

Principles, Practice, and Publications:
A Content Analysis of How British Columbia's
Homeschoolers Create Their Learning Environment

by

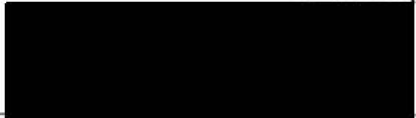
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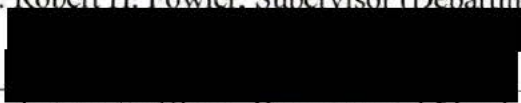
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ABSTRACT

This study is a content analysis of three British Columbia publications, circulated within the last two years, that provides an unobtrusive look at the unique nature of the home school environment in British Columbia. Homeschooling, as an alternative to public education, has shed its image as a social or educational aberration, and is attracting increased numbers of mainstream parents to the movement. Results of this study indicate that, despite the eclectic nature of the practice of homeschooling, writers who contribute to the newsletters share values about the importance of the intellectual, social, and spiritual development of their children. These parents rely heavily on support networks that include shared projects and resources, innovative educational opportunities, values about family, community, and their legal right to educational choice. In addition, the results of the study suggest the practice of homeschooling provides an axis on which to balance theoretical questions concerning public/private interests in education, personal and societal transformation in the pursuit of education reform, and values about children, family, parenting and community.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kay and Archie Crawford. Their example, their commitment to their children and family, and their love, have taught me, amongst other lessons, that there is much to learn from the careful nurturing of relationships with others, not all of whom will share the same values and beliefs.

Chapter One: Introduction

Research on homeschooling is sporadic and eclectic. It remains a phenomenon whose central purpose is not exclusively confined to how learning takes place, but embraces different ideas about the nature of knowledge, with its political, social, and cultural determinates. While alternatives to public education continue to evolve (Basham, 2001), their growth and importance will depend on the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with public education, the perceived state of the nation, the family, the economy, and the international affairs of the world. In addition, the continuation of those issues that challenge the boundaries of public and private interests in education suggest there is no reason to believe that homeschooling, as an alternative to public education, is destined to decline.

In Canada, home based learning, as some parents prefer to call it (Presnitz, 2000), has doubled in the last five years (Basham, 2001), with numbers in excess of 80,000. Given that education is at best a “moral enterprise” and ultimately about “the formation of persons” (Soltis, 1989, p. 123), the unique nature of the homeschool environment becomes relevant. Soltis (1989) believes that education:

is about developing and contributing to the good life of individuals and society. Even though we may disagree about the specifics of what constitutes the educated person and the good life, it is towards these high moral ends that the human enterprise of education in a democratic society is negotiated and directed. (p. 124)

Parents from B.C. who homeschool their children have successfully

negotiated the right to educate them at home without direct government interference under section 13 of the *Public School Act, 1989* (see Appendix A). Their understanding of the “educated person” and the “good life” is the subject of this study.

By registering their children annually as home learners in either the school district in which they reside, at any independent school, or a regional Distance Education School office, and by providing the Ministry of Education with an educational program for the children, parents fulfill their legal obligation as homeschoolers set forth by the provincial statute. There has been a quiet but determined struggle. However, the B.C. government does not presently appear to perceive or value home based education in ways equal to public schooling.

According to Colleen Erzinger, president and editor of B.C. Home Learners' Association (personal communication, May 10, 2002), school districts receive approximately \$340.00 for each homeschool student residing within their jurisdiction. This represents a small fraction of the FTE (full time enrolled) public school student allocation, which varies between \$4-6000 per school year. While their numbers may not be high (see Appendix B), home based learners account for a considerable saving to the B.C. government, a phenomena under appreciated, if not completely ignored.

With steadfast resignation, homeschooling in British Columbia has shown a steady but modest increase over the past ten years with 3,662 children registered for the school year 2001-2002 (see Appendix B). These statistics however, represent only those who homeschool under section 13 of the *Public School Act*, whereas many who teach their children at home do so with guidance, resources, and input from publicly administered programs, such as distance education, electronically delivered programs, and other home based learning programs

available in some districts.

The important distinction between these two groups of home learners, -those taught at home under section 13 and those participating in publicly administered home programs - is that the latter group is following a prescribed curriculum, whereas the former group, registered under section 13, undertake a program of studies selected, taught, and prescribed by the parents alone. This represents a significant concession on behalf of the government given the compulsory attendance regulation prior to 1989.

Compliance with the guidelines, as set out by section 13, protects the parent's right to homeschool their children, their right to choose an education program of their choice, and the use of their home as the learner's primary classroom. Given that the privacy of one's home is a jurisdiction ordinarily beyond the reach of general public inquiry, a study of the unique nature of the home classroom, the activities undertaken, resources used, and values promoted, becomes problematic for the researcher. In addition, the low public profile of the homeschool participants (Guterson, 1998) often leads to erroneous assumptions regarding their homeschool activities. Issues of privacy, in addition to the low public profile, tend to obscure the potential or real impact homeschooling has, or will have, on communities, public schools, families, and education theory and practice.

Previous inquiries into homeschooling have centered primarily on questions of motivation (Knowles, 1991) and outcomes (Ray, 1999; Presnitz, 2000), leaving the nature of homeschool practice under reported. Accurate information concerning how homeschoolers create their learning environment is further complicated by the knowledge that they are not a homogenous group (Knowles, 1991; Guterson, 1992). However, more recent studies (Basham, 2001; Arai, 2002) describe the home educator as increasingly similar to mainstream parents

who do not hold strong views on either end of the ideological spectrum, based in part on the fact that legal battles regarding homeschooling are being resolved, and the practice of homeschooling is no longer viewed as a “radical alternative to public education” (Arai, 2002, p. 3).

Regardless of their characteristics, how parents create their learning environment does become accessible through their writings. The newsletters they produce and circulate provide access to the homeschool environment by identifying the ways in which the participants define their learning behaviours and activities, as well as their values, interests, and concerns. Through their communication with each other, contributors to the newsletters nurture relationships with other parents, families, and children, and create a learning environment that becomes an alternative education community with its own unique characteristics. The newsletter publications become the window through which the home learning classroom can be viewed, studied, and analyzed.

The content analysis approach used in this study is respectful of parent’s privacy and values their right to make decisions in their children’s best interest. The data collected remains unaltered by the process of studying it, which gives it a “naturalistic found” quality (Reinharz, 1992). Employing this unobtrusive content analysis approach, eighteen B.C. homeschool newsletters, from three different publications, are examined as to the content of the articles, values expressed, information shared, and concerns raised. Specific categories of issues and interests are identified based on the articles in order to facilitate this analysis.

According to C. Elzinger (personal communication, May 10, 2002), there are over one hundred homeschool support groups in British Columbia, all of whom communicate through both written and electronic methods. By limiting the number of newsletters studied, a less broad but more detailed analysis becomes

possible, and by including one publication with a religious focus, an effort has been made to be responsive to the eclectic profile of home educators. Of the support groups advertised in *HEN* (Home Education News), approximately one third state they are a religious association.

As revealed by this study, homeschool parents acknowledge the difficulties and frustrations inherent in their decision to be the primary educators of their children. They take comfort from their communication and association with each other, and affirm their parental commitments in concert with the values and beliefs they share. Their newsletters include articles that describe how they adjust to this relative isolation from the larger public school's social and education environment. Moreover, the newsletters demonstrate that not all homeschoolers share the same theories or beliefs about education, nor do they practice the same teaching methods, nor do all find fault with the public system.

BCHLA (B.C. Home Learners Association) newsletters and *HEN* (Home Education News) are inclusive of this diversity, while *School Bell* (Abbotsford Christian Homeschool Association) prescribes to a "statement of faith" based on and motivated by their spiritual beliefs in addition to values about how children learn best. Yet, despite their differences, homeschool parents are focused and committed to one common task - the intellectual, social, and spiritual development of their children and families.

In this study ten categories of issues and concerns emerge from the data and are analyzed individually. They include family and parenting concerns, validating the decision to homeschool, socialization, learning theories, notices and ads, provincial government education policies, research supportive of alternative educational practice, values and beliefs of homeschool practice, creative writing, and contemporary cultural topics such as health, and environmental issues.

For example, parents who express concerns as to how children are taught in public schools, the aims of public education, and the subliminal messages imbedded in the public school curriculum, such as a particular ideological bias, cite research supportive of their claims. These parents suggest that public education engages in a form of subtle manipulation based on an “economic system that teaches (citizens) to consume, consume, consume” (Fromme, 2000). They conclude that this approach is not in the best interest of their children, society, or the environment, and some studies agree with this philosophy (Presnitz, 2000, 1987; Guterson, 1992; Illich, 1991; Holt, 1972, 1964; Gatto, 2002). Other studies point to the criteria that evaluates children and places them in designated groups in classrooms, believing this sustains the producer/consumer class stratification in society. However, not all parents who homeschool oppose the public education system, the curriculum, or the economic system under which they live (Basham, 2001; Arai, 2002).

Referring to the institutional barriers to learning in public education, newsletter articles claim that public schools do not have the time or commitment to nurture individuals in ways that are supportive of different learning styles. They also suggest public schools are not capable of enforcing acceptable standards of behaviour for students (Russell, 2002). In response to these concerns, homeschool parents describe in their newsletters how they facilitate their children’s education by exposing them to a variety of experiences within their communities, and by giving them choices about what they want to learn. The parents also claim they are able to monitor and control their children’s social development through the nurturing of friendships with other children within selected associations and support groups, a practice unattainable within a public school environment.

Some newsletters encourage parents to write about their personal journeys as homeschoolers, and they offer children and parents opportunities to engage in creative exercises such as writing poetry, fairy tales, and inspirational real life stories for publication. Collaborative events between children, parents and other families, such as a quilting project and an online adolescent magazine, are advertised and supported by the newsletters. The newsletters are rich in content and flavour, and they offer this researcher a potpourri of theoretical reflections by posing challenging issues and questions, not the least of which is what are the aims of education.

Chapter two of this thesis discusses the practice of homeschooling and explores the motivations, obstacles, and objectives of parents engaged in home education. This chapter reviews the history of homeschooling and the B.C. experience specifically. It includes a profile of the parents and children involved in homeschooling, and identifies research significant to homeschool practice. Central to the discussion in this chapter is the question as to how a child taught exclusively at home becomes socialized into the community, and receives the kind of education he or she needs to function in society.

Homeschooling can best be understood in the context of public education, including its aims, policies and practice. This subsection of chapter two describes theoretical issues in public education and the problems associated with creating public policy in a pluralistic society. The history of compulsory attendance requirements in public education is shown to be intimately related to the culture of the times and the corresponding responsibilities of citizenship. In addition, the concept of change in public education practice, and the political and ideological influences under which change is challenged opens up a Pandora's box of issues that are central to the lives of all citizens.

The methods used to collect, organize, and reflect on the research data are described in chapter three. Included in the chapter is a rationale for the methodology chosen, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. It includes, as well, a profile of the publications, the identification of specific categories that emerge from the data, and a table that records the number of categories and how these categories are distributed amongst the newsletters.

Chapter four analyzes the data and begins with a sample article taken from the newsletters. Articles in the newsletters are critically assessed based on the categories identified, and excerpts from these articles selected to support the analysis. Four main questions arising from the analysis are identified based on the data studied, and their relationship to education theory and practice.

In conclusion, chapter five reflects on the opportunities for change in educational theory and practice based on what has been learned from the alternative practice of homeschooling and the learning environment parents create for their children. One opportunity for change might be the attempt to re-define the boundaries between public and private interests in education.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Homeschooling: Motivations, Obstacles, and Objectives

This chapter begins by describing the history and current status of homeschooling in general, and the British Columbia experience specifically. It continues with an explanation of how homeschooling in B.C. under the *B.C. School Act, 1989* (see Appendix A) differs from other programs taught at home. A profile of the homeschool practitioner, and the children who are homeschooled is included to clarify their motivations, the obstacles they confront, and the values they promote. How homeschooled children compare with their publicly educated peers is also addressed. Given that homeschooling is now a legally sanctioned alternative to the public education system in B.C., a critical discussion of the aims, practice, and policies of public education, its history and evolution, completes this chapter.

History of the movement: The Canadian and American experience.

“Over the past decade, homeschooling has shed its image as a social or educational aberration” (Luffman, 1998). It is now an issue of choice and parental rights. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* has declared that “Parents have the prior right to determine the form of their children’s education ... the State’s right to intervene in the education process is limited to ensuring that the children’s right to education is fulfilled” (Bashram, 2001, p.16). This universal declaration of rights gives homeschoolers encouragement and public school administrators much to think about. With more than a million children homeschooled in the United States and 80,000 in Canada (Grossman,

2001), the significance of the movement is no longer in doubt.

Following trends in the United States, where the homeschool movement began in the 1960s, Canadian interest in this particular alternative education practice has gradually gained momentum. Based in part on the ideological concerns of the Christian Right and on the work of teacher and humanist John Holt, homeschooling is promoted as a step towards greater parental autonomy, and decentralized public school control (Basham, 2001).

Holt's work *How Children Learn* (1967) and *How Children Fail* (1967), as well as *The Underachieving School* (1969), are often cited in homeschooling literature in view of their penetrating critique of the public system.

Another critic, Ontario resident Wendy Priesnitz, founded the *Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers* in 1979 as Canada's pioneering advocacy and information resource for home based education. Author of *School Free* (1987) and *Challenging Assumptions* (2000), Priesnitz continues to promote home-based learning and parental control over education choice. As current editor of *Life Learning: The International Magazine of Self-Directed Learning*, her interests also include the broader implications of education practice as it relates to cultural, social, and environmental concerns.

Priesnitz compiled a report on home based education in Canada in 1990. It described the characteristics of 1,000 families who were given comprehensive questionnaires on all aspects of their experience as home educators (See Appendix C). It concluded that "the home education experience is a positive one" (Priesnitz, 1990, p. 1). Results indicated that homeschool parents in 1990 in Canada came from diverse backgrounds, did not practice the same teaching methods, and had a variety of reasons for homeschooling their children.

A few years later, results from a nationwide survey in Canada by American

Brian D. Ray (1994) provided a more comprehensive look at the movement. His report gave homeschooling high marks as well. The American *National Home Education Research Institute*, which Ray founded in 1990, is dedicated to producing high-quality research on home schooling. Ray's report in 1994 was commissioned by the "Home School Legal Defense Association" in Canada. It involved questionnaires sent to over 2,000 families and explored six fundamental questions about their experiences as homeschoolers. The study examined demographics, motivation, and education results. The findings suggest that parents who homeschool have more formal education than the national average, have more children than the average Canadian family, have a wide variety of religious preferences, and engage in diverse social activities with peers and adults outside the family. Moreover, this report found that homeschoolers performed "at or above the 76th percentile on national norms in terms of language, math, and science scores" (Ray, 1994, p. 2).

In her book *A Case for School Choice*, Claudia Hepburn (1999) summarizes the importance of giving Canadian parents educational choices by emphasizing the political and economic realities in other countries. For example, New Zealand restructured its education system ten years ago transforming government administered schools into locally managed charter schools, creating an autonomous public agency. Denmark and Sweden, affirming the parents' right to choose their children's education, gave parents access to publicly funded vouchers allowing them to send their children to whatever school they wish without paying fees. Hepburn states "97% of parents are satisfied or very satisfied with the education of their children." (p.2) in New Zealand, and parents in Denmark and Sweden think highly of their education system.

Given the positive educational experiences in countries such as New Zealand,

Denmark, and Sweden, Hepburn believes that if Canadian parents do not have these options that “Canadian education will continue to cost more, and yield less”(p. 3). Her comments suggest further that, despite public frustration with the Canadian education system, which has been “building for a generation” (p. 3), little has been done to find solutions to the problems. Claiming that 33% of Canadian high-school graduates are functionally illiterate, and that 27% drop out of school with no diploma, she sees an urgent need to redesign the system. Supporting parents to make alternative education choices for their children, such as homeschooling, is one solution.

Public interest and curiosity regarding the homeschool movement began to grow throughout the 1990s. The public media began to take notice. *Time* magazine recently devoted its cover story to the question “Is Homeschooling Good for Society?” (Cloud, J. & Morse, J., 2001). The main article included the first comprehensive study of homeschooling undertaken by the United States federal government. This study analyzed families who home school, and found that (a) homeschool children are generally from families with three or more children, (b) that these families consist of two parents, with only one parent in the work force, and (c) that at least one parent’s education is generally beyond high school. This research confirms the findings of the two previous studies mentioned. As to why they homeschool, the study found that parents simply felt they could give their child a better education at home.

Parents’ interest in education in its broadest social/political sense is gaining momentum. Examining the historical evolution of homeschooling from 1970 to 1990, Knowles, Marlow and Muchmore (1992) make reference to “the fluid nature of home education as a social movement” (p. 198). However, the authors suggest homeschooling’s growth is linked primarily to educational reformers such

as, “John Holt, Ivan Illich, and Jonathon Kozol ... who provided the ideological underpinnings of educational innovation” (p. 202). Their findings reveal that, besides education reform, homeschoolers are interested in social change. Reinforcing this awareness, Carper (1992) states that the popularity of home based learning is directly “related to changing family roles, and structures” (p.256) in society.

Interest in homeschooling, including the advantages and disadvantages of the practice, continue to grow. Patrick Basham’s study (2001) revealed that, in the last twenty years, the heightened awareness in homeschooling is fueled by interest from the popular media, and is attracting attention from national publications such as *Maclean’s*, *The National Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*.

The cover story of *Newsweek* on October 5th, 1998, indicated that compared to the 300,000 children homeschooled in 1990, the one and a half million children now being homeschooled in the United States have a variety of supports outside the home to assist them with the needed resources required to learn at home. Hooked up to the world of the internet, homeschool parents do not fear they are depriving their children of a thorough education. Homeschoolers are very much a part of the evolution of parent power that gave birth to vouchers (parents choose the school and program they want their child to attend), charter schools (run by parents themselves), and privately run religious schools in the United States.

Homeschooling is not a new phenomenon. Prior to the mid 19th century, education was considered a private matter. Governments would not presume to infringe upon the natural rights and responsibilities of parents to educate their own children, much less define what was to be learned. Children learned what they needed to know at home from family members. Skills and knowledge related to spinning, clearing the land, farming and other household chores (Priesnitz, 2000),

were central to their living experiences. The move to a public system was fraught with fear and uncertainties, particularly the compulsory requirement laws.

According to Presnitz (1987), challenges to compulsory education statutes in Canada have not received much attention. However, since 1982, legal interpretations of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* affirm that “home based education is a legitimate choice for parents” (p. 33). Complicating this option however, is the historical understanding that since the mid 19th century legislated relationships between society and the public education system are an essential component of a democratic society. Moreover, in Canada the state continues to plays a protective role concerning the overall welfare of children in Canada (Tomkins, 1986).

Parents who have reservations or concerns about public schooling do not necessarily choose homeschooling as a way of resolving their issues with the public system. Many try to change the system from within. Moreover, research suggests that those parents who do choose to homeschool are not a cohesive group, and represent a cross section of the socio/economic and religious/ideological spectrum (Knowles, 1991; Rakestraw and Rakestraw, 1990), not unlike the general population (Basham, 2001). This makes them a unique group to study in that they do not fall easily into any category or group, nor are they motivated by the same principles and values. However, as Arai’s (2002) research suggests, there is some difference between the American and the Canadian perspective, which is discussed below.

The British Columbia experience.

The Royal Commission in B.C. on education in 1988, titled *Legacy for Learners*, began with the intention of reforming the way British Columbia educates its children. With input from parents and educators, the commission established a new era of cooperation and consultation between the educational community and the B.C. provincial government. The passing of *The School Act* (1989) granted parents, for the first time, the legal right to educate their children at home. This was a major victory for parents who homeschool, allowing them to focus on issues more directly related to their children's learning and the homeschool community, rather than fighting for legal recognition. But their battles have been hard fought. The evolution of mandatory school attendance laws, which I address later in this chapter, puts B.C. homeschool parents' efforts for legal recognition into perspective.

The numbers of home based learners in B.C. may be confusing. According to C. Elzinger, president of the *B.C. Home Learners Association* (personal communication, May 10, 2002), the current estimate of three to four thousand children registered in the year 2001/2002 as homeschoolers (Appendix A) does not include those who may learn at home through distance programs, electronic delivered education (EDE) pilot programs, local district home based learning programs, or those who, for whatever reasons, do not comply with the legislated requirement to be registered in the district in which they live. Those students taught at home that participate in publicly administered programs are counted as public school enrollments, and are given special funding based on the specific programs involved. However, not all school districts offer alternative at-home education programs for children.

According to Peggy Glegg, a Ministry of Education official (personal

communication August, 15th, 2002), prior to 1989 it was not a requirement to register as a homeschooler in British Columbia. Consequently, statistics related to the number and location of children educated at home during the early days of homeschooling are not available. Most of the children educated at home prior to 1989 in B.C. have by now completed their education and generally have lost contact with the current group of homeschool parents, their organizations and newsletters (C. Elzinger, personal communication August 15, 2002). This has made it difficult to determine the extent of the early homeschool movement in B.C.

Of particular interest to parents in B.C. today are the recent changes in the provincial education budget guidelines. School districts are being encouraged to develop more creative approaches to program development. Parents now have additional options to consider should they choose to teach their children at home. It is important to note that a slight decline in the number of children enrolled under section 13 of the *School Act* in the last few years may be related to district initiatives in this regard (see Appendix B).

According to C. Elzinger (personal communication, May 10, 2002), the province allocates additional funding to districts for alternative home based options, but offer only approximately \$300.00 for article 13 homeschool children, that is, those whose parents educate their children without district involvement. School districts have much to gain financially if homeschool parents can be enticed into using publicly administered home based alternatives. However, Elzinger cautions that if parents want to retain full control over their children's educational program, they need to continue to register under section 13, *British Columbia School Act, 1989*.

Profile of homeschool parents.

Guterson (1992) researched parental “types” and found that the familial and parenting style profile of homeschoolers was not significantly different from their public school counterparts. In a more recent article (Guterson, 1998), he points out that home school parents are now coming from “the same American mainstream that once frowned on home schooling” (p. 71). Guterson, a public school teacher in Washington State, as well as a home-education advocate, views the reason for this change in attitude as the simple realization that homeschooling works. He concludes his comments with a cautionary note. Guterson wants home school parents to think about the world beyond their doors, and in particular to reflect on the impact homeschool education has on meeting public obligations outside the home and family.

Meyers (1994) suggests that homeschool families have a higher degree of togetherness and unity within their own families than do non-homeschooled families. She also suggests that homeschool parents are inclined to encourage more independence in their children than are non-homeschool parents. Her study further illustrates the need for additional research on the nature of the relationship between homeschool families and society in general, and between parents and children living and learning in a home environment.

Evidence exists that suggest some parents are becoming more involved in issues that affect their children’s learning through questioning educational policies and programs (Downey, 1988) and acting on those concerns. Some choose homeschooling, while others, for whatever reasons, respond in different ways, such as becoming a member of a *Parent Advisory Council* at the school their children attend. However, a single profile of the home educator is not possible, despite shared concerns and the realization that home educators are now coming

from the “mainstream” segment of society (Arai, 2002).

Rakestraw and Rakestraw (1990) looked at the multidimensional characteristics of parental motivation and involvement in homeschooling, and found that parental rights and quality of education were the primary concerns that initially attracted parents to the homeschool choice. Acknowledging the validity of this motivation, the researchers questioned the over reaction from public school administrators to the homeschool choice and wondered “why the education of one’s child at home becomes a major threat to universal public education and the survival of democracy” (p. 67). They concluded their study by reflecting on the need to look seriously at alternatives to the public system, but caution that the underlying issues regarding the balance of power between parents and society are equally complex and need to be addressed simultaneously.

Worried that homeschooling is draining the most articulate and proactive parents out of the public system (Cloud & Morse, 2001), educators are increasingly concerned that homeschool parents are precisely the parents who know how to advocate for needed reforms within public education. Some educators (Cloud & Morse, 2001) believe that a strong commitment to the public system and communities in general may be buried in the pursuit of home-based learning. Concerns about “insulating a child from the vibrant, pluralistic, democratic world” (p. 44) are serious and complex issues requiring more research.

Despite concerns related to socialization and the creation of alternative learning communities, attitudes towards homeschooling appear to be changing. Bruce Arai’s paper on “*Ideologues*”, “*Pedagogues*” and “*Mainstreamers*”: *Changes in Parents’ Motivation for Homeschooling*” (Arai, 2002) looked at these changing perspectives. Arai, who homeschools his own children, researched families in Ontario and B.C. regarding their motivation to homeschool and

compared these parents to their American counterparts.

Arai found that, unlike Americans who appear more concerned with the content of what is being taught in schools, Canadian homeschool parents do not differentiate between ideological and pedagogical objections to public education. Rather, they are concerned in equal measure with process and content regarding educational policies. Considered a more viable option to-day, Arai believes homeschooling is now becoming increasingly attractive to the mainstream segment of society, that is, to parents from various socio/economic backgrounds who do not hold extreme views at either end of the educational, social or political spectrum. Fueling this phenomena, he also believes, is the homeschool parent's increased involvement in social and cultural issues.

With social and cultural change comes the inevitable stress on public institutions to be responsive to those changes. Some homeschool parents view the public system as structurally incapable of meeting their individual expectations. Issues of content, for example, may provoke a challenge regarding the use of a particular book in the classroom that some parents may find objectionable. Ramsey (1992) discusses this gap and tension in communication between parents and school administrators and concludes that the parent/child/family/school relationship has become increasingly complex, given the fragmented nature of contemporary society.

The changing definition of what constitutes a family, along with a growing cultural diversity, further challenges the implementation of standardized school policies. Ramsey (1992) describes homeschool parents as an eclectic group with varied expectations for their children, which public school administrators may not be able to fulfill. But she also suggests that many aspects of education, such as advanced algebra and science, require resources parents may not have, or be

capable of delivering.

Motivated by their own values and principles, homeschool parents can not be described as a homogenous group. On a more individual/personal level, a study by Knowles (1991) examined parents as to their motivation to homeschool and discovered that many had experienced negative/difficult situations in their own public school education. Parental desire to shield their children from similar traumatic experiences in school constitutes a significant revelation in homeschool research. It addresses the complex dynamics of the child/parent relationship and reinforces the importance of personal life histories as a valuable source of research on homeschooling.

A safe learning environment is no small consideration for parents. The problem of violence and bullying in schools to-day creates a threatening and intimidating atmosphere for staff and children. School administrators, police, and community leaders, as well as parents, are understandably concerned with this more recent but alarming phenomena that crosses all socio/economic/ and geographical boundaries. Efforts to create a safe and secure public school environment are ongoing, but even a potential threat of violence may give some parents the added incentive they need to abandon the public system and homeschool their children.

Safety in school was the number one issue of concern for parents and students in a recent survey conducted by the Ministry of Education (Sharma, 2002). Provincial surveys to gauge parental satisfaction with the public school system are conducted on an annual basis by the B.C. Education Ministry. Blaming schools for problems related to safety in the classroom, John Taylor Gatto (2002), a strong advocate for homeschooling believes “schools do violence to children and society” (p. 10). He suggest that a large part of the Columbine disaster, a recent

shooting and killing incident at an American school, can be “attributed to the infrastructure of schooling itself...as workshops of disrespect” (p. 10). His research blames schools for much of the fragmentation that occurs in communities and concludes that schools have become “institutional analogues to factories ... a colossal work project, one in which passing out jobs becomes an end in itself,” with little regard for the welfare of the individual child (p. 11). Parents appear to have more reasons than safety to encourage them to abandon the public system.

Measures to protect children from harmful influences at school, such as workshops to prevent bullying, can be helpful, but their impact has yet to be assessed. Parents are justified in their concerns regarding the safety of their children. Removing them from public school is one solution. However, some educators worry about how a child taught exclusively at home becomes properly socialized into the larger community, or receives the kind of education he or she needs to function in society.

Profile of homeschool children.

Children’s performance academically and socially is of interest to parents and educators as well as public policy makers. Wendy Priesnitz (2002) reports that in his focus address at the 13th National Conference on Educational Research in New Zealand, Knowles had much to say about the issue of socialization. He suggested there is a difference between social development and socialization and believes that some home educators have chosen home education because they do not believe that the public school system promotes healthy social development. Socialization, according to Knowles, assumes a “fitting in” to a certain cultural mold assumed to be normal by society. Homeschool parents believe “the norms they perceive to represent the Anglo-American middle class” traditions are not

represented in public education to-day (p. 2).

Shyers (1992) examined the issue of socialization and found that public school children appeared to be at a disadvantage. They experienced more problem behaviours than the homeschooler. Other research on socialization (Moore, 1986) states that homeschoolers are happier, better adjusted, more thoughtful, competent, and sociable than nonhomeschooled children. The homeschoolers' isolation from the larger public school community, at first glance, appears to be an advantage.

However, not all agree that homeschooling is a positive experience for children. One pediatrician (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998) believes that children need to be successful in three separate but overlapping life spheres, the home, school and with peers, and that "home schooling compresses all that into a single setting that can be very difficult for kids" (p. 67). Public school teacher associations in the United States (Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998) also express concern as they continue to support more rigorous regulations regarding homeschooling than are presently being practiced.

Ray (1994) and Basham (2001) conclude from their studies that homeschool children perform academically at every subject and grade level higher than their public school counterparts. What is interesting regarding Basham's research is that he does not find any significant difference in a child's performance whether one of the homeschool parents is a certified teacher or not. For example, the length of time a child is homeschooled does impact on their SAT scores according to Ray (1999). Students homeschooled for at least seven years achieved a significantly higher percentile score (92nd) than those who had only one year of homeschooling (59th).

Ray's (1999) study concludes that the growth of homeschooling is interesting

for a number of reasons. In addition to the child's development, he believes its impact on society will be important to examine. He suggests parents who homeschool are themselves affected by the homeschool experience as they "begin to critically analyze society [sic] norms" (p. 18). This byproduct of the movement is no small consideration. He cautions also that "more causal-comparative studies are needed that simultaneously and carefully control the background variables in order to determine more clearly whether home schooling causes positive or negative effects" (p. 18). What specifically constitutes a positive or a negative effect is not defined in his report.

To understand the practice of homeschooling in more depth and to develop a greater appreciation of the complex relationship between parents, children, and educational institutions, a survey of how the public education system evolved and continues to evolve is addressed in the following section. This section further acquaints the reader with the overlapping social, cultural, and political theories inherent in defining public education policy.

Public Education: Aims, Practice and Policies

Theoretical issues in public education.

Albert Einstein, who was reported to have done poorly in public school, commented that "It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty" (Priesnitz, 2000, p. 55). Whether parents are influenced by a coercive process, not fully understood, or manipulated by a sense of duty to enroll their children in public school, the theory and practice of public education invites controversy and has done so since its origins in the mid 19th century. It appears that now, at the

beginning of the 21st century, “public participation in the policy making process is undoubtedly greater (to-day) and media scrutiny arguably tougher than a generation ago” (Pal, 1997, p. 27). This statement illustrates the current trend towards a more involved citizenry and the proliferation of new challenges directed towards public institutions. Homeschooling, as an alternative to public education, is part of this new scrutiny.

Concerns about education in North America are pervasive. Evidence of this appears in the fall, 2001 edition of *Harper's* magazine, which is devoted entirely to the issue of education. With provocative subtitles such as *Should Learning be Erotic?*, *Do we Have a Cultural Syllabus?*, and *Can We Imagine a Successful School?*, the articles raise questions concerning the theories and practice of education, its values, aims, and beliefs. Many contributors to the discussions, including editor and author Lewis Lapham, express mixed responses, pointing to the current contradictions in public education. Lapham states “why do we need to reinvent the school” (Lapham, 2001, p. 50), while Garret Keizer's (2001) contribution to the discussion suggests more strongly:

Public schools embody our democratic principles and contradictions better than any other institution we know. In schools we behold our own spitting image as a people who value equality but crave excellence, who live for the moment but bet on the future, who espouse altruism, but esteem self-reliance. (p. 43)

This apparent ideological contradiction between the practice of public education and its relationship to the democratic state raises interesting questions, not the least of which concern or relate to the aims of education itself. Keizer's comments also underscore the importance of a free and democratic way of life, one that allows a critical examination of public institutions and invites public

discourse. The power and importance of public education is at the heart of any debate that seeks to clarify its aims. But not all agree which questions concern or relate to the aims of education. Some homeschoolers have expressed strong opinions as to the gap between theory and practice in public education (Priesnitz, 2000).

Ralph Waldo Emerson, who came to be known as the custodian of the American liberal education tradition, promoted a unique understanding of curriculum, one which was thought by some to be the embodiment of a new “American Religion” (Pinar, 1995, p. 660). Wanting to take a closer look at the values prescribed within this particular public education tradition Harold Bloom wrote *The American Religion: The Emergence of a Post-Christian Nation* (1992). In this book he suggests that Emerson celebrated a type of belief system that was uniquely “experiential in nature, knowing rather than believing” (p. 660). Emerson’s pedagogical/ ideological perspective, together with Dewey’s instrumentalism, which viewed knowledge in light of its utility (Guterson, 1992), would influence American education policy for much of the twentieth century.

Dewey (1956) argued that the traditionalists’ view of public education, which includes a standardized curriculum, structured classrooms, teacher-centered lessons, and rote learning, was misguided. His instrumentalist philosophy opposed the idea of fixed value systems, and views ideas, values, and beliefs as instruments to achieve specific purposes in life. He believed the learner, integrated environments, critical thinking, and problem solving should be the focus of education rather than emphasis on core curriculum and rote learning.

Critics of the public education system come from many corners of the culture. Not convinced that the public education system had much to offer the general public, Mark Twain commented that he would never let his schooling interfere

with his education. Although schooling was meant to be a way of defining and liberating a nation, the public education system continues to accept both praise and criticism from within and outside its boundaries.

Ivan Illich (1991) commented that “Two centuries ago the U. S. led the world to disestablish the monopoly of a single Church. Now we need the constitutional disestablishment of the monopoly of school” (p. 16). Illich focuses on the ideological implications of shaping the minds of children, and underscores the politics embedded in knowledge and learning. Information without understanding is never enough, according to another education philosopher, A.N. Whitehead. “A merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God’s earth” (Whitehead, 1929, p.1). What schools should do, how they should do it, and for what aims and purpose continue to challenge public school policy.

History of compulsory learning in Canada.

The progressive views Emerson and Dewey espoused were influential in Canada as early as 1860. Although not widely accepted in practice at the time, these progressive ideas were viewed as significant by many educators (Tomkins, 1986). Anticipating what would be “discovery learning” (p. 63), some educators asserted that “children should be led to make their own inferences...told as little as possible, and induced to discover as much as possible” (p. 63). This theory is sometimes referred to as the progressive/child-centered approach to learning, an approach homeschoolers feel is in the best interest of all children (Holt, 1972).

In Canada compulsory schooling was not well received or understood initially. Tyack (1988) looked at some of the related issues during the time school attendance first became mandatory in the mid-nineteenth century, a time when Canada began to think of itself in national terms. Tyack’s study viewed

compulsory education through models of understanding that included the political, economic, ethnocultural, and organizational realities of Canadian culture at the time. He believed that by focusing on these different models of understanding, educators and parents are more likely to appreciate and understand the ripple effect education decision making has on all aspects of public and private life. Mandatory public school attendance in Canada served as a benchmark in the evolution of education policy, according to Tyack, and the subsequent formation of a nation.

Concerns related to compulsory school attendance during the nineteenth century stemmed primarily from parental indifference towards the public education system. Overriding issues such as parents needing their children at home to work, as well as overcrowding and unhealthy classroom conditions, contributed to child truancy (Tomkins, 1986). When government grants to schools began, parents who did not send their children to school faced legal action (Tomkins, 1986).

Defining education policy and practice was problematic from the early days of public schooling. Tomkins (1986) states that balancing the public education system's need for stability and its corresponding need for change, was difficult from the onset of public schooling in Canada. In B.C. "*The Common School Act of 1871*, ... made schooling free, universal, and compulsory province-wide, requiring attendance for four months per year for children age seven to twelve" (p. 47). This Act bears little resemblance to current public education policy, and underscores the importance of Tyack's (1988) study regarding how education reflects the culture of the time.

Prior to the above legislation, the first public school compulsory law on Vancouver Island was established in the year 1865, one year after Nova Scotia

passed a similar law, and prior to B.C.'s 1872 entrance into confederation. A controversy developed over sectarian, or non-religious schools, and the denominational schools, which were primarily Roman Catholic. The issue centered around what curriculum would be taught in the public schools. Several provinces had dual systems, but B.C. became the first province with the only fully secular school system in Canada. However, it was the complex problem of compulsory attendance that became the main issue in public education in the nineteenth century (Tomkins, 1986).

Tomkins (1986) discusses the intellectual and cultural background of curriculum issues and suggests that the origin of Canadian curriculum development comes from a "relatively small number of key, mutually acquainted reformers whose similar beliefs and common visions derived from their common British and Protestant backgrounds" (p. 33). Ontario's Edgar Ryerson's report in 1846 regarding his plan for a school system affirmed the belief that students be prepared to meet their "appropriate duties and employments of life as Christians, as persons of business, and also as members of civic community" (p. 34). Ryerson was an advocate of "disciplined intelligence" (p. 35), which included a combination of classical, liberal, and practical elements of education.

Amidst the complexities of public and private life in to-day's communities, reasons for not attending public school are complex and reinforce what Tyack (1988) had to say regarding the political, economic, and ethnocultural realities of the time. Some educators today remain cynical, unconvinced change always means improvement "given the current organizational infrastructure and political culture of schools, education has tremendous capacity to deflect improvements to respond to change in a ritualistic fashion" (Murphy, 1991, p. 94). Curriculum debates best typify this conundrum.

Research, reform, and response.

Downey (1988) opens up an interesting debate when he states that there is a conflict between the heavy hand of politics and the equally heavy hand of academic expertise regarding public education policy change and decision making. Who should decide what curriculum is taught in public institutions is an interesting debate. Parents who homeschool want to accept that responsibility themselves and make curriculum decisions in their children's best interest.

No longer perceived as above reproach despite its revered status in the emerging century, public education survives because it has attempted to respond to societal changes in varying degrees. While no serious scholar "would advance the argument that schools in general and curriculum in particular are politically neutral" (Pinar, 1995, p. 244), parents in B.C. had no legal option to withdraw from the system, should they so choose, prior to 1989.

While it is futile to speak against a public issue or concern regarding education without the power to act, Apple (1981) advocates that "one must actually resist in practice" (p. 35), to move from a state of powerlessness to power, to take a proactive position, and to see where it leads one. Homeschooling is but one option among many alternatives to public education, such as private (independent) schools, charter schools, and voucher systems, but nonetheless a decision that abandons the public system.

Some educators advocate for reform from within the system, believing that structural change is not only possible but desirable within public institutions. Addressing the pluralistic nature of society to-day, Abowitz-Knight (1999) reflects on the difficulties related to change, specifically the creation of inclusive learning communities. Mindful of the public education system's inclination to

perceive differences as “tears to be mended or bumps to be smoothed, in other words, erased” (p. 143), Abowitz-Knight identifies important considerations regarding the nature of learning communities. Her study identifies issues that directly impact on the homeschool movement.

Public education administrators must, she believes, address a wide variety of non-academic issues that are exclusionary of some individuals based on gender, inequality, class or race, while at the same time adopt strategies to accommodate these differences. In the absence of a common place in which to dialogue and resolve problems of diversity, issues become divisive to everyone; communities, families, and children. Public education provides a community space where acceptance and inclusion become possible.

For those who would attempt to escape the public sphere by establishing “ideological spheres of sameness and security” (p. 143), she has some concerns. Her article indirectly raises questions concerning the exclusive nature of homeschooling and the benefits that are lost when issues of diversity are not addressed, as well as the advantages of perceiving difference as complimentary rather than divisive. As an important social/educational inquiry, her article seeks to define what is meant by community, and the importance placed on how society values or doesn't value difference.

Concerned also with the creation of learning communities, Prawat (1996) explains how thinking on educational reform can be nonproductive when based on non-academic ideological perspectives. Prawat criticizes the business or management model approach to education reform, and suggests reform is more than just a matter of understanding differences. He claims that “some lose this openness (for reforms) in their single-minded pursuit of methodological rigor or control” (p. 99). But he is optimistic change is possible within the public

education system.

With the more desirable establishment of supportive learning communities at the classroom and school level, Prawat believes in the potential for “collaborative relationships” (p. 107) to develop. Promoting his social constructivist approach to school reform, he states “the shift away from an ‘input-output’ manufacturing view of schooling to one based on the notion of building a community means more than a change in surface features” (p. 94). The real battle for educators, according to Prawat, is one of control, when to let go, and when to hang on.

Prawat warns that, in addition to administrative reform issues, the issue of reform within educational practice requires an awareness of how “fixation on control profoundly affects current thinking about learning and teaching” (p. 98), and that this fixation tends to “narrow and restrict” growth in educational institutions. Prawat’s type of reform advocates for a restructuring approach at the administrative level that parallels what is already known about learning and teaching, with the emphasis on commitment rather than control.

Many scholars and writers advocate for reform from within the system (Hirsch, 1996; Nikiforuk, 1982; Dewey, 1956; Postman, 1995), acknowledging the importance of a strong and responsive public school system. However, reformers such as Holt (1964,1972), Illich (1971,1973,1992, 1991), Ray (1994, 1999), Priesnitz (1987, 2000), Goodman (1962), Guterson, (1992, 1998), Gatto (2002), fear that the public system, through no fault of its own, remains incapable of reform in any meaningful way.

Holt (1972), considered the father of homeschooling, states that “public education, compulsory schooling, compulsory learning, is a tyranny and a crime against the human mind and spirit” (p. 226). The lack of what he calls “individual freedom” in public schools encourages children to develop survival

strategies that eventually stifle their intellectual growth. Holt has written extensively on the subject, and is a strong advocate for choice in education. He is also a strong advocate for home learning.

Coming from a theological perspective that also includes a commitment to the process of liberation, the need to liberate the oppressed, as well as faith in God, Illich (1971) is concerned with more than intellectual growth when he states that public education is now the “church of secular times” (p. 119). He goes on to suggest that schools have adopted the “liberal myth that schooling is an assurance of social integration” (p. 99), and that despite the good intentions of equal opportunity for all, public education alone has not, and can not, live up to the expectations of complete social integration.

Whether public schools mirror the society they serve, or are the instrument of their design, remains unclear. However it is clear that the public school curriculum is a political text because it deals “with tacit ways in which knowledge and behavior get constructed, ...(where) students are induced to comply with the dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behaviour and morality” (P. McLaren, 1994, p.191).

Arguing that schools function to reproduce the class structure of the workplace, Apple (1981) and Giroux (1981) suggest that this shaping of the human consciousness is no small power to consider. Guterson (1992) believes the ruling class, relying on a consumer driven society, reinforces this power through the evaluation criteria of grading and promotional policies within public school guidelines.

Agreeing with this argument, Priesnitz (2000) describes how the public education system uses an industrial model of processing and warehousing students that is by nature hierarchical and coercive, not a place where children can feel

comfortable enough to learn. Gatto (2002) goes even further when he blames schools for creating a climate of fear and intolerance in schools, and an impossible environment in which to learn. Gatto and Priesnitz are adamant concerning their belief that the public school system is ideologically compromised and locked into a system very much tied to the demands of the market place.

Arguing that there are more than monetary or political issues to consider when looking at public education policies, Noddings (1992) sees other structures of domination at work that are equally disturbing. Her feminist theory suggests that care and concern for others is something all political agendas should share, and that the recognition of how children grow and develop through nurturing their special/individual capabilities should be of particular concern to educators. Noddings' study helps clarify the fact that, while most school administrators would probably agree in principle to the need to respond to the individual needs of students, they have problems matching theory to practice, citing circumstances beyond their control, such as budgets, staffing, class size, and parental preference.

As governments change, policies in education respond in kind. The political and economic agenda of conservative forces within government promotes strong individualism and faith in the efficiency of the market place (Popkewitz 1991). Within the last twenty years, Pinar (1995) believes this particular vision was a reaction to western preoccupation with "economic competition with Japan and Germany" (p. 671). Based on poor international test results and the belief that progressive reforms have not worked, individuals such as Bloom (1987) and Hirsch (1996) want to rescue the school system from the failure of the liberal agenda to deliver positive test results, and an improved school system.

In order to ensure a competitive edge on the world stage, Hirsch (1996) in the United States and Nikiforuk (1996) in Canada believe that change is necessary

and that by focusing on “intellectual capital” there will be greater understanding in the world, a healthy economy, and a better life for everyone.

In striking contrast to these conservative critics, Neil Postman (1995, 1999) claims that public education advances the “false gods of economic utility, consumerism, technology, ethnic separatism, and resentment” (Postman, 1995, p. 37). In spite of their basic differences, all three authors are confident the public system is capable of change, providing the will to make those changes is present.

However, the complexity of reforming public education is fraught with uncertainties both political and economic, but few would deny that some change is needed. According to a 2002 B.C. provincial Ministry of Education district by district survey, designed for parental input to gauge the satisfaction level within the B.C. school system, most schools generally receive a passing grade. The public school system itself however, according to a question as to how well it prepares students for the real world, receives a failing grade (Sharma, 2002). Moreover, it appears from this survey that, although the individual schools are trying to bring about needed changes at the regional or local level, the system itself is compromised and not cooperating because of entrenched structural barriers.

Not all issues within the school community are related to how well students are able to acquire the necessary knowledge to be successful in the real world. Bullying incidents and the tragic murder and suicide of people within school environments have challenged perceived wisdom concerning the nature of public school communities. Supporting the emotional growth and psychological development of students at all stages of their lives requires skill and understanding, a task historically and primarily undertaken by families. Moreover, while most recognize that the relationship between the teacher and the

student is central to the learning process, according to some research (Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 1984) teachers also influence their students in significant, nonacademic ways. Caring and nurturing relationships, such as those within the family home environment, are difficult to duplicate in the public system, given time constraints, class size, and teacher/student vulnerability. The question arises as to whether or not it is psychologically prudent or even possible for a public school teacher to assume such a role, despite what the research suggests (Noddings, 1984).

With the best of intentions, public schools that attempt to take on more individual responsibilities towards students may disempower parents in the process, as well as dilute their already scarce resources. Or conversely, the public system does need to be more responsive to the needs of families and communities and to take a more active role in the entire life of the student.

This debate will no doubt continue, but it contains at its core questions regarding the aims of public education. According to Priesnitz (2000), society has the kind of public education system it wants, a predominantly institutional learning model with students as learners of selective knowledge and values that, inadvertently or otherwise, teaches them to be passive consumers of information. Priesnitz believes the aims, policies and principles of public education are vague and frustrated by “institutional barriers that impede learning” (p. 103). Her national *Life Learning* magazine, dedicated to the memory of John Holt, concerns itself with a new and more responsible way of looking at life, at ourselves, and, most importantly at childhood. Her ideas suggest there is much to gain by challenging the public system, and much to lose by protecting the status quo unconditionally.

Others suggest that a strong public system is good for all citizens. Tomkins

(1986) claims that public education has been and continues to be responsive to public needs as documented throughout history, but he goes on to say that the problems of governance remain. Some parents homeschool to affirm their commitment and responsibilities to their children, and their decision is not necessarily tied to what is happening in the public school system. Not all parents feel manipulated or coerced into accepting a system that may not meet their particular needs or expectations (Priesnitz 2000). They just feel they can do a better job. They are supported by laws that affirm their rights as parents to educate their own children, and they are encouraged by the collective affirmation they receive from other homeschoolers.

Concluding Thoughts

Homeschooling as an alternative to public education calls attention to the complex relationship between society, parents, and the public education system. The nature of the homeschool environment is central to this discussion given the significant need of children to grow, learn, and develop within supportive environments. It is also important to note that regardless of where or how they are educated, all children will eventually take their place as contributing members of the larger community.

The studies and ideas presented in this chapter suggest that there is a need for a detailed critique of the public school system as well as the homeschool environment, based on their educational, psychological, and environmental consequences. Anchored in the values of a free and democratic nation, challenging questions arise from both parents and educators as to the purpose of education, including those culturally infused messages embedded in curriculum and pedagogical practice. As a catalyst for change, homeschool practice offers an

opportunity to examine some of these questions.

The following chapter addresses the research methodology used in this study of the nature of the homeschool environment. It includes the philosophical grounding for the methods used, a chronology of research events, the methods, and a reflection on the credibility of the research, including the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The records of any society...whether architectural remains, epitaphs, civic registers, national music, or any other of the thousand manifestations of the common mind which may be found among every people, afford more information on morals in a day than converse with individuals in a year.

Harriet Martineau, *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, 1836

Philosophical Grounding for Content Analysis Approach

Through their published newsletters, homeschoolers share information, concerns, activities and ideals about themselves in an open and uninhibited manner. Their publications offer those who wish to understand this educational alternative in more depth, the opportunity to examine and analyze the texts in an unobtrusive environment. The content analysis approach is based on the assumption that those who educate their children at home create a unique culture whose characteristics are identifiable through its written communication. This approach acknowledges the complex interplay between what is written in the newsletters, and the authors themselves with their particular historical, ideological and rhetorical conventions and devices (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The writing process is itself a political act infused as it is with the multi-dimensional aspects of the culture in which it is written. The nature of the learning environment that is

revealed through homeschool newsletters is the focus of this inquiry.

Content analysis provides the opportunity to answer those questions central to this study. Questions such as, what is the nature of the educated person, what do homeschool parents want from homeschooling, what is the nature of the learning experiences parents create for their children, what kind of relationships do homeschool parents create with each other, what kind of relationships do they create with their children as a family, and what kind of resources and activities do they participate in, are addressed in the newsletters studied.

My curiosity regarding the nature of the homeschool environment began with an awareness of the adversarial tension between public and private interest in education, and the corresponding social demands of trying to create inclusive communities. Parents' objections regarding the use of specific resource materials, the nature of the classroom environment, or the teaching methods practiced within the public school environment can lead them towards alternative education options.

Grounded in humanistic psychology "in the idea that persons can, with help, choose how they live their lives, free from the distress of early conditioning and restrictive social custom" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 264), I begin my inquiry by first valuing the parent's right to choose homeschooling as an alternative to public education. I value equally the newsletters shared by homeschoolers, including the thoughts, feelings and ideas they express. Of equal importance is my belief that education can not be separated from community life, as it forms and defines the values and priorities of the society (Giroux, 1981b).

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Methodology

By choosing to analyze the content of these newsletters, two advantages over other research methodologies become apparent. “First they (written publications) possess a naturalistic, found quality because they are not created for the purpose of the study. Second they are noninteractive” (Reinharz, 1992, p.147), that is they are not affected by the process of studying them as an individual might be. In addition, writing for a particular reader (other homeschoolers) gives these newsletters an authentic, genuine quality in that the writers are confident their articles will be viewed by a receptive audience who share their values and concerns.

One of the disadvantages of this method of inquiry is the possibility of misinterpreting or misunderstanding an article and not having the author available to clarify his or her intentions. Another disadvantage that is more logistical than methodological concerns those families who homeschool but do not subscribe to or contribute to any newsletter or support group. Their voice is not being heard. For these reasons the study can not claim to have captured the definitive nature of all homeschool environments in British Columbia, but can shed light on those issues and concerns some homeschool parents share with each other through their newsletters.

An additional concern of this methodological choice is in regards to the editing and publishing guidelines established by the newsletters and what impact this has on what is included or not included in the publications. The process involved in the production of the texts is an important consideration in content analysis (Reinharz, 1992). Because content analysis can be done in complete isolation ✖ from the environment in which the product is produced, it insulates the researcher from the kind of understanding that comes when relationships are formed and

boundaries eliminated (Reinharz, 1992). This is perhaps the most limiting aspect of content analysis.]

However, each time I pick up a newspaper or magazine, or read a book or other studies I am engaging in content analysis, and my interpretation will be influenced as much by what is being said as by what is not being said, by who is saying it, by how I feel at a particular moment, and by how much or how little I already know about the topic. I incorporate this understanding in the final analysis and acknowledge my own bias in this regard. I am also aware that homeschool newsletters are written and published for a particular readership, as mentioned before, and I view this as a distinct advantage given the unconscious nature of their use as research data.

Methods

I have used inductive analysis and assembled data in a way that “the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 31) and measured, as opposed to confirming or denying a hypothesis regarding the homeschooling community. The quantitative aspect of the study includes identifying patterns and frequency of categories within the newsletters and what this might suggest about priorities within the homeschool movement.

I began to organize my research data by first identifying the names of three homeschool publications in British Columbia from an internet site and through telephone conversations with one of the editors. Not knowing in advance how active or unique the newsletters were, I felt three would give me sufficient depth to complete the study. I selected the *BCHLA* newsletter because I read the *British Columbia Home Learners Association* website and found it to be comprehensive

and informative. I became aware that one third of the list of homeschool support groups in the province are described as having a Christian perspective, and this prompted me to include one Christian publication in my selection of newsletters. The *HEN* newsletter (Home Education News) was chosen because they also had an informative website but were not a part of any provincial association.

I proceeded by subscribing to *HEN* (Home Education News), *School Bell* (Abbotsford Christian Homeschool Association), and *BCHLA News* (B.C. Home Learners Association) and requested back copies. A total of eighteen newsletters were received, six issues from each of the publications dating from Jan. 2000 to 2002. I also examined one national magazine for home educators called *Life Learning: The International Magazine of Self-Directed Learning* edited by Canadian W. Presnitz as an additional source of information. I used this magazine to compare it with the B.C. newsletters and found it was concerned with a variety of cultural/environmental issues as well as at home education. However, homeschooling was not its primary focus. During my initial contact with the editors of each of the B.C. publications I discussed the number of subscribers, the origin of their newsletter, and the specifics of their mandate. They were very supportive and interested in my research. Two expressed interest in my final report.

The newsletters were read and each article, notice, story, or poem summarized, highlighting a specific focus, issue, or concern. I also made notes as to how I felt about the ideas expressed, research I had reviewed on a particular topic, and their relationship to other social, ideological and pedagogical issues. Categories of issues related to the practice of homeschooling began to emerge as I moved back and forth among the different publications. It was a challenge to define specific categories largely because they overlapped and made reference to several different

ideas concerning homeschooling within one article. For example, articles that discussed parenting and family issues also discussed how important it was to validate the homeschool experience. However, using specific categories, I created individual files by cutting and pasting from the summaries I had written. I then looked at the files and identified key points that were raised in the articles and made note of the questions, ideas and concerns that occurred to me as I read and reread them.

My analysis began by revisiting my data and comparing my thoughts and ideas with the issues raised in other research on homeschooling and studies on educational theory and practice. From this analysis four main questions emerge that form the basis of the discussion in this study. I am aware that my analysis is informed by my own experiences and interest in alternative educational practice, my role as a parent and teacher in a public institution, and my curiosity and concerns for communities in general and children in particular.

Also central to the analysis is my awareness that the privacy of one's home is a jurisdiction ordinarily beyond the reach of general public inquiry. It is this venue, however, that becomes the virtual classroom of the homeschooler who will eventually take his/her place as a contributing member of the larger community. This low public profile leads to erroneous assumptions regarding homeschooling that does little to broaden the information, knowledge and understanding of the movement. By examining these publications some of the erroneous assumptions concerning homeschooling will be laid to rest, or affirmed, and the unique nature of the homeschool learning community in British Columbia, as defined by the newsletters studied, made clear.

Pointing the way towards additional research those questions that do arise, given the unique nature of this learning community, are identified. However, it is

beyond the scope of this study to thoroughly address these important questions, other than to suggest some possible solutions and emphasize the need for additional research.

I have written a profile of the publications studied and included the naming of specific categories that emerge from the data. A table that compares each publication based on how the articles are distributed within the specific categories, including the frequency of their occurrence, is also included. The initial summary of the publications is important because it serves to demonstrate that the overall difference between homeschool publications is minimal. Moreover, it sets the groundwork for the detailed analysis that follows as to what issues are most important to homeschoolers and how parents and children work together to create unique learning environments.

Profile of Publications

HEN (Home Education News)

The *HEN* newsletter was first published in 1990 by a Vancouver couple who wanted to homeschool their five year old daughter. At that time *HEN's* intention was to give other homeschool parents and children a voice to better articulate their concerns, ideas, and views on education and family living. *HEN* also wanted to inform families of events and activities that would support them in their educational endeavours and give home learners the opportunity to write or draw for publication. The publication currently has approximately 100 paid subscribers and circulates an additional 150 copies to interested individuals/groups, according to editor J. Massey (personal communication, May, 2002).

HEN's focus is broadly based, encouraging parents to pursue their homeschool projects and validating parent's skills and commitment to their family

and children. It publishes original stories and poems from children and parents, shares information regarding learning theories and available resources, and keeps its readership informed as to contact names of regional support group representatives throughout the province. Also it publishes advertisements, announcements and meeting notices and sponsors joint learning projects, field trips, and special events.

BCHLA (British Columbia Home Learners' Association)

The *BCHLA* newsletter is distributed to all members of the association. According to C. Erzinger (personal communication, May, 2002), the association is a well organized group involved in protecting the rights of home educators regardless of philosophical or religious motivation. It has an active website and is interested in current educational research, government educational policies, information of interest to home educators and their families including health and environmental issues, and engages in its own research. Its membership fluctuates between 300 - 500 families depending on when the yearly membership renewal drive takes place. By organizing its own research projects it is able to assess the needs and current practice of home educators in B.C. It is also interested in the progress of homeschooled children as young adults, including those who have integrated into the workplace, or moved on to post secondary education.

The role of *BCHLA* includes lobbying government ministry officials for information on education policies in B.C., and offering their input on issues that affect home based learners. *BCHLA* also engages in public relations workshops, legal defense, and support networking. Its publication solicits opinion pieces, recognizes noteworthy accomplishments of home learners, and publishes news of interest to family life.

BCHLA calls itself the “provincial voice for home educators.” As a non-profit organization registered in 1988, it is an umbrella group for all home learners in the province and is staffed by volunteer members. Originally called *CHEA*, *Canadian Home Educators’ Association of B.C.*, the name was changed to focus more specifically on the learner, as opposed to the educator, and to make clear it is a provincial organization. President and newsletter editor Colleen Erzinger states her organization is aware of approximately one hundred support groups in the province, with each group having its own intermittent newsletter.

School Bell (Abbotsford Christian Homeschool Association)

School Bell is the name of the newsletter for the Abbotsford Christian Homeschool Association. It has an active membership of 80 families, which represents approximately 430 people involved in their association. Its publication contains inspirational stories and poems, a bulletin board, association news, and coming events.

The newsletter’s focus is on supporting families as well as organizing social and learning events/opportunities for children. It is proud to note that, unlike other support groups, a large number of fathers are involved in the activities of the association. *School Bell* publishes articles that focus on issues concerning character formation and the preservation of values important to the Christian faith of its readers.

The parents who subscribe to *School Bell* share their various skills, resources, and interests with other members of the association through notices and ads, rather than writing detailed descriptive articles. Their monthly “Mom’s Only” night out includes planned activities as well as a social event. Every issue of *School Bell* contains its statement of faith, membership benefits, and a list of the

advantages of belonging to the *Abbotsford Christian Home School Association*.

Categories Defined

I looked at a total of 18 issues, 6 from each of the publications listed, summarized the articles and made notes as to the issues/topics discussed and the thoughts, ideas and questions raised. The articles were divided into separate files and categories of issues emerged as the articles were read and reread. Some categories overlap, while others are clearly about a particular issue. For example, an article that discusses dealing with self-doubts concerning a parent's decision to homeschool their children may belong to parenting/family issues as well as validating homeschooling. Also, an article that deals with validating homeschooling may also belong to the learning theories or policies in education categories. However, an article that discusses the benefits of child centered learning clearly belongs to the learning theory and practice category. As the analysis in the following chapter will demonstrate, a plethora of issues related to the principles and practice of homeschool are revealed in the newsletters. To facilitate this discussion, the following categories are identified.

1. Family and Parenting Issues
2. Validating Homeschooling
3. Socialization
4. Learning Theories and Practice
5. Creative Writing (poems/stories)
6. Policies in Education
7. Homeschool Research
8. Health and Environment
9. Notices, ads, announcements, meetings.
10. Values and Beliefs

[The following table summarizes the distribution of the categories in the three publications.]

Of the ten categories identified, the *HEN* publication responds to 7 of the categories, *BCHLA* responds to 9, and *School Bell* 5.

Table 1
Distribution of Categories
in Publications

Total No.	Categories	HEN	BCHLA	SCHOOL BELL
16	Family and Parenting Issues	13	2	1
21	Validating Homeschooling	8	13	-
4	Socialization	3	1	-
32	Learning Theories & Practice	14	7	11
123	Notices, ads, announcement, meetings	19	13	91
33	Creative Writing (Poems/stories)	15	-	18
11	Policies in Education	-	11	-
3	Homeschool Research	-	3	-
2	Health and Environment	-	2	-
16	Values Beliefs	2	2	12

Reflections on Table One

Given that the editors and authors of the articles are all homeschoolers with similar interests and concerns, any difference in focus between publications as to the type of categories they contain may be insignificant. The differences may be attributed to the preferred mandate of the newsletters or how active/energetic the membership and newsletter staff are at any given time. However, the frequency of recurring categories throughout all the newsletters is significant because it points to those issues and concerns that are most important to homeschoolers.

Only four categories are represented in all three publications, but of the three newsletters *BCHLA* addresses the widest variety of concerns, with the exception of creative writing opportunities for homeschoolers. This newsletter achieves a balanced, inclusive approach to interest its readers. More engaged in issues of public policy, as is its mandate, *BCHLA* is also more active in affirming homeschooling as a viable option for parents considering it has the highest number of articles related to this topic.

Given that the newsletters share a variety of information and resources with their readers, the large number of notices, ads, and announcements is not surprising. *School Bell*, however, has three times as many as the other publications combined. This may suggest that *School Bell* organizes more activities, shares more resources than the other publications, or that it has a more active membership. Motivated by their Christian principles, as evidenced by numerous articles related to values and beliefs, *School Bell* subscribers may feel more confident and less compelled to write or debate issues concerning socialization, learning theories, or parenting. They may feel that these issues are already fundamental to their practice of home schooling. It may also be true that they garner support and share this type of information (learning theories, parenting

issues, socialization) with each other in more direct ways (meetings, gatherings) then through articles in their newsletter.

Generally speaking, there is a relatively small number of articles related to socialization in the newsletters. Although socialization is a major concern of public school administrators, nonhomeschoolers, and social scientists (Guterson, 1998), the scarcity of socialization articles perhaps indicates homeschoolers are not particularly worried about socialization and remain secure in their belief that their child's social development is not in jeopardy. Based on the large number of notices, activities, shared resources, joint family outings, field trips, and competitions, their confidence in this regard is understandable. Conversely, it may be a sensitive issue for homeschoolers to discuss.

There is a large number of articles in the newsletters related to learning theories and the role of the teacher (parent) in the learning process. This emphasis confirms research documenting that some parents are dissatisfied with the public school system's learning/teaching practice (Basham, 2001). In addition, the child-centered approach to learning as documented in these articles reflects the progressive reforms advocated by individuals such as Dewey in the first half of the 20th century.

The majority of articles related to learning theories came from *HEN*. They emphasized the view that homeschoolers see the learning process as central to understanding the unique value and importance of the homeschool experience. These articles accord equal importance to the role of the teacher, the child, and the environment in the learning process. They view everyday events from getting up to the sound of an alarm clock, cooking meals, shopping, and interacting in community as opportunities for learning and growing.

The large number of articles related to family and parenting issues confirm

Arai's (2002) research that family unity was an unexpected benefit of homeschooling, but not an initial motivator. This large number might also suggest that preserving family unity is a concern of parents and plays some role in their decision to homeschool, which will be addressed in the following chapter. As to the future of homeschooling, Basham's (2001) claim that homeschooling may be short lived because of the changing dynamics within families as well as economic considerations, is not reflected in these articles.

The following chapter analyzes the categories in table one individually citing various articles appearing in the newsletters, although, as was mentioned earlier, the categories overlap in some respects. The questions and concerns they raise are identified and their importance to this research explained. Based in part on the research in chapter two, this analysis reflects on the values, theories, and practice of homeschooling as articulated by the newsletters, and defines the characteristics of the homeschool learning community. A sample article that describes how one homeschool parent creates a unique learning opportunity for her children, begins this analysis.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Sample Article

In the October 2000 issue of *BCHLA* a parent writes about how she used her interest and love of cheese to create a learning opportunity for her children, and extended this interest to include other children and families. The families, all members of the Boundary support group, came together to explore the historical, geographical, cultural, economic and scientific diversity of cheese – making and, by association, diversity in general. Assigned a different cheese to research, each family eventually participated in a group social and tasting event. “After a few cheesy songs from our local choir, who renamed themselves, ‘The Cheese Puffs’ ... by the end of the evening they were all ‘cheesed out’” (Hillstrom, 2000, p. 8).

Commenting on the idea of “lived experiences” as learning opportunities, Grumet (1988) believes this type of educational practice is missing from the traditional classroom, a venue that looks at curriculum objectively. The parents and children in the cheese project discovered that knowledge is found where it resides, in the places, people, time and language of the event. Living becomes an opportunity for learning when it is “linked as it is to a text, mediated and expressed through language” (Pinar, 1995, p. 378). Appreciating the importance of establishing relationships within the learning process, this sample activity is typical of how homeschoolers come together to create their unique learning community.

Analysis of Categories

Family and parenting.

Articles related to family and parenting concerns focus primarily on the need

homeschool parents have to connect with and support each other. Newsletters give parents the opportunity to lament the everyday stresses of running a busy household and to share their joys and frustrations with like minded individuals. The articles cited below describe the unique child/parent/family relationship of homeschoolers as revealed through the research data. They include the ambiguities of parenting with its requisite sprinkling of doubts and fears in addition to its rewards.

In an effort to support the family, one article lists tips for avoiding parent burnout, including how to nurture the inner self and strategies necessary for prioritizing household commitments (Massey, 2002). Another parent comments on the fallacy of perfection, suggesting there is no such thing as a “perfect life” (Snopek, 2002, p. 9). She encourages homeschoolers to relax and enjoy their children while emphasizing the importance of parents communicating with each other. Summarizing her thoughts she states “far more than we need textbooks and programs, we need each other” (p. 9).

Further evidence that the newsletters fulfill this important function for parents appears in an article entitled *September Song*, which acknowledges the doubts parents have regarding their decision to homeschool (Kelly, 2001). Speaking from the voice of experience, Kelly writes that each September she will “muster my memories, and my friends’ wisdom, and my own courage in the face of the unknown, and get on with it” (p. 4). Her comments, and many that follow, acknowledge the trepidation and uncertainty of many parents who undertake the serious step of removing their children from public school.

Parents were asked in one newsletter to send in their list of ways in which they make homeschooling work for them on a personal/family level. Many shared their frustration concerning how difficult it is to “get out of the way” of their

children's learning (Leadbetter, 2000, p. 5). These parents pointed to the conflict between their need to be needed as a parent/teacher and their children's need to be independent, self directed learners and thinkers. They resolve this conflict first by acknowledging it is a problem, and then by reflecting on how the issue of control becomes a subtle, and yet not so subtle barrier to learning because they believe it stifles the creative learning potential of children. The controls built into the public education system, such as keeping to an inflexible schedule, or using only one evaluation method, plus the use of selective resources, parallels the parents' desire not to replicate this situation in the home. However, without controls it is difficult to imagine how a nation and the public education system it is responsible for could function effectively.

Public educators experience similar but different conflicts than homeschool parents. Prawat (1996) makes reference to the conflict faced by public school educators regarding the troubling distinction between control and commitment. He believes it is necessary to come to terms with the importance of "connectedness and inventiveness" (p. 91) in learning environments. According to Prawat, the public school educator needs to loosen the reins of control and focus more on commitment to learning if he or she is serious about creating supportive environments for learners. Homeschool parents appear to be aware of this potential or real conflict within their homeschool environments as well. However, homeschool environments have a better chance of achieving this goal given the fact they are not tied to a specific curriculum or time constraints.

Not reticent about acknowledging their personal struggles, parents in one newsletter share their homeschool challenges with other subscribers. One parent describes her ongoing debate with herself between giving her children guidance and support and directing all aspects of their learning (Groner, 2002). This

particular parent writes about how she had to learn to have faith in her child's choices. As a former teacher, she also needed to understand how "to let go of the illusion of control" in so far as her child's interests and subsequent learning were concerned (p. 4).

Another parent respondent (Huntley, 2002) reflects on what kind of a learner she has become as a homeschool parent, describing herself as "eclectic, unfinished, a work in progress, lifelong (learner)" (p. 4).

Ray (1999) and Basham (2001) comment on the unexpected impact homeschooling has on the parents themselves, a personal bonus that was not part of their initial motivation to homeschool, one in which they as the parent/teacher become affected by their role in positive ways. This awareness underscores the blurring of roles between teacher and student, where both are affected by the learning process.

Knowles (1991) also found that homeschooling was becoming not just an educational alternative but a "social movement" with a strong ideological foundation. Ray (1999) found that parents who homeschooled were affected by their experiences in ways that made them critically analyze societal norms and take on the challenge of becoming lifelong learners themselves. Parents who write for the newsletters support these findings, as they take on a somewhat risky challenge. The type of pioneering spirit they convey speaks to an additional characteristic of the homeschooler as one who is looking for a better way of life, in living and learning.

The articles that reflect on parenting and family issues are characteristically frank and self-effacing. One example describes parenting as "an uphill marathon, and its rewards, although hard fought, are slow to crystalize" (Williams, 2000, p. 11). This same parent pokes fun at the work of parenting and makes reference to

what she calls the “parent olympics” where parents engage in a process of entering into competition with each other for “the best kid” (p. 11). She states that the real winners in the parent olympics are those parents whose main desire is to see that their children are happy, content and relaxed. It is assumed that all parents desire to see their children happy, content and relaxed, however, her comments appear to be expressing two main concerns. First, parenting is a more difficult challenge when children are thrust into a competitive environment such as a public school classroom where evaluation criteria measures and rewards achievement based on set guidelines that are discriminatory (Holt, 1972). Secondly, if parenting is unique it requires that the parent ensures that the child remains at the center of the learning process. This may require alternative and innovative approaches to guide rather than direct a child in any given endeavour. For this particular home educator parenting is a serious and important role where personal awareness, responsibility and accountability are central to their homeschool practice.

Because all children will eventually take their place as adults in the larger community, it may be unrealistic to expect they will never have to compete in the free market world of western democracies. It is also interesting to note that some homeschool parents remove their children from public schools precisely because they do not feel their children are challenged enough, or receive the kind of education in the public schools (Basham, 2002) that prepares them for the real world. This supports the research that states parents who homeschool have a variety of reasons for doing so, and it would be a mistake to think of them as a homogenous group. But the movement is changing.

Research regarding the eclectic profile of homeschool parents (Knowles, Marlow & Muchmore, 1992; Knowles, 1991; Rakeshraw & Rakeshraw, 1990)

attests to the wide variety of motivations and opinions associated with home educators. However, homeschool parents are becoming increasingly similar to mainstream parents who send their children to the public schools (Basham, 2001). Based on the newsletters studied, the majority of parents who write for them feel they are breaking new grounds of understanding regarding the values and rewards of getting to know their children better, of networking with parents of similar interests, giving their children unstructured time to pursue their interests, and understanding what parenting means to them. If this is mainstream parenting society has little to fear, but I suspect homeschool parents have some concerns regarding mainstream society.

The effects of encouraging a competitive nature in children needs further study as to whether or not it is detrimental to their growth and development, or simply the result of a more intense parenting style. Research critical of the public school system does suggest that it is the competitive evaluation process in public education, and the hierarchal structure of institutional learning that promotes the consumer/producer mentality in society, and general intolerance of others (Illich, 1991 ; Holt, 1972 ; Priesnitz, 2000; Gatto, 2002; Fromme, 2000; Postman, 1995). However, if the consumer/producer mentality in society lays the groundwork for social fragmentation it is not clear what ideology could minimize these effects. How might an education system measure its effectiveness in the absence of a hierarchal system?

While homeschool parents' concerns regarding the competitive nature of public education may be valid to some degree, it is not clear what kind of changes in the public system would diminish their concerns. Given the promotion of critical thinking skills in public education as well as homeschooling, social scientists are no doubt aware of the ambiguities inherent in a society that appears to value

affluence and material possessions but questions the process by which these goods are acquired. Keizer's (2001) comments point to this ambiguity within democratic states and believes that public education is a true reflection of the values and norms of the society, however contradictory they may appear.

Fine tuning family relationships, in addition to learning, is an integral part of the homeschool experience. In her article *Everything Counts* (Keane, 2001) one parent talks about the importance of including the children in every aspect of family life. Not only will they learn more by observing a wide variety of experiences but they will become "experts on how to interact with people of all ages in various situations both business and social, (and) how to be self-sufficient, independent autonomous beings" (p. 7). In researching family relationships in homeschool environments, Meyers (1994) found that homeschool parents do produce independent thinking children and have a high degree of family togetherness with less conflict than nonhomeschool families. The more time spent together enriches the parent/child bond, particularly in the early years. The homeschool parents she studied did not necessarily encourage achievement or competitiveness in their children. Homeschoolers' "social, academic and self-esteem" criteria were compared to children taught at public school. Meyer's overall conclusion suggests that homeschooling, for a minimum of two years, did produce favourable results in so far as family togetherness, independent thinking children, and less family conflict.

Her research is supported by the work of Arai (2002), Basham (2002), Ray, (1999) and Priesnitz (2000). Harmony between the parent and the child, as identified by newsletter data, does appear to be enhanced by the homeschool experience. According to Ray (1999) the length of time an individual is homeschooled has favourable academic results. However, Ray does not address

the issue of harmony between the parent and the child based on the length of time a child is homeschooled. Follow up studies regarding the parent/adult child relationship of homeschoolers subsequent to their educational experience would be useful.

School Bell newsletters specifically encourage parents to draw near to God through prayer and bible reading in order to lighten their load as busy homeschool parents. One article stresses the importance of not letting life get too hectic (Schrodeder, 2001). Tempted by the numerous activities, events and outings promoted by the newsletter notices, her suggestion represents a considerable challenge for the conscientious parent. The same could be said for the non-homeschool parent whose family life is equally challenged given the plethora of community activities and events available to all children.

Life becomes hectic regardless of plans to minimize the impact of too many activities. Unexpected events interrupt the most organized parents. *BCHLA* members acknowledge the importance of supporting each other throughout difficult times. In response to a specific request, *BCHLA* initiated a parental support group for single homeschool parents, and those requiring additional assistance related to child custody problems with former partners (Erzinger, 2002). Responding to the needs of all parents regardless of circumstance affirms the inclusive nature of homeschool support networking.

Grateful for this kind of support, one parent writes that the friendship from fellow homeschoolers assisted her in receiving important legal advice, identifying her children's rights, and adopting useful coping strategies for herself (Erzinger, 2002).

In keeping with this empathetic/inclusive approach, *HEN* included messages of condolences and support for a mother of six living on Vancouver Island who

lost all her children in a tragic fire (Massey, 2002). Readers were asked to provide written and/or verbal messages of support and encouragement to this particular mother in her time of need. This reaching out to strangers in distress is reminiscent of rural communities and the value of neighbourliness that is lost in the larger centers. Knowles's (1991) reference to homeschooling as a "social movement" confirms attempts, such as the above, to recapture that which is lost when families are fragmented and communities indifferent to the circumstances of their neighbors.

When asked what type of home educator she was, one parent summarized her comments by saying "the kind that has faith that given the opportunity, my children will teach me more than I will teach them" (Groner, 2002). Her comments speak eloquently to the different gifts each child brings to a family, be they a challenge or special talent, something that may be lost in the structured environment of a classroom where curriculum and outcomes are predetermined. Open to many possibilities, homeschoolers see the role of the teacher ideally as an interactive relationship where both are affected by the learning process (Noddings, 1992; Dewey, 1956; Grumet, 1998).

How do homeschool parents meet their children's many social needs? One study claims homeschool children are better behaved, and perform academically at or above the level of their public school counterparts (Shyers, 1992). The newsletters studied did not include articles on disciplining children or on the specifics of behaviours that may be challenging to the parent. It would be a mistake to assume that homeschool children do not have behavioural issues or need discipline like every other child. According to Reinharz (1992), the editing and publishing guidelines of publications become significant regarding those topics that are not included, however no such guidelines were evident in the

newsletters' mandate. According to C. Elzinger (personal communication February 22, 2002) the newsletter editors do exercise discretionary authority as to what is printed in the newsletters.

If homeschool children under the guidance of the parents, not all of whom are educated as teachers, are performing better academically than their peers in public schools, what does this say about teacher education, and the kinds of skills that are most useful in working with children? The work of Noddings (1992), Martin (1984), and Grumet (1998) identify the importance of learning environments that give priority to the relationship between the teacher and the student as a means of academic and social development. Their work sheds light on why homeschool parents may be successful teachers of their own children; they know them best, they love them, and they care about what happens to them.

Arai (2002) looked at some of the parenting issues associated with homeschooling, including the necessity of one parent staying home with the children, the increased number of single parents, and the reality that homeschooling may not be economically possible for some. Arai also discussed the amount of time and effort that is required to homeschool and concluded that, for this reason, the homeschool movement may have a limited future.

However, the gradual growth in the practice of homeschooling is incongruent with what appears to be the fragmented dynamics of contemporary households. There does appear to be an increasing number of parents who are prepared to make the needed sacrifices to homeschool. Homeschooling is growing in popularity (see Appendix B), which suggests there are other reasons more compelling than time and income that influence parents to homeschool. Guterson (1992) talks about homeschooling as an attempt to recapture a traditional way of life, a return to the values of family life, a less materialistic approach to living,

and an awareness of the subliminal messages embedded in curriculum.

Despite the fact that stress and busy lives are common to all families, all families do not have a direct line to other families in which to communicate regarding education or family issues. Non-homeschooling families can communicate with each other as members of their local PAC (Parent Advisory Councils) committees, or through community sports and neighborhood events, but the frequency and intensity of this level of communication and interaction may not be as frequent or consistent as that of home educators.

The homeschool environment, however, may not be in the best interest of the larger community. The newsletters give parents the opportunity to connect with and establish associations with like minded individuals. Abowitz (1999) is concerned about the nature of all learning communities. She cautions that to engage in an avoidance of differences and retreat to an “ideological sphere of sameness and security” and escape the public sphere, may be counterproductive for communities. In her article on reclaiming community, Abowitz’s goal is to celebrate differences, believing that human differences are an “indelible aspect of learning communities” (p. 146). Concerned primarily with defining a theoretical groundwork for understanding differences as part of community, Abowitz sees difference as an essential component of community making, and one in which differences can be appreciated, and where the notion of dialogue and discourse becomes the ideal. Her research seeks to minimize the private/public dichotomization of learning communities. Parents who homeschool and create their own learning communities do not appear to support the notion that the public education system can be reformed in any meaningful way.

However, parents reveal through their newsletters that they do struggle with their decision to homeschool. They draw strength from each other to persevere,

frequently under stressful situations. Whether out of a sense of parental “commitment”, a concept Prawat (1996) discusses in his study of learning communities, or an attempt to call attention to the contemporary social/cultural/political climate, the practice of homeschooling requires a more thorough study (Ray, 1999) before conclusions can be reached as to its overall implications.

The learning community homeschool parents create is inclusive of all those who wish to participate and who share their views about the importance of children, family and parenting. Homeschool parents view their choice to homeschool as an affirmation of their family responsibilities. However, responsibilities towards the larger community are not discussed in their newsletters. Their practice can be seen as a grass roots movement whose overall objective is to change the way parents view their responsibilities towards their children and families.

It is interesting to note that *HEN* had 13 articles on this issue while *BCHLA* had 2, and *School Bell* only 1. Given that parenting and family issues are integrated within many of the other categories in all the publications, I do not think this imbalance to be significant enough to suggest *HEN* subscribers are more interested in family and parenting issues than the other newsletters subscribers.

However, the articles in this category do suggest that parents’ view the quality of their parenting and family life as a significant characteristic of the homeschool learning environment . The question arises as to what is the appropriate degree of “control” educators (public school teachers, and homeschool parents) impose on their students, and to what degree evaluation criteria imposes its own type of control over students. Another question that arises, given the articles in this

category, is to what extent should public school teachers attempt to emulate the child/parent relationship in the classroom, or is the parent and teacher relationship two different albeit complimentary roles in a child's life? These questions will be discussed in the final chapter.

Validating homeschooling.

The primary objective of the newsletters, their very existence, serves to validate the homeschool experience and acknowledge the work of home educators. However, some articles do this in more direct ways. The validation process occupies considerable space in the publications studied (see table 1). Although *School Bell* does not have any articles that directly refer to this category, as was previously mentioned, they may communicate with each other in person rather than through their newsletters. The articles that do validate the homeschool experience are primarily a critique of what is wrong with the public education system, as well as testimonials regarding the success of homeschoolers and the homeschool experience. The articles in this category are significant in that they offer support and encouragement to parents in their efforts to homeschool their children by documenting notable success stories. They also shed light on some of the concerns parents have with public education, and make reference to their struggles for recognition and acceptance.

Reviewing John Gatto's book *The Underground History of American Education*, Hodges (2000) lists the names of famous historical figures who never attended public school, including George Washington, Thomas Edison, and Andrew Carnegie. This validates the homeschool option in that it points to important historical figures that never went to public school and who made great contributions to society. Gatto discusses how public schools stifle the learning

process, and he accounts for the failures of the public school system in terms of its support for the principles and models of scientific management, the Industrial Revolution, and the Prussian military.

In another article, Gatto's (2002) understanding of education views personal growth as an essential component of the educational process, referring to those qualities students possess that promote good interpersonal relationships and are good for the nation. He goes on to say that this kind of growth and development becomes more difficult in "corporate schooling" (p. 11) because students are trained in habits that include the uncritical consumption of knowledge. One example he cites describes the kind of thinking that teaches marketing clout, an approach that currently permits companies such as "Microsoft...(to) set back computer progress a full decade with its superior marketing abilities" (p. 11). He laments the fact that "learning to think, learning to have the courage to think, becomes difficult ... given that schools tend to create the chemistry which produces the common characteristics of modern schoolchildren: indifference, dishonesty, boredom, malice, treachery, cruelty, whining, self-pity, boasting, greed, and a short attention span" (p. 12).

When all the destructive circumstances that affect children and young people are laid at the door of the public school system it is not surprising that some parents look for other alternatives. I suspect the problems are more complex. Public schools need to be assessed in concert with all the other cultural and societal influences that work against communities and the healthy growth and development of young people, such as movies, video games, fragmented families, unemployment, poverty, and poor role models. It is not surprising that the books homeschool newsletters review are critical of the public system. However, some public educators find no conflict in a system that encourages achievement and

competition, and they are not apologetic about the perceived aims of the public education system. There is considerable room for debate on this issue, but the debate will need to take place in the public arena, a location homeschoolers believe to be already compromised by the education system.

Parents looking to validate and affirm their homeschool choice need to be exposed to a variety of views and opinions on the subject of the aims of public education. Hirsch (1996), in his book *The Schools We Need*, claims that, in order to survive and maintain a competitive edge on the world stage, schools need to focus on “intellectual capital” in addition to critical thinking and character formation. He contends a healthy economy is good for everyone. His particular approach to educational reform is traditional and includes the valuing of some knowledge over others. Hirsch’s book was not reviewed in the newsletters, but it does speak to those individuals who may want to find ways to change the present system based on concerns that are both pedagogical and ideological. However, Hirsch would differ on many grounds with homeschoolers including their approach to child-centered learning.

To further validate the homeschool choice, Canadian Wendy Priesnitz’s (2000) latest book *Challenging Assumptions in Education* was reviewed in a newsletter article. She suggests the public education system “was designed to fight and win political and economic wars” (p. 5) to the detriment of children’s learning. Erich Fromme (2000), in a similar approach, is quoted as saying that the concept of progressive education has been debased and never did develop according to proposed reforms of the early part of the 20th century. Believing that the public system is a coercive and persuasively subtle manipulation based on economic systems, he feels students are taught to be mere consumers of goods, and that education should have the more important function of character formation based

on the promotion of critical thinking skills.

Newletters explore the electronic media to find information to validate the homeschool experiences. An online magazine, *Human Resource Management* quotes Robert Grossman (2001), who comments on a chain of American restaurants that actively recruit and hire homeschoolers. Describing them as “highly mobile with an entrepreneurial spirit” (p. 7), he quotes statistics from Knowles (1991) and Ray (1999) that say home learners are extroverts, not introverts, and that they have qualities of self discipline not found in publicly educated employees.

The “entrepreneurial spirit” that apparently exists in homeschooled children does not appear to be congruent with what has been previously stated as to how homeschoolers feel about the destructive impact of a competitive approach to learning and evaluation. However, another aspect of the “entrepreneurial spirit” not discussed in the article concerns how those looking for a “niche” in a workplace that has no competition can use this approach to further their ends. In addition, if homeschool children are uniformly distinguishable because they possess the quality of self-discipline, as mentioned in the article, it further validates the homeschool choice, and provides a new focus for research as to how this desirable quality can be encouraged in all children.

The July 2000 issue of *BCHLA* discusses different jurisdictions in Canada, the U.S., and Europe that have statutes in place related to homeschooling. These articles demonstrate how important it is for all homeschoolers to find ways of supporting each other. The statutes range from complete freedom to homeschool, as in B.C., to compulsory public school participation, as is the experience in Germany (Elzinger, 2000). One article identifies parents in Quebec who ran the risk of being jailed under the *Director of Youth Protection* authority if their

children were not enrolled in public school. This type of information solidifies parents' resolve to continue to support each other across the country and to lend their expertise where needed to assure free choice in education is legally respected.

Despite the difficulties within some jurisdictions parents persevere and continue to find reasons to support their homeschool choice. Several articles appearing in a column titled *Student Spotlight* (Elzinger, 2001) list the accomplishments of homeschoolers: science awards, spelling bee awards, music awards, chief scout awards, and international competitions. One article reports the large number of homeschoolers accepted into post secondary education programs (Erzinger, 2000). Local and national newspapers and magazines are also quoted in articles that praise and support the practice of homeschooling.

As the editor of *BCHLA*, Elzinger cautions home educators about a provincial program to entice homeschoolers back into the public system through distance education and electronically delivered educational programs. Elzinger (personal communication, May 10, 2002) states that parents should be aware that these programs will have an effect on the parents' control over content, unlike those parents who homeschool under section 13 of the *School Act* who can legally define their own educational plans. She also mentions 18 pilot projects in the province with a funding base of \$3500/student, as well as district controlled home based learning projects, which receive \$4-6000/student. These dollars are received by the district and it is not difficult to understand, given the money involved, why districts would want to encourage all home educators to take advantage of the district run programs. Home educators not involved in the district programs attract approximately only \$300.00 per student to the district coffers.

The public education system does not support the practice of homeschoolers on an equal funding level, nor do they publicly acknowledge that homeschoolers save the system a great deal of money in teacher salaries and other costs. This issue serves to reinforce the commitment homeschoolers have to continue in their work, despite the fact their efforts are not valued financially. It is not clear, however, what additional funding for homeschoolers in a particular district would do for those who practice homeschooling, other than an indication that their contributions to education in general are valued equally, and are beneficial to children.

Aware that homeschooling may not be for everyone, one article was prepared to look at a situation that challenged the benefits of the homeschool experience (Massey-Nesbitt, 2000). Written by a 12 year old homeschooler who wants to go to a regular school so “people will know who I am”, this young girl states her mind very clearly and feels she is missing out on everything as a homeschooler. Readers were asked to respond to her dilemma, give her suggestions, and write about their own struggles. For her it was quite simple, “it just doesn’t work for me anymore” (p. 15). Her age and comments in the article indicate she wants more control over her life than she is presently allowed, and that her limited interactions with her peers was the most compelling reason for her to want to attend public school.

Validating her own home school experience, a parent quotes W. B Yeats who says, “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire” (Easton, 2001, June). She goes on to state that, when homeschooling becomes a drudgery, something is wrong and that it is time to let Jesus help redirect the parent’s path for both wisdom and strength. This article is interesting because of where it appears. *BCHLA* is a nondenominational newsletter inclusive of all

ideological and pedagogical beliefs, and it validates and supports not only the decision to homeschool but the motivation behind it as well.

Based on the articles studied in this category, homeschool parents appear to be well informed and ever vigilant in identifying information that is supportive of their position on homeschooling, and in this way they create solidarity and faith in their learning community. However, the articles reviewed under this category do not examine or critique authors or issues that directly challenge homeschooling or evaluate ongoing reforms in the public system. Efforts to improve the public system, such as workshops to prevent bullying in schools, special education resource rooms for learning disabilities, and including parents in the decision making process through advisory councils, do not appear in the newsletters but would address some concerns homeschoolers express that are associated with the public system. Public schools are attempting to reform the system to make it more responsive to the needs of children and parents. The question arises as to how flexible the public school system can be in terms of addressing issues of importance to some parents. Until such time as parents feel their individual concerns are acknowledged by public schools, homeschoolers will continue to feel justified in their decision to homeschool their children.

Socialization and learning theories.

Homeschoolers' concerns regarding the socialization of their children is discussed only briefly in the newsletters. For this reason I have combined this category with those written on learning theories, a much larger category and one that is significant to homeschoolers.

Arguing that socialization is a complex question and poorly understood, one parent (Russell, 2002) discusses how socialization in school is too restrictive,

negative, and elitist. Stating that schools are misguided regarding the socialization process, she offers the view that schools do not promote good manners or respect for common areas and disregard the belief that all people are created equal. She comments that “learning acceptable social skills in school is as ridiculous as learning nutrition from a grocery store” (p. 4). Her article appears to give schools most of the blame when behaviours and attitudes fall below acceptable community standards. However, the changing dynamics within family relationships and the pluralistic nature of communities are equally influential in determining behavioural patterns. Social influences on children are pervasive, as was previously mentioned, including movies, video games, magazines, entertainment outlets, computers and the advertising industry. Perhaps the degree to which these influences impact on children’s lives depends on an accumulation of many factors including the vulnerability and susceptibility of individual children.

In another article (Dobson, 2000) a parent challenges the criticism that homeschoolers confine their children to home and limit their social contacts. He claims that the opposite is true, and that it is schools that confine students to the classroom, limiting their social contacts. Dobson goes on to list 20 activities that contribute to a homeschooler’s socialization, such as field trips, teaching co-operatives (parents share their expertise with other parents), athletic leagues, orchestras, visits to parks, museums, farms, factories, hospital visits, and tutoring services. Citing what he refers to as the “wrong kind of socialization” Dobson is critical of the behavioural standards of public school classrooms and makes reference to more vulnerable children and how he or she is subjected to pressures that are damaging and destroy confidence. Much is expected of the public school system. More community involvement in schools is needed and would

promote better understanding of the issues. Parents, community organizations, community agencies, and churches could coordinate the task of supporting children that are having difficulties, but this task would require cooperative efforts that are not currently in place.

As a well published critic of public education, John Holt (2000) writes in one article that socialization doesn't actually happen in school. He quotes studies that confirm that the process of "tracking" which directs children into levels of competency groupings as they enter the school system is damaging to children, and that this type of segregation very much runs along family socio/economic lines. Believing a kind of "caste" system is at work in school, Holt suggests that once a child is labeled intellectually it is almost impossible to move away from that label and move ahead socially or academically. Applying this same type of labeling practice to the issue of race discrimination, he states that the public education system unknowingly contributes to the violence and conflicts within groups by practicing the tracking process. A combination of related causes may be to blame, but it is difficult to deny that serious problems do not exist in public school environments in this regard.

In the limited number of articles on socialization, homeschool parents offer important insights into not only the kind of socialization that goes on in public schools, but also to what degree socialization is a byproduct of the education system. The sociological theory of functionalism believes the aim of school is to socialize students so that they conform to accepted community norms and standards of behaviour (Feinberg & Soltis, 1992). However, the pluralistic nature of contemporary society becomes problematic for the public system (Guterson, 1992). It is here that the issue of mediating public and private interests in education becomes more challenging in as much as it requires a greater

understanding of the interdependent nature of community and the value of difference. This issue also exposes the need for both individual and collective transformation if harmony in communities is to be a reality.

Guterson (1992) believes the kind of socialization that goes on in school to-day is frequently detrimental to a child's social development despite efforts to mediate the effects of bad influences. The powerlessness of schools to prevent bullying and violence in schools, despite prevention programs, attests to this phenomena. Homeschool parents are right to be discouraged by what they see occurring in public school classrooms, and they are also right in taking comfort from research that suggests homeschooled children are less confrontational and have fewer social problems than children who are not homeschooled (Bashram, 2002). The welfare of all children however needs to be addressed collectively.

Research by Noddings (1992) and Grumet (1998) believe there is considerable work to be done if public school classrooms are to become the nurturing places they should be. Parents who write for the newsletters have their children's best interests in mind, but will that be enough to change the direction of communities that are struggling with serious social issues? Homeschool parents create an environment for their children that they feel is an improvement over what public schools are currently offering. Their experiences put the public system on notice that it can do better in socializing children in ways that are supportive of their social development.

Learning and socialization are not separate issues according to Noddings (1992) and Grumet (1998). Stepping back and allowing her children to decide when they were ready to read was an important consideration for one homeschool parent (Whitehead, 2000). The author of this article believes schools force children to learn to read when they are not ready and thus cause frustration, anxiety, and a

dislike of reading that lasts a lifetime. When venturing into the alien world of the text for the first time, children need to feel safe and unjudged, according to this parent. The increase in the number of children with learning disabilities related to reading is not fully understood, but what is apparent is that all children do not learn using identical methods. All aspects of the learning process, including the biological, sociological, environmental and psychological influences on the child, have an impact on his or her success as a learner (Guterson, 1992).

Summarizing what it is parents can do to encourage learning at home, one parent submitted a list that includes encouragement and advice when requested, the provision of experiences and materials as needed, and the inclusion of children in daily activities, reading about brave independent individuals, and most importantly trusting children to know what it is they want to know (Leadbetter, 2000). Perhaps through no fault of their own, schools do not have time to get to know the children they write report cards about, suggests one parent (Martin, 2001), a criticism many public educators would support.

Another parent discusses the endless opportunities for learning in the course of everyday activities. For example, learning about food at the supermarket, cooking in the household kitchen, gardening in the yard, listening to music and doing the banking were discussed as excellent learning environments (Keane, 2001). Homeschool parents, based on the articles studied, believe children will watch, and listen, and eventually participate in learning once their curiosity is peaked. "Get our of their way" a parent warns (Leadbetter, 2000).

Parents explore a variety of ways in which to teach their children. One parent talks about how she involved her children in a lesson on First Nation's history (Massey-Nesbitt, 2001). Inspired by a particular landscape, she examines how the local band first settled in the area and how they lived off the land. Another

article by a parent who was a professional race car driver discusses strategies for learning. He believes children are better learners than adults because their minds are so open and flexible (Bentley, 2001). He suggests that everyone goes through four stages of learning regardless of what is planned, or what task is demanded. Stage one is called unconscious incompetence, the next stage is conscious incompetence, the next conscious competence, and the last, unconscious competence. His particular learning theory begins with the parent/teacher's ability to listen and observe, and then to facilitate that which is already of interest to the child.

A Bowen Island homeschool group went on a geological exploration trip and visited a museum near Squamish to learn about the mining industry. They brought with them two geologists who could answer questions and explain the on-site equipment (Keep, 2002). This type of experiential learning is already accepted in theory and practice in public education, but does not occur as often as it might due to logistical and monetary considerations.

Several articles discuss different learning theories and their application in practice. One article discusses the difference between right and left brain hemisphere learners (Silverman, 2000). This article includes strategies to support sequential and spatial learners as well as those relying on either auditory or visual stimulation.

The Waldorf Approach to learning was discussed by an interested parent who listed the main characteristics of the Waldorf School (Ferrari, 2000). Completely child centered, this approach includes allowing the student to have the same teacher for the first eight years of schooling, utilizing the imagination as the most important learning tool, delaying the reading process until the third grade, and promoting a strong interest in nature and music.

Another learning theory article discusses the difference between the Classical and the Unit Studies approach to learning. The classical approach, known as the Trivium, teaches in three stages, the grammar, dialectic and rhetoric stages, hopefully producing students who are then capable of teaching themselves. The unit studies approach takes a theme or topic and delves into it deeply over a period of time blending different subject areas as students move through the material. Classical advocate Dorothy Sayers, a British writer and medieval scholar, was quoted in the article lamenting the fact that schools were not teaching students to think for themselves. The strengths and weaknesses of these two different approaches were discussed in some detail.

Comparing the textbook/workbook approach to homeschooling as well as the unschooling approach, both practiced by homeschoolers, one article points out the advantages of each (Erzinger, 2001). The textbook/workbook approach follows a process of sequential learning beginning with a subject laid out for ease of use. The unschooling approach has little or no structure and allows the student to find out what they want to know. The article describes how parents are not always confident regarding their decisions as to how to approach their commitment to educate their children, but what is clear is that parents have no desire to make home like the school classroom.

Another parent's contribution to the articles on learning theories wonders why children must learn at a set age and time in school, as opposed to what interests them most along the way. Why not wait until the child is ready (Hughes, 2000) one parent states. She goes on to list the names of community resource people available to support the parent when more advanced learning is demanded as the child grows. In this way parents never have to feel they are cheating their children because they lack specific knowledge. Parents can encourage their children to

look for mentors that will inspire and encourage their interests, whatever they might be.

Science projects that can be done at home are listed on a homeschool website on a weekly basis. It introduces children to challenging concepts and questions such as why does one rotten apple spoil the whole bushel, how do rainbows form after the rain, and how to explore different textures, smells and taste (Krampf, 2000).

Sandra Dodd, a former teacher in the United States and a supporter of homeschooling, states that a new philosophy is needed to understand that learning is like breathing, and can't be turned off or on as schools imply. She goes on to suggest the act of living is itself educational, and that all experiences need to be viewed in ways that integrates learning with life. (Subler, 2000). Homeschoolers have come to realize that while their own efforts may not be enough, the combined efforts of other homeschoolers can compliment their efforts through the sharing of resources and information.

In reflecting on the articles related to learning theories, I believe that homeschoolers do not differ from public school educators in their understanding of the issues. The difference lies in the ways in which homeschoolers are prepared to practice the theories they believe will work best with children. Public schools, for a multitude of reasons I have already alluded to, do not have the luxury of always acting on what they know is best for children. Opinions do differ as to the most effective way of teaching a child to read, for example, and proponents of different theories usually have research to support their claims. It is the sign of a healthy system when new as well as old theories are utilized in schools, however, it is not the intention of this paper to weigh the pros and cons of different learning theories, but merely to draw attention to the fact that

homeschool parents are free to select that which they feel is best for their child.

Studies suggest homeschoolers perform academically at or above the level of public school students (Hepburn, 1999; Ray, 1994; Priesnitz, 1990; Basham, 2001). While there is evidence to support the homeschool approach to learning, unlike the public system, homeschoolers have the additional advantage of knowing their child best. How the untrained teacher, such as the parent, manages to achieve the kind of success he or she does becomes a challenging question for teacher training programs in post secondary institutions.

Notices, ads, announcements, and meetings.

The networking between homeschoolers includes a variety of notices and announcements on topics and issues of interest. It would not be productive to list all the notices, advertisements, and competitions, suffice to say this form of communication represents the backbone of the publications. A list of the generic type of notices follows. *HEN* is the only newsletter that lists the names of support groups in the province in each publication. It is not a complete list but does include on average 34 groups, 10 of which are designated as Christian groups. Parents motivated by Christian principles represent one third of the homeschool population in B.C. and this fact validates the inclusion of *School Bell* as research data. However, because it is not required to identify your personal beliefs when registering as home educators, the precise number who are motivated by Christian principles can be confirmed only through independent research. The support groups listed also include contact names and numbers.

The following list of notices represents a summary of those announcements that appear in the newsletters. The nature of the list is significant in that it reveals what is important and what is not important to the homeschool community. As

well, the nature of this list calls attention to how the data collected in content analysis methodology becomes significant to social inquiry (Reinharz, 1992). This particular type of data helps define the nature of the homeschool environment in much the same way as advertisements in magazines or newspapers convey a philosophy and focus of the publications themselves. I have grouped the notices based on their main focus and reflected on what their inclusion in the newsletters suggests about the homeschool learning environment.

Summary of Notices:

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Group</u>
-Children's conference in May 2002	Networking
-Launching of an e-zine (email magazine) for homeschoolers	Networking
-Updates on Quilt making project	Networking
-Mock Greek Olympics	Physical Ed.
-Mom's the Word (Actor's workshop for mothers)	Networking
-Creative Art Camp	Art/cultural
-Pen Pals	Networking
-List of Regional BCHLA reps	Networking
-B.C. Homeschool Convention	Networking
-Creative Curriculum Consultants	L. Resources
-Tutoring Services	L. Resources
-Books for sale	L. Resources
-Learning Link Store	L. Resources
-Fitness Education Leadership Conference	Physical Ed.
-Reports on AGM	Networking

-Homeschool Ranch Camp	Field Trip
-Sports Day	Physical Ed.
-Music for Young Children material	Art/cultural
-Recyculum 2001, used resource material	L. Resources.
-Museum invitation	Field Trip
-Seminars arrangements for parents/families	Networking
-Rock and Gem show	Field Trip
-Academic Fair in science and social studies	L. Resources
-Scholastic Book Sales	L. Resources
-Christ-centered lodgings for travelers	Networking
-Children's choir auditions	Art/cultural
-Workshop on writing skills	L. Resources
-Mom's Night Out	Networking
-Field Trips	L. Resources
-Sign language, science, writing and skiing lessons	L. Resources
-Volunteers needed for events (child care, etc.)	Networking
-Violin lessons	Art/cultural
-Horse Program - lessons on those interested in horses	L. Resources
-Learning center coop for Mom's (share your talents)	L. Resources
-Vancouver Symphony field trip	Art/cultural
-Skiing and Snowboarding Lessons	Physical Ed.
-Shows at Arts Center	Art/cultural
-Christmas Party Organizing Committee Meetings	Networking
-Looking for French teacher	L. Resources
-Homeschool gymnastics	Physical Ed.
-Writers Club	Networking

-Link Points at library	L. Resources
-Online math curriculum	L. Resources
-Manning Park outing	Field Trip -
Valentine Party	Networking

The two groups that represent the highest number of notices are networking and learning resources.

Networking had 15 general notices. Despite their relative isolation from other homeschoolers, parents who subscribe to the newsletters have developed opportunities for reaching out to each other in ways that serve to solidify and reaffirm their shared values and concerns. As one of the largest groups, these notices express the need homeschoolers have to continue to validate their homeschool decision, promote events, broaden the homeschool experience, share information and nurture a sense of fellowship between families and children. Advertising a conference, a social event, starting up an e-zine (electronic magazine), offering pen pal contacts, working on a quilt project, attending a convention, lobbying MLAs, creating new contacts and volunteering opportunities, all promote networking between homeschoolers.

This type of notice can be found on any bulletin board at community centers in cities or towns within the province. The difference, however, lies in the fact that community notices do not overtly share any particular value or concern but merely serve to attract those interested in a particular activity or event that live within a particular geographical area. It is assumed that most geographical areas in British Columbia are essentially pluralistic. However, homeschoolers, by virtue of the fact their notices are circulated in a homeschool publication and are accessed only

by other homeschoolers, appear to share a different concept of community. The homeschool learning environment is a unique community. Parents' specific values and priorities become central to their relationships with each other as established through their communication networking.

Research on the significance of what we have come to understand about the nature of communities (Abowitz-Knight, 1999) suggests there is much to gain from the richness of difference within communities. Attempts to restrict the concept of community to what she refers to as "ideological spheres of sameness and security" (p. 143) is troubling in that it does not allow for discourse on issues of fundamental importance to all citizens such as how to best support every child's social and academic development and create strong communities. Should the opportunities be made available to them, homeschoolers have much to share with public school educators regarding their positive experiences as home educators. Conversely, public schools are situated in a good position to promote strong inclusive communities. I believe that given ongoing reforms in education, the public system can be expanded to compliment, accommodate, and integrate alternative approaches to learning, including homeschooling.

Learning resources also had 15 general notices. This group includes those notices that directly relate to the acquisition, sharing, or sale of educational material, as well as tutoring/mentoring opportunities. Homeschool parents become familiar with the material their children use as they guide them throughout their learning. However, parents in the public school system are at a disadvantage in that they may be unaware of the variety of supports and resources available to them should they wish to assist in their children's education. Or, they may have grown accustomed to accepting without question resources the schools

select for use in a particular subject.

Taking a more active role in their children's education, parents newly arrived from China and living in Washington State request the identical text books their children use in school in order to follow their progress in a particular subject area (Guterson, 1992). Given that curriculum decisions are ideologically driven (Pinar, 1995), parents that take an active role in their children's learning by scrutinizing their resource material become more aware of the selective nature of knowledge itself.

These particular notices in the newsletters acknowledge that homeschool parents' may not have all the resources their children will need and that their expertise in certain areas may be limited. The learning resource notices also serve to promote networking between homeschoolers given the relative isolation of learning at home. Website addresses in the newsletters offer parents additional support in finding the right material for their children's needs.

Public school parents rely on teachers, school administrators and government policies in education to identify the appropriate learning materials/resources that are required for a particular subject or exercise. Motivated by parental concerns, homeschool parents wish to control what, where, when and how their children have access to learning material, and in so doing create a learning environment that meets not only their individual needs but promotes their values as well.

I believe that where we may disagree as to what specific topics, resources or issues are most important to learn, we can still appreciate that learning is an essential and unavoidable part of living. How we make educational choices is a worthy debate as Soltis (1989) suggests when he states it is towards the "high moral ends that the human enterprise of education in a democratic society is negotiated and directed" (p. 124). The learning resource opportunities in the

newsletters represent the concern, commitment, resourcefulness, and curiosity of homeschool parents, tied as they are to their families' lived experiences. As evident from the number of notices, ensuring a wide variety of learning opportunities are available to their children is a strong characteristic of the homeschool learning environment.

With Physical Education at 5, Arts and Cultural events at 6, and Field Trips at 3, the above groups of notices confirm that the homeschool learning environment is inclusive of a variety of opportunities to support the child in his or her growth and development. Participating in these events exposes the child to a wide variety of community activities, various professions, work placements, music education, and sporting events. Besides becoming familiar with the community in which he or she lives, the child comes in contact with those individuals who will further their socialization and integration into the larger community. Homeschool parents apparently are no different from their public school counterparts in that they recognize the importance of involving their children in music, art, sports, commerce, and industry. However, homeschoolers are free to make choices when and where they wish in pursuit of their individual interests.

The notices, ads, announcements and meetings draw an eclectic picture of the homeschool environment. I believe that besides identifying the values and activities of this unique learning environment, the notices confirm that despite the relative isolation of homeschooling an important link is established through the newsletters that is crucial to the quality and continuation of their practice.

Creative writing.

Poems and stories, imaginative and emotional, are included in the *HEN* and *School Bell* newsletters. Fairy tales and adventure stories from children are enthusiastically written and articulate, assuming they are not edited. Parents as well submit their contributions of poems and stories. An imaginative romp in 19th century Barkerville (Iredale-Gray, 2000), and a story about a procrastinating beaver (Whitney, 2001), remind readers of the creative potential of the imaginative child. Field trips are described that include a trip to a meat store, a museum, an old fashioned village display, a corn maze, a funeral home, and a coke factory (*School Bell*, Dec. 2001). Such experiences take advantage of the rich diversity found within particular geographic areas.

Poems written by adults in *School Bell* focus on inspirational and religious content. Names of poems include “*Circle of Friends*”, “*A Love Letter from our Father*”, “*Heaven’s Grocery Store*”, “*A Piece of a Peaceful Day*”, and “*Take Time to Heal.*” They are all published on the opening page of the *School Bell* newsletters.

HEN published a poem which reminded readers that “mindfulness and centering can all too often become just another extension of one’s ego” (Canil, 2002, p. 12). This poem also suggests that parents need to “let it be, let it go, and see the wonders grow” as opposed to thinking they must control all aspects of their children’s lives, by imposing their own thoughts and ideas on them.

Another poem titled “*On Tu B’Shevat*” (Shatzky, 2002) celebrates a Jewish holiday that speaks of the wonder of trees, and by association, the metaphoric connectedness of each person to the earth. The poem invites the reader to

understand the relationship between trees and all living entities while encouraging the reader to have faith and let go (like the leaves) of that which they think they need the most.

Imaginative stories from children include fairytales about a mystery key, a ring, and magic. One article announces the beginning of a project where stories are written together in a round robin writing event with many participants. A parent wrote about how important it is just to write, anywhere, anytime, and that the act of writing can bring great personal awareness and satisfaction (Martin, 2000). This particular article can be viewed as an affirmation of the newsletters themselves, an awareness that being able to write and express what is on one's mind is a fundamental need and one that can have a lasting affect on the writer as well as the reader.

I believe the creative writing category, particularly the poems, provide the reader with inspirational examples that create yet another way to encourage parents in their work as homeschoolers. They are expository in that they express a particular philosophy that values children, families, character formation, and being true to one's ideals. Sharing one's imaginative ideas is part of the learning process. Children are given the opportunity to share their stories and create bonds with other homeschool children who appreciate a good story, and at the same time build their confidence. This further supports their psychological and sociological growth by developing contacts outside the home.

Policies in education, and homeschool research.

Appearing exclusively in the *BCHLA* newsletter, 11 articles describe the current legislation on homeschooling and the importance of becoming involved in public hearings on educational practice in B.C. One article by a parent details the

challenging process of getting credits for grades 11-12 subjects for university entrance. Details include what academic subjects qualify for this assessment (Yim, 2002).

Some newsletter articles advise parents on how to prepare their children to enter post secondary education, and what type of courses are equivalent to entrance requirements at various universities (Sokoloff, 2002). In addition, those home learners interested in credits towards a B.C. high school diploma are given the specifics regarding proper documentation required in some subject areas (Erzinger, 2000). Homeschoolers' efforts to access post secondary institutions acknowledges that acquiring an education eventually entails conforming to some form of established academic criteria.

As to what constitutes the "educated" person, Soltis (1989) makes reference to the fact that education is a moral enterprise. However, given that morality is increasingly an individual domain in contemporary society, it is difficult to make the connection between a public system of education and an individual conception of what is a moral life. It is complex questions such as the above that the practice of homeschooling brings to the attention of all educators.

Another article in the newsletters lists the names of universities in Canada and the admission requirements applicable to homeschoolers. This article encouraged homeschoolers to write the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), while another article recommended admission on the basis of the mature student requirement.

In her *President's Pen* column, the *BCHLA* editor suggests it is important for homeschoolers to keep in contact with local MLAs, ask questions and solicit their support for home educators, attend conferences and workshops about rights and laws, and understand the requirements for additional options such as distance learning (Erzinger, 2000).

As is their mandate, *BCHLA* lists websites where the latest research and information on education policies and practice can be read and downloaded. These research articles include Bashram (2002) and Arai (2002) in addition to another study regarding a media/use audit reported in the *Vancouver Province*, May 28, 2001. The media/use audit found that surfing the net was seriously disruptive and exposed teens to a clutter of pornographic and violent images/information. It also found that 85% of teens have more than two media sources in their bedrooms, and that homework comes last as education takes a back seat to entertainment. There was no separation of the teens into homeschooled or not homeschooled, but the article did inform parents as to the downside of technology, despite its advantages as an educational tool, particularly for home learners. This article affirms the belief that schools can not be held responsible for all the negative influences children experience in community life. It also points to the fact that homeschool parents are in a much better situation to monitor their children's use of technology than are non-homeschoolers.

The articles in the newsletters on research in the field of homeschooling were not extensive as table one indicates, but they do provoke some interesting questions as to what do we mean when we refer to the characteristics of the educated person. Research as to how many parents homeschool all their children, or just those in elementary school, or only those children who want to would be helpful. Also an important research question would be whether or not children are homeschooled for their entire schooling or periodically, based on the children's or parent's wishes.

Health and environment.

Only two articles, both appearing in *BCHLA*, bring to the reader's attention the need for parents to be informed on health and environmental issues, such as how the body's immune system works and the benefits of a good diet. As an additional note, a Canadian National magazine on homeschooling called *Life Learning* edited by Wendy Priesnitz (2002) devotes considerable energy to understanding environmental and cultural issues and respecting all life forms, in addition to the benefits of home education. Its first edition covered topics such as *From Womb to World: Rethinking Self-Education*, *Learning Disability: A Rose by Another Name*, and *Living Outside the Cultural Norm*.

Children in public schools are exposed to issues related to the environment and health concerns. This confirms my belief that the public education system is responsive to the need to reform the system based on cultural concerns that involve contentious issues. However, I do not draw any conclusions regarding the newsletters based on the small number of articles in this category. Research does support the fact that homeschool parents begin to critique cultural norms as a direct result of their homeschool experience (Ray, 1999), however, based on the newsletters studied, they do not yet write about them in great numbers.

Value and beliefs.

This category refers to those articles that specifically call attention to the values and beliefs of the authors. However, the values and beliefs of homeschoolers are integrated throughout all the articles indirectly. A three part series of articles (Moitozo, 2000) by an American motivational speaker discusses values, beliefs, ethics, problem solving, and decision making. These issues, he

suggests, are best handled by the parent. He talks about the importance of modeling behaviour and separating learning from credentializing, the process by which public schools move children through grades as they grow, and conclude they are “educated.”

An interesting article about character and fate explores the nature/nurture argument and what is referred to as the “heliocentric” approach to understanding learning (Whitehead, 2000). This word is meant to suggest a turning towards the light as plant species do, and to be nourished by the light, or the knowledge that one acquires. The author believes children need to have positive experiences in their lives to bring them happiness. In addition to their genetic predispositions, she believes children eventually become products of both biological and environmental influences. Given the importance of both influences, she believes all children can and need to understand their capacity for joy so as to eventually spread joy and make the world a better place.

Values important to homeschoolers are listed in another article. They include supporting children to develop critical thinking skills, creative problem solving, a sense of history, basic math skills, writing skills, literacy, decision making, and the ability to manage money, communicate effectively, respect others, and have compassion for others (Poulin & Greene, 2000).

School Bell includes in every issue a list that itemizes the values and beliefs of the Christian faith. The front cover of each newsletter states “All your sons will be taught by the Lord and great will be your children’s peace.” Isaiah 54: 13-14. Many parents who are members of the Abbotsford Christian Homeschool Association credit their faith and trust in God as the most important value they have as homeschoolers, without which their work would be considerably more stressful than it already is. Members of the Abbotsford Association stay focused

on their families and children and do not concern themselves with political and legal issues directly, or with issues that compare their experiences with the public school system.

The values and beliefs of homeschoolers are central to their practice, but based on the articles studied they are implied rather than stated directly. Perhaps one of the reasons homeschoolers do not write a great deal about their values (with the exception of *School Bell*) is that they are fairly confident other homeschoolers share similar values, and where articles do occur they merely reaffirm values important to homeschool practice.

Questions for Further Research

I have suggested throughout this analysis that the practice of homeschooling and the learning environment parents' create for their children raises important questions central to educational theory and practice that go beyond the scope of this study. I have also suggested that the practice of homeschooling has much to commend it, and while I have identified some issues needing further discussion this does not in any way diminish the importance of this alternative education practice. Parents who homeschool are to be commended for their energy, work and success. The following questions have arisen as a result of this study, and will be summarized below.

1. What are the institutional barriers that control and limit public educational reforms known to be beneficial to children's intellectual and social development?
2. To what extent should public education practice attempt to emulate the child/parent relationship in the classroom, or are the teacher and parent roles different albeit complimentary aspects of a child's life?

3. To what degree should public schools, given the pluralistic nature of society, strive to accommodate the individual preferences of parents regarding their children's education?
4. In matters of education theory and practice, how can homeschoolers be responsive to the broader concerns and interests of public schools and society?

The first question I raise represents my concern for the appropriate use of control in the learning process, including administrative control. The practice of homeschooling sheds some light on the control issue in that homeschoolers assume control over their children's education by guiding rather than directing their learning, and by being more flexible about when, where and how their children learn. This approach is problematic in public schools.

My second and third question concerns the relationship between the student, the teacher, the school and the parent. These two questions are grounded in my concern for all children and the responsibilities all citizens have to ensure children are safe and given the educational opportunities that will serve them well as contributing members of society. Based on the concerns expressed in the newsletters regarding family and parenting issues, it appears that the public school environment is one that will not or can not support some parents in ways that they feel are important to them. Homeschool parents do know their children best, love them unconditionally, and desire to see them succeed in all aspects of their development. Given the right opportunities these parents have much to contribute to the public education system based on their unique approach to building learning communities and caring relationships.

My final question concerns the collective interests of society and how these interests might be served in an atmosphere of cooperative dialogue between public

education and the alternative practice of home educators. Based on my belief that communities are interdependent social constructs that value both similarities and differences, I suggest communities survive best when they share accomplishments, accept responsibilities, and work to resolve differences and adversities. This analysis confirms that the homeschool learning environment is a unique form of community with specific ideals and principles, however, what may be lacking in this learning environment is a common arena in which to dialogue and resolve those issues and concerns of the larger community.

In the concluding chapter I put forward some suggestions as to how these questions may be addressed.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Opportunities for Change in Public Schooling and Homeschooling

The newsletters studied have provided evidence of a vibrant, active, and committed homeschool environment in British Columbia based on the homeschool parents' ability to make contact with one another and to make choices about the nature of their own learning community. Forming a web of interrelated interests, resources, and support, the newsletters themselves play a significant role in contributing to the creation of this alternative learning environment.

I am aware that not all who homeschool subscribe to or contribute to the newsletters cited, nor are all submissions to the newsletters published. It is also true that networking between homeschoolers is also available through the internet, personal contact, and related electronic technology. However, other than homeschoolers, a structured communication network is not in place to facilitate similar interactions between non-homeschoolers that could offer parents mutual support regarding concerns and interests in the education of children, including the debate between education theory and practice. I suggest that the homeschool experience can be viewed as an important catalyst for change in understanding the possibilities of a public/private partnership in education, a community of learners whose interdependent nature serves to minimize the difficulties caused by differences, and at the same time complement each others efforts.

The coming together for shared learning experiences is made more difficult in classrooms because "in schools we become civilized by denying attachment" (Grumet, 1988, p. 181) as well as our intersubjectivity. The concept of intersubjectivity (Bowers, 1984) focuses on the individual's responsibility to a

larger entity than the self and suggests that “through socialization the individual’s intersubjective self is built up in a biographically unique way, and serves as the set of interpretational rules for making sense of everyday life” (p. 36). The attachment experience shared by homeschoolers, so evident in the newsletters researched, grows from and through the social networking they create. A deeper understanding of the cultural/societal effects of homeschooling could be pursued through examining this intersubjectivity, a more complex phenomena, but a topic intimately related to educational/social inquiry.

In his book *At Home In The Universe*, Stuart Kauffman (1995) compares scientific complexity and the theory of self-organization to our desire and ability to make connections with each other. “We lack a theory of how the elements of our public lives link into webs of elements that act on one another and transform one another” (p. 299). This statement establishes the possibility of focusing on similarities rather than differences in public life. Communication appears to be the key to establishing these links, reminding me of a comment by Walt Whitman that states we come to understand ourselves to the degree we recognize ourselves in others.

Homeschool parents are attempting to learn about learning from each other as was evident in the newsletters, and they are transforming themselves in the process of creating those links, by broadening their understanding of the issues while teaching their children at home. This study suggests that the parents use their newsletters to keep them in touch with other homeschool families and to facilitate their mutual interests.

Homeschooling is a significant movement for two important reasons. Firstly, as an alternative to public education it is an ever present reminder that there are many ways to serve the educational needs of children. One size does not fit all,

and the practice of homeschooling has demonstrated through research cited in this study that their children can succeed academically and socially outside the public school environment.

Secondly, perhaps most importantly, homeschoolers remind public administrators of the importance of networking with all the stakeholders in education: children, parents, families, administrators, communities, employers, researchers, politicians, religious leaders, and artists, all partners in the web of life and all affected by the other's decisions. Their example assists educators in understanding that a coordinated effort is required to accomplish worthwhile goals, and that schools alone can't be expected to take on this responsibility by themselves.

Change, should it occur, will require an openness to other ways of knowing and an appreciation of the "otherness" beyond the self. Speaking at a conference Huebner (1993) observes:

Students study to do what someone else requires, not for their own transformation, a way of "working" on their own journey, or their struggle with spirit, the otherness beyond them. Just as therapy is work - hard work, but important for the loosening of old binds and discovering the new self; so too should education as study be seen as a form of that kind of work.

The information revealed in the newsletters can "loosen old binds" and make conscious the implications embedded in language, in the lived experiences, in values, and in the networking that takes place between people. Homeschoolers' "work" has much to commend it as it points towards the other "work" yet to be undertaken, the coming together of public and private interests in education and

the realization that all is relational and everyone is the beneficiary of those efforts.

If more inclusive communities are to be established, homeschoolers may wish to maintain or re-establish contact with public schools in order to familiarize themselves with the concerns in public education, in addition to some of the innovative programs and events that are being implemented to resolve these issues. Homeschoolers may also wish to become involved in district school boards where issues of concerns are raised and debated. Efforts by public school administrators to include homeschool parents in the PAC (Parent Advisory Committee) meetings may help broaden the debates on educational issues. In addition, public schools are in a good position to facilitate the sharing of resource materials for all educators, including homeschoolers.

Further research needs to be undertaken related to homeschooling in order to clarify the issue of inclusive community building suggested earlier, and the mediating of differences between public and private interests in education. Another issue that would benefit from additional research is the complex nature of the child/parent relationship and how it relates specifically to a child's educational, psychological and social development. I have always had mixed feelings about the merits of the evaluation and promotion criteria practiced in public education. This is an area that has already been studied but because there has been a lack of opportunities for meaningful reforms, little change has taken place. Perhaps in light of the increase in alternative options for parents such as homeschooling, renewed efforts in this regard can begin. Further research in these areas may prove challenging but given the urgent need to find better ways to educate and support children, it is hoped that the "work" ahead for all educators will have a ripple effect on communities and individuals alike.

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Appendix A

BILL 67 - 1989

(Chapter 61)

SCHOOL ACT

Division 4 - Home Education

Home education

12. A parent of a child who is required to enroll in an educational program provided by a board under section 3 may educate the child at home or elsewhere in accordance with this Division and shall provide that child with an educational program.

Registration

13. (1) A parent of a child who is required under section 12 to provide the child with an educational program shall register the child on or before September 30th in each year with

- (a) a school of the parent's choice that is operating in the school district in which the parent resides.
- (b) a regional correspondence school providing services to the school district in which the parent resides or with the minister if no regional correspondence school provides services to that district, or
- (c) an independent school operating in British Columbia.

(2) If a parent wishes to register his or her child with a school in accordance with subsection (1), the board having jurisdiction over the school shall ensure that the administrative officer responsible for that school registers the child.

(3) A School that registers a child under this section shall provide the child with access to educational services in accordance with the regulations.

(4) A person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence.

Power to report

14. (1) A person who believes that
- (a) a child who is required to be registered under section 13 is not so registered, or
 - (b) a child who is being educated in accordance with section 12 is not receiving an educational program

may report that belief to the superintendent of schools for the district in which that child resides.

(2) On receipt of a report under this section, the superintendent shall take such action as is required by the order of the minister

(3) No action lies against

- (a) a person making a report under subsection (1), or
- (b) the superintendent in respect of an action taken under subsection unless the report is made or the action is taken maliciously.

Province of British Columbia

Government Document from Ministry of Education. Governance and Legislation, faxed from (250)953 4908 to (250) 579-5726, August, 2002

Appendix B

Ministry of Education - Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools
Home School Enrollments and Costs

Year	Public	\$\$	Independent	\$\$	Total	\$\$
89/90	770	646,095	925 (900)	383,888	1,695	1,029,983
90/91	958	858,811	1,538 (1,380)	721,222	2,496	1,580,033
91/92	878	824,025	2,002 (1,922)	567,183	2,880	1,391,208
92/93	615	297,087	2,610 (2,461)	783,869	3,225	1,080,956
93/94	782	189,116	3,471 (3,212)	551,323	4,253	740,439
94/95	705	173,830	3,686 (3,385)	578,015	4,391	751,845
95/96	726	180,137	4,079 (3,773)	637,309	4,805	817,446
96/97	672	167,500	4,253 (4,059)	687,073	4,925	854,573
97/98	637	159,250	4,176 (4,023)	660,968	4,813	820,218
98/99	494	123,500	4,149 (4,033)	688,615	4,643	812,115
99/00	518	129,500	4,021 (3,928)	683,812	4,539	813,312
00/01	373	95,581	3,769 (3,707)	669,059	4,142	764,640
½	311	77,750	3,351 (3,302)	680,274	3,662	758,024

N.B. The figures in parenthesis represent the number of home schoolers registered with funded independent schools.

(Public school figures obtained from School Finance)

Figures received from Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Education Governance and Legislation, August, 2002

Appendix C

Home-Based Education in Canada An Investigation and Profile

March, 1990

by Wendy Priesnitz

Summary of Selected Survey Questions

Parents' Education:

- high school graduation 26%
- at least one with college graduation 66%
- at least one without high school graduation 7%

Occupation Of Income-generating Parents:

- self-employed 29%
- librarian/teacher 6%
- professor 21%
- technology & trades 20%
- farmer 3%
- armed forces 2%
- entertainer/artist/writer 7%
- sales/service 5%
- pastor/missionary 4%

Annual Family Income:

- less than \$30,000 51%
- \$31,000 to 60,000 41%
- more than \$60,000 8%

Location:

- urban (city) 41%
- rural (country, small town, village) 59%
- outside of Canada 2%

Motivation for Home Education:

- academic/education philosophy 72%
- to preserve religious values 25%

- location in relation to schools 3%

Attitude Towards Public System:

- against for philosophical reasons 49%
 - against due to bad experience 6%
 - indifferent/neutral 31%
 - no opinion 10%

Conflicts With Public System:

- yes 18%
 - no 82%

Children Undergone Psychological Testing:

- yes 15%
 - no 85%

Children Undergone Standardized Academic Testing:

- yes above average results 32%
 - yes below average results 4%
 - no 64%

Parental Opinion of Standardized Testing:

- unnecessary 38%
 - harmful/inaccurate 26%
 - indifferent/in favour 36%

Use of Formal Home Study Curriculum:

- none 42%
 - Bible-based program 30%
 - provincial correspondence course 5%
 - other commercial curriculum 22%

Home Education Style:

- formal teaching 32%
 - informal unstructured learning 30%
 - child-directed teaching 20%
 - combination of formal/informal 18%

Note: the above percentages may not add up to 100% in all cases, due to rounding off of numbers and multiple answers to individual questions.

March 17, 2003

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The School Bell
Tracy and Joachim Weiss
8265 Kudo Drive
Mission, B.C.
V2V 7J5

Dear Tracy and Joachim,

I am writing this letter in regards to our verbal discussions around the use of School Bell as material for my study on homeschooling. It has been brought to my attention that as a researcher I am required to obtain formal approval for the use of your newsletter for the purpose of my study.

I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause but would appreciate your consent in the form of a signature at the bottom of this letter. I have enclosed a stamped envelope for the return post. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Joan McNamee
884 Seneca Place,
Kamloops, B.C.
V2B 6S3 (250) 579-5786

As former editors of The School Bell we gave approval to Joan McNamee for the use of The School Bell for the purposes of the study as described in the above letter.

Date Mar 31 / 03 Signatures 

March 17, 2003

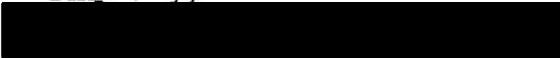
The Editor : BCHLA News
Colleen Erzinger
1150 Johnson Road
Penticton, B.C.
V2A 1W7

Dear Colleen,

I am writing this letter in regards to our verbal discussions around the use of BCHLA News as material for my study on homeschooling. It has been brought to my attention that as a researcher I am required to obtain formal approval for the use of your newsletter for the purpose of my study.

I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause but would appreciate your consent in the form of a signature at the bottom of this letter. I have enclosed a stamped envelope for the return post. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Joan McNamee
884 Seneca Place,
Kamloops, B.C.
V2B 6S3 (250) 579-5786

As editor of BCHLA NEWS I hereby give formal approval to Joan McNamee for the use of BCHLA NEWS for the purposes of the study as described in the above letter.

Date MARCH 17 2003 Signature 

March 17, 2003

Appendix F

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The Editor : HEN
Jacqueline Massey
Box 242
Bowen Island. B.C.
VON 1G0

Dear Jacqueline,

I am writing this letter in regards to our verbal discussions around the use of HEN as material for my study on homeschooling. It has been brought to my attention that as a researcher I am required to obtain formal approval for the use of your newsletter for the purpose of my study.

I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause but would appreciate your consent in the form of a signature at the bottom of this letter. I have enclosed a stamped envelope for the return post. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]
Joan McNamee
884 Seneca Place,
Kamloops, B.C.
V2B 6S3 (250) 579-5786

As editor of Home Education News I hereby give formal approval to Joan McNamee for the use of HEN for the purposes of the study as described in the above letter. ✱

Date March 25/2003 Signature [Redacted]

* Please note that the articles in HEN do not constitute or represent any official or formal statement on behalf of the editors or publishers of HEN. Furthermore all content is copyright of the author or authors and cannot be reprinted without permission.

University of Victoria - Human Research Ethics Committee

Certificate of Approval

<u>Principal Investigator</u> Joan Kathleen McNamee Graduate Student <u>Co-Investigator(s):</u>	<u>Department/School</u> EDCD	<u>Supervisor</u> Dr. Robert Fowler	
<u>Title:</u> Principles, Practice, and Publications: A Content Analysis of How British Columbian's Homeschoolers Create Their Learning Environment			
<u>Project No.</u> 089-03	<u>Approval Date</u> 24-Mar-03	<u>Start Date</u> 24-Mar-03	<u>End Date</u> 23-Mar-04

Certification

This is to certify that the University of Victoria Ethics Review Committee on Research and other Activities Involving Human Subjects has examined the research proposal and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Subjects.



J. Howard Brunt
Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions/minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of "Request for Continuing Review or Amendment of an Approved Project" form.

**APPLICATION FOR WAIVER OF ETHICAL REVIEW OF HUMAN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA**

Submit one original and three (3) copies to the Office of the Vice-President, Research. Handwritten applications will be returned immediately.

Use of the accompanying Ethics Application Guidelines is strongly encouraged in completing this form.

OFFICE USE ONLY:

VPR File No.:	89-03	Received:		To Chair:	
Sent Rev1:		Sent Rev2:		Notice:	
Return Rev1:		Return Rev2:		Annual Review:	MAR. 23, 04

Special Review Information:

Reference Information for funding source

Committee Chair Approval Signature: Janet AstorchDate: March 24/03**A. APPLICANT INFORMATION**

Principal Investigator:	Joan Kathleen McNamee
Department:	Education: Department of Curriculum and Instructions
Mailing address:	884 Seneca Place, Kamloops, B.C. V2B 6S3
E-mail address:	mcnameedon@hotmail.com
Phone number(s):	(250) 579-5786

Are you: Faculty Staff Graduate Student Undergraduate Student

Thesis Supervisor (if applicable)

Name of Supervisor:	Dr. Robert Fowler	Department:	Curriculum and Instructions
E-mail address:	rfowler@uvic.ca	Phone:	(250) 721-7803

B. PROJECT INFORMATION

Title of the Project:	Principles, Practice, and Publications: A Content Analysis of How British Columbia's Homeschoolers Create Their Learning Environment
-----------------------	---

Have you applied for funding for this project? No Yes (if "Yes" complete the following):

Source(s) of funding:	Exact title of grant(s):

Other Investigators on this project:

	Name(s)	Affiliation(s)	E-mail address(es)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Note: Investigators are NOT employees (research assistants etc.)
If investigators change, provide this information to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

C. SIGNATURES

Your signature indicates that you agree to abide by all policies, procedures, regulations and laws governing the ethical conduct of research involving humans.

Principal Investigator: _____

Date: March 17/03

The signature of the supervisor below indicates that the supervisory committee has approved the student's proposal and that the supervisor has assisted the student in the preparation of this application.

Student's Supervisor: _____

Date: March 19/03

The signature of the administrator indicates that adequate research infrastructure is available to conduct this research

Chair/Director or Dean: _____

Date: March 19/03

If you downloaded this file, you can complete it on your computer. You will only have to print off your final version and manually complete the "tick-boxes".

D. REQUEST FOR WAIVER

It is important to note that waiver of the requirement for ethical review is only permitted in very limited circumstances and such a waiver does not release researchers from any other applicable legal obligations such as violating a person's right to protect privacy, fulfilling copyright requirements etc.. If your study does not meet one of the following requirements, you will be required to apply for ethical approval.

Which of the following best represents the reason you believe this research qualifies for a waiver from ethical review:

- This research is limited to the use of materials that are in the public domain and for which all applicable copyright, patent, or other legal requirements and approvals have been either fulfilled or received. Databases must be supplied to the researcher in a completely anonymous form (attach a description of the materials you will use, all required approvals or permissions to use these materials and describe your methods).
- This research involves a living individual in the public arena, or is about an artist, based exclusively on publicly available information, documents, records, works, performances, or archival materials (attach a brief description of this research, including the name of the individual who will be the object of the research, your methods, and the types of materials you will be using in the course of the research).
- This is a quality assurance study, performance review or testing within normal educational requirements (attach a description of who will participate in the study, the context of the study, your methods, and copies of materials such as questionnaires etc.).
- This study involves observation of participants who are seeking public visibility such as speakers at public political demonstrations, public meeting etc.(attach a description of the types of people involved, the context in which the research will be conducted and your methods).

Provide details of your project on a separate page

Principles, Practice, and Publications: A Content Analysis of How British Columbia's Homeschoolers Create Their Learning Environment

This study is a content analysis of three British Columbia publications, circulated within the last two years, that provides an unobtrusive look at the unique nature of the home school environment in British Columbia. Homeschooling, as an alternative to public education, has shed its image as a social or educational aberration, and is attracting increased numbers of mainstream parents to the movement.

Through their published newsletters, homeschoolers share information, concerns, activities and ideals about themselves in an open and uninhibited manner. Three different publications in British Columbia were identified through an internet site and telephone conversations with the editors followed. After receiving a total of eighteen newsletters, six from each publication, a thorough examination of the articles contained in the newsletters was undertaken. Categories of concerns and issues, as articulated by the newsletter articles, were then identified and analyzed. Questions arising from the analysis are discussed and conclusions drawn as to how B.C. homeschoolers create their learning environment.

VITA

Surname: McNamee

Given Names: Joan Kathleen

Place of Birth: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1998 to 2003
University College of the Cariboo	1991 to 1996
Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing	1957 to 1960

Degrees Awarded:

B.A.	University College of the Cariboo	1997
R.N.	Holy Cross Hospital School of Nursing	1960

Honours and Awards:

None

Publications:

None

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Title of Thesis:

Principles, Practice, and Publications: A Content Analysis of How British Columbia's Homeschoolers Create Their Learning Environment

Author



Joan McNamee

April, 2003