

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS
OF PARENTAL DECISION-MAKING
IN REGARDS TO HOMESCHOOLING

By

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ABSTRACT

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Researchers have spent a relatively small amount of time focusing on homeschooling. The few studies which have been completed regarding homeschooling have skirted the question of the decision-making process taken by parents as they choose to begin or discontinue homeschooling. The void in the academic knowledge regarding this growing trend in education has been filled with the data and analysis of this study. By using a qualitative methodology I was not only able to gain insight into the thoughts and experiences of homeschool parents, I was able to hear their passion for their children's education and see their excitement as they described their familiarity with the twists and turns and emotions of the pathway to their final decision.

This study addresses the questions: "What process do parents go through when making the decision to begin or discontinue homeschooling their children?" And "What circumstances precipitate a parent's decision to move their children to homeschool or to end homeschooling?" Fourteen families were interviewed and data was collected and analyzed to determine the answer using a decision-making model made up of six different processes. Additionally, the precipitating circumstances were collected and categorized into sub-groups to clearly view the outcome of the evaluation of the data.

The results of this study indicate that two decision-making processes, convergence and insightful, dominated the corridor to the final choice of the initial child's educational placement. All of the parents in the study had friends who homeschooled and regardless of their background, were concerned about beginning to homeschool their own children.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the following individuals:

To my past: My late father, Frank S. Rogers and mother, Alice E. Rogers

My present: My loving husband Harold Campbell

My future: My sons, Dr. Mark Campbell and First Lieutenant Jonathan Campbell

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I am thankful to God for being my guiding light throughout this work as well as in life. He gave me the insight and tenacity to see this project through to the end.

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A very special thank you goes to my advisor and committee chair person, Dr. Kristy Cooper. Her guidance, support, and confidence in my abilities have been especially appreciated. Her willingness to become my advisor and committee chairperson in my final year of work has won my eternal gratefulness and admiration.

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Appreciation and thank you to the fourteen families who opened up their doors and hearts and let me learn about parental decision-making from those who had experienced the pathway to their choice of learning environments. Their willingness to share their experiences and understanding of the processes made a lasting impact on me.

PREFACE

As I evaluated options for my dissertation I contemplated various educational concerns. While discussing the alternatives with Dr. Phil Cusick, a professor (ret.) at Michigan State University, he asked what I knew about homeschooling. At the time I had several friends and acquaintances who were homeschooling their children. I began to read about homeschooling and talk to other educators and friends.

As a K-12 superintendent I had known families who had left their traditional school setting to begin homeschooling, as well as many children who registered for school after having been homeschooled for years. While spending time investigating children who were homeschooled and working with my advisor, Dr. Kristy Cooper, I was able to focus on my interest in the decision-making process as families follow a pathway to their final choice for the education of their children. My personal network in the mid-Michigan Christian community gave me an opportunity to continue to learn about homeschooling.

When parents choose to homeschool it is a critical life-changing decision. The decision-making pathway is filled with twists and turns, emotional ups and downs, and thoughtful conversations. The drive of a parent to provide the ultimate in an educational learning environment for their child is an integral part of the decision-making process. Throughout the text I give a close look into the families who followed a thoughtful pathway to begin homeschooling. Of special interest to many, I also include a depiction of the process families take to discontinue homeschooling. As you read the quotes, you will become acquainted with the families who spent many hours lovingly soul-searching and discussing their child's future. The support of my advisor, friends, and family made it possible for me to discover, analyze, and produce this dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1: HOMESCHOOLING: AN EDUCATIONAL CHOICE

1.1 Introduction

Families today have five basic options for educating their children: Traditional public school, public charter school including online charter schools, private religious school, private independent school and homeschool, which is also termed “domestic instruction” or “home education” (Gaither, 2008; Belfield, 2004). Of the five options, homeschooling is gaining in popularity at the greatest rate, with a 74 percent increase from 1999 to 2007 (IESa, 2007; Ray, 2009). This increase is twelve times greater than the number of students who began attending public school during that same time period (Kunzman, 2009).

Children are considered homeschooled when their instruction and learning primarily take place at home (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991). The National Home Educational Survey Program (NHES) defines homeschooled students as follows: students are “considered to be homeschooled if their parents reported them being schooled at home instead of a public or private school, if their enrollment in public or private schools did not exceed 25 hours per week, and if they were not being homeschooled solely because of temporary illness” (IESc, 2001).

Collom and Mitchell (2005) argue “Homeschooling is both a means of educating children according to parental standards and an alternative social movement embracing a unique set of cultural norms and values.” This type of schooling is not defined by strangers working in a bureaucratic educational organization; rather it is defined by the parents of the child, many times in cooperation with other parents who form cooperative groups to educate their children together one or two days a week. Families may educate their children independently, with the guidance of a homeschool organization, or under a collaborative homeschool group.

Eighty-four percent of homeschoolers are homeschooled only, while sixteen percent of homeschooled students also participate in a program at a local school (IESa, 2007). Over the past ten years many families have embraced homeschooling. Under the auspices of the United States Department of Education Center for Educational Statistics, the National Household Education Survey Program (NHES) completed a telephone survey in 2007 concerning “Parent and Family Involvement in Education.” The sample for the 2007 NHES survey was 10,681 students, 301 of which were homeschooled. Given that there are 53.2 million students in the United States, this rate implies that there are about 1.5 million homeschooled children nationally, which amounts to 2.9 percent of all school-aged children (IESa, 2007).

While homeschoolers are traditionally and predominately fundamentalist Christians who cite religious motivations for homeschooling, parents who homeschool their children come from a diverse mix of religious affiliations, political views, and value bases. (Bolick, 1987; Mayberry, 1987; Nemer, 2002; Van Galen, 1988; Welner & Welner, 1999; Lines 2000). From Christian fundamentalists and left-wing radicals to celebrities and transient military families, the nationwide acceptance of homeschooling has impacted the way that families homeschool and who has chosen to homeschool their children (Gaither, 2008). One homeschooling mother, when interviewed by a researcher, said, “Our decision is an individual decision. It’s not a decision to change the world or change the system” (Welner, 2002, p11).

While we have solid information on the reasons parents choose to homeschool, we do not currently understand how parents make those vitally important decisions either to start or stop homeschooling their children. Such a decision is a potentially life-changing moment in the life of a child and his or her family, and if made without a full understanding of the potential implications and consequences, the decision to start or stop homeschooling could be harmful to a

child's education and development. With a growing population of parents opting for homeschooling, we must understand whether families are merely jumping on board with a current trend or thoughtfully weighing their options and collecting information before taking the leap. If it is the former, then there may be cause for concern regarding the long-term consequences of an ill-informed trend. If it is the latter, then educators within traditional school settings may need to rethink whether and how they are meeting the needs of individual children. Regardless, the growing interest in homeschooling suggests that schools must do more to meet the needs of these families. For all of these reasons, further insight into the decision-making processes around homeschooling could help strengthen the knowledge base such that homeschooling is either enhanced so as to be more effective, or reduced, so as to minimize the burden on families as they contemplate the best educational environment for their child. A secondary concern would focus on parents who went through a decision-making process to choose homeschooling, then went through a process to choose to move to another option other than homeschooling. Additional insight into a family's decision-making process as they investigate the pros and cons of discontinuing homeschooling will benefit parents who have concerns with their child's education. Parents may not have the background to teach advanced classes, so they may need to rethink their decision to teach their children at home. Furthermore, some children and their parents may not have the temperament it takes to homeschool. This study reviewed the pertinent homeschooling research and incorporated in-depth interviews with parents who have homeschooled their children. In this dissertation telling the stories of fourteen families, I demonstrate the critical nature of the progression parents go through from the initial contemplation of the idea to begin or discontinue homeschooling their child through the decision-making process and ending with a definitive choice.

CHAPTER 2: HOMESCHOOLING IN AMERICA

2.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the pathways families follow through the decision-making process along the way to beginning or ending homeschooling their children. This section begins with a review of the literature describing what is known about homeschooling and why parents choose to homeschool their children. Next is a review of literature and research on the characteristics of homeschooled children. The third section, presents a discussion of the theoretical basis through which parental decision-making was viewed and analyzed.

2.2 What We Know About Homeschooling

Beginning in the 1990's the United States government began periodically surveying homeschoolers to learn more about the reasons why parents were choosing homeschooling. The data from the three National Household Education Surveys (1999, 2003, and 2007) has provided information summarizing reasons why parents choose to homeschool their children. The 2007 study determined that the six reasons given the most in order of dominance were (1) religious instruction, (2) a combination of safety, drugs or negative peer pressure, (3) dissatisfaction with the instruction of the academic curriculum in traditional private and public schools, (4) a combination of family time, finances, travel, and distance, (5) interest in educating their children with a nontraditional approach, and (6) health problem or special needs (IESa, 2007).

The most common reason parents gave for homeschooling their child, given by thirty-six percent of respondents, was "to provide moral or religious instruction" (IESd, 2007). Many homeschool families intend for their children to learn specific beliefs, values, and skills and view

teaching their children at home to be a directive from God, which represents their obedience and reliance on Biblical foundational ideology (Klicka, 2006). Some homeschoolers believe that they will strengthen their relationship with their children through homeschooling and teach them that their family is very important in our society (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991). Noted Christian psychologist and author Dr. James Dobson (2000) said that, “Homeschooling is the most Biblical form of education. God addresses parents, not government employees, as the educators of their own children.” Religion was cited by Olsen (2008) as being one of the primary motivational factors that initially spur parents to select homeschooling for their children.

Twenty-one percent of parents answering the NHES gave safety, drugs or negative peer pressure as a reason to homeschool their children (IESd, 2007). In his dissertation for the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, Olsen (2008) discussed eight motivating factors that led parents to choose homeschooling. Two of the eight factors were the fact that the child was involved in an incident at the school and the effects of negative peer pressure. Parents may become concerned about their children’s safety in school after hearing about the *Journal of American Medicine* (Anderson et al., 2001) report on school related violence incidents. The study linked 253 deaths to 220 incidents. Eighteen of the incidents resulted in multiple homicides. Parents’ concern about negative peer pressure is well documented in articles in print and on the internet. For example, in her article on negative peer pressure, Sandeen (2012) highlights several areas of parental concern including skipping school, smoking, sex, drugs, gangs, and alcohol.

In the NHES seventeen percent of parents indicated that the most important reason they homeschool is their dissatisfaction with “academic instruction” (IESd, 2007). Some homeschool families who are Christian fundamentalists object to what is taught in schools

(Klicka, 2006; Welner, 2002). Parents who began working with and educating their children as infants and toddlers to provide an academic advantage may be concerned that their children will be held back while learning in a stifling school environment. Many parents who homeschool believe that their children will pursue learning independently, inventing projects and working at their own pace. The learning in this type of homeschooling situation is often “individualistic, independent, and self-directed” (Van Galen & Pitman, 1991). One concern parents mention is how schools teach, rather than what they teach (Welner, 2002). Welner (2002) found that some homeschooling parents believe that if they leave their children in public schools, their children will be left behind with the inadequately funded, poor quality education they perceive as happening at some public schools. Some parents may believe that if their children attended a traditional school, the effects of the home environment of “at risk” students may have a negative effect on their children (Wise Bauer & Wise, 2009; Perkins, 1992). Additionally, lack of administrative support and the negative effects of peer socialization were considered in the top eight motivational factors in Olsen’s study (2008).

The results of the NHES revealed that family time, finances, travel, and distance accounted for 14 percent of families who homeschool their children (IESd, 2007). Some families find homeschooling their children is more appropriate because they work in jobs that demand that they move often (VanGalen, 1988). Homeschooling in the military is common enough that the Department of Defense issued a policy on homeschooling to advise military families (2002). In her blogged book, *Tossed by the Fates*, Moon (2012) offers advice to military families as they move about the country and to overseas assignments. Some military families consider homeschooling to help provide a feeling of continuity as they transfer from one assignment to another. Olsen (2008) indicated that families are motivated by aspects of their

lives, such that “unique environmental needs of the family” were considered in the top eight factors. Dobson (2000) wrote about children who had to travel and had nontraditional schedules because they were athletes, artists, musicians, and others who are able to pursue their passions and achieve academic success through homeschooling.

Seven percent of parents indicated an interest in providing their children with nontraditional approaches to schooling (IESd, 2007). Some homeschoolers use a nontraditional “unschooling” approach to educate their children. “Unschooling” offers a child an opportunity to follow their educational interests and needs. Families who chose “unschooling” wanted their children to benefit from self-directed learning without the constraints imposed by adult instructors. “Unschooling” specifically left out ideology that traditional educators take for granted like testing, having a well defined curriculum, setting benchmarks, and giving grades to students (Holt, 1979). Homeschooled students have had opportunities to use project based learning and experiential learning to enrich their life experiences. Homeschoolers may take advantage of opportunities to volunteer in veterinarian offices, non-profit organizations, or take college classes (Klicka, 2006).

Six percent of parents who homeschool their children indicated that their child’s health problems or special needs was the reason they chose homeschooling (IESd, 2007). Some families have had to resort to homeschooling due to the child’s immune deficiencies, cancer, muscular dystrophy, or other long-term debilitating illnesses. Families choosing homeschooling for their special needs children have cited their frustration with the special education process in schools and the sometimes harsh environment created for special needs children and their families (HSLDA, 2008). The fact that a child has special learning needs or disabilities was found to be one of the top eight motivating factors in a study by Olsen (2008). The Home

School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) (2008) says that parents of struggling learners or children with special needs find unexpected benefits when they begin homeschooling their children, such as being able to vary activities and accommodate their child so as to provide a positive learning environment (LifeTips, 2012).

2.3 History and Growth of the Homeschooling Movement in the United States

Education has been important in the growth of America. As our nation was formed the majority of American children were taught at home by parents or tutors. Puritan settlers established America's first public school in 1635 in Massachusetts (Boston.gov, 2011). Beginning in the late 1700's there was an immense amount of change in American education and educational philosophies. Christians interested in spreading their religion through the educational environment used their influence and pushed for schools that would be available to all children. Massachusetts enacted a provision in 1780 that legislated that communities must provide schooling for children (Cremin, 1980). In 1795, New York enacted legislation to encourage schools, and then in 1814, ratified an updated legislation that created a system of schools (Cremin, 1980). Noted textbook author Noah Webster served in the Massachusetts legislature from 1815 to 1819. Webster continually urged his fellow legislators to establish a system of schools funded by the state (Richman, 1995). In 1837, Horace Mann, in his position as the first secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, followed in Webster's footsteps and focused his efforts on the establishment of a State-run system of schools (Richman, 1995).

In the 1850's schools expanded to educate all ages and types of children who were previously schooled at home. Kindergarten classes were initiated for children aged five or six

and school districts began to open schools for disabled children (Cremin, 1980). High schools emerged in Boston for students who wished to continue to learn in English, rather than the traditional Latin. The new American high schools focused on preparing students for the university, which had previously only been available to the wealthy students who attended private preparatory high schools. Even with the improvement in schooling most children were homeschooled until 1852, when a compulsory school law was passed in Massachusetts.

Between 1840 and 1870, the percentage of Caucasian children enrolled in school increased from 38.4 percent to 61.1 percent. Funding for education in 1870 varied from state to state, Georgia spent \$1,250,299 on schooling with only 9 percent coming from public funds, while Iowa was spending \$3,347,629 with 94 percent derived from public funding (Cremin, 1980).

In 1880, resistance to the State-run school system, initiated by parents who were educating their children at home brought out the militia to enforce the compulsory schooling legislation in Barnstable, Massachusetts (Richman, 1995). In the late 1880's labor focused on expanding the nations' schools with the goal of keeping children out of the workforce and increasing wages for men (Peterson, 1985, Gaither, 2008). A strong campaign by labor leaders, between 1907 and 1911, produced legislation enabling San Francisco to enforce compulsory education (Peterson, 1985). A bigger fight by labor was won in the south after middle-class reform groups helped push for elimination of child labor and enacted compulsory schooling legislation. In addition to advancing the spread of schools nationwide, labor's influence helped lengthen the school year to 144 days (Gaither, 2008).

Parents in the early 1900's were prompted to move their children out of homeschooling and into public or private schools due to new compulsory school laws. The parent's ability to

educate their children in the traditional way by teaching them at home was being challenged by updated views of parenting and childrearing, which were based upon a new theory of specialization. In the theory of specialization, parents were told that each individual had a sphere of competence in that they were qualified to work and if they were not teachers, they were not qualified to teach their children (Mcalister-Kizzier, 2009). In addition to the theory of specialization, parents were convinced by researchers that an individual's income increases in proportion to the years he or she completes in high school (Gaither, 2008).

The Catholic Church was the major opponent to the expansion of compulsory schooling in defense of the Parochial school system, whose growth had been fueled by the influx of immigrants in inner city neighborhoods (Peterson, 1985, Gaither, 2008). By the early 20th century all states had passed measures legislating compulsory education, with the final enactment coming from Oregon that passed the Compulsory Education Act on November 7, 1922 (Katz, 1976, Gathercole, 2007). The passage of the Act was fueled by anti-Catholicism and the fear that private school attendance would create separatism, dissention, and discord between children of different religions. The Compulsory Education Act required nearly every child between the ages of eight and sixteen to attend public school (Gathercole, 2007, *Pierce v Society of Sisters*, 1925). This final act was almost immediately contested by two schools. The two established schools, one a private religious institution, the other a private for-profit school, fought the legislation all the way to the Supreme Court. Their case was based upon their belief that the legislation was contrary to the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution (*Pierce v Society of Sisters*, 1925). Initially, the federal District Court decided that the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment was violated by the Compulsory Education Act. Then upon appeal, the Supreme Court found that the parents' right to bring up their children and

direct their education had been interfered with by the enactment of the Compulsory Education Act. The court also found that the Compulsory Education Act interfered with the plaintiffs' business and that it could cause the destruction of the business and property of the schools. The Supreme Court decision included a provision that the state had the authority to require that children attend some school and that schools educate students in a manner designed so that "certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship ... be taught ... and that nothing be taught that is manifestly inimical to the public welfare" (Yudolf, 1979, p. 869).

The shift to compulsory schooling was not without controversy; along with religious private and for-profit schools fighting for their right to educate students, some parents went to court to protect the right to educate their children at home. Some of the court cases that coincided with the beginning of compulsory education decided that the state could not require children to attend public school and explicitly allowed private schooling. Other court decisions declared homeschooling illegal, while other decisions did not prohibit parents from educating their children at home (Gaither, 2008, Klicka, 2006). The relatively few children who were homeschooled during the late 19th through the mid 20th century were those students who were very transient; whose families traveled extensively, were stationed abroad, or lived in remote areas.

In the depression era of the 1930's, American men had difficulty finding work, which influenced youth to begin attending and staying in school longer (Gaither, 2008). Between 1930 and 1950, the percentage of children attending school rose from just under 50 percent to over 77 percent, and the school year lengthened to 178 days (Gaither, 2008). In the mid 20th century, a resurgence of homeschooling began because some families believed that the school environment was too conservative and stifled their children's learning opportunities (Lines, 2000). The

fledgling enthusiasm for educating children at home did not go unpunished. In 1958, a father in California was convicted of truancy for educating his son at home, even though his son had progressed from fourth grade to ninth grade curriculum in only 18 months (Somerville, 2003).

As more parents investigated home education in the 1960's as part of the anti-establishment movement, some educators began to study the effects of keeping a child home to be educated. After writing *How Children Fail* (1964) and helping to lead nationwide educational reform in the 1960's, John Holt became a proponent of "Unschooling," a type of homeschooling aimed at allowing a child freedom to learn. He believed that school was a good idea gone wrong, and that meaningful school reform was impossible (Mother Earth News, 1980, Farenga, 2003, Lines, 2000). Due to the poor publicity schools were getting and in an attempt to provide stronger educational opportunities for schools in low-income areas, Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was ratified in 1965. In 1967, the term "homeschooling" was first used to describe parents educating their children at home, and New Jersey courts ruled that homeschooling satisfied the requirement for education of children under the compulsory schooling legislation (Somerville, 2003). During the 1960's and early 1970's homeschooling families were rare and did not have very much opportunity to collaborate with other families (Somerville, 2003).

During the 1970's politically charged climate, legislated school integration prompted "white-flight" that had many families moving to the suburbs. Resistance to school district bussing programs spawned racial unrest and youth violence (VTNA, 1971, McKeon, 2007). Many families began reexamining their children's attendance at the local public school. Fundamentalists Christians were concerned about what their children were learning, believing that school districts had made certain liberal curricular choices that did not align with their beliefs

(Isenberg, 2007, Gaither, 2008). Other families viewed school district curriculum as weak and therefore opted for homeschooling as a way to raise the level of education for their children (Isenberg, 2007). When families examined options other than traditional public schools, many families began choosing homeschooling rather than magnet, private or parochial schools. Families who had chosen homeschooling were encouraged when a United States Department of Education employee and well-known educational author, Raymond Moore, wrote that children should not begin school until they were 8 or 10 years old (Moore & Moore, 1975). He later expanded on his views emphasizing that children schooled at home are successful. Even well known 1970's television talk show host, Phil Donahue, suggested that homeschooling was viable choice for children (Gaither, 2008).

When homeschooling began to grow in the 1980's, educators did not expect that numbers would grow to more than one percent of the total United States population of school aged children. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued *A Nation at Risk* following an eighteen month study that focused on our nation's secondary schools. The study found that our nation's schools were being eroded by a tide of mediocrity (Bell, 1983, Scherer, 2004). The findings of the study paralleled the dissatisfaction felt by many parents regarding their children's education. At the same time, many parents were becoming increasingly concerned about the safety of their children in the school setting (Bielick, Chandler & Broughman, 2001). Believing that public schools had become too liberal in the early 1980's, many Christian parents found themselves at odds with traditional public schools who in many cases viewed homeschooled children as truants (Lines, 2000, Isenberg, 2007).

Several activists assisted the new and prospective homeschooling families in their search for excellence in home education. Parents were encouraged by John Holt to keep their children

out of school and that “learning is living” in his book *Teach Your Own: A Hopeful Path to Education* (1981). Raymond Moore expanded his advice to homeschoolers by writing more books filled with tidbits on how to homeschool children, what to expect from your children as you educate them at home, and legal advice for parents (1984, 1985).

Homeschooling families emerged as a special interest group and focused attention on legislators through email alerts and good organizational skills. Families and high powered business people overwhelmed the law makers who began to formulate homeschool friendly laws (Gaither, 2008, Klicka, 2006). Such political efforts energized the fledgling homeschool movement and gave it vitality and strength to move ahead.

The laws governing homeschooling changed quickly possibly due in part to the fact that homeschoolers are interested in deregulation, as opposed to greater regulation (Klicka, 2006). By the mid 1980’s, most states accepted homeschooling as a legitimate form of schooling and revised their compulsory school laws. Much of the growth of homeschooling in the United States is due to the fact that legislation regarding how children are schooled has changed over the past forty years due to the political pressure from homeschooling parents (Klicka, 2006). At the same time states have upped the requirements and outcomes in traditional schools and legislators have given parents more choice in directing their children’s learning opportunities (Gaither, 2008). Many religious homeschoolers believed that they were successful in moving the legislature to enact new laws and repeal laws that were against homeschooling through the grace of God (Gaither, 2008, Klicka, 2006).

Since its inception in 1983, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) has been a major force in the legal struggles of homeschoolers and has continually lobbied the legislature on the behalf of homeschoolers. The HSLDA is the brain child of homeschooling

lawyers, Michael Ferris and Michael Smith. The HSLDA called attention to the fact that while most states required children to attend school through compulsory education laws, the laws did not specify what type of school. Unequal enforcement of the regulations in some states prodded homeschoolers to go to court to protect their right to teach their children at home (Klicka, 2006).

Homeschool activist attorney and author, Christopher Klicka attributed the growth of homeschooling to a resurgence of parents responding to God’s calling to educate their children with a biblical worldview (in response to Deuteronomy 6:7, “You shall teach them [God’s principles] diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up”). In his work as an attorney for the Home School Legal Defense Association, Klicka spent thousands of hours working with parents, eager to follow what they understood as their Christian commitment, fighting together with other homeschooling families against the anti-homeschooling legislation and local school district policies (Klicka, 2006). Milton Gaither (2008), associate professor of education at Messiah College and author of *Homeschool: An American History*, wrote that there was an ideological shift in the 1990’s as homeschooling went from being underground and radical to mainstream. By 1993, in response to pressure by homeschooling families, all 50 states had legalized homeschooling (Ray, 2011).

Christian speaker and founder of “Focus on the Family,” James Dobson said, “The great advantage of home schooling, in fact, is the protection it provides to vulnerable children from the wrong kind of socialization.” He goes on to expound on the limitless options available for children who are homeschooled (Dobson, 2000). Homeschoolers routinely belong to cooperative groups which specialize in educational enhancements including art, music, poetry, and Advanced Placement courses. They also have the opportunity to attend academic

competitions and participate in sports with other homeschoolers. Several of the past top qualifiers in the National Geography Bee (five percent) and Scripps Spelling Bee (twelve percent) have been homeschooled (HSDLA, May 30, 2003).

In response to concern regarding the nation's schools, President Bush (1991) met with the governors in Virginia for an Education Summit producing *America 2000: An Education Strategy* and laying the foundation for Goals 2000. Goals 2000 was later passed under the Clinton Administration in 1994 (Austin, 2004). One of the goals, often echoed by parents who have chosen to homeschool their children, addressed the fact that only 50 percent of students felt safe in their own high schools (Anderson, 2001).

Violence in schools has continued to increase the level of concern for many families. From 1994 to 1999, the *Journal of American Medicine* reports there were 253 documented school deaths related to 220 school violence incidents (Anderson, 2001). These statistics, along with an increase of bullying in schools, have underscored the need for a safe environment for the education of our nation's children (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). While trust in America's schools to take care of our children and provide a safe environment has been eroded due to the violence, proponents of homeschooling have promoted the safety and advantages of homeschooling (Kagan, 2008, Dobson, 2000).

Parents' level of concern for their school-aged children is at an all time high in the United States despite the well publicized documented improvement models including *No Child Left Behind* 2001 (Public law 107-110, 2002), and *Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)* 2004. On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed legislation reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965) as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, thereby forcing improvement initiatives and increasing accountability for schools. Public schools have exhibited lack-luster

performance and have been slow to initiate government dictated school improvement (Bloom, 2011, Izumi, 2009). Failed attempts to improve schools and poor learning environments have encouraged a move by many families to homeschooling (Bielick et al., 2001, Klicka, 2006).

2.4 Characteristics of Homeschooled Children

Much has been made about the characteristics of homeschooled students and their families, including the most popular age to homeschool, the percentage of white students, the socioeconomic status of homeschool families, and the education of parents who homeschool. Proponents believe that effective homeschooling may take place at any age. The largest numbers of homeschooled students are kindergarteners (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001). The percentage of students being homeschooled in the balance of the grades, first through twelfth, is similar (Bielick et al., 2001). Based upon the National Home Education Research Institute survey we know that the percentage of white students who participated in homeschooling was higher than other races at 91.7 percent and has increased from 2 percent to 3.9 percent of the total population of students in the U.S. since 1999 (Toppo, 2009). Researchers have reviewed the socioeconomic status of families who homeschool and found that 66.8 percent of families earn less than \$75,000 and more than \$25,001 a year (ICESd, 2007). In 1999, the NHES survey program found that 17 percent of homeschool families had an income above \$75,000. By 2007 the results rose to 33 percent (ICESd, 2007). The 2008 NHERI survey found on average, families who homeschool have a higher level of education than the general population: 67.3 percent of fathers and 62.5 percent of mothers have a bachelor's degree or higher (Ray, 2009). Out of the total population that the NHES surveyed, the proportion of college educated parents

who homeschool their children is 6.8 percent, up from 4.9 percent in 1999 (Toppo, 2009, IESd, 2007).

When reviewing family structure, researchers have found that 89 percent of homeschooled children are from two-parent households (IESa, 2007). Sixty-eight percent of home school families have three or more children (Ray, 2003). Fifty-four percent of families who homeschool their children have only one parent in the workforce. The highest numbers of students who are homeschooled live in the Midwest: 61,900 students. The highest percentages of students who are homeschooled in the United States live in the cities (IESc, 2001). The biggest growth in homeschooling is in the southwest (Gaither, 2008).

Although there are numerous statistics on the characteristics of students and families who do and do not opt to homeschool their children, we do not know the extent to that those characteristics factor into the decision-making process of families who consider homeschooling. It may be that many different types of families are more likely to consider homeschooling at all, or it may be that many different types of families conclude that they will indeed follow through once they begin to entertain the idea. Issues of unequal access to resources and information could be critical turning points in the decision-making process, making homeschooling feasible for some families and not others, despite equal interest in homeschooling across family types. If this is the case, then failing to understand and address these critical points of inequality could further propagate the divide between the haves and the have-nots in American society.

2.5 Decision-Making

The term decision-making indicates a cognitive process during which an individual or group of individuals evaluate the present options by gathering possibilities and probabilities that

are before them, then choose a pathway from among several alternative scenarios and finally make a definitive choice (Simon, 1960, Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, and Saint-Macary, 1995). Each individual or group of individuals incorporates various strategies and techniques when they go through a decision-making process. Often a decision-making process is direct, almost immediate seemingly without any conceptual framework; in other instances the process is expanded and lengthy, incorporating identifiable tools such as critical thinking techniques while including pressure from various societal, educational and intellectual considerations (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999, Simon, 1960).

When studying decision-making in families as it pertained to the life-changing choice of the purchase of a home, Klepper and Gronhaug (2009) stated that organizational decision-making is not fundamentally different than decisions made by families and although families do not usually have formal business meetings around their dining room table, they may assimilate the traits, objectives, and characteristics of a small organization. Klepper and Gronhaug (2009) applied decision-making philosophies from management to the families in their study. Some of their philosophical basis was built on Langley et al. (1995) who argue that in an organizational decision-making process it is difficult to ascertain the beginning and end of a decision, as well as determine the logical basis and pathway of the decision. As Klepper and Gronhaug (2009) incorporated Langley's et al. (1995) organizational decision-making process by applying it to families, they found that one area of a family's decision-making process is essentially tied to decisions in other areas. Due to the linkage and interconnections of the family's life-style, interests, and personal preferences, as the family is presented with a new period in their life and the decisions that are nested within that period of responsibility, they move into an era of deductive decision-making (Klepper & Gronhaug, 2009).

As the explosion of homeschooling has erupted, a number of questions have arisen about this trend that takes families back to the educational roots of the country. Yet while the history of homeschooling is well documented and there is plenty written about parental choice, there has been very little research on the decision-making process that parents go through when they choose to leave traditional neighborhood schools for homeschooling (Center for Educational Reform, 2009; Gaither, 2008; McKeon, 2007). Decision-making regarding homeschooling has primarily been addressed in two key contributions to the literature. First, while comparing burnout in homeschooling mothers to schoolteacher burnout, Lois (2006) examined the timing of the decision to homeschool. Lois found that some parents make the decision to homeschool prior to having children, other parents reviewed options for their children approaching school age, and still other parents decided to begin homeschooling while their children were attending public or private schools. In a second study, Hall (2007) conducted research in DeKalb County Georgia on factors that influence parents' decision-making process. She found that "the goal of homeschooling was to provide a successful education for children by applying a warm and loving environment, which fostered closeness and parental participation." While part of her research focuses on and discusses decision-making, it ignores the process through which parents traverse when deciding to begin or discontinue homeschooling.

2.6 Decision-Making Theories

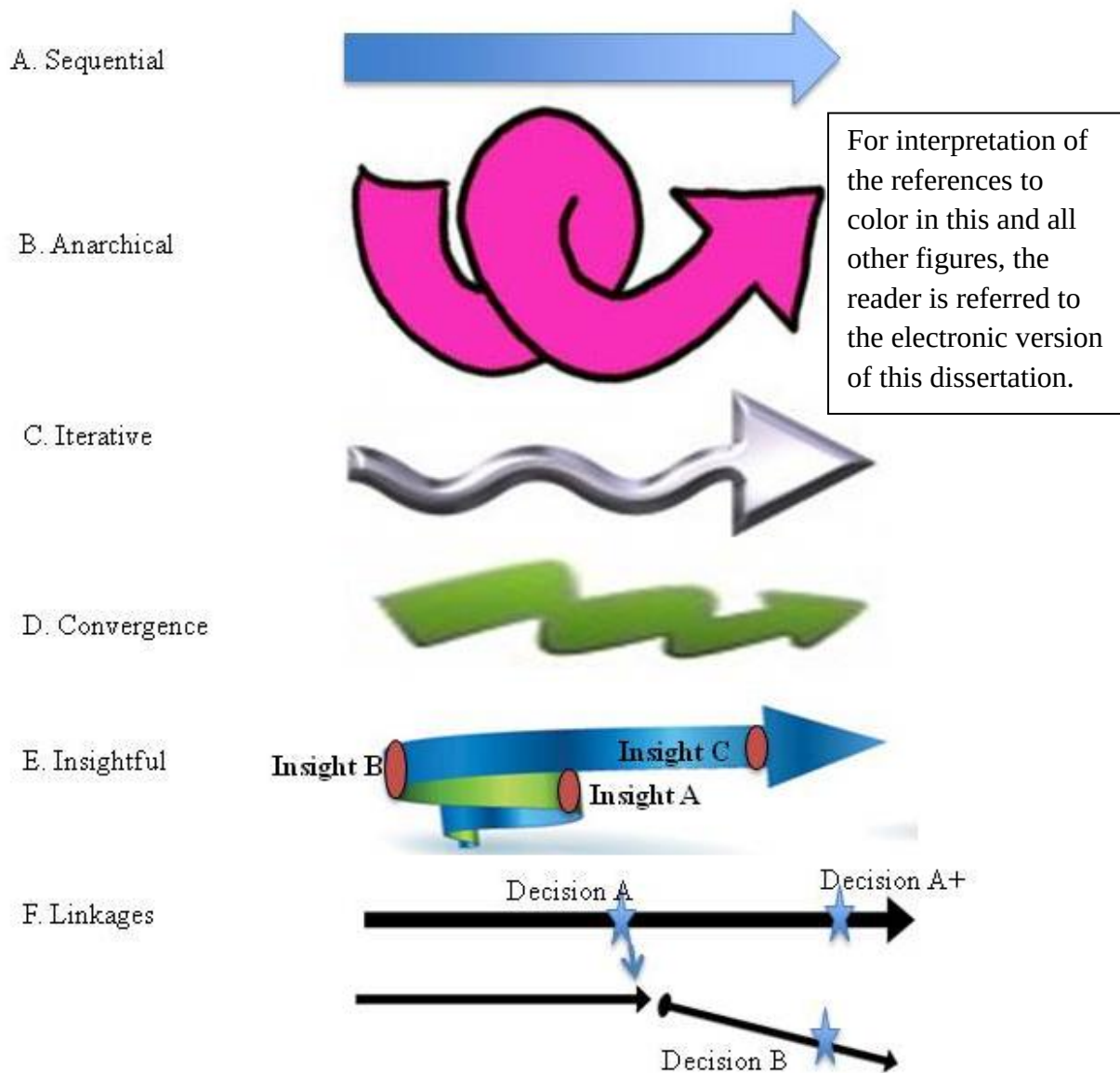
"The essence of ultimate decision remains impenetrable to the observer – often indeed to the decider himself... There will always be the dark and tangled stretches in the decision making process – mysterious to those who may be most intimately involved" (John Fitzgerald Kennedy, quoted in Allison, 1971, preface).

Early decision-making theory was introduced by Bernoulli in 1738, reintroduced by John Dewey (1910), and placed at the center of executive function by Barnard in 1938. Simon (1960)

expounded on Barnard's research by discussing the prolonged, multifaceted process which precedes the final choice. Since then many researchers have studied the ways decisions are made, and as President Kennedy mentioned, there are "mysterious", interwoven, and "tangled" pieces to many decisions (Allison, 1971). This study has reviewed and evaluated two models of decision-making that are integrated to provide a holistic framework for the analysis of decision-making.

The initial model by Paton (2007) features three main time periods in the decision-making process: *before the decision*, *the decision*, and *after the decision*. In my study I have intertwined Paton's *before the decision* time-period with six multifaceted, complex, unique choice processes that include various rational factors, logical steps, and pressures as presented by Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, and Saint-Macary in 1995 (Davis, 1973; Lipham, 1981; Dunstan, 1981; Rankin, 1981; Lipham & Rankin, 1982). The deductive empirical research on family decision-making by Klepper and Gronhaug (2009) and their agreement with Langley's et al. (1995) model set the basis for my use of Langley's et al. (1995) decision-making model. I have taken the model a step further and used the totality of Langley's et al. (1995) six decision-making processes as a scaffold for my study. The six pathways in the model included steps during which evidence was gathered and interpreted through a lens made up of personal perceptions, assumptions, and experiences and was labeled as sequential, anarchical, iterative sequence, convergent, insightful, and linkages (Payne, 2003; Lipham & Rankin, 1982; Langley et al., 1995). By using Langley's et al. (1995) pathways I was able to discriminate on the differences between the families' decision-making process by focusing on the intricacies of their pathways. In Figure 2.1 below, I present a graphic representation to illustrate the six decision-making processes.

Figure 2.1. Decision-Making Process Pictorial Representation



The sequential process [Figure 2.1, line A] is focused on “intelligence, design and choice” (Langley et al., 1995, p263). Families who use the sequential model have a narrow, research-based focused process made up of rational stages that may include the reduction of various thoughts into identification and definition of their interest in homeschooling, the suggestion of homeschool options, evaluation of the alternatives, the actual decision choice,

implementation of the decision to homeschool and the evaluation of the decision to homeschool (Lipham & Hoeh, 1974, Langley et al., 1995).

The “anarchical” [Figure 2.1, line B] decision-making model embodies inconsistent thoughts that provide the impetus to move the decision along various chaotic avenues and paths, which eventually tumble randomly into a choice (Langley et al., 1995). The randomness and true anarchy of thought in this model makes it difficult for the family to evaluate the alternatives available. Some of the pressures that hamper and confuse their pathway to the end choice are socio-economic, friends and family, gender, ethnicity, cultural ideology, values, habits, external expectations, past learning and life experiences, along with religious beliefs (Paton, 2007; Bloomer & Hodgkinson, 1997; Kessler, 2000). As an individual moves through the decision-making process Payne (2003) commented that some decisions are made through a process whose primary objective is avoiding negative outcomes. When the final decision is made it may seem as though the actual decision is so understated, that it is difficult to identify when the decision is completed (Lipham & Rankin, 1982).

The third model, “iterative sequence” begins similar to the first [Figure 2.1, line C] and is designed to be a theoretical half-way point between sequential and anarchical decision-making (Langley et al., 1995). Families go through some chaos and distractions similar to the anarchical model as they move along the iterative sequence pathway, but rather than all of the twists and turns incorporated in the anarchical process, this pathway, while filled with zigs and zags, is smoother and somewhat more managed. This model is characterized by a somewhat organized, but messy emotionally challenged process filled with divergence that slows the momentum to the final choice (Langley et al., 1995).

Families who faced the process and found themselves at the mercy of an element of chaos, integrated with sudden curves and turning points before focusing in on the decision point were classified as working through the “convergence” model [Figure 2.1, line D] (Langley et al., 1995). The convergence model unfolds from the initiation of the idea beginning with a family thinking about homeschooling, with the families steadily little by little focusing on the final decision. The convergence pathway, while similar to the iterative decision-making process in some ways, differs in a foundational basis regarding the underlying positive emotional feeling towards the idea of homeschooling. However, the families in the convergence process still found themselves tightly bound by a model which holds areas of distinct, discrete and tangible concrete phenomena that are considered in a responsive environment based upon culture, beliefs, opinions, and experience as the options are narrowed towards the final choice (Langley et al., 1995).

Families who move through the process with some elements of chaos, emotion and indecision, integrated with researching, talking to others, reading information on the internet, emailing current homeschoolers, thinking about the pros and cons of homeschooling and viewing optional programs, may fit into the fifth model of decision-making that is termed “insightful” [Figure 2.1, line E]. The “insightful” model is similar to the fourth model, with additional specific points of “insight” when families hear something or read something that helps to narrow their focus in an environment bounded by the view of possibilities and the determination of personal costs and benefits when coming to a conclusion that results in a choice (Paton, 2007; Langley et al., 1995).

Families who find themselves facing more than one decision as they consider homeschooling their child may follow the “linkages” model [Figure 2.1, line F] (Langley et al.,

1995). The “linkages” model is representative of families who are making decisions regarding the same concern that become interconnected over time (sequential linkages). As families evaluate the educational status of their children, they may find that ramifications include the need to make a decision regarding, for example, the status of their professional lives or their socio-economic status. These ramifications were termed lateral linkages and were associated with parallel decisions and precursive linkages that were decisions made on one topic that effects potential decisions on other matters (e.g. in this case decision A alters the path of decision B) (Langley et al., 1995). This decision-making process is depicted as being a multifaceted, intertwined, complex, ever-changing process through which several decisions are made concurrently, and the steps are interlaced together such that it may make it difficult, even impossible, to determine that steps lead to that decision (Langley et al., 1995).

Due to the effort involved in gathering information and evaluating the pros and cons during the *before* time period, moving through one of the six pathways, the actual decision may not be exciting or memorable. After the decision is made to homeschool, the families involved begin endeavoring to gather materials and make arrangements for their child’s learning environment similar to the ones outlined by their thought process during the decision-making process (Rankin, 1981). For parents who have discontinued homeschooling, the combined model offers the time *after the decision*, along with the subsequent time period to be reconsidered as the second *before* period, and the decision to stop homeschooling as a secondary decision.

Decision-making is broken up into multiple stages, characterized by change, confusion and anarchy of thought while focusing on logical and rational steps, along with pressure from various stakeholders (Paton, 2007; Lipham, 1981; Langley et al., 1995). Parents have an

emotional connection with the ultimate decision (Aldous, Condon, Hill, Straus, & Tallman, 1971). Reiss & Oliveri (1980) found similarities between stressful decision-making in the corporate organizational world and the family organization. They found that decisions were sometimes made on a temporary basis (Reiss & Oliveri, 1971). In the case of this study, the temporary decision to homeschool their children was revealed by the fact that all of the parents indicated that they reviewed their decision on a yearly basis. By using an integrated approach including points from both educational and organizational decision-making, the study benefited from the availability of the blend of philosophies. As the study progressed, it was important to keep various stages, steps, and strategies available from the two theories for the ultimate deciphering of the parents' processes as they move through their decision-making journey, finalizing in the ultimate goal of deciding whether to begin or discontinue homeschooling their children.

2.7 Research Questions

Homeschooling is not new to America. Most children were homeschooled until about 200 years ago, when compulsory schooling was initiated, and children began spending days learning in school, rather than with their mothers (Gathercole, 2007). As the explosion of homeschooling has erupted in recent years, a number of questions have arisen about this trend back to the educational roots of the country. After a review of the literature, the following gaps in the existing knowledge have been identified, such that this research was guided by two overarching questions:

- What process do parents go through when making the decision to begin or discontinue homeschooling their children?

- What circumstances precipitate a parent's decision to move their children to homeschool or to end homeschooling?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study used interviews to investigate the process parents went through when making the decision to begin or discontinue homeschooling their children. This research reviewed the recollections of parents regarding the events and conversations leading up to and surrounding their decision to begin homeschooling or discontinue homeschooling their children. When studying family decisions memories make up the records of the process leading to the eventual choice (Weick, 1971).

3.1 Sample Selection

I interviewed one or two parents from fourteen families [Table 3.1¹] who have homeschooled their children in order to discover and describe the information regarding parents' choices concerning homeschooling (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). I chose interviewees who have experienced homeschooling (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Table 3.1 Introduction to Families and the Grade Their Child Began Homeschooling

Mom	Dad	Child (begin HS)	Child (HS)	Child (HS)	Child (HS)	Child (HS)
Katrina	Devon	Jonathan (K)	Allen (K)	Simon (K)	Gessica (NA)	
Chrystal	David	Camile (PK)	Isaiah (K)	Georgia (K)	Julia (K)	Brooklyn (NA)
Hannah	Justin	Larry (PK)	Jason (K)			
Lindy	Ken	Alexandra (1+)	Michelle (PK)	Tim (PK)		
Mindy	Jeremy	Brian (K)	Samantha (K)			
Jessica	Evan	Ellen (PK)	Lynette (PK)	Alex (PK)		
Connie	Josh	Amos (6)	Andrea (6)	Jacob (6)	Marilyn (8)	Fred (1+)

¹ Pseudonyms were used for all participants

Table 3.1 (cont'd)

Connie	Josh	continued	Isaiah (1)	Emily (NA)		
June	Marcus	Emma (PK)	Owen (K)			
Debbie	Don	Sally (3)	Grayson (K)	Declan (1)		
Tina	Tom	Liam (PK)	Noah (PK)	Aden (PK)	Grace (PK)	
Janice	Bradford	Kelly (6+)	Jack (4)			
Julica	Steve	Norah (K)	Julia (K)	Caleb (K)	Blake (K)	
Karis	Herb	Holden (9)	Anne (2)			
Randie	Brice	Ronald (1)	Brielle (K)	Colton (NA)		

The sample, a subset of the population of those in mid-Michigan who homeschool their children, were not selected at random; rather I used convenience sampling and snowball sampling approaches. Convenience sampling allowed me to use a sample that was easily accessible. The snowball sampling approach, which has also been referred to as chain or referral sampling, allowed me to access people who were in the close knit or hidden homeschooling population, and capitalized on social knowledge gained from those within the homeschooling population (Bowers, 2011; Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

I used an initial convenience sample of ten families combined with a snowball sampling method to reach the full sample size of fourteen families. I targeted individuals for the initial interviews by emailing and calling them (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The families in the convenience sample were people who were within my network of contacts within the mid-Michigan Christian community. During the research and interview process I was serving as the superintendent of a well respected prekindergarten through twelfth grade Christian school in a fairly large city in mid-Michigan. In addition to life-long contacts I have made in the Christian community in mid-Michigan, my affiliation with the Christian school gave me an opportunity for people to be confident in opening up and speaking about their experience from their hearts.

During the interview, I asked the interviewee if he or she could recommend other homeschooling parents whom I could contact. I was able to obtain four homeschooling interviews through the snowball referrals. The convenience sample represented thirty-three children who were homeschooled by their parents. Nine additional children were represented by the four families in the snowball group. Each family in the snowball group was recommended by one family in the convenience sample [arrows indicate recommendation as shown in Figure 3.2]. Some of those in the convenience sample also recommended others for interviews, but the referred individuals were unable or unwilling to participate in the study.

Table 3.2 Disclosure of Convenience and Snowball Sample Interviewees

Convenience Sample	Related Snowball Sample
Katrina	
Chrystal	Lindy & Ken
Hannah	Mindy
Jessica	
Connie & Josh	
June & Marcus	
Tina	
Julica	Karis
Debbie	Randie
Janice	

There were forty-two children from the fourteen families in the study who began homeschooling. Of the forty-two children, there were twenty-one children from eight families who discontinued homeschooling at a later point in time. Of those twenty-one children who discontinued homeschooling, two children from two different families who were homeschooled and switched to private Christian school, then left their school to return to homeschooling once again. Out of those two children, one child subsequently left homeschooling to attend community college during his senior year of high school. While the goal was to include at least three families that have discontinued homeschooling for at least one child, I ended up

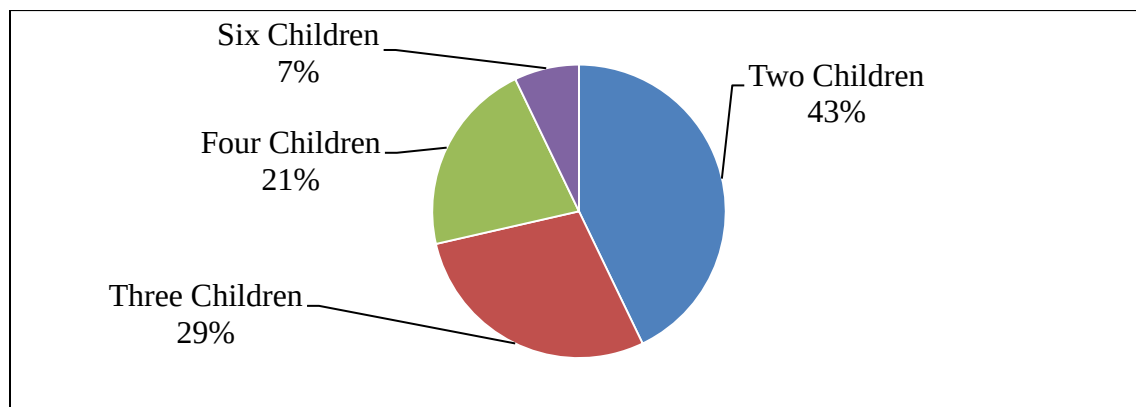
interviewing eight families who had at least one child discontinue homeschooling. While my goal was to interview the parent (mother) who homeschooled the children, in three families the fathers also participated in the interview. In Table 3.2, the interviews which included the fathers are indicated by stating both the name of the father and the mother. No children were interviewed.

3.2 Introduction to the Families

In this section I present a description of the families that includes family size, the type of environment where the interview took place, whether the children were present during the interview, the year of school when the child began homeschooling, the primary teacher's area of expertise, and the highest degree earned by the parent who conducts the home education of their children.

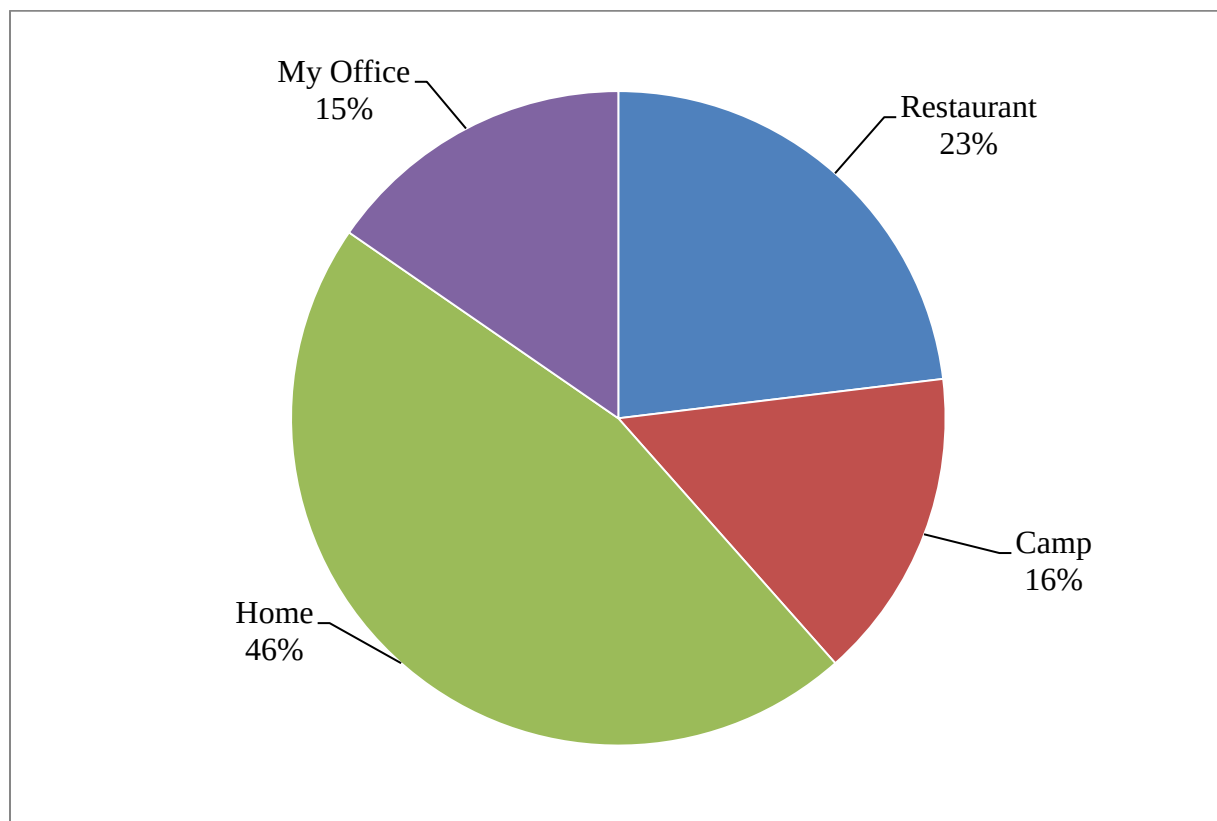
The parents interviewed in the study had children aged two to twenty-four. Families in the research study lived in various communities in mid-Michigan and consisted of between two and seven children and had homeschooled between two and six children [as depicted in Figure 3.1].

Figure 3.1 Frequency of Number of Children Homeschooled per Family



I interviewed mothers who were the main home educator of their children. In two cases, the fathers participated in the full-length of the interview and in one case the father arrived home and participated for approximately ten minutes during the middle of the interview. The interviews [Figure 3.2] took place in a restaurant, my office, during a homeschool outdoor education camping experience, or the home of the family. The interviews that took place in the families' home were predominately at the dining room table. One home based interview took place in the living room and one took place in the kitchen while the mother was baking cookies.

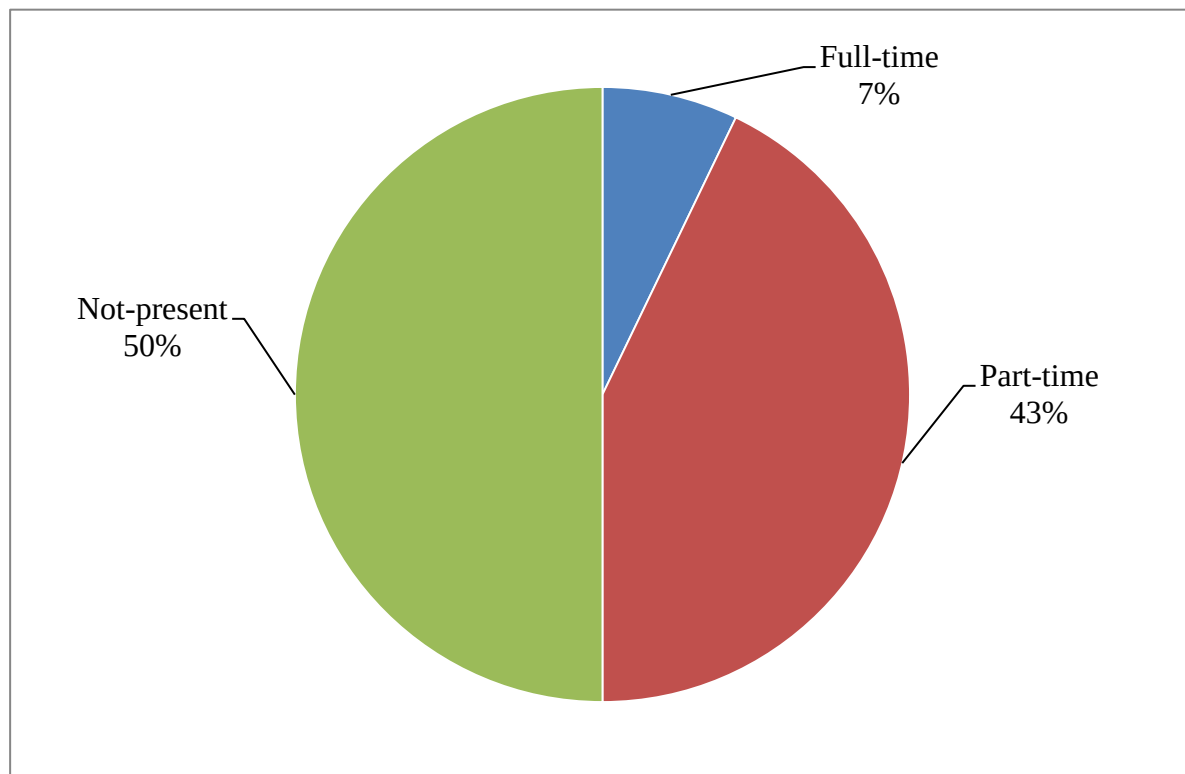
Figure 3.2 Location of Interview



During the interview with the parents, some of the children were not present, some were present part of the time, and some of the children were present during the full length of the interview in the same general area in their home, but were not involved in the interview. Of the children who were present part of the time during the interview, most of them were present

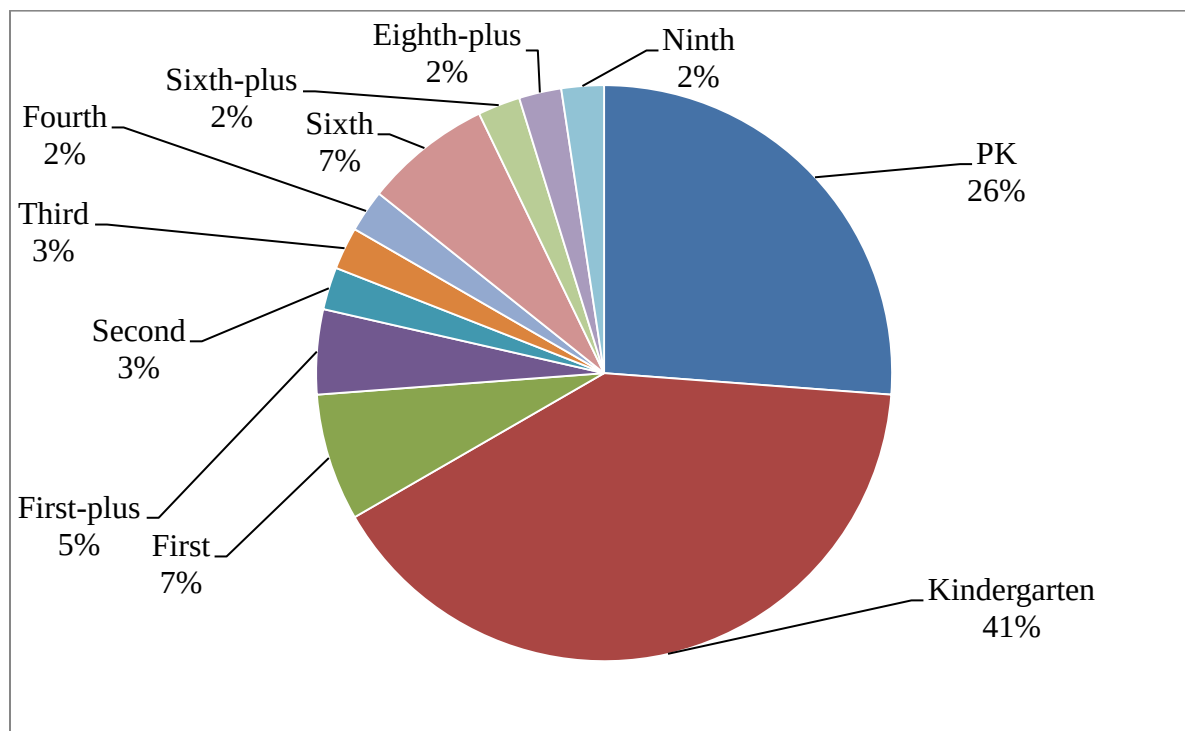
because the interview took place at their dining room table and they wanted a snack or other item from their parent. One of the interviews took place in the kitchen of a home while the mother prepared cookies for her family and one of the interviews took place in the living room of a home. One of the interviews that took place at a restaurant began while the mother's children were eating with my husband in an adjacent booth and continued while he took them on the other side of a glass wall to the play area. A visual description of the interview locations is available in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 Presence of Children During the Interview



The fourteen families interviewed in the research had a total number of forty-two children who were involved in homeschooling. One of the children included in the study was an eighteen month old preschooler who was currently involved in an intentional homeschooling course and was classified by his mom as being homeschooled.

Figure 3.4 Frequency of Initial Grade for Homeschooling

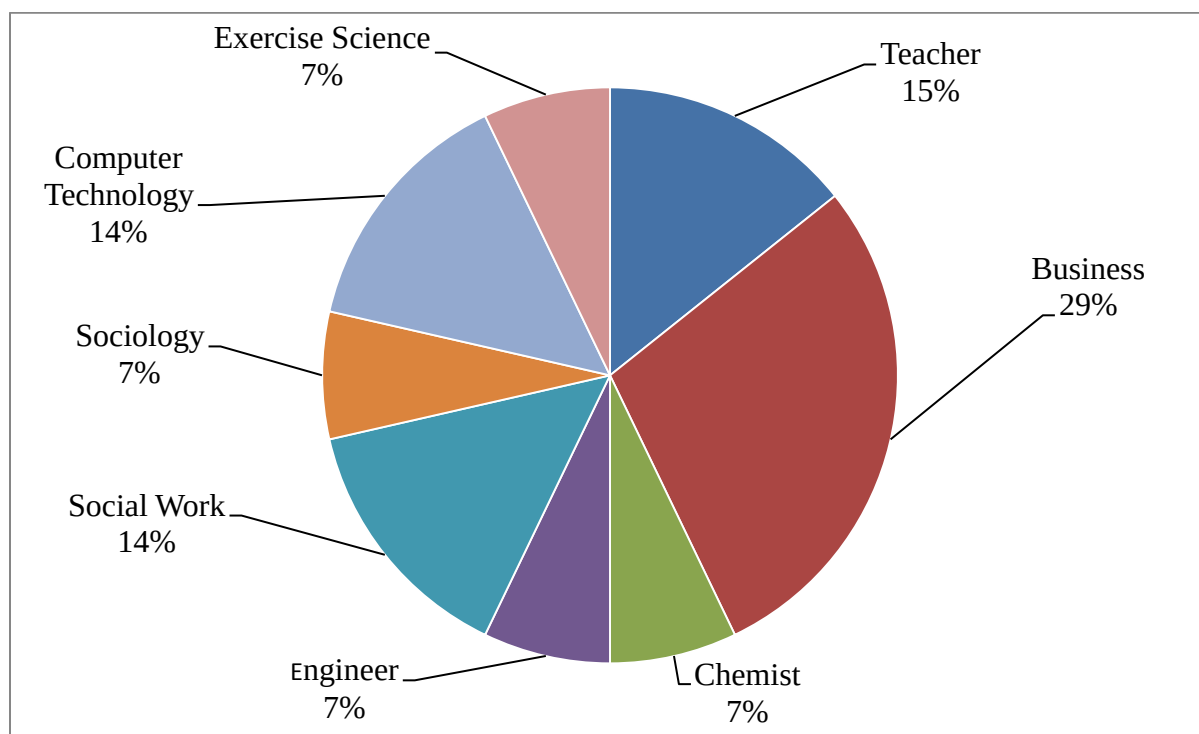


Four of the families had preschool children who were not considered as being home educated because their parents were not intentionally homeschooling them. As I reviewed the initial grade that parents began homeschooling [as seen in Figure 3.4], I considered the intentionality of the parent. Some of the parents began unintentionally working with their children as toddlers, but did not indicate that they were actually working through preschool curriculum. The largest group of parents began intentionally homeschooling their children in kindergarten. Two of the children who began homeschooling during first grade are labeled “First-plus” due to the students’ exit from a traditional school setting and initially beginning homeschooling during their first grade school year. A similar description, “Sixth-plus” and “Eighth-plus” was applied to students who began homeschooling during their sixth and eighth grade school years.

When looking at the parent who does the greatest amount of the homeschooling, I found that the mothers in this study were the home educator. While in the overall family, the father’s

field of expertise is important, I focused on the mothers' field of expertise since they were teaching their children day-in and day-out. I defined the field of expertise as the field in which the mother received her college training. In each case, the mother's original field of work was also congruent with the field in which she received her college training. As I reviewed the area of expertise or the field of their highest college degree of the mother I found that there were eight different degree fields represented by those interviewed in the study. The largest field of expertise is business, which includes accounting, marketing, and human resources [Figure 3.5].

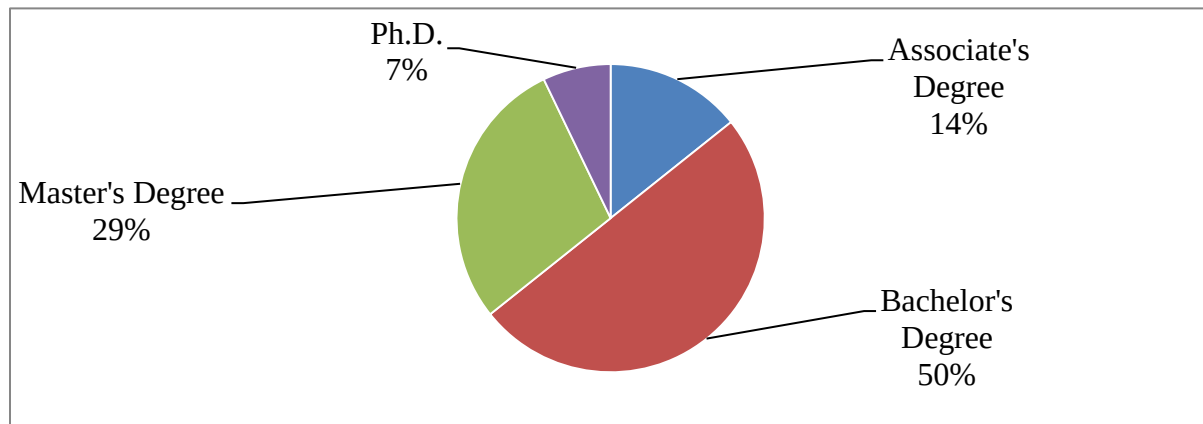
Figure 3.5 Homeschool Educator's Field of Expertise



In the study it was obvious that education was extremely important to the families. All of the parents from the families in the research study had attended college. In one family both parents had earned a PhD and in another family, the mother was pursuing her PhD when she had her first child and then remained at home with her new baby. At the time of the study, she was not planning on finishing her PhD due to the time commitment of homeschooling. When

reviewing the highest degree attained by the homeschool educators I found that when I considered only the parent who was the home educator, they all had earned a minimum of an associate's degree and one parent possessed a PhD [as depicted in Figure 3.6].

Figure 3.6 Highest Degree Attained by the Predominate Homeschool Educator



3.3 Data Collection

The convenience sample was made up of families who were in my network of contacts. A couple of the interviewees were in my environment but not well known to me. The interviews were arranged by phone calls, letters, and emails to the homeschooled families. The initial phone call included a brief introduction of the project, a description of the way the interviewer obtained the interviewee's name and contact information, explanation of next steps, and scheduling of a contact visit if desired by the interviewee (Seidman, 2006). Initial phone calls were followed-up with an email, detailing the desire for an interview (see letter Appendix A). Consent forms were included with the follow-up email (see consent form Appendix B). On arrival to the interview I reviewed the consent form with the interviewee.

Regardless of how interviewees were identified for potential participation, I made all contacts with the interviewees myself (Seidman, 2006). Following the initial email, I sent a

second follow-up email three or four days later. In the second follow-up email, I thanked the interviewees for agreeing to an interview and suggested possible times, dates, and locations for the interview. At that time the interview and location was scheduled. For a couple of the interviews, I spoke to the wife on the phone or in person to schedule the interview. For a couple of more hesitant potential interviewees, I offered to schedule a contact visit to help the interviewees feel more comfortable with the interview process (Seidman, 2006). In the end it was not necessary to schedule a contact visit. In three cases, I conducted an impromptu contact visit when I saw the potential interviewee at their church.

Basic tenants of family decision-making led me to use interviews to uncover elements of the processes because previous research studies had determined that “the best traces of... (family) decision processes are therefore in the minds of the decision makers” (Klepper and Gronhaug, 2009, p169). I carefully designed the questions to elicit the information that to correlate with my research questions (Creswell, 1994). Purposeful questioning helped to elicit a description of the decision-making process (see the interview protocol in Appendix C). I also used follow up questions to further illuminate the decision-making process.

Due to the focused nature of the recruitment of interview subjects I asked follow up questions to clarify the concepts that were unearthed in the interview. Concept clarification helped to define terms that were specialized or shared among homeschooling parents (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I also used responsive interviewing to interact with the families. Responsive interviewing is a descriptive phrase for the interviewing technique in that the interviewer responds to the answers given, rather than only asking scripted questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The interview was made up of topical questions with clarifying questions and responsive follow-up questions (Appendix C). The questions were open-ended, designed to determine the

process the families went through when they decided to begin or discontinue homeschooling their children. I listened carefully to the participant and explored essential ideas, words, and themes due to its essential nature to the research analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For parents who had discontinued homeschooling their child or children I followed up the initial interview questions with the final group of questions, along with responsive interview questions. This section included open-ended questions with the goal of uncovering the process the family used to decide to discontinue homeschooling. During the course of the interview I inquired to determine demographic information regarding the age and grade of the children, which parent, or other adult, conducted most of the homeschooling, the parent's educational background, cooperative schooling programs the children participate in, and the length of time the family had homeschooled their children.

Following the interview, I filed the consent form and interview protocol, including any additional notes, copied and labeled the digital recording of the interview, and transcribed journal entries (Seidman, 2006). In between interviews, prior to beginning the formal data analysis, I replayed and reviewed the interviews mentally, thinking about the meaning of statements and the importance of antidotal facts (Seidman, 2006). The confidential interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Names and identifying characteristics of the interviewees were not associated with the interview results. I kept a journal to record post-interview thoughts, impressions and considerations.

3.4 Data Analysis

The objective of data analysis was to produce findings by making sense of the data gathered during the interview process (Patton, 1990). The data in this study allowed me to move

with the families through the decision-making pathway from the circumstances that precipitated the process to the ultimate choice. I began analyzing the data through a continuous process when I began preparing transcripts of the interviews. The interview was then input into HyperResearch coding software, which enabled me to identify commonalities, concepts, and themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The coding software operated as a data organizer and helped to organize, store, and manipulate the data that was in the form of text (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Text data was the foundation of this phase and the analysis required that I read, reread, and reflected on the data. Using my theoretical framework on decision-making processes [graphically displayed in Figure 2.1], I identified significant patterns in the processes the respondents described in their interviews. During the data analysis process I used graphics to provide an effective way to describe the findings. When graphics are skillfully planned and designed, it helps to visualize, process, summarize and perceive the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This process enabled me to construct my results (Patton, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The reduction of data into the concepts contained within the theoretical framework helped me solidify the data into a format that is displayed [Figure 2.1] and shared (Seidman, 2006). While identifying significant patterns and repeating ideas, I worked to construct a theoretical narrative on how parents decided to begin or discontinue homeschooling (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

When reviewing the circumstances that precipitated a parent to initiate the decision-making process, I began looking at elements that correlated across families. Commonalities between families in the study were found by defining the circumstances into subgroups entitled specific events, conditions of schools and families, characteristics of parents and characteristics

of children. Each subgroup was subsequently defined based on responses given by parents through the interview process.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are important elements of the research that assure readers and reviewers of this research that the researcher was objective during the evaluation and analysis phase of the research (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). I worked to minimize threats to internal validity by holding the interviews under conditions which were comfortable to the interviewee. I interviewed homeschooling parents in their homes, at restaurants, in a quiet office during an outdoor educational homeschooling camp, or in my office based on the preference and comfort of the participants. The internal validity may be marginalized due to a lack of trust or concerned attitude by the parents of homeschoolers. Throughout the process of communicating with the interviewees, describing the level of confidentiality in the study, and interviewing the families, they all appeared to have a level of trust in my ability to assimilate their decision-making memories and represent their experience in a fair manner. My previous contact with many of the convenience sample interviewees and my position in the mid-Michigan Christian community also helped to raise their level of trust in me as a researcher, thereby raising the level of internal validity in this study. Using the personal referrals through the snowball method, their level of trust was elevated. I made three contact visits, by meeting the potential interviewees at their church to help negate any concern they had about talking to me. After the contact visit, one of the interviewees told me that she was very happy to speak with me because she really wanted to have an opportunity to tell her story. The contact visits were integral in establishing a productive relationship with the three homeschooling parents (Maxwell, 2005). The balance of the families

did not require a contact visit due to their familiarity and trust with their snowball referral contact or with me.

During the data interpretation and coding phases of the research, the study developed a level of reliability because the data was coded and interpreted into themes that could be understood by anyone who reviews the data (Frankel & Wallen, 1993). The study could be replicated in other states or across the country (Creswell, 1994). When answering the question, “What process do parents go through when deciding to choose to homeschool their children,” the area of external validity or trustworthiness was minimally addressed by determining that the questions answered the focus of the research. However, the trustworthiness may have been compromised by the fact that not everyone I contacted agreed to an interview. One may imagine that those who were willing to speak with me regarding their experience deciding to begin or end homeschooling represented the best case scenario. Many of the families (79 percent) who were interviewed had at some point of time in the past forty years been affiliated with the same large church, with over 2000 members, in mid-Michigan. Some of the families in my study had at one time been affiliated with the school where I was serving as superintendent. Only one family had a student enrolled in the school when I conducted the interview. This connection may have also compromised the external validity or trustworthiness of my study. While an audit trail would have augmented the validity of the study, I chose not to add an additional researcher to validate the decisions made during the research (Creswell, 1994; Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

The study has addressed transparency by giving the reader an opportunity to view the steps I take to collect and analyze the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Each step of the analysis has been explained. I have maintained careful records, including cataloging and filing all recordings, transcripts, and journal entries (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Communicability and believability are important to this phase. The ability to effectively and succinctly communicate and explain the research themes and theoretical framework has led to the communicability of the project (Auerbach & Silverman, 2003). By demonstrating that the interviewees have been straightforward and accurately represented during the analysis phase has elevated the believability of the results of this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

The population of my study [Table 3.3] is compared to the population of the United States and of the NHES study (IESd, 2007). My study had a higher percentage of Christians due to the network from which the convenience sample was taken. Although the study is not generalizable due to the focused nature of the convenience and snowball samples, the foundational analyses of the decision-making processes regarding homeschooling could inform the design of larger scale and more generalizable research down the line. While the U.S. population has a larger percentage of older children than kindergartners, both the NHES survey and my study showed more parents began homeschooling their children in kindergarten (IESd, 2007). When reviewing my study, I found that the results included more families who were white than the general U.S. population or the results from the NHES (IESd, 2007). The population of my study included a higher percentage of mothers who had earned their bachelor's degrees, than did the U.S. population or the NHES (IESd, 2007). The large NHERI (2008) study found that 62.5 percent of mothers who homeschooled had a bachelor's degree. One of the impacts of the increased percentage of bachelor's degrees in the population of mothers in my study is that there is an increased level of social capital. When they write about social capital, Adler and Kwon (2002) refer to linkages, relations, and connections within a community. The increased level of social capital may also help to support the academic goals and tasks within a

particular group of homeschoolers. Both the NHES and my study had a higher percentage of married couples than does the general U.S. population (IESd, 2007).

Table 3.3 Comparison Data for U.S. Population, NHES Homeschooling Survey (IESd, 2007) and My Study

	Christian	Largest age group of children	Females	Causian	Bachelor's Degree (females)	Married
General US Population	78%**	not Kindergarten**	48.8%***	72.4%***	34%*	65%*
NHES Study ****	70%	Kindergarten	58%	76%	49.9%	97.9%
Population of My Study	100%	Kindergarten	40%	93%	86%	100%

**** (IESd, 2007)

*** (Howden & Meyer, May, 2011).

** (Newport, December 24, 2009)

* (Laughlin, 2011)

The criteria of adequacy and appropriateness of data was informed by the population who responded positively to the request for an interview, those who actually met with me and interviewed, and the questions in the interview (Creswell, 1994). The issue of producing a coherent analysis was addressed by organizing the data and fitting it into the theoretical framework (Auerbach & Silverman, 2003).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS ON PARENTAL DECISION-MAKING PATHWAY

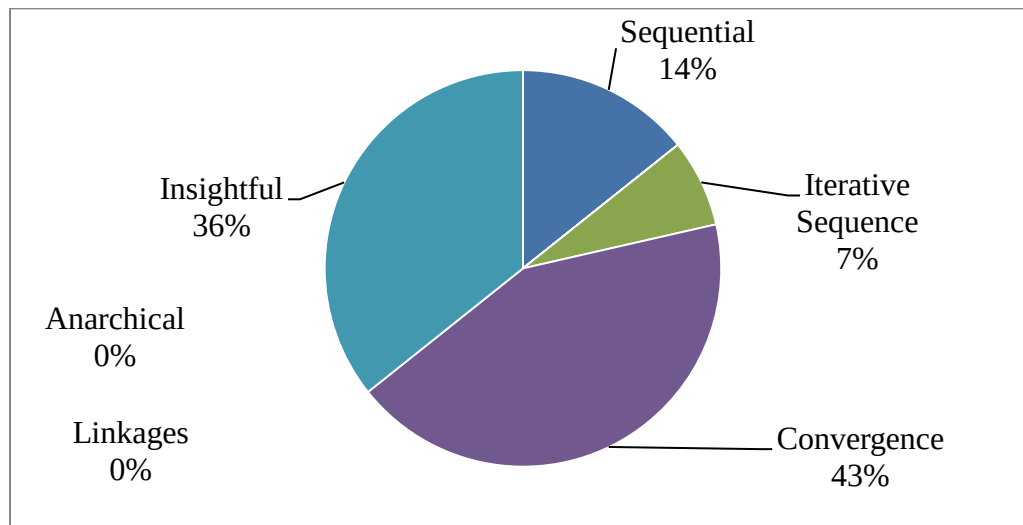
The analysis of the research revealed that the course of the decision-making process is critical as parents contemplate a move to homeschooling or consider discontinuing teaching their children at home. In this chapter I discuss the analysis of the progression parents go through as they begin to contemplate homeschooling all the way through the decision-making process culminating in a final choice to begin or discontinue teaching their children at home. The analysis includes a description of the route or pathway parents follow when pursuing the final decision regarding the appropriate learning environment for their child. The discussion of key precipitating circumstances surrounding the events, conditions, and characteristics of the decision-making process is the subject of chapter five.

The study of fourteen families found that in twelve cases the parents made the decision to homeschool for their first child and in two of the families, the initial decision to homeschool was made based around circumstances regarding the education of the second child. In both of the cases where the initial decision to homeschool was made regarding the second child, the first child had attended school with virtually no concerns. For the purposes of clarity, rather than discussing the eldest or subsequent children based upon birth order, the results are discussed regarding the initial and subsequent decision-making processes that a family makes. The initial decision correlates to the initial child for whom homeschooling was seriously considered.

The findings of the study revealed that out of fourteen homeschooling decisions for the initial child, the majority of the choices were determined to belong to one of two decision-making processes: convergence or insightful. The pie chart below [Figure 4.1] is a representation of the percentage of parents who followed a defined decision-making process when deciding to

move their initial child to homeschooling. This decision-making process applied to young children who had not yet started kindergarten as well as children who were attending a school whether public, charter, or private.

Figure 4.1 Decision-Making Process for Initial Child When Beginning to Homeschool



During the analysis it became clear that in the two key decision-making models, the schooling choice for the initial child was a critical and complex process filled with thoughtful research, conversations with homeschooling friends, and contemplation regarding faith implications. During the study it became evident that when the parents initiated the decision-making process and followed it through the twists and turns, while researching and spending time talking to each other and with their friends, they made a life-changing realization. For both the convergence and insightful decision-making processes, this first choice was not a simple assessment of the pros and cons of homeschooling but rather a pathway where each family had to overcome feelings of self-doubt and uneasiness, along with, in some cases, a fundamental aversion to of the idea of homeschooling.

4.1 Convergence Decision-Making

The six families who followed the pathway entitled convergence decision-making [Table 4.1] made up the largest group in the study.

Table 4.1 Characteristics of the Decision-Making Process for Families who Followed the Convergence Model

	Chrystal	June & Marcus	Debbie	Tina	Karis	Randie
Parent is concerned with their child's safety						
Child requested that they be homeschooled						
Parent is concerned about homeschooling						
Child is homeschooled in pK and child is advanced						
Parent has a general academic concern						
Parent has a specific academic concern						
Parent/child has negative interaction with school						
Child has disability or health concern						
Father had difficulty in school						
Father encourages wife to homeschool						
Parent believes they can homeschool child						
Stay-at-home mom						
Parents admire traits of homeschooled children						
Parent has homeschool friendly friends						
Faith concerns, church is homeschool friendly, God influences parents to homeschool						
Parent researched homeschooling						

The convergence model was made up of families facing the decision-making process and finding themselves at the mercy of an element of chaos, integrated with sudden curves and turning points before focusing in on the final choice of homeschooling their children (Figure 2.1, line D) (Langley et al., 1995). Families in the study who were classified as belonging to the convergence model found themselves in a process that unfolded from the origination of the initial idea of thinking about homeschooling. The process proceeded with the families steadily, little by little focusing on the final decision. This decision-making pathway included areas of distinct, discrete and tangible concrete phenomena that were considered in a responsive environment based upon culture, beliefs, opinions and experience as the schooling options were narrowed toward the final choice of homeschooling (Langley et al., 1995).

Taking a closer look at the six families who followed the convergence decision-making process, it was evident that there were some critical observations that depicted the conditions surrounding their choice. All of the families had academic concerns for their child's learning environment. The academic concerns of the parents included basic worries about available curriculum, increased emphasis on testing, accommodations for gifted or struggling students, and the belief that their child was more advanced than their peers. While interviewing June and Marcus I asked why they homeschooled their children. Marcus, who is a certified teacher, became animated as he explained,

I feel that schools are broken and driven by testing. Granted, I work in public schools, so that's why I see that schools are [broken]. I don't think they function very well especially as you move up; especially elementary [schools]. But then as you move up they start to do this specialization thing that I feel is a lie. I think a good teacher can teach about anything and they can help a student learn just about anything, but they break off into this is a subject area and this is, that doesn't work (pounding on the table). Sorry.

The families who followed the convergence pathway had a heightened level of concern with academics. When her daughter Camille was three years old, Chrystal began intentionally teaching her using a preschool curriculum. Camille enjoyed learning so much that she breezed through the curriculum in a short time. The longer Chrystal worked with Camille, the more she liked teaching. She said, “There is nothing like being there when your child learns something new. The a-ha moments aren’t just for someone in a school building. It’s that you get to see those little light bulbs go on.” Chrystal continued by telling me,

It felt logical – but you are used to teaching your own child and Camille was my first child. She had a desire to learn, so that was coming all throughout her being too. So just before she turned four she was already reading, so she was pushing me. She was, but she made it easy. Like I said, I had to take curriculum away from her so we had done preschool stuff when she was three and when she was four she was officially reading (and) writing.

It was obvious that Chrystal was passionate about her child’s education. Similarly, the other families in the convergence model had a heightened level of concern for their child’s learning environment. Their concerns were focused on the lack of congruency of the school’s pedagogy with their belief system, along with uneasiness due to their belief that the classroom in a traditional school lacked rigor and mastery. Most of the families who followed the convergence decision-making model explained that they had specific concerns with their child’s ability to study in a traditional school setting. For Karis and her husband Herb, their eldest child, Holden, was ahead of his classmates and was bored with the lack of academic stimulation. Karis told me about her son Holden’s experience in elementary school. She said, “When he started third grade he sat in class and said he was so bored because he knew how to do it. He would say, I learned it a long time ago, I think in first grade.”

A majority of the families who followed the convergence decision-making pathway had children who either suffered from health concerns or a disability including dyslexia or attention

deficit disorder. Chrystal, a mother of four children, found it easy to homeschool her eldest child. But when she began teaching her second child to read, it was difficult and at times frustrating. She described her experience with Isaiah by explaining,

Isaiah (seemed so intelligent, but with) his reading level he really had a hard time (and) his writing (and) even phonics. We spent two years on phonics. One day he could read the word cat, the next day we would sit down to work on it and it was like he had never seen it before. Even in the same paragraph sometimes he could read it and sometimes he would have to sound it out like he had never seen it before. It was so frustrating. It turned out that he can read. It was like a switch flipped and he could read fluently.

Karis and her husband Herb found that their daughter, Anne, struggled in class and was not given much assistance. Karis described her daughter's difficulty learning in her classroom. She explained,

The one thing that really bothered us about her was the reading. She could memorize the page just by hearing it and she wouldn't even know (what) the words were. And there is such a big push to get all the state requirements done. As long as she could sit down with a book and she would say, "What does this say?" and then go over the same book again, she knew how to read it. But when I would take a book and take it apart and move it around, she had no clue (and) that bothered me. Oh my gosh my daughter doesn't read! Then they moved her on to first grade. They said don't worry about the phonetically handwriting skills, don't worry about the fact she can't spell, don't worry about that she can't read, it will all come together.

Like many of the other families who followed the convergence decision-making pathway, Karis had a negative interaction with their child's school or potential school. When Karis found that the school was basically taking a wait-and-see attitude rather than actively giving her daughter assistance, she continued by saying,

But I am an impatient person so I said you know we need to do something on this, because math she excels because she pictures everything. She processes. Her processing skills are really strong in math. So we are like we have to do something about this. So that was one reason we pulled her too was the reading. And they put her in a reading lab and she said it was basically memorization. I found out that she didn't learn any phonics at all. It really bothered me and I said I have to get my daughter reading and to learn how to spell.

At that time she began reaching out for assistance. She searched the web and found a curriculum company that specialized in homeschooling resources. When she talked to the curriculum company the representatives had experience homeschooling and working with children who had learning concerns. The representatives were able to answer her questions and suggest appropriate information and an educational program to assist her with Anne's difficulties.

Karis was not the only parent in the study to have researched curriculum and programs to assist their children to learn successfully. All of the parents who followed the convergence process did in-depth research on homeschooling including reading books and pamphlets, attending conferences, surfing through internet sites, calling curriculum companies, and most of the interviewees consulted friends, who homeschooled their children. When Randie reflected on her process of investigating homeschooling her children, it brought back memories of her pathway to a final decision. She told me that, "Before we decided to homeschool somebody gave that (The Well Trained Mind) book to me." She continued talking about investigating homeschooling by saying, "I investigated a couple curriculums. I went to the conference and investigated them and saw some of them done. (I) visited co-ops to see how kids acted and are they normal kids, (or) are they obnoxious kids?"

Chrystal, the mother of a three-year-old, had not yet contemplated homeschooling her child, but had begun working with her by teaching her the alphabet and other basic information. She was working in the church nursery when she overheard a conversation regarding homeschooling.

When Camille was three years old, I heard people in the nursery at church talking about homeschooling and I mentioned that I was very interested; too bad I am not qualified for it. I didn't finish college. I thought it was interesting, but I couldn't do it.

Chrystal was interested in learning more about the idea so she attended a women's retreat at her church.

I went to this women's retreat at my church and (the speaker) said she homeschooled her child. She was going to send her to school, but she felt that God was convicting her to homeschool. And she thought of all the stuff she could do in her free time; she could go back to her career, that sort of thing. And she said she didn't feel qualified, but God provided everything she needed. And she said you are just going to have to pray about it and see what God has for you.

At this point in her research, Chrystal began praying to God, asking Him to direct her as she was working on investigating the best educational placement for her daughter Camille.

During the study, it was evident that Chrystal was in the majority of parents who followed the convergence model of decision-making, by putting her faith in God to direct her educational decisions regarding her child. Chrystal talked about how her faith in God directed her to continue her research by attending the local conference on homeschooling.

Then God started to work on my heart and He said, 'See, see, this is something I have for you.' God was just persistent and I prayed about it. Someone said there was a convention in the city and I could go to it and find out more. So I told my husband, and he thought that this was so strange and people who did it basically hid their children. That was true, fifteen years ago. It's different now; it's beginning to become normalized. And so we went to the conference and David was very impressed and came away very convicted that this was something that God had definitely (wanted) for us and He wanted us to... (homeschool). So we did (homeschool our daughter).

In the same way Chrystal's faith was central to her decision to begin homeschooling her daughter Camille, another mother in the convergence decision-making group, Randie, also expressed her interaction with God when praying for guidance as she struggled to decide where she should place her children for their education. At the time she began praying for guidance her son, Ronald was in kindergarten at a Christian school that was about twenty minutes away from her home. Randie talked about her belief of God guiding her to begin homeschooling by telling

me that, “I do think part of it was God working. At the beginning, I think He was heading us in a certain direction.” Similarly, Karis commented on her experience when searching for the best options for her children. She talked about God’s influence. Karis said, “I think that honestly I kept getting this head-beat from God that we need to do something different; this is just not going to work.”

Debbie also commented on her feelings regarding God’s guidance and influence on her choosing to homeschool her children. She explained,

Well, we had recently become friends with some (people) that we got to know. And we became very good friends. And they homeschooled, and they were affiliated with a lot of homeschoolers. And we kind of took that as yes this is God's plan. That was kind of the confirmation because we had thought about it before and no we (were)... not going to do it. And I would start thinking about it again and then I became involved with these friends and that was what they were doing and that was kind of a confirmation for us.

Parents not only prayed for God’s guidance when searching for answers regarding their child’s learning options, many of the parents also valued the integration of faith into their child’s learning environment. While interviewing June and Marcus they explained that not only were they concerned about the academics in schools, but they believed that it was important to have a focus on Christian values when educating children. Marcus commented,

Well it's a lot about that (pedagogy) but I also feel strongly that we have to have fundamental Christian perspective. So when I see schools that, I work in a public school and they are trying to do something different, but what is missing is they don't have the core worldview piece. They are trying to build off of character, and that's not going to work. Until they really put Christ in the center, they are not going to get it. Yes, that's where we are different.

All of the parents who followed the convergence model of decision-making mentioned that they had faith concerns including the belief that God was telling them to homeschool. They were concerned that public schools had a lack of emphasis on faith or they believed their church

was homeschool friendly. As I was listening to Marcus and June talk about their experience with homeschooling, June explained why she felt it was important to homeschool their children:

My reason to homeschool is that I love to know what my kids are doing throughout the day and that we can talk about what's happening during the day and how God is related to all that. For me, it is a passing on of a worldview and a belief system. You can still do that if your kids are in school. It is just harder because you don't know all the things they are taking in, that they are experiencing. You don't get to be a part of all that. To me that's why I like to homeschool that you are a part of their lives and you share all this life together and you can talk about all of that.

At the time of our interview Chrystal had been homeschooling for over ten years. She discussed her feelings regarding her teenage children and the importance of having a Christian influence in their school environment. She commented on her philosophy, "In an age when you don't know yourself very well and you are willing to try a new identity, it is most important to know who you are in Christ." Tracy echoed similar sentiments when discussing her concerns about her children and their learning environment. She said, "So sometimes it's better to homeschool, because you tell them what to learn. They don't get faith in their schooling in public school."

When looking at the families whose decision-making process followed the convergence model, all of the parents revealed that they had concerns about their ability to teach their children on a daily basis prior to deciding to homeschool. Debbie talked about her concerns with homeschooling and how she felt some of her friends were "superwomen." Her lack of confidence in being able to homeschool was partially relieved when one of her friends provided a model for homeschooling. Debbie told me about that realization and said,

As I got to know my one friend, I thought if she can do it, I can do it. She basically said, if I can do it, anyone can do it. Some of the people at my church seemed like superwomen, and I thought oh, my gosh, I, no way can I do this. I am not a Sheri or a Lindy. They just got it going; I don't. It just seemed more

realistic seeing my girlfriend, yes, we are a lot alike and she is able to do it, I guess I could do it.

Most of the families who followed the convergence decision-making pathway explained that after moving through the decision-making process, they became convinced that they would be able to teach their children, even if it was for only kindergarten or first grade. While interviewing June, who has homeschooled for the past nine years, I asked her about being reticent to begin homeschooling her children and what finally convinced her to begin teaching Emma at home. She answered by saying, “Well in my mind, I was stuck on ‘I am only doing this for one year’.”

In the convergence model all of the husbands encouraged their wives to homeschool their children even if their wives were not initially receptive to the idea of homeschooling. June talked about how even before they had children her teacher husband believed that homeschooling would be the best educational placement for his future children. June said,

This is how it started for us. Marcus was teaching (in a public school) and his first year he had 13 kids that ran the gamut of really, really smart to really struggling. It was a long year working hard to meet the needs of all those kids. The next year (Marcus) met a homeschooled kid when he came to pick up his sister and he had all these conversations with him. The more he talked to him the more he said he thought home schooling was a good idea. I think home schooling is a really good idea. I think we should do that. My response was always that I will never do that. If you want to do that you would have to do it yourself. He thought it was a good idea.

Similarly, Tina’s husband, Tom, encouraged her to homeschool their children beginning with their oldest son. Tina was teaching Chinese to children through a school and Tom believed that if she could teach other children Chinese, she could homeschool their son. During our interview Tina explained, “When my oldest was four we just started preschool and it was very hard for me to decide. My husband said, ‘Sure you could do it (homeschool),’ because I was teaching in the Chinese school.” Tina continued by saying, “At first he... wanted me to

homeschool. I (was) kind of half-and-half, I (wasn't) sure about the language part; I should say the English part. He (thought) that wouldn't be a problem."

In addition to having husbands who encouraged and supported their wives, the group of families who followed the convergence decision-making process also had a higher level of concern regarding safety of their children in the traditional school setting as contrasted with the other groups. When speaking with Karis regarding her son's classroom, she said, "There are a lot of discipline problems in the classroom and the teacher was so overwhelmed." She explained further about her son's personal concern about the school environment, "He didn't like to be in that bully-ish environment." She further illuminated her concern about her children's safety by explaining, "I must admit, the safety in the public schools, even though we have a little school, you never know what could happen in a little school."

Other parents who followed the convergence decision-making process also mentioned their concerns regarding the perceived inadequate safety for her children. Randie investigated the local public school by visiting and meeting with Ronald's potential teachers. While speaking to the teachers, Randie was concerned not only for her son's physical safety, but for his emotional safety as well. Her biggest concern was that the teachers recommended that she put her first-grade son in third grade. When speaking about her concerns, she explained, "I sure as heck wasn't going to put him in third grade. He would not have survived. It would have been horrid and for them to suggest it bothered me." Randie continued talking about her concerns, "I don't know, I had a hard time imagining Ronald dealing with that (beginning third grade when he was only six). Back then one of his biggest struggles was dealing with ... kids picking on him. That's just how he is."

The group of parents who followed the convergence process also showed a propensity to notice the traits of children who were being homeschooled to a greater degree than those who followed the other decision-making processes. As I interviewed Debbie, she talked about knowing people who homeschooled their children. As a follow up question, I asked her if she saw anything in her friends' children that were traits she would like her own children to emulate. She said, "Confidence." Then Debbie continued and illuminated her answer by saying,

Many of the homeschooled kids that I would want my kids to be like, they were confident and relate well and communicate well with adults and they weren't just bashful and could only communicate with kids their age and that was it.

While interviewing Randie, she told me that before beginning to consider homeschooling she had heard positives and negatives. When I asked her to elaborate on the positives and negatives, she talked about the way some homeschooled children seemed so well-rounded and personable. As she talked the positive impression she mentioned,

I witnessed many homeschool families ... (and the well) roundedness of those kids. They have an ability to interact with all ages. ...It would be hard for (my children) Ronald and Brielle not to come up and sit and join our conversation.

During the interviews several of the convergence mothers talked about their husband's negative experiences when they were in school and the way that influenced their encouragement of homeschooling. Tina told me about her husband, "From his experience (in school) he thinks the boys should be homeschooled." Debbie echoed Tina's sentiments by saying of her husband, Don, "His experience (in school) was really bad." While speaking with June and Marcus regarding Marcus' encouragement of homeschooling, Marcus commented,

Partly I went into teaching for spite. I was so annoyed with how things were when I was in school and how much of a waste of time things felt like to me, that I wanted to go change the world. I don't know that I changed the world.

Across all the twists and turns, the critical nature of convergence decision-making provided parents with a pathway filled with importance, thoughtful research, conversations and contemplation. As the families who pursued the convergence model followed the nuances of this process, it was obvious that there were elements that were universal across all of the parents and there were components that were specific to particular families.

As I have exhibited and discussed the critical elements of the parents' views regarding their children's academic environment, the safety of the school setting and the propensity of the families who experienced the convergence decision-making process to notice the traits of homeschooled children, it was apparent that the pathway developed out of distinct, discrete and tangible concrete phenomena considered in a responsive environment based upon culture, beliefs, opinions, and experience as the options were narrowed towards the final choice. The experiences that were considered in a responsive environment based upon culture, beliefs, and opinions revealed a connection between the heightened level of concern for academics and safety, combined with the parents' increased level of perception of the traits of homeschooled children that may have resulted from the fact that most of the fathers in this group of families had experienced difficulty in school and actively encouraged their stay-at-home spouse to homeschool their children.

4.2 Insightful Decision-Making

Five families in the study followed the pathway entitled insightful decision-making. The families who followed the insightful decision-making process [Table 4.2] made up the second largest group in the study.

Table 4.2 Characteristics of the Decision-Making Process for Families that Followed the Insightful Model

	Lindy & Ken	Mindy	Jessica	Janice	Julica
Parent is concerned with their child's safety					
Child requested that they be homeschooled					
Parent is concerned about homeschooling					
Child is homeschooled in pK & child is advanced					
Parent has a general academic concern					
Parent has a specific academic concern					
Parent/child has negative interaction with school					
Child has disability or health concern					
Father had difficulty in school					
Father encourages wife to homeschool					
Parent believes they can homeschool child					
Stay-at-home mom					
Parents admire traits of homeschooled children					
Parent has homeschool friendly friends					
Faith concerns, church homeschool friendly, God					
Parent researched homeschooling					

The insightful decision-making model has specific points of insight that are evident when families hear or read something that helps to narrow their focus in an environment bounded by the view of possibilities and the determination of personal costs and benefits when coming to a

conclusion that results in a choice to homeschool their child (Paton, 2007; Langley et al., 1995).

In addition to the points of insight, the insightful (Figure 2.1, line E) decision-making process featured elements of chaos similar to that experienced by the convergence families, and which included emotion and indecision, research-filled activities, talking to others, reading information, contacting current homeschoolers, tabulating pros and cons, and weighing optional programs.

Although both groups experienced chaos, the key distinction between the convergence and insightful families is that families who followed the insightful decision-making pathway experienced a clear flash of understanding, at certain points, that led to their final choice to homeschool. For the families in the study these moments of insight included the diagnosis of an illness that seemed to preclude a child from attending school, the realization that a child was in a school situation that did not live up to the parents' expectation, the mother's perception of that her child who could read at four years old may be bored in school, the experience of a parent realizing that her daughter was detached from the classroom experience, and a father who was influenced when he noticed that his six-year-old homeschooled niece had an excellent understanding of geology. While these examples represented a small subset of the insights encompassed in the study, it provides an illustration of the families "a-ha" moments. The insightful model of decision-making shares some aspects with the convergence model, but differs in the actual pathway. The insightful model put its focus on the moments of insight, together with tabulation of personal costs and benefits and pros and cons of the aspects or the decision pathway in contrast to those who followed the convergence model who actually began with at least an inkling of the idea to homeschool and then proceeded with steady movement narrowing the argument through zigs and zags to the final choice.

By contrast to those whose characteristics fit into the attributes of the convergence model [Table 4.1], the majority of the families who followed the insightful decision-making process [Table 4.2] did not comment on their admiration of the traits of homeschooled children. Rather it appears as though they were propelled by positive conversations with homeschooling friends and the impact of their research into homeschooling. Focusing on the families who followed the insightful model of decision-making, it is clear that they were concerned about their child's academic achievement, but they did not mention concerns regarding the safety of their children.

The families who followed the insightful decision-making process showed a great amount of love and care for their children, but appeared less concerned about the negative aspects of raising children than did those in the convergence model. The group of insightful families talked about teaching their children in a positive vein. They were impressed by the idea of giving their children the ultimate educational opportunity and focused on a positive future.

Similar to the convergence model of decision-making, most of the families had stay-at-home moms when they began homeschooling, but many of the insightful group of moms intended to return to their careers when their children were in school. Mindy, a former career woman with a Master's degree in business told me that she planned to return to work. She explained by saying, "I've always thought that once my kids got to a certain age, and we put them into school, I would get my career going again because I went to school for many years and got those degrees."

As the families moved into the decision-making pathway, they found themselves with various initial insights into the pros and cons of homeschooling their children. Some of the families had initial insights regarding their child's learning environment. Lindy and Ken wanted their daughter, Alexandra, to have a stimulating, successful experience in kindergarten.

However, they found her in what they believed to be a lack-luster learning environment. While discussing Alexandra's kindergarten experience Lindy said, "It turned out to be kind of a bad experience for her. The teacher, it was her last year before retiring so she was not really into it. I don't know. My expectations were probably way too high." Lindy continued by exclaiming, "I kept in the back of my mind, I could do better."

Excited for her daughter to begin first grade, Lindy found herself gaining her second point of insight. She explained by saying, "That following fall she went to first grade. That was just the turning point for us. It was kind of a disaster; there were just a lot of circumstances." Lindy, a certified elementary teacher, continued: "What I saw and observed was more just classroom management than teaching. ...At that point she was ready to move on and reading was a big deal." Elaborating further she said, "I thought this is not what I wanted for her. I just kept thinking that I could do better." It was at that point Lindy realized she had to find another avenue through which to educate her daughter Alexandra.

Lindy and her husband, Ken, found themselves at their third point of insight, which was realizing that they could not afford to send their daughter to Christian school and that they had to find another alternative. Lindy described this realization by telling me, "We thought about Christian School and it was just too expensive for us." As a college student Lindy had written a paper citing the negative aspects of homeschooling. Previously, she had not believed that homeschooling would be appropriate for her children, but now faced with the alternatives she felt that their next step was to investigate homeschooling. Lindy explained about her thoughts and feelings that fall fourteen years earlier:

It was during that fall I started praying about it. I thought maybe I ought to give homeschooling a chance. The more I thought about it, I started reading books; tons of books about homeschooling and I talked to people I knew about homeschooling. At that time it really wasn't accepted as much as it is now.

Lindy continued to talk about her investigation into homeschooling by telling me about all of the books she read. She remembered,

I hadn't even started thinking about homeschooling until she had started first grade and oh, this is a problem again. ...I started mulling it over in my head, and how do you even do homeschooling and I just started reading. There were books in the church library that I checked out. There were a couple (of books) that were really good. They really got me thinking: What is the purpose of education? What was my philosophy of education? What did I want my kids to gain from being educated? So all those things just started, I started thinking about it. The more I read, the more that I talked about (homeschooling to) other people. Those books were really helpful.

For Ken, the fourth point of insight was that Lindy was at home with the two younger children. Ken commented on Lindy's status as a stay-at-home mother and how it impacted his view of the options. He told me, "She was home with our other two kids and she was a teacher and passionate about education (and) literature. It seemed like a really good fit." Lindy continued talking about their evaluation of the option to homeschool by saying, "There were only a handful of people that I knew that were homeschooling and their kids were really little." She continued by telling me, "I started talking to them and asking them how do you do this?" Regarding the final point of choice, Lindy said, "So we decided over Christmas vacation, right before Christmas vacation (ended) that we would try it. So we decided to take her out of school and not go back after the Christmas break and I would try the homeschooling." Lindy added that her initial decision to homeschool was for the immediate time, but may not have taken them into the future. She said that because of the situation at school she told me, "This was just sort of a let's just try it. I was so nervous; I thought I was going to wreck her for us. (It was) just first grade."

In much the same way that Lindy and Ken were passionate about their daughter's education, but were not enthusiastic about homeschooling, Julica did not want to homeschool her

daughter, but wanted her to have the best learning environment available. Julica began realizing that her eldest daughter, Norah, who was four-years-old seemed ready to begin learning. The first point of insight for Julica was when her husband, Steve told her that he thought they should homeschool. She explained, “My husband was very impressed with my nieces (who were homeschooled) and how much they knew and he said we should homeschool.” At that point in the interview, Julica said she told her husband, “Yeah, right.”

Julica’s second point of insight was that her husband not only was impressed with her niece, but that he did not want his daughter to attend a public school because of his negative experience when he was in school. Julica explained his experience by telling me,

He was a military brat so he actually grew up in several schools and would come back to his hometown if they couldn't follow his dad. When his dad retired (when my husband was) in eighth grade they came back to his hometown so he could go to high school. He was really smart. He was gifted in math and science and he can remember being bored to tears and getting into trouble. She will cause problems because that's what he did. I don't want her to be like that. They will hold her back because she is ready to multiply fractions but the other twenty-nine students can't multiply straight numbers so I can't teach you fractions. I don't want her to do that so that was his motivation.

When Julica recounted her third point of insight she said, “When Norah reached about four and she was starting to pick up things from Sesame Street, she was ready to go to school.” Julica continued by saying, “When Nicole got that to the age when it was time to go school he decided we should do it (homeschool). I told him I would research it.” Initially thinking she would find a better option for Norah than homeschooling, Julica said that, “So I thought I would just find a private school that won't hold her back. That's why I initially did the research.”

Julica’s fourth point of insight came during her research of schools in the area. Julica described her research by telling me,

As I was looking at the different schools, (the closest) Christian (school) is basically a public school that you pay for at a higher rate. They are not overtly

Christian even though it's in their name. I am not sure how familiar you are with them. It used to be that you had to have a letter from your pastor to use the fitness center and a statement of faith. It has changed a lot. It's a good education but ... my dentist has two boys that have graduated from there and we talk about things. The world-view that is coming out of there is not necessarily a strict Christian. There is more piled into that and now that I know what I am looking for, I can see that now. When I was looking earlier it was the fee that was the drawback. The Montessori school was way too laid back. If they feel like doing that then it was okay. She's never going to feel like doing things; what kid would? How is that going to work! She did some preschool books and I would say let's go ahead and finish this and she would say I don't want to. But you could push her without too much effort. So we said ok that's not going to fit. (Another Christian school says) you have to go to their church. They have very strict rules as to what they require to dress codes to regulations. (It is) very legalistic. That's not going to fit us either.

Julica summed up her findings by saying, "So I checked into all the private schools in the area and homeschool was much cheaper than paying tuition."

By that point, Julica had solidified what she found initially in her fourth point of insight and began to echo her husband's sentiment of thinking homeschooling would be a better choice. She said, "We also thought it would better fit her. Nicole was and is a smart kid." To complete her research and solidify her thoughts about homeschooling, Julica put in a call to her sister who at that time was homeschooling four children. Julica talked about her call by saying,

So I called my sister and told her we were thinking about it doing this (homeschooling). (I asked her,) what do you think? So she gave me some recommendations. (My sister told me) well I use this, and I do that. And (she) told me not to worry about certain things."

Julica continued by explaining that during her call to her sister she felt encouraged to try homeschooling. Julica said her sister gave her insight into homeschooling by saying,

She said you can do this. It will be great. You need to get to convention, and you need to get curriculum and just get phonics and math. Don't worry about history! She's really young so you don't need much. It will be easy. You can get it done during Jennifer's nap time. She was all excited.

The encouragement Julica received from both her husband and her sister buoyed her confidence and gave her the point of insight, that as she told me, “We started with phonics and math and I went into it with the idea I couldn't screw up kindergarten. After all what do they really learn anyway? It was short-term and we would take it year by year.” Julica’s short-term foray into homeschooling when Norah was four-years-old has since become a full-time job. After ten years and homeschooling four children, Julica proudly told me that Norah is now working her way through high school.

When thinking about the initial point of insight for the families in the insightful decision-making group, I found that the educational philosophy had an impact on the way parents viewed their children’s learning environment. The educational philosophy of the families who followed the insightful decision-making pathway focused on successful learning. When interviewing Janice, I asked her about the way she and her husband, Bradford, thought about learning, she said,

We are bigger on making our lives an educational experience. That sounds totally dorky, but we want to continue to learn. Brian and I don't want to stagnate. We are always doing something to teach us more; whatever interests us. We see that in our kids too. Like in the summer time we always did stuff, we were always very involved.

She continued by telling me, “In the summer we actually bought curriculum to keep interesting stuff like science and whatever.” The fact that Janice and Bradford were so interested in providing their children with excellent learning experiences contrasted with the moment when Janice realized that her daughter, Kelly, was in a classroom with children that she characterized as “rowdy,” she began to question whether Kelly was getting the best education.

Similar to Lindy and Julica’s initial thoughts regarding educating their children, Mindy was not in favor of homeschooling. Mindy, a successful career woman who was a varsity

basketball player and varsity cheerleader at her high school and her husband, Jeremy, a former pro football player, both believed that they would send their children to a traditional school. Reviewing her decision-making experience, it was evident that the initial point of illumination was the fact that her son seemed too ill to attend school. As she talked about her experience she said, “It came time for him to go to kindergarten and I really didn't see that we had the option for sending him to school.” She continued to explain her realization by telling me that she felt if they sent him to school it “is going to mean more trips to doctors, he is not going to be in a school if we were to put him in a school and he's not going to be able to function in a classroom (because of his illness).” She explained further,

When he was so sick, if you got him out into a noise and all that, he couldn't handle it. I mean he was very bright; there was no doubt in my mind that he could learn. It was just going to take a special environment for him to learn well.

Mindy's background in business led her to research alternative educational programs for her son Brian. Mindy began her research by attending a seminar at her church. Talking about that experience, she said, “They had a woman's night with different tables for different interests and they had a table of homeschooling.” As Mindy listened, she decided to continue researching homeschooling. She told me, “I began to gather information, researching and looking and figuring it out.” During her research, Mindy said she read, “The Heart of Homeschooling.” She continued by telling me about her experience researching homeschooling for Brian. She said,

I looked at other families in our church, who had been homeschooling for years, and I looked at a lot of them and they were all elementary teachers and I thought well that must be easy for them. They already are teachers, and I am coming from this isn't my love, I didn't choose teaching. I attended a conference too, just to go look at curriculum and get ideas.

It was at that point Mindy experienced her second point of insight. She said, “And (I) thought maybe this is what we do for now, until we can get him doing better health wise.”

Mindy's case with Brian is different than some of the others in that because of the critical nature of his illness, there were fewer points of insight. Similarly to other families who followed the insightful decision-making pathway, Mindy and her husband Jeremy completed many hours of research looking into the pros and cons of homeschooling. Mindy's presence at the women's seminar at her church provided the basic information regarding homeschooling that she built upon through conversations with homeschooling moms, books that she read and her attendance at the annual statewide homeschooling conference featuring speakers, round-tables and a vendor area.

The other family who followed the insightful decision-making pathway found insight in various elements of their research. Much like Mindy, Julica, Janice and Lindy, Jessica focused on the pros and cons of homeschooling, along with a tabulation of the personal costs and benefits of teaching her children at home. Her move from not being in favor of homeschooling her children to being a full-time homeschooling teacher has had far reaching consequences. While interviewing Jessica, she described her intentional program of education for her eighteen-month-old son, Alex. Jessica told me that she is doing basic instruction with Alex based on her experience with her girls. She said,

For him I have been doing "Your baby can read." I am not being ridiculous about it, but he watches a video. It is actually pretty good. They will say a word, and then say the word again. They will say a picture about what it is talking about. It lasts about twenty-five to thirty minutes long. I keep him as part of the school day until it gets to the point where I need to work one-on-one with the girls and then I need him to not run away. I have that exer-saucer over there. He can't quite climb out of it. He will watch his video and suck his thumb. To what extent he is getting it, I am not entirely sure... He seems to understand more than I expect him to understand at this point. He can sign, but he doesn't seem all that interested in it. So basically with him it is language skills, signing and a little bit with puzzles and shapes. He adores a book on shapes. He knows what a circle is; he goes around everywhere and when he finds a circle, says "circle" because it is the shape of a ball. He goes from one ball to another ball to another ball. He goes after the trucks and the balls. We have had a hoop for two years and it is finally

getting used. He goes up and he knows how to shoot hoops and he will do it for a half-hour straight.

Jessica's experience moving through the insightful decision-making process towards her ultimate decision to begin homeschooling her eldest daughter has made such an impression on her family that, in much the same way as Julica learned about homeschooling from her sister, Jessica's brother is considering homeschooling his children and Jessica told me about her mom's feelings: "She actually wishes she had homeschooled us."

Across all of the critical insights experienced during the decision-making process by this group of families, the specific points were evident when the families heard or read something that helped to narrow their focus in an environment bounded by the educational possibilities and the determination of personal costs and benefits. (Paton, 2007; Langley et al., 1995). In this section, I have delineated that in addition to the points of insight, the insightful have traversed through a decision-making process that featured elements of chaos, emotion and indecision, integrated with thoughtful research, conversations and contemplation of the pros and cons and weighing optional programs. As the families followed the measures of this process, it was evident that there were specific elements that were universal across all of the parents in the study and there were components that were specific to particular families. In the insightful model, the analysis found similarities among this population.

In this section I have demonstrated and discussed the critical ingredients of the parents' pathways, noticeably undergirded by similar views of the link between faith and education. Families who followed the insightful decision-making pathway were identified by their perceptible inclusion of moments of a clear flash of understanding at certain points in their corridor to their final choice. These insights of discrete and tangible phenomena, based upon the

culture, beliefs and opinions of a family served to propel the parents along the pathway, narrowing their focus of the learning environment for their children towards their final choice.

4.3 Similarities Between Convergence and Insightful

The greatest similarities between the convergence and the insightful decision-making processes were found in three areas where all of the parents showed the same characteristics. All of the parents in both groups were concerned and hesitant prior to deciding to homeschool their children, they had concerns related to their faith, and researched homeschooling by reading books or pamphlets, contacting curriculum companies, surfing websites dedicated to homeschooling and attending conferences. Most of the families in the two groups had discussions with their friends who homeschooled their children. Many of the parents began homeschooling their child in preschool, which increased the child's academic ability and added to the belief that the child was advanced enough so that he or she would be stifled or bored in a traditional school setting.

All of the parents in the insightful and convergence pathways were concerned about homeschooling. At the beginning of the process the parents in the dominant models either did not believe in homeschooling or had initial concerns about their ability to teach their children. During my interview with Mindy she talked about her initial thoughts regarding homeschooling. She said, "Never in my wildest dreams had I thought that I would homeschool my kids, because those were weirdoes. Those people were weird, totally weird." Mindy continue to talk about her initial concerns by telling me, "I think at first I had thoughts; 'How are we going to teach this subject?' 'How are we going to do that?' 'I really don't like language arts.' 'I really e-w-w, don't want to do this'." Mindy's thoughts were echoed by other parents in the study who faced

the idea of homeschooling with concern and even sometimes with an element of fear, which over time, gradually subsided as they researched the educational options for their children.

In virtually all of the families in the convergence and insightful decision-making groups, the parents eventually became confident that they would be successful teaching their children, even if it was only for a year. This confidence was gained after time spent talking to their friends, reading books, skimming through homeschooling websites, attending conferences and reviewing curriculum. Jessica never had desired to be a teacher. She was in the doctoral program studying chemistry at a large university when she decided to stay home with her first child. Jessica had been working with her daughter, teaching her the alphabet, basic math facts and a smattering in each of several foreign languages. As she began to delineate the pros and cons of different educational options for Ellen, she came to the realization that, "I can't screw up kindergarten. I'll just keep going for kindergarten." Jessica's belief that kindergarten was basic enough for her to teach, was pervasive across the families in the study. Julica echoed the same sentiment regarding kindergarten. During the interview she revealed her increased level of confidence when she talked about finishing kindergarten with Norah, who was bright and learned easily. She said that when she finished the first year, she realized,

She (Norah) breezed through it and started reading before her fifth birthday. She had gone through a kindergarten math program. Her birthday is in August and she turned five. I thought this is kind of easy; we could do another year of this.

Julica's confidence did not only emanate from her daughter's ability to learn. She, along with the other families in the two largest decision-making groups saw a connection between faith and education. All of the families in the two dominate decision-making groups, insightful and convergence, had interests regarding their belief in God and the connection to the local schools. The interviewees also mentioned that they felt optimistic about homeschooling their

children due to the belief that God was encouraging them to homeschool and that public schools had a lack of emphasis on faith. Many of the families also revealed that they believed that their church was homeschool friendly. In many instances the parent would tie their interests in their child's learning environment and academic success to their faith concerns. When discussing her thoughts regarding the traditional school setting, Jessica told me that, "I would read books about what's going on in the public schools right now and it wasn't good stuff. (It was) how they are "dumbing-down" education a lot of times and how God has been rejected entirely."

Julica also talked about her philosophy regarding the link between education and faith in God. She had been attending a mother's Bible study group and some of the moms did not believe in homeschooling. As she searched the Bible to become grounded scripturally in her belief that homeschooling really was what God wanted her to do for her children, she told me,

The whole thing was what does God tell you to do with your kids? How can you make that mesh? The whole (study) program is to help you do biblical parenting from a mother's perspective. How to be the best mom for your kids? What you should do with your kids? God gave them to you and not somebody (else). They are your kids and that's when I had the epiphany that I am responsible for their education as well as their spiritual up bringing as well as their physical health. It's not just the one little microcosm you are in, you are responsible for the whole thing. God gave all of that and I have to answer to that. I don't think that I could do that if I send her to public school.

Julica continued on by explaining,

So at that point it became this (homeschooling) is what we are doing and we are in it for the long haul. We will graduate them and they will be what they will be and God will help us every step of the way.

This strong tie between education and faith was seen in each family in the two dominate decision-making groups. As they proceeded through their interview it became evident that the longer a family had homeschooled their children, the greater they believed that homeschooling their children was a directive from God. After homeschooling her son Brian for ten years, Mindy

talked about the relationship her faith had with homeschooling. She explained that in the beginning she realized, “I think it was really where God was leading us. This is what you are going to do Mindy.” She continued by telling me that initially she was, “Pure just trusting God that I could (homeschool).” Later in the interview when she was telling me about the successes she was seeing with her children, she revealed, “So it is just those moments when God is giving you: ‘See it's worth it, its working.’ We are seeing them really get something (academic connections).” Mindy continued by telling me that faith connections are not just something she sees, but that her children are linking their personal faith to what they are learning. She explained that sometimes the connections come when you are least expecting it,

Those are the days when God sends you the glimpse of one of them (who) comes up with some spiritual insight and wow - where did that come from? Well that's incredible and they're getting it through (the curriculum) we are using here.

These are only a few examples of the connections between faith and education that were discovered during the research into the parental decision-making pathways. The families in the two dominate decision-making processes, convergence and insightful, had both similarities and differences that have been discussed in detail. In addition to the two dominate decision-making processes of convergence and insightful, there were four other pathways that were applied to the processes the families followed. Of the four additional pathways that were considered, two of the pathways did not apply to any of the families in this study and two of those considered applied to a small defined group of families. The discussion of sequential and iterative sequence decision-making pathways is discussed in the next section.

4.4 Additional Decision-Making Pathways

Other decision-making processes followed by families in the study include in two cases, sequential and in one case, iterative sequence. Families who used the sequential model followed a narrow, research-based focused process made up of rational stages that included the reduction of various thoughts into the identification and definition of their interest in homeschooling, the suggestion of homeschool options, evaluation of the alternatives, the actual decision choice, implementation of the decision to homeschool and the evaluation of the decision to homeschool (Lipham & Hoeh, 1974, Langley et al., 1995).

Families who followed the sequential decision-making pathway (Figure 2.1, line A) focused on fundamental steps based on their research. Considering all of the options for their eldest child, Connie and her husband, Josh, both with earned PhD's in electrical engineering, evaluated the options and found that homeschooling would provide a learning environment they believed would lead to greater academic success for their son, Amos. As the mother of seven described the thought process that brought her to her ultimate decision, she began by saying, "We didn't think about homeschooling." She continued by saying,

We had a child who could not write, he was going to be in sixth grade. We were going to send him to a special school and we talked to the school counselor about it. This was a public school, and the public school counselor said, "Don't send him to a public school, homeschool him."

Connie continued by reiterating, "It had never occurred to us to homeschool." As she and her husband reviewed their concerns regarding their son, the counselor's words echoed in their thoughts. Connie explained,

He was in fifth grade and we got exercises for him from the public school teacher. The public school was not willing to investigate his problem. We got them (the exercises) from the public school teacher, who got them from the public school physical therapist; and we homeschooled him for sixth grade.

Connie and Josh's straight-forward march toward homeschooling was aided by the comments by the school counselor. As I continued to speak with Connie who was mixing up cookie batter in her kitchen, her husband who had just arrived home from work, joined the conversation. When I asked him what steps brought him to the point of homeschooling Amos, he said, "First when we sent Amos to school and he spelled a word wrong they didn't have him correct it, they just said good job! You did something! They didn't correct him. I think that was the first thing." At that point I queried further and Connie responded by saying, "We were going to send him to a special school because he couldn't write..." Without breaking a verbal stride, Josh interjected, "He couldn't even hold a pencil correctly." Then Connie continued by reiterating, "And the school counselor said homeschool. Do the exercises and homeschool." It really was that simple and straight-forward. The counselor suggested that they homeschool their son, so they did.

Similar to Connie who was confident in her academic ability and had taught college level engineering classes, Katrina had a master's degree in curriculum and had taught high school English for nine years. Katrina, like Connie, had herself attended a large city public school system all the way through high school. In much the same way as Connie made decisions about educating her son, Katrina found herself having to make decisions regarding the learning environment that would be the best fit for her eldest son, Jonathan. As I analyzed her decision-making pathway, I found that Katrina also fit into the sequential process. Her thoughtful step-by-step process, led her away from believing that a traditional school setting would match her son's learning needs to the belief that she should begin to homeschool him in kindergarten.

Katrina had registered Jonathan in a private kindergarten program taught in a home by a qualified teacher. Satisfied with her decision, she shared her thought process with one of her

friends. Upon hearing that Jonathan would attend that particular program, Katrina's friend, discouraged her by telling her that as a four-year-old, Jonathan already knew more than did her daughter Malia who was in that particular kindergarten program. At that point Katrina began to evaluate her options: public school, Christian school or homeschool. Due to her experience teaching in a public school, Katrina quickly ruled that option out. Katrina, a stay-at-home mom, evaluated their family's finances and decided that Christian school was not an appropriate choice because her husband was a full-time college student and they could not afford that option. Her careful, logical, step-by-step evaluation of the options left her at the thought of investigating homeschooling.

To educate herself on homeschooling, Katrina said that, "I talked with parents who were already homeschooling." Katrina continued by saying that she read the book,

"The Well Trained Mind", by Bauer; I used that as my base because there is so much out there I had to choose something. So I went with "The Well Trained Mind" because it came highly recommended. And I started that as the base and I made decisions off of that.

As Katrina settled in on the idea that she would definitely homeschool Jonathan, she focused on three qualifying questions:

The first thing was that I had to be in agreement with (my husband) Devon, because homeschooling impacts your family. We are choosing a lifestyle; so that was the first step. Are both parents on board? The second step was, what, if we choose to do this, what is our home going to look like? The third thing I had to do for me is why? Why am I doing this choice? And then once we could answer that, and we felt comfortable, we just moved into okay we are going to do it: Action.

While Katrina differed from Connie in the age that she began homeschooling her initial child, the analysis found that their similarities were in the straightforward, elemental process they followed. As they evaluated their options, both families began with alternatives and focused in on their final choice through a step-by-step process in a logical fashion that eliminated

unattractive selections. In contrast, the family who followed the iterative sequence process found that they were working to make logical choices in a rational manner, but discovered that they had become immersed in a sometimes muddled, expressively contrasted process.

The iterative sequence process (Figure 2.1, line C) began similar to the sequential decision-making pathway. This process was viewed in the study as a theoretical half-way point between sequential and anarchical decision-making (Langley et al., 1995). The family who followed the process went through some chaos and distractions similar to the anarchical model as they moved along the iterative sequence pathway. This model is characterized by a somewhat organized, but messy emotionally challenged process filled with divergence that slows the momentum to the final choice (Langley et al., 1995). When comparing iterative sequence with the convergence process, it is evident that one basic difference is that parents who follow the iterative sequence decision-making corridor do not begin with an idea of homeschooling, while the parents in the convergence pathway, have a favorable view of homeschooling which affects the way they view educational options. Additionally, the families who followed the iterative sequence process were not initially against homeschooling, unlike the insightful families, but neither were they seriously considering homeschooling to fit their family's educational needs. Furthermore, the families who followed the insightful process had clear points of insight into their child's learning environment which was not represented in the iterative sequence model.

Hannah and her husband, Justin, moved into homeschooling through a pathway that included a focus on basic decision-making steps with a bit of variance tied to emotions. As I reviewed Hannah's interview and applied the formats of the decision-making pathways, I found that her family belonged in the iterative sequence decision-making group. Hannah was the mother of two small children when she found herself with a four-year-old who was ready to

learn. She did not have a background in education, but knew she should be doing something to give her son the academic stimulation he seemed to desire. One of her friends at church homeschooled all five of her boys and seemed to have a good grasp on raising responsible polite children. Hannah described her interaction with her friend, Alice by saying,

Larry was very advanced even at four-years-old. He was ready to read and do stuff, so I started looking at programs and stuff, just to give him something to do to keep him busy. That's when I called Alice and said, "What did you use when your kids were this age for reading, because I think Larry is ready to start learning?" She told me about (the program she used). So I got that package and I did it with Larry and decided wow, this is really fun, I like sitting down with him and teaching him.

At that point Hannah did not consider herself as homeschooling Larry, since he was not even in kindergarten. Her goal was just to work with him because he seemed interested. Hannah talked about her experience working with her son during the year before kindergarten. She told me,

When I first started out, I didn't thing about any cons at the beginning. I loved being at home with the kids. I told Justin that as long as I could do as good a job as they could get anywhere else, I didn't want to them to go away, I love being with them.

Concerned that she would not make the right decision regarding the education of her children, she talked to her husband and prayed that she would give her children the best opportunity to succeed in all areas of life. Like some of the other families in the study, her husband was concerned that children who are homeschooled were weird. He was not interested in having his children turn out to be weird. Hannah commented on her confusion during that period of her decision-making process by saying,

I remember praying about it with Justin and he was like, "Aren't homeschooled kids...don't they not get along with other kids? (Aren't they) weird in social situations. It was getting over that hurdle.

Hannah and Justin's concerns did not end with their thoughts regarding having weird children. They were concerned with the legality of homeschooling. Hannah recounted her concern by telling me,

I went to some seminars about the legality about it (homeschooling). What records you needed to keep as far as if a social worker came to your door and wanted to know why they (the children) were home? I guess, just looking into making sure we were complying with what we had to do.

Hannah's interest in working with Larry and teaching him led her to read books about homeschooling. She also made another call to Alice to inquire about how she should go about extending Larry's learning experiences into kindergarten. She explained,

And so then I talked to Alice a little bit more and (she) recommended that I go to the statewide conference at the City Center. (They) sit in seminars. They have thirty different topics you can sit in on and learn all about homeschooling and they have a lot of vendors selling stuff. So I did that the first year and thought oh, my goodness I could never do this it is so overwhelming there is so much stuff here! But then when it actually came to the point I would have had to do kindergarten round- up. I thought I am going to try this (homeschooling). Larry was already reading lots of books. At five-years-old he was all gung-ho. I thought I would get some curriculum and do kindergarten; it went great with him. He was easy to teach and the curriculum seemed very easy. I spent about an hour the night before getting ready for the next day.

The step-by-step process considering logical contemplations, when compromised by emotional issues revealed the iterative sequence pathway for Hannah and Justin. Although in the analysis of this study only one family was identified as having traversed through the iterative sequence decision-making process, in a different sample there may have been a greater population.

During the course of the analysis, it was determined that for the initial child, few families ventured through the decision-making process of sequential (fourteen percent) or iterative sequence (seven percent) and none of the families used the processes that were classified as anarchical or linkages. The validity of what the parents have communicated regarding their

decision-making experience may be influenced by their need to organize and make sense of their memories; however the interpretation of the precipitating circumstances through the decision-making pathway to the final choice must come through the recollections of the parents.

Interestingly, during the analysis of the decision-making process for the subsequent children the resulting percentages changed. As I have discussed, there is critical life-changing nature in the decision-making process for the initial child. Due to the contrast regarding the initial child and subsequent children, I have found that there is a more logical decision-making methodology for the subsequent children. It was evident through the analysis that a greater percentage of parents moved in a more step-by-step, straight-forward decision-making process for their subsequent children.

4.5 Subsequent Children

Following the critical decision-making process for the initial child, the next decision was more direct. For the subsequent children, the majority of the families in the study followed the straight-forward, logical pathway of sequential decision-making. Through this process families honed in on their final selection of homeschooling through a thoughtful pathway that followed a finely planned conduit made up of stages of research plateaus, defined moments assessing alternatives and educational options and movement towards the final implementation of their choice (Langley et al., 1995).

After choosing to homeschool their initial child, all but one family either immediately began homeschooling their subsequent children or began homeschooling them when they reached schooling age. Many of the parents spoke with confidence when talking about

beginning to homeschool their subsequent children as though it made sense because they were homeschooling the initial child.

For example, after homeschooling their eldest child, Amos for one year in sixth grade, Connie and Josh's second child, Andrea asked if she could be homeschooled for sixth grade just like her brother. Andrea was an easy-going child who was a quick learner and Connie said that it was an easy decision to allow her to be educated at home. As they spoke about their decision, they just added it into the conversation in a matter-of-fact way. Josh said, "Then when you decided to homeschool Andrea; then we just homeschooled (our children) in sixth grade." Their comment also included the fact that they homeschooled their third child, Jacob for sixth grade. At the point where their fourth child, Marilyn, was ready to go to sixth grade she told her parents that she liked school and did not want to be homeschooled. Connie and Josh acquiesced to her request and allowed her to attend school. When they found that their fifth child, Fred who was in first grade, had been poisoned by a bug-bomb released in his classroom, they followed the sequential decision-making pathway to choose to homeschool him. When discussing their level of concern when focusing on Fred's learning environment, they said that they began homeschooling him in first grade and had continued homeschooling him and that now he was in eighth grade. Connie remembered the events and said, "It never occurred to us to do it more than one year until Fred was injured." Their decision to bring Fred home for his education prepared them to homeschool their next child beginning in first grade. A couple of years later their sixth child, Isaiah, was in kindergarten at the local public school when they had a conversation with his teacher. Connie commented on the discussion:

The public school teacher suggested that we not keep Isaiah in the school because as the kids transition from kindergarten to first grade they go to a self-directed kind of thing. Well you would know, they go from table to table and they have to finish whatever is at the first table, and then move on to the second. And the

kindergarten teacher said that Amos, I mean Isaiah was her most outgoing student, but really did not care to finish what was on the table, which was true. It didn't matter to him what was on the table. So he has done music (in homeschooling) that has helped him immensely. And we do physical therapy with him because he has fine skill motor issues.

Connie continued with her recollection of the events by saying,

Oh, he loved it (kindergarten). He loves people. We have people come over, he loves people. It was the teacher (who) said he would not flourish in their new whatever it's called, their new structure (that) was (a) self-directed structure. And Isaiah, as sweet as he was, is not self-directed; or that's what the teacher said.

Connie and Josh followed their comments regarding Isaiah by remembering their conversation with the kindergarten teacher and by concluding that the teacher “did not ever use the word homeschool, but she said that he would not do well in the self-directed (program).”

When I asked if she suggested that he repeat kindergarten, Connie said,

I don't believe that she would have the ability to, I think she was trying to say send him, there is so many private schools around here and of course, Andrea when she was homeschooled worked in the elementary, and we were homeschooling Fred. She never mentioned the word homeschool, but she knew we were homeschooling Fred and Andrea.

In much the same way as homeschooling became second nature to Connie and Josh; it just made sense to Lindy and Ken to continue homeschooling after they found that homeschooling worked for their eldest daughter, Alexandra. Ken said that Lindy had already used Alexandra as the guinea pig for homeschooling and if it worked for her it would work for their younger children, Michelle and Tim. Lindy commented that, “Allison was like the guinea pig for everything. As we learned from her experiences, it was much easier as the other two came through.”

When Julica was discussing her experience homeschooling she never really considered doing anything else with her younger children. However, Julica did comment on the fact that her

eldest child Norah was easy to teach because she caught on to things so easily. As she talked about her second daughter, Julia, she said,

By that time my second daughter had come up and she was not nearly as quick to catch on to things. She definitely would have been lost in the classroom. She would have been on that bottom tier that (was) just kind of high enough to be pulled along but low enough to struggle.

Other interviewees explained their decision-making process regarding their subsequent children. For example, Tina said that because she was homeschooling the two older boys, the third boy just joined into the learning activities. She talked about them and drew a comparison to them like they were a class. She told me,

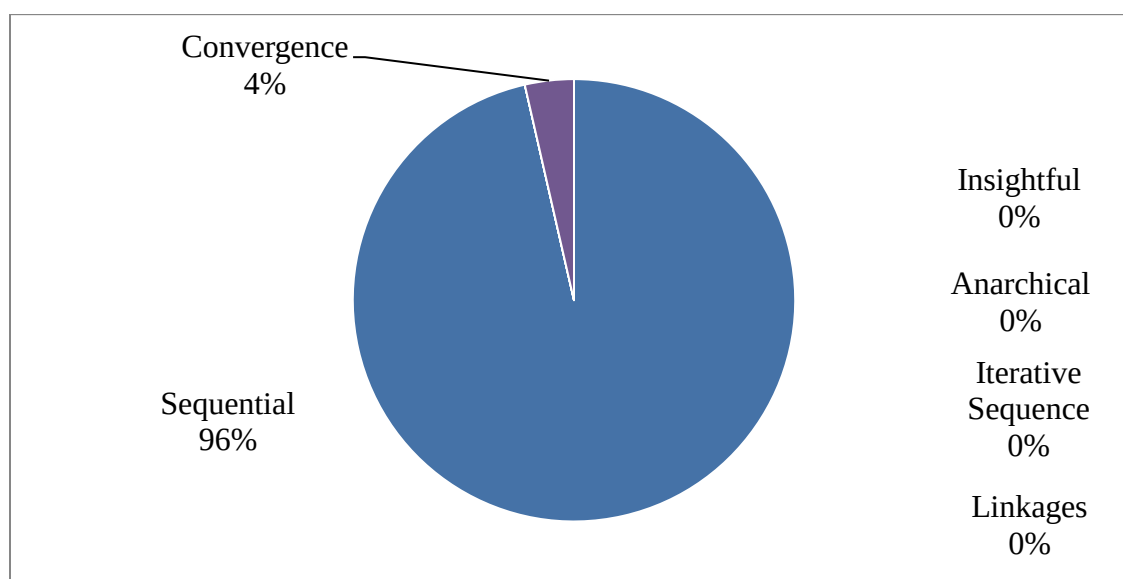
They learned together I think. It's pretty much like a little class. I didn't have to teach my third son how to read. (He) listened to (his) two older brothers and they learned all at the same time. (He was) always following along fine. He is very sharp auditory learner, so he could hear everything and remember; which is an advantage. Thank God for giving me a son like that. There are so close in age, the first one and third one only two and a half years (apart). The first one and second one are only one year (apart).

When discussing her experience homeschooling her children, Jessica talked about the fact that by the time she began homeschooling her second daughter, Lynette, she already knew Latin from listening to her mom teach her older sister Ellen. The transition from not being homeschooled to being homeschooled was almost imperceptible because as Jessica commented, "Lynette is a little more like me, she wants to know everything about everything. Why does it work that way?" Since it seemed as though Lynette was ready to learn because she had absorbed much of what Ellen was learning, Jessica said, "So Lynette just started kindergarten at four because she was ready."

The information resulting from the analysis of the subsequent children revealed that most of the families were like Jessica's where the children began homeschooling when they were ready. Some began with preschool, some with kindergarten and some, as noted in the case of

Connie and Josh's family, began when the parents believed that homeschooling was appropriate. As is evident from the pie graph below [Figure 4.2], in ninety-six percent of the decisions to homeschool subsequent children, the parents followed the sequential decision-making process. This correlates to twenty-seven out of twenty-eight cases where the parents revealed that they believed that because homeschooling was working or was the most appropriate choice for their initial child it was the best choice for their other children.

Figure 4.2. Decision-Making Process for Subsequent Children When Beginning to Homeschool



Only one of the subsequent children in the study fit into the convergence decision-making process when she began to homeschool. Thinking about the lens that depicts the convergence pathway, it was evident through the analysis that the model reveals that the process unfolded from the origination of the initial idea of thinking about homeschooling. The process proceeded with this family steadily, little by little focusing on the final decision. This decision-making pathway included areas of distinct, discrete and tangible concrete phenomena that were considered in a responsive environment based upon culture, beliefs, opinions, and experience as

the schooling options were narrowed towards the final choice of homeschooling (Langley et al., 1995).

Beginning with their son Amos, Connie and Josh had homeschooled their first three children for one year when they were in sixth grade. When their fourth child, Marilyn reached sixth grade she did not want to be homeschooled and asked her parents if she could continue attending school. At that point Connie and Josh believed that she would never experience homeschooling. When Marilyn was in eighth grade she contracted a debilitating inner ear condition and lost her balance. Due to her condition, she was unable to move from class to class or last all day in school. Her parents worked with the school so Marilyn could continue learning through her regular classes. While they knew from the beginning that it was possible to homeschool, they evaluated their options as they traversed through a chaotic environment.

Connie talked about her experience as she tried to work with the school. She said,

The school wanted her to be considered permanently disabled. We said we would not sign that she was permanently disabled because... she wasn't. They did not send homework home and we got a report card and she got straight D's, E's and F's. So I went to the school and I said "I have no recourse (but) to homeschool." They were very nice. They said "We'll give you books."

Connie and Josh homeschooled their daughter for the balance of her eighth grade school year. Marilyn returned to school the following year after her health improved and never had to be labeled disabled.

For the subsequent children, the majority of the families in the study followed the straight-forward, logical pathway of sequential decision-making. Through this process families honed in on their final selection of homeschooling through a thoughtful pathway that followed a finely planned conduit made up of stages of research plateaus, defined moments assessing

alternatives and educational options and movement towards the final implementation of their choice (Langley et al., 1995).

4.6 Discontinuing Homeschooling

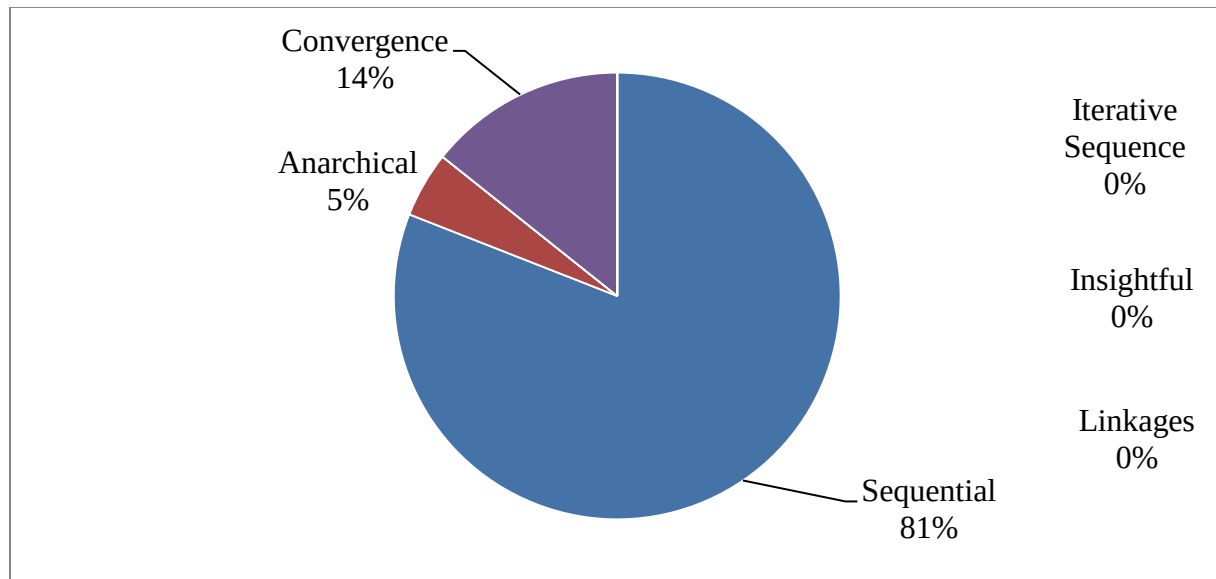
During the analysis phase I found that 21 out of the 42 children in the study discontinued homeschooling and moved or returned to a school setting after being homeschooled [Table 4.3].

Table 4.3. Traits of Families who Discontinued Homeschooling

	Chrystal	Hannah	Lindy & Ken	Connie	Deb	Tina	Janice	Karis
Child's traits caused an end to homeschooling (HS)								
Child's request to end HS								
HS worked for initial child								
Finances swayed placement								
Interaction with school								
Concerned about academics								
Hesitate end due to knowledge								
Kids want to be with friends								
Research/visited schools								
Finished HS & began college								
Child has faith & will be okay								
Planned return to school								
Reconsider HS yearly								
End due to parental circumstances								

Out of the fourteen families, eight had at least one child who discontinued homeschooling. The majority of the children in the study who discontinued homeschooling came from families who followed the sequential decision-making process when they stopped homeschooling their children [as depicted in figure 4.3].

Figure 4.3. Decision-Making Process for Discontinuing to Homeschool



The study indicated that as some of the families' homeschooled their children, their daily process and levels of academic success moved them little by little towards their decision to discontinue homeschooling their children due to their child's level of achievement or perceived level of need for additional programming. Out of the twenty-one children who moved to a school setting following their experience with homeschooling, there were two students who completed their homeschooling curriculum at the end of their junior year of high school and one who only took two homeschool classes during his senior year of high school. Considering the two students who finished their homeschool curriculum at the end of their junior year of high school, the parents considered them "dually enrolled" because they took college classes their senior year of high school, but not through the local public school. Both of the students took

online classes from a Christian college and one of them also took courses at the local community college. They finished high school early because of their progress and accelerated pace. Lindy and Ken's eldest daughter, Alexandra and second child, Michelle, both discontinued homeschooling when they began taking college classes. Lindy talked about her second daughter during her interview, "Michelle is a senior in high school, but she is not doing any classes at home. She is attending the community college dually enrolled. She is taking almost all her classes there." Her husband chimed in and said, "Yes, she is going full time at the community college." Lindy calmly clarified Michelle's status and said, "Yes, she is a full time student but she does have two online classes through a Christian university." Lindy continued to elaborate by saying, "She is all college. Yes, basically she is doing her first year of college." Making sure I understood, Ken said, "She has finished all of the requirements for high school. But we thought well, technically age-wise she is still a senior, so we would have her dual enrolled high school-college." Similarly, Janice's son Jack, when he reached his senior year of high school had finished most of his homeschool classes. Jack was able to convince his parents to allow him to finish his last two homeschooling classes and to dual enroll at the local community college.

For the eight families who discontinued homeschooling, their decision was made up of various thoughts, evaluations of schooling options, deliberation and reduction of thoughts. I also observed that as children aged, they had a greater voice in their schooling choice. Isaiah was the second of four children who were homeschooled by their mother, Chrystal. As he approached high school his ability to learn in the homeschooling environment was not to his liking. He believed that if he went to a school, he would be more successful due to the predictability of the schedule. After discussing his concerns with his parents, they allowed him to attend a Christian school. Another high school student, Larry, also asked his parents if he

could quit homeschooling and attend the local public school because of a specialized art program. After discussion and some research, his parents agreed and moved him to the local public school.

Three other children who discontinued homeschooling and followed the sequential model of decision-making belonged to Debbie and Don's family. Because their father fell terminally ill, the children were forced to end homeschooling and begin attending the local public school. Debbie's husband, Don, began to fall ill in the spring. Initially she balanced homeschooling, cleaning the house, and providing care for her ill husband. During the summer as Don's needs became greater, Debbie believed that she could not take care of her husband and provide quality homeschooling for her children. As Debbie talked about discontinuing homeschooling her children she said,

When I really stopped homeschooling was when Don got sick. He was diagnosed with cancer at the end of May in '09. He had pretty much been bed-ridden the month before he was diagnosed. He was healthy, or at least seemingly so before that. During the spring of '09 his back started bothering him and within a couple of months he was bedridden. So that summer he was in the hospital for five weeks or so and he needed constant care. He could not be by himself. That summer we realized that there was no option to homeschool; they would have to go to school.

Similar to the other families who followed the sequential pathway when they discontinued homeschooling their children, Debbie's family followed a logical step by step sequence, working through their options and narrowing their decision-making process to a final choice.

Fourteen percent of the children who discontinued homeschooling followed the convergence method of decision-making. Those who followed the convergence pathway towards the discontinuance of homeschooling began with an inkling of interest in moving their children to school. As they continued investigating and thinking about their child's learning

environment, they moved through distinct, discrete and concrete reflections regarding their homeschooling experience. Moving towards the families' ultimate choice, their beliefs and opinions narrowed the pathway towards their final choice to end homeschooling their child. Tina and Tom followed the convergence method when they discontinued homeschooling two of their three boys and their daughter. With each child, Tina, who had difficulties speaking English because she was raised in another country began thinking about discontinuing homeschooling her children, but hesitated as she found herself at the mercy of her thoughts and concerns impinged by culture, beliefs and point of view as she and her husband narrowed their choice to discontinue homeschooling for their child. Tina talked about her concerns for her children during her interview. She explained her feelings about discontinuing to homeschool her children and her anxiousness regarding their academic abilities, "I am going to have three boys to go to college." She continued by talking about her concerns,

I noticed my boys (were) very quiet and I think that it was part of my problem because I did not really teach them discuss when they were doing reading. I followed the book, the curriculum, and asked them questions, not like (a) normal American family; they bring up more heavy discussion, they use deeper or bigger words to let them hear it (and) use it. They (will) be able to (do) better in language (and do) better in writing (at school).

Tina continued by talking about her experience discontinuing her children from homeschooling. While deciding to discontinue homeschooling her fourth child, Grace, Tina and Tom followed the convergence decision-making pathway. Grace was homeschooling alone when her brothers moved to high school and college. Tina explained how important it was for homeschooled children to be part of activities. She went on by saying,

There is another part of homeschool(ing). You have to drive a lot to different places for their actual curriculum activities and so she (will) have friends and to learn together and play together. That kind of interaction is very important.

As Tina continued explaining her thoughts regarding discontinuing homeschooling Grace, she said,

At this age she loves friends; that is important. I love the atmosphere to do all the things together. When I was that age especially in middle school I had lots of good friends and we do things together. I thought it would be a good time to send her to school. She is outgoing and also it is hard for me.

Discontinuing homeschooling under the anarchical decision-making process applied to only five percent of the children, which amounted to one child out of the twenty-one children who discontinued homeschooling. The family whose pathway to discontinuing homeschooling their child followed the anarchical process stumbled along an inconsistent, chaotic avenue. While the family intended to avoid negative outcomes, the decision pathway was influenced by friends, families, ideology, values and experience.

Following the anarchical pathway to decide to discontinue homeschooling their daughter was difficult for Janice and Bradford. They had great concerns with their home environment while homeschooling their eighth grade daughter, Kelly. She kept things fairly chaotic and uneasy. Since she had already attended a Christian school from preschool to second grade and a charter school from third grade until half way through sixth grade, they were unsure of where to turn. As they went through ups and downs with Kelly, they made the decision to discontinue homeschooling her at the end of eighth grade. During this process to discontinue homeschooling their daughter, they found themselves in a twirling, up and down disconcerted extreme problem and emotion filled process. Janice talked about the experience homeschooling her difficult daughter by telling me,

Some days it is like from the minute you wake up to the time everybody goes to bed, that (teaching Kelly) is all I've been doing all day. That's kind of Kelly's MO; she could do a little bit, and then take a breather, but I had to make sure she was done with it and made that our goal. Sometimes it would be eight o'clock; she was just testing me. That went on the whole time we homeschooled.

Janice continued to set the stage for their decision to discontinue homeschooling Kelly. She explained,

I think that every day was a struggle. That was relational; it had nothing to do with homeschooling. Except it affected homeschooling. I think I didn't give up on her, but there has to be a place that she will not be miserable all day long.

Janice and Bradford's decision after going through the anarchical process gave their daughter an opportunity to attend high school with her friends. While things were not perfect after she discontinued homeschooling, it led to a calmer home environment.

During the analysis phase of this study, it became apparent that the parents believed they knew their children and were well keyed-in to the best learning environment for their child. It was also evident that when children presented parents with requests to begin or discontinue homeschooling, the parents did not always find that their child's request matched with what they believed was in their best interest. In one case, Chrystal allowed her son to attend school, but talked about not allowing her daughters Camille and Georgia, to discontinue homeschooling and attend the local school. She explained her thoughts,

Camille (wanted to discontinue homeschooling), but not for the right reasons. I didn't think it was going to help her education or her spiritual walk for the reasons she wanted to go, and she was honest with me. I could kind of see where she was going. If you go to school because you think it's cool, it's not where you should go. Isaiah had reasons for going, logical reasons; they have the same schedule all the time – that is going to help. Certain classes on certain days, if it is consistent he will be more successful. His argument that he will be more successful was convincing. David and I wanted nothing more than for him to be successful. Camille had (wanted to discontinue homeschooling) for the wrong reasons; it was social. It was so she could remove the homeschool nametag so that she could be someone else. In an age when you don't know yourself very well and you are willing to try a new identity, it is most important to know who you are in Christ. I said this isn't going to help you; it is just going to continue your uncertainty. Then Georgia is thirteen and she has friends and wants to go to school for the same social reason. She wanted to join a swim team not because she's good at swimming, but because her friends swim and she would get to see her friends at practice.

It was obvious by listening to Chrystal, much like the other mothers, that parents of homeschoolers grew close to their children and could evaluate their requests on several levels spiritual, social, and academic. By reviewing all of the occasions that led to discontinuing homeschooling, it was evident that steps were followed and critical research was completed prior to the final choice.

4.7 Summary

The data for this study was gained from interviews with parents from fourteen families who either were homeschooling or had homeschooled their children. The analysis of the decision-making process began with the primary motivating thought regarding the child's learning environment. The analysis continued to follow the parents along the decision-making pathway all the way to the culminating final choice to begin or discontinue homeschooling their children. This decision-making process applied to young children who had not yet started kindergarten as well as children who were attending a school whether public, charter, or private. Of the fourteen families the analysis found that in twelve cases parents made the decision to homeschool for their first child and in two of the families, the initial decision to homeschool was made based around circumstances regarding the education of the second child. In two of the cases where the initial decision to homeschool was made regarding the second child, the first child had attended school with virtually no concerns. During the analysis it became clear that in the four decision-making models that were followed, the schooling choice for the initial child was a critical and complex process filled with thoughtful research, conversations with homeschooling friends and contemplation regarding faith implications. During the study it

became evident that when the parents initiated the decision-making process researching and spending time talking to each other and with their friends they made a life-changing realization.

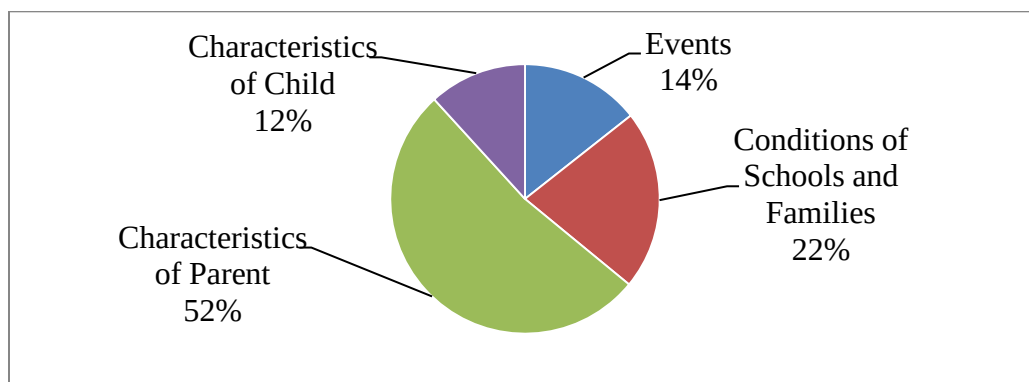
The analysis of the research revealed that the course of the decision-making process was critical as parents contemplated a move to homeschooling or consider discontinuing teaching their children at home. The analysis included a description of the route or pathway parents followed when pursuing the final decision regarding the appropriate learning environment for their child. Detailed data analysis revealed four decision-making pathways that were used by the fourteen families: convergence, sequential, iterative sequence and insightful. The findings of the study revealed that out of fourteen homeschooling decisions for the initial child, the majority of the choices were determined to belong to one of two decision-making processes: convergence or insightful. The analysis of the data also revealed some unexpected results that emerged from the focused investigation into the decision-making pathways. As parents shared their recollections of the pathway to the final choice to begin homeschooling their child, they revealed that the decision-making processes did not fall into the anarchical or linkages groups.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT PRECIPITATED THE ACTIVATION OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

5.1 Circumstances

This chapter contains a discussion of key circumstances surrounding the specific events, conditions, and characteristics that initiated the decision-making process. Regardless of the progression that families followed, all families began the decision-making process with an initial concern or thought that propelled them to investigate homeschooling as a possible educational choice. The situation that precipitated a parent's move toward the decision flowed from one or more of the circumstances described in this chapter. The circumstances that precipitated [Figure 5.1] the family to begin the decision-making process are defined as belonging to four areas: specific events, conditions of schools and families, characteristics of parents, and characteristics of the children.

Figure 5.1 Percentage in Each of the Four Types of Precipitating Circumstances.



In general the circumstances do not exist alone, but rather appear in groups such as in the case of Debbie and Don's family [as seen in Table 5.1]. There are multiple circumstances impacting the atmosphere that existed prior to the beginning of the decision-making process. The situations that precipitated a parent's decision to move their children to homeschool or to

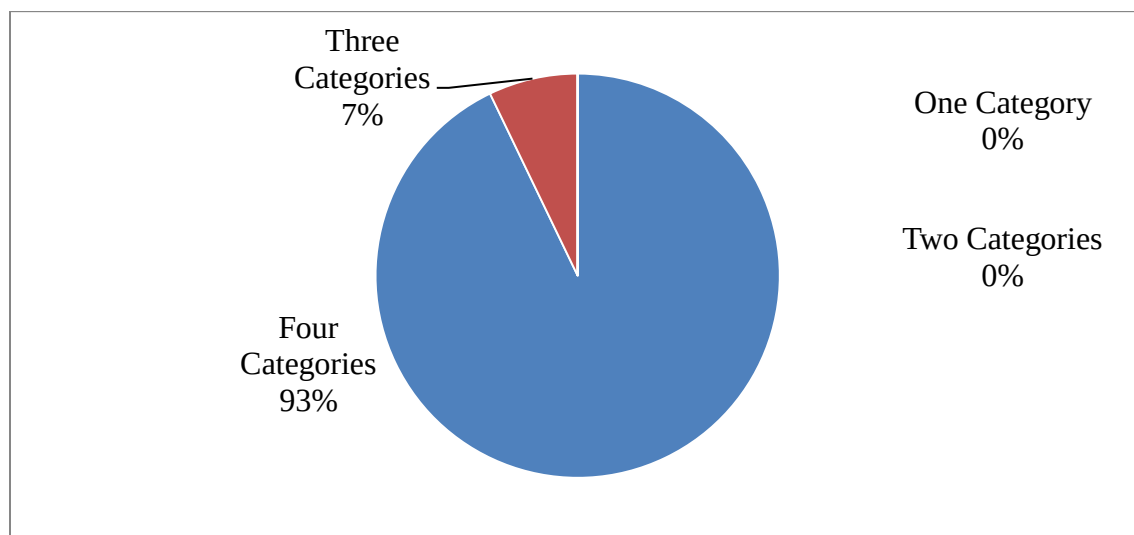
discontinue homeschooling stream from one or more of the four defined circumstances. For example, as depicted in Debbie's row, she has a specific event (her child has a negative school experience), three conditions (disability or health concern, mom stays home with her children, and faith concerns) and seven parental characteristics (she was concerned to homeschool, she had both a general and a specific academic concern, her husband had difficulties in school, she grew to believe she could teach her children, and she had friends who homeschooled). She also has a block in the child characteristics area (child illness/disability). These areas of circumstances are fully discussed and analyzed in following sections.

Table 5.1. Circumstances Precipitating the Decision-Making Process

	Child's Request	Negative School Exp	Parent Researched HS	Stays Home with Health	Disability or Health	Faith concern	Child's Safety	Concern to HS	Academic Concern	Specific Concern	Dad had diff in sch	Spouse encourages	I can teach my kids	HS friendly friends	Child is Advanced	Child difficult	Child illness/disability
Chrystal																	
June & Marcus																	
Debbie																	
Tina																	
Karis																	
Randie																	
Lindy & Ken																	
Mindy																	
Jessica																	
Janice																	
Julica																	
Connie																	
Katrina																	
Hannah																	
Event																	
Condition																	
Characteristic of Parent																	
Characteristic of Child																	

The type of circumstances that precipitated a family's move to initiate the decision-making process to start or discontinue homeschooling reveals that thirteen families (ninety-three percent) disclosed at least one precipitating circumstance in each of the categories and only one family (seven percent) had precipitating circumstances in only three of the categories [as depicted in Figure 5.2].

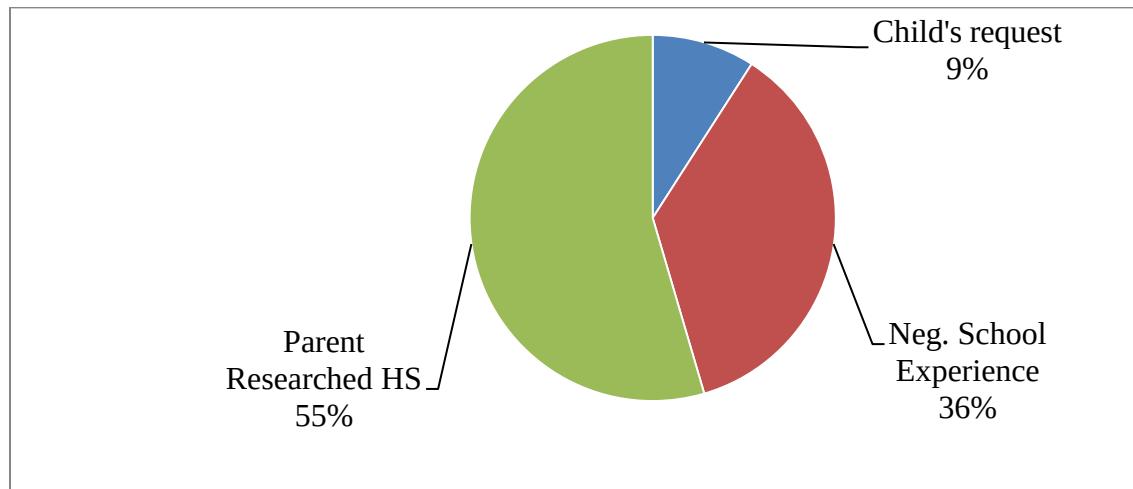
Figure 5.2. Percentages of Families that Disclosed Precipitating Circumstances in Various Categories (Specific Events, Conditions of Schools and Families, Characteristics of Parents and Characteristics of Child)



5.2 Specific Events

Specific events describe an occurrence or incident that influenced parents to consider beginning or discontinuing homeschooling their child. The study determined that events precipitating the movement toward homeschooling are comprised of conflicts with their child's school experience or with school personnel or an occasion when the child asks to be homeschooled. The percentage of events that were revealed during the interviews and were considered to be a circumstance that precipitated the decision-making process to begin or discontinue homeschooling is illustrated in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 Percentage of Events that Precipitated the Decision-Making Process to Begin or Discontinue Homeschooling



An example of an event was when Jack, an eighth grade student in a private Christian school, was assaulted during a school trip by some students who had bullied him previously. As Janice began telling me the story of the assault, she prefaced her comments by saying,

He had a really good seventh grade experience, then in eighth grade, (he began) to be bullied, (with) people picking on him. He wouldn't let us do anything about it. We talked to his teachers, and he didn't want us to call other parents. It wasn't that rough that we had to intervene.

Before they left on the trip, Jack had requested to be separated from the two students he perceived as bullies for the overnight accommodations. Janice continued, with passion, to talk about what happened on that trip.

Jack asked not to be put in a room with two certain boys, I don't know how they heard this, but he and his friend were put in with these two boys. And they wrapped him up in blankets and beat on him. I thought that something had happened to him sexually because he was so broken hearted, but nobody stopped it and the chaperones weren't really paying attention to what was going on. He had so been looking forward to the trip and just was terrorized the whole time and I just never could get beyond that. One of the kids did not come back (to school in the fall), so they never did anything to him except tell his parents that he did this. So we didn't feel like there was any vindication and justice. The other one called and apologized, and we had to accept it.

After hearing about the incident, Jack's parents Janice and Bradford contacted the school. It took several weeks for a school representative to return their inquiry and there were no consequences for the two boys. The school representative said that since this incident took place at the end of the school year, it was not fair to punish the boys at the beginning of the next school year. This event precipitated the parents to contemplate moving their son to homeschooling and was influential in his parent's eventual decision a year later when they chose to teach him at home.

Another instance of a precipitating event was described with passion by the mother, Connie. When her son, Fred, was in first grade he suddenly became ill and showed signs of damage to his central nervous system. Fred also began exhibiting characteristics of epilepsy. Connie sought immediate medical attention for her son and was told that Fred's condition looked as though it was brought about by chemical poisoning. She continued on and explained that,

He had the symptoms from the pesticides and he was damaged. We went to a pediatric neurologist and did, you know those forty-eight- hour things where they watched him and he (the doctor) said that he (Fred) had lesions in his brain and if we were careful (the lesions) might heal and they seemed to have healed. We don't know but he seemed to have awful reactions to pesticides.

When Connie contacted the school to inquire as to what chemicals they used in the learning environment, she was told that they had not changed any cleaning solutions. She asked her child's teacher if she had any ideas and the teacher admitted that she was tired of having insects in the classroom, so she had used a "bug bomb" over the vacation from school. Connie told me that the teacher was very apologetic and said she wished she had wiped off the desks after using the insecticide. At that point, Fred was already under the care of a physician and Connie felt she had no other choice than to begin homeschooling her son. Although Connie was terribly concerned about her son, it appeared as though it was a straightforward choice for

Connie and her husband, Josh, eased by their previous experience homeschooling three of their older children - Fred's brothers, Amos and Jacob and his sister, Andrea. Amos and Andrea had spent their sixth grade school year being homeschooled and Jacob was at that time being homeschooled for sixth grade.

The following is an instance where the event was the discovery of a poor learning climate in the classroom, which gives the case an element of belonging to the circumstance defined as a condition of the school. This is the case of Kelly who was in a classroom where the situation was believed to be too disorganized for optimal learning. Kelly, a bright young sixth grade student who had recently been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), was attending a local charter school that had experienced a period of immense growth. Kelly's mother Janice, a social worker by training, was excited by the school's curriculum and educational philosophy. Janice was so enthusiastic about the school's successful track record that she earned a position as an instructional aide and substitute teacher. One day Janice was assigned to substitute in Kelly's classroom. As Janice explained the condition of Kelly's classroom, she said, "One day I was subbing in sixth grade and there was Kelly and all these rowdy people. She continued by revealing that during the day she noticed that Kelly seemed lost and in her own world, seeming not to learn anything. Even though Kelly had just been diagnosed with ADD, she was surprised about Kelly's lack of engagement in the classroom. Janice continued describing her feelings by saying,

I wondered; how can she learn? Are we giving her the best that we can? And sitting in there that day, I said this is not the best for her. And right about that time we found out that she had ADD.

Janice seemed surprised at the condition of the classroom learning environment and the level of misbehavior exhibited by Kelly's classmates. "Their education is superior, but there are needy

kids. Just seeing the kids who got the attention and the good kids, who did their work, are they getting what they need or are they just getting by?" said Janice. Her experience substituting in Kelly's classroom made Janice and her husband Bradford question their decision to send their children to that particular charter school. Janice commented that she felt, "If there was another place for them to be and I could come alongside of someone then that's okay, but then it got to the point where that's not working." As Janice investigated schooling options, she talked to friends, perused websites, visited the local homeschooling group and even read a book about homeschooling on their family's Christmas vacation cruise.

When school started in January, Janice informed the charter school that she would leave her position and stay home with her daughter. Even with her concerns regarding the situation she found in Kelly's classroom, she allowed her son to continue attending the charter school through the end of the school year. During the interview it was obvious she still felt bad about leaving the charter school. She explained her feelings by telling me,

It was a loss, I had to go in and explain what was going on. It turned into what their vision was for education, it didn't stay at what we hoped it would stay. It was not fulfilling their needs. They didn't fail us; they did what they said they would do. They have a wonderful program, but it got too big.

5.3 Events that Precipitated Discontinuance of Homeschooling

Parents who discontinued homeschooling may have found themselves or their children influenced by events that precipitate their investigation of alternative schooling options other than homeschooling. Events that precipitated families discontinuing homeschooling for their children included the child's request to go to school or a positive interaction with educators while researching or visiting schools. In a number of cases, the event was that the students themselves requested that their parents enroll them in school because they had particular interests

that were not being met at home. For example, Larry was homeschooled from pre-kindergarten through his junior year of high school. During the middle of his junior year, Larry told his parents he was interested in attending a college that focused on graphic art. In Larry's homeschooling program he did not have an opportunity to explore and upgrade his skills in graphic arts and he wanted to spend his senior year of high school focusing on his central interest: art. After encouraging his parents to consider allowing him to investigate art programs at area schools, he was able to find an appropriate school placement. His mother, Hannah talked about Larry's request by telling me, "He had the desire to go to school. He went to school with a bunch of really good kids who went to local public school. He thought he wanted to try the high school experience before he went to college."

Another high school student in the study, Isaiah, was concerned that he was not achieving like he should in his homeschooling curriculum. Many of his friends attended traditional school, both public and private Christian. After spending time talking to them about his concerns, he approached his parents and inquired about the chances of his attending school. He discussed his concerns regarding his learning environment and explained that a traditional school placement would give him more structure and, as he figured, a better opportunity to succeed. As Chrystal talked about Isaiah, she said,

He wanted that routine, because in homeschool you don't have the same schedule every day. Well some people do, but we don't have the same schedule every single day because we go to different lessons. If you have lessons or tutors, that makes that day different. But for Isaiah, it is difficult to have different schedules, so he wanted that consistency. He wanted to try that.

Some of the events also have a relationship to the condition of a family or a school. In the case of Debbie and Don, the specific event that precipitated their children returning to school was Don's diagnosis with terminal cancer. This specific event led to a condition in the family

where Debbie found she was unable to continue homeschooling her three children. Debbie described the situation by explaining he originally became ill in the spring. When he worsened during the summer they decided that she could not continue homeschooling their three children. She ended by telling me,

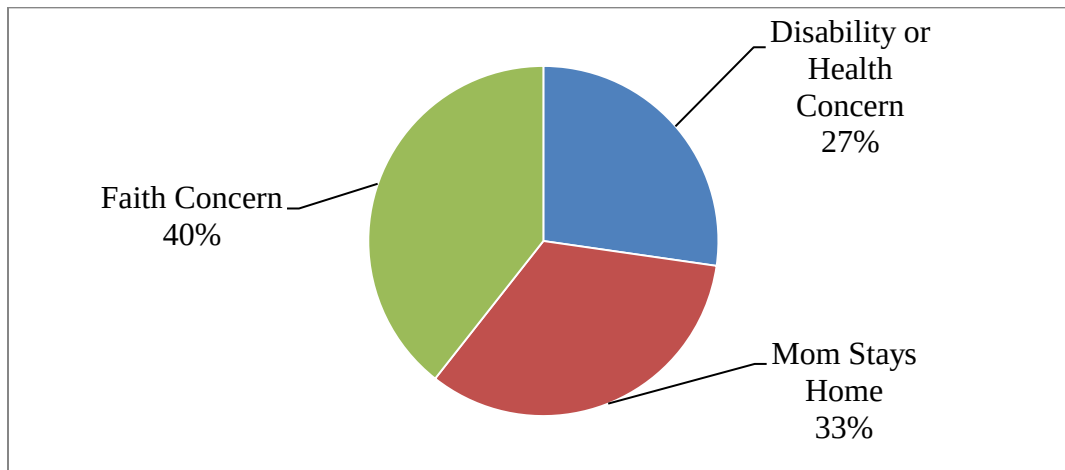
Then we couldn't afford to send them to Christian school, I couldn't drive them anywhere. God knew this was going to happen, so they are ready for school.

This event also could be extended into the next section: conditions of schools and families. Due to the change in the health conditions in Debbie and Don's family, the children discontinued homeschooling and returned to school.

5.4 Conditions of Schools and Families

In the study, the conditions of schools and families included child health concerns, the diagnosis of ADD or dyslexia, along with a particular criterion based upon a specific time line, such as a planned return to a traditional school following a defined length of time spent intentionally homeschooling a particular child. During the research and analysis of the data, the findings revealed that twenty-two percent of the time, conditions of schools and families were considered as precipitating circumstances for a parent to begin on the decision-making pathway to start or stop homeschooling their children. Circumstances in this study, that were defined as conditions of schools and families were disability or health of a member of the family, the mother staying home to care for her children, and when the parent indicated that they were concerned with faith in regard to schooling. Their faith concerns also included in some cases that they prayed for guidance or that they felt God was urging or telling them to homeschool. Percentages of the conditions cited as being circumstances that precipitated the decision-making process to begin or discontinue homeschooling is depicted in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 Percentages of Conditions of Schools and Families Precipitating the Decision-Making Process to Begin or Discontinue Homeschooling



Precipitating conditions may include the fact that because the mother already was staying home with the children homeschooling seemed intuitive. During my interview with Lindy and her husband Ken they spoke about the precipitating conditions of the school and of their family. They discussed the fact that a qualifying provision for homeschooling was that Lindy was at home with her two younger children. Ken brought up the subject by saying, “She was home. She was home with our other two kids and she was a teacher and passionate about education (and) literature. It seemed like a really good fit.”

The study also revealed that the parents’ affiliation with a homeschool-friendly church or their concern about the lack of faith in the public school were conditions that may have precipitated the decision-making process. In some families conditions were present that included the fact that the parents prayed for God’s guidance. Identified conditions also included the parents’ belief that God was encouraging them to homeschool their children. When Jessica was talking about her thoughts prior to homeschooling she remembered,

Mostly I just prayed about it. It was kind of one of those things that God can put on your heart long enough that you can either accept it or reject it. So in the end, I figured I could give them a better education, true or not.

Similarly, when Hannah and Justin were contemplating homeschooling she said, “I remember praying about it with Justin.” Chrystal too prayed for God’s guidance in selecting the appropriate learning environment for her daughter, Camille. As Chrystal talked about her recollections of her initial thoughts while investigating whether she should begin homeschooling her eldest daughter, she said, “Then God started to work on my heart and He said, ‘See, see this is something I have for you.’ God was just persistent and I prayed about it.” One parent told me that as she and her husband were looking for a different learning environment for their children who were attending a Christian school, they seemed to have ignored God. Janice and Bradford were searching for the best educational placement for their children. When they began thinking about the optimal learning environment, she mentioned, “I don’t know if I listened to God closely, I think some of it was I just didn’t want to do that.” At that point she moved her children from a Christian school to a charter school. It wasn’t until later that she acquiesced to what she thought might have been God’s direction to homeschool her two children.

Some of the families in the study had beliefs that precipitated self-imposed conditions on their child’s eventual learning environment. Several of the families were interested in integrating faith instruction into their child’s learning environment but could not afford to send their children to Christian school, so they chose to homeschool. Katrina talked about her experience looking for the best educational placement for her son Jonathan. She said,

Jonathan must have been three or four and we were trying to decide what to do for school. We had first considered sending him to a lady who does a preschool (and) kindergarten out of her house and I had him enrolled. I was at a friend’s house, and my friend had a daughter in it and she’s like, “Katrina don’t send him because he knows more than Malia does. The teacher is wonderful, but he’s beyond that.”

Katrina said that before having children she earned a bachelor’s degree in secondary English education, a master’s degree in curriculum, and had taught for eight years. As Katrina evaluated

her options, she decided that she did not want to send her son to a public school and her family finances were not adequate to support Jonathan's attendance at a private Christian school. For Katrina and her husband Devon, the conditions that existed in their family were faith and finances. After researching homeschooling, talking to friends who had experience educating their children at home and discussing the idea with her husband, Devon, she chose to homeschool her son. She continued to describe the situation by telling me,

I was well aware of what the local public school district does for kindergarten, and I was like "I can do that." ...Having taught in the public schools I didn't want... (what existed in the public schools) for my kids and I can't afford Christian schools. So that became homeschooling.

Often parents found themselves subject of several conditions. During the analysis of the data, I found examples where a family condition existed simultaneously with a school condition. In the following case of Randie and her children, changes in family income paralleled with her impression of the lack of enrichment at the local public school, which precipitated her launch into a decision-making process regarding her children's education. Randie's son attended an excellent but somewhat expensive Christian school about twenty minutes away from her home. Her daughter Brielle was ready to begin kindergarten. As she talked about the situation she said,

I wasn't working and changes in my husband's employment made it so that it really wasn't feasible to send two kids to private school... I had three options and we lived way over here. (We could) send Ronald and Brielle to the local public school, homeschool or actually I had four options, go back to work, or move. So four options and ... I had a summer to make that decision.

When Randie met with the first grade teachers at the local public school to discuss sending her oldest child, Ronald to their school, she learned that the school did not have the ability to offer enrichment classes. After reviewing the local public school's curriculum, Randie discussed the situation with the teachers and was informed that her first grader would be placed by ability in third grade. Since Ronald was small and shy, Randie was concerned and asked if

they could differentiate the first grade curriculum to accommodate his learning needs. When the teachers told her that they had no opportunity to give him the learning options he would need, Randie began to evaluate her other options. Since she was moving him from the area Christian school due to changes in her finances, she contemplated electing to send him via school of choice to another public school or beginning teach him at home. Clearly, given the fact that this study drew from a sample of Christian families, the prevalence of faith concerns was expected. Yet, it is still interesting that this was a central factor in thirteen of the fourteen cases.

5.5 Conditions of Schools and Families that Precipitated Discontinuance of Homeschooling

The conditions of schools and families that precipitated the initiation of a decision-making process to discontinue homeschooling may have varied in order to approximate elements of the situation. As parents continued teaching their children at home they experienced conditions that provided the impetus to begin thinking about discontinuing homeschooling their children. Conditions that spurred parents to begin contemplating discontinuing the education of their children at home included concerns regarding a school placement, finances, and parental circumstances.

Some of the circumstances discovered during the study regarding conditions that prompted parents to consider discontinuing homeschooling included several instances where children finished their high school homeschooling classes and wanted to move on to college as dual-enrolled students. For example, when Alexandra finished her homeschooling curriculum at the end of eleventh grade, she began to work with her mother Lindy to plan for her senior year of school. Her parents had informed her that she was too young to go to off to the college she was dreaming of attending in a state almost ten hours away. When Lindy and Ken researched the

opportunities for her senior year, they found that Alexandra could take online college classes less expensively than she could participate in supplemental homeschooling programs. Ken commented on the cost of college versus homeschooling classes. He told me,

For Alexandra, she was going to go to a particular college. That is where she wanted to go and while we were investigating I found out that they had an online program, so that gave me an idea. The classes for that were the same prices as the homeschool classes. That's what it was; they were discounted because she was a high school student. So I had it figured out. Well, instead of paying for the homeschool classes let's have her take these online classes and start toward her education at her chosen college.

Ken continued by commenting on his younger daughter, Michelle who also discontinued homeschooling by saying,

We realized that with the community college our kids could, all of a sudden, get college credit and that would reduce the time they would be in college, which would reduce our expense. I think it was economically driven the way I saw it.

Both Alexandra and Michelle earned college credit during their senior year of high school.

When I asked Lindy and Ken why Michelle took classes at the local community college, unlike her sister who took online classes, they told me that,

For Michelle, what she wants to do, they don't offer that major at the Christian college so I didn't want her to take something that wouldn't transfer to somewhere. I thought that most of the basic classes at the community college would transfer to somewhere else.

Because it worked so well for the two girls, Ken and Lindy talked about the fact that they were contemplating allowing their son Tim to also take college classes during his senior year of high school.

Similar to the situation with Michelle and Alexandra, Jack took college classes during his senior year of high school. He still had a couple of homeschooling classes to finish, but the rest of his time he spent taking classes at the local community college. Jack's mother, Janice talked about the positive effect college has had on Jack's confidence. She said, "Going to college has

really helped him. He knows what a syllabus is and he is bigger now; he is six foot three. In ninth grade he was so little. Jack is getting confidence by taking the college classes.” In the case of Alexandra, Michelle, and Jack, the conditions that precipitated discontinuance of homeschooling were focused on their academic progress. For other families, the family conditions were focused on the parents.

In the study there were instances of parental conditions that influenced the precipitation of the initiation of the decision-making process. When interviewing parents for affecting conditions I found that some parents grew increasingly concerned regarding their child’s educational readiness for college. One particularly poignant case was regarding a parent who was raised in a foreign country. Tina was born in Taiwan and had four children. Tina was a software developer who had earned an Associate’s degree and worked in a local utilities company instructing coworkers in the use of job embedded software.

Even though Tina had taught her coworkers and had been instructing her children since they began elementary school, she felt that she did not have adequate skills in teaching English and writing once her children approached high school age. Tina was hesitant to discontinue homeschooling her children and researched various options. She eventually came to the realization that although her children participated in optional homeschooling groups and co-ops, if she wanted to guarantee that her children would attain appropriate writing and English language arts proficiency to succeed in college, she would need to move them to a traditional school setting. Initially she moved her eldest child, Liam, to the nearby suburban school when he was in eleventh grade. He was followed the next year by her second son, Noah, who also began in public school as a junior. Seeing the success her two oldest children had in school, she then moved her third son, Aden to school. With Aden, Tina and her husband Tom felt that he

would benefit from repeating ninth grade, so when he began at the school he started as a freshman. During the interview, Tina commented on Aden's current progress in high school. She told me, "He is a junior; I pulled him back a year. He was ahead a year but I pulled him back and he is just the right age. He's got all his courses finished." Her explanation regarding holding him back a year was that he would be able to take more advanced placement courses in high school by being ahead. She said,

He is taking three science classes in the same year; one is because the school he wants to apply for required physics, so he needs to take physics the last year. And the other two, the chemistry and biology if you take AP (Advanced Placement courses) then you don't have to take it in college. That will save a lot of money. And the school he applied to requires you to take an AP class.

For their youngest child, Grace, they had additional concerns. She was going through a rebellious time in her life, so they researched additional schooling options and settled on sending her to a local Christian school where she already had friends.

In other instances of family conditions, the parents found educational options that were more attractive than homeschooling. This attraction to discontinue homeschooling is made up of both financial conditions similar to Tina and Lindy's families and, as in the case of Karis, the concern regarding the immense amount of work preparing the curriculum and daily lessons for their children. After homeschooling Holden his ninth grade year, Karis began thinking about moving him from homeschooling to an online charter school due to a proliferation of signs appearing in the community. She was still very concerned with safety and academics. After researching the online charter, Karis believed that it provided better curriculum and instruction for Holden than did homeschooling and it was free. By enrolling him in the online charter school she would still be able to keep track of his academic progress because he would be

working on his school assignments at home. She explained her decision to also move her daughter Anne to the online charter by telling me that,

The online charter school called us and asked if we wanted to put her in that program. We started her in the beginning of March.

Karis and her husband believed that homeschooling provided an impetus for her children to learn about mastery of a subject. While she had focused her children's education on this critical element, it took time and effort to provide all of her children's education. Since they had only been homeschooling for a short time, Karis and Herb believed that the online charter would suffice.

Some parents in the study put conditions on homeschooling and were dedicated to homeschool their child for a defined length of time or for a precise reason, such as increasing their child's ability to learn or do their schoolwork. If they did not experience any overwhelming reasons to maintain homeschooling, they remained true to their plan and discontinued homeschooling after one year. Connie and her husband Josh planned to homeschool their son Amos for a year to help him improve his academic skills and his ability to write legibly. They had become increasingly concerned with Amos's unreadable handwriting and the fact his school believed in inventive spelling and allowed the students to move to the next grade with mediocre achievement. Connie spoke to me about the situation at school; she explained,

He was in fifth grade and we got exercises for him from the public school teacher. The public school was not willing to investigate his problem. We got them from the public school teacher who got them from the public school physical therapist.

She continued by saying, "We had a child who could not write, he was going to be in 6th grade. We were going to send him to a special school." After researching other options for Amos, including a boarding school, Connie and Josh began contemplating homeschooling. Connie was already staying home to care for her younger children and she was confident that her

PhD in engineering was adequate preparation for her to teach sixth grade to Amos. At the close of the year of homeschooling, Amos had progressed to the extent that Connie and Josh believed he would be successful back at the local public school. She described his amazing progress by telling me, “It was amazing the difference it made. He went to nationals in the League of Academic Games. He did a lot better in math and (he) started writing.” While Connie and Josh valued homeschooling they believed in the public school system and felt that Amos would be best served by resuming his education at the local school after the sixth grade.

5.6 Characteristics of Parents

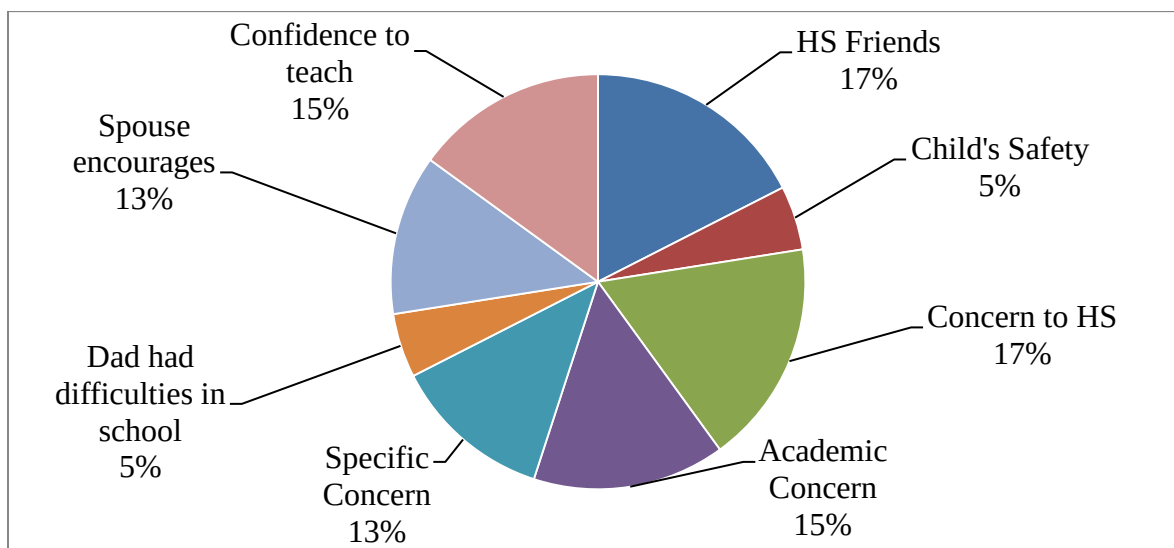
Parental characteristics provide a basis of distinguishing qualities that make up the next area of interest in this study. The characteristics of the parents may be described as substantial and purposeful. While parents varied in their discussions during their interviews, the study uncovered the following characteristics: the parent was very concerned with their child’s safety at school, they noticed the positive traits exhibited by children who were homeschooled, they were friends with other parents who homeschooled their children, and they did not immediately dive into homeschooling, but rather had to allay their underlying apprehension of homeschooling. Several of the parents not only showed the characteristic of having a general academic concern about schooling options for their child, but had specific concerns about their child’s learning environment. Several of the fathers in the study were reportedly the victims of bullying or had been placed in special education programs although they were of above average intelligence.

During the research and analysis of the data, the findings revealed that fifty-two percent of the time, characteristics of the parents were considered as precipitating circumstances for a

parent to begin on the decision-making pathway to start or stop homeschooling their children. Circumstances in this study, which were defined as characteristics of the parent were: a voiced concern for their child's safety, concerns related to homeschooling, academic concerns, specific academic concerns, the fact that the father had difficulties when he attended school, the existence of the father encouraging the mother to homeschool their children, the mother's belief that she could teach her children and the existence of friends who homeschool their children.

Percentages of the eight parental characteristics cited as being circumstances that precipitated the decision-making process to begin or discontinue homeschooling are depicted in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5 Percentages of the Identified Characteristics of Parents who Precipitated the Decision-Making Process.



Don's experience in school was not positive. Debbie mentioned that, "When he went to school he was a very smart man but academically he did very badly. He was dyslexic and that went undiagnosed." She continued by saying,

So his experience was really bad. They did not have good resources in place, so he was in with kids, some of them like were very mentally challenged and he wasn't. ...They didn't know what to do with him.

The previous experiences of some of the fathers may be the reason that many of them encouraged their spouses to begin homeschooling their children. It is interesting to note that none of the mothers indicated that they had negative experiences in school, in fact some of the mothers commented on their positive experiences. The group of interviewees predominately displayed the characteristic of moving from being unsure or doubtful of their ability to homeschool to believing that they would be able to teach their children, even if only for kindergarten or first grade. Jessica is representative of the group that believed that their teaching abilities would suffice for kindergarten. She told me that, “I figured ... I couldn't screw up kindergarten.”

Karis and her husband Herb provide an example of parents who explained that they were concerned with their children's safety at school. When Karis' son, Holden, was attending a public middle school he experienced bouts of bullying and harassment. Holden, who had some friends at school, became increasingly concerned with the antics of other students. Influenced by news reports describing school shootings and brutal assaults, Karis became worried that her children were not safe and would become victims of school violence. As Karis explained her feelings to me about having too many special needs children in the classroom without additional support for the teacher, you could tell it still brought goose bumps when she thought about it, even today.

And also too, I must admit, the safety in the public schools, even though we have a little school, you never know what could happen in a little school. Anne was in a classroom that had two kids in the same classroom, poor teacher, in second grade, she had two kids with Asperger's Syndrome. One of the kids I knew because I worked with him in a daycare one summer so I already had a clue. I was kind of concerned about him too, about some of the things he could do. Because one day at the daycare, he brought in a new knife his dad got for when they went hunting. He brought it to show it to me. That's all it was. He was not going to do anything with it, I didn't think. But he would get into rampages so I was kind of worried about that too. I felt like we needed a difference.

She talked about the comparison between her school experience where everyone knew each other to her children's experience where they only had a few friends and school officials and teachers seemed powerless to provide a safe environment for her children. After evaluating the options for her children's educational environment, she began reading information on homeschooling, talking to friends, surfing the web, and even calling curriculum companies. Ultimately, Karis and Herb chose to move their children to homeschooling.

During the interviews several parents commented about their admiration or appreciation of the traits exhibited by homeschooled children. One especially interesting story gives us an insight into the impact that the politeness displayed by five young boys had on a young couple. When Hannah and Justin's children were just toddlers they joined a group of people who met weekly to learn Biblically-grounded parenting tips and strategies to successfully raise children. The family who facilitated the weekly gatherings had five boys. During our interview Hannah commented on meeting the children,

From the first time we went to their house, all five of their kids greeted us at the door and said welcome to our home. And they were all so well behaved and such wonderful kids. That was the first up close exposure to homeschooled kids. They were aged three to thirteen at that time. And they were great kids.

Hannah continued by telling me that as she watched the family she admired the kids because "They were such good kids; that's what I wanted too."

Janice commented on her husband's first impression of children, who were homeschooled by saying,

My six-year-old niece came up to... (my husband) at this pile of rocks that we had and started telling him the kinds of rocks that were in the pile. He was impressed and said that we needed to homeschool our kids, and we didn't have any (children) then.

Janice continued on by saying, “They had done a unit on rocks and she remembered it, which is good. That’s more important that they remember what they are taught. That incident was prominent in the decision (to homeschool) because he saw the fruit (of homeschooling).”

While interviewing, Randie mentioned that she had heard positives and negatives regarding homeschooling. I asked her how she felt when she was thinking about the pros and cons of teaching her children at home. She explained by saying that,

I noticed a definite quality of the homeschooled kids that I knew that they could come up and converse with me, but yet, they could also converse with their peers and relate and help me with my four year old and help him down off the swing. They are multi-social. So, anyway that was a positive.

While listening to the interviewees, some of them told me that the fathers were influenced by their negative experiences when they were in school. Some of the mothers described their husbands as being identified as “bad boys” due to their inability to sit still in class. One of the mothers mentioned that her husband, who successfully completed a college degree and played pro football, spent many hours sitting in the hall because he was wiggly in class. When interviewing one of the couples, the dad talked about how bored he was in school and how it affected his confidence in the traditional school experience. Another father who successful business man and owns a company talked about his children and their high levels of academic achievement and said it didn’t come from him because he had to work hard his senior year to graduate with a 1.9 grade point average. Still another mom talked about the difficulties her husband had due to his undiagnosed dyslexia. As I spoke with Debbie she revealed the following story about her college graduate husband, Don:

When he went to school he was a very smart man but academically he did very badly. He was dyslexic and that went undiagnosed. Dyslexic kids and ... Grayson is too, they think very differently, their whole thought process is much different... Traditional public school doesn't cater to that; they have to cater to the mass. So Don’s... experience was really bad. They did not have good

resources in place so he was in with kids (who)... were very mentally challenged and he wasn't. ...They didn't know what to do with him. When we saw Grayson at school... Don...didn't want Grayson to have the same experience he had. He felt very strongly about homeschooling ... Grayson. It could have been somewhat an emotional decision for...(Don).

While speaking about her son, his dyslexia and the connection to his father, who later died tragically from cancer, it was easy to see that Debbie had obviously moved through a transformation going from not wanting to homeschool her child to realizing that she had to do what was best for her kindergartener, Grayson. She said that she was concerned because she never wanted to be a teacher; her degree was in exercise science. She continued by saying that her concern was basically academic and that her biggest concern was, as she told me, “How am I going to teach them what they need to know?” She concluded by telling me that she knew that she had to begin homeschooling. As she said, “Well, this is what needs to be done, I better do it.”

5.7 Characteristics of Parents who Discontinued Homeschooling

As I have discussed, there were many characteristics of parents that precipitated a move to homeschooling and there were also some distinguishing characteristics of parents who began doubting that homeschooling was the best learning environment for their children. All of the students who discontinued homeschooling and moved to a school setting had parents who initially became concerned about their child’s preparation for college, their ability to learn at home, or their curriculum choices.

After Hannah’s eldest son discontinued homeschooling and began attending a local public school, Hannah and Justin began thinking about whether their sixteen-year-old second son, Jason, was being prepared for college. While she wanted the best for her son, Hannah

enjoyed having her children at home. She liked working with them and had initially resisted allowing her eldest son to move to the public school. However she was concerned about Jason. During our interview she characterized Jason's homeschooling work ethic: "Jason is a totally different story. He was never driven on his own; it was I am sitting next to him saying, what is the answer to this?" The more she and her husband focused on the discovering the optimal learning environment, the more she became concerned. She continued by telling me, "Jason wanted a spoon to be fed to you constantly. He would rather I read a book to him than read himself. I knew that he would probably never need an AP class. I knew he needed to go to school too, because he needed out." Justin and Hannah's concern for Jason led them to search through options for Jason's education, give Jason an opportunity for a whole school year to improve his work ethic, redouble their efforts to find an acceptable school placement, and, against Jason's will, make the decision to move Jason to a local Christian school.

Characteristics of parents are related to the characteristics of the children because in many cases the parents believe that children have assumed features that are identical or similar to their parents. In cases where the parent was academically advanced when they were a child, they may believe that their child is also advanced and, correspondingly, if they struggled academically, they may believe that their child will also struggle. During the analysis of the characteristics of the parents which precipitated a move to homeschooling, I found that the synergy in a home environment combined with the propensity of the parents in this study to look at their friends' children and identify with their friends' perceived success at homeschooling, while contemplating their concerns about their child's academic learning environment, and their past experiences in school, resulted in the families' initial move to investigate homeschooling.

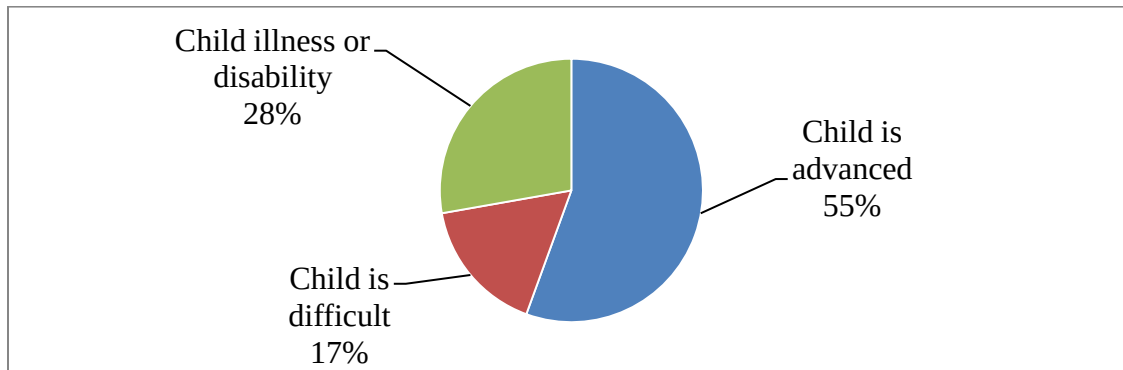
The resulting experience was not always the panacea that the parents anticipated, thereby initiating a pathway leading to the discontinuance of homeschooling.

5.8 Characteristics of the Children

Characteristics of children have precipitated a move to homeschooling by parents. The characteristics provided a foundation of the child's distinguishing qualities. The characteristics of the children may be described as significant and educationally altering. Characteristics of the children that precipitated the parental decision-making process included the belief that some youngsters were academically advanced and would be bored if sent to a traditional school. The characteristics also included attributes that may have held children back in school due to their academic struggles or illnesses. Some of the characteristics of the child may also have been categorized as conditions of the family due to their overwhelming effect on family synergy.

During the research and analysis of the data, the findings revealed that twelve percent of the time, characteristics of the children were considered as precipitating circumstances for a parent to begin on the decision-making pathway to start or stop homeschooling their children. Circumstances in this study that were defined as characteristics of the child were: the belief that a child is academically advanced for his or her age and grade level, the belief that the child has a difficult personality, and the existence of a disability or illness from that the child suffers. Percentages of the characteristics of the children cited as being circumstances that precipitated the decision-making process to begin or discontinue homeschooling are depicted in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 Percentage of Circumstances Cited as Being Characteristics of a Child.



The following example depicts the characteristics of a child who because she was advanced, seemed to be more susceptible to the conditions that existed in the school classroom. When Alexandra's mother, Lindy, began working with her daughter teaching her the alphabet, reading to her, and working through basic preschool education, she was doing what she thought was best for her daughter. After all, Lindy was an elementary teacher who believed that children who began learning as toddlers would do well in school and after all, it was easy and fun to teach Alexandra. When Alexandra went to school as a kindergartener, Lindy was excited because this should be the best year of her life. Lindy said,

When she started kindergarten, I had done preschool at home and she had a lot of fun and she learned a lot. So by the time she got to school I was really excited for her to experience kindergarten because for me it was the most fun grade ever.

Alexandra was more than ready for kindergarten; she was already learning to sound out words and was ready to learn. Unfortunately her kindergarten teacher was ready to retire and was not really excited to deal with a bunch of noisy five-year-olds. Lindy's recollection of the experience did not condemn the teacher, rather she said, "It turned out to be kind of a bad experience for her. The teacher, it was her last year before retiring so she was not really into it. I don't know. My expectations were probably way too high." Her husband Ken continued, "Well

the teacher, while a nice person, and of course we didn't have a lot of experience with education, it seemed as though she was kind of ready to not teach.” Lindy agreed and added,

She was kind of just putting in her time and I was really disappointed with that because I was really looking forward for this for Alexandra. She ended up knowing almost everything she needed to know for that year. So I kept in the back of my mind, I could do better. Not that I am so great, but I felt like I know we could have gotten further ahead with her. We stuck it out. She did that year of kindergarten.

As they struggled to be positive, Lindy worked to strengthen her resolve to support the public schools she loved. As first grade approached, Lindy encouraged Alexandra and grew excited as school began. Regrettably Alexandra found herself in a classroom with several difficult children who took up much of the teacher’s time. In addition, her teacher was a single mother with a new baby who was continually ill and the teacher missed a day or two a week. For Alexandra, a young girl who was ready to learn to read, the ever changing stream of substitutes resulted in great disappointment. As Lindy described the situation, you could tell it still was disconcerting that she forced her child to stay in a poor situation. She commented on the experience,

That following fall she went to first grade. That was just the turning point for us. It was kind of a disaster; there were just a lot of circumstances. It is not that the school system was bad. The teacher was a single mom and she had a baby. She was gone at least once a week. It was always different people. Her baby was constantly sick. Alexandra was the type of person that she likes consistency. So for her, having the sub in there, she didn't like that, it was stressful I guess for her even at that age; she just hated it...She wasn't learning what I thought she could be learning and it was a struggle to get her to go in the morning. I thought this is not what I wanted for her. I just kept thinking that I could do better. Not that I am so great or that I am so proud of myself, I just knew there was a better solution.

It was at that time during the first semester Alexandra began to feel ill and started whining and crying when she had to leave for school, it was at that point her parents began searching for answers and other options. In addition to the child’s characteristic falling in to the category of

academically advanced, the characteristics in the findings also included children whose disabilities or illnesses precipitated the parent's decision-making process.

Mindy and her husband, Jeremy, both with college degrees, were hopeful for their son Brian's future. After all, Jeremy had been a pro football player and Mindy was a starter on her school's varsity basketball team. However, as Brian grew it became obvious that something was very wrong with him. Mindy described the situation:

When it got time for my son to go to school, he had medical problems his entire life and we were struggling to find out what was wrong. Basically he had a terrible time functioning in the world. He was in pain much of the time and we just weren't getting anywhere with the medical community, but we kept trying with the medical community.

Mindy continued by telling me, "And it came time for him to go to kindergarten and I really didn't see that we had the option for sending him to school." This characteristic of the child, Brian, may also be seen as a family condition because it affected the entire family due to all of the medical bills and doctor's appointments.

Also having a defined circumstance falling under characteristic of the child, Debbie's son, Grayson, was attending kindergarten at the local public school. When Debbie volunteered in his classroom, she noticed that Grayson did not seem to know what to do and looked over at his neighbor's assignment. Debbie described her concern to me during the interview by saying,

Grayson was in...developmental kindergarten in the local public school and I started thinking I don't think the school is a great environment for him as a learner. I thought he would really get lost in the shuffle. I would observe him. I would be in the classroom helping out and I would see him just kind of getting by, just looking at his little neighbors and just kind of going along with what they were doing. I could tell he was not getting it.

Debbie's husband had mentioned homeschooling to her prior to their oldest child, Sally, attending school. Sally was in third grade and doing well. Debbie was not in favor of homeschooling in general and certainly did not want to homeschool her children. However after

seeing Grayson in the classroom, she believed that he may have been affected by dyslexia just like his father. Debbie's visit to Grayson's classroom made her question their decision to send him to school. She continued by telling me, "Things were just moving too quickly (in Grayson's classroom). So I thought I don't know if this is going to work." While characteristics of the child influence the precipitation of the pathway to begin homeschooling, they also may preempt thoughts regarding the discontinuance of homeschooling.

5.9 Characteristics of the Children Influences Discontinuance of Homeschooling

When parents began thinking about discontinuing homeschooling their youngster, it was sometimes due to the characteristics of their child. In several cases, the child's personality spurred their parents into thinking about discontinuing teaching their child at home. For example, when Kelly was homeschooled in seventh and eighth grade she virtually took all day to do her school work. Her mom told me that not only was Kelly very distractible, she would argue and make everyone incredibly miserable. As they continued to work together through the curriculum Janice became increasingly annoyed at her daughter's antics and inability to gain enthusiasm for learning. Janice explained, "We felt like there was no way we could have her home, she was terrible." After dealing with Kelly's incessant begging for two years to go to school like some of her friends and reassurance that she would work hard at school, Janice and her husband began to investigate the alternatives for the education of their daughter.

Like Kelly and her desire to be with friends at school, some of the other children who discontinued homeschooling encouraged their parents to let them go to school so they could join friends. In several instances in the study, the child's interest in joining friends at school was one of the factors leading their parents to begin contemplating discontinuing homeschooling their

children. Along with the child's desire to be with friends, some of the parents mentioned that as they began to think about homeschooling, one of the factors they considered was the child's spiritual well-being. When Hannah was recounting her experience as she and her husband were thinking about allowing their son Larry, who was in his junior year of high school, to quit homeschooling, she mentioned that because Larry had a deep faith, he would be okay in public school. She said, "He had the desire to go to school. He went to church with a bunch of really good kids who went to the local public school. He thought he wanted to try the high school experience before he went to college."

While Larry had always been a stellar student and had high test scores, his brother Jason was another story. Jason had been difficult for Hannah to homeschool. Larry arrived early in the morning ready to do his school work; Jason by contrast, had to practically be dragged out of bed midday. Hannah talked about her concern with Jason's characteristic of wanting his mom to lead him through his lessons by saying that he wanted to be helped with his assignments. As Hannah continued talking about Jason's characteristic of wanting to be spoon-fed his lessons and her concern regarding his future, she said, "I knew that he would probably never need an AP class. I knew he needed to go to school too because he needed out (of homeschooling)." In addition to academically being difficult, he did not want to attend school. She explained, "He just wanted to stay home and do like we were doing it before. He is getting close to college and we saw the benefit it (going to school) had for Larry being more responsible and hardworking." She continued by saying, "We wanted him to have peer pressure, we wanted him to have more responsibility for his own education, I thought for him. And he really needed to take that on to step up."

Chrystal's son had the characteristic of being easily distracted by his siblings during homeschooling and the emergence of a characteristic of wanting to be independent. She also talked about how his character promoted his difficulty with the daily change in his homeschooling schedule. Chrystal recounted her experience thinking about when she allowed her fifteen-year-old son Isaiah, to stop homeschooling and attend school. She said that he lobbied his parents by claiming that he found the relaxed structure of homeschooling to be lacking. She continued telling me about her thought process by saying, "He was coming out of eighth grade. And we thought you know what, maybe it will help our mother and son relationship stay healthy." As I have discussed, characteristics of the child influenced the precipitation of the pathway to discontinue homeschooling. The circumstances of child characteristics promoting a parent to begin thinking about discontinuing homeschooling include the child's inability to cope with the homeschooling schedule, a child's disability or illness.

5.10 Chapter Summary

The data for this study took into consideration interviews from fourteen families representing forty-two children ages eighteen months to twenty-four years of age who had been homeschooled. The children began homeschooling at ages ranging from eighteen months to eighth grade. Not considered in the study were four younger children who parents did not consider as being homeschooled. Three of the children who were not included in the study were four-year-olds and one was a three-year-old. Regardless of the decision-making process that families followed, all families began the process with an initial concern or thought that propelled them to investigate homeschooling as a possible educational choice. After analyzing the data, I have found that the situation that precipitated a parent's move toward the decision to begin or

end homeschooling their child flows from one or more of the circumstances described in this chapter that fell into four areas: specific events, conditions of schools and families, characteristics of parents, and characteristics of the children. The findings indicate that there were one hundred fifty-three circumstances cited by the fourteen families in the study. The greatest percentage of circumstances fell into the area defined as characteristics of parents, which was made up of eight different circumstances. The least number of circumstances fell into the area that was defined as characteristics of the child, which indicates that the parents' decision was more about their experiences and characteristics and less about the characteristics of the child. This fact could have been impacted by the result that sixty-seven percent of the initial homeschooling decisions were made for preschoolers or kindergartners.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The noticeable swelling of the numbers of homeschoolers over the past thirty years has encouraged researchers to explore this prolific phenomenon. Contrary to parents in the mid-twentieth century who were satisfied with the status quo of traditional public or private schooling, the families of homeschoolers have exerted their collective political pressure, clarified state laws dealing with compulsory schooling, and have chosen to educate their children at home. If the fast paced growth has continued since the 2007 NHES survey, homeschooled students outnumber students enrolled in charter schools and in the fall of 2009 they would have finally succeeded in topping 1,500,000 (Center for Educational Reform, 2009). Homeschooling proponents believe that number to be much higher due to hesitancy on the part of parents to answer the survey. They believe the number of children (grades k through twelve) who are homeschooled in the United States to be at least two and a half million (Ray, 2009). The estimate from one expert on homeschooling is that the true number of homeschooled students' is twice the national survey results, somewhere between three and five million children (TFL, 2009).

As the number of homeschooling families increase, it is essential for educators to discover the foundational aspects of the decision-making pathways and the circumstances that precipitate a family's decision to begin or discontinue homeschooling. This is critical information because the very essence of our country is built on the education that is available to our children. Simply ignoring an educational innovation or anomaly such as homeschooling will not ensure the proliferation of our country's learning foundation and cultural heritage. The

findings contained in this study will help to enlighten educators and parents who are interested in learning more about the process that leads to homeschooling. The results of this research demand our attention and provide an impetus for educators, parents, policy-makers and homeschooling organizations to begin to think differently. Having scrutinized in detail the specific mechanisms of the decision-making processes represented by the six possible pathways and the precipitating circumstances, we are now in a position to evaluate the relevancy of the groundwork described in the first chapter and develop a revised viewpoint.

Prior to the gathering and analysis of data in this study, we already were in possession of solid information on the reasons parents choose to homeschool. What was not understood was how parents make critically important decisions either to start or stop homeschooling their children. I believed that this type of decision would be a potentially life-changing moment in the life of a child and his or her family. The evidence reveals that the move both to and from homeschooling has the ability to change the lives of a family forever. The research scrutinized the question as to whether the parental decision-making process accounted for a full understanding of the potential implications and consequences of a choice to homeschool their children. I postulated that the disregard of potential implications and consequences during the decision-making process to start or stop homeschooling could be harmful to a child's education and development. Considering the fact that a growing population of parents have opted for homeschooling, I was concerned about our foundational understanding of whether families are merely jumping on board with a current trend or thoughtfully weighing their options and collecting information before taking the leap. I commented that if it is the former, then there may be cause for concern regarding the long-term consequences of an ill-informed trend. If it is the latter, then educators within traditional school settings may need to rethink whether and how

they are meeting the needs of individual children. The results of the research show that following a precipitating circumstance a family does indeed follow a decision-making pathway. The families in the study were very intentional regarding their opportunity of collecting information from various sources and weighing their options as they moved through the decision-making process prior to making the final choice. It was obvious as I moved through the data analysis that the parents did not simply jump into homeschooling and make a snap decision. Rather, the pathway was thoughtful and often involved a change in the parent's perspective as they gave credence to the stories they read and heard regarding homeschooling. For all of these reasons, the research into the decision-making processes around homeschooling helps strengthen the knowledge base by which homeschooling is either enhanced so as to be more effective or the decision-making process leads to the reduction of effort so as to minimize the burden on an ever growing number of families as they contemplate the best educational environment for their child. Furthermore, learning about the decision-making process and the depth of understanding that most families gain as they proceed through that process leading towards a choice to begin or discontinue homeschooling, helps to answer questions regarding the growing population of homeschooling families.

Due to the convenience and snowball sampling methods used in this research the findings of this study are not fundamentally generalizable to all families who homeschool their children. However, these findings are still informative because they provide a base knowledge to compare future research and help give insight into a formerly hidden process through which families move as they choose to begin or discontinue homeschooling. The findings of this research will serve to illuminate an area of family performance that had previously not been viewed, contemplated, dissected, and analyzed by researchers. The use of the six decision-

making processes gives structure to a formerly cloudy area of human behavior and gives information into the intentionality by which the families think about information they receive, how they weigh this information, and how emotions and culture impact their pathway to their final choice of learning environments for their children.

The research included fourteen families, consisting of forty-two children ages eighteen months to twenty-four years, who were intentionally homeschooled and two children who their parents did not homeschool because they were four-years-old. Of the twenty contacts I made with potential interviewees, I was able to schedule fourteen recorded interviews, which were then transcribed, coded and analyzed. Some of the parents who were unavailable for an interview operated on a tight time schedule due to homeschooling, work or volunteer commitments. Many of the families were interested in telling their story, so the interviews were fluid and cordial. Even those families who had discontinued homeschooling their children due to age or other causes, were able to provide information regarding the circumstances that precipitated their initial move to investigate homeschooling and the decision-making pathway that the families followed through to their final choice to begin or end homeschooling. The critical nature of the decision-making process indelibly inked the information into the memories of the interviewees.

This final chapter summarizes the research findings regarding the circumstances precipitating the initial thought about homeschooling and the parental decision-making processes pertaining to the choice to begin or discontinue homeschooling. As a result of this study we should be thinking differently about the way parents surf through the streams of the decision-making process. This chapter discusses how this study adds to the prior literature, examines the implications for educators, and identifies directions for future research. The central research

questions guided this study, from the initiation of the research through to the data collection and analysis.

This research was designed to answer two overarching questions:

- What process do parents go through when making the decision to begin or discontinue homeschooling their children?
- What are the circumstances that precipitate a parent's decision to move their children to homeschool or to end homeschooling?

The research questions were answered successfully and discussed in great detail in chapters four and five. Specific conclusions are described and discussed in the following sections.

6.2 Parental Decision-Making Process

The results of the study reveal that for parents going through the decision-making process and choosing whether to begin or discontinue homeschooling their child, the outcome and many times the pathway to the decision is life changing. The findings have indicated that the course of the decision-making process is critical as parents contemplate a move to homeschooling or consider discontinuing teaching their children at home. As I began conceptualizing the decision-making theory that would be applicable to parents who either followed a process to choose to begin or discontinue homeschooling, I found that decision-making regarding homeschooling had primarily been addressed in two key contributions to the literature. First, while comparing burnout in homeschooling mothers to schoolteacher burnout, Lois (2006) examined the timing of the decision to homeschool. Lois found that some parents make the decision to homeschool prior to having children, other parents reviewed options for their children approaching school age, and still other parents decided to begin homeschooling while their children were attending

public or private schools. However, she did not discuss the way in that they made the decision or the decision-making process they followed. In a second study, Hall (2007) conducted research in DeKalb County, Georgia on factors that influence parents' decision-making process. She found that "the goal of homeschooling was to provide a successful education for children by applying a warm and loving environment, which fostered closeness and parental participation." While part of her research focuses on and discusses decision-making, it ignores the process through that parents traverse when deciding to begin or discontinue homeschooling.

As a guide for my research into the decision-making process that families move through when choosing to begin or discontinue homeschooling and the focus of the precipitating events to the decision-making process I used two basic models of decision-making. The initial model by Paton (2007) featured three main time periods in the decision-making process: *before the decision*, *the decision*, and *after the decision*. In my study, I worked to intertwine Paton's *before the decision* time-period with six multifaceted, complex, unique choice processes that include various rational factors, logical steps, and pressures as presented by Langley (et al., 1995, Davis, 1973; Lipham, 1981; Dunstan, 1981; Rankin, 1981; Lipham & Rankin, 1982). The six decision-making model pathways presented by Langley (et al., 1995) included steps during which evidence was gathered and interpreted through a lens made up of personal perceptions, assumptions, and experiences. The six pathways (as shown in Figure 2.1) were be labeled as sequential, anarchical, iterative sequence, convergent, insightful, and linkages (Payne, 2003; Lipham, 1982; Langley et al., 1995).

I began by using Langley's (et al., 1995) six decision-making pathways to analyze the decision-making pathways within the fourteen families in the study. During the analysis phase of the research, I found that the families in the study followed one of four decision-making

processes when they began to homeschool their initial child. They followed the decision-making pathways entitled sequential, convergence, insightful, or iterative sequence. All of the families in the study chose to homeschool more than one child and many of them used a different decision-making pathway when choosing to homeschool the subsequent children.

The two predominate decision-making processes when a family chose to begin homeschooling were convergence and insightful. They accounted for seventy-nine percent of the families' decision-making pathways. During the analysis it became clear that in the two key decision-making models, the schooling choice for the initial child was a critical and complex process filled with thoughtful research, conversations with homeschooling friends, and contemplation regarding faith implications. During the study it became evident that when the parents initiated the decision-making process and followed it through the twists and turns, researching and spending time talking to each other and with their friends they made a life-changing realization. For both the convergence and insightful decision-making process, this first choice was not a simple assessment of the pros and cons of homeschooling but rather a pathway where each family had to overcome feelings of self-doubt and uneasiness, along with in some cases a fundamental aversion to of the idea of homeschooling.

During the course of the analysis, it was determined that for the initial child, few families ventured through the decision-making process of sequential (fourteen percent) or iterative sequence (seven percent) and none of the families used the processes that were classified as anarchical or linkages. Interestingly, during the analysis of the decision-making process for the subsequent children the resulting percentages were substantially different. Due to the contrast of the parents' view of the critical nature of the initial process versus the more logical decision-making methodology for the subsequent children, it was evident through the analysis that a

greater percentage of the parents moved in a more step-by-step, straightforward vein for their subsequent children. The data analysis found that all of the families who homeschooled their children were concerned with the academic development of their child and that they reconsidered homeschooling their child on a yearly basis. Many of the families found that since homeschooling worked for their initial child they followed a more simplified logical process to choose to homeschool their subsequent children. For the subsequent children, the majority of the families in the study followed the straight-forward, logical pathway of sequential decision-making. Through this process families honed in on their final selection of homeschooling through a thoughtful pathway that followed a finely planned conduit made up of stages of research plateaus, defined moments assessing alternatives, and educational options and movement towards the final implementation of their choice (Langley et al., 1995).

Prior to this ground breaking study on the decision-making process followed by parents to begin or discontinue homeschooling, there had been a couple of studies that touched on reasons parents decide to begin homeschooling, but I was unable to detect any studies that considered the decision-making process families follow when discontinuing homeschooling. The outcomes of the study found that this simple question of the decision-making process families follow when discontinuing homeschooling captures an interesting aspect of the relationship between parents and children during their homeschooling years. During the analysis phase I found that twenty-one out of the forty-two children in the study discontinued homeschooling and moved or returned to a school setting after being homeschooled. I discovered that the occasions that led to discontinuing homeschooling revealed evidence that during the decision-making process steps were followed and critical research was completed prior to the final choice. In eighty-one percent of the time, families followed the sequential

decision-making process when they discontinued homeschooling their child. In fourteen percent of the decisions to discontinue homeschooling, families followed the convergence decision-making pathway and in five percent of the time parents followed the anarchical process. It was evident that the initial decision to begin homeschooling carried a greater impact on the families' philosophy and practical habits, than did any other decision unearthed during the research. Since many of the mothers had never even contemplated homeschooling their child, they first had to have precipitating circumstances arise and acknowledge the weight of those circumstances prior to entering into the decision-making pathway. This situational aspect of the process resulted in the critical nature of the initial decision-making pathway to begin homeschooling.

6.3 Circumstances Precipitating the Decision-Making Process

Providing a virtual corridor into the decision-making process, the descriptive analysis of the data from fourteen families allowed us to see the pathway through their eyes and move with the parents along the frequently emotional and occasionally straight-forward decision-making process from the circumstances that precipitated the process to the ultimate choice. The homeschooling parents interviewed in this study revealed that the precipitating circumstances that initialized their decision-making pathways included specific events, conditions of schools and families, characteristics of parents, and characteristics of children. Through an exhaustive look at the data, the findings exhibit the results that reveal that while a precipitating circumstance may stand on its own, the resulting parental decision-making pathway was a consequence of the impact of multiple precipitating circumstances.

The findings of this study regarding the circumstances that precipitate the decision-making process show that the results in some instances correlate to previous studies. By

beginning with the existing studies, most notably the nationwide National Home Education Survey (IESa,2007), I have discovered how a number of comparisons connect my findings to this large study. My findings compare to the top three reasons for homeschooling children as found by the families surveyed by the National Home Education Survey (NHES) that were: dissatisfaction with the school environment, dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools, and a desire to provide religious instruction (IESa, 2007). The findings in my study indicate the top two reasons for families to begin looking into homeschooling to be academic concern and faith. Like the national survey, families in my study did have concerns about the school environment, including fifty-seven percent who had a negative interaction with a school and twenty-nine percent who were concerned with school safety. When analyzing the precipitating factors regarding the circumstances that may initialize a parent to embark on a decision-making pathway leading to homeschool their child, ninety-three percent of the parents voiced a concern regarding faith and their child's educational environment during their interviews. When I take into account the totality of the interviews, one-hundred percent of the parents mentioned faith during their interview. Due to the nature of the convenience and snowball sample, the results I obtained indicated that one-hundred percent of the families were Christian. My lifelong affiliation with the mid-Michigan Christian community focused my convenience sample and the subsequent snowball sample in the Christian community. This result is also higher than the results determined by the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) that found that over seventy percent of homeschoolers are Christian (2012).

When reviewing the circumstances that precipitated a parent to initiate the decision-making process, I began looking at elements that correlated across families. Commonalities between families in the study were found by defining the precipitating circumstances into

subgroups entitled: specific events, conditions of schools and families, characteristics of parents, and characteristics of children. Each subgroup was subsequently defined based upon responses given by parents through the interview process. The largest subgroup was entitled characteristics of parents. Circumstances that fell into the parental characteristics subgroup made up fifty-two percent of the total number of identified circumstances and included parental concerns for academics and school safety, spousal encouragement occasionally due to the father's past schooling experiences and positive characteristics defined as parental confidence regarding homeschooling and their friendship with homeschoolers. The dominate category in this subgroup was parental concern for academics with one hundred percent of the families declaring that they were interested in their child's academic learning environment. The strong showing of academics in the results of my study was in part due to the fact that I was able to ask questions in different ways to discover the passion that the parents in my research population had for academics. The results also may be attributed to the fact that all of the parents had a minimum of an associate's degree. I found that fifty-seven percent of the families talked about a negative school experience they had with their local educational institution and I was able to decipher that parents had a specific concern with their child's academics seventy-one percent of the time. While the families did not all express dissatisfaction with the academic instruction in the traditional schools in their area, the fact that all of the parents were concerned in one way or another with their child's education shows a stronger result than did the results from the NHES where seventeen percent of parents indicated that the most important reason they homeschool is their dissatisfaction with "academic instruction" (IESd, 2007).

Data gathered in a study by Olsen (2008), revealed that a parent's perception of their own experience guides their expectations for their child's experience. He comments, "For some

parents, the decision to initiate a home school program was primarily motivated by their own negative experiences in school (Olsen, p 180, 2008).” In fifty-seven percent of the fourteen families in the study, I found that a precipitating circumstance for a family to begin contemplating homeschooling was that the father had difficulties in school. None of the mothers indicated that they had any difficulties in school, in fact in a couple instances; the mothers indicated without prompting that their school experience was positive.

While my study on parental decision-making did not specifically ask for a primary motivation, it is obvious that there is correlation between the data sets. The national study cited the statistic of twenty-one percent of who parents answered the NHES gave safety, drugs or negative peer pressure as a reason to homeschool their children (IESd, 2007). In my study twenty-nine percent of the parents voiced concern regarding school safety. Only fourteen percent of the parents in my study actually mentioned drugs being in schools and seven percent of the parents were quite concerned regarding the presence of drugs in public schools. This difference in results may be attributed to the fact that I was able to sit down with the parents either in their homes, a restaurant or my office and listen and use follow-up queries for between forty-five minutes and an hour and a half as they described their concerns, dreams, issues, beliefs, and experiences that led to choosing to homeschool.

When reviewing the data set for the subgroup of the precipitating circumstances entitled conditions of schools and families, three commonalities stood out. The conditions that were the most common across families included: a faith concern that was defined in regard to the school’s lack of a religious component, the families’ belief that God was encouraging them to homeschool and the fact that the family was praying for God’s guidance. The conditions also included a disability or illness that affected the family or the fact that the mother was in the home

taking care of the children. Various homeschooling researchers have delved in to the question of faith and have determined that homeschoolers are traditionally and predominately fundamentalist Christians who cite religious motivations for homeschooling (Bolick, 1987; Mayberry, 1987; Nemer, 2002, Van Galen, 1988, Welner & Welner, 1999, Lines 2000). Klicka (2006) found that many homeschool families intend for their children to learn specific beliefs, values, and skills and view teaching their children at home to be a directive from God, which represents their obedience and reliance on Biblical foundational ideology. This finding corresponds with the number one concern found in the National Household Education Survey (2007) that determined that thirty-six percent of respondents viewed providing moral or religious instruction as being the dominate reason for homeschooling their children (IESa, 2007). In my study I found that forty percent of the precipitating circumstances in the conditions of families and schools subgroup fell into the faith concerns category. In total ninety-three percent of the families cited at least one of the contributing factors leading them to be categorized as having concerns linked to their faith.

The subgroup defined as specific events accounted for fourteen percent of the circumstances that were revealed through the interview process. The parents who were interviewed spoke about being influenced by the following precipitating specific events: their child requested permission to begin or discontinue homeschooling; it also included parents who had a negative school experience and parents who focused on researching homeschooling. The findings reviewed the information from the interviews of fourteen families. Each of these families voiced a concern regarding their child's education. They wanted to insure that their child was treated and educated the way they would want him or her to be. During the interview with Lindy and Ken as they were talking about their daughter Alexandra, although at the time she was junior in college, they still expressed passion for her education and the placement that

benefited her the most. This element of academic concern was a prevalent thread throughout all of the interviews.

In the subgroup entitled characteristics of a child, the commonalities included three categories: the fact that the parents believe that their child was advanced compared to peers, the child was difficult to homeschool due to personality traits and habits, and the fact that child had an illness or disability that included attention deficit disorder. Parents who had a child with a learning disability or illness that was not adequately addressed by the school or which the parents believed was not adequately addressed by the school began to investigate teaching their children at home. Some of the cases discussed in this study may have been preempted if additional care had been exerted by the school's administration. For example, regarding the specific event when Janice happened to substitute in her daughter's sixth grade classroom, and found that the discipline was less than optimal, it may have been the result of a need for training for the teacher or the substitute, or due to inadequate follow through by the administration in the form of student discipline or teacher evaluation. Janice's heighten concern was exacerbated by the fact that Kelly had been recently diagnosed with ADD. Olsen (2008) found in his study that special needs played a part in motivating parents to begin homeschooling their child. This result agrees with the NHES research that found six percent of the parents reported homeschooling due to health problem or special needs (IESa, 2007). In my study thirty-six percent of the parents indicated that the child's illness or disability prompted the parents to begin to embark on a decision-making process to investigate homeschooling. The higher level of response in my study may be an indication of the way in that I collected my responses. During my interview process I gathered data that showed responses regarding the precipitating circumstances in more than one

category, where the NHES study indicated the one reason parents' homeschooled. I discovered that precipitating circumstances did not stand alone, but were predominately found in groups.

Discontinuing homeschooling began with a precipitating circumstance that initiated the thought to change a child's learning environment from the home to a school. With precipitating circumstances ranging from students who wanted to discontinue homeschooling to take college courses to the impact of a terminally ill husband on a homeschooling environment, again, there was more than one circumstance that precipitated discontinuing homeschooling. In one hundred percent of the families in the study, the parents' concern regarding the academic situation of their child's learning environment was prevalent, along with a decision by the families to reconsider homeschooling on a yearly basis. Prevalent circumstances that were identified by the parents as having an impact on their embarking on a decision-making pathway to decide whether to discontinue homeschooling also included the fact that an initial child ended homeschooling so the parents felt the next child would be okay. It also considered a concern by parents regarding finances. The financial concerns were influenced by the fact that a student could earn college credit through the advanced placement program, the fact that it is less expensive to send a child to school and for two families that their child's participation in college courses was equal or less expensive than their participation in the local homeschool educational co-operative program. By participating in either the advanced placement program through a local public high school or through the local community college the students could earn college credit and save their parents money over having the children take the credits later at a four-year college or university. Fourteen percent of the families had children who opted to take college classes during their senior year of homeschooling rather than homeschooling full time. Financial concerns included the fact that if it was necessary for the parent to hire a tutor for their child they could register

their child for a public school or online charter and receive free schooling. In Tina's case her inability to feel confident when teaching her children English and writing influenced her to choose a public school for her three sons in high school rather than hiring a tutor. She also considered the impact of advanced placement courses on her final college tuition bill for her children. After moving through the decision-making pathway for her daughter, she believed that financial concerns were outweighed by her concerns regarding faith, so she registered Grace at a Christian school where she would benefit from both a supported environment for her faith and receive advanced placement courses while in high school.

To a lesser extent a precipitating event was the child's request to attend school whether a college or high school. Positive responses were made in three families. Four families accounted for six children who had requested moving to a school; three to a high school and three to take college classes. The parents did not always greet requests to attend school with a positive answer. In two cases that were revealed during the interview, requests to attend school were met with a negative response after the parent proceeded through the decision-making process. There were more casual requests that lasted for a day or so, but due to the child's changing request, the families did not pursue the decision-making pathway.

6.4 Implications

As the population and diversity of homeschooling continues to grow and impact education, it is important that policy-makers and school leaders increase their understanding of how families make the critical decisions to start or stop homeschooling. The implications of this research on homeschooling will bring a deeper appraisal of the process of making-decisions and circumstances that precipitate a family's choice to homeschool. This research provides policy-

makers and school leaders with a more balanced assessment of homeschooling by conceptualizing the inside story regarding a family's pathway leading to choose to homeschool their children. This research captures the voice of fourteen families who made a critical decision to homeschool their children and it illuminates the circumstances that precipitate the decision-making process for policy-makers and school leaders. The policy-makers and school leaders must become generally more informed about the true nature of homeschooling because theorists believe that homeschoolers seek to influence politics and American culture (Kunzman, 2009). Regarding the reasons educated professional parents choose homeschooling for their children over furthering their careers, school leaders must assimilate the thought process and begin to design programs and policies that will forge a link between established school communities and current and potential homeschoolers.

In this study the results show that two students took classes while being homeschooled from their local high school. In both cases the students took band. When thinking about ramifications regarding administrators and administrative policy in a traditional school setting, it is important to take note of the great academic concerns for homeschoolers. As school administrators work to structure programs that may include homeschooled students, they will want to focus on academic quality. It was obvious from the earlier research by the IES (2007) that sixteen percent of children who homeschool participate in classes in a local school. In addition, school administrators must continue to work with other school personnel to increase safety and the reassurance of parents that there exists a safe school environment. The study's data revealed that twenty-nine percent of the parents were concerned about school safety. As Karis commented when talking about school safety, "You never know what could happen in a little school." School leaders will want to pay close attention and reassure victims of violent act.

The parents of both victims and their classmates may be so influenced and concerned by the event that they may begin looking into removing their children from the school.

This controversial topic of homeschooling has been discussed with all diligence and deference and sheds a light on the circumstances that have been shown to precipitate a thought regarding homeschooling. Parents considering homeschooling will benefit greatly by this study's addition to the body of knowledge regarding the critical reasons parents choose to homeschool their children. In addition, for the parents who are currently homeschooling their children, it is essential to determine the precipitating circumstances that could cause them to begin a decision-making pathway that could end with a choice to discontinue homeschooling. Along with the attention parents will give to the results of this study regarding the precipitating circumstances, they will benefit from the descriptions and analyses of the decision-making process. As parents begin to contemplate homeschooling, they will be interested in the cited comments contained in this dissertation. Many of the parents who were interviewed for this study found themselves doubting their ability to teach their children. It will be of interest to potential homeschoolers and service providers to digest the data regarding the transformation from a parent who had little confidence in their ability and were concerned as Jessica commented that she would "screw up" her children. Additionally, potential parents and service providers may encounter the concern of many of the interviewees regarding their concern about their belief that homeschooling children are weird. When finding their way from the concern that homeschooling children are weird, to their determination that homeschooled children are polite, socially adept, and able to talk with other children as well as adults with poise and confidence. The positional swing of their opinions will help to inform potential homeschoolers of their child's potential. Mindy confirmed her belief in the positive social aspects of homeschooling

when she revealed that her son has been involved in basketball, karate, racing, and the Young Republicans' Club. She went on to talk about the fact that her daughter, who has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and aspergers, wheeled her electric wheel chair to assist a five year old who was having difficulty during an archery lesson. She went on to explain that this was not an anomaly; it is more the rule that older homeschooling children assist the younger ones during cross-age activities.

6.5 Future Research

For researchers engaged in examining educational practices, it is important to learn more about homeschooling and the interrelationships between decision-making and the pathways to the future of education for our children. This study was an endeavor to develop an understanding of the circumstances that precipitate a parent's initial thought to begin or end homeschooling and the subsequent decision-making process that follows. As the number of parents who choose to homeschool their children increases and the ranks continue to swell, it becomes more important to research and explore this prolific phenomenon. It is recommended that future research studies be completed in the ensuing areas.

To assist school administrators future research should evaluate the following research opportunities: further investigate precipitating circumstances and decision-making pathways regarding their choice to discontinue homeschooling; expand the research into the effects and impact of homeschooling on traditional schools – focusing on the financial aspects of externality costs; investigate school district sponsored proactive cooperative programs that connect to homeschoolers.

By completing further investigation of the precipitating circumstances and decision-making pathways, while looking specifically at determining the percentage of homeschoolers who discontinue homeschooling and why they choose to leave homeschooling, may give school administrators an opportunity to better market their schools to potential homeschoolers, by highlighting the problematic areas for homeschoolers. This research would add important information to the foundational base laid by my study and would provide information for homeschooling families and companies who market to homeschoolers. With updated and a greater breadth of information regarding precipitating circumstances that lead to a decision to discontinue schooling, parents who homeschool could work to avoid those circumstances through strategic planning exercises with their families. Companies who market curriculum, basic information and seminars to homeschoolers may take into account the cutting edge information regarding these problematic precipitating circumstances and work to strategize to provide parents and families with information to counteract various situations that may lead to families discontinuing homeschooling their children.

To assist families who may be interested in researching the decision-making process, further research into the opportunity costs for parents and students will help to inform the knowledge base. In regards to parents, the research into opportunity costs may be focused on the economic concerns in relation to employment for only one parent rather than two parents in order to homeschool their children. When focusing on students, the research into opportunity costs may focus on whether the children have given up possible instruction in curricular areas which could lead to a restriction of career choices due to homeschooling. Opportunity costs to students may also include the lack of laboratory facilities for chemistry, physics, and biology. Additionally, opportunity cost for students may include the lack of enhanced technology.

Future researchers may be interested in reviewing the intricacies and reasons why there are more mothers who homeschool their children than fathers. The study could focus on power relationships within the family unit related to decision-making. The researchers may also want to delve into the consideration as to whether the decision to homeschool is truly a joint decision or if the husband in a patriarchal relationship has a dominant amount of power in the decision-making process when choosing to homeschool. The study could also determine whether homeschooling is an avenue through which mothers may remain home with their children rather than joining the work-force, or by which husbands might influence that decision.

To assist school administrators, the expansion of research into the effects and impact of homeschooling on traditional schools may illuminate the reasons why schools across the United States are experiencing financial difficulties. When focusing on the financial aspects of externality, where the researcher would pay specific attention to the ramifications to the local educational agency in terms of bond issue and millage passage rates in comparison to the homeschooling population as a percentage of the local population of children, the researcher may find that homeschooling has a negative impact on the schools' financial viability.

Future research that would investigate school district sponsored proactive cooperative programs that connect homeschoolers to their local schools by offering programs in music, art, physical education or athletics, may enlighten school administrators in terms of discovering whether the programs are beneficial. The research could focus on the return rate of students who left school for homeschooling as well as for students who never have attended a traditional school. It would be interesting to determine whether the percentage of incoming full time students who were previously homeschooled outweighed the percentage in districts that do not provide support programs or liaisons that connect with homeschoolers. The research could also

delve into the costs and benefits ratio based upon the passage rates of bond issues and millage passage in comparison with the programs that are offered to homeschoolers.

Future research could be called upon to investigate the existence and effects of peer pressure in churches where many parents currently homeschool on the choice parents make when moving along a decision-making pathway. In addition, research may determine the effects on the degree that a church is supportive of homeschooling by providing space for programs and the percentage of eligible parents in a congregation who choose to homeschool.

Conceptualizing decision-making theory regarding how a family's ethnicity, culture, and heritage affect the choice to homeschool may enlighten both companies who market to homeschoolers and local school administrators. This opportunity for future research focusing on the role of ethnicity, culture, and heritage could lead to an opportunity for school administrators to use strategic planning techniques to thwart the decision-making process for certain populations, thereby retaining them in their school systems. Companies who market to homeschoolers may also benefit by this particular research study because they could begin to do early marketing to those who are more likely to certain types of stimulus in regards to their decision-making pathways.

6.6 Conclusion

A big take-a-way in this research illuminates the fact that the outcomes were not predictable. The research may have predicted that the six decision-making pathways would have been of an equal distribution, with two to three families falling into each process. In this case to capture the relationship between the research interviews and the resulting pathways, I have strived to draw correlations and found that two pathways were dominant. The most dominate of

the pathways, convergence, allowed parents who had an inkling of homeschooling to unfold and narrow their thoughts and considerations to a final selection. The secondary pathway, insightful, represents families whose big a-ha moments provided a striking realization as parents moved towards their ultimate choice. This foundational aspect of my research, analyzing the pathways through a revolutionary ideology gives us an opportunity to add to the body of knowledge regarding the parent's decision-making process.

As a result of this study we should be thinking differently regarding the ways parents make a decision to begin or end homeschooling. Having conceptualized the decision-making process and the circumstances that have precipitated the parents leap into the pathway moving towards homeschooling, I have found that different decision-making pathways have been generated to a great extent based upon a deep concern for academic opportunities, the impact of friends and associates who homeschool their children, and a genuine concern regarding faith decisions and foundational beliefs. These basic triggers for the parent's move to homeschooling become a foundational aspect of their homeschooling lifestyle. As Katrina explained in her interview, "We are choosing a lifestyle." She continued to discuss her feelings that while it is a lifestyle that comes with its positive relaxed schedule and ability to integrate teachable moments into the curriculum, Katrina commented in regards to homeschooling, "It's not who they are, it's the mode we have chosen for education." Bathed in opportunities to act on her expressed concern regarding academics, Mindy's comment further illuminated her love for her children and interest in their ability to maintain proper health, when she commented on her positive feelings about the flexible schooling schedule provided by learning in the home. Mindy explained her feelings by saying, "He feels he learns well the way we are doing it, he does well, and he has gotten healthier." She continued by telling me, "I think over time you figure it out that's not how

our homeschool has to look like. It can be flexible and if the kids need to sleep in, they need to sleep in today, that's their bodies telling them that they need more rest.” This realization that the homeschooling lifestyle as exhibited by the fourteen families in my study may be more beneficial to a child’s educational progress than attendance at a traditional school runs contrary to the belief of the majority of educational theorists, but is groundbreaking for future families who will become interested in homeschooling.

A huge concern regarding homeschooling for educational practitioners is socialization. As I would explain the foundational aspects of my research to non-homeschoolers, many people would comment on their great concern for socialization of homeschoolers and how homeschooling would affect the rest of their lives due to lack of socialization. Similarly a large concern for the families in my study was socialization of their children. As the parents followed the decision-making process to their final choice, many indicated that they did not want to have their children turn out to be weird. Through the analysis of the interviews I found that while parents were initially concerned with socialization, their intense investigation into the various aspects of homeschooling and their decision to provide intentional socialization opportunities for their children, they were able to squelch their concerns. This research, incorporating stories about real families who traversed through a thoughtful decision-making process, will help lay the groundwork for parents who have experienced a precipitating circumstance to comfort them regarding concerns about socialization.

Having examined in detail the specific triggers in the form of precipitating circumstances that occur as points of influence for parents to begin the decision-making process, I have found with true cogency that the fact that children have had a negative school experience was a precipitating factor. As seen in the explanation earlier in chapter five, I found a link

between the father who has had a negative school experience and his propensity to propose and encourage his wife with the idea of homeschooling. This fact is an important milestone in homeschooling research.

The outcome of the research shows a major challenge for local school administrators in the form of cooperating and supporting children with illness or disabilities. This simple fact alone provided precipitating circumstances that call into question the agility and willingness to adapt to the needs of students and to provide them with supports during a lengthy illness. In the case of Janice and her daughter Kelly, we saw the fact that her attention deficit disorder limited her ability to attend to the learning environment and her condition was exasperated by the lack of discipline and order in the classroom. According to my research interview with Connie as she replayed her differences and difficulties with her local school during the poisoning of her son, Fred, and her daughter Marilyn's illness, this scenario certainly calls into question that the administrators could have acted in a more supportive way to assist Connie as she worked to educate her children.

As the population and diversity of homeschooling continues to grow and impact education, it is important that researchers and policy-makers evaluate and increase their understanding of how families make the critical decisions to start or stop homeschooling. For researchers engaged in examining educational practices it is important to learn more about homeschooling and the interrelationships between decision-making and the pathways to the future of education for our children.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Homeschool Interview Request Letter

Dear _____,

My name is Pam Campbell. I am very interested in learning more about homeschooling. Many of my friends currently homeschool their children and have shared with me why they homeschool their children, how they choose their curriculum, and their child's school experiences.

I am currently working on my PhD at Michigan State University and am doing a qualitative interview based study about the decision-making process parents go through when choosing to homeschool their children.

I have always been interested in educational experiences for children. I have worked in the field of pre-K – 12 education for the past 25 years, both in public and Christian schools. In addition to my experience in traditional education, I have worked in the area of experiential education in cooperation with the Salvation Army and the YMCA.

Please be assured that your identity and any answers to the interview questions will be kept anonymous and confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at campb129@msu.edu or call me at 517-290-5747.

Sincerely,

Pam Campbell

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

HOMESCHOOLING STUDY PAMELA CAMPBELL, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION HOMESCHOOLING PARENT INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Please read the interview consent form prior to participating in the study.

Research focus:

The focus of my dissertation research is to explore the process that families go through when deciding to begin or end homeschooling their children.

Your participation in the research:

Your agreement to participate in the homeschooling research would result in meeting with me for a one hour interview. The interview would consist of questions designed to elicit responses that will describe the process you used to decide to begin or end homeschooling your children. I will not interview your children.

Benefits:

Your participation in the homeschooling research will allow you to share your decision making process with prospective homeschoolers. As homeschooling becomes more popular, your experiences will help inform others.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be protected throughout the research process. Pseudonyms will be used to protect and disguise you and your family in the summation of this research.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. If you wish to withdraw prior to the end of the study, I will not use any information gained from your interview, unless you give me permission to use portions of your information. You may choose to discontinue participating in the interview at anytime, and you may skip any particular questions

Data care and protection:

Interview transcripts will not contain your name. Transcripts of your interview will be stored at my home in Michigan. Transcripts of your interview will be destroyed three years after the completion of the research. Your interview will be downloaded and stored on my personal computer until the completion of the research study. Following the conclusion of the study, all recordings will be permanently erased.

Questions:

If you have questions regarding this research study, please call or email me (Pam Campbell) or Kristy Cooper, my faculty advisor at Michigan State University Graduate School of Educational Administration:

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Questions regarding your rights in this research:

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Agreement to participate:

The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily described to me, and I agree to become a participant. I agree to have an audio recording made of my interview.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print): _____

Appendix C: Homeschool Parental Interview Protocol

Campbell Homeschooling Decision Making Process Study

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to discuss your decision to homeschool your children. Do you mind if I record the interview? By recording the interview, I will make sure I get all of your comments.”

Homeschooling Participants

- I know you homeschool your children, what are their names and ages?
- Do you have children who you do not homeschool?
- Who does most of the teaching?
- How long have you been homeschooling?
- Where were you educated? (home/traditional public/private independent/private Christian/Charter)
- If you send your child(ren) to a traditional public, private, or charter school for a particular program, what is the percentage of time he or she is at the school?

Collecting Homeschool Information

- Tell me about the time when you began thinking about homeschooling.
- Who were the people you discussed homeschooling with as you began thinking about homeschooling?
- How many discussions would you say you had regarding homeschooling your child(ren)?
- What positive supportive comments did you receive from those you consulted with as you began to think about homeschooling?
- What negative comments did you receive from those you consulted with as you began to think about homeschooling?
- What books or pamphlets did you read prior to deciding to homeschool your children?

- Did you attend a homeschool conference, like INCH, while you were deciding to homeschool?
- Did you visit a homeschool group activity, program, or homeschool prior to deciding to homeschool your children?
- Were your children's opinions important to you as you were going through the decision making process?
- How did your children let you know whether they liked or disliked the idea to homeschool?
- If they disliked the idea, what did you do or say to help them understand your decision?
- What steps did you take to come to the decision to homeschool?
- How long did you gather information on homeschooling?
- What was your biggest concern about homeschooling?
- Why was _____ your biggest concern about homeschooling?
- ** If a particular philosophy of childrearing emerges during the collection phase of the interview, I will ask the interviewee to discuss their philosophy and how it impacted their data collection and ultimately their decision to homeschool.

Making the Decision to Homeschool

- When you realized you were leaning towards deciding to homeschool, how did you feel?
- How did you express your feelings to those you had consulted with during your fact gathering process?
- How did you communicate your decision to those you had consulted with during your fact gathering process?
- What was the first thing you did when you finally made your decision to homeschool your children?

- Did any of your friends or children try to talk you out of homeschooling?
- What was your children's reaction to your decision to homeschool?
- How do you think did your children felt?
- Did all of your children seem to feel the same about your decision to begin homeschooling?
- Seeing the character of homeschool children as you did your research, did that help make your decision?

Discontinuing Homeschooling

- What prompted you to begin thinking about discontinuing homeschooling?
- As you began to think about discontinuing homeschooling your child(ren), what was your greatest concern?
- How many discussions would you say you had regarding discontinuing homeschooling your child(ren)?
- With whom did you discuss discontinuing to homeschool your child(ren)?
- Did you consult anyone else?
- How do you think did your children felt?
- Did all of your children seem to feel the same about your decision to discontinue homeschooling?
- Did any of your friends or children try to talk you out of discontinuing homeschooling?
- What alternatives to homeschooling did you investigate?

Thank you!

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