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AUTHOR Williams, David D.; And Others  
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents selected results of some initial attempts to describe and understand the home school phenomenon. Two types of research activities investigating the nature of family curricula are reviewed: (1) informal descriptions of home schools and their participants' reflections as already published, and (2) several case studies of families at various stages in the home schooling process. Based on this review, first impressions of answers to the following three questions are presented: (1) Why do home schoolers choose to teach their own children? Six categories of reasons are discussed: unsuitability of children for school, desire of parents for control, socialization, conceptualization of the learning process, ideas about content, and personal interest. (2) How do they conduct their home schools? Brief descriptions by parents are presented, along with field notes from observation and a summary of trends and patterns. (3) What are some of the participating parents' major concerns with this approach to education? Concerns discussed include fear and self-doubt, social isolation, exhaustion, separating home from school, balance between structure and spontaneity, measuring progress, spouse roles, undesirable child behaviors, the teaching of independence, materials, children's socialization, insufficient resources, and apparent lack of progress. The paper concludes with implications for school districts, teachers and administrators, researchers, and legislators. (TE)

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UNDERSTANDING HOME EDUCATION:  
CASE STUDIES OF HOME SCHOOLS

David D. Williams  
Larry M. Arnoldsen  
Peter Reynolds

Brigham Young University

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## UNDERSTANDING HOME EDUCATION:

### CASE STUDIES OF HOME SCHOOLS

Legislatures and citizen groups increasingly pressure the public schools to improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of education. In response, productivity studies abound and a variety of alternative means for schooling children have been suggested and tried. It was estimated in 1980 that 25% of the school districts in the United States provided an alternative school or educational program of some form (Ott, 1980).

Parent involvement in the education of their children has been a component of some of those alternative programs. Hence, the literature on the nature and effect of parent involvement on student learning has been growing. According to a recent review of that literature (Henderson, 1981):

What becomes very clear from reading the research is that families provide the most important learning environment of all. If parents are not encompassed in the learning process, schools—and school children—are being deprived of an essential source of support. If there is no continuity between home and school, it becomes difficult for a student to integrate the separate experiences (p. 7).

Essentially, all the systematic research has focused on the role of parents and home as supplement to the efforts of school people. Lightfoot (in Sinclair, 1980 as cited by Henderson, 1981, p. 8) "suggests that the proper inquiry is not how to involve parents in the school, but how to reinforce and mutually adapt the curricula of families and schools." To meet that challenge, school people need a more complete understanding of the nature of family curricula. Disciplined inquiry is needed into what parents teach their children, how children learn in the home environment and how schools can build upon the foundations created at home (or compensate for weak foundations):

Of particular interest is the growing number of families who are choosing the extreme alternative of schooling their children at home. Although accurate estimates of the number of home schooling families are unavailable, it is clear from news accounts in recent years and the proliferation of home school support organizations that more and more parents are choosing to teach their children themselves.

A review of the empirical literature rigorously describing and analyzing home schools and characteristics of participants identified only two dissertations (Benson, 1981; Gustavsen, 1981). Benson described his own home school and Gustavsen surveyed 150 families regarding their reasons for conducting home schools, the general nature of their schools, their definitions of success, their "lifestyle" characteristics and some demographic characteristics.

The rest of the literature consists of news articles, reviews as in the Kaplan (Divoky, 1983), a "documentary" book (Deakin, 1972), anecdotal collections of self-reported stories and impressions from parents, as in

John Holt's newsletter Growing Without Schooling, criticisms of traditional schools (Goodman, 1964; Illich, 1970) and recommendations of materials and procedures for schooling at home or in private schools (Holt, 1981; Kinmont and Kinmont, 1981; Moore and Moore, 1979).

Because of legal implications, which vary tremendously from state to state and country to country, home schoolers generally have been reticent to identify themselves. Likewise, because of researchers' focus on learning in schools and not in homes, this educational phenomenon has been ignored by scholars.

This paper presents selected results of some initial attempts to describe and understand (in the Verstehen sense of the word) the home school phenomenon. After a brief description of the methods used, our first impressions of answers to three questions will be presented:

1. Why do home schoolers choose to teach their own children.
2. How do they conduct their home schools.
3. What are some of the participating parents' major concerns with this approach to education.

Many other issues need to be addressed; but given the restrictions on presentation time, other papers will discuss them.

### Methods

A series of research projects is being mounted to investigate the nature of family curricula, beginning with a focus on the curricula of families who plan to or are currently teaching their children at home. By increasing understanding of these extreme cases, it is hoped that schools and educators can better approach the task of cooperating with all types of parents in the education of children.

Two types of research activities were used this year:

1. Compilation of informal descriptions of home schools and their participants' reflections as already published. A variety of outlets for information about home schools have developed in recent years. Although anecdotal in nature, a review of this information provides valuable clues for understanding home schools and for generating hypotheses regarding their operations.
2. Several naturalistic (case) studies of families at various stages in the home schooling process. Families who were just starting as well as veteran home schoolers were observed and interviewed over a ten month period to qualitatively capture thorough descriptions of their activities and the meanings behind those behaviors. Listed below are some of the activities that were conducted in doing the case studies.

- a. Access to several home schooling families was obtained; workable and ethical contracts were arranged.
- b. Productive roles and ethical relationships with informants in the families were developed.
- c. Many visits to the homes were made and observations were recorded.
- d. Many interviews (both formal and informal, structured and unstructured) were conducted with parents and children.
- e. Critical documents such as educational materials used, records of learning activities kept, etc., were located and analyzed.
- f. Fieldnotes summarizing data gathered and tentative analyses made during and after fieldwork were maintained and reviewed regularly.
- g. Controls such as triangulation, prolonged engagement on site, reviews of fieldnotes by people under study, and other ideas suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1982) were used. These safeguards were intended to make the work defensible and to facilitate hypothesis generation and negative case analyses.

In addition to more case studies including increasingly broader samples of home schoolers, two other procedures will be used in this research series in future years.

1. A series of survey interviews and questionnaires. Building and expanding on what is learned during the naturalistic studies, a much broader sample of parents and children will be interviewed in depth. Results will be used to test and refine the hypotheses about home learning and parent roles that are generated by the naturalistic studies. Questionnaire items will be created out of these activities to be used in reaching a broader population later in the research series.
2. When the home schoolers' criteria of successful schooling are identified and operationalized, comparisons of effectiveness in terms of those criteria and conventional measures (of achievement, attitudes, performance, etc.) may be made using quasi-experiments. The exact nature of these studies will be clarified after extensive baseline information is collected using the activities listed earlier.

### First Impressions

Results from the scanty literature on home schools and from our case study fieldnotes will be combined in this proposal of likely answers to the three questions listed above (why? how? and concerns?). Most studies in education have attempted verification of hypotheses and testing of theories. This research, as a beginning to a series of inquiries into the nature of family curriculum practice is intended to generate hypotheses and theories. The results reported should help clarify the field of interest as we begin to identify the issues of greatest importance. The descriptions made here

in response to these three questions form our initial working hypotheses, to be modified as we continue to conduct these and other case studies of home schools.

### Why Home School?

Although parents state many unique reasons for choosing to begin a home school and teach their own children, six categories of reasons have been identified thus far in our study. Any given family may cite one or several of the reasons within or across the six categories. Here they are grouped for convenience in reporting. Individual cases must be reviewed to understand the interaction of subsets of reasons for each family. Each category is described briefly below.

Child seems unsuited for school. For some reason or other parents decide that their child is unsuited for participation in a conventional school. The child may either be bored because he or she already understands the material being taught at the school or the student may be behind and unable to comprehend or keep up with the other students. Or the student may be having social problems with teachers or with other students. The point here is that the students are judged to need individualization and the parents feel the schools are unable to provide the individual attention and help that their child needs.

The parents of one family we studied had intended to teach their children only until they were ready to go to school. They began at an early age to teach their first child the alphabet, how to read, how to add and subtract and so on. When the child was old enough to go to school the teacher told the parents their daughter already knew everything they were going to teach that year. She suggested they enroll her in a private school where she might receive better instruction. After a few weeks, the private school administrators suggested that the parents ought to teach her at home because whatever they were doing there was much more productive than what he felt the school could provide. Indeed, when this youngster recently enrolled in college at the age of 14 after having been home taught all of her life, she found that even college instruction was boring compared to her individual home studies in which she had dealt with the material that was being presented in college at a much more intellectually stimulating level.

In contrast, another pair of home school parents we are studying withdrew their child because he was having trouble in math and nothing that the teachers at the school tried seemed to make any difference. The parents finally decided they could teach their child and give him the individual attention at home he seemed to need but the school could not provide.

In a third home school, two of the children have had difficulty adjusting socially. They have been physically assaulted several times by other students and have found it difficult to participate in many of the school activities. The reasons for their social maladjustments are unclear. The parents postulate that because these two children usually know more of the answers to teachers' questions than the other students in their classes and they are quite small for their age, other students mistreat the children revengefully. The parents

did not want to withdraw these two children and continue to send their other children to school. They see home school as their only recourse to sending their children to be beat up and socially rejected at public school.

Parents and children want to feel "in control." Sometimes parents note that they found themselves, their children and their lives revolving around the children's school schedules and activities rather than around the home. They desired to be home-centered and to give the children responsibilities in the home, but the children's activities were focused on school and school-related purposes. Pulling children out of the school to have home school is a means of shifting the control from the school and the school structure to the home and to the parents.

As Divoky (1983) said, some "home schoolers are simply working for self-sufficiency in a society they perceive as too technological and too institutionalized." School is one of the first institutions children encounter and some home school parents want their children to be more independent of institutions. Some, in fact, want to feel independent of all government institutional control. They believe schools which receive federal funds, are "under government control."

Some home schooling parents are frustrated. They believe they have tried to reform the schools to better meet their expectations and have been unable to make meaningful changes. By pulling their children out and devising their own schooling, they feel much more in control. They don't have to change the entire school system to achieve the educational ends they desire.

When children are not spending four to six hours in school everyday, they have much more time to do other things. Home schoolers prize the freedom that their children have to explore some of their own interests in a wide variety of settings. Parents claim that when children have this freedom, they feel more in control of what they learning and what they are spending their time doing. Of course the amount of control parents maintain and the degree to which children are in control varies considerably from home school to home school.

Socialization. One of the major criticisms of home school is that children in home schools will not be able to take advantage of the socialization process associated with conventional schools. In fact this is one of the major reasons many home schoolers want to take their children out of the school. As one home schooling mother said, "we want our children to be peer-independent." These parents want their children to be family-socialized, and have their family be the center of the children's social world, at least until they are old enough to be on their own socially. This attitude does not preclude children from associating with other children; most parents do encourage social encounters, either with other home schooling families or with neighborhood children when those children are not in school. The socialization issue presents an example of parents wanting to be in control. They want to feel that children enjoy being at home associating with siblings rather than having their entire social life centered around peers.



Also, most home school parents see home school as a means of protecting their young from the rivalry, ridicule, competition, and conflicting moral values they believe are associated with much of the socialization that takes place in schools. Realizing that the children will encounter these characteristics of our modern society at some point in their lives, they choose to protect their children as long as possible in their home environment.

Conceptualization of the learning process. Home schoolers tend to value independent thinking, learning how to learn rather than learning facts, and giving learners the responsibility for their learning. Although these same attitudes toward learning are possible in schools, home schoolers tend to believe they are not encouraged. Rather, they perceive schools to be focused more on transmission of information and testing of children to see if they have captured information. They would rather emphasize helping children learn to love to learn, feeding their curiosity, encouraging inquisitiveness, and building independence from teacher structure and direction.

Not all of these parents make this choice based on experience with the schools. Some of them choose to home school before their children are old enough to go to school. However, nearly all parents who home school grew up going to school themselves. Based on their experiences in school they believe that the ideas about learning practiced in schools are not compatible with their own.

Ideas about content. Parents who decide they are going to teach their children at home have to believe they are capable of teaching their own children anything that the schools can teach. Often they purchase commercially-distributed materials, (usually workbooks), or they use materials that the schools lend to them. They proceed with the assumption that they can supervise the children's use of workbooks and textbooks as well as teachers can, especially since they can give them individualized attention which the teachers cannot give.

Many home school parents disagree with the things that are taught in the public schools. They believe home school provides them a means of teaching the morals and values that they prize without having to unteach values they perceive the schools are teaching their children that they do not want to emphasize. For example, many home schoolers are anxious to include the concepts of God, country, honesty and freedom in the daily lessons they provide their children. They are under the impression that these values are not emphasized in the public schools and that in their place, other values which they often categorize as "secular humanism" are implicitly taught through the text materials that most schools use. Certainly not all home schools have these attitudes but many do.

Some home schoolers also believe that children's interests are valid and should be seriously considered in planning a curriculum. They design their home schools to be responsive to the interests of their children and to allow their children to pursue their personal interests freely. These parents anticipate that eventually their children's interests will lead them to want to understand and learn nearly all the things the parents would want the children to learn anyway. Certainly not all home schoolers have this attitude, but it is present in several of the home schools we are studying.

Personal interest. Finally, some parents simply like to watch their children learn. They enjoy being parents and enjoy learning with their children. They believe they are not stunting their children's growth by keeping them home so they as parents can be involved in the children's education. Often, when parents are pressed as to why they are really teaching their children at home when many of their reasons for doing so could be overcome through cooperation with schools, they report that the major reason they are making the sacrifices that attend such a huge responsibility is that they have felt impressed to do so. They "just feel that it is right."

### How Do They Do It?

"If you ask home schoolers to describe a 'typical day,' they will laugh in your face! There are no typical days in our home school." That warning from one of the first home schooling parents we interviewed proved to be very true. Every home has its idiosyncracies and every home school is unique. But to provide some description of how home schools are conducted without presenting a book of detailed case reports, three types of summaries are presented here:

1. Brief descriptions by parents of their home schools.
2. An example of fieldnotes from an hour of observation at a home school.
3. A summary of trends or patterns noted across many home schools.

Parents' descriptions. The following descriptions were made in response to the questions: "Please briefly describe what your home school is like?"

1. We begin each day about 6:00 A.M. The children write down or at least decide what their plans are for the day (they are much more apt to follow through if it is written down). After breakfast they begin with music; they all play the piano and two have other string instruments. They have two hours to accomplish whatever they feel is most important. They always do music, then will read or begin doing some math or writing. We get together about 10:00 A.M. for the subject of the day. I also read outloud at this time from a book we always have going. We have chosen to study only one to two subjects per day, but on their own time they will often choose to do more. Monday is "music and manuscript," Tuesday "times tables and things," Wednesday, "the world, history and geography," Thursday, "art," Friday is "far out facts and science." There are times when we have a special project that will "break in" such as preparing puppets and a show for Halloween. We also get together with two other families once per week in the afternoon for group activities. This includes lots of sharing of ideas, field trips, preparing programs, etc. The children are involved in several outside activities, soccer, gymnastics, scouting, music and it is enjoyable finally to have the time to participate in these activities. When they were in school we found this to be quite difficult. During the time when the children are on their own, I devote my time to the younger three and five-year old as they are just beginning to learn many things and sometimes need

more help than the eight and ten-year olds. Along with many good books, games, and fun activities going, we also have a computer. There is always much to occupy the children in the afternoon when they are again "on their own." I am often quite surprised at the things they do in the evenings and odd times that most children in school would probably leave for school, not home. One reason for this I feel is that I strongly discourage TV and it is rarely watched except for occasionally planned educational viewing. I found that the TV was very destructive or at least disruptive to our efforts to help our children learn self-disciplined schooling.

2. When everyone is ready mom reads one or two chapters from our current book. We're on the 7th "OZ" and the second "Little House" books. Then we have our religion class, sometimes a lesson, sometimes a cassette tape. Then mom reads from the American Classic Series: Thomas Jefferson, after which each of the kids has a turn reading aloud from their respective McGuffey's Reader while the others are doing independent study. The rest of the day is spent in independent study with mom available to help when required. On Thursdays and Fridays dad does PE time with the kids--running, basketball, jumping rope, rope climbing, etc. Independent study consists of reading, writing, math, algebra, shorthand, typing, sewing, crocheting, cooking, and using the Sinclair computer. Also science, gardening, music, and merit badges. Mom also checks the educational TV programming guide and assigns appropriate programs for viewing during the week.
3. We are semi-structured. The children have free time after basics are done. The best teaching moments seem to come up when I'm not trying to teach them something. I work with them mostly on math and language. They do their own reading and sciences, social studies, and history, and discuss with me the most interesting things they have read. I'm beginning to see individual talents better. I found that I cannot tell them to study what they are interested in. That interest needs to be stimulated first. The days that I don't get things going they fall naturally into play that lasts for hours. It seems to go better (the play) when I mostly ignore it. Sometimes I try to pretend and play with them but I'm not as good at it as they are so I don't hang around for very long. They are happier, have gained weight and are gaining their self-confidence back. One of my children has stopped biting her nails and my 7 year-old for the first time ever says "reading is fun."
4. We used to be very structured in our school but now we prefer guided teaching, teaching skills to meet their needs. Without fancy gadgets and systems, our children learn simple truths and basic skills for learning. We teach reading and language throughout the day and math as the opportunities present themselves. Our 4 year-old knows as much about reading and math as a first or second-grader in the public schools should, according to their standards. Our 8 year-old prefers reading books, anything she can get her hands on at any level of reading. When she chooses books above her language ability, the questions pour out. We encourage them. They learn to solve all kinds of problems by studying

and they love to sing songs and make up songs that exemplify their feelings of love and strength.

5. We have school everyday in the mornings. We start with a pledge, a prayer, and a scripture story. Then we work for about three hours on reading, arithmetic, science and history. We have had experiments with a drone bee and bean sprouts and other interesting things. Most of the day is devoted to free time.
6. First we have prayer, pledge, and a Bible story or spiritual experience told. Then the children choose what they would like to do: science, reading, math, spelling, writing, health, history. They know they must do reading and math every day. When they complete two subjects in the morning, we have lunch. Then we finish up two more subjects. If they finish before school is out they have the opportunity to work on computer science. Our school goes from 8:30 A.M. to 2:45 P.M., except when they are super fast, of course. Then we have PE and exercises. Sometimes I play the guitar and we all sing together for our music time.
7. We have various subject assignments on a weekly basis so that the children schedule their own daily work (with a little help from mom). Some weeks they finish by Thursday and sometimes they have school on Saturday. There's lots of free reading and use of educational cassette tapes. They work with each other a lot, they love the encyclopedias and seeing who can discover some new fact first.
8. The first year we tried to make our home school very structured. This year we relaxed a lot. We don't have a rigid schedule. Sometimes we have school in the evenings. One day math may be in the morning; the next, it may be in the afternoon. Not having a set time for each subject is enough diversion that they are not bored. We say, "You need to cover math, science, social studies, phonics. Which would you like to do first?" We ask them what they want to learn about, that way I don't spend hours preparing for the next day and they are learning what they want. They usually pick things, in math for instance, that are challenging to them. They get bored with things that are too easy. They may spend a little time doing things that are too easy, but not very much. My children help me with the housework, everything from laundry to cooking. As a result I have more time to spend with them. It's great! We work together and play together. They have from 3:00 to 5:30 each day as their own free time.
9. It is very individualized and very flexible. Our high school age daughter is totally on her own with the second edition of the ACE curriculum. She will graduate one year early this spring as our 18 year-old did a year and a half ago. Our 9th grade son is in public school and has never shown much interest in home school. He is a straight-A student and gets much from the industrial arts program that I could not provide him. Our 8th grade son attended the local Christian ACE school last year and is home now. He is still searching to find himself and what he can and will do effectively. Our 9 and 10 year-olds work together quite effectively on a home-planned curriculum after working for the

past year with the ACE curriculum. Each child is responsible for choosing texts and scheduling time to study them. We have an electric typewriter, a piano, a guitar, a video recorder, a TI994a computer and a trampoline for use by the students. We try to make learning fun!

10. One room of the house has been set up as a school room. We have desks, books, and bookcases, etc. At times other parts of the house or even the world becomes the classroom. At least one fieldtrip is planned every week or a special "at-home activity."
11. With my 4 year-old, I work only when she expresses an interest. Then we work on alphabet recognition and consonant sounds and we play a number of games. My 6 year-old is working, as he shows interest, on the alphabet, making words, and addition. Either one of his older sisters or I read to him. The 8 year-old reads to me or the younger children, then she writes a synopsis of what she has read. I correct her grammar, spelling, and punctuation. She reads an article a day from the newspaper and underlines any new words, then looks them up in the dictionary and writes down the definition. When she does reading in other sources we follow this same practice. We work on multiplication tables, use of a calculator and some drills on addition and subtraction. The 10 year-old reads to herself or the young children and writes synopses of what she reads as well as doing original composition. I always correct these. She also reads an article each day in the newspaper, writes a report, looks up and writes a definition of new words. We also work on multiplication tables and use of a calculator on story problems. They may choose what they want to read.
12. We do a lot with games and reading. I'm also teaching them how to do research. We go to the library often. I use flash cards for math facts and we spend time daily with oral reading and comprehension.
13. We work each day around my time. My older boy is using books from Christian Liberty and works on each book everyday. The younger boy completes workbooks along with reviewing his phonics. The past few weeks they have had an art class which I feel is important. Education games are a favorite. The kids even like Scrabble and I feel they learn a lot about spelling when they play. Our local Parent Resource Center (library) has been a big help. I only regret that I have no car and can't go more often because my kids get bored if I don't give them change. I'm blessed with very smart kids and teaching has been easy. I would say the biggest problem is keeping it interesting.
14. We work mostly in the mornings: reading on Monday writing, on Tuesday, math on Wednesday, history on Thursday, science on Friday plus minimum reading requirements.
15. Core subjects are reading, math, and writing. The day is fairly structured but the interest and the inquiry shown by the children often times directs study in various directions. A good faith effort is made to comply with State requirements for length of day, year, and subjects taught. }

16. We have Spanish lessons, piano, singing, and are learning the deaf sign language. We learn through games as much as possible and go on fieldtrips. Once in a while we have social activities with another home school family. We do a lot of painting, drawing, and craft work. We try to be as well-rounded as we can. Reading has been one of our favorite subjects. Math puzzles are fun for the kids. I try to keep the schedule going somewhat, routinely but give the children plenty of freedom to ask questions and employ their own ideas daily.
17. Since I have only one child and he is just in kindergarten this year, our school is very casual. We have no set schedule. Whenever there is a question to be answered or something to be learned, whenever possible, we do it. I am strict on his reading and arithmetic. He has to do something involving both subjects everyday. I'm using this home school arrangement as a breather period until I feel my child is ready for dealing with regimented school life.
18. We began reading and numbers when our children were about three years old. We used a set of flash cards containing 250 basic words, and flash cards with upper and lower case letters and the numbers. Letters and numbers are learned very rapidly for about a two-month period. I do not use a set schedule nor push my children, rather I let their mood and their interest predominate. It's very important to me that I not be viewed by the child as being on the opposite side from them. In other words I want them to believe that my interests are the same as theirs and that my attitudes are the same as theirs. Everything I do I do to preserve their wonder, curiosity and love of learning.

7

After the letters are well-known, comes the mastery of 250 basic words (what the primary reading books consist of). I have done this by selecting beginning books, identifying relevant words, teaching these with flash cards and then going into the book. Children are usually surprised and delighted to discover that they can read a book. This process is continued until the child can read books containing all the 250 basic words. Arithmetic is handled the same way. We use concrete visual objects and pictures.

Once the children have learned to read, most of our instruction consists of them reading and writing and discussing what they have read. Often the children do not want to stop reading when it's time to go to bed. We have to take the books away from them. We also are heavily involved in music. All the children play the piano or some other instrument or sing. They are also learning how to use a computer.

We do not have a television and believe that has been very helpful in fostering more reading by our children. We know that there are fine educational programs and may buy a television set; but if we do, we'll keep it in our room and the children will only see it on invitation. We believe our purpose is to help our children receive the equivalent of a public school education; but we find we can do that with very little effort or time. We anticipate that all of our children will "finish"

high school by the age of 12 as our 13 and 14 year-old have already done.

In discussions we have with the children about what they are reading or some of the thoughts they are having, we emphasize analytical thinking. We often present to our children alternatives to consider when they are trying to decide how they think about a given subject. We urge them to decide for themselves. We constantly challenge them to think for themselves and decide for themselves. We use conventional textbooks and learning materials from the public schools as basic study materials and resources in the various subject areas, but we also try and give our children experiences that aren't easily had through textbooks. We have spent many hours in forests, on beaches and in museums.

The following descriptions are taken from issues 33 and 34 of the newsletter "Growing Without Schooling." These are excerpts from letters that have been sent to John Holt by home schoolers, describing their home schools.

1. Our original plan was to get correspondence courses for our children but we just could not come up with \$800 for two children. So we started school out under the trees by a lake with whatever appropriate books we could find at flea markets. We required the children to write one composition a week. We all loved to go to libraries. Of course it has not been easy and all fun. We have no records for last year's school work. We have tried to maintain the schedule; but the demands of younger children and another pregnancy, plus my own lags in discipline and lesson planning made it a stop and start again experience. There were times when they just did not want to have school and my insistence discouraged us all. All in all we are very glad we kept them home this past year; they are more family-oriented and not as much inclined to be led around by their peer groups.
2. I am home schooling my 14 year-old daughter. When I volunteered in her 6th grade classroom and saw just how terrible the whole school scene was I decided to teach her at home. I have had her tested every September and she is above average in every subject. We enrolled in our junior college last year and bought a very helpful programmed-learning math book and she is doing beautifully. She was not allowed to enroll herself but she was allowed to attend classes with me. We took basic writing and math (for her) and advanced writing for me. She was allowed to sit in there also and she enjoyed hearing the poems and stories others had done. . . I finally narrowed her education down to one hour approximately each day for each of these subjects--reading, writing, and arithmetic. Reading is from books I consider the most helpful and interesting, etc. I wonder if this is being too dictatorial. Still I'm afraid that if we are not all pushed a little we'll miss some excellent books. I know I would never have read many books if I had not had to for classes in college. The same with writing papers. I believe in allowing her to choose her topics sometimes but I do expect her to write. In her reading she does one chapter a day and writes a brief summary of it. She is also expected to clip one article from the paper and write a brief summary of it and be prepared to discuss it at dinner.

She is to learn one new word a day, know its origin and use it in a sentence. She does one proverb a day, paraphrasing it and illustrating it briefly. She also writes a half page in her journal daily.

3. We incorporated as a private school in December, 1982. The children stay inside until the public schools let out and we try to stay at or above "grade level" in our lessons. We try to produce enough paper work to be able to show anyone who questions us. We acquired boxes and boxes of textbooks from the surplus at the county schools; they were free. Even if we don't go through the books page by page, they are handy for reference. Some sections are very good. There is a computer corner in one set of math books. My son and daughter went through all the books from grade 2 through 8 (children are ages 10 and 12) doing the computer programs. I think that without knowing it, they are learning some laws of math by the way the computer had to be programmed to get certain results. We signed up as a school to take a self-guided tour of the animal areas of Bush Gardens. We got a very low admission price and they sent us a nice packet of pre-visit and post-visit activities to help us get the most out of our tour. I'm checking into other local attractions to see if they have programs like this.
4. We have been home schooling since 1979 with no real problems. I do wish the girls would show more interest in reading. It seems to be a lack of confidence in the 9 year-old resulting from being pushed into reading in kindergarten before she was ready. The 7 year-old hasn't yet mastered all the sounds and how to blend them together. They both want to know how to read but haven't decided to put the necessary effort into it. The 5 year-old has shown more curiosity about words than neither of the girls did. I have printed some on cards for him, I'm hoping for a major breakthrough here. You have to let it happen by itself. They love to be read to and to look at books and magazines, so I try to be patient. We go to swap meets and garage sales quite often and the girls have learned a lot about money this way, more than any workbook can ever teach them. I have been pleasantly surprised to hear them adding up various coins and coming up with the right answers.

We do a lot of art and craft type of things. The girls took an art class last summer from a lady who does beautiful water colors. It was a very small class, often they were the only two there. They have met in a small park adjacent to the lady's art gallery so there is no feeling of confinement. She let them draw or paint whatever they wanted, offering advice when asked. In getting to know her better I learned that she has taught art here in California and thinks the idea of home schooling is great. She offered to be available if ever we needed a certified teacher.

My husband thinks the kids should be in school so I could have more free time (I don't complaint). He agrees that somethings in school are bad but thinks kids should be there anyway. He is a commercial fisherman and recently built his own fishing boat with the kid's help.



5. I took my son out of kindergarten last March after meetings with the teacher . . . He still resists any attempt to learn new words or to read although he loves to read to. To encourage my son to read, I write out recipes for simple dishes he can prepare--he loves to cook and is very proud when he can do it by himself. He made his own loaf of yeast bread this way. I assembled the tools and ingredients and turned on the oven, he did everything else. We enjoy playing backgamon and have started to learn chess and yahtzee. We plan to send him to first grade in the fall; however, we all understand that going to school is a voluntary choice on our part and that we are the consumers, so to speak, of a service offered by this institution. This approach gives me the courage to confront teachers and administrators. Although I am an attorney and trained to deal with confrontations, I am intimidated by grade school teachers--the strict authoritarian figures of my timid girlhood. I do anguish over losing my son from 8:00 to 3:15 daily and I may see if I can bring him home at 1:00 or 1:30.
6. Now as to what the boys have been doing. Our 11 year-old has been on a Nancy Drew reading kick. He has also read all of the Little House books. He found out some relatives are making money on the stock market so he and his father read about stocks and have some pretend shares to check in the newspaper. He is still very interested in sports and spends time watching games, sorting his playing cards, reading books about sports figures and playing the various games outdoors.

Our 4 year-old seems most interested in numbers lately. His older brother taught him to play War with cards and he quickly learned the lower and higher values involved there. Next he watched Chris and a friend play Stratego and became obsessed with the game, wanting to play 3 or 4 times a day for two months. Now he watches the digital clock calling out the numbers. He also bought a book that he can "read" aloud so he trades the stories for the ones he wants us to read to him.

Our 8 year-old has been spending his time and money fixing up his bike. He saves and shops to get the equipment he wants. Money has taken on a value to him that it didn't have before. We were interviewed by a free lance writer on home schooling. The 11 and 8 year-olds were very pleased to be questioned about their opinions. Before the interview was finished the 11 year-old was interviewing the writer about being a writer. Our home schooling group meets weekly and is often an opportunity for social interaction for the boys as we moved here fairly recently. We have done some field trips with the group, visiting a vet's office, touring a bakery, picking apples and going to the beach. However our project of making pinatas was a disaster. The boys also have been involved in my pre-natal care. They come to the check ups, they listen to the baby's heartbeat, have been shown how to measure the heartbeat and how to measure my iron count. We borrowed some childbirth films from the library to view.

Sample observation. The following hour-long excerpt from our field observations in one home school portrays some of the challenges home schooling parents face in the minute by minute operation of the school. Of course

this portrayal is atypical in that it represents only a small portion of an entire day. Many hours are spent in free play, errands, relaxed group reading, etc. This mother explained in interviews that she may be over-structured at this point. Other home schoolers have told her to loosen up a bit. She would like to let the children do more on their own but worries they will "get behind" their peers in school. She wants them to be prepared to return to public school at any time because she is not sure she can handle the challenge beyond this year.

The code "OC" stands for comments made by the observer during observation. "L" is the mother, "M" is the father. The children are, Danny a 10 year-old boy, Joe an 8 year-old boy, Arty a 6 year-old boy, Alex a 4 year-old boy, Susie, a 3 year-old girl, and Amy is a 1 year-old girl. They will be referred to by their age (in years) in the following excerpt to help the reader identify them more quickly.

January 20, 1984 1:48 P.M.

I arrived and knocked on the door and heard a voice inside calling to everyone "He's here." As I came in L was sitting at the kitchen table with 6 working on writing. She told 10 to take my coat and hang it up but I hung my own coat up in the closet. She didn't really pay much more attention to me as far as I could tell which made me feel good to realize that she's making an effort to not worry about my being there.

L said to 6, "what do you want to write?" He was writing in a blue book and she was asking him what he wanted to write so he could practice his spelling as well as his writing. I noticed that 1 was writing in someone else's book.

10 said to me, "Like I said, not very much interesting is happening. We pretty much finished our home school this morning. I just have two things left to do," and then he went off to do something. 3 kept looking at me and then going over to L and pulling on her. L said to her, "Do you want me to talk to him?" 3 knew that I was a visitor and that her mother ought to be talking to me instead of just going on about her business.

4 said to no one in particular, "I know how to spell ET." Then he said, "ET". He was seated at the kitchen bar eating an orange.

OC: This was meant to be a joke . . . probably one he had heard older brothers tell?

10 said to his mother, "Come help me practice the piano mom." L said to 6, "Come into the living room so I can help you while I help 10." But they didn't go in; they stayed in the kitchen.

6 was busy writing in his blue book, working on spelling. After a moment L said to 10, "Help 6 spell whatever he wants to say in the thing he's writing." L brought over a speller that she had obtained from the school. She said to me, "This is the new speller they are using for the third grade. It looks to me like the words are first and second grade level words."

L rang the door bell from inside. I guess this is a message to the children in the basement that she wants them to come up. When 3 came up she said, "I want you to have a nap."

1:55 P.M. L is back in the kitchen helping 6 write a story. She comments on his writing and mistakes he's making on the writing and also on his spelling. 10 and 8 come up the stairs from the basement. 4 takes pencils from 1 and 1 begins to cry. L takes 4 by the hand and leads him into the bathroom, washes his hands and brings him back to the counter where 3 is filling out some worksheet papers. L gets out some papers for both 4 and 3 to work on.

1:58 P.M. L explains to 3 how to do some of the worksheets which involve matching pictures with one another and letters to one another. 10 is in the living room playing the piano. 1 is drawing in someone's science experiment book. I learned later that this is 6's "joy" book. L discovers that 1 is writing in there, says good naturedly, "darn your hide" and takes the book away and tries to give her some paper to write on. 6 is watching 3, telling her what she's supposed to do on a worksheet.

2:01 P.M. 10 comes in the kitchen, takes two books into a bedroom and then returns to the kitchen. 8 brings me a three-ring notebook with reports he wrote on January 17th, 18th and 19th about World War II air wars. He wants me to read them. He's done them on the computer. 10 says, "8 has lost my book." 8 says "I hid it," when L asks where he thinks it might be. 10 says, "You're brain is a peabrain, mine is the big one." L takes 8 back in the bedroom to try and find the book. 8 says, "He says his brain is big and mine is little." It was later discovered that neither 6 or 10 misplaced the book that 10 is looking for.

2:05 6 is looking at a times tables chart. He thinks it's pretty interesting. He brings it over and shows it to me and says, "Look, this goes clear up to 144." He takes it back over to the kitchen table and 10 explains to him how to use it. I notice that 1 is writing on someone else's book. 3 is sitting in the game closet singing and then she takes some materials and puts them up on the bar and begins filling out some sentence completion worksheets.

L to 6: "When you're ready to get serious I'll be glad to help you finish your joy book, I'm going now to help 10 on the piano."

OC: I'm looking through some of the assignment cards L has made for each child. I notice headings such as "relieving suffering" (this must be what L meant when she asked 10 the first time I came to visit if he would like to relieve some pain and suffering). Other items are "put books away," art, science, reading, exercise, math and so on.

8 comes and shows me his spelling book. I realize that I'm definitely not being very unobtrusive. These kids really seem to want to show me what they are doing and would like to have the attention of an outsider.

2:11 P.M. L is helping 10 on the piano. 1 is playing a tape recorder next to the piano. 6 and 3 are coloring at the bar in the kitchen, 4 is taking a worksheet back and forth from the kitchen to the living room to work on it in the kitchen and to ask L how to do it in the living room. L said she would come and help him in a minute. 4 returns to the bar then to L then back and so on. 8 is wandering from me to the living room to the bar. I can't really tell what he's doing.

2:14 P.M. 8 completes a simple language arts worksheet (meant for the younger children), takes it to L saying, "Look what I did mommy," L says, snickering, "Wow!" and explains, "I have some harder ones that might be at your level 8."

2:15 P.M. L returns to the kitchen. She was working with 10 at the piano for about 4 minutes. L says to 3, "Don't use markers on the pictures." 3: "Why?" L: "Because you can't see the pictures after you have colored them and also the ink goes through and it makes marks on the counter."

L is fixing a book and cassette which 1 broke. 6 wants to do something, I can't tell really what it is, L replies, "Not until you finish your joy book." 6 takes a worksheet away from 4 saying, "I can do this." 4 cries, he doesn't want 6 to take it away from him. L turns and sends 4 to his bedroom. 6 continues to work on the worksheet and L says, "Don't do that, that's for 4 to work on." 4 is in the other room crying. 6: "I won't do anything then!" L says, "okay, that's your choice." 6 goes into the bedroom where 4 is still crying. 10 is in the living room fiddling with the tape recorder. L says to 3, "It's bed time. Shall I read to you first?" 3: "No, I'm not tired." L: "Do you and I want to listen to the "courage" tape before you go to sleep?" 10 says, "Where is 1?" L says, "Probably crying somewhere; I really whacked her when she broke that cassette." 10 goes in and finds 1 and says "let's be happy 1" and begins to play with her.

OC: Must be completing his "Relieving Suffering" card here?

8 goes downstairs and 4 continues to cry. L says, "8 do you need me to help you with anything?" 8 doesn't answer, just goes on downstairs.

2:20 P.M. 10 returns to the kitchen. He and L are sitting at the counter. L says, "do you need me to help you with anything 10?" He doesn't reply. 4 comes in and says, "I'm ready to do something else." L says, "You can do the worksheet." He has returned from crying. L says, "It's just really difficult to do anything around here when you start squealing like that."

2:23 P.M. 3 is playing the cassette player in the bedroom. 8 is in the basement, 4 is doing his worksheet again at the kitchen counter. L is checking over worksheets that she got at the public library to see which ones 8 would be able to do, which one each kid might be able to work on. She lapses into singing from time to time, singing along with what's playing on the cassette in the bedroom down the hall. 10 is watching L, joking with her about whether she can answer the worksheets that she's selecting. 6, 3, and 1 are somewhere, I think in the bedroom. 1 is screaming, 6 carries

her out to the kitchen. L says, "looks like daddy is going to be staying up with some kids tonight."

OC: Refers to fact that M helps the kids finish their assignments at night if they didn't finish during the day instead of doing something fun with them.

2:29 P.M. I went to the basement to see what 8 was doing and discovered him in the computer study room playing chess on the computer. This room is full of books, several file cabinets and a large desk at which children say their dad works. 10 comes in and asks 8 if he wants to play "He-Man". 8 explains what he's doing with the chess game to 10. 10 responds. They talk back and forth about what's the best way to do it, 10 gives advice on how to do it and then says, "My brother is smart." 8 makes a move.

2:35 P.M. I went back upstairs. 3 was still in the bedroom listening to the cassette. 1 was playing with picture cards on the kitchen floor, 4 was working on worksheets still at the kitchen table. L and 6 were working on a worksheet at the counter.

2:39 P.M. 4 finished and almost began to work on 3's worksheet. L tells him to come and she'll help him. L is asking him what the letters are. 4 says, "Q" L: "This is a capital?" 4: "Yes." L: "Okay, let's have you do it." She leaves him to work on the worksheet himself. 4 begins working on a new worksheet but he says he's tired.

1 runs over to her mother. L: "Do you want up? Say up." She repeats this in a kind voice to 1 about six times but 1 never says 'up.' She just keeps reaching up to her mother. L says, "You button", picks her up and holds her as she watches and answers 6's questions as he's working on a worksheet.

L: "6, when you finish this do you want me to help you with your 'joy book'?"

OC: This is about the fourth time I've heard her mention this book to 6.

6: "No." L: "Okay, I'm not going to bug you anymore about something you should have done yourself before lunch."

2:44 P.M. L helps 1 pick up pictures she has left on the floor, tells 3 to bring a book to read in the bedroom so she'll fall asleep when they finish instead of reading it in the living room where 3 was wanting to read. 3 tries to help 1 and 1 wants to pick up the picture by herself, or at least with her mother.

OC: I'm amazed at how cool, calm, and collected L seems. She is constantly moving from child to child, singing much of the time.

2:47 P.M. 10 comes up the stairs saying, "I helped 8 get the guy in checkmate using the Sonogram program." 8 comes up the stairs too. L: "Wow!" 10 and 8 tell her they really did it and go on to explain how fun it was.

L: "How about everyone taking a nap now, I'm really tired?"

OC--I should think she would be. When does she get a break?

2:48 P.M. L is helping 4 on his workbook while 10 and 8 tell her how they played on the computer a chess game. 10 says, "Come on 8" and they run back downstairs. 3 takes about 10 books to her bedroom. L is still helping 4.

Of course not every hour of everyday is that packed for every home schooling family. But usually children's hours are filled with activity, either supervised by parents or independently. The following section describes some of the general patterns we have discovered so far.

Trends and patterns. Several common themes we have identified from these case studies will be briefly listed below. They represent hunches or pre-hypotheses about the operations of home schools.

1. There appear to be two general classes of home schools:
  - a. Those in which the children have never attended institutional schools but have continued in their home environment from birth.
  - b. Those in which some or all of the children have attended public or private schools in the past and some or all of the children are now taught at home.

Parents from the first group tend to continue teaching and responding to their children as they grow older in the same ways as when the children were young. They have had such success by the time the children are school age that they see no reason to enroll them in schools. These children usually know how to read by the time they are school age.

The parents in the second group usually begin home schooling with high structure. They often pattern activities after the structure used by schools. For example, they reserve certain hours of the day for certain subjects; they depend on workbooks and other materials to guide them; they assume they need to motivate their children to learn certain skills and concepts taught in schools.

After weeks and sometimes months, many of these parents become discouraged, frustrated and depressed. They begin to believe they are incapable of teaching their own children. Most of them send their children back to school, or they may send some back and keep others out, or they may arrange to keep a child out only part-time.

Those who continue to have home school tend to relax the structure somewhat. They become more patient with their children, more satisfied with what their children do learn. They come to look to the children to express and pursue their own interests. They may continue emphasizing traditional school subjects but more loosely.

Eventually, families who change to home schooling from conventional schooling begin to look more and more like families who always home schooled. Some of their characteristics and activities are described briefly below.

2. Learning tends to be experiential as well as and sometimes instead of academic. Children explore their world by visiting workplaces, museums, forests, beaches, etc., as well as reading about them. They make things with their hands and collect and observe actual specimens instead of sitting indoors and reading about crafts, arts, sciences, etc.
3. Parents may use instructional materials to help children learn to read and solve arithmetic problems. But the materials are usually a supplement to extensive reading by parents to children and by children to themselves in books dealing with subjects the children are interested in understanding. The arithmetic materials reinforce the students' understanding of numbers in concert with their use of money, weight and length measurement, use of recipes, etc. Also, the materials tend to be used as the parents and children want to use them. These families do not require the children to complete all the exercises on every page, only enough to make sure they understand.
4. Parents are willing to modify information they are presenting, the activities they are leading, and the subjects of study in response to the children's interests. They do not feel obligated to follow a set curriculum that they cannot modify. They are free to quit when the children lose interest and return to a lesson when the interest is back. In other words, they can afford to truly individualize because of the small number of children involved. Parents eventually come to trust their children's interests. They can live with the fact that their child may be "behind" peers in public schools in some areas because they are pursuing their interests more deeply in other areas. They believe that if children are given the freedom to pursue those interests, they will eventually be interested in nearly everything the parents judge to be essential.
5. Housework tends to become part of the home school experience. Children are involved in cooking, cleaning, repairing and creating as part of their learning experience. Meals and housework are often simplified so they do not take as much effort. Parents sometimes save the housework for evenings; but usually do what they need to do during the day while the children are doing "independent study," or helping them.
6. Support groups play an important role. Very few home schoolers isolate themselves socially. Rather, other home schoolers, neighbors, older friends, family, etc., form an important network which parents and children rely on for ideas and understanding.
7. Although parents are obligated by laws in most states to cover certain subjects for certain hours, they tend to interpret those requirements loosely. Since they believe the children are learning as they participate in "regular life," they count much of what they do as school. They

- may require one or two hours daily of "formal" studying or discussion of what they are learning. They may require the children to turn in written reports of things they have investigated on their own. But there are also entire days in which the children play, with little or no parental guidance or evaluation.
8. Sometimes parents have their children tested with standardized instruments used by the public schools. But generally, they claim that these tests do not measure what is most important to the parents and children. They also test their children's thinking skills by discussing difficult concepts with them. They observe the children's play, interpersonal interactions, creativeness, etc., to see how their children are growing wholistically.
  9. There are usually alternating periods in which children interact with parents and then study or explore or learn on their own. Children probably spend about half the time on their own, pursuing topics they are interested in or preparing for interactions with parents. The parent-student sessions include reading together, discussing, presentation of new ideas, learning something new to both, going on outings, etc.
  10. Learning to be of service and to do meaningful work is a major part of the curriculum. Children rarely spend all their time learning facts. Rather, they volunteer to help at blood banks and rest homes. They work for pay for neighbors and businesses. They have time for doing these things because they usually are able to learn the same material more rapidly than they did in schools.
  11. Subjects such as history, social studies, geography, etc., are frequently studied through the reading of biographies, news magazines, National Geographic and Science periodicals rather than (or in addition to) textbooks. The tendency is to go to the sources of information rather than compiled summaries.
  12. Since there are usually at least two and often more children in most home schools, parents frequently encourage the older children to teach the younger ones. This arrangement frequently helps the older child as much as the younger ones. The act of teaching truly reinforces what one is learning.
  13. Although most home schooling parents are well-educated themselves, they often become even more interested in learning new ideas as they have their home school. They tend to provide good "models" of learners to their children. They learn to not feel responsible to answer all their children's questions. Instead, they encourage the children to find out on their own or they learn with their children what they don't understand themselves.
  14. Sometimes, parents decide the children need the teaching attention of someone other than themselves. They go to interested neighbors, older students, junior colleges, and regular schools when the need arises.



15. Home schooling parents tend to have very high opinions of their children. They praise them and admire their individual ideas and interests. They consider the children's interests to be just as important, or even more so, than their own or than the subjects emphasized in conventional schools.
16. Home schooling parents tend to be highly interested in the learning process. They and their children look at all of their experiences for educational benefits. They are discriminating in judging the positive or negative educational value of every experience, event, material, etc.
17. Learning in the home is unified with other life experiences and is continuous. Intellectual, social, physical, spiritual ideas and skills are learned wholistically, not as separate "subjects."
18. Some home school parents are very negative about conventional schools, believing they not only fail to help children learn to learn and learn to love learning, but inhibit them. Other parents see the school as one resource among many to help them teach their children. These parents enroll their children in bands, choruses, sports programs and debate teams. They want to cooperate with schools for their children's ultimate benefit, rather than compete with them.

### Major Concerns

So far in this paper, home schoolers' reasons for and means of conducting their own schools represent a rather hopeful and positive image of the phenomenon. However, these parents have deep concerns as well. Understanding the concerns as well as the hopes and the application of those hopes to practice is essential. Some of the major concerns raised by parents in the case studies and the reviewed literature are summarized here. Most of these concerns have been expressed by parents who are not completely established as home schoolers. They may have been conducting the home school for more than one year. Parents who have been doing it for several years do not identify as many current concerns, although they recall having many when they were getting established.

Fear/self-doubt. One of the major concerns parents have is that they are not capable of teaching their own children. They ask questions like, "Will my child be ruined by me?" "Can I answer all of my children's questions?" "Would I be hurting them by keeping them out of school." "Do I know enough to teach my children?" "Am I doing it for the right reasons?" "Can I relax and allow them to learn naturally or am I going to have to force them as I was forced when I grew up in the school?" "Will my child end up lacking confidence because he was kept out of school?" "Will my child be able to develop social skills that they can adapt to different social situations if I keep them home?" "Can I justify doing this?" "Will all the failures and problems they have the rest of their life be my fault because I kept them in home school?"

Parents have very few models of home schooling parents and children who have been home schooled. The models they do become aware of seem to

be exceptionally intelligent children who do well, but might have done just as well in the school system. They don't have firm evidence of what makes the difference. They don't know if they did well because they were at home school or because they were genetically capable. Besides that most parents have a lot of fears about their own abilities personally to effectively teach their own children even if these models did make a difference.

Social isolation. Several of the parents we interviewed stated that they felt isolated from the community or that they would become increasingly isolated if they continued to be home schooling parents. They feel social pressure not only from neighbors and friends but from members of their families. Many people associated with home schoolers consider home schooling to be a form of rebellion from the social norm and tend to treat home schooling parents as if they were on the fringes of society. In addition, several home school parents indicate that they feel like they are in a "fish bowl" or on trial and other people are watching to see how they will do. If anything goes wrong with their children, the home school is blamed for it. Parents worry that not only they but their children will become social outcasts. Although that is a possibility, the advantages of home school may make it worth it but there is an element of concern and doubt about the negative value of being a social outcast.

Exhaustion/total dedication. Many parents, when they first talked to us about home schooling suggested that it is a joyous experience to see their children growing and learning and that they enjoy being involved with them in the learning process. They will eventually admit that being both the parent and the teacher, to their children, especially when there are more than one or two children, can be an extremely demanding role. It takes total dedication; it takes a lot of time, a lot of effort, a lot of energy. Parents ask themselves, Can I be that disciplined? Can I be consistently disciplined? What about my own freedom? What about the things I need and want to do for myself? Is there time to do such things?

Home school parents recognize that most people are very appreciative when their children are old enough to go to school, allowing the parents to have an anticipated break. New home schooling parents wonder how they are going to carry on the day-to-day activities of running a household, keeping it clean, taking care of younger children, preparing lessons for the school children, conducting those lessons, and so on.

Parents who have adjusted and find home school to be a pleasant experience, tend to find energy efficient ways of taking care of these responsibilities. They have learned to involve the children, to not take all the responsibility for the children, to be involved in natural learning events for more of the time and not spend so much time preparing and giving formal instruction. But arriving at that point may require a lot of compromise with parents' expectations and experiences.

Separating home from school. When a parent is playing both a parent role and a teacher role and the children are playing both the child and student roles in the same setting, potential problems arise. Relationships may become complicated, especially when the parents feel anxious about how well the

children are learning and realize that they are taking the responsibility to make sure that those children learn certain things. Some parents are not able to stand back and give the children the support that they expect themselves to be giving as parents because they are at the same time demanding certain things as teachers.

Also, problems that arise in the home school are often interpreted as a reflection not only of how the school is going but also how the family is going, how the relationships in the family are developing. Parents sometimes worry that the school aspect is overtaking the home aspect and wonder if it wouldn't be better, even if the children didn't learn as well, to send them to school so they could concentrate on being a family, supporting and enjoying one another at home. In successful home schools, parents deemphasize the contrasting roles so they are not so much teachers but parents who support learning and encourage their children to be responsible for their own learning rather than turn to them as teachers.

Balance between structure and spontaneity. Much of what John Holt writes suggests that parents should allow the children to learn spontaneously without structuring the learning experiences too highly. Most home school parents that we interviewed have read John Holt's materials and believe what he is saying is probably true. On the other hand most of these parents have also grown up in the public schools and have believed that structure is necessary for learning to occur. They feel pressured to make sure that their children cover certain academic topics on some schedule and that they keep pace with what they believe is being covered in the public schools. They also feel pressure to teach and guide their children almost every minute of the day. They wonder just how hard they should push their children; because when they were in school, their teachers pushed them. There is conflict in these parents' minds because their own experience tells them they should be structured and a major spokesman for the home school movement wants them to allow spontaneity learning. Achieving a balance between structure and spontaneity is one of the major challenges and concerns of home schooling parents.

Measuring progress. Another concern parents have is how to know if they are succeeding and how to prove they are succeeding to outside judges. Clearly they can submit their children to traditional testing procedures in the schools; but most home school parents have other objectives for their children's learning which they believe are not measured by those tests. They are not sure how to measure that progress. This is not a concern only in response to outside critics; parents also wonder if they are succeeding, if progress is being made. They are often concerned that they do not have valid indicators of progress.

Spouse roles. The majority of home schooling families tend to have two parents. Yet a majority of the home schools are run almost exclusively by the mothers. Sometimes families who want to be home schooling end up stopping because one spouse is not supportive. In the home schools that continue to operate, the mother is usually the principle force behind the operation. The father has to be supportive and pick up much of the slack that is caused by the mother's emphasis on home schooling. There are a few cases in which the father conducts most of the home schooling activities

but a concern of parents is, will my spouse be supportive? Can we agree on who is going to do what?

Related to this concern are the concerns of single parents, parents who have to work or are away from home regularly and yet want to home school their children. John Holt recommends to these parents that they go ahead and leave their children at home at least part of the day while they go to work. He claims that the children can learn and grow quite well if the parent spends time in the evenings with the child. Bringing themselves to do that may be a major problem for single parents. Few other solutions are clearly attractive either.

Undesirable child behaviors. Beginning home schooling parents are concerned that their children will spend all the time either fighting, complaining or wasting a lot of time if they are kept at home. They wonder how they can motivate their children to cooperate with each other because they will spend so much more time together in a home school situation than if they were separating to go to school. They wonder if their children will fulfill assignments and help with the housework without constant complaining.

Experienced home schoolers claim that although these problems do arise, once the home school is well established, disruptive behaviors diminish and the children learn to be more cooperative and supportive of one another and of the parents. It is often difficult for beginning home schoolers to believe these claims because when they begin their home schools, children are adjusting and do fight and complain.

Teaching independence. Since one of the major reasons for keeping children at home is to help them learn to think independently and to want to learn on their own, parents wonder how they are going to teach their kids to think on their own and be independent and self-disciplined. They wonder how can they get children to learn on their own without forcing them. Associated with this concern is the question of how they will find enough for their children to do and organize it so that it's interesting for them to do. Or should they organize it? Many of these parents believe that they never learned to be independent thinkers when they were young and so wonder if they are capable of helping their own children to be independent thinkers.

Again, more experienced home schoolers suggest that children are naturally curious and want to learn and the best thing parents can do is get out of the way and not organize everything for them. Again this is a hard lump to swallow for many beginning home schooling parents since they have rarely seen this kind of treatment of children in practice.

What materials to use. There are many commercially-available materials, books, computers and learning aids available for purchase. Parents, as educators have for many years, wonder which of these materials would be most effective in helping them teach their own children. Some experienced home schoolers claim that these materials are not needed and view them as gadgetry. The home schooling parents that we studied in our case studies regularly try new materials for teaching reading and math to their children. Trying to identify the products that will be most effective, realizing that some are

effective for some children and others are effective with other children is a challenge. Taking the time to select materials adds to the burden of being a home schooling parent. Many of these parents are concerned that they are not going to be able to do it.<sup>9</sup>

Children's socialization. Beginning home schooling parents find that their children often miss their friends. The most important dimensions of school to some of these children were their peer relationships. Now that they are in home school, they feel lonely and sometimes have difficulty making friends with their own family members. Also, parents worry that their children will think they are inferior or that something is wrong with them because they are being kept home from school. Or in contrast, children may begin to think they are superior because it appears to them that because they are able to learn without having to go to school, they must be better than all their peers. Parents wonder how they are going to be able to help their children adjust socially. However, they claim there are other difficulties they will face in helping their children adjust socially if they go to public schools.

Insufficient resources. Many schools appear to be cooperating with parents and home school children by allowing those children to come to school part of the time to participate in music groups, sports, debate teams and so on. However, some home school parents worry that their children will not be able to benefit from resources that can only be assembled by the community effort which schools represent. Whether the school will cooperate or not must be decided on an individual basis; but it seems to be up to the principals of the schools to decide if and how they will cooperate.

Apparent lack of progress. Home school parents are concerned when their children do not seem to understand the ideas they are trying to teach them through the home school. They become frustrated when their children do not "seem to get it." Unlike many teachers, parents are not able to blame the home environment for lack of progress. Therefore, they tend to blame themselves and judge themselves as being incapable or unprepared to help their children get past learning blocks.

Sometimes parents have exceptionally high expectations and come to believe they should have been more patient as they look at their attitudes retrospectively. At other times, this discouragement leads parents to be more reflective on what they are doing to help their children learn and what they could do to be more effective. So this particular concern may lead to more effective results because parents are motivated to respond creatively to their children's individual learning problems rather than expect a mass produced instructional product to overcome their problems.

### Implications

Although beginning home schooling parents do have some serious concerns about their ability to conduct home schools and our society generally discourages schooling outside of educational institutions, the movement appears to be growing. Parents who have established home schools for a period of years appear to be succeeding both in terms of their own purposes and expectations

and in terms of traditional measures of success. There may be parents who take their children out of school and fail to encourage them to learn and to prepare themselves for life as adults; but so far in our investigation of home schooling, we have encountered only one or two of these cases. It appears that generally home schooling parents are extremely conscientious and involved in helping their children learn.

Even though many, perhaps 75%, of the parents who attempt to home school end up sending their children back to school, it appears from our investigation thus far that these parents remain highly aware and interested in their children's learning. These parents are not ones that educators should ignore or alienate. Rather parents who are inclined to home school their children are the ones who will be most willing to cooperate and coordinate their efforts with schools if agreeable arrangements between schools and home schools could be reached.

Parents who home school their children do not generally blame the teachers in public schools for the problems that their children have or for the need to establish a home school. In fact they often consider the teachers to be victims of a system that is beyond their control. To be sure, some of them are very antagonistic toward schools because of extremely negative experiences they have had.

When asked what it would take for them to agree to enroll their children in schools, virtually all the parents we have asked report that they doubt that the schools could make the sweeping changes that would be required to provide the education for their children that they hope to provide in their homes. The large class size structure, the focus on information rather than learning skills, the social relationships among the young and so on are such integral parts of schools that these parents have little faith that schools could ever change as drastically as they would require them to change. However, nearly all home school parents agree that there are resources available through schools to which they would like to expose their children.

If the descriptions contained in this report as pre-hypotheses are confirmed during future studies, a major implication to be drawn from this research will be that schools and educators generally ought to make a conscientious effort to cooperate and coordinate their activities with the parents on a much larger scale. Home school parents represent an extreme attitude among parents; yet they do reflect the prevailing public attitude of dissatisfaction with conventional schools. If they are willing to cooperate with school people in educating their children, certainly many other parents who have not chosen to home school their children yet would be willing to establish a more cooperative partnership.

The home school movement is growing but is not understood by educational practitioners or researchers. These case studies begin to map the territory, identifying issues and suggesting relationships among variables in naturally occurring home school settings. They provide a way to begin understanding the motivations, objectives, methods, and accomplishments of home educators.

The results of this research should be useful to:

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