



Justifying homeschooling in Czech Republic: How “good parents” and their children use time

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Abstract

In our study of Czech homeschooling families, we discovered that the unifying theme of their justifying narratives was how the families rearranged the norm of “good parenting,” defined as the amount of time families spent together. The parents argued the importance of sacrificing their own time and educating their children themselves. They distinguished themselves from parents who are not willing to attend the children’s needs as much. Finally, we show that homeschooled children also actively adopt the family time management.

Keywords

Good mother, homeschooling, parenting, social norms, using time

Introduction

The modern practice of homeschooling has been developing within educational and family discourses that are referred to as “parentocracy” trends. Children’s education newly depends largely on the preferences and economic situation of the parents (Brown, 1990). Barrett et al. (2016) extend this concept by highlighting the proactive interest of parents in fostering child development through extracurricular activities. Homeschooling is embedded in the trend toward the increasing individualization of education provision (Barbosa, 2016) and the tendency to view the parent as the person most responsible for raising a child as a future adult and citizen (Dencik, 1989; Geinger et al., 2014; Vincent and Maxwell, 2016).

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While still marginal, homeschooling has been growing in number worldwide. For example, in the United States, the number of homeschooling families has been increasing in the long term (Murphy, 2014; National Center for Educational Statistic, 2018). This growing trend has given rise to a number of studies on the motives and backgrounds of homeschooling parents (Bhopal and Myers, 2016; Davies and Aurini, 2003; Hanna, 2012; Kašparová, 2017; Van Galen, 1987, 1991), the socialization of homeschooled children (Kunzman, 2017; Medlin, 2013; Mertin, 2003; Štech, 2003), the need to reflect the voices of homeschooled children (Jones, 2013; Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer, 2011), and the impact of homeschooling on mothers' lives (Lois, 2013, 2009; Machovcová et al., submitted).

In Czech Republic, approximately 880,000 children of school age are enrolled in the education system; homeschooled children represent less than 0.5% of the school-age population. Yet, the growing trend in homeschooling is obvious. The number has risen from 172 to more than 2000 children since the official recognition of homeschooling as a legitimate mode of instruction in 1998 (Kostecká, 2017). However, in the Czech legal system, homeschooling is defined only as an alternative route to completing compulsory school attendance. School directors are supposed to allow homeschooling as an exception. The specific reasons for allowing homeschooling are not defined in the legislation but usually include learning disabilities, weak immunity, participation in professional sports, being bullied, or frequent travel abroad. Families in these circumstances, who would otherwise prefer the standard education route but have been “forced” to opt for homeschooling, are sometimes distinguished from “homeschoolers by conviction” (Kašparová, 2017: 87; Kostecká, 2017), who prefer homeschooling to other educational options. A growing number of these parents in the Czech Republic practice alternative lifestyles, of which homeschooling is just one aspect. International research confirms that for many parents, the decision to homeschool is part of their commitment to resist what is viewed as mainstream culture (Bobel, 2002; Kašparová, 2017). Our sample encompasses families across groups, but we were particularly interested in hearing the statements of the parents who preferred homeschooling.

It is partly due to the non-mainstream lifestyles of homeschoolers that this practice is viewed with mixed feelings in Czech Republic. Kašparová and Láníková (2016) analyzed discussions of homeschooling in the Parliament of the Czech Republic and identified two coexisting public discourses: the discourse of discipline and the discourse of freedom. The discourse of discipline emphasizes the importance of centralized education, equal access to education, and expert knowledge provided by professionals. The discourse of freedom, by contrast, points to the responsibility of parents for their children. Importantly, in both discourses, there is little discussion of the child's agency.

During our research, we observed that emphasizing a particular kind of parental care in the Czech public space creates a major tension that puts the diverse minority of homeschooling parents in a challenging position. By refusing to participate in standardized education, these parents are accused of not being “good enough parents” to their children. In this light, we focus on the arguments parents use to justify their homeschooling practice.

Being a good parent and an even better mother

In our article, we understand “good parenting” as a social construct with wider social and political consequences and a variety of implications for expected behavior and

performance (Hays, 1996; Phoenix et al., 1991; Vincent, 2017: 12). As a societal norm, it may be accepted or challenged, but either way, it has a real impact on the identity of parents and especially mothers (Lois, 2013). As Carol Vincent (2000) points out, there exists the implicit expectation that all parents will “behave in an approved fashion” (p. 24). The studies show that normative discourses on parenting are constantly being reproduced and transgressed in contemporary society by the media, by professionals, and by parents themselves (Brown and Small, 1997; Vincent, 2017).

Considering the current discourses on good parenting, many scholars support the idea of individual responsibility for children (Davies and Aurini, 2003; Geinger et al., 2014; Phoenix et al., 1991). Parents, and in particular mothers, are generally expected to fully devote their time to every aspect of a child’s development, including the emotional, moral, social, intellectual, and physical levels (Brown and Small, 1997; Vincent, 2017; Vincent and Warren, 1998). In this light, parent is a category that, although usually presented in neutral terms, cannot be viewed as “gender-free” (Phoenix et al., 1991: 5). For this reason, in our article, we are mostly referring to mothers when we speak about parents, since in practice they assume most of the responsibility for attending to children and spend the most time with them.

There is a variety of characteristics ordinarily associated with “good parenting/mothering,” but in general the mothers are expected to be infinitely patient, unconditionally loving, sensitive, and responsive and to encourage children’s development in many ways (Lois, 2009; Phoenix et al., 1991; Vincent and Warren, 1998; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). These characteristics enable them to provide a warm and peaceful home for every family member (Bobel, 2002: 111) and treat their children as though they are “sacred” (Hays, 1996: 122). The norms of good mothering adhere strongly to the idea that mothers should devote most of their active time to their children and to satisfying their immediate needs, especially when the children are very young (Brown and Small, 1997; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). Mothers are also expected to be actively involved in their children’s education and schooling (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). This imperative applies from the moment a child is born, when parents already are supposed to begin stimulating the child’s cognitive abilities, and it continues to apply during the years of schooling, when this involvement might include actively assisting children with their homework and being in regular contact with teachers (Kremer-Sadlik and Fatigante, 2015). Giving love as a mother can therefore be “very time-consuming” (Hays, 1996: 111). Most of a mother’s activities are supposed to be child-centered; otherwise, she could be judged as performing her maternal role poorly (Phoenix et al., 1991). Not fulfilling the ideal of a good mother is deemed to mean being a bad mother. This dichotomy seems to be widely taken for granted and accepted (Brown and Small, 1997; Lois, 2013).

In our study, we focus on *the use of time* by mothers who homeschool their children. Time distribution proved to be a key feature of the everyday life of the homeschooling mothers that we interviewed. We argue that the societal norms of good parenting, primarily in relation to the use of time, are important for understanding the logic behind the justifications for homeschooling.

Data and methodology

The data for this article come from a qualitative research project that studied homeschooling parents and formerly homeschooled young adults. The primary method of data

collection was semi-structured interviews. We also organized two focus groups, participated in informal meetings that homeschooling families organized for themselves, and engaged in the long-term observation of the educational process in different households. We also browsed through websites, documents, and various media sources involved in the debate on homeschooling in Czech Republic.

The sample consisted of 50 interviewed respondents, the parents currently providing homeschooling participated in 30 of them. The parents' length of experience with homeschooling ranged from several months to 16 years and included cases where individualized education extended to the high school level; 25 children had previously started some sort of standard public education (preschool/kindergarten, first grade), and the families opted for homeschooling later when the school experience proved to be unsatisfactory. Among the parents who were not homeschooling at the time of the interview were families from the earlier generations of homeschoolers, when it was legally possible to homeschool only for the first 5 years of compulsory education. All of the families were middle class, and most of the parents had higher education. The participants who were homeschooling their children at the time of the interview ranged in age from 30 to 45 years; 10 participants were formerly homeschooled pupils who were around the age of 20 at the time of the research. Another 10 were the parents of these children, and they were all around the age of 50. In addition, seven of the homeschooler parents and six formerly homeschooled children took part in the focus groups.

The majority of the interviewees were married (two were single mothers) and they had between one and six children. About two-thirds were from the Prague metropolitan area, one-third came from other regions. Most of the interviews were 1 hour long; the focus groups lasted about 90 minutes. We were interested mostly in the process behind the decision to homeschool and in the practical organization of daily family life. In most cases, the mothers participated in the interviews as they assumed primary responsibility for educating their children. All of the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. We use pseudonyms for the participants.

In most cases, the practice of homeschooling seemed to be the only thing that the studied families had in common. In terms of values, beliefs, and lifestyles, they formed a heterogeneous group. However, over the course of the 1 year of collecting data, specific features of the families' daily schedules and a certain sense of personal sacrifice on the part of the parents, among other things, became apparent and allowed us to identify some common threads within the data set. Therefore, we started to focus on how parents justify their homeschooling practice by referring to their specific use of time. The analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and was supported with MAXQDA software, which was used to perform the coding process. We focused on the main research questions: *In what way is parenting in homeschooling families presented as distinctive from parenting in other families? How are the children involved in and influenced by this practice?*

Results: Round-the-clock parenting in homeschooling

In our research, we found that homeschooling parents not only adopt the imperative of "good parenting" but also are willing to challenge some of the commonly accepted reasons for mother-child separation and to promote practices such as home birth or home-based work. We explore how homeschooling children participate and how the specific

time management of the family is constructed. We argue that homeschooling parents intensify the normative model of good parenthood and distance themselves from families participating in the regular education and work system.

Time sacrifice

Once parents decide to homeschool, there immediately arises the question of how to combine this activity with employment. In our research, we observed two main tendencies. The first was based on the traditional breadwinner and homemaker model: the mother stayed at home and the father worked full-time and sometimes even had two jobs. In the second pattern, both parents adopted a more flexible work–life arrangement (working from home, part-time jobs). The second lifestyle was, however, less common among our participants. In both cases, the decision to homeschool often means the deliberate adoption of a more modest lifestyle.

One aspect of time use in our interviews was that the decision to homeschool often reshaped the time the mother had at her disposal—for example, how much time she was able to devote to her job, how much personal time she had, or whether she was able to continue her education. In the excerpt below, a former homeschooling mother recounts her long-term experience. She used to homeschool all three of her children, and at the time of the research, she was a part-time teacher for other homeschooling families. When asked about the career she might have had instead, she quickly identified with the concept of “sacrifice” proposed by the researcher. However, she associated this sacrifice largely with the element of time, not merely with the idea of a career that was suggested in the question:

Interviewer: Some people, especially women, don’t understand why they should in a way sacrifice their career to do homeschooling what do you say to that?

Mother: Well, they wouldn’t like my answer. You know, my sisters, they go to work, love their lives, and they make money. And they don’t have children. Good. I wanted children, so I sacrificed my career, and you know what? I’ve never missed it. Being a mother is my career. Ok, you give it up, it is a sacrifice. It’s your time you sacrifice It is. I felt like taking piano lessons, but my daughter got piano lessons. But I am not upset. It is a sacrifice, yeah. (Excerpt 1: Mary, preacher’s wife, part-time teacher)

For this mother, her decision to homeschool meant not only giving up a career but also setting aside her own hobbies and desires. In practice, she had to reorganize her time significantly. She forwent her own interests in order to devote herself to what she perceived as necessary attention to the needs of her children. From our data, we observed that many homeschooling mothers decided to extend the period of intensive care to include at least a portion of the child’s school-age years. While calling this approach a “sacrifice,” the mother quoted above proudly contrasted her decision with the choice of her sisters, who had decided to work and reject motherhood. By emphasizing this difference, the mother here suggested that this kind of time sacrifice is the only form of “good motherhood” and distanced herself from other parents who “wouldn’t like her answer.”

This notion of self-sacrifice is typical for what is understood to be “good mothering” (Brown and Small, 1997; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) and is characteristic of most homeschooling mothers (Lois, 2013). Lois (2013) shows in her analysis of homeschooling in the

United States that over the years, mothers internalize the practice of sacrificing their time and put both the explicit and the implicit needs of their children first—assuming the children’s attachment to their mother is their central relationship.

Yet, many homeschooling parents devote time to personal development and self-education. Parents legitimize this time away from children since those are activities directed at “becoming better teachers to their children.” The mother in the following excerpt described the process of self-development that had made it possible for her to adopt an individually tailored approach to each child:

The first six months were hard, but I learned from other homeschooling families that there are adaptation phases. I also read the literature about democratic schools and learned that every child has his own time plan. I bought some recommended books about history for him [my son] and I saw that it works. I have four children and I see each of them as having their own pace and style of learning. Then we attended the meeting of the Academy of Home Education and I learned a lot there. (Excerpt 2: Emily, artist)

By listing numerous activities she participated at, this mother showed how she has sacrificed a lot of her time. The goal was to learn about the theory and practice of homeschooling for being a better parent and to provide her children with what she understood as the best possible environment for their development.

Time out of homeschooling

In some cases, homeschooling parents contrast giving up work with time spent with their children, suggesting that earning money should never be the most important thing. Still, intensive parenting does not necessarily mean that parents completely give up their professional activities. Some mothers manage to find cracks in the “sacrifice” concept and create room for time that they spent regularly without their children. The mother in the next excerpt describes the demands on her time that she needs to balance:

I am the mother, I am the maidservant of the household, I am the one who gave birth to him, the one who has some interests of her own, who wants to have her own things in order, and who teaches him at the same time. (Excerpt 3: Uma, artist)

For this mother, homeschooling is one of several activities that she engages in and a part of her lifestyle. Her ability to find some personal time derives from the fact that institutions, such as an employer or a school, do not structure her time. She is thus able to divide her time according to the needs of all family members. In the next excerpt, another mother gives a more detailed description of the daily routine of her homeschooling–working household:

Homeschooling thrust me into the role of a person who needs to manage her time perfectly. In the afternoon, I have to leave the house, go to work and have meetings, because I oversee a team of twelve people. So my children sometimes see me working, I am definitely not a brood hen hovering over her chicks all the time and watching them closely. We like the arrangement where the children study by themselves. We really sit together in one room, I do my things, they do theirs, and we are here for each other if there is a need. (Excerpt 4: Grace, journalist)

The mother and the children in this scenario had to adapt their time and living space in order to put homeschooling into practice. This mother described structuring her time during the morning hours in a way that allows her to devote herself simultaneously to educating her children and to her work. However, the children's needs are her priority. On one hand, the afternoon is a period of time that the mother reserves for different activities. On the other hand, it is a period set aside for the children's extracurricular activities. Notably, the father or other carefully chosen adults mostly manage the children's afternoon time.

Trying to find time for oneself can be stressful. To avoid becoming frustrated at the loss of personal time, the parents learn how to alter their subjective experience of time (Lois, 2013). Most of them interpret homeschooling as a time of "being together as a family," which is evident in the next quote:

I teach the whole morning, and after lunch we take a break. Then, from 3 pm, I am with them. We can go to the park, visit friends, and do hobbies. Whatever you want, I'm here for you! And thanks to this break I can go on like that until midnight. In the evenings I prepare things [for teaching], organize field trips, whatever we're going to do. In fact, it's all on me. I am the one who is constantly doing something, planning what we could do, coming up with ideas. It's creative; you can't just sit around. (Excerpt 5: Sarah, stay-at-home mum)

This mother of three has taken on the role of being a devoted mother. Her time is not about balancing work and teaching; rather she provides an exhausting list of daily activities that shows how she is always doing something for her children and family.

We understand the need to actively search for personal time as a part of the child-centered approach to raising children. Taking a personal break during the day gives her a chance to renew her energy so that she can again be fully available to her children. Sarah identified herself as the core member of the family, who "can't just sit down like that," by which she distinguished her approach from that of parents who are not as engaged. The personal time of the homeschooling mother fits neatly into the overall picture of a family that is exceptional because it is able to be together as a family more often than other families.

Time managed by the family

Whether balancing a career with parenting or adopting the mother-teacher role, the key issue is time—its quality and its use. Homeschooling parents pointed to the "time advantage" as one of homeschooling's main benefits. They highlighted that they do not have to get up at a certain hour, they do not experience the stress of the morning rush that other families may face, their children can play first and start learning later when they are feeling calm. In other words, the homeschooling parents appreciated the fact that they do not have to subordinate themselves to institutional time and can respond more to the needs of the family unit:

We are together, we enjoy it, and it is very different I can't even imagine what it would be like if they were going to school. You leave the children there, then they come home with homework, I would have to do it with them, then they would have to go to do their extracurricular activities This feels good. We have multiple children, and I said to myself: what if the oldest one was going to primary school, the younger one to pre-school somewhere else, and the third one were sick? What then? I'd just have to take him along sick in the car in the winter, "whether you like it or not, you go with us because I have to drive the others." So I thought: we don't have to do that, and that's wonderful. (Excerpt 6: Sarah, stay-at-home mum)

Homeschooling allowed Sarah to schedule her time around the needs of her children. This seemed effective and “wonderful,” especially given that her boys were of different ages. The mothers we interviewed repeatedly highlighted the positive emotions they derived from being able to eliminate the alleged stress of an everyday routine that is built around the time schedules of school and work. Moreover, they enjoyed doing common activities together as a family: learning, traveling, doing sports, cleaning the house. The parents presented homeschooling as the best way of maintaining the family unit by spending time together and escaping the pressure on time management that other families experience daily.

Responsibility for the use of time and “other parents”

The ability both to spend time together as a family and to influence how their children spend their time is the result of the unique position homeschooling parents are in. The next excerpt is a quote from a mother of three adult children. She homeschooled for 16 years and views her decision to homeschool her children as a way of extending their childhood:

You only get to be responsible for your child until he is five years old, and what, you then just forfeit that responsibility? I am still the parent! So why shouldn't I be able to educate my child when I taught him all the basic things like walking, talking, and eating. Surely I am capable of teaching him everything else, too. (Excerpt 7: Nataly, part-time teacher)

Like other homeschooling parents, this mother links the time she spends with her child with her sense of responsibility for the child. She suggests that “other parents” who are not willing to spend as much time with their children are less responsible. Distinguishing themselves from other parents who accept mainstream schooling is an important part of homeschoolers' justifications for their decision to homeschool, and we were able to observe this attitude across the interviews.

In the next excerpt, a mother of four children recalls a discussion she had with an experienced teacher. The discussion revolves around her proposition that school hours are organized to suit the needs of parents:

I said to the teacher that going to school is a service primarily for parents, so that they can spend their time doing something else. It is not necessary for children to be educated for long hours every day [at school]. They definitely don't need that. (Excerpt 8: Adele, academic)

The mother is implying that some parents' priorities are contrary to the needs of children. The real reason why children sit in school for long hours is that their parents want to do “something else.” She reduces school to a service for parents. The emphasis here is on the conscious use of time: homeschoolers engage with their children, while other parents are involved elsewhere. This viewpoint also reflects the experience of many homeschoolers that the same results that are achieved at school can be achieved at home in much less time and much more effectively.

Homeschoolers oppose the regular school system, and they often describe school as a detached and impersonal institution. For most homeschoolers, the school represents an

institution that needlessly steals precious time that a family could be spending together (Bobel, 2002; Kunzman, 2017). It seems here that the central issue is what the parents' role should be, even while the decision as a whole is presented as anticipating or responding to children's needs. Responding immediately to a child's needs is regarded as part of the parents' job to help create a positive future for their children (Hood-Williams, 1990). However, the daily schedule of the children is primarily structured according to the preferences of their parents (Dencik, 1989). How then do the homeschooled children look back at the homeschooling experience? How do they actively organize their time and reflect the homeschooling practice? To focus only on the parent's relationship to the child leaves out the important voice of the learners, whose inclusion some scholars have been calling for (Jones, 2013; Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer, 2011; more generally, see Souralová, 2017).

Children managing time

In the interviews, the effective use of family time was associated primarily with ensuring the emotional stability of the children in a long-term perspective. Parents felt that providing strong family ties and an emotionally safe learning environment is a valuable investment into their children's future development. Consequently, whatever the parents' initial motivation to homeschool was, it was inevitably considered a responsible parental decision. Consequently, we argue that the homeschooled children are not only conscious of the unique way in which time was used in their household, they also made use of the unique way in which their family organized time, naming the "advantage of time" among the main benefits they gained from homeschooling.

Homeschooling parents tend to use time in a way that creates a space where children can take more control over scheduling and learn how to accept this as a norm. In the following excerpt, a mother who has just finished homeschooling her two daughters sums up the effects of family adjusted scheduling on her daughters' development:

My girls have it all rooted deep inside them now. They know when it's time to work. They sense when it is time to take a break. They know when to work hard and finish the task. And they know they don't have to hurry the whole time. Because we had such a relaxing time together at home. (Excerpt 9: Diana, spiritual leader)

The children know that they themselves and their needs are of central importance for their homeschooling mother. In the next excerpt, a high school student is asked to sum up her feelings about the time when she was being homeschooled:

For example, I feel that at that age I had a lot of time. I had a chance to do what I liked, much more than now when I have to follow the school's schedule. (Excerpt 10: Cathy, high school student)

She sees the advantage of having a lot of time as embedded in the ability to do what one wants to do. Children in our study welcome the opportunity to be more actively involved in organizing their time according to their needs and wishes—something that is hardly possible in an institutional setting. Among our respondents, the first experience with regular school, which was usually around the age of 12, was described in terms of feeling

uncomfortable with a firmly set time schedule. In the following excerpt, Donna—a high school student currently on an individual study plan—reflects on her first week at school:

When I came to high school, for the first year it was really hard for me to just sit there. All the lessons were interesting, but it was difficult for me to just sit and listen. My legs ached, my head ached. I was exhausted and felt it was a huge waste of time. (Excerpt 11: Donna, high school student)

In retrospect, children see homeschooling as an advantageous form of time use. Children's perception of the proper use of time and their definition of physical and emotional comfort are shaped by the organization of time in the homeschooling environment. They view the time that they do not spend as active learners (including both studying and hobbies) as "wasted" time, filled with empty activities:

Well, I had a problem with going to school. To me it seemed that once I already know something, I've learnt it, then why should I go back to it again? I've already learnt it all! For me it was enough to go there twice a week and the other three days were useless. I really had a problem going to school and sitting there when I didn't need to. (Excerpt 12: Claire, high school student)

The new experience of attending (high) school is a contrast for the children in our study, and they have to actively think about their priorities and make choices. Most of them embrace the intensive care and time investment they receive from their parents, and for them it translates into a form of self-responsibility. In other words, the parents present their children with a model of how they can use time effectively for their desired goals. Joanna is a university student who views her homeschooling years as the foundation of her later learning habits:

I am proud of being formerly homeschooled! I feel that my approach to learning is different from other students. I was used to having my own tempo with my mother's help. But it was my responsibility to finish a task. When I study nowadays, I keep thinking: my studying, my responsibility. (Excerpt 13: Joanna, university student)

The support for self-directed learning that Joanna received from her mother shaped her studying habits and time management. Homeschooling provided her with a working time schedule that she still benefits from. In this sense, homeschooling can be seen as a reciprocal activity that subverts some traditional patterns of authority. This is especially obvious in the cases of the Czech parents who practice something that is close to *unschooling*, a principle recommending that parents let their children discover and learn on their own, with only minimal parental supervision (Holt, 1995). We can conclude that homeschooling allows families in our research more control over their time for the later benefit of their children and gives children more time that they can manage by themselves in a way that makes them comfortable.

Discussion

The homeschooling parents in our study argue that they use their time in a unique and overall beneficial way. The greater amount of time that they invest in their children's

development and education is interpreted as the act of assuming more parental responsibility, which is widely accepted as a sign of “good parenting” (Brown and Small, 1997; Davies and Aurini, 2003; Geinger et al., 2014; Hays, 1996; Lois, 2013; Phoenix et al., 1991; Vincent, 2017; Vincent and Warren, 1998). Brown (1990) considers the shift in responsibility from schools to parents as typical for the “third wave” of education. The homeschoolers would only echo this view even more strongly since the accusation of irresponsibility is the most common argument raised by critics of homeschooling (Lois, 2009). Homeschoolers assert that they are assuming full responsibility for their children’s education, and for them it is a conscious choice that emphasizes the needs of the child, in striking contrast to the “ignorant parents” who accept the various forms of parent–child separation (Bobel, 2002: 84). Our research confirms that all parents are more or less expected to adopt a “sacrificial approach” to their children, which entails primarily mothers having to give up their hobbies to make room for their children’s activities and education (Vincent, 2017). A “good mother” should be able to sacrifice her free time for the sake of the children. In comparison with other families, this gives homeschooling parents a strong argument with which to justify homeschooling. Not only are they giving up a portion of their personal time, they are also reducing their working hours, which is contrary to the common assumption on successful career, and providing best for the family (Vincent and Maxwell, 2016).

The parents present homeschooling as a practice that is uniquely sensitive to their children’s needs. This viewpoint also seems consistent with the discourse of “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996), the style of mothering that is generally expected and valued in our culture. In this sense, the decision to homeschool tends to be gendered, as mothers are more often left with the responsibility for care and education, and the traditional family model of the male breadwinner and stay-at-home mother is reinforced (Lois, 2013; Phoenix et al., 1991: 15), resulting in situation which leaves women in a precarious position (Kostelecká et al., 2018). As noted above, in some of the families in our sample, both parents adopted working patterns that allowed them more flexibility, but the actual responsibility for homeschooling still mostly lay with the mother. We suggest that this kind of research topic requires a wider scope that also (more substantially) includes the father and above all the perspective of the children themselves. As opposed to a cross-sectional design, longitudinal studies would be beneficial for understanding how the accounts and experiences of the actors involved change over time.

Children who were formerly homeschooled later actively take advantage of the more specific use of time learned during homeschooling. The homeschooling time advantage, the way they see it, is linked to physical and emotional comfort, and thus affects their experiences during further education. Future research could focus on the lifestyles of formerly homeschooled children who appreciate the time sacrifice made by their parents, but who are also used to spending a lot of time engaged in their own interests and hobbies. The likeliness that these young people will adopt their parents’ sacrificial approach to raising their children and decide to homeschool their children to provide them with the same benefits deserves further attention. Apparently, the consequences of homeschooling for children in later life are still understudied in a long-term perspective (Kunzman, 2017; Murphy, 2014).

In a broader perspective, we seek to understand homeschooling within the wider frame of the trends of parentocracy or intervening parenting styles (Barrett DeWiele and

Edgerton, 2016; Brown, 1990; Murphy, 2014). Specifically, in some families, the decision to homeschool serves as a more affordable way of exercising school choice. The consequent deinstitutionalization of the family schedule gives them more control having to negotiate less with institutions, and it represents a greater materialization of parental responsibility. The concept of parentocracy is ideologically linked with economic success through individualized and recognized educational achievements, but homeschooling parents employ discourses of good parenting (Hays, 1996; Phoenix et al., 1991; Vincent, 2017: 12) in which the focus is on children's well-being and success is not as strictly defined as employment. This parenting trend calls for further research attention and for viewing homeschooling as a social movement (Murphy, 2014), with a focus on a broader European context.

Conclusion

In this article, we focused on homeschooling, an approach to educating children that is marginal but becoming more present in Czech Republic. Homeschooling families find themselves in a challenging position and justify homeschooling by referring to the societal norms of "good parenting." Our study shows how homeschooling parents and mothers in particular highlight the importance of the time they are investing in their children, in contrast to parents who unnecessarily prioritize other engagements. Homeschooling parents try to approach their children as active agents who benefit in many ways from the homeschooling time schedule from the way time is scheduled and later negotiate their own conditions at school.

We also present the reflections of children who were homeschooled and have adopted the approach to time use that they learned from their parents and later in the regular school system; they experience that this approach to using time has benefits but can also make things difficult for them.

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