Motives For Contemporary Home Education:
Seeing Through the Eyes of Parent Educators

A comparison between 'natural' and 'social' choices of home educators

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Abstract

On a worldwide scale the decision to home educate is becoming increasingly popular.

This study is based on a comparative analysis of views presented by parents from several countries with different cultural backgrounds, choosing to educate their children at home. It explores motivations, experiences and perceptions leading them to that decision.

This phenomenological exploration through in-depth interviews is undertaken by following a conceptual framework for categorizing parents' choices according to motivations for home education. In this paper, these choices are categorized into two groupings, either 'natural' or 'social', according to how these home educators constructed their reasons to home educate. The characteristics, similarities and differences among the members of the groupings are studied in detail.

The study concludes that although there are differences and variances in the rationales behind the choice of home education, these parents wanted to home educate their children for mainly two reasons. The first reason, underpinning all the others, was their perception of the inadequacies of the school-based education. Secondly, as a result, these parents therefore wanted better control over the educational experiences of their children. Hence, these parents with very different cultural, educational, philosophical, religious or political backgrounds had chosen home schooling as an alternative to education in conventional schools in the countries they had decided to live in.

Within the restrictions of this non-representational study, it was possible to identify certain similarities among the parents in this sample that may point to future areas for research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The rise of homeschooling is one of the most significant social trends of the last half-century.
(Lines, 2000)

Home education, once a necessary mainstay of education in many cultures, waned in the late 19th and early part of the 20th century, retreating before the drive for compulsory schooling and a public goal of seeing all children graduate from high school (Lines, 1991). However, in the last few decades, beginning in the late 1970s and increasing steadily since then, the practice has reemerged as a popular option for parents desiring a more direct influence over their children's education (Lines, 1991; Ray, 2000; Murphy, 2012). The growth of home education as alternative to school education was mentioned by many researchers around the world (Lines, 1991; Glenn, 2005; Beck, 2010, 2015; Gaither, 2008; Ray, 2011; Rothermel, 2011; Kraftl, 2012; Spiegler, 2015), yet research on homeschooling is at its beginning and there is still little known about it or those who practice it (Beck, 2010; Morton, 2010; Murphy, 2012).

There are many different reasons for why families choose to home educate (Van Galen, 1988; Mayberry, 1988; Beck, 2010; Morton, 2010; Rothermel, 2011; Murphy, 2012; Kunzman &Gaither, 2013). Morton (2010) characterizes some common perceptions of home educators as swinging between images of the 'tree-hugging hippy' and the 'religious fanatic'. Yet, whatever the label for such stereotypes, the fact remains that this educational choice is contrary to the modern trend toward the institutionalization and professionalization of education (Ray, 2000).

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This thesis attempts to examine the phenomenon of contemporary home education, its context, features, and especially, the motives of parent educators across several countries. It seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the parents' motivation in their choice to educate their children at home, as an alternative to public education, by studying the experiences of two different groupings of home educators and their respective constructions of childhood and the social world.

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The first grouping constructs home education as a 'natural' choice often presented in political or philosophical opposition to existing social structures. For the second grouping home education is predominantly a 'social' choice relating to the conscious transmission of various forms of capital (Morton, 2010). Even though there are different philosophies and worldviews behind the choice to home educate, what the conclusion of the paper indicates is that there are also common denominators between the two groupings, which perhaps grants us insight into a bigger context of motivations, bringing to mind contemporary issues in education.

The secondary literature used in this paper in order to grasp the global characteristics of this movement, is based on the studies and theoretical analyses mainly from the USA, UK, Germany and Norway.

1.2. Research Problem

Therefore, the overall research problem of the study was:
Why do particular families activate the option of home education?

The following questions helped to guide the study:
- *Who are these parents and why did they choose to educate their children at home?*
- *What were the experiences that led them to consider home education?*
- *Why is teaching one's child at home a meaningful experience for a parent educator?*
- *What are some differences and commonalities among parent educators?*

1.3. Structure of the Study

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter 1 defines the purpose of the study and presents the research question. Chapter 2 introduces the concepts and theoretical framework for contemporary home education used in this thesis. Chapter 3 presents a literature review based on contexts, features and motivations of modern home-based education. Chapter 4 introduces the research methodology undertaken for the study and details the whole process of data collection

and analysis. Chapter 5 presents the findings, analysis and discussion. Chapter 6 focuses on concluding remarks.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is both relevant and timely, and of importance to the continuing research on home education, as there is lack of international studies on the motives for home education across several countries and different cultural backgrounds, such as Asia, Russia, Europe, as well as the USA. In this particular context, home education gets our interest for several reasons:

- the new neo-liberal model adopted by a global education sector
- the changing conceptions of childhood and children, along with
- the conflicting interests between parents and the State in the children's upbringing.

Therefore, this study aims to make a contribution to this knowledge gap.

Chapter 2: Concepts and Theoretical Framework

"Facts are always examined in light of some theory and therefore cannot be disentangled from philosophy"   *(Lev Vygotsky, 1986, p.11)*

This part of the paper will look into the definition of contemporary home-based education. It will cover main concepts and theoretical framework to be used in the study.

2.1. Definitions and Terms

It is essential to define concepts used in this paper as they determine the outcome of the study. One of the concepts that needs defining is home education. However, it is important to notice that a comprehensive analysis of the homeschooling literature leads us to conclude that the concept is not quite as simple as it appears on the surface. As Belfield (2005) points out, there are many variations in the definitions of what constitutes 'home education'. However, in this study, a home education will be defined as educational practice, utilizing either parent-directed or parent-controlled methods in the course of traditional school hours during the traditional school days (Ray, 2000, p. 71).

Home education, therefore, consists of two related elements, the "decision by parents not to educate their children in an institutionalized setting and the decision by parents to educate their children in a home setting" (Hedeed, 1991, p. 1). As some sociologists contend, it is a way for parents to regain control of their children's and their own lives, and a way to make the impact they want on the next generation (Ray, 2000). Moreover, home education represents an educational choice option for parents (Gaither, 2008; Morton, 2010). This choice is being made by a wide variety of people, and closely bonds them with their children.

Furthermore, home education implies both voluntariness and a rejection of conventional schooling (Lubienski, 2000; Murphy, 2012). Therefore, a child who is unable to go to school is not considered to be home educated (Aurini & Davies, 2005; Murphy, 2012). Thus, actions that are not voluntary do not count as homeschooling in

this definition, and in particularly, in this study. In addition, the alternative terms 'home education', 'home schooling', 'home-based education' and 'unschooling' have the same meaning in this study and will be used as synonyms throughout the paper.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework presented in the following section has been developed based on an analysis of the general literature on modern home education. This framework will be used to guide the analysis of motives of home educator parents and their ideas on how to provide the upbringing of the child.

First of all, the neoliberal theory with the privatization movement as its main outcome (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough & Halsey, 2006; Zajda, 2010; Murphy, 2012) is used in this study, since home education presents a framework with two main ingredients: the rejection of public and private schooling and the use of the home as the center of educational gravity (Hedeed, 1991; Ray, 2000; Murphy, 2012).

De Alessi (1987 in Murphy, 2012) argues that privatization is a multilayered construct, which "entails a move toward private property and away from not only government and common ownership but also from government regulations that limit individual rights to the use of resources" (p. 71). Therefore, there are two different perceptions of the objectives of the privatization movement. First, some analysts (Savas, 1987 in Murphy, 2012) perceive privatization to be a vehicle to help "restore government to its fundamental purpose to steer, not to man the oars" (p. 71). Others (Star, 1991; Martin, 1993 in Murphy, 2012) who view privatization as an element of a more extensive neoliberal policy package maintain that a key objective is to reconstruct the liberal democratic state (p.71). Yet, privatization, in the context of home-based education in this paper, is viewed "as a vehicle to overcome the dependency culture associated with a social order dominated by government activity" (Murphy, 2012, p. 71).

In addition to this, individuals are influenced by contextual or social factors; thus the place they live in, socio-economic status of the family, peers, school policies and environment influence the home education option. Family background, including

values and beliefs held by the parents, also plays its part on whether or not parents choose this option (Rumberger, 2011). Moreover, parents make school choice decisions based on preferences, the quality of local schools, and constraints of income and available leisure time. For example, if two families with identical preferences, income, and leisure time choose different schools, the difference can be ascribed to the local education market (ibid.). Families who live in the same area with the same time and income constraints but who choose different schools must have different preference (Isenberg, 2007, p. 398).

One essential concept that will be used directly or indirectly in this paper is that home educators can be categorized according to the degree of consensus and conflicts in values and interests with school and national society (Beck, 2015, p. 91). Hoem (1978 in Beck, 2015) believes that limited commonality of values and social interest will result in greater sociocultural distance between specific and overarching social elements (ibid.). Therefore, the gap in values between home educators and school parents creates conflict in interests with school and national society. Thus, breaking with school becomes a threat not only to the school itself but also to national identity (Beck, 2015, p. 94). As Beck (2015) argues,

> when a centralized public school emphasizes universal national, secularized and objective values, home-educating environments may be construed as subjective protests to such school values and, some postmodern home educating communities of shared religious values may actually present as a threat to social integration. Despite these views, home education generally can also be described as constructive and essential for maintaining social integration and social and knowledge diversity in postmodern societies (p. 96).

Further discussion on motivational framework of this study will be offered in the Literature Chapter. I will feature some of these areas in this paper with essential ideas from other concepts, as appropriate, to discuss some of the main motivations for home education today.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In this chapter an overview of literature will be provided on the two major topics of this study: context and the motives for home education, by studying two different groups of home educators and their varying interpretations of childhood and the social world that surrounds them. The first part elaborates on what the literature says about several forces that allowed home education to become a global phenomenon. The second part focuses on literature that examines the comparative dimension of this study, that is, the differences and similarities that are prevalent among home-based educators.

For this part of the thesis, I searched widely for academic literature on home education globally, not only in English, but also in other languages familiar to me, such as Russian, Italian and Turkish. However, I discovered that home education literature is practically non-existent in the academia of those countries. Hence, most of the conceptual literature I was able to find focused on home education in the US, UK, Germany and Norway.

3.1 Contemporary Home Education: Context, Features, and Motives

This part of the paper explores the phenomenon of contemporary home education and its features, with a broad view on social, political and cultural forces that have formed a context for the growth of home education all over the world and how that context influences motivations. Therefore, to better understand the processes that are going on in home education today, it is important to analyze the historical background, context and motives that allowed this system of education to grow, in order to obtain some idea of its specifics. Thus, this part of the paper is divided into three main sections: first, it will briefly discuss how a social, political and economic environment becomes conducive for the surfacing of homeschooling at this particular time in history; followed by an examination of the global movement; and finally, it will investigate the motivations of home educating families that drive them to make this educational choice.

3.1.1 Context for Contemporary Home Education

"One of the essential laws of social sciences is that context almost always matters"

Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow (1995) contend that the growing number of home educators worldwide is occurring in a specific historical period. In relation to the interpretation of the contextual factors that paved the way for huge increases in home educators in the United States, Gaither (2008) argues that these factors were both social and spatial in nature. Firstly, post-war mass suburbanization with its improvements in housing quality. Secondly, the rise of feminism functioned as, in some cases, an inspiration for counter-cultural practices such as homeschooling and, in others, as a catalyst for a backlash amongst conservative families where mothers stayed at home (Kraftl, 2012, p. 5). And finally, disillusionment with the increased bureaucratization and secularism of public schools, which led to growing criticism of public schools for young people. All these factors provided an increasingly appropriate environment for homeschooling (Gaither, 2008; Kraftl, 2012). Thus, as Luebke (1999) maintains, large-scale cultural, social, and economic forces play a significant role in the development of home education.

Furthermore, the ideology of neo-liberalism, which is based on free trade and its influence on multilateral agencies through the appearance of sponsoring open and fair competition, has the potential to influence educational systems. Thus, "neo-liberal ideas…continue to dictate the policies and regulations… that govern trade, aid, and knowledge creation and distribution across the globe" by offering "a universal template for efficiency" and "promoting elements of a global standard-setting regime" (Lauder et al., 2006, p. 37- 41).

Therefore, the essential effect of globalization is that educational organizations, having modeled their goals and strategies on the entrepreneurial business model, are compelled to embrace the corporate ethos of the efficiency, accountability and profit-driven managerialism (Zajda, 2010). Thus, there is a sense that producers have "come to dominate most educational decisions and government has become their chosen mechanism for retaining control"(Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000, p. 223 in Murphy,

2012). As a consequence, researchers argue that education in the global economy, following neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideologies, which have both redefined education and training as an investment in "human capital" and "human resource development", has the potential to produce a great deal of discontent and conflict (Zajda, 2010).

Thus, most researchers believe that the distinctive issue in the home education movement is control. According to Kirscher (1991), as power and influence were passed from parents and communities to government agents and professional experts throughout the 20th century, parents began increasingly to experience the non-fiscal cost of conventional school education in terms of the loss of control over the schooling of their children. As a consequence, researchers suggest that home education can be examined as part of an ongoing debate about who should be in control of the education of children, government or parents? (Kirscher, 1991; Murphy, 2012).

Gaither (2008) points out that there is little question that a widespread "disillusionment with government has extended to all sectors, including schooling" (p. 93). According to Van Galen (1991), parents are home educating because they actively question the professionalization and bureaucratization of modern society, and particularly of modern education.

Focusing specifically on education, Murphy (2012) states, that "the attack on government-controlled schooling can be traced back to two broad areas: discontent with the processes and outcomes of schooling and critical reviews of the core system of schooling… governance and control" (p. 64). Murphy (2012) continues "critics maintain that school bureaucracies, as currently operated, are incapable of providing high-quality education… and, even worse, that bureaucratic governance and management cause serious disruption in the education process" (p. 67). It is this context, Murphy (2012) asserts, the home education movement represents "the fight… against government domination of schooling and against the dominant role played by professional educators in the production known as schooling" (p. 60).

Hence, researchers (Aurini & Davies, 2005; Belfield, 2004; Murphy, 2012) believe that the forces of neo-liberal politics, particularly marketization and privatization, and the ideology of choice as its outcome, have contributed enormously to the ongoing rise of home-based education as a response to the intrusion of ideals that are perceived as undesirable or intolerant.

Other factors of globalization that are closely related to the contemporary home education context are new digital platforms and new interactive technology that enables greater connection and interconnectedness, the exponential increase and rapid diffusion not only of technologies, but knowledge and ideas (Lauder et al., 2006; Van Galen, 2014).

3.1.2. Features of Home Education Globally

Today home education is a growing phenomenon all over the world and has become one of the most dynamic contemporary educational trends (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). However, its distribution is uneven, both in terms of numbers of learners and legal status (Kraftl, 2012). The legal, social and educational frameworks that encourage home education vary both among countries and within them (Beck, 2015). In the United States, for example, it is estimated that nearly 2 million school-aged children and youth are home educated (Lines, 1991; Ray, 2011). The latest published statistics revealed that approximately 3% of the school-aged population was home educated in the year 2011-2012 (IES National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). In the United Kingdom, the estimation is around 50,000 to 150,000 children (Kraftl, 2012), and in Norway, around 400 children are educated at home (Beck, 2010). According to Kraftl (2012),

> in most contexts, homeschooling is not simply 'legal' or 'illegal'; even where it is legal (as in the UK, Australia and Norway), families may be subject to scrutiny, being constantly required to justify their decision (p. 4-5).

Nevertheless, in these countries, "it is education that is compulsory and therefore, home education is a choice, on a par with school attendance" (Beck, 2015, p. 88).

Besides, the legal status of homeschooling has also been undergoing changes over the years in different countries, and not always in ways that encourage its growth. For

example, homeschooling was legal in Brazil until new legislation in 1987 and in Sweden until 2011. In Russia, since 2012, recent plans for the modernization of the education system would effectively outlaw home education (Kraftl, 2012). And in Europe, in general, there is a notable shift towards tighter state control across the countries (Blok & Karsten, 2011; Rothermel, 2015). In Germany, homeschooling has always been illegal and remains so (Spiegler, 2015). On the other hand, in the United States, the picture has been one of legalization and increased freedom over time (Kraftl, 2012). In Kazakhstan, homeschooling is also legally forbidden except in rare medical circumstances. Despite this, some parents still choose to home educate their children.

However, even though there are portions of interview material in this study that reveal some elements of the legal status of home-based education in specific countries, this paper does not discuss the legality of homeschooling except to point out instances where this had impacted the choices made by some parent educators who were interviewed.

3.1.3. Motives for Contemporary Home Education

"The decision to educate at home involves a complex set of motivations"

(Marlow, 1994)

Many researchers have explored the various motivations parents have for home educating their children (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Beck (2010) points out "two classical attempts to categorize motives to home educate… Mayberry (1988) and Van Galen (1988)" (p. 77).

Van Galen (1988) identified two types of home educating parents, based on their motivations: 'ideologues' are those who reject school and the public educational system because they disagree with the ideological content of the curriculum; and 'pedagogues' include parents who chose to home educate because of a perception that the school learning environment is either negative or maladapted to their child (Van Galen, 1991). Mayberry (1988), on the other hand, expanded Van Galen's typology by proposing four groups of parents. Among those who home educate for ideological reasons, she distinguished the religiously motivated from those inspired by the desire

to live an alternative 'New Age' lifestyle. She also divided the 'pedagogues' into two groups: those primarily concerned with academic performance and those preoccupied with socio-relational development (Mayberry, 1988).

Previous research (Van Galen, 1988; Mayberry, 1988) claims that 'ideological' home educators emphasize both family and conservative values, and are motivated by a disagreement with schools in terms of values. These parents are referred to as religious fundamentalists (Beck, 2010, p. 77). On the other hand, 'pedagogical' home educators consider breaking with institutional schooling combined with practicing more desirable pedagogic approaches (ibid). Beck contends that Mayberry and Van Galen suggest the reasons, which characterize middle class home education, both the 'structured' and 'unschooled' (Beck, 2010, p. 77).

Therefore, categorizing parents' choices according to motivations for home education, as exemplified by the typologies of Van Galen (1988) and Mayberry (1988), offered a first conceptual framework for following studies on parental motivation. Later researches have continued the interest in defining categories of parents according to families' motivation and have replaced it with an interest in the development of motivational typologies.

For instance, Stevens (2001) distinguishes between "heaven-based and earth-based" categories for home education (Stevens, 2001; Spiegler, 2015; Beck, 2015). The first group based their motives on religion, life view and ideology. The second group, on pragmatic and pedagogical issues (ibid.)

Beck (2010) contends that in all countries with home education, there are mainly four groups that may overlap. The first group can be defined as 'structured', which involve home educators, with religious, conservative, well-educated middle class parents (Beck, 2010, p. 74). Beck (2010, p. 74) explains that these families are "role- and position-oriented in their pedagogical codes and often practice structured school oriented home education with a priority on analytical objective knowledge". The second group, defined as 'unschooling' is home-based educators who are mainly well-educated middle class parents "with radical political and cultural viewpoints, and who are person- and identity-oriented" (Beck, 2010, p. 74). These families often practice

child-centered, natural learning home education with priority placed on cultural creativity and new interpretative and communicative knowledge (Beck, 2010, p. 74). Beck (2010) points out that these first two groups of home educators are the most distinctly defined and researched.

The third, less well-studied, group of home educators is called 'pragmatic', "often rural, working class home educators with usually limited formal education, who emphasize home education anchored in practical work" (Beck, 2010, p. 74.). And the last group is defined by Beck as 'unknown' or 'underground homeschooling', that is, different groups of home educators that are not registered with the authorities and avoid any forms of institutionalization, like gypsies and unknown immigrants (ibid.).

In addition to these four groups, researchers (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013) contend that there is a new grouping of home educators, who choose to home educate in order to preserve their cultural, ethnic and linguistic characteristics. Yet, little research has been conducted on this phenomenon (ibid.). Nevertheless, researchers like Gaither or Ray assert that the homeschool movement is continuously becoming more diverse (Gaither, 2008; Ray, 2010; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). However, while the homeschool population is gaining racial and ethnic diversity, the percentage of White homeschoolers has remained as its higher percentage (68%), followed by Hispanic (15%), than Black (8%), Asian or Pacific Islander (4%) (IES National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, p. 3).

As Beck (2010) notes, given groupings of home educators represents more general social groups also inside school, who have different sorts and degrees of socio-cultural conflicts with both school and the national state (Beck, 2010, p. 74). Beck (2010, p. 75-6) urges that with more student-time in school, both the substance and the degree of such conflicts could produce more social school problems and then could give social motivation for home education added to possible personal motives.

Interestingly, analyzing data from the 1998 and 2000 General Social Surveys, researchers found that demographic, religious, socio-economic, and family-structure characteristics played no statistically significant role in parents' decision to homeschool (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Another survey in 2007 identified that the

three most common reasons for homeschooling were "a concern about environment of other schools" (88%), "a desire to provide moral or religious instruction" (83%), and "a dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools" (73%). When asked to identify their most important reason, more than one-third (36%) of parents identified moral or religious instruction, followed by school environment at 21% (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, p. 9). A survey in 2012 confirmed the previous three most common reasons for homeschooling identified in 2007, but with a lighter increase: "a concern about home environment of other schools" (91%), "a desire to provide moral instruction" (77%), "a dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools" (74%), followed by "a desire to provide religious instruction" (64%) and "a desire to provide a nontraditional approach to child's education" (44%) (IES National Center for Education Statistics, 2013, p. 18). Yet, Spiegler (2010) maintains that those categories are much broader than others, for example 'poor learning environment' could be a subset of 'concern about school environment' which itself could be a subset of 'desire to provide moral or religious instruction'.

However, one of the noticeable changes in motives for home education lies in religion. Most researchers surmised that conservative Christians comprise the largest subset of home educators. Surprisingly, as Isenberg (2007) points out the overall figure for religious participation is lower for homeschoolers. All else being equal, children from very religious families are more likely to enroll in private schools. Therefore, according to Isenberg (ibid,) religion plays an important role in the decision to homeschool just as it does in the decision to choose a private school. Furthermore, conservative Christian families are less likely to homeschool when they live in school districts with heavy concentrations of evangelical Protestants, either because local public schools reflect their values or the high density of evangelical Protestants allows for ample private religious school options (Isenberg, 2007).

This is again echoed by research done in Norway (Beck, 2010). Only 7% of the possible home education motives would be for religious ones (ibid.). This is a strong decrease from 2002/2003 when 30% of Norwegian home educators were religiously motivated (ibid). However, "the pure pedagogical school motives, on the other hand, are more or less the same in 2006 (38%) as they were in 2002/2003 (40%)" (Beck, 2010, p. 78).

Furthermore, Beck (2010) points out other interesting signs of change in motivation for home education. Data from a Norwegian survey show correlation between a student's socially related problems at school and the parent's social motivation for home education (Beck, 2010, p. 77).

Beck (2010) asserts that the top two motives in 2006 are both socially driven. Parents who chose home education as an option are more concerned about mistreatment, the child's well-being at school, bad associations with teachers, and their child's overall social development, when compared to their peers. When pupils have social problems at school and/or parents want more time with their child at home, the home education option becomes more present in the parents mind. Thus, Beck (2010) asserts that a new "socially motivated home education can be an attempt to reconstruct modern everyday life and… could recruit participants from all social classes" (p. 79).

This confirms some important empirical work that reveals that ideological rationales in general and religion-based motivations in particular, although still quite significant, are becoming less important. Hence, motivations are less polarized (in Murphy, 2012, p. 79).

In addition, it is important to remember that the motivations for home education are typically not independent of particular circumstances. The characteristics of local schools, state policies regarding standardized testing, the opportunities that children have outside of the local school for curricular and extracurricular activities, all these reasons are important for the parental choice of home education and might be changed over the time (Isenberg, 2007; Spiegler, 2010; Rothermel, 2011; Rumberger, 2011). Yet, Murphy (2012, p. 77) asserts that,

> we need to be explicit about the universal, prime motive for home education, one that is somewhat underemphasized in much of the empirical literature on home-based education. Specifically, parents homeschool for one overarching reason: They want control of their children and their education. They do not want to give that authority away to the school. This is the foundation that informs all other motives. It is the vehicle to meet other goals – for example, to impart cherished value or to protect children from social harm.

3.2. Comparative Analysis of Home-Based Educators: Differences and Similarities

"While reasons for homeschooling are wonderfully diverse… they tend to fall into roughly defined categories"
(Dobson, 2001, p. 5)

Isenberg (2007) contends that although some sociologists emphasize the split between religious and educational homeschooling, the categories are broad, and it is not clear how to divide homeschoolers between religious and educational subgroups, and it is not always easy to know what parents meant.

Therefore, this section will focus mainly on two combined categories. First, on the 'natural' choice group, "which often presented in political opposition to existing social structures" (Morton, 2010). This category is similar to a group defined by Beck (2006, 2010, 2015) as 'unschoolers', whose "value and interests conflict with school and national society are pedagogical and cultural, but mainly not political, as social class conflicts" (Beck, 2015, p. 92). And the second group is a group that is steadily growing in recent years, for which home education "is predominantly a 'social' choice relating to the conscious transmission of various forms of capital" (Morton, 2010). The latter category might be defined by Beck (2006, 2010, 2015) as 'structured', since this category of parents identify their values as one of the motives for choosing home education for their children. Other groups, including 'pragmatic', 'underground' and 'ethnically diverse', will not be examined here in-depth.

Therefore, this part of the paper will examine two different groups of home educators and their different interpretations of childhood and the social world around them. The following three sections will discuss home education as a result of 'natural' choice versus a 'social' choice, identifying similarities and differences between these two groups.

3.2.1. Home Education as a 'Natural' Choice

According to Morton (2010), this group of home educators utilizes the term 'natural' to describe, "a way of life that was outside what they saw as false social structures" and that often employs images of an "idealized pre-industrial lifestyle" (p. 47). This

fundamental perspective manifests in choices regarding childhood, education and lifestyle. In general, members of this grouping are individualistic and strive to live apart from conventional social structures that they deem confining or unbalanced. In response, these individuals strive to position themselves in "opposition to the 'other' of the state and institutional structures" (Morton, p. 27). Members of this group also typically embody the following characteristics: a rejection of consumer culture, a concern for the environment, a subsistence lifestyle, individualism and a perspective of family centrality (Morton, 2010, p. 48).

For many families within this grouping the presence of the formal school system is problematic because it challenges their chosen lifestyle (Morton, 2010). For such parents, "home education is part of a conscious effort to reject conventional social structures and conformity to what they see as a tyrannical system" (Morton, 2010, p. 47). By extension, home education is viewed as a lifestyle choice, integral to and often convenient to 'natural' home educators' overall philosophy and lifestyle, rather than being related to purely academic considerations (Morton, 2010, p. 49). Many families in this group would agree with the idea that education is a self-interested process of self-discovery (Morton, 2010). However, these families do exhibit an element of pragmatism, as, "despite a deliberate effort to thwart economic and institutional structures, there is an acceptance that economic labor is a necessity for survival and that home education should equip children for that reality" (Morton, 2010, p. 50).

One primary characteristic of this group is the centrality of family. According to several 'natural' families, the household unit is the primary focus and guides the lifestyle (Morton, 2010). For many of these families the formal school system and its representation is often perceived as creation and function of 'oppressive state' or 'oppressive capitalist structure' (Morton, 2010, p. 49). For 'natural' families, home education is perceived as a way to "protect… children from negative state structures and preserve their innocence" (Morton, 2010, p. 49).

Members of this grouping vary widely in their interactions with an ideology regarding mainstream society. For example, while some members within this grouping define authoritative structures as both confining and constraining others seek to improve

upon existing schooling frameworks (Morton, 2010, p. 49). At their core, these families are strongly individualistic. As a result, they implement an autonomous and child-led approach to education. This sense of individualism over community means that 'natural' home educators tend to operate as "independent units with relationships with other home educating families being fluid and transient, existing to meet families' needs". Consequently, there is often also suspicion of other home educating families, particularly those who are not 'natural' home educators (Morton, 2010, p. 49).

3.2.2. Home Education as a 'Social' Choice

Unlike 'natural' home educators, parents for whom education is a 'social' choice do not take issues with the concept of formal education (Morton, 2010). Rather, is it the associated social interactions integral to formal education that prove problematic for these families (Morton, 2010). These might include: moral and academic deficiencies, negative peer interactions, and discontinuity between what is emphasized at home and school.

'Social' home educators express similar concerns regarding deficiencies in formal education as it pertains to morality and academics. Many families in this group describe themselves as 'Christians'. For these educators, "their beliefs and values are central to their choice of home education over mainstream schooling" (ibid.). Although many of these families would consider private education as a possible alternative to home education, this is often financially unrealistic. For these families, parents perceive an obligation to provide for the social and moral upbringing of their children.

As such, it is a common conception among this group to that parents "should not relinquish the responsibility to the anonymous and morally ambivalent structure of the school system" (Morton, 2010, p. 50). Parents in this grouping are also motivated to choose home education due to the perception that the available public schools are of poor quality (Lines, 2000). As studies show, some parents have lost faith in the public schools and their ability to teach values that align with their own (Vigilant, Trefethren, & Anderson, 2013). These parents express concern regarding the

following: inappropriately low academic standards, the curriculum, the content that is featured and the content that is not covered (Murphy, 2012).

For members of this grouping there is great concern regarding peer interactions among their children. For many of these families the conglomeration of many children from different families is described as 'unnatural'. These parents feel that it is their duty to protect their children from these unnatural interactions and associated consequences. This initially seems to overlap the ideology of the 'natural' group. However, while socially motivated families who choose home education desire protection, they seek "a different kind of protection" from that of the natural group, namely, the protection from unwanted ideas, rather than from the overall structure of formal education (Morton, 2010, p. 50).

Members of this group "express greater concerns about the values that other people's children bring into schools and the influence those children may have upon their offspring" (Morton, 2010, p. 50). In addition, few of the parents who home educate for 'social' reasons convey serious worries about bullying in schools. This rationale was not in evidence in the same way as for 'natural' home educators. Rather, parents in this group perceive home education "as a way of exerting control over what their children are exposed to, especially with regard to the kinds of children they mixed with" (Morton, 2010, p. 51).

According to Morton (2010, p. 51), "'social' home educators are also troubled by the potential for poor interactions between teachers and students" and the exposure to social and moral values that differ from those of the family. In other words, unlike at home, in a formal educational system the parent cannot "guarantee moral and value homogeneity between themselves and the teacher" (Morton, 2010, p. 51). According to this group, they do not want their children to be confused by discontinuity different the home and formal school setting. These parents view their children as "semi-formed individuals" (Morton, 2010, p. 51-2). As such, socially-oriented parents view their responsibility to ensure that their children receive an education as a way to ensure proper socialization in adulthood, including the issues of morals and values.

3.2.3. Similarities and Commonalities

Although there are differences among these groupings, there is also significant similarities and overlap both in philosophy and practice. Some parents may see themselves within the larger context of a social movement towards home education, while others view their decision to homeschool as merely an alternative way to educate their children (Morton, 2010). Regardless of the respective philosophies of the individual families, some similarities exist among most home educators. The following section will examine the commonalities among homeschool families as they pertain to: philosophical context, socioeconomic affects, parent educator education level, parental and familial empowerment, curriculum development and implementation. While some variation regarding the ideology surrounding homeschooling exists, there are some universal fundamentals.

According to Kunzman & Gaither (2013, p. 10), "the most consistent ideological thread, one that crosses demographics of all kinds, is the conviction among homeschool parents that they should have sole or at least primary responsibility for the education of their children". Another primary similarity among all homeschool educators is the "perceived incongruity between a preferred cultural identity and the one they see in the school curriculum" (Murphy, 2012, p. 96). According to researchers like Marlow, "the home education movement is often motivated by perceived threats to particular moral understanding and a desire to reinforce and protect the beliefs and values to provide a stable worldview and guide to life" (as cited in Murphy, 2012, p. 87).

Another interesting similarity pointed out by Isenberg (2007), is some evidence that the perceived quality of public schools and decreased choice of private schools both may contribute to an increase in the motivation for home education. For example, many families purchase homes in neighborhoods that are seen as having high quality public schools (Holme, 2002).

Studies indicate that "in small towns, a decrease in math test scores in a school district increases the likelihood of homeschooling" and the lack of private school alternatives may escalate the tendency for families to choose home education (Isenberg, 2007, p.

404-5). The effect of parent's education on academic achievement is especially interesting. Early research studies failed to find any significant relationship between home-educated children's achievement scores and parental educational attainment (Mayberry et al., 1995, p. 31). However, more recent studies claim that parental educational level matters very much for academic achievement, with intuitive results – higher parental educational level equates to improved scores among children (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Moreover, better-educated mothers are also simply more likely to homeschool their children (Isengberg, 2007).

The less apparent underlying commonality between different groupings, as researchers (Mayberry et al., 1995) point out, home-based education gives parents the opportunity to "expand personal and family rights, regardless of their secular or religious orientations". Thus, at the root of the development of home education are the attempts of a widely diverse group of parents to decide, "how their children will be educated, what values they will learn, and which socialization experiences they will encounter" (Mayberry et al., 1995, p.39).

As Kunzman (2009) argues, "the right of parents to raise and educate their children – and the complete lack of government authority in that regard – is perhaps the foundational conviction in home education" (p.181). As Murphy (2012, p. 72) points out us,

> given the central role of the individual consumer in the market narrative and the reality that privatization represents as shift from government to private provision, it is not a surprise that individual freedom and choice (at least for parents, if not children) is at the heart of the newly forming economic foundation on which homeschooling rises.

Another overlapping area between 'natural' and 'social' home educating families is the importance of the individual. One main element of the "structural critique centers on schooling's regimentation of children, having all children in lockstep in an instructional dance that requires them to learn the same material at the same time" (Murphy, 2012, p. 96). Some suggest that home education can supply better individualization and targeting of unique needs, as compared to public schools (Murphy, 2012; Pell, 2014).

As Murphy (2012) points out, this individualization of choice expressed in home education is "in many ways an echo of a wider mantra of 'choice' and 'the individual' within society and within social policy". Thus, home education is in many ways a logical extension of the effect of educational choice (Murphy, 2012). As a consequence, researchers (Mayberry et al., 1995) on all sides of the homeschooling debated confirm, "The home school movement perhaps to a greater extent than other movements… exemplifies the principles of individualism" (p.102).

Most 'social' families follow a formal program of home education, often following a set curriculum, which also reflects their rigid value system. Despite the fact that many of these families value structure and replicate school structures at home, they also speak of valuing the flexibility of life that home education permits them. Thus, some social families may strike a balance between natural home educating families and those enrolled in institutional educational systems.

Regardless of whether a formal curriculum is followed, home education involves adjusting to the more flexible context of the home environment. According to Kunzman and Gaither (2013, p. 14),

> one of the most consistent findings of research on homeschooling proactive is that after a year of two of assiduous effort to mimic formal schooling at home, homeschooling mothers gradually move towards a less-structured, more eclectic approach. This shift enables mothers to cope with the added responsibilities with which homeschooling burdened them.

The eclectic model, nevertheless, recognizes that all family interactions even the informal and spontaneous become educational opportunities (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, p. 14). There is also a gentle movement towards more informal educational methods with the introduction over time of extended project work in addition to more formal curriculum-based work. Like the 'natural' home educators, 'social' home educators value the opportunity to individualize their children's education to individual strengths, weaknesses and interests, although to a lesser extent (Morton, 2010).

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This study is based on a comparative analysis of views presented by a group of parents in different countries who chose to educate their children at home. It compares the views of two different categories of parents with two different philosophies behind their choices, gathered from oral interviews. The methodology behind these interviews is the main focus of this chapter. The chapter describes the rationale behind choosing a qualitative research strategy, a research design, the making of the interview guide, how the sample of participants was located, and how the interviews were conducted. It also provides a brief discussion on ethical considerations, the researcher's reflexivity and the limitations of this study.

4.1. Qualitative Research Strategy

A research study can either be qualitative or quantitative in nature depending on its purpose. According to Bryman (2012), qualitative research is involved in getting the meaning of a phenomenon, exploring a situation that is less understood or describing a phenomenon. On the other hand, quantitative research aims at finding out causal relationships and through analysis of statistics and figures. Information, which may be difficult to explain quantitatively, may be understood with more depth when qualitative methods are employed (Robson, 2002). Since this research is aimed at a deeper understanding of the home education phenomenon in order to find out the root causes, consequences and their relevance, it is qualitative in nature. It involves seeking to understand those who chose to educate their children at home, why they made this choice in the first place and attempts to study how this affects the society and the individual.

4.2. Phenomenological Study

As Bryman (2008) points out, in knowledge construction it is very essential for the social researcher to construct knowledge by understanding the social world through the eyes of its participants. Thus, as Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) contend, "phenomenology points to an interest in the nature of human experience and the meaning that people attach to their experiences; with the assumption that the

important reality is what people perceive it to be" (p. 26). In its broadest sense, the term phenomenology refers to a person's perception of the meaning of an event (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Leedy et al. (2013) point out that a phenomenological study is a study that attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation (p. 145). In this study, I examined the experiences of home-educator parents in order to gain a better understanding of their motives in choosing home education for their children in the light of how their ideas about childhood and society influenced them. Thus, a phenomenological approach is considered suitable for the research problem of the study.

Later in this chapter, I discuss data collection and data analysis strategies that are applicable to the qualitative design of this study.

4.3. Semi-Structured Telephone Interviews

To understand a phenomenon, one needs to be in contact with the target individuals (Bryman, 2012). As Leedy & Ormrod (2013) argue, phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews with a carefully selected sample of participants. Typically, the researcher listens closely as participants describe their everyday experiences related to the phenomenon, as a phenomenological study is as much in the hands of the participants as in the hands of the researcher (ibid.). This research is designed as a small-scale qualitative study, involving seven home-based educators, which utilized the phenomenological interview, "in which the researcher and participants work together to arrive at the heart of the matter" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 145).

Therefore, as a flexible tool that adapts to the situation (Robson, 2002), the use of the interview method enabled the collection of data from the actual participants who could help to get to a deeper understanding of motivations behind their choice. This research was based on semi-structured interviews, whereby the first few questions were structured and applied to all participants. Data on age, income, and level of education were answered using standard questions. The rest of the interview involved asking unstructured questions to get further information from the participants, in other words, open-ended questions. This was essential to allow flexibility and to elicit more

information from the participants. The questions allowed probing and better understanding as both interviewer and interviewee could clarify any issues, which they did not understand. In general, a typical interview sounded more like an informal conversation, with the participant doing most of the talking and the researcher doing most of the listening, except for gentle probing to learn more about the participant's views.

The interviews were conducted during a two-month period in the autumn of 2013. Due to geographical spread of the participants over several countries, all interviews were performed online using Internet, and particularly Skype, as one of the popular means of communication today.

The participants had a choice of being interviewed in English or Russian language, even though for some participants neither was not their mother tongue. Each interview lasted approximately from 40 minutes to an hour.

All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, and some notes were taken both during and immediately after the interviews. Subsequently, all the interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher herself, in order to maintain confidentiality.

All the participants have been given fictitious names in this study, and any information that could reveal their identity has been omitted. This was done to protect their anonymity.

The interview guide in this study was developed to research the context and motives for home education as a contemporary educational phenomenon, based on the review of literature as presented in the chapters Theoretical Framework and Literature Review. The main topics in the interviews were the participants' motives for choosing home education and their experiences with it so far, and its potential impact on the future of their children and society. The use of interviews rather than questionnaires was chosen in order to create a dynamic dialog between participants and researcher.

The researcher noted that in general there were several inherent limitations to this method of data collection. First, there is the trust issue: the participants might not be willing be interviewed or to divulge their personal information or experiences to a stranger, especially if they are in countries where home education is not legally accepted. Another problem was that participants might give incorrect information, which could to incorrect analysis. Despite these reservations, the researcher decided to adopt the online interview method as the most practical one under the circumstances. Although it was not possible to meet the participants in person, the researcher felt that among those who eventually agreed to be interviewed, it was fairly easy for her during the conversation to break the ice and establish rapport. In the end, she was satisfied that the interviews had yielded credible material where the participants' perspectives, feelings and experiences were freely shared, and she had every reasonable confidence that they had spoken with sincerity and truth according to their individual perceptions.

4.4. Sampling

As was mentioned before, this study was designed to give a deeper insight into the past and present experiences that led parents to the decision of teaching their children at home. Therefore, only they could best tell their individual stories.

Researchers (Mayberry et al., 1995; Lines, 2000; Murphy, 2012) agree that for both ideological and legal reasons, many parent educators do not wish to participate in studies about home schools. Some parents believe that home education researchers are associated with governmental agencies and fear that the researchers' findings may be used to prevent the future operation of home schools. Some parents may be operating home schools illegally in countries, where compulsory school-based education is strictly enforced. This makes it hard to locate these parents and they are highly unlikely to respond to social researcher surveys. Therefore, research on home education families is limited primarily to those parents who registered their home school and/or developed a sense of trust towards the researchers conducting the study (Mayberry et. al., 1995, p. 4).

4.5. Participants

The participants in this particular study were located through family members, friends, forums on the Internet, blogs and social media groups related to home education. Some people suggested other friends and acquaintances who might be suitable participants.

Understandably, the response varied from country to country. I found an enormous interest and desire to participate in my study in countries where home education was well-established, like the USA, but very little response in countries where it was outlawed, such as in Kazakhstan and Germany. Thus, all interviewers were essentially self-selected, as the researcher could not require home schooling families to participate, and were identified through a snowball sampling approach. This approach helped a lot in finding willing participants, even though it took a while before I was referred to someone who was both qualified and willing to participate in the study.

In total, I conducted 13 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with as many home education families residing in seven different countries. These comprised four families from the USA, three families from Norway, two families from Russia, one family from Portugal, one family from Costa Rica, one family from Kazakhstan, and one family from Singapore. Even though the "theoretical saturation" was not reached in this study, as the appropriate sample size is often said to be at the point where more participants would not contribute any fundamentally new insight on the topic (Bryman, 2008), the responses do provide a sense of the parents' diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Later on, only seven qualified families were chosen for the study in order to present one family from each country of residence. Although the nationality of the families was not a comparative dimension of this study, the study aimed to represent people of different ethnicity, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds to get some picture of their demography and the influences on their decisions to choose to home educate their children. It was not really possible to relate the demographics in a national sense, as many of these parents were not residing in their countries of origin.

The non-representative sample covered parents who have chosen to educate their children at home, instead of enrolling them in formal education, which is compulsory in many countries for children of age six through 16. Naturally, a larger sample would

show even more diversity, and also give more indications of what general views exist on the subject. However, due to time constraints, the number of participants was limited.

The following is a short description of the participants:

Julie

Julie and her husband are both Norwegians living in the South of Norway with their two daughters. Julie holds a professional degree as a nurse, but prefers to stay at home with her children in order to create a safer family environment based on Christian principles. They have only one daughter of school age, who has been home educated for the last two years.

Laura

Laura and her husband are self-employed yoga teachers in Portugal. They have three children of school age, but only one child is being home educated. As their first two children are from previous marriages they had to take into account the desires of the other parents and send them to a conventional school. Laura, who is originally from North America, met her Brazilian husband in India, where they were practicing yoga together. Laura's choice of home education for her youngest daughter is a result of previous experiences that she had first-hand with the Portuguese school system.

Karl

With Katie, his wife, Karl has home educated three of their five children after they removed their oldest son from a public kindergarten in Germany six years ago, where home education is an illegal practice. Since then, they have adopted a nomadic lifestyle and travelled extensively. Karl has a successful online business, which helps him provide for his family and lifestyle. The excerpts from the interview in this study present Karl's perspectives regarding the couple's experiences as home educators and the practice of home schooling or 'world schooling', as Karl calls it.

Lee

Lee is originally from Malaysia but now lives with her husband and four children in Singapore. After graduating with a degree in Accountancy from the National

University of Singapore, she worked for a while in a bank. Feeling attracted to working with youth at risk, she then quit her job and went back to school to obtain her Diploma in Education and become a teacher until the birth of her first child. Lee and her Singaporean husband have been involved in home education since 2005. At the time of the interview, all four of their children were being home educated. The ages of the children ranged from 5 to14. Lee's commitment to home education is rooted both in her Christian beliefs and in her experiences with school and family life.

Natalia

Natalia, who is originally from Moscow, holds two citizenships; one Russian and the other French, as she was first married to a Frenchman. Her only son, born in Russia from her second marriage, holds two citizenships, which gives them ample opportunities to travel. After letting her son attend an elite French school in Moscow for five years, Natalia removed him because she thought the quality of the school was unsatisfactory. She continues to live in Russia.

Sarah

Sarah and her husband are from Kazakhstan, which was a part of the Soviet Union until 1991. Continuing to live there, they have two children on home education, which is an illegal practice in that country. Sarah and her husband are both well educated and intend to continue striving for independence from compulsory education in order to provide their children with better educational opportunities.

Kathy

Kathy and her husband are North Americans with four children; three of whom are home educated. They were living in North Carolina at the time of this study. Kathy's husband works in the U.S. Army and is deployed overseas for several months a year, so all the responsibilities as a home educator and parent are mainly upon her shoulders when he is away. Although both parents have their roots in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly known as Mormon Church), religion was not mentioned by Kathy as her main motive for home education. Instead, it was the school environment and the poor quality of the available schools that was mentioned.

Table 1 summarizes the details of the participants for this study (pseudonyms, country of residence, nationality, number of children, ages of children and number of home-educated children at the time of interview):

Table 1 Participants

Name	Country of Residence	Nationality of Wife & Husband	Number of Children	Ages of Children	Number of Home-Educated Children
Julie	Norway	Both Norwegian	2	7, 3	1
Laura	Portugal	USA & Brazil	3	10, 8, 6	1
Karl	Costa Rica	Both German	5	12, 9, 6, 3, 1	3
Lee	Singapore	Malaysian & Singaporean	4	13, 12, 6, 5	3
Natalia	Russia	Russian & French & Russian	1	13	1
Sarah	Kazakhstan	Both Kazakh	2	10, 8	2
Kathy	USA	Both USA	4	11, 9, 6, 5	3

While the participants in this study are by no means a representative sample of the home school population, they do however represent a diversity of parent educators, and meet the criterion used to select parent educators, which is that all have at least one child on home education for at least for several months.

All participants were contacted by email, and given the opportunity to agree or disagree to participate before the initial interview. A general email was sent to all potential participants, which described the content and aim of the interview. All were

then given the opportunity to either withdraw from the research or suggest a suitable time to conduct the interviews. This affirmation of informed consent was repeated at the beginning of each interview, where the aim of the research in general, and the interviews in particular were again stated. The researcher took care to repeat reassurances about confidentiality and their anonymity. All participants agreed to partake in the interviews and to have the interviews recorded digitally.

4.6. Method of Data Analysis

The central task during data analysis was to identify common themes in people's descriptions of their experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Thus, in my analysis of interview transcripts I identified patterns in the data by means of thematic codes through a process of inductive analysis. "Inductive analysis," Patton (1980) explains, "means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (p. 306). This was also in line with the method described by Bowen (2005.) Her analysis of data entails studying the patterns that emerges and making logical associations with the interview questions. She details the process of deriving her research findings as follows: "At successive stages, themes moved from a low level of abstraction to become major, overarching themes rooted in the concrete evidence provided by the data. These emerging themes together with a substantive-formal theory of 'development-focused collaboration' became the major findings of my study."

I merged elements of both methods in my data analysis in this research. I gathered all the qualitative information from my interviews with the participants, separated relevant from irrelevant information, and broke the relevant information into small segments (phrases or sentences) that each reflected a single, specific thought. I then grouped the segments into categories that reflect the various aspects of the phenomenon as it is experienced; looked for the various ways in which different people experience the phenomenon; and used the various meanings identified to develop an overall description of the phenomenon as people typically experience it (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The prevailing themes were cross-referenced to the literature review before coming up with a final report of findings. The final result

aimed at being a general description of the phenomenon as seen through the eyes of people who have experienced it firsthand.

To facilitate data organization and interpretation process, I used a HyperRESEARCH software program on my computer, which is suitable for qualitative research study. This program provided a ready means of storing, segmenting, and organizing lengthy interview transcripts, as well as of analyzing my qualitative data. It took some time to learn how to use this program effectively, but I believe it saved me time in the long run.

4.7. Units of Comparison

Dobson (2001) points out that while reasons for home schooling are wonderfully diverse, they tend to fall into roughly defined categories. Thus, during my fieldwork and analysis of the data collected, two groupings of home educators become apparent in terms of their views and philosophies behind their initial choice to home educate. Compared with the literature review, the first grouping constructs home education as a 'natural' choice often presented in political opposition to existing social structures. For the second grouping home education is predominantly a 'social' choice relating to the conscious transmission of various forms of capital (Morton, 2010). Each grouping is not homogeneous or totally mutually exclusive. There is a degree of overlapping, but in general each grouping encompasses a rough degree of similarity among a wide diversity of home educators. The rest of this study examines the different views and philosophies behind the choices of home educators and briefly explores the different characteristics of the two groups.

4.8. Ethical Considerations

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that ethical decisions must be made throughout the research process. They point out four ethical rules for research on humans: the informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the researcher's role (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This study complied fully with these ethical standards and considerations in conducting research on the participants.

The research included the written confirmation of the respondent's informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and evaluating what the possible consequences of the study might have for the participant. The researcher took all possible measures to ensure that there were no consequences for those she interviewed as a result of subsequent identification in a report or published work. Pseudonyms are used for the participants' and no specific information of the location of the setting is provided to ensure confidentiality. Field interviews and their transcripts were treated as confidential documents, and care was taken to ensure that others did not read them. The families (parents) were informed of the researcher's intentions. Participants received an informal letter, in which the study goals, purpose and opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, was described. The letter emphasized that the study would follow the standard research ethics. The informed consent was taken orally from all the participants before they were interviewed for the study.

4.9. Researcher's Reflexivity

Alcoff & Potter (1993) cautioned about the possible intrusion of researcher's identity in a study, as the "self and the multiple identities represent the fluid self in the research setting" (as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210). Given that I chose my research problem and those with whom I was engaged with in the research process, it is to be expected that my own views might influence this study in subtle ways. The voices of the parents heard in this study came through my own. Hence I was aware of my own impact while collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data in the phenomenon that I undertook to research. As Guba and Lincoln (2005) point out:

> Reflexivity demands that we interrogate each of our selves regarding the ways in which research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives. (p. 210)

However, as Botha (2011) argues, a reflexive knowledge-generating process is multidimensional in that it interrogates the researcher's role, and it considers the interpersonal relations of collaboration, as well as a third dimension of collective participation and social change through research.

In my case, my various identities – as an individual, a Christian, a raw foodist, a vegetarian, a health promoter, a yoga practitioner, a world traveller, a wife and future

mother – my personal experience of the situation undoubtedly helped me to find common ground to build rapport, enabling the participants to respond more openly. Thus, taking my experiences and practices into account, I have been critical of my capacity to connect with the respondents in this study in order to collaborate and co-produce understanding of the ideas.

4.10 Limitations of the Study

The main limitation in this study is that all findings were based on a non-representative sample. As such, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population of home educators.

Chapter 5. Data Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, the main questions are about the parents who establish home schools and their various motivations for home educating their children. Who are these parents and why did they choose to educate their children at home? What experiences led them to consider home education? Why is teaching one's children at home a meaningful experience for parent educators? I examine the characteristics, experiences, and thinking of home-educating parents from Norway, Portugal, Germany, Singapore, Russia, Kazakhstan and the USA. I analyze their differences and commonalities to gain a better understanding of what makes home schooling an appealing educational alternative to such a wide range of parents. The study was guided by the theoretical framework and literature review described in earlier chapters. In answering the research questions based on the findings, these theories serve as the backdrop in the discussion.

5.1 Home-Educating Parents: Some Characteristics

Parents Who Teach Their Children at Home

I begin my analysis with the demographic and religious characteristics of the parents who operate home schools. Although the discussion draws from a small non-representative sample of parent educators from seven different countries, this account illustrates not only the diversity among home school parents, but the commonalities among them as well.

5.1.1. Demographic Characteristics

Table 1.1 informs us that all seven home-educating parents live in different countries: North and South America, Central Europe, Russia and Asia. Some families originally did not belong to the current country of residence. One family is originally from Germany, but due to the difficult situation for home education in the country, they decided to live a nomadic lifestyle and at the time of interview resided in Costa Rica. The family living in Portugal has a multicultural background, as the mother originally was from Upstate New York, and the father is originally Brazilian. A mother from Russia, originally from Moscow, has a dual citizenship from France and Russia. And

finally, the mother originally from Malaysia resides in Singapore with her Singaporean husband. The parents from Norway and Kazakhstan live in their respective countries of origin.

Table 1.1 Name, Country of Residence, Nationality of Home Educators

Name	Country of Residence	Nationality
Julie	Norway	Norwegian
Laura	Portugal	USA
Karl	Costa Rica	German
Lee	Singapore	Malaysian
Natalia	Russia	Russian
Sarah	Kazakhstan	Kazakh
Kathy	USA	USA

Table 1.2 shows us that the majority of parents in this study (five out of seven) who operated home schools were relatively "young" (in their 30s). In addition, one mother who was in her 40s, had in fact started home education in her 30s, as her two elder sons are now teenagers. This finding is in accordance with the data available suggesting that homeschooling parents are likely to be younger than parents in general (Mayberry et al., 1995; Ray, 2010; Murphy, 2012). All were married with at least one spouse working. The main home educator was usually the mother. Most of the mothers were full-time homemakers. This is understandable, given the time pressure associated with teaching children at home. The number of children ranged from one to five, where two families out of seven had two children and the other two families had four children. The remaining families had respectively one, three, and five children. This data also generally supports some of the hallmark characteristics of home

education families in previous studies: large size and strong marital cohesiveness
(Mayberry et al., 1995; Ray, 2010; Rothermel, 2011; Murphy, 2012).

Table 1.2 Age of Parent, Number of Children, Marital Status

Name	Country of Residence	Age	Number of Children	Marital Status
Julie	Norway	31	2	Married
Laura	Portugal	33	3	Married
Karl	Costa Rica	38	5	Married
Lee	Singapore	44	4	Married
Natalia	Russia	45	1	Married
Sarah	Kazakhstan	37	2	Married
Kathy	USA	32	4	Married

Table 1.3 demonstrates that parent educators in this study received significantly high formal education. All but one of the home education parents that I interviewed was at least college or university graduates. One mother had completed graduate education in Biology and another had completed three years of college without graduating. In addition to that, one mother and one father had a teaching qualification in addition to being a college or university graduates. This confirms another "universal agreement among scholars across time that homeschooling parents are generally well educated" (Kunzman, 2009; Murphy, 2012, p.16).

Table 1.3 Educational Attainments of Home Educators

Name	Country	Level of Education	Teacher Training
Julie	Norway	College graduate	None
Laura	Portugal	Postgraduate Degree	None
Karl	Costa Rica	College graduate	Yes
Lee	Singapore	University graduate	Yes
Natalia	Russia	University graduate	None
Sarah	Kazakhstan	University graduate	None
Kathy	USA	3 years of college	None

The results of previous studies (Mayberry et al, 1995; Ray, 2010; Rothermel, 2011; Murphy, 2012), demonstrated that mothers not employed in the paid labor force almost always carried out the tasks associated with running home-based education programs. This study supports that finding: 5 out of 7 (70%) interviewees were full-time homemakers, who were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the home school (see Table 1.4). The remaining two participants said they were self-employed, which gave them a high degree of work time flexibility.

Table 1.4 Occupation of Home Educators

Name	Country	Occupation
Julie	Norway	Homemaker
Laura	Portugal	Yoga Teacher
Karl	Costa Rica	On-line Business Owner

Lee	Singapore	Homemaker
Natalia	Russia	Homemaker
Sarah	Kazakhstan	Homemaker
Kathy	USA	Homemaker

Given the preponderance of mothers who answered their occupation as *"I am a home-maker and I spend the time teaching my children at home"*, I wondered why families voluntarily gave up the chance to obtain additional income in order to teach their children at home. The responses to my question suggest that many mothers perceived the job of home teaching as "more important" than the additional income they would gain from paid employment. Indeed, parent educators often view the economic status of the family and its financial security as secondary to the learning and socialization activities that occur in home education. One mother from Russia I interviewed, described her commitment to providing for her child's education by saying:

> *I want to say that in general money is not essential; prohibitions or bans are not important. The most important thing is that home education gives parents a unique opportunity to provide their child with much bigger view of the world, with much more knowledge than any school could provide, much more. (Natalia, Russia)*

This statement reflects the sentiment that many home educators expressed during my interviews with them.

Finally, Table 1.5 illustrates that home education within this sample is primarily a middle-class activity. All the parents who participated in this study indicated that their yearly income corresponds to the middle-class bracket, in relation to the living standards in their respective countries.

Table 1.5 Income of Home Educators Families

Name	Country of Residence	Age	Annual Income as Declared by Interviewee
Julie	Norway	31	Middle-class income
Laura	Portugal	33	30,000+ Euros
Karl	Costa Rica	38	US$100,000
Lee	Singapore	44	Middle-class income
Natalia	Russia	45	Middle-class income
Sarah	Kazakhstan	37	Middle-class income
Kathy	USA	32	US$60,000

Clearly, this study supports previous research (Mayberry et al, 1995) that shows that the home education movement draws primarily from the younger, well-educated, and middle-income segments of society. Yet, as later research points out, home schooling is an educational choice that appeals to a wide spectrum of people (Gaither, 2008; Kunzman, 2011; Rothermel, 2011; Murphy, 2012). However, in this particular study, parents who home schooled their children had flexible work situations, stable family incomes, and high levels of education.

5.1.2. Religious Characteristics

In many earlier research reports, the religiosity of home school families is particularly striking and noted (Mayberry et al, 1995). Yet, this study does not quite support those reports, even though six out of seven participants did not deny their belief in some kind of higher wisdom, be it God or Nature.

Table 1.6 illustrates that only 3 out of 7 of the home education parents who were interviewed confirmed that their religious commitment played an important role in their lives, attending church weekly. These regular church-goers, who are clearly more religiously oriented, were raised in religious institutions such as the Norwegian State Church, Bible Presbyterian Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon Church). Interestingly enough only one parent out of seven said that religion was a primary motive in her choosing Home Education.

Table 1.6 Religion Views and Church Attendance of Home Educators

Name	Country of Residence	Religious View	Church Attendance
Julie	Norway	Christian - Protestant	Weekly
Laura	Portugal	"Nature"	None
Karl	Costa Rica	"Close to Buddhism"	None
Lee	Singapore	Christian – Bible Presbyterian	Weekly
Natalia	Russia	Christian - Orthodox	Once a year
Sarah	Kazakhstan	None	None
Kathy	USA	Christian - Mormon	Weekly

Not many parent educators, however, chose home education in order to instill in their children particular sets of religious values, even though, two non-religious participants describe their affiliation with "Nature" or "Close to Buddhism" commonly known in the literature as New Age philosophy (Van Galen, 1988; Mayberry, 1988, Mayberry et al., 1995; Morton, 2010).

5.1.4 Summary For Demographic and Religious Characteristics

In the previous sections of this chapter, data on the demographics of the participating homeschooling families was explored, including their geographical locations, income, educational level, marital status and religious affiliations. As this is a non-representative sample due to its size, the researcher's summary is restricted to the information within this group, without any attempt to generalize the findings. However, despite the small size of the sample, certain features can be identified. First, the diverse and far-flung geographical locations of the home educating parents in this study reflects the global spread of this movement and its diversity in terms of nationality and ethnicity. Second, it seems clear that home educators in this group are middle-class, well-educated and relatively young parents living in traditional two-parent families. This supports the findings of previous studies by Mayberry et al (1995) and Ray (2010). Third, generally within this group, the mothers were full-time homemakers, while the fathers were the main wage-earners. Staying out of full-time employment afforded the mothers sufficient time to be the main provider of home school education. For the two families where the fathers were actively involved in home schooling, they chose to be engaged in occupations that allowed them flexibility of time commitment, so that they could shoulder part of the home schooling load. Fourth, as far as religion is concerned, some parent-educators were religiously motivated and highly committed to their faith, while others professed no or only weak attachment to organized religion. Hence, religion as a motivating factor in the decision to home-school does not appear to be a main factor. This confirms the recent research (Isenberg, 2007; Beck, 2010; Rothermel, 2011; Murphy, 2012) indicating that the overall figure for ideological rationales in general, and religion-based participation in particular, are becoming less important.

5.2 Comparative Analysis of Home-Based Educators: Differences and Similarities

Seeing Through the Eyes of a Parent Educator

In the previous section it was made explicit that the variety of parents who teach their children at home is significant. This part of the paper will focus on the wide range of rationales that orient the home school activities, identifying both the common and essentially different characteristics of parent educators.

In studying the interviews with the home-schooling parents, I looked for ways to categorize their motives and found that they fell into two groups according to the way they perceived the impact of education on childhood and of the school system on society at large. This supported the framework of 'natural' and 'social' choices as identified by Morton (2010), which was discussed earlier in the Literature Review, chapter 3.2.

In this section I will therefore look in depth at the respective characteristics of each group in turn: first the 'natural' choice group, followed by the 'social' choice parents, and finally the similarities between these two groups of parents.

5.2.1. Home Education as a 'Natural' Choice

"My daughter was so young, she was only six and the kids laughed at her for being different because she was bringing a vegetarian lunch with her to school."

(Laura, Portugal)

The term 'natural' in this paper refers to families describing their choices and ideas around childhood, learning, education and lifestyle (Morton, 2010). I interviewed two families who displayed characteristics of the 'natural' approach group. Laura and her husband were yoga teachers, choosing to live very much in tune with a "close to nature" lifestyle in the countryside of Portugal. The other family belonging to the 'natural' category of home schooling is Karl and Lene. They are German expatriates living in Costa Rica and are raw vegan lifestyle advocates.

The following excerpts, from the interviews conducted with them, explain a way of life, rejecting consumer culture and being more concerned about the environment than fitting into the norms and expectations embedded in the mainstream of society. This manifests itself in an adaptation to a vegetarian or raw vegan diet, with a few images of an "idealized pre-industrial lifestyle" (Morton, 2010, p. 47).

The 'natural' home schooling parents showed a strong desire for freedom and autonomy both in their own lives and in raising their children. Laura spoke about her beginnings in the discovery of a more alternative lifestyle:

When I finished university I took a trip out west with another biologist, we worked on this ranch in Utah. At this time I was living very isolated in nature, this was my first time living outside of society, because I was just living in a barn in the middle of a ranch. At first, I was scared of this life style, but then it started to really, really feel right. So, this was my first contact with living outside the normal society, after that I just started travelling immensely and meeting many people. I can say that I have a lot of friends who inspired me for this life style.

It was kind of a slow gradual process that just came from trying things and seeing how it felt. Which happened because of me leaving my country and travelling, and being able to be an individual, because where I was from, I couldn't be like this, because there would have been too much judgment. But as I left, I didn't have people around judging me, so it gave me a lot of freedom to be more self-expressive, and just try things: realizing diet, and living in different areas in the city, outside of the city, just seeing how my body reacts, and my emotions react, as well as my family.

I know that I am a happier parent in the countryside than I am in the city. And I like my kids more when in the countryside, than I do when in the city, I feel that. (Laura, Portugal)

Here is what Karl said about the pivotal experience that caused his family to leave Germany for good in order to continue to be able to home school his son with full freedom:

We have a travelling lifestyle, so we lived in a big, huge truck and were travelling around Europe at the time. And so we were not really even living in one place anymore. This is how I think we got started. We heard that the police was coming by and looking for Lenny, my oldest son, to bring him back to school. We just heard about it but we never faced them personally. And after that incident, we basically just left Germany for good. After this first thing in Germany, we never had any real issues, because we always just played our cards smart. We lived in England. And we eventually left England, and moved to Costa Rica. And since then we've just been digital nomads. We don't have a

home, we are free, we are tourists, and nobody bothers us. We just figured it
out, it might sound a little awkward, but I say, "We are like ghosts". Nobody is
responsible for us. We have signed out from Germany and so we are a German
expatriate family and wherever we are, we are tourists. So we have the status of
tourists and nobody cares about tourists or at least not in regards to education.
And when we are in Costa Rica; nobody will ask us about how we educate our
kids. They have other problems, so nobody is bothering us, we are 100% free
and I value this freedom so much I can't explain it. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Unlike Christian parent educators, these parents from the 'natural' group believed in the internal nature of authority; that is, for them, the ultimate source of authority, residing within the individual, not with some external power. As one parent commented when asked about her religious views:

I believe in some type of God, I don't have a name for it, I would say. I think
that Nature has a lot to do with my religion. It's found in some sort of Nature
understanding. The universe is very vast and powerful, and trying to connect
with this bigger energy that is within us, is what it is about. (Laura, Portugal)

And another parent felt his beliefs were spiritual rather than religious:

I am closer to Buddhism. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Thus, these beliefs give us a backdrop for both the philosophy of education of the 'natural' grouping of parents and their decision to home educate their children.

During the interviews, these parents, who were more aligned with a New Age philosophy, remarked that education should address all interrelated aspects of the human experience – emotional, spiritual, intuitive, creative, aesthetic, and rational. The place where such an education could occur, they stressed, is in the family:

Education of our kids shapes our family's reality… We do 'world schooling',
which means, like Montessori told us: we smell, we feel, we see, we hear, we
listen. There are a lot of very practical things also happening, just through the
travelling. Anybody, who's been travelling, knows how many experiences you
get from being in a different country, on so many different levels: it's about the
culture, about the smells, the landscape, the fauna, the flora, the snow - there

are so many things to learn, if you just travel with open eyes. And we travel a lot, when we are in one place, we make a lot of excursions, we go to national parks, we meet the locals, it is the mixture of all of those things. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Therefore, for the 'natural' family group, a concern for the notion of the primary role of the family on the development of the child was what guided the lifestyle, where the family was seen as the core unit of society, holding the key responsibility for the upbringing of children and the main place where the education of children should take place. Home education is therefore a lifestyle choice, integral to the autonomous, self-responsible and self-determining philosophy of life that these 'natural' home educators embraced, rather than being a choice purely related to education. For these families the existence of the formal school system was in itself problematic, as it contradicted the lifestyle that they would like for themselves and their children (Morton, 2010). Moreover, their views about conventional schools were integrally tied to the direct experiences their children had in school. As Karl puts it:

The actual reason for this (home education) was my son, my oldest son Lenny. He went for some weeks to the Forest kindergarten in Germany, it was many years ago, he came home always crying, he was so unhappy. I was trying to talk with him, but he didn't let us know what was happening, he just begged us "Please, daddy, I don't want to go there anymore!" After seeing and watching him for two weeks coming home crying, we just said "we can't do this anymore". And that started everything basically - my son not wanting to go to the institutions. That is really what started us questioning the educational system. And on top of this, I'm pedagogically skilled. I am a social worker, so I know the educational system inside out, and specially in Germany. And I just doubt many of the things they do, and it is very clear that the system is not very efficient. So I started questioning everything, and one thing lead to the next, and now we are here, we are home schooling. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Laura described the frustration she had encountered as her daughter began in public school:

My daughter was so young, she was only six and the kids laughed at her for being different because she was bringing a vegetarian lunch with her to school.

Even though, she is very strong - she does socially have the power to get involved with other kids and go beyond all these barriers – but just having her to deal with that and all these obstacles, doesn't work. Why should I change? Who I am to fight the social standards? So that was the first time that the alternative life style had confronted something, but I had to say "okay, I can live like this, but now my kid…" She has to integrate into this square school structure, that isn't fair, it's not fair for her. How can she? It's like, everything I told her is wrong. Until she went to school, we didn't deal with that, because we just surround ourselves with likeminded people. That was not the only disappointment with education; it was everything. (Lea, Portugal)

According to Morton (2010) for many of these families home education is part of a conscious effort to reject conventional social structures and conformity to what they see as a tyrannical system. This often involves positioning themselves in opposition with the state and institutional structures. For many of these families the school system and its representation of what is often perceived as an oppressive state, or oppressive capitalist structure, is the problem that they are escaping by choosing home education. The father, who left his country of origin to home school his children, articulated it this way:

In Germany, the school system comes from Adolph Hitler, from the Third Reich, that is where this duty comes from. Adolph Hitler was getting all the kids together in the schools, forcing them to be there to make the propaganda, to make them into the Aryan race. So this is what the people have not yet questioned. You know, you have to be questioning things if you don't want to be in alignment with tyrants, with dictators, who do exactly the same thing… (Karl, Costa Rica)

Here is Laura's point of view:

When I moved to Portugal, three years ago, I first got Saia into school here. First of all, the language is not my mother tongue, so that was difficult because in my house, the mother, no matter what, is the one who is sort of in charge of the homework and attending the school conferences. And also being an immigrant, I didn't like the reaction I got being an immigrant. I didn't feel that I was totally accepted. And then doing homework with her, working together, I felt the questions they asked were so stupid. They weren't mentally stimulating. One

example, the sentence was, "the duck drinks milk", and you are sitting there thinking, "ducks don't drink milk, what kind of sentence is this?" and then it gets into more difficult things like "why do we go to the doctor? To get vaccines." And then you start thinking: "Wow, here things are getting tricky, these are homework questions are already engraving these ideas in our kid's brain." (Laura, Portugal)

Home education, therefore, allows parents to protect their children from negative state structures and maintain their innocence. In particular, bullying in schools is a warning concern for these parents. Laura continues:

There is a lot of social stuff that goes on in school that I would like to protect my kids from. Like, talks about drugs or sex, all this kind of stuff scares me. And there is this thing about bullying, I believe we have not personally experienced troubles with it, but I know a lot of parents taking kids out of school for that. Some people would say, "I am protecting them", whatever. But you know, you can protect your kid for a while, eventually they are going to grow up and learn stuff, but if they can do it when they are older, that's okay. (Laura, Portugal)

The parents in 'natural' group believe that large mixed groups of children in public schools are essentially "unnatural". Laura says:

I don't think others' belief systems will affect them (the children) so much, but I think that when they are in school, you start to change things because you want to adapt to the group. Like Saia, she wanted to eat meat because her friends eat meat, you know. Like back in the day, if you live in a tribe, everyone in the tribe is more or less like-minded. But if you are in this great mixed group, everybody is mixed, and it has some positive aspects; but on the other side, the kids have a lot of power in controlling other kids, you know. There are soft patterns influencing them. (Laura, Portugal)

Thus, these parent educators found home schooling to be a first step towards maintaining the autonomy of the family unit in the face of institutional intrusion and regulation, as Karl states it:

You really want to propagate a family having a free world. We must allow our kids to choose how they are going to get educated, as long as we can make sure

they get education, they get free access to education. We must have that freedom

to have the choice. That's what I stand up for. (Karl, Costa Rica)

In addition to rejection of the functions of schooling structures in particular, there is among these families, without any sense of contradiction in their minds, a strong sense of individualism (Mayberry et al., 1995; Morton, 2010). There is a strong belief in the freedom of the individual and a child-led approach to education, where structures are rejected as constraining and conformity is perceived negatively:

I think home education makes children very independent and they become more

sure about their belief systems. (Laura, Portugal)

Karl commented along the same lines:

Home education gives my kids the freedom to become the persons they truly

want to be. What they want to be, not what I want them to be, or the system

wants them to be. I treasure this freedom, I would have loved so much to have

that as a kid myself, but I was not given it. So I provide this freedom for my kids.

(Karl, Costa Rica)

This sense of individualism over community means that 'natural' home educators tend to operate as independent units. Karl continues:

And also be free from group pressure, peer pressure, from being judged by your

clothes and, by the test you have to do. And, you know, kids are even judged for

the paintings they do. How one can possibly judge such an artistic process like

painting? In Germany, if you don't paint the way the teacher tells you, you get a

bad grade. So I just wonder, how many beautiful artists did not come to be…

having shut their creative side down, because they went to school. That does not

happen to my kids, so that's what I treasure most about it. My kids are free to

become who they want to be. (Karl, Costa Rica)

As a consequence, these families sought to provide an informal and flexible home education, in contrast to the rigid structure of the conventional school system, and one that is child-led, with the parents acting as facilitators to bring out the best in their children, according to each child's learning-interests and initiative. Here is another extract from the interview with Karl, father of five, on home educating children and

the differences between traditional homeschooling and unschooling, and the useful skills for parent educators:

There is a big difference between homeschooling and unschooling. Homeschooling per definition is still like you do educate your kids like a teacher. That means you stand in front, you tell them what to learn, when to learn, you have materials provided for them, you have to sit down. It's still very close to the school system. That's homeschooling per definition. The normal school system works in that way: you tell kids what they have to do, and when to do it, and you tell it to them even when they're not open for it.

The unschooling, however, is a completely different thing, it's the opposite of that. You do not force your kids to learn what you believe to be important in that moment; you just stand back and answer the questions. The qualities you need as an unschooler, are to be able to trust and to be able to shut up. Honestly, I can say it louder, because as parents we talk so much, it's really annoying, how much we talk. And, you know, and force our kids to do this, put this on, don't do that… and it's really the opposite, it's really giving the kids the room to just be themselves and to unfold their inner plan, which is meant to be. So the biggest quality is really to trust, shut up, to be quiet and to be aware. Because the big difference, and this is critical, you can easily explain by doing nothing. So there is a very important but subtle difference. It does not mean to unschool your kids, you just leave them alone and do nothing. No, you're always there with your presence, but your presence is in the background, you're an observer. You have to have the ability, that's another skill, to be an observer, to observe and to be there with your energy. But shutting up, even if they make mistakes, even if they do something wrong, you still have to have the ability to just let them make mistakes and learn for themselves. On the other hand, and this is the flip side. You have to let go of everything you do and just be there for them, and be there and feed their interest. Being there, being present, when they ask you for your presence, and other than that just shut up.

So that's the difference from home schooling and still one more sentence. Unschooling does not mean that there are no rules. Kids need rules, rules are really important. So there are specific rules, even if you keep yourself in the

background. Rules are that you don't destroy things that belong to others, you are not allowed to take another person out of their process, if somebody is sitting down and painting (and) they are totally lost in that painting, you're not allowed to disturb that person. You have to do this very gentle and calm, you're not screaming, you're not using swear words, you're not physically, or mentally, or emotionally abusing others. So there are some common sense rules. I am not even making those rules up. The kids come to me and ask for those rules often times. So there are rules, but still you keep yourself in the background, being an observer and being there when they ask for it. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Not surprisingly, 'natural' home educators are clear as to what they think education should be. Karl, once again emphasized freedom of choice:

The ideal education would be the freedom of choice. We need the freedom of choice and the kids and families can choose which way they want to educate their kids. The ideal world would be like, where the state ensures kids get the chance to get education, but how they're going to get this education is totally, entirely a choice of freedom of the individual family. That would be my ideal country or education. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Laura's emphasis was on giving children a happy experience without stress, while learning practical life skills:

An ideal education is a happy education. An education where you are actually learning things that are practical, and that are going to help you to be able to survive in this society. I feel like I had a lot of education, but it didn't prepare me for a lot of things that I needed to know. Like, I graduated from college thinking, "now I have this great education", but I didn't know how to make rice! So I felt like education these days doesn't take in a lot of things that it needs to. So education to me would be more a "call" kind of education, taking into account a lot of things, not just books, and history, and biology. It would take into account cooking and games, survival skills, and I think the person who is being educated feels happy and doesn't feel pressured and overwhelmed too. (Laura, Portugal)

Therefore, these parents were clear about what they felt the aims and outcomes of education should be. There was also a clear understanding that their children should be prepared for the future, equipped with practical skills for living:

There are very interesting case studies on long term homeschooling kids, like the Summerhill Schools, they experimented with this for decades. If you see the comparative data on case studies that have been done with normal school kids and homeschooling kids, you cannot say that homeschooling kids have become doctors, or famous artists, or you know, very rich or something, that's not the thing. So if you see the test marks, if you compare both groups with each other, you see that pretty much the exact same jobs, occupations are taken on by homeschooling kids are the same as normal kids.

However, one big difference, the one that counts for me, is that normally homeschooling kids and kids who have the freedom to really get in touch with themselves through homeschooling and unschooling, those kids, when they turn into adults, they get jobs they're happy with. So there is more happiness, because those kids, they have time to feel themselves, to explore themselves. In school, I think, nobody cares about what I'm interested in. You have to follow the rules, you have to follow the plan, and you have to do the tests. Then you turn 16, and already they throw you out of school, and then, they expect you to know who you are and what you want to do with the rest of your life. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Hence, these 'natural' parents expected their children to make up their own minds and choose their own values rather than having values and morals imposed upon them by the state:

It took me years, many years to recover from that (school system) and to really get in touch with myself again. This is the one main thing that I see… And again, I'm not just believing in this, there's real data backing this up, that the kids, who do homeschooling, they are better in touch with who they are, what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are. They have a better understanding, especially when they're younger adults – 16, 18, 20 – they have a better understanding of what they want in their lives, about their values.

Values that come from the system give no meaning, you just follow them like you do in school, they place something in your head and you just reproduce it. That's what you learn in school. That's not the kids that will be happy adults... But I totally trust that my kids will be happy adults, they will know who they are, they will know their values, what matters to them, not because of me, or the system, but what matters to them. And they will get jobs or do something with their lives that will have meaning to them, that provide value for the community, for others. And that is the most important thing. I don't care if they get rich, or if they may become doctors. I just want them to be happy and that's what I feel I can give them through the homeschooling. (Karl, Costa Rica)

As this indicates, for 'natural' families, despite the ideal of an escape from the economic and institutional structures, there was an acceptance that economic labor was necessary for survival, and that education should equip children for that reality. At the same time Karl's comments also highlight the idea of education as a process of self-discovery and self-fulfillment. Ultimately, both the parents in the 'natural' group also believed that the process of education should produce happy children who would in turn grow to be happy and capable adults, well-equipped to make good choices for their own lives.

5.2.2. Home Education as a 'Social' Choice

"I wasn't afraid when we left school; I had some doubts, but not fears… I think I would be actually scared if we had to go back to school. I don't want it at all."

(Natalia, Russia)

In contrast to 'natural' home educators, as Morton (2010) points out, parents for whom education is a 'social' choice, do not see the structures of the formal education system as problematic. Their issues are specifically centered on the social interactions that are formed as their children associate themselves with other pupils and with teachers at the schools and the outcome of the values communicated through those interactions.

The remaining five parent home educators showed predominantly 'social' characteristics. These were the parents residing in Norway, Singapore, Russia, Kazakhstan and the USA.

As pointed out in section 5.1.2, several families in this study described themselves as 'Christians', thus their beliefs and values played an important role in their choice of home education over mainstream schooling (Isenberg, 2007). These parents believe in the existence of an external authority, a higher being that guides their moral decisions, including the decision to educate their children at home (Morton, 2010). For instance, during the interview a mother from Singapore, who has a teaching qualification, explains her main motivation in choosing and continuing with home education:

> *One day my husband came home and he was telling me that he met a father of a family, who was homeschooling in Malaysia, and that family, their children were already young adults. So I was very interested, because I had not heard of such an alternative before, because we thought education was compulsory and that was what had been told to us all along. So when I heard from my husband, that a Malaysian family was homeschooling, it was kind of like the seed was planted in my head and I was very interested. There was just this desire to know more about it and so for one whole month, when I was reading the Bible, Matthew chapter 13, the whole chapter was just coming to me and speaking to me and I made notes in my journals and wrote what God was telling me. And mainly I could see that God wanted my children to know a Christian world view in everything, whether it's learning Chinese, or Math, or English, or Music, everything. He wanted my children to learn through His point of view. So that really, really motivated me to carry on. After about a year plus, it was quite hard, because I didn't have any syllabus to follow, I made up my own syllabus, it was very tiring, so I asked my husband and he said, "Well, it is up to you. What decision you take, I will support you." So I went back to God and I prayed to Him and I rewrote the notes that I wrote when He called me to home school, and then I decided that this is the path God had called us to. So even though, at times it may be difficult, I am very convinced that this is a calling from God, so I continue and never look back. (Lee, Singapore)*

Another mother who belongs to the Mormon Church confirms:

> *The reason why I do it (homeschooling) is because I spiritually feel that's what I need to do. (Kathy, USA)*

Therefore, for these families home education was connected to perceptions of parental responsibilities, they saw themselves as having ultimate responsibility for their children's upbringing, both moral and social. The following excerpt from an interview with a mother from Russia, indicates that these parents felt that they should not give up the responsibility to the anonymous and morally ambivalent structure of the school system:

> *When you get away from school, you take all responsibility on yourself. It is an illusion that school owes it to you, that it has to teach your child. In reality it is not a fact that school should do it at all. (Natalia, Russia)*

In addition, the Norwegian mother, who was homeschooling her child mainly for what she felt were academic benefits, pointed out during the interview the importance of Christian teachings in her homeschooling program:

> *Not directly, but we do Bible studies also. The security… Christians have it in the security, having God to lean on. Putting all our worries and problems on Him. I want my children to have that too, but I also want them to have a choice, so I'm giving them the best I can, and try to make this a safe Christian home-base. So that when they grow up, they hopefully want to have that too and also for their own kids. At the same time it is a choice, it's not like you can pass salvation unto your kids: it is a choice, but you can pass on love, you can pass on… everything good comes with God, Jesus and that's what they're doing... I don't know, but we include Jesus, we do. (Julie, Norway)*

Not all parent educators in this group, however, indicated that teaching their children particular religious and spiritual values was one of the primary motivating factors in their decision to operate a home school. Rather, their primary goal for home instruction was to provide their children with an effective learning environment. During an interview, a mother from Russia made the significance of this goal apparent:

> *I began my interest towards home education, when the level of education in the school stopped to satisfy me, I mean the school in Russia, Moscow. My son went*

to a private French specialized school until 5th grade. All those years he was going to a private French specialized school. This is when I understood that it is a lot of workload, but little results. The child is getting tired, but the result of education, the level of education is not satisfying... I didn't have a clear idea about home education then and how to organize it, I thought it was complicated, but in reality it is very simple, easy and more joyful than to go to school. I see a serious progress in my child's education. And my son tells me "I miss this or I miss that... I would like to go to this course, or that course, because it is interesting", but in school it wasn't interesting... So the situation is obvious: my son is learning three foreign languages: French, English and Chinese. In addition, he is engaged in robotics. So if we would go to public school or private, we would naturally have no time for these classes, I don't mention sports or other type of activities. But the fact is that the way, how seriously we study the languages here, would never have happened in school. (Natalia, Russia)

A mother from Kazakhstan, who operated homeschooling under the shadow of its being outlawed in that country, echoed this point of view:

In my hometown, (name of this town withheld for confidentiality reasons) there is a bunch of children who are home schooled. For a variety of reasons; some are sick, some come from disadvantaged families, and some are like us because school is so boring!

With home schooling, you can learn in blocks, with textbooks that you choose, with the teachers that you like and most importantly those subjects that your child will choose personally. In such circumstances, he will not learn for the illusive grade, but for the sake of satisfying his own cognitive interest. I checked it out on my own children and do not regret it, I am so happy!!! (Sarah, Kazakhstan)

A mother from the USA, although having a strong connection to her religious community, illustrated this point in this way:

We were stationed in Washington state when my oldest was about to go to kindergarten and I heard a lot of awful things about the school system. It's very

liberal in Washington State, so I talked to a lot of people at church, and about 75% of the people that were at our church, home schooled, because it was so bad there. So I looked into it and decided that that's the kind of route we wanted to take, at least temporarily. I didn't know if it was going to be a permanent thing or not, but we decided to do it for at least that first year; and then kind of felt like it went really well. We really liked being able to control the situation a lot better, than you could if you sent your kids to public school. And then as well, my son was kind of a fast learner and so in a lot of ways he was very much ahead of his grade level, and I think he would have been very bored in school. So we kind of tailor everything to him.

Since then we've done it because we like the structure and then being able to control it as well. We feel they get a better education, because we are able to sit down with them one on one, so my kids are ahead in a lot of areas. One of my other kids had a hard time reading and so we were able to go slower according to her needs. She still has a little bit of trouble compared to other children, but it's nice to be able to go slower, if you need to, and then go faster if you are able to, and kind of take it from there. (Kathy, USA)

Thus, although there are some elements of religious motives in this group of parents, which were also noted in previous researches (Mayberry et al., 1995; Ray, 2010; Morton, 2010; Murphy, 2012), these parents underlined that a concern about the environment of public schools was a main reason for homeschooling their children. Hence, as Hoem (1978) argues, "limited commonality of values and social interest… results in greater sociocultural distance" between home educators and public school (Hoem, 1978 in Beck, 2015, p. 91).

This again confirms the recent research (Isenberg, 2007; Beck, 2010; Rothermel, 2011; Murphy, 2012; IES, 2013) that points out the overall figure for religion-based participation, in particular, is becoming less important in selecting home education for their children. Parents in this grouping were motivated to homeschool because of the poor quality of the public schools available for their children (Lines, 2000). As studies (Murphy, 2012) show, they had lost faith in the public schools and had come to believe that schools would harm their children and not only academically:

The first reason why we wanted to start home schooling, is because the school system where we were was very, very bad. We were living in downtown Tacoma, Washington and there is a lot of crime there. The schools were getting broken into and I just didn't like the situation. So, that was why we started to home school… They taught a lot of things I didn't agree with, they were actually starting to teach sex education in first grade and I didn't think that was appropriate… (Kathy, USA)

Here is one of Sarah's observations regarding the obligatory public school system in her community and problematic issues:

I was told by the director of one of the schools outside of A. (a city in Kazakhstan) that they have registered dozens of children, whom they don't see until graduation. They come for their certificates with average grades and they are "free". And all because we have this compulsory education system, and so the school authorities are not entitled to deduct them in any way but must keep them on the balance sheet even if they are not present. In the city of A., it is a little more difficult because the system is computerized, but outside, for example, K. (a small town near to a A.), it is more "normal" to have the children homeschooled because they are not enrolled on any computerized system. (Sarah, Kazakhstan)

Besides an increasing dissatisfaction with the growing bureaucratization and secularism of public schools noted by these parents and the researchers (Kraftl, 2012), there is also a surfacing fear when it comes to the inappropriateness of public schools for young children, like bullying and standardized testing. The following statements express the parents' concerns with these issues:

Our situation in school was very tense, tense to the limit that dropping out of school was a huge relief for my child and me. That was kind of a moral relief… The tension was that the child was bullied at school, that he was somehow different, so there was a sort of conflict with the classmates…(Natalia, Russia)

These parents expressed concerns about the low academic standards that characterize the schools their children would be attending; about the curriculum, about content that is featured and about content that is not covered:

In A. (a city in Kazakhstan) there are many children who simply do not go to school, and their parents do not need any certifications, because they are not going to get higher education in Kazakhstan. Again, according to one of the directors of a very prestigious school, from my personal communication, whose son graduated from Cambridge, and who sends most of her students abroad. There (abroad), our school diplomas are not worth anything. What you need there is to come a few months early, to go through some courses, and on a general basis to pass the entrance exam. So if you are oriented towards foreign education, then why waste time on a bunch of unnecessary subjects, especially if you are going abroad? (Sarah, Kazakhstan)

A mother from the US echoed these concerns about school standards and standardized testing in her interview:

I had heard other things about the testing being really bad, that they weren't passing the state test and things like that, and so I knew that the county that we were in ranked lowest in the state and so I just knew that wasn't very good. I didn't like the things I was hearing, and then we were going to be moving in another year, so I figured we'd just try home school. I was public educated, I went to school like everyone else. My husband did home school for one year, cause he got behind and had to repeat a grade, so his mom pulled him out and they homeschooled him for a year to catch up, and he really liked it. So he had a little bit of experience home schooling, but it's never been something I expected to do all along, it kind of just happened… (Kathy, USA)

In addition to these issues, 'social' home educators pointed out the effects of large class sizes in formal schools and believed that teachers were unable to provide individual attention to their children. Julie from Norway shared her thoughts:

In school, my daughter would have to share those few teachers with a lot of other students. At home, if she wonders about something, I could be there immediately and so the learning goes a lot faster. When she was six, she already started second grade, because her first grade books were done with a long time ago. So we just started second grade, so she is a couple of months ahead in Math. So, for that bit of it, it goes a lot faster and I don't think that it only has to do with the fact that I can be there immediately to help her, but also because of

that safe foundation that I have talked about. It's just that safe base; I think it makes her focus on her schoolwork. So it goes a lot faster and when it goes a lot faster, you can use a majority of the rest of the day to do other things than siting down and writing, because 'the sit down and write' part, takes about a couple of hours in the beginning of the day. Usually we try to get it done before lunch, it is not always possible, but we try and the rest of the day we can learn in other ways.

They can cook with me, they can shop with me, we can take trips, walks, we can go boating, walks in the forest, do anything and they can learn through that. They both really enjoyed that, at least my oldest girl is very active, she wants to do stuff all the time. She doesn't like to sit still and that's good because I can use that to make her to do stuff and learn things. In school you could probably do that, but not as good as at home. When you have 20 kids and you have one teacher, you have to have the structure to be able to get done what you need to get done. I just think my kids have been able to get all this attention all the time, and that it is good for them. I don't know if it would work for every family, for every child, but I can see that it benefits both of my girls because they are happy and that is my main goal. I want them to be happy; I want them to pursue their own goals and to learn. And I think I'm doing something right. When they aren't happy, that means I'm doing something wrong and I need to change my approach.

At this point, it's very good. Maybe if they were in school and having trouble with something, the subject math for instance, and they didn't get help, then they could have a setback. Or on the other hand, if they were doing really good, they weren't allowed to go on, because they needed to be doing the same thing as the other kids. So they are kind of molding them into this path, which is to me kind of unnatural, because I think children are gifted in his or her way. And it is just a beautiful opportunity to pursue. So that's kind of what we're trying to do. (Julie, Norway)

Some families were turning to the home schooling of their children out of frustration with the education available in schools. They also believed that regular classroom teachers were indifferent to the needs of their children. Natalia shared her experience:

From teachers it was kind of indifference, they didn't care. "Your child is behind in class. It's your problem! We can't give him more time because we have 30 other children sitting in class. Who wants to learn, learns. Who doesn't want to learn, there is Internet. You have the Internet, so sit down and learn…" So there was no more meaning in going to school, because the child mainly learns at home. He comes from school; we sit down and learn even more than in school. So school is just a load, because it is supposed to be that way. (Natalia, Moscow)

Furthermore, even though, both groups of parents expressed concerns about bullying in schools and the sense of the large groups of children as "unnatural" (Morton, 2010), there are still subtle differences between them. Unlike the 'natural' group, 'social' parents express greater concerns about the values and morals that other people's children bring into schools and the influence those children may have upon their offspring (Morton, 2010). The following excerpt describes the experience of a Norwegian homeschooled child's direct impression on how the children related to each other in the public school, when the local authorities suggested that the child attend public school once a week accompanied by her mother:

The immediate reaction was that she (the child) was just standing there staring at them, and she didn't understand why were they doing this, and because we didn't have any of those things at home, and we have always been focusing on "you shouldn't fight and you shouldn't say bad words" and that's that… We have never said bad words at home and when she heard them, she was like, what does that mean, what are they saying, why are they fighting? I would just tell her that some kids do that and that's how it is, and people are different and maybe they had learned it from other kids, or they had learned it at home, and that is not something that we should do, fighting or saying bad words. And she agreed and that was it. (Julie, Norway)

Therefore, home education helps these parents to protect their children from receiving mixed and confusing messages from school that are not in alignment with the family's

values. For 'social' parents, it was important to ensure that their children received the right social messages and internalized the right values; hence they saw it as their responsibility as parents to ensure their children's development into well-socialized adults. Home education is, therefore, as Morton (2010) points out, the performance of the parents' duty to give better social conditioning to their children than the school options make available to them.

The following excerpts from the interviews show how in many ways these parents echoed the rationales of parents who choose private schooling for their children as a way of claiming control over what their children were exposed to, especially with regard to the kinds of children they mixed with (Morton, 2010):

> *Home education is kind of a good thing, because they (the children) don't have the bullying, they don't have the bad influences, so we are able to control that a little bit better. (Kathy, USA)*

> *I believe that you can raise children in a good way by having them in public school, but you need to be especially aware of the things they are learning, that you don't want them to learn, like bad words, like bad attitudes, all of those things. They kind of have to re-learn when they get home. And other kids, probably, teach them some things that you don't want them to learn. So I think that if I were to have my kids in public school, it would be a lot harder for me. (Julia, Norway)*

Therefore, one of the goals of home schooling, for these parents, was to protect their children from these "undesired" influences. Kathy expressed it in this way:

> *We're very sensitive to what they learn and the influences they have. We want to be able to make sure that they do not use bad language, that they are not exposed to things that I don't agree with. In that way, we are just very careful about the influences they have around them, and want to keep them in a little bubble as long as possible until they are a little bit older. (Kathy, USA)*

This is what Julie from Norway thinks about being a protective mother:

> *Protection has become kind of a bad word, but I want to make it a good word, because it has become my job, kind of, to protect my children because I am their*

mother and without me they would be lost. They are only three and seven and
they need someone to guide them and tell them, this is right and this is wrong,
you should do it this way… and at the same time, as they get older, I need to let
them make their own decisions and adjust along the way, and not totally take
control or keep her at home and protect her from all surroundings. I can't do
that but when they are so small, I feel like it's my job to guide them. To make it a
safe place for them to grow up, because when they have a secure and safe place,
they can make wiser decisions when they get older. So in that way, I guess I do
protect them. (Julie, Norway)

The role of women who chose to home school has received significant attention
among researchers (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). While some scholars raise questions
about gender oppression and inequitable educational opportunities for girls, others
suggest that home educator women often embody and encourage a different kind of
feminism, one that shapes not only the future of their families but also the
homeschooling movement as a form of resistance to contemporary culture (Mayberry
et al., 1995; Morton, 2010; Murphy, 2012). Hence, when outsiders accuse them of
being socially overprotective and relationally hyper-engaged, these mothers in turn
question whether contemporary culture appreciate enough the protective and
nurturing nature of close family relationships (Morton, 2010). Following is a touching
experience of our home educator from Singapore regarding close family relationships
between her children:

Last Christmas my two older kids were given a Christmas gift and that
Christmas gift was, they could go for an outing with a relative, but the condition
was, as the relative told them, they could not bring the younger siblings with
them. So my two older boys were to go on their outing without the two younger
ones. And immediately my two older ones gave back the envelope and said
"Thank you, we are sorry, we would not want to accept that because we would
like to go with our younger siblings". Then the relative said, "Well if you don't
take this, I would not offer you another gift", and my children smiled, the two
older boys, and said "that's okay" … So I don't think I would be able to teach
them to love their siblings in this way, it just has to be the part of their everyday
living together and being with each other… So to see my children having a
close relationship with one another is a strong motivation for me to continue

(with homeschooling. It is more about their relationship with one another,
which is one of the hidden forces to hope that they will build a strong
relationship among their siblings, that they are best friends with each other.
(Lee, Singapore)

In this way, like the 'natural' parents, many parents saw the family as the most important institution in society, one that is superior to all others, including schools. This finding supports the most acknowledged and analyzed family-based motivation for homeschooling, which centers on the importance of supporting the development of individual families and maintaining the institution of the family (Mayberry et al., 1995; Kunzman, 2009; Morton, 2010; Rothermel, 2011; Murphy, 2012).

Thus, the previous interview excerpt confirms a significant motivation that emerged in many previous studies (Mayberry et al., 1995; Kunzman, 2009; Morton, 2010; Rothermel, 2011) that underlined the goal of home education as forging an alternative model of the family away from what is typical in contemporary society. Thus, homeschooling becomes a means to strengthen the bonds between parents and their children, which in turn will help children resist the damaging influences of consumerism, moral permissiveness, and anti-intellectualism that they see spread through modern culture and institutional schooling (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). The following is how a mother from Russia expressed this point of view:

What the secondary education in schools is? It is nothing but the desire to make
people into cogs. The cogs in the system. They (schools) only give them the
strictest minimum of requirements: "Why should we develop the children
intellectually? Why should they read a lot of books? Why? All they need is to
they process some kind of work, and that's it."
And there is more and more advertising, more consumption, everything is about
consumption. "Why to should we make them think at all?"
For example, in Germany, there is no such subject like literature. It does not
exist there. There is a 'German language', which includes the part of some sort
of literature subject, a part of the language of literature. Here in Russia, too,
they speak of limiting the literature subject to a part of the 'Russian language'
subject. I think it's pretty sad. It is like everything becomes simpler… (Natalia,
Russia)

Furthermore, most 'social' families in this study followed a formal program of home education, often following a set curriculum that reflected their value system. They also felt the freedom to adapt existing curriculums according to their children's needs. One of these parents, who used to be a school-based teacher, was conscious of the need to prepare her children to take the standard Government exams for local schools, so that they would not lose out on the opportunity to enter local tertiary institutions in future:

> *The curriculum that I used was more like a very Bible based curriculum, but I substituted with a lot of local curriculums as well, because my kids still had to sit for their government exam when they are 12 years old… So I had to cut and paste my syllabus. I went to the local bookshop, where they sell a lot of local curriculums, and then I just took from there and I went to Ministry of Education of Singapore website, and got to know their syllabus, and then I looked at it, and studied it, and then, I did my own piece-meal curriculum with Charlotte Mason philosophy, which I read from the Internet. (Lee, Singapore)*

Another home educator also explained how she adapted the different curricula for her child's needs:

> *Last year we got some books from the local school and I also used the library and I bought some books from different places. This year we use the Christian curriculum from the States. We just bought the second grade package with all the second grade books, but also some of the first grade books, because this is the English curriculum. So that my daughter wouldn't feel like she couldn't master the second grade, I bought some first grade books. They are upper levels in a natural way; we enjoyed them so much, because you don't have to be afraid of what's on the next page. It's a safe curriculum. And she enjoys it too. I have the math book here; it's a big book. It has all these fun colors and she enjoyed it a lot. We have science, and we have math, and we have all the subjects, and I think I'll probably use the Beka book for the third grade curriculum as well. I have also the kindergarten curriculum, and CDs, and DVDs, and other books, and it's good. They like it. (Julie, Norway)*

Kathy, from USA, was able to take advantage of her state's free home school program until she moved to another state:

We actually for the first four years did public online school. So it was a home school program through the State, that gave us free schooling, and so our taxes paid for it. And we were actually given a teacher that we had to report to, but we did everything from home on the Internet. And we did that for the first four years. We really, really liked it, it was kind of the best of both worlds, everything was free and then we were able to do it at home. But then we moved to North Carolina and they don't offer that in our State, so then we were on our own. And in some ways it was a little bit better, because then we were able to do extra things that we didn't have time for before. Now I send the kids to groups, where we do like speech, and debate, and art, and things like that. We didn't have time for it before, so that's kind of nice to be able to do other things. But then in another way, it's expensive because you have to buy all the materials yourself and come up with the curriculums, so it's a little bit different that way. (Kathy, USA)

Therefore, despite the fact that many of these families valued structure and replicated school structures at home, they also mentioned an appreciation of the greater range of flexibility that home education provided them. The following examples provide additional illustrations:

We do have a curriculum but if there's something that they are really interested in, I'll tell them to read about it and come tell me, and we'll make little projects. So we are not so strict in that, "now we need to learn about the plants, we're not going to do volcanoes right now, I don't care if you watched something on volcanoes and you want to learn more". It's like we'll kind of tailor things to where they need and I'll say "oh, we'll skip this and we'll come back to that, but right now you want to do this". So I'm not too rigid to where I'm going to kind of ignore that, but it is nice to be able to kind of tailor it, and there are certain things that I feel they know a lot more about than regular public school kids, because they are at home and have to figure it out. My oldest daughter has become a really good cook because she is home all day and really enjoys that, she actually makes breakfast and lunch everyday, cause I am always involved with homeschool, and so in that way it's very helpful, because then I'll be doing a math test with one daughter, and she's off making soup or something like that

for everybody else and sandwiches, so that's very helpful. So it's like she's getting that experience that she wouldn't if she was at school. (Kathy, USA)

We got this freedom to be able to travel somewhere. If we studied World War I maybe, or World War II, and the purpose was to study this, we could go to Germany, France, Italy for some study reasons, but we wouldn't be able to, if they were in school, because you couldn't travel that much. And also some days, when the weather is sunny, if I had to bring them to school, we could not do fun stuff like maybe also school at the beach or hiking, stuff like that. It would set us back a bit as a family and the life we want to give to our kids. We create so many memories, you wouldn't be able to do that with having a job, my husband having a job, my youngest being in some kind of a childcare or kindergarten, and my oldest in school: then we would be everywhere, we couldn't be spontaneous. So that is a motive and when we first started out, we decided to give this a try and we did. And after the first year, of course, there are ups and downs, and days when I just feel like, ooohhm, is this really possible? But the majority of the days are good and the outcome has been amazing. So we've decided to go with this the second year too. As long as it goes this good, we're going to keep doing it. (Julie, Norway)

Thus, there is also a gentle movement towards more informal educational methods with the introduction over time of extended project work, in addition to more formal curriculum-based work, as Julie continued to explain:

I think when my kids will get a bit older, I want to take them traveling. It's learning about different stuff, you can travel to different parts of the world; it's a great way to learn about stuff. You get to see things and it makes such an impression rather than reading sometimes. I admire people that can do it all the way because I can't. I need some books, I need some schedule, some form, but also a flexible schedule and I think it's good to have books to kind of see where we are at, and plan ahead a bit. But I totally believe you can do unschooling. I totally believe that you can do it without books and just teach the kids and being that lifestyle and it can be good. We are trying to do a bit of that too, but we probably will have a few books. (Julie, Norway)

The individualization of the children's education in terms of individual strengths, weaknesses and interests, in the 'social' group, compared with the 'natural' home educators, is much appreciated even if it is not emphasized to the same extent (Morton, 2010). As this mother explained:

> *We regularly travel around France, where my son also is learning French. But the efficiency of his French specialized school here in Moscow was very low. I basically wasn't satisfied with the level of language teaching that was there. And now due to the fact that we are engaged in individual learning, the language level of my child in a one-year and half excelled from the A1 level to the level B1. That is a very great progress. Thus all individual work with the child is very good and a useful thing. The child develops a lot better and quicker, despite the fact that it seems like his social life is limited. But it is not the case, as he always goes to the different courses, where he communicates with other children. Therefore, there is no such a thing like isolation in home education. There is isolation from the world, for which there is no desire to be in contact with. Yes, there is isolation from that world. (Natalia, Russia)*

Natalia continues:

> *Another plus of home education is that the child gets used to work independently. That is, he has a certain amount of work that he needs to do (but) not for the assessment. He understands that the assessment does not matter; what matters is the knowledge that he gets, which is important for his future life. Therefore, children that are being home educated seem more independent in my opinion. He has a schedule: "Today I have English, tomorrow I have English and French, after tomorrow I have Chinese, and then the next day I have robotics, and there I need to do build this and that and so on. But now I need to do geometry, algebra, physics and set up some experiments etc". (Natalia, Russia)*

This demonstrates the opportunities that the homeschooled child to enjoy an individualized learning experience based upon his or her abilities or interests.

5.2.3. Similarities Between 'Natural' and 'Social' Home Educators

"I'm neither for nor against school. There are different children and different parents. When it comes to me, I'm for freedom. It really is the most important thing. And I'm glad that I had the courage to provide my children with it. Every evening, when planning for the next day, their eyes are burning: "So many interesting things! How we manage to fit everything!?" So it is worth it."

(Sarah, Kazakhstan)

Even though there were some differences between the views held by this very diverse group of parents, there were many significant similarities among them as well. The most consistent similarity between the two groupings that was also underlined in the previous research (Mayberry et al., 1995; Morton, 2010; Murphy, 2012; Gaither & Kunzman, 2013) is the belief that the parents should hold full responsibility for and control over the education of their children. These parents were determined towards the strengthening and protection of the values and beliefs that would provide the desired worldview to guide the life of their children. Therefore, the main issue was that the parents observed a distinct difference between the cultural identity the school system provided and the one they would prefer for their children. As one mother stated:

> *I don't think the education system in Portugal is very great. I am not impressed with the education system. When I read the books and the texts that they require, I think it is not stimulating. Then my husband is Brazilian, I am North American, we live in Europe, so we live within three languages basically and schools don't take into consideration this type of students that have a more worldly view and they don't stimulate them. Instead they are putting them in the same box as all the rest of the students, which I think, is limiting. Actually these students can be a gift for the other students, if they are integrated properly. But society doesn't know how and hasn't adapted to this kind of situation. I just think that school is quite limiting. I mean they are still teaching in schools like we were in the fifties. (Laura, Portugal)*

Thus, the lack of academic quality of available public schools in fact encouraged provided the stimulus for the parents to look towards other alternatives:

> *I have to tell you that we are not dogmatic about this (home schooling). When we were in Germany last summer, Lenny went to a free school. It is a very cool system that we have in Germany. There are no teachers; they call themselves*

'companions' and they are at the back. They have many rooms in the house, there are different materials, and kids can come together, find themselves in groups, and the teachers are more at the background, only if kids ask, other than that, they leave the kids alone. And it is an accepted form of school now in Germany, and you can even get a degree in this kind of school. So this is the kind of school we have been looking for our kids and we are constantly very aware and open, and try different things. We might also try it out here in Costa Rica; there is an alternative jungle school we want to check out. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Another commonality within this sample is that there was not any evidence of overnight decisions to home educate. Prior family and educational experiences played an important role in the way parents first began to think about home education:

We have a travelling life style, we lived in a huge big truck, and we were travelling around the Europe at that time, so we even didn't live in one place anymore and I think it's how we got started with home education. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Among both groups of parents, there was a natural chain of events that led to the their realization that there was an alternative to regular school. Even though there were some cases of bullying at the school that led parents to consider homeschooling as a possible alternative, there was practically in every case, either an influence from a relative or an acquaintance that recommended this alternative way of education, or they had a lifestyle already tuning in to 'alternative' ways. Therefore, these parents did not begin home education by themselves, but they came to this educational choice within the social framework of the community they were a part of, as Laura expressed:

I have known people that have home schooled especially in Upstate New York, because I lived in a very alternative community, where Cornwall University is. So there are a lot of professors and highly educated people, they even have a home school association there, so parents can meet, discuss different things. They even have parents teaching different subjects together, sort of in an alternative way. And actually I heard that it was now a lot of foreigners have moved there, so they are starting this home schooling society too, where the

parents are learning and if someone knows music they can teach music… so I have been in contact with home schooling for years. (Laura, Portugal)

Thus, with both groups, two of the main features of globalization – the rapid spread of Informational Technology and freedom of travelling – seemed to have been important factors in the development of contemporary home education. The access to trends, practices and information around the world led in some cases to a Digital Nomad Phenomenon and internationally traveling families, whose children were not fitting into the conventional state school systems anymore. As Laura elaborates:

I think basically a lot of parents these days are becoming engaged, they are just not happy with the education, so they are looking for alternatives. For example, English or German expats who had moved to southern Portugal, there are lots of foreigners here and I think they come here especially from northern Europe or England. You have different standards of education and you come here and you go, "wow this is really sort of basic or just memorization!" And these people decide to take their kids out of school, you know. It's clear to think if they are expats, they are leaving their country, they are people with a different mindset, you know. So they are going to scrutinize whatever they are confronted with more than someone who just lives in their same town forever. So they are taking their kids out of school… (Laura, Portugal)

And for the families whose older children had originally been in school, it was past experience that led them to seek an alternative for their later children's education. For example, with his wife Katie, Karl had been homeschooling their other three children since they removed the eldest, now 12 years old son, from the public kindergarten in Germany. The excerpt that follows, presents Karl's perspectives on the couple's experiences in their own country:

It's different in Germany than in many other countries, by law you have to send your kids to school. So one day, we heard that the police was checking at the address, where we were registered and that was the time, when we just said, "Okay, we have to leave Germany, because they can even take our kids away". It's really a very forceful law in Germany in regards to that (education), so we moved to England. And then we lived in England, because in England home schooling is very well perceived and it's supported even from the government

and everybody supports you and it's good there. So then we started doing this (home education) in England… (Karl, Costa Rica)

The same was apparent for religious families who chose to home educate through an evaluation of their beliefs and by embodying the philosophy they held in life. Their personal life and work experiences also strongly influenced the decision to home educate:

After I pursued my Diploma in Education I went for the interview with the Ministry of Education and I asked them specifically that I should be given a chance to serve in a school, a neighborhood school with youth at risk. And I also told and requested that they allow me to teach a subject called the Office Administration, which is only given to the Normal Technical students and the Normal Technical students in Singapore are the ones, who were really, really bad in their studies, and they are really having a lot of problems. So as I started teaching, I saw that a lot of the youth that I was reaching out to, had a lot of problems because of their lack of attention and love at home. And I found that they were looking for attention from their parents in the wrong way and I (at that time) was the head of pupil welfare in the school and I had a lot of opportunity to do counseling with these students. And I was really heartbroken to see them reaching out to their parents in the wrong way by doing drugs, with gangs and premarital sex and all. So later on, when I had my own children, I said, well, I wouldn't want my children to gain my attention in this way. (Lee, Singapore)

Here is what Julie from Norway had to say about her first encounter with home schooling:

I was an exchange student in the United States in the year 2000 and that's where my interest began. I met a home schooling family. It was how they lived their lives, to the fullest and what they did and how they were. The kids were just so secured and quiet, and they were fun, they were fun families. They did lots of traveling and the one thing that caught my mind was that they did everything together as a family. It was not like okay the children would go in their room and the adults would sit here and talk. No. They did board games, and they went out together, and did stuff together, and just the setting and the

whole security that came out of that, it was just amazing. I wanted that for my family, so I think that was what caught my mind. Yet, I didn't really consider it until I had my oldest daughter, that was few years ago and when she was about three years old, I had an American friend who lived in Norway at that time and she told me that it was possible to do home schooling in Norway. And then I thought, hmm, and I started to investigate and do some research and I found that it was possible and actually a few people were doing it in Norway. So I started gathering some curriculum and books, and stuff, and when she (daughter) turned about five to six, we started. (Julie, Norway)

Wherever the reason to engage in home based education, the initial decision was reinforced over time through the parent's experiences and connection with the home education movement such as joining an organization and communicating with other home educators, reading literature on alternative education and spending time with their children:

We have a special lifestyle of traveling so much, but we have friends (home educators), and we have friends all over the world, and in many different continents, and we connect to them through Video Skype. And in the countries we go, we go back to see our homeschooler friends and unschooling friends. So yes we have friends in almost every country, we meet both unschoolers and homeschoolers. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Therefore, as these parents went from considering home schooling to gaining enough confidence to actually practicing it, they began also to question more of the established norms:

My mother has been a teacher for 40 years and she's totally in the system and she was, of course, afraid, especially close family was afraid that our kids would not be able to read and write, and learn the most basic skills, which they actually mastered before other kids. So my Oley is 6 and she is already writing and reading, she did it when she was five. But people were scared, people were unhappy. It's like when we were going on the raw food diet, we were also going into much more discussions than we should have. We should have just done our thing that we do right now, and I don't even argue with anybody anymore, it's just like working. And now we're doing such a good thing, and I'm much more

confident also than in the beginning, it's a whole new thing (for people), and
you're doing such a drastic new thing. Like the raw food diet, you have to just
get some years into that to get the confidence and other stuff. So in the
beginning it was really not easy, I can tell you. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Thus, while home education was not always the easiest way to provide an education for their children, ultimately all parents have expressed satisfaction with the choice they made:

I really like this way we have chosen, but of course, there are things along the
way that we bring into our lives. And there are things that we have chosen into
our lives, because we really try to be aware of what is good and what is not
good, or the happiness of the family, or the well being of the family and others
around us. So just by being aware and not following the pattern of everyone
else… (Julie, Norway)

Another similarity observed in this study that agrees with previous research (Isengberg, 2007) points out that better-educated mothers are more likely to homeschool their children, which goes along with the representation in this study, considering that all the mothers interviewed were well-educated women, who reported that the academic achievements of their children were outstanding.

Another consistent findings of research (Murphy, 2012; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013) on homeschooling, which also was noted in this study, is that after a year of two of serious efforts to copy formal schooling at home, homeschooling parents gradually move towards a less-structured, more relaxed or laid back type of approach, where parents use a mixed combination of resources provided by a state curriculum, 'homemade' curriculum, and individualized curriculum. This type of home education was recognized as an educational opportunity, as all family interactions, even the informal and spontaneous have potential for learning. The following participant underlines again that all life experiences are shaping educational reality of his children:

We make a mixture of unschooling and world schooling. If our kids want to
learn about elephants in Asia, we buy plane tickets and fly to Asia. The next big
thing is that they ask us to do a Safari, because they want to see the animals and

wildlife in Africa, so we are going to go to Africa. There is the rain forest starting now in Costa Rica… So we try to learn as much as possible in real life. And, of course, we also have resources like books and the Internet. So this form of education is shaping our reality to a big degree because our kids always come first. When they have interest we take great effort to provide materials for them to travel, to just give them the experiences they are looking for at that moment, so it does affect our reality a great deal. And that allows us to really have our kids to shape our family reality in the education of our kids. (Karl, Costa Rica)

Another thing that the two groupings have in common, underlined by previous research (Mayberry et al, 1995; Kunzman, 2009; Rothermel, 2011; Murpy, 2012), is the opportunity to choose and influence the ways their children will be educated, the values they will acquire, and the social relationships they will develop. These parents are determined to raise their children without the constraints and regulations of "government authority" (Kunzman, 2009, p. 181). As one parent commented:

I'll just tell you my personal opinion. I know what they learn in France, my friends have their children there. I know what they learn in Russia, what they learn in America in general, but my view on the subject matter is that the formal education that constitutes the schooling of today, does not justify itself at all. I think this situation is worldwide. In Germany, my girlfriend recently visited me, she lives in Germany, her son goes to school there and it's just monstrous! What the secondary education in schools is? It is nothing but the desire to make people into cogs. The cogs in the system. They (schools) only give them the strictest minimum of requirements. (Natalia, Russia)

Thus, the key similarity for these parents was the theme of the individual. As argued in previous studies (Murphy, 2012), "public schooling fails to provide needed individualization for children, and the unique individual academic needs and interests for many go unmet" (p. 96). As a mother from Kazakhstan, where home education is totally illegal, stated:

I'm neither "for" nor "against" school. There are different children and different parents. I'm from those, for whom freedom, in all respects, above all else. And I'm glad that I had the courage to provide my children with it. Every

evening, when planning for the next day, their eyes are burning: "So many interesting things! How we manage to fit everything?!" So it is worth it. (Sarah, Kazakhstan)

Thus, all of the families perceived their children as individuals and the parents as the experts in understanding their children. As a result, many home school parents articulated and defined opinions about formal education and about the educational experiences their children had. They also spoke of what potentially could have happened if the child had attended public or private schools. All families have given the educational system a critical look, be it on structural, social or individual levels, and their solution has been to choose home education as the best option for their child.

Yet, these parents believe that the outcome of home education will be for the benefit of society. As Karl puts it:

I totally trust my kids will be more happy adults. They will be knowing who they are, they will be knowing about their values, about what matters to them, not because of me, or the system, but what matters to them. And they will get jobs or do something with their lives that will have meaning to them and that will provide value for the community, for others. And that is the most important thing… and that's what I feel I can give them through the homeschooling. (Karl, Costa Rica)

This is what Lee (Singapore) has to say:

An ideal education is where the child knows what is his gifting and that he is able to use his gifting and all the learning that he has to benefit the society and to serve God. I think that is the best education, I would say, and that is what we aim to give each of our children. (Lee, Singapore)

5.3 Summary: What Have We Learned?

Although there is a range of religious and spiritual orientations (from the New Age movement to conservative Christians), revealing the ideological diversity within the home school movement in previous researches (Mayberry et al, 1995), which has been assumed to be the main motivation for parents to withdraw their children from

regular school, this study, as I have already pointed out, does not clearly support ideological differences as one of the leading motivations for the construction of choice for home education. Instead, data from this sample reveals that six out of seven families, point out that they are primarily concerned with the environment and the unsatisfactory conditions of the public schools; this seemingly is the most significant reason for homeschooling children.

Therefore, the choice of home education serves to highlight some of the different ways in which parents are dissatisfied with the school system and also continuing mismatches between schools and wider social cultures. It also highlights the broad spectrum of parents' concerns and constructions beyond a simplistic human rights or fundamentalist dichotomy. Hence, researchers agree that the formation of homeschooling is a social and education movement (Mayberry et al., 1995; Gaither, 2008; Murphy, 2012).

Thus, this study supports another interesting and insightful research (Rothermel, 2011) into home education over the years, which claims that "attempts to establish and address the reasons why people home educate through a simple 'grouping' approach, such as 'religious reasons', 'bullying' and so on, is a fruitless and flawed methodology" (p.52). Families begin home educating their children for many different reasons. These reasons can change and overlap with other reasons very quickly. Their approaches continually alter according to the philosophical and physical changes within the family, the changing needs of the children, and the changing ages of the children. On the other hand, schools neither have the need nor the means to continually adapt to the level of change and flexibility that is integral to the home educators' families. Home education is an unavoidably dynamic process. A school teaches the same curriculum day after day, regardless of the families whose children they enroll. As Rothermel (2011) argues,

> There are no simple answers as to why people chose to home educate. Not only do reasons change over time (sometimes very quickly) but the motivations and reasons will often have emerged over many years… Labels that create categories are useful for those with financial and controlling interests, such as local governments, whose education budgets increases with pupil numbers and who may therefore, develop initiatives to persuade certain types of children into, or back into, school. As long as this approach continues, the needs of home educators and their children may never be met (p. 53).

In this context researchers are called to be thinking more widely about this "fascinating experiment in school choice" (Isenberg, 2007, p. 407) and its broader social impact (Morton, 2010).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This paper has sought to give parent educators a voice by examining, from their perspectives, the multifaceted phenomenon of home education. The study covers the motivations, experiences and perspectives of seven families in seven countries across four continents – North and South America, Europe and Asia. Such a study has not been attempted before in such cultural diversity, especially covering such a wide geographical area.

The participants in this study articulated in their own voices some of the many issues and circumstances, educational and family experiences that led them to home educate their children. I presented their accounts in longer verbatim extracts to give a more complete picture of their perspectives and experiences. Their words give personal and contextual meaning to the central themes discussed in this paper. These accounts are not intended to be representative of the hundreds' of families from the countries they are from. The narratives, however, do provide a sense of the parents' diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.

Despite the diversity of cultures represented in this study, it is interesting to note much common ground among the parents involved. Without attempting to generalize the findings beyond this study, I would like to highlight certain observations concerning this group alone.

1) The **tables** presented have pointed to certain characteristics of the parents in this sample, as previously mentioned: They were in their thirties when they began the home education process, they were well-educated, middle-income parents in traditional two-parent families. Most of the active home educators were either homemakers or had chosen occupations that allowed them some flexibility in hours of work.
    a) All were at least exposed to tertiary education. The higher levels of education they attained were important because it enabled them to assess, combine or construct curriculums for their children. This might have been more of a challenge if they had only a low level of education, like primary school.

b) All in fact came from middle-income families. In many countries the state school system is heavily subsidized and is offered to parents either at low-cost or even free of charge. Examples: Norway, Germany, Singapore, Russia, and Kazakhstan. However there are no subsidies for these home educator parents, so they have to foot the whole cost themselves. Moreover, the enriched curriculum that many parents provide, e.g. outings, excursions, special classes to cater to their children's interests, could be taxing to low-income families.

c) There is also a much heavier time commitment required of parents than if the children were enrolled in conventional schools. That could be why most of the parents interviewed were either female homemakers or had a job with flexible working hours, like being a yoga teacher. Thus, they were able to devote full attention to raising their children through home education. Where the men also took an active role in homeschooling, they chose work that allowed them similar time flexibility, such as managing an online business or teaching yoga.

d) The active parent engaged in home education had the support of a spouse to help with the family's income and sometimes to shoulder part of the home education load. Without such support, especially to relieve the stress of maintaining the family financially, it is questionable whether the family's home education journey could have even begun.

e) Therefore, it might be the case that the choice of home education is easier to consider for those parents with similar characteristics.

2) Although the sample is small, the **interview material** has revealed certain commonalities among the parents who chose to home school their children:

a) They all made their decision out of conscious choice, not necessity, influenced by their personal beliefs about raising children, their goals for these children as well as their experiences with the state-run school system.

b) Generally these parents expressed dissatisfaction with the conventional school options in one way or another, and this dissatisfaction in turn played a big part in their motivation to begin and continue the home education process.

c) Another motivator they all shared was a strong desire to be in control of their children's educational process and outcomes.

d) They had confidence in their own ability to decide what was best for their children, and they maintained their confidence without wavering, despite

facing negative reactions and even fear of legal consequences, in some cases. Those with a religious commitment had their faith to support them.

e) They were all satisfied with their decision to keep their children out of conventional schools and educate them at home.

f) While home educating parents showed a deep commitment to their children's education, they were generally much less interested in conventional measures of academic attainment.

g) Instead of conforming to the usual parental goals of seeing that their children did well according to achievements measured by results in school tests and exams, these parents independently pursued higher goals such as their children's happiness and their future development into thriving, capable adults who could contribute to society.

h) Breaking away from a social norm like sending one's children to attend conventional schools requires an unconventional mindset to make such an unconventional decision.

i) These parents were willing to experiment with different curriculums, trusting their own judgment of what would suit their children's needs and interests.

j) They did not put pressure on their children to achieve scholastically, allowing them to develop according to their own pace, interest and ability.

k) Some parents briefly mentioned that their children were using curricula ahead of their school cohort. The pacing and focus on interests of this child-centered approach thus allowed their children to attain higher levels of achievement in some areas, driven by interest and ability rather than the need to pass exams and tests.

l) Ultimately the decision to home school also required courage to stand apart from the crowd and take the responsibility for the upbringing of their children into their own hands.

m) So the picture that emerges of the home educator's personal characteristics through this study is of a person who has shown the courage to make an unconventional choice, trusting in their own judgment to do what is best for their children's personal development and future role in society, and who is deeply committed, motivated, dedicated and involved in their children's education.

6.1. Suggestions for Future Research

Further work needs to be undertaken to examine the decision to home educate and its relationship to national and global contexts. The seven parents who have been studied suggest that the decision to home educate is reinforced over time through the parent's experiences and connection with the home education movement around the world. Joining organizations, travelling, communicating with other home educators, reading literature, all these elements create common ground for nourishment of a global social movement behind home education. Further research on the global context of home education, may contribute in the better understanding of perspectives related to the education of school-aged children from all over the world and discover what more there is to learn from this non-mainstream phenomenon. This has been a study covering only a small sample. It would be interesting to see if a larger study could lead to more generalized results.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

    1. Socio-economic status of family:

- Age

- Education level

- Occupation

- Income

- Number of children

- Age of children

- What are your religious views, if any?

- Where are you from originally?

- Where do you live now?

- Are you planning to move somewhere else?

    2. Motives behind parents' choice of home education:

- How long have your been educating your child at home?

- How did you get involved in HE?

- Why did you decide to start with HE?

- Who/what has inspired you in your choice of lifestyle?

- What did facilitate your involvement in HE?

- How and when you began your interest in HE?

- Was it difficult to decide to educate your child at home?

- How do you deal with legal issues? Or was there any?

- What kind of relations/agreements do you have with school-authorities?

- What does it mean to you to educate your child at home?

- What is the difference for you between educating your child at home and sending her/him to school?

- Did you have any other options beside homeschooling (like sending your child to private school)?

- Where do you get necessary information about HE?

- What do you think motivates you to continue with HE?

- How long are you planning to home educate your child?
- What was the reaction of other people to your decision to home educate your child? What was the reaction of your family? Your friends?
- Which skills do you need to be able to educate your child at home?
- What are the benefits of homeschooling for your child?
- How do you think it will impact your child in the future?
- Do you have any contact/cooperation with other HE-families?