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Criticism and education: dissatisfaction of parents who homeschool and those who send their children to school with the education system

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ABSTRACT

Homeschooling is a practice in which children of all ages do not attend school, usually by choice of their parents. Research has found diverse reasons for choosing homeschooling, including, reason related to family, personal safety, and others. However, the main reason cited repeatedly for homeschooling is dissatisfaction of parents with the quality of education that children receive at school. The present research used qualitative instruments to examine the criticism of the education system voiced by parents who homeschooled, in comparison with that heard from parents who sent their children to conventional schools. The findings indicate significant differences between the two groups in the nature of their criticism of the education system. The results of the comparison suggest different perceptions of the system and of the purpose of learning. This may enlighten our understanding of the differences among parents who choose different styles of education for their children.

Introduction

Homeschooling is a practice in which children of all ages do not attend school, usually by choice of their parents. The notion of not attending school is not new. In fact, throughout most of human history, the majority of children did not go to school, but studied, if at all, in their homes or learned a trade as apprentices. A very small group of children, usually those of a very high socioeconomic class or children destined for different religious positions, studied in educational institutions (Hiatt 1994; Tyack 1980). This situation changed dramatically during the industrial revolution. Many countries enacted mandatory education laws that required all parents to send their children to school to acquire an education. In order to accommodate the large number of children who therefore began studying, many schools were built and teachers trained. The practice of education at home became marginal, and the decisive majority of children in Western countries began attending school on a regular basis, by force of law (Evangelisti 2013; Kostelecká 2010; Neuman and Guterman 2013).

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In the past few decades, we have seen a growing trend of returning to the practice of homeschooling. Many parents are once again assuming more responsibility for their children's education, removing them from the schools, and teaching them at home. According to different estimates, this practice, which began several decades ago with a few families, now encompasses over two million children in the US, which has the largest percentage and number of children who are homeschooled. Other countries in the West also allow homeschooling; most notable in this respect is England, where an estimated 80,000 children are now being homeschooled (Aurini and Davies 2005; Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Monk 2009; Waddell 2010).

Many countries have adapted their mandatory education laws so that parents who educate their children at home and fulfill certain conditions (which vary by country) are considered to comply with the law (Meighan 1997; Petrie 1995; Taylor and Petrie 2000).

In Israel, the practice of homeschooling also began growing a few decades ago. Recently, procedures have been introduced to provide parents with exemptions from the mandatory education law, in effect allowing them to teach their children at home under the supervision of ministry of education representatives. According to current estimates, the number of families who homeschool their children in Israel is over 400. This also represents an upward trend; about two decades ago, the estimated number was only 60 (Neuman and Guterman 2013).

Many studies (Anthony and Burroughs 2010; Collom 2005; Mackey, Reese, and Mackey 2011; Neuman and Aviram 2008; Rothermel 2011), as well as meta-analyses (Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Spiegler 2010) have examined why parents choose homeschooling. The results have indicated a wide range of reasons, including, among other things, a desire to provide religious and moral instruction, health, family structure (the desire to keep one's children in the family setting), personal safety (fear of the high level of violence in the schools), socioeconomic factors, parents' negative school experiences, and others.

However, one of the main reasons for opting to homeschool is the growing dissatisfaction of parents with the quality of the education that children receive at school (Anthony and Burroughs 2010). This dissatisfaction is not limited to homeschooling parents alone; in fact, many studies have revealed dissatisfaction and criticism of the education system among parents who send their children to school, as well.

A comprehensive survey conducted in the United States in 1994 about the views of parents regarding schools indicated that a large majority believed the public schools did not supply the minimal requirements of education, namely, the provision of an organised and safe environment and effective teaching of the basics expected of schools. Most of them believed that the schools fell short of fulfilling their fundamental role: to ensure that the children master basic essential skills, such as reading and writing English and doing simple arithmetic, acquire general knowledge, and understand science, history, and geography. In fact, people considered the schools so lacking in order and discipline that learning could not take place. In addition, there was a sense that the school environment is becoming increasingly violent and unsafe (Farkas et al. 1994). A survey of over 27,000 parents in the United States also showed that the strongest variable regarding parental satisfaction with the school was the level of personal safety of their children (Friedman, Bobrowski, and Geraci 2006). Phi Delta Kappan's 2017 yearly

poll indicated that the American public was largely critical of the nation's schools as a whole, but parents were less so when it came to their own children's public schools (Kappan 2017).

Parents choose three main types of reaction to this dissatisfaction: the first is to try to resolve the difficulties within the educational institutions that their children attend. The second is to transfer the children to other schools. For example, Bukhari and Randall's (2009) study of parents who transferred their children from one school to another revealed that the main reasons for doing so were the quality of the curriculum, moral values, religious values, and quality of instruction. Some of these parents claimed that the former school did not meet the needs of their children (such as, for instance, learning disabilities); others cited problems of class size, lack of programs to cultivate talented and gifted students, bullying in the school, and the like. Bennett (1996) also reported that parents thought their children studied in classes that were too large, which affected the quality of instruction and learning. In another study, Brown, Aalsma, and Ott (2013) found that parents of whose children had experienced bullying in school and not received a fitting response from the school administration were forced, in some cases, to transfer their children to another educational institution. The third way that parents react to their dissatisfaction with the education system is to leave it completely and homeschool instead.

Thus, the common denominator among the parents who choose any of these three means of coping is their dissatisfaction with and criticism of the education system, but they differ in the strategies they choose in response to this dissatisfaction. Strategy A, which is shared by the first two groups (changing the present education system or moving the child to a different school system) represent ways of dealing with the problem within the existing systems. In contrast, Strategy B, which is characteristic of homeschoolers, is to abandon the education system all together.

Parents who choose the first or second strategy are actually making a change, moving from the existing situation to one that they consider preferable. In order to understand this change, it is interesting to apply the conceptual framework of first- and second-order change, described by Aviram (2010). According to Aviram, this perspective is derived from the philosophy of science. Kuhn first coined the terms in 1962 to differentiate between changes that occur within an existing system of paradigms and are based on the accepted fundamental assumptions, and changes in the system as a whole, which lead to different basic assumptions and a transition from the old world-view to a new one, that sometimes contradicts the former. Kuhn also referred to second-order change as "paradigmatic change". Watalawik, Weakland, and Fish (1974) described first-order change as one that takes place while preserving the existing perception of the situation (that is, without changing significant parameters of the system), and second-order change as one that necessitates a cognitive leap, in order to change essential parameters of the system. Aviram (2010) cited Cuban's (1989) definition of first-order change with respect to the education system as an improvement of what already exists in the system, without changing its essential characteristics, and second-order change as including alteration of significant characteristics of the system, such as a shift of goals, substance, and the like.

Both the parents who choose Strategy A and those who adopt Strategy B are critical of the education system, but they choose to deal with this criticism in different ways. In

other words, they adopt different means to change the current situation. Therefore, one of the questions of interest in this regard, which has not yet been studied, is whether there is a difference between the respective criticisms of the two groups that might explain their choice of different reactions to their dissatisfaction. This is an important question, because the answer could shed light on the difference between parents who homeschool and those who send their children to school, and this could lead to relevant insights not only about homeschooling, but about education in general.

In the present research, negative views or criticisms of schools were collected from parents who sent their children to schools and from parents who homeschooled.

It should be noted that an attempt was not made in this article to present a balanced picture of the school system. Instead, the aim was to evoke, examine, and compare the criticism of the schools held by two groups that had chosen different strategies in response to their criticism.

Methods

A qualitative method was chosen for the purpose of the present research, because of the need to map out the parents' criticism of school education, instead of using existing maps of this criticism. The point of departure was the assumption that remapping was necessary because the purpose of the research was to compare the criticism of parents who homeschooled with that of parents who sent their children to school, and the mapping system used for one group would not be suitable for studying the other group. Remapping the types of criticism of the two groups may help clarify the difference between them.

A hermeneutic-phenomenological research design was adopted (Glense and Peshkin 1992; Maykut and Morehouse 1997; Shkedi 2011); therefore, employment of qualitative methodology, and particularly semi-structured in-depth interviews (Creswell 1995), may shed light on the parents' criticism of the schools. The methods of sampling and analysis were chosen for the purpose of understanding the unique and the particular aspects of the interviews, in order to later formulate generalisations (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Simons 1996; Stake 1995).

Participants

For the purpose of the research, 15 mothers who sent their children to conventional schools and 15 mothers who homeschooled their children were chosen. The home-schooling mothers were chosen by means of a flyer distributed to homeschooling families; the mothers who sent their children to school were selected by means of a flyer sent to them. The choice of a sample of mothers only was based on the knowledge that among homeschooling families in Israel, the mother is usually the parent who stays at home most of the day.

The participating mothers had an average education of 15.80 years, with a standard deviation of 2.14. In order to examine the possibility of a difference in education between the mothers in the two groups, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results indicated no difference between the groups in terms of mothers' education, t (28) = 0.01, $p > .05$. The average age of the mothers was 38.43, with a standard deviation

of 3.87. To examine the possibility of a difference between the two groups in age of the mothers, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. The results indicated no different between the groups in terms of age of the mothers, $t(28) = 0.61$, $p > .05$. The average number of children per family was 2.90 with a standard deviation of 1.03. An independent samples *t*-test showed no difference between the groups in number of children per family, $t(28) = 1.15$, $p > .05$. All the participants were non-religious.

Research procedure

The research was conducted by interviewers who were trained for this purpose, including practice using the interview guidelines for this study. All the interviews were held in the homes of the families. The interviewers arranged to visit at times that were convenient for the mothers. Upon arrival, the interviewer explained the purpose of the research, the procedure, and how the data collected would be used in detail. Each mother then signed an informed consent form and the interview began.

A semi-structured interview was used. It included direct questions regarding the research question ("what is your opinion of the school"; "what do you think about the education system"; "what do you think is problematic about the education system") as well as an open-ended conversation about different aspects of education. The purpose of the two parts of the interview was to obtain direct answers to questions, and also to enable the interviewees to express themselves freely regarding the research subject or other related issues. The assumption was that combining these two approaches would elicit rich information about the attitudes and opinions of the parents regarding the education system.

All the interviews were recorded with two recording devices (a main device and a backup device, in case of technical problems), and transcribed.

Data analysis

The data analysis was comprised of three main stages (in accordance with Giorgi 1975).

In the first stage, data preparation and the interviews were scanned to find those passages that were relevant to the research question. Only paragraphs and sentences that included parents' criticism of the education system were chosen.

In the second stage, the preliminary analysis, each of the relevant sentences that were identified in the first stage was assigned a title that reflected the themes it contained. Upon completion of this stage, each of the analysed passages was associated with a name/theme.

In the third stage, the mapping analysis, the themes were organised into super-themes. Upon completion of this stage, each of the themes found in the second stage was associated with one of the super-themes.

The thematic analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti software for analysis of qualitative data. Among other things, this program enables assignment of themes to textual passages, as well as graphic representation of these themes, in order to examine the relationships among them.

In order to examine the reliability of the analysis, and based on Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness concept (1986), peer- debriefing method was utilised: the researcher

conducted the first stage of the research (choosing the relevant passages) and a colleague researcher then conducted a critical examination of the passages chosen and those eliminated from the research. Disagreements between the researchers regarding any passage were resolved by means of discussion.

Once agreement between the researchers was achieved regarding the relevant text passages, the researcher conducted the second and third stages (division into themes and division of the themes into super-themes). The results of these 2 stages were then given to the colleague researcher for critical examination. Here, too, disagreement between the researchers was resolved in a discussion between them.

Findings

The analysis of the interviews of the parents who homeschooled and those who sent their children to school led to a list of themes divided into two main groups of super-themes: themes regarding the values and subject matter taught in the school, and themes regarding the teaching methods employed in the schools.

Both the homeschoolers and the parents who sent their children to school referred extensively to these two super-themes. Correspondingly, the findings are presented here according to these super-themes, (a) values and subject matter, and (b) teaching methods.

Values and subject matter taught in the schools

Parents whose children attended school

The parents whose children attended school spoke mainly about the school's failure to adequately teach the students different aspects of the subjects studied. They noted that in practice, the school did not teach the children, but primarily gave parents free time to work and seek self-fulfillment, in effect serving as a babysitter:

> In my view, the school framework is much like a babysitter, because actually, if we honestly want them to know arithmetic and English, we might be able to have three concentrated months a year or a certain number of extracurricular classes for them to learn that and waste the rest of the time on other things. There's no doubt that we need six hours a day more because the parents have to work than because the children need to learn or be in society of such rigid rules and sit at a desk and not move and raise their hands to go to the bathroom. It's not really to teach or educate them. This framework, in my view, is intended to solve the problem of getting people out to work. (1)

> [The school] gives me peace and quiet; it gives me time to go to work and empower myself too, and on days that I don't work, it also gives me free time to myself. I like knowing I have a free day. (5)

In terms of subject matter, the parents noted that the children did not learn enough academic subjects at school, that there was no aspiration for excellence, and that in fact, it was education towards mediocrity:

> [The schools] should include more things. Yes, it's important to learn geography, it's important to learn subjects, but the state doesn't have money. (10)

If my husband was here he would only have reservations. He really believes that it's impossible that [the children] come home at two without any homework. Like, what do they go to school for? (7)

As though [the school] lowers them all to a low level, that's what they want. To make everyone … I feel as though it's something mediocre. And I don't want my children to be mediocre, I don't allow … it requires a lot and I don't have the energy for it. (11)

Homeschooling parents

Unlike the parents who sent their children to school, the homeschooling parents referred in their criticism of the schools regarding subject matter and values, mainly to the fact that the schools had not changed much over many years and did not teach things that are relevant to life today:

It's simply not logical, I think, that much of the material taught in school isn't relevant to daily life. Nowadays there are lots of aids that can be used, but in fact, if you look at everything that they learn, lots of life skills are missing. (12)

12 years, and what for? It's sort of a waste of time. The truth is that today the generation is transforming, as though today's generation is the generation of the world, not of the country where it lives. They know that by clicking a button they can talk with someone in Australia who is twice as old as they are and get the information they need. Children also understand that teachers are only like pot plants in the classroom. And it's a shame, it's a shame because one can learn a lot from a teacher or any person, but to sit and read a book to me from the beginning to the end for a full year just to narrow down the field we're dealing with … in other words, in the case of history if you only learn a certain period, or in biology only one certain material, its narrowing down the fields so much … I think it would be so much more effective to open up the material, to open the notebook, to widen the field of interest; it's simply a waste. (29)

This is an undemocratic framework, right? There's not much room for change. There are set subjects and they are not always relevant, but what can you do? (5)

Life skills – yes, I would take the subject of life skills and open it up in the direction of yoga or how to control anger, of more body awareness, consciousness of others; I would take it in that direction. (6)

These findings reveal a gap between the two groups of parents. The parents who sent their children to school were occupied mainly with subject matter that was lacking and the need for more subjects or for teaching subjects in a way that emphasises excellence. In contrast, the homeschooling parents were occupied mainly with the need to shift the focus of the studies – to replace the existing subject matter. In other words, the latter group sought a completely different system of values and subjects that are relevant to the present time and related to life skills and broader learning that cuts across disciplines.

Methods of teaching and learning

Parents whose children attended school

On the subject of teaching and learning, the parents who sent their children to schools referred to several aspects. They noted that the instructional methods in the schools were not up to date. For example, a mother who sent her children to school said she

would prefer the learning to take place by means of experience and not written work, and another mother spoke against frontal lectures.

> *You don't have to come home and write a summary about the moon. Let him be creative, prepare the Creation Day, not summarize it. Prepare him through practice. If you're learning literature, do it in a play, with modeling clay, with whatever you want. And don't come home to mommy. Do I need to do a summary on the moon? I told him ... "take the dictionary, write about the moon, two or three lines." [My child] responded – "the teacher asked for a whole page."* (8)

> *Teachers today already know that the frontal lecture is very boring; children are used to such stimuli; it's not the same as in our time.* (10)

Other comments on this subject indicated the view that the school offers a framework but at the same time stifles creativity and curiosity:

> *It dampens creativity, curiosity, self-searching, all of that kind of thing. You sit a child down in a classroom for five hours ... opposite a desk and a blackboard ...* (11).

Criticism was also voiced against the school's creating pressure and placing a heavy burden on the children, who studied many subjects, were given numerous assignments and a great deal of homework, and were tested very frequently. This burden also affected the parents, who had to help their children keep up with the pace of the studies at school.

> *The main difficulty is the burden, the load placed on these children in the lower grades ... the high expectations of them and the very high demands that actually pressure the children ... assignments, homework, papers – yes, tasks. I understand that you need homework – I don't have a problem with that, in fact I'm even pleased about it. But I think that the amount they give in first grade is huge for children who just got out of kindergarten and need to deal with the new framework. It's a lot to deal with at once – the framework, the studies, the assignments, and the expectations. All of it.* (3)

> *It's only a matter of exaggeration in terms of the study material ... this year [the child] studied arithmetic and geometry all day on Mondays. Really – seven hours of alternating arithmetic and geometry? ... It's mad, it's mad. And we help him get ahead ourselves. We are already moving ahead with him, especially since [my husband] is an arithmetic teacher, too, so that's okay.* (6)

Another criticism arose with regard to the physical conditions of the school, which some of the interviewees considered inadequate.

> *Give him a desk, give him a nice chair. Just like you want the best chair in an office. Give the child this chair, too. Just as you want a desk with the most space, give that to the child. It doesn't have to be a computer. It doesn't have to be the most expensive. Just don't give him a chair that tips or a desk ... where you have to push a piece of paper under it so it doesn't rock ... or one that is chipped and peeling in the corners ... give him a drawer to put his equipment, not a pathetic tiny one that doesn't even have room for a pencil. So give him two drawers. Give him the conditions, give him proper air conditioning.* (8)

> *The school he went to is concrete, concrete, and more concrete, without even one tree. Concrete sidewalks, concrete floors, rooms like that, classes of forty-two children. He started first grade and I saw that the child was smart and all, but things weren't right. I said, wait a minute, is this what I want, a factory for children? Eight hundred children . . .* (11)

Homeschooling parents

The parents who homeschooled their children raised a wide range of complaints regarding the methods of instruction in the schools. They too noted the issue of inadequate physical conditions, and particularly overcrowded classrooms:

> When you have a mediocre teacher today with twice as many students, 35 children, it doesn't work. If the classes were half the size, if there were 15 in a class, that's enough to make it more meaningful. (19)

> Having a teacher for 30 children is a tremendous drawback. There's always a slower group and a more advanced group. You can't give either one what they need in the framework of such a class. The ones at the middle level don't enjoy quality learning either. If you check, you see that often the child gave the answer but didn't really understand completely what they wanted of him … I think this kind of studying is a great weakness of the education system because of the size of the classes. (17)

> Add another teacher to the class, a teaching assistant for each teacher, reduce the number of students in a class, enlarge the classroom space (8)

The interviewees also spoke negatively about the poor standard of teachers in some of the schools, the serious burnout in the teaching profession and what they saw as a lack of adult supervision.

> I wish they would pay teachers more money [because then] there would be more suitable people. This is a very draining profession, I can tell you. And someone good [at] conveying the material is not always good at discipline. Nowadays the teachers are very occupied with discipline … there is not enough respect for them so they won't have to deal with discipline … and therefore the burnout is very great. I think they try very hard to make the material interesting. I also know that they show lots of films and other things. In other words I think in terms of teaching methods, they are very good, but I believe their burnout is very very great, even though they have two months' vacation a year and Passover vacation … it's really hard to be a teacher; I wouldn't be a teacher; it's very hard work. (1)

> [The school] lacks educators in the sense of setting an example and openness and education in the open sense of the word, of looking for things, looking for ways to ask questions. (11)

> Because they raised the [academic] level too much there aren't enough … perhaps high-quality teachers or the right number of teachers to teach in correspondence with higher level [of studies] and because of this, many students fail. (12)

> Too many things happen [in the school] between the children without adult supervision, which often leads to negative things. (21)

With respect to the methods of teaching and learning, the interviewees also noted that the children spend too much time at school sitting in chairs and little time is devoted to learning itself:

> I believe that sitting down so many hours at school is too much. Sitting instead of having lots of activities and learning through movement and play. And they begin learning at a very young age and there are less games. (25)

> They study mathematics four hours a week. Think about it, that's a lot. So it turns out that four hours are not really four hours. It's 45 minutes a lesson. 45 minutes, minus ten minutes because by the time you really start, ten minutes pass if not more. And during the lesson the pace is terribly slow because you have to explain. It's enough that one child doesn't understand or

there's a disturbance. It turns out that out of their weekly hours, the net time is about an hour and a half or two hours. Half the time, you see? And that's the best-case scenario. (17)

One of the subjects that was prominent in the interviews with the parents who home-schooled was the argument against the trend of standardisation in the schools.

This was expressed in statements that school is not suited to all children, that the education system is rigid and doesn't "see the children," and that the system doesn't take personal needs into consideration but teaches in a uniform manner:

There's no doubt that school is not adapted to every child. I think that this framework is really suitable for very few children. There are children with learning difficulties and then they are very unsuccessful. (1)

A teacher told me: "What do you think, that I don't wish there were just a few children, so I could adapt to their needs, to what they want? But the framework says that until the new year and the High Holidays, the children need to learn all the letters and by Chanukah [a Jewish holiday] they need to know how to read. The framework tells me and I have to comply with it. I have to make sure the children meet these; otherwise they'll say I'm a rotten teacher." (16)

It's a very large system that wants to respond to many needs and there is something really closed and rigid in the nature of its structure. (24)

I think the education system is problematic by definition. Its main drawback is that they can't see each child completely. (21)

They are structured processes, where the child is a small screw in the system and you have to listen to everything dictated to you and you have to finish learning what the system dictates within a certain time frame. There's no room for individuality. I see it as a factory conveyor belt – moving, moving, moving. If something falls off the belt – have you ever seen it? It falls and that's it, it's left by the wayside. There's no room for individuality, individuals … it's a very narrow conveyor belt. (23)

Thus, the parents who sent their children to school complained about outdated teaching methods, pressure, and workload in the school, as well as a burden on the parents who had to help their children learn the material taught at school. They also complained about the inadequate physical conditions in the school.

Parents who homeschooled their children also referred to the physical conditions as inadequate, particularly with regard to the crowded classrooms. In addition, they spoke about the low quality of teachers and teaching methods that force children to sit in their chairs for a long time. However, in addition to these criticisms, the homeschooling parents also voiced strong criticism of the trend of standardisation in the schools.

Table 1 shows the criticism of the schools raised by the parents who sent their children to school and those who homeschooled, divided into the themes of values and subject matter and of teaching methods.

The qualitative analysis of the themes that arose from the interviews with the parents was conducted in accordance with the method described by Giorgi (1975). This method consists of data preparation, preliminary analysis, and mapping analysis. In the present research, primary themes were identified in the descriptions given by parents from both groups and these themes were then divided into super-themes. The primary themes and

Table 1. Parents' criticism of the education system, by values and subject matter as well as teaching methods.

	Parents whose children attended school	Parents who homeschool their children
Values and subject matter	Not designed to teach subject matter (but rather to provide babysitting services) Not enough subject areas Aspiration to mediocrity	Material irrelevant to the present times
Methods of teaching and learning	Outdated teaching methods Pressure and workload for the children Pressure and workload for parents Inadequate physical conditions	Sitting in chairs for a long time Inadequate physical conditions Overcrowded classrooms Poor quality of teachers Standardization – lack of adaptation to child

the super-themes constituted the findings of the research. Analysis of these findings indicated differences between the two groups of parents.

These results, in turn, gave rise to several questions: what is the source of these differences, how are these differences associated with the theoretical framework of the present research, and what are their implications for the understanding of homeschooling? These questions are considered in the Discussion.

Discussion and conclusions

As noted, parents who are dissatisfied with the education system and criticise it can choose one of three reactions to this dissatisfaction: the first two – trying to resolve the difficulties within the educational institutions that their children attend or transferring the children to other schools – actually represent dealing with the problem within the existing systems (Strategy A). The third possible reaction is to leave the present system completely (Strategy B). In both cases, criticism of the education system was voiced; thus, it is interesting whether the types of criticism of parents who chose Strategy A differ from those of the parents who chose Strategy B, and whether such a difference might explain their respective ways of responding to their dissatisfaction.

The findings indicate that the parents who homeschooled and those who sent their children to school were critical of the education system. Their criticism was directed at the subjects studied and the methods of teaching. However, as the findings show, there was a significant difference between the criticisms voiced by the two groups of parents. As noted earlier, these differences may help explain their different choices of strategy in response to dissatisfaction with the education system. The dissatisfaction that the parents felt led them to search for a response or solution, that is, to make a change in the existing situation, but each group chose to do so in a different way.

The terms first-order change (changes that occur within an existing system of paradigms) and second-order change (paradigmatic change) mentioned in the introduction provide a useful conceptual framework, since they help to better understand the differences between the two groups.

In examining the changes required to respond to the criticism regarding values and subjects that was voiced by the parents who sent their children to school, it is necessary to add to and improve the quality of the same subject matter; in other words, to make a

first-order change. However, a response to the criticisms of the parents who home-schooled requires much more significant change in the subject matter. It also involves fundamental change in the objectives of education, as subject matter is taught to achieve these objectives. Such changes in subjects and objectives are, in fact, second-order changes.

In response to the criticisms regarding methods of teaching and learning voiced by the parents who sent their children to school, it is necessary to update the methods of instruction, reduce the pressure and burden on children, and improve physical condition in the schools. All these are changes in the existing parameters of the system, that is, first-order changes. In order to respond to the criticism on these issues heard from the homeschooling parents, it is also necessary to change methods of instruction (such as not sitting such a long time), improve the physical conditions, reduce the number of students in a class, and improve the quality of the teaching staff, which are also first-order changes. However, the criticism of the homeschooling parents regarding the schools' tendency to standardise and not adapt to each child, requires second-order solutions: in order to respond to this criticism, the educational objectives have to be changed.

Several scholars of education, including Lamm (1972, 1976, 2000), Egan (1997, 1999), and Rorty (1999) have divided educational objectives into three main groups: social objectives – socialisation, or teaching values that enable individuals to function as productive and contributing members of society; cultural objectives – acculturation, or teaching values and worldviews that are the pillars of the culture; and finally, personal objectives – individualisation, or offering each individual an opportunity for personal development and self-fulfillment.

Standardisation in the schools may arise from either of two objectives, socialisation or acculturation. Standardised teaching and study methods can be justified by the goal of schools to teach coherent cultural values or social conduct; for this purpose, a uniform process is required. Calls to eliminate such uniform processes in fact seek to change the educational objectives, shifting the focus from acculturation and socialisation to indivi-dualizatios. Therefore, this criticism requires a second-order change (see also Neuman and Guterman 2016(. Schools may also promote individualisation, although this might require a second-order change, which is very difficult to perform in the education systems.

The data presented here might also indicate that homeschooling parents put more emphasis on individualisation. This notion is consistent with the findings of previous research on this subject, which indicated that parents who homeschool strongly empha-sised the education goal of individualisation (Neuman and Guterman 2016).

In summary, it is evident that the parents who sent their children to school and those who homeschooled both criticised the education system in terms of study matter and values, as well as teaching and learning methods. Responding to the criticism of the parents who sent their children to school requires first-order change. They did not call for changing the underlying principles of the system. Responding to the criticism raised by the parents who homeschooled also requires first-order change, but it also requires second-order change, at the level of both values and study matter and of teaching and learning methods.

First-order change is difficult enough, as seen by the countless and frequent pro-
cesses of change and educational reforms instituted in education systems, which often
succeed only partially. However, second-order change is much more difficult. This may
be the reason why parents who homeschooled chose a second-order solution to their
criticism of the education system; they decided to leave it. Rather than try to solve the
problems within the existing parameters, they chose to set up a whole system of new
assumptions about what and how to educate, or, as Aviram (2010) put it, to undertake a
paradigmatic change.

Limitations of the research

The research reported here had several shortcomings. First, because this is the first study
to be conducted on this topic, an attempt was made to examine a small number of
cases in depth to draw insights. It is also important to note that data regarding different
types of homeschooling in Israel is not available, and therefore, it was not possible to
characterise the participants of our research according to such types. The research
findings, which indicate that the parents who sent their children to school voiced
criticism that requires in response first-order changes, but those who taught their
children at home voiced criticism that requires in response both first- and second-
order changes, might be considered such an insight, from which it is possible to develop
descriptive theory.

However, the present study employed qualitative research methods, and therefore, it
is not possible to generalise this descriptive theory. In order to further examine this
theory, future research should include quantitative analysis, as well, to examine parents'
criticism of the education system in larger samples, in terms of first- and second-order
change, and in terms of socialisation, acculturation, and individualisation.

Another limitation of the present study was that the correlations between the
parents' school choices and their criticism of the schools might be bi-directional (the
narratives generated in the interviews with parents might to some extent be based on
an attempt to legitimise their decisions). Future research that includes quantitative
analysis might shed light on this question.

Another limitation of the present research lies in its examination of only one of many
aspects of the choice made by parents to leave the education system – the pedagogical
aspects associated with dissatisfaction with the education system. In order to obtain
broader understanding of the choice of homeschooling, future research should include
examination of additional aspects, such as reasons related to the personal history of the
parents or family history, religious ideology, and others.

Despite these limitations, the research compared the criticisms of the education
system voiced by parents who sent their children to school with those of parents who
homeschooled. As such, it may provide a partial explanation of the choice made by
numerous parents not to send their children to the educational system. Understanding
the reasons for this decision is essential, in order to both better explain the phenom-
enon of homeschooling and to gain insights regarding current trends in conventional
education. As the present research showed, there was a difference in the views of the
two groups regarding the shortcomings of the education system. Understanding this
difference may shed light on the motives of an increasing number of parents that

choose home schooling. Further study might reveal that different types of criticism generate different responses by those who criticise. In this respect, the present research also contributes to the study of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. In many cases, examination of behaviour refers to people's objectives as the basis of their behaviour; in contrast, the present study suggests that the way people's criticism is constructed may affect their objectives. For these reasons, it is hoped that the present research will lead to further studies that help develop and deepen these perspectives and contribute to a better understanding of the rapidly growing trend of homeschooling.

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Dr. Ari Neuman is a senior lecture in the Department of Education at the Western Galilee College in Israel where he chairs the Education Systems Management Division. He is interested in home schooling as the ultimate form of parental involvement in their child's education, and also as a parental response to the crisis in education. His research explores the process of choosing to home school, the reasons for this choice, the significance of the choice itself, and the ramifications for home schooling families. He also explores the overall significance of the home schooling phenomena and its role in better understanding education today and in the future.

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