Chapter 8

Homeschooling/Unschooling in Gifted Education: A Parent’s Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the lived experiences of one parent of a profoundly gifted student. Parental perceptions of gifted programming in the public school system, parental reasons for leaving the public school system, and the alternative schooling designs of homeschooling and unschooling are discussed. Further discussed is the parental perception of the general lack of knowledge teacher educators possess in regards to highly, exceptionally, and profoundly gifted students. Parent recognition and discussion of the incompatibility between the traditional schooling system and their child’s personal characteristics is a main theme. Parental design of new educational experiences to meet the unique needs of their individual child is shared. Insights into the alternative education practices of homeschooling and unschooling for highly and profoundly gifted students, as well as one parent’s perspective of the current school system, are shared with teacher education faculty preparing new teachers to work with gifted students.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the lived experience of one parent of profoundly gifted children. The chapter qualitatively demonstrates the holistic perspective of one parents’ reality in regards to her profoundly gifted children’s experience in the educational system, as well as the families’ continued experiences with both homeschooling and the unschooling philosophy. This one-participant phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of the subject’s experience navigating the school system in connection to gifted and talented programs, as well as the choice to leave that same school system and homeschool as a family through implementation of an unschooling philosophy. This chapter includes detailed experiential descriptions of the subject’s children in relation to their schooling situation. Moon (1991) notes that internal reliability increases with “the inclusion of low-inference descriptors such as direct quotations” (174), and as such, parental perceptions will be shared in the subject’s own words throughout this chapter. The chapter focuses both on reasons the family chose to leave the school system in order to homeschool, and suggestions for successful homeschooling utilizing an unschooling philosophy. Insights into the alternative educational practices of homeschooling and the unschooling philosophy for highly and profoundly gifted students, as well as the parent perspective of the current school system, are offered for current educators and teacher education faculty preparing new teachers to work with gifted students.

Parents are instrumental to the development and educational success of their children. Likewise, parental support and involvement increase schools’ ability to advance student achievement and motivation for learning (Campbell and Verna, 2007; Wang and Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). As early as the mid 1980s, research noted advantages such as increased motivation and student satisfaction with the schooling experience, when parental involvement by parents of highly gifted students increased (Tao, 1986). Unfortunately, sometimes schools are either unwilling, or unable to work with the parents of highly or profoundly gifted students to the extent needed to meet the students’ individual needs (Morse, 2001; Kennedy, 1995).

There are several reasons that schools struggle to meet the needs of profoundly gifted students. First, modifications that may work for moderately gifted students likely will not work with highly gifted students, and are extremely unlikely to work with the profoundly gifted population (Kennedy, 1995). Further as Morse (2001) notes,
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