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Deaf and Hard of Hearing homeschoolers: Sociocultural motivation and approach

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Deaf and Hard of Hearing Homeschoolers

Sociocultural Motivation and Approach

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Research on the education of deaf and hard of hearing students has largely ignored homeschooling as an option that parents are choosing, yet thousands of parents across America are pulling their children from more traditional school placements to educate their children at home. This is a pilot study of 21 parents, investigating through questionnaires their backgrounds, motivations for homeschooling, methods of constructing their school environment, communication preferences, and the socialization that occurs for their children. Results show that while homeschooler demographics and approaches vary, there are similarities among their motivations and approaches to providing their children with socialization and interaction with deaf and hard of hearing adults. It also points out that, because of the diversity of approaches used, homeschooling can be both beneficial and detrimental to deaf and hard of hearing children. This research fills in gaps of understanding both in the homeschooling movement and in deaf education, provides a glimpse into the deaf experience that has not yet been investigated, and suggests possible directions of future research.

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1.0 Introduction

Appropriate placement of deaf students in educational environments is a pivotal topic for educators, families, and the future of students. Much of the prior research on deafness focuses on two sites of education: mainstreaming in schools with hearing students, and schools, often residential, focused only on deaf students. These educational options have provided a rich field for researching and understanding the multitude of dynamics that affect social, psychological, and intellectual well-being of students.

Homeschooling, however, has been ignored in most research to date as an option that people are choosing. Parents are increasingly deciding to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons. In general, it continues to be a growing movement within the United States as parents pull their children from more traditional educational environments because of their dissatisfaction, in some way, with local educational systems. Homeschooling does not, however, always take place in a social vacuum. Some parents may choose to educate their children at home full-time, while others will homeschool while also enrolling their children part-time in a public or private school. Homeschooling groups have been formed to create social networks for families. In homeschooling, the lines between teachers and parents become nebulous as the roles meld into one person and the school and home environments overlap.

According to the Gallaudet Research Institute's 2003-2004 Annual Survey, three percent of the deaf and hard of hearing students included in the national survey were educated at home. These results indicate that well over a thousand deaf and hard of hearing children are currently being educated at home, nationwide. The first Annual Survey to gather information specifically on this group occurred in 1996-1997 when 1.5 percent of the respondents indicated their educational facility to be at home. Seven years of research saw a doubling in homeschooling percentages, indicating that education in the home is growing as the chosen educational option for a number of families with deaf or hard of hearing children. These students and their experiences are being lost in the shadows of more prevalent educational options, yet theirs is important for the understanding of the total deaf experience, educationally and otherwise.

Public and private school administrators and educators have often had concerns about the effectiveness of the educational experience for students in homeschooling environments. Many of these concerns mirror the objections that have been raised for deaf children attending residential schools. Since the United States Congress passed the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* (EHA) in 1975 and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) in 1990, the goal of inclusion and providing free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment has often entailed certain mental images for mainstream society, focusing solely on general education. Can homeschooling be considered the least restrictive environment for some children?

As deaf and hard of hearing students are placed in educational facilities, individualized education programs (IEP) are created after the evaluation and continued monitoring of the child's individualized needs. According to the United States Commission on Education of the Deaf, these unique factors include, but are not limited to, such aspects as:

- Communicative needs,
- Linguistic needs,
- Child's academic level and style of learning,
- Social needs,
- Emotional needs,
- Individual motivation,
- Cultural needs, and
- Family support (Innes, 2000, p. 3)

Determining the educational success of students is often considered the domain of school administrators and teachers. However, other stakeholders also play a role in student achievement. Understanding the personal experiences of families with deaf or hard of hearing children is pivotal for the successful implementation of these factors, regardless of the educational environment. Parents may be motivated by a variety of these cultural, communicative, and social needs in their decisions for their children, but how these specific factors impact the homeschooling parent is not yet known.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to obtain a basic understanding of deaf education in homeschool settings through the life experiences and perspectives of homeschooling parents. To accomplish this, the study explores the perspectives of homeschooling parents of deaf or hard of hearing children who are currently, or have recently, homeschooled their children. Their involvement in the study provides an avenue in which to (1) obtain homeschooling parents and child's demographic, educational, and socio-cultural information, (2) investigate the motivations for homeschooling, construction of the academic environment, and socialization of the children, and (3) provide a foundation for initial understanding and further study of this growing population. Because of lack of prior research on this topic, this study serves as a pilot study for future research.

1.2 Scope of the study

This study attempts to provide a broad understanding of the homeschooling experience families with deaf or hard of hearing children. It does not cover the experiences of deaf or hard of hearing parents who are homeschooling their hearing children, although this group would provide insight to homeschooling in a deaf environment. It also does not attempt to communicate with the homeschooling students, themselves. Their understanding of their own homeschooling years would provide another valuable perspective of this educational option. This study focuses primarily on families that are currently homeschooling their children. Although a few exceptions were made to include recent homeschooling parents whose children recently went to college or transferred to a private or public school, this study does not attempt to provide a longitudinal perspective of homeschooling. Because it targeted current homeschoolers, the opinions of those who chose not to homeschool for various reasons were excluded. Interaction with this group would provide an important perspective of homeschooling from another vantage point.

This study also did not cover the many legal educational aspects of homeschooling that are unique to each specific state or region. Laws attempting to ensure the safety and well-being of each school-age child play an important part both in parents' initial choice to homeschool and how they decide to proceed. Although this type of information would prove helpful in understanding homeschooling more holistically, the scope of this study did not allow for an in-depth investigation of the legal specifications of each area.

2.0 Review of the literature

Homeschooling, simply defined as the approach of educating children at home, is an educational option that has been overlooked in deaf education research. Thus, this review of literature is not able to include any prior studies that have been done specifically related to homeschooling deaf or hard of hearing children. Instead, a proper framework for this project includes an understanding of a number of more fundamental ideas. First, what is the historical foundation and present practice of homeschooling? In addition, what are the legal considerations for homeschooling families? Third, an understanding of the physiological and socio-cultural perspectives of deafness in education provides a starting point for understanding the deaf identity in context. Fourth, the history of deaf education and the placement of homeschooling in it. Fifth, a discussion of the academic concerns in deaf education. Finally, a look at the

socialization of homeschooling and deaf or hard of hearing children, as it applies to their personal development and identity formation.

2.1 History of homeschooling

Homeschooling is not a new idea. In the United States, before there was any government intervention or support in providing education, parents were responsible for the education of their children. This may have occurred through the hiring of teachers for a group of town children, or it may have been accomplished by employing tutors in the home for individual instruction of children in the upper class. Apprenticeships provided vocational skill to some. Parents considered it their responsibility to educate their children with whatever resources they had available. Yet, while the concept of educating a child at home is not a new one, the label "homeschooling" is not even three decades old. The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (Tenth Edition) indicates that the word "homeschool" was coined in 1980, a verb meaning "to teach school subjects to one's children at home" and the noun "homeschooler" was coined a year later and defined as "one that homeschools" or "a child that is homeschooled." (p. 555)

The concept of homeschooling (without the label) was the norm until approximately 150 years ago when a new educational philosophy was introduced. In 1850, Horace Mann supported compulsory public education, following a model that was established in Europe. Public education allowed for the education of a large number of children, but Lahrson-Fisher (1998) and Burch (2002) argue that this was not the primary goal of its implementation. Instead, public education attempted to create a mold through which to integrate a diverse people into one unified whole in society: "to mold the huge influx of immigrants, with all their ethnic, cultural, religious, and language differences, into patriotic, English-speaking, protestant factory workers and laborers" (Lahrson-Fisher, 1998, p. 50). In the late 1890s, compulsory education began expansion in Massachusetts and New York, (Gatto, 1992) and became what is commonly perceived as the primary means of education for American citizens. These public schools provided people from lower economic classes the opportunity to receive schooling, regardless of their parents' skills or abilities.

A century later, general dissatisfaction with public education caused some parents to adopt a more positive perspective of educating their children at home. Their beliefs were influenced by educational writers John Holt and Dr. Raymond Moore who, in the late 1970s, argued for increased parental involvement in childhood education. In the early 1980s, the homeschooling movement grew even more quickly as parents began, often for religious reasons, to remove their children from private and public schools in favor of homeschooling. Since that time, the philosophical approaches to education, the types of families involved, and the children's needs have all varied as the homeschooling community has become increasingly diverse.

Homeschooling has received variable amounts of positive and critical attention, often accompanied by legislative battles that bring the public's attention to this "new" perspective of education. Even so, the general homeschooling population has continued to grow at a slow, steady rate (Lharson-Fisher, 1998). In 1999, there were over 850,000 homeschooling families across the country, as documented by the Department of Education Statistics (Parkay and Stanford, 2004). Holt (2005) indicates that estimates for 2004 go well over a million homeschooled children.

Motivations for homeschooling differ among families. Academic reasons are often at the forefront of these motivations, as research results indicate that the average child educated at home has higher test scores than their average peers enrolled in a traditional mode of education (Bell, 1997). The decision to homeschool may also be driven by the belief that school networks do not replace the importance of family, and that the time spent at school is increasing and causing weak family structures and weak community relationships (Gatto, 1992). Research studies indicate that homeschoolers, in comparison to their peers, have lower problem-behavior scores, higher self-concepts, and less peer-dependency (Bell, 1997). Some parents desire to give individual attention to the child providing specific resources for individual needs while avoiding a situation where a child would be formed by an institution's mold. They

may believe that by homeschooling, they can remove their child from mindless imitation while cultivating training that impacts the ability to make wise choices in daily life (Martin, 1992). Dissatisfaction with school institutions is another motivating factor. Some parents believe that the institution's goal is not to educate their children but to look out for its own reputation (Gatto, 1992). Religious motivations may also impact a parent's decision, as they desire to base curricula on religious values that are not offered in educational institutions in their area (Parkay and Stanford, 2004). At times, homeschooling may not be built on any of these reasons, but driven rather by a desperation—the last resort after many failed attempts at other educational options.

2.2 Homeschool legalities

The Supreme Court upholds the rights of parents to manage care for their children. Parents always have a right to know what is happening with their child in the educational world, a right to appeal anything with which they do not agree, and a right to choose the educational placement of their child within the home or another private or public institution. Parents, under law, have a right to choose what is best for their child, as long as it is considered by society to be supportive of the child's welfare. This can be difficult, as views to what is truly benefiting the child may differ. Although homeschooling is legal everywhere within the United States, laws and requirements vary, and they continually evolve and change (Parkay and Stanford, 2004). Over 60 percent of states have homeschooling regulations, and fifty percent of states require some sort of annual academic standardized testing (LaMorte, 2002). Because parents do not need to have a teacher certification in any state, any family across the country is eligible to homeschool.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures the educational rights of children with disabilities and their parents to a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE), but it does not ensure that the desires and rights of the parents will not be challenged by those in authority positions in educational institutions. Parents of children with "special needs" are entitled through federal law to appropriate services through their local public school. These services are free, and a parent can have as little or as much assistance as they want or need. They must, however, meet the guidelines established by the school district in order to obtain support services. These guidelines may be designed around the child's individual education program (IEP) or, if their child is in a private school, a "service plan" (Department of Education: United States of America, 2005). Because homeschools often fall under the category of private schools, parents may request help in drafting a service plan. Other times, parents may be involved enough in their local public school, that an IEP is created for their child so that they can have access to services. Either way, parents follow a plan drafted by a certified professional in order to meet regulations.

Actual wording of state laws regarding homeschooling can be found under "Compulsory Education" or "School Attendance" in courthouse or law libraries, but most states require you to submit an educational plan to your local district, notify the State Department of Education, and/or register your home as a private school. In the state of Maryland, for example, under the Title 13A State Board of Education, Subtitle 10, Home Instruction 13A.10.01, General Regulations enacted in November of 1991, "parents may homeschool if at least fifteen days before the beginning of a home instruction program the parent signs a Notice of Intent form certifying that the homeschool will provide a regular thorough instruction in the required subjects…" (Regional and Worldwide homeschooling, October 1, 2005). Maryland parents must either work through a state-approved correspondence course, or meet with the local superintendent to ensure that they are following an adequate educational program. Regulations also indicate that they must be observed by school personnel while instructing the child, but not more than three times a year.

Parents may, at times, meet with a great deal of resistance by the school systems. One primary concern for most school systems is the negative financial impact. As they are often not compensated by

outside sources for students who are only enrolled part-time or involved in extracurricular activities, homeschooling families can become a drain on school resources. School administration and teachers may also disagree with parents' motivations or skills to adequately educate their children at home, creating tension between their beliefs of what is best for the student and the parents' decision to homeschool. Without ideological support of the parent's decision, they may attempt to take legal action against homeschooling families in order to right the situation. Legal support for homeschooling has been mixed, and courts have not always been sympathetic to homeschoolers. Although homeschooling parents may run into social and legal hassles for their decisions, as indicated by the numerous homeschooling legal defense agencies such as Association of HomeSchool Attorneys (AHSA) and Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), parents continue to homeschool their children. It is often up to the parents to know their rights and responsibilities in order to legally support their decision to homeschool.

2.3 Deaf education in America

While little is known about deaf people in the United States prior to the nineteenth century, permanent deaf schools officially began for North America in 1817, when the first school for the deaf— the Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons (now American School for the Deaf)—was established in Hartford, Connecticut by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc, on April 15. This school, because of the relative low incidence of deafness in the United States, served a wide geographic area. Because of the daily commute of children to reach school, the first school for the deaf also opened its doors as a residential institution, where children were often separated from their families and isolated from hearing society. As the first deaf institution in the country, many deaf schools copied its model and use of sign language, and residential schools began to feed the foundation of the American deaf community (Van Cleve and Crouch, 1989). Deaf education has not always perpetuated this one school's ideology, however; it has experienced many debates about proper approaches, positive educational settings, solutions to academic and social problems, and, in general, what is best for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Joyner (2004), in her study of deaf peoples' lives in the antebellum south, found that deaf children were not encouraged to attend school until they were in their mid-teenage years. Before they reached this age, mothers (assumed to be the primary care-takers of the children) were encouraged to educate their children at home. As one teacher put it, "We earnestly appeal to parents to make an effort for their training, both mental and moral" (p. 53). Parents were given pamphlets indicating the best methods of teaching, and school administrators encouraged parents to teach visually oriented skills, finger-spelling, writing, and reading. Thus, deaf and hard of hearing children, when believed by their parents to have intellectual ability, were often educated at home, along with their hearing siblings. This was especially true for two social classes: the wealthy families who could afford to provide a private tutor for their children, and the poorer parents who could not afford to send their children to the deaf institution, but engaged them in vocational education in order for them to help support the family (Burch, 2002).

Today, parents have a number of decisions to make about the education of their children. Issues of the school's geographical location, whether it is a residential or day school, its educational philosophy, and the desire for their child's social identity are just a few of the factors that remain an integral part of the parental decision. Because these factors have varying degrees of importance to the parents, they create complicated layers in the child's appropriate educational placement. One choice that a parent makes incurs a host of consequences that they may not have desired, and parents may find themselves settling on a variety of issues in order to achieve their primary goal.

2.4 Deaf education sites

Because of the diversity of backgrounds and needs for deaf students, there are a number of educational placements available to them. The U.S. Department of Education defines six placements for

deaf students: regular class, resource room, separate class, separate school, residential facility, and homebound/hospital environment (Schirmer, 2001). These can be further classified into mainstream educational facilities, special educational facilities specifically designed for deaf students, and education in the home.

Mainstream educational facilities can be approached in a number of ways. Students in regular classrooms are mainstreamed into the general school system, occasionally with interpreters at other times with no support services. These facilities may be private or public. Resource rooms tend to serve deaf students that are mainstreamed in regular classrooms for most of the day, but are for a specified time placed in a special room with a teacher who provides instruction in a few subjects. This may be with other deaf children only or with other students who are designated to have special needs. Deaf students who are educated in a separate class but remain in the mainstream environment, are taught by a teacher of the deaf for the majority of the school-day, but are integrated into activities with hearing students for brief times.

Educational institutions that are designed exclusively for deaf students also come in a variety of forms. Special schools may be residential, in which the student lives at the institution, or day schools, in which students commute, daily, back and forth from home to school. Because these schools are not present in every school district, parents must often make the choice of relocating close to the school in order to stay in close contact with their children or to send their children to a residential program, in which their children visit them less frequently. While these schools may be private or public, deaf students in these environments are segregated from hearing students. Education of the student may also take place in the home or in another location where individualized attention is given. These students may be taught by a hired tutor or teacher, by a parent, or by some other interested person.

Residential schools have historically been the most tradition school placement for deaf students in the United States yet, according to the Gallaudet Research Institute's National Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students, a decrease in residential school attendance is currently occurring. This seems to be a result of the children of hearing parents being placed in mainstreamed programs, as the proportion of children of deaf parents' enrollment in residential schools nearly doubles that of hearing parent's children (Holden-Pitt, 1997). Mitchell and Karchmer (2004) found that parents' regular sign use in the home seems to play an important predicting role of which type of educational setting a deaf or hard of hearing child attends. This finding indicates that communication and language preferences are an important factor in the educational placement of deaf and hard of hearing children.

2.5 Communication methods

The debate over a spoken, signed, or combined approach to communication in the educational system has a long and volatile history. Cultural and social issues related to communication and language choice are manifested in all of the available school settings. There are three main communication methods adopted by educators of deaf students: oral/aural, bilingual, and total communication (Schirmer, 2001).

After the international deaf educators conference in Milan, Italy in 1880 decreed that oralism was the best approach for education deaf children, countries all over the world adopted it into their institutions. Oral/aural methods focus on spoken language, and curricula focus on speech and aural habilitation, with the expectation that students will use speechreading, auditory skills, and speech to communicate on a consistent basis. Various techniques have been adopted with the goal of creating successful deaf children who can integrate into the hearing world with minimal difficulties. While signed language is usually avoided or forbidden, proponents of this method may attempt to create visual aids to help students learn and understand spoken language. Cued speech, for example, uses a set of handshapes to differentiate speech sounds that are difficult to identify on the lips (e.g. p, b, and m).

Bilingual methods recognize natural signed language as a legitimate language and seek to use it in education. Most bilingual programs strive to use a signed language as the language of communication, the first language of deaf students, while written English is taught as a second language. Many bilingual

programs attempt to be bilingual-bicultural, as well. They emphasize two cultures, deaf and hearing, alongside the use of two languages, signed and spoken. The bilingual-bicultural movement is becoming increasingly popular, growing dramatically in the 1990s.

In the late 1960s, the total communication method was adopted by some schools in the United States. These educators were in favor of using any means necessary to communicate, both speech and sign. Artificially constructed signed systems that attempted to show English on the hands (manually coded English) grew in popularity and, while often adding a visual component to strictly oral communicative approaches, they still did not create an atmosphere where natural language was used. While the total communication method may, in theory, attempt to use any and all means of communication, in practice it often becomes simultaneous communication, in which signed and spoken language are used at the same time (Schirmer, 2001).

The right communication method for a deaf or hard of hearing child is based on a number of factors that are unique to each family and child. According to Allen and Schoem (1997), the degree of hearing loss is one factor that influences communication choice: "the preferred method for communication mode used in the classroom is very strongly related to degree of hearing loss…fully 81% of the deaf students with profound hearing loss in the annual survey database attend schools where a combination of signs and speech is used" (p. 13). Another factor, as pointed out by Thumann-Prezioso (2005) is the parents hearing status—if both parents are deaf, they will sign with their children, while if one parent is hearing and one is deaf or both are hearing, there may be some mix of sign and speech or a speech only approach.

2.6 Cultural identity

According to Meadows-Orlans (1987), the decision about a child's linguistic and cultural orientation is one of the most critical decisions for the child's identity formation, socialization, and future success. Because the educational setting takes up most of the early identity forming stages of a young person's life and because the length of exposure to a culture will impact the identity development of a deaf individual (Leight et al., 1998), the role of education in cultural identity construction should not be underestimated.

Two main perspectives of deaf people are seen in education: physiological and socio-cultural. The physiological view is the most traditional in mainstream society and is marked by viewing deafness as a disability, a problem that needs to be cured or fixed. This view is often accompanied by the assumption that a deaf child must learn to speak, hear, and interact with general society through whatever means is necessary (Schirmer, 2001; Van Cleve and Crouch, 1989). The socio-cultural view, on the other hand, views deaf people as part of a cultural and linguistic minority. The concept of deaf culture and community was introduced most strongly into the academic sphere in the 1970s (Padden and Humphries, 1988) and the deaf minority group can be described as a community that values sign language and embraces deafness as a positive part of their identity (Schermer, 2001; Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan, 1996; Moores, Cerney, and Garcia).

These two perspectives are important to understand because they affect the educational environments available to students. Many educators who embrace the physiological view also incorporate oralism as the primary educational approach. The socio-cultural survives despite the global pressure for deaf people to integrate, and can be seen in bilingual-bicultural education centers that incorporate both English and American Sign Language into their curricula. Proponents of this approach are concerned not only with linguistic access to the material, but with the cultural identity formation of their students.

People may identify themselves not only on the basis of their amount of hearing, but by the community (hearing or deaf) with which they wish to be identified. Glickman and Carey (1993) created a Deafness Identity Scale that was further adapted by Leigh et al. (1998) in order to better identify and understand a person's deaf or hearing identity. They divide cultural identities into four orientations. The first is an orientation of the culturally hearing—"hearing norms are the reference point for normality, health, and spoken communication." (Leigh et al., p. 331) The second is the culturally marginal—those

who are neither deaf nor hearing in their orientation. The third is an immersed orientation into deaf culture—positive identification as a deaf person with hearing values degraded. Finally, a bicultural identity may emerge in which people are able to negotiate both hearing and deaf settings, internalizing deaf culture while valuing hearing people and relationships.

Identities are generally not stable, and may change due to a number of external and internal factors. The process is comprehensive, with new roles and ways of interacting and identifying socially building on the skills and definitions already adopted. Leigh et al. (1998) found that being deaf or hard of hearing with hearing parents carries with it different aspects of identity development than being deaf or hard of hearing with deaf parents. They point out that this struggle to define one's identity may, in part, be a result of conflicting pressures and debates by various influential people to join a deaf or hearing environment. Glickman (1996) argues that most deaf individuals would be expected to partake in most of the four identity orientations at some point in their lives and would progress through hearing, marginal, deaf immersion, and bicultural stages, in succession. In each of these stages, individuals learn how to socially interact in culturally appropriate ways at any given time (Hagstrong, 2003).

In a study of deaf and hearing cultural identity paradigms, Leigh et al. (1998) found that a person's identity not only comes from their own decisions and self-perceptions, but is also defined by the "groups or persons that interact with the individual and impose identity (or identities) on the individual that can affect self-definition" (p. 329). This combination of individual and social definition plays an important role in the creation of the deaf community and culture. Because most deaf children are not born to deaf parents, the nature of the culture is constantly in transition; how to develop a deaf cultural identity is not easy to pinpoint. This flexibility, according to Leigh et al. (1998) gives rise to "questions of authenticity" that "pose fundamental dilemmas regarding the meaning of identity formation within Deaf culture…" (p. 330)

Some people in the deaf community are concerned that with the decrease in residential school enrollment, deaf culture may also be at risk. However, if Holden-Pitt's (1997) findings are accurate, deaf culture may not be at a soaring level of risk since many deaf students from families with deaf parents are continuing to attend residential schools. These children, the five to ten percent who have deaf parents (Mitchell and Karachmer, 2004), are the ones who learn the cultural norms and signed language unique to the deaf community from their parents and then can pass it on to their peers and the next generations. It is also possible that, as Padden (in press) suggests, the spaces that were once considered the centers of deaf culture are shifting. Other places than deaf institutions may become the cultural centers of the deaf community. It may be possible that with the transition in deaf spaces currently occurring, homeschooling space may be one of these new places for the transmission of deaf culture.

2.7 Academic quality

One of the biggest concerns in deaf education is the academic achievement of the students. Thumann-Prezioso (2005) found that many deaf parents are frustrated with the current deaf educational situation and concerned with the curricula, quality of the teachers, and teacher communication skills in all educational environments. According to Allen and Schoem (1997), deaf or hard of hearing students "generally perform poorly compared to their hearing peers in reading comprehension, mathematics problem solving and mathematics procedures" (p. 19).

Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989) place the failure of deaf education squarely on the shoulders of the system and its lack of linguistic access to curricular content at appropriate grade levels and the low expectations of educators and parents for their academic performance. They argue for the importance of family and parental support in the successful education of children and youth, their emotional well-being, and their educational support. From a linguistic standpoint, many children are not prepared to access the curricula because of a poor language base upon arrival at the schools. Moreover, the curricula that are offered to them may not be adequate nor the language abilities of the teacher enough to meet the child's

needs. Additionally, any low expectations from teachers further perpetuates academic failure and students' own perception of what they are able to do.

One way to encourage the perception of students of what they are able to accomplish is to provide positive role models and mentors. Role models and mentors have long been shown to play an important function in student development and their perception of their capabilities (Zirkel, 2002). Deaf parents may be more comfortable and put more confidence in residential schools because of their ability to communicate with their children, their educational and socio-cultural philosophy, increased direct contact between staff and Deaf parents, and the atmosphere of residential schools for their child's development in which teachers and staff are positive mentors and role models (Holden-Pitt, 1997).

Role models and mentors help to focus the students' attention on the future in such a way that they are motivated to move toward positive (or negative) ends. Whether through providing examples of what is possible in a general sense through role models, or through the personal support and guidance of mentors, concrete information can be communicated from adult to child about their abilities and what is available to them. Information is not only transferred through the presence of a person in a certain social position, however. The absence of someone from a specific social group also delivers information that will affect the way children perceive themselves and what they view as possible for their lives. Apart from being encouraged to become something more than they currently are, students also acquire the discernment to known when and how to use skills to succeed in life.

Unfortunately, role models that match students' social groups or individual demographics are not always easily available. Zirkel (2002) found that while white students had a plethora of matched role models to choose from, minority students were less often presented with role models or access to personal mentors that matched their social group. Yet, when minority students were provided with matched role models, they "performed better academically than those without 14 to 18 months after the role model assessment took place" (p. 367). Zirkel (2002) argues that it is important for children to have race and gender matched role models in order for them to identify closely with others who share common life experiences. As they internalize these representations of the opportunities available to them, they will encode these into their own identity formation. This process of identity construction will have enormous impact on their academic and social success.

Allen and Schoem (1997) assert that the way to best achieve the objective of deaf or hard of hearing children receiving education that enables them to be contributing members of society and achieve academically remain elusive. Their study finds that the population of deaf or hard of hearing children and youth are "extremely heterogeneous, and a myriad of variables—for example, degree of hearing loss, educational program placement, racial and ethnic background, communication mode used in instruction, and academic achievement—are all interrelated in complex ways" (p. 3). Education program planning must include factors such as parental hearing status, linguistic socialization, socioeconomic status, parental expectations, and membership in the deaf community if it is to be academically effective for deaf and hard of hearing children (Schirmer, 2001; Lane, Hoffmeister, and Bahan, 1996; Erting, 1982).

2.8 Socialization and integration in homeschooling and Deaf education

The educational system and family structure both impact children's social development and acculturation. According to Antia (1998), social characteristics of the educational environment (frequency and type of contact with peers, the degree to which the child's learning needs are addressed within the classroom, and the support of the community) are key to the success of children. Homeschooling parents and parents of deaf or hard of hearing children are met with a barrage of questions and concerns about the adequate socialization of their children.

 Integration—often supported because of its push for socialization into the mainstream society—attracts intense interest from educators and from the public, yet identifying which factors encourage positive integration may be difficult to identify. While Parkey and Stanford (2004) define "inclusion"

simply as the "practice of integrating all students with disabilities into general education (p. 530), Burch (2002) points out there is more behind the practice of inclusion than the attempt to minimize negative effects of segregation. Integration specialists traditionally attempt to alter the character of minority groups in order to promote their involvement with mainstream society. Osgood (2005) agrees, asserting that the concept of inclusion has "transcended the mere idea of integrating exceptional children with nonexceptional peers in the regular classroom" (p. 197). Instead, it is now a symbol of the efforts to break down the distinctions between children all together. The debate about inclusion and integration is built on seven issues that interact in significant ways:

1. Efficacy: Are segregated or integrated settings more effective in helping all students succeed academically, socially, and emotionally?
2. Efficiency and Economy: How do these settings compare in terms of facilitating the efficient education of students in schools, efficient operations of institutions, and effective distribution of financial (and other) resources?
3. Territory: Who should be responsible for making decisions, planning programs, delivering instruction, and evaluating the success of students and programs?
4. Community: How crucial is the establishment and nurture of a sense of community among students in the classrooms?
5. Legality: How have changes in laws undercut legal basis for segregationist practices and established benchmarks for the civil and educational rights of children with disabilities?
6. Power and Identity: In what way is the debate over inclusion an actual, if subsumed, function of the power relationships between the disabled and nondisabled?
7. Axiology: To what extent are integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion moral or ethical, rather than legal or practical, issues? (Osgood, 2005, pp. 10-11)

For Osgood (2005), integration and inclusion "embodies the right of every child to be educated in a common setting where her or his individual needs and those of all other children are addressed completely and effectively" (p. 198). These needs include more than simple academic aspects, but extend to social accommodations that allow children to interact in positive ways that help them to grow into thriving adults. Since the United States passed Public Law 94-142, instituting that disabled children were guaranteed access to "a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment," exactly what a least restrictive environment looks like has been a subject of constant debate (Osgood, 2005).

Baker (2003) argues that each type of classroom available to deaf and hard of hearing students creates a certain social environment that impacts their learning. Whether this environment is effective depends largely on the teacher's ability to manage the classrooms, and the student's ability to engage in the social, atmospheric, and academic information available. The successful socialization of children is not solely dependent on the teachers and students, however. Some environments are simply not conducive to any degree of adjustment to make it the best atmosphere for a child's skills, socially or otherwise, to develop. Penn-Nabrit (2003) argues that public schools are environments designed by "Caucasian-white men and controlled by Caucasian-white women" (p. 79) and, as such, is an environment that best matches this group of students. No matter what type of traditional educational setting one is in, there is a need to recognize the environments' flaws that touch racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic aspects of society. While these flaws can be addressed, their actual elimination may be impossible if the school structure is built on unstable foundations.

Homeschooling is not limited to any one ethnic or racial group, religious group, cultural background, social class, or other demographic characteristic. One of the primary arguments against homeschooling is that it delays children's experience with the positive and negative aspects of general society. For minorities, this infers that homeschooling students do not experience institutionalized racism, ensuring that they will not be able to cope with it when they ultimately have to face it as young adults. Penn-Nabrit

(2003) argues, however, that very few people homeschool in a limited environment—most spending a lot of time away from their homes accessing various outside resources. These experiences bring children face-to-face with general society and provide the opportunity for broad exposure to the positive and negative characteristics of the world.

Parents of deaf and hard of hearing children also find themselves confronted with these issues on a number of fronts. Because parents of deaf or hard of hearing children come from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds, with more minority representation than the general population of the United States (Allen and Schoem, 1997), they too must deal with the racial issues of society. Deaf or hard of hearing children, because of their hearing status, must also deal with the goals of physiological and socio-cultural perspectives to impact their education and development toward integration into mainstream society through their ears, or to deaf cultural society through their eyes.

For children to engage socially with others, they must have opportunities to use language in a way that facilitates relationships. These relationships must be on a broad level, including peers and adults of various backgrounds engaged both formally and informally. Ramsey (1997) says that occasions for socialization must occur in "comprehensible social contexts where there are other children and adults who share the language and who can help make the world intelligible" (p. 3). Communication itself is a form of social engagement (Stinson and Foster, 2000). This access to social relationships and environments through language, whether through speech or sign, will reinforce children's perspectives of themselves, impact their self-esteem, and ultimately create a unity or gap between hearing and deaf children and adults.

Caldron and Greenberg (2000) indicate that there are two primary sources from which children derive their social constructions: families, and professionals that interact with the child. As families and professionals present their own understanding of the children's skills and social capabilities, children internalize what is seen into their own perspective of themselves. Spencer, Erting, and Marschark (2000) stress that "when lack of a shared language system interferes with communication between a child and other family members, interactions with peers and teachers at school provide an especially potent context for social and personal development" (p. 187). Students' communication experiences, and therefore social experiences, differ in the various educational programs available to them. Stinson and Foster (2000) point out that mainstream settings and special classes have different communication access points than residential schools where sign language is used. Also, because teachers in residential schools are more likely to be deaf, shared life experiences are also available in a way not present in most other environments (Allen and Karchmer, 1990).

Because most deaf children are born into hearing families, school is often a primary place that they come into contact with other deaf people who sign. In homeschooling, school and family home become a single environment. Here, the teaching profession and the parenting responsibility role into one task. Thus, it is of primary importance that parents are educated about the needs, academically and socially, linguistically and culturally, of their children.

2.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the lack of homeschooling research of deaf and hard of hearing children prompts the questioning of how issues in both deaf education and in homeschooling interact. While academic success and social integration continue to be matters of concern for both educational groups, cultural and linguistic identity issues play an enormous part of academic and social success. As communication and relationships are negotiated between auditory and visual worlds, hearing and deaf perspectives, inclusion, as described by Osgood (2005), becomes not only a point of social contention and individual stress, but a goal to which deaf and hard of hearing children in homeschooling contexts are driven. Whether homeschooling can be a least restrictive environment for a deaf or hard of hearing child is a constant concern. As deaf and hard of hearing children develop under the umbrella of home-schools, parents'

experiences and perspectives about their lives and their approaches to the successful development of their children become an important part of understanding both deaf education and the homeschooling.

3.0 Methodology

This research project is primarily driven by the qualitative results of participants' revealed perspectives of their homeschooling experience. It does not attempt to validate or disprove their beliefs, but is designed to create a forum through which the homeschooling experience can be better understood. This chapter includes an overview of the researcher's role in the study, the research questions, the questionnaire development, selection of the subjects, procedures for collecting and analyzing the data, and the limitations of the methodology.

3.1 Role of the researcher

The researcher, as a former homeschooler, brought with her experiences and beliefs that guided the development of the research questions. The many responses and questions that she has interacted with through the years during and after homeschooling led her to this topic and informed her understanding of the concerns, objections, and supportive positions for homeschooling. Her former work as an educational interpreter for deaf students in mainstream settings, and supervising students in dormitories at residential schools for the deaf, informed her understanding of deaf education and the various factors and possible outcomes from these educational environments. Her academic interests in deaf studies, linguistics, and communication broadened her focus to a variety of issues in this pilot study.

Participants were aware that the researcher was finishing her Master's degree at Gallaudet University in Deaf Cultural Studies. Some who specifically asked the researcher for her background prior to returning the survey were aware that she is a former homeschooler. As a hearing member of an ethnic minority group, her perspective lends itself to an insiders' perspective of minority issues and homeschooling, and an outsiders' perspective of deafness.

3.2 Survey questionnaire

Background information about the families and perceptions about their homeschooling experiences were collected through a series of questionnaires. The survey questions were designed to obtain a basic understanding of deaf education in homeschool settings through the life experiences of individual homeschooling families:

Motivation of Homeschool Parents:

- What is the motivation for homeschooling?
- What challenges do parents encounter?
- What types of support are available to parents and with which are they involved?
- What are the expected outcomes of their educational decision for their children?

Construction of the Academic Environment:

- What is the logistic construction of the academic environment?
- What linguistic communication method(s) is/are used and in what situations?
- What special educational or legal issues need to be considered?
- How is academic achievement measured?

Socialization of Homeschool Students:

- In what types of extracurricular activities do the students participate?
- What exposure do homeschool students have to deaf/hard of hearing adults and peers? To hearing adults and peers?
- In what types of mentorship relationships are students engaged?

The first questionnaire was developed based on the initial research questions and was designed to take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. It consisted of three types of questions: multiple choice, fill in the blank, and short answer. After the initial demographic information about the homeschooling parent or guardian and their child, twenty questions probed into the participant's perspective of the homeschool space, curricula, communication choices, and social interaction of the child (See Appendix A). Responses were collected and analyzed and a follow-up questionnaire was designed with six questions related to common themes that were identified in their initial responses (See Appendix B).

A mail survey approach was appropriate because it collected detailed information from people in a wide geographic area with relatively little expense (Mertens, 1998). It also allowed the respondent to consult records before responding, as some of the participants had been homeschooling for a number of years. This survey was the first known attempt to discover the perceptions of homeschooling parents of deaf or hard of hearing children and thus there were no previous instruments available for immediate use in this study.

3.3 Participants and data collection

The participants of this study were intended to be current homeschooling parents or guardians of deaf or hard of hearing children. Participants could be homeschooling full-time or part-time and children could be attending pre-school through high school. Because of the nature of the study and the relative difficulty in identifying and contacting homeschoolers, participants were contacted through a snowball approach. This included asking acquaintances if they knew of any possible participants and using a variety of Internet resources: list-serves, discussion groups, discussion boards, and homeschool networks. When the researcher was prevented from joining certain online discussion groups because they were reserved for parents currently homeschooling their deaf or hard of hearing children, advocates for the project posted a request in her stead (See Appendix C). A few families were contacted through the postal mail when their contact information was given by other participants or people who wanted to support the research. Most parents communicated through electronic mail.

Once contacted, the participants were personally invited to participate via written communication by the primary investigator and were sent the initial questionnaire either through postal mail or through electronic mail. Instructions were given at the beginning of the questionnaire and they were asked to return it within a month, their confidentiality being guaranteed. Participants that received the questionnaire through postal mail were also given a researcher-addressed stamped envelope to which they could send their response. Participants in both questionnaires were given an electronic mail reminder one week prior to the due date.

Of the thirty parents contacted, twenty-one (70 percent) participated in the initial questionnaire and twenty of these replied through electronic mail. Twenty of the initial respondents included their email addresses and indicated willingness for further participation in the study. They were mailed a follow-up questionnaire and of the twenty, nineteen participants (95 percent) returned the second questionnaire. Eighteen of these responded through electronic mail. As the questionnaires were returned, they were entered into a Microsoft excel database for ease of comparison.

3.4 Methodology limitations

A major limitation of this study's methodology is that participants were contacted primarily through Internet resources. This limits the homeschooling community covered in this research project to those families that have access to computers and the Internet. The questionnaire methodology is limited in scope because of the lack of open questioning that could occur. With space limited to a fairly constructed document, participants may have had other important experiences to share that were not included because of the research design. Another limitation is that the questionnaire was only distributed in English. Some deaf parents may not have been comfortable communicating through English and this may have created

difficulties in comprehending the survey and responding to the questions. Finally, while Microsoft Excel did create one method of comparing and analyzing the data, future research would be better served by utilizing a more detailed database for comparison and correlations for statistical analysis.

4.0 Results

This chapter will report the results of the questionnaires by describing the demographics of the homeschooling participants and their children, and by summarizing their experiences and perceptions as revealed by the questionnaires. It will also compare variables in order to better understand the interaction that personal characteristics and decisions related to culture, language, and educational approach may have. Finally, results of this survey would not be complete without including the words of the participants themselves. From these quotations, this result section will not only summarize survey responses but will give a window into individual experiences of homeschoolers.

4.1 Characteristics of the parents/teachers

This study targeted the parents or guardians of homeschooling children as its focus group. While the majority of participants fit into this category, two unique scenarios surfaced. One survey response indicated that the participant was neither parent nor guardian, but a teacher specially requested by the parent to homeschool their child. This teacher, a former educator of the homeschooled child in a traditional setting, played an integral role in the parents' decision to homeschool. A second scenario showed that multiple children from different families were sometimes homeschooled in a single home. In one case, children from two families were homeschooled by a single person, the participant returning the survey. In another, the study participant shared the load of homeschooling with her housemate, who also had a homeschooling, although hearing, child. These participants were included in the study because they were central to the homeschooling process, and influential in the homeschooling decision. From each of these scenarios, only one questionnaire was returned.

Of the 21 participants, 17 indicated they were hearing, 3 as deaf, and 1 as hard of hearing. All but one indicated that they were female, and that they came from a multitude of locations including three each from Virginia and Washington, two each from California, Florida, and Michigan, and one each from Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, and Texas. In addition, two participants hailed from the provinces of Ontario and Alberta, Canada. This study did not limit participants to the United States, although its primary focus was on the U.S. Canadians were included in this study because they have a similar deaf educational history and situation as the United States, and because their primary languages of American Sign Language and English reflect the linguistic situation of the United States. All of the participants indicated that they were White, except one who declined answering the question.

All but one of the questionnaires indicated that females are doing the primary educating of the children. Almost all mothers are doing the primary educating of the children, with only one father adopting the teaching role. The one teacher that was brought in from the outside to homeschool the child was also female. The primary source of household income covered a wide range of occupations including, for example such fields as teaching, truck driving, and engineering. One participant indicated that her primary income came from child support.

The highest educational degree earned by the participants varied from a high school diploma to a master's degree. Four of the questionnaire respondents indicated having earned a master's degree, 12 indicated having received a bachelor's degree, 1 had earned two separate associate's degrees, and 4 indicated that they had graduated from high school and received some college education. See Figure 1 for a summary of the participants' characteristics.

Figure 1: Parent/Teacher Characteristics (of 21)

Gender	
Male	1
Female	20
Deafness Identity	
Hearing	17
Hard of Hearing	1
Deaf	3
Geographic Region	
South (VA, FL, TX)	6
Midwest (MI, IL, MN, CO, IN)	6
West (WA, CA)	5
Northeast (MA, NY)	2
Canada (Ontario, Alberta)	2
Highest Education	
High School	4
Associate's Degree (2-year)	1
Bachelor's Degree (4-year)	12
Master's Degree	4

4.2 Characteristics of the child

As Figure 2 indicates, children ranged from two to twenty years of age and fell into the following educational level categories: 2 in preschool, 11 in elementary school, 4 in middle school, and 4 in high school (at times, with some college-level curricula and courses). The mean age of the group was 9.38, with a mode of 7, and a median of 10. Almost equally split between females and males, there were 10 females and 11 males. The children showed more ethnic diversity than the parents, although most were described by participants as "White". Only four of the children were of an ethnic minority—Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Hispanic/Latino. Of the 21 children reported on in the questionnaires, 8 were identified as deaf and 13 as hard of hearing.

Figure 2: Child Characteristics (of 21)

Gender	
Male	11
Female	10
Deafness Identity	
Hard of Hearing	13
Deaf	8
Grade Level	
Preschool	2
Elementary	11
Middle	4
High	4
Race/Ethnicity	
White	17
Minority	4

4.3 Homeschooling families and motivation

For many of the families in this study, the homeschooling child was not the only child in the family educated at home. Instead, participants indicated that anywhere from one to five of their children had been educated at home. This could be a result of any number of factors. Some parents strove to keep the family together, while others indicated that their positive experiences homeschooling their deaf or hard of hearing child led them to bring their other children home. Some parents were already homeschooling other children, prior to choosing to educate their deaf or hard of hearing child at home. While some parents indicated that all of their children were homeschooled, others reported that some were homeschooled while others went to public school. There were even situations where, within the same family, one deaf or hard of hearing child was homeschooled and another was placed in a mainstreamed setting.

The length of the time the parent had been homeschooling also varied greatly. Some participants indicated that, at the time of the study, this was their first homeschooling year, while others had been homeschooling as long as fifteen years. The average total number of years the parent had been homeschooling was 7.3, the mode 2 and 4, and the median 4.

Almost all of the parents indicated that homeschooling had not been their first and only option, although each child's previous educational experiences varied. Some had tried various options and had completely abandoned them in favor of homeschooling, while others participated in some sort of combination of full-time homeschooling and the use of outside educational resources. Figure 3 indicates the relative frequency of the various educational options that had been used in educating their child. Mainstreaming was the most popular, with more than half of the children having been enrolled in mainstreamed general education prior to homeschooling. Self-contained deaf classrooms were the next most common at eight of the 21, while multiply handicapped classrooms were only indicated by two participants. These participants also indicated that their children had special needs beyond deafness that needed special attention.

Figure 3: Previous Educational Contexts (of 21)

General education (mainstreamed)	12
Self-contained (deaf)	8
Self-contained, special education with support	4
Resource, special education	3
Multiply handicapped classroom (deaf)	2

The transition from more traditional educational contexts to homeschooling was inspired by a number of reasons, depending on the experiences and perspectives of the parents. Lack of options for quality educational environments in which to place their children were parents' number one concern and motivating factor, almost doubling any other reason given by parents. As one parent put it:

> *"I checked out several school options. I found one fabulous deaf classroom at a public school, but it was an ASL environment and she doesn't sign much. I found a great school that uses SEE and speech simultaneously, but my daughter's verbal skills were well above the other children's her age, and I generally don't like SEE, so I didn't see that the school would benefit her specifically. I finally planned to enroll her in a hearing class at a Waldorf school…Unfortunately, the school is very expensive, and I couldn't get financial aid. I've always wanted to homeschool, but wanted to give a fair chance to the available schools, so when I didn't find anything appropriate…"*

Almost half of the parents simply did not appreciate the hectic schedule the educational systems required of them, preferring more flexibility in their academic and personal lives. Over a quarter of the parents indicated that they wanted to have more freedom to include their religious beliefs into their child's academic and educational curricula. Some pointed out that increased daily contact would allow them the time to instill important values that reflected personal convictions into their children. Some parents indicated that their desire to see family strengthened and communication increase within the home was a primary motivation to homeschool.

Parents may, at times, feet outside pressure to indicate religious reasons for homeschooling, as it has greater guaranteed legal protection. Although it may be an important factor in the decision to homeschool, it may only be one of any number of motivations. As one parent indicated, state law required them to put religious reasons as their motivation for homeschooling, although academic learning, their child's happiness, and racial issues also played significant roles in their decision making:

> *"Finally, in the Winter of 2005, we pulled her out of school, frustrated that she wasn't learning and wasn't happy…In addition, we don't feel that the area is very racially tolerant and our daughters are all adopted from India. Officially, as per state law, we homeschool for religious reasons, however, and that does play an important role in our decision to educate our girls at home."*

In some cases, parents were influenced by an extremely negative experience that their children had in public or private schools. In one case, a parent shared:

> *"(My child) was very excited to be mainstreamed into our local school for grade 5. Unfortunately, the experience was abysmal…His grades plummeted, the teacher got annoyed*

with him because he was constantly asking her to repeat herself, the children teased him horribly. By the spring of his grade 5 year, my (child) told me he'd rather kill himself than go back to school and I believed him."

As one can see from these quotes, the transition to homeschooling ranged from a general frustration over not being able to find an appropriate educational setting to an urgency to remove a child from a negative setting. See Figure 4 for a summary of reasons given by participants. These results are not mutually exclusive; parents could indicate as many motivations as desired.

Figure 4: Motivations for Parents to Homeschool (of 21)

Lack of quality educational opportunities, poor support services, 1:1 attention	17
Freedom to make academic and schedule-related choices	9
Religious freedom	6
Desire to homeschool, to be involved with child's education, to keep family together	6
Child not happy with public or private education	5
Socialization	5
Cultural void and lack of racial tolerance	4
Previous positive homeschooling experiences	3
Financially more affordable that private education	2
Communication preferences	2

After parents made the decision to homeschool, they were met with various legal considerations, depending on their location. While a few parents indicated that they had no special responsibilities to their local government or school district, most had some type of regulation that they needed to satisfy. Most participants indicated that they were diligent in finding out what legal steps needed to be made to homeschool, of attempting to meet the criteria required of them, and of asserting their rights to educational authorities if needed. Although not all experiences were smooth, the majority experienced little formal opposition to their decision to homeschool.

This does not mean, however, that parents are not aware of the possibility of legal problems arising at some point in their homeschooling years. Many parents indicated carefully investigating the legal mandates for homeschooling in their area and, as one parent describes, taking action to protect themselves as much as possible from future hassles:

"Before we pulled (our child) from school we joined the Home School Legal Defense Association and got advice from them. We sent the school district a letter and then pulled (our daughter). Our daughter is still younger than the compulsory age of attendance, six years old, so we're not in a lot of danger at this point. However, once our daughter turns six we do believe the school district may come after us, using social services to accuse us of not adequately providing a sufficient education for our hearing impaired daughter. To protect ourselves we have documented what we teach, our goals and our daughter's progress weekly and twice a year...As I read this, I realize I sound like a raving lunatic—that the state is coming after us. However, we have seen that special needs education is the one area where parents' rights to homeschool is still in jeopardy. And our daughter represents a lot of money to the local cash strapped school district. As an aside, we do

not use the local school district to provide any services such as speech therapy, etc. Generally, we think the less noise we make, the better."

Participants indicated a number of ways that they approached fulfilling local homeschool requirements. They indicated working with public charters or directly with the local school district. Some used private school curricula to monitor progress, others utilized annual standardized academic testing, required number of school days were carefully recorded, and diligent academic records kept. In addition, because these children would often have an individualized educational plan (IEP) in their local school, some participants indicated attending IEP meetings and keeping up with their plan in order to receive continued support from their local school.

4.4 Reactions to the homeschool decision and other challenges

Reactions to parents' decision to homeschool varied from full support of families and friends to skeptical questioning and legal action taken against them by school administration. Initial reactions from friends and family were reported to be supportive. Thirteen parents indicated that friends had been positive and supportive—often even financially—while seven reported that they had been supportive with some reservations. One parent specifically indicated that while friends fully supported her decision, family remained more reserved in their support until the results of the homeschooling proved to be a positive impact on her child.

School administrators' responses, however, were less supportive of parents' decision. Parents' indicated that local schools' responses ranged from ambivalence to resistance, and even to open antagonism. Parents indicated that they had to be quite persistent in requesting support services for their children, even when their children were under the age of compulsory schooling. One parent indicated that while there was no legal opposition, there was a fight for basic communication support for her child, a right that would have been given to another child that planned on going to public school. However, because of the parents' decision to homeschool, the school system resisted the request for help. The support that was finally granted for this family will end when the child is considered of school age.

One parent was directly asked by a special education professional "what exactly makes you qualified to educate your son?" Another reported a much more direct opposition in which she was given incorrect information about her parental rights and refused any support from the school system:

> *"My school district told me it was illegal to home school my daughter because she is disabled. The district started retaliating with truancy letters even though I had done all the papers they needed and filed a private school affidavit. I called a home school group who deals with legal issues to make sure I was doing what I needed. I called the state for additional information…Letters came frequently from the school district with various threats and my district would not give my daughter an individualized service plan as they were required to do. My district refused to give her any of her previous therapies and refused to help in any way."*

Participants indicated that the challenges they faced to homeschooling were not limited to negative responses to homeschooling from outsiders. Although this was frequently mentioned as a primary obstacle, other stressors appeared. These revolved around the issues of appropriate curricula, limited finances, lack of access to support services, communication difficulties, socialization restrictions, and the general lack of motivation of the child to learn.

Curricula present a challenge to homeschooling parents of deaf or hard of hearing children because there is no one curriculum that professionals support for homeschooling, nor is there a curriculum specifically designed for homeschooling deaf or hard of hearing children. As the many curricula available are investigated and decisions are made about how to adapt them and create lesson plans, parents still

struggle to know what exactly they should expect academically from their children with the new adjusted curricula. The process of choosing curricula and adapting it to meet individual needs is very time consuming. Participants indicate that they not only teach but also order, adapt, and create the resources that the children use.

Curriculum is also first on a long list of expenses that can arise during homeschooling. Financial drain caused from medical bills and private therapies also causes challenges to the pocket book. Because public schools often refuse or discourage the use of their resources for homeschooling families, parents are forced to pay for them in the private sector, a process that can become quite expensive. As therapists can be in high demand, some parents also struggle to find available services to them in a timely manner. A number of parents relayed that interpreting services became difficult to attain, expensive, and they were therefore forced to interpret everything themselves.

Communication seemed to be a central challenge to more than one parent. Two parents specifically indicated that they sought sign language instruction for themselves but had difficulty accessing services because of their decision to homeschool. Even when they did find places to learn, problems arose simply in becoming proficient enough to communicate well with their children. While some deaf people seem to encourage homeschoolers' interaction in Deaf Pride Days and other deaf community events, parents indicate that some members of the deaf community have not been supportive of their choice to homeschool, nor of the process of parents learning to sign.

Children, when not given social access, may become lonely in the homeschooling environment. A few parents indicated that they had difficulty finding the homeschooling network in their community. One indicated when they finally did, it was a positive experience that aided in the social development of her child. Another, however, stated that the homeschooling group rejected her child because of his deafness. These mixed results point out that while the homeschooling network is present, it is not always easily discovered, accessible or welcoming. As with any school, some children seem to lack motivation to learn or engage in schoolwork. Two parents mentioned that their biggest challenge is simply keeping their children motivated and convincing them that homeschool does not mean all play and no work.

4.5 Homeschool environment

The location of children's study varied, depending on the family. Some had a general set place such as the kitchen or dinner table where most of the homeschool materials were located. Others converted a spare room into an office or school, complete with white board and bulletin board. Some even sat on the couch or floor or wandered about the house in a loosely controlled environment. Most participants indicated access to a computer. Internet seemed to play an integral part of their homeschooling resources. A variety of reasons were given for internet use, including using it for finding certain curricular resources and lesson plans, support of student research projects, social connection with other homeschoolers, keeping current on education approaches, and finding homeschooling information.

Homeschooling families seemed to vary considerably in the construction of their school atmosphere. None of the parents reported homeschooling their children more than 6 hours daily, on average, although all but one of the participants reported homeschooling full-time. In fact, fourteen of the students did not spend more than 1-3 hours on schoolwork in an average day. As Figure 5 indicates, preschoolers never averaged more than 1-3 hours, and only three of the eleven elementary students, one of the middle school students, and two of the high school students averaged more than 1-3 hours of daily school work. Those that indicated more time during the day never averaged more than six hours.

Figure 5: Average Daily Schoolwork Hours by Grade Level
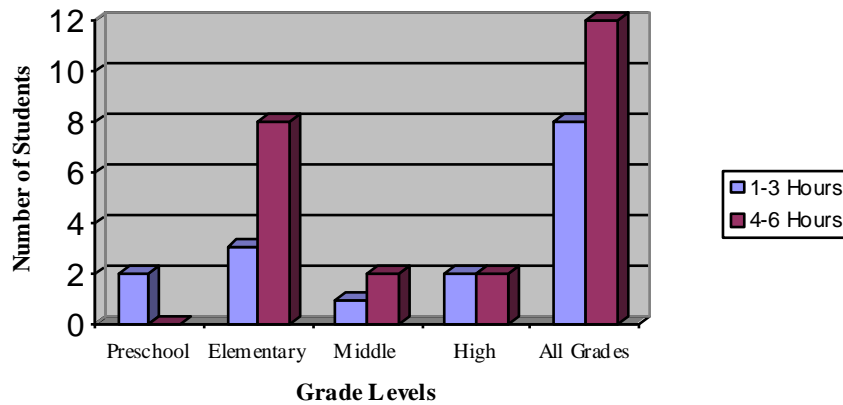
Most of homeschoolers' daily school schedules varied from day to day, dependent either on the goals of the parent or on the interests of the child. Two parents labeled their approach to education with a flexible day dependent on the interests of the child as "unschooling":

> *"I am a bit of an 'unschooler' so tend to just let her go about her business and answer questions for her about whatever she wants to know."*

> *"Through unschooling, (my son) has rediscovered his joy of learning. He's interested in everything and isn't shy about following up on learning new things. When you have a choice not only of what to study, but to what depth and for how long…well, it means you are more likely to express interest in new things and check it out to see if it's something you want to explore more fully."*

As Figure 6 shows, only five of the students indicated that their schedule was structured and consistent from day to day and these were all in elementary school. The rest of the 16 students were fairly split: nine indicated that their schedule varied daily, dependent on the parents' daily goals for the child, and seven indicated that their schedule varied daily, dependent on the interests of the child.

Figure 6: School Schedule Structure
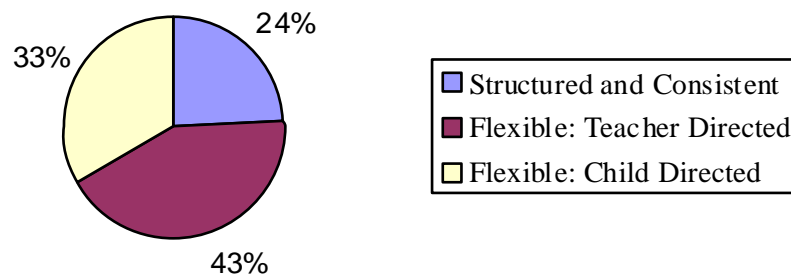
4.6 Communication and language preferences

Communication and language issues lie at the heart of deaf education. For this reason, parents were asked both to indicate the communication mode used principally during the school day and the communication mode used during home life, outside of school hours. While most parents indicated that the communication modes were the same regardless of the time of day or activity, three indicated that language inside the classroom and outside of the classroom were not consistently the same. One of these parents reported that while American Sign Language (ASL) was used during the school day, some combination of ASL, contact signing, and speech were used elsewhere. Another parent indicated that cued speech was used for school-work, but communication after hours was primarily done through speech only. The third parent indicated that while sign and speech was used during the school day, signs were dropped once the rest of the day began.

During the school day, five indicate that they communicate through sign only, eight report that they use a combination of sign with speech, and eight indicate that they use speech only. Of those that indicated using sign only for communication during the school day, four of the children are identified as deaf and one as hard of hearing. For this hard of hearing child, the parent identified herself as deaf. Of those that indicated using speech only for communication during the school day, seven are hard of hearing and only one is deaf. The parent of this deaf child specifically indicated that she waits to ensure that he is looking before speaking. See Figure 7 for a summary of student communication choices used during school.

Figure 7: Communication Preference During School
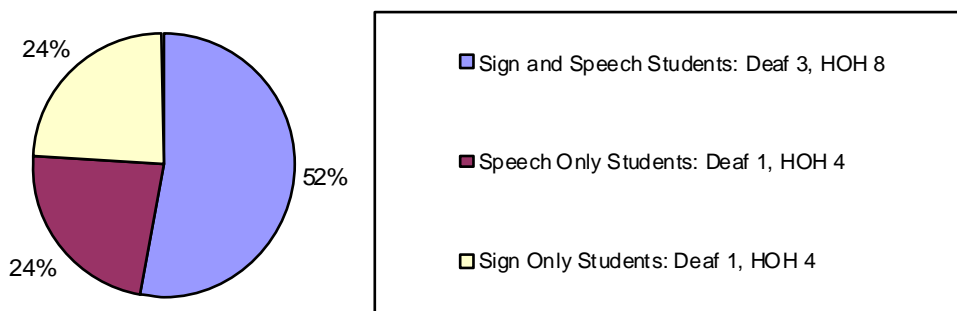
Parents reported that their children used (and did not use) a variety of hearing assistance devices. As Figure 8 indicates, the majority of the 20 responses indicate using hearing aids of some kind. Only two currently have a cochlear implant, although three more indicated that they were very interested in it, currently pursuing it, or waiting for technology to improve before they would go ahead with getting a cochlear implant. Those that mentioned switching from analog to digital hearing aids stated that the improvement in sound was significant and that they would never want to return to analog. Those who indicated that no hearing assistance device was worn stated that it was not necessary for communication, that it conflicted with learning, or that the child did not like the side-effects of its noise.

Figure 8: Use of Hearing Assistance Devices (of 20)

Cochlear Implant	2
Hearing Aids	13
None	5

4.7 Academic curricula

Academic curricula came from a myriad of sources for homeschoolers. Only one parent indicated using a specific curriculum: Calvert School Homeschooling Program. All of the others described a list of resources that they used. While participants listed over 50 separate curricula and textbook sources, this list is too long to include here. A few of the most common ones included ABeka, Alpha Omega, Bob Jones, Sonlight, Handwriting Without Tears, Saxon Math, and Math-U-See. Although some of the parents listed academic curricula from only a single provider, most indicated that they used some combination of a number of options at various times, depending on their student's needs and age.

The academic subjects studied during a typical school-day also varied among families, although there were a few standard ones. Figure 9 lists the subjects reported and the number of parents who indicated studying this subject material during a typical school day. Subjects that were reported by only a single parent were not included, although they touched on a number of important topics such as library skills, driver's education, sexuality education, Spanish as a foreign language, and computer skills.

Figure 9: Academic Subjects Studied During a Typical Schoolday (of 21)

English language arts (reading, writing, literature, spelling, vocabulary building, etc.)	21
Math	19
Science	19
Social Studies, History, Geography	14
Physical Education, Health	11
Art	10
Bible	7
Music	5
ASL, Sign skills	4
Logic, Critical Thinking	4
Speech Therapy	3

English language arts related subjects were reported the most frequently and seem to be of the highest concern to homeschooling parents. Every one of the 21 participants reported that they focused on English language arts during their school day. Even parents that ideologically hold to a more flexible school day, dependent on the desires of their children, indicated that English language arts was in some way a part of their education:

"Reading is primary. Math, science, (and) art are also important and included."

"My child does lots of reading and the rest varies depending on the day."

Math and science were the two next most popular subjects, with 19 participants indicating their inclusion in the school-day. Bible is as a topic being required by seven of the parents. This indicates that at least a third of the parents consider religious education to be of significant importance to the education of their child. This is in keeping with the motivations indicated by parents for homeschooling.

Time spent developing sign language skills is surprisingly low. This is especially true considering that 16 of the parents indicated that they used either sign only or a combination of sign and speech as their

communication choice during the school day. Of the four that reported focusing on sign skills, three specifically indicated American Sign Language, while one simply stated "sign skills".

4.8 Determining student success

Like most parents, homeschooling parents generally have an idea of what a successful outcome would look like for their child. As Figure 10 indicates, of the 19 that responded to this question, most listed certain academic qualities (especially the ability to use English in some way), and one hearing participant indicated that the ability to use ASL was a critical goal.

Figure 10: Desired Outcomes for Homeschooling (of 19)

Academic	12
Love of learning; lifetime learner	8
Character; contribution to society	6
Increased life abilities	6
Religious faith	2
General happiness	2

Parents were asked to describe the ways that they measured the academic achievement of their child. Testing within the home was the most popular means used to determine academic progress, followed closely by annual standardized tests. Some parents, although taking the standardized tests to fulfill legal expectations, stated that they did not believe them to be an accurate reflection of the academic achievement of their children.

Participants also indicated that they set goals and determined their child's success by whether they reached them. Others indicated that they simply monitored their child's daily growth as they worked alongside their children. One parent did not measure academic achievement only on the basis of subject matter knowledge, but instead determined it by other characteristics:

> *"Ease of communication with others outside our family, character development and manners, and grade level academic achievement."*

Figure 11 indicates the types of measurements homeschooling parents use. Some parents only used one type of measurement, while others used all four.

Figure 11: Determining Academic Success (of 21)

Home tests and assignments	11
Achievement testing from an accredited source (Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Stanford Achievement Test)	9
General observation	7
Goal setting and achievement	5

4.9 Socialization

   Parents chose to approach socialization of their children in a number of ways. Most placed their children in a variety of extracurricular activities at different locations. The most common of these was athletic activities through local clubs, the YMCA, little league, or recreational facilities. Considering that 15 of the parents had their child enrolled in at least one (and often as many as five) different athletic pursuits during the school year, it would seem that sports and health are of importance to homeschoolers.

   The second most popular social activities were those that were formed by homeschooling groups, some of which were specifically religious in nature while others were not. The homeschooling groups provided access to a variety of activities and opportunities ranging from cooperative teaching to group field trips to local sites of interest (e.g. museums and historical sites). Homeschooling groups also tended to form email list-serves or to create newsletters that were sent out periodically to keep homeschoolers connected and communicating. Some groups hosted larger activities that allowed children to interact and compete with each other for various purposes. One parent, for example, indicated that they went to a "Presentation Day" once a month where children in grades kindergarten through high school presented reports, poems, speeches, and artwork to each other.
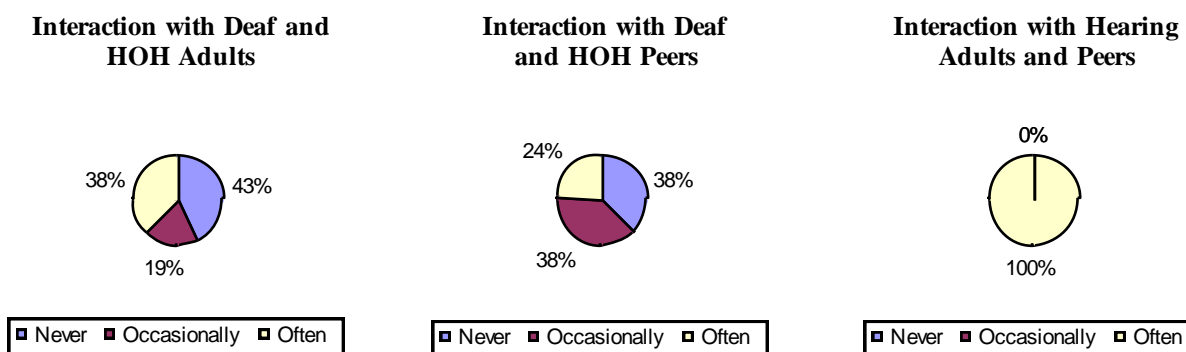
   Almost half of the parents also included their children in church activities. These took the form of weekly club meetings such as AWANA, Sunday School classes, weekly church services, drama productions, or other musical events. Private art and music lessons , neighborhood relationships, and even Deaf community social gatherings were less popular social events, but still seemed to be common among participants. Parents also seem to make extensive use of their local libraries. They checked out books for schoolwork, pleasure reading, participated in various programs offered by the library personnel, and used libraries for research projects that their children were conducting. See Figure 12 for a summary of social events in which homeschoolers engage.

Figure 12: Social Activities in which Homeschoolers Engage (of 21)

Physical Education (Baseball, Martial Arts, Horseback riding, etc.)	15
Homeschooling Group	11
Church Group/Services	10
Music and art lessons (piano, guitar, etc.)	8
Neighborhood relationships	5
Deaf Community Social Gatherings	4
Library activities and programs	3
Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts/4-H/Volunteer	3
Camps (drama, sports, etc.)	2
Public or Private School extracurricular activities	2

   When asked about their children's interaction with deaf or hearing peers and adults, the results showed that it was more than twice as common to interact with hearing people than deaf people, regardless of their age. When children did interact with deaf adults and peers it was through the deaf clubs, schools, churches, local deaf events, relatives, or short-term annual deaf camps. Interaction with hearing adults and peers, however, occurred in a much wider range of environments and for more extended periods of time. See Figure 13 for a summary of the frequency of interaction of homeschoolers with peers and adults, deaf and hearing.

Figure 13: Student Interaction with Peers and Adults

Interaction with Deaf and HOH Adults

38%   43%

19%

☐ Never ☐ Occasionally ☐ Often

Interaction with Deaf and HOH Peers

24%   38%

38%

☐ Never ☐ Occasionally ☐ Often

Interaction with Hearing Adults and Peers

0%

100%

☐ Never ☐ Occasionally ☐ Often

Although the results point out that nine of the children do not interact with deaf or hard of hearing adults and eight do not interact with deaf or hard of hearing peers, this should not necessarily be interpreted as a lack of desire. Although some parents simply answered "no" or "not really" to the question about the child's interaction with deaf or hard of hearing adults and peers, and one inferred that there was no need for deaf or hard of hearing interaction, at least a quarter of the parents gave responses that indicated that they felt this lack of contact…unfortunate. For example, one parent stated:

"One of the things we both miss from when (my child) went to the school for the deaf is the contact with other deaf/hoh people…we haven't connected with other deaf/hoh people…which is sad, really."

Other parents point out that they have not had any difficulty plugging into the deaf community. For deaf parents, there is a natural interaction with the deaf community through their own lives and friendships. For hearing parents, the availability of outside resources and interest that deaf and hard of hearing people take in the child's homeschooling experience play a key role in how much children interact with the deaf community.

"A Deaf teacher comes to our home weekly during the school year. We attend children's events hosted by the local Deaf Association once or twice a year. We are starting a monthly support group for families raising deaf children. Some Deaf adults have been involved in this."

"We have several Deaf and hard of hearing people who want to see this school succeed…Generally we find more things in Chicago than in our area, but we FIND opportunities for the kids to be with other Deaf people."

Communication preferences vary depending on the type of interaction occurring between hearing and deaf people. Some children communicated orally with fellow deaf/hard of hearing peers and adults, while others signed. Some children signed with hearing peers and adults. It depended on with whom they were interacting and the communication preference of the child, in general.

Mentoring relationships were few and far between. While 16 of the 19 respondents indicated there was no one in a mentoring relationship with their child or did not mention anyone in particular, five described a mentoring relationship in which their child was involved. Parents seemed to vary in the amount of importance that they placed on a mentorship relationship, with some parents simply stating "no" to the question and others indicating that the desire is there but for some reason the opportunity is not available. Of the five parents that did have a mentor for their child in some way, only two parents

indicated that those outside of the homeschooling environment were the mentors. One parent pointed to the parents of a friend while another pointed to a coach.

> "...her basketball/volleyball coach. This woman is a go-getter, very energetic and skilled at sports and emphasizes team work and good sportsmanship."

Three of the mentors were in a teaching role with the child. Mentoring behaviors included teaching, encouraging, correcting, instructing, recommending, guiding, supporting, interacting, having fun, and speech modeling. When indicating why they believed they were good mentors, they discussed their love and commitment, patience, and communication ability.

> "... She also has wonderful articulation and diction, so she is a great example of speech for my daughter to follow."

> "I am a nationally certified interpreter, a teacher with many years experience teaching Deaf children in both a Deaf School and a public school program (and now a private school...I have met and interacted with hundreds of Deaf people over the years and count several as good friends. This allows me to have a mental image of who these children might be when they grow up. I am able to change language or a way of explaining things to be more the way that Deaf people think because of this long history with Deaf people. I also think I'm a good mentor because I truly think it's ok to be Deaf. There is NOTHING wrong with these kids, they use a different language but they are not disabled. I respect them and Deaf culture and I expect a lot from them. I expect them to do things as well as hearing kids!"

As participants shared their homeschooling experiences, they, too, serve as possible role models for future and current homeschoolers. Parents were eager to give advice, based on their own experiences. For a complete list of parents' advice, see Appendix D. Advice centered around a number of common themes: motivation about parents' ability to teach, encouragement to treat the child as an individual, desire for parents to seek out accountability and social support, the need for the emphasis of reading skills and of sign language skills, and to stay persistent since homeschooling has both positive and negative experiences.

5.0 Discussion

Just as homeschooling was an option for families centuries ago, parents are still choosing to educate their children at home. They are driven by a number of motivations, perceive their experiences from a myriad of perspectives, and point to the diversity of educational experiences for deaf or hard of hearing children. Participants' responses to the survey questionnaires in this study revealed several key findings that point to a number of commonalities with deaf education on a holistic scale along with a few points of departure. This chapter provides an initial overall understanding of homeschoolers' experience, and serves as a springboard for future research by describing who is homeschooling, their motivations and expected outcomes, outside reactions and homeschooling challenges, construction of homeschooling academics, and the socialization of deaf and hard of hearing homeschoolers.

5.1 Discussion of key findings

5.1.1 Who is homeschooling?

This survey, which recruited participants through a snowball approach, included any person eligible for the study who indicated their interest in participation. While the researcher's expectation was that parents are the ones directly homeschooling their children, and this is true in the majority of the cases, this

study also points to other possibilities. Participants indicated that one challenge that they faced while homeschooling was the outside incredulity over their academic ability to teach their children. While only a few of the participants indicated that they have education degrees or teaching credentials, this study reveals that the majority of homeschooling parents may have higher education. More than half of the participants of this study earned a bachelor's degree or higher prior to homeschooling. Some parents may choose to combine their own teaching skills with others, not isolating themselves within the home. This includes bringing outside teachers and tutors into the home, sharing the load with other parents from day to day, and forming homeschooling networks that offer courses to homeschoolers across a region.

The 2004-2005 Gallaudet Research Institute Annual Survey indicates that the majority of deaf students are located in the South and Midwest. This homeschooling study reflects these numbers, as the majority of participants that responded were from Southern and Midwest sections of the United States. While homeschooling children were both deaf and hard of hearing, only three of the 21 participants indicated that they were either deaf or hard of hearing. This is not surprising considering that only 5-10 percent of deaf or hard of hearing children have deaf or hard of hearing parents (Mitchell and Karchmer, 2004). However, the presence of deaf parents indicates that they, alongside hearing parents, may be unsatisfied with present traditional deaf educational situations.

One surprising survey result is that all parents indicated being White, except one who abstained for answering. Considering the diversity present in the United States and Canada, this implies that there may be a specific racial cross-section of the country homeschooling. If these numbers extend past this group to homeschoolers as a whole, it would point to a need for further research to determine the causes of this trend, and a need for diversity training so that homeschoolers have interaction with the cultural variety present around them. In contrast to the uniformity in parent's racial background, four participants indicated that their children were from minority groups. Even this number, however, does not reflect the large percentage of minority deaf and hard of hearing children that are found in the deaf community. These findings, in conjunction with the indication that it is mostly hearing parents who are deciding to homeschool their children, show a need for diverse deaf and hard of hearing role models to be available to homeschoolers if their children are to see others whose life experiences and backgrounds reflect their own (Zirkel, 2001).

Parents indicated that homeschooled children ranged from preschool through high school ages, with the majority in elementary school. If this is indicative of the greater homeschooling population, the grade spread could be due to a number of reasons. First, because no specific grades were requested for this survey, it is not surprising that elementary school includes the greatest number of students as it includes the greatest total number of grades, as well. Also, as the homeschooling movement gains momentum, it is possible that the next generation of parents are deciding to homeschool their children at younger ages instead of waiting to see what happens in traditional schools. Although parents tend to have high levels of education, they still may not feel adequate to the task of teaching upper-level courses in areas where they did not focus their own academic training. This tendency may also lead to the higher proportion of younger students. Finally, it is possible that the children, as they grow and assert their own desires, start advocating for themselves to attend more traditional educational settings for various personal purposes.

5.1.2 Motivation of homeschool parents

Homeschooling parents of deaf or hard of hearing children, while supporting previous research that shows motivations for homeschooling to differ among families, also points out a common concern unique to this group. While the majority of parents enrolled their children in traditional educational environments prior to homeschooling, these experiences did not convince them to leave their children there. Instead, the primary reason parents are choosing to educate their children at home is because of a perceived lack of quality educational opportunities for their deaf or hard of hearing child, and negative experiences that they have had prior to homeschooling. Parents were simply not content with their children's academic

achievement, nor with the environment in which they were learning. This may come as a surprise to some, since many believe the primary motivation for homeschooling typically stems from religious motivations. Nevertheless, religious motivation is given as a reason far less often than is parents' desire for quality academic instruction.

This is not to imply that religious motivations do not play a part in homeschoolers' lives. In fact, freedom to make spiritual and moral choices drive many homeschooling families, but it is often a part of their motivation, not the whole of it. Some parents may even feel pressured to indicate a stronger religious motivation than they have in order to gain the legal protection available under the claim to religious freedom. Although specific information was not requested from parents about their religious affiliation, a third of the parents indicated that the Bible was a core component of their academic study. No other sacred text was mentioned. This indicates that most, if not all, of the families that indicated religious motivations for their homeschooling affiliated with Christianity; and that Christians, in general, may be at the heart of the homeschooling movement.

In keeping with the overall homeschool development, parents are often removing their children from traditional educational environments after having experienced a disappointment, in some way, of the educational goals for their child. These negative experiences are not limited to a single traditional environment, but are being experienced both in mainstreamed settings and in special schools for the deaf. This finding supports Allen and Schoem's (1997) claim that there are potential problems in all deaf educational settings. As both hearing and deaf parents are choosing to homeschool, this study also supports Thumann-Prezioso's (2005) research indicating that both hearing and deaf parents are concerned about the current status of deaf education and are looking to make changes, sometimes by pursuing an option that requires a huge effort and time commitment on the part of the parents.

While parents almost always indicate that they have a personal desire to homeschool their children, some parents comment about how their children were very unhappy in public and private schools, that they were not learning, were experiencing negative effects of their minority status, and there was a lack of cultural appreciation, both of their ethnicity and their deafness. As Penn-Nabrit (2003) points out, discrimination is still apparent in many of the school environments despite the drive toward multiculturalism and diversity education. Many homeschooling parents, to avoid this discrimination and negative social training, are finding other social and educational activities for their children in which they can have positive interaction and achieve academically.

Parents indicated a broader spectrum of expected outcomes for their homeschooling experience than simple academic excellence and social capabilities. While academics were the primary concern, homeschoolers also expect their children to internalize a love of learning that will be life long. This love of learning goes beyond academic knowledge to include integrity of personal character, valuable contributions to society, and the ability to live independently and productively. Homeschooling parents generally are looking at the long-term effects of their educational choices instead of the immediate ease of their lifestyles.

5.1.3 Outside reactions and other challenges

Support and opposition comes from a number of angles, and reveal that the road of homeschoolers is not always easy. Families and friends that may be initially reserved in their support, upon finding the children doing better than when they were in traditional settings, become fully supportive. In fact, friends may be even more supportive than family in the initial stages. Although the reason for this trend was not probed or volunteered in the survey, it is plausible that it is a result of friends' closer interactions with the parents' perspectives and experiences, or that families feel a greater vested interest in the successful outcome of the child's education. Homeschooling groups also seem to be a hub of support for parents, whether through face-to-face interaction at various arranged activities and events, or through Internet resources and communication. While parents apparently know very few other homeschoolers of deaf or

hard of hearing children in their area, some use Internet resources to connect with this subset of homeschoolers across the country. Many indicated the desire to form closer connections with other homeschoolers like themselves in order to support each other in the task of homeschooling, as well.

Many families experience negative reactions from public and private school administrations upon their decision to homeschool. While this could be a result of any number of factors, participants in this study indicate that school personnel seem to be concerned in parents' ability to teach, the successful social integration of their children, that children's education is the territory of professional educators, and the legalities surrounding the choice to homeschool. While their concerns may vary in their legitimacy, the way that parents feel they have been poorly treated points to the need for greater understanding and communication between parents and school administrators in an effort to work well together to meet children's educational needs. These responses by participants also show that homeschooling is at the center of the integration debate, as they deal with most of the seven issues that drive the integration debate, as described by Osgood (2005). Further investigation and understanding of how homeschooling parents approach integration of their children could stretch the understanding of the typical polarized educational scene of complete segregation or total integration of deaf or hard of hearing students into the hearing mainstream.

Many parents struggle to find the support services that they need because of the cost of private services, the unavailability of private practitioners, and the unwillingness of schools to accommodate homeschoolers. This is an issue that needs to be addressed on a number of levels. For example, it needs to be addressed at an economic level, as schools typically need monetary accommodations to support homeschoolers out of their limited budget and parents may need the support services that their local schools can provide in order to provide a solid education for their children. Increased communication between educational parties also needs to be encouraged so that parents and schools all know the rights and responsibilities of homeschoolers and their diverse needs. With the increase in homeschoolers across the country, it is important for these children's future success that accommodations be made available to them in a way that is advantageous for all.

Participants also indicated that they have removed their children from schools in an effort to create positive social environments in which they can grow. While many parents are finding support from family, friends, and other homeschoolers, it is not always easy to get or stay connected to these support groups. Some parents, hearing and deaf, find it difficult to convince their children to become plugged into the deaf community or into the homeschooling network in their area. The overall reasons for this, whether because of the child's possible shyness or some previous negative event with these groups, were not always indicated. One parent in this study described discrimination from homeschooling groups who did not want to accommodate her child's deafness and others described a general avoidance of them by deaf people in their community because of the decision to homeschool. This points to the need for increased connection and understanding between homeschooling families with deaf or hard of hearing children and the social groups with which they could become involved.

5.1.4 Construction of the academic environment

While parents are aware that there are usually legal expectations for their homeschools and work to fulfill these requirements, some parents seem to have a constant awareness and apprehension that their rights may be questioned at any time. Because of the different laws in each region, parents must learn the details for their specific school district. Also, because laws are constantly evolving and changing, they must stay up-to-date with the legalities of their educational choice. Currently, these regulations range from no requirements demanded of parents, annual standardized achievement exams, formal interaction with a certified teacher on a tri-annual basis, to a review of the curricula and academic studies of the students by school administrators. For children who require more individualized attention, rules may be even more stringent. Parents who want to access their public institutions' support services must find out

their area's policies. While some will allow use of services provided the child has an IEP, other will not allow homeschoolers access. Participants indicated that schools were not always aware of their duties to homeschoolers while other participants seemed not to know their own rights or responsibilities. School administrators and teachers must stay aware of the regulations so that they can deal accurately and supportively with parents for the benefit of the students.

The construction of the school at home is not standard among families. As could be inferred from parents motivation to homeschool in order to have more flexibility in their schedules and lives, children tend not to have a consistent schedule nor a standard place where they do their schoolwork. While parents tend to spend less time than might be expected on school work with their children, they also try to engage their children in extra activities outside of the home through homeschool groups, their local schools and churches, or other recreational and educational clubs. Many of these activities focus on their children's physical well-being and socialization. Some would argue that the one to three hours of schoolwork that roughly 40 percent of the students reportedly do is far too little. However, these numbers must be combined with the number of hours that children spend in extracurricular activities. A point of further study would be to compare these numbers of schoolwork hours with more traditional educational environments, in order to see if children in private and public schools spend an equivalent, less, or more time in academic study during a typical day.

Academic curricula for homeschoolers tend to come from a variety of sources, and while a number of subjects are reportedly studied, the primary concern of all parents is their children's English skills. Parents tend to make great use of their local library to supplement the curricula that they buy, with books to read and activities to try. Reading is emphasized by all. Sign skills of any kind took a much less prominent place in the subjects parents reported. This may be of concern for these children as language and communication issues have been argued by many researchers, including Baker (2003) and Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989), to play an integral role in a child's social well-being, access to curricular content, and self-esteem. Some parents indicated that they did not feel comfortable with their level of sign skills, yet they chose to teach their children through a mixture of sign and speech. The question lingers in homeschooling situations as to whether children have enough linguistic access to the material that parents are providing to excel.

Communication preferences tend to remain constant during schoolwork times and outside of schoolwork times. While the majority of parents in this study used both sign and speech with their children, sign-only and speech-only environments were present. Sign-only environments, however, tended only to be used with deaf children and speech-only environments with hard of hearing children. Less than half of the environments described in this study used sign-only communication by hearing parents. Instead, the majority of sign-only environments were a result of deaf parents or of a previous deaf educator that believed in the value of ASL in deaf education. This points to the continued value of spoken language for most parents, as hearing parents tend to use spoken language either in addition to or as an alternative to sign language.

As stated earlier, parents are not motivated exclusively by the academic success of their children when choosing to homeschool. They are, however, adopting various measures of monitoring their children's academic development both to keep themselves on track and to fulfill legal regulations. While many children take standardized tests, parents generally track academic progress through observation within the home, paying less heed to annual standardized tests and more to their own goal setting and daily progress. This is not surprising, as both parents and teachers question the validity of these tests to accurately measure a child's achievement (Johnson, 2002).

Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989) point out to a number of critical components for successful deaf education. They state that parental involvement and support is key to the successful development of deaf students, academically, emotionally, and otherwise. Homeschooling creates a situation where parents are intimately involved in the students' lives and focus their education on reading skills, according to Allen

and Schoem (1997) a traditionally weak area for deaf students. They also state that it is important for teachers and parents to have realistically high expectations of their children. Homeschooling parents tend to exhibit this component positively. Most participants indicated that they expect their children to accomplish the same as any hearing child, and it was primarily because of lack of successful academic and social accomplishments that they decided to homeschool. However, the third critical component of positive deaf education as described by Johnson, Liddell, and Erting (1989) is linguistic access, and the results of this seem to be mixed. While parents who sign and speak are not always confident in their signing skills, children are still seeing this as their primary language model both within school hours and in home life. Parents indicating sign-only seemed to feel they were good language models, and those who indicated speech-only, did so with their hard of hearing children who wore hearing aids. Further research into this area as to the linguistic and communicative success of the homeschooling environment is needed.

5.1.5 Socialization of homeschool students

Because homeschooling is occurring for children and youth anytime during their first twenty years of life—critical identity-forming stages—it is important that their environment be conducive to identity construction. As hearing homeschooling parents educate their deaf or hard of hearing children at home, it is vital for children to be given the opportunity to be exposed to a broad range of cultural experiences so that they can make informed decisions about their own identity, understand the world as a whole, and their place within it. Much of these decisions will be based on the communication choices of the parents and children.

Allen and Schoem (1997) point out that degree of hearing loss is a factor that impacts communication choice. The results of this survey support these findings as the majority of speech-only students were hard of hearing and the majority of sign-only students were deaf. The exception to this was when parents were deaf themselves, again leading to the support Allen and Schoem's research that indicates parental hearing status to be of importance for the communication choices of their children. Researchers (Ramsey, 1997; Stinson and Foster, 2000; Spencer, Erting, and Marschark, 2000) point out that communication is primary for a child's socialization and positive social engagement. How these communication preferences are being used in daily life is important not only within the home, but outside of it.

Homeschooling brings both these worlds together, and as the majority of children are communicating via speech and sign both in school and home, interaction with both hearing and deaf worlds seem to be of importance. Parents' indication of the importance of homeschoolers' social interaction with deaf and hard of hearing adults and peers appears to be inconsistent, at best. Many homeschooling deaf or hard of hearing children never have interaction with deaf or hard of hearing adults or peers, although interaction with hearing peers and adults is common.

Participants indicated that children are being placed in extracurricular activities in a number of ways. The most common of these are athletic activities, but various combinations of homeschooling academic and social meetings, church services, art and music lessons, camps, and deaf community social gatherings are also done. Because of the possibility of homeschooling networks, deaf children of deaf parents may have the opportunity to interact with deaf children of hearing parents, but will be surrounded mostly by hearing homeschoolers. However, this study's results point to deaf children of deaf parents interacting with the deaf community and deaf school's events more than with other deaf homeschoolers or homeschoolers in general. This may be due to few deaf homeschoolers in the area, to limited knowledge and communication, or to lack of initiative. Homeschooling networks unique to deaf students and deaf parents could increase the amount of socialization that occurs between deaf adults and children, while allowing for the identity development and interaction of hearing and deaf worlds. This, in Padden's (in press) description, could become a new deaf space.

Mentoring relationships were also reportedly rarely among these homeschoolers. Although some parents indicated a desire or current search for a proper mentor, the majority of the children had none, and

their parents were not actively engaged in a search for any. The few mentors that were described by participants as impacting their children's lives were all hearing. They were considered good role models because of their positive attitude toward deaf people, their ability to speak clearly, or their motivational personality.

This lack of matched mentoring relationships and interaction with deaf or hard of hearing peers and adults supports Zirkel's (2002) findings that minority groups tend to have fewer matched role models available to them. This is concerning in light of the findings that this void affects their self-esteem, their academic success, and their identity development. It also points to a need for parents to introduce their children to deaf and hard of hearing people in order for them to not remain marginalized in the in-between world of Glickman and Carey's (1993) and Leigh, et al.'s (1998) identity scale. Since most of the children in this study are communicating with sign and speech, they have both visual and auditory centers to their way of being. For children to be able to negotiate bi-culturally the deaf and hearing worlds, a trait that some would claim as necessary, they need to be able to individually and socially define themselves.

5.2 Is homeschooling a least restrictive environment?

According to the United States Commission on Education of the Deaf, unique factors critical for the successful education of deaf and hard of hearing students include communicative, linguistic, academic, social, emotional, motivational, cultural, and family support needs (Innes, 2000, p. 3). In review of the homeschool environments described in this study, creating an accommodating atmosphere depends on each parents' implementation of their educational program. Parents are deciding which of these factors are necessary in their school and home environment, and while a few parents indicate that there are concerns in some of these areas in their own situations, others are convinced that they are covering them well.

In essence, homeschooling, like any educational environment, is dependent on many interacting factors that are unique to each family. Whether hearing social norms or deaf cultural values thrive in the homeschooling environment depends much on whether the parents are deaf or hearing and whether deaf or hearing people interact with the child on a consistent basis. The potential for homeschooling to be a positive educational experience, academically and socially, for the child and the parent, is evident by these parents' responses. However, their responses also point to challenges that could make the homeschooling situation a negative one.

Whether or not homeschooling deaf or hard of hearing students reflect the overall trend for homeschoolers to fare better than their peers academically, socially, and in self-esteem is a matter for future research. However, with the individual attention that can be given to the child, homeschooling does provide a situation where the deaf or hard of hearing child can excel at their own pace, with their individual needs being met. In this way it is possible that homeschooling can be a least restrictive environment and inclusive in the way that Osgood (2005) argues. Homeschooling can also become an important key to the debate of integration and segregation, as it often transcends either a strictly segregated deaf environment or a complete integration with hearing society when parents specifically place their children in both environments.

5.3 Future research

Homeschooling research, on a whole, is scant, and homeschooling research about deaf and hard of hearing children non-existent. This study is meant to be a pilot study from which future research can begin. The directions that research of this topic could take are limitless, but a few possibilities are indicated below. Much is not known about the children's perspective of their homeschooling experience, or about school administrators' experience interacting with homeschoolers. Whether or not homeschooling deaf or hard of hearing students are excelling academically and socially is another matter that needs investigation. This is a small cross-section of thousands of deaf and hard of hearing

homeschoolers across the country and around the world. Future research should look to incorporating this group into the existing deaf education research, homeschooling research, and global education research.

This study also brings to light another group of people that have been overlooked: deaf or hard of hearing parents who are homeschooling their hearing children. While children of deaf adults have a rich experience of their own, this unique educational environment is another area ripe with possibility for understanding cultural transmission, language acquisition, and social integration. It could also point out the various aspects of education that deaf adults consider important and how they apply these to the education of their children.

Future research should examine the role that mentoring relationships have in homeschoolers' lives in providing matched role models. Do these relationships impact the educational and social success of deaf and hard of hearing children in their ability to successfully learn the appropriate times and ways to interact in social situations? Homeschoolers can also give insight into the integration debate. Osgood (2005) indicates seven characteristics that mark the debate around the importance of integration in education. These characteristics can be further matched with the homeschooling environment to determine not only its degree of integration, but to shed further light on the benefits or negative implications of integration on deaf and hard of hearing students.

Until homeschooling environments with deaf and hard of hearing people are investigated, research continues to have a gap in understanding of the ways of deaf and hard of hearing people, their community, and their culture. In addition, through further investigation of the homeschooling movement, homeschoolers can find ways to improve the education that they are offering their deaf or hard of hearing children. This study hopefully serves as a catalyst to the better understanding of a minority group within a minority group: homeschooling deaf children, or deaf homeschoolers. By learning from the life experiences of those who apply principles of education within their home in loving care of their children, improvements can be made both for the future of deaf education and homeschoolers.

Appendix A: Homeschooling deaf and hard of hearing children questionnaire

Please respond to this survey if you are a homeschooling parent or guardian of a deaf or hard of hearing child. Return completed questionnaire before January 15, 2006 by email to Elizabeth.Parks@gallaudet.edu.

This questionnaire is part of a study being done by a student in the Deaf Studies department at Gallaudet University. The purpose of this questionnaire is to better understand parental perspectives of homeschooling deaf and hard of hearing students. Your responses will be used to help us understand the experience of deaf education in the home, parental motivations for homeschooling, and community interaction for homeschoolers.

Please complete this questionnaire to the best of your ability. Twenty questions related to the construction of your homeschooling environment, your motivation to homeschool, and your child's community interaction will follow a brief demographics section. This questionnaire should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. Although your answers to all parts of this questionnaire are valued, participation is voluntary and you may omit any questions to which you are uncomfortable responding.

All information which would permit your identification will be held strictly confidential.

If you are a parent or guardian homeschooling a deaf/hard of hearing child, please fill-out the following demographic information about yourself as completely as possible.

Parent/Guardian Information

Gender _____   State and County of Residence _____

Identity Status (choose one answer that best describes you)
     _____ deaf
     _____ hard of hearing
     _____ hearing

Race/Ethnic Background (mark all that apply)

_____ White	_____ Asian/Pacific Islander
_____ Black	_____ American Indian/Alaska Native
_____ Hispanic/Latino	_____ Unknown
_____	Other (specify)

Source of Primary Household Income (example: type of occupation): _____

What is the highest educational degree you have completed? _____

If you homeschool more than one child, please report information related to your oldest homeschooled deaf/hard of hearing child.

Child/Student Information

Age _____   Gender _____

Identity Status (choose one answer that best describes your child)
      _____ deaf
      _____ hard of hearing
      _____ hearing

Race/Ethnic Background of child (mark all that apply)

_____ White   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander

_____ Black   _____ American Indian/Alaska Native

_____ Hispanic/Latino   _____ Unknown

Other (specify) _____

Current Educational Level of child
      _____ Elementary
      _____ Middle School
      _____ High School

The following 20 questions relate to your experience as a home-schooling parent/guardian.

Homeschool Environment

For questions 1-7, choose one answer that best describes your homeschooling environment.

1. My child is homeschooled _____.
      A. Full-time
      B. Part-time

2. My child spends _____ hours a day, on average, doing schoolwork.
      A. 1-3
      B. 4-6
      C. 7-9
      D. More than 9 hours

3. We follow a daily schedule that _____.
      A. is structured and consistent from day to day
      B. varies day to day, dependent on my daily goals for the child
      C. varies day to day, dependent on the interests of the daily child

4. The primary educator in our homeschool environment is the _____.
      A. Mother
      B. Father
      C. Both, equally
      D. Other (specify) _____

5. Which one of the following communication modes is principally used to teach your child?

        A. Speech only

        B. Cued Speech

        C. Sign with speech

        D. Sign only

        E. Other (specify) _____

6. Which one of the following communication modes is principally used outside of school?

        A. Speech only

        B. Cued Speech

        C. Sign with speech

        D. Sign only

        E. Other (specify) _____

7. How would you describe the response of friends and family to your decision to homeschool?

        A. Positive and supportive

        B. Supportive with reservations

        C. Discouraging

        D. Openly in opposition

        E. Other (specify) _____

For question 8, please mark all that apply.

8. In what other types of educational environments, other than homeschooling, has your child been placed? (Mark all that apply.)

        A. Self-contained (deaf)

        B. Self-contained, special education with support

        C. Multiply handicapped classroom (deaf)

        D. Resource, special education

        E. General education (mainstreamed)

        F. Other (specify) _____

Please answer questions 9-13 as completely as possible.

9. How many (if more than one) of your children have you homeschooled?

10. How many total years have you homeschooled your child(ren)?

11. Please list the subject material (math, science, etc.) included in your schoolday.

12. Do you use specific curricula? If so, please list any and all curricula you use.

13. In what ways do you measure academic achievement of your child?

Homeschool Motivation

Questions 14-15 relate to your motivation for homeschooling. Please respond as completely as possible.

14. For what reason(s) did you decide to homeschool your child?

15. Please describe any challenges you encountered when first homeschooling.

Community Involvement

Questions 16-20 relate to your child's involvement in the community. If your child is involved in any activities or relationships outside the home, please respond as completely as possible.

16. Please list any extracurricular activities in which your child is involved and where these activities are hosted.

17. Does your child interact with deaf/hard of hearing adults? If so, please describe the location(s), frequency, and mode of communication in these interactions.

18. Does your child interact with deaf/hard of hearing peers? If so, please describe the location(s), frequency, and mode of communication in these interactions.

19. Does your child interact with hearing adults and peers? If so, please describe the location(s), frequency, and mode of communication in these interactions.

20. Does your child have a relationship with a specific person whom you would consider a "mentor"?
    If so, please answer parts A and B.

       A. Describe the qualities of this person that makes them a good mentor for your child.
       B. Describe the mentoring role that he/she has with your child—what does the mentor
       and your child do that makes it a mentoring relationship?

Thank you for participating in this project! Your time and effort is greatly appreciated! Please send completed questionnaire to the address on the first page.

May I contact you to learn more about your unique homeschool experience? _____ *Yes* _____ *No*
Would you like to receive a copy of the project results upon its completion? _____ Yes _____ No

If answering yes to either of the above questions, please include contact information:
Name _____
Email _____
Address _____
Telephone/TTY _____

Appendix B: Follow-up questionnaire

Dear (Participant's Name),

Thank you so much for your help with this homeschooling project! Your time and input are greatly appreciated.

After reading through and processing the participants' responses to the questionnaires, I have six follow-up questions for you. If at all possible, please answer and respond before the end of February. If you need any clarification, please do not hesitate to ask. Feel free to email your answers back to this address.

1. In what ways do you use the Internet and web-based resources to support your homeschooling?

2. Describe the place (the physical location) where your child does most of his/her academic learning. (e.g. In their bedroom on the floor, in an office at a desk, at the kitchen table, etc.)

3. What special legal issues must be considered when homeschooling a deaf or hard of hearing child in your state? What legal challenges or frustrations, if any, did you personally experience?

4. What kind(s), if any, of hearing assistance device(s) does your child use? (e.g. Body aid hearing aid on one ear, cochlear implant on one ear and earl-level hearing aid on the other, FM hearing aids, etc.) For what reasons did you choose this technology over other types for your child?

5. What expected outcomes do you have for your child's education at home? How will you determine success?

6. If you had one piece of advice for someone who is considering homeschooling their deaf or hard of hearing child, what would it be?

Thanks again for your time and effort. I look forward to your reply!

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

Appendix C: Homeschooling online recruitment post

Are you a parent homeschooling your deaf or hard of hearing child(ren)? Would you like to see more parents and educators understand the experience of homeschooling a deaf/hard of hearing child? If so, I need your input!

As a graduate student at Gallaudet University in the Deaf studies program, I am exploring homeschooling as practiced in the d/Deaf community. As a frequently overlooked option in deaf education, this study is designed to explore the experiences of homeschooling families, whether part-time or full-time, in order to educate others about the potential costs and benefits of homeschooling.

This study will primarily be done through written questionnaires and face-to-face interviews that are designed to better understand, through the eyes of parents, the construction of the homeschool environment, the motivation of homeschooling parents, and the experiences of homeschoolers.

If you believe you are a good fit for this study and are interested in becoming involved, or you would like to receive more information about this study, please contact me at Elizabeth.Parks@gallaudet.edu.

Appendix D: Parents' advice for parents considering homeschooling

- YOU CAN DO IT! Just research your options and find support.

- Seriously consider what you have to offer. Nobody will understand your child's unique communication needs better than you will. Chances are you can offer a better student-teacher ratio. Research relaxed/unschooling methods.

- It is very individual. First you need to get the child used to it and not push too hard because you will stress yourself and your child. If the schools don't want to help and you have the ability to make the choice it is a good option. You know your child the best and can tune into how they learn and what they need much better than people they will not be with very long (teachers). Sign language is very helpful as a learning tool even if you are not proficient. Social aspects are easy to overcome by being resourceful and finding local home support groups. It can be a bit difficult if your child has no deaf friends but you will find home school families are more receptive and sometimes they will start a class for sign language just because you are around which opens many doors like it has for us.

- Learn ASL and take advantage of every teaching moment. READ READ READ. Don't quash your child's willingness to learn just because it doesn't fall within "the standards.

- Do it. After all, who knows and loves and is more dedicated to your child acquiring language and learning to read than you are??? All I heard from the 'professionals' was that my daughter would do best in a teacher student ratio of as close to one to one as possible. And she is.

- It's important to know that you are not alone. It's hard to get support when you have deaf children…so find a group as soon as you start to teach at home.

- Don't be afraid to do it because of your child's hearing loss. My son told me that home is less noisy. That to me says it all!

- Have faith, get support, and remember that there is more to schooling than academics. For me, the most rewarding part of homeschooling my sons is that we are able to spend time learning together. We support each other, and work through not only academic issues, but social and spiritual issues as well.

- Be patient and get excellent support from private therapists. I also try to network with other parents who have children in similar situations. But, it's really hard to find children who have Down Syndrome, have the significant hearing loss (my daughter) has, and home school!

- You don't have to do this alone! If you look and ask around, you will find professionals and experienced parents who are ready and willing to help you each step along the way.

- My advice is for other homeschooling moms, dads, or parents who are deaf or don't know any sign language well is that they need to make plans ahead to find the interpreters for classes, tutoring sessions, etc. and meet other deaf/hard of hearing students who are homeschooled nearby to associate with so they can learn new things. Also find out if the school for the deaf allows the deaf/hard of hearing homeschooling students to have one or more classes there or go with other students for the field trips if possible.

- My advice for those considering homeschooling ANY child would be to remember that child WANT to learn and it is usually school that eventually convinces them that it is something they don't like. Specifically for a deaf or HOH child, my advice would be to make sure that your child has excellent language role models. For a signing child, I think an adult in their life whose first language is ASL is a MUST. For a HOH child, adults who speak articulately are important language models. And reading Is a must for all homeschooled kids, no matter how they do it. Reading TO them until they

are READY to learn (probably when they are 7 or so) is probably the best way to encourage them to WANT to learn to read. The challenges for signing kids learning to read are greater, but Deaf adults I've known who are excellent readers have proven to me that even those challenges can be overcome. If a child can read, he or she can learn ANYTHING.

- Trust your intuition and focus on your child's strengths. Use a lot of visual resources. Workbooks work well in this regard as well as editorial TV, movies. Stay tuned in to your child, constantly being their advocate.

- The most important thing is language! If your child needs ASL and you are not FLUENT in ASL, don't homeschool! Get your child in an environment where they can truly understand and learn, whether that's at home, Deaf School, private school, or public school.

- I've heard over and over that the one thing that all successful hearing impaired adults have is a determined mother. I think that's true. If you believe in your child, trying new methods, your child will learn. Teaching a deaf child is a roller coaster ride: so keep the determination and have fun!

- Get involved in a good group of people who homeschool, deaf, hoh, or not. Support is the key!

- If there is a calling from above, respond to HIM for in every trial produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character…Character in our children and us blossoms from this homeschooling experience to strengthen family. Seek resources on parenting; go to support groups, attend Bible studies, find other Deaf and HOH activities in the community to participate or volunteer in. Grow with your children whether they are deaf, hoh, or hearing.

- Go for it! You can do it because you know your own child! Don't let the experts convince you that only an expert can deal with a D/deaf/HOH kid. There is nothing so wonderful for dealing with communication as one on one interaction! Search out the resources and support on the Internet by googling "deaf homeschool".

- If you love your child (the main qualification for homeschooling) and you love learning (something your child will "catch") homeschooling is a wonderful way to keep your child in front of an adult speaker (at close range). If you find that the "experts" resist your decision, find a support group, decide that this is worth your effort (it does take effort), and remember that you will be in relationship with your child long after the "experts" have moved on to other children/jobs. This is a long-term process, but the education of a child with any handicap needs to be carefully tailored, even changing methods in the middle of a school year. The most flexible education situation is found at home, and your interest in your child will always be greater than that of the "experts, no matter how well-educated they are. It only makes sense that the one who has to schedule the appointments with the ENT, the audiologist, and the pediatrician is also the one who knows when more work is needed on phonics, reading comprehension, or math. Your child won't cave under peer pressure and say he/she understands something when he/she doesn't—just b/c the rest of the class wants to move on. And, conversely, when your child understands a concept, you can zip ahead, giving more time to the areas that need the work. Finally, the home environment represents safety: freedom to grow and learn without the feeling of being "different."

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