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Walden University
2014

Abstract

Perspectives of Parents of Students With Disabilities Toward Public and Homeschool

Learning Environments

by

Angie Marie Delaney

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Special Education

Walden University

December 2014

Abstract

Homeschool delivery to students is on the rise, particularly in regards to the education of students with disabilities. At this time, there is a lack of research on homeschooled students with disabilities. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how parents choose a model of education for their children with disabilities. A purposeful sample of 3 distinct groups comprising 13 parents of children with disabilities was assembled: (a) parents who are homeschooling their child with a disability, (b) parents who have decided to enroll their child in the public school system after previously homeschooling, and (c) parents who may have or never have considered homeschooling their child but instead chose to have their child attend a public school. Open and selective coding techniques were used to identify significant themes in the participants' responses. The results of the interviewed participants revealed themes of Needs, Flexibility, Child's Request, and Bullying. These themes, especially parents stating that their child's needs are met, were a significant reoccurring reason parents reported choosing the educational setting they did. Findings also included that overall satisfaction of parents of students with disabilities was higher among parents who had homeschooled than among parents with children in public school. Finally, topics of participation and communication between public schools and parents were explored in order to examine the possible influences of parent choice. Implications for social change include compromises from both schools and parents and a suggestion of a possible hybrid option for some students with disabilities.

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Angie Marie Delaney

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Doctor of Philosophy
Education

Walden University

December 2014

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this small accomplishment to my father. Although we never met in person on this Earth, passing and entering just days within one another, I know we are connected. You gave so much for so many in that awful war. I hope I made you proud!

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my husband, Patrick, who decided to challenge me to this PhD “process.” In knowing my competitive personality, he also knew we would both finish. We did it!

To my friends and family who endured my answer to that question, “How much longer?”: Thank you for your patience. A big shout out to my brother Bryant, thank you for always having my back. And to my boys, Jonathon and Jacob, I hope you find and live your dreams I love you!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The focus of this research was parental perspectives of students with disabilities on and their choice of an educational environment for their children. Parents of students with disabilities have more recently been used as participants in research studies (Applequist, 2009); however, an understanding of why they may choose to homeschool is not yet evident in the literature (Arora, 2006; Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse, 2011).

This chapter includes a background of the educational options including homeschooling, a problem statement, and the purpose of the study. Additionally, research questions, a conceptual framework, and the nature of the study are included. Definitions, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study are also found in the chapter.

A gap exists in the limited research exploring the population of parents choosing to homeschool in lieu of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE); meanwhile the practice is increasing (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; McReynolds, 2007). This lack of research contributes to a deficient understanding of the homeschooling populace, specifically in the arena of children with disabilities being homeschooled. Many public school resources and funding are at this time withheld from the population of students with disabilities being homeschooled. Additionally, schools districts are losing the funding for the students who receive their education from home. Arora (2006) stated, "In contrast to schools, parents receive no funding" for electing to homeschool (p. 55). Therefore, parents are choosing to homeschool despite financial

support and resources that public school can provide, and school districts are losing the funding for these students.

The value of my research addresses potential social implications. For example, public school systems can provide screenings and evaluations, as needed, to determine if children qualify for in-school therapies such as speech, occupational, and physical therapies. Students in school can benefit from diverse settings, such as a sensory room or a smaller group environment, as determined by the child's individual education plan (IEP) team. More information is needed to determine if useful resources for students with disabilities being homeschooled are available and are being utilized with these students in the home setting. I sought to explore what factors might influence parents of students with disabilities to decide to homeschool despite the resources public school could provide their child with disabilities.

Additionally, although researchers have examined the rights of homeschooling families (Cooper & Sureau, 2007) and the successes of homeschooled students (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004), research studies addressing the homeschooling of students with disabilities is scarce. This study contributes to the literature by exploring the perspective of parents who homeschool their children with disabilities. Although there is little research surrounding homeschooling, the practice is on the rise (Arora, 2006; Martin-Chang et al., 2011). When parents withdraw their students from public schools, districts lose funding as a result of parents' choice to homeschool. More research is needed to help school districts better meet the needs of students with disabilities and retain these students in public schools.

Background

The development of public education in the United States reveals exclusion of persons with disabilities and then a progression towards acceptance of differences. In the early 1900s, it was culturally acceptable to institutionalize children with disabilities, essentially ignoring their educational needs. According to Shapiro (1993), results of the U.S. Census from the 1970s indicated that “some 750,000 American children between the ages of seven and thirteen did not attend school” (p. 165). These students had a range of disabilities, and, according to Shapiro, “schools had simply turned them away, saying they were unable to educate them” (pp. 165-166). Discovery of the lack of attention to the educational needs of their children led parents to campaign for equality for their students with disabilities. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) passed as a federal law, a direct outcome from the parents’ protest (Shapiro, 1993, p. 166). This historic legislation meant all children with disabilities were guaranteed FAPE in the public school system. Shapiro explained that until special education laws such as P.L. 94-142, many children with disabilities were educated in their homes.

After laws were implemented to meet the needs of students with disabilities, student attendance increased within public schools. “Millions of disabled children have since gone through school under the act, often in mainstreamed schools with children not disabled” (Shapiro, 1993, p. 166). However, a more recent trend is that some parents of students with disabilities are deciding to educate their children with disabilities in the home environment (Arora, 2006; Duvall, Delquadri, & Ward, 2004; Ensign, 2000). As

with many other educational practices, the pendulum of homeschooling versus public education tends to swing one way and then back again (Sherman, 2009). In other words, educators, school systems, and curriculums follow a trend for some time and then change is instituted, often shifting practices drastically in another direction. Currently, homeschooling is a growing trend for parents and their children (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; McReynolds, 2007).

The population of homeschooled children is diverse. According to Cooper and Sureau (2007, p. 110), although a large number of homeschooling families are Evangelical Christians, many others have different or nonreligious backgrounds. Parents have arrived at the decision to homeschool for varied reasons, including protecting students from a public school environment, immersing children in a religious education, and feeling that homeschooling provides superior academics (Collom, 2005; Lebeda, 2005).

The objective of public education, specifically the law of FAPE, is to provide America's students with access to the most suitable educational resources at no cost. Understanding why parents are choosing to homeschool their child with disabilities was the goal of this research study. Although the practice of homeschooling is an increasingly popular trend (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004; McReynolds, 2007), the research has not kept pace with the growing movement of parents choosing to homeschool (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Kunzman, 2005; Wagner, 2008). Even less research targets the homeschooling population of children with disabilities (Abbott & Miller, 2006). It is unclear why parents of students with

disabilities are homeschooling versus enrolling their child in public schools. I sought to explore the trend in experiences and the influences of parents who homeschool their child with disabilities.

Problem Statement

The problem is a lack of understanding, due to the limited research on the topic, of why parents of students with disabilities are choosing to homeschool their children. I addressed the problem by interviewing parent participants with students with disabilities and looked for possible themes in their concerns regarding the educational environment of their children. This study contributes to the understanding of the homeschooling trend for students with disabilities and provides information that can be used to assist educators to better serve students and ultimately keep them in public schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the reasons parents give for choosing a learning environment for their child with disabilities. In this study, I sought to understand reasons why parents of children with disabilities make the decisions they make regarding educating their children in public or homeschool settings. The findings of this study add to the minimal amount of existing research regarding parents teaching from the home setting. Additionally, I specifically explored the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities who homeschool, parents who have homeschooled in the past, and those who have considered but decided against homeschooling their children with disabilities in the rural areas of north Georgia.

Research Questions

Main Question

Why do parents of students with disabilities make the decision to homeschool or enroll their child in public school?

Subquestions

1. What reasons do parents of students with disabilities give for choosing to homeschool, not homeschool, or return their child to public education after homeschooling?
2. What factors do parents report influenced the decision processes?
3. What factors would impact parents to alter their original decision?

Nature of the Study

In order to understand their parental viewpoints, I implemented a qualitative approach using a phenomenological study design, to explore the trend of parents' educational decisions regarding their children with disabilities. A phenomenological study describes the approach of researching several individuals with a similar phenomenon with lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). The lived experiences of parents of students with disabilities, specifically the choices they make in their children's educational environment, was explored and compared.

I implemented a phenomenological approach in the attempt to describe the real experiences and perspectives of parents of children with disabilities and their choice to homeschool their child or have their child attend a public school. Realizing the research

presented is an exploration of human behavior, I sought the perspectives that have shaped the parents' choice of a learning environment for their child with disabilities.

Researchers using interviews attempt to employ a thorough inquiry and communicate study participants' lived experiences. "For a researcher the basic source of evidence about the narratives is the interview" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 163). Qualitative researchers use narrative methods such as interviews to identify themes from study participants' lived experiences. Insights into parent's decision making assisted my understanding. "As I come to know this thing before me, I also come to know myself as the being who intuits, reflects, judges, and understands" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). I was searching for the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities and the influences that might have convinced them to educate their child at home rather than participate in a public education setting. One expectation was that the findings of the study would clarify the behavior of parents of students with disabilities.

In this study, I compared the perspectives of parents who are homeschooling their child with a disability, parents of students with disabilities who have decided to return to the public school system, and those parents who have never considered homeschooling or decided not to homeschool their child with a disability. The focus was to understand the nature of the decision to stay with the homeschool model opposed to public school and the influences for parents choosing to maintain or reverse homeschooling by returning to a public school setting.

I transcribed interviews with 13 parent participants of school-aged students in the north Georgia area and coded reoccurring themes from the collected data. From the

themes revealed, I made interpretations and provided implications that the research findings reflected for parents and educators of students with disabilities.

Conceptual Framework

There has been limited attention paid from educational researchers to the issue of homeschooling (Arora, 2006, p. 55). Because the trend continues to gain momentum (Collom, 2005; Cooper & Sureau, 2010), a phenomenon surrounds homeschooling. Hence, a phenomenology approach to examining parental perceptions of their children with disabilities educational environments and their decision-making was an appropriate path.

At the core of this research is parental choice. It has been previously stated that while homeschooling is a trend becoming an educational phenomenon (Kunzman, 2005), it remains unclear why parents are making the decision to keep their children out of the public school system and instead provide their child's education at home. Glasser (1998) developed choice theory to explain why and how people make choices that establish the path of their lives. Glasser's theory of choice can be applied directly to understanding parents' distinctive choice to homeschool, such as asking whether the decision for some parents is an external control.

Definitions

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): The public law that states all children in the United States are entitled to an appropriate education free of cost under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 94-142).

Homeschool/Home school: Parents taking direct accountability for their children's education by teaching them at home (Griffith, 1999).

Home-school approach: A combination model of instructional delivery of part-time or "shared-time" between the traditional school and home setting (Waggoner, 2005).

Homeschooling support/community groups: A network of homeschooling parents who communicate regularly to share ideas and experiences. Groups can be local or meet via the Internet (Griffith, 1999).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): An individualized document created for students with disabilities under the provisions of IDEA (Richek, Caldwell, Jennings, & Lerner, 1996). A federally mandated team of professionals, parents, and the student required to meet and develop the most appropriate program, an IEP, for students with disabilities enrolled in a public school. The IEP document is used to individualize students' educational needs (PL. 94-142).

Liaisons: Persons who can provide support for parent and school professionals in an effort to collaborate on the educational needs of students (Sanders, 2008).

Special Education: The passing of special education laws such as PL. 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Children Act, established rights for students with disabilities in 1975, stating that they have the right to FAPE. The result of this historic legislation meant all children with disabilities were guaranteed an education in the public school system with considerations to be made at annual IEP meetings (Turnbull, 2005; PL. 94-142).

Unschooling: A term coined by John Holt, a homeschooling advocate from the 1970s, meaning teaching and learning that takes place in an environment other than the traditional classroom (Holt & Farenga, 2003).

Assumptions

I assumed that participants would openly communicate and answer interview questions honestly. I also assumed parents understood and truthfully acknowledged that their child meet the criteria of having an eligibility for special education if enrolled in a public school.

Limitations

Limitations of this study are that the research presents a small number of parents of students with disabilities school choices compared to the much larger number of actual parents of students with disabilities making educational environmental decisions. This study was also limited in its focus. The research focused on parents of students with disabilities and makes no attempts to address parent perceptions of students without disabilities. The research excluded parents under the age of 18, parents who homeschool their children without disabilities, and parents who have children without disabilities enrolled in public schools.

Scope and Delimitations

The study included 13 participants, with a minimum of four in each of the three groups, aged 18 years or older, who are currently homeschooling, have homeschooled their child with disabilities in the past but returned their child to public school, or may

have or have never considered homeschooling, yet have decided to have their child with disabilities attend a public school. Participants lived in counties of northern Georgia.

Significance of the Study

Collecting data that explored parents' perspectives illuminated parents' choice of learning environments for their child with disabilities. By analyzing the trend of detailed interviews with parents, I gleaned new ideas for both homeschooling parents and public education professionals. The findings proved to be a source highlighting some advantages in public school resources. These interventions may be resources unknown to homeschooling parents. Additionally, parents of students with disabilities enrolled in public schools could be enlightened to the positive aspects of the homeschooling option. The importance of accurate and current data reflecting parent perspectives is that it could aid parents in making informed decisions regarding their children's specific educational needs. Lastly, I have made suggested comprises for public schools to consider that may lead to a hybrid type setting, merging home and public school.

Contribution to Social Change

Societal change can occur by clarifying the reasons parents are choosing to take on the responsibility of their child's education because more information would be available to both parents and schools. Parental perspective data on homeschooling can potentially improve the knowledge and understanding of educational institutions. With the trend increasing, public school systems should no longer ignore the large numbers of students being homeschooled. Districts could gain, from a financial standpoint, from a phenomenological understanding of possible qualities parents are not finding in their

local schools. Educators could improve their approach to parent communication. Additionally, parents would have more information regarding other parent beliefs that may or may not influence their decisions of homeschooling.

The few researchers who have focused on homeschooling agree that parents choose to homeschool for a variety of reasons (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; Isenberg, 2007). A proactive approach for school districts (to implement) is to explore possible reasons why parents would want to remove their child from the public school system. Further exploration of parent – school relationships could improve communication between parents and schools. Exploring parent concerns early on could possibly reduce incidences of students being removed from schools by parents due to negative experiences (Knowles, 1988). Improved relations between parents and school professionals could create social change in the lives of students with disabilities whether they continue to be homeschooled or receive their education in the public school setting.

Summary

Addressed in this study are the underlying concerns that children with disabilities are being homeschooled, yet the reasons why are unknown. Further, it is also unknown if the parents of children with disabilities possess the skills and resources needed to provide an appropriate education for their child. The call for research on the topic of homeschooling, specifically regarding the education of students with disabilities at home, has been consistently documented (Arora, 2006; Duvall et al., 2004). The implication for positive societal change impacting the lives of students with disabilities is a great focus.

Although limited, a thorough literature review of existing peer-reviewed research pertaining to homeschooling and the public school / parent relationship is summarized in Chapter 2. Additionally, a combination of data on reasons parents homeschool and special education services are included in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 is a summary of the phenomenological methodology and research design that was utilized in this study. These findings are presented in Chapter 4. A discussion of findings concludes this study in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this study, three groups of parents of children with disabilities were studied: those who enrolled their child in public school and may have or have never considered homeschooling, those who are currently homeschooling, and those who have homeschooled and currently have their child educated in a public education setting. In an attempt to understand the attitudes of parents of students with disabilities towards public and homeschool modalities of education, I present in this chapter past and present research studies exploring educational choices for children with disabilities. A strong focus on homeschooling is communicated throughout this work in order to share information about the option of homeschooling for students with disabilities versus public education. Research regarding public special education programs is abundant, while alternative educational choices for children with disabilities are less documented; therefore, further research on the latter is needed.

Although the practice of homeschooling is growing exponentially, worldwide, educational research studies on homeschooling are lacking (Arora, 2006; Martin-Chang et al., 2011). While several studies and theories provide positive rationales for parents to homeschool their children, it is clear from the lack of research conducted on homeschooling that more information on the topic is needed. Again, while I explored many alternative learning environments in this study, homeschooling remained a central focus in this work in an attempt to fill the gap in literature specifically addressing parents of students with disabilities who choose to homeschool.

This chapter begins with historical information about homeschooling, including homeschooling philosophies parents currently follow and resource books for parents considering homeschooling. After a review of the study questions and setting the stage of homeschooling background, I review current research organized into the following sections: Homeschooling Data, Homeschool Models Versus Public School, Alternative Educational Choices, and Possible Interventions for Improved Relationships Between Homeschool Settings and Public Schools. Comparisons and contrasts of perspectives are threaded throughout the literature review in an effort to expand on this study's research questions and objectives. This chapter includes research related to the method of the study and concludes with a review of my conceptual framework focus of a phenomenological study exploring parents' decisions about the educational environment for their children with disabilities.

Literature Search Strategy

I used several variations of terms to search for applicable resources, including books, peer-reviewed articles, and previously published dissertations. The strategy implemented to gather thorough results included frequent searches in the databases Academic Search Complete, ERIC, Education Research Complete, ProQuest, and SocINDEX. Repeated terms used in the database searches were *homeschooling*, *special education students*, *disabilities*, *home education*, *homeschooling and students*, *early intervention*, *alternative education*, and *home school communication*. A type of mining of the data was utilized due to the lack of successful results of *homeschooling students*

with disabilities. Therefore, terms such as *alternative education* and *home school communication* became useful.

Conceptual Framework: Homeschooling Theory in Relation to Glasser's Choice Theory

Glasser's (1998) choice theory can assist in explaining why and how people make the choices they do in their lives. This theory is appropriate to explore and advances the nature of my study, which focused on parents' choice of educational environments for students with disabilities.

Glasser (1998) described how traditional psychology defines external influences that get people to do what others want them to do, including actions that they may not intend to act out (p. 5). Glasser referred to this concept as "external control" (p. 5). The perspectives of Mason (2008), Holt (2003), and Durkheim (2002), which are explored in the following sections, speak directly to the homeschool educational model and possibly have influenced parents' decision to homeschool their children.

In addition to how Glasser's theories apply to the psychology of parental choice, Glasser expressed an opinion of schools specifically. According to Glasser (1998), schools can exude pressure to conform: "The educational message of our existing schools, Learn what we tell you whether it is useful or not or we will punish you, compounds this problem, a problem that only the schools have a chance to solve" (p. 194).

Lastly, Glasser (1998) discussed personal freedom: "The only person whose behavior we can control is our own" (p. 332). There are two ways to consider how this

applies to homeschooling; while parents have the personal freedom to choose to homeschool their children, how does that decision reflect on the personal freedom of the child? In other words, Glasser's psychological theory supports the choice of parents, but also insinuates that by homeschooling, parents may not produce the ultimate impact on their children that the parents are intending. Depending on their reasons for homeschooling, such as control over the environment, based on Glasser's theory, the outcome of that environment will not influence their child's behavior. Parents can make the choice to homeschool, but all they will get from a child's behavior is "information," which may be a sacrifice if learning is not the primary goal of parents homeschooling (Glasser, 1998, p. 333). Considering Glasser's position and choice theory, in the current research study presented, I asked the question, What are the perspectives of parents choosing to homeschool their children?

Homeschooling Background

Foundational Theories of Homeschooling

Charlotte Mason, 1842-1923, an early 20th-century educator of parents' teaching skills, and John Holt, 1923-1985, an advocate of keeping children at home versus sending them to public school, are two foundational authors of homeschooling. Mason's mission was to support the parent by providing best practice scenarios. Typical of the era, most of Mason's lectures referred to educating children with a Biblical foundation. Wilhelm and Firmin (2009) concurred that Biblical teachings were the main focus for children during this period of time in American educational history. Subsequently, many parents

who are currently homeschooling their children for religious reasons implement Mason's ideals into their homeschooling curriculum despite the century-old teachings.

In *Home Education*, Mason (2008) outlined for parents the importance of God's laws in the education of children. Mason stressed the importance of using the Bible as the primary source in the education of students ages 6 through 9 (p. 165). Mason added, "By nine they should have read the simple (and suitable) narrative portions of the Old Testament, and say, two of the gospels" (p. 165). In 1904, Mason commented that parents are responsible for revealing God to their children and thus the reason why God allowed them to have children (p. 41). According to Mason, parents have a great responsibility in homeschooling children; however, she also stated, "The children are the property of the nation, to be brought up for the nation, and not according to the whim of individual parents" (p. 16). Some parents who educate their children at home today in order to control their moral education may utilize Mason's teachings to support their decision to homeschool and use her teachings from the turn of the century to defend their platform.

A later homeschooling idealist, Holt, expressed his opinion of public education's incompetence after the systems of schools were well established in the United States. A matter-of-fact activist who was originally an educator, he declared public education a deception (Holt & Farenga, 2003). In his book *Instead of Education*, originally published in 1976, Holt stated, "The most we will be able to do may be to find ways to help some children escape education and schooling, and to help some others, who cannot escape, to be less damaged by it than they are now" (2004, p. 8). Holt spoke of education from the

home setting before homeschooling became the movement it is currently, describing homes as classrooms (2004, p. 33). In the introduction of his re-released edition of *Instead of Education*, Farenga praised Holt, saying “Holt was able to foresee and nurture the homeschooling movement in detail before anyone else” (2004, p. viii). While Holt did not conduct research studies to support his beliefs, he published many books admonishing the procedures of the American public school systems.

Holt and his coauthor, Farenga (2003), who continued Holt’s work on homeschooling publications after his death, consistently wrote about the shortcomings of the school system. For example, they contend teachers insist that all students should be learning at the same level. “Quite often such teachers tell the parents of such (hyperactive) children that unless the child does the work the other children are doing, he will fail” (Holt & Farenga, 2003, p.18). Holt and Farenga felt that schools did not teach to the student who needs to be challenged or the child who struggles. The authors explained that they had heard from parents who asked for help for their struggling student; however, their teachers were unwilling to grant the accommodations the children need to be successful. They stated, “The teacher then (after having the parent ask for assistance) usually says, ‘I can’t be giving special help to your child, I have all the rest of the children to look after’” (Holt & Farenga, 2003, p. 18).

Holt and Farenga (2003) often quote parents’ positions in their book, *Teach Your Own: The John Holt Book of Home Schooling*. While representing these parents’ perspectives, the opinions expressed should by no means be misconstrued as reflective of parents everywhere. While there do exist dissatisfied parents, as well as incompetent

teachers and ineffective programs, there are also effective public school educators and programs across America (Johnson-Leslie, 2007). Logically, and documented in their books published in 2003 and 2004, Holt and Farenga would seek out and use the perspectives of parents who praise homeschooling and have negative feelings towards the public school experience for their children. However, Holt and Farenga's assumptions are biased, which directly affects the validity of their work, especially considering their lack of research on the topic.

Many parental perspectives are reflected in articles and books that specifically target parents frustrated with the politics and hurdles the public schools seem to present to them. In an American parent perspective piece, Peterson (2009) advises other parents with children with disabilities, "If you have been questioning whether the endless individualized education program (IEP) battles and teacher conferences are benefitting anyone, remember that you have another option," alluding to home education for these students (p. 38). Peterson, like Holt and Farenga, is reaching out to those parents who are searching for a voice. Sanborn, Santos, Montgomery and Caruthers (2005) also alleged that parents of students with disabilities in the future will feel "betrayed by false promises of equality in education" and will, therefore, have to homeschool their child with disabilities (p. 28). However, without current research, one can only theorize there are parents of children with disabilities who have the same concerns.

Mason and Holt presented diverse perceptions for parents considering homeschooling. Mason (2008) encouraged parents to nurture the positive qualities children have naturally, while Holt points to the dangers in the public school system.

Both homeschooling philosophies are embraced today by parents who homeschool (Griffith, 1999; Morrison, 2007). Researchers concerned with a true picture of the apprehensions of parents who leave the school setting for homeschooling should conduct thorough investigations where reliable and valid data are analyzed. Although Holt and Farenga's (2003) work is not presented as a research study, but rather a trade book, they summarized some parents' negative experiences for future readers who are most likely those looking into pursuing homeschooling. Clearly, the views of Holt and Farenga (2003) are not encouraging parents to create working relationships with schools, but to take on the education of their children in the home setting.

A Different Perspective on Schools and Homeschooling

A theorist to consider on the topic of educational settings is Durkheim (1973). Offering an opposing view to Holt and Farenga, Durkheim considered the school system a healthy environment because it is different from a child's home life (Durkheim, 1973, p. 235). He addressed a concern about socialization, which many express of the homeschooling model. "Thus, although we could not at any time do without the school to instill in the child a social sense," he continued to defend the need for children to remain in school, "the services that the school can render are of incomparable importance" (p. 236). At this time "services" available in the public school settings, including the implementation of a child's IEP for children with disabilities, are inaccessible for students who are homeschooled.

Although his research focused on sociology in a broader sense than education, exploring Durkheim's views on the school setting provides a foundational perspective.

Durkheim, a social theorist in the early 1900s, conveyed a deep respect for schools and the educational processes used in classrooms. Durkheim considered schools a group in which children become natural participants (Durkheim, 1973, p. 235). Today, socialization seems to be the greatest concern amongst opponents of homeschooling. However, objective thinkers should consider the climate and age of Durkheim and his theoretical writing. Based on current research regarding homeschooling models that follow, a theme I reiterated is one of cooperation between the homeschooling communities and public schools.

Current Homeschooling Research and Data

Confusion and possible misconceptions surround the practice of homeschooling, perhaps due to the gap in research. In addition to the uncertainty surrounding homeschooling practices, the reasons parents choose to homeschool their children are varied and inconclusive (Spiegler, 2010). In a study that focused on parents' motives for homeschooling, Spiegler (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 12 other homeschooling studies, looking for a possible influence of the methodologies used in the original study. Spiegler found that the number of different methodological approaches and research instruments used in previous studies exploring reasons why parents homeschool make it impossible to draw inferences about the topic. Based on his research, Spiegler (2010) called for a future international study to explore parents' perspectives towards homeschooling to clarify homeschooling data. "Only then (after a broader lens is used) is it possible to assess in what respect homeschooling parents are different from parents whose children attend schools" and the motives of parents homeschooling (p. 68).

Therefore, according to Spiegler (2010), the homeschooling research that exists is inconclusive due to researchers' approaches. The confusion is compounded by the many different reasons why parents might homeschool their children. Rothermel (2003) stated home educators are themselves diverse and these parents' motives are also ever-changing.

Each state in the United States regulates the rules of homeschooling in different ways (Kreager, 2010). Kreager (2010) reported that state requirements differ in the documents parents must present, parent or homeschool educators' qualifications, as well as a specific number of days homeschooled students must receive instruction. At this point, the United States has not taken part in the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as other nations in the United Nation (UN) have done, which would provide a more consistent law of homeschooling (Blokhuys, 2010; Kreager, 2010;). Clearly, when exploring homeschooling practices across the country and around the world, making generalized statements referring to all homeschooling situations should be limited by any author.

A Persuasive Case for Homeschooling

Although now outdated, Romanowski (2006) reviewed the current state of homeschooling parents and tried to dispel homeschooling myths such as the popular topic in homeschooling circles, socialization. Romanowski believed that homeschooling is not a choice every parent should make, but advocated for homeschooling as parents feel it is appropriate for their lives. The concerns Romanowski addressed include the social and

moral lives of the homeschooled, college acceptance of homeschooled students, and the reasons why parents homeschool.

In regards to the commonly held belief that homeschooled students lack the socialization skills schools offer, Romanowski (2006) challenged that parents who homeschool are sensitive to the issue of socialization and go to great lengths to ensure that their children have positive social experiences (p. 126). He utilized other literature and studies to document evidence indicating social strengths versus weaknesses of children that are homeschooled. Romanowski (2006) provided preexisting research to support that homeschooled graduates do not have difficulties enrolling in colleges and become well-rounded adults. In the past, universities had viewed homeschooled high school graduates with suspicion; however, graduates from a homeschool setting are currently not only accepted but are in high demand (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009, p. 304).

Reasons That Parents Homeschool

The right to choose homeschooling. While there are several perspectives of parents who choose to homeschool, including religious reasons, some homeschool for the educational control (Romanowski, 2006). Dumas, Gates, and Schwarzer (2010) believed that the “flexibility in approach, materials, pacing, scheduling and activities” are benefits above traditional schools and are possible reasons for parents to homeschool, allowing parents to exercise more management over their child’s education (p. 72). Romanowski (2006) also believed parents are pursuing educational superiority over public education by providing homeschooling. Meanwhile, Merry and Karsten (2010) stated that homeschooling should be considered an “expression of parental liberty” (p. 498).

Fields-Smith (2009) found African American parents who homeschool would rather not risk their children attending public school due to perceived problems. Qualitative data were focused on the “phenomenon of home school through the eyes of Black families” (Field-Smith, 2009, p. 372). Findings included African American parents had strong feelings that parents should have an invested role in their children’s education and that the parents’ perceptions of school settings were negative; therefore these reasons played heavily on their decision to homeschool. These parents’ perspective that homeschooling was the best environment for their child is another example of homeschooling being a personal right of parent choice.

The academic achievement of homeschooled students. Supporters of homeschooling might point to the achievement success of students homeschooled. Collom (2005) reported that homeschooling parents are motivated by academic purposes (p. 331). Ray (2010) also discovered higher student achievement from homeschooled students than students in a traditional school setting. One study that focused on academic achievement found homeschoolers scored above those students in a typical school setting (Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse, 2011, p. 200). Martin-Chang et al. (2011) documented that when homeschooled children’s achievement was compared to traditionally schooled students, the homeschooled students outperformed the others. The researchers repeated that their results reflected positive, high achieving from homeschooling, when a structured educational setting was established. However, students that received their education with a lack of a structured curriculum, scored lower than children in a traditional school setting (Martin-Chang et al, 2011, p. 201).

Reading gains for homeschooled students. Keys and Crain (2009) specifically explored students' reading progress in the homeschool setting. Participants in the study took the informal approach to teaching reading to their children. "We found that many homeschooled children received little or no formal instruction, yet they learned to read at or above age level by the time they were 8" (Keys & Crain 2009, p.9). Ray (2010) also discovered higher student achievement from homeschooled students than students in a traditional school setting. One unknown is if these children have or could have a learning disability.

Older research from the United Kingdom is comparable to Martin-Chang et al's findings. Rothermel (2004) assessed 35 young children from differing socioeconomical backgrounds. Rothermel's findings included that while children educated at home scored higher, those from a lower economical class scored higher than their middle class peers when a high level of parent involvement was evident, indicating that parental involvement makes a positive difference (2004, p. 273). Rothermel stressed that key to the success level of these homeschooled students was that their education was, "flexible and tailored to their individual needs and interests" (2004, p. 296).

Information containing a strong research base can be helpful for persons making quick judgments of the homeschooled population. Sandborn, Santos, Montgomery and Caruthers (2005) predicted that homeschooling will continue to grow in popularity, and college-educated mothers will have decided that public schools are "just test-takers and numbers for a headcount" (p. 28). Public school administrators should recognize the data indicate the trend of homeschooling and be proactive in understanding the reasons.

Specific homeschool research for students with ADHD. Duvall et al. (2004) evaluated students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) achievement from both homeschool and public school environments. They found that students with ADHD in the homeschool settings performed equally and in some instances better than their peers with ADHD in a public school environment (Duvall, Delaquadri, Ward, 2004, p. 151). The researchers' data also showed that students homeschooled were twice as engaged and the children made more progress in math and reading than students in a traditional school setting (p. 140). Although a clear limitation of Duvall et al.'s research is the small number of participants, the authors have shown homeschooling for students with ADHD, especially those needing fewer distractions in their learning environment, to be a promising scenario. While students' interventions in a public school can include "limit distractions" in their Individualized Educational Program (IEP), a true controlled setting would not be as attainable in a classroom as a homeschool environment.

Homeschoolers' preparedness. Another area researchers have explored is the readiness of homeschoolers for colleges and university settings. As earlier stated, there is a reported shift in homeschooling perceptions; Wilhelm and Firmin (2009) stated that universities are now more welcoming to a homeschooled population entering college (p. 304). However, reflecting on the assumption that homeschoolers are not equipped academically or socially for a higher institution, Jones and Gloeckner's (2004) research is of importance. They presented data comparing high school graduates from a traditional school setting and those students that completed high school at home.

Jones and Gloeckner (2004) found that when assessed, students who completed high school from home were as prepared for college as their school educated peers (p. 20). Cogan (2009) also found in an exploratory study of doctoral students from both homeschooled and traditional backgrounds that those students from a homeschool setting had higher GPAs, college entrance scores, and graduation rates (p. 24). Cogan pointed to the importance of future studies since the majority of homeschooled children have yet to enter college.

At this point, neither public school systems nor homeschooling advocates have earned bragging rights. More importantly, the separate entities should not stand in judgment accusing the other of poor performance when clearly the data reflects equal effectiveness. Instead, homeschooling community groups and their local public schools could explore strategies that bridge relationships between the two educational delivery modes. Additionally, more research should be focused on defining the population of students with disabilities. One area of focus of my research is whether a one-on-one setting is a positive approach for students with disabilities and if homeschooled children with disabilities are further advanced than the traditional school's educated students.

Quantitative Data Related to Homeschooling

Isenberg (2007) compiled quantitative data from homeschooling studies pertaining to the United States. The purpose of Isenberg's inquiry was to explore the research regarding the number of students being homeschooled and reasons, statistically broken down, for why parents homeschool. According to Isenberg, there are over 1 million children being homeschooled today. Isenberg's review of the data revealed that

parents homeschooling for religious reasons dropped from 52% in 1999 to 30% in 2003 (Isenberg, 2007, p. 401). Also reduced were those parents who believe they are providing an improved education; in 2003 this number was down 19%, from 67% in 1999 to 48% in 2003 (Isenberg, 2007, 401). In comparison, while much smaller than the United States, the country of Sweden more recently reported only a hundred students in 2008 were homeschooled (Villalba, 2009, p. 278). Villalba (2009) highlighted that Sweden, like other nations, has conflicting interpretations of the homeschooling regulations and systems of monitoring the practice (p. 277).

Statistics on homeschooling students with disabilities. While Isenberg (2007) stated that the percentage of parents homeschooling their child due to special education needs has stayed consistent at 14 and 15% from 1996 to 2003, Abbott and Miller (2006) reported nearly 45% of parents homeschool their children because of their child's disability (2006, p.49). Although Abbott and Miller's research was 3 years later, the growth of students with disabilities being homeschooled seems like a significant jump, and possibly in conflict with the data Isenberg reported. According to the latest national survey information from homeschooling parents, some areas surveyed of reasons why parents would homeschool were so insignificant, the number did not meet reporting standards (see Table 1; NHES, 2007). Further complicating the interpretation of these conflicting data regarding students with disabilities being homeschooled is the weakly explored success of these children with disabilities being homeschooled. Despite the lack of research, Sanborn, Santos, Montgomery and Caruthers (2005) still alleged that parents

of students with disabilities in the future will feel “betrayed by false promises of equality in education” so, therefore, will have to homeschool their child with disabilities (p. 28).

Table 1

Survey of the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES)

Number and percentage of homeschooled students, ages 5 through 17, whose parents reported various reasons for homeschooling and their most important reason for homeschooling: 2007

Reasons for homeschooling

	Number	<u>Applicable</u>		<u>Most important</u>	
		Percent ¹	Number	Percent	
Concern about the environment of other schools ²	1,321,000	88	309,000	21	
Dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools	1,096,000	73	258,000	17	
To provide religious or moral instruction	1,257,000	83	540,000	36	
Child has a physical or mental health problem	169,000	11	‡	‡	
Child has other special needs	315,000	21	55,000	4	
Nontraditional approach to child's education	984,000	65	99,000	7	
Other reasons ³	485,000	32	216,000	14	

Note. ‡ Reporting standards not met.

¹ Percentages do not sum to 100 because respondents could choose more than one reason.

² These include safety, drugs, and negative peer pressure.

³ Parents homeschool their children for many reasons that are often unique to their family situation. Other reasons parents gave for homeschooling include family time, finances, travel, and distance.

Excludes children who were enrolled in school for more than 25 hours a week and students who were homeschooled primarily because of a temporary illness. Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement Survey of the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES). Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement Survey of the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES). http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009030_sup.pdf

Effectiveness. Duvall and Ward (1997) conducted a study exploring the effectiveness of home education of students with learning disabilities compared to students with learning disabilities in a special education program in public school. Duvall and Ward's (1997) purpose was to measure the effectiveness of parents homeschooling teaching skills despite that they were not certified teachers (p. 150). Results revealed that students in a small group setting enabled parents to be successful with their children regardless of their lack of teaching endorsement (Duvall & Ward, 1997, p. 158). Although this study is no longer considered current, this landmark research is significant considering the limited studies that have been conducted before and after. The authors stated that further research is needed to determine if homeschool settings are as effective as those they uncovered during this research (Duvall & Ward, 1997, p.150). Unfortunately, studies duplicating the topic of effective homeschooling practices for students with disabilities are scarce. Defining the homeschool population can improve the knowledge and understanding of educational institutions across the nations. With the trend increasing, public school systems should no longer ignore the large numbers of students being homeschooled. Districts could gain from a financial standpoint, also from a phenomenological understanding of possible qualities parents are not finding in their local schools.

Homeschooling research outside the United States. Curiously, more research has been conducted on this specific topic in England compared to the United States. Another quantitative study is by Parsons and Lewis (2010) who specifically addressed parents' perspectives of students with disabilities being homeschooled in England.

Parsons and Lewis surveyed 27 parents of students with disabilities in the United Kingdom. In summation of their data, Parsons and Lewis stated that very few parents had no experience of their child with disabilities in a public school, and the majority of their participants had reasons not to consider public education based on their background (Parsons & Lewis, 2010, p. 81). Of the parents that did have experience with the school system, some feared that remaining in the setting would negatively affect their child's mental health (p.81). Of those parents surveyed, 48% of the homeschooled population was students with autism (Parsons & Lewis, 2010, p. 67). Parsons and Lewis (2010) reported that the parent participants felt that homeschooling was their only option for their child with disabilities despite a financial hardship to the family (p. 81). These studies, although not directly taken from public school situations in the United States, could have an important impact on schools in the U.S. If there was a question of the significance of the research such as these examples, one only need reflect on the increasing prevalence of homeschooling, including the practice of homeschooling students with disabilities.

Likewise, Australia embraces homeschooling "as a legitimate way to meet compulsory education requirements" (Jackson & Allan, 2010, p. 360). Jackson and Allan (2010) found from an examination of Australian research that Australian parents chose homeschooling for many of the same reasons Americans and English homeschool (p. 360). Jackson and Allan categorized these reasons as either "real or perceived" by parents of students with disabilities, such as their child potentially being bullied or public school not meeting their child's individualized needs (p. 351). Their inquiry of

Australian homeschooling data also indicated that homeschooling was a beneficial option for parents of children with special education needs as compared to a traditional school setting (Jackson & Allan, 2010, p. 361).

Research on the Homeschool Models Versus Public School Services

Parents and advocates were still fighting for the rights of students with disabilities to be educated in the public school system as late as the 1970s. In today's society, however, the law ensures a free and appropriate education to all children. Ironically, though parents of students with disabilities won the legal battle for public schools to provide individualized educational programs for their children over 30 years ago, some choose to keep their children at home.

As consistently stated, homeschooling has become a popular trend in education (Fields-Smith, 2009; Kunzman, 2005). Parents nationally, as well in other countries, have decided to decline the classroom services the public school system provides. The controversy of homeschooling children with disabilities is far more complicated than a parent simply choosing to homeschool their child. For example, one debate might surround the fact that resources for these homeschooled students with disabilities are either nonexistent or paid at the parents' expense. The following research I have reviewed reflects the benefits and disadvantages of homeschooling students with disabilities.

Benefits of Individualized Education at Home for Students With Disabilities

Similar to Duvall and Ward (1997), Ensign (2000) explored the effectiveness of parents educating their children with disabilities at home although they lack the

specialized training of a special education teacher (Ensign, 2000, p. 147). Drawing participants from her 9-year longitudinal study, Ensign analyzed data from families' homeschooling their children with special educational needs. Ensign (2000) concluded there were marked differences with the different settings. For example, the homeschooled students Ensign studied showed academic improvements when parents considered and gauged instruction according to their children's interests and strengths. Ensign (2000) suggested from her findings that the parent participants provided "focus on the whole child rather than primarily on the child's disability or extreme ability; individualized attention; and care, patience, and respect for the child" which could have led to their academic improvement (p. 157).

Similarly, Abbott and Miller (2006) asserted that advocates for the homeschooling of students with disabilities feel parents know their children better than teachers, and parents will focus on strengths instead of a child's weaknesses (p.56). Peterson (2009) stated, "You do not need to be a special education teacher (or any certified teacher) to homeschool You already are an expert on your child" (p.38). Likewise, Hurlbutt (2010) declared one of the benefits of homeschooling children on the autism spectrum is incorporating a student's specific interests into their lessons (p.20).

Some researchers have emphasized parents can have a superior understanding of their children's interests and learning styles than the public school system (Fields-Smith, 2009; Sofia, 2010). Dumas, Gates, and Schwarzer (2010) claimed homeschooling is beneficial for students with learning differences. In particular, they point to students with learning disabilities and those with gifted and talented skills (p.78). Conversely,

Simpson, Mundschenk, and Heflin (2011) declared that for students with autism spectrum disorders should always be educated by persons specifically trained in autism. While most special education teachers recognize the individuality of students, perhaps the one-on-one implementation of learning styles create a positive difference for homeschooled students with disabilities.

The socialization factor of homeschooling. It has been presented earlier that socialization is a widely debated issue between those who promote and those who discourage homeschooling. While Durkheim (1973) supported the social environment of public schools, Lebeda (2007) presented a different perspective. Lebeda indicated that some homeschooling parents feel that public school can have negative social peer effects and that homeschooled children are provided socialization in a variety of ways. For example, Lebeda asserted community and church activities well equip homeschooled children with positive social exchanges (Lebeda, 2007, p. 103). Griffith (1999) insisted that another benefit for students in a homeschool setting is that they will maintain a positive self image since they will avoid the school's niches they do not fit into (p. 221). Lebeda stated that many parents choose to homeschool because the socialization their children would engage in would have negative effects on them. Lebeda also highlighted the likelihood of homeschooled students of being more self-directed and self-confident than their school-educated peers (p. 104).

Specifically addressing homeschooling students with disabilities, parents' reasons to homeschool could include sheltering their child from ridicule and bullying due to their differences. Peterson (2009) agreed, "Like it or not, our children may have physical

differences and unusual behavior, which makes them most likely to be harassed at school regardless of the anti-bullying platitudes posted in the hallways” (pp. 38-39). However, one might question how long a parent can oversee every relationship and social situation for their child. Furthermore, parents should foster problem solving strategies that will assist them when a difficult personal experience does arise. Controlling a child’s environment to ensure they are protected from harassment could lead to insufficient self-advocacy skills in future social situations. Parents that homeschool for fear of bullying may be unaware that, as shown by Farrington and Ttofi (2009), many public schools now implement antibullying programs to prepare children socially.

Homeschoolers’ preparedness. Another area researchers have explored is the readiness of homeschoolers for colleges and university settings. As earlier stated, there is a reported shift in homeschooling perceptions; Wilhelm and Firmin (2009) stated that universities are now more welcoming to a homeschooled population entering college (p. 304). However, reflecting on the assumption that homeschoolers are not equipped academically or socially for a higher institution, Jones and Gloeckner’s (2004) research is of importance. They presented data comparing high school graduates from a traditional school setting and those students that completed high school at home.

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the importance of future studies since the majority of homeschooled children have yet to enter college.

At this point, neither public school systems nor homeschooling advocates have earned bragging rights. More importantly, the separate entities should not stand in judgment accusing the other of poor performance when clearly the data reflects equal effectiveness. Instead, homeschooling community groups and their local public schools could explore strategies that bridge relationships between the two educational delivery modes. Additionally, more research should be focused on defining the population of students with disabilities. One area of focus of my research is whether a one-on-one setting is a positive approach for students with disabilities and if homeschooled children with disabilities are further advanced than the traditional school's educated students.

Public School Services for Students with Disabilities: "Special Education"

Detection for early intervention services. A well known strategy for students with disabilities is the implementation of early intervention services (Harn, Linan-Thompson, & Roberts, 2008, p. 115). Many students are identified with disabilities within the school setting. As reported in a pediatric research journal, Abbott and Miller (2006) claimed that teachers, due to the great deal of time they spend with children, have an opportunity to identify both health and academic problems before parents and doctors (p. 50). Homeschooling parents, especially teaching the only or oldest child, may be unaware of significant educational milestones. When delays occur, a school system could have more experience detecting the developmental milestones which might lead to

services ultimately improving a child's ability to compensate earlier rather than later in his or her education.

Vanderschuit et al. (2009) compared the home literacy environment for preschool students with and without intellectual disabilities. The researchers discovered that parents of children with intellectual disabilities kept fewer reading material in the home, and conducted less engagement with literacy activities with their children. Additionally, parents of students without intellectual disabilities had much higher expectations of their child for later years (Vanderschuit et al, p.1031). Further studies comparing homeschooling environments for school-aged children with and without disabilities could clarify how prepared parents are in the homeschooling setting, especially for those students with disabilities.

In a longitudinal study involving children with autism exposed to an early intervention behavioral preschool program, Goin-Kochel, Myers, Hendricks, Carr, and Wiley (2007) noted progress was indicative of their participation in the treatment. Structured interventions, such as ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) were implemented for these young students. Goin-Kochel et al. found these students made significant gains in all of the skill areas assessed (p. 151). Additionally, achievements made by nine of 16 children in this study, resulted in their ability to join an inclusive kindergarten or first grade classroom (Goin-Kochel et al., 2007, p. 151).

Unless parents pursue resources, such as early intervention programs, preschool aged children might not have access to the behavioral techniques such as this preschool put into practice. According to Cross, Salazar, Dopson-Campuzano, and Batchelder

(2009), “Early childhood educators can support and strengthen family functioning by providing resources for parents” (p. 2). However, the authors also stressed that working with parents in the home setting is a strategy that will improve the child’s progress as well as the parent – teacher relationship. “This collaboration acts as a bridge between the home and school to help children feel that learning opportunities occur in both places” (Cross et al., 2009, p.3). Strategies implemented at an early age can have lasting, positive educational impacts for students with disabilities.

Individualized educational programs: A legal document.

IEPs are specifically designed in the public school systems with each student’s needs in mind. Unique to federally funded institutions, the child’s IEP team considers the student’s strengths and weaknesses individually. Measurable annual goals are written, and any supports and interventions are legally enforced as part of students’ educational plan. However, “The IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) does not specifically regulate the provision of special-education services to home-schooled students” (Osborne, 2008, p. 26). Unlike the laws public school systems follow, private and homeschooled students with disabilities do not have an individualized document, such as an IEP, to guide educators and therapists when working with students with disabilities. As documented by Osborne (2008), “Nothing in the IDEA requires (school) boards to provide any services on-site for home-schooled students” (p.26). Parents considering homeschooling need to understand that by choosing this method of education for their child with disabilities, they will be waiving their Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). While Osborne (2008) declared that parents have choices regarding

private and homeschool, special education services are not an entitlement under those circumstances (p. 24). At this point in the United States, public schools provide students with disabilities with a legal, written document supporting their educational future; however, students with disabilities not enrolled in a public school do without this benefit.

The power in numbers of professionals. Another resource not commonly provided to homeschooled students is the plethora of educational professionals and therapists. Students with disabilities in public school districts can receive as many services and treatments as they are eligible. However, at this time few resources such as speech and language services are offered, but not commonly advertised to the homeschool population.

Co-taught classrooms, settings where a special educator joins the instruction in the general education classroom, in public schools allow students with disabilities an environment to learn amongst their peers and gain exposure to grade level curriculum. Wilson (2006) encourages the co-teaching model in schools and states the technique provides an alternative to self-containing students with significant disabilities (p. 200). Dover (2005) recognized that the current trend is for students with disabilities to receive their education in a general education classroom because the addition of a special educator in a typical-peered environment will look for inventive strategies to support and implement a student's IEP (p. 32). The co-taught model provides for a setting in which one teacher is the specialist in the curriculum while the other's area of expertise is learning strategies and accommodations for identified students.

Noticeably, when students are educated in a public school setting, there is a community working for the betterment of the child. While not every teacher will have a lasting or even a positive impact on a student, many children, including those with disabilities, are influenced by a few educational professionals who possibly made a positive difference in those students' futures. Dover (2005) points to thoroughness that special education services bring to children with disabilities, including interventions both directly and indirectly as well as the collaboration of paraeducators, teachers, therapists and parents (p. 32). Dover's opinion is that special education is not easily reproduced and most certainly should be considered a team effort that is given for each student. Public education services withheld, especially resources available to students with disabilities, can mean that students lack skills and opportunities not otherwise available in a parent only environment.

Potential Qualitative Themes and Perceptions Regarding Homeschooling

Parent Perspectives of Students With Disabilities: Parents Feeling Valued

School districts need to realize the prevalence of homeschooling. Osborne (2008) expressed the importance of school districts knowledge of the population of students with disabilities being homeschooled: "Thus, public school officials should endeavor to locate and identify all home-schooled students with disabilities" (p. 26). Not only should the population of homeschooled students be identified, knowing the reasons why parents are undertaking the responsibility of educating their child could add to the understanding of homeschooling. Perhaps if parents felt like they had more input and increased opportunities to become involved in their child's education, incidences of homeschooling

could be reduced. Anderson and Minke (2007) investigated how parent involvement leads to their decision making. They found that several parents did not feel valued, and they also had concerns regarding how much teachers cared about their child (Anderson & Minke, 2007, p. 320). Although the authors acknowledge that the study's limitations included that parents willing to participate in this study are more likely to be involved in their child's education, nevertheless the findings point to implications for school systems.

In a recent study focused on parent advocacy for their children with intellectual giftedness, Duquette, Oders, Fullarton, and Robertson-Grewal (2011), found that their participants regarded a successful school as one that recognizes the learning needs of children with gifted intelligence are as important as those with learning disabilities (p. 506). Duquette et al. revealed that some parents felt that schools did not treat students with giftedness with "high priority" (p.501). Although similar research has not documented parents of students with disabilities perceptions, this raises the point that parents might be making the decision to homeschool out of frustration.

Logically, parents would want to feel valued. In order to feel valued, parents would need to trust that school personnel have their child's best interest at heart. Angell, Stoner, and Shelden (2009) conducted a study focused on mother's trust of teachers of their children with disabilities. They found the greatest factor of importance was the teacher knowledge, their communication with the family and the teacher's ability to assert a caring attitude towards their child (p. 166). Certain educational situations, such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP), meetings where students' special education placement and services are discussed, are times when school personnel need to

be especially understanding of parents' feelings of partnership. Considering that in most critical meetings, the parents are outnumbered by teachers, administrators, and psychologists, it seems reasonable to understand that the parent perception could be a, "them against us", mentality.

Applequist (2009) explored urban parents perspectives of special education services provided to their children with disabilities in public schools. The findings of Applequist indicated that schools need to improve defining Individual Educational Program (IEP) services and making families feel as though they are an IEP committee member, including not telling parents what services will be delivered. Applequist identified some areas that parents felt needed improvement, but overall positive interactions with school personnel were reported (p. 15). The research interest of this author includes identifying a possible significant relationship between parents of students with disabilities choosing to homeschool due to negative experiences with public school systems.

Personal research. In a preliminary study conducted in November 2009, I found the participants of students with disabilities possessing dissimilar perspectives regarding their reasons for homeschooling (Delaney, 2009). Analyzed transcripts indicated that while one parent expressed concerns of her student with disabilities not having his academic needs met with the number of students in the public school system, the other parent felt inclined to withdraw her child with disabilities because of her child's constant behavior issues. In the larger study on this topic, I continued to explore perspectives of parents' homeschooling their students with disabilities within this dissertation.

Alternative educational choices. Programs are currently being developed today that can be defined as an alternative to public school. Alternative educational settings, which include homeschooling, have increased in the last ten years (Hughes-Hassell, 2008). Some are a hybrid of both settings, while others are so radical many parents and educators are unaware of their existence. Some of these alternative educational programs are only possible as a result of today's developing technology. It may be the case that by providing students with options to a traditional school experience, children with social difficulties and disabilities maybe more successful with their educational goals. Changes in traditional, homeschool, and / or alternative settings, by providing students and parents with choices, should surely be consider a positive social change in the educational arena. Claims have been made that alternative educational programs provide a more individualized education to students (Hughes-Hassell, 2008; Foley & Pang, 2006).

Alternative educational placements within a school district. Unlike other programs mentioned in this review of educational settings, alternative educational schools for students struggling with the behavioral difficulties can be a forced choice for parents. Alternative education programs and treatment centers are more about an environment of removal from the traditional public school setting then an ideal alternative school setting. Hughes and Adera (2006) pointed to the ever mounting expectations of schools to explain why many students with emotional and behavior problems are placed in alternative settings (p. 26). Many parents facing the placement of their child in an alternative school will reject the assignment. Bateman (2008) describes a due process case in which the student's transportation would be almost an hour one way

to the alternative setting the school district was suggesting (p.60). The outcome of this case resulted in a loss for the school district. The judge felt more should have been done by the school in the way of interventions that would allow him to attend his home zoned school (Bateman, 2008, p. 61). Caution needs to be taken when placement of students in alternative settings is prescribed. In addition, as evident in this case, all proactive strategies should be exhausted before changing a student's placement.

Alternative schools that focus on the specific needs of children that have emotional and behavioral concerns, can be a positive option to traditional educational environments. Biniker and Pindiprolu (2008) conducted a case study of utilizing a functional assessment in an alternative setting. A functional assessment plan is used to analyze motivations of students with emotional and behavior disabilities. Biniker and Pindiprolu concluded that the use of functional assessment of students' behavior difficulties can improve children's on-going problems (2008, p. 76-77). Foley and Pang's (2006) research suggested that keys to a successful alternative setting for students needing a different placement than a traditional school are: "parental involvement," "community-based services such as wraparound programs," and "highly skilled and effective educators" (p.20). It is apparent that appropriate and individualized supports in an alternative setting are necessary for a productive substitute to the traditional school setting.

Alternative school settings can be suggested by IEP team members, however an agreement of IEP team member's opinion of the most appropriate setting for students with disabilities can be less than mutual. Parent perspectives should be heard and

considered. Cushing, Carter, Clark, Wallis, and Kennedy (2009) developed a tool, Program Quality Measurement Tool (PQMT) to assess the appropriateness of inclusion provided to students with disabilities (p.195). Taking precautions, such as using comprehensive resources and exhausting all other options when determining that a student needs an alternative setting, is prudent and can avoid litigious actions from parents.

The Internet as a resource for students at home. The Internet has become a vital resource for working adults to pursue degrees. According to Pastore and Carr-Chellman (2009), undergraduate students enrolled in online courses increased by almost 1 million in a single year (p. 263). Virtual schools and classes are also becoming a popular online learning option for elementary, middle, and high students at home. Even as early as 2003, it was reported that of 41% of homeschooled students utilized multimedia outside of their home. (Princiotta & Bielick, 2006, p. 18). Wilhelm and Firmin (2009), predict that the expansion of home education practices due to availability and popularity of the internet (p. 303). Archambault and Crippen (2009) explained that K-12 online education is expanding through virtual schools in the United States. Literature for virtual educators has been written to train teachers on line. One review of such a book applauds the author for specifically addressing the virtual and distance education population (Rothermel, 2005, p. 176). Huett, Moeller, Foshey, and Coleman (2008) also have recognized on-line learning as beneficial (p. 66). Many of the online schools are marketing their curriculum and services as an alternative or additional tool to the homechooling community.

One recent option for parents appearing across the United States, and possibly the newest trend in homeschooling, is cyber-school. Kunzman (2012) claimed “Cyberschooling” is a trend that will continue due to the economic benefits (p.89). Marsh, Carr-Chellman, and Sockman (2009) reported cyber-schools enrollments are increasing by 20% per year (p. 33). In the state of Georgia, an on line, public school is the Georgia Cyber Academy (<http://www.k12.com/gca/>). Students are educated via on-line by certified teachers, teaching to state standards. One feature not focused on in a private school setting is a child’s IEP. The Georgia Cyber Academy drafts and conducts IEPs for students with disabilities as any with any public school.

Special education using virtual schools. Repette, Cavanaugh, Wayer, and Liu (2010) investigated the effectiveness of on-line learning for students with disabilities. They found virtual educational programs useful for engagement of at-risk students (Repette, Cavanaugh, Wayer, & Liu, 2010, p. 101). Other uses of virtual learning can improve special education by providing training to educators of students with disabilities. A recent study by Ludlow and Brannan (2010) indicated that while an on-line training of special education teachers had areas of needed improvement such as a focal point and student supports, there was possibility for future success for these on line training programs (p. 11). Today, regardless of the education of students in K-12, general or special education, it is probable that their teachers and administrators are to some extent being educated on line. Collopy and Arnold (2009) stated over 90% of universities incorporate on-line learning courses for students (p.85). Most likely, this trend will continue.

Although utilizing an internet program to enhance or even complete a students' education seems reasonable especially with the high standards accredited on-line institutions must meet; however, programs designed specifically for students with disabilities needs in mind are still to be identified. The aforementioned special education services available for students with disabilities in the public school system cannot at this time be recreated. Even though special education students are educated amongst others in the public school setting, many times the setting is a small group and hopefully, most importantly, in the least restrictive environment.

Bray, Pugalee, Flowers, and Algozzine (2007) explored the accessibility of web sites from home for students with disabilities. The researchers found that middle school web pages were not designed to consider students with disabilities, specifically those with visual impairments. The websites also did not seem to regard possible assistive technology devices students may be using such as software readers. The researchers stressed the importance of images needing alternative text options for students (Bray, Pugalee, Flowers, & Algozzine 2007, p. 170).

One solution to parents wishing to keep their child at home yet receive a specialized education could be possible if public school systems would allow special education teachers lessons to be fed to the homes of students who qualify for such a service. This would also permit students to learn when they medically could not attend classes. Currently, counties must plan for hospital / homebound allowances for students that have medical notes indicating they will not be able to attend school. The ability for students to "login" to their classes, such as the Georgia Cyber Academy, would eliminate

the extra costs school districts pay teachers to deliver instruction at hospitals and students' home.

A home-school approach to homeschooling. Some parents are choosing to homeschool on a part-time basis. Waggoner (2005) detailed one case of parents homeschooling due to a conflict with the teacher of their daughter's history course. Their decision was to allow their daughter to attend public high school and then teach her American History from a home setting. The parents additionally requested, and consequently won, the right for their daughter to participate in after school sports activities while being a part-time student.

It seems that school districts would embrace a seemingly cooperative situation of shared time with parents homeschooling. Parents would be assuming partial responsibility for their child's education. Additionally, schools could also benefit from these part-time students receiving government funding for the time they attended school. Ultimately, part time homeschooling would equate to options for parents and students.

Need for research on homeschooling students with disabilities. Unfortunately, very little attention has been paid to the topic of homeschooling from a research standpoint (Arora, 2006, p.55). Even more obscure research to obtain is data reflecting parents educating their child with disabilities at home despite the reality of this growing population. Abbott & Miller, 2006, stated that research on homeschooling students with disabilities is scarce and controversial (p. 56). Also, mystifying the issue, U.S. state requirements for homeschooling differ. Kreager (2010) reported some states have required prior permission to homeschool a child with disabilities while other states do not

(p. 243). Research on homeschooling is limited, but even more ambiguous is specifics surrounding parents who homeschooling their children with disabilities.

Unlike their peers without disabilities, children with educational disabilities most often require specialized interventions to learn. It only seems logical that homeschooling children with learning or behavioral problems would complicate the learning process. Therefore, the topic demands a clearer picture of the issues surrounding why parents would homeschool their child with disabilities.

The request for current research studies on homeschooling is reoccurring, Despite its size, scarce data on homeschooling have impaired our understanding of even the most basic questions, including a precise estimate of how many homeschooled children there are, why families homeschool, and how families combine homeschooling with using conventional schools. (Isenberg, 2007, pp. 387-388)

Defining the homeschool population can improve the knowledge and understanding of educational institutions across the nations. With the trend increasing, public school systems should no longer ignore the large numbers of students being homeschooled.

Patterson et al. (2007) stated schools would expand their knowledge from homeschooling models, if explored (82). Marsh, Carr-Chellman, & Sockman (2009) proclaimed exploring the reasons homeschooling parents choose alternative programs could lead to deeper understanding of regarding parents attitudes which may inform schools of innovative ways to approach education not yet in practice (p. 32). Conversations

between the homeschooling population and public school systems could change the educational options for many students.

One goal for special education departments to utilize in order to improve parents' involvement and increase their feelings of value is to provide them with the opportunity to give feedback. Even in the medical profession, doctors are listening to parent's perspectives in regards to their children with disabilities, "When a family decides to homeschool their special-needs child, understanding why they have made that choice can provide insight into the home environment, which can help you participate more effectively in the overall care plan for the child" (Abbott & Miller, 2006, p. 56). For public educators, asking for parents' opinions as to how their child's educational needs are being met prior to the meeting is ideal. Parents can feel undermined when they have not been asked, especially if the parents concern section or other information has been filled in prior to the IEP. Situations where parents are talked to, not listened to, can understandably lead to negative outcomes.

The use of additional team members, advocates, local educational agency (LEA), & liaisons. Many angry parents of children with disabilities find "advocates" or lawyers to voice their concerns to school personnel, which at times leads school faculty to feel defensive. Whomever the parents feel most comfortable representing their concerns should be allowed to attend an IEP; however, best practice should encourage parents to approach teachers and administrators openly. Likewise, schools need not feel threatened by the parents' attempts to include others in their child's educational team.

Actions such as these should indicate to teachers and administrators more communication in the partnership is required in that relationship.

Arora (2006) found that parents of children with disabilities, homeschooling in the UK, preferred their children have been educated in a public school but felt that their child's special needs would not be met (p. 55). At this time when parents make the decision to keep their child with disabilities at home in order to homeschool; special education services are not automatically granted to students. One might wonder if more negotiation during the IEP planning could result in less disgruntled parents removing their child with disabilities to home school.

While schools across the United States require LEAs (Local Education Agency) at every IEP, Arora (2006) reports that the United Kingdom employs LEAs (Local Education Authorities) to monitor and provide assistance to the parents whom homeschool their child with and without disabilities. This service is optional to parents, therefore, reducing the anxieties of parents and ideally avoiding the feeling that they are being watched. Even in the homeschool environment it is the responsibility of the LEA to make sure that students with disabilities needs are met (Arora, 2006, p. 56). Jennens (2011) reported that although strict regulation cannot be enforced by an LEA in England, they can influence parents to homeschool if excessive absences from school are apparent and they can intervene if the homeschooling environment is inappropriate (p. 150). This method could find success in the United States, as well as opposition since homeschool interference from a public school representative is not currently implemented.

Home-school relations: Communication. Parental involvement is varied, and the amount can change at different levels of education. Reilly (2008) reports that home and school communication decreases in middle and high school after elementary school but asserted that improved student performance is linked to parental involvement (p.42). Student success has been associated to parent involvement (Reilly, 2008; Flynn, 2006); therefore, does the responsibility of initiation of communication and positive home / school relationships fall on the educational system or individual parents.

The degree to which collaboration between home and school is encouraged or not by the school can rest in the perception of parents (Wanat, 2010, p. 159). Wanat (2010) explored parents' perceptions of school collaboration with parents and found, when interviewed, satisfied parents discussed school activities and refrained from referring to their own children. Meanwhile, dissatisfied parents with home-school relationships felt that not enough was done specifically to help them at home with their children. Another finding was that displeased parents did not participate in provided school activities, while satisfied parents often volunteered for various school programs (Wanat, 2010, p. 179). One conclusion from the data Wanat hypothesises is that content parents could not need as much learning support at home; in other words, their children are more academically successful. Only a small percentage of satisfied parents with student with disabilities were pleased with the monitoring of their child's progress (Wanat, 2010, p. 179). While limited, this research should serve as a reminder to casemangers of students with disabilities to take even more proactive steps to ensure a positive, mutual relationship with parents.

Parents of students with disabilities should have increased opportunities to become involved with their child's education since each will have, at a minimum, an annual IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting. Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) specifically explored parent perceptions of their experiences at IEP meetings. The researchers found some areas that contributed to parents' perceptions of satisfaction in IEP meetings such as: professionals referring to the child's individuality versus a member of a diagnosed group, teachers seeking the parents input throughout the meeting, and the school staff acknowledgement of parents' perspectives (pp. 250-251). These areas of sensitivity may require training of professionals, and could benefit from a perspective of an objective point of view like a school counselor or other advocate.

Training for homeschooling parents. Another model of schools working with parents in the home setting is when training is provided for parents. Patterson (1996) explored one program, "The Family Learning and Cultural Center," which successfully provided training to parents whom homeschool (Abstract). Although Patterson's research was conducted over a decade ago, the implication for schools to give teaching techniques to parents still exists. Parent education is needed, specifically in the area of parent advocacy training and activities that would result in the best educational practices for their children (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011, p. 506). Again, the specific area of training for homeschooling parents is one that could benefit from additional researcher's exploration.

Schools could benefit from offering training to parents who homeschool. As seen in the case presented by Waggoner (2005), some parents only request a portion of their

child's day is taught at home. One reason to work with parents that are using the "shared-time" model is the students' performance will be a reflection of the school's efforts (Waggoner, 2005, p. 31).

A concern of some school administrators could be that at some point parents could choose to re-enroll their child into the public school system not aware of the academic progress students have made while out of the school setting. If homeschooling parents had the benefit of teacher training sessions, the parents improved skills will most likely have a direct result on their child's education. Additionally, a school district that embraced homeschool parents attending purposeful training could improve the parent perceptions of schools. Regardless, students would ultimately benefit from offering training to parents who homeschool.

Parents are currently seeking out other options for their children including voucher programs. Specifically addressing students with disabilities, parents have inquired about taking the funds schools earn, Full Time Equivalency (FTE), in order to use them in a private school setting. While courts have granted funds be given to parents for private school use, it is not inconceivable that parents begin to ask for these monies for the purposes of homeschooling. Recalling from earlier in this dissertation, many passionate authors advocate for parents of students with disabilities to not only homeschool but pursue their child's federal funding as well. In her book to parents considering homeschooling Griffith (1999) advised parents, "Be aware that, even if you are homeschooling, you may still be entitled to special education services through your school district" (p. 215). Keeping the lines of communication open for parents and

working to solve disputes will ideally reduce the incidences of parent lawsuits and filed grievances. Preferably, positive relationships between home and school will lead to less incidences of parents homeschooling due to disgruntled situations.

Home-school liaisons. In addition to using school counselors, another solution to improving the communication between public schools and homeschool parents could be the utilization of home-school liaisons. Sanders (2008) conducted a qualitative case study focused on the effectiveness of liaisons. She concluded liaisons offer a wide range of supports to parents in conjunction with schools for at-risk students (Sanders, 2008, p. 287). While Sanders focused on the effectiveness of liaisons within the traditional home-school environment, the concept could be applied to homeschooling situations. In reflection of their research of developments in homeschooling, Wilhelm and Firmin (2009) urged future research to focus on the “right balance” between schools and homeschooling parents, believing homeschool students need to “reunite with their local public school systems” in some way (p. 312). A reiterated statement in this dissertation is the middle ground Wilhelm and Firmin speak of.

In 2006, Lois examined the specific role of mothers’ adjustment to becoming their child’s educator. She found that mothers reported homeschooling being more demanding than they initially expected (Lois, 2006, p. 507). The responsibility was a strain on the mothers’ other roles as parents and subsequently, many experienced an “emotional burnout”; however, when mothers had support from husbands, they were able to better cope with the demands (Lois, 2006). This research study did not indicate if the children of the mothers had disabilities, but one could inference that homeschooling students with

additional needs would add more stress to a parents' role. Therefore, a school representative, LEA, or liaison supporting parents could only lead to more success within the homeschooling practice.

The use of liaisons to improve effective communication between teachers and parents has broad potential for parents considering homeschooling. Cross et al (2009) challenged the educator to broaden their approaches with parents of students with disabilities by suggesting, "incorporating home visits, parent discussion groups, parent resource rooms, and home lending libraries" (p.4). Partnerships, which involve respect amongst parents and schools, are required to ensure the collaborative environment needed for students' successes (Sanders, 2008, p. 287). The importance is not in the name liaison, LEA, or advocate; the success will be found in the actions of building bridges of trust and open communication between home and school. Additionally, liaisons could be effective for those part-time homeschooled students receiving some of their education from a public school.

Study Approach Rationale

A phenomenological study is the approach I chose to explore the educational choices of parents children with disabilities. Kunzman (2012) stated, "Homeschooling is an increasingly significant educational phenomenon in its own right"; therefore he substantiates the need for exploration (p.76). The use of such phenomenology provided the researcher a perspective lens into a variety of homeschooling situations where parents have homeschooled their children with disabilities and may have returned to public education or decided to continue homeschooling. Likewise, parents' perceptions that

have possibly considered homeschooling but chose to have their child with disabilities educated in public school setting was investigated. Multiple groups increased internal validity of this study since, “the representation of a small sample is difficult to defend” (Stake, 1995, p. 5). Additionally, utilizing a phenomenology study method allowed the researcher “a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” of parental choice of educational environments for their children with disabilities (Merriam, 1998, p. 41).

Chapter 2 included a review of my direction by presenting the main questions and how they pertain to Glasser’s choice theory. Homeschooling ideals and current research on homeschooling were presented, despite an obvious lack of literature on the homeschooling practice, with even fewer studies on parents’ homeschooling their children with disabilities in existence. This researcher used a mining technique to present what current research is available regarding homeschooling models, statistical data, and relations with homeschool and public schools. Chapter 2 concluded with the rationale of case study and phenomenological methodology.

Chapter 3 delves deeper into the methodology and specific details of implementation of this phenomenological study. Data collection procedures are presented as well as the plan of answering the research questions of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology I chose to explore the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities and the learning environments they chose for their children with disabilities. The research questions are explored as they pertain to the research design, participant selection, and data collection analysis. Additionally, a plan to present the results is shared and the measures I took to ensure participants' rights are discussed in this section.

A phenomenology study design was most appropriate for my study in order to “describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57) such as parents of children with disabilities dealing with educational decisions for their children. Parents of students with disabilities are ultimately responsible for the environment and resources their children receive. A parent can refuse special education services in the public education system and homeschool their child with disabilities. The parental perspective impacts the choices parents and guardians make regarding the setting and services. Complicating the issue, the practice of homeschooling children is underresearched (Arora, 2006; Martin-Chang et al., 2011). The range of parent's needs and desires for their children are diverse and therefore for these reasons, the term *phenomenon* is appropriate in referring to parents of students with disabilities experiences in determining the best educational environment for their child.

Understanding parents of students with disabilities and their motivations for choosing public school or a homeschooling environment for their children was a

phenomenon not addressed thoroughly in current literature (Abbott & Miller, 2006, Arora, 2006, Martin-Chang et al., 2011). The phenomenological study methodology provided insights that highlight “common experiences” of several individuals within the same group, parents of students with disabilities (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). These insights pointed out themes in my research focused on parents of students with disabilities choosing and not choosing to homeschool their children. In order to explore the themes, the approach to this research was a phenomenological study.

The focus of this phenomenological study was to explore the reasons behind parents’ decisions in choosing the public or homeschool educational environment. I realized parents of children with disabilities homeschooling may have used a public school setting before, after, or never during their child’s education. Therefore, in an attempt to draw conclusions about this population’s choices and experiences with homeschooling their child with disabilities, it was of particular interest how long parents homeschooled if they have in fact made this decision.

Research Questions

Main Question

Why do parents of students with disabilities make the decisions to homeschool?

Subquestions

1. What reasons do parents of students with disabilities give for choosing to homeschool, not homeschool, or return their child to public education after homeschooling?
2. What factors do parents report influenced the decision processes?

3. What factors would impact parents to alter their original decision?

Research Design: Approach

A number of research methodologies were reviewed in attempts of selecting a design for the study. My exploration of current research of homeschooling in the literature review revealed a gap of current peer-reviewed studies on the practice of homeschooling. Further, of the research that applied to the topic of homeschooling, even fewer addressed homeschooling students with disabilities specifically. The gap in the current literature led to my exploration of splinter topics of homeschooling. A qualitative approach was chosen over a quantitative design due to my desire to examine the participants' lives, hoping to provide a lens into the perceptions and decision-making processes of parents of students with disabilities regarding educational environment. In addition, the gap of literature surrounding homeschooling, specifically addressing students with disabilities, led me to pursue a qualitative approach in order to understand and depict a rich description of the participants' lived experiences at a deeper level than a quantitative study would have allowed.

Several qualitative approaches were examined for the study. An ethnographical design was considered. An ethnography study would need to be interpreted using the common patterns of a group sharing the same culture (Creswell, 2007). It is difficult to stereotype the homeschooling population as a culture, as they clearly have different approaches and motivations for their actions. Parents who homeschool their students with disabilities would be problematical to define as a community, therefore the ethnography approach was discharged. Grounded theory was dismissed because

developing a theory was neither the intention nor motivation of the study. A phenomenological study was chosen over a case study when I decided to explore multiple choices parents of children with disabilities have made regarding a public or homeschool environment. After careful deliberation as to the most appropriate research design of the study, it was decided that a phenomenological model would most closely fit my intentions of exploring the reasons parents of students with disabilities might choose to homeschool, or utilize public special education programs. More specifically, a phenomenological study allowed for a deeper examination of the common or uncommon experiences surrounding the phenomenon of parental choices for their children with disabilities. In addition to viewing their lived experiences, adding a phenomenological approach, I was able to explore “significant human experience” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40) amongst the shared common factor these participants share, children with disabilities.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to independently gather data from study participants. Although I worked in the school district of the parent participants, I excluded any persons I had known personally or professionally. According to Moustakas (1994), “bracketing” was necessary in this process; therefore, I set aside my own experiences “to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon” throughout the study. (pp. 59-60).

Study Setting

The study was conducted within counties located in northern Georgia. The population of these counties is approximately 200,000 inhabitants. This area was selected due to the ease of access and proximity I had to the counties. The study explored the parent perspectives of parents who are homeschooling their child with a disability and those parents of students with disabilities who have decided to return to the public school system, as well as those parents who may have or never have considered homeschooling their child but chose to have their child attend a public school. Parents with students with disabilities, enrolled in a public school, were asked if they have ever considered homeschooling their child with disabilities during the interview process.

Sample Selection

A purposeful sampling was used to contact, communicate, and interview participants needed in this phenomenological study. My arrangement was to work with the local school district to identify parents of students with disabilities whom have enrolled, and/or have re-enrolled their children in public school special education programs. I was not provided the names and contact information of current parents of students with disabilities directly. The special education director had agreed to contact potential participants on my behalf with a letter of request to participate in the study. Written approval from both the county superintendent and director of special education was secured (Appendix A). I interviewed the 13 participants as they contacted me as directed in the letter from the director of special education. This number of participants falls in the recommended range (Creswell, 2007). Had my target number of 12-14

participants, with a minimum of four in each of the three groups, become unattainable, I would have reduced the number in each group, taking care that a member of each group was represented. Fortunately, I was able to interview enough participants in the recommended range.

Data Collection

Once I had permission from the community research partners (Appendix A) and potential participants (Appendix D), I established a time and date convenient to each member for the formal interviews. I used a self-produced interview protocol (Appendix E). The interviews questions consisted of open-ended and closed inquiries. As discussed in previous chapters, Glasser's (1998) choice theory supports the conceptual framework of my study. The interview protocol was developed with parental choice being the key component. The focus of the interview questions was on reasons parents chose the educational setting for their child with disabilities. Audio recording was used for accuracy during the data analysis, transcribing phase.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed at several levels and coded according to qualitative methods. Initially, open coding was used to develop starting categories, and then I used a more selective coding method (Trochim, 2001, p. 160). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for reoccurring themes. Member checking was implemented to ensure accuracy once the transcripts were prepared. Thus, these processes for data analysis were utilized to ensure I had thoroughly explored my participants' perspectives with fidelity.

Presentation of Results

Presentation of the study results included coded charts and a detailed description of the findings in thorough, rich, and descriptive language. Themes were highlighted, ideally explaining the reasons parents have chosen a certain educational environment for their children with disabilities. Hopefully my findings reflecting homeschooling parents' perspectives will contribute dramatically to the large gap of current homeschooling research. Had I found discrepant cases I would have reported and attempted to explain any issues that occurred.

Participants' Rights

I was prepared to present my certification of required courses regarding human study participants' rights. I understood the rights of my participants and agreed to uphold the requirements to the fullest extent. It is important to me to earn the respect of my peers and participants and complete this process with integrity. Furthermore, the procedures of submitting the proposal to IRB authority, gaining approval and guidelines for conducting research were followed.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established by consideration of credibility, transferability, and confirmability. As stated earlier, I excluded any participant I had previously known which increased my objective lens. Additionally, since I had no background experiences either personally or professionally with homeschooling therefore, parents whom had chose to homeschool their child with disabilities were sharing their experiences from a neutral place. While the process of member checking added to my study's credibility,

likewise, using audio recording of the participant interviews provided precision by creating the opportunity to “check and re-check” the data (Trochim, 2001, p. 163). By detailing the research using rich language and clearly articulating assumptions transferability was established.

Summary

This study focused on the educational setting choices of parents of students with disabilities. In Chapter 3 I reflected on the research design, the methodology, and my role as the researcher. Further, my data collection and analysis plan was presented. I concluded this chapter with issues of ethics and trustworthiness. Chapter 4 is a review of the research conducted.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of my research was to examine the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities and the reasons they chose certain learning environments for their children with disabilities. Through interviews, I explored the lived experiences of participants who had selected to enroll their children with disabilities in public school special education programs, those who are currently homeschooling as well as those whom had previously homeschooled but now have enrolled their child with disabilities into a public school. In this chapter I reveal what themes from participants' significant statements emerged to draw closer to answering my research questions.

Processes of Data Collection

Participant Selection

In accordance with my IRB agreement, I met with the director of special education in a north Georgia school district to explain the criteria of participant selection. Ideally, I was seeking three distinct groups of parents with children with disabilities. The grouping requested was (a) parents who are homeschooling their child with a disability and (b) parents who have decided to enroll their child(ren) in the public school system after previously homeschooling, as well as (3) parents who may have or never have considered homeschooling their child but chose to have their child attend a public school. The director, who was cleared through the superintendent's office to assist my participant selection, then searched for parents who fit my participant criteria. The director wrote a letter of introduction and support to the parents and proceeded to send letters via postal

mail and/or e-mail. In her letter, she stated that participation was voluntary and personal information would be remain confidential. She instructed interested parents to contact me directly and included my Parent Invitation Letter (Appendix B).

Once the letters were sent, I received e-mails and phone calls from parents. I then proceeded to set up appropriate meeting locations, along with days and times in accordance to the participants convenience. Some interviews were conducted at mutually convenient locations, such as coffee shops, offices, and other times I interviewed participants in their homes. Since I was seeking a minimum of 12 -14 participants, every parent that contacted me and fit the criteria was included in the study; no parent was excluded.

Interviews

Interviews were arranged at the parent's convenience. All interviews were audio recorded with the participants' permission. Additionally, field notes were taken during every interview. Parents were given a consent form and signed that they were willing participates in my study. Additionally, they understood that they would receive a summary of the findings and could decide to not participate at any time. In total, there were 13 participants interviewed which met the original sampling criteria.

One unexpected development was that I interviewed parents which had more than one child with disabilities educated in different settings. Two participants fell into crossover categories. Ultimately, the breakdown of participant grouping were as follows: five (one crossover) parents currently homeschooling, with one of those parents having other children in special education programs in public school; four (two crossover)

parents currently have their children with disabilities in public school special education programs but had previously homeschooled. One of the parents in this grouping continues to homeschool other children with disabilities and another has an additional child with a disability that has always attended public school; and six (one crossover) parents were interviewed that have children with disabilities that have only had their children in public school. Table 2 is included to clarify the groupings of participants.

Table 2

Participant Groupings (N = 15)

Parents currently homeschooling	Parents Currently With Children in Public School but Previously Homeschooled	Parents Currently With Children in Public School, Never Homeschooled
<i>n</i> = 4	<i>n</i> = 4	<i>n</i> = 5

Note. Thirteen parents were interviewed; two of these participants had more than one child that fit into multiple categories and therefore answered the interview questions for more than one grouping. Thirteen participants answered interview questions about 15-19 students with disabilities, as the setting applied.

Data Analysis

Field Notes and Recordings

As parents were interviewed I recorded detailed answers to the interview questions. These field notes were used when reviewing the audio recordings of the interviews to create individualized typed responses of each participant, numbered then sorted with a color-coded system in accordance with the appropriate grouping of the parent. Initially, I used an open coding method to create preliminary categories. While re-reading the participants' answers I sought out reoccurring statements or words. Using

the participant's individual sheets, I created a hand-written chart for each of the three groupings of participants: those parents which currently homeschool, those whom have previously homeschooled, and those who have never homeschooled. Then I designed another chart which included all the parents and highlighted the significant statements, then grouped them into "meaning units" as suggested by Creswell (2007, p. 159). This selective coding method allowed me to view, sort, and analyze the participants' responses in a logical manner and narrowed the themes I was exploring.

Theme Units of Participants

The data were viewed as separate groupings: (a) parents currently homeschooling, (b) parents that had previously homeschooled but now have their children in public school, and (c) parents who have always had their child in public school special education programs. However, the data were also looked at as a whole group or phenomenon of parents who chose an academic setting for their children with disabilities. The broad focus of this research, as evident from the research questions, was why parents of students with disabilities choose one academic setting over another for their children. It was also asked of participants that had changed environments, why they had made the alteration. Additionally, the participants were asked if they would consider varying their current decision.

When consulting all the collected data, themes emerged which directly answered the reasons why parents are making their choices of learning environments for their children with disabilities. The codes that emerged from the participant data were Needs (N), Flexibility (F), Child's Request (CR), and Bullying (B). Of these themed units, the

importance of each was weighted given the numbered times the overall participant population mentioned the reason. Guided by the research questions, I was able to glean insights into the phenomenon of the perspectives of parents of children with disabilities and the reasons they make the decisions they do regarding their child's educational setting.

Satisfaction Ratings

In addition to initial codes that emerged from open coding mentioned above, more specific codes in regards to parents satisfaction with educational settings was evident. Tables 4, 5 and 6 reflect the satisfaction of public school setting compared to satisfaction with homeschooling as it applied to those parents that have utilized either public education, homeschooling or both environments. Parents were asked in two questions on the interview protocol their level of satisfaction of public school and homeschooling as it applied. Question 5 was, If you child has ever attended public school, what is/ was your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with public school based on a scale of 1-5, 1 being *very dissatisfied*, 5 being *extremely satisfied*. Question 6 was, If you child has ever been homeschooled, what is/ was your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with homeschooling based on a scale of 1-5, 1 being *very dissatisfied*, 5 being *extremely satisfied*.

The purpose of the inquiry of parents' satisfaction was to ascertain overall satisfaction of public school compared to homeschooling. Additionally, I was able to glimpse participants' level of contentment with their current and past choices of academic setting for their children with disabilities. The importance of asking parents their

satisfaction was to understand their perceptions of educational environments as those settings pertained to present and past experiences for these parents. Possibly these participants were more satisfied with one setting over the other; however, for one reason or another, such as financial, they were not currently implementing their preferred environment for their children with disabilities. For example, as shown in Table 3, the overall satisfaction with homeschooling (4.6) from participants that have ever tried homeschooled compared to those currently homeschooling (4.5) was higher. One explanation for this could be that the participants that previously homeschooled, expressed satisfaction with homeschooling, however needed to enroll their children in public school because homeschooling was not the most optimal choice at that time. One parent went back to college and another felt her work schedule was not conducive to homeschooling. Another parent enjoyed homeschooling but felt her children with disabilities needed more academic assistance. Lastly, one parent currently has several children with disabilities in both homeschool and public school. She stated that she allows the children to be in public school “when it works.” I found those participants with homeschooling background overwhelmingly felt it was a favorable experience.

Table 3

Parent Satisfaction with Homeschooling

	Satisfaction Rating for Homeschooling, Parents Currently Homeschooling	Satisfaction Rating for Homeschooling, Parents not Currently Homeschooling
Totals	4.5 overall satisfaction	4.6 overall satisfaction

As shown in Table 4, parents who currently had children in public special education programs and have never homeschooled had a (4.4) higher overall satisfaction with public school than those parents that had either previously homeschooled or are currently homeschooling (3.1). The lower rating amongst parents that have tried homeschooling is a logical finding since those searching for an alternative to public school were not as pleased with public school.

Table 4

Parent Satisfaction with Public School

	Satisfaction Rating for Public School, Parents have never Homeschooled	Satisfaction Rating for Public School, Parents have tried Homeschooling
Totals	4.4 overall satisfaction	3.1 overall satisfaction

Overall, parents who were or had previously homeschooled were more satisfied with homeschooling their children with disabilities than participants overall satisfaction with public school. Participants gave a significant (1.0) higher rating to homeschooling as an educational practice than public school setting for their children with disabilities.

These data are significant since the research comparing public school education and homeschooling is not available in current literature.

Table 5

Parent Satisfaction with Learning Environments for Children with Disabilities

	Satisfaction Rating for Public School	Satisfaction Rating for Homeschooling
Totals	3.6 overall satisfaction	4.6 overall satisfaction

Findings

I was able to cluster similar responses by looking at the answers of targeted questions from the interview protocol (Appendix D), including Question 3, “If you have tried different educational environments, what are your reasons for changing school setting?”, Question 4 “If you have not changed school settings for your child, have you ever considered changing from homeschool or public school setting?”, and #9 “Under what circumstances, if any, would you consider changing your child’s current educational setting?” As shown in Table 6, themes arose from the participant’s significant statements leading to the four categories of reasons parents choose the school environment for their child with disabilities: Needs (N), Flexibility (F), Child’s Request (CR) and Bullying (B).

Table 6

Reoccurring Categories

N - Needs	F- Flexibility	CR – Child’s Request	B - Bullying
Mentioned 32 times by 11 participants	Mentioned 13 times by 8 participants	Mentioned 7 times by 4 participants	Mentioned 5 times by 5 participants

Summary of Needs Category

The largest category of significant statements for parents given as a reason they chose one learning environment over another or decided to changed, was need. Eleven of the thirteen, or 85% of participants, reported that meeting the needs of their child with disabilities was key in their decision in the current school setting for their child with disabilities.

The term *needs* and how the participants referred to this word was relative to their own situation. For example, some homeschooling parents used statements such as, “My daughter needed one on one and she had anxieties (while in public school)” and another stated, “I believe that homeschooling is growing now because public school is not flexible to children’s individual needs, especially those with disabilities.” Other parents expressed reasons from their lived experience using the term need to support having their child with disabilities educated in a public school setting. When one participant was asked if she would consider changing setting for her child who receives public school, special education services, she proclaimed, “No, because I can’t provide the resources he needs.” This participant expressed that homeschooling a child with disabilities would be difficult to notice a child’s needs. Another parent stated that the public school special education program environment “fits his needs perfectly.” A participant who had tried homeschooling recalled that when her children with disabilities were not retaining what she was teaching at home, she “felt like they needed professional help as opposed to what I could do at home.”

There are the participants that have more than one child with disabilities at home, but chose a different setting for different children. One parent felt that homeschooling her children with disabilities does not fit the needs of her children during middle school; however, she stated, “I will send the middle schoolers to high school” to fit their individual needs. Similarly, another parent chose to homeschool one child because she felt that the public school setting was not meeting his behavioral needs; however, her younger son attends a self-contained program and believes that the program is addressing

his needs. These are indications that parents weigh the individual situations of their children and make the decisions they feel are the most appropriate based on their perspectives of homeschooling or public school accordingly.

Five out of the six parents with children with disabilities who are in public school and have never been homeschooled felt that through special education programs, their child's needs are being met. One parent in this category specifically referred to public school as "continually changing to meet his needs" and in reference to homeschool stated that she couldn't "provide the resources he needs."

Of the 4 parents that had previously homeschooled and now have their child in public school, 2 reported that public school special education programs are currently meeting their children's needs. One parent that had previously homeschooled stated, "I felt like they needed professional help as opposed to what I could do at home." The other two parents in this grouping were cautious of public schools and willing to pull out and homeschool again if they felt like their child's needs were not being met. Two of the 4 parents that previously homeschooled had originally pulled out of a public school setting because they felt that setting was not meeting their child's needs. One parent said, "She was not successful at school, not enough support, and I wanted to take her off medication."

The parents currently homeschooling overwhelmingly felt that homeschooling was addressing their child's needs. One homeschooling mother said of homeschooling, "It's been good for them and they are not stressed out." Of the 5 homeschooling parents, all 5 stated they would consider discontinuing homeschooling if they needed. Two

specifically stated considering changing school setting based on their child's needs and 3 spoke of altering the homeschooling setting if their financial situation changed.

Summary of Flexibility Category

The second most prevalent repeated theme from participants regarding the reasons they made the choice they did for educational setting for their child(ren) with disabilities was flexibility. Four participants of varying groupings—1 previously homeschooled, 2 homeschooling currently, and 1 parent of children with disabilities who have always been educated in public school - used the word “flexible” to refer to public school. These participants made such statements as, “Public school does not have the flexibility of taking the time for children to ‘get it’”; “It [public school setting] wasn’t working because the teachers and school wasn’t flexible about children not having internet access at home as well as not excusing absences for therapies and doctor appointments.” Flexibility was also mentioned positively in reference to the homeschooling style. “I liked how hands on it [homeschooling] was, lots of science experiments and my child got to guide the instruction” said one parent that previously homeschooled. Another stated she “never used a boxed curriculum” and that flexibility made homeschooling successful for her child with disabilities.

Summary of Child's Request Category

Four participants specifically referred to making decisions based on their child with disabilities requests. Of the four, two were currently homeschooling and one previously homeschooled, and the other had always had her children in public school. One parent that was currently homeschooling said, “My daughter requested to be

homeschooled,” but also stated that she would enroll her children with disabilities back in public school for high school if her children requested. The parent that previously homeschooled stated one of the reasons she brought her child back to public school was because her child asked and “she missed her friends.” Two other parents both said they would consider changing their child’s educational setting if their student requested. One parent who has always homeschooled her children said that she would consider letting her son attend public school, “if he came to me and really wanted to go.” The parent that has never homeschooled said she has considered homeschooling because her children with disabilities “have asked for it a lot.”

Summary of Bullying Category

Five participants pointed out that bullying was an issue that impacted their decisions. Two parents who previously homeschooled, 2 parents that have always had their children in public school and only one parent that is currently homeschooling mentioned bullying. The one parent that is currently homeschooling stated, “You don’t have to worry about bullying or [your children] getting left out” with homeschooling. Three parents with students currently in public school, 2 which have never homeschool and 1 previously had, stated that they would leave public school because of bullying. One parent expressed that her child with disabilities had been bullied, stating he has reported to her other students have called him “special ed”, but she said she would not homeschool him for this reason. She stated he needs to, “toughen up and learn those skills.” Another parent who had previously homeschooled is considering leaving public school again for her child with disabilities because in addition to her child’s needs not

being met, the mother felt bullied by the school saying the child is “not trying hard enough.”

Parent Satisfaction With Learning Environments

Parents were asked in two questions on the interview protocol their level of satisfaction of public school and homeschooling as it applied. Question 5 was, If you child has ever attended public school, what is/ was your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with public school based on a scale of 1-5, 1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being extremely satisfied. Question 6 was, If you child has ever been homeschooled, what is/ was your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with homeschooling based on a scale of 1-5, 1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being extremely satisfied. As explained earlier, some parents at the time of the survey had different children in more than one setting, therefore had different satisfaction ratings for the environments. Some participants with multiple children in the same setting had different satisfaction ratings based on one student’s experiences versus another.

As shown in Table 7, looking at all 13 participants who shared their level of satisfaction in public schools, homeschooling, or both as their experience applied, the overall satisfaction of homeschooling was greater than the overall average of satisfaction with public school.

Table 7

Summary: Satisfaction With Learning Environments for Children With Disabilities

	Satisfaction Rating for Public School	Satisfaction Rating for Homeschooling
Parents Currently Homeschooling		
Participant #1 -2 children		Child #1 - 5 Child #2 - 4
Participant #2		4.5
Participant #3		4
Participant #4	3	5
Parents Currently with Children in Public School but Previously Homeschooled Child(ren) with Disabilities		
Participant #5	5	5
Participant #6 7 children	Child #1 - 3 Child #2 - 4 Children #3-6 - 1 Child #7 - 5	All 7 children - 5
Participant #7	4	3
Participant #8 2 children	Child #1 - 4 Child #2 - 5	Child #1 - 3
Parents Currently with Child(ren) in Public School, Never Homeschooled		
Participant #9-2 children	Child #1 - 5 Child #2 - 3	
Participant #10	5	
Participant #11-2 children	Child #1 - 5 Child #2 - 2.5	
Participant #12	5	
Participant #13	5	
Mean overall satisfaction	3.6	4.6

Answers to Research Questions

Main Question

Why do parents of students with disabilities make the decisions to homeschool or enroll their child in public school? The main question is answered by addressing the following subquestions.

Subquestions

Question 1. What reasons do parents of students with disabilities give for choosing to homeschool, not homeschool, or return their child to public education after homeschooling?

Overwhelmingly, participants in this research revealed that the greatest factor in which learning environment, public school or homeschooling, they choose for their child(ren) with disabilities, is whether the setting is meeting their child's needs. The perception of parents differed depending on what educational setting they were currently using, but all felt they were putting the needs to their children with disabilities first. Additionally, several indicated that if the current environment no longer met their child's needs, they would do something different.

Another reason given for choosing their preferred school setting for their child with disabilities is the flexibility factor, and mainly as it applied to homeschooling. Three parents, 2 which are currently homeschooling, and 1 that previously homeschooled, made reference to homeschooling allowing a flexible schedule and curriculum. Other comments surrounding flexibility was how public school is too controlled. Several parents felt that public school does not have flexibility in scheduling

or in their discipline policies. One parent stated, now homeschooling two children with disabilities, “Public school does not have the flexibility in its schedule to allow time to slow down to catch up with some children.”

Question 2. What factors do parents report influenced the decision processes?

The academic and behavior needs of their child with disabilities were reported to influence parents the most. Two parents revealed they pulled their child with disabilities out of public school to homeschooling due to their child’s behavior. Both of these parents felt not only was their child’s needs not being met they felt it was not fair to the other students. These parents felt that the school was trying but more action needed to be taken. “It got to the point to where he was crying everyday and it was nobody’s fault, the teachers did everything they could. He was too immature at the time.” The other participant stated, “Behavior was becoming a problem for my son and I didn’t want him labeled as a bad kid.”

Bullying was another factor that participants referred to as influencing their decision. Homeschooling would be the obvious environment to educate children for those parents who are concerned with bullying. In fact, of the 5 parents who currently homeschool, only 2 mentioned bullying. The other participants expressed concerns with bullying but one parent actually stated she would continue public school despite the bullying so that her child would develop a thicker skin.

Question 3. What factors would impact parents to alter their original decision?

When asked under what circumstances, if any, would the participants consider changing the current academic setting for their child with disabilities, parents had varying

answers. Three participants made reference to financial situations. Three parents homeschooling said if they could no longer afford to stay home to maintain the school schedule, they would put their children in public school. One participant would consider taking children out of public school if she could afford to pay for an at home or private education. Four homeschooling participants shared they would allow their children to attend high school for the range of programs public school offers, but 3 stressed that it would be up to the student to decide.

As mentioned earlier, the key factor in these participants altering their original decision in school setting would be their child's individual needs. When asked what circumstances would have to be present for their choice to be amended, six parents specifically mentioned if the "need's of my child changed and could not be met." This mentality was shared from parents homeschooling as well as those whom have changed from homeschooling to public school, and two of the participants that have always had their children in public school. Of the six parents who have always had their child in public school environments, four thought there was no circumstance that would occur that they would change their child's learning environment.

Discrepant Data

Discrepant data were not found amongst the research collected. While some responses look completely opposite, participants shared their opinion from their perspectives. For example, although the majority of parents stressed the most important aspect of school setting for their child with disabilities was their child's needs being met, some strongly felt that only the public school could meet all the varying individual

concerns of their child's education, whereas others believe only the homeschool environment gives them the flexibility to address their child's needs.

Validity and Trustworthiness

As previously stated I recognize there is a possible bias because I have been in the field of public education for over eighteen years; however, I went to great lengths to leave my profession aside when conducting the interviews and analyzing the data. I told participants that I was looking for their perspectives to their experiences with choosing an educational setting for their child(ren) with disabilities. I only asked follow-up questions to clarify the participants' response. Additionally, I interviewed parents that I was professionally and personally removed from.

During the interviews, I used field notes and audio recordings with the participant's permission, in order to assure accuracy when reflecting back on the responses. The use of the multiply groupings of parents of students with disabilities choosing different educational settings gave me greater insight into the lived experiences of the participants as well as a way to cross reference why one choice may change.

Lastly, member checking was utilized as a validation strategy. Participants were sent a summary of the results and asked to provide any discrepancies or additional feedback they would like to see included and or changed. No participants alerted me to any concerns with the summary shared.

Summary

Thirteen parents of students with disabilities participated in this research. The phenomenological approach this researcher used, interview questions that specifically

targeted why parents make the decisions they do regarding their child's educational setting, allowed for insights into participants' lived experiences to be revealed. In Chapter 4, I reviewed my data collection process. I explained how the data was analyzed and the findings of the data through rich, vivid language. Also, I specifically addressed how the research questions developed in the proposal were answered. In Chapter 5, I conclude this project by providing interpretations of the findings, implications of the data, and recommendations for further research in the area of parental choice of learning environments for their children with disabilities.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Summary

Overview

I have focused this study on parental choice of educational settings for children with disabilities. The purpose was to explore the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities and the choices they make regarding whether they homeschool or enroll their child in a public school special education program. Thirteen participants were interviewed to discover the participants' perceptions of the best educational environment for their children with disabilities. In this last chapter I have interpreted the findings and included how it relates regarding parent choice and homeschooling. Implications for social change, recommendations for further research and the researcher's experience have also been addressed in this final chapter.

Integration of Findings with Literature

Reflecting on the Conceptual Framework

Glasser's (1998) choice theory explains why people make the decisions they make, which is at the heart of my research inquiry. I was seeking to explore the reasons the parents of students with disabilities make the choices they do. Glasser's choice theory was explained in Chapter 2 to include three components: external control, persuasion, and personal freedom. Exploring the responses from the participants, I found that one parent referred to a source of external control when she stated she used and followed the homeschooling practices of Charlotte Mason, while two others claimed Montessori philosophies they were familiar with played an influential role in their decision to homeschool. Glasser (1998) addressed the pressure schools place on parents,

“The educational message of our existing schools, learn what we tell you whether it is useful or not or we will punish you, compounds this problem, a problem that only the schools have a chance to solve” (p. 194). This was evident to me when one participant stated she felt “bullied” by the school when told her daughter was “not trying hard enough” and therefore was considering withdrawing her child with a disability a second time from public school to homeschool. Glasser’s choice theory also includes personal freedom, “The only person whose behavior we can control is our own” (p.332). In Chapter 2, I posed the question, while parents have the personal freedom to choose to homeschool their children, how does that decision reflect on the personal freedom of the child? Interesting, four participants specifically stated they would consider changing their current choice of academic setting for their child with disabilities at the request of their children.

Significant Themes and Existing Literature

My focus in this research was to understand the phenomenon of parental choice of educational environments for their children with disabilities. Clearly, each participant shared their answers based on their perceptions and background experiences with education. It is also apparent that their satisfaction plays an enormous role with the decisions they made for their children’s setting. When compared to other research looking at parent approval with educational settings, some connections can be made between the significant themes that emerged; however, because this study was distinctive and my approach unique some of findings are landmark.

As indicated in Table 8 and previously explained in Chapter 4, four reoccurring statements were identified from the participants' responses to my research questions; Needs, Flexibility, Child's Request and Bullying. Unlike earlier research conducted on the subject, the empirical data revealed from my study reflects inquires asked of parents' satisfaction in several ways during the interview. Grady, Bielick, and Aud (2010) studied the previous statistics from 1993-2007, which in part asked parents satisfaction with their child's school setting. Unlike my study, the census from National Center of Educational Statistics focused on parents' satisfaction of the following areas: School, Teachers, Academic Standards, Order and Discipline, and Staff Interaction with Parents. Although they found, "a greater percentage of students attending chosen public schools and both types of private schools had parents who were very satisfied with their schools than did students attending assigned public schools," questions specifically targeting the concerns of parents with public education were not explored (p.30). This seems to corroborate with Glasser's choice theory. Parents favor having a choice, even when it is a preference of public schools. The research also indicated that parents are more satisfied with their child's overall education if it was their choice of public school.

Parents who participated in my research reiterated the priority they feel that their child's needs are met. For the majority of parents that meant they were willing to change their child's educational setting to ensure they felt the student's needs were met. Reasons they felt one setting or another did not meet their child's needs ranged from public school was causing too much anxiety, to homeschooling was not meeting the academic needs of their children with disabilities. The feedback that Wanat (2010) received from parents of

students with disabilities that were dissatisfied with public schools were similar to the parents I interviewed who decided to homeschool. For example, Wanat stated that, “parents of special needs children who did not volunteer talked about creating a personal curriculum to make up deficits in student learning” (p. 171). Parents expressing that they need to create “a personal curriculum and make up deficits in student learning” sound similar to those participants I interviewed which made comments pointed to public school not able to meet their students’ needs such as stating that homeschooling filled the gap that public school left. Wanat made the correlation that those parents, including parents of students with disabilities, whom had less involvement in their child’s school, the less pleased with public education they seemed. Perhaps parents need to be involved with their child’s education directly to feel that their child’s needs are being met. The implication for schools is to find more practical ways to involve parents. Schools could inquiry via surveys how and to what extent parents are willing to be included with their child’s education, paying special attention to working parents needs and those that have transportation difficulties.

For some (eight) participants, flexibility was a reason for their choice of educational setting. One parent felt that the public school system was not flexible to the schedule of her child’s outside therapies, therefore homeschooling was required. Homeschooling was the only setting referred to by participants as being flexible, the other statements regarding flexibility involved public school not being flexible enough for students, including the pacing of academics. A thorough search of existing literature did not uncover similar concerns from parents about flexibility; however contentment

criteria in other parent surveys regarding their satisfaction, focused on school relationships and academic standards. Despite not finding comparable results, the need for flexibility for my participants was real. The suggestion is a reoccurring one for schools to be open to flexible school pacing, especially for students that require accommodations such as curriculum pacing and extended time to grasp concepts. One solution is for public schools to consider hybrid school environments where course credit can be achieved through on line on part time homeschool status. This concept is expanded upon further in later sections.

Most would consider bullying in schools an issue regarding children which is difficult enough to control in public school; however, it was concerning to hear from a participant that she feels bullied by the public school team. Another parent stated that a reason that she now homeschools, is that her son was being bullied in public school. Cooper and Nickerson (2012) looked at parent views on bullying and found that participant's perspectives reflective of their past experiences with bullying. "A parent's increased involvement with bullying during childhood may be predictive of the strategies implemented with their own child" (Cooper & Nickerson, 2012, p. 537). Their suggestion to schools and parents was that they show leadership by raising awareness (p. 537). Again, this involves parents and schools working together. The responsibility is on public schools to encourage parent involvement with this issue otherwise, as evident with some participants in this research; parents could just as easily keep their children at home to avoid bullying.

Parent choice, as illustrated Glasser’s choice theory, is a expressing a personal freedom. In my research, four parents interviewed shared they would consider letting their child chose a different educational setting in their high school years. Parental choice is evident in the research compiled by Grady, Bielick and Aud (2010), who found that “in 2007, a greater percentage of students in chosen public schools had parents who went to a parent-teacher conference (77 percent) than did students in assigned public schools (72 percent)” (p. 32). Additionally, “the percentage of students in assigned or chosen public schools whose parents volunteered or served on a school committee was higher in 2007 compared with 2003, and attendance at school events was higher” and they continue, “school choice improves parents' satisfaction with their children's schools, and public schools that face competition have shown improved performance” (p. 33). Apparently, parents feel valued when they have a voice and that voice is associated with choice in regards to educational setting. “Surveys of families participating in school choice programs have found that parents are more satisfied with their children’s education when they can choose their children’s schools” (Lips, 2008, p.1).

Table 8

Themes of Reasons

N - Needs	F- Flexibility	CR – Child’s Request	B - Bullying
Mentioned 32 times by 11 participants	Mentioned 13 times by 8 participants	Mentioned 7 times by 4 participants	Mentioned 5 times by 5 participants

The themes that have been shared in this research have significant implications for public schools and parents. Although public education is funded through the federal

government, customer satisfaction is still imperative. Perception of public education is not always positive, “satisfying the customer has not been much of a priority in public education” (Wohlstetter, Nayfack, & Mora-Flores, 2008, p. 66). When the customer, being the parent, is pleased with public education they are more willing to play an active role in their child’s progress in school, such as volunteering in the school to know what is taking place. According to Hill and Taylor (2004), “It is well established that parental school involvement has a positive influence on school-related outcomes for children” (p.161). Wanat (2010) found that “dissatisfied parents rarely volunteered” (p. 168). Specifically addressing parents of students with disabilities, Wanat found that “volunteers were more satisfied than inactive parents with schools’ responses to special needs and willingness to communicate with parents” (p. 171). It is the commitment of public education’s free and appropriate policy to live up to meeting students’ needs and satisfying parents, within reason, for the betterment of our society as a whole because when parents trust public schools and support their child’s education in public schools, more students succeed.

Implications for Social Change

The overwhelming conclusion of why parents of students with disabilities make the decisions they do regarding which academic setting is need. Consistently, participants in this research study referred to not only making the decision of their child’s current environment based on need, but would also change the school setting if their child with disabilities needs were not being met. In the following paragraphs I reveal the

implications for schools and suggestions that could lead to social change for parents searching for the most appropriate educational setting for their children with disabilities.

The first implication addresses participants concerns of their child's needs being met. Findings will be shared with the school district as outlined in my IRB proposal and the agreement with the school district. Specifically, the special education department of the district I conducted this research in should be aware that some parents choose to homeschool their children with disabilities because they feel that public education does not meet the needs of their children. One participant stated she felt that public school "has too many students" and homeschool can address this concern. Additionally, statements will be shared regarding a feeling of some participants that feel that public schools are not flexible. Some parents that homeschool, feel that public schools, even special education programs, must forge ahead with agendas. Another area to make public school aware of is bullying. While bullying amongst students is a known problem, one participant in this study stated she felt "bullied by the public school system" when she does not agree with the recommendations of her child's IEP team. Somehow parents' voices need to be heard but most importantly, parents need to feel that their concerns are being heard. While districts offer school PTA meetings and school board gatherings for parents to attend, are parents' needs being met?

Implications for Public Schools to Consider

Both areas of concern revealed by the data, overcrowding and bullying need to be explicitly tackled by the public schools. School districts should be forthright with these problems with parents and address exactly how the district is providing solutions. For

example, asking the county for funding through bonds to decrease class size and adopting research-based curriculums that attack bullying in schools are proactive means to make parents aware of how their concerns are being handled. Otherwise, parents might resort to withdrawing their students from public schools.

One feature many of the homeschooling parent participants shared was that they take part in a “hybrid” program. This term is used amongst the homeschooling community to mean that social and academics are supplemented with classes outside the home environment. Of the 5 participants currently homeschooling, 4 used some kind of hybrid version instead of the traditional only at home schooling, 3 of these participants had their children with disabilities attend a private school at least one day a week. The other parent meets with a network of other homeschooling parents and students once a week and “parent participation is a must.” The purposes of the hybrid schooling system ranged from socialization reasons, to using more experienced and knowledgeable teachers, and implementing a smaller version of a school setting. Armed with this information, that some homeschooling parents are open to flexible settings, public school districts could implement hybrid programs of their own. Students could take some of their classes on line, or with a parent, but for other subjects that a parent is not confident in instructing, the schools could offer part time enrollment. The district could define the criteria needed to meet a credit, such as the passing of a subject’s final exam, but a parent would have the freedom of using whatever teaching curriculum or resources they felt appropriate. One area to define with this type of hybrid program, which would need state approval, would be what state standardize testing would be mandatory.

It is significant for public school systems to understand that there are parents currently homeschooling that are utilizing a mixed methods of school environments. According to my research, all participants currently homeschooling find additional ways to incorporate a more traditional school setting with their children. Additionally, these parents, four out of the five, indicated they would consider public school in the future, especially if their child requested. Therefore, these parents have a high potential for enrolling their children in public school if options of a hybrid system were available.

Implications for Homeschooling Parents to Consider

On the other hand, the hybrid options seem to meet the needs of the homeschooling parents. Significant is the fact that participants who no longer homeschool did not utilize additional outside resources however some had children receive therapies. Perhaps having a hybrid style delivery to homeschooling creates an even more successful outcome. Socialization concerns arise often in connection with homeschooling (Lededa, 2007; Romanowski, 2006). Some homeschooling parents utilize private schools, which cater to this community, for a price. If this is the case, another reason for schools is to have more of a role in this hybrid programming is socialization. While districts could offer part-time courses for homeschooling students, homeschooling parents would need to compromise as well with meeting the state requirements such as end of course exams and standardized testing. However, homeschooling parents would benefit from this school setting because their children would not only receive social opportunities for their children but also therapies as needed for students with disabilities. Also, it would be without charge, and during their child's

public school time, parents would be afforded planning time for their homeschool lessons.

Having options while homeschooling a child with disabilities, is an implication for both public schools and homeschooling parents. Another approach would be for public schools to exist as a resource for the homeschooling community. Imagine if parents homeschooling their children with disabilities could access school teaching strategies and highly effective teaching techniques. If public education had a more open door policy for parents to participate in school activities, attend educational workshops, or even hold classes for homeschooling parents, bridges could be created. Parents would be exposed to more opportunities to trust public schools, which might result in future enrollment in public schools and ultimately, children would benefit from additional resources.

According to Hill and Taylor (2004) “Most teacher training programs do not include courses on how to effectively involve parents” (p.163). They stress that “understanding each community’s” uniqueness is important when trying to cultivate parental involvement (p.164). Therefore, I suggest the targeted school district consider my research as it applies to all parents in the county, both parent of students in public school as well as parents homeschooling. Then, the county should make attempts to reach out to parents both with students attending public school and homeschooling. Before a new school year it would be proactive to gather parents concerns and needs they have for supporting the education of their children. Based on that data, the district could offer classes focused on need for parents, both homeschooling and non homeschooling alike. Ultimately developing a hybrid system of public and homeschool could occur by

public schools taking the initial step and involving parents who homeschool at any level. The benefit is both financial, every student in public school receives FTE funding, and more importantly, ethical. If parents are homeschooling their children without the appropriate resources such as curriculums, materials, or access to additional therapies their children with disabilities may qualify for, then ethically, it is worth it for public schools to reach out to the homeschooling population.

Recommendations for Further Research and Action

This study is foundational but only a starting point for further research. Public school districts, especially special education departments, might want to consider that the significant reason these participants with children with disabilities choose the setting they did was based on the perceived need of their child. If other populations of parents with children with disabilities are similar, parents are willing to withdraw their children from public school if they feel their child's needs are not being met. Districts have the ability to inquire if parents of students with disabilities are not only satisfied with their child's educational program but more importantly, do they feel their child's needs are being met.

As a result of the information found in this research, surveying parents' satisfaction with special education service in public school is a worthy and informative procedure. My empirical research, after studying the homeschooling phenomenon trend, points to action that could lead to better relationships between all parents of students in the school district. For example, public schools could embrace the idea of a hybrid union with the homeschooling population. Utilizing the internet as a means to public education is already a reality; therefore, modifying the criteria and working with homeschooling

families is a possibility as well. The result would be mutually beneficial for both the school districts being able to receive funding for these students, even if it is on a part time status, children would get the services that are most appropriate, and parents would be satisfied customers.

Additionally, the results which highlight the areas of disconnect between parents and schools, will be shared with the school district where this study was conducted. It is recommended based on the findings, the special education department will initiate parent satisfaction surveys beyond the state required inquires where only some schools are randomly chosen to participate. It is my hope that the outcome of asking parents perspectives will hopefully yield potential solutions to the concerns parents have which lead them to homeschool.

A recommendation for further research is looking at the parents of students with disabilities whom have pulled their child out of public school and placed them in private education. In many cases these settings would only be available to who could afford their education in a private school. Another interesting avenue to research in this arena of private education for students with disabilities is the child's FAPE (Free and Appropriate Public Education), which is then waived. Possible research inquires associated with this study is to ask if parents that leave public education and enroll their child with disabilities in private school feel their needs are then better meet. Lastly, it is recommended that research studies are conducted to measure parent satisfaction and success rates in the future as possible hybrid programs joining homeschool and public forces are established.

Researcher's Experience

According to Creswell (2007), researchers should reveal their “personal experiences with the phenomenon under the study” as a first step in the narrative approach to data analysis (159). While I have been in the field of special education for eighteen years, my background experience with homeschooling has been minimal. My only experience, prior to the interviews, with speaking at length with a homeschooling parent occurred the day I realized the focus of my research. I was attending a training as a special education teacher. I soon discovered that many of the other attendees were parents homeschooling their children with reading difficulties. I realized that week that I had several questions for those parents that included, why are you homeschooling your child with a reading disability instead of having them enrolled in a special education program? This questioning led to the research questions developed in this dissertation.

During the interview process and data analysis I needed to “set aside personal experiences so that the focus can be directed to the participants of the study” (Creswell, 2007, 159). I successfully interviewed participants that I had not known personally or professionally. I did not engage in conversations with parents regarding my position as a special education teacher or department chair of a special education department. In every interview, I tried to understand each parent’s individual reasoning for their choice of educational environment and reserve all judgments of their decision despite my background in public education.

My overall research experience impacted my impression that parents truly seek the best educational setting for their children; however, the best is defined differently for

parents. I came to the conclusion based on the data that for parents with disabilities, they make decisions they feel are meeting the needs of their children. While some parents who have their child attend public school, such as myself, feel that our children's needs are met, other parents believe they can only meet the needs of their children by homeschooling. I am left with the understanding that one parent should not judge another's choice in school environment, even when those parents are making choices for their children with disabilities.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I have provided interpretations of the findings including relating the data back to the conceptual framework from earlier chapters. In addition, social change, implications for future research and my personal experiences with this phenomenological study was revealed. The objective of exploring perspectives of parents with disabilities toward public and homeschooling was accomplished by interviewing 13 participants who shared their lived experiences with me.

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Appendix A: Community Partner Research Letters

Community Partner Letter deleted for privacy reasons on the advice of Form and Style

Appendix B: Parent Invitation Letter

2013

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am Angie Delaney. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a study to explore the educational decisions of parents of children with disabilities. Specifically, I want to understand why parents choose one setting, such as public school, or decide to homeschool. Very few research studies exist surrounding the topic of homeschooling and even less focus on homeschooling students with disabilities, therefore my study will provide valuable and needed data to the field of educating students with disabilities.

If you agree, I will conduct a private interview at your convenience. The meeting will take about an hour and will be recorded to ensure accuracy. My interview questions will relate to your decision to either homeschool or have your child with disabilities attend a public school. Your privacy is of the utmost importance to me. As I conduct the data collection and analysis, all identifiable details connected to you and your child will be withheld from anyone other than myself.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can decide now or later that you no longer want to be a part of this research. If you do not want to participate, no information you shared will be used in my study.

At any time you may ask me, my committee chair, or university questions regarding this research project. You can reach me at [REDACTED] or

angie.delaney@waldenu.edu, my committee chair, Peggy Locke at
peggy.locke@waldenu.edu, or my university at 1-866-492-5336.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Angie M. Delaney, MEd

angie.delaney@waldenu.edu

Appendix C: Consent Form

I am inviting you to take part in my research project focusing on educational parental decisions for your child with disabilities. This form is a requirement and is to be considered your informed consent, if you accept to become a study participant. This information is also given to provide you with information to make an informed decision as to being a study participant. This research is conducted by me, Angie Delaney, a PhD candidate at Walden University.

Background:

I am conducting a study to explore the educational decisions of parents of children with disabilities. Specifically, I want to understand why parents choose one setting, such as public school, or decide to homeschool. Very few research studies exist surrounding the topic of homeschooling and even less focus on homeschooling students with disabilities, therefore my study will provide valuable and needed data to the field of educating students with disabilities.

Procedures:

Your participation in this research will involve your feedback to my interview questions. The one time interview session will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy during my data analysis phase.

Voluntary:

The decision to participate in this research is completely voluntary and you can change your mind at any time. If you are a study participant and during the interview you

may decide to skip any questions that may seem too personal. It will not be revealed to anyone if you do decide to participate, likewise, if you do not participate your decision will be respected.

Risks and Benefits:

No foreseen risks are present if you consent to participate in this research. The interview questions will focus on decisions parents of students with disabilities have made regarding their child's education. Currently there is a lack of research on this topic therefore it is probable that this study will positively contribute to the existing literature about educational decisions of parents of students with disabilities.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for the participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

As I conduct the data collection and analysis, all identifiable details connected to you and your child will be withheld from anyone other than myself. Everything you share with me during this research will be kept confidential.

Contact Information:

At any time you may ask me, my committee chair, or university questions regarding this research project. You can reach me at [REDACTED] or angie.delaney@waldenu.edu, my committee chair, Peggy Locke at

peggy.locke@waldenu.edu, or my university at 1-866-492-5336. My Internal Review Board (IRB) # is 11-08-13-0108813 and it expires on November 7, 2014.

I will provide you with a copy of all forms for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I understand the above information and agree to be a willing participant in this research study.

Printed Name of the Participant: _____ Date of Consent:

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

1. What setting, public or homeschooled, is your child with disabilities currently educated in?
2. Has your child ever been educated in an environment, public or homeschooled, other than they are currently educated in?
3. If you have tried different educational environments, what are your reasons for changing school settings?
4. If you have not changed school setting for your child, have you ever considered changing from homeschool or a public school setting?
5. If your child has ever attended public school, what is/was your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with public school based on a scale of 1-5, 1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being extremely satisfied.
6. If your child has ever been homeschooled, what is/was your level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with homeschooling based on a scale of 1-5, 1 being very dissatisfied, 5 being extremely satisfied.
7. If your child has ever been homeschooled, what training related to education or your child's disability, if any, have you participated in? Please describe the training.
8. If your child has ever been homeschooled, what services or resources, such as therapies/ programs, if any, has your child participated in either now, in the past or possibly in the future?

9. Under what circumstances, if any, would you consider changing your child's current educational setting?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your child's educational setting?

Curriculum Vitae

ANGIE MARIE DELANEY
[REDACTED]

Education:

2006 – 2014 PhD Special Education, Walden University

1992 – 1994 MEd Special Education, University Nevada Las Vegas

1987 – 1991 BA Communications, Palm Beach Atlantic University

Experience:

2004 – Present Interrelated Teacher /Special Education Department Chair
[REDACTED]

1998 – 2004 Special Education Teacher

Melrose Elementary, Melrose, Florida

1996 – 1998 Special Education Teacher

Glen Springs Elementary, Gainesville, Florida

1992 – 1994 Researcher Assistant

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Endorsements:

- MindSet and CPI trained, crisis and restraint Training
- Orton-Gillingham trained
- SRA trained
- Kansas City / SIM Strategy trained
- CRISS Strategy trainer