

Transcending “Standard” Curricula: Homeschooling Pedagogy that Promotes Cultural Compassion and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

The focus of this autoethnographical article is one family who opted for a homeschool program for their first grader during the 2020-2021 academic year. The authors of this article acted as the primary educators in the discipline-specific areas. The primary emphasis of instruction was ensuring that the child learned to read and write. Working one-on-one with the child daily revealed areas of concern that were addressed over time by regularly incorporating her advanced artistic and verbal abilities in lessons that allowed her to be successful in learning to read, the area in which she was most detached and ambiguous. Although the authors utilized the school district’s academic standards the foundation for planning, over time the homeschooling process began to transcend these requirements to include pedagogy that addressed anger management, diversity training, and self-care. Hands-on and interactive lessons, as well as regular field trips were designed to facilitate experiences for the student to advance not only skills and increase content knowledge, but to improve self-efficacy in all areas.

Keywords: homeschooling, nontraditional education, resource-based learning

THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC introduced both change and uncertainty into our national and global society. Aspects of education and curricular instruction were among those areas that were significantly impacted by these changes. As a result, classroom teachers, educational leaders, and parents had to make difficult decisions about how to instruct children while maintaining the health and safety of both educators and the children themselves. At the height of the pandemic (during the 2020-2021 academic year) many schools struggled to create viable options for instruction that offered health and safety, while maintaining a high level of academic rigor, acceptable assessment procedures, and general accountability. Some of these options were perceived as less than ideal by both educators and parents, such as completely online learning or in-person/online hybrids that alternated days of face-to-face instruction to ensure safe social distancing in classrooms.

It is not surprising, then, that some parents determined that these options were unsuitable for their child for a variety of reasons and searched for other choices such as fully offline homeschooling programs. U.S. Census data gathered in the fall of 2020 indicated that 11.1% of households with school-age children were homeschooling. This change represented “an increase of 5.6 percentage points and a doubling of U.S. households that were homeschooling at the start of the 2020-2021 school year compared to the prior year” (<https://www.census.gov>). Homeschooling during the 2020-2021 academic year showed an increase across racial groups and ethnicities, with homeschooling rates varying widely from state to state. While some states, like Alaska, showed an increase of 17%, others such as Maryland showed only slight increases of 1.7%. These differences may be attributed to local rates of Covid19 infections or academic choices made by school districts.

The focus of this article is one family who opted for a fully offline homeschool program for their first grader during the 2020-2021 academic year. The authors of this article, while not the parents of the child, acted as the primary educators in the discipline-specific areas, such as a basic understanding of mathematics, science, and social students concepts consistent with the child’s age and

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grade level. The primary emphasis of instruction, however, was ensuring that the child learned to read and write and was fully prepared to return to grade two, should full-time face-to-face instruction become available during the 2021-2022 academic year.

Working one-on-one with the child daily revealed areas of concern that were addressed over time by regularly incorporating her advanced artistic and verbal abilities in lessons that allowed her to be successful in learning to read, the area in which she was most disengaged, uncertain, and resistant. Although the authors utilized the school district's general guidelines as the basis for planning, over time the homeschooling process began to transcend these requirements to include pedagogy that addressed anger management, diversity training, and self-care. Hands-on and interactive lessons were designed to facilitate experiences for the student to improve not only skills and content knowledge, but to increase self-efficacy in all areas.

It is our hope that the experiences of the authors and the child can be used as a basis for understanding how educators in both homeschooling situations and other contexts can approach their instructional planning with a widened perspective that allows for increased use of nontraditional teaching resources and methodology (Safapour, Kermanschachi, & Tenaja, 2019). While traditional educational methods are based on instructors explaining topics in a textbook or using direct instruction to introduce, practice, and encourage mastery of discrete skills, nontraditional methods allow for more active participation (Niman & Kermanschachi, 2018). Such nontraditional teaching may include the use of games, open educational resources (OERs), and self-learning strategies that are designed to increase a learner's level of engagement, curiosity, and creativity, optimizing the learner's achievement and improving their sense of self-efficacy. As we began our homeschooling journey, we conceived of curricula that would allow the student to be a co-creator, as well as a participant, in unique activities and long-term projects.

Homeschooling from an Historical Perspective

Homeschooling was outlawed in many states until 1996 but has long since made a comeback (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). Compulsory school attendance and planned curricular instruction from trained professional educators was the norm in the United States from 1870s to the 1960s (Dumas, Gates, & Schwarzer, 2010), but amid the emergence of de-schooling ideas proliferated by authors such as John Holt (1964, 1967), the numbers of homeschooling families across America have continued to increase well into the 2000s (Cheng, Tuchman, & Wolf, 2016). Homeschooling as a social movement and practice has now become one of the most "robust form[s] of educational reform in the United States today," constituting almost one-fifth the size of private school enrollments and exceeding charter school enrollment by almost 500,000 (Murphy, 2014).

The increase of homeschooling families makes evident that families may choose homeschooling for their children for a variety of reasons. Those reasons appear to be changing over time (Bell & Kaplan, 2016), although much attention has been drawn to the ebb and flow of influence in homeschooling movements which indicate that it appears to be "a battle for the moral high ground in the country" (Murphy, 2016). Specifically, a look at trends in homeschooling indicate that parents may utilize it to push back against governmental control of curricula, including both the content that is taught and the methods and materials used to instruct. As a social movement, homeschooling is both the result of and a contributing factor to dynamic changes in religion, politics, and family, highlighting the prominence of Christian fundamentalism.

For some, however, one of the emerging reasons is the desire of some families to improve the rigor of education by accessing a variety of resources within both the home and the community. Families who homeschool for these purposes appear to spend less time on formal instruction and instead participate more fully in cultural and family activities than their public-school peers. This suggests that homeschooled students may avail themselves of opportunities that allow them to acquire cultural capital outside of formal instructional time, negating the concerns that some critics espouse regarding perceived isolation of homeschooled children (Hamlin, 2020). Indeed, increased opportunities for hands-on and active learning may be a fundamental reason why some families opt to homeschool. Participation in these types of activities also may play a compensatory role, possibly offsetting some of the perceived social deprivation attributed to the failure to attend brick-and-mortar schools (Hamlin, 2020). Another benefit of homeschooling lies in the fact that one-on-one instruction can progress at a faster pace than traditional whole group instruction, allowing for greater amounts of time for excursions, extracurricular activities, and deeper explorations into concepts interesting to the child (Bowen, 2014).

Despite these apparent benefits, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the benefits of homeschooling and the methods employed in its planning due to the scarcity of empirical data. While the literature provides a great deal of "ideological bantering as well as some solid conceptual modeling" (Murphy, 2014), our autoethnography utilizes a metacognitive approach that may help others understand pedagogical decision-making present in homeschooling situations. Studying homeschooling using this autoethnographical design allows us to shine a research-based light on homeschooling in a concrete way and to explore the underlying choices that are part of curricular planning, especially those that may lead to important but less obvious learning outcomes.

Qualitative Design

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of academic writing and research that draws on and analyzes the lived experiences of the author. The researcher displays multiple layers of consciousness, intentionally connecting the personal to the cultural; it connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues.

Grounded in careful and critical self-reflection, also called active self-reflexivity, autoethnography requires the researcher to engage in the "consideration of the ways in which researchers' past experiences, points of view, and roles impact these same

researchers' interactions with, and interpretations of, the research scene" (Tracy, 2020, p. 2). It acknowledges and values the researcher's relationship with others and shows individuals immersed in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and make life better by evaluating the meaning of their struggles. Our purpose, then, in adopting autoethnography as a research design was to analyze our processes, our rationales, and our procedures, and to use our experiences to garner insights into the larger cultures of which both we and the child we were teaching were a part.

Author Positionality

In this article we will provide an overview of the frameworks that informed our teaching, but before we delve into our strategies and experiences, it is necessary to provide information about our backgrounds. We are both biologically related to the child that was homeschooled, and as such, have a personal and familial connection to both the child and her parents. One of us is an adult preservice educator in the second year of a baccalaureate teachers college program, preparing to be a secondary teacher of history and social studies. This author was a paternal aunt to the child. The other of us is a teacher educator, having taught elementary children in literacy for almost two decades before teaching at the post-secondary level. This author was the paternal grandmother to the child.

We have written this manuscript with the intention of safeguarding our own voices, even as we engage in critical self-analysis. We both speak throughout this article, and we both participated equally in instructional planning and field trip organization, relying fully on each other's areas of expertise, knowledge, and pedagogical skill. This is in keeping with our resource-based theory of learning, which we cover in the next section.

Theoretical Frameworks

At the onset, it was our belief that a deficit view of learning would not be effective in teaching this child. The deficit model, which attributes failures in learning and achievement to a personal lack of effort or a specific deficiency in the individual child, assumes that the child will "do better" if they "work harder." Rather than focus on the failures and limitations of the educational or training systems in which a child operates, the deficit perspective puts the onus of failure squarely at the feet of the child.

Instead, we chose to utilize an abundance view embodied by the resource-based theory of learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) allowing us to focus on what skills our student brought to any given task, including her interests and abilities. We continually and formatively evaluated where she was academically and behaviorally, and then we implemented creative ways to serve and support these identified areas of need. The homeschooling process allowed the child to contribute to the planning, flow, timing, and overall design of each homeschooling session. The activities and lessons presented during homeschooling were designed to incorporate the student's interests, abilities, and strengths.

Resource-based learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) emphasizes the role of resources in teaching in learning, specifically the principles that are used to select and organize the content of learning materials, which include the nature of support available, the means and manner of assessment, the design and production of material, the use of media, and the roles and responsibilities of the teachers, learners, and materials. The design of any teaching method - and of language teaching methods in particular - will include views on the role of teachers, of learners and of materials. Resource-based learning presupposes that the interaction between the learner and the resources (which may include human resources) is the main structuring device of the learning situation. This brings to the forefront the pedagogical relationship between the learner and teacher.

Planning for Homeschooling

In the interest of disclosure, it is important to note that this child was being raised by young parents operating with limited financial and educational resources. For the first two years of the child's life, the child's mother did not work, and the father was the only means of support. Both the mother and father attended college, but neither obtained a college degree, limiting their financial income as they started their working years. The family qualified for the federal Head Start program, allowing the child to attend both 3-year-old and 4-year-old preschool designed to ready her for entrance to kindergarten at the local public school. By the time the child entered kindergarten, both parents were working full-time, and, while providing a greater household income, it limited their ability to spend time with the child and engage in school-oriented activities such as reading aloud to the child and practicing letter and numeral recognition.

To begin our homeschooling journey, we first looked at the age and abilities of the child with whom we were working, as well as the State learning standards. When we began, the child was six years old and entering her first-grade year. Based on the State's learning standards, there were several things we wanted the child to achieve by the end of the academic year in each of the main subject areas: English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

To ensure that the child, Everly, would have sufficient instruction in the four areas, we decided to divide each subject up and determined the amount of instructional time that would be required to meet the standards. We also determined, based on our own areas of interest and expertise, it would be prudent for both of us to instruct in the English language arts and mathematics, while one of us worked on social studies and the other worked on science. Then we conducted an informal, observational assessment of the child to see at what areas she excelled and what areas needed improvement.

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The assessment revealed that, while the child shone in mathematics and science understanding, she struggled with reading and social studies concepts. English language arts and social studies were also the subjects in which she showed the least interest and engagement. As a result, we planned each homeschooling session to include, at a minimum, one and a half to two hours of English language arts, one hour of mathematics, and then an hour of either social studies or science.

Whenever possible, we integrated reading and writing activities into the social studies or science topics. It is important to note here that the meaning of curriculum or subject integration may vary from source to source, and teachers or schools may integrate in different ways (Wall & Leckie, 2017). However, curriculum integration or interdisciplinary teaching, as it is often called, generally involves meaningful learning activities that are organized around issues or concepts that are important to teachers and students (Beane, 2005). Keeping in mind the relative strengths and weaknesses of the child, we usually integrated discrete reading and writing skills into large-scale themes, topics, and activities in other content areas, especially science and social studies. This strategy allowed the child to utilize her areas of strength and interest (drawing, verbal engagement, storytelling, and outdoor physical activity) in lessons designed to explore social studies topics, master difficult math concepts, or apply newly introduced English language arts skills in content-specific reading and writing activities.

Meeting and Transcending the Standards

In the next section, we elucidate the ways in which we worked toward meeting a particular standard in a specific content area. This is followed by an explanation of how that standard was extended intentionally using the child's interest, strength, or because of a particular need that was identified through formative, observational assessments.

Social Studies

Our social studies learning objectives were many. We wanted the child to understand how time is broken up into categories; identify the ways in which maps work and what they are used for; comprehend that different groups of people interact with their environments in unique ways; understand that needs change over time; articulate the roles of laws and public service workers in our society; respect the opinions, rights, and beliefs of others; understand currency is used as a source of economic exchange; and understand people produce and consume goods and services as well as trade goods and services for the things they want.

Meeting the Standards.

One of the first lessons in social studies for Everly was an introduction to community. In addition to walking around her neighborhood and making a map of her street (including visible landmarks) during an outdoor learning session, lessons were created around the roles and responsibilities of community helpers, such as fire fighters, police officers, nurses, and teachers. These activities included worksheets that explored some of the most common "helpers" and the jobs they do, as well as using coloring books and reading picture books about these roles. Most instruction took the form of a general discussion, where Everly and the instructor exchanged questions and responses regarding the role of the specific helper, the uniform the helper might wear, the tools the helper might need, and the services provided by that helper.

We were fortunate enough to have access to a fire museum nearby, allowing us to plan a day trip to extend her understanding. The fire museum was organized to take an historic look at firefighting, including old fire trucks, uniforms, and fire notification systems. The museum also provided hands-on activities including sliding down fire poles, touching the clothing of fire fighters, identifying fire concerns, and practicing the basic rules of fire safety in a playhouse. We spent several hours at the museum, and then followed it with an art lesson where Everly used finger paints on her hand to make five red fire fighters, added "faces" and helmets, and learned a poem that can be sung to the tune of I'm a Little Teapot: "I'm a little firefighter on the go; Here is my helmet. Here is my hose. When I see a fire, hear me shout, 'Turn on the water and put the fire out.'" While completing the art project, we recognized that although Everly had access to a wide range of skin tone circles to be used for firefighter faces, she chose to use only "white" faces on her artwork (see Fig.1). We discussed the fact that there were other circles available, but she was adamant that she wanted to use only the lighter circles on her craft. As a result of this, we decided to plan for age-appropriate diversity training as part of her future instruction which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

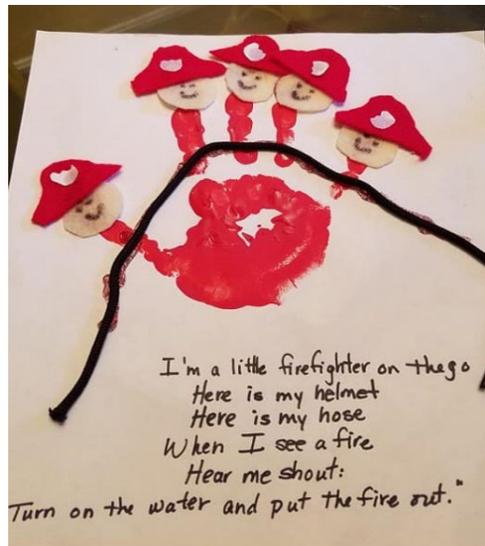


Figure 1. Everly's fireman art activity

Social studies content included learning that we live on planet Earth and identifying the continents on Earth. We covered information about how continents are split into countries, and that within these countries there are states and provinces which have cities within them. This information was reviewed daily until she showed a full understanding, and we then began working on naming all of the continents, which came rather easily to her. To make all this practice more relevant, we discussed the fact that, while we live in the United States, our family came from Italy, which we helped her identify on the world map as the “boot.” This led seamlessly into a lesson on ethnicity, where we explained that because her skin is white and her physical characteristics are more European (as indicated on the world map,) her race is “White.”

The conversations around these topics were fluid and often child directed. For example, when discussing familial ethnicity and relationships, she asked questions about her family and how adults in her life were related to her (e.g., her dad is the son of her “Grammy,” and her dad has two sisters who are her aunts). A puzzle map of the United States was purchased and was put together several times, allowing us to point out what state she lived in, what state(s) her grandparents live in, and what states she has been to or would be going to for vacation. We also practiced her complete address and had her commit it to memory as a form of assessment.

During the fall of 2020, during the homeschooling period, Everly went to Salem, Massachusetts for a Halloween trip with her parents. Before she went, Salem, Massachusetts was located on the U.S. puzzle map. This organically led into an age-appropriate discussion about the Salem Witch Trials. Everly questioned why the “witches” were put on trial, and since Everly does not have a religious background, we briefly contextualized Christianity and defined the term “Puritans” so that she would have some background information in which to frame the historical content she would be experiencing on her trip. This instruction naturally led into a conversation about cultures, how different cultures have religions, and how her family had an ethnic culture which included traditions (i.e., celebrating Christmas and Easter, the things her family cooked, the things her family does for fun). It is important to emphasize that these discussions were organic and not “instruction heavy,” with the information and vocabulary (e.g., culture, religion, ethnicity, states, tradition, etc.) emerging out of ongoing curricular conversations that included experiences and ideas relevant to the child's life.

Transcending the Standards

Helping young children develop cultural competence and compassion is no easy task, and due to Everly's lack of POC in her artwork during the helper unit and her sincere interest in her own cultural identity and heritage, we determined that age-appropriate diversity training was an important next step.

We started the cultural awareness unit by reading two books to her, *Antiracist Baby* (Kendi, 2020) and *Sulwe* (Nyong'o, 2019). During the readings of the book, we encouraged Everly to ask questions and comment about what she thought of them. *Antiracist Baby* presents “nine steps to make equity a reality,” depicting illustrations of diverse, happy babies and parents in fun and interesting situations. Each step (such as “Open your eyes to all skin colors” and “Celebrate all our differences”) includes a brief, rhyming explanation. When reading *Antiracist Baby* (Kendi, 2020), Everly appeared less interested in the content of the book, but she enjoyed the illustrations. She completed a one-page book report that included the title, author, a dictated statement of her favorite part, a comment reflecting what she learned from the book, and then a picture of her favorite part of the book (see fig. 2) that indicated she liked the part that indicated we should “believe that we will overcome racism.”

Sulwe (Nyong'o, 2019) is a story of a young Black girl, dealing with issues of colorism and self-esteem and is based on the author's own life growing up as a dark-skinned girl. Having many members of her family light-skinned, the author learns at a young age that darker skin is not privileged. When introduced to this text, Everly exhibited a keen interest in both the story and the illustrations. She was very touched by the book, asking questions such as, “Why would she hate her skin?” and commenting, “The goddesses are so beautiful!” By the end of the book, Everly asked for her own copy to read at home which we noted as a positive

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change in both interest and engagement, given the fact that she often reticent about reading. She completed another one-page book report for this text as well.

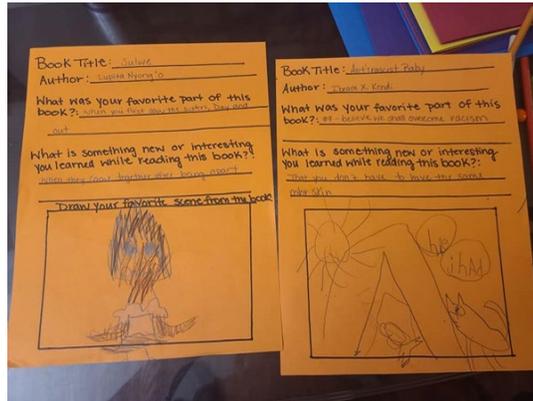


Figure 2. Everly's book reports for *Sulwe* and *Antiracist Baby*

Given the fact that one of Everly's responses to the book report indicated that she had learned "that you don't have to have the same color skin," we decided to follow the reading of the books with discussions that defined "racism" and "discrimination" in age-appropriate ways. In order provide an historical context to these terms, we explained the history of slavery. By the end of the discussion, Everly was able tell us how slaves were brought to America, what unfairness they experienced, and had a clearer sense of the historical period and purpose of slavery. Although she had more historical "facts," we still determined there was more that we could do to increase her emerging cultural awareness and sensitivity.

The field trip that followed this unit was an excursion to the National Underground Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. We spent the day carefully guiding Everly through exhibits that included a timeline of slavery from African capture until Emancipation, Ku Klux Klan robes and hoods, a modern slavery exhibit, a computer simulation where "decisions" needed to be made about how to escape slavery in the South and travel to the North, and an opportunity to "try on" chains to see how heavy and uncomfortable they were.

The most impactful activity during this field trip was a movie clip that looked at what it felt like hiding during the underground railroad progression. The museum had a "house" where the "escaped slaves" had to hide in a spot under the steps as they had in the movie clip, which we experienced alongside her. While walking her through this exhibit and the activities, she became very emotional and began asking why people would treat another person like that. We responded to Everly by explaining that such behavior comes from a lack of understanding and that learning about these events and situations can help individuals see things through someone else's eyes, leading to a greater level of compassion and empathy. We reminded her that, although she was young, she likely knew more than some people about the experience of slaves and that she could help others be sensitive and caring by her own example. Later in the day, she requested to read more books like *Sulwe* in future homeschooling lessons and asked if we could come back to the museum again. These conversations showed a heightened level of concern, empathy, and understanding that we continued to nurture through the remainder of her homeschooling experience, especially given her interest in the topic and desire to know more.

English Language Arts

In the English language arts, we wanted Everly to be able to read text at an appropriate complexity for her grade level; comprehend the text with an ability to describe characters, main events, and settings; identify words and phrases; use illustrations and details to help her describe characters, settings, and events in a text; ask questions to help her clarify words and phrases in a text; know and apply phonics and word analysis for her grade level; demonstrate her understanding of syllables, spoken words, and phonemes; and read with accuracy and fluency. We also wanted her to be able to write all upper and lower-case letters and begin writing words and phrases to the best of her abilities using invented spelling (Read, 1975).

Meeting the Standards

While Everly was not read to at home regularly during her emergent literacy years, she was engaged in meaningful and responsive conversations with her parents and came to the beginning of homeschooling with excellent listening and speaking vocabularies. She had basic phonemic awareness introduced during her kindergarten year in public education. While she understood that words have sounds and sounds put together make words, she did not know the names and sounds of all the letters of the alphabet, could not identify all upper- and lower-case letters by sight, and did not utilize blends, digraphs, or short vowel sounds.

A short three- or four-session review of these was all that was required to begin the task of teaching using a synthetic phonics orientation, but it was clear that Everly preferred a more hands-on approach to learning difficult or confusing sounds and letter combinations. She was responsive to picture sorting, enjoyed a range of games related to letter learning and sound identification, and was highly motivated by extrinsic rewards such as stickers, edible treats, and time for outdoor activities. As a result, we developed and utilized word sorting activities (Bear et al., 2015) that allowed her to review and master a wide range of sounds and begin the process of classification (such as putting words in word families) and sound pattern identification. We also created word family letter

slides to practice beginning and ending consonant sound changes and regularly practiced VCV words using developmentally appropriate sets of Bob books (Maslen, 1976).

Transcending the Standards

Everly was particularly fond of hands-on activities, including the word sorts (Bear, 2015) and file folder games (Burch, 2001; Presnell, 2005) that focused on letter sounds or combinations of letters such as consonant blends and digraphs. She also enjoyed being read to from “chapter books,” as part of her homeschooling experience, which we began to use as a reward for attentive behavior during phonics lessons. While the process of mastering sounds was not particularly difficult for Everly, she was dispassionate and detached from applying that skill to the actual reading task when asked to decode connected text during oral reading. She enjoyed many of the activities that required her to sort pictures by sound and appreciated opportunities to use her advanced drawing skills to create pictures of words with specific sounds (like a chart of pictures that started with /ch/, /sh/, and /th/.) However, she became flustered and anxious when she was required to decode unknown words with those sounds in the Bob books (Maslen, 1976). She regularly complained that reading was “too hard” and bemoaned her belief that she just wasn’t “a good reader.”

To encourage ownership of the reading process, we allowed Everly to choose the books she wanted to read, while still controlling the number of texts she consumed during an instructional period. Additionally, we used a reward system of drawing a small star in the front of every text she read satisfactorily and presented her with a tangible “reward” (e.g., stickers, candy, a 10-minute break, a chapter of a book read aloud to her, etc.) for each book read successfully. The number and frequency of these “rewards” were slowly decreased and eventually eliminated, making the actual drawing of the star on the inside cover of the book the reward for mastery, as well as the opportunity to have a chapter of a Roald Dahl book read aloud to her. Consistent practice over time allowed her to see herself as a reader, although she remained hesitant to initiate decoding independently when required to read text in non-instructional situations (e.g., when reading a children’s menu at a restaurant).

Early on in homeschooling, we were surprised to find that, although Everly did not enjoy reading, she loved writing. Her interest in drawing illustrations and then “writing” the narrative portion was profound and consistent, and while she often tired of decoding text during “reading,” she rarely, if ever, tired of “encoding” a story for our consumption. She enthusiastically embraced invented spelling (Kolodziej & Columba, 2005) often writing notes prior to our arrival for us to read. Using the Language Experience Approach (Allen, 1976), we emphasized the basic tenets of the reading-writing connection: “What I can say, I can write; What I write, I can read; I can read what I write and what other people can write for me to read.” Over time, providing Everly with ample opportunities to write and illustrate her own books (often modeled after Bob books or related to an area of content instruction) improved Everly’s sense of herself as a reader and generated improved self-efficacy.

During the homeschooling year, Everly progressed in reading ability. She proceeded through several levels of Bob books (Maslen, 1976) before we began requiring her to read in other contexts. During field trips and other excursions, we encouraged her to read decodable words on children’s menus at restaurants and helped her to apply decoding skills to her favorite video game, Animal Crossings. Important words for Animal Crossings (such as character names and places) were also put on index cards for her to recognize as sight words. Although Everly remained slow to independently attempt reading when faced with real-world text, she regularly initiated writing tasks, such as writing a letter and list to Santa, generating “notes” to her parents and instructors, and completing worksheets and workbook pages independently during instruction.

Self-care and Anger Management

While there are no specific standards for first graders about self-care and anger management in the State learning standards, there are societal expectations for the behavior of young children in traditional schools or public settings. From the beginning of the homeschooling process, it was clear that Everly was fiercely independent, impatient to talk in verbal exchanges, and had difficulty expressing her wants and needs. When faced with any challenging situation, whether it was during an instructional session or a field trip, Everly would talk loudly over the speaker, say, “I know!” and refuse to listen, or show extreme frustration through tantrums, uncontrollable crying, or expressions of anger.

Traditional discipline in a homeschooling situation (such as using a time out or restricting enjoyable tasks or treats) did not make sense in the homeschool setting, especially since the homeschooling session was a limited block of time conducted by non-parental adults. Despite an award system, where Everly earned points and treats for good behavior and extended periods of positive work during a session, it became clear that Everly struggled to identify her feelings, name them, and know what to do when she experienced negative emotions. She was prone to high levels of frustration when work did not come easily, interrupted instruction with statements of “I know!” especially when directions for assignments were reviewed and tried to control the amount and pace of work covered or assigned during a block of instructional time.

In keeping with our desire to emphasize resource-based learning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986), we decided to emphasize the resources available to us in teaching Everly at home, specifically the availability of self-care and self-help strategies. Capitalizing on her independent nature and desire to accomplish tasks with little to no direction, we decided to allow her discretion and choices where it made sense and did not interfere with the educational process. It was explained to her that we recognized she “knew” many things and could accomplish various tasks without our help and input. Thus, we encouraged and eventually required her to do three things prior to our arrival each instructional day: 1) be dressed; 2) brush her hair (and teeth, if she had already eaten breakfast); 3) present a tidy room. We also integrated routines such as making breakfast to our homeschooling routine, when applicable, and encouraged her to keep the makeshift “classroom” organized and free of clutter. This standing “assignment” allowed Everly a daily opportunity to prove what she “knew” and “could do” by herself, setting the stage for a more peaceful interaction when we arrived.

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Transcending the Standards

While self-care increased Everly's self-esteem and pride in accomplishment, we wanted to work through her anger management issues and get to some of the root causes for her impulsive behaviors. We purchased a copy of *Anger Management: A Workbook for Kids* (Snowden, 2018) and began to engage in the assignments and activities with Everly during each instructional period. This text was chosen from among many available because of its hands-on and art-driven orientation, as well as the fact that it emphasized a multi-sensory approach to identifying, naming, and acting on emotions (e.g., How does anger look? How does it feel? How can I know I'm getting angry?). The book provided a rich and useful set of practices and exercises that could be used by young children to develop the skills to manage their internal emotional states.

Because Everly was an emerging reader, most of the text was read aloud to her, but the colorful illustrations and practical activities were interest-inducing for her, and the book quickly became a favorite (and requested) part of homeschooling instruction. Everly was particularly responsive to the assignments that required her to draw pictures of emotionally charged situations, rate by number or "thermometer" her level of emotional intensity to specific scenarios, and provide narratives about situations where she experienced hurt, anger, sadness, disappointment, etc. The text also encouraged the student to recognize the feelings in others, assisting us with helping Everly increase her level of empathy and emotional intelligence when dealing with others.

After approximately ten instructional periods of using the anger management workbook, Everly spontaneously began referring to the book during periods of high stress. She would refer to the "thermometer" of emotional intensity by naming a number that corresponded to her level of anger and reminded us of activities we had completed. Taking our cue from her point of reference, we began asking her to be more specific in naming her feelings, replacing words like "mad" with "frustrated," "hurt," "disappointed," and "upset," while concurrently requiring her to think through her reactions and behavior in the moment. The ongoing conversation with Everly also provided a platform for us to engage in meaningful discussions with Everly's parents so that alternative forms of discipline and rewards systems could be put in place to maintain a degree of consistency between non-educational home and homeschooling periods.

Discussion

As we found out over the academic year, one of the advantages of homeschooling was the opportunity and ability to bring all manner of resources to bear on our pedagogical practices. We were able to utilize the child's interests, abilities, and strengths to increase her level of engagement in instructional tasks, while concurrently addressing her areas that, in a transmission-oriented classroom, would be considered deficit. To extend instruction, the flexible homeschool schedule allowed us to take weekly field trips, extend and deepen lessons that were of particular interest to Everly, and modify our practices by creating and purchasing materials that capitalized on her skill set and preference for hands-on, active learning. Because of the one-on-one instructional format, we were able to continually evaluate her progress and make adaptive changes to our teaching processes in real time. Perhaps more importantly, the homeschooling process allowed Everly to ask meaningful questions in such a way as to contribute to the timing and overall design of each homeschooling session. It was not uncommon for a lesson in one area to turn into an ongoing lesson on a different, but related, topic. A lesson on bees collecting pollen on their legs and sucking nectar from the flowers and storing it in their crop, for example, led to several comparative lessons on how human digestion works. The table below is a graphic representation of how the sample lessons included here, while meeting the core lesson or content area objective, also transcended those learning goals (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Learning Objectives and Transcended Outcomes

	Content Area Learning Objective	Lesson or Activity	Assessment or Evaluation	Revised Lesson Approach	Transcended Outcome
Math	The student was expected to count money, including pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters.	Pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters activity worksheet	Everly struggled to complete assignment because she was unaware of how to skip count	Took her outside and wrote numbers by 10 in chalk on the blocks on the sidewalk; had her fill it in so she could visualize skip counting as "jumping" from one number to the next	Everly not only learned skip counting by tens, but was more motivated to do other skip counting (by 2s, 5s, 25s, etc.)
Social Studies	The student was expected to name community helpers, articulate their roles & responsibilities, and	Worksheets from Social Studies activity book about various community helpers (police,	As a follow up, we took her on a field trip to the Fire Museum to ensure she understood the	We realized during follow-up art extension activity from the fire museum that	We initiated a diversity unit, including learning about race and racism, history of

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	recognize their uniforms or appearance	firefighters, nurses, EMT, etc.)	role of fire fighters, historical concepts of firefighting, and fire safety rules and procedures	Everly exhibited a lack of awareness with regard to diversity	slavery, which led to another field trip: National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
Language Arts	The student was expected to utilize decoding skills in both receptive language activities (reading) and expressive language activities (writing)	Everly engaged in daily hands-on activities to practice sound-symbol correspondence; these were then applied to both reading decoding activities and invented spelling during writing assignments	Everly assimilated to writing activities adeptly, but was reluctant to apply them to reading activities	We had Everly begin writing her own “books” that she would illustrate and dictate the story. These were then used as text for her to read, increasing her level of interest, engagement, and improving the relevance to her lived experience	Everly began reading her own “books” and showed improved interest in reading the books written by others. She began to use invented spelling and picture clues to generate “notes” to the homeschool teachers without prompting
Science	The student was expected to list the characteristics of the insect: including naming head, abdomen, thorax, and knowing that the six legs attach to the middle section of the body	Everly was interested in bees and honey making, so we read two books about bees making honey, and had her create a bee using art materials around the house, correctly labeling the three parts and attaching six legs and wings	Everly mastered the learning objectives for the lesson, but questioned why bees wouldn’t “digest” the pollen and the honey when it went into their mouth like humans	After the completed lesson on bees, bee body parts, and honey making, we decided to learn about human digestion. We watched videos and the <i>Magic School Bus</i> episodes about both bees and about human digestion	Learning about the differences between human and insect digestion; we did honey and honeycomb tasting, and visited a farm

Self-Care	No formal learning objective	No original lesson/activity	We noticed that Everly was having trouble with self-care (brushing hair, brushing teeth, washing hands, etc.) in preparation for our homeschooling sessions	Taught her how to do these things and expected that she complete them every day before homeschool; checked to make sure she did them every morning	She learned how to take care of herself and also learned why it is important to maintain hygiene for both physical and mental health. Improved sense of independence and self-efficacy
Anger Management	No formal learning objective	No original lesson/activity	We noticed that Everly had difficulty naming her feelings and engaging in self-regulation of emotional during transitional	Purchased an anger management textbook online that highlighted her drawing ability and provided activities (oral,	Everly began to name her feelings, as well as indicate the intensity of her feelings in stressful situations. Improved sense

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			periods or periods of frustration	written, graphic, and sensory) that required her to think about situations that caused her anger, stress, frustration, etc.	of emotional stability and self-control
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The educators in this study were able to draw from a wide range of available resources that may have been untapped in other contexts—puzzles purchased from dollar stores, coloring book pages, neighborhood walks, family genealogy, dot-to-dot, word find, and crossword puzzle books, library books, teacher-created materials, sight word cards, video resources (especially the Magic School Bus animated series), and a wide range of cultural capital in the form of public museums, aquariums, zoos, personal oral histories, and family-owned farms. We looked specifically at how the role of these resources played an integral role in meeting and exceeding learning outcomes, especially in the areas of cultural awareness, self-efficacy, and character building. While the role of the homeschooling educators mattered, it was the interests and abilities of the child that ultimately drove what teaching methods and materials were utilized. Resource-based learning, because it presupposes that the interaction between the learner and the resources, became the critical structuring device for all our lesson planning, curricular decisions, and instructional methodology.

It is important to note that the homeschooling teachers in this situation were also educators. The ability to access and evaluate appropriate resources, design a trajectory that will lead to learning outcomes, and evaluate the student regularly presupposed the researchers’ experience and training as teachers. One cannot underestimate the value of academic and professional praxis when considering curricular and instructional decision-making, making the process of short-term lesson and long-term unit planning more efficient and effective.

That said, the researchers engaged in critical self-reflection and recognize that their familial relationship with the student led to some academic and personal tensions. There was a propensity, on the part of the child, to push back on the role of the teachers in the homeschooling situation because they were, in personal contexts, an aunt and grandmother. While parents may also experience this in a homeschooling setting, it was our belief that parents, as part of the child’s nuclear family, are able to maintain their traditional roles as rule-makers and rule-keepers in the home. Aunts and grandparents may have a less structured role and be seen by the child as “fun adults” rather than discipline-oriented persons with academic authority.

The traditional role of aunt and grandmother also meant that both instructors may have been more inclined to accept learning approximations, rather than pressing for academic perfection as they might in a classroom with non-related students. The child was also provided greater leeway in academic and learning behaviors (e.g., completing seatwork independently, sustained oral reading requirements, memorization of sight words and math facts) and was granted more time in movement toward academic excellence. More importantly, both educators had areas of interest and expertise (in social studies/history and literacy) which led to greater emphases on these content areas. This is not to say that a balanced curricular approach was not attempted, but it would be accurate to suggest that more time and attention was often devoted to those subjects than science and mathematics.

It is also important to note that limited summative assessments were administered. The educators, buoyed by the one-on-one instructional methods available, relied heavily on formative assessments, including observation, checklists, work samples, and electronic portfolios, pictures, and videos. While not necessarily an issue during the instructional process, the lack of a more structured evaluative process may lead to a lack of understanding of the child’s long-term learning and retention for the purpose of integration into traditional face-to-face public schooling.

Conclusion

Consistent with current research, we found that homeschooling allowed a higher rate of participation in hands-on learning activities. It also provided opportunities to increase our student’s exposure to museums, art galleries, farms, and other community-based resources. We were also able to improve the child’s self-efficacy and sense of self as a “reader.” While some of these skills remain untested in a more traditional setting (i.e., upon return to a brick-and-mortar school), we concluded that the homeschooling experience was mostly positive for both the student and the educators.

It is also important to indicate that, despite the positive outcomes of this experience, the educators remain steadfast proponents of public educational institutions. The information herein indicates a best-case scenario where the homeschooling teachers are also traditionally trained educators with exposure to both learning theory and pedagogical praxis. Training in teachers’ college (and experience in traditional classrooms) allowed the homeschooling teachers to choose methods and materials that had potential to maximize learning under very specific circumstances and for a limited time.

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