and physically and emotionally draining, plus just being her ‘mom.’ There isn’t time left for me.”
- “It’s emotionally and physically tiring to homeschool a special needs child. I go out to eat one evening a week with another homeschooling mother so that I do not lose my sanity.”

### Lack of Understanding

Home schooling families have had a reputation of being out of the mainstream in education as noted in the review of the literature. That reputation has caused misunderstanding to exist with the conventional schooling community. Some of the parents who participated in this survey expressed a frustration over this perception: “The

**stereotype that we must be either loony or religious fanatics if we're homeschooling. The idea that schools probably know better than parents." These parents also echoed some of the common concerns of the home schooling community over attitudes ("Being afraid of asking for help because of anti-homeschool attitudes") and the intricacies of the law ("I get irritated that I have to watch closely the laws and those that write them and be careful that the right to home school is not taken away").**

**The majority, fourteen of the seventeen parents who cited this category, expressed the concern that their efforts to home educate a child with special needs were misunderstood by others:**

- **"That nobody understands how you can homeschool a child with special needs when the child 'belongs' in school."**
- **"You have well meaning friends and family who jump in and want to tell you all about what you are doing wrong and why you should let someone else do it for you."**
- **"People who think that a parent cannot possibly do a good job educating a special child. Having the same questions to answer over and over."**
- **"People believing they know what's best for Bobby and that he needs public education and all it offers."**

**This concern was especially frustrating when the home schooling community itself did not offer support or understanding:**

**My children do not appear to have special needs so many people judge me and homeschooling as being a failure because my children are behind most kids their age. Even homeschoolers consider I am doing a poor job until they spend some time with my children and realize what I am dealing with. I thank God for**

all my children.

Getting other homeschool veterans to understand our multiple ways of teaching is frustrating. It is a tough, different load that they endure. State groups are forming around but need to be better informed about support for us.

Knowing that others in the secular and home school realm think you should have extra helps. At times this creates doubt in my mind. I would rather concentrate on the task at hand than on my ability. God has proven faithful and has provided help when it has been needed.

#### Lack of Resources and Support

Equally frustrating to the respondents as misunderstanding being a part of the home schooling special needs children experience, was the lack of money, resources, and support for the home schooling effort. Again, seventeen families cited this category. The lack of money or financial help referred to either funding for home schools by the government (“I’d say the most frustrating thing would be not getting any financial help. We save the government thousands of dollars but get no help that them”) or loss of income from the stay-at-home teaching parent (“Financially, I devote full time to homeschooling – loss of income”).

Most of the parents who cited this category did so because of the lack or cost of curricular materials and support services for the special needs child:

- “Not having the tools and resources to train me to help her . . . help and direction is appreciated and needed.”

- **“It is difficult to use our homemade school aids for her . . . I wish we could have access to handicapped horseback riding lessons and to have more computer-based programs which would accentuate her abilities.”**
- **“Probably for me was locating materials that truly work for the special needs child.”**
- **“Finding appropriate services and bearing all financial costs for needed services.”**
- **“Finding services that don’t cost an arm and a leg.”**
- **“Lack of contact with competent counselors.”**

**Isolation: *Who is there to encourage me?***

Mentioned only twice as the sole reason for frustration, isolation of the home schooling parent was cited by a total of six respondents. The feeling of “being alone,” “having no one to talk to,” and “without adult social contact and mentally unchallenged” was voiced by these participants. However, one of the parents expressed this feeling in greater length through her story:

**My greatest personal struggle is feeling alone. I belong to a statewide organization but know no other local people who are home schooling dyslexic children. I feel very different from my local home schooling group because my challenges are so different. They talk about teaching their 8 year old Latin or all the self-teaching their children do. I can’t even relate. We are still struggling with English and all my teaching is engaged – Paul does almost nothing on his own. I have no support system and I miss it. I leave home schooling meetings discouraged because they just make me aware of all Paul can’t do. For both of us I have to keep myself focused on what he does well but there is no one to help me do that. Watching Paul struggle often reminds my husband of how he**

still struggles with dyslexia so he also needs encouragement. Who is there to encourage me?

### **Dealing with the System**

Because of the specific needs children with disabilities often have, parents can sometimes run into difficulty in dealing with organizations that provide services. Five parents in this survey expressed frustration over the use of such services and the paperwork that might be involved therein:

- “Keeping school officials out of the process. Having to do all the paper work for reports to the school child study evaluations.”
- “Communicating with educational consultants in the public school system.”
- “Communicating our concerns during the IEP meetings.”
- “Dealing with the system – meaning the Medicare and the school system. I have had to fight tooth and nail for every therapy, change in IEP, and appropriate placement, equipment, etc.”

### **Patience**

Five respondents noted the great need for patience in home schooling children with special needs. One parent expressed the need this way: “The enormous amount of planning, energy and patience required! Did I mention the enormous amount of patience required?” Another parent discussed her lack of patience while reflecting upon her role of a home school teacher:

Just my lack of patience and expectations for quicker responses, etc. I want faster results and bigger gains . . . until I look back just two months and see what HUGE gains he has made. I have embarrassed myself with my lack of

patience and my inability to go with the flow on some issues . . . he has done way better than me in those categories . . . although I am an improved woman because of all this, I still have a long way to go to be a better teacher . . . perhaps my son is homeschooling me too.

From citing frustration with others to frustration with themselves, some of these home schooling parents were very open in sharing some of the details of their experiences. For some, it also seemed to be an opportunity to “unload” the feelings of frustration that might accompany the choice of home schooling a child with special needs.

#### Additional Comments

For about one-half of the survey respondents, answering the open-ended questions discussed above did not conclude their participation in this phase of research. Fifty-one participants took the opportunity to make additional comments about the survey and various aspects of their home schooling experiences. For some, the extra lines simply provided space where further explanation to one or more of the other questions could be included. It was also here that 69 respondents included an address to receive a summary of the findings. For the respondents who completed this section, their responses were classified into five categories listed in ascending order:

1. Additional information for previous questions
2. Comment on content or intent of survey
3. Criticism of public school system
4. Contextual information of family or home school setting by parent completing survey
5. Testimonial to home schooling

Also, there were five families whose responses were combinations of the last two categories.

### Additional Information

Three respondents used this section to complete previous questions. One parent continued the discussion of the frustration that comes with home schooling a special needs child:

Teaching materials/curriculum may not match the needs of a special needs child. In teaching my son who is deaf, I've had to do a lot of research and creative building of lesson plans. It's rewarding but time consuming. And there's always that fear of "what if I'm not covering all the basics he needs?"

Another parent listed all three of her children, commented on their public school experiences, and explained academic and social progress made since home schooling. The last respondent included another reason for selecting home education: "We chose to homeschool due to the negative influences in the public school environment which countered our spiritual beliefs."

### Comments on Survey

Three participants offered comments on the content or intent of the survey. One respondent was critical and offered suggestions for improvement. This criticism was noted earlier when discussing responses under academic and social progress questions. However, the comment really addressed the philosophical basis for the education of special needs children:

The questions start from a wrong point of view. Homeschooling should come first and special needs second. In your questions, you assume that everybody

will have the same perception of what schooling is and what public schooling is. You first have to establish where the parents are in their conviction. This will color the answers and might skew your report.

The respondent finished the comment with addressed specific areas of the survey and concluding with “Just food for thought.”

Another parent also criticized the content by offering the opinion: “I think you left out a few categories for measuring progress. . . self-help skills. Also, bonding with family, spiritual growth, self-confidence, obedience.” This same parent also commented that she could not “wait to read the survey results [hoping that there was] a good response rate [since it was] being talked about all over the world (over the Internet).” Finally, another participant simply offered appreciation: “Thanks for taking the time to consider parents who home school special needs kids.”

### Criticism of the Public School System

Nine of the respondents expressed criticism of the public school system. For several of these parents, it was a continuation of sharing the frustration they felt in home schooling a special needs child:

- “The Washington County School District receives funds for my child, but in four years, he was never given any help. They always found a way NOT to provide as in stating that dyslexia was not recognized.”
- “We must make sure that when our schools are failing our children that we take over. Too many parents close their eyes because they feel the so-called ‘educated’ people can do better. All your child is to these people is a dollar sign. No one knows your child’s needs better than you do.”



- “. . . those who rape, murder, etc., are not treated as badly as I have been. In large cities, there are more aids available. There is a great choice of help.”
- “Finding someone to talk to and discuss ‘techniques’ for teaching special education kids at home is a problem. Most public school resource teachers have little to offer because they usually have (1) lower expectations, (2) limited, in-depth knowledge and insight into a child’s dynamics, and (3) educational biases.”

Within the critical comment, some of the parents offered suggestions on how to improve their situation:

- “It would sure be nice if the state could come up with some good guidelines for end of the year testing for LD homeschoolers. As of now, it is left up to the individual school districts.”
- “I wish the school system would begin to put a class/program/service together for special needs children with Asperger’s –he needs such intense behavior help that it’s hard to manage at home solely by me.”

### Contextual Information

A number of parents (15) used the comment section to provide background information of themselves, the family, the children, or the home school setting. This information was communicated to give context to the survey answers. The following story is representative of these comments:

To explain my answers, I’d better give you the summary of how our family has grown! First, (11 years ago), we gave birth to one son, then 2 years later to another. Both of them have been homeschooled since birth or age 5 – however you look at it. Both are also well above average learners. Then about 5 years

ago, we adopted 2 children (then ages 14 and 10) who are siblings to each other and who both have Mosaic Down Syndrome. They had been in school and on education plans up to that point. We finished out that school year, then homeschooled them so that I could get to know them and so they could learn more real life skills. Ashley, our oldest, went back to school this past year for vocational training and will continue this fall as a senior in high school.

Jon has chosen to go to high school this fall to “be like all the other teenagers.”

In providing background information, the respondents often gave lengthy explanations as above. Some of these stories also tended to be testimonial in nature – parents attesting to the success of home schooling for their children. The following story is an example of a parent describing the behavior of her home schooled child and noting his ability to progress in spite of a disability:

Our ADD child can't sit still or be quiet. He clicks, buzzes and hangs off the swivel piano stool. He scores high every year on his Basic Skills Test. So does he need a special teacher, stigma of an IEP? When he needs to, he can go outside and blow off steam and get his work done later. He's avidly into bugs, rocks, trees . . . we let him learn. He drives the piano teacher WILD with his incessant wiggle, but he is progressing.

### Testimonials

The majority (28) of the participants who added comments endorsed home schooling as an educational alternative. The following were typical of such responses:

- “Homeschooling has been the best decision we’ve made and we are adding our other two children next year.”

- **“I would recommend homeschooling for anyone, especially for a special needs child. A mother knows her child better than anyone including the experts.”**
- **“Although homeschooling my special needs children is a challenge to me, I wouldn’t want it any other way.”**
- **“It took me awhile to decide to home school, and I have absolutely no regrets. I wish I would have started sooner. The growth in both of my children has been amazing. Though home schooling may not be for everyone, I know it is for us. I won’t go back to traditional schooling because home schooling has proven to be so good for my children and my family. I especially think special needs children benefit from the one-on-one and the extra time with people that love them.”**

**Sometimes, it was not just the children and the families that seemed to benefit.**

**According to this respondent, it was also the parent:**

**Even though I have a degree in special education, I can truly say that I have learned more about how to teach from homeschooling (resources, catalogs, and other home schoolers) than I ever did in my college program. Most homeschooling parents are much more knowledgeable and capable of teaching their child(ren) special needs or not than most public school teachers. The parents also have a vested interest in their child that no teacher will ever have for their child.**

**Not every family, who participated in this survey, intended to continue to educate children at home. The following mother explained the purpose of her home schooling venture:**

**We no longer homeschool because we felt it was time for regular school and**

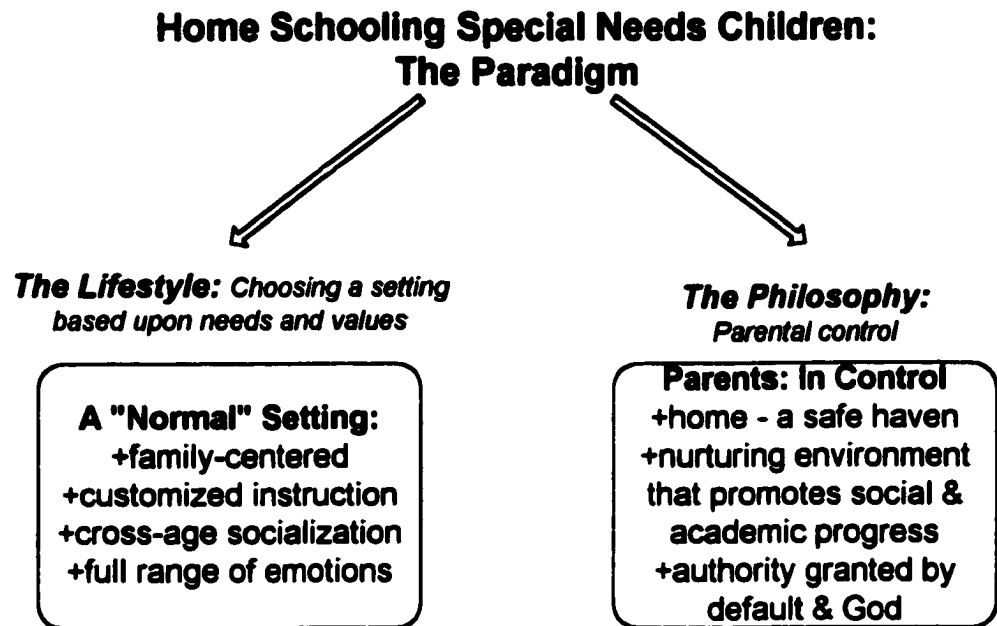
that we had given our child a good foundation. He is placed in our local school district middle school special class. He is doing well there. Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven." I feel this is the case for us and homeschooling. It was a time and now it's time for regular school.

Although much of the information included in the comment section could be incorporated into the previous questions, it was a place where respondents could give emphasis to the various aspects of their home schooling experiences. It was interesting to note the enthusiasm and intensity of their comments, especially those for whom the survey seemed to become an opportunity to share personal convictions and beliefs.

#### Themes

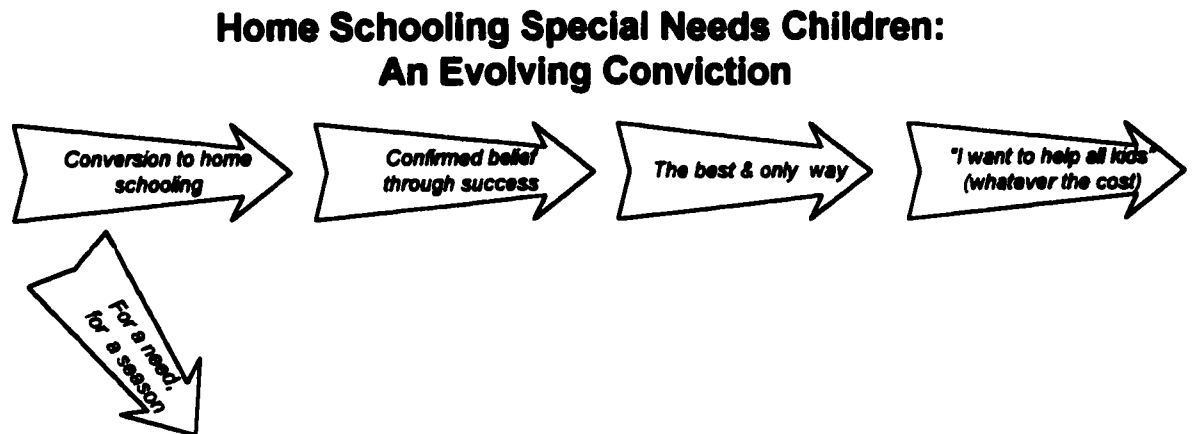
Across the categories of responses of the survey questions, themes emerged that represent the philosophies, beliefs, and experiences of the study participants. From the words of the parent/respondents there arose a picture of the phenomenon of home schooling special needs children (see Figure 8). The participating families experience a family-centered lifestyle fraught with its own challenges, frustrations, and joys. From the words of the parents emerged a philosophy that challenges the traditional view of education. Which is "normal" – our traditional schools with their various methods of meeting the needs of special education students or home schools with parents attempting to meet those same special learning needs? Respondents challenged the traditional idea of schooling by addressing issues of control, safety, family values, and spirituality.

**Figure 8.** Graphic representation of themes.



There was evident almost a sense of religious fervor about home schooling itself that could be placed along a continuum. There were those parents who were new “converts” with bright hopes and enthusiasm, seasoned veterans with a deeper faith and understanding but who often view home schooling as one of the options, and zealous missionaries who see no other way to educate their children. At the extremes, there were those so thoroughly dedicated to home schooling that they have taken on some very challenging situations as well as those who tried home schooling for a season only (see Figure 9).

**Figure 9.** Graphic representation of home schooling conviction.



Before discussing the emerging themes, it is important to reiterate an earlier observation. As noted in the limitations to the study, the participants in this study are all voluntary which has likely produced a biased response group. The fact, too, that the respondents are all members of some sort of home school support network through which they were accessed would also limit the generalizability of the results and the conclusions found therein.

#### What is “Normal?”: The Home School Lifestyle

“In your questions, you assume that everybody will have the same perception of what schooling is and what public schooling is. You first have to establish where the parents are in their conviction.” A parent/respondent was chastising me for the wording and intent of my questions, but he was also commenting on the idea that educational researchers and the rest of the world who does not home school were assuming that “traditional” schools were our reference point, the educational norm. Several respondents noted that home schooling was a natural progression in the schooling process. It had been

the only schooling option considered particularly for the special need child among other “regular” need children: “Home school all our children. Special need child was third child – no difference.”

It became apparent through the responses of the other parent/teachers that the norm to them was the home school; it was conventional education that was unnatural, “out of control,” and failing to meet the needs of their children. This notion of normalcy was also extended to the label of *special needs*. One parent expressed the idea this way: “He’s just another kid in my house, not a diagnosis!” To some parents, there was a higher mandate to ignore the difference: “The number one reason [to home school] was the Bible tells us to teach ALL our children. You can’t do it if they are not there.”

The home schooling families represented in this survey expressed a lifestyle that is family-oriented. They chose to educate all their children (special needs included) with curricula and instructional methods that matched learning needs and abilities geared to individual learning pace and family schedule. The parents wrote of establishing high goals of achievement for their children in settings that often took advantage of real-life situations. Socialization occurred in more “natural” settings and circumstances than age segregated classrooms with the ever-present pressure to conform to the peer group. However, home school parents did not report a life without problems. Amongst the joy of teaching one’s own child, they also reported frustrations inherent in the teaching and parenting of children, particularly some children who might present special challenges.

The family. The strongest sub-theme that emerged from the surveys was the importance of the family. The idea of family unity and the desire to have close relationships within that unit was referenced 80 times in the survey responses. Often,

circumstances that surrounded the previous schooling of the children had impaired family relationships:

We don't have to deal with all the "fallout" which would happen if she were going to school. Whenever she has spent extended time away, she has come home and "taken it out" on the family.

Parents discussed the satisfaction of being together as a family in all circumstances -whether working or learning. Many were convinced that the love and encouragement generated in the family was the reason for social and academic progress of their special needs children: "[We find satisfaction from] seeing them grow and being a part of a family that enjoys each other. It has been very healing for our whole family. All are able to reach goals and learn skills they never thought were possible."

Customized schooling. Parents noted all the different curricula used in meeting the needs of their children/students. They were pleased with the ability to pick and choose the texts, software, correspondence courses, and supplementary materials that were appropriate to the needs of both the special needs and other children in the family. The home setting afforded an ability to use curricular materials not always found in conventional schools:

They all have a more well-rounded education. I teach classical literature to all regardless of their disabilities. They all learn to cook and sew. They all receive instruction in carpentry skills, small engine repair, music, art, Bible, and animal husbandry.

Parents also found that the ability to work around the irregular schedule of therapy sessions and health problems was more suited to a home setting ("While in public



and private school, she had a hard time keeping up with grade appropriate work. Now we can move the educational, occupational, and speech therapies throughout the day instead of at a designated time schedule.”). Similarly, working at the pace of the child with special needs seemed to be easily met in a home school (“We work at her pace. If it takes two hours to complete a math test, oh well.”) Finally, a number of parents noted the advantage of one-on-one instruction - selecting both the content and methodology that is specific to the student’s needs:

. . . but a parent being willing to seek advice on techniques and do research can take the time to give their child the special attention they need – the attention no teacher could possibly give.

Often, parents expressed setting expectations for their children above that of the conventional schools:

“Their needs were not being met. The school had set below standard expectations and our children were performing to their low expectations . . . I was told often that my expectations were too high. Well, they are meeting my high expectations and sometime even surprising me a their accomplishments.”

In meeting the needs of the family unit and the learning needs of all the children therein, home schooling seemed to provide greater normalcy for these parents. The end product for which they hoped was realized by using different means. For the majority of the respondents, conventional schools had either failed their children or were never given a chance to try.

“Normal” socialization. One of the greatest sources of annoyance to a home schooling parent is the ever-present question, “How well socialized are children

seemingly removed from the mainstream of education and placed into relative isolation?” That feeling of frustration was stated by one of the participants in this manner: “I’m sick of explaining our concept of socialization vs. the public school’s idea of same.” As noted in the summary of the question addressing socialization, the majority of parents viewed their children as either normal relative to their age and disability or progressing socially. Very few noted a lack of progress at home and only one parent saw a need to place the child back in school to receive socialization.

The concept of socialization to which the above respondent referred was the ability of home schooled children to relate to and socialize with children and adults of all ages. Parents often cited the importance of having healthy family relationships over the detrimental effects of negative peer pressure. One mother reported the words of her son after he entered a public high school: “Mom, they are such hateful, immature, disrespectful kids. Homeschooling spared me all those years that made those kids that way.”

“Normal” experiences within home schooling. As noted in the summary of parents’ frustrations in home schooling special needs children, it is not all idyllic. Parents have doubts about their teaching abilities, frustrations over finances, the sometimes slow progress of special need learners, the feelings of isolation and fatigue in home schooling as well as being misunderstood by others.

Parents also noted the satisfaction in watching their children learn. Many parents described the joy or satisfaction of watching a child master a new skill, enjoy success, show confidence, and develop the love of learning. Both of these emotions are common to any setting where teachers and students are engaged in teaching and learning.

The home schooling parents who participated in this study are mostly convinced that the experience of home schooling a special needs child is not aberrant at all:

- “If put in an atmosphere of love and given the opportunity to learn at their own pace, all children can thrive at home, especially special needs children.”
- “After all the year, I would say home is the only place a child with special needs get full and undivided attention, with the love and interest that is needed for the child to excel!”
- “I believe the program we give our child is better and more appropriate than anything the school could provide.”

#### The Home School Philosophy: Who’s in Charge?

The whole home schooling paradigm expressed by these respondents has a philosophical basis. At the heart of the philosophy seems to be the question, “Who’s in charge of the education of these children – the parents or the state?” Even though many of these parents were no longer involved with the public school systems, there was a great deal of criticism of public schools either through home school communication or personal experience with past treatment of children. However, many of the parents were still utilizing services, such as therapies, at the time of the survey. Very few of the respondents referred to private schools; the experiences with conventional schooling took place mostly in the public setting.

Traditional Schools: Failure to produce and protect. Parents expressed this disillusionment with the public schools by reporting the failures to meet their children’s needs. The stories of inadequate teaching, abuse, and ridicule were the motivation for many parents to home educate their children. Parents gave up on “the system” and were

encouraged by the success of their children: “Her self-esteem is much improved since she is not spending the majority of her day with her head down on her desk anymore.”

Another parent succinctly stated her dissatisfaction: “Public school couldn’t teach my LD child; public school wanted my nine year old on medication, and he could not focus; public school could not deal with ADHD/gifted boy.”

A number of parents told tales of name-calling and ridicule because of the effects of the disabilities. Some parents feared for the safety of the children. For some, this fear was grounded in instances of physical and sexual abuse. The real or perceived lack of protection for some of the children represented in this survey was another indication to the respondents that the schools who claimed to be in control were actually “out of control.”

Parents: *I can fight the battles I want and have control!* The home schooling parents in this survey gave testimony to their belief that they were in control of their children’s education. This conviction came through two means: (1) by default through the failure of “the system,” and (2) as a mandate from God. Addressing the first category, parents made statements such as the following to indicate who was in charge and why:

- “I wanted to homeschool before I had children. I saw what was happening in public education and I thought I could do better at home. So when I knew my children needed special help, I researched their areas of special education and found answers.”
- “[It is satisfying] not sending him to a place where they aren’t servicing him properly and causing me headaches. I can fight the battles I choose and have control.”
- “We can teach her what we want and not what the school says.”

It was these parents that reported the stress and frustrations associated with conventional schooling. They used the terms *frustration* (not only in the context of the question on frustrating aspects of home schooling) and *stress* 37 times. Feeling out of control with the stressful factors, they determined to take control of the situation through home schooling. They reported improvement in academics and social progress:

- “No longer stressed – reading, spelling, math improved two grade levels.”
- “Much less stress on all – seeing progress.”
- “No stress involved. [I] am able to use curriculum designed especially for dyslexic disabilities.”
- “Much less stressful and I am able to tailor his lessons . . .”

Other parents did not necessarily adopt the philosophy of parental control of a child’s education through disillusionment with the school systems. About one-fourth of the parents noted that the decision to home school was directed by God. This mandate became the impetus to home school. At other times, this spiritual conviction evolved during the course of home schooling. Here are some of the statements of these parents below:

- “I believed from the beginning that it was God’s will for us to home school Micah. This has been a source of great strength to me because it has not been easy.”
- “We felt the Lord wanted to bring our family together and public school tore us apart. God wants us to raise godly children.”
- “It is our personal religious right and conviction to train up our child in the Lord; wisdom, knowledge starts with God.”

- “At first, it was only to meet education needs (needing one on one/small group situations). Gradually, it became a calling from God. We now believe as parents, we are responsible for teaching our child.”

**Strengthening of the conviction: a “religious experience.”** The last statement noted above was typical of the “conversion” process through which parents often passed while experiencing home schooling. Conversion in this sense refers to the conviction that home schooling is the fulfillment of the needs of the child, the parents, and the family. Sometimes, parents held that conviction from the start while others developed it through a positive outcome in the experiences of the children, their parents, and families. As in the following example, the testimonies of the parents almost seemed to reflect the impact of the experience: “Both children have excelled beyond our expectations. Our daughter went from ‘globally retarded in all areas’ to gifted. Our son with Down syndrome tests cognitively above his age for a typical child.”

There were often longer statements with emotional overtones and words of encouragement to others:

- “I would be willing to send school records, test results, etc. if it would be helpful. I would like to encourage all parents to consider taking on the challenge of being responsible for their children’s education.”
- “I would recommend homeschooling for anyone, especially for a special needs child. A mother knows her child better than anyone including the experts.”

Although highly desirable and personally successful, not all parents were convinced that home schooling was for everyone:

I would strongly recommend a special needs child if the parent has the proper

temperament and ability to handle the child. The child receives the best learning environment and will probably maximize her lifetime benefit to society by the one on one early on.

Then, there were the extreme cases: those families who home schooled only for a season, and, at the other end, those parents for whom home schooling became a sacrificial calling and mission in life. Of the 100 families who participated in the survey, 15 had three or more children with between three and ten of those children with learning needs. Some of the respondents indicated that the children had been adopted with prior knowledge of the disability. Additionally, two surveys (out of 20) arrived after the cut-off date with families who had seven out of seven and nine out of nine special needs children. Most of these parents volunteered information about each child – their needs and progress made. All were enthusiastic about home schooling in spite of the extreme amount of effort and time required, or, as one parent of seven special needs children stated, “We love homeschooling our children. We’d never do it any other way. They have wonderful self-esteem and are quite happy in their skins.”

#### Summary

The data in the twenty-nine surveys that arrived late were not included in the data analysis but fell within the findings in this summary. The only difference noted was the inclusion of two families with the higher proportion of special needs children within the total children in the families. Otherwise, parent and family demographics and open-ended responses fell within the range of both the statistical and narrative summaries.

Concerning the content of the responses, I found interesting the emotion and intensity of the responses. For the most part, parent/respondents were very articulate in

**expressing their stories. They were convinced that they were responsible for the education of their children and took that responsibility seriously – even when faced with self-doubt, fatigue, lack of money, isolation, and misunderstanding. It was also interesting to note the questions raised as to which form of schooling was right or appropriate to the needs of children, whether special needs or not. Whose way is the right way – home educators or conventional educators?**



## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS: PHASE TWO

*We had no time to spend with the kids when they were in school. They came home exhausted and there was no opportunity to teach them the things that are important to us and cannot be taught in school.*

**-Home school mother of three special needs children, New York**

The second phase of this research study is an in-depth look into the phenomenon of home schooling special needs children through the experiences of four home schooling families. I observed and interviewed these four families that were located in four different U. S. geographic locations and neighborhood settings, represented various socio-economic backgrounds, and had children with various special needs. The results of this phase of the research study are presented according to the two forms of data collection: interview and observation. Interview data were summarized and analyzed noting themes. Observations of the home schools in progress were described in narrative form. A cross case analysis was conducted after considering the individual cases.

The first family was the Piper family, who lives in a military housing community of a southeastern coastal city. The Grays are located in a rural county outside of a large city in the southcentral United States while the Fines reside in the suburbs of a large city in a mid-Atlantic state. The fourth family, the Dixons, live in a large city in Northern California. The following stories depict the experiences of these four families who home school children with special needs. Depending upon the routine of the family, interviews

and observations were conducted in either order. Results reported below reflect the order in which they occurred.

### **The Pipers: A Military Family**

Arriving at the Piper home right after lunch on a Monday in September, I was greeted at the front door by the mother, Faith Piper. "She's here," I heard her call out, and the children, Heather and Dennis, came into the kitchen where Faith led me. The kitchen also served as school and was outfitted with desks, chairs, a worktable, computer, and walls of bookshelves filled with books and teaching materials. Teaching posters and charts covered the few open spaces on the walls. Noticing my look of interest in the schoolroom contents, Faith volunteered, "We are very popular with the school children in the neighborhood. When they have to do a report, they come over to use our resources. Another family in the housing area is home schooling a gifted child and they use our CD-ROMs."

Faith offered me a chair at the worktable to talk and hold interviews. As I sat down, I noticed her husband (I surmised) working outside the kitchen window in the garden. Faith indicated that he was home because he had taken a duty assignment yesterday on Sunday and therefore had the day off. I talked briefly to her husband, John, who was a quiet man and not easily engaged in conversation. It was apparent that he left participation in research up to his wife. She volunteered his biographical information.

John Piper, 44, is an electronics technician in the military. He holds an associate's degree from college but has dedicated his adult life to military service with its routine of regular overseas deployments and absences from his family. A tall, quiet man, he commits his time at home to his family and home. He is involved in the activities of the

children, enjoys yard work, and attends church activities. As a matter of fact, the Piper's yard stands out among the rows of brick and siding townhouses in a military housing community where there is a constant turnover of residents. There are flowers and landscaping timbers carefully placed amidst neatly trimmed shrubs and lawn – a contrast to the other yards where not as much effort or care is evident. The Pipers have an advantage over the other families in this regard, however; they have remained in the same location for seven years. Because of the special needs of two of their three children, John has been eligible for special consideration of duty station assignments. He rotates to different jobs every two or three years, but remains in the same geographic area.

Faith, 39, has committed herself to the job of raising children. Like many military wives, she has had to assume responsibility for much of the decision-making involved in the child-rearing processes – from discipline, financial, and health issues to spiritual and educational concerns. However, in speaking to Faith, it is clear that she and John are in agreement over the decisions in all areas concerning their children. A heavysset woman with short red hair and a ready smile, Faith holds a high school diploma and once was employed as a bookkeeper before raising children.

Proud of their three children, Faith showed me pictures of the oldest child. Hope, 18, is a senior at a public high school she has attended because of its mathematics and science magnet program to which she was admitted three years prior. For her middle school years, Hope was home schooled. The two younger children, Heather and Dennis, are presently home schooled having begun six years ago. At the time of the observation, Heather, 12, was a sixth grader with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) as well as some chronic illnesses involving her urinary and digestive tracts. As a preschooler, she was

also diagnosed with a learning disability involving delayed speech. Dennis, 9, was registered for home schooling at the local school district as a third grader. Also having chronic health problems including allergies and asthma, Dennis was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and was presently being screened for a speech and language disorder. Both children were polite, quiet, and very much at ease in the presence of a strange adult. They were agreeable to being interviewed but were not overly talkative in the process. It was often difficult to understand Dennis since he had some articulation difficulties. Faith indicated that he had received speech therapy several years ago through the school system and was again being evaluated through the local military hospital to once more receive therapy.

The Pipers are Christians in their faith and actively involved in their local church. Faith and Dennis attend a mid-week Bible study at another church as well. Before home schooling, the older two children had attended a private Christian school. However, when it became apparent that special needs were involved, the cost of private schooling became prohibitive. At that time, Faith embarked on the practice of home schooling the three children. This year, Heather was able to attend a Christian-sponsored home school program of enrichment classes on Thursdays. As noted earlier, Hope was enrolled in the public school system three years ago, but Faith stated that this decision was made only through prayer. As a matter of fact, in our conversations, Faith often mentioned being “led by the Lord” or using prayer to make important decisions in the children’s schooling.

### Interviewing the Pipers

As we sat in the kitchen, I introduced myself and the purpose of my research. Heather and Dennis stayed in the room listening to our conversation. Dennis sat in his mother's lap as I explained what I would be observing the next day. After reading them the consent forms, I asked if there were any questions. Indicating they understood, they signed consent forms - Dennis painstakingly, but proudly, inscribing his signature in block letters – as Faith looked on. We decided the children should be interviewed first to take care of the “squirm factor” Dennis seemed to be experiencing. Since he was a little apprehensive, Heather agreed to go first.

#### Heather Piper

A pretty girl with dark brown hair pulled back in a ponytail, Heather spoke with assurance for a 12 year-old child. Although she answered the questions, she seldom elaborated on the answers, and I frequently had to go beyond the interview protocol to get her to expand upon some of her answers. She was not uncomfortable in the interview; she simply did not have a lot to say. She sat up straight in a chair opposite me gazing steadily in my eyes as she quietly answered the question.

Home school likes and dislikes. When asked what she liked best about home schooling, she was quick to reply, “I get to read a lot.” She indicated that she read a great deal during the school day – instructions in her lessons, the lessons themselves, and her own pleasure reading in the afternoons. As a matter of fact, she wants to be a writer when older because she takes so much pleasure in reading and writing. During her “free” time,

she often goes to her room to read and then make up her own stories. Home schooling gives her the opportunity to have more time to devote to reading and writing.

What Heather liked least in her “school” was mathematics. She said it was a struggle, especially prior to this year’s new math curriculum, *Math-U-See*: “Last year, I did Scott-Foresman, and I’d be sitting there, like maybe an hour doing it because I just couldn’t figure it out. But this year, I am taking Math-U-See, and it’s easier.” Using a different format and ample manipulatives, she was beginning to make progress in mathematics. What also was helping her in mathematics was the addition of a day at enrichment classes for home schoolers at a local church. She was enrolled in two math classes – one on grade level, the other below grade level where she helped the teacher with the younger children. (Her mother saw this second class as a means to reinforce the learning.)

Beyond home schooling. Beyond the academics, Heather stated that she went roller skating on Tuesdays and also was a member of the home school swim team, which was just beginning practice for the fall season three afternoons a week. She was proud of her participation in a community youth commission which met at a local library on Saturdays to plan community service events for local youth: “On Saturday, we went up and down the street picking up trash and we planned our schedule. Members were elected as phone people to call others to tell them when the next meeting is – and I was one of them.”

Asked if she wanted to remain in home schooling, Heather replied, “No, but . . . I really want to go to a real school. But I can’t do school because I have this gap between my math and language.” Later, Faith explained that Heather’s math and language test

scores varied widely and would be problematic in a regular classroom. She was recently tested to screen for a learning disability in those areas that might affect mathematics. When probing to see if Heather could compare her home school experience to conventional schooling, it was apparent that she had no frame of reference other than the experience of her older sister. Some days, she wanted to go to “real school and some days, I just don’t want to do anything – which is usually the case.” However, when the day came for her to go, she would be ready since she was “paying attention to detail” when doing her schoolwork, particularly in mathematics. Her sister apparently had some difficulties in her high school classes, and Heather felt if she applied herself now, she would be ready when the time came for her to go to “real school.”

#### Dennis Piper

Watching his older sister being interviewed, Dennis then calmly took his seat across from me. He briefly answered each question – sometimes with a solitary “yes” or “no.” At nine years old, he probably was fairly typical of any boy under scrutiny although I never felt he was resistant or anxious to get away. He simply was answering the questions; perhaps I was not asking those questions on which he wanted to elaborate.

Home schooling: “It’s fun . . .” When asked what he liked best about home schooling, he replied, “It’s fun and I like to write.” Faith explained that they were spending a great deal of time this year on writing in contrast to a focus on reading last year when she was putting her energies into a strong reading program. Dennis was particularly enthusiastic over learning cursive handwriting and seemed to relish his handwriting assignments. Perhaps following Heather’s lead, he indicated that math was

also his least favorite part of the school day. Later, Faith commented that Dennis performed well in math mastering the concepts fairly easily.

To the point, Dennis said that he liked home schooling although he had no experience in a regular classroom other than Sunday school. He thought he would like to remain in home schooling until he graduated whereupon he would become a painter since he enjoyed drawing. A friendly boy of average build and short blond hair, Dennis indicated that he liked to play with friends in the neighborhood and to play Nintendo – when it was permitted since “I can’t have it all the time.”

Dennis bounced out of his chair when the interview was over and ran to be with his father. It had been difficult on my part to talk with Dennis at times, since there were speech problems and I hated to keep asking him to repeat answers. I found later as he became more comfortable with me and was more talkative, I still could not easily understand his speech. As noted earlier, he was in process of beginning speech therapy at the military hospital.

### Faith Piper

Keeping their father company, the children left the kitchen area so that Faith and I could discuss her experience as the teacher/parent in home schooling. Nervously, stretching a rubber band throughout the interview, she sat next to me with the tape recorder between us. Her fingers were the only indications of nervousness, as she articulately answered questions thoughtfully and completely.

Rationale: Home schooling, a conviction. I first asked Faith to comment on her reasons for choosing home schooling for her children. She had been thinking about it for some time before making the decision to home school: “I had thought about it for four



years and had been convicted that that was probably what we needed to do for our children.” She continued her explanation stating that Heather was enrolled in a private Christian kindergarten where she made little progress. The school advised Faith that Heather would have to repeat kindergarten – or she might consider home schooling her. Heather had already been screened at three and a half years for Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD) through the public school system and was receiving speech therapy there. At this point, Faith and her husband faced making some hard decisions. They felt that they could no longer afford the private tuition, but they “were also concerned with the school district here because they do not look kindly upon military children and we experienced that continuously since then.” Taking all these factors into consideration and John’s work schedule, they decided to home school their children.

Subsequently, the decision to continue home schooling was made as it became apparent the special needs were a large part of the picture. Faith stated, “I found that over the years as their special needs began to crop up that it’s just better suited them to be at home than for them to be in a classroom setting.” Later, Faith elaborated on this answer:

[Home schooling has been good] for our family structure because of the kids’ special needs and because of our doctors’ appointments and because it is quieter here. We can use the time diligently and not be distracted with other stuff. My oldest daughter has said that the worse part of being in school is the waste of time. She said that I can get so much more done at home.

The needs of the children. In discussing the special needs of Heather and Dennis, Faith first gave a brief history. Although, Heather was diagnosed at three and a half years with CAPD and received speech therapy, Faith felt the problems were resolved when

Heather was “graduated” from receiving therapy. Faith thought the school district was not “enthralled with keeping her in the program as a home schooler so they graduated her. [Faith] felt okay with that at that time.” However, later, Faith began to realize there were other problems, and a screening revealed ADD.

With Dennis, Faith knew there were problems from a young age. First of all, he had a stuttering problem so that he was diagnosed in the public school system with a speech disorder and enrolled in speech therapy. Faith never enrolled him full time in a conventional school but decided to home school him from the beginning. As far as the speech therapy, “They [school system] graduated him because they didn’t want to continue an IEP and I was comfortable once I eventually figured out what I was doing.” Later diagnosed with ADHD, Dennis was under the care of a school psychologist and a neuro-developmental pediatrician as well as a speech pathologist for the speech difficulties. All of these professionals are provided through the military medical services. Also, both children have health issues that cause them to be under regular medical attention.

I asked Faith how she managed to meet the needs of the children with the variety of issues that make up the whole picture. First of all, she felt it was easier to remove the children from the school system since dealing with them was more a source of frustration than of help (“I didn’t feel I had the energy in me to deal with the system, to continue with those services”). Secondly, the hospital services provide much needed help for her (“I just found it out two years ago and I’ve been really blessed”). Finally, she embarked on a mission to self-educate herself to the needs of her children:

**At all the home school conventions, I always try to get into the special needs**

track. In fact, they had a really good special needs track this convention. There was a speech pathologist and some other things that I took advantage of. . . And I've read probably every book there is on ADHD. My friends feel I am very knowledgeable in that realm. Knowledge doesn't always lend itself to practicality but I feel like I've done as much research as I can possibly fathom at this point. I've made those changes that makes it easier for them to learn.

Part of the job of providing for those needs includes selecting curricular materials that match the needs, interests, and abilities of the children. Faith conversed at length about the various publishers, textbooks, and materials she had selected for both children. She had tried quite a few – mostly Christian publishing companies like A Beka, Bob Jones University Press, Sonlight, and ACSI. These companies are frequently selected by home schoolers because they market products for the home school communities whereas the large publishers do not. However, Faith had also used other publishers like Scott-Foresman. She worked diligently to find the right textbooks, workbooks, and other materials to bring success to her children's learning experiences.

Academic and social progress. In accordance with state home school regulations, some form of evaluation must be submitted to the local school districts in which the home schooling families reside. Faith discussed how she approached this requirement for her children. Academically, Heather is at or above grade level as evidenced through year-end testing:

Heather does fine with standardized testing. She is not anxious or anything so I have her tested with a certified tester or sometimes (since I helped to lobby for morning testing with the school system and she tests well) I've had her go ahead

and take the test with them. Her scores are fine. I am not afraid of them.

For Dennis, the school district accepted the Woodcock-Johnson that was administered at the military hospital. Faith discussed the test results as well: "For his age, he is behind in language arts. For his grade, he is average or below average. But I am satisfied with his progress . . . he is progressing." However, she also noted, "I wouldn't want to see him in a structured [school] testing situation."

Discussing the children's social progress, Faith felt that they were both socially immature as compared to their peers and that this situation was partially due to their attention disorders. However, she noted that they were "very comfortable with adults and children – a wide range of people." She also commented that "they were not under peer pressure from the children they play with." Because of sometimes impulsive and inappropriate behavior, Faith and John chose to put Heather in enrichment classes this year to help her work on social behavior. The children also maintained a busy schedule outside the home – swim team, rollerskating, church and children's ministries.

Home schooling: Little time for self. All of the activities in which the children are involved, together with the constant demand of schooling children with special needs gives Faith little time for herself personally. She discussed this side of her experience as being the frustrating aspect. She contrasted her situation with other home schooling parents: "There are other people I know who can cross-stitch and do a whole lot of things while their children are schooled. But I can't because the moment I lose my focus or do something that doesn't have to do with school, they get distracted. . . that is the nature of their disability." Faith went on to emphasize the commitment involved in her decision especially as Dennis has been advancing in the grades.

**Benefits to the family.** Although there were some factors that detracted from the experience of home schooling, Faith also praised home schooling for being able to experience the moment of discovery with her children. This aspect was particularly true in that they seemed to struggle more than other children in light of their disabilities: “When the light comes on and they get it, that’s really satisfying.” Furthermore, she commented that home schooling was beneficial to their family: “It has kept us together over the last seven years.” Faith noted that the unusual demands of doctors’ appointments and therapy schedules were well suited to the flexibility of a home school schedule. This flexibility also meets the work schedule of a military father so that the children can have more time with him when he is home. Faith summarized much of their experience:

For our family structure, because of the kids’ special needs and because of our doctor’s appointments, and because it is quieter here, we can use the time diligently and not be distracted with other stuff. My oldest daughter has said that the worst part about being in school is the waste of time. She said that I can get so much more done at home. We have seen both sides.

### **Discussion of Interviews: Themes**

As Faith and the children shared their thoughts on home schooling, it became apparent that their status as a military family with special needs children was at the basis of their experience. The demands of a military lifestyle along with the special educational needs of the children placed a stress upon the family that could be alleviated through the more flexible schedule of home instruction. The strong Christian faith of the Pipers and a home schooling community with networks and support groups encouraged both the selection and commitment to the practice.

**A military lifestyle.** John Piper is a career military professional. Faith stated the facts and did not complain about his career. He was assigned to duty stations that entailed frequent absences so they sought a way to keep their family dynamics healthy. One of the ways the Pipers found would afford them “as much family time as we could get” was home schooling. Faith stated that home schooling allowed them to have days “when [her] husband, who is usually out to sea and not available, is home and the children can have a lighter load to spend time with him. [It’s] very important with a family in the military.” Faith was also grateful to have the medical and psychological services of the military medical facilities. She took full advantage of them finding the facilities to be a “blessing,”

**Special needs.** Faith Piper was fully knowledgeable about her children’s physical and psychological health and the educational implications thereof. Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of public and private schooling in helping them meet the various needs of their children, she and her husband decided that “it’s just better suited for them to be at home than it is for them to be in a [regular] classroom setting.” With their special needs in mind, Faith devised curriculum, instructional methods, and forms of assessment that were customized to each child’s strengths and weaknesses. She educated herself to the educational diagnoses and took advantage of home schooling networks and support groups. However, it was definitely the special needs considerations that convinced the Pipers that their only real educational option for Dennis and Faith was home schooling:

I think [home schooling] has kept us together [as a family] over the last seven years . . . we are in a doctor’s office or doing something medically at least once

a week. I have the flexibility of saying, 'Okay, we are going to do our schoolwork now in this period of time because we have a doctor's visit in the afternoon or tomorrow and we'll do school after that. I don't think we would be able to make up the work over the years with all the doctors and the back and forth. It's a way of life.

**Underpinnings of faith.** Although Faith never specifically cited her religious faith as a rationale for home schooling, her conversation and her actions gave strong evidence of her beliefs. While their children were enrolled initially in a Christian school, they had been thinking about home schooling and then were "convicted that [home schooling] was probably what we needed to do for our children." The basis of Faith's curriculum choices was Christian publishers like A Beka, Sonlight, and Bob Jones University. The family had strong involvement in their church activities, and Faith and Dennis attended a mid-week Bible study for home schoolers and their mothers. The geographic area in which the Pipers live has a well-organized home schooling community with support groups, newsletters, umbrella schools, and organized enrichment classes. Although available to anyone, these services and affiliations are primarily outgrowths of the Christian community.

**Time.** Another sub-theme that emerged through Faith's interview was the idea of time commitment. A military lifestyle introduced time constraints upon family life. The children's special needs with all the visits to doctors and therapists brought demands upon time. Home schooling, as a solution to these demands for time, had a huge time commitment upon the parent/teacher. Was it all about time and priorities in life?

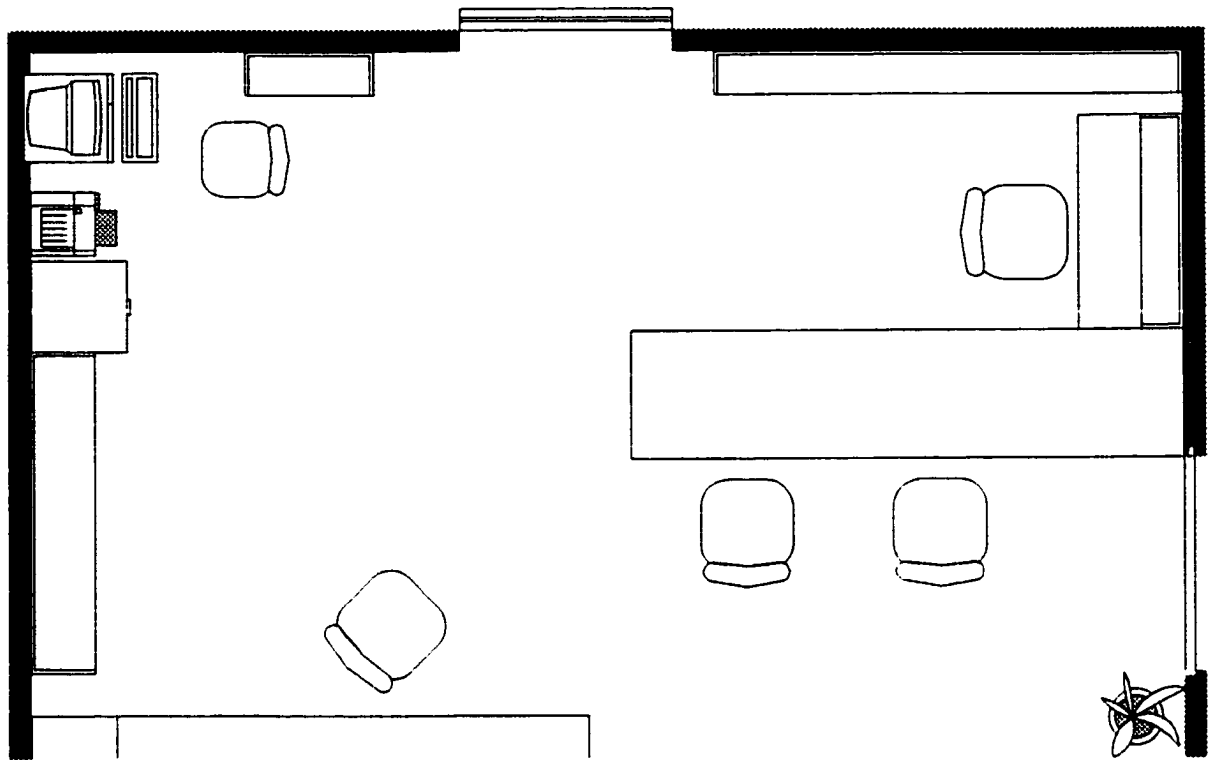
**Summary.** After completing these formal, taped interviews, Faith and I sat and talked for another hour while the children worked and played alongside their father. This time afforded me an opportunity to make observations of the setting and build a relationship with the family so that my presence would not be so intrusive into the school time on the following day. The Pipers were very open and gracious; they were willing to share their thoughts and experiences as well as two days of their lives with me.

#### **Observations: The Pipers**

I returned to the Piper household Tuesday morning at 9:20 a.m. to find the family in the midst of eating breakfast and taking care of morning chores. Normally, they started the school day at 9:00 a.m., but this day had begun with early morning doctor's appointments for both Faith and Dennis. My arrival coincided with the completion of the meal and the commencement of a devotional time. The children and their teacher took their places in the schoolroom – Dennis and Faith sitting side by side at the worktable opposite Heather who would later turn her chair 90° away from the table into her built-in desk facing the wall (figure 10). My observation point was a chair placed in the corner of the room about two feet diagonally behind Dennis. The room itself was not large, and I was never far away from any of the conversation or activity.



**Figure 10.** Diagram of the Piper's schoolroom.



**“You are my portion, O Lord; I have promised to obey your word,” Heather read fluently from her Bible and then from a small devotional guide while occasionally receiving help on pronunciation from her mother. Expressively, Heather finished her reading: “Salvation is the first step in a journey of a lifetime,” and Faith concluded with a prayer. Focused on the task at hand, both mother and daughter seemed oblivious to Dennis who stood up several times or turned around to stare at me during this family devotional time. Faith had indicated earlier that Dennis was taking medication for ADHD, a practice many home school parents avoided and one reason they choose home education.**

**Heather and Dennis: Independent vs. dependent learner.** Academics began at 9:30 a.m. with Faith and Dennis settling into the first activity and Heather pulling her chair into her work area and opening her assignment book. On Monday, Faith had shown me the assignment books she prepared for each child on a weekly basis. On the weekends, she prepared her lesson plans in her master plan book and copied each child's assignments into their individual assignment books. Heather worked independently in the mornings selecting the order of the subjects and checking with her mother as each was completed. Faith checked off assignments by placing stickers on each subject line as the children moved through the designated activities.

While Faith and Dennis opened a phonics workbook, *Explode the Code*, Dennis popped up to run to the bathroom. Faith leaned toward me and whispered, "I can tell this will be a classic morning. It usually is when we have an early one." Dennis returned and began the lesson still drinking juice from breakfast and taking bites of leftover oatmeal. After a few minutes, it was apparent Dennis was more interested in the food than phonics. Then Faith insisted he finish eating and clean his dishes. Returning to the lesson, feet dangling at odd angles or tucked underneath him, his mother positioned his body to enable him to work at the table with less difficulty. Dennis finally seemed to focus on the task at hand, and I became aware of the absolute peace in the household – and even in the neighborhood.

For a minute, I reflected on the lack of activity in the neighborhood as I drove through the streets of crowded townhouses with cars parked in the driveways indicating either stay-at-home mothers or husbands gone on deployment. The grayness of the day and occasional rain added to the feeling of solitude. As Dennis and Heather worked

through their morning academic routine, I became keenly aware of the hum of the computer and the cycling of the air conditioner and refrigerator.

While Dennis and Faith worked together through the sequence of language arts lessons that morning, Heather sat at her desk about three feet in front of them attending to her lessons. As she finished each activity, she handed the finished product to her mother who simultaneously checked off the assignment or corrected the lesson as she monitored Dennis. She always handed the completed lesson to me after they were done for my inspection while Heather went back to her desk to continue her studies. There were no questions about lesson content or directions for the majority of the morning. I was very much impressed with the accuracy of Heather's work and her ability to focus her attention for long periods of time. I was reminded of Faith's remarks the day before about the waste of time in conventional classrooms. On the other hand, I also had to wonder about the lack of interaction between Heather and anyone else during this phase of her school day.

In direct contrast to Heather were the behaviors of Dennis. After twenty minutes of the phonics lesson that required constant feedback from Faith, they moved on to an English grammar lesson. Using an A Beka textbook that used biblical examples to teach language concepts, Dennis had to rewrite sentences about Moses and Aaron in the Sinai Desert using correct punctuation and capitalization. As Faith got up to adjust the air conditioning, Dennis lost interest in his work preferring to pick at a scab on his elbow. When his mother returned, he then focused on the writing – but not without constant encouragement from Faith who praised him for his improved handwriting.

A phone rang and abruptly disturbed the rhythm of the morning. Faith ignored it to let the answering machine pick up the call. However, it rang again a minute later. This time, Faith responded remembering the hospital was supposed to call with some test results. As she left the room, Dennis seemed to seize the moment. He spied a box of crackers on the end of the work table, opened it and placed a whole one in his mouth. He then found a “ball of electricity” to show me. He told me the story of finding it at an arcade, but because of his articulation difficulties, I had a difficult time understanding his explanation.

As Faith reappeared, Dennis settled back in his chair and his workbook, but his attention was definitely waning. He grabbed a tissue and blew his nose showing the results of his effort to his mother. Wiggling, leaning back in his chair, he protested over completing the sentence writing. Nevertheless, Faith, always calm and patient, managed to get him to continue and finally complete it. No matter what Dennis did, Faith did not change her demeanor. I was under the impression that this was her normal response and not because she was under observation.

Less than an hour into the morning’s studies, Heather finished vocabulary, language arts, and literature lessons. She then asked her mother if she could take a break. Faith agreed and asked Heather to put water on to boil for iced tea. Looking for a boxed juice drink, Heather banged around the kitchen filling the teakettle and placing it on the stove before returning to her desk.

Heather’s break seemed to be a time of transition for the schoolroom as Dennis began his reading lesson, which included a story from an old Pathway reader. Faith had explained to me that this older basal reader published by an Amish community in Iowa

worked better for Dennis since the black and white drawings were less distracting while he tried to focus on the text. Although reading in a monotone, Dennis attacked the words strongly and without hesitation. In the meantime, Heather was singing to herself while sipping her juice. Several requests from her mother and brother finally got her to stop. She retrieved the boiling teakettle, poured the steaming water into a pitcher and began a vocabulary lesson

By 10:30 a.m., Dennis checked his assignment pad and put stickers next to all his completed language arts-based subjects. He completed all within the hour and was ready to begin his assigned math lessons. Working from a colorful textbook on a lesson about liquid measurement, Dennis squealed with delight over the instructions that directed him to use colored pencils to identify different types of measurement. Heather handed him a plastic container full of crayons and pencils from one of the shelves above her desk.

As he progressed through the lesson, he continued to utter high-pitched noises to punctuate his colorings. Occasionally, he turned around to smile at me or exclaim something unrelated like, "I wish I could have some coffee!" Faith was actually trying to read a paperback book while he completed the math lesson, but when the noises and comments began to crescendo, she once again turned all her attention on Dennis. After seeing how Faith worked almost focused entirely on one child and his needs providing constant feedback, I wondered how he would survive in a regular classroom setting. It was not until he completed all his day's assignments in the next half-hour that his mother attended to anything or anyone else for any significant amount of time. I also wondered how much that situation contributed to Heather's almost absolute independence during

the school morning. Was she that capable or did her brother's need produce that behavior in her?

When Dennis completed the lesson on measurement, he asked for a break. Claiming he was hungry, he disappeared into a pantry closet off the entry hall of the house. Meanwhile, Faith arranged his next assignment – another math lesson featuring addition of three digit numbers. Dennis reappeared with a cookie as Faith was placing Cuisenaire rods alongside his math workbook. Nibbling and working on math problems, Dennis first estimated the sums and then found the exact answers using the rods when not completely sure of a response. With Faith attending, he vocalized every step of each problem he solved. By 11:00 a.m., Dennis had completed mathematics for the day. He was becoming noticeably more animated as the morning was winding down and he headed into the final series of lessons on spelling and handwriting.

Time for Heather. While Dennis was being directed through the steps of his lessons – again with constant oversight and feedback from Faith, Heather continued to select assignments to complete. She finished math homework from her Thursday enrichment class and began a social studies lesson from Sonlight Publishing, *Praying Through the 10-40 Window*. After reading silently for a few minutes, she placed the paperback textbook with a stack of novels and informed her mother she needed some help with math. Faith asked her to record the number of pages she read in the novels while Dennis finished his handwriting lesson.

By 11:20 a.m., two hours after beginning the morning's lessons, Dennis announced he was done for the day. With his mother's blessings, he checked off all assignments in his planner, put away all materials, and opened a math game on the

computer. Winning a round of addition baseball, he asked to be excused to the living room to watch a video. Faith agreed and Dennis bounded out of the schoolroom leaving Heather his place at the worktable.

The lesson Heather placed before her mother was on equivalent fractions and required the use of manipulatives, which Faith removed from a container on the table. As Heather read the directions, Faith pulled the proper plastic pieces from the box to demonstrate the concept. Heather then took the manipulatives from her mother to solve the next few problems. There was finally a moment of discovery when it was clear that the intended results occurred in the process. Both mother and daughter seemed very pleased with that moment of inspiration.

Two hours later: Done. Faith announced that school was over for the day, but then Heather pulled out another worksheet of problems to complete. I saw a noticeable sagging of Faith's shoulders then. She seemed weary after the morning's work. Nevertheless, she pulled out more manipulatives for Heather to use as she tackled each problem on the page. Finally finished at 11:35 a.m. and all materials put back into place, Heather removed herself from the schoolroom and joined Dennis in the living room. Faith looked at her watch and noted, "It usually takes us two and a half to three hours to finish the morning schoolwork. You made a difference here today."

Faith discussed her afternoon routine while straightening up the schoolroom and moved to the kitchen to prepare lunch. After lunch they would do "read alouds" and maybe watch a video to supplement social studies lessons. Yesterday, they had watched a biography of Mother Theresa and had plans to watch *Gandhi* and *Passage to India*. "Read aloud" time was when they read together as a family and when Faith and Heather

spent more time together. Faith admitted that Dennis took up the bulk of her morning so that she made a concerted effort to use the afternoons to devote to Heather's interests. They were always done with schoolwork for the day by 3:00 p.m. and began extracurricular activities. Also the neighborhood children arrived home around this time for those afternoons of "hanging out" as Dennis noted.

### The Pipers: Summary

I left the Pipers at lunchtime. They had been very gracious to open their home and school to me, but seemed relieved as I left. Although I felt that the school day I witnessed was fairly typical of their normal routine, I was also aware that their behaviors were also somewhat altered due to my presence. The children had definitely relaxed around me from the initial meeting the day before, but while in the formal schooling process probably felt somewhat obligated to perform – Heather with increased diligence and Dennis with both increased effort in his school work and in entertaining a new person in the house.

I was impressed with the absolute time on task during the morning's lessons for both children – Heather as she worked almost entirely by herself and Dennis under strict scrutiny from his mother. Although there was definitely a structure to the school day, breaks were taken as needed and occurred during the natural flow of the lessons. My educator's mind could not help but feel some misgivings about the lack of interaction in the morning's activities for Heather and an absence of science education in their curriculum. Were my thoughts a product of my own conventional school tradition or were these valid misgivings? In light of the special needs considerations, Faith was satisfied with the children's progress both academically and socially. She and John were



adamant about keeping Heather and Dennis in home education until high school, but were open to conventional schooling after that time.

### **The Gray Family: Life in the Rural South**

**Matt and Diana Gray live about thirty miles outside a large city in the southcentral United States. Their 140 year-old farmhouse is located on three acres of land situated in a farming community dedicated to cotton and soybean crops. Scattered throughout this rural area are also farms whose purpose is to train thoroughbred racehorses. As a matter of fact, the Gray's property is bordered on two sides with horse pastures. When I commented on the beauty of the setting, Diana noted her discomfort over the horses that came to the farms in a "wild" state to be "broken" before returning to their owners' stables. "I'm afraid the kids will have their hands bitten off if they decide to pet one." The Grays have three children: Caleb (8), Adam (4), and Grace (19 months). They are also expecting another child in a few months.**

**Driving out to the farmhouse on a warm, fall afternoon, no one would suspect that it was located near a large city at all. Immediately after leaving the interstate highway that circumscribes the city, there were no suburban neighborhoods that so often accompany a city's growth. The small two-lane highway that took me out to the Gray's home passed through cotton fields that were ripe for harvest. It looked as though fields were covered with a generous dusting of snow. The highway was littered with cotton that had blown off the loads being hauled to processing points. Withered yellow soybean fields were interspersed among the cotton fields attesting to the fact that very little rain had fallen in the past few months.**

As I pulled into the dirt driveway of the Gray's home, fitting my car between three used cars with "For Sale" signs, a dirty brown chow dog barked my arrival. Immediately, two young boys and their mother walked out onto the front porch of the old, white-sided farmhouse. Dressed in t-shirts and shorts, barefooted, they greeted me with friendly smiles and handshakes and took me into their home. The house was dark, cool, and airy with large windows, wood paneled walls, and 14-foot ceilings to the large rooms that flowed from one to the other. Matt (35) and Diana (30) bought the house seven years prior, and it was obviously a full-time project for them. There was evidence of renovation everywhere inside and out. Nevertheless, the home was inviting, attractive, and comfortable. We sat in the living room to talk. Since this room was connected to the dining room with a large doorway, I could see the "schoolroom" decorating scheme in there. Sipping dark, sweet iced tea, we shared introductions while the boys played and interrupted us frequently. Finally, Diana sent them outside to ride the four-wheeler to give us a few moments of peace as the baby finished her nap.

A petite woman with long, brown hair pulled back into a ponytail, Diana shared her background with me as I informed her of the purpose of my research. Her accent gave evidence to the fact that she had been born and raised in the area. She left to attend a large southern university where she majored in chemistry and met Matt. After completing a year of a doctoral program in analytical chemistry, she left academia for marriage and raising a family. Along with managing the household and children as well as teaching, she also kept the books for one of her husband's businesses – glass installation. Matt's primary occupation is firefighting, a job with rotations that allow time for additional money making ventures. Also, the Grays have a license for selling used cars - hence the

three on the front lawn. All of these occupations and interests take up much of Matt's time but also give them the ability to raise a large family and renovate an old house without an additional income from Diana. Diana did muse about one day teaching chemistry in a high school when her duties to her family permitted it. At the present time, though, she knew that she was called to take care of her husband, children, and home and attend to the schooling needs of Caleb, the oldest. Because of Matt's full schedule, I did not have the opportunity to meet him. Formal introductions aside, I pulled out the tape recorder to ask Diana questions about her home schooling experience.

#### Interviews: Diana and Caleb Gray

##### Diana Gray

Home schooling: A philosophical choice. While Caleb and his brother were driving the four-wheeler around the yard of the farmhouse and the baby continued her nap, I asked Diana why she had chosen to home school Caleb. That decision was made jointly by her and her husband, she informed me, for religious reasons. The couple were Christians, Matt having become one about the time of Caleb's birth. Diana remarked that Matt strongly was convinced that the purpose of the public schools was not compatible with their own philosophical beliefs. Therefore, she noted, "We had originally planned to home school our children for religious reasons because we believed that the public schools were doing everything that they could to deter any beliefs in God or certainly Christianity." Both products of public schooling themselves, Matt was the more adamant of the two about home schooling. Diana admitted she would like to send Adam to a public kindergarten while she continued to teach Caleb.

A history of Caleb's needs. Because of Caleb's special needs, Diana did not see a formal school setting in his near future. When I asked her about Caleb's background and her decision to continue home schooling him, it was apparent the Grays were home schooling for far more than philosophical reasons. Diana realized, from the time Caleb was an infant, that "something was not normal." He was not affectionate and would stiffen and cry when held or touched. He did not talk formally until he was 4 ½ although he could read at 3 ½ years. She took him to the public school system for an evaluation at three years old. The diagnosis was speech delay, and he was placed in speech therapy. After four sessions where he screamed, hit the walls, and vomited on the therapist, Diana and the therapist agreed that he was not ready. Upon a referral to a psychologist, Diana took Caleb for another evaluation. This time, the diagnosis was autism and specifically Asperger's Syndrome, which places the child at the high functioning end of the autism spectrum. The psychologist informed Diana that there was a preschool program available for such children so Diana took the diagnosis back to the school system and asked for the program.

The program did not provide adequately for Caleb's needs and seemed to create additional problems: "We started him in a preschool program, and he began to show signs of regression. It was difficult to deal with. He began to show signs of being physically abusive toward himself and became very easily frustrated, cried, and that sort of thing. So we felt a calmer environment would be better for him – he could focus better." They kept Caleb in the preschool program until it ended that school year. Additionally, when they realized the kindergarten program had no provisions for his special needs, they knew he "could not handle it." Then, they enrolled Caleb in a local

**Christian umbrella school for home schooling families. Being technically a private school, they bypass the state's home schooling requirements. The umbrella school to which they must submit grades twice a year keeps their records – for a fee of \$40 a year for one child, a cap of \$90 per family. There is no testing requirement, but families are urged to keep ample documentation of student progress. Diana cannot imagine a formal testing situation for Caleb.**

**Meeting needs: Dealing with him as an individual. When asked how she was meeting the needs of Caleb in a home setting, Diana replied that she just tried “to deal with him as an individual.” When first diagnosed, she did a lot of research, reading books on autism and searching the Internet for information. She felt that the schools had some advantages in that they might have children of similar abilities with whom Caleb could interact. Such was the case in his preschool. However, she knew that after preschool, public school “wasn't an option.” Diana continued, “I didn't want to put him in with children who were ‘normal’ because they tease and taunt him. What do I do to meet his needs? When I see that he needs to learn something, then I work with him on it.” Diana admitted that she had no formal training in special education and no input at present from support groups or home schooling organizations. The umbrella school in which Caleb was enrolled simply provided her the legal framework in which they could conduct home schooling. The only obligation was to submit grades twice a year.**

**“Meeting his needs as an individual” also characterized the selection of curriculum. Diana planned the course content based upon the state learning objectives. She put together the courses, resources, and materials according to Caleb's abilities and interests: “He's really behind in some areas and ahead in some areas. He's working out of**

a second grade math book and a third grade grammar book. He does writing, and we have a second through fourth grade science book out of which we are working.” Having tried curriculum packages, Diana preferred to select textbooks from home schooling magazines and to buy workbooks from the local educational supply store. Putting together her own curriculum enabled Caleb to concentrate on one skill or concept at a time. If there were multiple skills or reviews of previous ones imbedded in a lesson, as was so often the case in the packages, Caleb would be confused. In addition to workbooks and textbooks, Caleb spent a great deal of time using educational CD-ROMs on the computer and was proficient in use of the Internet. Diana also took the children to the local public library frequently participating in the weekly story hour developed specifically for home schoolers.

Academic and social progress. Discussing his academic progress, Diana gave a positive report citing progress in mathematics and writing. His reading had always been above his grade level. Although Caleb was presently below grade level in math, he was making steady progress. At the time of this interview, he was working on addition with carrying and measurement in time and money. Diana was particularly pleased with his progress in writing: “His writing skills were nonexistent. He could read on about a third grade level when we began [in kindergarten], but he couldn’t write at all – maybe three or four letters, maybe the word *cat*. Now he can write capitals and lower case letters. He can write all day, loves to write and draw pictures.”

Social progress for Caleb has not been as remarkable according to his mother. He has developed his “language to communicate with other children and learned phrases that are appropriate in certain situations.” However, his social skills still have a long way to

go: “He mostly mimics phrases that he has learned. He doesn’t come up with a lot of new things on his own around other children . . . he usually ends up in a fistfight in a social setting with other children categorized as normal, especially at his age level or above. He gets along really well with younger children. Most adults are not really tolerant of him. He tends to get a little too verbal, and they get annoyed.”

Taking credit for accomplishments. What Diana found satisfying about home schooling Caleb was the ability to “see the progress he is making and know that I take some responsibility for that. I think that it is better than if he were in a public or private school setting . . . I just take some credit for his accomplishments.” However, there were also frustrating moments. Diana found that his crying and his own constant frustrations were a challenge to her patience. She admitted they were both making progress in this area: Caleb was having fewer instances of crying and she was learning how to more effectively calm him down. Concerning any sort of personal feelings of frustration over the lack of time for herself, Diana was pragmatic in her outlook: “ I think I just reached the conclusion that I am not going to have time for myself. It’s not the schoolwork that keeps you from having time to yourself – babies, bottles, and diapers and housework – it’s just a part of life.”

As far as having an impact on the family, Diana did not think that home schooling had made a difference. The practice was a part of their normal routine. Diana stated her thoughts:

It hasn’t really changed it that much because our family life pretty much revolves around raising the children and teaching them. Just the fact that I have a few organized things that I do every day hasn’t really changed our lives very

much. We don't have winter and summer vacation. We do school all year. If we have to take a day off, we do. It doesn't really affect our lives that much because I taught my children before I registered [for home schooling].

During the interview, the baby had awakened. Diana got up to get her and checked on the boys. We resumed our conversation while she rocked Grace. My presence did not seem to affect the routine of the home. Looking forward to the observation the following day, Diana concluded the interview by stating that their daily school schedule was not a structured one: "You try to do schoolwork five days a week at least, sometimes six. But if you don't and you only get two or three in, then that is the way it is. We do schoolwork for an hour a day and then I try to guide him [Caleb] towards an activity where he can be on his own for a few hours."

#### Caleb Gray

Diana took Grace into her bedroom to change a diaper and asked Caleb if he would like to talk to me. He bounded out of his parent's office where he had been playing on the computer and sat next to me on the other side of double lounge chairs eager to engage in a discussion. When Caleb realized that the conversation would be recorded, he began singing, "Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam . . ." It was apparent that Caleb enjoyed being the center of attention. I quickly launched into questions about his home school experience.

Caleb's interview: An exercise in divergent thinking. Caleb informed me that math was his favorite part of school "because I know all the answers to math." Interestingly, Diana had discussed earlier that math was his deficit area and Caleb had just completed a difficult session that day where his father had marked three problems



incorrect. Apparently, Caleb had been devastated by the appearance of red ink on his paper, a practice Diana seldom performed. Caleb, then, proceeded to discuss the parts of speech he had learned or was in the process of learning in English and some of the other subject areas as well: “I just learned some nouns and adverbs and adjectives and even plural nouns. We also do maps and geography. We also do science . . . we talked about clouds today and we also talked about water.” When I asked him about writing, he broke into a narrative on some of the story characters he included in his writings:

I write about lots of things like dinosaurs and stuff. I also wrote a story about three people named Ed, Peter, and Ralph. They have beards and these hats that you dance with. And they are kind of silly. And they are friends with Dash. Dash is outrageous, funny, and crazy. He also builds inventions. His favorite things are dinosaurs and monsters. His wife is Miss Frizzle, but Miss Frizzle bothers him all the time.

Caleb would have continued the tale, but I asked more questions about what he did in “school” and on his own time. He was particularly enthralled with science, specifically dinosaurs and fossils. He would often ask me questions as we spoke inquiring if I liked volcanoes or had been to Hawaii, which I had. That discovery made it particularly challenging to return to his thoughts and experiences. However, when I asked him about his use of the Internet, I received a lesson on the differences between the use of *.com* and *.org* in the address of a website:

I go to Juno and connect to the Internet. I’ve got Internet for Kids. My favorite Internet site is FoxKids because it’s got the Magic School Bus on it. Just go to [www.foxkids.com](http://www.foxkids.com). Well, when you go to [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org), you need an *org*, not a *com*.

When you go to Disney.com, you need a *com*. Some websites need a *com* and some need an *org*.

When I asked Caleb if he sent e-mail to people, he asked me if I “used to do that when [I was] a kid?” Very amused, I explained that Internet was a recent phenomenon to which he commented, “Oh, maybe that’s when I was born.” As the interview progressed, I frequently had to bring my focus back to Caleb because he would turn the tables upon each new subject area asking me questions. He asked such questions as if I liked obsidian, if I had ever heard of the Galapagos Islands, if I knew that tornadoes were dangerous, and did I think Hawaiian dancers were beautiful? I ended the interview with a feeling that Caleb and I could continue our conversation for a long time jumping from subject to subject. Diana had commented that he would spend long hours in front of the computer or reading books and encyclopedias.

As far as commenting on his own experiences in home schooling, his answer was brief. I asked him if he could compare his experience in preschool with home school – which did he like better. He replied, “Well, yesterday, we talked about my favorite things like animals and dinosaurs and stuff. We talk about everything. I like it.” He did remember being in preschool, but did not recall any experience or event while there.

Engaging Caleb in conversation was an easy task. He was polite (“Yes and no, ma’am”) and certainly interested in a wide range of subject matter. He seemed to enjoy my company as we sat side by side during the interview, but he would not look me in the eye as we talked. Diana had informed me that she had some of the same tendencies as Caleb when she was a child. She was labeled *developmentally delayed* with indications of poor motor skills and immature social skills while being a precocious reader. She recalled

forcing herself as she got older to hold the gaze of other people while having a conversation. When I dismissed Caleb from the session, he was perfectly content to return to his room. I looked forward to being an observer to the events of the following day.

### Themes of the Interview Responses

Several themes emerged primarily from the interview with Diana. Caleb was an engaging conversationalist for an eight year-old child, but his answers to my questions showed as much fantasy and inquiry as they showed fact and opinion. Diana described a family lifestyle that included formal learning integrated into the daily routine in a natural manner. The decision to home school Caleb was made partly because there were no other options for Caleb and partly because of a religious conviction that it was the best choice for him.

Home schooling: Totally integrated learning. Once the decision had been made to teach Caleb at home, Diana determined that he would have a “calmer environment” where he could “focus better.” Caleb’s brief experience with formal schooling was not a particularly satisfying one. At home, Diana could meet his needs as they arose: “What am I doing to meet his needs? When I see that he needs to learn something, then I work on it.” Diana relayed an example of teaching Caleb shoe tying, a skill that took him a year to master including overcoming the tears and demonstrations of frustration.

The choice of curriculum, the structure of the school day, the decision of which days to teach during the year are all decided in accordance with the needs of the individuals involved and the natural course of events. Because schooling is just another part of the family’s day-to-day routine, “it hasn’t really changed [the family life] very

much.” Diana simply viewed teaching as a part of raising children. She characterized her style of teaching as “unstructured and natural.” As far as the future, she was very pragmatic: “I think it’s always been a wait-and-see thing for me.” Whether they would use conventional schooling again, she replied, “I guess we will just have to cross that bridge when we come to it.”

Home schooling: A means of protection. When Diana and Matt decided to educate Caleb at home, they provided a safe haven for him. The small rural public school district provided few means to help Caleb. The “calmer environment” Diana mentioned became a means to protect Caleb from his own self-destructive behavior and from the teasing of other children. In preschool, Diana reported that Caleb “began to show signs of being physically abusive towards himself and he became easily frustrated, cried, and that sort of thing.” His sessions with the speech therapist had been disastrous. Even working with him at home evoked behavior that was replete with signs of frustration: “He cries with everything he finds to be the least bit difficult.” However, Diana knew that she had to learn coping strategies, patience, and methods of teaching Caleb how to learn those skills that were sources of irritation, like shoe tying.

Diana and Matt also brought Caleb home to protect him from the taunts of children or from being “tormented and neglected by the teachers because . . . they don’t have enough time to spend with the children.” Even at times when Caleb was put into a social setting with other children, Diana was very watchful because his social skills were so lacking: “He usually ends up in a fistfight in a social setting with other children categorized as normal especially at his age level or above.”

**Summary.** The taped interview with Diana provided the basis for the suggested themes and the background for the observation to follow. Diana was an articulate participant. She was open in her discussions about her experiences. The children were friendly and a pleasure to both observe and interview. Diana had stated about Caleb, “Most adults are not really tolerant of him. He tends to get a little too verbal and they get annoyed.” Caleb was verbal, but from a researcher’s point of view, I was delighted and not annoyed. I looked forward to the next day.

### **A School Day with the Gray Family**

The Grays awake anywhere between 6:00 and 7:30 a.m. depending upon the activities of the adults and the baby in the family. Diana usually baked bread each morning using flour from the wheat she had ground earlier. Breakfast and morning chores were between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m., and schoolwork followed shortly thereafter. I arrived as breakfast was ending and the children and dog ran out to greet me. Dressed in t-shirts and shorts and no shoes, Caleb and Adam wanted to show me their bedroom while their mother was busy with the baby. It certainly seemed to be a room that would delight young boys. A large wooden structure took up the majority of the room. Two beds were positioned at a right angle one above the other reaching a few feet below the ceiling. A ladder went up and a chute made of PVC piping was the route down. Movie posters decorated the walls that were not taken up with shelves that contained volumes of children’s books and toys. One wall had old school lockers labeled with the contents of various children’s playthings, such as building blocks. Two large windows overlooked a neighboring horse pasture. Diana called the boys into the living room to begin the school day.

The school day: Juggling children and chores. I quickly took my seat in a lounge chair in the living room and pulled out my notepad as Diana and all three children sat cross-legged in a circle in the middle of the rug. “There are seven days, there are seven days, there are seven days in a week. Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday,” they sang. Grace, with hand gestures, indicated that she wanted to sing “Deep and Wide.” Caleb helped her with the hand motions as they sang the children’s Sunday school song. Adam played with a small motorcycle keeping rhythm with the song while they sang. The singing over, Diana led Caleb into the dining room to locate the day’s date on a large calendar that hung on one wall amid completed school worksheets and drawings. Adam followed the two, and Diana put him to work at the large, antique dining table. “Circle the letter *N*,” she instructed him as he grabbed a crayon from a plastic container.

While Adam was getting settled, Caleb wandered back to the living room and banged out some “music” on the old, upright piano in the corner and then spied a small, toy lizard. He playfully placed it on my head when Diana summoned him back to the dining room. I moved to a chair in the schoolroom to have a better view of the events in there. Caleb sat down next to his mother at a child’s table and chairs placed in the bay window section of the dining area (see Figure 11). Diana presented a lesson on plural noun endings. Explaining the rule, she wrote on a marker board. Caleb quickly grasped the idea and spelled correctly the examples she placed on the board. “I am smart!” he yelled. He giggled frequently and interjected, “This is fun!” while changing each *ch* ending to *ches*. Moving to the large table, he completed a worksheet vocalizing throughout the exercise and painstakingly writing in large, block letters the spelling

words. Diana moved from Adam to Caleb and back constantly providing positive feedback to their work. In the meantime, Grace wandered around the room jabbering happily and still “singing.”

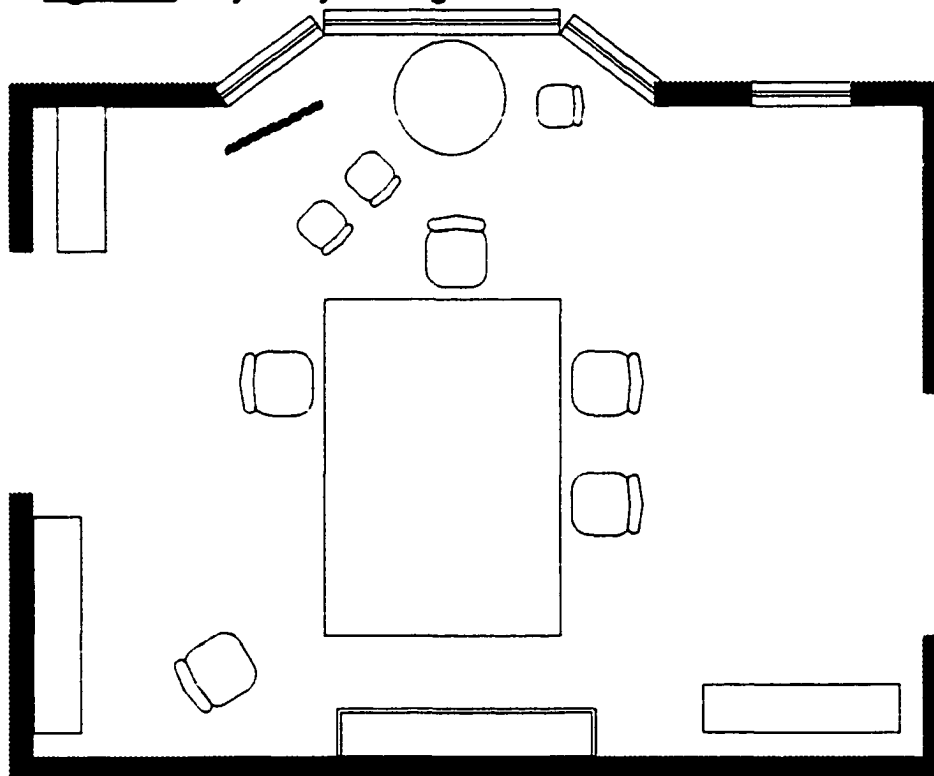
As Adam successfully completed his preschool lesson, he left the room and Diana resumed the lesson on plural endings moving back to the marker board. Again, Caleb grasped the concept of changing *fe* to *ves* and completed another worksheet. While Caleb and Diana were continuing their teaching/learning sequence, Grace was getting increasingly noisy and began climbing over them. At one point in time, the marker board came crashing down. Yet, Caleb never lost his concentration. Adam also ran back into the room to show me an educational resources catalog. I was amazed at how Diana and Caleb could maintain their focus and composure under the circumstances. A half hour into the morning’s work, Caleb had completed the language arts lesson showing proficiency in two spelling rules while Adam had conquered recognition of a capital *N* and Grace investigated the schoolroom activities.

When Caleb was finishing his second worksheet, Diana sent Adam and Grace into a playroom off the kitchen where Adam had set up a train set. They continued to play in there to give some peace to Caleb. It was only then that I heard the sound of the air pump in the large aquarium located in the room. Large, brightly colored freshwater fish swam around the tank oblivious to the human activity beyond the glass walls. The room was brightly lit with sunlight streaming in through the large bay window that overlooked three apple trees in the side yard.

After she finished making iced tea in the kitchen that connected to the dining room with both a doorway and a large pass-through window, Diana walked into the room

to check over Caleb's work and take out a box of pattern blocks. She called Adam into the room and placed the box before him and his brother instructing each of them to select a pattern and begin fitting the geometric blocks into the appropriate spaces.

**Figure 11.** Gray family's dining room/schoolroom.



Adam immediately selected a card and focused on the task. Caleb, however, continued to look through the cards without making a selection. "Is pattern blocks math?" he asked. His mother answered in the affirmative. When he couldn't seem to find a card or a reason to begin, Diana asked him if he was discouraged. He replied that he was discouraged and would rather play with Legos. Diana encouraged him to continue and selected a crocodile card for him getting him started on the first few blocks. It became an arduous task of



cajoling him into participation. Once when asked to work, he replied, "I can't. I guess I'm just too lazy."

Finally getting to a completion point, Caleb commented, "I love this." There was not much enthusiasm in his voice. I wondered why he had even made the statement. "I wish we had a CD ROM about patterns," he mused. When Diana told him that there was one, his demeanor changed and he became more animated. He took out each block and gave it the geometric shape name. He then walked out of the room stating, "Building with patterns is fun and important. I love math!" Caleb checked on Grace in the next room who was watching a "Teletubbies" video.

Putting away the blocks, Diana was ready to begin Caleb's next math lesson for the morning. She put Adam to work with on a letter *O* worksheet and handed a page of addition problems to Caleb. Since he was familiar with the directions, he settled down to work the problems. Satisfied that the children were all occupied, Diana left the room to go to her office to look up information about clouds on the computer. For science yesterday, they had begun a study of clouds. The clear skies were poor sources of examples and the children had painted pictures after looking at textbook pictures. Diana was hoping today had better offerings. Since severe thunderstorms were predicted, she seemed to have a rich source for the day. While she was gone, Adam finished identifying *O*s and gave it to me to check. He then ran out of the room after picking up toys off the floor. Caleb's work progressed more slowly. He labored over each problem, looking around, singing, and talking. He was frequently trying to catch my attention. Diana often checked on his progress while completing household chores. All of a sudden, Caleb shouted, "Guess what? I'm done. Wait until I tell Mama this!" Apparently, he had

finished the page of problems satisfactorily, and his core lessons were over for the day about 1 ½ hours into the school day. It was time for a break.

There was a feeling of relief in the atmosphere as Diana pulled out a homemade coffee cake and glasses of iced tea. I was not sure if there was a sense of relief each day when the difficult lessons were complete or if my presence had introduced an additional pressure. However, everyone seemed to welcome the morning snack time – including the researcher. It is tiring trying to focus on the activities of a learner in a learning environment with so many factors that command attention, such as the younger children.

As the snack time ended, Caleb placed his completed worksheets in his school folder, which is kept on the bookcase in the dining room. Evidence of his work was well documented for the umbrella school's requirements. For the day's science lesson, Diana invited everyone into the office to look at the entry on clouds that she had prompted on the computer. After reading the entry from *Encarta*, we traveled to the front yard to stare into the array of clouds overhead. Caleb was not very thrilled with the activity and asked to go back indoors commenting, "It hurts my eyes." Adam and Grace were completely wrapped up in their own interests which included climbing on top of the used cars and playing with some of the toys that are strewn over the front yard. After pointing out the fast-moving thunderclouds on the horizon, Diana relented to Caleb's wishes and sent everyone back into the house. She whispered to me that Caleb did not particularly like to be outdoors. I asked her if there was too much sensory stimulation for him in the setting, but she was not sure.

Feeling pushed to provide activities now, Diana suggested to Caleb that he show me some of his favorite CD ROMs. We returned to the office, which was a room entirely

lined with shelves floor to ceiling. Books, videotapes, catalogs, software packages, and knickknacks filled the shelves. Along with desks and filing cabinets, there was a copier and two computers set up. Caleb went directly to a carousel that contained a large selection of CD ROMs. His mother's suggestion triggered a thought that had been introduced earlier during math time, and Caleb searched for a disk that featured geometric patterns. He would not consider any other choice from the dozens of educational software packages the Grays owned. Unfortunately, Diana could not remember the name of the selection so that Caleb remained thoroughly dissatisfied and dejected. No one could cajole Caleb into loading any of the other disks.

About two hours after the family had begun the school routine, they were finished. Diana was apologetic but assured me that this was a fairly typical day. They often ran errands after completing the morning chores and schoolwork. This day was no different, visitor or not. They had plans to pick up a package at the post office and go to the library to find a book on clouds before having lunch and putting the baby down for a nap. The afternoon was when Caleb was able to do his own personal reading and computer time. The evenings were devoted to family activities together with Matt.

Diana explained a little more about her philosophy behind her teaching routine for Caleb before I left. She emphasized the need to present learning in a natural way to Caleb without the pressures he felt in the preschool setting that caused him to exhibit destructive and harmful behaviors. She gave priority each day to including math and English lessons since "that is what is important. The other subjects, history and science, are just facts. Caleb takes in so much information in his reading and computer work."

### Summary: The Gray Family

Shortly before noon, I thanked Diana and the children, petted the dog, and drove away as the raindrops were starting to fall on the parched fields. I noted the family preparing to take off on their errands as I turned onto the paved road in front of the house. It was difficult to imagine the amount of activity I had just witnessed in the Gray's home taking place in any of the other farmhouses that made up this quiet neighborhood. I had forgotten the amount of stamina necessary in caring for small children with high levels of energy.

Despite Diana's insistence that teaching was just integrated into the natural course of events during each day's routine and that she implemented unstructured experiences for the children, I found it very organized and purposeful. Perhaps, for her, the routine that included the teaching/learning times had become such a part of her being that it seemed "natural and unstructured." Diana had stated this idea in her interview: "... our family life pretty much evolves around raising the children and teaching them." However, to an observer with a background of traditional schooling, "natural" takes on a different meaning.

### **The Fine Family: Complex Needs**

Fall seemed to be in the air as I drove down the tree-lined streets of a suburban neighborhood in a large city of a mid-Atlantic state. The maples were turning shades of red and yellow and were dropping their leaves along the sidewalks and yards of brick split-level homes. The thirty-some year-old homes in the neighborhood appeared to be in their second generation of owners with bicycles and toys strewn in the yards. Close to the

busy intersection where the Fine home stood was the synagogue that was the cultural hub of the neighborhood. The Fine family, who are Orthodox Jews along with most of their neighbors, were in process of resuming their routines after the fall season of holy days.

I pulled into the driveway just as Ruth and two of her children were unloading the family van. They had just returned from taking Shimon to religious studies for the afternoon. Avi looked at me shyly as I introduced myself in the driveway and then ran toward the steps to the kitchen door. Carrying three month-old Shayna, Ruth shook my hand before leading me into the kitchen of her home. "Avi, show Mrs. Duffey your experiment," Ruth called out feeling compelled to entertain me while she prepared lunch for Avi and herself. Avi ran into the kitchen and said something I took to be an explanation of the plastic container with colored water setting on the bench of the dinette. It was difficult to understand Avi, who was 7 ½ years old and had communication difficulties. Avi was small for his age, but so were all the Fine children whom I met. Ruth herself was of short stature and all the children bore a likeness to her: dark hair that peaked out from her head covering, fair complexion, and large, expressive eyes.

Ruth placed plates with baked potatoes and canned tuna in front of Avi as she took her seat at the table. I had been holding the baby, who was obviously hungry also, and I would not be able to satisfy her nursing need. So we conducted formal introductions while Ruth and her two youngest children finished their meals. Like many mothers, Ruth could juggle many activities concurrently. With much animation, Ruth spoke quickly in an accent that betrayed her origins in the state of New York. As a matter of fact, she and her husband Morris had moved to this home from New York about seven years ago.

Morris (42) and Ruth (40) have six children: three boys and three girls. Baruch, 13 years old, arrived as I was leaving the house the first day I spent at the Fines' home. Technically home schooled, Baruch spent the mornings with a tutor and the afternoons at the school for religious studies where his brother Shimon (11) joined him each day. Shimon spent his mornings at home while his twin sister Chavah and younger sister Riva (9) attended a Jewish Day school. Morris, an actuary, was very supportive of home schooling, but Ruth was the teaching parent in the arrangement. Although Ruth had all but her dissertation completed in doctoral studies in economics from Columbia University, she had pursued her role as a wife, mother, and teacher wholeheartedly. She did not regret being "needed" in this full-time capacity except for the financial burden it placed on the family.

With so many tuition payments, it was apparent in the physical surroundings that the family sacrificed luxuries. It was obvious that it had been years even before the arrival of the Fines that the house had any renovations made. Peeling paint, threadbare carpets, torn window blinds, and aged appliances made up the interior of the home. The disrepair in the home was matched by the Fines' furnishings, which were sparse and in similar states of disrepair. Where the parents seemed to indulge their children was books and educational toys. These items were in abundance and evident in the large dining/living room next to the kitchen. The family dining table was covered with educational worksheets, clay molds, a large number cube, and writing implements. A large bookshelf made of shelving and concrete blocks lined one wall of the room. There were children's books, an encyclopedia set, educational toys, and building sets filling the shelves in a haphazard manner. Ruth and I sat on a sofa so that she could finish nursing

the baby while I conducted the interview. Avi busied himself with crayons and his Winnie the Pooh coloring book. He occasionally interrupted us and asked his mother if he could play with some chalk.

### Ruth Fine's Story

Ruth was a very articulate woman and offered lengthy responses to my interview questions. Because Ruth would get excited when answering some of my questions, she would sometimes stray from her original line of thought. I found myself sometimes confused with her responses and often asked for clarification. When Sharon Hensley referred her to me as a possible participant in the study, I did not realize that there were multiple children with special needs in her family. I thought that I would only be observing the youngest son, Avi, who was diagnosed with autism. When I arrived at their home, there were only he and the baby present. However, as Ruth began to relate the reason she originally chose to home school, I was surprised to learn the story of her oldest son who was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism.

Deciding to home school three sons. Baruch attended a Jewish day school for his early elementary years. While in fourth grade, his teacher felt his performance did not match his abilities. Ruth had a different opinion and insisted to the teacher that he was doing his best: "She never was satisfied with whatever he did." He became anxious. Ruth felt "he was possibly on the verge of a nervous breakdown" and was very "depressed." When faced with the possibility of being in the classroom of a critical teacher, Ruth decided to "pull him out." After that first year of home schooling, Baruch wanted to return to school, but Ruth refused to let him. She realized that "it wasn't just that teacher.

**It wasn't just personality. He couldn't handle the material . . . he couldn't hack it academically."**

**A year later, Ruth decided to home school the second son, Shimon, who also was struggling academically due to a learning disability. Like his older brother, he suffered anxiety while in the regular classroom: "[Shimon] was crying over homework – whether it was too hard or whether he wasn't understanding, whatever the reason." He also had difficulties at recess bringing home tales of boys fighting on the playground. Ruth did not think his withdrawn personality fit in with the more aggressive natures of the other boys. It was easier to make the decision to home school Shimon than it had been to home school Baruch. However, it took a while for Ruth and Morris to decide to "bring home" their youngest son. Avi's problems were even more challenging for a home schooling parent to undertake than had been his brothers' disabilities.**

**Avi was receiving services from the public school system from the time he was about two years old. He entered preschool when he was three years old, and the Fines were pleased with both the program and the teacher. Believing Avi would continue at the same school the following school year, they were surprised to receive a notice of a different location for Avi that September. When Avi arrived at his new school, Ruth was even less pleased: "Not only was this change very sudden, but Avi was one of three children in the class. One was Down syndrome; he spoke in grunts. The other was four or five years-old, not potty-trained, and also did not speak." The situation "worsened" for Avi. He stopped talking in class until Ruth attended with him to "show" the teacher he really could talk. Ruth began to confront the various levels of professionals in the school and the school district but was never really satisfied with any of the arrangements and**



programs for Avi. Finally, Ruth enrolled him in a private school for special needs students.

At his new school, there was some relief: “There was only one other kid in his class. The teacher was fantastic. He was happy. It might be the last time in school he was happy. Within one week, he was talking more. He was much more interactive with others – all for \$10,000 a year.” Unfortunately, more children enrolled and were placed in Avi’s classroom. Some of the children had more severe behavior and learning problems, and Avi was coming home with copycat behaviors. Avi remained at the school for 1 ½ years until Ruth and her husband no longer felt that he was making progress. They found that the behaviors of the other children were far too detrimental to the progress of their son, especially when faced with the large outlay of tuition. After a meeting with school officials, they asked to be released from their contract. The school obliged, and they brought Avi home.

Multiple needs require various approaches. Shortly before pulling him out of school, Ruth honestly did not know how she would teach Avi. She consulted with Sharon Hensley at Almaden Valley Christian School and investigated a program promoted through the National Academy for Child Development (NACD). The program was highly prescriptive and gave Ruth the confidence she needed to undertake Avi’s schooling. Furthermore, during the first few months of the program, Ruth took ill for ten days and basically just “lay there all day, not able to breathe, and he would crawl all over me.” Worried that Avi would regress markedly during this time, Ruth was delighted to realize that Avi “was still better than he was before even though we did practically no program.

He began to drop this repetitive talk [he had picked up at school].” Ruth was then encouraged to begin home schooling Avi in addition to the other two boys.

In the course of her story about her decision to home school her sons, Ruth had indicated the diagnoses of her sons. Baruch had Asperger’s syndrome and Shimon a learning disability diagnosed through a private psychologist. “I had all these special needs kids so I was alert to problems,” Ruth stated when discussing Avi’s condition. At an early age, he was diagnosed (also by a private psychologist) as having pervasive developmental delay. When he was later evaluated by a public school team, they did not perform their own psychological exam upon Ruth’s insistence. She shared, “My advocate told me not to have the school perform one because they would just say that he is mentally retarded and therefore limited in his abilities and wouldn’t have to do anything.” Ruth admitted that through her experience with public schools, she “developed a very negative attitude toward special education.”

When I asked Ruth how she was providing for the special needs of her children, some of the dissatisfaction she felt with the school system was evident. She indicated that her observations of her children’s various therapy sessions and her ability to read from the same literature as the professional educators enabled her to make some of the same provisions for her own children: “I’ve been involved in special education for 12 years and I’ve read a lot. I’ve attended speech therapy sessions with Avi and Baruch. I’ve observed what went on. It was intentional play . . . They have the Brigance. What is an IEP? It is taken straight from the Brigance. They will do what is next. I can get the Brigance, too, and I can say what comes next, too.” [*The Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early*

*Development* (1991) is a comprehensive inventory that includes assessments for skills from birth through the developmental age of six years.]

Ruth also sought support for the three boys in their home schooling efforts. To satisfy compulsory attendance requirements, they were enrolled in a Jewish umbrella school. For Baruch, she hired a tutor to instruct him in his core coursework. Like Shimon, he attended the school for religious studies in the afternoons. Additionally, Ruth enrolled Shimon in music therapy, a course that uses music to stimulate specific cognitive functions. Shimon puts on the earphones everyday during a period of silent reading as prescribed by the program. Ruth also takes him to a vision therapist to improve his visual tracking. As noted above, Avi was enrolled in the NACD program, which developed a curriculum for him after a period of evaluation. Ruth had to follow a particular course of activities every day and reported to a state representative of the program four times a year to discuss concerns and evaluate progress. Ruth was also a client of Sharon Hensley and called her occasionally with questions pertaining to Avi's education.

Programs and curricula. The NACD program provides the curriculum that Ruth uses to teach Avi. Reading selections come from the collection of children's books within the home. Avi seemed particularly fond of the Disney version of Winnie the Pooh books. When I questioned Ruth as to whether she had ever used a packaged curriculum, she replied, "I can't. I know that it wouldn't fit. And a lot of stuff is entertainment value, the cutting and pasting. I have to make sure that I have enough stuff that is going to make him better." It was obvious during the course of the day that Ruth tried to fill Avi's time with the activities prescribed by his program allowing him to play only when she needed a break or had to attend to either the baby or Shimon.

The other two boys used textbooks from various publishers selected for ability level and interest. Ruth believed strongly in capitalizing on interest. Therefore, Shimon's science lesson during the fall was studying a ham radio manual in order to obtain an operator's license. He diligently studied a section a day and answered questions to prepare to take an examination in the spring. Circuit diagrams and other principles of electricity, sound waves, Morse code, and various regulations of the Federal Communications Commission are a sampling of what made up his course of study. Ruth admitted that it was a challenge to provide reading material for Shimon to keep up with his interest level. However, since home schooling, Shimon was beginning to read at his grade level.

Academic and social progress. As far as academic progress was concerned, Ruth felt all her boys were moving in a positive direction since home schooling. The older boys were testing at grade level in their deficit areas of reading and language. Before coming home, they were below level by one to two years. Ruth also agreed that Avi was "definitely progressing." Avi's progress could not be measured in the same ways that his brothers could. With Avi, the goals were still in the preschool realm of talking in complete sentences, counting, and interacting socially in appropriate ways. As Ruth noted, "There are things that he is progressing on. He is more interactive. He's using words that he wouldn't have before . . . [when we took him out of school], he dropped all the negative stuff. He's definitely improved since we pulled him out. I see it but I would just like to see more."

[Six weeks after these interviews and observations, Ruth phoned me when the boys received their yearly academic evaluations based upon the results of the Wide Range

Achievement Test (WRAT). She was very excited over the progress of Baruch and Avi. Baruch had made progress in all areas, but notably his math score had risen two years, four months over the past year. Avi's auditory processing had improved two years in the last year to place him in the mid-preschool range. His math score had improved six months since the last quarterly evaluation. However, she was disappointed over Shimon's progress. He not only failed to improve but had even regressed in some areas. She attributed his regression to the lack of attention he received during his school day, particularly recently with the addition of a new child. Unfortunately, Ruth had just broken an ankle and was even less involved in the schooling process while recuperating. Friends were helping with housework and taking care of the baby and Avi, but there was no additional care and attention given to Shimon.]

When I asked about social progress for Avi, Ruth replied, "I think he is making progress, but I want more. That's what drives me to keep up with this program. I want more." Social progress was not exactly an issue with the other children who were all in some type of schooling situation either full or part time.

Ruth enjoys home schooling her children. She shared with me that teaching her children was simply a part of her calling in life. There was a sense of satisfaction in being needed by her children in this area. There was also a sense of satisfaction in being an integral part of the learning process. In discussing Avi, Ruth stated, "[The most satisfying part of home schooling is] when he makes progress – when he answers a 'why' question and he is on my watch. I feel it's because of me." She also noted that "what I really like about home schooling is that you get your own kid back. That is certainly true with regular kids, but especially true with special needs kids."

Frustration to Ruth was the juggling act, not having enough time to devote to the extreme demands of Avi's program and meeting the needs of the other children. She felt no frustration over having little or no time to herself: "I don't feel that way. I don't feel burned out by having them around me . . . I like home schooling and planning what we are going to learn . . . I like learning new things myself."

Because home schooling has become such a part their lives in the midst of other events, Ruth failed to see a major impact on her family's life. When I probed, she thought that perhaps "evenings might be more peaceful because each of [the children] is not carrying on about school." Later as she reflected upon the question and discussed it with Morris, they agreed that home schooling also meant a possible change of lifestyle for them with the loss of Ruth's earning potential. Interestingly, Morris perceived the home schooling day as a time when Ruth had the whole day to herself. To Morris, it seems that being occupied meant having an occupation outside the home. Morris's assessment did not offend Ruth, however. Her final statement to me was "I prefer things the way they are. Every minute is purposeful and meaningful."

#### Themes of Ruth's Interview

On the first day of my visit, Ruth was the only person available for whom an interview was appropriate. The themes I surmised then were based upon her perspective and experiences. Although I did not meet Morris, Ruth talked of him so frequently that I felt he was also a part of the interview process. It was apparent that he was very supportive of home instruction and of the job that Ruth undertook. The themes that emerged were forged by Ruth's personality, her mother's heart, and her faith.

**Parental ambition: “I just want more.”** The dominant theme in Ruth’s interview was her intense desire to help Avi achieve and progress. She repeated many times, “I just want more,” when discussing Avi’s academic and social progress and citing what she found frustrating in home schooling. The route that led them to home school Avi was filled with dashed hopes and frustrations with conventional schools. Ruth shared all the means they had explored to meet Avi’s needs: public schooling, private schooling, home schooling, and use of a somewhat controversial program. Ruth also noted that if money and time were not factors, she would do more: “If I didn’t have the baby, I would take him to a speech clinic. Why not? It wouldn’t do him any harm. It might not do him any good, but it wouldn’t do him any harm. I don’t feel at liberty to do that. I’ve got Shimon in the morning and the baby makes it a little difficult to travel.” She later stated, “Maybe if I were rich, I would take him to a vision therapist.”

Ruth’s desire to provide for the needs of all her children was also evident. However, the extreme challenge of Avi’s disability seemed to draw emotion and intensity from Ruth in a way that was not displayed as she discussed the other children. It was obvious that Ruth and Morris sacrificed in material goods in order to provide for the educational needs of all their children. The private school tuitions, religious training, various therapies, and the NACD program all took a financial toll on the family. Additionally, Ruth’s full time status as a homemaker and teacher ensured the fact that only one income would support the family.

**A Sense of Calling.** As Orthodox Jews, Ruth and her family are deeply religious. Their faith, however, was not motivation for home schooling their children as is so often the case with Christian home schoolers. If the boys did not have special needs, they

would be enrolled in the Jewish day school where Baruch and Shimon had begun their schooling. On the other hand, Ruth and Morris would have kept Avi in public school if they had been satisfied with his experience there. Ruth noted that she was the product of public schooling.

However, Ruth did see her role as a teacher as a part of her calling in life, a part of God's plan for her life. She explained that she became "religious" when she married. Always a Jew, she became Orthodox at that time. The Fines now live in an Orthodox community and live their faith. It is this faith, too, that not only prescribes their daily routines but also gives Ruth the strength to carry out the various roles she assumes as a wife and mother – and teacher. She shared with me that she talked with the rabbi about these roles and the strong sense of calling to them. She reiterated this belief in her final remarks in her interview: "I prefer things the way they are. Every minute is purposeful and meaningful."

Summary. I had to admit that I was intrigued by the unique nature of the Fine's background among the largely Christian home schooling population. Ruth's intensity and strong desire to provide for her children's needs was appealing. I wondered what sort of feelings would compel a Jewish mother with strong religious convictions to consult the director of Almaden Valley Christian School to find the help she needed for her child. I looked forward to observing the home school experience of the Fine family the next day.

#### Home School at the Fines

Joining the rush hour commuters, I arrived at the Fine's home on Tuesday morning shortly before 9:00 a.m. Avi and Shimon greeted me at the door since Ruth was putting the baby to bed for her morning nap. Both boys wore jeans and flannel shirts to

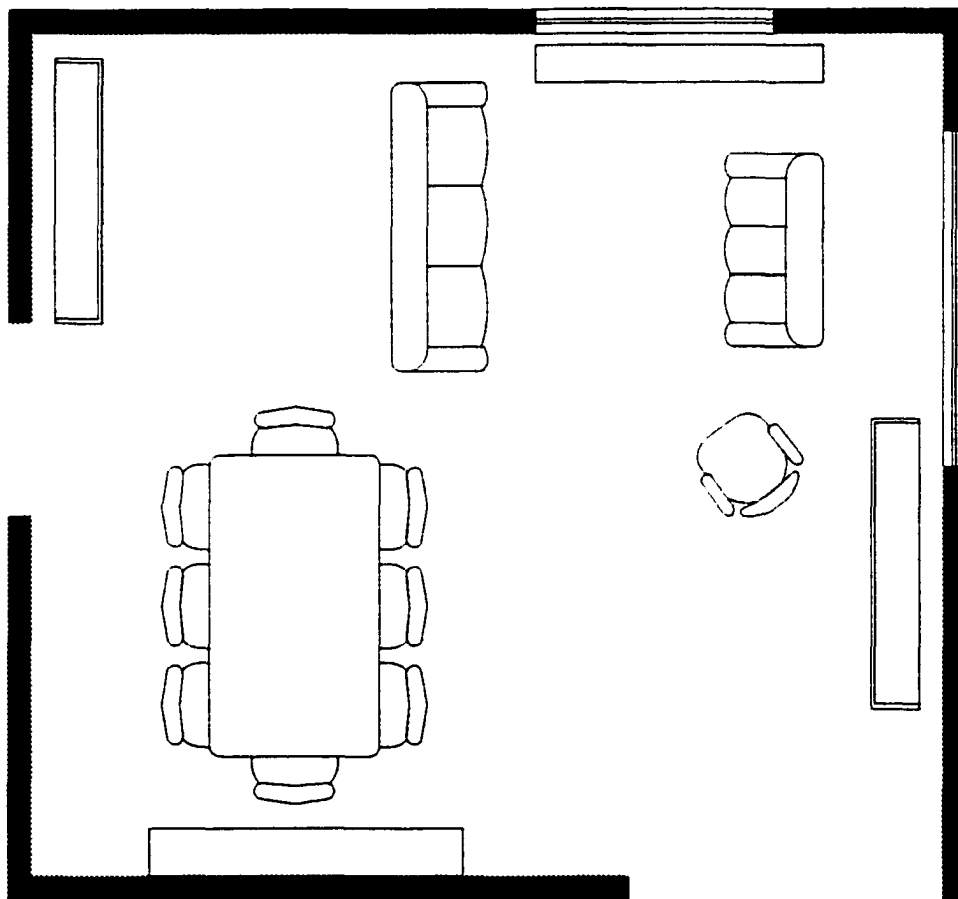


match the cool morning. Yarmulkes sat atop their dark heads and the tassels of Avi's undergarment could be seen below his shirttail. "I cut out Figlet!" Avi exclaimed as I took a seat at the kitchen table. Noticing the scrap from a coloring book in his hand, I was surprised to hear him address me so articulately. Ruth appeared and finished cooking breakfast for the boys while Shimon interviewed me about the nature of my research. While he ate his hamburger patty, I answered his probing questions about what I was doing, the purpose of the study, and the reporting of the findings. He seemed to be most interested in the fact that something about him would actually appear in print and be placed in a library somewhere. He had been to the Library of Congress and hoped he would be included in the volumes. He seemed a little disappointed when I explained the process of dissertation publishing.

The first hour: Dividing instructional time. By 9:00 a.m., school was in session for Shimon. With Shayna in bed and Avi busily coloring a picture of Eeyore on the carpet of the living room, Ruth and Shimon sat beside each other on one of the sofas to begin a language arts lesson. I took a seat in a rocking chair next to the sofa for my vantage point for the majority of the morning (see Figure 12). For the next 20 minutes, Ruth discussed with Shimon the reading selection, "Sequoya's Gift" from *Wordly Wise*. During that time, Ruth kept a watch over Avi's activities and questioned him frequently about his coloring and cutting. For the most part, Avi echoed back Ruth's questions: "Is Eeyore sad? Is Eeyore a donkey?" Occasionally, he would volunteer an original response: "Eeyore bounces like a jump." His speech had a sing-song quality to it with inflections at inappropriate places in the sentences and phrases.

When Avi finished his art project, gluing his cutout to a piece of paper, he ran into the kitchen to wash his hands. He left behind a mound of scraps; it was apparent that cleaning up was not in his repertoire of skills. After the sound of running water and a large crash from the kitchen, Avi reappeared munching on rice cakes. He took a seat on the sofa opposite his mother and brother and stared out the window. Throughout all this activity, Shimon paid no attention to Avi at all. Intent upon his lesson, Shimon took turns

**Figure 12.** Layout of the Fine's living room/dining room area.



with Ruth reading aloud from the lesson only stopping to discuss occasionally the purpose of language. When the lesson was complete, Ruth told Shimon to take a break before silent reading. It was time to begin some of Avi's activities for the day.

Ruth had given me a copy of Avi's "Weekly Program Data Form," (Appendix I) which listed the activities with the designated frequency and duration to be administered to Avi each day. She admitted that she did not always get around to every activity each day, a fact that deeply frustrated her. Sitting on the sofa opposite Shimon, she began this day with applying deep massages to Avi's toes and legs while presenting a plastic clock with a large face. She quizzed Avi about the numbers on the clock face while continuing to massage his legs. Instead of answering her prompts, he yelled several times, "Go away!"

In the meantime, Shimon settled back on his sofa with a history book opened to a selection on Cherokee Indians. While he read, he played with a large floor fan. As soon as Avi noticed this action, he began to exclaim, "He's playing with the fan! He's breaking it! I want to get cold!" Avi broke free from his mother's grasp and ran toward the fan. Ruth grabbed him and returned him to the sofa to resume the activity.

"Do you want to read a book?" Ruth asked Avi.

No response.

"Do you want to read about chalk?"

"No!"

"Do you want to make chalk?"

"Yes!"

"Do you want to read a book about making chalk?"

**“Yes!”**

**Chalk production seemed to be the motivation to get Avi to comply with the morning activities. However, when Avi realized that he had to complete several more exercises before receiving his reward, he protested loudly: “Go away!” While all this commotion was going on, Shimon calmly and serenely sat on the sofa and finished his reading. Ruth instructed him to begin his music therapy time. He set a timer for 30 minutes, placed the earphones on his head, and resumed reading his history book. I was amazed at his ability to concentrate in the midst of the all the noise and activity in the room.**

**Finished with the first round of massage, Ruth and Avi sat together to read *Oh Bother! Someone's Jealous*, another book in the Winnie the Pooh series. With her arm firmly around Avi, she read the story with great animation stopping to insert counting lessons. “Use your fingers and toes to count to 15.” He complied and yelled, “Read it! Read it, please!”**

**Ruth continued, “Which is more – four or six?”**

**“Four!” Avi squealed with delight.**

**Ruth patiently showed him four and six fingers asking the same question again. Avi was successful the second time. Ruth rewarded him by continuing the story while massaging his hands and fingers. The story time/math lesson went on for about twenty minutes with Avi fluctuating between listening with pleasure and protesting the session with cries of “I don’t know it!” They finally finished with Ruth asking Avi to summarize the story, a task he was unable to complete. Ruth was ready to move onto the next activity; Avi was not.**

Shimon had quietly finished his reading and music therapy, slipped off the earphones, gone up to his bedroom, and returned downstairs with his basket of dirty clothes to do a wash. Having three children of my own, I was moved by this display of responsibility and independence in an eleven-year-old. He left the room to do his chores while Ruth put the earphones on Avi and began to brush his face with foam rubber swabs. Like all the other activities, he again protested the touch of his mother, repeating over and over, "No!"

The next activity required Avi to strip down to his undershorts so that Ruth could rub his legs with gloves that were knit from a rough acrylic yarn. Discovering Avi had forgotten to put on that item of clothing in the morning, Ruth sent him upstairs to get dressed. This mistake won him a reprieve. He was so excited when he returned to the living room that Ruth sent him to the dining table to play with some clay to calm him down. Grabbing the moment, she summoned Shimon to bring the ham radio manual to her for their science lesson.

The next hour: The focus shifts. As Shimon settled down with his mother to discuss the principles of electrical grounding, I realized that school had been in session for only an hour. The quick pace of the activities and the great variation of the learners with their respective needs and challenges made the last hour seem far longer. Ruth mentioned that we were very fortunate that the baby was taking a long nap since it probably would not be as successful a school day if she were awake.

The atmosphere of the room regained a sense of peace as Ruth and Shimon discussed radio matters and Avi quietly pressed Play-doh into molds. However, when the lesson wound down, Ruth instructed Shimon to build a model from a "Car-Tech" kit so

that she could resume Avi's activities. As Ruth performed tactile stimulation with her gloved hands on Avi's legs, she read from the chalk book. Even the long-awaited chalk discussion would not appease Avi now. He squirmed and repeated, "Go away! No!" Finally finished with the session, Avi dressed and moved to the dining room table to perform "digit spans" with Ruth.

This session required Ruth to give Avi a number sequence to repeat while they held hands and rocked back and forth. The number sequences lengthened and Ruth added some word sequences. Avi was fairly successful repeating the sequences with four items and sometimes five. Ruth indicated later that he had improved greatly in this activity since beginning the program last winter. At least, Avi did not seem to mind this activity as much as the others. He was definitely more compliant and responsive and even gleeful at times. He began the session with screaming out numbers to 30 giggling in between each few numbers. Ruth was consistent with the praise. Each successful completion ended with "Good boy!" and a kiss.

When he completed the session, Ruth felt Avi needed a break. She told him to get on his shoes to go on a bike ride. I think that Ruth also needed the break. While the baby continued to sleep, she placed Shimon, who was still building a model, in charge of the home and his baby sister. We took a walk around the block with Avi riding about ½ a block in front of us on his bicycle constantly turning around to make sure that we were behind him. Ruth took the time to explain the NACD program to me and to air some of her concerns and frustrations. Having another adult with whom to share educational concerns was a rare occasion for Ruth who did not belong to any support groups.

Order breaks down. Returning home at 11:00 a.m., we were greeted by a smiling Shayna happy to see her mother. As Ruth nursed the baby, Shimon took Avi into the kitchen to prepare the chalk. Reading the directions, Shimon directed the venture. There was a lot of chatter and noise coming from the kitchen. By the time Ruth finished with the baby, the boys had mixed the ingredients and were squeezing plastic bags of chalk dust and water. Kneading the dough-like mixture and rolling it into large tubes, Ruth and Avi completed the project while Shimon took over the care of Shayna. As a matter of fact, until Shimon left for religious studies in the afternoon, he provided much of the care of his sister so that Ruth could attend to Avi's activities. I wondered what would happen when Shayna reached an age when she would be more active. How could Ruth handle the demands of Avi's program, teach Shimon, and meet the needs of a busy toddler?

For the next hour of the morning and into the lunchtime, the atmosphere of the home, which was already charged with the intensity of the children's activities, became almost frenetic. Ruth continued with Avi's prescribed routine: more word sequences to repeat, two minutes of a "cross march-skip" where he marched back and forth in a set pattern, more digit spans, and more massages. The massages were punctuated with protests from Avi: "No! Go away! You hurts me! You're bad!" In between these sessions, Ruth tried to attend to Shimon's English lesson, respond to his questions about antennae for a ham radio and the reason clouds are white, and acknowledge that they never got around to his math lesson for the day. At one point, Ruth did turn to me and admitted, "We waste a lot of time because of lack of organization."

Around 12:15 p.m., lunch consisted of canned spaghetti that Shimon had burned. He was the only one to partake of it; everyone else would wait to eat until after the

carpool to religious studies. Ruth's plans for Avi for the afternoon consisted of more number work, knee walks, and a trip to the Discovery Zone before the other children arrived home from school. Shimon would finish his math and English assignments when returning home. Ruth did note that her plans were based upon circumstances, moods, and needs of the children. That assessment definitely characterized what I had witnessed that morning.

### Summary

When the Fines piled into their van to take Shimon to school that afternoon, I thanked my hostess and the children and took leave of them. Observing their school day was a draining effort, and I needed time to reflect upon the experience. Their school morning was fast paced with rather disjointed activities. Ruth was disorganized and her school planning reflected this trait. I had the feeling she conducted the school day in a "triage" fashion – attending to the most pressing needs of the moment. At least, subscribing to the NACD program brought a framework for teaching Avi.

The focus of the school day seemed to be on Avi and his needs, and I hoped that the NACD program was providing what was appropriate and useful. I was mostly concerned about the time dedicated to Shimon who lacked the one-on-one attention and advanced planning I had witnessed in other home settings. Shimon was a bright, self-motivated, and helpful child. I could see why his mother enjoyed his company, but I worried that he was home to provide a service and not simply because he had a need for home schooling. Ruth had reported that Shimon's previous test scores indicated a gain of two years in language decoding to bring him up to grade level. [However, my concern was heightened with her latest disclosure of test results.]



As far as Avi was concerned, I could not make any sort of judgment. His needs certainly were challenging, and the Fines had tried programs and services that were within their means. Maybe there were more options available with more time and money. However, for now Ruth was placing her hopes on home schooling and the NACD program. She felt sure Avi was making progress but still had a desire for so much more for him.

I did not have an opportunity to observe the rest of the family and only briefly met Baruch the day before. As noted earlier, he also was a home schooler, but was only technically so since the majority of his schooling was conducted elsewhere. Home for him meant completing homework. Ruth commented that the representative from the umbrella school in which the three children were enrolled requested that Baruch have more follow-up at home. Apparently, there was a concern that he was not adequately meeting his educational goals. Ruth was reluctant to take on more interaction with Baruch since there were issues of aggression and behavioral problems in addition to the learning needs due to Asperger's syndrome.

The Fine's decision to home school was not simply a solution to some educational need in a child's life. It was far more involved and based upon multiple children with multiple special needs. Additionally, there were concerns about family dynamics and religious values. I sensed almost an air of desperation in Ruth as she shared her story – and yet, I also felt that there was a real sense of fulfillment for her as she assumed the demanding job of teacher to her children. However, I also had to wonder if this was a lasting situation or whether Ruth would find another school or program that would provide the “so much more” she desired for her children.

### **The Dixon Family: Committed and Called to Home Schooling**

**The last time I had visited Northern California was twenty years ago. I had forgotten what a busy place it was – huge networks of highways and homes squeezed onto every square inch of habitable soil. The Dixons live in the suburbs of a large city where middle class homes were typically one story, ranch style dwellings with small yards planted with trees and shrubs able to withstand the long dry spells and brief rainy seasons. It was fall and there were brush fires somewhere within a few hundred miles so that the ever-present haze was even thicker than normal. In spite of the constant threat of brush fires, earthquakes, crowded living conditions, Californians are very loyal citizens. The Dixons were no exception. Rich and Rena Dixon were natives to both the state and city in which they were now living. Rich (44) and Rena (42) were products of the public school system, but they chose to educate their two sons, Jesse (12) and Terry (9), at home.**

**Making my way through the morning rush hour on the freeway, I arrived by 9 a.m. on a late October morning. Rena and the two boys were huddled under blankets on the living room couch as Rena read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* aloud to them. Rena said she refused to turn on the heat before November and the cool nights left their home on the frigid side until the afternoon sun had a chance to take the chill away. Seeing the three of them snuggled close together as Rena read and the boys responded and laughed heartily at the exploits of Tom evoked strong memories of my own pleasant family times years ago. However, the scene seemed an anomaly in this geographic setting. In the midst of the Silicon Valley with a population known for its fast paced living, I was witnessing a**

scene from another time and place. Interestingly, there are apparently about 50,000 such home schooling scenes in the Northern California area alone (Hull, 1999).

The Dixons had always home schooled their boys making that decision when Terry was very young. Like most home schooling mothers, Rena, who had completed two years of college, was a full time homemaker and teacher for her sons. She also kept the books for her husband's business. Graduating from college with a degree in illustration, Rich was a partner in an advertising and design agency. Terry and Jesse frequently visited him at his office and were somewhat adept at using the graphic design software Rich used to conduct his business. As a matter of fact, both boys expressed an interest in following in their father's footsteps when choosing a career later in life.

Their comfortable three-bedroom ranch home was typical of the others in the middle class neighborhood in a somewhat affluent area of the city. Simple contemporary decorating and spotless housekeeping characterized the interior of the home. Large windows and sliding glass doors opened onto the backyard that was well stocked with fruit trees and brightly blooming flowers. The neighborhood was well established with homes in the twenty-year range. During their after school hours, Jesse and Terry liked to ride their bicycles and play with other children in the neighborhood.

#### Interviewing Rena and Her Sons

Rena read to her children every morning. I honestly enjoyed my first day in their home school just listening to her relay the story. I also had read the same book to my own children so the experience was very memory-provoking for me as well as a pleasant way to begin my two days of interviews and observations with the Dixons. On Thursday

afternoon, after school was over for the day, I conducted interviews with Rena and the two boys.

### Rena Dixon

Home schooling: An educational and philosophical choice. The primary reason Rena and Rich decided to home school their sons was because of their dissatisfaction with the “poor quality of public education in California.” When her oldest child was preschool age, Rena began to research the public schools and determined that “they were not meeting the needs of the children as well as they could.” Consequently, she attended a home schooling conference with a friend. She “talked it over with Rich and made the decision to home school.” Because they had decided to home school Terry from the beginning of his schooling experience, it naturally followed for Jesse. Rena did not suspect that either child had a special need. That discovery came during the course of time and was never an impetus for selecting the practice originally.

Because Sharon Hensley had referred this family to me and I knew that the boys were enrolled in her Christian umbrella school, I asked Rena if religious convictions also were a factor in selecting the practice. Rena readily agreed: “Absolutely. I don’t agree with some of the philosophies of the public schools. I was a product of the public schools in California and, at the time I went through school, I got a good, basic education without a lot of alternate worldviews and multiculturalism. I got just basic American, patriotic, 3-R’s education. That is what I want for my kids.”

The Dixons remain a home schooling family because they are “committed to it.” Rena feels as though it is something that she is “called to do.” Furthermore, the commitment has been deepened because of the learning needs of the boys: “At this point,

I remain committed to it because it definitely serves our needs as best as possible given the learning problems.” Rena also shared with me an incident that further convinced her of the wisdom of her choice:

When [Terry] was diagnosed, the woman who did the testing and gave me the results said to me, “It’s a godsend that he has never been to school because socially he has not had to endure the pain and stigma of failure.” I have to think it was providential that God encouraged us and influenced us to teach him at home.

The challenge of dyslexia. The learning problems to which Rena referred are learning disabilities. Terry, now 12 years old, was 9 when he was diagnosed with dyslexia. Nine year-old Jesse was diagnosed a year ago also with dyslexia as well as ADD. Typical of the type of learning disability, both boys have severe difficulties in coding and decoding the written word.

The boys were diagnosed by a private psychologist. They were never evaluated in the public schools, and all services provided to them were private as well. Terry received occupational therapy for 18 months and vision therapy for 12 months while Jesse went to occupational therapy for only 4 months switching over to a tutor who focuses specifically on his deficit areas. I was impressed with Rena’s knowledgeable discourse on her son’s learning problems and the scope of the therapies. She admitted that she had “done a lot of reading on development and [her] sons’ specific learning disabilities – what causes them and some of the things you can do to compensate and remediate.” As a matter of fact, Rena was reading from a text, *Developmental Variations and Learning Disorders*, while Terry was copying a paragraph during one of his lessons.

Rena's ability to provide for her sons' special needs was through her own commitment to self-education and the network of support she had built up around her. Her efforts included attendance at the home school curriculum fair, the state home school convention, and monthly meetings for parents at the umbrella school. She also had support and encouragement from a home schooling group at her church that was probably more social than anything: "Having home schooled this long, I know a lot of families. If we want to get out and do something, we have plenty of contacts."

When Rena selected curriculum for the boys, she "was always really interested in real books" and did not choose a package or traditional texts heavy with workbooks. As she became aware of the disabilities, she continued the heavy reading emphasis: "I really enjoy reading to the boys since their own reading levels don't support their intelligence levels. It's been a really great way for them to get a lot of information that they wouldn't have gotten or they would have had to wait and they would have gotten frustrated."

Academic and social progress. The academic progress of the boys is related to the discovery of their learning disabilities. Rena noted that Terry did learn to read "but got to a point where he hit a wall and really couldn't get past it. He had the basics, but it was hard and wasn't progressing." It was then that Rena and Rich sought help from an educational consultant and eventually had him evaluated. Then, Rena

reworked the curriculum and started to work with some things that were specific to his needs. By the first year, he went to the third grade level in his reading. The second year, he gained three more grade levels. And last year, it was one more. By the third year, he had basically jumped six grade levels in his reading.

Math did not present the same challenge for Terry as did reading and language related activities. He has “always been close to grade level” in that regard. Rena has put a heavy emphasis on the language arts areas. This year the focus has been on writing or, as Rena explained, “We put all our eggs in the ‘reading basket’ for several years and he’s to the point now where we are putting more eggs into the ‘learning to write basket.’” One strategy has been to master word processing to facilitate learning the skill.

Because Jesse’s disability is more severe, Rena did not see much progress until they had hired a tutor who uses a multi-sensory approach. Rena has customized his curriculum to fit his needs but realized that he needed more help than she could provide. Jesse works with the tutor two days a week, and Rena is waiting to see how he continues to progress. Like Terry, math is an area that is not as problematic: “He understands the concepts but is having extreme difficulty with rote memorization. He uses the calculator, too. He does understand it.”

Rena found the question about academic progress reasonable. However, like many other home schooling parents, she was perturbed over the notion of poor socialization for home schooling children – her sons included:

I’ve always told people that I can put my sons in a room with a dozen other kids and you wouldn’t be able to look at them and say, “Oh they’re obviously home schooled because they’re such weirdos.” We are social creatures. We are social in our family in terms of treating each other nicely, being respectful of one another. We’re involved in our church so they have lots of other agemates with whom they interact, both boys and girls. They are both active in scouting. My older son is a boy scout, and my younger son is a cub scout. So they both

have a lot of outside, extracurricular, fun, stimulating things to do. The younger takes guitar lessons. They get their social needs met, just in a different format.

To socialize is learning how to get along and function alongside other people so there are lots of ways to address that issue besides the traditional classroom.

The joys and frustrations of teaching. When I asked Rena about the satisfying and frustrating aspects to home schooling, she was quick to cite the areas. As far as the satisfaction she felt in home schooling, Rena emphatically noted the close relationship she has with her children: “I bleed along with them. When it is hard and frustrating and they are having a bad day, you can’t avoid it. But, conversely, when they get it, I am overjoyed.” She also found it exciting to be a part of the learning process, “always looking at things, questioning things, and discussing things. It’s just automatic that we talk and discuss.” To sum it up, Rena stated, “Watching their progress and being a part of the process of discovery is satisfying.”

With the unique relationship of a parent/teacher also comes frustration inherent in the position. Rena often found it hard to bear their frustrations and sometimes their anger. She said that they worked hard to express their feelings appropriately. She also found it difficult to watch how hard learning was for them: “It’s sort of like it’s ‘not fair.’ Well, it’s not fair and that’s just the way it is.” However, to summarize her response, she reflected, “A part of the whole learning process is to learn to understand yourself and to learn to cope with your own shortcomings.”

In addressing her own personal frustrations, she admitted only to frustration over the limited amount of time she had to devote to the major commitment of educating her sons. Weighing all the possibilities, she just did not think that “the alternatives are



appropriate for our family at this point.” She expressed a clearly positive opinion of the experience on their family:

Excellent. Absolutely excellent. The relationship, the progress they have made. They do get frustrated, but on the on the other hand, I don’t see them suffering. They know they are intelligent and they know that the sky is the limit. They know that they have a God who loves them. They know that they will eventually get to the point where they have the academic skills to do what they need to do. So nothing but positives.

### Terry and Jesse Dixon

When I observed Terry and Jesse Dixon, they were not particularly shy and retiring. However, when a tape recorder was placed before them, they became “men of few words.” Rena had whispered to me before the interviews that they would probably be very negative in their responses. She noted they really did not like school due to the extreme difficulty of learning for them. Their responses were not as negative as they were terse. It was obvious that they were uncomfortable in the formal role of interviewee.

The least enthusiastic participant was Terry. Succinctly, he told me that reading was his favorite part of school while writing was not. He found typing fun and liked history. After school, he went to scouts, did work, and went to church. He really did not have much of an idea what he would do when he was older but “might want to do what my dad does.” Terry was relieved to finish the interview.

Jesse was definitely more at ease during the interview process and gave a detailed description of a field trip taken to a local science museum that had an earthquake exhibit. In school, Jesse enjoyed his mother’s reading and math. When I asked him what he did

not like, he answered, “almost everything,” as his mother predicted. I asked him to be more specific, and he replied, “I don’t really like doing hard questions and hard sentences. Phonics – they can be challenging.”

What both boys seemed to enjoy a great deal was building. Jesse had quite a few plastic models of aircraft he had built. Lego plastic pieces and models were scattered throughout his room. Terry had scenes of Civil War soldiers constructed across his bedroom floor. Jesse seemed a little more sure of his ambition to be a designer and builder in the future than Terry. He shared how he “figured out how to do 3-D work on the computer.”

In spite of a negative view of school or learning, Jesse wanted to remain in home schooling because “‘out school’ is not very safe.” I did not ask Terry whether he saw himself in a home school setting in the future for any reason. I sensed a true feeling of inadequacy over his learning difficulties whereas Jesse was more open in his opinions. However, when I completed the brief interviews, Jesse, like his brother, was also relieved to be done and went back to his room to work on a building project in progress.

### Interview Themes

Two main themes underlie Rena Dixon’s home schooling experience: the deep commitment to the education of her two sons and the sustaining and directing faith in God. Rena’s experience reflects a true progression from her introduction to home schooling to deep commitment to the practice. Her philosophy has been largely impacted through the learning needs of her sons and the community through which she and her husband have received help and support.

**Commitment.** Rena shared that she and Rich made the decision to home school their children before they even had a need to do so. By the time, they discovered that the boys had special needs, they were already committed to the practice feeling a sense of calling. The boys' needs also heighten that commitment: "At this point, I remain committed to it because it definitely serves our needs as best as possible given the boys' learning problems." Home schooling has become a way of life for the Dixons, particularly for Rena and the boys. When Rena discussed frustrations she felt in home schooling, she reasoned,

I really enjoy this. I would rather do this than a whole lot of other things. What gets frustrating for me is when I have other things that vie for my limited amount of time, having to make choices and establish priorities and not being able to do certain other things. This has to be a priority. This has to be a major commitment, and it is.

**Sustaining faith.** Intertwined with the commitment to home schooling because of needs and the conviction of the propriety of the practice is the faith that sustains and encourages Rena and Rich. "I have to think that it was providential that God encouraged us and influenced us to teach them at home" was the rationale Rena offered when asked why they had selected the educational practice. She agreed that a religious conviction was one of the reasons they first investigated the possibility and then remained committed to it. It was also this strong foundation of faith that she sought to instill in the boys to enable them to press on in accomplishing something that is so very difficult for them: "They know they are intelligent and they know that the sky is the limit. They know that they have

a God who loves them. They know that they will eventually get to the point where they have the academic skills to do what they need to do.

Summary. My first day in the Dixon household was a very upbeat experience. The atmosphere of the home was charged with possibilities. I witnessed some of their frustrations and noted their hard work. Rena was always encouraging and loving in her remarks to her sons. Granted, they were under my inspection, but children are not usually adept at being unnatural in their actions for long. Rena was very articulate and honest in responding to the questions I posed – as articulate as the boys were terse and guarded in their remarks. With great anticipation, I looked forward to returning the next day.

#### Home School with the Dixons

Since I allotted extra time to fight the freeway that morning, I arrived a few minutes early when the anticipated traffic jam failed to appear. The boys gave me a tour of their bedrooms as school had not yet started for the day. There were various building sets everywhere in both boys' rooms, colorful National Football League comforters donning each bed, and models lining the window ledges. Even with the building sets on the floors, there was a sense of order. As a matter of fact, the entire house had a sense of order and neatness to it. Even the physical appearance of the Dixons was orderly. Rena was a trim woman with short blond hair and fair complexion. She dressed in khaki slacks and a cotton knit shirt. Casually dressed in t-shirts and shorts, both boys sported short brown hair, and had dark expressive eyes. They bore a strong resemblance to their mother.

Beginning each day with literature. Rena called the boys into the living room to begin the school day. Like the day before, they nestled under blankets on the large sofa

that stood against the wall of the room and faced the large glass doors leading to the patio and back yard. The cool morning and shade of the large trees around the house kept the temperature in the home on the chilly side. I was glad to have remembered to pack sweaters as I settled into a large armchair nearby and took out my packet of field note forms. Sitting between her two sons, Rena began the day's activities with prayer and then resumed the reading of *Tom Sawyer* from the day before.

Rena read with great expression a chapter from the book. As the story of Tom and Huck's pirate adventure unfolded, the boys interrupted often to ask questions and make comments about the action and unfamiliar vocabulary words. Sometimes, they interjected hearty laughter at appropriate moments. While his mother read, Jesse played with one of his Lego creations. Rena later told me that he needs an outlet for his ADD. Apparently, he used to sit on the rug and rock back and forth and still was able to attend to her reading. At one point, Rena did stop and ask him if he was listening. His reply was "Yes, but I'm hungry." He had been staring at an apple tree in the back yard laden with ripe fruit. From then on, he seemed consumed by the thought of eating and mentioned it frequently.

After about 45 minutes, Rena let Jesse take a snack break. She had read for the duration with time out for discussions about fine points of plot, geography terms, and old superstitious practices. Listening to Rena and the boys' responses was very engaging, and the time seemed to move quickly. I had to purposefully take note of other events in the house that might be occurring. Rena had obviously been doing chores before my arrival since I could hear the hum of the clothes dryer and the rustling of the pet rabbit in its cage

in the kitchen. Every 15 minutes, a cuckoo chirped out the time, but I was definitely the only one who took notice.

Jesse's morning. As Jesse hurried to the kitchen to make a snack, Rena instructed Terry to pick up a snack and his silent reading book, *The Bronze Bow*, to take to his room. Terry read silently in his room each morning while Rena worked with Jesse. Jesse reappeared with two bowls, one filled with sliced apples and the other with slices of salami. He once again sat next to his mother on the sofa for his time of reading. I remembered Rena's words the day before, "I really enjoy reading to the boys since their own reading levels don't support their intelligence levels." Knowing the severity of Jesse's disability, he could not possibly read the books on his interest level.

Jesse's individual reading selection was *All Kinds of Minds*, a contemporary storybook whose characters are children with different learning needs. "Do you remember what's going on with Derek?" Rena asked. Derek has difficulties with social and motor skills. He is befriended by Eddie who has ADHD. Although Jesse seemed more intent on eating his snack, alternating the fruit and meat slices, than on the story, he stayed with the line of questioning from Rena.

"What is Derek's problem?"

"Social skills."

"What does that mean?"

"Getting along with other kids."

"What does it mean to have problems with motor coordination?"

"Problems moving around."

As the story drew to a conclusion, Jesse could name all the characters and knew their learning needs. In the epilogue to the story, he pointed to a sketch of each child while Rena read about the careers into which each child had successfully moved. I was impressed with the depth of understanding about special needs that Jesse exhibited. I made a note to myself to pick up a copy of the book. It would be a good resource for classroom teachers as well.

The morning reading finished, Rena and Jesse moved into the kitchen for the “formal teaching.” Unlike, other home schools I had visited, there was not a particular schoolroom in the house. Reading aloud was done in the living room. Formal instruction in mathematics and language arts took place at the kitchen table. A bookshelf lined a wall and contained all the textbooks, workbooks, manuals, and resources neatly arranged below the china. Terry read to himself in his bedroom and then worked on keyboarding lessons on the computer in the studio. Apparently, science and history lessons took place anywhere appropriate. Rena liked to incorporate learning into all aspects of their everyday life.

Taking a seat at the kitchen table next to his mother, Jesse began with a phonics lesson, and it was evident that he really struggled with decoding words as he painstakingly attacked each sound of every word. Rena pulled out a pack of 3X5 cards that she had made into flash cards. He successfully read the portion with sight words she removed from the blue stack. The pink cards were the individual letters; an exercise with the *b* and *d* cards was next. Apparently, Jesse was having difficulty differentiating between the two letters in reading. After repeated sequences of recognition, Rena handed

Jesse some clay to form the word *they*. With the leftover clay, Jesse made a *b* and then manipulated it to be a *d*, then a *p* and a *q*.

As Jesse washed his hands from the remnants of clay, Rena pulled out a *Math U See* textbook and opened to the lesson. She instructed Jesse, “Build a rectangle, 12 over, 14 up.”

Jesse took out the red, blue, and yellow blocks to form the rectangle and answered his mother’s questions based upon his product.

“What are the dimensions?”

“12 and 14.”

“What is the area?”

“12 by 14.”

“What is the answer?”

“164.”

“Count it out.”

“... 168.”

“Write out the equation.”

A groan followed the last command, and he reluctantly completed the exercise and the next. I watched him as his mother led him through a review of “skip counting” multiples of eight and nine. His feet wiggled constantly; he leaned back in his chair and pushed away from the table. While reciting number facts, his fingers were playing with the blocks. Suddenly, his wristwatch alarm startled us from the routine of the lesson. He giggled over his prank – and so did I. Jesse was the more animated and outgoing of the two boys. He seemed to enjoy the extra attention my presence brought into the home.



Two more lessons to go. It was almost 11 a.m. and Jesse would be finished with school for the day. Rena produced two workbooks: more phonics and handwriting. Jesse read, "Will you get a snake as a snack?" Four sentences to read, a page of handwriting, and Jesse was "outta here," as his mother said. He scampered away to his bedroom to work intently on his latest building project.

Terry's turn. It was now Terry's turn for one-on-one instruction with his mother. He breezed through the kitchen, dropped off *The Bronze Bow* on the way to the studio to work on his keyboarding. When he returned minutes later, Rena questioned him about the day's reading. Terry reported the story line in the chapter he had just read. She interjected questions that motivated Terry to give great detail in his reports. It was clear that he enjoyed the adventure and drama in the novel he was reading. Later, Rena showed me a large bookcase filled with books they had read. It was heavy into the classics and books that had masculine appeal like the Hardy Boys series.

On Terry's agenda for the morning were mathematics, handwriting, and English. He had a choice of the order of the first two subjects and selected a workbook dedicated to fraction operations. As reinforcement to his textbook, Rena was supplementing the lessons on fractions with more practice. Terry easily completed the pages with accuracy. That impressed me since I had taught this level mathematics for over ten years and could see that Terry was very much on grade level for this mathematics concept. Rena recorded each completed activity in a lesson plan book she used to document each boy's academic progress.

As he finished math, he picked up his handwriting lesson to work on the letter z. Earlier, Rena had discussed Terry's fine motor difficulties with me. He had asked his

mother if he could learn cursive handwriting this year since he had only previously used printing. Rena had planned to progress directly to typing to facilitate written expression for him. Handwriting was very difficult for him, and as he copied the lesson, he stated, "Oh, man, this is stupid!" Nevertheless, he persevered and completed the assignment. Then, amidst great praise from his mother, she pulled out his composition notebook. Terry let out a loud, "Aaaaagh!"

Obviously, writing was Terry's least favorite activity. I had watched the day before as he and his mother had edited a paragraph he had written. Today, he had to write the final copy. Rena had penciled in all the corrections. Now, he had to include spelling corrections, proper punctuation and capitalization, additions to sentences, and other grammar changes. Terry proceeded to tackle the task before him telling his mother, "I'll scream when I need your help." This remark was supposed to be humorous since she was seated right beside him.

Terry carefully copied the paragraph word for word going back and forth from the rough draft to the final copy. Rena encouraged him along the way always specific in her praise: "I like the way you . . ." Vocalizing each word he copied, he noted frequently, "This is so hard." When he finally completed the task, Terry hit the table and declared, "Done! There!"

"Good, what do you do when you're done?" Rena asked

"Check it over."

"Good."

Willingly, Terry silently read over his work and seemed satisfied. Rena reminded him to include his name and date, which was a new concept for him. That was a habit I took for granted – a necessity in large classrooms.

Terry was basically done with his work for the day. I took a look at the paragraph that had been such a Herculean effort for Terry and saw a very neatly produced work. It was obvious that Terry had perfectionist tendencies that must cause him extreme frustration in light of the disability he carried. He was very relieved to the “outta there” and back to his room to finish reading a science text. It was about 12:30 p.m. Terry had been on task since 9:00 a.m. with only a snack break mid-morning. Their afternoons were dedicated to running errands, the tutor twice a week for Jesse, field trips, and free time to play in the neighborhood. Most of their school days were structured like the two days I had observed. Occasionally, Rena declared a “read-a-thon,” a day focused on a topic like castles or pyramids. On such days, they read intensively on the topic, had serious and deep discussions on the subject, and watched videos.

### Summary

Because of the organization of the Dixon’s home school and the independence of Terry and Jesse, Rena and I had several opportunities for uninterrupted conversations during my visit. I was impressed with the depth of her knowledge of home schooling and educational matters specific to the needs of her sons. It was clear that she had taken great efforts educate herself in these matters. She articulated well her experience and her perspective on home schooling in general. Additionally, she asked many questions about my work and research.

I enjoyed my visit with the Dixons and was very glad to be ending my home visits on such a positive note. Rena had a sense of confidence that Terry and Jesse would do well in life. She seemed to be a mother who had committed her whole being to providing an education that was specific to their needs. But, it was more than that effort to teach. I reflected upon Rena's final words in the interview when I asked her about the impact of home schooling on the family: "Excellent. Absolutely excellent . . . They know that they will eventually get to the point where they have the academic skills to do what they need to do." Rena was looking into the future and preparing her sons for it without dwelling on the difficult circumstances of the present.

#### **Cross-case Analysis**

As I completed the data analyses of the individual cases in the study, I reflected upon the similarities and differences of the four families. The families had been selected to represent different geographic locations, varying lifestyles, and the learning needs as indicated in the earlier survey. The intentional selection did produce unique cases of home schooling special needs families according to the criteria for selection. However, there were also common characteristics and themes that ran through the individual case analyses as noted below.

#### **Demographic Characteristics**

Because of the selection procedures, the four families represented different geographic locations in the United States. Specific locations of the homes included the rural setting of the Gray family, the suburban neighborhoods of the Fine and Dixon families, and the military housing community of the Piper family. All four families

reflected a middle class socio-economic background although it was clear that there was a range of incomes as determined by the occupations of the fathers in the families and the economic conditions of their geographic areas. According to the first phase of the study, fathers' occupations fell into the categories of professional I, protective services, and military. Their ages ranged from 35 to 44 years, a mean of 41.25. All the mothers in the case families were homemakers although two also provided bookkeeping services to their husband's businesses. Their ages ranged between 30 and 42 years, a mean of 37.75. The racial background of all four families was white (non-Hispanic). Three of the four families' religious preference was Christianity while the fourth was Judaism.

#### Educational Backgrounds and Training of Parents

The four families all had a parent with some post-high school education. John Piper had a two-year associates' degree while Faith had a high school diploma. The Grays both held bachelors' degree, Diana with a year of graduate work. Morris and Ruth Fine both had postgraduate work including Ruth's master's degree and doctoral studies. Rich Dixon held a bachelor's degree while Rena attended two years of college. The mean number of years of education for the fathers and the mothers in the cases were both 15.75 years.

As far as training specific to education, none of the parents were certified teachers. All of the mothers in these cases were the teaching parent and had self-educated themselves to provide for their children's learning needs. Mostly, the mothers had read literature and conducted research specific to the learning needs of their children. Additionally, Faith Piper and Rena Dixon attended workshops at home schooling conventions and took advantage of local support groups.

### Student Information and Characteristics

The ages of the children in the four families ranged from infancy to high school. The ages of the children being home schooled were all in the elementary and middle school range. The grade levels ranged from preschool to seventh grade. The family size ranged from two to six children, the mean being 3.5 children.

The families represented a variety in the educational needs of their children and in their participation in home schooling. The Pipers home educated two (those with special needs) of their three children although the oldest daughter had been home schooled previously. The Grays had one child with special needs at home; the other children, although too young to be eligible for compulsory attendance, were included in the school activities because it was a part of the family routine. The Fines home schooled three of their six children, those with learning needs; two others attended private school and the youngest was still an infant. The two Dixon children, both with special needs, were both instructed within a home setting.

The four families included children with the learning needs indicated in the previous discussion of participant selection. All of these children were being home schooled although some were also receiving outside services. The Piper children had been and were presently enrolled in speech therapy; Heather was taking enrichment classes through a local home school program. The Fines enrolled their two older sons in a structured program of religious studies; Baruch received his academic instruction through a tutor; Shimon received vision therapy; and Avi's progress was monitored by his program consultant. Rena Dixon conducted her home school under the guidance of the umbrella school to which they belonged. Additionally, Jesse used a tutor and both boys

had received vision and occupational therapy services. Only Diana Gray was instructing her children, specifically Caleb who was the only one of school age, without any outside support or services.

### Home Schooling Factors

Although the families were located in different states with different laws governing the practice of home schooling, three of the four conducted their schools in a similar fashion. The children were registered in religiously affiliated umbrella schools taking advantage of a private school option for state compulsory attendance requirements. Each family then conducted their own school program in accordance with the umbrella school requirements. In contrast, the Pipers registered their children with the local school district under home school regulations as specified by the state.

The curricula of the children in the cases were selected according to the individual learning needs. The mother/teachers had all chosen textbooks, workbooks, “real” books, and supplementary materials related to the abilities, needs, and interests of their children. They did not use curricular packages. The only prescribed program was that selected by the Fines for the extreme learning needs of Avi.

The style of the teaching/learning process varied in the homes. Both the Pipers and the Dixons had a very organized approach and kept detailed documentation of the daily learning activities in lesson plan books. The Pipers home was a model of a small school with physical layout similar to a schoolroom and shelves of resources and materials. All of the other homes had large amounts of children books, educational software, and other materials, but usually these items were contained within the

children's bedrooms and other rooms of the house. Only the Pipers had fashioned a room dedicated to school.

The teaching style of Diana Gray was naturalistic. She planned for about an hour's worth of direct instruction for Caleb each day in the basics of mathematics and the language arts, but the rest was left up to Caleb's own high interest in various subject and advanced reading and computer skills. Furthermore, with the young ages of the other children, much of the schooling fit into the routine of child rearing and home making.

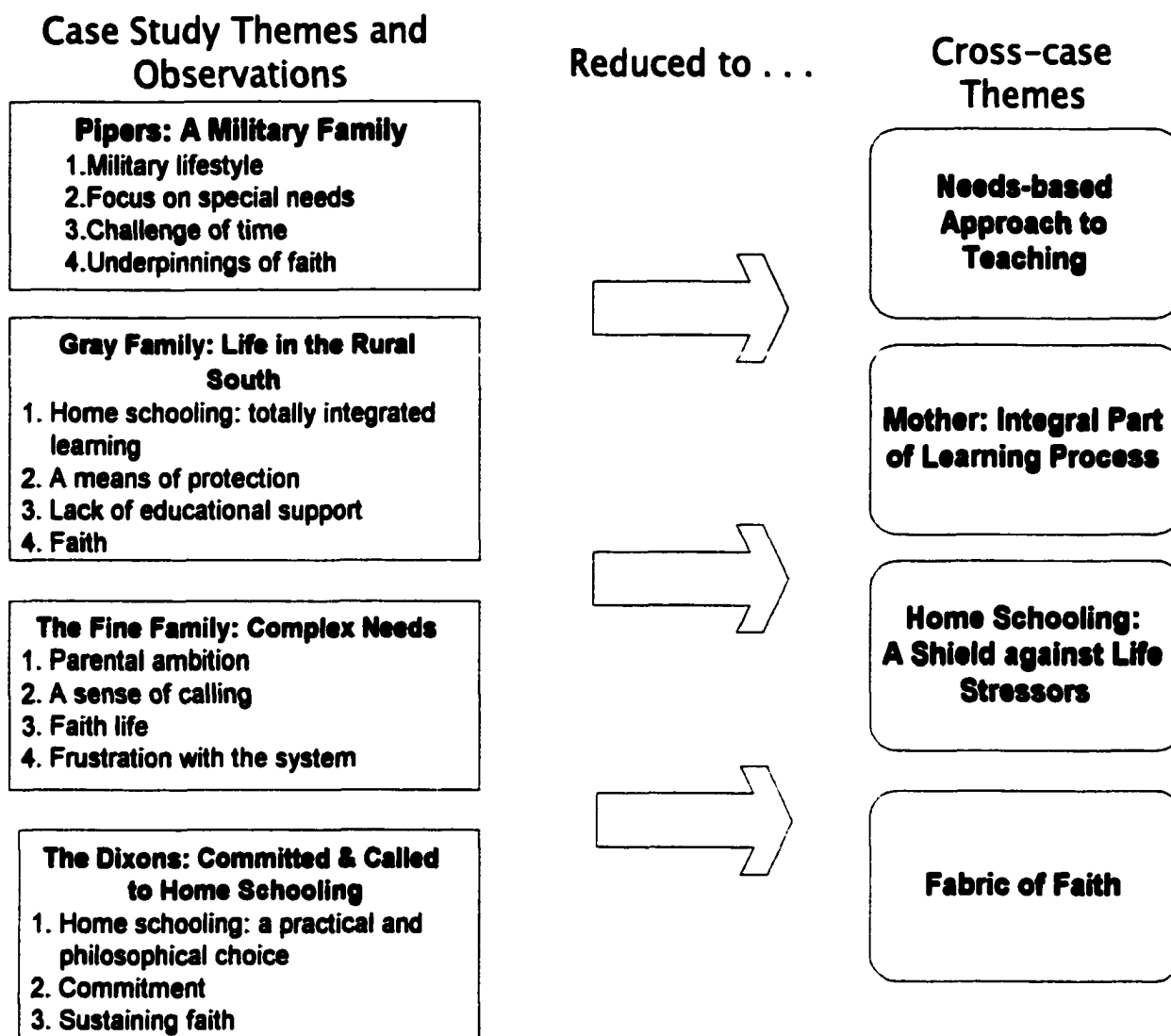
In contrast to these three home schools was the approach of Ruth Fine. Faced with the challenges of three children with special needs and attending to the demands of an infant, the teaching and learning seemed to take place in a haphazard manner for the two children who were truly educated in the home. Ruth tried to carry out Avi's education plan but did not always complete the daily routine and had to fit the activities around the baby's needs. Ruth juggled Shimon's lesson in between the needs of the other two. The atmosphere of tranquility with dedicated family and learning time I sensed in the other three homes was not evident in the Fine's school setting. In a sense, the Fine family represented an outlier case. Yet, there were also factors present that gave them communion with the other families as noted in the cross-case themes.

#### Cross-case Themes

The four case families had become home schoolers for a variety of reasons. However, the main rationale, either originally or eventually, was to meet the educational needs of their children for whom they perceived conventional schooling was not or would not be successful due to the special needs. Only the Dixons had decided to home school their children prior to any school experience or knowledge of their sons' learning needs.



**In spite of taking different routes to the community of home schooling and having a variety of demographic and educational backgrounds, the families shared similarities that were produced by their common experience in educating children with special needs. “Special needs” is not a theme in itself but a basic assumption that runs through the entire study. The themes of these shared experiences have been reduced from the earlier themes of the individual cases that emerged from the perceptions expressed by the teaching mother as well as my own observations of the home schools (see Figure 13).**



**Figure 13.** Cross-case themes.

**Needs-based Approach to Teaching: Teaching Time and the “Squeaky Wheel”**

Like most classrooms, it is the proverbial squeaky wheel that gets the most attention. That “wheel” may be the child with behavioral problem or the student with the extreme learning need at either end of the spectrum. Teachers often exercise a sort of educational triage and attend to the most critical need of the moment. Hence, that tendency is the reason that the well-behaved, undemanding child with unmet learning

needs may “fall between the cracks” of the system. In these four home schools, the child with the most challenging need was the child who received the most one-on-one attention. There was no exception to this rule. Faith and Rena addressed the fact that one child received greater amounts of attention due to a perceived urgency of need.

When analyzing the Piper’s home school, I noted the bulk of the morning devoted to Dennis and his lessons (one hour fifty minutes). It was remarkable how independently his sister worked while he required constant attention from his mother. Faith could only attend to Heather’s math questions (15 minutes) when Dennis was finished for the day and watching a video. More attention was given to Heather in the afternoons, but it was not exclusive. Reading aloud, having discussions, and watching videos included her brother as well.

In the Gray home, it was natural that Caleb received the bulk of the instruction since he was the only child of school age as defined by the law. It seems safe to say that Caleb would still have the majority of the attention if Adam were school age. Adam, at four years, was completing kindergarten material as a part of his schooling experience and was included in all aspects of the school routine. Already, Adam was independent in his learning tasks. Caleb’s needs required his mother to devote exclusive time to him.

With Avi’s challenges, Ruth definitely focused most of her attention on his activities. Since the baby slept for most of the morning, it was easy to observe the allotment of instructional time. Shimon, who was able to work independently, had very little one-on-one time with his mother. She worked with him at the beginning of the morning on his language arts lesson and later on the radio operator’s manual - for a total

of about 45 minutes. Furthermore, other than the time with the music therapy, I did not observe any instruction that would address his learning disability.

Rena recognized that Jesse's learning disability was "much more severe" than his brother's. She not only devoted more instructional time to him, but she also enrolled him in tutoring to supplement the home instruction. When Terry is able to read to himself and does so in his bedroom, Rena reads individually to Jesse. With Jesse's severe dyslexia, Rena plans more instruction in the phonics/decoding areas for him using a multi-sensory approach. Not as much time was allotted to Terry since the skills emphasis was writing and he was limited in the amount of time he could devote to the skill before reaching the frustration level.

Whether the decision to devote unequal amounts of time to the children for whom they are responsible is justifiable is the dilemma that faces all teachers. Like most teachers, these teaching mothers made the choice to give more instructional time to the child with the greatest need. It just seems ironic that children in a home setting cannot get the one-on-one attention that seems to be the greatest benefit of home schooling. Perhaps, Rena had the appropriate philosophy when she mused, "It's sort of like, 'it's not fair.' Well, it's not fair and that's the way it is . . . but a part of the whole learning process is to learn to understand yourself and to learn to cope with your own shortcomings." That statement applies to teachers as well as their students.

#### **Mother: An Integral Part of the Learning Process**

When I asked the mothers to comment on a satisfying aspect of home schooling, each one spoke of the joy or privilege of being involved in the teaching/learning process of their children's lives. For Faith Piper, there was the satisfaction of being there "when

the light comes on and they get it.” Diana Gray expressed this same sentiment: “I am able to see the progress he is making and know that I take some responsibility for that . . . that’s about it. I just take some credit for his accomplishments.” In the same way, Ruth Fine was satisfied when Avi “makes progress. When he answers a ‘why’ question and he is on my watch, I feel it’s because of me.”

Perhaps, Rena Dixon was the most expressive of the mothers in saying, “I bleed along with them. When it is hard and frustrating and they are having a bad day, you can’t avoid it. But, conversely, when they get it, I am overjoyed.” She summarized her thoughts: “Watching their progress and being a part of the process of discovery is satisfying.”

Both Rena and Ruth also noted that the pleasure they took in being a part of the learning process went further than just the satisfaction in witnessing moments when their children “get it.” Both enjoyed the process of teaching and learning itself. Ruth stated, “I like the planning of what we are going to learn. I enjoy learning new things myself.” Rena spoke at greater length on this subject: “I think home schooling gives you the mindset that you are always looking at things and questioning things and discussing things. It is just automatic that we talk and discuss. If we don’t know something, then we find out about it.”

It was clear that Rena meant what she said. She was an enthusiastic teacher in her style of delivery asking probing questions that prompted in-depth discussions. I also observed Ruth taking a moment to remove herself from the commitment to Avi and the baby to delve into a science question with Shimon. They could not find an answer to why clouds are white in any of their own resources. She instructed him to phone various

friends with science backgrounds and museum information desks to find the answer. She would not let it rest until the answer was found. As I observed this time of inquiry and research, I was able to understand what Ruth meant when she said she enjoyed the learning process. As I reflected upon the incident, Rena's words were very appropriate: "home schooling gives you the mindset that you are always looking at things and questioning things and discussing things."

### **A Shield against Life Stressors**

Each of the case families conveyed the sentiment that home schooling provided a shield against the stressors in life, perhaps a solution to complicated circumstances surrounding the family. Those points of stress were unique to each family's circumstances but included such factors as family separations, health concerns, geographic isolation, and the surrounding issues that emerged from the special learning needs of the children. The effects of these learning needs might be exacerbated due to a lack of support from the available educational systems, lack of the family's financial capability to meet learning needs outside a public system, and a perceived lack of social support. For these families home schooling became a solution to a problem that was not solely the learning needs of the children but often was the complexities that surrounded the learning need.

Faith Piper noted that they selected the practice because they "were not comfortable with the public schools in the area" attending to the learning needs of Heather and Dennis. She also noted that "we felt that with my husband's schedule we needed as much family time as we could get." Later, she also referenced the demands of chronic health problems: "For our family structure, because of the kids' special needs and

because of our doctor's appointments, and because it is quieter here, we can use the time diligently." Faith was convinced that home schooling was the "glue" that had kept their family together in light of the circumstances of their life.

For Diana Gray, home schooling represented a haven for her son who had an unsuccessful experience in the public preschool program. Understanding Caleb's special need that included poor social skills, she felt that home was a "calmer environment" and a place where he would not be "tormented by the other children." Diana mentioned three times in the interview that Caleb had been "teased, taunted, or tormented" by children in his preschool class. Likewise, his intense need for individualized academic attention could not be provided in a school district with few resources where he might be "neglected by the teachers because . . . they don't have enough time to spend with the children [since] they have so many of them." The rural geographic location contributed to the challenge in that the school district had limited services and even the private schools could not help - even if they were affordable.

Multiple children with learning needs, some of which were quite severe, as well as a large family was the challenge in life presented to Ruth Fine. She chose to meet the challenge through home schooling. One son at a time, she selected the practice as she felt the learning need could not be met through conventional means. For Baruch, "he couldn't handle the material . . . he couldn't hack it academically . . ." Shimon was "crying over his homework." With Avi, Ruth and her husband explored several options, which Ruth considered disastrous, before deciding on home schooling. Finances also influenced their choice as Ruth mentioned several times that there were other possibilities she would like to try "if money were not as issue." Home instruction was the solution in the meantime.

Although Rena Dixon and her husband did not select home schooling because of an adverse experience with conventional schooling for her boys, it still represents a shield for them philosophically. Rena stated, “I don’t agree with some of the philosophies of the public schools.” She was “convinced that it was not a positive atmosphere.” Later, she became committed to home schooling because it “serves our needs as best as possible given the boys’ learning problems.” In light of these problems, Rena held the conviction that home schooling was the means through which Jesse and Terry “will eventually get to the point where they have the academic skills to do what they need to do.” She saw the practice as a “godsend” – as the educational diagnostician who tested Terry stated, “It’s really a godsend that he has never been to school because socially he has not had to endure the pain and stigma of failure.” For them, home schooling has become the shelter from potential pain and failure.

### **Fabric of Faith**

It is not surprising that the theme of religious faith ran throughout these case studies. My own background in Christian education probably gives me sensitivity to philosophical choices in schooling. Furthermore, I used groups that had a Christian affiliation to locate some of the families. Two of the families selected for the research were associated with Almaden Valley Christian School. Ironically, one of those families was Orthodox Jewish. Another family was located through a Christian support group (NATHHAN). It is a logical assumption that three of the four families should have had a Christian affiliation. It is also documented that home schooling is a practice well visited by Christians (Lines, 1991; Lyman, 1998; Ray, 1997). Therefore, it was likely that some



of the selected families would be such even without the means I used to locate these families.

Although the most important criteria for selection of the families was their child's special need diagnosis and their geographic location, strong religious faith was a characteristic common to all the participating families. Their faith influenced their selection of home schooling as an educational option as Diana Gray noted. Their faith also sustained them and was a sort of "spiritual glue" that provided a bond for family relationships. All the families I visited began their day with prayer, talked about spiritual matters with their children in the course of the school day, and referenced their faith in interviews. Although it may have been the needs of the children that drove the choice to home school, it was faith that contributed to the continued commitment to the practice, and it was the communities of faith that helped to support the families in their efforts. All of the mothers spoke of involvement in church or synagogue, related activities and support groups, and relationships with various religious professionals who guided and encouraged them in their chosen walks.

### Summary

Prior to each of my home visits, I sought to prepare myself as a researcher following the principal of bracketing. I thought it would be an increasingly difficult task as I gained more exposure to each home school. However, I found that the more homes I visited, the less certain were my expectations. When I observed the Pipers, there seemed to be a strong similarity with other homes I had visited in the days before I embarked upon this research project: the mini-schoolhouse format. However, the subsequent home studies left me with absolutely no preconceived ideas about the nature and characteristics

of home schools with special needs children. It would probably take many more experiences before I might have certain expectations.

Although there were the similarities that created the themes noted above, home schooling is still a unique practice. The profile of each family and the needs of the children produced distinctively different “schools.” Although these home schools sought to provide a “child-centered” education customized to the needs and ability of each child, probably a more accurate description of that education would be “needs-based” and “mother-directed.” The needs of the children were important in these families. However, the needs of the family were equally esteemed. Home schooling has given the families an element of control over lives seemingly disrupted by challenging learning needs. The mothers were the strong voices in all of these families. The father’s support of the practice was evident through the mother’s reporting. Not one was a teaching parent and only John Piper was present during the observations.

The learning needs noted in this study may have been more stressful due to a father’s occupation, lack of local school system resources and support, and multiple disabilities in a family. As great as the commitment is in home schooling, it became the solution to life’s challenges for these families. As Faith Piper stated, “I think [home schooling] has kept us together over the last seven years.” As to regaining control, Ruth Fine stated, “What I really like about home schooling is that you get your own kid back. That is certainly true with regular kids, but especially with special needs kids.”

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

*I tried for a year and a half to get a good IEP and then to get it enforced by the school. The principal was not supportive stating, "The slim rewards of teaching your child simply aren't worth the challenges she presents." She was illegally restrained and repeatedly punished for manifestations of her disability. She would be punished for not following directions given auditorily when she cannot understand spoken language and is supposed to be given visual instructions. Finally, I decided it would be easier to teach her than to teach the teachers and more effective in the long run.*

-Home school mother, Internet respondent

It has been a long journey to this chapter. I feel as though I have become an integral part of the lives of my research participants and a part of the larger community of home schooling families. I became introduced to the subject through my own experience with home schooled children as a schoolteacher and subsequent research into the home schooling literature base. The knowledge gained was extended through data gleaned from the survey used in Phase One of this study. The impersonal statistics and responses from those families who participated in the first phase became personalized through the case studies conducted in the second part of the study. These Phase Two families produced the "cameos" within the larger picture of home schooling special needs children produced by the first phase.

As suggested by Rudestam and Newton (1992), this discussion chapter contains the following elements: (a) brief delimitations and subsequent limitations of the study; (b) an overview of the significant findings of the study; (c) consideration of the findings in light of the existing research studies; (d) implications of the study for current practice; (e) implications for educational policy and practice; and (f) recommendations for further

research. The overview of significant findings answers the questions posed in the beginning of this study that address the characteristics of home schooling families with special needs children as well as the nature and process of the home schools. In answering these research questions, comparison is made between the survey and case study results.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

As noted in the introduction to this study and later referenced in subsequent chapters, the study's delimitations lead to significant limitations to this study. The choice of research design and selection of participants produced these considerations. Therefore, the findings, conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations of this study should be considered in light of the limitations that follow.

The method in which participants were selected in Phase One was purposeful, but the heavy dependency upon snowball selection was not the original intent. Participants were enlisted wherever they could be found and were willing to participate as discussed in the methodology chapter. Because random sampling was not used, the participants were all voluntary which introduces the potential of bias into the sample. Obviously, with the number of surveys distributed as compared to those returned, there were far more home schooling parents who chose not to participate in the study. They may have had a far different set of responses.

In addition to the selection of participants, the use of the case studies, meant to provide an in-depth look into the profile of the survey participants, limits the generalizability of the results. However, as Stake (1995) suggested, the reader may draw certain "naturalistic" generalizations through vicarious engagement in the experiences of

the case study participants. Such generalizations occur when producing thick descriptions in the process of presenting case study data.

### **Significant Findings**

The guiding research questions are the framework used to address the significant findings of the study. Both the results of the survey as well as the observations and interviews of the case studies produced the answers to the questions.

#### **What are the demographic characteristics of home schooling families with special needs children?**

The results of both phases of the research study indicate a distinct similarity in demographic characteristics. The survey families were overwhelmingly two-parent families (97%) Their prevailing geographic setting was split between suburban (48%) and rural settings (44%) The racial background of the survey families was primarily white (88%). Occupations of the fathers in the survey families varied greatly with a small majority (19%) in the Professional I category while participating mothers were generally homemakers (74% of survey families). The mean number of children in a survey family was 3.3.

All the case families represented a white racial background. Three of the four case families lived in suburban settings with one family living in the rural South. Fathers in two of the four case families also were classified in the Professional I category while all the mothers were homemakers and home educators. The mean number of children of the case studies was similar to the survey families at 3.5 children.

**What are the educational backgrounds and training of the teacher-parents of special needs children?**

The mean number of years of formal education for the fathers in this study's Phase One was 14.79 – similar to the mothers at 14.29 years. The teaching parent in the survey was generally the mother. On the average, 80% of the mothers contributed 80% of the teaching time. Whereas 64% of the fathers indicated as involvement in the teaching process, it was for a mean of 12% of the total teaching time. As far as training in education, few survey fathers were certified teachers (6%) and even fewer trained in special education (5%). The survey mothers included 12% certified teachers and 30% who had taken some steps toward educating themselves in matters of special needs.

In Phase Two, both the fathers and the mothers held the same mean level of schooling (15.75 years), almost a year higher than their survey counterparts. However, it should be noted that Ruth Fine's graduate studies, within a small sample of case studies, produced the notably higher level among the mothers. These mothers also contributed the total amount of the teaching time during the morning session. There was no contribution made by the fathers to the formal instruction of the children but there were other professionals such as tutors, therapists, and religion teachers. However, these outside sources were generally supplementary except in the case of the oldest child in the Fine Family who was not included in the observations. His total outside tutoring seems to be an anomaly in the generally accepted home schooling protocol.

None of the case study fathers or mothers was a certified teacher. However, half of the mothers had attended workshops in special education while all had read literature or conducted Internet and library research on special needs. Along with attending all the

special needs workshops at home schooling conferences, Faith Piper noted, "I've read probably every book there is on ADHD. My friends feel I am very knowledgeable in this realm." Similarly, Diana Gray volunteered, "I've done a lot of research when [Caleb] was first diagnosed. I did research and read a few books on autism. I found information on the Internet."

**What are the special education classifications of the home schooled special needs children?**

Parents in the survey cited twelve of the special education categories of diagnoses for the 144 special needs children in the study. Additionally, four other specific classifications of some of the categories were noted. For example, 12 out of 17 parents of children classified under mental retardation indicated a medical diagnosis of Down syndrome. Although there were diagnoses with greater frequency indicated by the participants as noted in the selection of case study families, the survey parents cited 11 of the 13 categories of disabilities described in IDEA. The two categories not cited were deaf-blindness and traumatic brain injury.

Fifty percent of the children in the survey families had special needs; 53% of those with special needs had two classifications. It should be noted that in both phases, two classifications sometimes occurred when an earlier broad diagnosis later became more specific. For instance, a preschool age child might be identified with speech and language impairment as well as developmental delay and then later be classified as autistic. In the 4 case study families, 57% of the children in the families had special needs with half of these children indicating more than one classification.

**What are the rationales parents of special needs children give for choosing home education?**

The majority of survey parents (62%) turned to home schooling when dissatisfied with conventional schooling. Parents cited this reason more than twice as much as the next two reasons: home schooling is consistent with family dynamics (27%) and a desire to follow and teach religious values (26%).

Likewise, the case families decided to home school their children when the conventional schools failed to live up to their expectations and they felt that home was a more suitable environment. One of the case study parents also cited the reason that the routine of home schooling more aptly fit the needs of the family: "We were not comfortable with the public schools in our area and also we felt that with my husband's schedule we needed as much family time as we could get." Another family selected the practice for religious reasons "because we believed that the public schools were doing everything that they could to deter any beliefs in God or certainly Christianity."

**How can the home school be structured, what are the instructional practices, and what is the nature of the curriculum?**

The surveys indicated that the respondents were resourceful in structuring their home schools. The parents often sought and used outside help in meeting the needs of their children. In addition to teaching their special needs children, the parents enrolled them in various therapies and counseling (76%). Twenty-four percent enrolled their children on a part-time basis in conventional schools. Additionally, 97% of the families were members of support groups and used support services.



These figures are comparable to the case study families' experiences. Three of the four families have children enrolled in therapies. All four families participate in a support group. Two of the families have children taking classes through a formal system: religious studies and enrichment classes. One contrast occurred between the two phases of the study in the use of umbrella schools. In the survey families, only 7% enrolled their children in an umbrella school whereas three of the four case study families took advantage of this practice. It may have been that the survey participants did not understand the term *umbrella school* when responding to the question.

As far as the instruction within the home schools is concerned, it was only possible to determine the instructional practices of the observed families since no survey question addressed that subject. With these families, the majority of the formal school time was spent in direct, one-on-one instruction by the mother. The child not receiving direct instruction was engaged in a variety of activities: independent study, reading, playing educational computer games, family chores, video watching, and playing. Two families also included a group read-aloud time as a part of their daily routine. All the families studied subjects in the field as well. How the morning instruction time was structured differed from home to home – from the schoolroom format with formal lesson plans to the homes with a more free-flowing approach. As noted in the previous chapter, one family was somewhat of an outlier with the lack of organization and structure in the mother's instructional approach.

In curriculum choices, the majority of survey parents (58%) designed a curriculum for their children. Another 23% used a package and 6% a program provided by a school. All the parents in the case studies designed the curricula for their children

based upon their ability and interest levels. As a matter of fact, most of the mothers criticized packaged curricula as in the example that follows: “I don’t like those; I think they require the teacher to do more work than the child. The children aren’t learning a whole lot – it’s just a lot of busy work.” Additionally, one of the families enrolled a child in a prescribed program that specified both content and process of the instructional time.

What are the home schooling parents’ perceptions of the home schooling experience concerning academic and social progress?

The overall perception of academic progress of the home schooled survey children by their parents was positive. Ninety-six percent claimed a measure of academic progress whether test scores were noted or a less quantifiable measure used. Eighty-nine percent of the survey respondents felt that their special needs children exhibited either average or improved social progress since home schooling. The parents noted that their special needs children participated in extracurricular activities on the average of 4.14 activities per child

These same positive perceptions were also expressed by the mothers in the case study families. They perceived positive academic progress made by their special needs children except in the case of Shimon Fine who had actually regressed in the past year. These claims were based on achievement testing or by using a specified criterion such as the Brigance Index. In addition to the academics, all of the case study mothers thought that their children were either improving or were on track socially – sometimes in light of the challenge that the learning need might present. The children in the case studies all participated in at least one organized activity outside the home as well as informal play in the neighborhood or at the family place of worship. One mother summarized the general

tone of the responses by stating, "To socialize is learning how to get along and function alongside other people, so there are lots of ways to address that issue besides the traditional classroom."

**Do the factors that characterize the general population of home schooled children also characterize the population of home schooled special needs children?**

This question requires a comparison of the findings in this study to the existing body of knowledge in previous research studies and will be addressed in the next section.

### **Additional Findings**

Although the research questions did not include a determination of the satisfying and frustrating aspects that parents perceive in the practice of home education, both the survey and interview protocol posed these questions. The top three satisfying aspects of home schooling their special needs children for the survey parents were (1) the strengthening of the family unit, (2) the joy of watching and being intimately involved in the teaching/learning process, and (3) the educational benefits of flexible and customized instruction.

As far as satisfying aspects of instructing their special needs children, all four case study mothers agreed that they enjoyed being a part of the teaching/learning process in their children's lives. Typical was one mother's response: "I am able to see progress he is making and know that I take some responsibility for that." Two of the four mothers felt that home schooling made a positive impact on their family life. One of these mothers made the statement, "I think it has kept us together over the last seven years." This same mother also concurred that the flexibility of home schooling fit the needs of a family with extraordinary demands.

The most frequent points of frustration for the survey respondents were (1) the challenges of teaching a special needs child, (2) the lack of time for the teaching parent, and (3) the lack of understanding about home schooling special needs children - particularly within the community of home schoolers. The case study mothers' primary focus was on the second survey point. They cited the demands of a life committed to teaching a special needs child and the resulting lack of time for the mother to attend to personal needs and other family responsibilities. One mother's response to this question reflected this frustration:

I find with my children I cannot do anything else during our school day. There are other people I know who can cross-stitch and do a whole lot of things while their children are schooled. But I can't because the moment I lose my focus or do something that doesn't have to do with school, they get distracted.

Along with frustration over time, three of these mothers, like the survey parents, also felt frustration in meeting the learning needs of their children. The following response illustrates this feeling:

I get so frustrated when he cries when I ask him to do things. He cries over everything he finds to be the least bit difficult. I am trying to learn to have patience in that area. Sometimes, I just have to say, "Okay, we'll do this again tomorrow."

### **Themes**

The themes that emerged from the case studies are similar to those of the surveys but were definitely more specific to the characteristics and circumstances of those four families. However, there are certainly points of contrast and deviations from those

themes. The interviews of the families and first-hand observations of the home schools allowed an in-depth description that would not be available from the survey results alone. The survey themes that reflected the educational setting that is family-centered, uses customized instruction, provides cross-age socialization as well as an integrated lifestyle were themes that were applicable to at least one if not more of the case families.

Family-centered learning vs. mother-directed learning. In the surveys, there was strong reference to a desire to achieve family unity through the selection of home schooling. Respondents cited strengthening of the family unit as a reason for choosing the practice and as a point of satisfaction resulting from that choice. The case study mothers also discussed the importance of home schooling in maintaining close family relationships. Having lives with circumstances that presented challenges to the cohesiveness of the family unit, they saw home schooling as a means to maintain that unity. However, what I heard and observed gave evidence to mothers who directed the learning experiences of their children and delighted in being an integral part of that process. In other words, not all the family was involved in the teaching/learning process. I saw only one father during my visits; neither he nor any of the other fathers contributed to the instruction of the children. All the mothers attested to the father's support of the practice but there was no evidence during my visit of direct involvement.

Customized instruction vs. needs-based approach to teaching. In the survey, parents noted the advantage of choosing curricula and instructional methods that were customized to the needs of their children. The case study mothers also spoke about selecting curricular materials that fit their children's abilities and interests. Likewise, they developed their instructional techniques to respond to the needs of their children. I

definitely observed these efforts taking place, but the additional element of the amount of instructional time allotted to the individual children became an issue in the case studies. The planning and intent were present but the ability and interest differences among the children in each family created an inability for the mother to provide equality in instructional time.

Socialization issue. Although the issue of normal socialization for home schooled special needs children was a factor in the responses of the survey participants, it was not a theme that prevailed in the case studies. The case study mothers all held positive views of their children's social experiences but often in light of the special need of a child. The children all maintained a life outside the home that involved social experiences with peers.

A "normal" lifestyle for insulated families? The idea emerged from the survey that the home schooling lifestyle was "normal." In this sense, home schooling brought some solutions, but there were also still problems. Along with the satisfaction of seeing a child respond to a learning sequence came the frustration of working with a child who requires more repetition. Survey parents cited a full range of emotions and reactions in their efforts to instruct their children as would teachers within a conventional school setting. Some of these parents also presented the idea that what took place within the home school setting was not only the most appropriate place for a special needs child to learn but also challenged the idea that a conventional setting might be the accepted norm.

Although the case study mothers did not specifically voice this same notion, they did discuss their rationale for selection of the practice in a way that seems to not support this suggestion of normalcy. The choice of home schooling was reactionary and provided

insulation from stressful situations and elements. Because of the various circumstances surrounding each family, they chose to remove themselves from mainstream educational practice to shelter the children from previously experienced or potential problems. Furthermore, three of the four families discussed the possibility of their children returning to the conventional setting or had other children presently attending traditional schools. The two themes do not seem to accommodate each other.

**Philosophy: Parental control.** The philosophy of parental control that arose from the survey responses was apparent in the interviews of the case study mothers. Parents in the surveys challenged the traditional acceptance of the educational professionals knowing what is best for a child educationally. Furthermore, they indicated that this responsibility was given to them by divine appointment as well as relegated to them through school systems that failed to do the job. The case study mothers similarly gave strong testimony to their conviction that they were in charge of their children's education. As they shared their strong convictions and beliefs in the practice of home schooling that was influenced by a religious faith, it was apparent that they shared a common philosophy with the parents in the survey.

### **Summary**

Given the unusual means used to secure participants for this study and the lack of a representative sample, there still seems to arise a profile, as described in this findings section, for the participants in the study. Furthermore, the case study families fit well within the profile that emerges from the survey results. Some of the anomalous aspects of the Fine's home school exhibit outlier qualities, but again with a sample this size and the selection process, it is difficult to establish that claim.

## **The Study Findings and Existing Research**

To consider the findings of this study in light of existing research, it is necessary to first return to the final research question of the study: *Do the factors that characterize the general population of home schooled children also characterize the population of home schooled special needs children?* A discussion follows that compares the findings of this study to Ray's (1997) study of the general home schooling population since his work and survey was used as the basis for this present study to answer the above question. It should be noted that the comparison is tenuous at best in that the two populations are so dissimilar. Additionally, I will draw a comparison to the earlier work on parents' rationales conducted by Van Galen (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991). Finally, this section includes a discussion of the findings in light of the research of Duvall et al. (1997) on home schooled students with learning disabilities, the only study that addresses the home schooled special needs population.

### **Comparison to the General Population of Home Schoolers**

In comparing the results of this study to Ray's (1997) study of the general population of home schoolers, I have used only the survey results as I have indicated that the case study results generally fall within the range of survey results. The points of comparison are demographic information and educational background of the parents, social and academic progress, and parent rationales.

### **Demographic Information and Educational Background of the Parents**

The survey used in this present study is based largely upon the survey Ray (1997) of the National Home Education Research Institute developed in his general study of home schoolers. Since the surveys are so similar, comparisons can be made between the



special needs families in this study and the general population of home schoolers Ray selected. These comparisons are indicated in Appendix J. There are clearly some similarities between the two groups as well as a few discrepancies. It should be noted again that Ray also faced the same challenges in the selection of participants and used convenience sampling through use of home school support organizations. His efforts were definitely more extensive but his response rate (28.8%) was quite low (as was mine at 30%).

The educational level of the fathers in the general population is slightly higher (15.6 to 14.8 years) as is the mother's level (14.7 to 14.3 years). Fifty-three percent of the parents in Ray's (1997) study held a bachelor's or higher degree; 44% of the parents in this special needs study did so. The leading occupational categories of fathers in both studies are Professional I and II. Homemaker/home educator continues to be the predominant occupation of the mothers in both studies although 14% less in the special needs group claimed this occupation while 10% selected the Professional category.

The breakdown of the formal teaching within the home school is very similar for both groups deviating by one to two percentage points for the three selections: mother, father, and other. Quite similar also, are the percentages of parents with teaching certification; Ray's (1997) mothers have a higher percentage by three points. Perhaps, one of the greatest discrepancies in the data is the racial/ethnicity background of the parents. In Ray's study, both parents are at 96% white (non-Hispanic) in his sample. In this special needs study, parents were 88% and 89% white (non-Hispanic).

**Strong similarities also exist in the average number of children, both at 3.3, and the percentage of families represented by two parents, 98% and 97%. The average age of children in Ray's (1997) study was 10.5 years and in the special needs study, 9.8 years for all children and 9.0 years for those with special needs. There was a higher percentage of homes with computers in the special needs study (91% to 86%), but this study was conducted a few years later possibly accounting for a greater use of technology in the homes.**

**In curriculum choices, the major selection in each study was a parent-designed curriculum. However, more parents in Ray's (1997) study designated this choice. Both sets of respondents used curricular packages by about the same amount (24% to 23%). In the special needs group, there were more parents selecting the "other" categories and specifying unschooling or programs (11% to 6%). While 6% of the special needs parents used a school program for their children, only 1% of Ray's group did so. Extracurricular activities for both groups were quite comparable.**

**Probably the most significant area of difference in the findings was the average number of years home schooled and conventionally schooled for the children in the studies. As far as number of years in home education, the mean number for a child in Ray's (1997) study was 4.8 years. If any children were enrolled additional years in conventional schools, the mean number of years was 0.4. In this special needs group, the mean number of years in home schooling was 3.8 with 3.6 in conventional schooling. These figures seem to suggest that the special needs children in the study experienced more years of schooling both in the home and in the conventional setting. In other words, their education often started earlier and took longer. Children with special needs often**

have need of early intervention services and resources and stay in school settings longer to ensure an adequate transition beyond secondary schooling.

Summary. Although the participants in this study of home schooling families with special needs children were clearly similar to the population described by Ray's (1997) study addressing the general population of home schoolers, there are some notable differences. The educational level of the respondents was lower than the Ray population. The major racial group (white, non-Hispanic) was not as overwhelmingly in the majority as previously. The number of years of attendance in conventional school was greater for this population of students as well as the number of years of schooling altogether.

#### Academic and Social Progress

The academic areas cannot be compared between the special needs study Ray's (1997) study since Ray used standardized test score data. Parents reported their perceptions of their children's progress in this special needs study and seldom indicated standardized test results. For many of the families, the children were not tested but received evaluations based upon some sort of learning plan. Ray reported test scores that were higher than national norms, but such a claim for the special needs group cannot even be considered. Overall, parents' perceptions of their children's academic progress were positive. However, children whose learning goals are often set on an individualized basis are usually evaluated in light of that plan and not on the results of a standardized test.

Ray (1997) did not specifically ask parents about social progress in his study. He did survey his families as to the number of and amount of time devoted to extracurricular activities, the contact time with other people, and the amount of time spent watching

television or playing video and computer games. The mean number of extracurricular activities between Ray's study and the special needs study was similar as noted earlier.

### **Parents' Rationales**

As noted in the Literature Review Chapter, Van Galen (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991) conducted the seminal work on parents' rationales for selecting home education. The terms, "ideologue" and "pedagogue," have come to represent the basic two categories of rationales: those who home school their children because they object to the philosophies of traditional schooling and they seek to strengthen family relationships and those who object to the teaching practices in the conventional schools. Her description was drawn from a study of home schooling families that again did not include special needs students. However, it seems that the two categories are applicable to the participants in this special needs study.

The overwhelming reason parents in this study chose to home school their special needs children was because of dissatisfaction with conventional schooling. Sixty-two percent of the respondents criticized the school systems of their locale, and most of their students had been enrolled at some time in a conventional school. The next two reasons cited by the parents were in line with the "ideologue" category: 27% desired consistency with family dynamics and 26% desired to follow and teach religious values. The next three reasons all stemmed from the special needs of the children: the provision of one-on-one attention and customized curriculum and instruction as well as protection from the teasing and ridicule of others.

The rationales of the parents of the children in the case studies could also be placed within these categories. The Piper children were being home schooled because of

dissatisfaction with the public schools and because home schooling conformed better to their family dynamics which included the demands of a military lifestyle. Diana Gray felt that home school was a better environment for her special needs child when a public school experience proved to be unsatisfactory. There was also a philosophical choice on her part. Ruth Fine selected home education for her sons after conventional schooling failed to meet expectations. In the final family, the Dixons, home schooling was the early choice because Rena and her husband were not in agreement with the philosophies presented in public education and they were critical of the quality of the public school system.

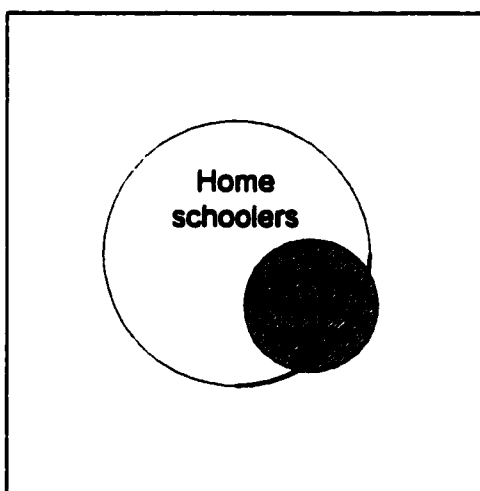
In conclusion, although the parents' rationales in this study fell within the general findings of Van Galen's (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991) work, there was a distinct difference as well. Parents were dissatisfied with conventional schooling, primarily the public school systems, and they were expressing their opinions in light of a negative experience on the part of their special needs children. In conjunction with this perceived failure of the system to meet their children's learning needs, was often a desire for a school setting that more consistently met the values of the family and strengthened the family unit. Additionally, the special needs of the children also created a rationale unique to this study: a desire to create a school setting focused on the need of the child where one-on-one attention could be achieved, curriculum and instruction customized to the needs, and the child sheltered from criticism and ridicule from peers and others.

### Summary

Before attempting a comparison to the other study of special needs home schooled children, the research question needs to be revisited. Can the factors that characterize the

general population of home schoolers also be applicable to this group of special needs home schoolers? It seems that on many points of description the populations are similar. The differences were also noted and seem to focus on the greater relationship these families have with their school systems. For the most part, these children have experienced enrollment in conventional schooling in some point in time and often continue to use services. The parents choose home schooling not just for ideological reasons but often in conjunction with an unsatisfactory schooling experience. Returning to the graphic representation of this research question (see Figure 14.), the appropriate placement of the circle of home schooling special needs students would be an overlap with the circle of the general population. There are many similarities. Yet, the special needs population has its own distinctions determined by the special need of the student and the surrounding factors that need entails.

**Figure 14.** A comparison of the characteristics of the special needs population of home schoolers to the general population of home schoolers.



### **Home Schooling Special Needs Students: A Comparison to the Duvall Study**

The study on home schooled students with learning disabilities by Duvall et al. (1997) is the only previous research that addressed special needs students within the home schooling community. Although the research conducted by Duvall & al. is quite different from that of this study, the results of both are compared below.

In the Duvall et al. (1997) study, the population was very small (n=8) and only focused on students with learning disabilities rather than multiple special education categories. The design was experimental with statistical results. Although the researchers did not claim that they had determined definitively that home schooling learning disabled students produced greater academic achievement than did conventional schooling, the study has been advertised by home schooling advocates (Home School Legal Defense Association, 1997) in their lobbying efforts as proving such. The researchers did conclude that untrained parents could provide students with instructional environments conducive to the acquisition of basic skills. This acquisition occurred because of the ability of parents to engage students at higher rates of academic achievement time than could special educators in the public school classrooms. Furthermore, the researchers considered the low pupil-teacher ratio as critical to this success.

This present special needs study was descriptive and used both statistical and qualitative techniques to assess data. No conclusions were drawn in assessing whether one form of schooling was superior to another. The phenomenon of home schooling special needs children was merely described through the reporting of experiences and

observations of those who practice it. Although the reporting of the parent/respondents was generally very positive in regards to their experiences, it cannot be stated that home schooling special needs children is more academically and socially successful than conventional schooling. For the participants in this present study, it has proved to be a favorable practice that meets the needs of their children and families.

### **Implications of the Study for Current Practice**

The studies cited in Chapter Two that have strong contributions to the conceptual framework supporting home schooling were those studies that focused on factors promoting improved student achievement in both regular and special education. In review, those factors relevant to the practice of home schooling were tutoring (Bloom, 1984), parental involvement (Walberg; Epstein, 1997), high academic engagement time (Karweit, 1984), and early intervention (Casto & Mastropieri, 1986; Slavin, 1996). Some of these factors were apparent in my observations and many parents indicated their presence in the survey responses.

### **Tutoring**

Tutoring is one-on-one or small group instruction. The average home schooling family in this study had about three children. For many of the families, the number of children being taught at home was even less since there were older children either out of the home or attending conventional schools or there were preschool age children. In my observations, there were only two children in each family receiving home instruction. Furthermore, two of the children in these case study families were enrolled in tutoring sessions in addition to or in place of their home experience. The findings indicate



evidence of a tutoring model in the homes of this study. Nineteen percent of the survey parents specifically stated that they chose home schooling in order to provide one-on-one instruction for their children. Another 16% expressed a desire to customize curriculum and instruction to the needs of their special needs children as another reason to practice home schooling. Tutoring not only ensures a small pupil/teacher ratio, it also affords a better opportunity for individualization and flexibility of instruction and curriculum.

### **Parental Involvement**

Walberg (1984) and Epstein (1997) all noted the value of parental involvement in effecting productivity in a learning environment. It almost seems superfluous to comment on the role of parental involvement in home schooling since that feature is fundamental to the practice. In this special needs study, that fact is certainly true. In the survey families, 96% of the mothers were involved in the instruction of their children with 80% responsible for 80% of the instructional time. Furthermore, 66% of the fathers contributed to the instruction of the children as well. Such involvement often took its toll on the parents; nearly one-fifth of the respondents stated that the lack of personal time was a definite point of frustration for them in their role as a teaching parent. However, the benefits of home schooling seemed to be worth the sacrifice of time and self for these families, or, as one parent stated: "It has been an investment in our legacy! Well worth the sacrifice and time."

### **Academic Engagement Time**

Academic engagement time (AET) or time on learning was a focal point of the study on home schooled children with learning disabilities (Duvall et al., 1997). Because the researchers found that the children in the home settings had higher AET than their

public school counterparts, they proposed that this factor might account for the higher academic achievement of this group. Ray (1997) also suggested that this factor might also contribute the higher levels of achievement of the children in his home school study.

In this study on special needs students, there was no question on the survey that addressed this factor. However, during observations, I noted the amounts of time the children were involved in the learning task. In three of the four case families, the children exhibited dedicated time on task during their school day. All the students were actively engaged in direct instruction and oversight by the mother or they were working independently on one of the assigned activities. The exception to this statement was the fourth family, the Fines. The children were on task during the school day when involved directly with their mother. Because of the more demanding needs of Avi, more time was devoted to his instruction. As a matter of fact, when Ruth called to give a report on the testing results of the children, Ruth attributed Shimon's lack of academic achievement to the lack of attention and time spent on learning tasks.

Karweit's (1984) study noted that only about half the conventional school day was used for instruction. In the home schools I observed, the length of the school day was shorter than the traditional setting. Most of the school days were completed by lunchtime, between noon and 1:00 p.m. – a time that would comprise the half conventional school day noted by Karweit. Afternoons still might have school assignments but were conducted in a more informal manner. In these case homes, the school day was determined by assignments completed rather than the clock. There were simply not the time demands that large groups introduce to a learning setting that were relevant in the home settings.

### Early Intervention

Early intervention is the practice of providing early childhood services and programs to children with disabilities either in or outside the home. The studies of Casto and Mastropieri (1986) and Slavin (1996) all indicated effectiveness of the programs. It is difficult to state if early intervention is a feature of home schooling in this study.

Although several of the survey families noted that schooling of their children began before the age of compulsory attendance, especially for the younger siblings of children already undergoing home instruction, a question did not address that time schooling began. For the case families, three of the four had children receiving preschool services or attending preschool programs through their public school systems. The fourth family, the Dixons, did not begin the schooling process any earlier than normal and did not even realize that there was a special need present in either son until two years into the schooling. Therefore, if early intervention might be a feature that would account for success in home schooling, it could not be determined in this study since the reported early intervention that took place was that provided by the public school system.

### Summary

Because this study takes the phenomenological approach, it cannot be stated conclusively that the home is the best or even a better educational setting for special needs children. The experience of home schooling special needs children has been described through the voices of those engaged in the practice. In the eyes of these parents, the mothers in the case families and the majority of the survey respondents, it

seems to be a satisfying and successful practice. The positive report of the parents might be explained by some of the factors noted above. The effectiveness of the tutoring model could certainly contribute to the success of the students in these homes. Parental involvement and intense dedication to the educational achievement of their children is another possible factor. Finally, greater academic engagement time during a home school day could also contribute to the perceived success of the practice. It would be difficult to cite a single factor when any home could probably be a model for all three of these elements to some extent.

### **Implications of the Study for Educational Policy and Practice**

After conducting research into the issue of public access for home schooling students, Ray (Jacobson, 1997) stated, "The thought is, we want legal access because we are taxpayers, but most of us don't use it." The parents Ray surveyed were not parents of special needs students. Of the 100 families participating in Phase One of this study, 76% utilized therapies and services through either the public schools or private settings. Twenty-four percent were enrolled in a conventional school on a part-time basis. The children in this study have been enrolled in conventional schools (a mean of 3.6 years) almost as long as they have been in home schools (a mean of 3.8 years). It is a subtle difference in the populations but an important one. The majority of these families have a relationship with conventional schools, but many expressed a desire for a better relationship and were highly critical of local public school systems.

### **Policy Implications**

States are gradually allowing home schoolers to participate in curricular and cocurricular activities. That practice is a recent development and may benefit families with special needs students. Most states allow home schooled students with disabilities to obtain special education and related services at their local public school regardless of access allowed for regular education students. However, with the implementation of public access policy, these home schooling families may be able to put together an educational plan for their students that might truly deliver the “best of both worlds” for students with learning challenges. Described below are some programs that address the collaborative relationship that is possible between the public schools and home schooled special needs students.

### Model Programs

Since the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education has advised that school districts must include home educated children in their child find activities and make special education available to those eligible for service under IDEA (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1998), it seems that there is a potential for a strong relationship between local education agencies and home schooling families. School districts such as Des Moines, Iowa, have made a proactive effort to establish a partnership with parents with special needs children. The school district not only provides the special education services and programs for eligible students, but the parents are advised in curricular choices and instructional methodologies, provided with a certified visiting teacher, free annual standardized testing, annual written evaluations, and the optional use of the school district curriculum. Dahm (1996), Coordinator of Home Instruction in Des Moines, stated that the supervising teachers “work with [home

schooling] parents to assure that the instruction meets the needs of the student as identified in the student's last IEP" (p. 70). Dahm noted that their intent is to support home schooling families and not control them.

Special needs students make up about 6% of the home schooled population in Des Moines. In discussing the efficacy of the program for the special needs students, Dahm, (personal communication, March 20, 1998) noted that there seemed to be particular success for students with behavior disorders and attention deficit disorder.

Also in Iowa, the Ames School District has implemented a similar program to that of Des Moines: the Ames Community School District's Home-Based Education Program. Terpstra (1994), the coordinator of the program and a home schooling parent, noted that the attitude of the district set the pace for the success of the program: "We found that our district was committed to meeting every child's educational goals – even in nontraditional settings" (p. 57). In her opinion, the public schools benefited from the relationship since "home educators who feel connected to their schools will support those schools more fully – and support of the community is critical to public schools" (p.58). In Iowa, the school district also receives state aid for those home schooled children who choose to be a part of their school community. Programs such as these can provide a model for other school districts.

For many states and local school districts, there are policies already in place. With the generally favorable attitude towards home schooling, more states are likely to follow suit. However, there are far fewer implemented programs than there are policies. Oftentimes, state legislatures pass statutes, and state departments of education along with their school districts are left with the task of implementation. This part of the process has

been slow to evolve (Dailey, 1999). There is presently a need for implementation and strong leadership.

Although few in number, there are models out there, such as the programs in Iowa. States, such as Washington and Oregon, also have put programs into place. The practice of home schooling, including families with special needs children, looks like it is a trend that is likely to continue. School districts and their special education coordinators need to implement programs, which will ensure that the families with special needs children are supported in their efforts. Right now, the implementation process is being slowed down by battles over participation in cocurricular activities (Dailey, 1999; Hawkins, 1996). Children who need resources and services are seemingly being caught in the middle when parents are hesitant to approach school districts rocked by controversy and negative press.

Terpstra (1994) asked the question, "Can we see new possibilities for the public school acting as an umbrella for some types of alternative schooling?" (p.58). For those parents who desire the partnership, there are exciting possibilities if they could join hands with professional educators. As an example, California has created several charter schools for home schoolers; some of these schools are specific to special needs students (Walsh, 1997). These students have the benefit of the legal covering of the school as well as access to counseling, resources, and services.

Regardless of the structure of the partnership or access, parents of special needs students expressed common desires in their comments and criticisms in their survey responses. Besides access to schools on a part-time basis for some children for therapies and other services, the parents expressed a desire to take advantage of resource centers

where they could use books, computers, and other curricular materials. They were also interested in use of consultants, professional educators who could share their expertise with the teaching parent. Many of the parents indicated that they had enrolled in workshops and classes specific to the learning needs of their children. Such professional development opportunities for parent/teachers would be of great benefit to the progress of the special needs child whose parent might continue to provide the bulk of his or her schooling without the advantage of the latest professional knowledge.

Many home schooling parents already utilize testing and evaluation procedures offered by both private and public schools since some form of evaluation is required by the states' home schooling regulations. Public schools should expand this service to meet the unique needs of the special needs students. For example, Faith Piper asked for morning testing for her daughter since there was a greater chance for success than in the afternoon sessions normally allotted to home schoolers. However, she still had to seek a private evaluation for her son since she knew he would not perform well in the group testing offered by the public school district. Such an expansion of evaluation offerings would benefit the school district as well in that they could keep abreast of the progress of the students who might avail themselves of this service. The school district would be much better informed and be in a position to offer help if warranted. Furthermore, since many of these students tend to transition back into the public schools, that process could be greatly enhanced by maintaining current testing information and building a relationship with the home schooling family.

At the heart of these suggestions for policy implementation and possible programs for home schooling special needs students is a suggestion for a change in attitude by



professional educators and policy makers. The early days of home schooling were fraught with court battles and negative publicity. Even more recently, studies (Gorder, 1995; Mayberry et al., 1995) indicated that school professionals held unfavorable opinions of home schooling. School superintendents lacked support for the practice and teachers feared home schooling caused a drop in enrollment and loss of prestige, and the teachers were reluctant to admit that schools had some of the problems home schoolers criticized. Whether home schooling parents want access or not, many feel that their payment of taxes ensures their “educational rights” (Mayberry et al., 1995). ). As noted in this present study, home schooling parents generally hold the philosophy that they are responsible for the education of their children – and not the state. Respecting that point of view can become the basis for a partnership with parents in educating their children. To revisit Terpstra’s (1994) comment, “home educators who feel connected to their schools will support those schools more fully – and support of the community is critical to public schools” (p.58). Opening lines of communication with home schooling parents is a step in that direction.

#### Implications for Professional Practice

As the name implies, home schooling would seem to have few implications for professional practice within the realm of conventional schooling. However, the results that continue to emerge from studies on home schooling children depict a practice that is meeting the needs of the families who make that choice. According to studies of academic achievement (Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999), home schooling as an alternative form of education is showing its viability. Although this special needs study relied upon the self-reported perceptions of parents, it would seem that home schooling is also proving

itself in meeting the needs of even the more challenging students. Therefore, perhaps home schooling does have implications for professional educators.

Findings such as those in this study only serve to reinforce what educators already know. They know that parental involvement in their children's education makes a positive contribution to student achievement, and home schooling is the epitome of parental involvement. They know that the tutoring model is a powerful form of instruction, and tutoring is the primary format in home schooling. They also know that time engaged on the learning task is critical to success in learning; studies, such as Duval et al.'s (1997) suggest that increased academic engagement time within home schools account for higher levels of student achievement – even for special needs students. Of course, a home where there are relatively few students and distractions are minimal can provide these features where a traditional classroom struggles to do so.

Some researchers (Lines, 1996; Weston, 1996) have already encouraged collaboration between home schoolers and public educators. They suggested that educators could benefit from studying the effects of such home schooling practices as one-on-one lay tutoring, the informal learning environment, and heavy use of technology. These practices might be incorporated into the conventional classroom given the right mixture of funding, students, and parent volunteers.

For special educators, there are additional implications. Parents of these special needs children chose home schooling to enable their children to be in a setting where the student/teacher ratio was low and where instruction could be individualized to their needs. For many, this type of education was not occurring in the conventional school so they opted out. When Diana Gray realized that there were no special programs for Caleb

beyond preschool, she took him home rather than witness him placed in a regular classroom where the teachers “don’t have enough time to spend with the children; they have so many of them.” The researchers in the Duvall et al. (1997) study suggested that there could be implications for inclusion when home school students, despite being taught in more restrictive environments than their public school counterparts, made as satisfactory or even superior academic progress. In other words, parents are looking for an environment where they are assured their children will receive adequate attention to ensure academic achievement and proper socialization. When schools are placing special needs children into classrooms with the least restrictive environment, many parents feel their children are being deprived of the attention they need. This message was clearly evident in the responses of the study participants.

There is, of course, a realization that not all school districts have the same capabilities, even with federal funds provided for children with special education eligibility. Home schooling can be an alternative form of schooling that can help relieve a school district of some of the burden of financial responsibility. Educating special needs children is a costly undertaking. Maintaining enough qualified professionals is another challenge. Collaboration between the parent/teacher and the professional educator could benefit both parties: relief for the school district and much needed help for the parent. Additionally, for parents who are home schooling and struggling in their efforts, a school district partner could make a distinct difference in that home setting. With the present trend in home schooling, it seems likely that there will be more special needs children withdrawn from the conventional setting.

Finally, beyond the suggested benefits to both school and home of such a home-school partnership, is the notion that special educators might also learn from the home schooling parents. One such example is Sharon Hensley in San Jose, California. She has taken her years of being a professional special educator working within conventional schools into the home school community as a parent educator. She has developed an organization that has become a model for assisting home schooling parents of special needs children. Not only does her school provide legal coverage for home schooling families, but she assists parents in planning instruction and selecting curricular materials. Parents attend teaching workshops and monthly support group meetings. Furthermore, she is available for consultation on an as-needed basis. Granted, Hensley has years of experience in special education before moving into the role of home schooling parent. However, there are more like her who are less visible but who can provide insight into meeting the needs of students with challenging needs. Collaborating with Hensley and others like her could be of great value to the school districts in which they work.

### **Recommendations for Research**

This study was an attempt to describe the phenomenon of home schooling special needs children and was exploratory in nature. Although the focus of the study was a segment of families within the greater population of home schooling families, there was still a wide range of diversity contained therein. The unique status of each family due to demographic and educational background as well as the nature of the special need must be kept in mind when making generalized statements about the population and their practice of home schooling.

This study did not attempt to draw conclusions concerning academic and social progress of the home schooled children as compared to conventionally schooled children except to report the perceptions of the parents. However, there is a natural tendency to do so. In order to accomplish this task, it would be valuable to look into the specific areas of diagnoses to determine efficacy of the practice for those children. Duvall et al. (1997) recommended that more studies of experimental design on home schooled learning disabled students follow their work. No matter what the choice of methodology, the focus of the population should be narrowed to the disability. Then the question of whether autistic children or hearing impaired children learn more effectively in a home school or conventional school setting could be answered. Similarly, the often asked question about adequate socialization could also be answered when narrowing the population to a specific special education category.

Duvall et al. (1997) focused on academic engagement time as the critical variable in determining whether home schooled children with learning disabilities could make adequate academic gains. More research should be considered to study the effects of academic engagement time and other practices such as direct teaching. Since the unequal amounts of one-on-one instruction became an issue in this study, how many home schools are able to provide an equitable arrangement for the students? Is there any relationship between the amount of instructional time received and academic progress?

The value and effectiveness of any educational process, content, or context is in the final product. Taking a look at that product for only a moment in time can produce some interesting data, but looking at that same product over time probably delivers a much clearer and more telling picture. Longitudinal follow-up data about the participants

in this study could produce a commentary about the effects of their schooling on their transition into conventional schooling at any level or into the work force. This recommendation might also be extended to include a survey of school districts to determine numbers and profiles of special needs children transitioning into local schools from home schools. Just how successful are these students in academic achievement and social adjustment? Which students make the transition and which do not?

Further research needs to extend to the administrative aspects of part-time special needs students. What school districts have implemented programs to assist home schooled special needs students? How are these programs structured and how many students are being assisted? Such data could inform other states and school districts of successful arrangements or perhaps those practices to avoid.

Philosophies have been such points of contention between the home school community and the professional educators. A study that compares and contrasts the views and perspectives on education of the two communities would be valuable to help bridge the philosophical gap. We have seen the criticism home schoolers have leveled at public schools. What are the areas of concern professional educators have about home schoolers?

One final recommendation for research is born from my arduous task of enlisting research participants. Interviewing home school parents as to their reluctance to participate in research studies could yield information that might assist future researchers. Certain geographic regions and states seemed to produce more participants. Is there a relationship between home schooling laws and a willingness to participate? The Internet proved to be a valuable resource in this study. Does the availability of almost total

anonymity guarantee better delivery of participants, and are the responses of Internet participants a valid source for studies? Past researchers (Kaseman & Kaseman, 1992) have proposed reasons for the reluctance of home schoolers to participate in research studies but these rationales have not been determined through extensive research but from suggestions from a few home schoolers including the researchers themselves.

### Summary

With these recommendations for future research, there is a note of caution and of concern. Unless school districts implement home school programs, there will continue to be difficulty in accessing the population for research purposes. Special educators have expressed concerns over whether students eligible for special education are having their needs adequately met at home. These professional educators desire only the best services and programs for these children, but so do their parents, and these parents have lost confidence in the ability of the system to deliver. Such confidence can only be restored through building a relationship of trust.

Whether seeking participants for a study, locating children for accountability purposes, or possibly implementing a home-based education program, there needs to be a respect for parents who feel that they bear the responsibility to educate their children. Private schools who advertise comprehensive educational services also should take heed to such recommendations as well. When asked about a desire to participate in a home school program through the local school district, the following response was given by a mother of a special needs child:

*My daughter has an IQ of 30 and functions in the TMR range. She is now 18 so basically it's too late for us. Our school district's basic theme is power and control*

*(yelling, criticizing, and restraint come first). Well thought-out services and curriculum at my daughter's level do not exist. She never had an opportunity to have friends or positive behaviors modeled by typical peers. What a tragedy, and I get to pay taxes for it too.*

For some families, the relationship with the local school system can be very satisfying and worthwhile. Several survey parents volunteered evidence of a relationship that can prove supportive of those who home school special needs children:

*The special education department at our public school told me it was the best thing that could have happened to Cara and to keep up the good work.*

*Next year, all our children are going to school – all for a variety of reasons – many social and some parent burn-out. It is very difficult to homeschool five children, including three with serious disabilities. On top of the diagnoses, all of the children who were adopted have emotional/psychological needs as well. Our school district is quite good and has provided services as needed. I would love to continue homeschooling, but it has become too difficult.*

### Epilogue

As I reflected upon my journey into the world of home schooling special needs children, I was sometimes bothered by the dilemma of the objectivity of a researcher compromised through the subjectivity of the experience. Rena Dixon asked me to share some highlights of the findings from the survey portion of the study. When I did so, she commented that I sounded like a home schooler. Although I was merely sharing the statistics and summarized responses with her, it was apparent that I could express the philosophy of the participants in a rather authentic manner.

Returning to the discussion of the subjectivity/objectivity dilemma qualitative researchers face as noted in Chapter Three, I remembered the words of Glesne and



Peshkin (1992) : “My subjectivity is *the* basis for the story that I am going to tell. It is a strength on which I build” (p.104). I took comfort in that discussion and decided my subjectivity did not compromise my ability to report responses and construct a narrative. I immersed myself into the home schooling community, studied the phenomenon and, in the process, came to know many families and individuals. I have reported my findings in the tradition of phenomenology so that others might “understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). In spite of the subjective nature of my researching experience, I remain an outsider in the world of home schooling because I am not a home schooling parent and specifically not one with a special needs child. Most of my acquaintances and contacts within the community have accepted and confided in me because of my Christian school background and a sincere concern about the well-being of the children.

That same concern has convinced me that I have a contribution to make to education. What began as a research interest has become a professional objective. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) wrote about the roles in which researchers often find themselves functioning as they get involved in fieldwork. One of those roles is advocate. An advocate can take the results of a study and use them to take a position and perhaps champion a cause. After completing this study, I began the process of studying home school programs developed by private schools in order to write a proposal for the school in which I work. I distributed a needs assessment to home schooling parents to determine if they had an interest in a home school program and, if so, what courses and services they would desire. There was an overwhelmingly positive response from the parents, and they indicated an interest in a wide range of courses and services. The interest and desire

for a collaborative relationship that seemed to emerge from the study was echoed in the needs assessment.

Parents who home school their special needs children want help. However, they want help from a trusted source that understands and respects their philosophical position. I now realize through the course of this study, that I have come to understand that philosophy so that when I converse with home schoolers, I “sound like” one of them. It is the immersion into the world of home schooling that has given me the ability to speak the language, understand and express the philosophy, and develop a desire to collaborate in my professional capacity. However, I remain convinced that conventional schools have their place in education. As they have always been able to respond to the changing environment and needs of the population, a new opportunity is now present. I hope to be an agent for that change and be a part of an educational endeavor that supports a strong collaboration between home and school.

Aside from examining my role as a researcher and the growth I experienced through the duration, I also reflected upon the process of the research. Hopefully, my hindsight can be of benefit to future researchers who desire to study home schoolers. The most challenging aspect of the study was selecting participants. My hopes of making contacts in person were unrealistic. The Internet proved to be the more effective means to locate both individuals and support groups. Had I known that the use of Internet technology was far more fruitful than other means and given the time constraints I worked under, I certainly would have started with electronic communication. The results of the survey could have been stronger with a greater return rate.

As far as the design of the study, I feel the mixed design was an appropriate approach to the topic. Having the results of the survey gave me some knowledge of the subject going into the case study portion. That familiarity allowed me to establish a rapport with the families in the case studies. The survey itself had a few problems in the wording of the questions. There was confusion over the reporting of educational diagnoses and frequently medical diagnoses were given resulting in my own “best guess” as to the category to which to assign the child. The survey was piloted, but perhaps more extensive review would have avoided the confusion.

The use of the phenomenological approach was an appropriate methodology in the case studies. The results described “the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept of the phenomenon” (Creswell, p. 51) .However, while conducting the case studies, I would have preferred having a time to interview the fathers. Because of time and financial constraints, I could not afford to extend my visits to include the father – even if the father was agreeable to submitting to an interview. That input could have been valuable in depicting the complete picture of the family dynamics, particularly the role of the father in the home schooling family.

The final point of reflection is a philosophical one. If I had it all to do again, would I invest so much time in the area of home schooling? My own life’s philosophy holds that nothing happens by chance and that there is meaning in all our actions. For someone with a lifetime invested in conventional schooling, this study might seem to be an anomaly. Yet, I believe that there will be an end result beyond the completion of this study and this paper. I remember remarks from the survey of respondents who thanked

me for “taking the time to consider parents who home school special kids.” It is for the remark such as this closing one that I know I am convinced this study was worthwhile:

*I am constantly thankful that I live in the USA where home education is an option. I never wanted to home school – until my child was suffering and begging me to try. I really believe that had we lived somewhere this wasn't an option, my daughter would have turned to suicide or drugs. No matter what we tried to instill in her at home in regards to her self-worth, she wasn't believing us. School was sending her the message that she was “no good” and didn't measure up. She could not distinguish who she was as a person from what she did to perform. Home schooling took away that measuring stick and let her develop at her own pace. She always gets A's because I give her back her assignments and we work on them until they're right. This has given her back her self-worth. I'm so thankful this choice was available to us.*

## APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX A

Table: State Home Schooling Policies

<b>State</b>	<b>Home Schooling Statute(s)</b>	<b>Specific Policies on Students with Disabilities</b>
AL	None	§ 14.30.340: School district of residence must make special education and related services available in conformance with IEP.
AK	§14.30.010 (b) (12)	None
AZ	§15-802	None
AR	§6-15-501 et seq	Rules and Regulations for Home Schools §9.00: Districts must provide a genuine opportunity for home schoolers to access special education and related services. Inclusion in testing is decided by the student's IEP committee.
CA	None	§51745 CA Educational Code: Students with disabilities may participate in independent study only if their IEPs provide for this.
CO	§22-33-104.5	State Department of Education Guidelines issued 1/98: It is recommended that the district provide written notification when a student with a disability is home schooled that the district is no longer required to provide special education or related services. All provisions of the home schooling law apply to these students and the district must provide accommodations in testing the student.
CT	No law but DOE guidelines	None
DE	Title 14 §2703	None
FL	§232.02 (4)	None
GA	§20-2-690(c)	None
HI	§302A-1132(a)(5)	None
ID	None	Interim Special Education Manual (1997): Home schoolers are included with nonpublic school students. Dual enrollment in general education courses allowed for students with disabilities on same basis as other students; students with disabilities may also receive special education and related services at the public school site.
IL	None	State Attorney General Opinion (1992): The same exemptions and requirements for equivalent education apply to home schooled students with disabilities as to any home schooled child.
IN	None	None
IA	§299A.1-299A.10	Specific regulations [Title V Ch. 31 §281.31.1 to 31.9 (299)] on special education students: Competent Private Instruction in the home is allowed with the written approval of the director of special education of the area education agency.
KS	None	None
KY	None	None
LA	§17-236	None

State	Home Schooling Statute(s)	Specific Policies on Students With Disabilities
ME	20-A §5001-A(3)(A)(3)	Special Education Regulations Chapter 10c§4.7: Schools must inform parents of home schooled students with disabilities of the availability of a free appropriate education, review the special education needs of that student, develop an IEP, and advise parents of their rights.
MA	None	None
MI	MCLA §380.15S(3)(f)	None
MN	§120.101	None
MS	§37-13-91(3)(c)	None
MO	§167.031(2)	Article IX, §162.996: Districts may provide special education to home schoolers and receive state aid based on the full-time equivalent daily attendance of the student.
MT	§20-5-102(2)(f)	None
NE	None	None
NV	§392.070 [and Code Ch. 392]	Technical Assistance Document (1997): NV does not recognize home schooling as a private school. Home schoolers do not have an individual right to program benefits under IDEA or state laws, nor to benefits as voluntarily placed in private schools.
NH	§193.A	None
NJ	§18A.38-25	Policy Guide: District must provide an evaluation if requested and may offer services (permitted but not mandated).
NM	§22-1-2	Per <i>Procedures Manual</i> parent should contact local superintendent to obtain special education services; district shall propose a meeting to develop and review IEP and make available special education and related services as determined by the team and stated in the IEP.
NY	§3204(1) & Regulations Title 8 §100.10	Per Packet on Home Schooling: Districts must offer home instructed students with disabilities the special education services as recommended on the IEP. There are 15 specific instructions pertaining to students with disabilities.
NC	Article 39 §115C-547 through 115C-565	None
ND	ND Cent. Code §15-34.1-6, 03	Children with developmental disabilities may not be home schooled except those with autism. Parent home schooling an autistic child must file diagnosis, an instructional plan, and progress reports by a psychologist, an OT, a speech therapist, and a certified teacher. Nondisabled child who scores below 30 <sup>th</sup> percentile in achievement must be evaluated by a multidisciplinary team for potential disability.
OH	§3321.04(A)(2)	None
OK	None	None
OR	§339.030(5). 035	None

<b>State</b>	<b>Home Schooling Statute(s)</b>	<b>Specific Policies on Students With Disabilities</b>
PA	24 P. S. §13-1327.1	Instruction for any student identified under law as needing special education services must be approved by a teacher certified in special education in the state or by a certified school psychologist. Written notice of the approval must be included in the notarized annual statement that the parent must submit to the district.
RI	§16-19-1	None
SC	3 options: §59-54-40, -45, -47	None
SD	None	None
TX	None	None
TN	§49-6-3050	None
UT	§53A-11-102(2)	None
VT	§1 16VSA 11 (21), § 166B	Guidelines for Home Study in VT (1997): Parent of a student identified as in need of special education must demonstrate how appropriate support will be provided through the description of the minimum course of study. The child has a right to receive special education services at the public school.
VA	§22.1-254.1	None
WA	§28A 225.010, 200.010	None
WV	§18-8-1 Exemption B	Memorandum of Clarification: Home schooled students are considered "parentally placed in non-public school settings."
WI	§118.15(4), §118.165 (1)	Districts are required to screen and evaluate and, if an IEP results, make a placement offer. Parents may refuse. Districts may, but are not required to, provides services to home schooled students with disabilities
WY	§21-4-101	None
American Samoa	None	None

Source: National Association of State Directors of Special Education, 1998.





**Part B. Information regarding your children**

1. List the age and gender of each child and indicate if home schooled and grade level.

Age	Gender (M/F)	Home schooled? (Y/N)	Number of years?	Grade level?
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

2. Which of the above children have been diagnosed with a special need?

Age	Gender (M/F)	Special education diagnosis (be specific and indicate where and when the diagnosis was performed)
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

3. Has your child(ren) received an individualized education plan?
- 
- Yes
- 
- No
- 
- If yes, who prescribed it (public school team, private physician, educational consultant)?
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ when? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What kind of curriculum do you use for your special needs child(ren)? (indicate all that apply)

 Curricular package (includes language, social studies, mathematics and science materials – examples: BJU, Alpha Omega, A Beka, Calvert School)

Indicate publisher: \_\_\_\_\_

 Parent-designed curriculum (components picked by parents)

 Program provided by local private school or public school; specify \_\_\_\_\_

 Correspondence course; which one? \_\_\_\_\_

 Other, specify: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you have a computer in the home the child(ren) use(s) for educational purposes?
- 
- 
- Yes
- 
- No If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Indicate the special education support services your child(ren) receive(s)?

 Physical therapy

 Vision therapy

 Speech/language therapy

 Psychological counseling

 Occupational therapy

 Learning disability therapy

 Biofeedback therapy

 Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. Is your child (are your children) enrolled part-time in a public or private school?

 Yes  No If yes, for what classes or services? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What other support services or organizations does your family use in home schooling?

 Local/state home school support group (underline which one)

 Home schooling special needs support group (NATHAN, PREACCH, other: \_\_\_\_\_)

 Educational consultant

 Umbrella school

 Home School Legal Defense Association

 Tutor, for: \_\_\_\_\_

9. In what extracurricular activities are your children engaged outside the home?

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group sports       | <input type="checkbox"/> Ballet/dance classes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunday school      | <input type="checkbox"/> Art classes          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Field trips        | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer work       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Music classes/band | <input type="checkbox"/> Scouts               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-H                | <input type="checkbox"/> Karate               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth group        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____         |

---

Please use the back of this form if you need more space to answer the following questions.

10. Why did you choose to home school your special needs child(ren)?

---



---



---

11. How would you describe the academic progress of your special needs child(ren)?

---



---



---

12. How would you describe the social progress of your special needs child(ren)?

---



---



---

13. What is the most satisfying aspect of home schooling your special needs child(ren)?  
(Consider self and family.)

---



---



---

14. What is the most frustrating part of home schooling your special needs child(ren)?

---



---



---

15. Any additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

---



---

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have any questions, you may reach me at the following address, phone number or e-mail address.

Jane Duffey  
128 W. Belvedere Rd.  
Norfolk, VA 23505  
757-451-4505  
tnjduffey@erols.com

If you would like a summary of the results of this study, please include your return address.

---

## APPENDIX C

*Jane G. Duffey*  
*128 West Belvedere Rd.*  
*Norfolk, VA 23505*

*Telephone (757) 451-4505*  
*E-mail [trjduffey@erols.com](mailto:trjduffey@erols.com)*

---

May 24, 1999

Dear Research Participant:

The attached questionnaire on home schooling special education students is part of a research requirement for my doctoral studies at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. This particular project involves identifying factors concerning your experience with home schooling.

In recent years, home schooling has become very popular and is enjoying great success. Many researchers have documented positive findings, a fact which has aided in the passage of some favorable policy regulations. However, very little is known about home schooling students with special needs. I am interested in changing that fact, but I need your help to do so.

Please take a few minutes and answer the questionnaire. Answer each question as briefly or with as much length as you like. Feel free to write on the back of the page and make comments. **Please know that your responses will be held in the strictest confidentiality.** Participation in this study is voluntary. If you have additional questions regarding this study, please call Dr. Jill Burruss (School of Education, College of William & Mary, 757-221-2361) or Dr. Bob Hanny (757-221-2334), or the researcher, Jane Duffey.

I will be pleased to send you a summary of the questionnaire results if you desire. Include an address under "Additional Comments" to indicate that interest. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

*Jane G. Duffey*

## APPENDIX D

**Jane G. Duffey**  
**128 West Belvedere Road**  
**Norfolk, VA 23505**  
**[tnjduffey@erols.com](mailto:tnjduffey@erols.com)**

---

June 30, 1999

Dear Sharon,

I just thought I would let you know how the research is developing. I have just finished all my classes and am now able to devote more focused time to the research process. I am anxious to get this project moving now.

I have sent out approximately 600 surveys thus far. These have not all been distributed but sent to individuals and contacts, like you, who are distributing them for me. My initial goal was to get about 400 completed surveys returned. I knew I would need to wait until summer because of the busy schedules of home schooling families (especially those with special needs children) during the "school year." I guess, though, I am starting to get nervous because I have only received about 50 completed surveys. I am excited to see returns from out your way.

Patience has never been one of my strong points so I guess the Lord is teaching me a little more. I would, though, like to "pick your brain." If you know of some way I can follow up on the surveys to those who are not responding as some sort of encouragement, please let me know. Besides the above addresses, you can call me at 1-877-4DUFFEY (toll free).

Thanks for your help. I hope you are enjoying your summer. I think I am definitely planning on coming to your area to conduct a family observation in the fall. I will talk to you about that as my summer work progresses.

Sincerely,

Jane Duffey

## APPENDIX E

**From:** Gail Biby <gailb@wdata.com>  
**To:** Jane & Tom Duffey <tnjduffy@erols.com>  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 13, 1999 9:42 AM  
**Subject:** Re: special needs support group

---

Jane,

Are you asking about North Dakota? If so, what part of the state are you in? What type of special needs are you referring to? In ND if a child has been labeled by a professional as being developmentally disabled that child cannot be home schooled.

Gail

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Jane & Tom Duffey <tnjduffy@erols.com>  
**To:** [gailb@wdata.com](mailto:gailb@wdata.com) <[gailb@wdata.com](mailto:gailb@wdata.com)>  
**Date:** Monday, April 12, 1999 3:07 PM  
**Subject:** special needs support group

>Hello! My name is Jane Duffey. I am interested in getting in touch with a  
>support group for home schooling families with special needs children. Can  
>you put me in contact with such a group - name, phone number or e-mail  
>address? Thank you - Jane

## APPENDIX F

### Home School Interview Questions (Parents)

1. **Talk about why you originally chose to home school.**
2. **Why are you encouraged to continue to home school?**
3. **Your child has been diagnosed as having a disability. What is it and how was it diagnosed?**
4. **If your child received services through a formal school system, describe those services (setting, teachers or other professionals, classroom accommodations, therapies).**
5. **How are you providing for your child's learning need? Have you received any training to address your child's disability?**
6. **What help are you presently receiving to meet your child's special needs? (tutor, support group, services from a school, independent therapist, etc.)**
7. **What type of curriculum do you use in your home schooling?**
8. **How would you describe your child's educational progress?**
9. **How would you describe your child's social progress?**
10. **What is the most satisfying aspect of home schooling your special needs child?**
11. **What is the most frustrating part of home schooling your special needs child?**
12. **What has been the impact of home schooling on your family life?**

### **Home School Interview Questions (Students)**

**[Note: these questions will be used for those students for whom they are appropriate.**

**Questioning will be sensitive to age and ability of the child.]**

- 1. What do you like best about home schooling?**
- 2. What do you like least about home schooling?**
- 3. (If appropriate) Since you have attended both regular and home school, compare the two experiences as to - learning the subject matter**
  - taking tests**
  - socializing**
  - participating in extracurricular activities**
- 4. How do you think home schooling affects your family?**
- 5. Would you like to home school for all of your school years?**
- 6. What do you see yourself doing when you graduate?**



## APPENDIX G

### Consent Form

The information provided to you on this form is presented to fulfill legal and ethical requirements for the School of Education at the College of William and Mary and the Department of Health and Human Services regulations for the Protection of Human Research Subjects (45 CFR 46).

“Home Schooling Children with Special Needs: A Descriptive Study” is a research study being conducted to fulfill doctoral requirements. The purpose of this study is to provide descriptive data on the home school special needs population: reasons parents choose to home school their special needs children and the nature and design of the home school.

You and your children will be involved in this study in the following ways:

1. Observation of a typical school day in the home by the researcher and
2. Interview of the parents and home school children.

These activities should not take more than ten hours (observation and interview time together) over the course of two school days. There are no foreseeable risks to the participants. At any time, the participants may withdraw from the study without any penalty. Specific information about the participants will be kept strictly confidential and will be obtainable from the researcher if desired. Pseudonyms will be used.

The purpose of this form is to allow you and your children to participate in the study. Parental consent and child assent for this study is voluntary without undue influence or penalty.

If you have additional questions regarding this study, the rights of participants, or potential problems, please call Dr. Jill Burruss (School of Education, College of William and Mary, 757-221-2361), Dr. Bob Hanny (757-221-2334) or the researcher, Jane Duffey (757-451-4505H, 757-423-5748W).

---

Signature of Student

---

Signature of Parent/Guardian

---

Date

## APPENDIX H

### Field Observation Protocol

#### Descriptive Notes

- A. **Pre-observation Bracket**
- B. **Context**
  - 1. **Description of home - interior rooms, exterior of home and neighborhood**
  - 2. **Sketch of room where schooling takes place**
- C. **Participants**
  - 1. **Physical description**
  - 2. **Ongoing description of behavior during school day**
  - 3. **Dialogue and interactions among family members**
- D. **Process**
  - 1. **Teaching/learning activities of the school day**
  - 2. **Interfering activities**
  - 3. **Chronology of events**

#### Analytic Notes

- A. **Pre-observation: Bracket**
- B. **During observation: Feelings and impressions**
- C. **Post-observation**
  - 1. **Clarification of observations**
  - 2. **Preliminary speculation, afterthoughts**
  - 3. **Memos to self**

(Glesne & Peshkin, 1992)

# Field Notes

*Reflections  
and  
Asides*

<b>Observations</b>	

APPENDIX I



**LINDA KANE**  
 NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS  
 P. O. BOX 380  
 HUNTSVILLE, UTAH 84317-0380  
 PHONE (801) 621-8606 FAX (801) 621-8389  
 EMAIL linda@nacd.org

**WEEKLY PROGRAM DATA FORMS**

Client Name \_\_\_\_\_ Week of \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

At the first of each month the "Weekly Program Data Forms" for the previous month should be sent to the address above.

ACTIVITY	F	D	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Deep Presence	2	5							
Push & Tumble Blocks	1	3							
Tongue Stick in Fun	2	2							
Mouth Stick	4	1							
Spin - Log Roll	2	2							
Deep Pres.	4	-							
Activities to the Object	4	3							
- Reinforcement									
Acid Dye Spots	2	3							
- Reinforcement									
String rolling	2	-							
Reception	4	2							
Wiggly stick	2	-							
Knee Walk Forward (inst)	2	2							
Pronation isometrics	2	2							
Cross Match - Sharp	2	2							
- Construction	2	-							
- E - E Paste Cuts									
Numerals	2	1/2							
Count Objects	2	2							
Verbal Finger Match	1	5							
- Start Learning to ( use Knives )									
All Manual Jam Millie	-								
Picture Units Swirlies	2	2							
Tapet - Counting	2	2							
- Swirlies	2	2							
- G - L	2	3							
- A	2	3							
Stones		AMAP							

Communication is essential in assuring the continuity of the program. Any significant changes in the client and/or difficulties in administering the daily program would necessitate an E-mail or call to Linda Kane at Phone (801)621-8606, Fax (801)621-8389, E-mail linda@nacd.org.

**APPENDIX J**  
**Comparison of the Results of Ray's Study to the Results of Survey of Special Needs Families**

Category	Ray (1997)	Duffey (1999)
Mean educational level - F	15.6 yrs	14.8 yrs
Mean educational level - M	14.7 yrs	14.3 yrs
Major occupation category: Father	Professional I/II (tied at 17%)	Professional I (19%)
Major occupation category: Mother	Homemaker/home educator 88% Professional 5%	Homemaker/home educator 74% Professional 10%
Formal teaching – Mother	88%	87%
Formal teaching – Father	10%	8%
Formal teaching – Other	3%	5%
Major race/ethnicity – Mother	96% white	88% white
Major race/ethnicity – Father	96% white	89% white
Average number of children	3.3	3.3
Average age of child in study	10.5 yrs	9.8 yrs 9.0 yrs (special needs)
Two-parent families	98%	97%
Computers used in homes	86%	91%
Teacher certification – M/F	15/6%	12/6%
Major curriculum choices	Parent designed 76% Package 24%	Parent designed 58% Package 23%
Major extracurricular activities	Sunday school 84% Field trips 77% Group sports 48%	Sunday school 77% Field trips 75% Group sports 44%
Average number of years in: home education/child	4.8	3.8
conventional education/child	0.4	3.6

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