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Home Education in Quebec: Family First

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In Canada, until now, no studies have focused on the practice of home education in the francophone province of Quebec. While the home-educating population in that province is tangible, it has remained largely unknown. Quebec's distinctive character on three fronts – political, historical and cultural – make the application of results from the rare Canadian studies or data from the US home-educating population seem inappropriate. This research, conducted by questionnaire in 2003, documented the sociodemographic characteristics of Quebec's home-educating families and their motivations for home education. Beginning with a portrait of Quebec's particular context, this article presents the motivations underlying the choice of home education expressed by 203 Quebec families. The reasons why these families have chosen to homeschool are many and diverse; parents' rationales for their choices are wide-ranging and multidimensional. One particularity of the results is that no religious, philosophical or anti-state viewpoint seems to dominate the combined discourse. Seven motivational factors for home education were identified. Collectively, the respondents express the following as their main motivations for home educating their children: a desire to pursue a family educational project; an objection to the organisational structure of the school system; a desire to offer curriculum enrichment; and finally, a preoccupation with their children's socio-affective development.

Keywords: Canada, Quebec, home education, homeschooling, family, motivations

Introduction

It was only in 1943 (later than other Canadian provinces and most Western countries) that the province of Quebec adopted a law establishing compulsory school attendance for children and adolescents. According to historian Dominique Marshall (1996), the Catholic clergy, still very powerful politically in Quebec at that time, had succeeded in holding back the implementation of compulsory public instruction for almost 50 years in order to keep its established hold on the spiritual education of Quebec youth. Adelard Godbout, the province's Prime Minister from 1939 to 1944, promoted compulsory instruction in response to the extraordinary demand for qualified manpower generated by the Second World War. Marshall also explains that two social circumstances contributed to the successful implementation of compulsory schooling. First, the majority French-speaking population during that period was beginning to take its place alongside the dominant (minority) English-speaking population in the management classes as well as in the regional economy. This upward social movement consequently diminished the population's mistrust towards the public instruction promoted by the British allegiance state.¹ Second, the 1945 federal law that established family allowances mandated that parents whose 'school-aged' children did not attend school would not receive those allocations.

In 1988, the new Law on Public Instruction began the process of changing school board structure in Quebec. Historically, the boards had been divided by religious affiliations (Catholic or Protestant). The new law laid the groundwork for boards to divide along linguistic lines (French and English).² At the same time, an addition was made in the school attendance exemption clause. Until 1988, this clause provided guidance only for student cases involving expulsion from school, illness or handicaps. The addition to the clause included the case of home education. This situation is described in article 15.4 (our translation):

A child may be exempted from compulsory school attendance if he or she receives home instruction and an educational experience which, according to an evaluation made or commissioned by the school board, is equivalent to that which is provided or experienced at school. (Gouvernement du Quebec, 2004)

This possibility of exemption was put in place as a safety valve to prevent the potential ire of religious groups unhappy with the decision to divide boards secularly. Simultaneously however, it opened up a new path for parents who, for whatever reason, wished to take full responsibility for their children's education. When the secularisation of the boards was finalised in the summer of 1998, some parents were already making use of the possibility of exemption, sometimes notifying the authorities of their decision, and sometimes not. Consequently, home education, while not a new practice, has only recently become an educational alternative at the margin of compulsory schooling in Quebec. This helps us understand the lack of knowledge about this phenomenon and the regulatory blur that surrounds it.

Home Education in Quebec: A Practice with Legal Provisions but Little Documentation

Prior to the study presented in this paper (completed in 2003), no research had been published in Quebec on the practice of home education and no scientific study had specifically targeted Quebec's population. In 1997, when Statistics Canada published a profile of home education in Canada, it was noted that, contrary to other provinces and territories, 'Quebec's Ministry of Education (MEQ) does not collect data on home education' (Luffman, 1997). Conversations with administrators of the Quebec Association for Home-Based Education (QAHBE) led to the revelation that only a portion of homeschooling families notify their school board or the Ministry about their decision to home educate. On the school board side, there appears to be no consensus on the manner in which these cases should be treated: neither is information on them centralised. Different school boards and school directors interpret the provincial law in very different ways, which in turn leads to diverse attitudes towards and relationships with parent-educators. The MEQ is presently trying to gauge the importance of the homeschooling movement, and is preparing to take actions to delineate and detail the law's content. Again, in contrast to the situation in many other Canadian provinces, evaluation methods, parent and school board obligations, provision of services to parents and the attribution of

subsidies for children educated at home are not yet clearly defined. This situation pleases some homeschooling families in Quebec, and leaves others dissatisfied.

The dearth of knowledge about Quebec homeschooling families cannot be attributed to their scarcity. According to the QAHBE, as of 2003, there were between 2500 and 5000 homeschooled children in Quebec: a sufficient number to provoke interest in their educational situations. Moreover, it can be surmised that the number of homeschooling families is growing in Quebec, as it is in the rest of Canada (Luffman, 1997). Also indicative of the homeschooling presence province-wide are the numbers of regional support groups (groups of families who organise group social and educational activities) and national and provincial associations. Some of these are the QAHBE; the Association for Christian Parents-Educators of Quebec (ACPEQ); the Home School Legal Defence Association (HSLDA) of Canada; and the Canadian Association of Home Schoolers (CAHS). Family-managed Web sites, busy Internet discussion forums, educational supply businesses that target homeschooling families, cultural institutions that offer programmes specifically designed for homeschoolers, association conferences and symposiums, and media coverage all suggest a growing trend.

Nevertheless, parents who opt to homeschool have to accept both the hazards of marginalisation and the attendant possibility that their children could feel a certain amount of exclusion from the majority who are educated in institutions. They might encounter misunderstandings or even prejudicial attitudes from their immediate families, friends and neighbours, as well as from school administrators. Because the legislation is vague, collaboration between parents and school administrators (and by implication, the availability of resources offered by schools) cannot be taken for granted. In order to accept such a situation, it can be presumed that a parent's affirmative decision to homeschool rests squarely on motivations strong enough to accept, both for themselves and for their children, a different kind of lifestyle. But what are the motivations that bring families to choose complete responsibility for their children's education over a public service offered free of charge?

Home Education: The Motivations Behind a Marginal Choice

Van Galen (1988) identified two types of home educating parents, based on their motivations. In brief, 'ideologues' are those who reject school and the public educational system because they disagree with the ideological content of the curriculum; 'pedagogues' include parents who choose to home educate because of a perception that the school learning environment is either negative or maladapted to their child. Mayberry (1989) added nuance to Van Galen's typology by proposing four groups of parents. Among those who home educate for ideological reasons, she distinguished the religiously motivated from those inspired by the desire to live an alternative or 'New Age' lifestyle. She also divided the 'pedagogues' into two groups: those primarily concerned with academic performance and those preoccupied by sociorelational development.

Categorising parents according to motivations for homeschooling, as exemplified by the typologies of Mayberry (1989) and Van Galen (1988), offered a first understanding of, and a conceptual framework for, subsequent studies on parental motivation. Subsequent advances in research have superseded the interest in defining categories of parents according to their motivations and have replaced it with an interest in the development of motivational hierarchies or typologies. Arai (2000), Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000), Marshall and Valle (1996) and Welner (unpublished) point out that the Mayberry (1989) and Van Galen (1988) typologies do not accurately represent all families. In fact, many families fall between the two categories because they base their decision to home educate on a combination of reasons that sometimes belong to more than one category. In addition, these typologies fail to reveal the evolution of parental opinion. Marshall and Valle point out that the dichotomous nature of Van Galen's typology can lead to the characterisation of the two groups instead of their categorisation: 'Ideologues become right-wing Christian fanatics and Pedagogues become New Age eco-progressives' (Marshall & Valle 1996: 6).

A recent summary of the home education phenomenon in North America by the Fraser Institute suggests that Canadian and US home educators share the same ideological profile (Basham, 2001). But studies in English Canada (Arai, 2000; Priesnitz, 1995) underline many differences between the discourses of Canadian and US parents. In the same way that Canadian parents appear distinct from US parents in terms of their motivations to home educate, Quebec's society, distinct in terms of its language, culture and home education policy might also be different, not only from those of the USA, but even from those of Canada in terms of why parent-educators choose to home educate. Perhaps their motivations might better be discovered in the larger spectrum collected by Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000: 24), whose review of the literature on the parental motivations for home educating reveals nine major categories:

- 1) Dissatisfaction with traditional schools; 2) Religious motives; 3) The claim that schools cannot provide children with the personal interest and attention they can get from their family; 4) Parental rights and responsibility over government regulations; 5) Protection from unwanted influences; 6) Negative schooling experiences; 7) Maintenance of the family unit; 8) Views on child development; and 9) New Age influences.

Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000) propose a home education research agenda that suggests studying the level of importance given to each of the parental motivations generally identified by the research, the degree to which parents subscribe to each motivation and the importance parents attribute to the different factors in each category of motivations. The Quebec study presented in this article was conducted within that framework between May and July 2003.

Method³

A list of 50 statements about the motivations for home educating was developed by compiling reasons invoked in the specialised and scientific literature on the subject, and from an analysis of discussions over a Quebec web-based discussion forum on home education. Participants answering the questionnaire were invited to indicate, on a five-point scale (importance of my decision: none, low, average, great or very great), the extent to which each of the indicated motivations contributed both to their initial decision to home educate and their subsequent decision to continue that practice. Following the data collection phase, a principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed to examine the factorial structure of the list of motivations proposed.

The questionnaire was made available in two languages (French and English) as well as in two formats (paper and web). For this preliminary exploration of a sensitive and unknown population, as large a sample as possible was gathered. To ensure the questionnaire's distribution, agreements were made with contacts from a Quebec home education association, regional support groups, specialised media connected with those groups and a distributor of pedagogical material for homeschoolers. This distribution resulted in 203 completed questionnaires.

Family characteristics

The questionnaire stipulated that the parent who 'best' knew the family and its reasons for choosing home education was to fill out the questionnaire. Among those respondents, 192 were women, 10 were men and one did not answer the question. Forty-one respondents (20%) reported that in their families, at least one parent in the household had obtained a master's or a doctoral degree; 78 respondents (38%) reported that in their families at least one parent in the household had obtained a bachelor's degree or a university certificate; 34 respondents (16%) reported that in their families at least one parent in the household had obtained a college diploma (technical or preuniversity);⁴ and 50 respondents (24%) reported that in their families at least one parent in the household had obtained a secondary school diploma, whether or not the full course of study had been completed. These data, within the limits of the sample's representativity, indicate an over-representation of parents who have obtained university diplomas, especially at the master's and doctoral levels, among home educators. On the other hand, no remarkable over-representation or under-representation was noticed for the factors of family income or place of residence. Families from almost every region of Quebec participated in the study. Participants were almost equally distributed between cities (29%), suburbs (22%), small towns and villages (22%) and rural areas (26%).

Relationship with educational authorities, language of instruction and religious or spiritual commitment

Forty percent of respondents in this sample stated that educational authorities were not aware of their decision to educate their children at

home. Among the remaining respondents, 20% have made an agreement with their local school board, 3% are in conflict with their local school board and 36% have informed the school board of their decision, but have neither an agreement, nor a conflict with the authorities in question. The language of instruction is French for 73% of families. As 87% of all children registered in Quebec schools study in French (MEQ, 2003), the sample's figures could indicate that a larger number of home-educating families are offering instruction in English or in both languages. As for religious or spiritual commitment, 55 respondents (27%) answered that religion or spirituality was fundamental to their family lives; 30 respondents (15%) said it had 'some influence' on their family lives; 87 respondents (43%) indicated that they value some type of spiritual belief but have no specific organised religious affiliation or practice and 27 respondents (13%) indicated that they have no religious or spiritual commitment at all.

Results

Distribution of the importance given by families for their motivations to homeschool

Whether classified by the average degree of importance the respondents as a group gave to a reason, or whether classified by the number of respondents who rated the importance of an item 'great' and 'very great', the reasons are organised in a nearly identical order. Tables 1 and 2 present the motivations

Table 1 Most frequent motivations for home educating

<i>Motivations</i>	<i>Average importance (scale from 0 to 4)</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Percentage of families who rated great (3) or very great (4) importance (%)</i>
7. More individualised teaching	3.18	0.95	80
4. Family project	3.18	1.07	77
1. Curriculum enrichment	3.12	0.99	76
5. Parents in a better position to educate	3.03	1.04	72
10. Importance on family relationships	3.02	1.03	73
41. Better socialisation through family and community life	3.00	1.14	72
28. Better adult/ children ratio	2.98	1.23	72

Table 2 Least frequent motivations for home educating

<i>Motivations</i>	<i>Average importance (scale from 0 to 4)</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Percentage of families who rated great (3) and very great (4) importance (%)</i>
14. Godly prescription	0.83	1.35	14
50. Difficult access to desired school	0.62	1.12	10
48. Child's particular activities	0.62	1.11	10
37. Child not ready cognitively	0.53	1.08	9
47. Parents' professional activity	0.43	0.91	5
49. Child's illness	0.13	0.63	3

that had more and less importance for the respondents, as a group. (The exact wording of each statement can be found in the questionnaire (Appendix 1). The number preceding a statement refers to the number of the question.)

The most frequent motivations for educating at home are: 7. more individualised teaching; 4. family project; 1. curriculum enrichment; 5. parents in a better position to educate; 10. importance on family relationships; 41. better socialisation through family and community life; 28. better adult/children ratio.

The least frequent motivations for educating at home are: 14. godly prescription; 50. difficult access to desired school; 48. child's particular activities; 37. child not ready cognitively; 47. parents' professional activity; 49. child's illness.

It should be mentioned that, according to these results, the less frequently cited motivations of child's illness, extracurricular activity (such as sport competitions or an artistic career), inability to access a desired school (because of transportation time or the cost of a private school, for example), or parental professional activity do exist but these situations remain exceptional.

For six motivations (presented in Table 3), the distribution of participants reveals a polarisation; it is of note that the greatest number of responses can be found on the scale's extremes, that is, under 'no importance' and 'very great importance'. Of the six motivations, three are related to religion and three are related to the child's characteristics and experience. It is therefore important to clarify that the 'low importance' averages calculated on these items do not reflect a general tendency, but rather reveal that some families do not identify with those motivations at all (the greatest number) while others completely identify with them.

Table 3 Motivations that present polarisation

<i>Motivations</i>	<i>Percentage of families giving ... importance (%)</i>				
	<i>No</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Great</i>	<i>Very great</i>
<i>Related to religion and spirituality</i>					
11. Coherence with family religion	50	13	12	7	18
14. Godly prescription	65	11	10	3	11
22. Child's need for spiritual development	24	18	15	15	27
<i>Related to the child's experience and characteristics</i>					
42. Child's special needs	39	11	11.5	15.5	24
34. Child's negative school experience	44	10	12.8	10	25
25. Child transformed by schooling	41	5	11	14	30

Factor analysis

Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was effectuated in order to examine the factorial structure of the list of proposed motivations. A preliminary analysis extracted 14 components. The last four motivations on the list (47. parental activities; 48. child activities; 49. illness; 50. accessibility) were removed from the analysis because they solicited factual more than subjective information and could have been associated with any one of the other 46 reasons without significant relationship. Factorial analysis, which then extracted 11 factors, was forced to 7 factors, each of which appeared to measure a different theoretical construct and explain 56.3% of the total variance. The total variance can be divided in the following manner: 23.4% for the first factor, 11.0% for the second, 6.4% for the third, 5.5% for the fourth, 3.8% for the fifth, 3.2% for the sixth and 3.0% for the seventh. Table 4 presents the saturation of each item presented under the seven factors. In keeping with the recommendations of Hair *et al.* (1998) and Gorsuch (1983), the only items retained were those that resulted in a saturation coefficient greater that 0.30, which presented a minimal difference of 0.10, with a saturation coefficient under another item (if that is the case). The seven factors extracted from this analysis can be conceptually related to: religion, morality and spirituality; family project; school organisation; negative school experience; socioaffective development; enrichment; and child's particular characteristics.

Transmission of religious, moral or spiritual values

Motivations corresponding to this factor express a will to give the child an education and a way of life that are coherent with the parents' religious, moral and spiritual values. Statements mentioning religion and the word of

Table 4 Principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factors</i>						
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Religion, morality and spirituality</i>							
11. Religion	0.840*						
14. God	0.793						
19. Respect/discipline	0.681	0.302					
22. Spiritual development	0.667						
13. Control over education	0.659				0.317		
9. Moral sense	0.636				0.315		
16. Exterior influences	0.602				0.575		
40. Unknown teachers	0.521		0.379				
29. Too many rules/too much discipline	−0.410				0.392		
12. Philosophy	0.399				0.353		
35. Negative experiences (parent)	0.381						
<i>Family project</i>							
4. Family project		0.743				0.309	
3. Freedom/flexibility		0.741					
41. Family and community life		0.596					
46. Too much time at school		0.558					
5. Parents better suited	0.378	0.555					
15. First 5 years successful		0.535					
18. Parental responsibility	0.482	0.509					
10. Familial relationships	0.399	0.503					
20. Competition/evaluation		0.462		0.450			
44. No need for a diploma		0.392				− 0.322	

Table 4 (Continued)

Items	Factors						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Criticism of school organisation</i>							
33. Social structure			0.717				
27. Learning not meaningful		0.335	0.699				
32. Learning motivation			0.656				
23. Lowering the bar			0.561			0.466	
39. Teaching methods			0.543	0.382			
26. Conformism		0.312	0.511	0.313			
21. Place given to parents		0.303	0.307				
<i>Negative school experience</i>							
34. Negative experiences (child)				0.834			
25. Transformed by school				0.752		0.314	
45. School framework				0.723			0.484
<i>Socioaffective development</i>							
8. Separated for long periods	0.334				0.533		
24. Peer pressure	0.353		0.308		0.525		
28. Ratio adults/ children			0.356		0.501		
30. Peer dependance			0.369		0.461		0.304
31. Violent environment	0.306		0.323		0.459		
7. Individual teaching			0.308		0.321		
<i>Enrichment</i>							
6. Advanced for age						0.772	
1. Enrichment						0.659	
2. Child's choice				0.334		0.558	
36. Quebec curriculum			0.386	0.405		0.447	
17. Information/ stimulation		0.402				0.404	

Table 4 (Continued)

<i>Items</i>	<i>Factors</i>						
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Child's particular characteristics</i>							
38. Not ready psychologically							0.743
37. Not ready cognitively							0.694
43. Boys			0.356				0.568
42. Special needs			0.324	0.399			0.453
Variance explained / factor (total: 56.3%)	23.4%	11.0%	6.4%	5.5%	3.8%	3.2%	3.0%

Extraction method: principal components factor analysis.

Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser's Normalisation.

Rotation converged in 17 items.

*Only the items that presented a coefficient greater than 0.300 and a minimal difference of 0.100 with their coefficient under another factor were retained (in bold).

God are related, as well as the child's need for spiritual development, difficulties with trusting an unknown teacher's moral competence and the absence of parental control over the content of education in school. Also related is the desire to develop the child's sense of morality and the will to pass on the principles of respect and discipline. A negative correlation is observed with the statement criticising the excessive rules and discipline at school.

Family project

This factor groups statements that address a family and community life project, the pleasure of shared discovery, close family relationships as the most favourable environment for the education of children, and the happiness and freedom of all family members. Also included in this category is the affirmation that parents are in a better position to provide for their children's education, both before and after 'school age', and the statement that children spend too much time in school.

Objection to school's social or pedagogical organisation

This factor is related to statements that criticise school structure. The criticism includes statements about the curriculum being tailored for the success of the weakest, inappropriate teaching methods, the encouragement of conformism at school and the lack of significant learning. Also found here are statements that reflect a belief that school destroys the motivation to learn and that its social organisation does not prepare children for engagement in real society.

Child's negative school experience

The three statements related to this factor have to do with a negative school experience, a child's discomfort within the school framework and the negative transformation of the child during schooling.

Preoccupation with a child's socioaffective development

Motivations related to this factor demonstrate parental concerns about protecting and accompanying the child's socioaffective development. Home-schooling is a means to avoid a school environment perceived as too violent, and generative of peer dependency and unnecessary peer pressure. Statements about separations from parents that are too long and an inadequate ratio of adults to children at school add to this factor.

Enrichment

This factor is related to statements about a child's precocity, a desire to offer curriculum enrichment and the respect for the child's choice to home educate.

Child's particular characteristics

This factor brings together motivations that express dissatisfaction with the discrepancy between what the school can offer and what the child requires. It expresses a desire to postpone the beginning of school learning and the departure from the family frame, as well as the need for school to adapt to boys.

As Table 5 shows, the degree of intercorrelation between the factors is generally weak ($p < 0.30$), or average ($0.30 < p < 0.60$). It can therefore be concluded that there is a significant degree of independence between the factors.

Overview of motivations

The rationale that serves as grounds for a family making the decision to home educate consists of several factors: on average, four factors carry an importance that ranges between 'average' and 'very great', and two factors carry an importance that ranges between 'great' and 'very great'. Therefore, the temptation to interpret the motivation categories as reflections of family categories must be avoided.

Altogether, the factors that were attributed an importance between 'average' and 'great' in the parents' decision-making process are, in decreasing order of importance: a desire to experience a family project; an objection to the social and pedagogical organisation of school; a desire to offer an enriched curriculum to their children; and finally, a preoccupation with their children's socioaffective development. These are shown in Table 6.

A negative school experience is an important factor for almost 20% of families. Yet its average importance for the sample of participants remains low, partly because of the responses of families whose children have never attended school. The factor related to religious, moral and spiritual preoccupations and the one that expresses a dissatisfaction with what school can offer versus what the child's particular needs are remain important only for a minority, despite the fact that families are polarised on these issues.

Table 5 Interrelation of factors (Pearson's chi-square)

<i>Factors</i>		<i>Religion/ morality/ spirituality</i>	<i>Family project</i>	<i>Criticism of school organisation</i>	<i>Negative school experience</i>	<i>Socioaffective development</i>	<i>Enrichment</i>	<i>Child's particular characteristics</i>
Religion/ morality / spirituality	Pearson's correlation	1.000						
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000						
	<i>n</i>	203						
Family project	Pearson's correlation	0.377	1.000					
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000					
	<i>n</i>	202	202					
Criticism of school organisation	Pearson's correlation	0.210	0.482	1.000				
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.003	0.000	0.000				
	<i>n</i>	203	202	203				
Negative school experience	Pearson's correlation	– 0.025	– 0.008	0.277	1.000			
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.729	0.906	0.000	0.000			
	<i>n</i>	199	198	199	199			

Table 5 (Continued)

<i>Factors</i>		<i>Religion/ morality/ spirituality</i>	<i>Family project</i>	<i>Criticism of school organisation</i>	<i>Negative school experience</i>	<i>Socioaffective development</i>	<i>Enrichment</i>	<i>Child's particular characteristics</i>
Socioaffective development	Pearson's correlation	0.465	0.583	0.534	0.130	1.000		
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.067	0.000		
	<i>n</i>	203	202	203	199	203		
Enrichment	Pearson's correlation	− 0.027	0.314	0.338	0.296	0.182	1.000	
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.707	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.009	0.000	
	<i>n</i>	202	202	202	198	202	202	
Child's particular characteristics	Pearson's correlation	0.014	0.193	0.203	0.260	0.261	0.098	1.000
	Sig. (two-tailed)	0.842	0.006	0.004	0.000	0.000	0.163	0.000
	<i>n</i>	202	202	202	198	202	202	202

**Correlation significant at the level of 0.01 (two-tailed).

Table 6 Importance given to each factor by respondents as a group

<i>Factors of decision</i>	<i>Average importance (scale from 0 to 4)</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Percentage of respondents that rated great (3) or very great (4) importance (%)</i>
Family project	2.90	0.81	48
Objection to social and pedagogical organisation	2.63	0.89	35
Curriculum enrichment	2.34	0.96	23
Socioaffective development	2.23	0.89	18
Religion/morality/spirituality	1.94	0.89	14
Negative school experience	1.52	1.14	20
Child's particular characteristics	0.94	1.23	4

Discussion

It can be observed that the motivations of Quebec homeschooling families for their decision to home educate are many and heterogeneous. Indeed, out of the 50 suggested motivations, every one carried a 'very great' importance for at least four families, and no single motivation received unanimous agreement. It can be understood that home education is an alternative to the education currently available for families with very different educational horizons. It is also clear that there is great diversity in their family situations, experiences, projects and convictions.

Asking families to qualify statements from our list enabled us to pull out an internal logic from all that heterogeneity, which can in turn be structured as seven motivational factors for home education: (1) a desire to engage in a family project, (2) an objection to the social or pedagogical organisation of school, (3) a will to offer academic enrichment, (4) a preoccupation with a child's socioaffective development, (5) the transmission of religious, moral or spiritual values, (6) a child's negative schooling experience, and (7) a dissatisfaction with the discrepancy between what the school can offer and the child's particular characteristics.

The relative importance given to each of the motivations⁵ in the present study differs noticeably from the results presented by Chapman and O'Donoghue (2000) and by Canadian and US studies. When the most popular 'one size fits all' motivations are excluded from their classifications, such as: 'dissatisfaction with traditional schools', or 'can offer better education at home', religious motives come first. In Quebec, motivations directly related to God and religion rank at the lowest level of importance. The factor that relates to religious, moral and spiritual preoccupations bears a 'great importance' for only 13% of the sample and, in total, rates an average importance of 1.94 (between 'low' and 'average'). The proportion of families

motivated in their choice to home educate for religious reasons is two and a half times smaller than in Priesnitz's Canadian study (1989). Still, these statistics cannot be attributed to a poor representation of religious families in the current study's sample, as ACPEQ members (Association of Christian Parents-Educators of Quebec) represent 23% of the sample, and 27% of all respondents answered: 'religion or spirituality is fundamental to my life' elsewhere in the questionnaire. As Arai (2000), Marshall and Valle (1996) and Priesnitz (1995) observed, it seems that when it comes to making educational choices for their children, religion is not the most important criteria, even when it plays an important role in the family's spiritual life.

If religious motivations are less predominant in Quebec, motivations related to home educating as a family project are dominant, while, for example, in Chapman and O'Donoghue's study (2000), that motivation came seventh. Also particular to the results of the present study is that no philosophical, political or religious voice appears to dominate, or even take up much room in Quebec home education discourse. The same observation can be made about the categorical rejection of state intervention in education.

Conclusion

We have drawn a portrait of families from all over the territory of Quebec, from cities to rural areas, who have chosen home education. On average, they are highly educated and organised in various networking groups in order to create common ground for their educational and support resources. As a group, these deeply committed parents want to home educate their children for two principal reasons. First because they wanted to pursue a family educational project, and second because they have given the educational system a critical look from several different perspectives: its organisational structure, its lack of curricular enrichment and its effect on children's socioaffective development. Still, our understanding of parents' choices must remain sensitive to a greater heterogeneity of motivations and a multidimensionality of decisional rationales.

Dandurand (2003: 2–3) might inadvertently offer an explanation for the minor presence of religious or anti-state discourses from the Quebec families represented in this study (our translation).

Right from the start, one must reflect on the distinct conceptions of the relationship between the family and the State. Much like other countries of Anglo-Saxon tradition, the United States and [English] Canada presently have a privatist conception of this relationship, based on the respect for private life and the noninterference of the State in the lives of families and individuals. This conception is even more accentuated in certain regions of the United States, where it is manifested in both the neoliberal alternative to the State and in a very conservative vision of the family. [Author's note: those two options are also found in Canada, in the province of Alberta.] Although this mistrust towards State intervention was very present until the sixties in Quebec, and still exists in some sections of the population, it is possible to say that since the end of the

1970s, the Quebecois have developed a conception that favours the State's interventionism in family matters.

The recent implementation of compulsory schooling in Quebec, in conjunction with this conception of the interconnected relationship between family and State, created a home education movement mainly founded on a different conception of family life and on criticism of school organisation, rather than on religious or anti-state discourses. Now, how will Quebec society, characterised by its explicit family policy, negotiate the degree of interventionism in the family projects of parents who choose home education? To remain coherent with its family policy, and so committed to the support of families, will the provincial authorities conceive of pedagogical and financial support measures for those home-educating families who express a need for such services?

Research on the effectiveness of homeschooling has produced only favourable conclusions about the academic and social successes of the children so educated. Because of this, it challenges educational researchers and authorities to better understand its perspective on the education of school-aged children and to learn from its marginalised point of view. In the spirit of embracing the questioning that motivates families to choose home education, as well as the families themselves and their various practices of home education, it will be necessary for researchers and authorities to establish a dialogue with the participants of this educational movement, and to support parents in their work as educators if they express a desire for support. Further analysis of the results of this study will help to reveal the needs and difficulties homeschooling families encounter, to study their conceptions of education, and to describe them more accurately. We will thus attempt to contribute to the reflection on the future and the evolution of educational institutions in which other home education researchers are currently participating (Marshall & Valle, 1996; Meighan, 1995; Rothermel, 2000; Stevens, 2001). The contributions of their research on the experiences of homeschooling families nourishes discussions about the social movement behind home education, the scientific foundations that support schooling and its organisational structure, the value of families as educational partners that can transmit a society's knowledge and culture, and on possible partnerships with parent-educators, like the 'flexible schooling' option.

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Notes

1. Quebec is the Canadian province in which the French, after colonising Canada (then called 'Nouvelle-France') and ruling it for a little more than two centuries in the name of France, lost their dominion to the British in 1763. Quebec society, recognised as 'distinct' in the 1987 Canadian Constitution, still reflects the cultural and social aspects of its history. Quebec remains a province with a vast majority of

- Francophone citizens. The province has 7,487,169 inhabitants, and represents 23.7% of the Canadian population.
2. Denominational school boards (groups of Catholic or Protestant schools) became linguistic school boards (Francophone or Anglophone) in the summer of 1998. In 1988, articles on this matter in the Law on Public Instruction were not yet active.
 3. This research was made possible by funding from the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC). For more details on the method and the sample characteristics, see Brabant *et al.* (2003).
 4. In Quebec, college level studies are the beginning of postsecondary studies. They offer technical and preuniversity programmes.
 5. The same distinctions are observed, whether motivations are compared by factors or individually.

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Appendix 1: Statements from the Questionnaire

Motivations for homeschooling

- (1) We can offer more **enrichment** at home.
- (2) It's my **child's choice** and I respect it.
- (3) I made that choice for the **freedom** and the **flexibility** it gives to the family.
- (4) Homeschooling is a family project, for the pleasure of living and discovering together.
- (5) **Parents** know their children best and are best situated to make an educational commitment.
- (6) My child is **advanced** for his/her age.
- (7) **Individual or small group teaching** is more efficient and it improves learning.
- (8) I do not want to be **separated** from my child for such long periods of time.
- (9) I want to develop my child's **morality** and **character**.
- (10) I give a lot of importance to siblings and parent-child **relationships**.
- (11) I want to provide my child with values and a lifestyle in conformity with my **religion**.
- (12) I want to provide my child with values and a lifestyle in conformity with my philosophy.
- (13) I want to have more **control** over what my child is learning.
- (14) God gave us children, asked us **to raise them and to teach them** to respect the authority of the Scriptures.
- (15) The education I gave my child from age 0 to 5 was successful and **I feel capable of continuing**.
- (16) I want to protect my child from unwanted **exterior influences**.
- (17) My child has access to more **information** and **stimulation** outside of school.
- (18) Education is **my responsibility**, not the State's.
- (19) I want to raise my child with **respect** and **discipline**.
- (20) **Competition** and **evaluation** at school are harmful to self-esteem and do not respect individual learning rhythms.
- (21) School does not give enough importance to **parents**.
- (22) School ignores the child's **spiritual development**.
- (23) The school system **lowers the bar** of education with diluted curricula.
- (24) At school, **pressure** from other children harms development of the individual.
- (25) School had **transformed** my child. He/She was not blossoming as much anymore.
- (26) School encourages **conformism**.
- (27) At school, learning is not **meaningful** because it is disconnected from reality.
- (28) At school, the **number of children per adult** is not appropriate.
- (29) There is too much **discipline** and too many **rules** at school.
- (30) School creates **peer-dependence** (between children).

- (31) School is too **violent** an environment.
- (32) School destroys the **motivation** to learn.
- (33) A school's **social structure** does not prepare children for real society.
- (34) My child has had **negative experiences** in school.
- (35) I personally had **negative school experiences** and I don't want my child to be exposed to the same things.
- (36) The Quebec school system's **curriculum** does not correspond to my child's interests and strengths.
- (37) My child was not cognitively **ready** for scholarly learning at age 5 or 6.
- (38) My child was not psychologically **ready** to leave the family at age 5 or 6.
- (39) I am dissatisfied with school's **teaching methods**.
- (40) I don't want to leave my child to **teachers** whose values and competences I don't know.
- (41) Family and community life is more favourable than school for a child's **social and psychological development**.
- (42) School does not respond to my child's **special needs** (medical needs, behaviour or learning difficulties, giftedness).
- (43) School is not well adapted to **boys**.
- (44) One does not need a diploma to be **successful**.
- (45) My child doesn't function well in the **school framework**.
- (46) Students spend **too much time** in school.
- (47) School attendance is not compatible with **my professional activities** or those of the other parent.
- (48) School attendance is not compatible with my **child's particular activities** (competitions, artist).
- (49) This temporary choice is due to the child's **illness**.
- (50) Our desired school is not adequately **accessible** (rules, distance, costs).