

HOMESCHOOLING TRENDS IN METRO ATLANTA

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A. SPECIFIC AIMS

Specific Aim 1: To determine the demographics of Metro Atlanta homeschooling families in the year 2004.

Specific Aim 2: To determine the reasons families in Metro Atlanta make the choice to homeschool.

Specific Aim 3: To determine the different teaching methods used by homeschoolers in Metro Atlanta and outline the rewards and challenges of each method.

Specific Aim 4: To investigate how the primary educator creates balance in his/her life.

B. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

1. Demographics

This proposal is designed to determine the demographics of Metro Atlanta homeschooling families. Nationwide there have been few reported studies on the demographics of homeschooling families (Bauman 2002). Of those studies, the statistical report published in 1999 by Patricia Lines, a former Department of Education researcher, and the National Center for Education Statistics (Bielick 2001) are the largest and most inclusive to date. It is clear that more and more people are homeschooling and it seems that the demographics are changing. This study will add to the body of knowledge by collecting demographic information specific to the Metro Atlanta area.

Nationwide accurate statistics have been difficult to obtain on homeschooling. Possible reasons for this difficulty are that some families are not trusting and/or willing to provide information (Lines 2000). This bias might be decreased by specifically targeting known groups and networks of homeschoolers. It is thought that this method will increase the likelihood of collecting data from a diverse group of homeschoolers.

In the National Center for Education Statistics technical report published in 2001, it was reported that a greater number of homeschoolers as compared to nonhomeschoolers are white and non-Hispanic. Though no significant difference in household annual income, the parents of homeschoolers have a higher level of education (Bielick 2001). Furthermore, homeschoolers are more likely to be from religious, conservative, and two-parent families, with usually two children being homeschooled and another younger, non-school-age child in the family (Lines 2000).

In Georgia, there is a paucity of demographic data on homeschooling families. The Georgia Department of Education keeps statistics only on the number of children being homeschooled in each county of the state. As of the end of the 2002-2003 school year, 31,732 children were being homeschooled in Georgia, representing a 67% increase over the 1998-1999 figure of 21,132 homeschooled children (Ga. Dept. of Education 2004). No further demographic data are available.

2. Reasons

This study will also look at the reasons families choose to homeschool their children. Although there are several reasons for homeschooling, dissatisfaction with the academic quality of public schools appears to be the number one reason (Anderson 2000; Lines 2000). Encountering different standards when moving from one state to another state has been an incentive for initiating homeschooling. Aileen Dodd, in her August 2003 article in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, relayed the story of a family moving from Virginia to Gwinnett County in Georgia. They had no choice but to homeschool because Gwinnett County, one of the most advanced school systems in the state (Dodd 2003), was not equipped to deal with their children who were multiple grades ahead. Another example of dissatisfaction with the academic quality of public schools is the case of third-grader Myles M. who begged his parents not to send him to school and wanted instead “just to read” (Anderson 2000). Myles’ teacher was pleased when his parents removed him from public school to begin homeschooling. Because the school curriculum was structured to teach to the 40th percentile, Myles was not being challenged enough to keep his attention. This situation occurred in Massachusetts (Anderson 2000) but it is not unique to that state.

As the trend to homeschool continues to rise, the public education system remains under attack (Anderson 2000). The 2002-2003 SAT scores released in August of 2003 showed Georgia, for the second year in a row, has the lowest scores among all states (Tofig 2003). This study will help to determine the proportion of families that are choosing to homeschool because of their belief that the Georgia school system is below par.

Before the mid-1800 there were no public schools. Homeschooling was the norm and not the exception. Public schools came into existence as a result of political and religious influences. Besides teaching academics, the public school was an ideal forum to promote patriotism and moral values (Kleist-Tesch 1998). In the 1960 and 1970, protesters of social and religious values formed communes and homeschooling was revived. The founder of this homeschooling movement, John Holt, objected to the quality of education and emphasized child-centered education. In the 1970 and 1980, with the impact of fundamentalist Christianity and the revival of conservatism, homeschooling again gained popularity. This time it was as an objection to what was being taught (Kleist-Tesch 1998).

Today, families choose to homeschool for one of several reasons, not only because of an objection to the quality of education or the content of what is being taught. Other reasons for homeschooling include family reasons, special needs or disability, behavioral problems, unsuitable learning environment (i.e., trailer classrooms), unsafe learning environment (i.e., drugs and violence) or because of the parents' career choices.

3. Teaching Methods

The different teaching methods used by homeschooling families will also be investigated. Many people are not aware of how homeschooling families go about teaching and learning. Times have changed since the days of sitting at the kitchen table. Homeschooling methods today include, besides the traditional parent-child instruction, study groups, field trips, tutors, and Internet interaction, among others (Anderson 2000; Kleist-Tesch 1998; Lines 2000). The present study will attempt to characterize the teaching methods used by parents in the Metro Atlanta area.

I am interested in determining the specific types of curriculum materials that families are using to teach their children. There are several avenues available for homeschooling families. Preset curriculums are available and can be strictly followed. A parent may also choose to use a mixed design, using the preset curriculum part of the day and adding study groups, tutoring, Internet interaction, or field trips to supplement the remainder of the day. An alternate method called “unschooling” is also popular among some homeschoolers. Unschooling is a method of learning in which there is little adult direction. The child is open to explore his own interests.

4. Balance

Lastly, this proposal is designed to inquire about the methods used to create balance in the parent-homeschooler’s life. There is little research in this area and for that reason alone this study is necessary.

Burnout among homeschoolers happens quite often. Fatigue and discouragement can set in rapidly when the desired results are not there. Some homeschoolers have found that teaching for six weeks and then taking a week off helps to beat the fatigue. Also, common sense health habits are necessary for the body to work efficiently. Besides physical needs, some homeschoolers find time alone for spiritual renewing to keep their balance. (Miller 1999). Metro Atlanta homeschool educators are not immune from burnout. In addition to the above methods of controlling burnout, it will be interesting to discover if there are other methods used by Metro Atlanta families.

C.EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN and METHODS

The questionnaire is the preferred format for this study for the following reasons. First, it is not costly. A questionnaire can also be administered to groups efficiently and can be anonymous. Because one facet of this study is to gather information from homeschooling families in Fulton County, Georgia, a questionnaire is a viable method to be handed out at group sessions, or distributed via e-mail.

1. Procedure

A two-page questionnaire was constructed. The preamble at the top of the survey states the purpose of the survey is to obtain demographic information on homeschooling families, reasons for homeschooling, teaching methods, and how balance is maintained in their lives. The participants are informed that the study is being performed under the direction of Dr. Katheryn McGuthry, herself a homeschooling parent. The preamble also states that this study is voluntary and anonymous. The final part of the preamble thanks the participants for their time.

The survey then asks for the participant’s last four digits of the home telephone number which will be used as a precautionary step to ensure that each homeschooling family is included only once in the study. Next the questionnaire asks for demographic information: gender, marital status, race, years of college for adults, county of residence, religious affiliation, political party, ages of children being homeschooled, grade equivalent for each child, and the family’s annual household income. Participants are told that this question is optional; however, any and all questions are optional.

The next section of the questionnaire lists fifteen (15) common reasons for homeschooling. This list of common reasons was obtained from a study by Kurt J. Bauman of the U. S. Census Bureau titled “Home Schooling in the United States: Trends and Characteristics” (Bauman 2002). The format was altered to include a rating column and the table format of the chart was adjusted for clarity. The participant is asked to check the reason

or reasons that apply to their family and are asked to rate the reasons as 1st, 2nd, or 3rd if more than one. A space is also given to explain any reason not included in the list.

The next section of the survey inquires into teaching methods. The participants are asked to choose the method typically used: 1) mix of preset curriculum and own design; 2) strictly preset curriculum; or 3) "unschooling" method, and are then asked to comment on the rewards and challenges of the method. This section also asks the participant to list any groups, activities, or classes the homeschooled child attends.

The last set of questions asks for the participant's opinion regarding the overall rewards and challenges of homeschooling and asks how the primary homeschooling parent keeps balance in his/her life.

The participants are asked to contact Dr. Katheryn McGuthry if they have any questions and are provided Dr. McGuthry's school phone number for that purpose. Furthermore, the participants are given the opportunity to obtain the results of this survey by e-mailing Dr. McGuthry at KM1@reinhardt.edu.

To ensure anonymity, the participants will be asked to place the survey in an envelope with other surveys when the surveys are distributed in a group or when they are distributed one-on-one. Also, when collecting the surveys is not convenient, the surveys will be distributed with a self-addressed return envelope. The envelopes will be preaddressed to Judy Walker, 3735 Shadow Creek Drive, Cumming, GA 30041, with Reinhardt College's address as the return address. The other option given when collecting the surveys on site is not convenient will be to fax the completed survey to Judy Walker at 770-730-6122. When this option is exercised, the phone number that the survey is faxed from will be immediately blacked out.

2. Data Analysis

The data obtained from this survey will be analyzed by using descriptive statistics

Demographics: All the questions in the first section pertain to demographic information and require open-ended answers. The responses will be coded and the descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, will be obtained.

Reasons for Homeschooling: For the list of reasons, first, secondary, and tertiary ratings for each reason will be determined. Frequency will be counted for each reason. The open-ended question at the end of this section will be analyzed for trends in response and categories for the responses will be determined. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, will then be obtained.

Different Teaching Methods and the Rewards and Challenges: Frequencies, means, and standard deviations of the predetermined answers (preset curriculum; mixed curriculum and no-schooling) will be obtained. The open-ended questions will be analyzed for trend in response and categories for the responses will be determined before descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, can be obtained.

Ways in Which Primary Educator Maintains Balance: This section will require a qualitative data analysis. Each response will be analyzed for a trend and categories for the responses will be determined.

D.INSTRUMENTS

The only instruments used will be a computer to construct the questionnaire and also to distribute it to participants not otherwise reachable and a pen or pencil for completing the questionnaires.

E.FACILITIES AVAILABLE

No facilities are required for this study. The surveys will be distributed by hand or e-mail.

F.HUMAN SUBJECTS SECTION

1. Participants

The participants in this study will be men and women who are currently the primary home educator in the family and live in Georgia. Fulton County will be the primary county that will be targeted; however, all surveys submitted will be included in the study. Race, education level, religious affiliation, political party, county of residence, and family income level will be relevant to this study. Age and gender will be irrelevant to this study.

2. Recruitment of Participants and Consent Procedures

Recruitment of participants will be through acquaintances, and through networks of homeschoolers.

Because all the participants are of legal age, and also because the survey is anonymous and does not pose much risk of harm, a preamble will be used in place of a consent form. Debriefing will take place when possible. Contact information will be provided.

3. Potential Risks

<<Note to students: You have to decide if there are any ethical concerns. You should consider what kind of information the participants are being asked to provide and how the information is being returned.

You must add information here and also to the following section.>>

4. Risk Reduction

5. Potential Benefits to be Gained by Society and Participant

The potential benefits to be gained by the participants include the opportunity to have a voice. They will also have the opportunity to use the results of the study as an educational tool. If they request, we will provide study information that will include a summary of the results. Furthermore, obtaining the study summary will provide them with an opportunity to learn how many others share similar circumstances.

The potential benefit to be gained by society is the knowledge gained concerning homeschooling families in Fulton County. Specifically, the *reasons* they chose homeschooling over more traditional systems will be determined.

G.LITERATURE CITED

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