# Making Sense of Homeschooling Approaches Through Content Analysis

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*A common problem for new homeschoolers is understanding how to choose and implement specific educational approaches. In response, I conducted a qualitative content analysis on key texts representative of popular homeschooling approaches, including* The Well-Trained Mind *(classical),* Home Education *(Charlotte Mason), and* Teach Your Own *(unschooling); and compared these to current classroom-based learning. This article finds that classical homeschooling and modern-day classroom teaching are similar; the Charlotte Mason approach is the most varied in teaching methods; and unschooling makes little mention of teaching methods. This paper also suggests that homeschooling families can be defined by the teaching methods they regularly employ.*

*Un problème courant pour les nouveaux enseignants à domicile est de comprendre comment choisir et mettre en œuvre des approches éducatives spécifiques. J'ai donc procédé à une analyse qualitative du contenu de textes clés représentatifs des approches populaires de l'enseignement à domicile, notamment* The Well-Trained Mind *(classique),* Home Education *(Charlotte Mason) et* Teach Your Own *(non-scolarisation), et je les ai comparés à l'apprentissage actuel en classe. Cet article constate que l'enseignement classique à domicile et l'enseignement moderne en classe sont similaires, que l'approche de Charlotte Mason est la plus variée en termes de méthodes d'enseignement et que l'approche de non-scolarisation ne mentionne guère les méthodes d'enseignement. Cet article suggère également que les familles qui font l'école à la maison peuvent être définies par les méthodes d'enseignement qu'elles emploient régulièrement.*

The coronavirus pandemic may be credited for the recent growth of home-based education. In 2021, as parents planned to reduce their child's risk of exposure to COVID-19, 24,234 students enrolled in home school programs across Alberta, compared to 13,463 in the previous year (Edwardson, 2021). For many COVID-schoolers (families that began homeschooling because of the pandemic), home education was both worrying and stressful (Thorell et al., 2022). Indeed, pandemic aside, there are many limitations that make home education a difficult option. At least one parent must sacrifice years of their own time and potential career to oversee their child's education. Mass schooling (public, private, or charter) is by far the most popular educational choice. The alternative, taking on the task of overseeing and facilitating a child's education, is weighty (Baker, 2019), and can furthermore be isolating for both parent and child. Choosing to homeschool may mean that children do not receive needed outside medical or professional expertise (Quist et al., 2019; van Schalkwyk & Bouwer, 2011), or even perpetuate situations of abuse (Bartholet, 2020; Goodpasture et al., 2013). All in all, home education should be seen as an

alternative to a child's education, included alongside other more typical schooling choices, but not without deep discussion and great consideration on the part of parents and caregivers.

## Literature Review

### Parental Motivation

Despite the above-mentioned difficulties of home-based education, a significant population exists, and for good reason. Murphy et al.'s (2017) expansive summary of parental motivations established that homeschooling is founded primarily on a desire for parental control. With control in hand, parents may then strive for other goals. Most goals have previously been separated into van Galen's (1991) framework of ideologues and pedagogues, where parents were unhappy with either what students were being taught or how they were being taught. Murphy et al. (2017) further grouped American parental motivations into four major categories: "(1) religion; (2) schooling: academics; (3) schooling: socialization; and (4) family" (p. 95). Recent research in parental motivations have continued to identify more specific parental concerns such as preservation of culture (Etienne, 2022), racial justice (Mazama & Lundy, 2014), or education for students' special needs (Morse & Bell, 2018). By contrast, Arai (2000) found that Canadian parents chose homeschooling as a remedy to whole environment concerns, such as crowded classrooms and the potential for poor teacher-student chemistry.

Indeed, home-based education, or homeschooling, has myriad researched benefits. Structured homeschooled students achieve just as well, if not better, than their publicly schooled counterparts (Martin-Chang et al., 2011), and the process of homeschooling may yield greater creativity (Medlin, 1996; Unger Madar & Ben David-Hadar, 2021), open-mindedness (Kunzman, 2017), and desire for learning (Grady, 2019). The benefits of one-on-one customizable instruction are well-documented (Cebula et al., 2017; Francis, 2018; Gann & Carpenter, 2019; Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Unger Madar & Ben David-Hadar, 2021), and the question of socialization is easily addressed. Homeschoolers find plenty of socialization in cooperatives, group lessons, and the everyday opportunity of being involved in public life to a greater extent than their peers who must remain in a school building for a large part of their day (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2018; Fisher, 2006; Mincu & Sârbu, 2018).

### How Homeschooling Functions

A growing body of research is now focusing on the day-to-day of homeschooling. Hanna (2012) conducted a mid-sized study on the materials that homeschoolers used, but chose to conflate methods, materials, and curriculum; that is, use of museum visits and field trips were discussed alongside purchased curriculum, but teaching methods were not distinguished. Similarly, Cheng and Hamlin (2022) examined homeschooling arrangements on a larger scale ($n = 1468$), revealing that homeschoolers today are making increasing use of online services, part-time attendance in a brick-and-mortar school, tutors, prepackaged curriculum, and other resources that somewhat displace full parental control in the homeschool.

Van Galen's (1991) prior research also divided homeschoolers mainly into structured and unstructured populations, based on how school was conducted at home. Neuman and Guterman (2017) improved upon this by proposing that researchers examine homeschoolers for amount of structure in content and process. That is, homeschoolers could potentially be structured in

content (ex. following a curriculum) but unstructured in process (ex. no set timetable for learning), or any combination thereof. Jolly and Matthews recently (2020) added to this by suggesting that researchers begin examining home education pedagogy as well, in addition to content and context.

Scholars are making greater use of certain terms for understanding homeschooling approaches. Taylor-Hough (2010) detailed broadly recognized homeschooling approaches, including unschooling, classical, and Charlotte Mason, among others. Sotomayor (2022) recently conducted a data analysis of web content to define *roadschooling*, a very specific subset of homeschooling families who use family road trips to teach academic content. And though Jolly et al. (2013) sought to present an overall picture of homeschooling gifted children, rather than focus on the mechanics of homeschooling, interview excerpts elicited the term *eclectic homeschooling*, being a mix of approaches as opposed to an adherence to one approach.

Terms aside, the richest material for understanding the details of homeschooling is found in empirical evidence studies, such as that conducted by Mazama (2016), who not only distinguished between teaching and learning approaches and tools used, but detailed content and activities as well. Thomas (2016) surveyed a large population of Christian homeschoolers and supplemented findings with a small number of interviews to better understand homeschooling routines. Likewise, Kunzman (2009) also captured snippets of homeschooling life from conservative Christian families, findings from a series of in-person observations conducted with a small sample of suburban, urban, and rural American families. Understanding homeschooling types is essential to further research within the homeschooling population, especially regarding the significant effects that homeschooling approaches have on the child (Guterman & Neuman, 2018).

## Gaps in Research

Although researchers now know more about homeschooling, parents who are intrigued by home education often still avoid it based on a perceived lack of resources (Ray et al., 2021). Resources, in this case, refers to more than just curriculum; parents also need regular and easy access to knowledgeable and encouraging mentors (such as assigned facilitators or more seasoned homeschooling parents), as well as pedagogical knowledge. Understanding the homeschooling approaches that appeal to specific parental motivations is only practical when parents are also able to implement the approaches they desire. The empirical studies mentioned above are one means of communicating how parents can begin homeschooling, but research still lacks in providing pedagogical support and an understanding of best practices found in different homeschooling approaches.

## Problem Statement

Thus, in this paper I survey several widely recognized homeschooling approaches—classical, Charlotte Mason, unschooling (Taylor-Hough, 2010)—and compare the recommended teaching methods to pedagogy promoted in modern, classroom-based practice. My main research questions are:

1. What teaching methods are used in common homeschooling approaches (classical, Charlotte Mason, and unschooling) for 6- to 9-year-olds?

2. How do these compare with school-based teaching methods for 6- to 9-year-olds?

By focusing on ages 6 to 9 (roughly grades 1 to 3), I aim to provide pedagogical knowledge to support parents who want to homeschool close to or from the beginning of school-age. I assume that most of these teaching methods will be modifiable and usable for parents starting homeschooling at any grade. When the benefits of homeschooling are so well-documented, homeschooling researchers have a duty to provide a clear starting point for implementation, so that access to educational options remains equitable.

## Content Analysis as Guiding Research Method

This research paper aimed to answer the above questions through a qualitative content analysis of the teaching methods that are presented in texts recognized as authorities on homeschooling approaches. Whereas a basic content analysis might rely on counting mutually exclusive characteristics only, a qualitative analysis seeks to go beyond by discovering a text's "themes and core ideas" (Drisko & Maschi, 2015) through systematic and objective identification (Neuendorf, 2017). In the case of each approach, I identified the approach's teaching methods by reading through the chosen text and categorizing every unique mention of an activity under the teaching method that the activity represents. I used the counts under each teaching method to compare each approach to the other.

The teaching methods were elicited through reading of the texts mentioned, beginning with Charlotte Mason's text, as it was the longest and most detailed out of the texts used. During reading, I generated teaching methods, refined the elicited categories, reread Mason's text for a more accurate count with the refined categories, and then proceeded through the other texts with said categories. Drisko and Maschi (2015) recommend that a qualitative content analysis use words or themes taken from or closely related to the text; however, I chose to use modern-day terms for teaching methods, so long as the definitions were similar or identical to the activities described in each text. Doing so allowed me to expound on the "variation found within specific categories or themes" (Schreier, 2014b, as cited in Drisko & Maschi, 2015).

## Terms Defined

In this paper, a teaching method (synonymous with learning method, or teaching/learning method) is defined as a group or category of teaching activities (University of Buffalo, 2022b). Teaching activities, or strategies, are present where there is a specified content, process, and product: "what students are to learn, how they are to learn it, and what products they are to make, show, or express as a result of their learning" (Smutny & von Fremd, 2009). Merely discussing content and product is not enough; all three factors must be present for an activity to be tallied under the teaching method it represents. For example, Charlotte Mason wrote that "children should be taught … that the chief responsibility which rests on them as persons is the acceptance or rejection of initial ideas" (Mason, 2021, p. 8), but as she failed to specify an activity or process in particular, this passage would not be included in a tally. Similarly, if a generalized teaching activity such as memorization were recommended in passing but not connected to a specific piece of content or result, the mention alone would not be tallied.

Finally, recognizing that parents are the main education facilitators in home education, the terms *parent(s)* and *educator(s)* are used interchangeably throughout this paper. I keep the term *teacher* apart simply to signify one who is working in a public, private, or charter school classroom.

## Potential Biases and Pitfalls

The greatest hindrance in recognizing and categorizing teaching methods were my own experiences, beliefs, training, and teaching practices as a classroom teacher. Teaching methods that appeal to my training and/or preferences could be more apparent in the text, and I ran the risk of miscounting activities and methods that were out of my experience. Doing so would misrepresent the approach and potentially turn parents off a path that would otherwise work for them. As a solo researcher, I sought to make myself more cognizant of different teaching methods by reading over lists of teaching methods prior to readings of the text.

Another potential for significant bias in this piece lies in my choice to rely mostly on single texts as representative of each homeschooling approach (with the exception of unschooling Though I have done my best to justify the texts used, there is still the possibility of creating a biased understanding of an approach among scholars because of my choice of text. There is certainly opportunity for further research in this direction, where additional analysis of other texts that align with the homeschooling approaches addressed here may further clarify the methods used in each homeschooling approach.

## Findings and Analysis

Educational approaches are unique to the educator and their response to their students, whether the context be of a professional teacher in a public classroom, or of a parent at home with one or multiple children. Taking from Neuman and Guterman's (2017) proposed framework, I use the following terms to describe each educational approach: Content may be *structured* (many recommendations given on subject matter), *partially structured* (some recommendations given on subject matter), or *not structured* (no recommendations given on subject matter). Process may be *structured* (time and/or place specified for learning all subjects), *partially structured* (time and/or place specified for learning some subjects), or *not structured* (time and/or place are not specified at all for learning subjects).

Thus, I begin each section on a distinct approach by introducing its purpose of education, briefly justifying the text, and noting the amount of structure present in content and process, before building upon Jolly's and Matthews' (2020) suggestion to examine pedagogy, found in the text's recommended teaching methods, and the part that the educator may be expected to play in implementing each approach. The approaches below are discussed in order of most structure to least structure: modern-day classroom teaching, classical, Charlotte Mason, and unschooling. Resulting graph and counts are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1. Before discussing each approach, the following section explains the terms used in defining teaching methods.

### Teaching Methods Defined

What follows is a list of the teaching methods elicited from the texts used for each approach. The teaching methods are discussed in alphabetical order, with each term being followed by a brief definition of the process(es) that it encompasses.

*Drills* includes activities such as vocal or pronunciation drills, recitation, and memorization. It is often associated with rote learning and repetition (Lim et al., 2012). *Experiential learning* encompasses real-life activities and tasks, practical use of tools, manipulatives (especially for

Figure 1.

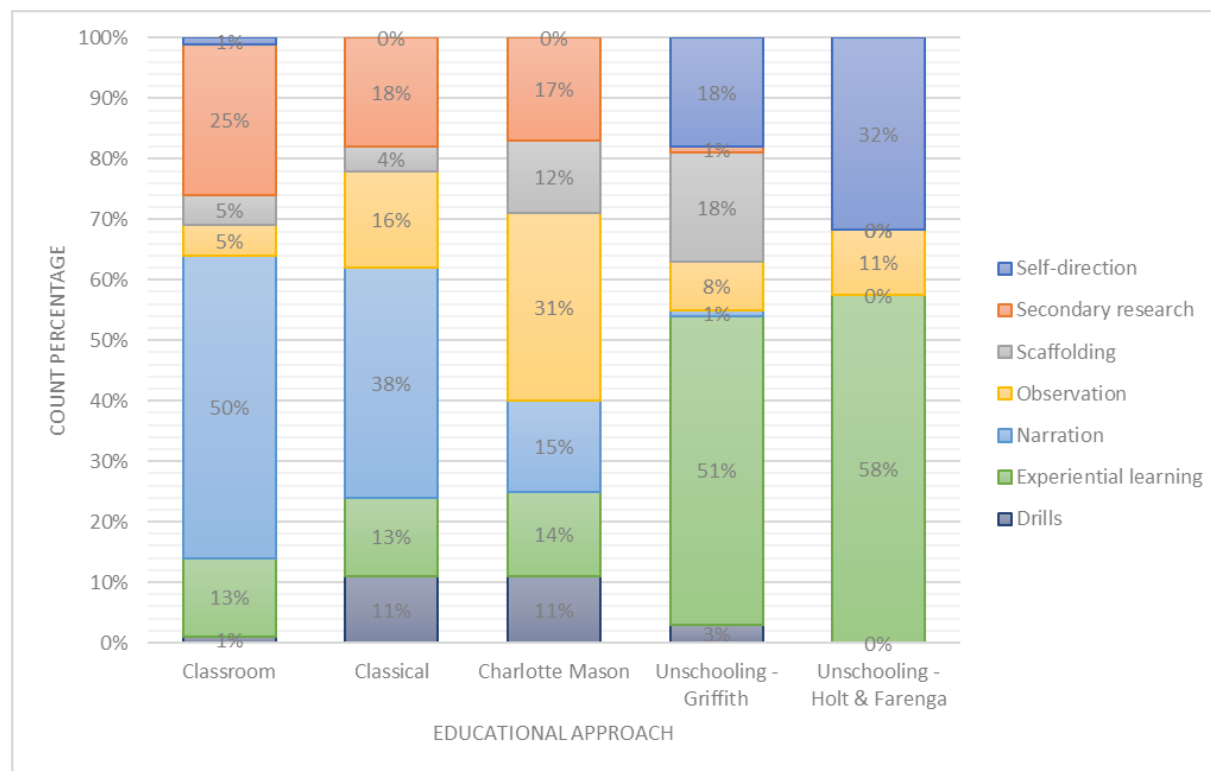*Educational Approaches as Defined by Teaching Methods*



Table 1.

*Count of Teaching Activities by Teaching Method Recommendations Within Educational Approaches.*

| | Classroom | | Classical | | Charlotte Mason | | Unschooling–Griffith | | Unschooling–Holt & Farenga | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Method | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % | Count | % |
| Drills | 1 | 1 | 5 | 11 | 14 | 11 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Experiential learning | 14 | 13 | 6 | 13 | 18 | 14 | 49 | 51 | 11 | 58 |
| Narration | 55 | 50 | 17 | 38 | 19 | 15 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Observation | 6 | 5 | 7 | 16 | 40 | 31 | 8 | 8 | 2 | 11 |
| Scaffolding | 5 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 15 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Secondary research | 28 | 25 | 8 | 18 | 21 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 0 | 0 |
| Self-direction | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | | 0 | 18 | 19 | 6 | 32 |
| Total | 110 | 100 | 45 | 100 | 127 | 100 | 97 | 101 | 19 | 101 |

*Note.* Educational approaches arranged from most structured content to least structured content.

math), and science experiments, as well as teaching methods such as outdoor education, place- and/or project-based learning, student-centred learning, and active learning (The Association for Experiential Learning, 2022). *Narration* uses discourse, whether it be in stories, conversation, or through multimedia (Rymes & Wortham, 2011). A mother may read a book aloud to her child, a

child may narrate back to her father what she has learned, or a child may even draw a picture. *Observation*, as in monitoring and evaluating (Couzijn, 1999), includes records of observations through activities such as nature journals, self-created calendars, or maps. *Secondary research* includes acquainting oneself with knowledge through other people or other sources. *Scaffolding* introduces and builds upon smaller parts of student experiences and knowledge towards bigger concepts and/or improved skills (University of Buffalo, 2022a). A parent may use local geography to illustrate global geography (for example, using a lake to visualize an ocean; using small distances to help visualize larger measurements); or simply teach one skill at a time towards a greater project (for example, sketching, then colour theory, then painting). And finally, *self-directed learning*, or *self-direction.* involves significantly restricting the parent or caregiver's input to avoid intruding on the child's own processes of play or learning. Initially termed *discovery learning*, self-directed learning may include learning from experiences but differs on the basis that content is child-determined (Foushee et al., 2021), whereas educator-determined content drives use of the method experiential learning.

## Modern-Day Classroom Teaching

In a research brief to Albertan teachers, Kowch (2005) suggested that educators prepare students for a society of rapid change by moving away from drills and towards experiential learning, self-directed learning, and scaffolding, but did not provide much detail. Although teachers may have access to newer teaching materials through staff or union libraries, I did not have any such access at the time of writing. Similarly, parental access to pedagogical material and expertise will vary by homeschooling board. Using public Albertan resources as an example, only one resource detailing instructional strategies for K–9 Alberta teachers was easily found online (Alberta Learning, 2002). From this resource, instructional strategies demonstrating narration represented half of the suggested activities, with a couple of mentions of cooperative learning (not present in the other texts), and single mentions of self-direction, experiential learning, and secondary research. Please note that this resource's count was not included in Figure 1 or Table 1. Because the above resource focused on one subject only, I felt the need to draw on a different text for the purpose of tallying types of learning methods used in classrooms today. For this reason, this section is described as a modern-day approach, rather than being Alberta-specific.

In choosing a text to represent the modern classroom, I began with the search term "teaching strategies for young children," with a filter for "books only," through the University of Calgary's digital library. This search term was used as an alternative to "teaching methods for young children" because the initial term used turned up research focused on the effects of individual methods with young children, rather than recommendations for general teaching. When using the word "strategies," only one fully online book, within the first 50 results, discussed teaching strategies in all subject areas for the ages covered in the scope of this paper, without a particular concentration on special needs, behavioural needs, or language ability. Thus, I used the text, *Differentiating for the Young Child: Teaching Strategies Across the Content Areas, PreK-3* (Smutny & von Fremd, 2009), to represent modern-day classroom-based teaching practices.

Modern teaching in the classroom has structured content and structured process. Teachers must follow a prescribed set of learning outcomes set by the province and school schedules are rigid in terms of their school hours. The only flexibility of structure in process is typically found in elementary classrooms, where teachers may be with children for long periods of time and can thus modify the time spent on each subject from day to day, depending on the lesson at hand.

Smutny and von Fremd (2009) relied heavily on narration as a teaching method. Interestingly, the proportion to which they rely on narration corresponded with the Alberta Education resource for health teachers.

Narration primarily focuses on ways in which children can express their learning, including reports, posters, roleplays, dramatization, art pieces, and more. Teaching through conversation and questioning is encouraged; lecture without student input is not even mentioned. Supporting the heavy use of narration is the method of secondary research, though it is only mentioned half as many times. Students are encouraged to gather information through secondary sources to obtain information to present to others.

Mentioned half as many times as secondary research is that of experiential learning. Some activities implementing this method include measuring distances, using music and rhythms to understand fractions, or making a map of a location with which students are familiar. Scaffolding, observation, and self-directed learning are all mentioned in passing, but hardly any specific examples are given, making it clear that classroom pedagogy often focuses on reporting what students know, what they wonder, and what they have learned.

## Classical

Susan Wise Bauer's and Jessie Wise's *The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home* (2016) is widely regarded as the authority on classical homeschooling (Sherfinski, 2015). A search on Amazon for "classical homeschooling" shows that this text has the most customer reviews, and the same title has the most reader reviews on Goodreads (6,984 reviews at the time of writing), far outstripping other titles on classical education such as *The Core: Teaching Your Child the Foundations of Classical Education* (Bortins, 2010) at 1,805 reviews or *A Classical Education: The Stuff You Wish You'd Been Taught at School* (Taggart, 2009) at 1,539 reviews. The fourth and latest edition of Wise Bauer and Wise's (2016) text contained content recommendations and suggested teaching practices for all subjects from grades K–12, schedules, means of tracking assessment, and supports and encouragement for prospective homeschoolers. Only pages 59–252 were used in this report's qualitative content analysis, as these were the pages that dealt with teaching all subjects to grades 1–4, covering ages 6–9.

The purpose of classical schooling is to prepare children to be analytical, self-disciplined, literate, and curious students "who have a wide range of interests and the ability to follow up on them" (Wise Bauer & Wise, 2016, p. xx-xxi). Borrowing heavily from quotes and material found in Dorothy Sayers' (1948) essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning," Wise Bauer and Wise (2016) suggested following a process of learning described as the Trivium. That is, children at a young age begin in the Grammar stage, focused on observation and memory (Sayers, 1948, p. 12); move into the Dialectic stage where reasons are provided for the facts they have learned (p. 14); and finally enter the Rhetoric stage, synthesizing the facts and ideas they have learned into arguments (p. 17). Given this, the classical approach promoted by Wise Bauer and Wise (2016) encouraged both structured content and structured process. There certainly is room for flexibility, especially in response to children's needs; however, the schedules supplied in their book (p. 253) made it clear that a parent ought to designate blocks of time for learning each subject. Whether these blocks must occur at the same time every day is not specified; nor are school hours ever mandated in the text.

The teaching method most promoted in *The Well-Trained Mind* (Wise Bauer & Wise, 2016) is narration. This largely includes parents reading aloud to children (p. 192), assessment of

learning through children's narrations (p. 66), and, as the child matures, dictation, oral grammar exercises, and verbal discussion of people, places, things, and concepts. After narration, secondary research is most promoted. This teaching method involves parents encouraging children to familiarize themselves with topics through ways such as finding books at the library (p. 141), watching a documentary (p. 193), or learning the specific names of things.

Less promoted but still discussed are methods of observation, experiential learning, and drills. Observation can be as simple as looking at an object in its natural environment and describing it (p. 193) or by copying the style of other classical writers (p. 76). Experiential learning can include building with Lego (p. 193) or actual art projects (p. 244). And drills might be used in memorizing the multiplication table (p. 114-115) or monthly poetry recitations (p. 67). Similar to the classroom, classical education heavily promotes narration and secondary research, but specific applications of these teaching methods take advantage of the individualized learning opportunities that homeschooling offers.

## Charlotte Mason

A British educator in the 19th century, Charlotte Mason's following among modern-day homeschoolers has grown thanks to the publishing of Susan Schaeffer Macaulay's (2022) book *For the Children's Sake*. Though Mason advocated homeschooling only for the younger ages (up until age 9), preferring classroom schooling for children afterwards, her writings are a significant contribution to the area of homeschooling, being a definitive guide (Lee, 2022) for parents to support their children's education, and forming the basis of her eponymous approach. Of the six volumes Mason wrote, only volume 1, titled *Home Education*, was examined in this paper, being the only volume primarily focused on children ages 6–9.

Mason's purpose of education is multifold: to master one's will, to reason, and to understand that "the chief responsibility which rests on them as persons is the acceptance or rejection of initial ideas" (Mason, 2021, p. 8). This description may well resonate with classical homeschoolers: Sayers' (1948) previously mentioned essay lamented the many ways in which adults unthinkingly accept ideas (p. 3–4). A key difference between these two approaches, however, is that the classical approach is structured around the Trivium and the means of learning (from observation and memory, to reasoning, and then to synthesis), whereas Charlotte Mason (2021) avoided prescribing such a definite and overarching process. Thus, the Charlotte Mason approach may be defined as having structured content with partially structured process. Mason (2021) made numerous recommendations to a child's breadth of study, and strongly suggested that most learning occur during daylight hours. Mason further recommended that learning occur before dinner, so that children have time to pursue their own quiet interests in the few hours before bed. Apart from this, Mason made no other recommendations as to when learning ought to occur or for how long.

The method most advocated by Mason (2021) is that of observation. A great lover of nature, Mason encouraged mothers to bring their children out of the city and into the countryside where they may observe natural phenomena for hours at a time. Mothers should use questioning to encourage children to create clear mental pictures of what they see. Children who are beginning to write are invited to record their observations in a nature journal, with paintings and notes (pp. 54–55); or in a calendar, observing the time of phenomena such as the reappearance of the first bird after winter (p. 54).

Such observation should naturally lead to secondary research, where children learn the names

of flowers, animals, or insects as they are observed, typically from a parent, other adult authority, or book; so children can refer to their findings by name. All of these observations are meant to be discussed in narration, whether it be with parents or peers. Experiential learning is held high above textbooks and/or workbooks and exhibits itself in the sheer number of times that Mason recommended being outdoors, but also in instances where children learn about direction by learning to navigate with a compass (p. 76), or mapping by first walking through a local area (p. 77).

Mentioned only slightly less than the above methods are scaffolding and drills. In scaffolding, Mason encouraged parents to extrapolate understanding of concepts from the small and familiar, so that a parent might use a lake to discuss an ocean (p. 274) or teach astronomy from the simple phenomena children can observe on their own in the skies (p. 267). Grammar is to be learned from oral exercises drilling the same concept (p. 297), as is perfect pronunciation of words in recitations (p. 222). All in all, the Charlotte Mason approach demonstrated the most variability in methods compared to the other approaches.

## Unschooling

John Holt is largely recognized as the father of unschooling (Gaither, 2023), and the text he co-authors with Pat Farenga (2021), *Teach Your Own: The Indispensable Guide to Living and Learning With Children at Home* shared parental anecdotes with anyone who wanted to understand unschooling as a homeschooling approach. That said, other books such as Mary Griffith's (1998) *The Unschooling Handbook: How to Use the Whole World as Your Child's Classroom* have risen to greater popularity, being more prescriptive for the budding unschooling family, yet still relying on parental anecdotes to supplement suggestions. With the search term "unschooling," Griffith's (1998) book is counted among the top how-to-unschool books, with 207 reviews on Amazon and 1413 ratings on Goodreads at the time of writing.

In choosing a text to analyze, I did also consider more popular books often referenced in unschooling, such as Ainsley Arment's (2019) *The Call of the Wild and the Free: Reclaiming the Wonder in Your Child's Education, A New Way to Homeschool* or Kerry McDonald's *Unschooled: Raising Curious, Well-Educated Children Outside the Conventional Classroom*. However, Arment's (2019) text specifically described her approach as something compatible with other forms of homeschooling, such as classical or unschooling, rather than being representative of unschooling (p. 228). McDonald (2019) also wrote that her text was a personal experience and not particularly representative of unschooling (p. v).

Unschooling presents the most challenges in text analysis, given that it can be so variable. Thus, I chose to include tallies from Holt and Farenga (2021) as well as Griffith (1998), counting teaching methods mentioned in parental accounts. These parental accounts were taken from all those present in Holt and Farenga (2021), and only from pages 73–150 in Griffith (1998), being the pages that focused on how to teach specific subjects. Unschooling passages did not typically specify an age for particular teaching methods, although a chapter in Griffith's book did address the changes that could occur in an unschooled household as children aged (pp. 151–162).

Rather than state a desired outcome as the other approaches do, unschooling is largely the product of people who resist the idea that children must go through some sort of formal education to become someone worthy of living. Instead, a commonly held belief is that, given the needed freedom, love, and support to do so, children will still naturally gravitate towards being "responsible citizens" (Holt & Farenga, 2021, p. xiv). Unschooling has both unstructured content

and unstructured process (Neuman & Guterman, 2017), and is perhaps one of the most distinct homeschooling approaches recognized in scholarly literature. Parents who implemented this approach in both texts relied heavily on experiential learning and self-directed learning. Children are expected to learn as naturally as they breathe through all their life experiences; all the sights, sounds, and observations of living and experiencing new events. Self-directed learning may give the impression that the child is completely in control of what they do, however, this was often shown to be incorrect in both texts. In self-directed learning, both child and parent are still involved: parents must withhold their input, allow the child to explore and pursue their own interests, and should create opportunities and supply resources for the child's benefit.

In providing opportunities for their children as they observed their child's interests (Holt & Farenga, 2021, p. 67; p. 93). Griffith's (1998) text demonstrated more than Holt's and Farenga's (2021) that parental provision included encouraged use of secondary research, such as an emphasized availability on educational television, library books, and textbooks in the house. Most parents refrained from mentioning a focus on achieving specific learning outcomes; however, Griffith's text did include rare mentions of drills, useful for when a child was intent on learning to read (p. 83) or learn pre-calculus (p. 106); and observation for writing skills in providing good models of literature (p. 88). Overall, both unschooling texts were in strong agreement over a reliance on experiential learning and self-directed learning, with significantly less emphasis on any other teaching methods.

## Where Approaches Overlap in Method

Given the wide variation in methods favoured by each educational approach, I have chosen to organize discussion alphabetically by method. In each section I briefly detail the extent to which each approach utilizes the specified method and how much they do so in relation to the other approaches, basing my comparisons on the counts show in Table 1. Where applicable I also briefly discuss why the method may be used as it is in the given approaches.

### *Drills*

Discouraged in modern-day classrooms (Kowch, 2005) and completely nonexistent in unschooling, drills and memorization are more common in the Charlotte Mason and classical approach. Still, this method of learning is not heavily used. Interestingly, although Wise Bauer and Wise are modern-day authors, the proportion to which they and Charlotte Mason, a teacher in the 19th century, recommend use of drills is quite similar. Charlotte Mason (2021) promoted grammar drills and oral practice of pronunciation until a perfect accent is achieved, and Wise Bauer and Wise (2016) encouraged regular memorization of multiplication tables and poetry recitation.

### *Experiential Learning*

This method of learning is significant across all approaches examined but dominates the unschooling approach. This may be because unschooling, without any set curricula or prescribed learning objectives, likely relies almost entirely on experiences as catalysts to learning. Unschoolers cited at-home experiments (Griffith, 1998, p. 112) and household chores such as gardening (p. 115) as examples of experiential learning. Wise Bauer and Wise (2016) suggested

art projects (p. 244) and music lessons (245-246), and Mason (2021) suggested navigation with a compass (p. 76) to learn direction. Of the above suggestions, again, the classical approach seems most achievable on a regular basis within a modern-day classroom.

### Narration

This method is most favoured within the modern-day classroom and classical approaches and included as one of Charlotte Mason's top three methods. Narration is a useful teaching method especially in the younger grades because children's listening comprehension is likely far beyond their writing ability (Wise Bauer & Wise, 2016). Mason (2021) made similar recommendations based on children's general writing abilities. Furthermore, classical students are encouraged to participating in the great conversation of humanity that the classical approach drives towards; conversation with their parent or caregiver is simply the first step.

In a classroom, as well, the use of narration is an excellent way to encourage participation between the teacher, the students, and the lesson at hand. However, the heavy use of narration can also serve a different reason: teachers are required to assess and produce grades for each student. Narration can easily be used as evidence to determine whether a child has met a prescribed learning outcome or not. Given that there is little mention of narration in unschooling, perhaps the use of an approach with structured content is related to the need for narration.

### Observation

Gathering data firsthand is little used in the modern-day classroom: the resources needed for authentic artifacts, field trips, or science experiments are not always readily available, especially in classroom settings. By contrast, observation is a primary method in the Charlotte Mason approach. This makes sense, given the many hours of outdoor play that Charlotte Mason recommends for parents of young children. Observation features in classical and unschooling approaches as well, to a lesser degree. Set outside of classroom walls and school hours, away from the need to provide for thirty-odd children at the same time as classroom teachers do, perhaps homeschooling allows for greater use of observation as learning method.

### Scaffolding

Scaffolding is little advocated across all approaches except in that of Charlotte Mason. This may be because children within the 6- to 9-year range are still acquiring foundational information and skills on which future scaffolding will rest. However, Charlotte Mason's detailed descriptions showed that scaffolding is possible using even early childhood experiences. She suggested, for example, that the mother offer "a little help in the art of seeing" and provide answers after which children can model their own (Mason, 2021, p. 49). Of course, lack of explicit scaffolding activities does not mean it is absent in the classroom. The modern-day text surveyed did not offer explicit scaffolding activities, but it did begin each subject chapter with a discussion on how to assess students' prior knowledge, the first step in Vygotsky's scaffolding (University of Buffalo, 2022a). Being such a natural means of teaching, parents and teachers are also likely to employ this method whether they intend to or not (West et al., 2010).

### *Secondary Research*

Second-hand acquisition of information is the second-most recommended method across all approaches except for unschooling. The modern-day classroom, being unable to furnish firsthand observation or experiences for all prescribed learning objectives, relies heavily on secondary research to endow children with information. Secondary research is also needed to support narration in the classical approach, and to supplement observations made in the Charlotte Mason approach. Given these reasons, perhaps it is the lack of structured content in unschooling that makes secondary research unnecessary for young unschoolers, though, as mentioned earlier, an unschooled child is still likely use secondary research during their own pursuits.

### *Self-Directed Learning*

Unsurprisingly, self-directed learning is most mentioned in unschooling, an approach that believes learning is everywhere and that the best learning occurs on a child's own timing in an area chosen on their own. It is not explicitly mentioned in classical or Charlotte Mason as a teaching or learning method; however, discussion in both texts used reveal an assumption that the parent can and should follow the child's interests in given subject areas. Wise Bauer and Wise (2016) encouraged memorization of poetry that the child likes (p. 67) and Mason (2021) is famous for her belief in laying a feast before the child, for them to pick and choose. At the same time, both the classical and Charlotte Mason approaches suggested more structure in learning process than unschoolers typically employ. Jessie Wise (2016) wrote in a footnote that she was not a believer in child-led reading, directing parents to enforce at least 5 minutes of reading practice a day regardless of the child's preference (pp. 39-40). Charlotte Mason, too, recommended that parents build regularity into their household to shape children's mental abilities (pp. 131-132).

What is surprising, given Kowch's (2005) beliefs that modern-day teachers were moving towards more self-directed learning, is that self-direction is almost entirely absent from the teaching methods suggested in the modern-day text I examined (Smutny & Fremd, 2009). To be fair, the activities discussed in the text give multiple options; one might assume here that the teacher can give the choice of task to their students. And of course, the lack of mention does not exclude the method from being used, but forgoing advice on how to use self-directed learning in the classroom leaves teachers at a loss on how to implement said method in a class. Although the Alberta Learning (2002) health resource did discuss independent study, such discussion still necessitates the establishment of rules and limitations as to when students can complete their independent study. Given the contrasts presented here, the case may be that the more structure that is present in learning content and process, the more difficult self-directed learning may be to realize.

### Summary of Findings

Content structure seems to be an indicator of whether certain teaching methods will be used or not. Given a set of goals for learning content, methods such as narration and secondary research work well for approaches that believe in structured content. By contrast, an approach with unstructured content seems to promote experiential learning and self-directed learning. The classical approach bears more resemblance to modern-day education than their names suggest. The Charlotte Mason approach is the most varied in proportion of methods used. And finally,

unschooling seems to eschew traditional learning methods, although this is not necessarily the case, as is in the discussion that follows.

## Limitations of the Study

As mentioned in self-directed learning, lack of mentions of a particular method certainly does not exclude it from being utilized in an approach. Such is the case in unschooling, where responsible parents who follow their children's interests are likely to converse often with their child (opportunities for narration and secondary research), provide learning opportunities and resources for their children (possibly experiential learning, observations, and/or secondary research), take the time to teach their child a skill (experiential learning and/or scaffolding), or even quiz their child if requested to do so (drills).

The above discussion only indicates what methods were promoted and discussed in the texts but ignores author discussion of methods where specific content is not present. In this way the proportion to which methods are used by each approach may be somewhat distorted. Of course, although the texts used are emblematic of the approaches in this paper, they are by no means comprehensive. And finally, with the exception of Charlotte Mason, the author eponymous with her approach having passed away in 1923, each approach has its roots in modern-day society and cannot avoid reacting to or referring to modern-day trends in teaching.

Rather than advocate for one homeschooling approach or the other, the purpose of this paper is to gather what teaching and learning methods are likely in practice to provide a starting place for parents who may be interested in home education but who feel intimidated at the thought of teaching their own child. As parents read this paper, I hope they will realize that there are many methods for learning, and that facilitating their child's education in a constructive and meaningful manner rests largely on finding what methods and techniques suit their needs.

## Implications and Recommendations

The results of this paper are hopefully useful for several audiences: parents and educators, and researchers. In this section, I separate my discussion into sections by audience, with each section containing implications of the above findings, and then recommendations for the audience being addressed.

### For Parents and Educators

Although homeschool quizzes exist online, including ones helping parents determine which homeschool approach is right for them (Spooner, 2016), such inventories are still limited in providing a greater perspective on educational approaches. Having a side-by-side comparison provides a starting point for parents in understanding what approach might fit their own beliefs about teaching, and what approach might suit their children's proclivities. As this paper found some correlation between content structure and type of teaching method, these results may also help parents identify how much structure they prefer in their homeschooling content.

Educators in any environment can also use the approach taken in this paper to evaluate the teaching/learning methods that they utilize regularly. By tallying the activities that they use into the corresponding methods, educators can then spot strengths and weaknesses of their approach. Perhaps they rely too heavily on one method and neglect other methods, or perhaps their methods

are not coherent with their beliefs about teaching and learning. Educators who use this paper as a model for means of self-reflection might also come to realize that there are other methods that would better suit their students or the type of approach that both teacher and student are pursuing. Reflection, whether it be for parents or classroom teachers, is certainly instrumental in improving teaching practice (Karakaya Cirit & Aydemir, 2020).

## For Researchers

For researchers, this paper demonstrates an application of Neuman's and Guterman's (2017) proposal for categorizing homeschooling approaches. The paper could benefit from increased rigour in research method. For example, are there greater degrees to which we can qualify partial process structure versus structured process structure? Neuman and Guterman (2017) examined mostly traditional homeschooling versus unschooling yet the fact is that there are many other homeschooling approaches to be explored. Beside classical and Charlotte Mason, other approaches include unit studies, world-schooling, and the ever-elusive eclectic approach (which, by definition, may defy categorization). Examining methods and materials used in homeschooling may help researchers understand the subgroups of homeschoolers, a necessary task for exploring social and academic outcomes of homeschooling families (Valiente et al., 2022).

This paper provides a different perspective of homeschooling approaches, in that the approaches are defined by their most commonly used methods rather than by structure, as has been discussed before (Neuman & Guterman, 2017). The correlation of teaching/learning methods with structure in content and/or process might also help categorize homeschoolers for future research. An undiscussed topic in this paper is whether the view of the child, as can be elicited within the given approach, correlates with particular teaching methods. Parents and educators who take a more philosophical approach to pedagogy will likely find that their assumptions of who children are and how they learn are correlated to the teaching methods the parents/educators prefer.

This paper also points the way to several areas of further research. One direction would be to examine not the educational approach but the correlation of the purpose of education with preferred teaching methods. The results would be useful for educational policy, as government officials who wish to craft particular citizens will appreciate knowing which teaching methods correlate with which aims. Researchers pursuing this might also build upon the results of such research towards determining outcomes of homeschoolers by teaching method employed in their household (Ray et al., 2021).

Another direction for future research would be to directly observe families who practice each approach, conducting a content analysis of what actually goes on in the home, to see how closely practice of each approach aligns with what has been discussed in the texts. Of course, one significant barrier to this study would be the fact that many homeschooling families describe themselves as being eclectic homeschoolers (Thomas, 2015), being families that mix and match content and methods that suit their children. Any study seeking to corroborate theory and practice of homeschooling approaches would thus require additional instruments to measure how closely a family aligns with a homeschooling approach before deciding whether the family really fit with any single approach.

## Conclusion

The goals of education are manifold: creativity, resilience, adaptability, lifelong learning, good citizenship, health habits, and so on. Towards this end, one might argue that all teaching methods have the potential to be useful and beneficial; the difficulty is knowing in what proportion to use these methods to produce these aims. The choice of teaching methods must also, to some extent, fit the needs and desires of both teacher and student. Yet education is not simply about passing certain values onto the next generation but about equipping children for whatever their future may hold. In this regard, perhaps the question is not necessarily what methods are best, or what approach will suffice, but what more we can do to improve our children's education, whatever their context may be.

It is my hope that this paper will remove the mystery of how learning is done at home. The results demonstrate that home-based education can vary greatly, being similar or greatly dissimilar to the approaches taken by classroom teachers. By defining homeschooling approaches with the same terms used in professional teaching, I hope to help the public understand that home-based education is simply an alternate form of education. In particular, this form of education is more likely to contain experiential learning and self-directed learning, types of learning that the public often calls for but that are difficult to achieve in a regular classroom.

I hope, too, that the information here stimulates discussion for parents and caregivers about the type of education they wish their child to have, while their child is still young. Time is of the essence, especially in the case of homeschooling, for the reasons mentioned at the beginning of the paper. However, whether a child is eventually educated at home or in a public, private, or charter classroom is not as important as the fact that their parents and caregivers have carefully considered their child's education, and the resources and opportunities that they want for their child.

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Despite having been trained as a public-school teacher and having taught in several countries, *Andrea Lai* began looking into homeschooling when she was asked about what educational options she had considered for her first child. After realizing she ought not to laugh at something she knew nothing about, Andrea began a deep dive into the topic of homeschooling, making it the focus of her final year completing her M.Ed. at the University of Calgary.