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CHILDREN IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD'S  
SCHOOLING EXPERIENCE

by

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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(DIRECTION: PLAY THERAPY)

at the  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: MRS I.F. JACOBS

NOVEMBER 2009



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## DECLARATION

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I declare that "AN EXPLORATION OF CHILDREN IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD'S HOMESCHOOLING EXPERIENCE" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## STATEMENT OF PROOF READER

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Hereby I declare that I have language edited and proof read the thesis *An exploration of children in middle childhood's homeschooling experience* by Kathryn Jean Mills for the degree MDiac. I am a freelance language practitioner after a career as editor-in-chief at a leading publishing house.

Lambert Daniel Jacobs (MA, MDiv)

9 November 2009



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## DEDICATION

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Tessa Eadie encouraged this thesis in its infancy. Matthew Mills empowered me every step of the way and Issie Jacobs gave patient and understanding attention to every detail. Thank you for your kind words, encouragement and understanding. You all truly inspired me to never give up.

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The participants who took part in this research. Thank you to the parents for allowing me into your homes and for each participant for sharing your experience of homeschooling with me.

Thank you.

## ABSTRACT

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The study explores children in middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling. The researcher makes use of a qualitative research design in the form of a case study, studying the participants' experiences of homeschooling in their natural setting. The sample consisted of children in middle childhood who participated in semi-structured interviews exploring their individual experiences pertaining to learning at home, their familial relationships and their social learning in the homeschooling environment. Developmental aspects relating specifically to middle childhood are discussed and utilised along with the views of the participants in this study, those of experts, and literature reviews in order to gain a genuine understanding of the child's experience of homeschooling.



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## KEY TERMS

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Education

Homeschooling

Middle childhood

Experience

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## INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

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### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Homeschooling has become progressively more acceptable as a viable substitute to main stream education. Common reasons for following this new trend within the South African context seem to be the unsatisfactory standard of education in schools, large classes, offensive study material, drugs, pornography and bad values being learnt in the school environment, the low matriculation pass rate and lastly the lack of provision for children with learning difficulties or special needs (Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum, 2008). In addition to these, possible factors contributing to the expansion of homeschooling could also be the expenses of schooling, and the distance and travelling difficulties families encounter. Many parents are thus looking to homeschooling as an alternative way of educating their children, in order to provide the best opportunity (according to the parents) for their children's future (Clery, 1998:1; Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum, 2008).

Homeschooling was incorporated into the South African Schools Act in 1996 (no 84 of 1996). However, even though the Western Cape Home Schooling Association estimates that 100 000 children are being homeschooled within South Africa, the Department of Education has no accurate prevalence estimates in South Africa (Siza, 2008).

Due to the diversity of the nature and application of homeschooling, the researcher defines homeschooling by combining four components congruent across literature pertaining specifically to a) the learning and teaching taking place primarily within the home environment, b) the relationship between parent and child, c) the parent's role and responsibility as teacher/educator, and d) homeschooling as an alternative choice to traditional schooling (Moore, 1994:7-9; Clery, 1998:2; Thomas, 2002:3). Homeschooling is further defined as an alternative form of education based on the

supported by loving adults who understand their child's  
guide their child to explore life freely, stressing  
freedom and responsibility with regards to their child's education.

For the purpose of this study, the research will not involve the success of homeschooling as the study aims rather to add insight into the phenomenon of homeschooling in the South African context by obtaining an understanding of the child in middle childhood's experience of their home based education. Middle childhood, according to Berk (2006:6) is generally recognised as children between the ages of 6 and 12. The middle childhood phase is also characterised by steady development as children slowly progress in their development and begin to master their world.

To date, research with regards to homeschooling has predominantly focused on the adult's perspective, with the child's understanding and experience being overlooked (Mayberry, Knowles, Ray & Marlow, 1995; Adams & Purdy, 1996; Broadhurst, 1999). Landreth (in Sweeney, 1997:6), in commenting on the reality that the child's perspective has often been an overlooked facet of everyday adult living, reflects on children and their experiences when he emphasises that even though,

if an individual is only five years old does not in any way make that individual any less a person. And that person (child) is just as deserving of respect, recognition, affirmation, understanding, genuineness, and the right to be listened to as any adult person.

It is from this assumption that the researcher attempted to investigate and understand how children in middle childhood (8-12) experience homeschooling.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION**

Creswell (in Fouché & De Vos, 2005a:98) writes that there are five main motivating factors influencing the choice of a specific research topic. Two of these factors have been significantly influential in the researcher choosing the specific topic; the one being a personal interest about the topic and the other reason being that previous

...inantly been approached from an adult's perspective. Two bodies of published research namely that of Broadhurst (1999) and Clery (1998) available on the child's perception of homeschooling of which both were conducted in Australia dating back to 1998.

Although there has been much caution and criticism from various sources on homeschooling, parents are increasingly choosing homeschooling as an alternative (*as the better option*) to the conventional school system, with the latest research (Meighan, 1995; Broadhurst, 1998; Clery, 1998; Thomas, 2002) indicating that homeschooling is indeed a feasible alternative in education. With the core of homeschooling emphasising family, freedom and informal learning, this has given rise to many challenging questions and elicited much concern of whether the best option for the child is indeed the traditional schooling system, or this alternative of homeschooling. Research therefore has focused mostly on educational issues such as the effectiveness of homeschooling, for example Rudner's (1999) study that compared the education of homeschooled children, versus children who attend regular school. Other research also focussed on the socialisation factor, parents' teaching qualifications and parents' motivation to educate their children at home (Mayberry, 1988; Mayberry, 1989; Knowles, 1991).

One of the biggest concerns and criticism on homeschooling has been the socialisation factor of homeschooling. With regards to this aspect Reich (in Moore & Moore, 1994:39) is of the opinion that "homeschooling can potentially give students a very one-sided view of things, as their parents may, even unwittingly, block or diminish all points of view but their own in teaching." The implication seems to be that education can be seen as a process of shaping children and teaching them to learn what others (in the case of homeschooling - parents) think they ought to know.

This study in its attempt to answer the question, "What are children in middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling?" explores what is it like to do homeschooling as a child, addressing the assumption of what is best for the child in terms of home based education (according to the child). It is necessary that parents and teachers become aware of the child's experience of homeschooling, as the implications of researching the child in middle childhood's experience of

new avenues of discussion; ascertain aspects of childhood, with regards to peer support and peer alienation in the learning environment; identify elements within tradition school settings that may need to be considered, as well as to educate parents with a comprehensive knowledge of the child's experience of homeschooling so that they can make an informed choice on behalf of their children.

Due to the research requiring children to be able to express their experiences and understanding clearly, it was fitting for the research to consist of children in middle childhood as their verbal and cognitive abilities and in particular, their ability to reflect on their experience, are well developed in middle childhood (Berk, 2006:241; Santrock, 1999:272-291). According to Berk (2006: 18) Erikson's understanding of middle childhood, is that children become increasingly interested in how things are made and how they work. This perspective suggests that children in middle childhood may be more receptive to the self regulation, with regards to homeschooling's premise of freedom in education; in allowing children the space to choose what they need to learn and when they are ready to learn new things.

With both previous research done by Broadhurst (1999) and Clery (1998) having been undertaken 10 years ago, and the increase of homeschooling within the South African context, the researcher is of the opinion that this research study will add insight into the research done before, as well as to possibly confirm or refute the common threads that have been found previously. The motivation for this study is thus a combination of both.

### **1.3 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this research study was to explore and describe children in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling. The unit of analysis or object of investigation was children in middle childhood, who are homeschooled in the Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula. Although goals and objectives are often used interchangeably, Fouché and De Vos (2005b:104) differentiate them as the goals of research being the "dream" the researcher wants to attain, and the objectives being the step by step actions the researcher needs to follow in order to achieve the goal. The



undertook in order to achieve the goal in this research

- To obtain a conceptual frame of reference based on literature and consultations with experts regarding: homeschooling and children in middle childhood's development.
- To undertake an empirical study in order to explore children in their middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling through the use of semi-structured interviews.
- To analyse and verify the collected data with literature in order to describe the children's experiences.
- To make conclusions and recommendations on the homeschooling approach in educating children to policy makers in education as well as to parents who are currently homeschooling their children and to parents who are considering the possibility of homeschooling their children.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH APPROACH**

Creswell (1998:15) defines qualitative research and the approach of the researcher working within this paradigm as,

í an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Creswell (1998:17-18) further presents seven convincing reasons behind identifying a project as a qualitative study, of which five have been substantially influential in the researcher's preference of engaging in a qualitative inquiry with regards to this specific study. These rationales being: the nature of the research question; the opportunity of the topic to be explored; the need to present a detailed description of

individuals in their natural setting and lastly the role of the researcher, who can tell the story from the participant's view (Creswell, 1998:17-18).

In attempting to explore and describe the child in the middle childhood's experience of homeschooling, the researcher aimed to listen to and hear the participants as the researcher was interested in the participant's perspective of their experience of homeschooling. The researcher therefore aimed to play the role of an active learner who can tell the story from the participant's view rather than as an expert who passes judgement on participants (Creswell, 1998:18).

### 1.5 TYPE OF RESEARCH

In this research study the aim was to explore and describe children in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling. The qualitative approach to research allows the researcher to study in depth the meaning, experience and perceptions of the participants of the study in order to gain a genuine understanding of their world (Fouché & Delport, 2005:73). Blanche and Durrheim (2002:39) state that exploratory studies are used to make preliminary investigations into relatively unknown areas of research with Bless and Higgins (in Fouché & De Vos, 2005c:134) describing the exploratory approach as gaining insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or person. Thus focusing specifically on the goals of the research (*exploring and describing the child's experience of homeschooling*) the exploratory approach fitted with this research study as a gap was identified in a relatively unknown area of research, specifically done on the child's perspective of homeschooling to date (Mayberry *et al*, 1995; Adams & Purdy, 1996; Broadhurst, 1999).

In this study the researcher aimed to produce rich descriptive data, with the aim of applying the data generally to homeschooling in the Western Cape. With the purpose being to contribute towards the body of knowledge available in South Africa on the homeschooling approach to parents and to the homeschooling association as well as to be an ingress for further research within the South African context, the study therefore falls within the ambit of applied research. The distinction between applied and basic research according to Blanche and Durrheim (2002:41), is that basic research is

of the social world, whereas applied research focuses on practical applications, in particular contributing towards issues of problem solving, decision making, policy analysis and community development.

As highlighted in 1.2, this study aimed to add insight and information into the phenomenon of homeschooling by providing a rich description of the child in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling in the South African context due to the lack of literature and research in this area.

## 1.6. RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Fouché (2005:267) the research design is the framework from which the strategy for the research is devised; it is the plan that guides the action. Sellitz, Jahoda, Deutch and Cook (in Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:19) further describe the research design as the procedure of systematising the conditions for collection and data analysis most fitting to the research aims.

The case study according to Fouché (2005:272) is an applicable research strategy utilised when the goal of the research is to attain a thick description of the phenomena being studied. Babbie (in Fouché, 2005:272) note that description is more likely to refer to a more intensive examination of phenomena and their deeper meanings. In concurrence with this, the research strategy utilised for the purpose of this study was an instrumental case study where the focus was to gain knowledge and a better understanding of the social issue of homeschooling. This was achieved through thick descriptions of the child's experience of homeschooling. According to Fouché (2005:272), the intention of this design is to provide inclusive descriptions of the case over a specific bout. Fouché (2005:272) further adds that "the case being studied can refer to a process, activity, event, programme or individual or multiple individuals."

The researcher according to Fouché (2005:272) then places the case within its larger context; however remaining focused on the specific case. For the purpose of this study, children in middle childhood were the unit of analysis, situated within the larger context of homeschooling.

### 1.7.1 Literature review

Strydom (2005c:252) emphasises the importance of the literature study when undertaking any scientific research. For the purpose of this study, both national and international sources were studied. These sources included: the Internet and information from the following disciplines; social work, psychology, sociology and education, and books, previous research, journals, scientific articles, and homeschooling journals. It is critical to note that even though writings such as Holt (1967), Mason (1887) and Mayberry (1988) were published more than 10 years ago, they are classical writings and are considered masters on the topic of homeschooling, and are still used today amongst scholars and homeschooling associations. For this reason, the researcher found it imperative to review and utilise both the classical writings of Holt and Mason, as well as the research undertaken by Mayberry throughout the study, along with more current sources, in order to gain a complete picture of homeschooling today. Due to the limited availability of information both dated and current on homeschooling within the South African context, the researcher made use of numerous electronic and internet resources.

### 1.7.2 Universe, population, sample

The terms, 'universe' and 'population', are defined by Arkava and Lane (in Strydom, 2005b:193) as the *universe* being the group of people who possess qualities of interest to the research, and the *population*, being a smaller portion of this universe, with specific constraints. In this study, the universe consisted of children in middle childhood who were currently being homeschooled in the Western Cape. The population included the constraint that these children in middle childhood were currently being homeschooled in the Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula.

Strydom (2005b:192) maintains that sampling is one of the most critical elements of a research study, as in order to generalise the data collected during the study, the sample group must be considered representative of the population/universe from which it is selected. The researcher selected children between the ages of 8 and 12, who were

in the Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula. The purpose to study emerged after consultation with the Western Cape Home Schooling Association. The researcher employed both purposive sampling and snowballing sampling strategies simultaneously as the researcher was looking for particular cases (*purposive sampling*) that can in some instances be hard to reach. The particular cases obtained through purposive sampling pertain to the specific elements that are of interest to the researcher as they maximise the detail and richness of information (Strydom & Delpont, 2005b:328). Babbie (in Strydom & Delpont, 2005b:330) describes the snowballing process in that "the researcher collects data on the few members of the target population he can locate, then seeks information from those individuals that enables him to locate other members of that population" (Strydom & Delpont, 2005b:330).

The criteria for inclusion in the sample were as follows:

- Children in middle childhood who were currently being homeschooled
- Boys and girls
- English/Afrikaans speaking
- Reside in the Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula

To further ensure that the findings of this research were transferable to other homeschooling contexts within the Western Cape, the researcher used the technique of sampling to redundancy. This involved interviewing more and more participants within the bounds of the specific criteria stated above, until the same themes appeared repeatedly (Greeff, 2005:294).

For the purpose of this study nine participants participated in the study. The researcher is of the opinion that by focusing on these participants' experiences of homeschooling, allowed for an in depth exploration of their experiences of homeschooling. It also allowed for further research on whether the findings acquired from this study can be transferable to the South African context.

& Delpont, 2005b:331) the purpose of a pilot study is

to determine that relevant data will be obtained from the participants of the study. The researcher informally conducted the semi-structured interview with two children in their middle childhood who are currently being homeschooled. These two children did not form part of the sample, and were asked the questions in order to ascertain whether the relevant data would be obtained during the research study. In 3.2.2 the researcher discusses three ways in which the pilot study proved to be imperative in this study, and the crucial adjustments that were made before the main investigation began.

#### **1.7.4 Data collection**

In order to meet the purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews were utilised. In this regard Greeff (2005:296) noted that "researchers use semi-structured interviews to gain a detailed picture of a participant's beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic." The semi-structured interview allowed for the interview process to be flexible and of particular interest to the researcher, to stay with the child's process in order to explore their experiences of homeschooling. According to Greeff (2005:296) researchers are able "to follow up particular interesting avenues that emerge in the interview" when using semi-structured interviews.

Participants were interviewed individually in the child's home to ensure that the children were comfortable in a familiar environment. In most cases, a room was arranged with the parents prior to the interview in order for an adequate degree of privacy to be achieved. In some cases, as discussed in 3.2.2.2 the participants requested the mother or sibling to be part of the interview. The results may have been influenced by this factor, as the participants knew they were being studied, both by the researcher and the mother. For this reason it is imperative to consider the limitations of this influence on the study in discussing the Hawthorn effect.

Bowditch and Buono (in Olson, Verley, Santos & Salas, 1994:37) describe the Hawthorn effect as follows "when people know they are being observed they often

According to Draper (2002:2), the Hawthorn effect is a process, as the participants of the study are doing things at the request of the researcher. Draper discusses four areas where participants are most likely to be influenced by the Hawthorn effect, two of which are pertinent to this specific study. Firstly, the participant's desire to please the experimenter and secondly, the participant's understanding of what the researcher really wants to gain from the interview (Draper, 2002:2). Gaining a true reflection and account of the child's experience of homeschooling was of paramount importance to the researcher, as well as to the credibility of this study, thus these two aspects were taken into account. The Hawthorn effect, in reference to this specific study, could be applied in the mere presence of the mother or sibling in the interview process affecting the participant's ability to answer the questions honestly. The participant may have felt pressured to answer the questions in a way that pleased their mother or sibling, as well as the researcher, which may lead to an altered account of the participant's actual experience of homeschooling.

By observing, making use of field notes and video tape recording each interview, the researcher aimed to gather rich descriptions of the children's experience of homeschooling. The interviews were then transcribed in order for the researcher to analyse and code the written data. Field notes according to Greeff (2005:298) include empirical observations as well as the researcher's interpretation during the interview; they are critical in exploring the interview process as well as minimising data loss.

### **1.7.5 Data analysis and interpretation**

Data analysis is defined by De Vos (2005:334) as 'the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data - a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process.' When dealing with the data analysis and interpretation, it is important to have a clear picture of the purpose of the study, the methodology underpinning the study and the type of data that the researcher is aiming to collect (De Vos, 2005:334).

When working within the qualitative paradigm, there appears to be no clear indication of when data collection stops and data analysis begins. The experience of the



of the research for as the researcher and researched co-creating meaning (De Vos, 2005:335). As the participants described their experience, the researcher began the process of reflecting on their experience. This process is described by De Vos (2005:335) as a twofold approach in that òí the first aspect involves data analysis at the research site during data collection and the second aspect involves data analysis away from the site following a period of data collection.ö

The process the researcher followed in conducting qualitative data analysis was based on a combination of guidelines presented by Creswell (1998:142), Blanche and Durrheim (2002:139) and De Vos (2005:335). This process is indicated in a diagrammatic illustration below:

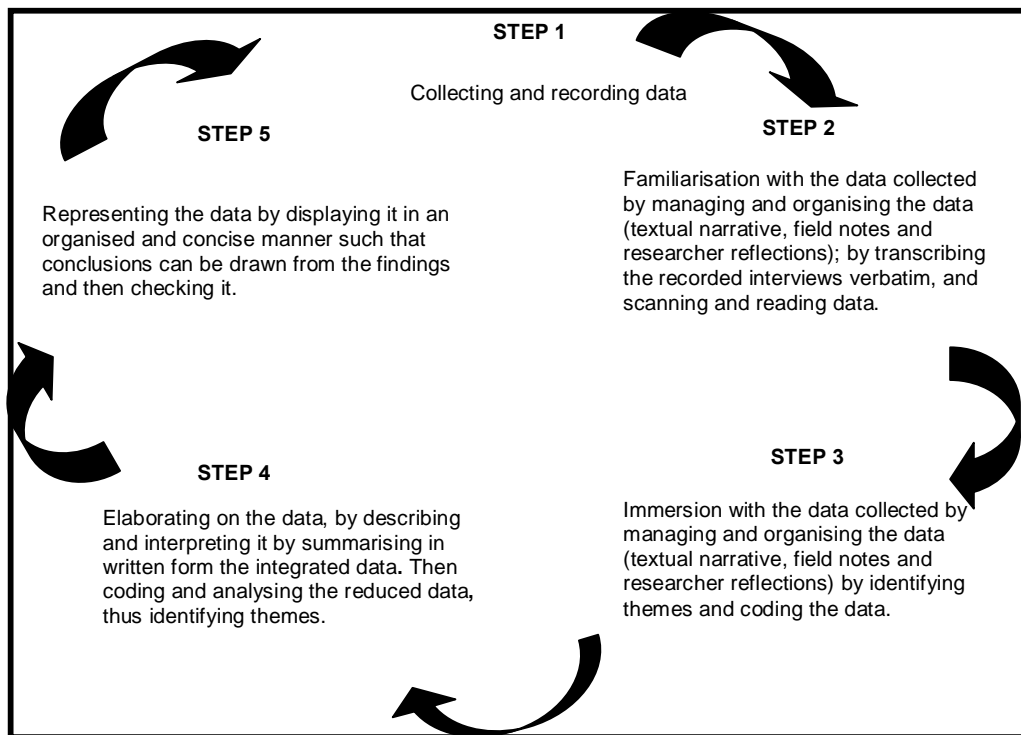


Diagram 1.1 ANALYTIC REPRESENTATION OF DATA ANALYSIS

De Vos (2005:334) notes that data analysis is best represented by a circular image as there are often recurrent adjustments throughout the data collection procedure. In accordance with this, the researcher's first step in the data analysis was to listen and note observations during the interview process, then to transcribe the data gathered in





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...orsing into the data with the intention to find common  
...ween the themes in an attempt to build a compilation  
of rich data of the child in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling.

**1.7.6 Assessing trustworthiness**

According to De Vos (2005:345) trustworthiness and validity are an imperative guideline in any research study; in both qualitative and quantitative traditions. There is extensive conformity that the data should be valid, however the meaning of validity is dependent on the approach the researcher is working in. Lincoln and Guba (in De Vos, 2005:345) highlight four concepts that they propose accurately reflect the 'validity' and 'trustworthiness' within the qualitative paradigm; working under the assumption that it is the 'strength of the qualitative study that will warrant its validity.' These concepts – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability – were utilised as guidelines in guaranteeing the trustworthiness of this study.

*1.7.6.1 Credibility*

Firstly qualitative research is determined in gaining an in depth description of the phenomena being studied, so that the data collected and analysed is richly depicted in relation to the context in which it is found and the world around it. Parameters are thus critical in qualitative studies, are placed and stated around the study as it is 'within the parameters of that setting, the universe, population and theoretical framework, the research will be valid' (De Vos, 2005:346).

In this study, the researcher through semi-structured interviews with participants gained rich descriptive data describing each participant's experience of homeschooling. The parameters placed around the study in order to achieve credibility were as follows: The study consisted of children in middle childhood being homeschooled within the Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula. The samples included children who, together with the consent of their parents agreed to participate in the study. Due to the fact that this was a dissertation of limited scope, the researcher chose to use one specific area. Limitations that accompanied this study

selected only within a specific area in the Western  
parts of the Cape Peninsula. The researcher is however  
of the opinion that the data was collected until a point of saturation was achieved, thus  
giving credibility to the study.

### 1.7.6.2 Transferability

Secondly Blanche and Durrheim (2002:62) argue that research findings should be transferable. According to Durrheim (2002:41), the aim of applied research is to “generalise the findings of a study to the specific context under study in order to assist decision-makers in drawing conclusions about the particular problems with which they are dealing.” This transferability according to Blanche and Durrheim (2002:62) is realised by creating a framework of understanding of specific contexts by constructing both detailed and rich descriptions of these contexts. Blanche and Durrheim (2002:64) describe the process of countering the challenges of generalisation within the qualitative paradigm, where researchers refer back to the original theoretical framework of the study, to show how data collection and analysis have been guided and framed by concepts and models.

The data that the researcher collected from the research fitted within the qualitative paradigm as the data was rich in depth descriptions of children in middle childhood’s experiences of homeschooling through semi-structured interviews. The data collected was as discussed in 1.7.5 analysed utilising Creswell’s (1998:142) method of data analysis, which encouraged a circular process of data analysis. The researcher thus countered the challenges of transferability through working within a solid framework throughout the study.

According to Atheida and Johnson (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:485-499), qualitative research can enhance transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the research methods, contexts and assumptions underlying the study. The researcher thus further enhanced the transferability of the study by providing a detailed description of the research methods utilised in this study, as well as in Chapter 2, providing a conceptual framework detailing the contexts and assumptions underlying the study.

Thirdly, it is important to query the assumption of reliability and replication commonly associated within the quantitative paradigm, as it directly contrasts the qualitative assumption that the social world is in a state of flux (Blanche & Durrheim, 2002:63-64). Affirming this Blanche and Durrheim (2002:63) state that qualitative researchers

do not assume that they are investigating a stable and unchanging reality and do not expect to find the same results repeating. Instead they expect individuals/or groups will behave differently, express different opinions, in changing contexts.

Therefore in place of the criterion of reliability, Blanche and Durrheim (2002:64) propose that findings should rather be dependable as opposed to reliable so that the reader is assured that the results ensued as the researcher reported. This dependability is achieved through rich and detailed descriptions of the collected data. The researcher in order to achieve dependability; in Chapter 3, provided rich and detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis.

Furthermore dependability according to Atheida and Johnson (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:485-499) is enhanced by the altering of the research design as new findings emerge during the data collection. The researcher found the pilot study to be of utmost importance to the study, as it enabled the researcher to modify the research design in order to collect rich and detailed descriptions of each participant's specific experience of homeschooling. Alterations were made in the interview schedule as discussed in 3.2.2.3, in the flexibility of the interview process as discussed in 3.2.2.1, as well as the researcher's observation skills and methods utilised during the interview process.

#### *1.7.6.4 Confirmability*

And lastly, confirmability according to Blanche and Durrheim (2002:347) stresses the need to ask whether the findings of the study could be verified by another study. The

...ata help confirm the general findings and lead to the  
... confirmability, the researcher has logically chosen  
research methods to fit within the framework of the research design. The researcher is  
therefore of the opinion that the study is confirmable and that the findings confirm  
general findings as well as lead to implications as discussed in 4.4.

## 1.8 ETHICAL ASPECTS

Ethics are defined by Strydom (2005a:57) as

í a set of moral principles which is suggested by an individual or group, is subsequently widely accepted, and which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students.

A number of ethical considerations are highlighted in any research undertaking which include: harm to experimental subject and/or respondents; informed consent; violation of privacy; actions and competence of the researcher; release or publications of the findings and lastly restoration of subjects and/or respondents (Strydom, 2005a:58). These considerations will subsequently be discussed.

### 1.8.1 Harm to respondents

Strydom (2005a:58) cautions the researcher against physical and emotional discomfort that he/she might cause the respondent in the course of research. Due to the nature of the research study the researcher did not foresee any major bearing on participants. The researcher however still highlighted the goal of the study with both the parents and the participants prior to the interviews, as well as at the start of the semi-structured interview with each participant.

The participants and their parents were also thoroughly informed of any potential impact the study could have. Participants were further informed that they have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

As the study's main unit of analysis was children, this brought unique ethical problems, due to their age and level of consent and understanding of the research. Strydom (2005a:60) emphasises, "Informed consent ensures the full knowledge and cooperation of subjects, while also resolving, or at least relieving, any possible tension, aggression, resistance or insecurity of the subjects." A letter (see Addendum A) was sent to each participant's parents as well as a letter (see Addendum C & Addendum D) for each child, with age appropriate information of the study. These letters conformed to the standards presented by De Vos (1998:25) highlighting information pertaining to the credibility of the researcher, the goals and procedures of the research study, as well as any possible advantages or disadvantages of partaking in the study.

### **1.8.3 Violation of privacy**

Strydom (2005a:61) highlights three aspects that provide the participants of research studies utmost discretion, these being: privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. In order to facilitate this discretion, the researcher provided a maximum level of privacy and confidentiality through the following activities. Firstly, only the researcher had access to the videos and transcribed data collected throughout the study. The videos were recorded on the researcher's personal video camera and the information was stored on the researcher's personal home lap top, under anonymous labels as presented in 3.2.3.1. All participants and their parents were informed through a letter (see Addendum A) prior to the interview of the video recorder. Secondly, the children's identities remain anonymous in the report to further ensure privacy of the participants.

### **1.8.4 Actions and competence of the researcher**

Strydom (2005a:64) draws attention to the responsibility the researcher has in ensuring his or her competence in the research study, thus the researcher worked closely with the allocated study leader throughout the process of the study. The



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ed constant awareness of ensuring objectivity and  
nts in the research process.

### **1.8.5 Release or publication of the findings**

A copy of the findings will be made available to the parents who wish to view the report, as well as to the Western Cape Association of Home Schooling. A post interview age appropriate presentation will be made for those children who would like to hear the report. As stated above, the participant's identities remain anonymous throughout the researching process.

### **1.8.6 Restoration of participants**

Although debriefing sessions often follow research studies, as a way of clearing up misconceptions or minimising any harm experienced in the study, the researcher found that debriefing was not necessary during or after the research process, as no harm was inflicted on the participants (Strydom, 2005a:67).

## **1.9 KEY CONCEPTS**

The main concepts addressed in this chapter were: education, homeschooling, experience, and middle childhood and will subsequently be discussed.

### **1.9.1 Education**

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines the process of educating as "the training of minds, character and abilities" (1999: s.v. "educate"), with *Encarta Dictionary* defining the act of educating as "the imparting and acquiring of knowledge through teaching and learning especially at school or similar institutions" (2008. s.v. "education"). The general assumption being that it is not only the cognitive level of a child that is being moulded but, also their personality, their spirit and their talents. Mason (in Cooper, 2004:71) wrote that "education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life," presenting education rather as a lived out experience in learning how to be.



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This study was seen as two fold, incorporating both learning basic subjects in order to acquire a successful career, and the Charlotte Mason education, of learning to live.

### 1.9.2 Homeschooling

Homeschooling is defined by Thomas (2002:3) as a rich informal learning environment where the child can discover new things as they choose to, through their everyday experiences at home. Moore(1994:9) attests to this definition in noting that homeschooling education in its purest form is individual, handmade, and customised to each child. Parents respond to their children in a loving, informal way, it is a balance between systematic structure where needed and a great deal of freedom for youngsters to explore.

Homeschooling is an alternative education, where parents choose to teach their children from home, as opposed to the education that is provided in schools. The term homeschooling and home based education are used interchangeably throughout the study. The parents are the primary educators, and they generally choose an eclectic method in the subjects and curriculum covered. One of the critical points of home schooling is that the children are viewed as unique, with different learning styles and with the ability to take responsibility for what and when they learn. It is characterised by individualised conversational teaching, which takes place in the home.

### 1.9.3 Middle childhood

The middle childhood phase is defined by Berk (2006: 6) as

children who are 6-11 years old, who learn about the wider world and master new responsibilities that increasingly resemble those they will perform as adults. Improved athletic abilities, participation in organised games with rules, more logical thought processes, mastery of basic literacy skills, and advances in self understanding, morality, and friendship are hallmarks of this phase.



Santrock (1999:303) adds that middle childhood is a physically, cognitively, emotionally, morally, sexually and socially as the child slowly pushes towards more independence.

For the purpose of this study, middle childhood refers to children between the ages of 8 and 12, of both sexes, as the research requires the child to be able to express their experiences openly and to be able to participate in the study with a full understanding of what is expected of them. It is thus fitting for the research to consist of children from this specific age group, as their verbal and cognitive abilities are further developed (Santrock, 1999:272-291; Berk, 2006:241).

### 1.9.4 Experience

The *Oxford Dictionary* (1999: s.v. "experience") defines experience as "the practical involvement in an activity, event, etc; knowledge or skill gained through this," *Dictionary.com*, in alliance with the American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (2006: s.v. "experience") further defines experience as the process of apprehending knowledge or skill through "the senses of the mind." Each child that participates in the study has their own values, experiences, beliefs and ideas that will all influence the interpretation that the person assigns to it. The researcher aimed to explore experience as it appears above, in that it is not what is seen, but how the individual person interprets it, in other words the meaning children in middle childhood make of their homeschooling experience.

### 1.10 SUMMARY

Chapter one aimed to present the research topic, to discuss the research methodology followed in order to answer the research question and to achieve the goal and the objectives that was formulated for the study.

The following chapter consists of a conceptual framework which explores the key concepts of this study.



## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF HOMESCHOOLING AND MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

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### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

Middle childhood initially represented a time when children became progressively more involved in contributing and improving the family's economic status. The twentieth century according to Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:1) however brought with it a radical shift in the perception of children's worth. The child rose from being an asset to a family, to being a child of which the family can be an asset, with the child's education taking precedence. This shift toward the education of children was deliberated as an equaliser, as it aimed to give children from different economic backgrounds a chance to become successful citizens (Charlesworth, Wood & Viggiani, 2003:1). Subsequently this developmental period became categorised as the 'school age', as it marked a child's entry into formal education (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2006:325).

For the purpose of this study the terminology of middle childhood as opposed to school age will be utilised as the researcher concurs with Hanvey (2002:6) that 'the child's development is not only defined within the parameters of the school.' The researcher believes that even though the school environment is a substantial factor shaping children's development, the ranges of contextual influences include an array of in-home and out-of-home environments as children develop.

McNeely (2003:12-15) identifies school; including education, peer relationships and relationships with teachers, as a particularly important influence on children in middle childhood's emotional and cognitive development as the child's school experience creates challenges and opportunities for growth in all aspects of the child's life. In accordance with this, research undertaken by Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:1) indicates school as the 'next step' in the educational process in middle childhood development. Even though a great deal of learning goes on at home before

childhood and enters school, it is of popular belief that  
that children develop their confidence and ability  
to master their world (Craig, 1996:346). Couchman (2002) depicts this process aptly  
in that for the first time in middle childhood the family is handing over and entrusting  
the wellbeing of their child to an institution created by society in order for the child to  
develop into a successful citizen. Kaseman and Kaseman (2003:1) however indicate  
that many homeschooling parents oppose this view as they feel that

by giving kids the opportunity to spend their early years as part of  
a strong and loving family, by giving them the space, support, and  
security they need to become strong, positive, can-do people that  
this is a much more effective way to help kids learn to deal with the  
real world, and become successful citizens.

Although it has been commonly established that the middle years of childhood  
development are the period in life where the child leaves the security of his or her  
family and independently enters the external world of the school environment  
(Charlesworth, Wood & Viggiani, 2003:1), the opposite is the truth within the  
homeschooling context. Here the family is believed to still be the primary system of  
interaction and influence in the child's life. The experiences the child needs to master  
in his or her world and to develop are thus provided within the home environment.  
Homeschooling therefore has the potential to have a significant influence on  
children's development and experiences. In this regard Paquette and Ryan (2001:23)  
assert that the family is the closest, most intense, most durable and influential  
factor in children's development as the family's influence extends to every aspect of  
the child's development.

According to Gibson (1999:3) homeschooling provides families with a unique  
opportunity to spend more time together. The quality of peer and family relationships  
plays an important role in the development of children and whereas children who  
attend school move more from parents' influence to peer influence, homeschooling  
parents approach their children's education and socialisation in an alternative way, as  
it is the parent who provides the learning experience, and spends each day with the  
child (Kowaleski-Jones & Duncan, 1999:930; Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2006:325).

The model chosen for this research study is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development, as it answers the question of how the child's environment in middle childhood influences the child's continued development. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development (in Damon & Lerner, 1998:996) examines the child's environment and the systems influencing human development, recognising that humans don't develop in isolation, but in relation to their family and home, school, community and society with each of these ever-changing and multilevel environments, as well as interactions among these environments, being key to development.

For the purpose of this chapter, the objective was to provide a conceptual framework describing homeschooling and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of children's development by focusing on the development of children in middle childhood. This chapter is therefore based on the assumption that middle childhood is a distinct phase of development, in which children develop in varied contexts and these contexts influence the child's development in complex and interactive ways.

## 2.2 HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschooling due to its ideographic nature is best defined as an alternative form of education in and out of school setting (Thomas, 2002:3). It is ideographic in that it is the parents who decide on the philosophy, the learning style, the content and the experiences in the child's education, with the aim of guiding their children in their learning in the way the parent believes is best for them. As discussed in 1.1 homeschooling is thus based on the supposition that the child is supported by loving adults who understand best what their child's needs and learning styles are (Thomas, 2002:3; Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum, 2008).

Broadhurst's study (1999) reflects this viewpoint as it was reported that the informal learning structure of homeschooling, the conversations, discussions, debates and questions asked and answered were reported as a positive element of learning at home. In addition Clery (1998) found four common threads influencing the positive impact of homeschooling on the child, those being: autonomy, self awareness, family

relationships. Within the context of homeschooling, Clery and Broadhurst (1999) and Moore (1994) both appeared to play the role of a supportive guide rather than teacher, reinforcing lessons through stimulating their child with age appropriate fun activities and material. Therefore the relationships between child and family, the activities provided and the independence in studying were found to be an influencing factor in determining a positive practice of homeschooling.

Thomas (2002:3) infers that homeschoolers attempt to provide an individualised and rich informal learning environment where their children, through their everyday experiences at home can discover new things as they choose to. Therefore homeschooling is more than the construed construct of 'education' in the traditional sense of children being in school and learning what and when they are taught. In addition homeschooling stresses freedom in learning, responsibility and consequently the ability of self regulation as children, as they within their own education set the pace and direction in which they discover the world around them (Clery, 1998; Broadhurst, 1999; Thomas, 2002; Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum, 2008; Western Cape Home Schooling Association, 2008).

### **2.2.1 Reasons for homeschooling**

As was discussed in 1.1 homeschooling was incorporated into the South African Schools Act in 1996 and is therefore a fairly new initiative within the South African context. It is however estimated that over 100 000 children are being homeschooled in South Africa today, verifying current research which indicates that homeschooling has become increasingly acceptable as a viable substitute to main stream education (Meighan, 1995:275; Clery, 1998:1; Broadhurst, 1999:4; Thomas, 2002:3; Basham, Merrifield & Hepburn, 2007:10; Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum, 2008).

Ensuing the historically dominant threads of homeschooling, two of the most common reasons people choose homeschooling as a substitute to main stream education, are religious or countercultural. The third thread of homeschooling is where children experience problems in school, both academically and socially (Moore, 1994:18-24; Broadhurst, 1999:4; Gibson, 1999:2-10).



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ing are unique to each family and often to each child, reasons that she has found influencing the families choice to homeschool. These will be discussed and explored below.

### 2.2.1.1 Academic reasons

A study by Rothermel (2002:5) reports on problems within the school system, the disappointment with education (31%); bullying (25%); child sickness, stress, exhaustion, depression (24%); lack of suitable schools, bad teaching and behaviour in schools (16.4%) being the most common reasons for homeschooling in Australia. Within South Africa, the most common reasons to homeschool according to Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum (2008) are: the unsatisfactory standard of education in schools, large classes, offensive study material, drugs, pornography and bad values being learnt in the school environment, the low matriculation pass rate and the lack of provision for children with learning difficulties or special needs in the classroom. With these reasons in mind and due to the amount of time children spend in the school environment, parents are choosing homeschooling in order to control the influences in their children's lives and increasing their opportunity to transmit their values to their children (Western Cape Home Schooling Association, 2008), thus evading the problems of drugs, pornography and bad values within main stream schooling.

South Africa has over 12.3 million learners of different colour, race, and gender enrolled at schools across the country. There are 366 000 teachers, in government funded public schools, with the average ratio of scholars to teacher as 32.6 to one, while private schools generally have one teacher for every 17.5 scholars (Education in South Africa, 2008). Homeschoolers therefore seek to provide their children with the best educational environment possible, and believe individualised one-on-one teaching to be this. Gibson (1999:2) concurs with this belief and asserts that homeschooled children excel academically and socially as homeschooling integrates elements essential for learning in the classroom, namely parental involvement, small classroom size, and individualised learning styles. Erwee (2009) comments on the aspect of parental involvement in homeschooling as she believes that homeschooling tells children that their parents are interested and committed to providing the best opportunity for them to excel.

According to Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum (2008), many families have chosen homeschooling as the best education option for their children who are either diagnosed with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), or with Autism. Berk (2006:282) defines ADHD as a childhood disorder involving inattention, impulsivity and excessive motor activity. Autism according to the Child Health Speciality Clinic is defined as a developmental disability which significantly affects the child's verbal and non-verbal communication, having adverse affects on the child's social interaction as well as their educational functioning (Regional Autism Services Program Child Health Specialty Clinic, 2009).

According to Gibson (1999:3), all children have unique ways of learning, however in reference to both ADHD and Autism, these learning difficulties can be seen as too difficult to accommodate in a classroom. The disruptive behaviour in the classroom often leads to the child being disciplined, and defined as a child with problem behaviour. Gibson (1999:3) also reports that parents with children with learning difficulties or handicaps often find that they know how their child learns best. It has further been found that children with learning difficulties or handicaps who have previously felt anxiety in the classroom, appear to thrive in the home school environment.

### *2.2.1.3 Social reasons*

Lastly, one of the most controversial, but at the same time one of the most common reasons for homeschooling, is that of socialisation (Kaseman & Kaseman, 2003:1). Barone (2009:1) defines socialisation as "the ability to adapt to the needs of any given group, to follow the rules of society, and live harmoniously in the particular society in which we live."

Although the social reasoning for homeschooling has come under much criticism, and is suggested as one of the major weaknesses of homeschooling, Gibson (1999:3) and Barone (2009:1) assert that this is opposite to the truth. In this regard Kaseman and Kaseman (2003:1) mention that in contrast to the main stream schooling system of separating children into age appropriate classes, break times and assemblies,

at a greater opportunity to interact with a broader community on a daily basis, which thus prepares the child to be socialised and skilled to handle a variety of social situations. On the other hand, according to Worth (1999:1) and Kaseman and Kaseman (2003:1), the school environment is artificial and does not allow the same opportunities to deal with a variety of social situations as homeschooling does, but rather teaches children how to interact with children of the same age.

Another argument concerning socialisation which opposes homeschooling has to do with the development of certain coping skills in order to help children cope with day to day challenges. In this regard Hanvey (2002:7), for instance, is of the opinion that as children move into the stage of middle childhood, a larger arena of social interaction and influence opens, with new challenges and demands. These challenges, namely that of bullying and peer pressure, have the potential to develop coping skills within the child that will aid them in adapting in group settings, therefore helping children to become "successful" citizens.

A study by Stough (1992:255) however contradicts the above opinion as it is reported that children who are homeschooled "have gained the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to function in society at a rate similar to that of conventionally schooled children." Results according to Williams and Williams (2002) furthermore suggest not only that homeschooling may improve a child's social development but that it improves "a child's self-concept and helps children develop the ability to withstand peer pressure."

To conclude, studies according to Barone (1999:1) have indicated that children learn to socialise in a positive way through time spent with people who love them unconditionally and are interested in their growth, in their development and their knowledge. Erwee (2009) confirms these results as her experiences have led her to believe that the loving relationship, sacrifice and investment in children who are homeschooled are the keys to a child's good self concept.

From the above mentioned discussion it seems clear that this aspect regarding homeschooling is controversial with forever contradicting arguments from researchers and authors to prove their view point.



With this variation in the parents' reasons to homeschool, there is also diversity in the methods of educating within the homeschooling paradigm. Unschooling, Montessori, Theory of multiple intelligences and Charlotte Mason are among some of the more prominent education paradigms utilised within the homeschooling tradition (Moore, 1994:4). A brief definition of each educating paradigm is provided below.

#### *2.2.2.1 Unschooling*

John Holt is widely regarded as the founder of unschooling. Greer (2008:2) describes the unschooling process as a range of educational philosophies and practices that differ markedly from conventional schooling.

Greer (2008:2) depicts unschooling as a highly unstructured form of education, where the parents direct their teaching towards their child's individual interests and needs. Therefore, even within the constructs of homeschooling, unschooling contrasts with most home educators, as the child's education is not directed by the teacher or a curriculum. The main difference between conventional school and unschooling according to Greer (2008:2) is that school is viewed as 'a case of knowledge (that someone else has determined to be important) chasing after the student, while unschooling puts the student chasing after the knowledge (that they have decided is important).' This is facilitated by parents providing a wide range of resources, giving their children the opportunity to access and make sense of the world they are discovering.

#### *2.2.2.2 Montessori*

Maria Montessori, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, developed the Montessori educational method for children. It is a child-centered alternative to conventional education, and is based primarily on child development theories (Brehony, 2000:120). According to Smith (1997) the Montessori method is characterised by children being self directed in their own educational learning, and the teacher, being more of a guide walking alongside in the child's self discovery. It stresses the importance of adapting



to his or her developmental level, and of the role of abstract concepts and practical skills (Smith, 1997).

It is reported that homeschoolers can scale down certain aspects of the Montessori method into the homeschooling environment, such as having a clean and calm, child friendly environment for the child to learn in, as well as the child's self direction and self responsibility (Brehony, 2000:120).

### *2.2.2.3 Theory of multiple intelligences*

According to Plucker (2007:1) Howard Gardner proposed the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983. His theory opposed the insufficiency of the traditional definition of intelligence as he proposed that it did not encompass the wide variety of abilities humans display.

Traditionally, education has emphasised logical and linguistic intelligence (reading and writing), and although many children can thrive in this environment, there are those who do not. Klein (1998:1) emphasises that the theory of multiple intelligences contests this traditional line of thinking, as it views each child as an individual, with individual and unique learning styles and needs.

The seven core intelligences that Gardner (1999:56) identified are as follows: linguistic (language), logical-mathematical (logic and abstractions), spatial (vision and spatial judgement), kinaesthetic (bodily movement), musical, interpersonal (interaction with others) and intrapersonal (self reflective) and naturalist (nature and nurturing). The teaching methods used within the homeschooling tradition are thus tailored specifically to meet the specific child's needs and learning style/intelligences.

### *2.2.2.4 Charlotte Mason*

According to Andreola (1998:24) Charlotte Mason was an educator that devoted her life to improve the quality of children's education in Britain. She based her life's work on the belief that children are persons and need to be respected and treated as persons. She defined education in a holistic way, saw education as an atmosphere, as a discipline and as a life (Andreola, 1998:1; Cooper, 2004:10-25). These three



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an understanding of the Charlotte Mason methodology presented below.

- *Education as atmosphere*

Mason (in Andreola, 1998:24) stressed the importance of education as an atmosphere, where the child's home environment should not be adapted as she believed that a child should be able to live freely and naturally in this home environment. Mason proposed that with regards to a child's education the child's home environment was superior to the conventional schooling environment, due to the lack of freedom in this artificial educational environment (Natal, 2000:3; Scott, 2004:72-86).

Mason placed significant emphasis on the type of atmosphere that is most conducive to a child's natural development. Outdoor life, where children have the opportunity to use their senses, and play and learn from observing nature is among one of the most important educational principles in her methodology (Scott, 2004:75).

- *Education as discipline*

According to Natal (2000:3) Mason believed that children's good habits must be formed, and that "undesirable behaviours could be eradicated by replacing thoughts with those that lead to desirable behaviours, repeated and reinforced until good behaviour was habitual." Education as discipline, therefore accentuates that education is stronger than nature and that all children are born with possibilities for both good and evil.

- *Education as life*

Mason (in Cyr, 2004:100) pursued the notion that the mind feeds on ideas, that children have an inherent desire for knowledge, and that this desire is often stifled by conventional education, influenced both by the environment and specifically the child's curriculum. Mason defined this curiosity of children and their desire for knowledge as the chief instrument of education and for internal motivation. Furthermore Natal (2003:3) reports that Mason strongly believed that external rewards of any nature were detrimental in the child's quest for knowledge.

Further believed that the most important method of reading, and that in this reading, children should be presented with living ideas. One of the most popular features of Mason's methodology therefore is the concept of 'living books'. She insisted that instead of dry, factual books, books must be written by people who have a passion for the subject as it is the book's content which makes it a living book. She further insisted that the conversational and passionate style of the book enables the child to engage with the subject making the book 'alive' (Mason in Cyr, 2004:125-127).

In summary, it seems as if the homeschooling approach to education is far more gentle and flexible than the systematic education within the school setting, with major focus on the child's environment, the child's behaviour and lastly the child's curriculum all influencing the child's experience and motivation for knowledge and development.

## 2.3 MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Middle childhood is a phase of development which Santrock (1999:263) describes as a calm period characterised by slow consistent growth. Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:7) however assert that middle childhood in the twentieth century has become more commonly recognised as a potentially turbulent period of transition in children's lives, due to the important changes intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Children between the ages of 6 and 12 are in this age period commonly referred to as the middle childhood years (Santrock, 1999:263).

Whilst developmental theorists concede that children in middle childhood's behaviour and thought differ significantly from previous periods, certain theorists deliberate on dividing human development into discrete time periods due to its continuous nature (Kowaleski-Jones & Duncan, 1999:933). According to Paquette and Ryan (2001:2-3), contemporary child development theories more commonly accept the significant role of both the child's biology and their environment in the child's development, focusing both on the role and influence each aspect plays in development. For this reason, the researcher believes that a systems perspective is fundamental in understanding and exploring the child in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling.

Table 2.1 outlines the varying developmental tasks of middle childhood. This table serves as the framework of this section as it illustrates Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of child development, Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development and Erikson's Psychosocial theory, therefore focusing deliberately on the intellectual, social and emotional changes taking place in middle childhood (Charlesworth, Wood & Viggiani, 2003:1).

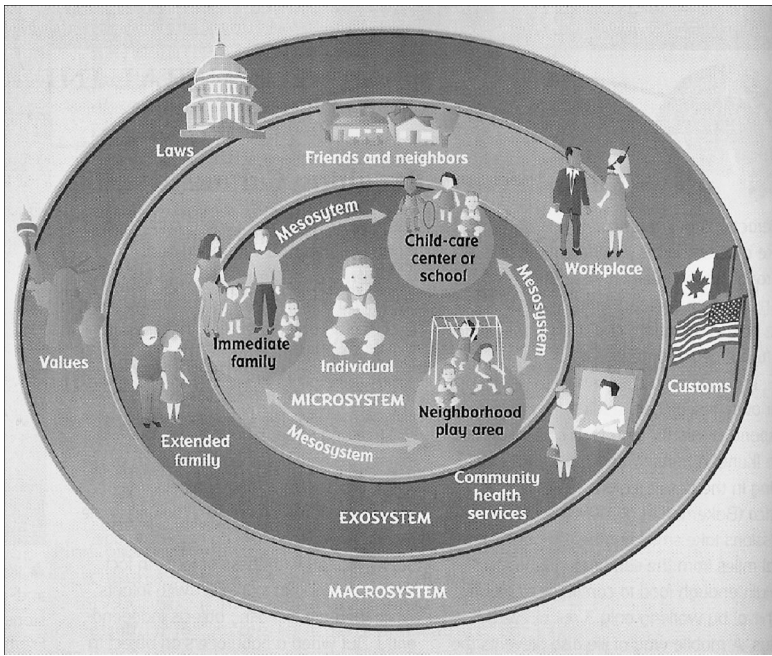
	<b>Infancy</b>	<b>Early childhood</b>		<b>Middle childhood</b>	<b>Adolescence</b>
<b>Age</b>	0-1 yrs	1-3 yrs	3-6 yrs	6- puberty	12-18 yrs
<b>Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory</b>	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>Microsystem</span> <span>Mesosystem</span> <span>Exosystem</span> <span>Macrosystem</span> </div>  <p>(Diagram from Berk, 2006:28)</p>				
<b>Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development</b>	Sensorimotor  <i>Coordination: Sensory input and motor responses.</i>	Preoperational  <i>Symbolic thought</i>	Concrete operational  <i>Mental operations: concentrate on events; mastery of conservation, hierarchical classification</i>	Formal operational  <i>Mental operations: applies to abstract ideas, logical, systematic thinking</i>	

Table 2.1 reflecting Bronfenbrenner's, Piaget's and Erikson's theories of middle childhood development.

## Ecological model of middle childhood development

Damon and Lerner (1998:994) highlight three important focal points within the ecological model: its child-centeredness; its focus on the child's experience and lastly the nature of the relationships between different settings. These three focal points enhance this study, as the primary aim is to explore and describe the child in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling.

Paquette and Ryan (2001) highlight the five types of systems of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and lastly the chronosystem. Each system contains relationships, roles, norms and rules that can powerfully shape and influence development. The ecological model thus illuminates the systems influencing the child's development and experience of homeschooling.

Damon and Lerner (1998:993) believe that the systems in middle childhood either foster or prevent the child's attempts to acquire a sense of mastery in their life. It is according to Craig (1996:346) widely accepted that at this developmental stage developing friendships, confidence and an ability to master their world within the school environment is increasingly important. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model focuses on children's development within the context of the system of relationships that form the child's environment. The influences on children in middle childhood will thus be explored by specifically focussing on the quality of the connections and relationships between peers and significant adults in the life of the child who is homeschooled (Damon & Lerner, 1998:993).

The following description of the different systems is adapted from Damon and Lerner (1998:996), Berk (2006:27-29; 559-563) and Paquette and Ryan (2001:1-4), and will be discussed as follows.

### *2.3.1.1 The microsystem*

Bronfenbrenner & Morris (1998:996) asserts that children need people in order to develop and according to Berk (2006:28) the microsystem is the layer in which

have direct contact with people. The microsystem relationships and interactions children have with their immediate environment which influences their development.

Bronfenbrenner (in Berk, 2006:28) stresses the bi-directional influences of the child's experiences at the microsystem level, relating to the impact of relationships that is both away from the child and toward the child. According to Santrock (1999:260), there is consensus across the board regarding the role and importance of relationships in middle childhood. It is therefore evident that the influence of interactions in the microsystem, between biology, family, friends, school and community is paramount, as they all affect the child directly and the child directly influences them.

Paquette and Ryan (2001:25) postulate that the biological system, the cognitive and the emotional system form the core of being human, as these systems gather and process data into a representation of the world humans exist in. The role these three systems play in the child's development in middle childhood will subsequently be explored.

- *Biology*

The child's own biology is the body and life system, which enables interaction with the environment (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:5). Paquette and Ryan (2001:5) emphasise that the child's biology impacts the child's education as disorders, diseases and lack of nutrition all impact the child's development and ability to learn. The body functions and brain functioning therefore either enhances or impedes the child's ability to learn, play, run, write and explore the world (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:5).

Santrock (1999:266) describes development of the body and life system during middle childhood in the following ways, namely that children's physical development begins to advance more steadily than during previous developmental periods, children's motor development becomes smoother and more coordinated and children gain greater control over their body. Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:12) assert that the varied nature and pace of physical growth in middle childhood is





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ic and environmental stimuli thus accounting for the development of children in middle childhood.

Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:14) further assert that, "gender is a profoundly important organising factor shaping human development and its biological correlates may impact behavior and learning processes in ways we do not clearly understand." Nonetheless it is still important to highlight for the purpose of exploring children in middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling, that the child's gender plays a pivotal role in shaping his or her experiences.

- *Cognition*

Bronfenbrenner (in Berk, 2006:28) developed the ecological systems theory to explain how everything in a child and the child's environment affect how a child grows and develops. According to Paquette and Ryan (2001:22) Bronfenbrenner equates the environment surrounding the child as a physical structure affecting the child's stages of cognitive development. Piaget and Erikson (in Berk, 2006:16-18; 20-22) cite that the child's cognition develops in stages, with Piaget's theory portraying the child's cognitive development at every stage of development, as being influenced by their contact with their environment.

Furthermore Piaget's (in Santrock, 1999:274) theory of cognitive development recognises the school and community's direct influence on the child as they enter into the concrete operational stage of middle childhood. The concrete operational stage indicates the extent to which children in middle childhood become logical, reasonable and systematic thinkers, able to solve problems in a variety of tasks. Piaget (in Paquette & Ryan, 2001:22; Santrock, 1999:270) thus focuses on the child's intellectual aptitude as the major accomplishment of middle childhood.

- *Emotion*

As the child's social world expands during middle childhood the child, according to Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:8) is faced with new challenges and influences in their social arena. These new challenges and demands aid children in



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their emotional coping skills. Goleman (2006:341) defines emotional intelligence as the ability to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations, to control impulse and delay gratification, to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think, to empathise and to hope.

Although the family remains an extremely significant influence on the child in the middle childhood's development; peers, teachers and other significant adults in the broadening social context, begin to play more of a role in the child's development in every aspect. According to Hanvey (2002:7), it is within this social realm, that children develop their self concept as they experience both successes and failures and their success or failure becomes public. Middle childhood is thus a time where children not only begin to develop a greater sense of self, but a self in relation to others (Santrock, 1999:263). In the classroom, children who are impeded by their physical or brain dysfunction, from extreme cases of mental retardation to dyslexia, begin to compare themselves to others and look strongly toward their teachers for support, guidance and encouragement. For this very reason as stated in 2.1.1.2 the child's disability to learn effectively in the school environment, is often cause for parents to begin homeschooling their children (Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum, 2008). By deciding upon homeschooling, parents are merely choosing to give their child the best opportunity to master his or her disability with people who love and understand their child's needs and problems (Gibson, 1999:3). This one on one, specific teaching and educating at home is the parents' attempt to give their child the best education possible.

Paquette and Ryan(2001:25) in addition to identifying biology, cognition and emotion as significant influences in the development of the child in middle childhood, indicate family, school and peer group as significant role players in children in middle childhood's development. These three systems will be discussed below.

- *Family*

Magnuson (2003:1428-1446) is of the opinion that in early childhood, the influence of the immediate family context is paramount. In contrast with this, middle childhood is



ation in social programs as children interact with  
neighbourhood; therefore broadening their systems of  
influence. Comparatively speaking middle childhood thus represents a time of  
increasing influence outside the family environment. This aspect is confirmed by  
research done by Hill and Stafford (in Santrock, 1999:303) where it was indicated that  
parents tend to spend less than half as much time with their children aged 5-12 in care  
giving, instruction, reading, talking, and playing as when they were younger.

An interesting fact that Adele and Allen Gottfried (in Santrock, 1999:295) however  
have found is that greater variety of home experiences, parental encouragement of  
competence and curiosity, and home emphasis on academically related behaviours  
were directly related to children's internal motivation for achievement and  
development. Albeit during middle childhood the family is not the only important  
influential force in a child's life, the family still remains an extremely significant  
influence on development (Charlesworth, Wood & Viggiani, 2007:8).

One of the most widely recognised developmental tasks of middle childhood  
according to Hanvey (2002:3) is the acquisition of feelings of self-competence,  
consequently children search for opportunities in their environment to demonstrate  
their personal skills, abilities, and achievements. Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani  
(2003:21) highlight the child's need for authentic, accurate encouragement in  
comparison to superficial bolstering of the child's self esteem. They agree that middle  
childhood is the critical time for children to acquire this sense of competence, and that  
the family plays an important role in supporting this sense of competence.  
Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:21) further found that this significant  
influence of family is found in the feedback loops within the adult-child relationship,  
as important adults in the child's life, still through providing specific feedback and  
praise, can counter the child's frustration in their failures.

In reference to the above, Bronfenbrenner (in Paquette & Ryan, 2001:19) outlines five  
propositions that provide a framework for schools and parents to collaborate toward  
supporting positive development of self competence in children. These five  
propositions outline the ideal relational context for a child in middle childhood to  
develop, regardless of traditional schooling or being schooled at home. The following

and applied where applicable within the context of the ecosystem (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:19-26):

- Children need a loving and supportive mutual relationship with an adult(refer to 2.3.1.1);
- Children gain confidence from this adult-child relationship(refer to 2.3.1.1);
- Children learn from the interactions from this adult-child relationship(refer to 2.3.1.2);
- A bi-directional interchange between adults promote a sense of community (refer to 2.3.1.3), and lastly
- The public support influences the primary adult's role in the child's life(refer to 2.3.1.4).

The first proposition of Bronfenbrenner (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:23) insists that children need to experience a mutual relationship with an adult who unconditionally loves, supports and believes in the child. The second proposition is linked very closely with proposition one, as it is based on the premise that the child's ability to effectively live and explore the environment stems from the confidence encouraged by this initial adult-child relationship and therefore deals with the impact this connection and interaction with an adult will have in helping children interact with their environment. (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:23).

- *School*

According to Hanvey (2002:10), it was Erikson who stressed the importance of the wider social contexts in middle childhood, and their strong influence on the child's development. Along with physical development, emotional capability and an acquired cognitive competence, the child gains access to the widening world, marked by the child's entry into school (Berk, 2006:6; Berger, 2005:316). Corroborating the role of the school in the child's development, there is an increasing body of research indicating that experiences at school do have a profound influence on the social, cognitive and emotional development of young people (Paquette & Ryan, 2001; Hanvey, 2002). Craig (1996:60) concurs in that these critical developmental tasks are mainly characterised by socialisation with peers in the school environment.

99:265) delineates human development into stages of psychosocial crisis, defining the developmental task of middle childhood as industry vs. inferiority. His theory ascertains that children become increasingly interested in how things are made and how they work. When children are encouraged in their efforts to make and build and work, Erikson's model proposes that children gain a sense of industry as opposed to a sense of inferiority, when discouraged or hindered when trying things on their own (Santrock, 1999:265).

Wait (2004:140) stresses that the child who is unable to gain mastery over challenges they face in their learning environment, will experience feelings of inferiority, and that a few failed experiences can generate such strong negative feelings that the child will avoid engaging in new tasks in order to preclude further failure. In addition Hanvey (2002:6) observed that students who struggle in school, with academics, relationships with both teachers and peers appear to disengage from school.

Children's development in middle childhood is thus commonly recognised as being driven by basic psychological needs to achieve competence, autonomy and to relate to others. According to Santrock (1999:315) industry is commonly viewed as the dominant theme of this period of development, industry referring to the child's internal motivation to acquire new skills and gain mastery over these skills.

- *The peer group*

Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:25) explore the growing ability of the child in middle childhood to look at things from other's perspectives. They believe that this perspective taking, enables the child to develop more complex and intimate relationships with their peers as the child becomes more aware of other opinions, thoughts and feelings. According to Paquette and Ryan (2001:24) these relationships that develop at school are critical in the positive development of the child, cognitively, emotionally and socially.

the persistent growth in reliance on peers in middle childhood. The aspects of peer groups in the development of the child in middle childhood. Hanvey (2002:16) focuses on the potential of positive role modelling being provided within the peer group, the acceptance and understanding that is provided, as well as the opportunity that peer groups create for children to belong and have fun. Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:24) highlight the peer group's increasing influence on children in middle childhood, in the way they dress, behave and act as well as the potential for the peer group to 'reflect and support social competence' – discourage egocentrism, promote positive coping, and ultimately serve as a protective factor during the transition to adolescence. The peer group through middle childhood and transitioning into adolescence is thus commonly accepted as having a significant influence on the child's life. Peer groups can be defined as a collection of children with unique values and goals (Santrock, 1999:265).

Homeschooling parents often oppose the influence of peers in their children's life as discussed in 2.2.1.3, as they try to protect their children from the pressures experienced in the school environment. Pressures relating to sex, alcohol use, drug abuse, and swearing appear to be the primary focus and deterrent of homeschoolers as they approach the topic of peer influence in the school environment (Rothermel, 2002:5; Education in South Africa, 2008). In contrast to the peer influence, children attending home school are faced with family influence as parents role model values, ideas, and norms to their children.

However, although the family often meets the needs of children in terms of positive role modelling, acceptance, understanding and belonging, Carr (in Charlesworth, Wood & Viggiani, 2003:175) emphasises that the peer group is critically important in the child's development as it provides unique and different opportunities for the child to learn and grow. Hanvey (2002:7) further iterates this point in stating that

‘while many families assist their children to find out who they really are and to feel proud and confident of their unique traits and abilities, the peer group may often be more accepting of their feelings, thoughts and actions associated with this search for self-identity.’

) discuss three important lessons that children have in a peer group setting. Firstly, the peer group illuminates to the children different points of view, which the child needs to appreciate and accept. Secondly, the peer group teaches the child how to recognise norms and demands in the peer group setting and thirdly, the peer group provides close same sex relationships. Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:23) compare individual friendships and peer groups stating that "where individual friendships facilitate the development of critical capacities such as trust and intimacy, peer groups foster learning about cooperation and leadership."

The question remains to what degree children in middle childhood that are presently being homeschooled are experiencing peer pressure, peer influence and peer relationship. Many homeschoolers according to Worth (1999:1) contend that their children are not isolated but rather that they are introduced to many different social contexts providing them with adequate opportunities to foster their socialisation skills. In the context of the peer group, what exposure does the child in home school experience and in what context, as homeschooling parents choose their children's interaction groups? Reich (in Moore & Moore, 1994:39) argues this point as he believes it is highly probable that homeschoolers gain a prejudiced view, as parents teach their children their own beliefs without comparison and exposure to others as in the school environment.

From the above discussion it is evident that as middle childhood approaches, the child begins to transition into a more complex social creature with the new challenge to find ways to control their broadening social environment and to understand who they are in this new environment. Couchman (2002:54) states, the "middle years" of childhood are commonly accepted as "that period in life when the child leaves the security of his or her family and independently enters the external world."

### *2.3.1.2 The mesosystem*

The mesosystem is the layer comprised of the connection between the systems of the child's immediate environments. In addition to the family (home) and peer (school) environment, it is evident that children in their middle childhood years development is

ers (people) apart from the child's immediate family  
s, the mesosystem is made up of the relationships  
between the people (things) present in the microsystem. Paquette and Ryan (2001:23)  
highlight the significant influence these supplementary relationships have on the child  
in middle childhood's development.

The third proposition of Bronfenbrenner focuses on the interaction that is formed in  
the relationships between child and adult. These relationships are viewed by  
Bronfenbrenner (in Paquette & Ryan, 2001:23) as learning grounds, where the child  
gains "affirmation from a third party relationship, and will bring those new skills  
to the initial relationship."

Children in middle childhood begin to reach out to other adults and community  
resources, recreation, arts, club activities and playing or "hanging around" with their  
peers (Hanvey, 2002:16). The quality of the connections between the role players in  
each of these settings is thus paramount in the child's development, with Domina (in  
Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani, 2003:180) stating that "the link between school  
and home is important in every child's life across the age span." This link is vital as  
school and home are the two major environments in which children have direct  
contact. Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani, (2003:28) emphasise that the more  
similarities in the two spheres, the more successful the child will be. The challenge for  
parents according to Scott (in Hanvey, 2002:7) therefore will be to capitalise on the  
child's chances in all these environments so that the child can feel "valued,  
nurtured, recognized, engaged and included" by as many people as possible. The  
adults that children who are being homeschooled interact with however are primarily  
their parents, or adults that the parents have approved of.

### *2.3.1.3 The exosystem*

The exosystem is the layer encompassing the larger social systems in the child's  
environment which influence the child's primary systems. The child does not function  
directly in this system and therefore it does not influence the child directly; however  
the child does feel the positive or negative impact involved with the interaction with  
his own system. It is at this level that the community lies (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:24;



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er (1998:1000) define community as an entire group in the geographical area that have an interest in the well-being of the young children who reside there.

According to Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:30) communities provide identity and kinship to people with similar concerns, they provide access to resources and they provide emotional support. Proposition four of Bronfenbrenner highlights the need for this kinship in the form of community, in that the primary adults in the child's life need to mutually work together and compromise so that a bi-directional interchange can occur in both the neighbourhood and workplace of the child's parents (Charlesworth, Wood & Viggiani, 2003:30). In the context of this study, this community would most likely include the interaction, communication and co-operation of families, formal community groups (church), au pairs, and informal groups (friends and relatives) (Berk, 2006:28; Paquette & Ryan, 2001:23; Hanvey, 2002:17).

#### *2.3.1.4 The macrosystem*

The macrosystem is considered the outermost layer in the child's environment, and is comprised of cultural values, customs and laws (Berk, 2006:29). These principles largely influence all the layers, therefore children are affected by their culture, and the customs and laws of their society. According to Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:23) that culture dictates people's beliefs in every area of their lives, their choice of religion, their option of traditional schooling or homeschooling and the way they live family and community life daily. Furthermore, they believe that it is the generations that pass these values on to the child as they develop.

According to Paquette and Ryan (2001:23) group identity is one of the aspects of the macrosystem, which has the potential to influence the child in middle childhood's development both positively and negatively. The child in middle childhood acquires the ability to see things from other people's perspectives, and applies this new found ability to develop who they are, in relation to others (Santrock, 1999:312-313). Homeschooling, by its definition, is implemented within the context of home and of family; therefore there is limited exposure to different ethnicity, cultures, genders,



statuses. For that reason this is a crucial factor in this  
ing may impede on children in middle childhood's  
development in relation to others. Charlesworth, Wood and Viggiani (2003:16) have  
found that awareness and beliefs associated with different ethnic groups, cultures,  
socioeconomic statuses and gender identities during middle childhood, are created  
and highly influenced by their experiences in different areas of their lives.  
Furthermore they indicate that this crucial task of acquiring a positive group identity  
is widely being recognised as a developmental task of middle childhood.

Kowaleski-Jones and Duncan (1999:940) focus on how children in middle childhood  
begin to 'learn what constitutes success in society.' The researcher is of the  
opinion that success in society is often measured by a high level of achievement  
intertwined with acceptance; this type of success is often manifested in academic  
settings, sporting arenas and popularity with peers in middle childhood. Furthermore  
the researcher is of the opinion that society declares what is acceptable in the school  
environment, with popularity and success being determined by what you have, what  
you can get and what you can do with it.

Middle childhood as contended above, is the age of mastery and competence where  
children learn to assess and accept their own strengths and weaknesses as they  
succeed and fail in new environments and new tasks in the school environment (Berk,  
2006:16-18; Santrock, 1999:302). Kowaleski-Jones and Duncan (1999:940) highlight  
the potential danger of middle childhood due to the child's vulnerability as they  
develop their sense of self and their sense of competency. They assert that children  
due to this vulnerability can often be discouraged when they experience themselves as  
inadequate. The influence of society is thus paramount on the child in middle  
childhood, as they attempt to gain a sense of mastery as opposed to failure, a sense of  
industry as opposed to inferiority.

Additionally society is responsible for providing resources enabling the structures of  
any child's mesosystem to flourish (Berk, 2006:29). The fifth and last proposition of  
Bronfenbrenner looks at the public support and attitude towards the role of the adult  
in the child's life. This is an important facet in direct relation to children being  
homeschooled as there is a lot of debate, criticism, concern and lack of support of



Chen, 2008:2). Parents choosing homeschooling in a conventional schooling, how then is society providing resources to help these parents? The parents' ability to carry out their responsibility toward their child within the context of the child's microsystem is thus strongly influenced by society (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:1). Homeschoolers are creating a new culture constituting people of similar beliefs, similar outlooks, shareable resources and experiences; they are creating a community of people who support each other in this alternative education process.

### 2.3.1.5 The chronosystem

Berk (2006:29) describes the chronosystem, as the system encompassing both external and internal changes related to time in the child's environment. Paquette and Ryan (2001:24) assert that these changes are related to historical elements that change within the child's environment; this change then influences the child directly within all the systems. Furthermore they find that these changes, being external influences, of which no one has direct control over, influence both the child in the school environment and the homeschooling environment very similarly, and will affect the child both directly and indirectly (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:24).

## 2.4 SUMMARY

In relation to children's development, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998:996) affirms that children need people in order to develop as he states that

í it is primarily through observing, playing, and working with others older and younger than himself that a child discovers both what he can do and who he can become - that he develops both his ability and his identity. Development, it turns out, occurs through this process of progressively more complex exchange between a child and somebody else - especially somebody who's crazy about that child.

and Viggiani (2003:27) accept the multiple human community influencing children's development, they emphasise the importance of formal schooling during middle childhood. They indicate that school provides a new environment that children need to learn to navigate, that school provides a basis of evaluation on the tasks children perform, as well as an important resource for physical, cognitive, emotional and social tasks of middle childhood.

The researcher is of the opinion that homeschooling is in direct contrast to the traditional teaching mode in formal schools, as parents aim to teach their children in the child's natural learning mode, in their experiences in everyday life. The researcher has found that homeschooling, as opposed to the view held by many people in society, is not an isolating process but rather an educating one, a process of journeying with their children in their discovery and mastery over their world. In Erikson's (in Santrock, 1999:309) own words, children should be "mildly but firmly coerced into the adventure of finding out that one can learn to accomplish things which one would never have thought of by oneself."

The researcher is therefore of the opinion that middle childhood is an important phase to address the issue of homeschooling, as homeschooling parents approach their children's education and socialisation in an alternative way. The researcher is further of the opinion that the family and homeschooling experience holds great responsibility in making it more difficult or less likely for a child in middle childhood to get the experiences they need to master their world.

In chapter three the researcher will present the empirical research undertaken during this study.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND LITERATURE CONTROL

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of Chapter two was to provide a conceptual framework describing and creating an understanding of the basic concepts relevant to the research study. In Chapter three the researcher addresses the empirical research undertaken during this study, focusing on the research process, the data collection and data analysis of the research findings.

The primary goal of the research was to explore and describe children in middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling. After careful analysis, certain themes, sub-themes and categories were identified. The researcher will present each theme individually, and then explore these themes in relation to the literature that has been gathered throughout the research.

### 3.2 RESEARCH PROCESS

The research process of this study was discussed in Chapter one. Therefore an overview of this process is presented in this section.

#### 3.2.1 Research and work procedure

The researcher utilised a qualitative approach (Refer to 1.4) in the study allowing an exploration of children in middle childhood's homeschooling experience.

#### 3.2.2 Pilot study

As was indicated in 1.7.3 the researcher decided to undertake a pilot study to determine whether the relevant data could be obtained from the participants. The pilot study proved to be imperative in this study in the following three ways:



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The two children that took part in the pilot study, made it clear that a relaxed atmosphere needed to be created for the participants in order for them to feel comfortable in answering the questions in the interview. This information enabled the researcher to be flexible in the interview process. For example, the researcher saw the value of having the mother in the room with the younger children (age 8), or allowing children to do the interview with their sibling, in order to create this atmosphere. Even though the presence of a parent or an older sibling might have induced the Hawthorn effect in influencing the answers the participants gave as discussed in 1.7.4, the researcher was of the opinion that by being flexible in creating this comfortable atmosphere allowed participants to share valuable in depth information.

#### *3.2.2.2 Individual experiences*

The pilot study showed the importance for the researcher to be introduced to the participant, as well as the topic that was to be discussed. With the aim of exploring the child's individual experience of homeschooling, it was important for the participant to understand that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions, but that the researcher's aim was rather to listen and hear each participant's specific experience of homeschooling.

#### *3.2.2.3 Modified questions*

The researcher modified certain questions on the interview schedule before the interview process that was found to be irrelevant in collecting the data required during the pilot study.

### **3.2.3 Method of data collection**

With the aim of exploring and describing a genuine understanding of the child's world, the researcher utilised a semi-structured interview schedule (refer to Addendum E) and observation as the primary data collection methods (Refer to 1.7.4).

for the interview process to be flexible and gave the the participant's flow and lead that emerged in the interviews in order to explore their experience of homeschooling.

### 3.2.3.1 Interview structure

For the purpose of this study the researcher interviewed nine children in their middle childhood who were currently being homeschooled in the Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula. Of the participants seven were female and two were male. For ethical purposes each participant was awarded a letter of the alphabet. The following information indicates each participant's age, gender and the period the participants have been homeschooled:

- Participant A: 12 years old male, been homeschooled for 2 years.
- Participant B: 11 year old female, been homeschooled for 6 years.
- Participant C: 10 year old female, been homeschooled for 4 years.
- Participant D: 8 year old female, been homeschooled for 2 years.
- Participant E: 8 year old male, been homeschooled for 2 years.
- Participant F: 10 year old female, been homeschooled for 2 years.
- Participant G: 12 year old female, been homeschooled for 5 years.
- Participant H: 12 year old female, been homeschooled for 5 years.
- Participant I: 9 year old female, been homeschooled for 3 years.

The interviews took place in the participants' homes to ensure that they were comfortable in the familiar environment. Where participants requested the mother or sibling to be part of the interview, the researcher included them into the interview process, however keeping the primary focus on the participant by directing the interview questions to the participant. The researcher further reassured the participant of the purpose of the interview process, to hear and describe the participant's individual experience of homeschooling. Thus releasing the anxiety to conform (The Hawthorn effect) to either the researcher's expectations or the mother's presence as participants answered the questions (Refer to 1.7.4 and 3.2.2.1).



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were tailored to fit each participant, in an attempt to experience of homeschooling. For example, the initial question for participants between the ages of eight and ten was: “How does the day go by for you at homeschooling?”, and for participants between the ages of ten and twelve was: “How do you experience/find homeschooling?” As the researcher required the participants to be able to express their experiences of homeschooling, it was important that the participant understood what they were being asked.

### **3.2.4 Method of data analysis**

After the interview process was completed, the interviews were transcribed and analysed. When dealing with the data analysis and interpretation, the researcher utilised Creswell’s spiral for data analysis as discussed in 1.7.5.

## **3.3 EMPIRICAL DATA**

The themes presented in this section are based on the information provided by the participants in the interview process and were spontaneously put forward by the participants during the interviews. The themes presented are therefore directly related to the aim of the study namely to explore and describe the experience of homeschooling of children in their middle childhood.

### **TABLE 3.1**

The following table (Table 3.1) illustrates the identified themes, sub-themes and categories.

*Categories*

- *Individualised learning*
- *Freedom in learning*
- *Flexibility in learning*
- *Customised learning*

**THEME 2: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

**SUB-THEME 1: Cohesion**

*Category*

- *Mother-child relationships*

**SUB-THEME 2: Place of safety**

*Category*

- *Building self confidence*

**THEME 3: SOCIALISATION**

**SUB-THEME 1: Social comparison**

*Categories*

- *Learning in the classroom*
- *Peers*
- *Extracurricular activities*

**3.4 THEME 1: INVIDUAL LEARNING**

The empirical findings showed that one of the key elements that inspired the participants in their homeschooling experience was that of individualised learning. Every participant spontaneously stressed that their parents understood them best, the way they think, and the way they learn as not all children learn the same way.

The researcher will discuss under the main theme the following sub-themes which pertain to individual learning in homeschooling.

The sub-theme of individual learning styles in this study, although not solely based on the premise of Gardner's (1999:12) theory of multiple intelligences, indicates the importance of understanding a child's learning preference in order to create an atmosphere conducive to promoting that individual child's learning potential. The theory of multiple intelligences recognises that individuals learn in different ways, and that different styles and techniques either inhibit or promote the individual's learning style (Gardner, 1999:12).

The participants in this study spontaneously reported that they felt that their parents understood them, their needs and how they learn, that their parents knew them and helped them learn in a way best suited to them. Participant F amalgamated the responses of the participants with regards to the above as she reported that: "she [my mother] understands who I am and how I learn best."

Although learning styles (multiple intelligences) is a relatively new approach to education, it is becoming more commonly recognised that each person in their uniqueness prefers different learning styles and techniques. According to Sarasin (1999:2) a student's academic achievement is highly dependent on the activities, teaching and structure of the lesson reflecting the individual student's learning style and preference. Sternberg and Zhang (2001:7) support this viewpoint as they report that classroom effectiveness relies heavily on the teacher's ability to consider the individual diversity of each student. The researcher is of the opinion that mastery in the context of an encouraging, understanding and supportive learning environment should be possible for everyone. Homeschoolers are a strong advocate of this notion, as they strive to understand their children's own learning styles and techniques suited specifically to them (Medlin, 2000:109; National Home Education Research Institute, 2008).

In order to comprehend the diversity of individual learning styles, the following diagram taken from Gardner (1999:150-151) illustrates the seven multiple intelligences (learning styles) as well as a brief description of each one.



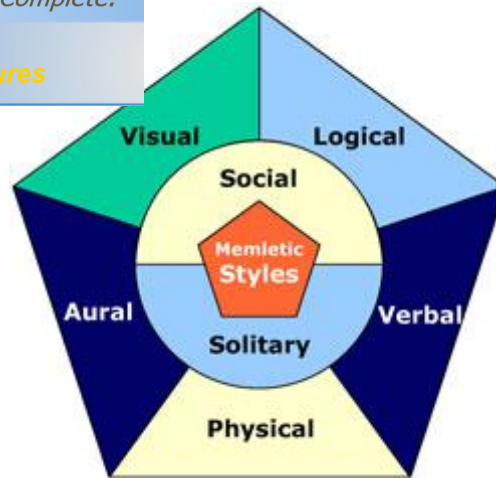


Diagram 3.1 Individual Learning Styles  
(Gardner, 1999:150-151)

- Visual (Spatial) ó The individual who learns more effectively visually, prefers using pictures, images and spatial understanding.
- Aural (Auditory and music) ó The individual who learns more effectively through music, prefers the use of sound in their learning and understanding.
- Verbal (Linguistic) ó The individual who learns verbally, prefers using words, and is talented in both speech and writing.
- Physical (Kinaesthetic) ó Individuals who learn physically, prefer using their body, their hands, and touch in learning.
- Logical (Mathematical) ó Individuals who learn logically, prefer using logic and reasoning and systematic thinking as they learn.
- Social (Interpersonal) ó Individuals who learn socially, prefer to learn in groups and with other people.
- Solitary (Intrapersonal) ó Individuals who learn solitarily, prefer to learn on their own in a form of self study (Gardner, 1999:151).

The findings regarding the individual learning styles focus on four categories that each participant expressed, the individualised learning, freedom in learning, flexibility in learning at home and customised learning. The researcher is of the opinion that these four aspects form part of the intricately developed approach of homeschooling in supporting the child's individual learning style and will be discussed below in the context of homeschooling and the traditional schooling system.

The participants stated that the individualised learning, and working outside the classroom context provided an avenue where they both did more work, found it more interesting, and were able to delve deeper in subjects than in the school environment. In this regard Participant A reported that partaking in homeschooling broadened and even altered his view on school subjects; as homeschooling helped him appreciate the subjects more. Long (in Moore, Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004:2) verify this finding, as he found that the individual attention and academic freedom allowed homeschoolers the opportunity to engage in-depth in subject matter. It appears that homeschooling provides children with the avenue to explore their own interests and develop their individual learning styles.

According to Brynard (2007:91) homeschooling parents are of the opinion that their children are at an advantage being home educated. They observed that the individualised learning environment of homeschooling provided an opportunity for their children to attain and perform at their full academic potential, as opposed to when working with classroom distractions. In fact according to Ray and Rudner (in Reeve & Robinson, 2002:1) research consistently indicates that home educated children score fifteen to thirty percent higher on standardised academic achievement tests than do conventionally-school peers. The idea that individualised learning (homeschooled children) exceeds collaborative learning (public schooled children) in academic achievement, is supported by the research of Van Oostrum and Van Oostrum (1996:4) and substantiated by Rademeyer (2004a:3) which shows home learners in Grade four to be 90.5% literate, in comparison with 48.1% of learners in public schools.

Dillenbourg (1999:1) and Charp (2001:12) both however promote collaborative learning as the best environment for children to learn and be educated in. Dillenbourg (1999:5) further persists that an individual's ability to learn in isolation is not suppressed in collaborative learning environments. He asserts that the individual's ability to learn is instead promoted by the interaction among students in the classroom as it generates extra activities that cannot be experienced in isolation for example. Furthermore, through collaborative learning children are taught problem solving

er and with each interaction that the child has, the  
experience (Dillenbourg, 1999:2; Arnold & Westwood,  
2004:375; Pintrich & De Groot, 2008:1-6).

Brynard (2007:90) on the other hand had found that the effectiveness of classroom learning was adversely affected by the disproportionate increase of learners to teachers. Due to larger classes, he reported a significant decline in individual attention towards students and according to Thomas (1998:4) the child's individual learning styles become irrelevant in the classroom setting. Chen (2008:1) therefore deems public school teachers incapable of giving the children the individual attention that they need to succeed and achieve. Confirming the peripheral nature of children's individualised learning styles in the public school setting, participant A shares his experience namely that

í I didn't understand things at school and the homework that I had to do was getting to me, because I didn't understand what I had to do. Homeschooling has fixed that up, my mom helped me at my own pace. Something is a lot easier when you know how to do it, and what is going on!

Although in some instances Charp (2001:12) has found that individual learning of homeschoolers has left children both passive and less motivated to work, he corroborates Wood and O'Malley's (1996:4) findings that enhanced collaborative learning is only achieved in the context of a realistic and socially enriching learning environment, not often found in the classroom. Research undertaken by Wood and O'Malley (1996:1) supports this proposition as they demonstrate that even though collaborative learning can improve a child's learning and development through the interactive activities, the conventional classroom learning environment is not conducive in facilitating this high quality of collaborative learning.

The advantages of the individualised learning environment of homeschooling is aptly conveyed by Participant H when she states that

is accessible to me, and that I can ask mom  
to, or go look something up on the internet to  
find answers. I also like that you don't interrupt the entire class when  
you don't understand something.

These advantages as depicted by Participant H, substantiate Gardner's (1999:151) multiple learning styles, that each individual has a certain preference in learning as homeschoolers appear to prefer learning on their own in a form of self study (Solitary learning style). Participant G describes her partiality to independent learning in stating that "I do a lot more independent learning, because I like that." Participant G continues to comment on the way homeschooling provides the opportunity for parents to develop their children's individual styles, as she states that "I know with my little sister, mom teaches her and sits with her captivating her attention with fun little activities."

Although the findings of this study appear to refute Dillenbourg's research on individual learning, they appear to support his emphasis on the influence of activities in promoting an individual's motivation and ability to learn. Participant F confirms this connection, as she states that "work is put across in a fun way, there are outings and outdoor work and projects and we watch movies to reinforce what we are learning."

#### *3.4.1.2 Freedom in learning*

The category of freedom in learning indicates the participants' experience of learning at their own pace. The participants in the study all stated that they benefit from being able to learn at their own pace, with specific emphasis on the individual attention in the instruction they receive. Case in point, Participant I gives an example of this individual attention by mentioning that

"my father sometimes helps us with maths and then my mom and dad do maths with my big sister, and then my mom teaches us one by one Afrikaans while one of us are doing Afrikaans, my mom is

kaans and the rest have something else to

Two aspects namely individual attention and an individual learning schedule were identified under this category and will be discussed below.

- *Individual attention*

As has been discussed in 2.2.1.1, public schools in South Africa have a ratio of scholars to teacher of 32.6 scholars to one teacher (Arora, 2002:20; Department of Education, 2008). This includes children from different cultural backgrounds, different learning backgrounds as well as children with special needs. The correlation between class size and the teacher's inability to give individual attention and allow for the child to work freely therefore seems clearly evident (Thomas, 1998:3). In this regard Participant F commented on the decline in individual attention in stating that "when you have more people in your class, you don't get any individual attention."

Brook, Young, Mordecai and Phethean (2005:2) found that children acquire understanding and skill through having time to "explore, build on prior knowledge and to experiment". Homeschooling according to the participants allows time for exploring and understanding subjects. Participant B for instance commented that

"my mom understands me, and the way I learn. I can ask as many questions that I want, and she will explain it over and over and over again until I get it. And she explains it in different ways. My mom is a structured kind of teacher, but she is kind. At school I was too scared to ask questions when I got stuck, as maybe the teacher would shout, or the kids would tease me that I'm not keeping up with the work."

- *Individual learning schedule*

Participant B reflects on the parents' accommodation to their children's lack of concentration in the school day by stating that "we can still have breaks when

to concentrate, or we can go for a walk, or go on an  
subject. It seems evident that the homeschooling  
environment allows for this freedom and flexibility, as there is no pressure to  
complete specific work in a day. This is due to the fact that homeschoolers rather aim  
to create an understanding of the subject and according to Macaulay (2004:25) to  
create a love for learning. According to the researcher's observations freedom,  
flexibility and creativity are intricately linked in homeschooling as parents seem to  
adapt the day to the child's specific needs and interests in each subject.  
Homeschooling according to Reeve and Robinson (2002:2) offers a learning  
environment tailor made for the individual child, with fun activities, exciting  
curriculum, and freedom in the staying with the child's own pace.

Another aspect that the findings uncovered regarding freedom in individual learning  
schedules was the ability of participants to restructure their own learning schedule.  
Participant B indicated this by stating that

I enjoy that I can pace myself in the day, that I know what I  
have to get through in terms of my work for the day, and that I can  
choose when to do it. Like for instance if I have ballet in the  
afternoon, then I try get things finished before then, but even if I  
don't get it done, I know that I can just finish in the evening or the  
next morning.

Participant F reaffirms that it is possible to go over learning material as she learns at  
her own pace which therefore allows for her mother to go over things until she  
understands the work. According to her her mother can sometimes even be irritating  
because she [my mother] goes on and on about it.

Brynard (2007:92) supports the empirical findings as he found that children being  
homeschooled were able to develop their potential because of the individual attention  
and adaptation of parents in allowing their child to develop at their own level without  
pressure or comparison.

that due to the freedom in the participant's learning experience little stress in completion of tasks for the day, and rather an internal motivation to complete what was planned for the day.

#### 3.4.1.3 Flexibility in learning

The category indicates the child's experience of learning in their home environment. The flexibility of homeschooling provides the child with the choice of where and when and how learning occurs. With regards to this each participant of the study commented on the flexibility of their education as a positive facet of being homeschooled. Flexibility in learning seems to be an important benefit of homeschooling.

The research findings indicate that the children had the choice in where to do their school work for the day, as well as the parents' flexibility in choosing different learning arenas for their children. This flexibility appeared to be based on the subject matter that needed to be covered in the day, as well as the child's concentration level on the specific day. Research by Reeve and Robinson (2002:2) supports the findings of the study as they found that the make up of home education daily, is highly influenced by the psychological, emotional and academic needs of each individual learner.

Participant A embraces the core of the findings on the theme of flexibility in learning in his description of homeschooling by commenting that

í Homeschooling is loose, you don't have to get up early, and you can do homeschooling wherever you want in the house. One of my best experiences of homeschooling was last year in winter. We spent the whole day in the cover terrace, with our kitten, a fire going and mom reading to us. At school you have to stay in one class the whole day and at one place at break time with your grade.

The learning environment of homeschooling for the purpose of this study is understood by the researcher as an educational experience at home that focuses



ation to the child's individual needs and interests, and the children's ability and potential to learn. Although researchers such as Dillenbourg (1999:2) and Chorp (2001:1) promote public school as the best learning environment, schools in South Africa according to Footprints on our land: South African Homeschool Curriculum (2008) are a disadvantageous learning environment as they are working within an unsatisfactory standard of education, indicated by the low matriculation pass rate.

In discussing the homeschooling learning environment, all participants commented on the stark contrast between home school and public school in its flexibility. This flexibility was experienced and expressed in four different ways:

- *Rigidity in public schools*

Both Participant D and Participant E emphasised the flexibility of the homeschooling environment as opposed to the public school environment, in that they don't have to abide by the set and rigid rules and learning schedule of the public school system. For example Participant D comments that

í We don't have to get up early, or wear a school uniform, or have our hair in a special way. We wake up early, and we get to watch TV or play Playstation till mom and dad wake up, and then we get breakfast and start school. Oh and you are not allowed to talk in class!

The researcher is of the opinion that the homeschooled child's encounter of flexibility in the learning environment has a significant influence on children's perception of homeschooling and their motivation to learn. In this regard Participant E commented that the positive of homeschooling for her is that although the school day is shorter than public school, children who are homeschooled learn more subjects but also have more outings.

According to Chen (2008:1) it is the learning environment that plays the crucial role in determining what is best for a child's education, whether homeschooled or



benefits to each. Research findings for this study schools are viewed by homeschoolers as structured, boring and rigid as opposed to their homeschooling, which is more commonly viewed as creative, fun and flexible. A comment by Participant E aptly describes the participant's experience of homeschooling when she remarks that "I really enjoy not doing homework, and going on outings, and having lots of break times. We learn more subjects at homeschooling. I think that other kids get jealous of homeschooling because it is so fun."

- *Planning the day*

All participants seem to be in agreement that the flexibility of being able to finish school when they have done all their work gives them the opportunity to do what they choose to do with their time in the afternoons. The researcher however is of the opinion that the flexibility of finishing home school earlier is strongly connected to the child's ability to apply and plan with regards to their school work. Participant B confirms this opinion by mentioning that "I plan my day because I know what I need to get done." Bunday (2006:1) confirms this assumption of homeschoolers as he states that home education gives the child the opportunity to initiate their own learning and thereby taking responsibility for their learning.

#### *3.4.1.4 Customised learning*

Parents according to the White Paper on Education and Training, RSA (1995:21-22) have the legal and moral ability to make choices regarding their children's education, as they have the primary responsibility for educating their children. In their attempt to aid their child's ability to become successful students and citizens, parents therefore have the choice to public or private schools, formal schooling or informal homeschooling.

One of the reasons why parents choose homeschooling for their children seem to have to do with the fact that traditional schools according to Chen (2008:1) rarely take learning to a deeper level, but rather try and introduce many ideas to the children, in



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nect the ideas with one another and gain a bigger

Homeschooling in contrast to traditional school systems is an individualised, customised learning experience, where parents take their children to deeper levels of education (Thomas, 1998:20; Medlin, 2000:109; Arora, 2002:5). In this regard Participant I reflects on her parents' choice to their educational curriculum content, as she states that, "Mom chooses what is important for me to learn. My mom like gets books from the library, documentary ones and reads them to us."

Gifted Homeschoolers (2009:1) further argue that homeschooling provides children with an educational environment that is tailored to meet each child's need. This tailored education is assumed to provide homeschooled children with increased choice and convenience. Butler (in Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004:20) in this regard identifies the ability to customise curriculum to meet the individual needs of the learner as one of homeschooling's major benefits.

The empirical findings indicated a strong religious undertone to a majority of the participants' learning experience, with Bible education being part of the school day. Cizek (in Reeve & Robinson, 2002:1) highlights that 75% of homeschoolers worldwide are conservative Christians who stress Christian morals, teachings and principles. Reeve and Robinson (2002:1) are of the opinion that parents who are religiously motivated additionally seek to "control their children's exposure to undesirable social interaction partners, develop close families, and attain high academic achievement for their children." Reich (in Moore & Moore, 1994:39) as discussed in 1.2., cautions that this impartation of family values and religious beliefs limit a child's education as it offers children a one-sided view of things.

In the researcher's view it can not be assumed that parents obstruct all other points of view other than their own in their teaching, however two of the participants reflected a need for more exposure to other value systems. Participant B reflects on this lack of contact with those outside her faith and the religious element of homeschooling in her household by commenting that, "It is like being at a Christian school; I think I need more exposure though as it is quite shocking what others get up to." Participant G

commenting on her lack of experience in the public school system. Participant E said, "I don't know what normal school is like because I've never been, but homeschooling is my education. Mom has set up a chart of what we need to learn and we work by that, and know what to do and when to do it."

Even in stating the above, and within the context of *religiously motivated homeschoolers*, it seems that the customised curriculum of homeschooling provides greater options in the child's education, as the individual child's needs and personal circumstances are accommodated (Brynard, 2007:83). This aspect is highlighted by a comment made by Participant C when she mentioned that

"Mom lets us learn in our own way, she looks for ways to help us learn what we are learning in fun ways. For instance when we were learning about the cell, my brother made one of clay, because he loves to make things, where my little sister made one out of jelly, because she likes to be in the kitchen and we all got to eat it. And my other sister acted it out, a little story about all the different parts and what they do and well I learn best from just reading through it, but mom finds ways to reinforce what we learn."

Participant G further highlights the above mentioned fact as she comments on her mother's ability to develop things with the children, in figuring out what fits each individual best. These examples as well as Participant E's description of his experience of homeschooling namely "we learn a lot outside, and I love being outside. Like when we learnt about habitats, we went outside and had to find different habitats and draw them. I like to draw", reaffirm the child's direct experience of customised learning as well as the relevance of parents' understanding and awareness of their children's individual learning styles in homeschooling.

In summation, the participants with regards to their learning style reported that they are taught at their own level, that they are taught in their own time, in their own space and lastly that they are taught with learning styles that suit them best.

concur with the researcher's opinion, as they commend the ability to pace their learning experience, as well as being able to have personalised teaching focusing on the child's strengths, to teach in an environment conducive to optimal learning and having the space to work on any challenges individually.

### 3.5 THEME 2: FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Research by Mayberry *et al.*, (1995:2) showed that there are no apparent reasons why parents cannot teach (home school) their own children in the context of the family. Brynard (2007:85) confirms this view as he alleges that the influence that the social environment, family and home environment have on children's success academically is far greater than any teacher or curriculum in a traditional school. Meighan (1995:280) corroborates with Brynard's research as she observed in her study that the close relationships, and family cohesiveness found amongst homeschoolers appear to be an enhancing factor in their overall experience of homeschooling as well as their academic success. Romanowski (2001:2) echoes this opinion as he states that "no other factor in life will have more of an effect on a child's life than the family, and homeschooling." Participant F shared her experience of homeschooling changing her life, as she states, "I feel free at home school to be myself. Being homeschooled has changed my perspective on things, like peer pressure."

The following sub-themes namely that of cohesion and place of safety which represent the participants' experiences of homeschooling in the context of family relationship will subsequently be discussed.

#### 3.5.1 Cohesion

Research by Carlson (1990:17) indicates an apparent stabilising force within home schooled families, accommodating a higher level of "adaptability and cohesion" than in families who choose the traditional schooling system. Ray (2000:74) attests the increase of familial cohesion within homeschooled families to the increased time and shared experiences between parent and child. Arai (2000:210) affirms this viewpoint in stating that the "meaningful communication, emotional intimacy and closer

ing families are produced by parents and children in the context of home education. Romanowski (2001:2) further found that in addition to strengthening the parent-child relationships, unique bonding takes place between siblings in the homeschooling context. Participant H indicates this sibling bonding in stating that, "I find that because my sister and I are the same age that I don't get lonely because she is always around. We are very close."

Participant B highlights this unique bonding in the homeschooling setting by commenting that,

"My mom can be strict as a teacher but as I said before she is very kind. In fact I love spending time with my family. My mom and dad love me. It is nice we all do homeschooling together, and go on trips even that are education, but we also make time to just have holidays and do no education. I think homeschooling has brought my family together more."

The National Coalition of Home Schoolers in South Africa (1996:3) correlates the reinforcement of family ties within homeschooling families to the occurrence of being educated within the family context. According to Carlson (1990:17) it is the homeschooling family's aspiration to reach common goals in the child's education that establish a strong family bond based on the enhanced communication and trust between children and their parents in the homeschooling context. Arora (2002:17-18) echoes this correlation as she found that due to the large amounts of time homeschoolers spend with their parents, siblings and families, the relationships within the family and specifically within the child-mother relationship are strengthened.

#### *3.5.1.1. Mother-child relationships*

The majority of the participants' experience of homeschooling is with their mother, as the mother is the primary educator and nurturer (Thomas, 1998:7; Arora, 2002:17). The National home education research institute (2008) confirmed this as a common status of homeschooling, in that the majority of homeschooling families consist of the

and the mother who stays at home with the children as (Participant:13). The findings of this research support the above mentioned studies as only two of the participants were home educated by both mother and father. The fathers were experienced by the majority of the participants as separate to their educational experience, and participants reported being heavily reliant on their mothers for their academic and emotional support and success. Even in the two cases where the father was involved in the educational instruction, the participants described this participation at a bare minimum. In this regard Participant I indicated her father's role in their education by stating that "Dad sometimes helps us with maths and then my mom and dad do maths with my big sister, and then my mom teaches us one by one."

The empirical findings further indicated the family environment and particularly being taught by their mother, as a positive and motivating experience for the participants. Broadhurst (1999) reports that children enjoy the engaged conversations and structured lessons alongside their siblings and their mothers, with an emphasis on the children's most favourable characteristic of homeschooling being the time spent with their mothers, thus supporting the findings of this study.

The following statement by Participant F captures the feelings of all participants with regards to their experience of their mother(s) being the educators and the ones they spend most of their time with:

You learn to appreciate your mom, and to learn from her. And watch her, even how she teaches, she teaches you how to teach. Like I said, mom understands you and you get to know her and then its just nice being with her and then also she helped me constantly. When she teaches she can be a bit strict.

The researcher concurs with Reeve and Robinson (2002:2) in that the supportive teaching style of a mother in the homeschooling context has many educational and developmental benefits as children are allowed the freedom to work at their own pace in their own style.

Advocates of homeschooling propose that homeschooling is a safe and calm environment, stressing that children prosper in this safe environment of familiarity (National home education research institute; 2008). This aspect is highlighted by Participant A's comment that in the context of homeschooling "you can just be completely relaxed because it is just family!"

### 3.5.2.1 Building self confidence

From the empirical findings and for the purpose of this study it seems as if building self confidence was influenced by factors such as participants feeling safe in their home environment, one-on-one attention of their parents, and having the opportunity to be in contact with children and older people from all walks of life.

Charp (2001) defines homeschooling as the safest environment for children to develop in, as they don't have to deal with peer pressure or fitting into predefined cliques. Piaget (in Rubin, Coplan & Bowker, 2009:6) however argues that exposing children to peer pressure provides opportunities for the child to develop social negotiation as well as the acquisition and development of perspective-taking skills. Rubin *et al.*, (2006:571-654) have developed strong empirical evidence supporting the ability that peer interactions, and relationships serve promoting both "adaptive and maladaptive social, emotional, and social-cognitive functioning." Participant C reiterates the above, as he stated, "I feel like I have grown more confident being with my family everyday, it's like being with people who understand you and love you for you everyday."

Participant A's experience of building self confidence in the safety of the family context however was a more debilitating experience. According to him he has found that,

"because at homeschooling I was only hanging out with my family, and not chatting to other people, or being around other people, that I wasn't really being socialized. I found that I couldn't talk to anybody and only after a while have I made friends, it is



awkward in the beginning. I think I lost the  
nally. There was a lot of peer pressure before  
I left school. I think that as you get older that it dies down, maybe  
because you mature a bit. They excluded you if they didn't think  
that you were good enough. They would literally say "Go and find  
another friend" in front of everyone. It was really harsh.  
Homeschooling I've been able to just be completely relaxed and  
not be pressured because it is just my family.

Romanowski (2001:3) deliberates on the isolation of homeschoolers and the  
handicapping effect being sheltered from the "real world" may have on  
homeschoolers. He comments on the social interaction skills consistently found in  
traditional school systems that he believes homeschoolers are deficient in.  
Romanowski (2001:3) is of the opinion that "unless these children are exposed on  
a daily basis to the social life found in public schools, they will lack the skills needed  
to successfully adapt to real-life situations when they are older." Worth (1999:1)  
however contests Romanowski's viewpoint, as he found that children who are  
homeschooled encounter people in "all settings" settings they will encounter in  
life. Therefore children who are homeschooled have the opportunity to meet people  
of all ages and cultures, building social skills they will need to successfully deal with  
life situations.

Many of the participants in the study presented a story of repeated attempts to "make  
school work" for them and it appeared that it was only after a period of unhappiness  
and deterioration of their self confidence in the traditional school system that their  
parents reluctantly made the decision to homeschool. Participant B is a fitting  
example of this period of unhappiness by stating that

"I found that the girls at school were really mean, I was so shy, and I  
would come home crying everyday. I had no confidence when I was at  
school. But I have grown in confidence. I think that because I spend time  
with my family, who loves me for me, that well I don't have to be  
anyone.



the negative pressure and influence of peers in the school environment was the main reason parents showed preference to homeschooling. In the context of children being bullied, emotionally or physically, Reuben *et al.*, (1999:19) assert that parents who tend to be over protective, by over-managing or directing a hurtful situation for their child is restricting their child's development of independence and development of self confidence. Reuben *et al.*, (1999:20) believe that this parental behaviour of a *quick fix* in protecting their child is often done as a way of releasing the child from discomfort. The authors do however accommodate for children's dejection to have been the causal factor of parental overprotection and over control in the form of withdrawing the child from public school. Whilst this process of withdrawal recurred for most of the participants, there were some exceptions, in which parents had decided on home education for religious reasons.

Shyers (in Basham *et al.*, 2007:24) comments that there was no significant difference between homeschooling and non-homeschooling in terms of a child's development of self confidence or assertiveness. The findings indicated however that participants' self confidence grew in the context of homeschooling; Participant C emphasises this growth in stating that, "When I was at school I was so shy, I now have confidence to talk to people, I actually feel more confident." Research by Arora (2002:16) supports the findings of this study in that homeschooled children are well-adjusted, have a higher self esteem and are more confident and achieve more highly than children who attend traditional school.

In summation the researcher is of the opinion that despite a widespread belief that home educated students are not adequately prepared for life in the development of their self confidence and independence the preponderance of research suggests otherwise.

### **3.6. THEME 3: SOCIALISATION**

Socialisation in this study is understood as a process which entails the acquisition of language, fundamental beliefs of society and lastly self concept. (Santrock, 1999:311-



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cialisation as a process of enculturation, acquiring particular culture.

The researcher is of the opinion that the most common misconception about homeschooling is that children are not effectively socialised. Research by Worth (1999:1) and Arora (2002:16) however refute this perception of homeschooling as an isolated and impeding social environment and rather perceive homeschooling to be a healthy value driven learning environment.

The following sub-theme and categories indicate the participants' experiences of their development with regards to the social dynamics of learning from home, in the context of a broadening social and educational world.

### **3.6.1 Social comparison**

According to Santrock (1999:446) cognitive changes that occur in middle childhood heighten the child's ability to reflect on both themselves, and those around them. This newly acquired ability in development enables both the evaluation of success and perceived failures. This cognitive development is crucial in enabling children to engage in social interaction with those around them; however cognitive development also heightens the ability to compare themselves to others, influencing their concept of self in comparison to others.

The findings regarding social comparison in terms of learning in the classroom, peers and extracurricular activities are discussed below:

#### *3.6.1.1 Learning in the classroom*

The teaching methods that are commonly used in the classroom learning, even in the light of conflicting evidence, are mainly linguistic and logical. Gardner (1999:150-151) describes these classroom teaching methods as being limited, repetitive and pressured, as the school uses ineffective teaching techniques and tests as a form of reinforcement, analysis and review. This method of teaching has the potential to influence the child's self concept, in that it reinforces that a learner is either 'smart' if

to school standards, or challenged if he or she fails learning techniques. The traditional school system is bound to preset standards which systematically evaluate children and define children by their performance. Learning in the classroom is therefore accompanied by a new degree of comparison, in the form of competency as well as acceptance (Gardner, 1999:150-151).

Eccles (1999:16) reported that peer-to-peer classification in the classroom stresses children's individual strengths and liabilities, in both their academic and social abilities. As children experience successes or failures in the classroom setting they learn to reflect on their performance and compare it to those around them. Participant B describes her experience of this compared performance as she comments that "the other kids in class would tease me that I was not keeping up. I was too scared to ask questions in class."

Eccles (1999:17) reports on the decline of children's self concept and their expectation to succeed in life during middle childhood, correlating this decline to the increased negative feedback and children's new ability to reflect and compare their academic performance in the classroom. This heightened awareness of children in middle childhood to reflect on themselves in comparison to others of the same age being more capable or more skilled, can undermine the child's self confidence (Eccles, 1999:16). Furthermore in support of homeschooling, Eccles (1999:14) found that the family environment enables children to see older children succeeding in things that they cannot yet do, this instils hope in the child in their future ability and success. The finality of their failure is not as personalised as compared to when children compare themselves to children of the same age (Eccles, 1999:14).

### *3.6.1.2 Peers*

Simmons (in Romanowski, 2001:3) asserts that interacting with children in the school environment is an important part of education, not just a desirable social attribute. In order to receive a complete education, children need to participate in the engaging age-appropriate environment of the classroom. The lack of peer interaction and comparison in the classroom is therefore according to Romanowski (2001:4) of great



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student's education. In this regards Participant F made

í I miss the competition against people in my class; I always compare myself with my brothers. Like when my younger brother grasps something I haven't got yet, that irritates me. Or like I want to be where my older brother is and I get frustrated.

From the empirical findings there seems to be a difference in experiences by the participants with regards to their interaction with peers. Participant B for instance highlights that she enjoys the choice of who she wants to be friends with, and comments on the forced friendship groups in public school as she states, "I love that I have learnt to be me. I can choose my friends. At school you have to be friends with the people in your class."

There were however participants that felt that they are missing out on the daily interaction with others within the classroom setting. Participant A comments on his missing out on this interaction with other children as he states that "there are other people in school; I just have my mom and my sister and brother at homeschooling." Participant G confirms this finding by stating that "I think it must be fun having other kids around you when you are learning, but I have tons of friends, I do sports for fun and I make lots of friends there, but not at school."

Four participants acknowledged and regretted the reduced number of friendships in the homeschooling context. The following are two examples of this:

Participant C stated that,

í I find it lonely that I have no friends around me. No people my own age around me, although I am glad I don't have to deal with pressure to do things like drink or smoke. I can choose who I want to be friends with, and well who I want to be. Oh but I am sad that I am missing the Gr 7 dance, I find that hard.

í I do have friends, they are just not at school with me. I didn't have any other friends from normal school, just homeschooling friends. I didn't do any team sports, just squash. I found it really lonely and kind of boring, because I didn't have any boys my age around me.

Worth (1999:3) indicates that although the school environment is disguised under the guise of being an environment conducive to where children are taught diversity, he believes that the classroom is an artificial setting as it only trains children to interact with the same children of the same age every day. Romanowski (2001:2) refers to this as 'the age segregated class systems of the public school environment.' Participant D commented on the fact that she would enjoy homeschooling more, if they could do school with other homeschoolers. Even though combining homeschooling activities with other homeschoolers creates an opportunity for daily interaction, the researcher is of the opinion that as these interactions are compiled of other children who are homeschooled, of which the parents have chosen to integrate with their children, this type of interaction provides children with an artificial social group.

### 3.6.1.3 Extracurricular activities

Van Pelt (in Basham *et al.*, 2007:16) found that contrary to the concerns of the educational establishment, 'the typical homeschooled child participates in a wide variety of extracurricular activities.' Extracurricular activities were often mentioned spontaneously during the interviews. The empirical findings included afternoon and weekend activities of sports, scouts, youth groups, dancing and play dates with neighbours and friends from school. Eccles (1999:9) found that successful experiences in a wide range of settings can help to give a child a healthy positive view of self. The empirical findings of this study indicate that homeschooling is based on interacting, working and engaging with others and gaining many experiences in a wide range of settings.

Participant B encompasses the extracurricular aspects of the study's findings, in stating that,

ends, they are from dancing, and youth group mainly, and I think that I have more friends now than I ever did when I was at school. I do get lonely being in my room all day without friends. But then I love art, because then there are other kids who are also being homeschooled there.

In summation, according to Mayberry *et al.*, (1995:2) those opposing homeschooling assert that the interaction of students in the formal school environment can never be achieved or addressed in the homeschooling environment. Although Worth (1999:1) questions the importance, necessity and validity of socialisation, the researcher is of the opinion that social learning is a skill that one needs to master. In a world surrounded by social beings, appropriate roles and behaviours need to be learnt to engage fully in their environment. The researcher is further of the opinion that the process of social learning, in terms of self learning and social comparison, is critical in the child's ability to interact and function in their world. Brynard (2007:93) found that the social security at homeschooling cultivates children's social development.

### 3.7 SUMMARY

In Chapter three the researcher addressed the empirical research undertaken during this study, focusing on the research process, the data collection and data analysis of the research findings. The researcher presented themes found in the exploratory research and explored these themes in relation to the literature that has been gathered throughout the research.

The empirical findings described the child in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling, and the researcher highlighted specific themes that participants spontaneously brought forward in the interviews. The researcher found the themes to be intrinsically linked and interwoven in the children's experience of homeschooling.

The four major themes were:

- Individualised learning
- Family relationships



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Chapter Four will summarise and conclude on the findings presented in Chapter Three.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter three addressed the empirical research undertaken during this study, focusing on the data collection and data analysis of the empirical findings. The empirical findings were explored in comparison to literature gathered throughout the study.

The aim of Chapter four is to determine whether the goal and objectives of this study have been met in such a way that answers the research question effectively. Conclusions are furthermore provided on the research findings and lastly recommendations are made for potential future research.

### 4.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

This section aims to evaluate the goal and objectives of this study in order to determine that the study achieved its purpose.

#### 4.2.1 Goal

For the purpose of this study, the goal was to explore and describe children in middle childhood's experience of homeschooling.

In aiming to explore and describe the child's experience of homeschooling a literature study was undertaken in order to identify the questions that were formulated in a semi-structured interview schedule (refer to 3.3.4.1). The researcher used the semi-structured interview schedule to interview nine participants in their middle childhood who were currently being homeschooled. After careful analysis the researcher identified themes from the exploratory research, and presented each theme individually exploring them in relation to the literature that has been gathered throughout the research.



The objectives that the researcher undertook in order to achieve the goal are listed and described as follows:

#### *4.2.2.1 Objective one*

- To obtain a conceptual frame of reference based on literature and consultations with experts regarding homeschooling and children in middle childhood's development.

In chapter two the first objective was met by presenting a conceptual framework describing homeschooling and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of children's development focusing on the development of children in middle childhood.

#### *4.2.2.2 Objective two*

- To undertake an empirical study in order to explore children in their middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling through the use of semi-structured interviews.

In Chapter three the researcher addressed the empirical research undertaken during this study, focusing on the data collection and data analysis of the research findings. The researcher through both purposive and snow balling sampling strategies recruited nine participants who at the time of the research project were being homeschooled. The research population of the research study included the constraint that the participants were currently being homeschooled and that they reside in the Southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula. The sample therefore consisted of participants in middle childhood who were currently homeschooled, boys and girls, English and Afrikaans speaking, who reside in the southern suburbs of the Cape Peninsula.

of semi-structured interviews, field notes and interviews were video recorded in order to gather rich descriptions of the children's experience of homeschooling.

The main focus of the semi-structured interviews was the child's experience of homeschooling, involving aspects such as how the day is structured, who they are taught by, what they do at homeschooling and what they would want to change about their homeschooling.

#### 4.2.2.3 Objective three

- To analyse and verify the collected data with literature in order to describe the children's experiences.

The process the researcher utilised in analysing the data, was based on a combination of guidelines as discussed in 1.7.5. In utilising this process of data analysis, rich data was effectively analysed, presented and discussed in Chapter 3. The three major themes that were identified and discussed and explored with reference to literature collected throughout the study were:

- Individual learning
- Family relationships
- Socialisation

#### 4.2.2.4 Objective four

- To make conclusions and recommendations on the homeschooling approach in educating children to parents who are currently homeschooling their children and to parents who are considering the possibility of homeschooling their children.



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in section 4.3 and 4.4 where the researcher will draw conclusions based on the findings as was presented in

Chapter 3.

The goal and objectives of this study were thus successfully achieved. The empirical study was successful in exploring and describing children in middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling in the Cape Peninsula.

#### **4.2.3 Research question**

Working within the confines of qualitative social research, the researcher intended to explore children's experience of their home based education, answering the question: What are children in middle childhood's experiences of homeschooling?

The research question was effectively answered through the process of collecting data, analysing data and presenting data with a discussion thereof in Chapter three. The empirical findings were discussed and verified by literature sourced throughout the research study.

Participants reported that homeschooling provided the opportunity for their parents to take a greater control over their education. The participants reported that key elements impacting their positive experience of homeschooling were found in the customised learning, freedom in learning and flexibility in learning. The participants reflected their experience of a type of education that suited their individual needs as they reported that they were able to learn in their own individual style, at their own pace and in their own home.

Additionally participants reported that they experienced a higher level of cohesion as a family unit and that in the safety of learning at home the participants found that they were empowered to build their confidence and sense of self.

Lastly participants shared their experiences of the social dynamics when learning from home, focusing on the experience of learning at home on their academic achievement, their friendship groups and involvement in extra curricular activities.

ed the child in middle childhoodø experience of  
er highlighted the specific themes that were drawn  
spontaneously from the participants. The researcher found each theme to be  
intrinsically pertinent in the childø experience of homeschooling.

### **4.3 CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE RESEARCH RESULTS**

The researcher is of the opinion that the research question has been answered as the participants shared their experiences of homeschooling. The empirical research was confirmed within a literature control even though the researcher identified the limited literature available on homeschooling within the South African context.

The results of the empirical research are summarised under the following themes:

- Individual learning
- Family relationships
- Socialisation

The conclusions reached within these themes will subsequently be discussed.

#### **4.3.1 Individual learning**

The empirical findings demonstrated that one of the key elements inspiring the participantsø homeschooling was that of the individualised learning experience. It was found that homeschooling creates the opportunity for children to learn at their own pace and in their own style.

The researcher infers four aspects drawn from the findings supporting the individual learning styles of each participant in the context of homeschooling. These four aspects, individualised learning, freedom in learning, flexibility in learning and customised learning, the researcher found encompassed the participantsø experiences of homeschooling.

The empirical findings demonstrated the significance of individual learning styles, as it was the opinion of each participant that their parents understood the way they think

hooling was an attempt to encourage their specific  
ems that through this study an increased awareness  
was created of each participant's appreciation of their customised learning experience  
in homeschooling.

Individual learning in the homeschooling context appears to create an understanding and passion for learning. The researcher found that the participants were more concerned about what they had learnt, as opposed to their academic achievement. Participants for instance shared that they enjoyed delving into subjects, as it was at their own pace and in their own time. The researcher is of the opinion that homeschooling creates an unrushed atmosphere for children to learn, as they are provided the opportunity to explore each subject adequately, investigating things that are of interest to them.

The empirical findings indicated that the participants missed the interaction of peers in their schooling environment. Interaction amongst peers is an essential part of being social beings. Where children in the public school environment are exposed to different cultural backgrounds, economic statuses, languages, and religions as well as learning skills of interacting in a group setting, negotiation and working in teams (Refer to 4.3.3), the homeschooled child learns alone.

#### **4.3.2 Family relationships**

The empirical findings acclaimed family relationships as having a considerable influence on the participants' experience of homeschooling, suggesting that homeschooling supports good relationships between participants and their families. The empirical findings demonstrated three areas pertaining to the participants' relationships within their family. These areas were a strong sense of cohesion as a family unit, a unique bonding within the mother-child relationship and lastly the family environment as being experienced as a place of safety.

The empirical findings substantiated previous research, indicating a sense of cohesion among family members as a result of homeschooling. The empirical findings further correlate with research (Refer to 3.6.1) in that the increased amount of time



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family context, consolidates communication, trust y.

The empirical findings again demonstrated the family context, specifically being taught by their mother, as a positive feature of homeschooling. The researcher is of the opinion that the mother's supportive teaching style in homeschooling contributes to the development of individual learning styles. Participants for instance each expressed experiencing a sense of freedom in asking questions, working at their own pace and in their own style.

Lastly the empirical findings illustrated homeschooling as a learning environment, in which participants felt safe to explore and learn educationally and personally. Responses in this regard included Participant F describing how she felt the freedom to simply be herself at home. Participant A alluded that the reason for his experience of freedom is due to the fact that he feels completely relaxed because homeschooling allows him to spend time just with his family.

Even though there was a common accord on the experience of learning from home as a place of safety, there were conflicting responses with regards to the participants' individual experience of what this learning in safety entailed. Participant C contends that homeschooling enhanced her ability to grow in self confidence, whereas Participant A shared a more debilitating experience as he found that he couldn't talk to anybody as he was only experiencing talking and being with his family, and therefore felt he wasn't really being socialised.

Research (Refer to 3.6.2.1) presents a conflicting picture of socialisation within the context of homeschooling. Homeschooled children are often portrayed by researchers as isolated, shy, and passive due to their isolation from 'normal' socialisation. While some of the findings of this study may indicate a sense of loneliness and a desire for more exposure to other children, the question of the participants being confident is irrefutable.

The empirical findings indicated in general that the participants experienced a building of self confidence in the context of homeschooling.

Participants in general indicated a balanced social learning experience. The researcher found that the participants were all able to reflect on their socialisation within the homeschooling context, to describe their experiences of socialisation as well as to compare their experiences with those who are not homeschooled.

The empirical findings showed four different levels of social comparison within the context of homeschooling: self learning, learning in the classroom, peers and extra curricular activities. The empirical findings indicate that homeschooling offers a type of educational environment that is more suitable to the social needs of some children, enabling participants to build their self confidence, learn in a way best suited to them and make more friends.

Participants expressed both the enjoyment of learning in the context of their family as well as the need to interact with other children on a day to day basis in the school context. As an example Participant G commented on the amount of friends she has at sports, but she thought it would be fun to have other children around when she was learning.

However the empirical findings indicated that homeschooling is based on interacting, working and engaging with others, as the participants were all encouraged to take part in extra curricular activities on a daily basis. Even though the results indicated the participants' need for friendship in their school setting, with two of the participants feeling lonely, all participants commented on the ability homeschooling provided them, in being able to choose their friends.

#### **4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher recommends the following in terms of the growing phenomenon of homeschooling within the Western Cape.

The empirical findings demonstrate children in middle childhood's positive experiences of homeschooling and as such have implications for educational

ons need to recognise the significant rise and impact  
Africa. The positive experience of homeschooling  
presented in this study, highlights the fact that overlooking the phenomenon of  
homeschooling would be negligent.

The researcher would like to make the following general recommendations regarding  
expanding the current knowledge base and recommendations pertaining to research  
done and further studies:

#### **4.4.1 General recommendations**

- As participants highlighted the fact that home school has been far more interesting and that they have learnt more than in the public school setting, the researcher recommends that the public school environment takes more time in delving into subjects they are studying and creating rather a passion for learning than an achievement in test scores.
- The researcher recommends that homeschoolers work together on certain subjects, such as art, history outings, science experiments, as literature shows that children learn both problem solving and team work techniques in these group interactions of the classroom environment. The benefits of both group work and the diverse social education that children are exposed to in the school setting cannot be ignored, and should rather be incorporated into the homeschooling educational model.

#### **4.4.2 Recommendations pertaining to further studies**

- The empirical findings show that an acceptance of the diversity of individual learning styles is needed in order to enable children to reach their academic potential in their learning environment. The empirical findings indicate that a flexibility of curriculum, teaching styles and individual attention are key elements in achieving this potential within homeschooling. The researcher recommends further research in order to explore the correlation between flexibility of curriculum, teaching styles and individual attention in the child's ability to reach their learning potential.



Homeschoolers appreciated the freedom to choose their peers as not an issue in this selection. Within the public school setting, children are restricted to age-segregated classrooms and in some schools, age-segregated play grounds too. The researcher is of the opinion that this forces children to select peers based on area instead of choice. The researcher recommends that further research be done in the area of age segregated learning and play.

- The empirical findings indicate that homeschooling supports cohesion within the family unit, supporting the relationship between the participants and their families. In light of the break down of the family system in society, it is crucial for these elements of homeschooling that appear to develop family relationships to be explored. The researcher recommends that research monitoring homeschooling families be done in order to establish the influence of the family as opposed to school on children's self confidence, family relationships and education.
- Literature shows that homeschoolers create a love for learning within their families and a desire to discover the world around them. Homeschooling appears to encompass a holistic style of learning, in developing a passion to learn in all areas of their life. The researcher is of the opinion that more research needs to be done on this topic, to explore the influence of parents' involvement and interest in their child's education.
- School experiences and extra curricular activities focus on skills, and to some degree make a child's success or failure relatively public. In the context of homeschooling, the researcher finds a gap in research and suggests further research be done focusing on whether homeschooling provides the opportunity to build resilience against this public failure, or to build confidence in the context of public success. Positive attitude towards learning and engaging in life's activities and challenges.
- It appears that extracurricular experiences have been found to either exacerbate or compensate for experiences at school. The researcher suggests that further research be done exploring the degree to which extra curricular activities influence a child's sense of self. The researcher is of the opinion that every encounter either supports or hampers the development of an individual's sense of self.



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the study is limited, as the sample size is small and specific age and developmental state. Therefore the researcher recommends that in order to generalise the findings and gain a better understanding of South African children being homeschooled, the research be replicated in other age groupings and provinces. A further recommendation is that a comparative study on the child's experience of homeschooling of different cultural groups, such as black, white and coloured children be done.

#### **4.5 FINAL THOUGHTS**

The empirical findings indicate that children's development is intertwined with the educational system. Whether a child receives a formal schooling or informal homeschooling, the role that the educational environment plays in the child's development is paramount. The researcher is of the opinion that a child's education is based on the right to learn to be, and to build skills to thrive in this world, that a child's education should be about releasing the potential of the individual child in their process of development. The researcher is further of the opinion that this study has provided inroads into gaining an understanding of the phenomenon of homeschooling as a possible avenue in releasing this potential.

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Dear Potential Participant,

Participation in research project: The childø experience of homeschooling.

I am a Masters student in Play Therapy at the Huguenot College in Wellington (done in collaboration with Unisa). The research component of our course requires us to carry out a dissertation. I have decided to look into the childø experience of their home based education.

---

The goal of my study is to gain an understanding of how the child perceives their homeschooling experience. The researcherø introduction to informal learning came when she started to work as an au pair and educator with a homeschooling family at the beginning of 2008. Watching the children learn, explore and discover their world with such enthusiasm has drawn the researcher to look into the childø experience of homeschooling. The researcher is neither for nor against homeschooling as an alternative education and for the purpose of this study is not interested in the success of homeschooling but rather intends to explore objectively the experience the South African child has of home based education.

The researcher in her attempt to explore and describe the childø experience of homeschooling, aims to listen to and hear the child, as the researcher is interested in the childø perspective of their experience and aims to play the role of an òactive learnerö who can tell the story from the participantø view rather than as an expert who passes judgement on participants. All participants can be assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Should you be interested in being a part of this study, please complete the attached document indicating your consent; I will then be in touch with you to set up the interviews.

Thank you in advance for your support in this endeavour.

Warm regards,

Kathryn Mills

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Information regarding the study:

Participants should be aware of the fact that for accuracy purposes, video recordings of the interview will be made. These recordings will be handled with the strictest confidentiality, and are only for viewing for myself. I will be transcribing the interviews personally, and will keep these files on my computer which only I use. I will be available to answer any questions pertaining to the research process before, after or during the interview. Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any point. A prior meeting with the participant before the interview will take place to explain the process as well as to gain a level of ease with the interviewer.

Please fill in your contact details and sign below to indicate you are aware of the necessary information pertaining to this research project. Thanking you in advance for your contribution to this valuable research. I look forward to meeting with you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed

Date

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**form (Ages 8-9)**

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The goal of my study is to understand how children feel about their homeschooling. I've been pairing this year with a great family who are all being homeschooled. Working with them and watching them learn by exploring the world around them has drawn me to look into the child's experience of homeschooling.

I would like to listen to your story of homeschooling. What you like about being homeschooled, what your best subject is in the day, what you do in the day.

If you do choose to take part in this study, you can know that your name will not be used in my paper and that everything you say to me will stay between you and me.

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This form is to state that I,

\_\_\_\_\_, have agreed to be involved in the homeschooling study being run by Kathryn Mills.

I agree that I have chosen to take part in the interviews and that clear information has been provided about what is expected of me, with regards to the video recordings and report back of the study. I have also had the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have and am aware that I can withdraw from the interview at any time.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ on: \_\_\_\_\_

form (Ages 10-12)

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The goal of my study is to understand how children experience their homeschooling. At the beginning of the year, I started working as an au pair and teacher with a homeschooling family. Watching the children learn, explore and discover their world with such enthusiasm has drawn me to look into the children's experience of homeschooling.

In my attempt to explore and describe your and other children's experiences of homeschooling, I want to listen and hear what you say, and to be able to tell your story.

If you do choose to take part in this study, you can be assured that your name will not be used in my paper and that everything you say to me will be held confidential.

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This form is to state that I,

\_\_\_\_\_, have agreed to be involved in the homeschooling study being run by Kathryn Mills.

I agree that I have chosen to take part in the interviews and that clear information has been provided about what is expected of me, with regards to the video recordings and report back of the study. I have also had the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have and am aware that I can withdraw from the interview at any time.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ on: \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions formed part of the semi-structured interview schedule and were used in order to collect qualitative data:

- How do you experience/ find homeschooling?
- What is homeschooling like?
- What do you do at homeschooling?
- How does the day go by at homeschooling for you?
- How is homeschooling different to normal school?
- If there was anything you would change about homeschooling what would it be?
- What is your favourite thing about homeschooling?
- What do you do after homeschool is finished for the day?