"I'm Not Talking to Myself, I'm Having a Parent-Teacher Conference!": A Study of Literacy Practices and Mediation within Homeschooling Families

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“I’M NOT TALKING TO MYSELF, I’M HAVING A PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE!”:
A STUDY OF LITERACY PRACTICES AND MEDIATION WITHIN HOMESCHOOLING
FAMILIES

by

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B.S. Florida State University, 2012

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Homeschooling is a dynamic learning and living community producing a growing percentage of our nation’s college-ready students. Serious academic studies of homeschooling remain scarce, and those that exist tend to come out of sociology and anthropology. Through an analysis of the literacy practices that constitute the work of homeschooling, this study offers findings and conclusions relevant to current discourses in the fields of literacy studies and rhetoric and composition. These include discussions on the ways technology is reshaping and individualizing traditional models of literacy learning and composing, as well as the growing research on the specific actions taken by literacy brokers when mediating mainstream literacy practices to novices.

This study borrows theoretical and methodological concepts provided by the New Literacy Studies in order to understand the ways in which two homeschool families with high school students learn and practice various literacies. Data collection methods included interviews, observations, and participant-produced literacy logs. I took an ecological approach to data analysis that required identifying the specific literacy practices and events of the participants and attempting to situate them within the context of the homeschooling movement and culture at large.

A primary finding of the study is that homeschool mothers’ role in their students’ literacy practices often resembles the work of what scholars term literacy brokers. These mothers actively mediate a wide variety of mainstream or institutional practices and values to their children. While current discussions of literacy brokers detail their actions of advocacy,
guidance, and assistance, this study contributes to our understanding of literacy brokers by highlighting homeschool mothers’ actions of delegation and customization within the mediation process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It remains an oddity in my mind that only one name will be placed on the title of this thesis. Odd, because this project’s existence and much of the valuable parts within it are indebted to quite a few individuals. First and foremost of these individuals is my committee chair, Dr. Angela Rounsaville. Over the course of this study, Dr. Rounsaville guided me and my project with exceptional knowledge, insight and - perhaps most necessary – grace. I am truly and deeply grateful to have learned and been constantly encouraged by her. This gratefulness extends to my committee members, Dr. Kevin Roozen and Dr. Stacey Pigg, who provided me with plenty of productive, generative questions and sources at the outset of my research. The help of my committee members was supported by the excellent teaching of the rest of the Rhetoric and Writing faculty at UCF. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Elizabeth Wardle and Dr. Douglas Walls for classes that were both challenging and foundational to my approach to writing and literacy research.

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This study is clearly not possible without the participation of the incredibly busy and incredibly gracious homeschool families. To all the families who let me annoy them with questions about reading, writing and literacy, please accept my fullest thanks.

I thank my family, who pushed me and supported me throughout my entire academic journey. And mostly, I thank my beautiful wife, Hannah Marie, whose encouragement was endless and whose patience with a chore-forgetting, library-dwelling recluse nothing short of saintly.

Finally, I give thanks to God, who made all the aforementioned graces possible and because “He is good; His steadfast love endures forever” (1 Chronicles 16:34).
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A homeschool t-shirt worn by a mother during my research and which inspired the title of this paper. Courtesy of Zazzle.com
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study, like most, began with a question. It was a question that I had been asked since childhood. Whenever my peers – be they on the city-league basketball team, in the guitar class, or at the local park – asked what school I attended I could immediately predict their follow-up questions once I answered, “I homeschool”: (1) *Do you get to do all your work in pajamas?*, (2) *Do you have any friends?*, and (3) *What type of work do you do in homeschool?* The first two answers were easy: (1) *I don’t like pajamas*, and (2) *yes*. But the third question has stuck with me, presenting itself to me even now as I work as a public school teacher and have graduated from a large public university. While I could of course tell you what kind of work I was doing, I couldn’t really tell you what my other homeschool friends were doing. And even as I look back on my experience as a homeschooler, the memories become vague and blurry. Like the public school students I teach now have expressed to me, certain projects, books, learning achievements and frustrations tend to stand out, but the rest of my learning seems to just mesh together. I feel like learned well enough but I couldn’t really describe to you how I learned from my own personal experience. All I knew was that I graduated from homeschooling¹ with a strong interest in reading and writing and the encouragement to pursue it at the next level.

¹ I was part of a graduating class of five (and no, the others were not my siblings). My diploma was printed on a piece of a white copy-paper, displayed a picture of the *Lord of the Rings* character Gandalf, and read in bold, Imprint-font: “You shall pass.” Pomp and circumstance indeed.
This study comes from the fascination with reading and writing I gained through homeschooling, combined with my own questions as to what happened in my homeschooling experience to foster it. This is my initial attempt to examine homeschooling through the perspective of a socio-cultural literacy researcher. This vantage point gives me an eye towards how texts and literate activities mediate and shape homeschooling and how they are adapted and reinvented in the process. Most foundationally, this project aims to answer a very simple question: what are homeschoolers doing with literacy? (Barton & Hamilton 1). A thesis study of this size and scope will not suffice to fully answer this question but it can serve as a necessary stepping-stone to draw literacy researchers’ attention to the movement of homeschooling for further and more helpful conclusions--for myself, for homeschoolers and for those who are generally concerned with issues of literacy and learning.

A Case for Researching Homeschooling

Homeschooling, as described in the scant studies that have been conducted on it, represents a rich, dynamic, and relatively unexplored learning and living community (Kunzman, Lois, Murphy, Nemer, Stevens). Literacy researchers, as well as scholars from the fields of education and composition, need to begin seriously engaging with the movement of homeschooling for at least three reasons. Homeschooling’s exponential growth rate is the most prominent aspect of the movement, and the first reason. Complementing this first aspect are the spate of recent studies showing that the population making up homeschooling’s growth is incredibly diverse and represents people from all classes, races, and ideologies (Huseman, Tanz). Finally, for those whose concerns are more with how people learn, homeschooling is well-
positioned to provide a glimpse into some of the innovations and shifts that are likely to become implemented in mainstream educational approaches, and is therefore an excellent source of research for those who have restricted their studies to traditional institutions.

In this introductory chapter, I begin by elaborating on these three primary reasons for why homeschooling demands stronger academic inquiry. This case for researching homeschooling will be followed by a brief outline of the rest of the thesis project.

Homeschooling’s Growth

Homeschooling, once relegated to fringe status by both popular culture and the academy, is now experiencing unprecedented growth. While its numbers do not seriously rival institutionalized schooling options and probably never will, homeschooling’s growth implies the presence of underlying beliefs and goals that are leading an inordinate amount of families away from mainstream educational options. According to Joseph Murphy, a leading quantitative researcher on the movement, homeschooling’s growth is verifiably radical “even [when] using the most conservative estimates available” (10). From the earliest research in the 1970s, when there was a suggested number of 10,000-15,000 students involved with homeschooling, we have arrived at estimates ranging from 1.2 to 2.1 million; this constitutes roughly 2% of the nation’s school-age youth (9-11). In the United States alone, homeschooling’s annual growth is estimated to be anywhere between 7% and 15% (HSLDA, Questions). Homeschooling is also growing outside of the United States, but at slightly less feverish rates (Questions). In light of homeschooling growing by 75% just from its population in the year 1999, it is safe to assume
that homeschooling’s rapid, exponential growth will not reach a plateau anytime soon (Lawrence).

Homeschooling’s growth should draw attention from researchers generally concerned with literacy, education, anthropology, and sociology if only for the fact that the movement is producing a noticeable - and noticeably growing - percentage of our country’s students. Washington Post columnist Jay Mathews accurately summarizes the strange disproportion of scholarship amongst charter schools and homeschooling, both of which are “[growing] with the same surprising speed and volume” (2012). He writes: “Our debate about charters is rooted in some useful data. By contrast, we still don’t know much about homeschooling. Nor does there seem to be much effort to close the information gap” (Mathews, 2012). While Mathews’ point is valid and underscores my own argument, I believe that homeschooling’s numerical growth actually represents the least compelling reason for further study.

_Homeschooling’s Growing Diversity & Respectability_

A stronger reason for why homeschooling demands increased engagement from educational and academic scholars is that the populations fueling homeschooling growth are strikingly diverse. The stereotype of families being primarily driven to homeschooling by some extreme religious or liberal ideology is under attack by way of actual statistics. African-Americans, for example, make up 10% of the homeschooling population, compared to the 16% they comprise of the public school system, and are steadily growing (Huseman). And as African-American studies researcher, Ana Mamzama, points out, “it’s assumed that [African-Americans] homeschool for the same reasons as European-American homeschoolers, but this
isn’t really the case” (Huseman). Indeed, the reasons cited for choosing to homeschool are diverse and range from desiring to better assist disabled and special-needs children, to frustration with the erratic shifts in school districting boundaries, to wanting to better protect young minority students from systemic racism and sexism (Goldstein, Huseman, Friedersdorf). Vanessa Robbins explains that many African-Americans are frustrated at educational institutions’ inability to adapt to their children’s specific needs, remarking that, “The [public school] wants little black boys to behave like little white girls and that’s just never going to happen” (Huseman). In speaking about some African-Americans’ reluctance to leave the institutions they fought so hard to gain access to, scholar Paula Penn-Nabrit remarks that the “decision [to open public schools to African-Americans] meant that the state can’t decide to give me less than, but I can decide I want more than” (Huseman). For many African-Americans, then, homeschooling is being considered as a “more than” option compared to what traditional institutions have to offer.

Homeschooling is also experiencing an influx from a relatively unusual population: the members of the technologically savvy, Silicone Valley-centric culture (Tanz 2015). Homeschooling mother, Samantha Cook, explains that home education is a natural extension of the tech-elite culture of which she considers herself a member when she says, “The world is changing. It’s looking for people who are creative and entrepreneurial, and that’s not going to happen in a system that tells kids what to do all day” (Tanz). The ability to innovate, tinker, and explore the nature of learning within homeschooling seems naturally attractive to those whose livelihood depends on such qualities.
Staunch conservatives and radical liberals become strange bedfellows in their embrace of homeschooling, and families long hesitant or opposed to a movement so seemingly overshadowed by bold ideologies are now testifying to its viability and benefits (Elie). Popular culture is starting to warm up to homeschooling thanks to homeschooling superstars like athlete Tim Tebow, and you can now find spirited defenses of homeschooling in both Christianity Today and Slate (Moon, Friedersdorf). Perhaps most telling of homeschooling’s ascendency into popular consciousness and available educational options is the thoughtful, critical treatment it is starting to receive. Concerns range from the ethics of letting parents be solely responsible for educating their own children to the potential effects on society as a whole if an entire group of people secede from public schools (Goldstein).

Homeschooling’s availability and allure as an educational option to a diversity of groups implies, at the very least, the reality that more and more families are not convinced that traditional, compulsory schooling is their only choice (Wohlsen). The reason homeschooling is in need of further research is not because some are convinced homeschooling is superior to public or private schooling, but that it is now considered a reasonable choice in today’s society. As long as homeschooling remains a valid educational option for families and students, insightful research on the practice for the sake of theory, pedagogy and the practitioners themselves should be pursued.

Homeschooling and the Evolution of Education

Compulsory public schooling from early childhood to adulthood is a concept relatively new in history, only becoming engrained into the American society in the 19th century (Collins &
Blot 23). Part of the aim of compulsory schooling, in addition to help forming an educated populace, was to create a shared national identity across the disparate states (101). Although American public schools were not the first, they helped popularize various tropes of schooling: a centralized campus for learning, classes with hierarchical authority, a single curriculum the student was supposed familiarize themselves with, and a variety of practices that constituted the work of schooling, such as writing essays, taking notes during lectures, and homework (Guterson 1-5). Public schooling is experiencing unprecedented change, however, due to the proliferation and capabilities of Web 2.0 technology and a rapidly expanding trans-national world.

Homeschooling is uniquely equipped to provide researchers insight on upcoming shifts in our society’s overall approach to education. The social trends and beliefs that led to a growth of homeschooling, alongside the educational opportunities that have exploded out of Web 2.0 and technological innovation indicate that the conception of education being primarily centered on several instructional periods located in a physical building for twelve straight years is beginning to erode. Homeschooling, then, should be approached as a type of research-and-development site for researchers and educators looking to understand different approaches to instruction and how these might be bleed into the next stage of traditional public or private schooling.

I do not mean to imply that homeschooling is the educational movement of the future, or that any serious scholar is suggesting as such, or that is the bandwagon that researchers must get on before they are left in the dust. Common sense dictates that no matter how great and effective homeschooling might prove to be, the majority of families will continue to educate their children through some version of the traditional model. The prevalence of two-income families, our
current obsession with standardized forms of schooling and pure logistical reasons make such an exodus from institutional instruction highly unlikely. Additionally, public schooling is deeply engrained into the fabric of American culture and is widely considered an integral part of the American childhood and civic duty. As homeschooling researcher Guterson puts it, the public school is often perceived, in unspoken words, as “the foundation of our meritocracy and a prime prerequisite to a satisfying existence” (1). In spite of public schools’ (and their ways of doing school) historical and cultural hold in American society, homeschoolers appear to be at the forefront of some major shifts in education, both primary and secondary.

As hinted upon in the previously referred Wired article by Jason Tanz, technology has afforded parents the ability to bring rigorous, standard-aligned, professionally-designed lessons and curriculum straight into their student’s iPad, suited precisely to their learning preferences and needs (2014). Our society has long known and agreed with start-up founder Albert Wenger’s remarks that “the internet does a great job of providing access to learning”, but in a sort of ironic twist on Wenger’s original intent, the internet’s teaching capabilities are increasingly being used to teach students in the uber-localized setting of a home, as opposed to reaching those students who would normally go without a proper education (Tanz). Universities and colleges now offer an astounding amount of credit-earning instruction via the web, and are starting to find themselves in competition with web-only educational options from the likes of Khan Academy and other small schools who entirely eschew the concept of a centralized, physical campus. In the state of Florida, secondary students are required to complete at least two of their classes through Florida Virtual School (FVS), and since there is rarely a period dedicated to these web-
based courses, students are conducting a greater amount of course work (as opposed to traditionally defined homework) at home. As a result, some parents of high school students, previously oblivious to homeschooling, have seriously considered or adopted homeschooling, letting their children complete all their courses through the FVS system.

Despite the growth, the diversity of the growth, the praise, and the critiques, homeschooling has failed to receive much in the way of nuanced scholarly discussion. The scholarship that does exist tends to be primarily based in sociology, such as Mitchell Steven’s excellent insight into religion and organizational differences amongst homeschooling families and Jennifer Lois’ analysis of the motivations of homeschooling mothers (2003, 2013). The lack of attention from fields such as education, literacy studies, composition, and otherwise might indicate that homeschooling has continued to pass underneath the radar because many are unaware of its growth and influence. This, however, should no longer serve as an excuse. According to educational researcher Karianne Nemer, “the time has come for in-depth study and critical analysis of this movement, its lessons, and its future” (21). I agree with Nemer, and this study is partly in response to her suggestion. Moving forward, this thesis takes for granted that homeschooling is a viable educational option made use of by an increasing amount of families. It also assumes that any field concerned with issues of literacy, pedagogy, sociology, anthropology and other aspects bound up in previous studies of traditional schooling should be naturally drawn to an educational movement increasing in both numbers and diversity of students.
Overview of Study

In this chapter I have attempted to present a general case for the need to bring serious scholarly research to the movement of homeschooling. In chapter two, I better articulate my interest in studying homeschooling with an eye towards practices of literacy. This concern is rooted in a socio-cultural literacy studies perspective, particularly the strand of research coming out of the New Literacy Studies (NLS). I then spend the majority of the second chapter reviewing the relevant literature to my study. For this study, I draw heavily upon the work of David Barton, Mary Hamilton, Shirley Brice Heath, Andrea Fishman, and Ligia Ana Mihut, among many others. I use Barton and Hamilton mainly in order to explain an ecological understanding of literacy, wherein literacy is understood as being situated within specific contexts, or domains. Within these domains, literacy is studied at the level of literacy practices and literacy events. While most studies adhering to these concepts have looked at domains that reside outside of the mainstream, such as Amish communities, African-American Appalachian towns, and prisons, there is a wave of scholarship that is drawing attention to commonly ignored contexts that exist between stabilized mainstream and non-mainstream domains; places like after-school programs and self-published texts. In my study, I posit that homeschooling fits this “third-space” domain, and more specifically, that homeschooling parents’ work within this domain is similar to the work done by literacy brokers. These brokers, according to Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry, are agents “involved in the production of [...] texts, [and] influence the texts in different and important ways”, often by borrowing, modifying, and re-using the literacy practices of surrounding domains (3). In addition to Lillis and Curry’s research, I also
reference the similar scholarship of Ligia Ann Mihut, Deborah Brandt and Eileen Willis to clarify this concept.

In chapter three, I cover both the methodology and practical methods used over the course of this study. I explain how I have combined the methods of a small-scale case-study with the holistic emphasis of a traditional literacy ethnography to form what I term an *ethnographic approach*. This approach involved meeting with specific families, attending a curriculum and logistical planning meeting for a homeschool co-op, surveying the history of homeschool practice, reviewing the types of curriculum made available and used heavily by homeschool families as well as incorporating some data collection by the participating students on their day-to-day uses of literacy. The process of data collection was overwhelming and messy. I say “messy” in the best sense possible, as I found myself being taken from my clear-cut methods of data collection and observations into entirely unpredicted areas of homeschooling and literacy by the families involved. My original plan and the way it was deviated from are included in this section, along with my central research questions, research aim and a self-analysis of the study design’s flaws, and the way the final research matched up with the intent of the study.

In the fourth chapter, I begin to look at the big picture by focusing on the larger context of homeschooling. This chapter includes a brief history of the movement and a description of the dominant “spheres” of the movement, typically characterized as “unschooling” and “homeschooling”. I briefly discuss the movement’s notable voices as well as its evolving culture.
by drawing upon the texts that I believe best constitute and “bind” the community\(^2\). These include works by homeschool pioneers such as John Holt, Michael Farris, Christopher Klicka, and the members of the national Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). Part of this overview includes a review of the homeschool resources many families expressed a connection to: books, blogs, magazines and newsletters they considered an integral part of their affiliation with homeschool. Afterwards, I spend time detailing the particulars of the local homeschooling communities in which the participating families homeschool. While the communities share many similarities, there are some notable differences that play out in how “homeschooling” looks like for the families involved.

The fifth chapter contains my qualitative findings and is where the participating families get to speak for themselves. I have divided the chapter by family, focusing first on their motivations and processes of entering the movement, then on the literacy practices that students currently or very recently engaged in. I end each family-specific section by focusing on the work of literacy mediation that the parents (specifically, the mothers) are engaged in, but save much of my commentary and conclusions for the following chapter. Within the two families – the Gardners and the Bennets – I focus specifically on the practices of their respective high school students, Rachel and Corey. However, their mothers, with whom the interview process

\(^2\) I chose these texts on the basis because of their prominence in other scholarly research on homeschooling, or because they were specifically described to me by the homeschooling families themselves as being considered widely influential.
took place, are prominently involved in the narrative, to the point where the narrative actually revolves around them; unsurprising, since they are the ones that bear the most agency in the work of homeschooling.

My conclusions and implications in the sixth and final chapter stems from the synthesis of the big-picture overview of homeschooling with the intimate look at the two participating families. Here, I express the four points that seem to arise from the data: (1) the unifying literacy practice of homeschooling is the continual process of selecting texts, curriculums and literacies for the student, (2) the literacy practices of homeschooling are overwhelmingly gendered, with the mothers handling most of the work related to the movement, (3) homeschool parents are best understood as literacy brokers, whose work highlights the actions of delegation and customizing within the mediation process, and that (4) in homeschooling, parents are not only the brokers, but also the sponsors. Homeschooling, I conclude, is a space that exists between the stabilized mainstream and stabilized non-mainstream that requires its inhabitants, particularly the parents, to function as literacy brokers. This, as I more fully articulate in the conclusion, provides additional insight into the concept of literacy mediation, and its accompanying (or constituting) activities of customization and delegation.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

This is a socio-cultural study of literacy, and as such, its assumptions, theoretical framework and points of interest are closely aligned with the scholarship taking place within the field of New Literacy Studies (NLS). There is a field of literacy that comes out of the Education and Linguistic disciplines that tends to focus on the cognitive acquisition of literacy by children and adults (Perry 1). According to literacy scholar Kristin Perry, socio-cultural studies of literacy, however, have different foci and aims.

This [socio-cultural literacy] research has been concerned with understanding the ways in which people use literacy in their everyday lives, finding ways to make literacy instruction meaningful and relevant by recognizing and incorporating students’ out-of-school ways of practicing literacy, and decreasing achievement gaps for students whose families and communities practice literacy in ways that may differ from those in the mainstream or in positions of power (51).

Unlike cognitive studies of literacy, research that comes out of the field of New Literacy Studies is primarily concerned with how literacy is used and how it is defined and conceptualized within various contexts. Not that the NLS is unconcerned with the learning aspect; rather, the NLS will often look more towards the learning of literacy within specific contexts, rather than at the general pattern of cognitive pistons that are firing in the process (51).

According to Perry, the way socio-cultural literacy researchers perceive literacy is often markedly different from the perceptions found in popular media or held by government officials.
(Perry). Whereas common media representations of literacy picture it as a single, universal skill that some people are better at than others, scholars in the NLS consider literacy as a social practice (51). Brian Street framed this dichotomy as a clash between an autonomous model of literacy and an ideological model of literacy (1). An autonomous model of literacy carries with it the idea that literacy promotes a neutral, context-free rationality and that text-based literacies are of higher value than other literacies, such as those that are oral or image-based. In contrast, the ideological model implies that literacy is “culturally embedded” and constructed by social institutions (2). This means that literacy is dynamic, constantly changing and adapting, and that what literacy means in one context can be wildly different from what it might mean in another (Barton 39). Since literacy is a social practice, NLS scholars do not consider it possible to study literacy apart from the social context with which it is intimately connected. Literacy is an ecology, according to David Barton, and in order to study an organic ecology, researchers must expect to study active processes and practices, not simply texts and definitions of literacy presented within static textbooks (29-30). Literacy is then a social practice that is situated within specific contexts. James Gee, David Barton and Mary Hamilton have produced a wealth of research positing their theory of situated literacy, but other researchers have contributed to this understanding as well, including Deborah Brandt, Shirley Brice Heath, and Roz Ivanic.

Certain situated literacies tend to provide power, be it socially or economically, to those with mastery. This is a primary contention of Deborah Brandt’s work Literacy in American Lives, which describes different individuals’ experiences of acquiring, losing and re- acquiring cultural, social and economic advantage through literacy practices. Literacy, Brandt argues, is
often promoted by deeply-invested literacy sponsors, be they institutional, commercial or otherwise. Literacy sponsors act as “agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way” (166). There is a great deal of scholarship devoted to the analytical lens of literacy sponsorship, but as of late a growing number of researchers are focusing their attention on the literacy broker or mediator. For these individuals, Brandt’s definition of literacy sponsors seems to apply in all senses save for the last caveat, stipulating the desire for personal advantage. Researchers have illuminated the many agents who “enable, support, teach, model, […] recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold” for little to no personal economic, social or cultural advantage (166). Examples of such agents include health workers, teachers and/or tutors who receive little to no compensation and are detached from institutional obligations, social workers, friends, and parents. As I simultaneously conducted research and reviewed transcripts and documents provided by parents and teachers, I began to realize that homeschool parents (and for this study in particular, the mothers) fully inhabit this role of literacy broker and mediator to such an extent that the typical labels of “teacher” and “parent” oftentimes seem inadequate in comparison.

I contend, then, that homeschooling is a domain wherein the defining ecological activity is that of homeschooling parents actively mediating and brokering literacy practices, particularly through the customization and delegation of literacy instruction and practice. Before I can effectively argue these conclusions from my data, however, I want to further elaborate on these three connected theories of or related to literacy: (1) literacy as a social practice, (2) literacy as
situated, and (3) the role of literacy mediators and brokers. The first two theories serve as my theoretical grounding, or the basis on which I entered into this study. These concepts constituted my initial coding categories when I approached the data and therefore shaped the conclusions of this study.

**Literacy as Social Practice**

Prior to the current dominant perspectives in literacy studies, most research on language and literacy was situated within two distinct locales: the mind and the school. In her groundbreaking work, *Ways with Words*, Shirley Brice Heath produced a study that began with the premise that literacy was “best understood as a set of social practices” and that the best way to study literacy was to observe these social practices in action, with an eye towards the larger context of the society and culture they inhabited (Barton & Hamilton 6). Heath’s study helped set off a wave of scholarship that viewed literacy as a series of practices, which brought it outside of the mind, and as needing to be studied in the contexts of everyday life, which brought it outside of the school.

Soon after *Ways with Words*, similar studies arose that sought to replicate Heath’s ethnographic methodology and shared her concern that “there was little systematic description of the functions of writing for specific groups of people” (Hull & Schultz 579). The findings were relatively similar; the sub-cultures and communities that were studied all demonstrated a tremendous facility with literacies, albeit in ways foreign to the standardized, white, middle/high-class academic literacy most consider as “normal.” An example of this is found in Andrea Fishman’s literacy ethnography of an Amish community (1988). Fishman’s *Amish*
Literacy is modeled after Heath’s study and is focused on its titular subject, particularly the “what and how it means”. In this distinctly out-of-school context, Fishman of course does not actually leave the issue of education behind; much of her book is focused on what is taught and learned in Amish schoolhouses. What Fishman does leave behind is the traditional educational institutions with which the majority of Americans are familiar. Through months of handwritten correspondence, family dinners, schoolhouse visits and community gatherings, Fishman came agree to agree with Heath in concluding that “literacy truly is a cultural practice, not a decontextualized, universal set of skills and abilities automatically transferable across contexts” (3). This understanding would continue to be reaffirmed in studies to come, including Barton and Hamilton’s long-term ethnography of the town of Lancaster, England (2001).

David Barton set out to both summarize and systemize these new understandings of literacy by offering the metaphor of ecology to socio-cultural literacy researchers (30). He describes the many benefits of considering literacy from this perspective:

[An ecological approach] is one which examines the social and mental embeddedness of human activities in a way which allows change. Instead of studying the separate skills which underlie reading and writing, it involves a shift to studying literacy, a set of social practices associated with particular symbol systems and their related technologies. To be literate is to be active; it is to be confident within these practices (32).

Barton essentially took what researchers like Heath and Fishman were implying and made it clear: a study of literacy is a study of activity; it is a study of various practices. These practices,
however, are not random or arbitrary but rather, “different literacies are associated with different domains of life, such as home, school, church and work” (37). Studying literacy well, therefore, means to enter into these “ecological niches” and studying literacy as it is situated and practiced within them.

**Literacy as Situated**

In order to study situated literacies, one must pay attention to *literacy practices* and the *literacy events* that constitute those practices. Heath, Fishman, and many others posited that literacy was a social practice, which Randal Hume summarizes as “the recurrent literacy activities of a community” (65). Considered on a large scale, America shares a variety of national literacy practices, such as the filling out of electoral ballots, navigating W-2 forms and acquiring and appropriately presenting specific licenses, IDs and certifications. These practices identify an individual as a citizen, or at least as an active, conscientious one, a strong value in our culture and one for which the government must sponsor in order to exist. Considered on a smaller scale, the members of a church might engage in a number of specific actions involving literacy on a repeated basis: Bible reading, scanning worship music lyrics off a projector screen, or scribbling notes on a worship service bulletin. These recurring social activities involving texts and the use of literacy are a primary unit of analysis in any socio-cultural literacy study (Barton, Gee, Hume). However, because a literacy practice is a collection of repeated *actions* with related *values*, a more specific unit of analysis is needed.

*Literacy events* are the actual, observable actions involving texts (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). In a culture as drenched with text and media as our own it is hard to imagine a time when
some type of literacy event is *not* occurring. If a literacy event – such as writing notes in class – is often repeated, it is usually the result of an overarching practice, which in this case might be the practice of being a good student (Hume 67). The key for a literacy researcher is to detect those events that are repeated as part of a community or culture, whether officially organized or not. The literacy events that form a church’s literacy practices are often intentionally structured and organized, while literacy events like thank-you cards and Christmas cards tend to be driven by social expectations (Barton & Hamilton 8-9). When I examine homeschooling through a socio-cultural literacy perspective, I will begin by examining the literacy events, especially those that seem to recur often.

Since literacy is situated in dynamic, active domains, it is always informed by a history of practice or precursors. The literacy event of an individual reading the instructions on a box of cake mix while gathering the ingredients is not a wholly novel event, but one that has “evolved” over decades (or centuries, or millennia) of practice (Barton and Hamilton 7-8, Hume 70). Presumably, someone needed to communicate to another person the required ingredients for a stew before written cooking instructions were available; this need might have been satiated through oral or sign communications, later through more traditional texts, and at some point through the placing of the instructions on a box of the same material a person would use to bake a cake. Literacy events can then be understood as visible instances within a continually evolving literacy practice (2000 7-8). A man focused on his phone while he attempts to cook a complicated dish would have seemed bizarre and unprecedented only ten years ago, but is now considered perfectly normal. His act of acquiring cooking instructions from a 4.7” screen in his
hand is situated within an evolving, millennia-old practice that at one point included reading books or boxes.

   Literacy’s historical situatedness means that a full understanding of how communities practice literacy needs to be understood within the context of both the community and the practices’ past. Barton and Hamilton offer six tenets of literacy as social practice in order to aid this understanding and study:

   (1) Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices.

   (2) There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.

   (3) Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships.

   (4) Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.

   (5) Literacy is historically situated.

   (6) Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making (2000, 8).

   For a researcher intent on understanding a context’s specific literacy practices, Barton and Heath imply that they will need to be both an active observer and at least a partial historian. This can get complicated quickly; for example, a homeschooling family might sit in the overlap of traditional schooling practices, familiar domestic practices, specific religious practices, and many others. Brian Street’s study of literacy in small Iranian villages reveals how complicated local economic and religious literacy practices clash with newer, Westernized iterations of literacy (145-159). They clash, firstly because they are not one and the same, which many Americans
make the mistake of believing (178). But not only do they crash, they also evolve: “the transformation [...] of ‘Maktab’ literacy to these commercial practices had been a specific process involving [...] the development of certain skills and concepts and the abandonment of others” (178). Thus, the economic practice of these Iranian villagers is a unique practice situated in a converging history of Islamic religious practice and Western economic practice.

To account for literacy’s historical situatedness in my study I will need to place any visible literacy event in the larger context of the continually evolving, historical practices that informed such an event. In my third chapter I will better explain how the ethnographic approach I took enabled me to do this.

In addition to a literacy event’s location with a historical context, every literacy event is ultimately situated in the local expression of that practice. Just as the practice of emailing is a historically situated practice arising from a legacy of communication that included letters delivered by horse, telegrams and mail trucks, so a specific company’s use of email might be slightly different from another company’s. Between the big-picture view of the historical context and the ground-level view of the event observation is the middle-ground of the local context.

The “local” context can be said to indicate geographical region (Harlem, Lancaster, PA, Lancaster, England), a community (Amish, homeschoolers, telemarketers) or even a family or organization. Barton, in his own discussion of literacy’s historical situatedness, explains that this involves the cultural and as well as the situatedness of a practice (49). This personal literacy history “goes back to early childhood and the first encounters with literacy practices in home
literacy events; it continues with involvement in community and school practices, and on into adulthood with its varying and changing demands” (50). What people do with literacy is largely based on what they have already done with it or how they have encountered it. So it is not helpful to only look at literacy’s place within an evolving cultural and historical context; one must also be willing to learn literacy’s place within an evolving local and personal context. This study attempts to do both.

**Literacy Brokers and the Work of Mediation**

Literacy brokering, as defined by Kristen Perry, is “a process of seeking and/or providing informal assistance about some aspect of a given text or literacy practice. Brokers bridge linguistic, cultural and textual divides for others” (256). As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, this concept stems out of - but is certainly not synonymous with - the concept of literacy sponsors presented by Deborah Brandt. Some key differences between the terms include their level of visibility in the literacy processes and the rewards or advantages the brokers gain by filling in the “gaps” for others. Ligia Ana Mihut notes that, unlike literacy sponsors, “literacy brokers are less visible” and “remain rather obscure in formal, institutionalized sites of writing” (2014). Additionally, there is rarely any tangible or substantial reward or advantage gained by

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3 Mihut makes sure to distinguish this idea of “literacy obscurity” from the concept of “ghost writing”. Wherein ghost writers attempt to “impersonate someone else”, literacy brokers are rendered obscure because their mediation mostly goes unnoticed in the products, or is relegated to only the most “mundane” of activities.
the literacy broker, unlike the sponsor. Whereas a sponsor hopes to acquire some type of personal gain – economically, socially, politically, religiously, etc. – the broker often works in the sole interest of the recipient. Both sponsors and brokers, can be understood as engaging in the work of literacy mediation, where an individual or group stands between the recipients of their expertise and the institutions the recipients are trying to navigate. Examples of brokers engaged in the work mediation include those who take personal time and may work in mildly subversive or unofficial ways to help those at a disadvantage within dominant system.

Increased scholarship on the nature and activities of literacy brokers has provided plenty of examples, variations and insights into the nature of their work and how they accomplish it. Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry, for example explore the variety of literacy brokers and activities involved within the process of publishing English, academic texts (2006). Mihut focuses on Romanian social workers who assist immigrants in navigating the literacy expectations and processes involved with gaining access and citizenship into the United States. Children’s roles as literacy brokers has received much attention, especially in relation to the many immigrant children serving as their families’ guide through an English-based world (Chu 1999). A consistent thread between most discussions of literacy brokers and mediators is a focus on transnational literacy issues. In all the provided examples, literacy brokering is a large concern because of the overriding issue of language. In these contexts, a large part of the broker’s role is “translating and interpreting” (Mihut 58) the language as well as the practice for those disadvantaged by some form of “linguistic, cultural and textual divide” (Perry 256). In the
domain of homeschooling that I examine, there is a level of translating and interpreting, but it is not nearly as prominent, and far less focused on language.

The nature of a broker’s role and how it is enacted varies. Lillis and Curry offer three types of brokers: “academic, language, and nonprofessional” (29). They then suggest that these “types” can also be understood as activities rather than roles, so that one broker might potentially vacillate between all three types. They also found that brokers often (and perhaps, unsurprisingly) offered their assistance from advantageous or unequal positions of power. Brokers, they noted, often “compensated” for what the recipient lacked because of a void of helpful prior experience or inclusion (30). Brokers are often serving in the role of an advocate, such as when Aboriginal health workers who lack the literacy instruction to suffice for medical work in Central Australia are “advocated” by the brokering service of better-equipped nurses (Willis 173). Brokers can be “community interpreters”, “representatives”, “reporters” and “consultants” (Mihut 62). Additionally, they are often called to navigate multiple contexts or domains, allowing them to gain what Mihut refers to as a “bi-institutional perspective” (57). Mihut especially claims that for brokers, mediation is often “an emotional work”, and this aspect is critical to the reasons why mediators often subvert, work around and manipulate dominant institutional literacy practices (59).

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4 To which the phenomenon of children acting as literacy brokers for their parents would serve as a notable outlier.
Because of the typical themes and roles related to research on literacy mediators and brokers, I did not imagine this study intersecting with the concept much at all. Only after data collection and analysis did I find the connections that seemed too prevalent and substantial to ignore, and therefore turned to studies on the concept in order help make sense of what I was finding. Even though most studies of literacy brokers and mediators focus on those involved in bridging the gap for people with significant linguistic disadvantages, I believe that homeschool parents not only constitute legitimate literacy mediators, but are ones from whom fresh insight on the concept can be acquired.

**Exigency**

In reviewing the research on literacy brokers, one will recognize the wide variety of available descriptions about what literacy brokers are and what their work implies. The scope of their activity, if each of these descriptions are to be considered complementary, is notable. Consider these scholars’ following descriptions of a broker’s work:

- They draw upon and offer personal expertise, guidance, and “[broker] literacy practices, language use, and the consequences of reading and writing for others” (Kalman 2013).
- They “are involved in the production of […] texts [and] influence the texts in different and important ways” (Lillis & Curry, 2006).
- They “read and write for somebody else” (Papen 2010).
- And, perhaps, most broadly, they “assist others with reading and writing” (Mihut 2014).
Literacy brokers, in sum, can be said to provide individuals with the guidance, expertise and authority in order to enable them to succeed with alien or complex literacy practices in a manner that is distinct from regular instruction.

I contend that the nature of some homeschooling parents’ role within their high schooled students’ literacy practices more closely resembles a literacy broker-recipient relationship than a teacher-student relationship, and highlights two important aspects of the broker’s work: customization and delegation. By this contention, and through this study, I seek to contribute additional insight to what we have already learned about literacy brokers and the work of mediation. Also, implied in this contention is the idea that teachers, even teachers of literacy, are not quite the same as brokers of literacy. To be blunt: yes, this implication is purposeful. While a literacy teacher can no doubt be said to often engage in the actions of brokers, and a broker may at times engage in the act of teaching, these are still distinct roles and actions. To further clarify, we might expect to see a literacy teacher providing imperative-driven instruction on what to do, how to do it, while the broker might be expected to be doing the literacy practice with the person, or bearing the weight of navigating the literacy practice for the person.

**Conclusion**

Socio-cultural literacy research coming out of the New Literacy Studies field argues that we can’t assume literacy in a unique context resembles the literacy we use in more familiar ones. A boy reading a novel on his couch and a woman reading scores of documents on a desk may look like they are completing similar activities, but we instinctively know that what they are reading, why they are reading, and how they are reading those texts are probably very different.
Scholars such as Barton and Hamilton, Gee, and Street have done a great deal of work in order to show that literacy is a situated thing, a practice that takes a unique form based on the specific ecological domain in which it exists. It is a social practice, and as such, it is profoundly shaped by the context’s history, intra-community discourse and underlying values. Because it is a practice within an ecological domain, it is a dynamic practice, one that evolves and adapts as related factors change, such as technology, values and resources. These practices are studied at the level of specific literacy events, the actual, recurring moments of reading and writing that, when considered altogether, demonstrate the more general practice, along with its attendant perspectives and values.

The recent and important scholarship on literacy brokers has served to illuminate the ways experienced individuals guide novices through various literacy contexts and their practices. This work is often done through mediation, an activity by which the guide often re-presents specific practices to the novice in a way the novice can successfully navigate and complete. Literacy broker’s researchers, including Lillis and Curry, Kalmut, Mihut, and Papen, have explored the variety of specific actions involved in the work of brokering, including assisting, guiding, influencing, and bearing the brunt of the work.

These various, complementary, theoretical strands inform my understandings and perspective when approaching the movement of homeschooling. In the following chapter I explain the methodology and practical methods I used in order to study the context of homeschooling and two families currently involved with it.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Prior to entering into her ethnographic research with the Amish, Andrea Fishman outlined four guiding elements of what an ethnography should incorporate: active participation in another culture, a willingness to change perspective, a willingness to understand “concepts, practices and beliefs that shape other’s perceptions”, and the “developing [of] personal relationships that facilitate both access and understanding” (6). In sum, Fishman’s articulation of an ethnography places a great deal of value on humans and their ability to speak for themselves. It neither ignores human error nor the human tendency to see things in slant, but anticipates it. It is not so much a detailed look into cold hard facts but into reality as it is actually lived. To use the Amish lifestyle as an example, we can verify that the Amish are not accomplishing some tasks in the most productive and efficient means possible; take long-distance communication, for instance. Yet the Amish are not living in this reality because of ignorance but because of willful choice. An ethnographer will not enter into an Amish community to explain all the ways Amish people diverge from the objectively best methods of farming, communicating and transporting, but rather to explain the values of the Amish lifestyle as articulated by the Amish themselves.

This study is propelled by the belief that the best way to understand homeschoolers’ perspectives and uses of literacy is to go to the people who are actually asking and answering these questions for themselves on a daily basis. Understanding how a family perceives their literacy practices within the movement of homeschooling will require a methodology that enables participant input and an ability to understand both practice and context. In this chapter, I
want to examine the key components of an ethnography, explain how my approach aligns and diverges from typical ethnographic studies and why I choose to articulate my methodology as an *ethnographic approach*. I will then outline my primary methods of research and conclude by explaining some of limitations of the study.

**Ethnography and The New Literacy Studies**

The literacy ethnography is a popular methodology among the many researchers who subscribe to a New Literacy Studies perspective because it enables the reflective nature needed to conduct this type of socio-cultural study. The outworking of an ethnography stems from the assumption that “people [can't] be studied the same way as objects” (Lois 25). Rather than leaving the bulk of the study and interpretation to the responsibility of the sole researcher, ethnography calls for an acknowledgement of a researcher’s limitations and a subsequent acknowledgement of the participants’ understanding of their own practices and culture. While Fishman’s four key aspects of an ethnography are helpful, this study will more closely align with the four tenets of an ethnographic study put forth by Barton and Hamilton:

1. It studies real-world settings
2. It takes a holistic approach "aiming at the whole phenomena"
3. It is multi-method, drawing on a variety of research techniques
4. It is interpretive (57-58).

When adhered to, these four tenets help ensure a study is both comprehensive and reflective. In addition to Barton and Hamilton’s criteria, the methods and aims of this study are shared and represented by a large collection of previous literacy ethnographies, which I have used as guides
for practice (Barton, Brandt, Fishman, Hamilton, Heath, Moss, Street). Barton and Hamilton’s criteria, however, is especially helpful since this study seeks to resemble their own study of the everyday literacy practices of Lancaster, England’s residents, albeit with one significant caveat.

It must be noted that Barton and Hamilton, as well as many of the scholars that have been and will be drawn upon in this study, have used an ethnographic methodology to accomplish long-term studies. Indeed, a long-term study is usually necessary to satisfactorily accomplish the four tenets of an ethnography that Barton and Hamilton outline. A true ethnographic researcher “dwells” within their focus of research, and dwelling takes time (Fishman 10). This, however, is a short-term project more typically associated with the methodology of a case study, and thus I want to clearly distinguish how I make liberal use of ethnographic and case study methodology without claiming this study precisely fits the criteria of either one. Because of time constraints, I have opted to take what I term an ethnographic approach to studying homeschool families and their literacy practices. This move allows me to replicate many of the valuable methods and practices of an ethnography on a notably smaller-scale, while still allowing me to achieve substantive insight and footholds for which to pursue deeper, more immersive studies in the future. For example, my research was spread out over the course of a Spring and Summer semester, and while this is not an insignificant amount of time, the actual time spent “dwelling” with homeschool families was not comparable to the type or depth of observation other ethnographers have attempted and achieved. By using this ethnographic approach, however, I placed an emphasis on obtaining interviews and observations as well as letting the participants speak for themselves, rather than claiming any knowledge based on textual research alone. I have
also attempted to situate this study within specific historical and local contexts. Essentially, this study was based around Barton and Hamilton’s four key criteria, albeit on a much smaller scale. In this section I want to further explain their four tenets along with how I attempted to satisfy them.

1. An Ethnography Studies Real World Settings

The overarching tenets of ethnography have real, practical impact on my choices of how to accomplish this study. If this study is to help illuminate what practices homeschooling families engage in and for what reasons, observations, participant input and a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying cultural and contextual factors are necessary. For example, this study called for me to heavily interact with – even to become embedded within - the culture, community and families who chose to participate. While texts and textual artifacts are critical to the study, they were studied within the real-world activity and context in which they were created, consumed and distributed (58). This action is based on the assumption that an analysis of texts and textual practices apart from the “lived experiences” in which they relate to homeschooling can only provide a limited understanding of their actual uses and the reasons behind them (Knobel 8). As Bazerman and Russel point out, any attempt to study the role and function of texts “apart from their animating activities is to miss the core of a text’s being” (312).

2. In Ethnography Utilizes a Holistic Approach

In addition to making sure to study texts as they are used in the context of a literacy event, such contexts needs to be understood as existing as a point – and in some ways, a culmination – of previous history, decisions, and values (Barton 50). This “holistic” approach is
the means by which a literacy researcher aims to capture the historical and local context a specific literacy event is situated within. For a researcher like Shirley Brice Heath, satisfying this concept in her studies of two different towns in rural North Carolina - “Roadville” and “Trackton” - meant unearthing the educational, economic and demographic histories of both, as well surveying many of the individual families’ history with literacy. For Brian Street and his study of Iranian “Maktab” literacy, accomplishing this goal meant ingratiating himself as fully as possible within a culture, a community, and a religious tradition. Studying how the Iranian villagers used and navigated literacy was only possible once Street had an understanding of Islamic literacy traditions and how this geographic area had experienced radical economic shifts in the past decade (11-12).

Applying the criteria of a holistic approach to a study of homeschooling, therefore, demands an understanding of the homeschooling community’s different and/or previous iterations, founding philosophies, history, current perspectives, status in the culture-at-large, educational efficiency, and inner-community dialogue facilitated through blogs, magazines and newsletters (Barton and Hamilton 58). Without trying to grasp at too large a goal, this study will aim to account for the overall homeschooling community context as well as the local homeschooling community of which both families are members. This allows me to keep an eye on the actual lived experience while still maintaining an eye on the “larger sociocultural and historical events and practices” in which they occur (Knobel 8).
3. An Ethnography is Multi-Method

To accurately understand what people do with literacy, how they do it, and why they do it will require more than one method. Rather than relying on one method to attempt to carry the weight - such as the method of interviewing participants - most ethnographies encompass a variety of methods that work together to unveil connections and relationships. Actually talking with people is, of course, a primary method, but most literacy ethnographers also spend a great deal of time analyzing the texts referred to by the participants, as well as observing how they are used rather than simply being told. This is partly because we are wont to overlook particular details of when and how we use literacy, and partly because seeing (and hearing) a literate activity from different angles often provides productive insight.

While much of the research methods used in literacy studies, including my own, will be decidedly qualitative, the actual study and findings of this study will be perceived and discussed in light of the available quantitative data on homeschooling and literacy for sake of situating them within the major trends of homeschooling and education. This might mean placing the particulars of a chosen family unit against the current data on what constitutes the “average” homeschool family, and it might mean balancing a family’s literacy practices and results against other homeschool families as well as families engaged in other forms of schooling.

4. An Ethnography is Interpretive

The last criterion is one of ethnography’s most beneficial contributions. Because of its emphasis on collaborative interpretation, ethnographic research places a high value on the participants’ perspectives on their own practices and the reasons behind them. Barton and
Hamilton elaborate on this point, explaining that an ethnography “aims to represent the participants’ perspectives; we endeavor to do this by highlighting the actual words people use and by discussing our data and our interpretations with them” (58, emphasis added). This humble approach to research stems from the understanding that a researcher probably can’t accurately gauge or understand personal, private and community-specific practices or beliefs without being both immersed in the community and being guided by a member of the community.

This means that the participants are closer to the role of a researcher than a subject. They must think critically of their own practice in order to talk about it meaningfully, and are given a more active role in the research process. This study, for example, requires active participation on the part of the high school students beyond observations and interviews. These students are asked to keep a Literacy Log over the course of a week (I expound on this method later in the chapter), a choice that both grants them agency and requires them to thoughtfully consider what they will count as a use of literacy or otherwise.

By following Barton and Hamilton’s criteria I hoped to create an authentic study that at the very least embraced the ethnographic ideals. Once these guiding principals were in place, however, the actual methods required to unearth meaningful data needed to be decided. In the next section I will outline my methods for participant recruitment and data collection in order to be transparent and helpful to those who might wish to conduct a similar study.
Methods

Participant Recruitment

Two homeschooling families with high school aged students were sought for this study: the Gardeners and the Bennets. Having been personally homeschooled in Central Florida within the homeschool group known as HOPE Homeschoolers, I decided to take advantage of my connections within this community to seek out families that would be open to assisting with this study. The two participating families were selected because they met a pre-existing criteria: (1) they were active members of a homeschool organization and (2) were currently homeschooling a high-school aged student.

I chose to work with a family that was a member of homeschool organization for a few specific reasons, the first of which was convenience. Practically speaking, it is hard to find a homeschooling family who, for all intents and purposes, does not want to be found. If a family is homeschooling in anonymity, the difficulties present in attempting to locate them and - to say nothing of securing research consent - would probably not be worth the time for a study on a scale such as this one. An additional reasons for this criteria is that the majority of homeschool families are associated with some organized community (Murphy 40), so researching with such a family would be slightly more representative of homeschooling practice at large. An additional reason for focusing on a homeschool family that was part of a larger community is that it makes it a little easier for the researcher to understand the direct influences and contexts from which the family is learning “how” to homeschool. An organization or community is a helpful agent of stability for a homeschool family and, by extension, the researcher.
The Gardener family is a member of the same homeschool community my own family participated in while I was a homeschool student. I decided to take advantage of my “insider status” that researching in this community could offer, especially since research access in the homeschool movement is considered notoriously hard to come by (Murphy 4). Both of the participating families have previous connections to my family, as well as to myself personally. Having said that, I knew little to nothing of their homeschooling practice. I had never met the second family, the Bennets, prior to this study, and only came to know them through the recommendation of other homeschool parents who thought Tess, the mother, would be an eager participant (she was). So even though both families were approached because of previous connections, beyond the expected commonalities associated with participating in a similar homeschool group as the one I grew up in, I approached their homeschooling experience as a relative stranger.

The second criterion for a participating family was that they be currently engaged in primarily homeschooling a high school aged student. By “primarily homeschooled”, I meant that the family (and the student) had to perceive themselves to be homeschooling first, even if outside classes, dual enrollment or participation in public or private school activities was occurring, as is often likely with high school homeschool students and was occurring5. I wanted

5 Perhaps the most popular example of a homeschool student participating in public high school sports is the eventual Heisman Trophy-winning and highly controversial NFL player, Tim Tebow. Tebow’s parents are actually considered pioneers of the homeschooling movement.
to focus on high school aged students partly because my own educational background is in Composition and Rhetoric, while my professional background is in a high school English classroom. Focusing on a student population I was already familiar with seemed like a good place to start. An implication of this decision, however, is that all consideration of early-childhood homeschooling will come through the perspective of the high-schooled students and their parents. As such, further, more comprehensive research on the literacy practices that surround a full-scale homeschooled education is something I hope to pursue at a later point.

Working with two families was a decision driven by the rationale that it would allow for slightly more input, perspective and insight into the actual practices of homeschooling and the sociocultural impact of homeschooling culture at large; to repeat the cliché, two are better than one. However, as is often the case with ethnographies, this tidy, little decision to simply research two families broke down very quickly once research began. One of the families alerted me the night before a set interview that they forgot they had to attend a homeschool co-op planning meeting for the next school year during our planned meeting time. At their invitation, I was able to sit in on the meeting. Before the meeting was done I had talked with nearly every homeschooling parent in the room, most of whom had something to add or contribute to the

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Upon being nominated for a Heisman - the first homeschool student to receive such a nomination - Tebow remarked that “a lot of times people have this stereotype of home-schoolers as not very athletic — it’s like, go win a spelling bee or something like that” (Strauss 2012).
study. I will briefly detail this experience and incorporate some of my findings from the experience into the research narrative into Chapter 5.

Interviews

The crux of this research depended on simply listening to what the participating families had to tell me about their literacy practices. This was mediated through a few interviews that looked slightly different for each family. With the Gardners, I held one full-length, formal interview within their home, and interacted through another half-dozen or so emails, messages, and calls for clarifications and further insight. With the Bennets, I held one formal interview with Tess Bennet during and after a curriculum planning meeting for the Veritas Christian Academy situated at a local church, and then another interview with her son Corey Bennet (with his mother present; a fact I will cover in more detail in my provisions for vulnerable populations). I used an audio recorder for every formal interview session. I also took down notes, particularly of statements the participants would make in the “gaps” between the formal recordings, such as when I was leaving the Gardener’s house and a couple of textbooks left on a dinner table initiated a discussion about the mother’s role in the grading process (22 April 2015).

I transcribed each formal interview with an aim towards word-for-word accuracy. In the statements that appear in the thesis all “missing” words that can reasonably be inferred from the context are inserted within brackets. The only change I have made to the interview excerpts within this paper is to smooth them out, if necessary, for readability. Any words that are italicized for emphasis are meant to indicate an emphasis the speaker placed upon those words in the interview, not my own, unless otherwise stated.
I include a list of almost every interview question I posed in my Appendices (Appendix A). They were mostly designed to get the participants talking about literacy and producing a transcript from which I would later attend to and code for themes relevant to my research questions.

Observations

While time constraints did not allow for sustained observations, I was able to naturally observe the families within activities directly related to homeschooling during our formal interviews; these observations, noted in my research notebook, and sometimes mentioned out loud in the audio transcripts, play a critical role in my findings. For example, during both of my formal interviews, the respective homeschooling mother had given their children an iPad to occupy themselves with; and in both situations, the iPad had come with directions or guidance on what to do with it. One mother informed her daughter she was “allowed” to play the “ABC game”, and the other mother encouraged her son to try out the audio and video-recording apps, since they were interactive and he responded well to these. Moments like these would not likely have been picked up over long-distance interviews and were incorporated into the narrative.

For the Gardeners, I had the opportunity to be guided through their home, where they demonstrated the different areas where school, reading and learning were typically accomplished. With the Bennets, I was invited to observe a homeschool co-op curriculum-planning meeting. Through both of these observations and experiences I was able to better fulfill my aim of achieving a more holistic approach. Ultimately, the observations were used to provide additional context to the literacy practices as well as enable myself to view these
practices from the perspective of the community rather than from the perspective of an outside researcher (Fisher 9).

*Literacy Logs*

A key component of this study at the outset was the active participation on the part of the high school students to track down as many of the daily literacy events they engage in within a journal. These participant-driven journals were labeled Literacy Logs; partly because of their function, and partly because of personal alliterative affection. My instructions to the students as to how to use the journals were somewhat barebones, as intended. I merely asked them to record, as best they could, any instance they felt they were engaging in an act of reading or writing. I also asked them to assign a label to each act of reading and writing if possible: the labels I suggest included “school”, “personal”, “fun”, “work”. I told them they were free to invent as many labels as they wished or to choose not to assign a label. After those instructions I explained that whatever they chose to place in the journal was up to them. I include excerpts of both students’ literacy logs in the chapter on findings, and include their entirety in the appendices (Appendix B, C).

The Literacy Logs method satisfied practical and ethical aspects of the study. Practically, it helped the participant and primary researcher locate patterns and practices that might be overlooked in interviews or in cursory discussions of daily literate practices. The logs provide some basic information as to where and when literate activities took place, allowing for insight into potential correlations between the timing/location of certain activities and their distinction (i.e., non-school literacies potentially occurring more often in the bedroom at evening-time).
Ethically, these logs gave increased agency to the participant and helped accomplished Fisher’s ideal of enabling the researcher to change perspective, quite literally, by letting the participants provide a great deal of perspective into the data. It was my aim to provide the students a space to clearly define and record their own literacy practices or events without my intrusion or their parent’s suggestion. This precaution stemmed from a concern voiced by Mary Hamilton during a Literacy Research Group meeting, where she cautioned, “What’s a literacy event for one person is not necessarily a literacy event for another” (Barton, et al. xii). This aim to keep my instructions limited resulted in mixed results, and the entire method, though still very much a part of this study’s findings and conclusion, was marginally diminished as my research questions evolved. I provide further detail on these issues in the Limitations sections.

Text Analysis

In order to gain a better understanding of the homeschool context at large I needed to conduct a series of text analyses. This occurred in multiple levels. First, I attempted to become as familiar with the discussion on and about homeschooling as possible, particularly from the voices inside the movement. This meant familiarizing myself with seminal works and figures in the movement, such as the texts by John Holt, Christopher Klicka, Susan Wise, and Michael Harris, among many others. This part of the process did not involve any coding, or focused analysis beyond identifying the critical topics, values and pedagogies located within the movement.

Having achieved a general impression of the movement that I felt allowed me to posit some reasonable assertions, I moved into a closer analysis of the resources that are most often
used in the movement to support the work of literacy instruction. These resources included curriculums, programs, and textbooks. Having noticed many mentions of two primary approaches to homeschooling in the first step of text analysis – the Charlotte Mason approach and the Classical education approach – as well as the pervasiveness of Christian values and approaches, I familiarized myself with the available curricula and created a chart that classified each resource according to its relationship with these identifiers. I did not, however, simply judge a curriculum as being “Christian, Charlotte-Mason, and holistic” based on pure observation or inference. Rather, I only designated a curriculum by one of my pre-set descriptors if it explicitly aligned itself with those descriptors. A consequence of this is that, if a curriculum only seemed to meet all the criteria of a Classical-based approach, it would not be labelled as such unless it specifically claimed such a distinction.

Since it is impossible to research and categorize the hundreds of available homeschool resources, and in order to avoid the issue of only including curriculum or resources that might further my own argument, I made a few boundaries. The first was that any curriculum or resource that I categorized and included was either (1) listed on the Homeschool Legal Defense Association’s page for suggested (but not necessarily recommended) curricula, or (2) specifically named by the participants themselves. Having observed (and even used) a variety of other texts not included in this final list, I believe the final list of resources that I coded and which are included in the fourth chapter do a satisfactory job of representing what is most commonly used or known by homeschoolers.
Issues of Privacy and Sensitivity

While homeschooling is ripe for deeper study, it also presents unique challenges to any potential researcher, mostly because any study of homeschooling requires an examination of a family’s home-life, including the two things they tend to value most: their children and their privacy (Murphy 4). As such, various precautions were set up and approved by the University of Central Florida’s Institutional Review Board.

In order to protect every participating family’s privacy, each referenced member has been assigned a pseudo name. Other individuals mentioned by the participants – such as family friends, or teachers – are also given pseudo names. All organizations and locations named within the study, however, are accurately named. In rare cases, and for the sake of privacy, I have refrained from giving specific names to people or classes, opting instead to refer to them as “the mentor” or “the writing course”. All data secured from time spent with the families - including interview notes, recordings, and literacy logs – were kept in my home and or in a secure digital file to which I alone had access. In situations where I was to review the work of one of the students, I always asked for parental consent before analyzing and then again for permission to use in the study.

Protecting Vulnerable Populations

While this study called for input from high school aged students (ages 14-18) - a vulnerable population - it also presented a favorable avenue for conducting the proposed research. At no point in the study was there any physical student-researcher interaction outside of the presence of a parent/guardian or the walls of the family’s home (or, in one case, the church
where the co-op met). An emphasis on researching with the family – and not merely the individual students – meant that the parents/guardians were expressly notified, involved and present with any action involving their child, or their child’s Literacy Logs or analyzed texts.

Methods of Analysis

Analyzing the interview and observation data took multiple forms. After collecting interviews, observational notes, images, literacy logs, and a few participant-created texts, I first set about the process of transcribing the interviews. I personally transcribed the collected interviews word for word. The only anomalies to this process were when irrelevant interruptions to the interview occurred. This meant that certain interactions that had nothing to do with the study, – such as when one participant was momentarily engaged with a younger child – but were still captured on audio, were noted in my transcriptions but not actually transcribed. Some information included in the findings were not on the transcriptions because they occurred outside of the bounds of the audio recordings. For these instances, I took notes in a research notebook.

After the transcription process I then proceeded to read and reflect on the data, looking for themes and patterns. Perhaps a bit unorthodoxly, I wrote out an initial chronological narrative of both families with almost as much of the data as I had acquired in order to see their practice from both the chronology of the interview narrative as well as the chronology of their homeschooling experience per their description. From the combined collection of notes I had taken from the co-op curricular meeting, interview transcriptions, and other pieces of data, such as a student text or literacy log, I began to notice trends and patterns emerging. This led to the coding stage.
The initial process of coding revolved around identifying the literacy practices related to homeschooling as well as issues related to the convergence of domains within homeschooling. At this time, the focus of my research questions was centered on the concept of domains of literacy. During this process of coding and parsing the data, however, the issue of domains within homeschooling, while still relevant and traceable within the data, became overshadowed by larger, more compelling themes. As such, my research questions adjusted to what the data presented, and I began to code for two threads of conversation that seemed prevalent:

- The homeschool parents’ active and constant process of customizing curriculum and learning, as well as…
- …the homeschool parents’ tendency to delegate learning to a wide-variety of outside programs and educators.

After this shift in emphasis, I proceeded to code and re-code, identifying the areas where the parents made intentional changes to pre-set curriculums, classes or methods and where they delegated instruction or practices to another individual or institution (Table 1).

The final two steps of this process included a final re-coding, where I attempted to combine what I had collected for both families and find commonalities. This resulted in a slight reorganization and reframing of the chronological narrative I had crafted so as to create a stronger focus on the findings that pertained to the evolved research questions.
Table 1: Examples of Interview Comments and Assigned Coding Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Code Category &amp; Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“We needed her to be accountable to someone else at this point, and for someone else to teach it to her” (Tess Gardner, 15 April 2015).</td>
<td>Delegation: the mother sought an additional individual/institution under which her daughter could better learn the subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The problem for me is that I pay a lot for these local homeschool classes and the classroom instruction is fine, but then they [her children] bring it home and need me to proofread and edit. So I bring out the red-pen and then the emotions start flying. ” (Laura Bennet, 22 April 2015).</td>
<td>Delegation: Laura delegates literacy instruction to ‘local homeschool classes’, with which she expresses some frustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“[Our curriculum] is definitely eclectic and since Rachel has gotten older it’s kind of, you know, it just gets morphed into what works for that child” (15 April 2015).</td>
<td>Customization: Tess intentionally “morphs” Rachel’s curriculum and classes in a way that they both deem appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We took the best of the Institute for Excellence in Writing [curriculum] and modified it” (Laura Bennet, 22 April 2015)</td>
<td>Customization: the mother took a pre-existing resource and practice aid and adjusted it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitations of the Study

Even despite this study’s modest aims, there are some limitations that prevented this study from being as robust as it could have been. The study’s flaw that I perceive as most frustrating is the amount of time spent observing homeschooling in practice. While some time was afforded to these observations, and while these observations provided illuminating data, a study that claims an ethnographic approach perhaps demands further time than what I could afford in this study. Part of the limitations to the time was a combination of other personal responsibilities – I am a full-time teacher – and the difficulties of scheduling interviews with busy families who lived an hour away.

A second limitation of this study is that its initial design did not mesh as much as I would have liked with the research questions I ended up answering. The student’s literacy logs, for example, provided valuable insight and still serve to provide richer detail of their day-to-day uses of literacy, but are not integral to my eventual conclusions concerning the parents’ roles as literacy brokers and mediators. Had I been more attuned to this issue prior to entering into the study, or had I more time to adjust, this study would perhaps have asked for a research unit similar to the literacy log from the parents. These suggestions are included in my conclusion and discussion chapter, where I suggest further questions for research and potentially better suited methods.

Finally, the IRB approval that was secured for this study limited me from being to adapt easily with the natural, organic directions the participants took this study. My experience with the Veritas Christian Academy co-op, while still influential on my findings and conclusions, is
limited because they extended beyond the specific provisions I requested from the board. While I have done my best to incorporate all these elements into the narratives and conclusions for a strong study, I regret not entering the study with a better, more reflexive study design.

These concerns aside, this study was designed to let a few homeschoolers explain what learning, reading and writing looks like for them. In this ultimate goal, I believe the study succeeds.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to be forthright about my methodology, methods, and the potential concerns and limitations of my study. One of the values of this study, as I have mentioned, is its consideration of literacy activity within the context it is being practiced. In the following chapter I begin this process by briefly overviewing the history of homeschooling, looking at how it is discussed and propagated through various seminal and serial texts, analyzing the dominant approaches to literacy evident in its resources, and reviewing the background of the specific homeschooling communities and groups in which the study’s families are situated.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTEXT OF HOMESCHOOLING

In this chapter I provide a brief history of the movement of homeschooling and an exploration of its practical and ideological roots. I will begin with the big picture and look at the ideas and motivations that propelled its countercultural start as an alternative to institutionalized education, move into a more detailed study of different strains of homeschooling and its champions, and finally, into the specific contexts in which this study’s participating families practice their homeschooling. In most sections - usually at their conclusion - I will provide some observations focused on literacy’s uses and intersections with homeschooling’s development.

Conflicting Perspectives on the Modern Homeschooling Movement

Homeschooling has either experienced unprecedented growth since a recent inception or a great resurgence, depending on whom you ask. Modern-day homeschooling’s origins are hotly contested because, like the hotly contested discussions on human origins taking place in homeschooling, how and where the movement started says a lot about what homeschooling is meant to do and where it is going. Despite the homeschooling community’s incredible diversity of motivations and opinions, there tends to be two popular but distinct perspectives on the nature of homeschooling’s origins.

*Homeschooling as a Resurgence of Traditional Education*

For many, including most of the influential, conservative, evangelical leaders, homeschooling as we see it today is a resurgence of an educational approach that pre-existed the introduction of compulsory schooling (Murphy 30). At the very start of his book, *The Heart of
Home Schooling, leading homeschool activist Christopher J. Klicka announces, “Home schooling is back” (1). In his account, “homeschool was one of the leading forms of education” in the first century of American society, but it faded into obscurity after the advent of the public school system (1). According to Murphy, most scholars divide homeschooling into three distinct phases: the pre-compulsory schooling era, the time during which compulsory schooling became mainstream, and the current homeschool movement (Riding History). Homeschooling was the default educational option in the nation, but when the national milieu began to change in the late 19th century, states began to create their own educational system. This system quickly became the norm, resulting in the notable consequence of “family and parental influence and choice [...] giving way to government control” (Murphy 2012). Homeschooling’s true return, according to Klicka, occurred in the 1970s, bringing back with it such values as the “tutorial process” and a more Biblically informed parent-child relationship dynamic. For Klicka, as for many who abide by this account, the 1970s amounted to a “spiritual revival” (1). In Klicka’s perspective, we see a type of spiritual enthymeme at work: since homeschooling is clearly a superior form of schooling that is well-approved by God and supported by common sense, it certainly could not have begun in the 1970s. God, not to mention common sense, would have necessitated its presence throughout history. In light of this, homeschooling’s modern day origins represent a return to form for our country, and especially for those who claim a Christian heritage.

Understanding the current homeschooling movement as a comeback is certainly possible without the additional burden of believing it constitutes a “spiritual revival”. For many less spiritually-inclined, homeschooling is at least a return to a purer, more successful and more
American form of education, characterized by family-centric individualism and freedom from bureaucratic intrusion. According to Murphy, when compulsory schooling began gaining traction, one of the moves made by its supporters was to trumpet the disparity between “professional” educators and systems and the families attempting to do it without government support (*Riding History*). The result was that families who continued to educate at home were considered odd at best, and social deviants at worst. Now, advocates argue, many families are seeing that the government’s ability to educate children is often both inefficient and ineffective and that families should return to what worked in the first place. Original homeschool advocates, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, argued for a return to homeschooling out of research on child development rather than the Bible (1984). They believed that compulsory schooling was ill-equipped to meet individual student’s needs, and served only to produce manufactured, robotic followers (Stevens 39). This perspective tends to accompany a high view of “traditional” American values – the faith, family, and freedom type - and is best represented in homeschooling T-shirts like those depicting the face of Abraham Lincoln with the caption: “Homeschool: It Worked for Me” (Zazzle). David Guterson, one of the early conservative leaders of the homeschool movement, is quick to connect homeschoolers today with individuals educated at home in the past, describing today’s few “truant” homeschoolers as following in the footsteps of the likes of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Mark Twain, and Albert Einstein, among many others (5). The classical educational model, a distinctly Western pedagogy that emphasizes the development of rhetorical persuasion and analysis over
specific professional skills, is popular with those for whom the founding fathers serve as their greatest inspiration (Bauer & Wise).

_Homeschooling as an Extension of Radical School Reform_

On the other end of the spectrum of perspectives on homeschool origins are those who view homeschooling as a new, innovative direction that was primarily preceded by groundbreaking pedagogical research (Stevens 34). In keeping with the times of the 60s and 70s, progressive educational reformers sought to provide a healthy alternative to the public school system, which they considered “authoritarian and oppressive” (Herbert Kohl, as quoted by Stevens, 34). A chief concern for these early leaders was the lack of unrestricted development for the children, who were so often stunted by overly bureaucratic systems (a concern, it should be noted, that was shared by the more conservative Moores). Previously unheralded concepts like children’s need for the freedom to explore, to play, and to pick and drop subjects depending on their individual needs and preferences began to enter popular conscious.

Whereas more conservative homeschoolers placed their motivations within a narrative of educational excellence that connected them to grand beginnings, the progressive side of the homeschool movement perceived themselves as a next step in the evolution of education, a necessary shift away from compulsory education’s failings (Holt, Kohl). These two origin-points lead to two very different types of groups who primarily educate at home, and who are often considered to be equivalent: homeschoolers and unschoolers. The movement towards home education began in the 1970s, with educational researcher John Holt decrying the institution from one side with accusations of the stifling of children’s capabilities, and with Raymond and
Dorothy Moore on the other side, decrying school’s lack of Godly values and teachers. Stevens summarizes the relationship between these dual motivations when he remarks, “The Moores concurred with Holt and his circle that conventional schooling was detrimental to children, but not because it was authoritarian” (38, emphasis added). For Holt and the unschooling crowd, the presence of an institution or a hierarchy of authorial figures had become the central problem. For Moores and the homeschooling crowd, the problem was simply that the wrong institutions and hierarchies had authority.

From these separate theories of homeschooling origins, we can already see competing ideologies and trends. Issues of authority – parental or otherwise – are rooted in the divide between homeschooling and unschooling, alongside issues of pedagogy, organization, and learning goals. Unsurprisingly, issues of literacy - and how students are taught or acquire it – are intertwined with these issues. Each pedagogical model carries within it different values for literacy, and the type of literacy practices a student becomes most familiar with changes immensely depending on if the goal of educating at home is to nurture a “Godly child”, a robust civic servant, or a “free-thinker” (Klicka, Harris). To understand how homeschooling is enacted today, I want to analyze both approaches in further depth, especially in how the ideologies are practically enacted in the homes. While both families who participated in this study are self-described homeschoolers, their practices, like the origins of homeschooling, are a blurry combination of the values and aims of both movements, and their roles as literacy brokers owe no doubt to their choice to be one and not the other.
Unschooling & Literacy

John Holt, unschooling’s most popular advocate, set off a series of important implications when he first argued that the main culprit in students’ struggle with learning was the school. His first, more charitable opinion, was that schools had total control over children’s education and were simply doing an abysmal job: “The worse the results, the more schools claim they are doing the right thing and the bad things are not their fault” (Fail 4). In what would soon become a popular notion, John Holt insinuated that the failure of children was almost universally a matter of systemic ineptitude (4). Institutionalized schooling was failing at the outset because it naturally rendered children “afraid, bored and confused” (4). A cornerstone of Holt’s ideology is that children are naturally drawn to learning and creativity; therefore, if we find a void of this in the majority of children coming out of our educational institutions, the problem is clearly with the institutions. This frustration with schools eventually grew to such a point that Holt chose to forgo efforts at reform and began suggesting entirely new methods of schooling altogether. For Holt, the problem was no longer that schools were doing an awful job; the problem was that there were schools.

Opposed to the conflation of cold, inefficient institutions with the organic, dynamic process of learning, Holt suggested parents intentionally unschool (Farenca, xvii). In this form of education, children take the reins of their own education and parents “follow the children” (Stevens 45). Sara McGrath, a current, influential, advocate of unschooling outlines unschooling’s central tenets:

(1) We learn all the time.
(2) All learning has value.

(3) We learn best by our own motivation, in our own ways. (3)

Likewise, the “un”-prefix of “unschooling” represents a rejection of “coercive teaching habits” which “can be harmful to a child’s curiosity and natural love of learning” (3).

This rejection of “schooling” as part of the learning process has taken many different forms, but it is easy to see McGrath’s Holt-inspired tenets at play in each of her examples. For McGrath’s daughter, Maia, unschooling takes the form of pursuing any desire that interests her during the day; these include watching marine-life documentaries, doing math worksheets, playing video games designed to teach financial literacy, and participating in local, structured, dance and art classes (7). McGrath, for her part, also rejects traditional conceptions of parenthood: “My relationship with Maia is a partnership and a friendship. I don’t tell her what to do and I don’t expect her to respect or obey me. I strive to be a person she will respect” (7). An unschooled family, the advocates argue, is one that believes “play” is the greatest learning tool, so there tends to be a rejection of necessary, “structured” time or activities. Parents enter into the learning process only when asked or needed, or to provide safety. In an unschooling family, according to McGrath, there is no “teacher”. There are just learners, young and old.

At its heart, unschooling is predicated on a positive view of human nature. Holt, for instance, begins his unschooling manual Learning at Home with great praise for all children:

[…] Children are by nature and from birth very curious about the world around them, and very energetic, resourceful, and competent in exploring it, finding out about it, and
mastering it. In short, much more eager to learn, and much better learning, than most of us adults. Babies are not blobs, but true scientists (1).

This perception of children in particular, and human nature in general, is a great part of what differentiates unschooling from homeschooling.

*Approaches to Literacy Instruction for Unschooling*

When it comes to the task of learning literacy, unschooling advocates stand by their general assertions. Children should “learn to read and write when they decide to do so”, says McGrath (68). However, this of course does not mean that unschool students live in a literacy-free vacuum. Many unschoolers believe in surrounding their students with rich literacy resources, but never in pushing them upon their children. Yet even McGrath, with her “radical” unschooling philosophy, practices what many might consider to be a subtle form of “pushing” through nightly read-alouds by the parents to the children. 6

Literacy, like everything else in unschooling, is slowly acquired once the situation demands it. If a student wishes to be a scientist, the thought goes, she will naturally look to read about what scientists do, and upon discovering that scientists observe and record their observations (typically through writing), she will therefore do the same. This is the crux of unschooling, and it is certainly an alternative to the approach taken in schools, where universal standards of writing and an emphasis on canonical texts dominate grade-school instruction. In

6 Although not addressed in this project, I believe a study of how unschoolers might subtly mediate their children’s literacy practices would be valuable.
unschooling, however, there are no reading-lists, no deep-seated respect for canon, and little
writing for writing’s sake. One advocate, Sandra Dodd, flaunts the fact that the first “book” her
son read cover-to-cover was a Nintendo video game manual (88). After that? A book about “the
stock-market a few days later” (88). What matters to the student and their interest and personal
development, unschoolers argue, is the only relevant consideration.

When it comes to literacy practices within the realm of unschooling, there is little to no
distinction between the practices of school and otherwise, since the domain of school has all but
ceased to exist. Unschool children and adolescents are free within this “system” to explore “real-
world” literacy practices and receive guidance and instruction when requested, and not
beforehand. In this approach, parents might still engage in the work of a literacy broker, albeit
with more subtle methods, such as the types of practices they surround their children with, and
the type of texts they leave around the house. Unschooling’s approach to life, learning and
literacy is less popular than the approach of homeschooling, but it has an influence on – and
shares some similarities with - the sensibilities of those who choose the alternative.

Homeschooling and Literacy

Homeschoolers, like unschoolers, tend to share a lack of trust with most institutionalized
places of learning. Their reasons for distrusting these places, however, differ markedly, as do
their course of action once the child is removed (or kept) from school. Having briefly examined
the unschooling approach, this section outlines the values and objectives of the homeschooling
approach – the one most relevant to this study – and shows some connections between these
values and objectives to the resources most often used by homeschoolers, and ultimately, to the literacy practices that tend to follow.

In the introduction to his book *Family Matters: Why Homeschooling Makes Sense,* Guterson makes the case that school is deeply intertwined with our idea of democracy – an argument with which few would find fault. Having established our cultural marriage between school and democracy, he then proceeds to argue:

> Our democratic sentiments, it turns out – so deeply felt, so altogether vital to our national identity – prevent us, ironically, from seeing the democratic possibilities of a society in which many children learn outside of government-operated institutions (3).

Guterson is a bit of an anomaly among the voices in homeschooling. He actively defends homeschooling as both a homeschooling father and a public school teacher but also argues that both forms of schooling should be encouraged and work together, since some students are best served by classrooms and others by working more closely with their parents (10). While there are certainly some homeschoolers who disagree with Guterson’s views about the benefits to be gained through traditional schooling methods, Guterson does hit upon a distinguishing feature of homeschoolers as compared to unschoolers: a higher regard for the *practice* of schooling.

Whereas unschoolers vary in their level of school rejection, homeschoolers only really reject the school in its institutional form, not its practiced form. To take their names at face value, we can understand unschoolers as getting rid of the school and homeschoolers as simply moving it to a new location.
Systematic, organized, curriculum-based approaches to learning characterize a homeschool approach to learning. While many homeschoolers I encountered were self-conscious about the “messiness” or “eclectic”-ness of their teaching approach, it was clear that their approach was nothing like that of a self-described unschooling family. Homeschooling families, at their most extreme, attempt to recreate the experience of a typical American classroom in style, procedure and scheduling. Most, however, employ a style that is loose but still incorporates traditional curricula and procedures (Murphy 115). A homeschooling family’s vocabulary tends to sound similar to that of a traditional-schooling family, with concepts like “textbooks”, “units”, “grades”, “tests”, and the rest of the accompanying school-based lexicon.

As the movement matures, however, leading homeschool-researcher Bryan Ray notes a change in how families approach the use of curricula. Whereas early data revealed that roughly 25% of families opted to homeschool through the use of “complete” curriculum packages, – the A Beka or Sonlight curriculums, for example -a 2010 survey found that the figure had shrunk to 10% (Murphy 115). Homeschoolers, it appears, are flexing their ability to pick-and-choose from a variety of resources to suit their educational needs and preferences while still adhering to a traditional variety of “classes” per year and an organized structure. They are flexing their ability to customize.

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7 Exemplified by the Dekker family, who appeared on the cover of an August 2001 issue of Times magazine with the bold-font headline: ‘Is Homeschooling Good for America’?
Homeschoolers, homeschooling resources, and guiding texts of the movement tend to vacillate between two popular approaches to pedagogy and practice. The first is the classical educational method, an approach linked with homeschooling since its inception but which has experienced a resurgence in the movement thanks to the book *The Well-Trained Mind* by Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Bauer. Wise summarizes the goals and methods of a classical model:

Classical education depends on a three-part process of training the mind. The early years of school are spent in absorbing facts, systematically laying the foundations for advanced study. In the middle grades, students learn to think through arguments. In the high school years, they learn to express themselves. This classical pattern is called the trivium (*What is Classical Education?*).

A classical education juxtaposes heavy memorization in the early years with a sharp focus on critical thinking in the later years. In relation to literacy, a classical model tends to put a strong emphasis on engaging with the canon. A typical, classical, homeschool curriculum for high-school students includes plenty of Aristotle, Augustine, Cicero and Dante and a focus on learning Latin and Greek (*Memoria Press, Veritas Press*). A classical approach to writing resembles an old-fashioned collegiate style, with an emphasis on winsome, systematic analysis and argumentation that is usually mediated through essays and research papers (*Memoria Press: Writing English & Grammar, Memoria Press: Logic & Rhetoric*). Patrick Henry College, one of the few colleges in America designed with graduating homeschoolers in mind, describes its mission as “seek[ing] to recreate the original American collegiate ideal with fearless learning for
Christ and His Truth. We train young leaders in the American and classical traditions with our core curriculum” (“About”).

The Charlotte Mason Method (CMM), on the other hand, is characterized by a focus on fostering a love for learning in students and constitutes the second popular approach. The eponymous educator whose pedagogy the approach is based on was an 18th century woman who pioneered a “liberal education for all” that aimed at growing children, not merely “teaching” students (Who Was Charlotte Mason?). Two couples, John and Sonya Shafer and Doug and Karen Smith, are major proponents of the method they summarize it on their website:

The Charlotte Mason Method is based on Charlotte’s firm belief that the child is a person and we must educate that whole person, not just his mind. So a Charlotte Mason education is three-pronged: in her words, “Education is an Atmosphere, a Discipline, a Life.” (What is the CMM?)

This “three-pronged” approach involves creating a warm, secure, and supportive environment for children to explore and learn, intentionally focusing on character formation, and an emphasis on ideas and reflections from the world and practical life, as opposed to simply ingesting facts (What is the CMM?). Reading and writing values in a CMM model are not incompatible with the classical approach, but certainly tend to differ. For example, there is a much heavier focus on reflective writing, with resources revolved around journaling and creative writing than on analysis and argumentation (Simply Charlotte Mason Bookstore). The natural world is also a recurring theme in CMM-based literature, perhaps a reflection of CMM’s concern for Atmosphere and connection to the real-world. Of all the textbooks and resources available to
homeschooling, it would probably be an overreach to say that the majority of them fall squarely into these two approaches. Rather, these tend to be the figurative North and South Poles between which most homeschoolers can chart their proximity on a spectrum of practices. Some curriculums, such as the one utilized by the Gardeners, describe itself as a combination between the two, and many others reject or avoid any reference to either approach (at least in name). Far, far more characteristic of the wide range of available homeschooling resources is their explicit Christian-worldview.

Religious Homeschool Resources

The classical and CMM approaches are both overwhelmingly supported by Evangelical Christian resources (Stevens 54). While neither the classical nor Charlotte Mason model is an exclusively Christian pedagogy, the materials, curriculum, and frameworks provided for homeschoolers are almost universally and explicitly Christian. Even the wide variety of curricula that do not claim to align perfectly with either pedagogical approach remains overwhelmingly Christian-based. The HSLDA, a non-religious entity that supports every homeschooling family regardless of religious choice suggests ten complete curriculum packages for high school students; note that only one avoids claiming a Christian influence (Table 2).

The evidence of a Christian-worldview within these curriculum options can range from overt to nearly undetectable. Key areas where a Christian worldview tends to show up most in the high school curricula include biological science, history and literature. Some curricula, however, will incorporate Christian themes even within such subjects as math and chemistry.
As homeschooling diversifies, there is a growing discussion over its predominantly Christian resources and a demand for other options. Mainstream, secular companies like Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Hewitt are starting to step into this void, perhaps because of this very demand (or perhaps they have simply begun to consider homeschooling to be of profitable size) (HMH Homeschooling).

Table 2: Homeschooling Curricula Suggested by the HSLDA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Title</th>
<th>Pedagogical Focus</th>
<th>Christian?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Beka</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonlight</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJU Press</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The L.A.M.B. Company</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seton Home Study School</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lepanto Press</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hewitt Homeschooling</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Conversations</td>
<td>CLASSICAL</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant Home Curriculum</td>
<td>CLASSICAL</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Omega Publications</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each curriculum listed, I read the publisher’s website and “About” page. The publishers were quick to identify themselves as Christian or classical, while Hewitt refrained from identifying with either perspective. The curriculums are listed in the same order as on the HSLDA’s website.
Even within the Christian sector of the homeschooling movement, however, there is increasing dissatisfaction with the way some subjects have been presented by publishers. Christian Schools International, a curriculum publisher based in Michigan, has caused some controversy over their decision to publish “science curriculum [that] clearly presents science from a Christian perspective, but does not attempt to discredit the theory of evolution” (Wheeler). The obvious and repeated intermingling of Christianity with the majority of the educational resources specifically produced for homeschooling is an issue that one family in this study brought up as a point of concern, not so much for themselves, but for those who want to homeschool but do not abide by a Christian worldview.

Lauren: You know, there’s this presumed Christian viewpoint in the homeschool world and not everyone has that. We’ve tried homeschooling with other people who don’t have that and it’s fascinating when you realize that all this curriculum has this Christian point of view and when you realize that someone doesn’t come from that [background]…I always feel bad. It’s so alienating to them (22 April 2015).

Despite how deeply Christianity is woven into the fabric of homeschooling, homeschooling Christians often confess to feeling as alienated by other Christian families who school through traditional means as anyone else; other Christians retort that homeschool parents are simply “easily offended” (Challies 2006). The movement remains an oddity among Christian denominations and institutions that were not specifically founded for the support of homeschooling. Indeed, there are minor rifts between prominent Christian authorities over
whether or not the movement is healthy, with some arguing that families pulling out of the public school system is not helpful to the goal of evangelizing (O’Neil, 2013). Added onto this discussion is the fact that many Christians (as well as the culture at large) tend to associate homeschooling with some of its hyper-conservative iterations, such as the type advocated by Vision Forum, Quiverful and ATI/BPI institutes. These homeschooling networks/companies have garnered negative attention as of late in the wake of accusations against founders and prominent members for various cases involving sexual abuse, including the most recent scandal surrounding reality-television star, Josh Duggar (Blumberg). Nevertheless, themes and practices related to Christianity are deeply embedded in the movement and resources of homeschooling. Many boast of their mission to produce Godly children through their Christian-based curriculum and lessons that have a strong “Biblical worldview” (My Father’s World Overview).

**Beyond the Home: Community and Intra-Community Dialogue within Homeschooling**

Homeschooling, despite the name, is hardly isolated to the home. Many if not most families are involved in homeschooling groups, co-ops, and national organizations like HSLDA (Murphy 41). These connections to community can serve a variety of needs for a family: support and encouragement, spiritual guidance, instructional advice, practical advice, protection and security, and instructional delegation. As with involvement in any community or organization, participation can range from active involvement to passively receiving updates.

National organizations exist primarily to protect and represent homeschoolers, or certain groups of homeschoolers. The HSLDA, for example, is a legal organization designed “to bring together a large number of homeschooling families so that each can have a low-cost method of
obtaining quality legal defense” (*About*). Headed by homeschool pioneer Mike Farris, HSLDA might be homeschooling’s most popular organization, no doubt aided by its occasional newsworthy involvement in politics (Stevens 143-177). Other national groups, such as the National Black Home Educators organization (NBHE), exist as a means of providing “free information and training resources to parents” (*Vision*). A step down from the national organizations are the state-wide organizations. Both families involved in this study are recurring visitors to a large, annual homeschooling conference organized by the Florida Parent Teacher Association (FPEA). A primary objective for most of these national organizations, however, is to successfully plug members into the local support groups that can give them aid at a more personal, consistent level.

Local groups, unlike national organizations, are uniquely suited to providing the “social” component that many outsiders often believe is absent from the homeschooling experience. If the sheer amount of active homeschooling groups is any indication, than socialization, support and community is an integral aspect of most families’ homeschooling. In the state of Florida alone, there are eighty homeschool groups listed on the HSLDA directory (*Local*), a poor number compared to the FPEA’s listing of 119 (*Support Groups*). Homeschool communities can offer a vast range of activities: structured PE gatherings, support groups for mothers, support groups for fathers, teen leadership groups (similar to high school or collegiate government), 4-H clubs, science clubs, writing classes, field trips, and graduation and recognition events (*Starting Point 10*). Within or “between” these local groups, there are often homeschool cooperatives, or
co-ops, wherein even smaller groups of homeschool families come together one or more days a week to plan, teach, and socialize.

Organizations and groups at the local and cooperative level are nearly always maintained through volunteer effort, primarily from homeschooling mothers. Stevens and Lois both spend considerable time reflecting on how and why homeschooling mothers, already actively engaged in educating and mothering, involve themselves in the responsibilities and stressors of maintaining a lively organization. While it is true that many homeschooling families need not be an active participant - let alone leading member - of a group, these organizations typically require the energy and service of many families to maintain their existence. Between the two families interviewed in this study, one is an active participant within a co-op while the other is a former homeschool group director.

The discourse of homeschooling is maintained through a variety of periodicals and blogs. Popular homeschooling resources, as listed in relevant studies and suggested by participants, include *Homeschooling Today*, *The Old Schoolhouse*, *Home Education Magazine*, and *The Teaching Home* (three of which have self-described Christian leanings). In addition to the columns and feature-length articles on issues related to homeschooling, a key function of these periodicals is to provide reviews of various curriculum, methods, and resources (Stevens 20-21). National, state, and local organizations, along with the magazines – both print and digital – consistently send out various updates and emails that alert homeschoolers about upcoming seminars, pressing legal issues, or new curriculum.
Hope Homeschoolers & Veritas Christian Academy

Having briefly overviewed the world of homeschooling at large, I want to conclude this chapter by examining the local contexts in which the participating families of this study homeschool. While both families live in neighboring cities in Central Florida, they are members of different homeschool groups and have never met. The homeschool groups share similar values but there are certainly differences on which values are stressed and how the families relate to the groups. The first group, Hope Homeschoolers, is the homeschool group my family participated in during my years as a homeschool student, so I have a fuller understanding of its history and make-up than I do with Veritas Christian Academy, the co-op the Bennets have joined. It is worth noting here that both participating families identified themselves as Protestant Christians.

In his study, Mitchell Stevens divided homeschool groups into two, self-termed categories: believer groups and inclusive groups. While there is a greater amount of inclusive groups in the unschooling side of the movement, they still exist within homeschooling and are growing in popularity; such a group existed in the same area both families homeschooled, though neither were participating members.

Hope Homeschoolers – Lakeland, FL

Hope Homeschoolers was founded in 1991 in Lakeland, Florida, a small city that resides in the middle of the stretch of Florida between Tampa and Orlando. The group self-describes itself as “A Christian Support Group for Homeschooling Families in and around Lakeland, FL” (Hope). While there is an implied intangible form of support that comes from relationships with other members, specific support provided by the group includes meetings for mothers, fathers,
and a weekly Park Day get-together for families (What We Do). High school students can join a student council where they plan their own social and educational functions and community projects (What We Do). The largest visible form of support comes through the annual Family Nights, where students get to display their talents, and Celebrate!, a graduation and recognition event held at the end of the traditional school year. Although not listed under Support on their website, the group’s leaders also disseminate pertinent information regarding homeschooling and the shifting expectations of the state of Florida in regards to the proper way of documenting student work. Their website includes a links to popular curricula, resources, and homeschooling websites.

As could be insinuated from both the name and description, Hope Homeschoolers is defined by a centering on faith. The group’s Statement of Faith places it squarely within the orthodox Protestant tradition, with adherence to such doctrines as original sin, Christ’s physical birth, death and resurrection, and the infallibility of the Bible being necessary before membership can be granted (Statement of Faith). This issue of faith, however, has caused some problems in the past. Like the origin of homeschooling itself, Hope Homeschoolers shares a contested past with another entity. Lighthouse Homeschoolers, another homeschool group based in Lakeland, claims the same starting point of 1991, despite no longer bearing the name Hope. Both groups began as one group, called Hope Homeschoolers, but eventually split in the mid-nineties over a variety of issues, one of which was many members’ insistence on religious exclusivity. Hope’s website contains no trace of this event, while Lighthouse’s page simply remarks that, along with “many other changes since its inception, […] the group[‘s] structure and
leadership has changed to accommodate its growth” (Our History). Since this split, Hope remains distinct from Lighthouse because of its insistence on requiring some compatible form of Christian belief in its members, while Lighthouse simply avoids any mention of a criteria at all. This split, however, was not necessarily a split between Christian and more liberal or secular homeschooling families, since many Christian families of the same faith and doctrines as Hope’s continue to participate in Lighthouse.⁹

Because of Hope’s primary function as a Christian support group for homeschooling families, many of the attendant literacy practices of the group resemble those found within the church more so than in the public school system. Meetings are bookended by prayers while Scripture readings are integrated into the majority of group activities. Common and expected practices of members include daily Bible readings, often referred to as “devotions”, focusing on training children to develop Bible reading practices on their own, as well as the ability to defend their faith with reason and evidence through advertised summer apologetics courses.

*Veritas Christian Academy – Winter Haven, FL*

Veritas Christian Academy is a co-op, not a homeschooling “group” or “community”, though it is, of course, still both of those. Homeschooling mother Lisa Ann Henson currently directs the Academy, and all of its teachers and “staff” are the homeschooling parents whose

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⁹ For example, one Lighthouse member, a mother of five boys, once informed me that the only reason they made the switch was because, “Hope mainly had girls.”
children attend the co-op. The cooperative is held on the campus of a local Catholic church once a week, during which students will go from class to class, have lunch together, and from which they will leave with homework. Despite having a director, the majority of the decisions and administration is handled by the community of parents who have “cooperated” in pulling it together. One of the draws of these co-ops is the ability to leverage each parent’s particular strength; one mother is a successful artist, so she teaches the students how to paint pictures that are relevant to their history or literature classes, another mother is proficient in complex math, while another specializes in literature. Not every parent is a teacher, but every parent is on the school “board” and is involved with the decision-making.

Unlike Hope, with which I had a great deal of familiarity and which has an online presence to analyze, I learned about Veritas mainly from its members and my time spent sitting in on a year-end curriculum meeting. At the meeting I attended, the central topics were the impending Recognition ceremony, setting up the future class schedule, and the reading and writing texts and expectations for the coming year. It was nothing short of full-fledged school board meeting, with issues such as mapping out what the seating for the Renaissance-themed celebration would look like, to deciding which rooms were most pragmatic for the subject that was being taught, to behavior expectations, homework expectations, expense considerations, and academic goals. Every member was involved in the process and either took upon or was delegated some task. Questions in regards to the reading and writing topics quickly came up: would they be basing the reading list off personal preferences or other reading lists? If it was to be based off of other “required” readings lists, than which ones? Some argued they should be
reading the same lists as other high schools, while others contended that they wanted to delve into texts you wouldn’t find at other high schools. Henson, the director, eventually drew a large T-chart on a nearby white-board and told every parent in the room to tell her which texts they either liked or at least thought would be a good fit for the students (Table 3). The list they produced indicated a familiarity and desire to work with canon, as well a desire to stay within the realm of U.S. History, a tenet of 11th grade in public schools, as one member suggested.

Issues related to literacy seemed to hold universal concern for the members of the group.

Table 3: Initial Draft of 2015-2016 VCA Literature Booklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vol 1. – Course Texts</th>
<th>Vol. 2 – Recommended Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red Badge of Courage – Stephen Crane</td>
<td>The Chosen – N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Tom’s Cabin – Harriet Beecher Stowe</td>
<td>The Old Man &amp; the Sea – Ernest Hemingway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crucible – Arthur Miller</td>
<td>Animal Farm – George Orwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hiding Place – Corrie Ten Boon</td>
<td>To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Scarlet Letter – Nathaniel Hawthorne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washington Irving (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edgar Alan Poe (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frederick Douglass (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Booker T. Washington (author)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Giver – Lois Lowry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One mother became tearful in relating her frustrations with getting her son to write, while others kept saying how thankful they were that their children were part of the co-op, because they enjoyed the social aspect of reading literacy with their peers. Unsurprisingly, the conversation through all of this kept returning to what was best for the child. Which class was best for each child, regardless of grade-level or social-group, which sometimes conflicted? Which method was best for the child, regardless of its appropriateness elsewhere? My research only followed this trail of questions to one VCA family, the Bennets, whose answers demonstrate that this level of questioning is happening at a furious rate throughout the homeschooling journey.

Conclusion

Homeschooling is a dynamic educational community made up of various pedagogies, methods, and resources. From this overview, as well as from personal experience, I find that there tends to be more similarities between different homeschooling families than outsiders expect. However, there is no discounting the fact that if you were to walk into five random homeschooling family’s houses you would likely run into five wildly different conceptions of what “homeschooling” is. In one house you might find a boy reading a video game manual to the delight of his parents, while in others you might feel a bit flummoxed by a tenth grader’s facility with the classical canon. Homeschooling, as distinct from unschooling, is the strange place where issues of discipline, family structure, faith, and life values often explicitly intertwine with pedagogy. The Charlotte Mason Model, for instance, could just as easily be viewed as a child-rearing manual than as a guideline for educating children, and some homeschoolers’ science and history textbooks often read more like Bible Study resources. Yet, while homeschooling is an
umbrella for wide variety of approaches to educating children within the home, there are ways that it is stabilized and unified.

Organizations and groups, from the highest level to the most intimate level, serve to gather families under various homeschool-related causes, with the most notable cause being the right to homeschool children their preferred way. At the more intimate levels, families gather to delegate teaching and knowledge expertise, experience the social benefits that come more naturally at traditional schools, and to encourage and support one another on the journey. These groups are typically organized and managed by the homeschool mothers, who often take on such titles as “publisher”, “administrator”, and “project manager” in addition to their roles as mother and primary educator. Ultimately, then, a great deal of the work of homeschooling is centered on homeschooling; the protection of it, the continuation of it, and the success of it. Choosing to homeschool, then, is very often a decision to bring school into a family’s home, along with all of its complex issues of pedagogy, administration, and legal and political concerns. This conglomeration of specific literacy domains shows up in the texts and practices that surround the community: receiving and reading newsletters from the HSLDA, updating and checking group websites or listservs, continual examination and re-examination of curricula and resources in order to choose the best possible option, a job that often requires flipping through various magazines for reviews and commentary. This is the context in which parents become teachers, but also through which, as the next chapter will demonstrate, their teaching evolves into practices of brokering and mediating.
In this brief overview of the larger context of the homeschooling movement, it should be noted that much of the literacy practices covered here relate primarily to the parents (and most often, to the mothers). Although students can play a part in this larger context, it is not until we get to the family level that we can really begin to see what learning and using literacy looks like for them. Even then, however, it is impossible to miss the traces of their mother’s agency.
CHAPTER FIVE: HOMESCHOOLING AND LITERACY IN PRACTICE

What does homeschooling look like at the ground level? How is literacy experienced by families involved in the practice of homeschooling, beyond what the discourse of homeschooling’s larger organizations, communities and institutions imply or recommend? This chapter provides some answers to these questions by describing, primarily in their own words, what homeschool families are doing with literacy: how they are learning it, how they are using it, and how they perceive it. Despite my own background in homeschooling, I attempted to approach these families with the same, overarching questions formed by Heath and Geertz, as quoted by Andrea Fishman: “What is going on here? (Heath 1982; Smith 1983) and, perhaps more accurately, “What the devil [do] they think they’re up to?” (Geertz 1976, 224).

The findings from the data have been organized to provide a narrative as well as to highlight the parents’ roles as literacy mediators and brokers. As such, I will begin with a narrative structure and slowly, but explicitly, transition to a structure that focuses on the prominent themes. I will first introduce both families, their motivations to homeschool, and their process of entering the movement. After this, I will describe the literacy practices that attend their practice of homeschooling, including those that are outside the bounds of participant-described “school work”. Having provided an overview of the families and high school participants’ homeschooling and literacy practices, I will then focus on the parents’ roles within their children’s literacy practices, particularly their active, constant involvement with customization and delegation.
The Gardner Family

Getting to interview the Gardner family was tricky. They were enthusiastic about the study and were ready and willing to participate, but as with any family with school-aged children, they were very, very busy. “I’m doing my very best to keep life simple right now,” Tess Gardner told me. “Simple” is a hard find for any family, let alone one with a recently arrived sixth child. While I was at their home, typical, day-to-day occurrences orbited around us: the baby needed to be held, the boys were golfing in the backyard, the dog was vomiting, and Dad was coming home to transport the eldest son to baseball practice.

I first met the Gardners in my senior year of high school, when their family joined my family’s church. Through occasional social gatherings and dinners at our house I got to know them a little, but was never very close to their family because of the disparity between their children’s age and my own, and because I was soon off to college. I approached the family for this study because I knew their oldest daughter, Rachel, was now in high school, and thought she’d be interested in this study. I knew nothing of Rachel’s homeschooling experience, let alone her practices of literacy going into the study, beyond the fact she was a member of the same homeschooling group as my family.

Tim Gardner, Tess’s husband, works in insurance and is involved in the planning of homeschooling but rarely in the “practice” of it. The family, as implied, identifies as Christian and faithfully attends a local, Protestant Church of around one hundred members.
Motivations to Homeschool

“But I think we’re pretty normal…I think,” Tess Gardner laughed, describing some initial concerns about some “strange” homeschoolers she had encountered in the past. Rachel nodded, as if to confirm with her mom that yes, in the range of homeschoolers, they were perfectly normal. Normal, of course, is tricky to define, but as Tess shared her and her husband’s motivations to homeschool it became clear that her choice mirrored those of many homeschool converts.

At the outset, homeschooling was never an option that the Gardners seriously considered. In fact, it only became viable as a last resort. Tess described the factors that went into Rachel’s move from traditional schooling to homeschooling:

T: Rachel went to [a local, private, Christian school] for three years: Kindergarten, 1st grade, and 2nd grade. It really was just a financial burden. We couldn't do it anymore. I didn't know what to do. We toured the public school and I wasn't comfortable with that, so I was like, "I don't know what else we're going to do so I guess we'll homeschool" (15 April 2015).

Up until this point the family had never taken homeschooling seriously. Beyond one relative who homeschooled, the only interaction with homeschooling that Tess and Tim had experienced was with homeschoolers who they felt fit many of the negative stereotypes. Tess hesitantly confessed, “I did know a couple kind of weird homeschool families” (15 April 2015). The lack of socialization of the children and the hyper conservativeness Tim and Tess had encountered in
other homeschooling families hadn’t helped improved their perception of homeschooling as an option. Yet, as Rachel entered the third-grade, they decided to give homeschooling a go.

Once the family started homeschooling Tess says she began to see it was a better fit for her family than she had first imagined. “It just seemed to make sense once we started doing it,” she said. “It seemed to make sense that it would be the best thing, the most beneficial to the kids” (15 April 2015). Since their decision to start, they haven’t stopped. All the children of schooling age have started and continued to homeschool, including thirteen-year old Michael, ten-year old Liam, and five-year old Liz. In our conversation Tess continually reaffirmed how much she appreciated homeschooling and how grateful she is for choosing to do it. She did, however, mention that traditional school used to enter the topic of conversation, but normally in the form of a subtle threat:

T: Since then, I’ve questioned [the decision]. Especially if I’m having a bad day:

‘Alright, this is not good for the kids.’ I even made a chart; if you [the child] have a good day, you get a sticker and get to stay home. You have a bad one, and you’re closer to going to school” (15 April 2015).

Considering how much she praised homeschooling, I remarked that it was hard to imagine Tess ever seriously considering sending her kids back to traditional school and she admitted, “I don’t threaten that anymore” (15 April 2015).

If homeschooling was never a valid option at the outset, how did the Gardners eventually come to enough of an understanding of it to give it a try? Tess admitted that she didn’t have a lot to go on when she started but that she found the courage to do it through the example a close
relative. “My aunt homeschooled her grandson,” she said. She said she found her aunt’s choice bizarre at first, but later on would consider it as the educational model for her own children – in the beginning, almost exclusively. “That was the only interaction with homeschooling I really had, other than” the few, “weird” homeschooling families she had met (15 April 2015).

The decision to homeschool is credited to more than just Tess’s aunt. According to Tess, the option of homeschooling was nothing less than a gift from God. She remarked that there a came a moment when she started to really evaluate what her aunt was doing with homeschooling, and that was when “the seed” was planted:

T: And you know she, she was able to do a lot with him, and he was able to do a lot of things so that was kind of...and she had mentioned before "so why don't you homeschool?", and I thought, "oh no, I can't do that". But then - they live in Tennessee - and we'd visit them a few times. So, I don't know, the Lord just had to have put it on my heart. So he used her [to] plant that seed as something that we could do, but you know He just really put it on my heart that [this] was something we would do (15 April 2015).

Through multiple visits to their aunt, many talks, and much prayer, Tim and Tess agreed to give homeschooling a try.

Getting Started: Entering the Movement

Tess’s aunt proved to be more than just the impetus to get the Gardners started on homeschooling; she served as the family’s guide into the movement. According to Tess, getting started on homeschooling was almost fully funded by her aunt: “My aunt’s grandson is two years
older than Rachel, so she would start giving us [things] like ‘Oh we did this, how about this?’ She just started kind of passing things down” (15 April 2015). A significant moment in the Gardner’s transition to the homeschooling was Tess’s first homeschooling convention. “I went to the FPEA [Florida Parent Educator Association] conference and then I saw: whoa!” Tess admitted to being both awed and overwhelmed by all the available resources and communities. “I saw [that] there was a whole lot out there” (15 April 2015).

Between her aunt and the convention, Tess said she began collecting resources that helped her learn and facilitate homeschool. A lot of it, Tess said, was basic “Your First Year Homeschooling” type of guides, and was interspersed with Evangelical Christian introductions to the movement, such as those by Focus on the Family founder, Dr. James Dobson. Mostly, though, her education of homeschooling was guided by the example of her aunt, even down to the curriculum. From this early start, Tess would soon become an enthusiastic supporter of homeschooling, even becoming the director of Hope Homeschoolers for two years.10

Rachel Gardner: “A Reader and a Writer”

“Rachel is a reader and a writer,” Tess said. “That's what she loves, so [in] her curriculum there's a lot of reading and writing with it. She likes that stuff” (15 April 2015). Entering into this study, as previously mentioned, I knew little of Rachel as a person, let alone as a homeschool student. The picture I received in my short time being guided by her through her literacy practices was of someone who was comfortable with the identity of being both “a reader and a

10 She has since stepped down from that role, but remains a member of the group.
writer”, and whose day-to-day activities within “school” and outside of “school” tended to intentionally orbit around literacy-centric activities.

For her structured learning, Rachel’s curriculum is anchored by a central textbook collection, but she also receives instruction in structured classes outside of the home. This past year, most of her schooling has been through the “My Father’s World” curriculum set, which focuses on three subjects: History, Literature, and Bible. For subjects like Math and Chemistry, Rachel attends a local homeschool co-op. When describing their curriculum, Tess was quick with specific word: “eclectic”.

T: It’s eclectic. It’s definitely eclectic. So I can’t say, ‘oh, we’re a Charlotte mason family’ or, ‘we’re this’; it’s definitely eclectic and since Rachel has gotten older it’s kind of, you know, it just gets morphed into what works for that child (15 April 2015).

Part of this morphing process, according to Tess and Rachel, has to do with the type of curriculum used. When they first started homeschooling, Rachel used an entirely different curriculum that had the capability to be carried into high school, but which they eventually chose to give up. That was the Sonlight curriculum, which the family used almost by default, since it was the curriculum passed down to them by her aunt. Tess seemed to denote a connection between the Sonlight curriculum and a literature-focus in her description:

T: […] Once we started homeschooling she would just pass down all the literature they would read. They did Sonlight curriculum so there’s tons of readers with that. So then we used a ton of those and that was really helpful because we really had no money at the
time. And so that was basically our schooling, it was all the books that they gave us. Which was great (15 April 2015).

Because Sonlight emphasizes the use of readers, it appears that when the family started, much of the learning came through the process of engaging with literature. Indeed, Sonlight self-describes its curriculum as one that’s “literature-based” and which “lets learners succeed because stories stay with them” (emphasis added, Sonlight 2015). Sonlight also worked well for the family because of its Christian orientation, an aspect that has already been briefly noted in the previous chapter. The My Father’s World curriculum, as the name clearly implies, also frames its teaching within a Christian worldview. Its publisher positions it as a beneficial synthesis of “Charlotte Mason’s ideas and classical education with a Biblical worldview [and] an international focus” (MFW Books 2015). Whether the relationship between these curricular goals and Rachel’s preferences are a correlation or a causation is hard to tell, but Rachel appears to be the perfect student for these homeschool programs. When not engaged in structured learning, most of her free time is centered on reading and writing in various ways for pleasure. The extent of her activity, as well as the fervency with which she attends to it, is clearly unique (Table 4).

According to Tess and Rachel, and as evidenced in Table 4, Rachel engages in a wide variety of practices that correspond with what Barton refers to as “literary” view of literacies (169).

T: She’s also writing-how many?-like…

R: Four, five books…
T:…like four or five books. That’s not school. She does that for fun. She doesn’t even like to look at it and I don’t look at it, but it’s just tons of writing, you know? (15 April 2015).

Rachel’s practice of novel writing is supported by a variety of other related practices, such as her keeping of journals. In discussion her journaling, it became clear there were three types of journals she was actively writing: a Character journal, an Ideas journal, and a Personal journal.

T: And see, you [Rachel] has several journals…

R: Yeah, I do a lot of character development. Things like ‘what would this person be like?’

J: So you have your own personal journals and then you have journals for your characters in your books?

R: Yeah.

T: She has an Ideas journals too…

R: Yeah, which I write down [my story ideas – distorted by audio]. It’s almost full. I fill one about every six months. It’s just a bunch of different book ideas (15 April 2015).

When I asked for more details on what the Character Journals looked like, Rachel explained that she would spend time writing entries from her fictional character’s perspectives, in order to strengthen her understanding of them, which she hoped would in turn lead to a stronger novel. As is evidenced by her Literacy Log (Table 5), she seems to attend to these practices on a daily basis.
Table 4: Rachel Gardner's Literacy Practices

*Please see Appendix B for full list of Rachel’s literacy practices.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Domain/Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books (Read)</td>
<td>Personal/School</td>
<td>Reads books for school and personal interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Writes journals from the perspective of characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Schedule</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Reads dance schedules before teaching and practicing, to know what to expect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional/Bible</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Reads a devotional, or her Bible, usually at the start of the day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea Journal</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Writes down ideas for stories, characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Reads magazines related to her writing and photography interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novel (Writing)</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Writes novels that she will occasionally share on Wattpad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcrossing</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Writes and receives postcards to and from strangers around the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td>Personal/School</td>
<td>Keeps track of any book she's read for school or personal interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipes</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Reads recipes in order to cook various items for the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Reads and writes in textbooks within the MFW curriculum and co-op classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wattpad</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Posts completed novels to Wattpad, reads and responds to feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When Rachel is engaged in her structured learning, her literacy practices are relatively familiar to those of her traditionally schooled peers. A lot of her work with the My Father’s World textbooks involves reading and studying the content and responding to the text-specific questions. She is often writing essays as part of the curriculum; at the time of our interview she was currently working on an essay about marriage that stemmed from a textbook prompt. Her essays usually require her to conduct some form of research, leading her to blogs, articles, and Wikipedia.

When she’s not “writing mostly for books and for school” (15 April 2015), Rachel’s other literacy practices remain varied and prominently involved with her life. For example, she participates in a project called Postcrossing, which is set up to “allow people to receive postcards from all over the world, for free. The main idea is that: if you send a postcard, you will receive one back from a random Postcrosser from somewhere in the world” (About Postcrossing 2015).

These postcards are usually taped to Rachel’s mirror, the same place where she says she will often write lists and Bible verses.11 She enjoys cooking and will often read recipes to make desserts or meals. Additionally, she will to blogs and magazines related to her favorite topics of photography and writing.

11 Unfortunately, she had removed the postcards from her mirror before our interview because she “was running out of space.”
Rachel also engages in practices of literacy that revolve around her love for dance and involvement in Church and Christian causes. She attends a dance academy where she functions primarily as an instructor to other girls, although sometimes she will take the role of a student.

Table 5: Excerpt from Rachel's Literacy Log (Wednesday)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Literacy Activity</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>How long?</th>
<th>Time of Day?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read Devotion</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>7:45-8:05 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read School Book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>9:40-9:55 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read Music</td>
<td>Music Lesson</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>10-10:30 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read History Textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>11:25-12pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read School Book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>12:05-12:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read History Textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>1:30-2p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Answered History Questions</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>2-2:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read a Postcard</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>2 mins</td>
<td>2:30p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Wrote School Essay</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>35 mins</td>
<td>2:30-3:05 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Wrote Book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>3:10-3:50pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read Dance Schedule</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>5:55-6pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read a Book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>10:15-10:35p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Wrote in Journal</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>10:50-11:40 am</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This requires reading through dance schedules and organizing lessons. At home, she says she often reads materials related to dance, and especially enjoys browsing a hefty dance encyclopedia she keeps in her room (15 April 2015). In keeping with her identity as a Christian, Rachel will start many days off with a devotional time, wherein she reads either the Bible or a Bible-aid and take notes. At the time of our interview she was currently preparing for a missions trip to Haiti and had just finished securing necessary funding. This process had meant writing letters, faithfully posting and responding to social media and securing important traveling documents, such as passports and tickets.

The Work of Mediation in Rachel’s Homeschooling

It became clear in our talks that Tess considered Rachel to be a “good” reader and writer. I never detected a sense of concern for Rachel’s literate abilities from Tess, and after combing through the data multiple times, no evidence of such a belief ever surfaced. As Tess continued to describe and almost marvel at her daughter’s “love” and facility with reading and writing, a question about accountability and grading came to mind. I asked her how comfortable she felt judging and grading Rachel’s work, since she clearly felt that Rachel was so competent at these practices. She responded with an immediate: “Oh no. I don’t grade anything she writes” (15 April 2015). Instead, Tess sends all of Rachel’s school-centered writing to a high school English teacher who is a close friend.

T: I send everything Rachel writes to her. And it’s great. She’ll give it a grade, provide feedback and send it back to her. I never look at it (15 April 2015).
This idea of “not looking at Rachel’s work” showed up in other areas as well, particularly during the part of our conversation focused on Rachel’s novel-writing. Here, Rachel explained her process of posting her novels to an app that gained her an instant, anonymous audience:

T: She [Rachel] doesn’t even like me to look at [her novel writing], and I don’t look at it, but it’s just a ton of writing, you know? She has a book on “WhatPad” or whatever it’s called…

R: It’s called WattPad. It’s an app. You can put your…

T: It’s an amateur authors app.

R: You can put your writing on there and I can have people read my books even though I’m not a professional.

T: And they can comment on it, tell you what you can get better at (15 April 2015).

For Rachel, the ability to gain an instant audience through WattPad is a key reason for her use. For Tess, Rachel’s ability to receive constructive feedback is the major draw.

In both her school writing and novel writing, we witness the majority of Rachel’s literacy practices being outsourced from parental supervision, but in each case there is an individual or group able to keep Rachel accountable to certain literary and academic standards. This, however, is not to say that her mother is uninvolved with this process. Perceiving herself as not the best person to grade her daughter’s writing, she personally sought out her English teacher friend to fill in the role of grading. There have been times, however, when this sort of delegation has turned back disappointing results.
In middle school, Rachel was signed up for a local homeschool writing course. The ten week course, run by a former homeschool mother who was in turn, a former high-school English teacher, came highly recommended and regarded by many of the homeschool families in the area. Considering Rachel’s affinity for writing, the course seemed to be a perfect match. Tess and Rachel, however, described it very differently:

T: Honestly, that was a disaster. It was.

J: Really?

T: I don’t feel like it improved her writing at all. I feel like it did the opposite. I feel like it was detrimental to her writing.

J: In what way?

T: Because there were so many assignments at the same time, and it was very choppy – “okay, now we’re going to write this paragraph, and now this week we’re not going to even look at that, you’re going to write this”, you know? So none of her work, you know, none of it flows. Whereas, when you let her go, it sounds fantastic” (15 April 2015).

Both Tess and Rachel were adamant about this fact: Rachel’s writing was far better if you gave her room and space to do things her way, not by a rigid system. Rachel, in defending her methods, admitted that they went against what she considered “conventional” approaches.

R: And I know you’re not supposed to do this, but I write and edit as I go, and it sounds so much better.

T: It’s [much better] than [if] she goes, “okay, brainstorm, okay, outline, now…” You know, [that] just doesn’t help her. It’s just better to let her write. I don’t think that I’ll
have my younger son do it. I really don’t. And I know for some people it might work really well, it just didn’t for us.

R: I actually wrote a lot more afterwards, but I hated it during the class (15 April 2015). And so the Gardners customized their approach. Deciding that Rachel’s writing grew and worked best within less-rigid confines, they moved into the current approach of having her complete the writing the way she wants and sending it to be graded by the writing instructor.

This type of trial-and-error adjustment is not limited to literacy. Tess, and now to a greater extent, Rachel, are continually customizing and delegating Rachel’s learning. For example, they have decided that whereas Rachel is best left to herself when it comes to reading and writing, she is best suited to structured classes for subjects like Chemistry and math. For this reason, she goes once a week to a local co-op, where homeschool mothers who are better equipped in these subjects run college-course like classes. The co-op, for Rachel, is essentially the same as going to a traditional high school.

R: I go at 8am in the morning, stay until lunchtime, go to a couple different kind of classes, and uhm, there’s a study hall.

T: So there’s teachers…

R: Right. There’s a lunch break…I don’t know, [it’s] what I picture a normal school being like (15 April 2015).

Except that, unlike within traditional school, Rachel and Tess have selected the specific classes they wanted for Rachel, which in this case is Chemistry and Algebra II and have opted to take
the rest through other means. For example, even though the co-op offers an English course, the Gardners have passed on it, preferring to continue the approach they already have in place.

Rachel Gardner’s passion for reading and writing drives her into natural learning and assuages most of her mother’s concerns.

Table 6: Tess Gardner's Brokering Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delegation</td>
<td>Sends Rachel to writing workshop course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sends all of Rachel's essays and school-based writing to high school English teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approves</td>
<td>Approves of Rachel's fictional work being posted to anonymous online writing community of WattPad where it receives comments and feedback from other members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>Partners with Rachel to select the classes she most needs from local co-op; chooses to avoid doing the &quot;full&quot; co-op</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customization</td>
<td>Reviews and adjusts curriculum on a year-by-year basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chooses</td>
<td>Chooses not to continue sending Rachel to next writing workshop course because they considered the first one &quot;a disaster&quot;.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tess, however, is still very present in most of her daughter’s practices, even the ones “she never sees”, like the novel writing. She is present through her tacit approval and appreciation of the feedback she knows Rachel receives through the online forums. Tess actively customizes Rachel’s education around her gifts for reading and writing, opting to let Rachel freely choose
most of her reading, and attempting to create a learning environment that encourages literacy practice without too rigidly defining how those practices are accomplished. Tess delegates much of Rachel’s literacy learning and practice oversight to others, from workshops, to high school instructors, to, once again, anonymous online commenters. In Rachel’s homeschooling experience we do not see her mom just letting her do whatever she would like, as in an unschooling environment. Instead, we see her mom overseeing and actively mediating Rachel’s interactions with literacy, even if from a comfortable distance.

The Bennet Family

There are five members of the Bennet family: Kyle, Laura, and their three children, Corey, Jesse and Anna. Corey, like Rachel Gardner, is a rising Junior. Jesse is entering 9th grade and was born with Down syndrome, and Anna is in middle school. Laura stays home and handles nearly all of the work related to homeschooling while Kyle runs his own web design company. Like the Gardners, they have been homeschooling for eight years, and also like the Gardners, they are Protestant Christians who attend church on a regular basis. Although the Bennets are not current members of any homeschooling community, they are actively involved with a homeschool co-op that functions much like a miniature homeschooling community.

Motivations to Homeschool: “We Just Blew it all Up”

Much like the Gardners, Laura and Kyle Bennet never intended to homeschool. Their eventual reasons for choosing to homeschool, however, were quite different from the Gardners. Corey attended a private school from Kindergarten through third-grade, where it quickly became apparent he was a gifted student. Over time, Laura became increasingly frustrated with the
school’s two solutions for her son’s giftedness; they would either push to move him up multiple grade levels, which she felt would hurt his social wellbeing, or give him marginally more work to do, so that he still spent the majority of his time “bored” at school. She describes the variety of factors that went into pulling him out of school, starting with the moment the school first requested he be moved up from Kindergarten to third-grade:

L: And Kyle and I thought, “That doesn’t seem appropriate socially.” And he’s young for his grade, [since his birthday] is at the end of the school year. Kyle’s brother and sister are ridiculously smart and kind of awkward. But they never fit in. It was always an issue for them. So we talked to my mother-in-law and asked her, “you’ve had bright kids, what’s your opinion?” She said, “I think there’s a lot to be learned, that even if you’re the smartest kid in the class, that you learn compassion. When you have to sit there and listen to a kid sound out a word you already know, it teaches you all sorts of stuff. I would say make him stay with his classmates, but be a leader. And with your family dynamics, if anyone is going to need to learn patience and compassion it’s Corey, with his little brother.” Of course at this point we didn’t have [child] number three. So we told the school no (22 April 2015).

Corey’s teachers tried their best to accommodate him but Laura soon felt that rather than positioning Corey as a leader in the classroom, as someone who could maybe help, he was usually just being handed some upper-level work and told to complete it. That was when Laura and Kyle felt their educational priorities for Corey and the school’s priorities were not
converging: “We didn’t need to keep stuffing his head with information,” Laura said (22 April 2015).

Even though the solution was to take Corey out of school, it was not, however, to place the complete responsibility of schooling into the Bennets’ hands just yet. Corey was instead admitted into a Stanford educational program for gifted students, where he began meeting with a professor over web video-chat every day. The family stayed with the program for nine months and the results were drastic.

L: In his first eight to nine months of homeschool he went from third grade and completed sixth grade math. In nine months. And I thought, you know, this just doesn’t really feel right. He’s eight. There’s no automaticity with his math or his times-tables. So that’s when we just…blew it all up (22 April 2015).

“Blowing it all up” meant that Laura got to try out homeschooling on her own terms, something she admitted to always wanting to try but never having the needed courage. Even after they made the choice to begin homeschooling, Laura jokingly admitted she had some reservations: “I figured ‘if I screw him up in the third grade at least he’ll be able to catch up’” (22 April 2015).

Entering into the Movement: Books, Blogs & Pinterest

“I don’t get much sleep,” Laura told me. “I’m always up, reading, studying, learning, and browsing blogs and Pinterest for better lessons and ways to homeschool” (22 April 2015). When she started homeschooling, Laura quickly read many of the movement’s seminal texts, including The Well-Trained Mind, an argument and how-to for classical home education written by Susan Wise. Without my prompting, however, she described herself as “mostly” abiding by
the Charlotte Mason method, which seems to align well with her efforts to ensure her children’s whole person was being attended to instead of just their intellect.

Laura has and continues to attend the FPEA convention. She seeks out and attends other conferences or seminars on homeschooling, especially if they’re about issues that are relevant to their family, such as effectively teaching students with Down syndrome or on science and medicine, which are Corey’s primary interests. The family has been involved with different homeschooling groups but now finds most of their homeschooling community and support through Veritas Christian Academy, a local homeschool co-op comprised of about a dozen families.

Corey Bennet: “A Numbers Guy”

The time spent with the Stanford professor illuminated two things to Corey’s parents: first, that he had an unusual facility with math, and second, that they would need to stay at least “two steps ahead of him at all times” (22 April 2015). Part of this two-steps-ahead strategy involved the adoption of a catchphrase that would shape their homeschooling mission: *Fun with a purpose*. For Corey, Laura always needed to undergird the fun with something rigorous and stimulating, since “for him, *that* was fun” (22 April 2015).

An example of this mantra, used more with his brothers and sisters, but which illustrates her point, is when Kyle and Laura would give everything in the house a label – “Toilet” for the toilet, “Dresser” for the dresser, and so on - and then would switch all the labels at nighttime. The kids would compete to correctly switch the labels to the correct item, fostering pattern connection and reading skills; fun, but with a purpose.
For reading and writing, the family motto meant having to tie the learning of literacy skills into larger thematic units to maintain their child’s interest. Laura describes this period of homeschooling for Corey, which she summarized as “the magic years”:

L: We’ve always tried to wrap our reading around whatever historical period we were studying or whatever trip [we were taking]. We did historical biographies when we were studying the Colonial period; we went up to New England and explored the area and Williamsburg. We definitely tried to do thematic reading during the elementary years. […] We did KONOS [a theme-based writing curriculum] when they were little for unit studies. And if you ask my children what are their favorite memories of homeschooling, they would say KONOS. And the fact that everything wrapped to the theme, everything was hands-on…those were like the magic years (22 April 2015).

A lot of Corey’s literacy skills were honed through academic competition at a young age, a strategy the Stanford professors had urged the family to embrace. “They encouraged us to always have him in some type of contest,” Laura explained, “whether it was the science fair or a spelling bee” (22 April 2015). Even now, of the few literacy activities recorded in Corey’s literacy log, the majority of them were for the sake of preparing for an upcoming debate (Table 7). Laura and Corey both say the presence of a competition in his learning has worked so well because Corey is a naturally competitive individual (22 April 2015). “It’s been awesome,” Laura said of how well he’s acclimated to that type of learning (22 April 2015).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Literacy Activity</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>How</th>
<th>Time of Day?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Read Psychology Textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>75mins</td>
<td>10:30-11:45p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Read Various Articles for Upcoming Debate</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>2hrs</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Read Various Articles for Upcoming Debate</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>2hrs</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Read Various Articles for Upcoming Debate</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>2hrs</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Read Kickstarter Submissions</td>
<td>Entertainment, Personal Interest</td>
<td>45m</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Read a History Lesson</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30m</td>
<td>Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Read Merit Badge Wikipedia</td>
<td>Personal Interest, Other</td>
<td>90m</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unlike reading, Tess described the process of learning to write as being the most difficult to navigate, even if she wouldn’t necessarily characterize any of it as unsuccessful. The family has attempted to teach writing through a long list of programs and curriculums. All the programs they both mentioned, with the exception of KONOS, are stand-alone programs or classes that focus exclusively on writing, unlike the “whole curriculum” set-up of the Gardner’s “My Father’s World”. Their reasons and methods for using, customizing, and dropping these programs and curricula will be discussed in further detail in the following section on the role of literacy mediation within Corey’s homeschooling experience.

Corey might describe the bent of most of his current literacy practices as “not as fun, but still with a purpose.” For school, Corey takes Literature, History, Art, and French through Veritas Christian Academy, the homeschool co-op. In the past year he has begun to dual-enroll at the nearby community college, taking Composition I and, most recently, Psychology. He mainly writes essays for his college courses and short-answers for his Veritas studies while most of his academic reading revolves around textbooks and novels read within his literature courses. Most of the work done with the novels is relegated to class discussions.

Outside of structured learning, the majority of Corey’s literacy use occurs in a few specific areas: his internship, his Eagle Scouts troops, and his personal interest in specific stories and franchises (Table 8).

Corey currently interns with his father’s web-design company, where most of his time is spent “reading various samples of code” and writing HTML and CSS code through a free, web-based, instructional program called W3Schools.com (7 May 2015).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Reads textbooks for his Composition and Psychology courses at the community college, as well as for specific subjects at VCA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Writes essays for his college courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novels</td>
<td>School/personal</td>
<td>Enjoys reading sci-fi, fantasy and historical fiction interest when he can find the time. &quot;The thicker the better,&quot; according to his mom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Internship/Responsibility</td>
<td>Reads and writes HTML and CSS code as part of his internship at a web-design company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Reads Wikipedia for school and personal interest. He often returns to wikis related to his favorite franchises, such as Star Wars and The Inheritance Cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kickstarter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>Reads articles in preparation for upcoming debate competitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scout</td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>Reads and writes in his Handbook in order to achieve higher rank and earn specific badges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
He is also a long-time member of an Eagle Scouts troop, a responsibility that both him and his mom stressed required a good deal of reading and writing, mostly related to the associated handbooks and guidebooks (7 May 2015). He will also spend time researching the criteria for various medals and badges on places like Wikipedia (7 May 2015, Literacy Log). Wikipedia, when he has time for it, is where Corey will return to explore some familiar topics.

C: Well, I read Wiki-pages. There are a few themes, a few franchises – like Star Wars.

J: Do you ever write or edit Wikis?

C: Not really. Sometimes I think I’ll have something to add, or something new will happen that should go on the Wiki, but someone always beats me to it (7 May 2015).

Corey enjoys a few specific fictional series, although he admits to rarely having any time for it now that he has so many other responsibilities (7 May 2015).

C: My favorite things to read are *The Inheritance Cycle*¹², the Star Wars expanded universe, John Grisham books, Tom Clancey books, and Dan Brown books. I’ve [also] read a few Reader’s Digest compilations of war stories.

Now, however, Laura describes Corey’s reading as “90% academic reading […], and not reading for pleasure” (22 April 2015).

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¹² A popular, four book, fantasy-adventure series with its own film adaption that received quite a bit of attention upon release because the first draft was written by a homeschooled teenager at the age of fifteen and the books started to be published only three years later (alagaesia.com/author).
For Corey, unlike Rachel, reading and writing are rarely, if ever, aims in themselves. Although he tends to read avidly and has succeeded in his writing programs and courses, he summarizes his approach to writing quite bluntly: “Mainly the things I write are for a purpose. They are either for school or for a job” (7 May 2015). Corey is interested in the sciences and wants to pursue a medical career, which shapes not only his schooling, but which practices he values: “[My] Psychology class is helping me the most. That [class] would apply more [to my career] than Composition 1” (7 May 2015). As usual for Corey, what he enjoys and what is purposeful in a pragmatic sense remains one and the same.

The Work of Mediation in Corey’s Homeschooling

Laura explained that writing was her and Corey’s biggest challenge by far. She listed at least three reasons: (1) the failure of many writing programs to provide personalized feedback, (2) the failure of writing programs/curricula to incorporate revision into their teaching, and (3) the emotional dimensions that makes teaching one’s own child how to write extremely difficult. Whereas she enjoyed and took control of her child’s early childhood reading, and encouraged writing through dictation, once her students began to get older, the picture Laura and Corey painted was of her as an exceptionally active guidance counselor, finding the best avenues for her children to maximize their learning. In talking about how they approach writing – and, it is reasonable to assume, most curricular decisions – Laura said that, “[With writing] we factor in their personal temperament, and found the curriculum that worked best for them” (22 April 2015). Early on, writing and reading instruction was facilitated by the KONOS curriculum, which as we have already seen, was a favorite of Laura’s. However, once the thematic approach
of KONOS failed to meet Corey’s maturing sensibilities and needs, they decided to try the Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW), a web-centric writing that came with an abundance of resources and some personalized instruction. Over time, though, IEW failed to satisfy Laura and Corey’s desire for constructive feedback:

L: But, all those online classes, were…well, like, when I would say [about Corey’s writing], “Do you want this back? He had a lot of [suggested] corrections”, they would say, “well, if he wants to.” Don’t say that! Please don’t tell him that, because he doesn’t want to! He doesn’t want to see this paper ever again! [laughs] (22 April 2015).

Laura went on to joke that even though she subscribed to a Charlotte Mason approach to teaching, that didn’t mean she wasn’t a fan of real, honest feedback.

Another issue with IEW and other programs Laura had expressed interest in trying was that they didn’t integrate the process of revision into their instruction as much as Laura would have preferred. Not until Corey attended Composition 1 did Laura find the work of revision suitably addressed. Here, she briefly discusses the discrepancy:

L: You know, one of the things about Jennings [Corey’s Composition instructor] that I so appreciate is that you do get the paper back and you get to touch it again and again. And so often, the writing teachers [in the homeschool programs] didn’t do that. Just turn it in and move on. Like, what? You never get to make it better! And Jennings [would say], “start off with 1000 words; now expand this to 2000 words.” Now that makes sense to me. (22 April 2015).
Even when Laura switched-up her approach, and went for smaller scale and shorter-term classes to allow revision focus, she found problems arise. Originally, though, she and Corey were a fan of these course’s brevity, particularly of one program called *Write at Home*:

L: I do think that the nice about *Write at Home* was that the courses were all six weeks; and that is about the attention span of Corey. And I think that’s brilliant to me. I’d rather have an ugly six weeks and call it done and you kind of get hit hard on it, and then you can kind of brew and marinate in it (22 April 2015).

In a similar vein, Corey began taking a writing class facilitated by a local homeschool mother who had previously been a journalist. Again, the short-term nature of the class was a plus, but issues with revision showed up. Laura elaborated on the problems that ended up coming out of both methods:

L: The problem is that I pay a lot for these local homeschool classes and the classroom instruction is fine, but then they bring it home and need me to proofread and edit. So I bring out the red-pen, and then emotions start flying. (22 April 2015).

This convergence of the emotional and instructional roles involved in homeschooling one’s child – particularly on the subject of literacy - became a theme. The driving question that kept coming up was “how does a mother – the person we typically associate with being the child’s steadfast cheerleader – do the work of a teacher?” Literacy – and especially writing – was the thorniest area. Throughout the discussion there were reminders and inquiries as to whether the mother

13 This was not the same class as the one attended by Rachel.
was speaking about an issue “as the parent, or as the teacher” (22 April 2015). One homeschooling mother in particular, a close friend of the Bennets, described her biggest issue as being the question of, “Which hat do you wear? The teacher, the principal, or the mom? I think that’s the biggest challenge” (22 April 2015).

This challenge has led the Bennets through a process of continual customization. Laura, for example, recognized that Corey responded well to quantitative feedback better than anecdotal. She describes how she began to pull from other programs to craft a system that worked best for him:

L: We took the best of IEW and we just modified it. Because [the scoring] got a little tedious, but I loved the fact that there was a number because Corey is number-oriented. So I can say “that’s a 90 based on all the numeric elements that you were supposed to have.” That’s kind of cool (22 April 2015).

Whereas the Gardners pushed back on the introduction of a more rigid writing system, Corey seems to have embraced it, particularly the ability to calculate how “good” his writing was. As has already been noted, Corey responded well to the step-by-step construction of an essay presented to him in his composition course, where he was encouraged to “start off with 1000 words” and then systematically expand upon that in further sets of words. Laura felt that few homeschool-centric writing programs or curricula encouraged such an approach, but remarked that in homeschooling, you can pull these disparate strategies together: “And I think in homeschool you can do that, and obviously Jennings found a way to do that in the classroom” (22 April 2015).
### Table 9: Laura Bennet's Brokering Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Activity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delegation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sends</strong> Corey to writing workshops and classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Enrolls</strong> Corey into online writing programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Enrolls</strong> Corey into Veritas Christian Academy co-op. He participates in every class offered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Enrolls</strong> Corey into community college for dual enrollment; has taken Composition and Psychology thus far.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Sponsors</strong> Corey's involvement on debate teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customization</strong></td>
<td><strong>Suggests</strong> ideas for co-op curricula, including reading lists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Combines</strong> instructional and grading methods pulled from various curriculums and programs to match child's optimum literacy learning style.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Selects</strong> various learning sites and opportunities that encourage the literacy practices that are most valuable to Corey's career ambition to work in medicine, including sending him to special seminars, camps, and science weekends at the University of Florida.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout Corey’s ongoing homeschooling career, Laura has always been very hands-on. As we have seen, though, being hands-on hasn’t meant she has been the teacher, particularly where literacy is concerned (Table 9). Rarely, in fact, has she accurately filled that description beyond his early childhood years. Corey entered into a college composition class as a sophomore in high school, having already been exposed and enrolled in a wide variety of courses aimed at teaching him writing, from the IEW’s heavy use of numerical scores of different parts of his paper to the local homeschooling class’s more anecdotal, “suggestive” feedback. These different approaches to writing did not necessarily come to him year by year; within the span of one year he might be expected to navigate the expectations of the Veritas co-op, a six-week writing course, his mom’s own “customized” approach, and eventually, his Composition course.

Delegation for Laura does not always result in simply plugging Corey into a new and different program or class. One of the strongest themes of the Bennet’s homeschooling experience has been the strong friendship they have with the Masons, a homeschooling family of similar make-up to their own. Laura could not speak more highly of this homeschooling grace, and her answer illuminates that its provisions for further delegation is a large part of the blessing:

L: When [Corey] was little het met his best friend, probably when he was eight, and they are still best friends. They are very, very similar as far as their interests and they’re both smarties. And that has been magic. To have another mom to come alongside has been…They have another daughter Anna’s age and their son if Corey’s age. And we do everything together. We do everything. She considers my kids her [own], and vice versa. And I would say that is definitely unique in the homeschool community, you know, the
sort of “it takes a village” mentality. And when you find another family whose life lines up with yours, that’s the sweet spot (22 April 2015).

For the Bennets, the homeschooling movement seemed to resemble a variety of autonomous families working on their own and coming together at times for support and help, but they now feel that they are engaged in the work with another family, side-by-side. In this unique partnership, Laura makes clear that both families shoulder and share the burden of properly educating their children. It seems then that the Bennets and Masons have taken the intimate-level of the homeschool co-op and reduced it yet further, to two families working side by side. Indeed, Laura’s description of the way her family works alongside the Masons seems to have been a concept the two mothers had already previously discussed. When Norah Mason, the mother, first came to me and was introduced by Laura, the first thing she said was: “It takes a village!” This idea, like the Bennet’s mantra of fun with a purpose, seems to best describe the way Laura, and even the Gardners, have approached the work of literacy instruction.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described and juxtaposed Rachel and Corey’s daily literacy practices, as well as the ways their mothers influenced and affected these practices. By synthesizing these brief glimpses of two homeschooling families with what we know of the larger homeschooling context, I suggest at least three initial conclusions.

First, literacy practices of high school homeschooled students resemble the ad-hoc character of the homeschooling movement at large. The students pick up and drop practices based on what they prefer and what is most convenient to them at the time. As such, one
student’s practices can take one form while another’s looks completely different. When I asked Corey how he felt all the writing instruction in homeschooling had prepared him for his college course he replied: “I would say they kind of prepared me by showing me what they’re looking for in a professional paper. They prepared me for MLA format, citations, proper research” (7 May 2015). This focus on preparing the student for professional writing is not as emphasized in Rachel’s practices as in Corey’s—though it also not entirely absent either. Rachel’s practices, and the curriculum her mother has customized around her, is both suited to her preferences as reader and writer while being scant in reading and writing work, since Rachel already reads and writes so much on her accord.

Yet, even within the variety of literacy practices they move between, it is clear that Rachel and Corey are not unschooled students. School, with all its attending genres, practices and expectations still shape their relationship with literacy. Both still write essay papers and submit them to other teachers for grades and feedback, both still have deadlines and tests and both can clearly define what counts for “school” and what is separate. Thus, in some homeschooling literacy practices, as in the homeschooling movement at large, we see a high-level of individualized instruction and curriculum but not so to the point where we find a rejection of the authority of a traditional school hierarchy, sources of authority or attending practices. The practices, and how Corey and Rachel learn them are fluid, but bounded.

Secondly, there is a strong sense of self-awareness in regards to literacy practices. Rachel could explain what she was doing when she wrote and why it probably deviated from the norm. Corey could describe his writing as being intimately connected with tangible results, as always
needing to be done with a clear-cut reward in mind. Without as much compulsion to complete recursive literacy practices, the parents and the students seem to seriously consider each practice they use, its benefit, and its relevance to the particular student. Just like a family can’t really be said to drift into homeschooling, and that it is an intentional choice, so it seems that the families are not just adopting the practices that were dictated to them by textbooks or schools. When mediating literacy for their children, the mothers in this study seemed to be accounting for three points of consideration: the practice’s compatibility with their child, its compatibility with what the parent thought made sense, and how well it aligned with upcoming college requirements and expectations. For instance, Tess and Laura both switched their children out of programs or customized those programs because, in their eyes, the programs weren’t well suited to their children’s learning sensibilities. However, sometimes the parents made changes based on poorly the program or workshop lined up with what they thought was an effective way of teaching the subject; Tess felt that Rachel’s writing class was teaching writing too rigidly while Laura felt that Corey’s writing programs didn’t focus enough on building on what was already there and on revision. Both parents, however, became bounded by the graduation requirements and expectations of college once their children reached high school. After this constraint, the mothers seemed more willing to delegate their children’s learning, to find classes, teachers, and accountability who could make sure their children would be up to current standards.

Finally, the answer to the question of “Which hat do homeschooling mothers wear?” is, I contend, neither that of a teacher, mother, or principal. Guidance counseling, I believe, is a more accurate way to describe the nature of homeschooling parents’ roles within their high school
child’s literacy learning and practices. They are present and they are intentional, even when they intentionally “don’t look at it”, as Tess explained in relation to Rachel’s stories. Their actions of staying aware of all their students’ activities, selecting the best available instructors and curriculum – even from traditional institutions, such as Composition courses and other English teachers - and customizing programs to the children’s preferences and temperament more closely resembles the responsibilities of a guide and a mediator rather than one engaged in direct teaching, like a teacher, or detached and merely authoritative, like a principal.

In the next chapter I will take up some of these brief conclusions in further detail in addition to providing a few conclusions directly related to the parents’ roles as literacy brokers.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

This study originally began with an aim to study the homeschool community through the lens of socio-cultural literacy practices, and a question as to how homeschool families navigate different domains of literacy practices. I was initially interested in understanding how the traditional domain of “school” fit into the traditional domain of “home” – a place typically considered school’s foil – and how still other domains might overlap in the practice of homeschooling, including religious, work, and others. I think this is a study that can still be done on this topic and can still provide valuable findings. Throughout the study that ended up occurring, however, this initial question was overshadowed by themes of conflicting values within homeschooling’s resources and literacy expectations. Further, what turned into a question of how the students interacted with these values turned into a study of how their parents – and in the case of these particular families, primarily the mothers – also evolved from teachers into literacy brokers; brokers who customized and delegated practices, values, and instruction for their children. In this final chapter I want to offer three conclusions related to the concept of literacy brokers, and then follow with a few implications for researchers of literacy in specific, and researchers of homeschooling in general.

As I elaborate on my conclusions, it is worth repeating previous concessions about the scope of these conclusions. When I write “X is often Y”, this statement should be understood as being based off interaction with two families and the peer-reviewed studies of other scholars, particularly the quantitative work by Joseph Murphy and sociological work of Mitchell Stevens. Now, having said that, in each conclusion I do attempt to explicitly demonstrate that not only do...
my conclusions seem accurate for one or both of the participating families at the very least, but
that – in connection with what we know of the larger context of homeschooling, and in
triangulation with the research previously conducted – it seems appropriate to generally and
cautiously apply them to the homeschooling movement.

Findings

1. A unifying literacy practice of homeschooling parents is the continual process of selecting
texts, curriculums and literacies for the student.

In discussing the various, sometimes-conflicting ways people can value different
literacies, David Barton writes:

   Literacy is embedded in institutional contexts which shape the practices and
   social meanings attached to reading and writing. Within these social contexts, the
   act of reading or writing becomes symbolic. […] Values are also clearly
   expressed in the relative importance attached to literacy as compared with other
   activities, such as practical and physical activities. Sometimes reading and writing
   are contrasted with work, at other times they are compared with leisure (Literacy,
   47-48).

This concept is slightly problematized within homeschooling because, as we have seen, there is
no overarching, monolithic institutional context. The students and the parents involved in this
study, instead, draw from a wide variety of value-laden resources, programs and classes. But
right there, in the action of selecting practices and resources from the wide range of available
ones offered through homeschool publishers and the larger, traditional institutions, is the primary literacy practice of homeschooling: the intentional analysis and selection of others.

Homeschooling, as we have seen, is education at its most consumer-centric. Hundreds of curriculum publishing companies vie for the parent’s approval, conventions collect dozens of speakers, often stemming from multiple pedagogies and perspectives, if not religious views to direct and guide parents one way or another. Magazines, blogs, catalogues, and countless organizations at every level of the ad-hoc homeschooling infrastructure suggest or advertise different options, different practices that deserve emphasis – “rigorous rhetorical analysis!”, “no, self-directed reflection!” – and even still, the “perfect fit” remains hard to come by, as evidenced by both Tess and Laura’s minor frustrations with various programs and curriculums.

In a community so atomistic and so diverse, the overriding practice related to literacy seems to be the practice of selecting new practices, new approaches, and better literacy-instructional resources. Robert Kunzman, in his study of evangelical homeschoolers, highlights how the abundance of available resources and practices can be “disorienting,” but also how the mother he is currently working with, Debbie, is able to handle it:

The unique context of homeschooling provides a mix of opportunities and challenges here. The curricular options and resources, for example, are immense. As I witness with other families, this can be overwhelming and disorienting. Debbie’s experience as a long-time homeschooler, however, enables her to mix and match in ways that engage her children and meet a variety of learning needs (18, 2009).
A mark of her experience in homeschooling, Kunzman suggests, is her facility with customizing the swirling mass of resources, texts, curriculums and practices to the individual needs of her children. Unschoolers may refrain from intentional direction, but homeschoolers embrace this responsibility, and if there is one action that seems to indicate their membership within the movement, one literacy practice that best symbolizes their roles as homeschooling parents, it seems to be that of actively observing, analyzing and selecting different and better literacies and related resources.

The result of this reality is that most homeschooling students will be shaped by a wide variety of approaches to literacy. Many of the values students will learn through homeschooling are shaped by the overall pedagogical approach of their textbook’s publishing companies. Rachel and Corey, rather than being taught by one individual for the duration of their education (such as their mother or father), and rather than being subject to a singular literacy sponsor, such as the public school system, or even a private school, have engaged with and navigated through various classes, courses and programs. Many of these classes held not only different pedagogical approaches to teaching literacy but different understandings of what is valuable within literacies. A theme among many of the curricula and programs that Rachel had approached was of Christian citizenship: the idea of using reading and writing to more closely align yourself, your community, and your country with God’s ideal. We see evidence of this displayed in the types of essays Rachel wrote as part of her curriculum, including one on the institution of marriage, as well as from the stated intentions of the curriculum providers (15 April 2015). My Father’s World, for example, claims to be striving to “[raise] up generations of families who see the world
through God’s eyes and live according to that knowledge” (MFW Overview), while KONOS, the thematic unit-based studies used by the Bennets, lists its first of four goals as “to train our children in Godly character…by focusing on character traits” (KONOS Overview). But Corey also participated and learn reading and writing through the Institute for Excellence in Writing, which prizes a more general approach that aligns more closely with a public school approach; indeed, the organization does not advertise any religious affiliation and markets itself to both public schools and homeschool parents. Finally, Corey now attends a community college where he is learning to approach and understand the types of values academic institutions prize in students’ literacies.

If a parent is not constantly reviewing and intentionally choosing homeschool curricula and literature, a homeschool student would likely come across widely divergent ideas of learning, reading, writing and of what being “literate” actually constitutes. Whereas a Charlotte Mason-leaning curriculum might encourage reflective literacy, and the idea of literacy as leisure or a recursive act of bettering one’s self, a classical model carries with it a strong emphasis on rigid argumentation and the belief that writing and reading is a primarily analytical practice, done for the sake of bettering the civic context. A student not helpfully guided through this by a knowledgeable parent might end up, like the majority of graduating high school students, greatly confused about issues like writing and its values and purposes.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} I do not suggest homeschool parents are failing to competently guide their students through this process. I only mean to suggest that it seems more likely to happen in a homeschooling environment than in a traditional schools.
2. *Homeschool parents are best understood as literacy brokers, whose work highlights the actions of delegation and customizing within the mediation process.*

Because homeschooling lacks a central institutional force that provides underlying values for all the families involved, parents’ work becomes markedly different than that of a teacher. From my discussion with the parents, as well as from evidence culled from the studies of Stevens, Lois and Murphy, it is not simple enough to say that homeschool parents are simply tacking on “teacher” to the already long list of roles parents have by necessity. In my study, the only time teaching in the traditional classroom style or one-on-one instruction seemed to occur was during the primary years, and perhaps a little into the middle school years (15 April 2015, 22 April 2015). By the time the students had reached high school the traditional model was all but dropped. Kunzman also noticed this phenomenon of parents beginning to drastically pull away from hands-on teaching of their older students and believes it has less to do with the naturally increasing capabilities of the student and more to do with the fact that many homeschool parents simply can’t afford to give any type of “instructional” level assistance to high school students when there are usually younger siblings to nurture or guide (18). Speaking from the perspective of an educator, he expresses some concern with this trend, believing parents “risk overlooking specific learning needs when joint activities are necessary” (18). While this might be the case for many homeschooling families with multiple children, it is worth noting that both of the where the teacher’s approach to reading and writing may differ, but very rarely the school’s curriculum. Homeschool parents, however, may benefit from familiarizing themselves with the scholarship on writing axiology that Composition has produced (Fulkerson).
families I interviewed had additional, unique family circumstances: the Gardeners had recently welcomed their sixth child – the second in three years –, and Corey’s younger brother’s down-syndrome no doubt required more attention and focus from his mother than most eighth grade boys normally need.

Homeschooling then, as we have so far seen evidence of, is a process wherein the parent/teacher and child/student work together to locate the best available resources, delegate instructional and accountability to specific parties or institutions, and customize program and curricula to meet their preferences. While this role of “brokering” can be seen as extending to all aspects of the children’s education, it is especially evident in areas of writing and reading. Reasons for this constant brokering range from the emotional difficulty of teaching literacy in-house, to potential feelings of inadequacy in accurately judging a child’s writing. Delegation does not mean just shipping the work out of home, however. It can mean trial-and-error approach to outside sources, as both families attested to, or the modification of programs and the constant evaluation of what works best for the child and what is “a disaster” (15 April 2015).

Constantly evaluating, delegating and customizing can be overwhelming for any individual parent or single-family unit. So in homeschooling we see a pattern of homeschooling families acknowledging their limitations and choosing to join together; again, particularly in the area of literacy learning and practice. Ligia Ana Mihut describes this process of “partnering” that can often be seen occurring amongst literacy brokers:
As brokers partner with others, they create webs of support often based on commonality of experience and quite frequently on ethnic ties. In their position of mediation, brokers harness various types of affiliations – civic, ethnic, local, or global – and channel them to accomplish goals for those individuals who need assistance (65).

Mihut precedes and follows this statement by highlighting that mediators are often working between and with other institutions, giving them a “bi-institutional perspective” (65). Mihut suggest that the difficult reality of being situated between multiple institutions is the driving force behind mediation as well as the desire to partner with others. Once the mainstream domains of literacy – school, work, church, etc. – all become unable to directly sponsor the literacy learning and practices of individuals and families, there becomes an immediate need to individually draw upon those practices and to create, an essence, some centralizing institution of one’s own to provide stability. In other words, when the institution is broken down to as small a unit as a family, there follows the accompanying work of creating a stable domain with the optimum values, practices and pedagogy. Literacy is a social practice, and without dominant or even non-dominant domains being able to necessarily dictate what these practices look like, homeschool parents are forced to decide for themselves what type of “domain” they want. And so communities centralized around religious affiliation arise, with workshops that incorporate

15 Mihut’s study is focused on the mediating work of Romanian immigrants. To better match this study’s subject matter, I think religious ties would be a more accurate statement. Laura’s comments about the difficulties of working with homeschoolers who do not share a Christian perspective – since so many of the resources are explicitly Christian - is one example.
themes of family, God, and charity (22 April 2015). There is the formation of the even further localized co-ops, but even then, the families involved in so small an “institution” make decisions to further customize the experience to best fit their child, as in the case of Rachel taking only Chemistry and Math at the weekly Lakeland co-op.

3. In homeschooling, parents are not only the brokers, but also the sponsors.

The question of authority in regards to who gets to decide the value of different literacy practices is what causes the most concern in the homeschooling community and seems to be a driving factor in most efforts to form stabilizing communities. The problematic task of crafting a high school reading list, for instance, demonstrates some of the conflicts within the homeschooling community. Unlike unschoolers, homeschoolers tend to very much appreciate and desire “authority” and are not overly squeamish around concepts like a literary canon. The question for homeschoolers, however, isn’t whether there is a canon, or whether there is an authority that needs adhering to, but rather, who exactly that authority is? That there is someone who decides optimum goals for reading and writing seems assured, but who is that exactly? This is not to say that homeschoolers never end up deciding this for themselves or that they are always in a state of flux, but rather, that this is a process which the formation of communities, co-ops and even intimate partnerships, as in the case of the Bennets and the Masons, serves to help solve.

Even as these partnerships and communities provide some grounding for authority by way of creating a consensus, there is no avoiding who ultimately calls the shots in homeschooling: the parents. I have argued that they are best understood as brokers, as distinct
from teachers, and also as distinct from sponsors. Yet, it becomes clear that the parents themselves must also be understood as sponsors who, in addition to “enabling, supporting, teaching, modeling, […] regulating, recruiting, suppressing [and] withholding literacy” are receiving that critical aspect of a sponsor; an advantage (“Sponsors” 166). For homeschool parents, what constitutes this advantage might vary, but no doubt remains similar to the reward most parent seek from their children: the comfort of believing they are learning and growing in the best possible way.

4. The work of mediating within the homeschool movement tends to be highly gendered.

This study makes ample use of the word “parents” to refer to the agents making the key decisions in these homeschooling families. This is because both parents certainly are involved in the work of homeschooling and the decision to homeschool was certainly one jointly made in both families’ cases. However, this study makes it abundantly clear that the majority of the practices related to homeschooling are mediated and accomplished by the mother. This is not unusual. Jennifer Lois, whose own work centered on mothers in the homeschool movement, remarked her initial surprise to find that homeschool parents is merely another way of saying homeschool mothers (3). Lois goes so far as to say “homeschooling is women’s work and is closely tied to mothers’ identities” (3). While this study did not dive into issues of the mother’s identity, it did further confirm Lois and Steven’s assertion that homeschooling “is mainly a movement of women” (Murphy, Stevens 15).

Why is this? There are certain practical factors at play, such as the fact that at least one spouse needs to be working to support the children’s education, even if it’s at home. Between the
father and the mother, however, mothers are almost never the ones working the full-time job. The most recent data on the occupational status of homeschooling parents reveals that 84% of the mothers do not work outside the home, and those that do overwhelmingly work less than fourteen hours a week (Ray 1997). Even in my own time homeschooling, I never once met a homeschool family where the father was the primary “educator” or even equally involved. There are other factors at play, of course, including different perspectives on gender, cultural expectations (and perhaps, confusion) surrounding the qualities of a “good mother” (Lois).

Whatever the reasons, there was no act of literacy mediation recorded in this study where the father was the primary broker. A few minutes after meeting Laura, she explained that it was almost entirely her work when it came to homeschooling. There was one father in attendance at the Veritas co-op meeting, but he seemed to be there primarily because of his role in creating some props for the Renaissance-themed recognition night. He mostly asked questions related to expectations of props and spent the rest of the time sketching out wood-working plans in a notebook while the mothers facilitated the rest of the discussion related to curricular, teaching and logistics. As homeschooling grows and diversifies, and as gender perceptions change in popular culture, it will be interesting to see how the dynamics of homeschooling and the mediating of practices within it change, if at all.

**Implications and Questions for Future Research**

This study was meant to initiate further questions and research into homeschooling, to provide avenues for stronger academic inquiry into the movement. As such, I pose five
questions for further research, some of which literacy researchers will be best suited to explore, and some which can be used by researchers from other relevant fields.

1. Where are literacy responsibilities and practices being delegated in a brokering relationship?

Studies on literacy brokering tend to focus on the work that the brokers take upon themselves to accomplish, but in a mediatory relationship, some of that work can be delegated to appropriate parties. Those parties could be members of the “web of support” the broker is a part of, different institutions, or, as we see in homeschooling, sometimes even to the person for whom they are mediating in the first place. The broker, of course, can’t be said to entirely hand over the responsibility or work of brokering, but may hand over many of the other responsibilities that come with mediating and teaching literacy.

In this study, both homeschooling mothers slowly transitioned from delegating literacy instruction to various outlets to delegating it to their children once their children have demonstrated a mature enough facility with the practices. By tenth grade, for example, Laura claims there are no longer any “reading lists” or “required reading” for Corey, who is free to read whatever he wants. This is still an act of mediation, as Laura makes this statement well aware of the reading Corey is still required to do for the Veritas co-op and community college classes; the decision to give Corey greater agency in choosing his own literacy practices and values is still an informed one as opposed to a complete “letting go”. Further research on literacy brokers should attend to this process of slowly granting greater agency to the individual for whom the broker’s services were needed in the first place.
2. **How do institutional practices still affect the practices of those detached from their authority?**

“Old habits die hard,” as the saying goes, and this appears true for those families who have chosen to homeschool. In lieu of a default institutional authority, homeschool families need to decide which authority they *will* abide by, even if only for a semester of a year. Parents in this position, however, are forced to create their own criteria for evaluating the “success” of these ad-hoc authorities in meeting their needs and goals. For homeschoolers, the primary coordinates around which they map their own “domains” of literacy seems to be what they perceive as working best for their children and what they remember working well for them. This latter element is best characterized as “institutional memory”. Without the government, school board, pastor, investors, or other literacy sponsors to directly designate literacy values, homeschool parents are forced to rely upon their own experiences with literacy, much of which, ironically, revolved around traditional institutions. Sometimes these “memories” can serve as models of what *not* to do or repeat, such as when Laura relied on her memories of school in order to contend that schools didn’t do a great job of teaching “compassion”. Other times these memories are a guide to figuring out how to approach literacy instruction in the first place, and provide a starting point from which parents can customize and modify, such as by adjusting learning and literacy values to either Charlotte Mason, classical, or other approaches.

3. **What is the role of homeschool support groups and communities in creating stabilized values for literacy practices?**

This is a question this study dealt with, but not in a satisfyingly thorough manner. A specific study on the ways these local support groups - be they the larger communities or the
smaller co-ops - work to create a “common” understanding of literacy practices could provide insight on how inhabitants of what scholars in the NLS call “third-spaces” draw upon the discourses and discussions of other domains to create their own. This is very similar to the initial questions that comprised this study, but for which the study design did not prove very effective at engaging. I believe a longer study, where the researcher could sit in on various community/co-op meetings would provide more than enough data to begin forming some helpful conclusions on this topic.

4. What are the trajectories of delegation and customization over the course of a homeschooled child’s education?

Again, this is another theme that this study brings up throughout its entirety, but for which I believe more sustained attention should be given. If my contention that homeschool parents tend to gradually delegate agency to their children in areas of literacy practice as they mature is granted, than a study of the defining markers along this transition could potentially illuminate how and why teachers and brokers begin to slow down their activity. What are the signs that a student is able to succeed in homeschooling? From my study, I could make subjective inferences from both families, such as that Rachel’s level of production and activity earned her mother’s trust, while Corey’s ability to succeed within an upper-level institutional context was the defining marker for Laura; that these moments or activities were the places where the parents seemed to exhale and say “they’ll be okay.” A study that traces this sort of delegation from early childhood to graduation, and comparing it, perhaps, to the level of oversight provided by traditional structures might illuminate differences in literacy values and practices found in the homeschooling movement from those found in traditional institutions.
5. What is the role and function of technology in homeschool brokering activity?

This is a question drawn from a ubiquitous issue amongst literacy researchers, educational researchers, and rhetoric and composition researchers. Technology, having always changed how people practice and learn literacy, continues to change it at an incomparably rapid pace. For homeschooling, however, technology seems capable of playing an especially important role in the process of delegation rather than just as a tool for learning. Two examples of this occurred during my field study. The first happened before my interview with Rachel and Tess, when Tess told one of her younger, school-age daughters that she was now “allowed” to go play the ‘ABC game’ on the iPad while her mother talked with me. The second example presented itself when Laura explained that most of her children’s’ literacy learning in early childhood was facilitated through the Leapfrog computer programs she had them play. “I wish I had invested in Leapfrog,” she told me. From the Institute for Excellence in Writing, to Corey’s coding education at WP3Schools.com, the ability to delegate literacy learning and practices to sources through technological means was a recurring event. No doubt this reality of delegation through technology is a pertinent issue for educational organizations of all types at every level and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Literacy practices reveal something about the people who practice them, as well as the values of the institutions, influential figures, traditions and geographical contexts in which those people dwell. This is partly why a study of homeschooling and literacy is difficult to accomplish effectively; there are not a lot of clear boundaries in place like there are with long-standing or
more centralized communities and institutions. Where does homeschooling begin, where does it end, and what resources or methodologies do families and groups most clearly draw upon? Homeschooling’s extreme heterogeneous make-up, clearly its greatest deterrent to substantial research, turns out to be closely connected with the literacy practices of its participants. When one looks at the literacy practices of homeschooling families, they are probably getting a glimpse of practices that have been selected, modified and delegated with a high level of awareness of how these practices fit into the specific child’s learning and life. This glimpse would reflect the family’s initial decision to homeschool, which remains a countercultural one, and as such, one that is usually undertaken with the knowledge that it is tantamount to “blowing it all up”. The literacy practices of its families – what they are, how they’re done, and where they are learned and practiced – are marked with that same level of intentionality.
APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Project Title: *Literacy in the Overlap: A Literacy Ethnography of Homeschooling*

**INTRODUCTION**

Introduce self, project, and review project particulars.

Introduce interview process: The goal of this interview is to help me get a better understanding of what homeschooling means to your family, how it is practiced and any general thoughts you have on the movement. During this conversation I would like to specifically focus on your family’s approach to literacy instruction: instruction related to reading and writing. I will ask a few questions related to the types of reading and writing you routinely practice, whether for school or for personal use.

Describe eventual benefits: I hope that this study will help us better understand whether there is a difference in the way homeschooling might affect a student’s approach to literate practices, such as reading, and writing. This study might provide insight into how label, define and think of schooling and the types of reading and writing we do for school and the ones we do outside of it.

**Parents**

1. Why did you choose to homeschool?
2. How is homeschooling different from or similar to your own educational backgrounds?
3. What does a typical homeschooling day look like in your house?
4. What curriculum do you use? How did you decide upon it?
5. Why did you choose to join the homeschooling group you’re currently in now?
6. Can you describe your level of activity within the group?
7. What resources have you personally used to help you homeschool? Could you explain which ones were most beneficial and why?

**Literacy Background & Practice**

8. What was your writing education like growing up?
9. What types of reading and writing do your high school children do as part of homeschooling?
10. Is there any reading or writing that your high school children do that you consider separate from their “schooling”? What are those? Why are they considered separate?
11. Have there ever been moments you can recall when you had to decide whether some reading or writing activity was going to be counted as “school”? What factors went into that decision?

**Students**

12. What kind of writing and reading do you do for school?
13. What kind of writing and reading do you do “outside” of school?
14. How is the writing and reading that you do apart from school different from the writing and reading you do as part of school?
15. In your opinion, how would your reading and writing practices change if you were enrolled in a traditional school? Would they change at all?
16. Would you say you tend to enjoy writing? Would you say you tend to enjoy reading?
17. Have you ever written something for yourself that you later ended up using for school, or vice versa?

**Literacy Logs & Observation-based Questions (Exit Interview)**

These are only sample questions. The exact content of the questions will change depending on what is actually observed during the observation, the content of the student’s literacy logs and any texts the student chooses to share.

**Students:**

18. Were than any reading and writing activities that you were surprised to find in your literacy log?
19. Would you say your literacy log gives an example of an average week for you? Please explain.
20. Why did you categorize [specific action of reading or writing] as [school/personal/work/chore, etc.]?
21. Was it difficult choosing to label your different reading and writing activities, or relatively easy?
22. Are there any texts you read or wrote during the week you kept your literacy log that you would feel comfortable sharing?
   a. Can you describe this piece of writing and why you wrote it?
   b. Can you explain to me how and why you would label this piece of writing? Would you consider it to be a personal piece, schoolwork, etc.?

**Observations:**

23. Would you describe what I observed on [date of observation] as representative of an average school day? If not, how was it different?
24. I noticed that you engaged in some activities that are necessary to keep the home going while you were homeschooling. How do you label these activities? Would you call them part of the process of homeschooling, disruptions, or something else?
25. [Other questions may be asked depending on the literate work observed during the observation].
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Domain/Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>Personal Interest/School</td>
<td>Reads articles on the internet and newspaper for school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Scans blogs for school and personal interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books (Read)</td>
<td>Personal Interest/School</td>
<td>Reads books for school and personal interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Journals</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Writes journals from the perspective of characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Schedule</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Reads dance schedules before teaching and practicing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional/Bible</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Reads a devotional, or her Bible, usually at the start of the day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Writes essays for school, typically for her History class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea Journal</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Writes down ideas for stories, characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Will write &quot;To Do&quot; lists and important events on her mirror.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Reads magazines related to her writing and photography interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novel (Writing)</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Writes novels that she will occasionally share on Wattpad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Domain/Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Journals</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Keeps personal journals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcrossing</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>Writes postcards to strangers around the world and receives postcards in return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Collects quotes in a journal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Log</td>
<td>Personal Interest/School</td>
<td>Keeps track of any book she's read for school or personal interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipes</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Reads recipes in order to cook various items for the family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Uses social media to connect with others and to help spread the word about her Mission Trip and receive funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Message</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Texts friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Reads and write in textbooks within the My Father's World curriculum and local co-op classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wattpad</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Post completed novels to Wattpad, reads and responds to feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>Personal Interest/School</td>
<td>She goes to Wikipedia &quot;a lot&quot;, pretty much whenever &quot;she asks anything.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: COREY BENNET’S LITERACY PRACTICES
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Domain/Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Reads and writes in textbooks for his courses at the community college and VCA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Writes essays for his college courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novels</td>
<td>School/Personal Interest</td>
<td>Enjoys reading sci-fi, fantasy and historical fiction when he can find the time. &quot;The thicker the better,&quot; according to his mom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Internship/Responsibility</td>
<td>Reads and writes HTML and CSS code as part of his internship at a web-design company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wikipedia</td>
<td>School/Personal Interest</td>
<td>Reads Wikipedia for school and personal interest. He often visits wikis related favorite franchises, such as Star Wars and The Inheritance Cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kickstarter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>Reads articles in preparation for upcoming debate competitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy Scout</td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td>Reads and writes in his Handbook in order to earn specific badges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handbook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D: RACHEL GARDNER’S LITERACY LOG
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Day</strong></th>
<th><strong>Literacy Activity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Type</strong></th>
<th><strong>How long?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Time of Day?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read devotion</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>7:45-8:05 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read school book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>9:40-9:55 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read music</td>
<td>Music Lesson</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>10-10:30 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read history textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>11:25-12pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read school book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>12:05-12:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read history textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>1:30-2p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Answered history questions</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>2-2:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read a postcard</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>2 mins</td>
<td>2:30p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Wrote school essay</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>35 mins</td>
<td>2:30-3:05 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Wrote book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>3:10-3:50pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read dance schedule</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>5:55-6pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>10:15-10:35p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read devotion</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>7:50-8:10 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read history textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>10-10:45 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Answered history questions</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>10:50-11:20 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read recipe</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>11:30-11:35 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read school book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>12-12:15am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Wrote school essay</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>1:30-2pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read school book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>2:05-2:55pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read journal</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>4-4:05 pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>9:30-9:45p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th</td>
<td>Read/wrote book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>9:50p - 10:20p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Literacy Activity</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>How long?</td>
<td>Time of Day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Wrote in journal</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>9:30-10:30a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Read history textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>2:15-3p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Answered history questions</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>3:30-4:15p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa</td>
<td>Texted someone</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>3:30-4pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa</td>
<td>Wrote postcards</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>10-10:30p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su</td>
<td>Wrote in journal</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>8-8:40a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Su</td>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>1 hour 40 minutes</td>
<td>8:40-10:20p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>10:15-10:45a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Wrote essay</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>50 mins</td>
<td>11-11:50a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Read history textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
<td>11:50-12:15p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Read history textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>1-1:20p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Answered history questions</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>1:30-2p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>2:10-3:10p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Wrote a book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>3:30-4:30p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Texted someone</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>8:45-8:55a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Read Bible</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>8-8:30a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Wrote in journal</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>9:30-10:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Read history textbook</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>10:30-11a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Answered history questions</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>11-11:30a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Wrote essay</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>45 mins</td>
<td>11:30-12:15a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Read book</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>2-2:40p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Literacy Activity</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>How long?</td>
<td>Time of Day?</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Character development</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>15 mins</td>
<td>2:45-3p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Wrote a book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
<td>3-3:30p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>Personal Interest</td>
<td>10 mins</td>
<td>3:35-4:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu</td>
<td>Read dance schedule</td>
<td>Priority</td>
<td>5 mins</td>
<td>5:30-5:35p</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Joshua Corlew

Date: February 27, 2015

Dear Researcher: 

On 02/27/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Exempt Determination</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Literacy in the Overlap: The Literate Practices of Homeschooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Joshua Corlew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Number:</td>
<td>SBE-15-11020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding Agency:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Title:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research ID:</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Joanne Muratori

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 02/27/2015 02:47:47 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

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REFERENCES


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