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When I was at school – differences in stories about school told by parents of home-schooled and regular-schooled children

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ABSTRACT

Home schooling has become increasingly widespread over recent decades in the western world. Since the choice to educate children at home in effect signifies abandonment of the educational system, one may assume that parents' childhood experiences within the educational system play a significant part in their decision to opt for home schooling. The present study takes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigating the choice in favour of home schooling and compares the childhood memories of school reported by 28 mothers of home-schooled and regular-schooled children. Data were analysed in three stages – determining the nature of the experience; performing a thematic analysis; and arranging the themes into groups of meta-themes. Six interviewees reported an entirely positive experience; 6 reported an entirely negative experience; and 16 reported a mixed experience. Analysis of the text revealed 30 themes, which were grouped into five meta-themes: treatment, attributes, teachers, studies and social relations.

1. Introduction

Home schooling is a practice in which children of all ages do not attend public or private schools and are instead taught at home by their parents. Home schooling has been steadily gaining momentum worldwide over recent decades. Ever more parents in the western world are choosing to remove their children from formal educational institutions and to teach them at home. Various scholars estimate that more than two million children are currently schooled at home in the U.S.A.; according to a 2007 estimate by the National Centre for Educational Statistics, 1.5 million children were being homeschooled at the time (Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Ray 2011). In England, the number of homeschooled children exceeds 80,000 (Blok and Karsten 2011). In Israel, where only a handful of academic research studies have been conducted on homeschooling, the number of families in which children are schooled at home has steadily increased from approximately 60 at the beginning of the 2000s to more than 400 families today (Neuman and Guterman 2013, 2016).

Alongside the increase in the number of homeschooling families in the western world, there is an ever-growing body of research-based knowledge about this practice. Numerous

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academic studies have investigated what motivates parents to educate their children at home. Amongst the most prominent reasons are poor learning conditions and a poor climate in schools; dissatisfaction with the level of teaching in schools and a lack of faith in the ability of the educational system to impart values and meaningful content to children; a high level of violence in schools that leads parents to worry about the children's safety, and so forth (Anthony and Burroughs 2010; Dumas et al. 2005; Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007; Guterman and Neuman 2017; Neuman and Aviram 2015; Planty et al. 2009; Redford, Battle, and Bielick 2016).

It is customary to divide home-schooling families into two main groups, according to how structured the teaching processes that they conduct are. The first type of group, which adheres to structured teaching processes, could be labelled structured home schooling; while the second group, which does not start out with structured teaching, could be called unstructured home schooling, or unschooling (Aurini and Davies 2005; Bertozzi 2006; Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Neuman and Guterman 2016; Ray 2010, 2011; Van Galen 1988). On the basis of these two categories, a further division provides a more precise differentiation of the extent to which homeschooling is structured, by separately examining the degree to which the learning content on the one hand, and the pedagogic processes on the other hand, are structured (Neuman and Guterman 2016).

Various scholars have considered homeschooling as an educational practice and opting for homeschooling as a pedagogical choice on the part of parents (Anthony and Burroughs 2010; Collom 2005; Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Princiotta and Bielick 2006). However, because homeschooling is a complex phenomenon and since the choice to homeschool one's child has repercussions that extend beyond the pedagogical aspect and may impact the relationship between parents, their career, standard of living and so forth (Neuman and Aviram 2015), one may assume that the choice in favour of homeschooling is influenced by additional factors.

Numerous studies conducted in various fields show that people's past experiences affect their current standpoints as well as their choices and actions (Pervin and John 1999; Bandura and Walters 1963). This is true of many areas of life, amongst them education. Studies show that the experiences that parents recall from their long years at school impact the manner in which they prepare their children for school and their relations with the school community (Miller 2015). While such memories are not necessarily accurate, they are perceived as such by the individual, and therefore go some way to determining his or her beliefs, actions and thoughts. And while the interpretation of these memories is selective, it contributes to shaping their approach towards learning and education. The impression made by past experiences may have a greater effect than the details of one's present experiences. Proceeding from the premise that our memories of school remain with us for many years, it is important to consider the ways in which negative and positive memories influence parents' interaction with the school and their perception of their child's initial learning experience. Parents who remember their school experiences to have been warm and positive draw on an inner "working model" according to which schools are positive places for children. By contrast, parents who describe their experiences as negative, and who regard school as a hostile and unjust place, operate with a negative "working model". These models lay the foundation for children's socialisation (Miller 2015; Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley 2004). Putallaz, Costanzo and Smith (1991) note that childhood memories tend to resurface when parents prepare their

children for similar experiences, and that parents use their memories of childhood experiences to interpret their children's experiences.

In a series of longitudinal studies, Räty (2003, 2007) investigated how parents' memories influence and predict their level of satisfaction with their children's school. The parents were asked to recall their school days and to rank how well or badly they themselves did at school. The aspects rated were the quality of teaching, the degree of fairness towards the students, the extent to which they were encouraged, the effectiveness of the studies for their lives, and consideration shown for their individual needs. They were then asked to rank their satisfaction with their children's school. The parents' feelings were defined as relatively positive or negative. After examining this trend over the first five years of schooling, Räty conducted a follow-up study amongst parents of children in higher classes. At this stage children move from a small to a larger school, their group of friends changes, they study more subjects, a dominant class teacher is replaced by several teachers, and the school distances itself from parents by reducing the frequency of its communication with them. The study found that parental memory was a stable factor that possessed predictive power. It impacted the parents' satisfaction across the years with their children's schooling, with parents who had more positive memories showing higher levels of satisfaction.

In a study conducted by Miller (2015), parents noted that their memories of school impacted both their current thoughts and behaviour, and the way they prepared their children for the move to school. The findings reveal three areas of significance for the preparation of children: the impact of transition between school; the social aspect of school; and the labelling of special education. In general, the parents' memories induced them to think and to act in a particular way with regard to their children's education. Their overall view of education shaped their approach to the socialisation of their children within the formal education system. The parents believed that their memories contributed to the way that they wished to be involved in the life of their children's school, and to how they intended to supervise their children's education and learning.

Since opting for home schooling in effect means abandoning the educational system, one may assume that parents' experiences as students in this system are likely to constitute a significant factor in their decision to educate their children at home.

Wyatt (2008) maintains that amongst the major reasons for parents' choice of home-schooling is that this move constitutes a means of challenging elements of the dominant culture that these families oppose. Part of this opposition stems not only from their perception that public schools are currently in a sorry state, but also from their own experience of the public school during their time as students. These past experiences, associated with social cruelty and academic frustration, play a major driving force in the decision on the part of many of his research participants to educate their children at home. Many families were motivated to choose home schooling for these reasons, irrespective of the pedagogical, spiritual and political differences between them. Olsen (2008), who conducted a research on parental motivation to home school offers a similar explanation. Knowles (1991) conducted a study amongst families that school their children at home. He sought to uncover the rationale that underpinned their decision. Of the principal reasons offered by the parents, two are linked to the past. These are the parents' memories of their family life and of the schools at which they studied. These factors served as a powerful driving force toward the decision to home school and motivated the parents to preserve this form of education. The parents' memories of their childhood were generally polarised – either very positive or very negative.

The above survey demonstrates a significant link between parents' experiences of the educational system on the one hand, and the educational choices they make for their children as well as their educational approach on the other. This link emerges both with regard to education overall and more specifically with regard to home schooling. Nevertheless, upon examining the experiences of home schooling parents one must ask whether these experiences and their subjective memories differ from those of parents who opt for regular schooling. In other words, it is insufficient to examine only the school-day memories of parents of home-schooled children; rather, it is important to compare these parents' memories with the memories of school retained by parents who send their children to school. A study of this sort is likely to add an important layer to understanding the link between parents' memories and their choice of home schooling for their children, since there is currently no scholarly evidence of differences between the school-day memories of the two groups of parents. Without a finding pertaining to differences between the memories of school held by the two groups of parents, it is difficult to substantiate the link between parents' memories and their choices. Obviously, it is not sufficient to find differences between the childhood memories of parents in order to substantiate the assertion regarding a link between these memories and educational choices for the children, but the existence of these differences constitutes a necessary condition for the assertion. In other words, if no differences between the childhood memories of the parents are found, one obviously cannot claim that memories of childhood contribute to differences in parental choices.

The current study therefore compares the childhood memories of school retained by parents of home-schooled and regular-schooled children. It thus constitutes an exploratory study designed to map various aspects of the experiences that parents underwent as school-children, as they remember them today.

2. Objectives

The research examines parents who educate their children at home in order to map their memories of school and to compare these to similar memories retained by parents who send their children to school.

3. Method

The research described here was conducted according to the hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Glense and Peshkin 1992; Maykut and Morehouse 1997; Patton 1990), which seeks to understand reality as experienced and perceived by the interviewees.

This approach is particularly appropriate to the type of research undertaken here, which sought to gather parents' experiences from their time at school rather than seeking to establish whether these reported experiences actually reflect the world of their schooldays, or whether the events related by the interviewees indeed took place.

4. Population

The study comprised 28 interviewees. Fourteen of these were conducted with mothers who school their children at home, and 14 with mothers who send their children to school. The mothers' average number of years of education was 15.86, with a standard deviation of 2.16.

To ascertain whether there was a difference in educational level between the mothers in the two groups, a *T*-test for independent samples was run. This revealed no difference in the mothers' education level between the groups ($t(26) = 0.17$; $p > .05$). The mothers' average age was 38.64, with a standard deviation of 4.41. Once again, a *T*-test for independent samples revealed no difference in the mothers' age between the two groups ($t(26) = 1.59$; $p > .05$). The average number of children per family was 2.71, with a standard deviation of 0.90. The same type of *T*-test revealed no difference in the number of children between the two groups ($t(26) = 0.84$; $p > .05$).

It was decided to interview mothers because in the vast majority of home-schooling families in Israel, the mother is the significant adult who spends considerable time with the children and is largely responsible for their education (Neuman and Guterman 2013). Similar findings were reported in Australia (Jackson and Allan 2010). In order to ensure similarity between the interviewees in the two groups, only the mothers of regular schooled children were interviewed as well. All the families that participated in the study had one or more children of primary school age.

In order to recruit families for the research, two groups of parents were approached. The idea was presented to parents who homeschooled during social meetings of home-schooling families that are held on a regular weekly basis. For the regular-schooling parents, the researchers initiated contact with families, with the aim of creating a comparison group with similar characteristics to those in the group of home-schoolers.

Research assistants underwent a process of training and practice that focused on two aspects: developing relations of trust and openness with the families, and correct implementation of the interview. The interviews were held in the homes of the families. First, the parents signed an informed consent form and then the interview was held. At the end of the session, an open conversation was held, with the purpose of answering additional questions the family might have and concluding the meeting in a positive atmosphere.

5. Tools and procedure

This study used semi-structured interviews that contained a direct question pertaining to the parents' experiences as students, "Describe to me your experience as a student at school."

In addition, an open discussion about home schooling was conducted, during which interviewees were encouraged to speak about aspects of home schooling that were relevant to them.

The interviewers met the parents in their home. The interview commenced once the parents were given an explanation of the research and signed an informed consent form.

All interviews were recorded on two recording machines and were subsequently transcribed into a Word file.

6. Analysis

Following Giorgi (1975), the thematic analysis was conducted by identifying the general atmosphere of the text, dividing the text into units of meaning, identifying and labelling the central theme of each unit, and finally arranging the information amongst the themes and allocating them to a number of meta-themes.

The thematic analysis made use of *Atlas ti* software, which enables one to link themes to sections of text, and to find links amongst the various themes.

For each of the interviews, all the material relating to the parents' school-day experiences was identified and gathered. These texts constituted the source material for the analysis.

6.1. Step I – determining the nature of the experience

The reported experiences of each interviewee were examined to determine whether she was describing a positive, negative or mixed experience (one that included both positive and negative aspects). This step was conducted separately by the researcher and a colleague researcher. The resulting categorisations were compared, and the two researchers discussed all instances of disagreement over the nature of the experience until they reached agreement on it.

6.2. Step II – thematic analysis: breaking the text down into units of meaning and identifying the central theme of each unit

Each interview was analysed to find the units of meaning it contained. Each such unit was then assessed to determine the principle topic it addressed and its theme. At the end of this step, each unit of meaning in every interview had been labelled with a theme according to the central topic with which that unit dealt. This analysis was conducted by the researcher. Upon completion of the analysis, the results were submitted to a colleague researcher for critical assessment – to check whether each of the themes accurately represented the topic dealt with by the unit of meaning to which it had been attached. Once again, differences of opinion were discussed and resolved.

6.3. Step III – finding meta-themes

At this stage, the individual themes were grouped into a number of meta-themes, according to their common elements. This analysis was conducted by the researcher. Upon completion of the analysis, the results were submitted to a colleague researcher for critical analysis – to check whether each of the themes grouped into a meta-theme indeed belonged in it. Here too, differences of opinion were discussed and resolved.

This procedure, whereby a colleague researcher validated the analysis of the researcher, was conducted according to the concept of trustworthiness and peer- debriefing developed by Lincoln and Guba (1986).

7. Findings

7.1. Step I – examining the overall experience

As mentioned, the first step was to examine the findings for each individual interviewee. The way in which each interviewee related to her experiences at school was analysed to determine whether she was describing a positive, a negative, or a mixed experience. The interviewees were then divided into two groups – home-schooling and regular schooling.

Six interviewees recalled a wholly positive experience, six recalled an entirely negative experience, and 16 reported a mixed experience. Table 1 presents the numbers of interviewees who reported a positive, negative or mixed experience, according to type of schooling. There are evident differences in the types of experience between the two groups. Fewer mothers in the home schooling group reported a positive experience, while more of them reported either a negative or a mixed experience.

7.2. Step II – breaking the experience down into themes

As mentioned, in this step the experiences gathered from the interviews were broken down into units of meaning. Each unit of meaning was analysed and labelled with a theme that indicated the topic it addressed.

Descriptions of success in studies were, for example, grouped under the theme "strong student," while events dealing with failure in studies were grouped under the theme "weak student."

The experience reported by each interviewee could, of course, be labelled with a number of themes.

In all, 30 themes were identified across all the interviews.

7.3. Step III – grouping the individual themes into meta-themes containing shared elements

A total of five meta-themes were identified.

Following are the themes that emerged from the analysis. The themes are presented according to type of education (home schooling and regular schooling), and under each type of education, according to meta-theme. The themes ascribed to each meta-theme are listed, and representative citations from interviews are included for some of these themes.

Themes that emerged from interviews with home-schooling mothers.

7.4. Meta-theme – treatment

This theme deals with the way the interviewees were treated by adults (parents and teachers) when they were at school. The themes subsumed under this meta-theme are: protection (the school afforded a sense of protection); mother is angry (because of failure in studies); a sense of humiliation (stemming from the teacher's treatment of the students); lack of supervision by an adult (leading to unbecoming behaviour by students toward one another); I wasn't given sufficient space (to develop her interests); an inflexible regime (within which many aspects of the student's life are regimented); and punishment (for failure to obey instructions).

Table 1. Type of experience by type of schooling.

Type of experience	Home schooling	Regular schooling	Total
Positive	1	5	6
Negative	4	2	6
Mixed	9	7	16
Total	14	14	28

I grew up in [name of a country], ah, although I feel that our schools had some advantages, the very fact that the school is fenced in and protected by a guard, and a child grows up in a place he can't leave freely, that's something that plants the thought that the world is a dangerous place and it's just as well that I'm within boundaries. (interviewee 7)

My mother used to yell at me and get cross with me, there was real pressure about my not reading. (interviewee 1)

Yes and no, I remember the mornings were a nightmare, that if you didn't come on time there'd be some punishment, and if you didn't come dressed in a certain way then there'd be punishment, you had to go home and change, there's also a lot wrong with the system, the matter of studies didn't bother me personally and I don't recall it, I do sometimes remember teachers who would force us to learn and they would give out punishments yes, or a teacher who may get you to stand up and tell you to recite everything and if you couldn't then you'd be reprimanded in front of everyone, I remember that as an unpleasant experience … (interviewee 2)

7.5. Meta-theme – attributes

This meta-theme covers interviewees' references to personal attributes they linked to their time at school. It includes the following themes: stupid girl (the schoolgirl's self-perception as being stupid, and lacking ability); striving to please at heavy emotional cost (the student tries to satisfy her environment by doing well at school and this doesn't allow her to pursue her interests); poor student (self-perception as being a poor student, with little ability); a rebel (the student perceives herself as someone who fails to abide by the rules).

Look, I was a rebel, I didn't think that [school] was something that suited me, was right for me, or what I wanted, I managed, I kind of managed like somewhere between the cracks … as an adolescent … I recall myself in first grade, I already then thought to myself that I'll have to keep my head down for 12 years … (interviewee 12)

I thought then that there was something wrong with me and I grew up always, throughout school, I grew up feeling I was stupid and that I wasn't good enough. (interviewee 1)

I was a very good student, I also used to disturb teachers who bored me at times. But it took me many years to realise that … ah … that my excellence at studies was largely not because I wanted to study those things so badly. I rather wanted to be my parents' good girl, the teachers' pet. I wanted people to like me, to be proud of me, to be able to be proud of what I achieved, and I didn't stop to think about what most children don't stop themselves to think, why you? Why is it important to you? Why do you study like that for an exam? And what would happen if you got 80 or 70 instead of 95 … and that came at a heavy emotional cost to me. Because in adulthood it took me a long time to reconnect to myself. (interviewee 13)

7.6. Meta-theme – teachers

This meta-theme deals with the way in which the interviewees describe their teachers. It includes the two themes: a good relationship with teachers; and "teachers don't know me."

A kind of feeling like we even lost out, that is, you know, they never told us off, never … I'll speak for myself, because [her partner's name] doesn't like me talking about him, I never deliberated much in class in any way, and that's actually a very strong feeling that they ignored me kind of, like at parents' meetings they always used to say [name of interview] is a sweet and quiet girl, so my mother says what do you want to say about [her]? No, she's very quiet. so they didn't know me. (interviewee 8)

7.7. Meta-theme – studies

This meta-theme deals with the way in which the interviewees described aspects of their studies at school. It contains the following themes: strong in creativity and in sport (these were the student's strong areas, by contrast to others); good student who doesn't study (the student doesn't want to engage in learning activities); ineffective learning at school (difficulty in making use of what is learned at school); hard to sit in class (difficulty sitting still in class); poor student, average student.

> As a schoolgirl my strong subjects really were painting, drawing, creativity, music. When there was a choir at school I was a soloist in it. At a regional competition I was amongst the winners in painting. (interviewee 7)

> As a student at school I wasn't one of those who did homework … I couldn't stand doing homework and then there were always the clashes of … there was a price to pay … I got into trouble whenever I didn't do homework … I think that in twelfth grade I did everything that I didn't have to make an effort to do. (interviewee 14)

> I was an excellent student throughout my years at school and I enjoyed it very much. (interviewee 10)

> And I suffered a lot at school in the respect that one had to sit for a long time. I found it very difficult physically, I'm that kind of person … who doesn't like to sit on their backside for long … always on the move and movement is very important to me. It wasn't by chance that I learned biodance, movement, we need it as children and also as adults and it was very very hard for me there. (interviewee 1)

7.8. Meta-theme – social relations

This meta-theme contains the interviewees' references to social aspects of their schooldays. It includes the themes of social acceptance and social difficulty.

> Probably pretty bad from a social perspective. No, I never went with the flow, I was scared all through elementary school. I had friends, but not always, there were, you know, the most popular girls, I wasn't part [of them] nor did I try to be a part … in short yes, I had no problem with the studies but socially speaking I thought that school was a very very stressful place. (interviewee 6)

> I was relatively very well liked, I didn't suffer, let's put it that way, I was well liked, I had many friends, I was truly amongst the class leaders. (interviewee 10)

> *Themes that appeared in interviews with regular-schooling mothers.*

7.9. Meta-theme – attributes

This category contains interviewees' references to personal attributes they associated with their schooldays. It includes the themes: unexploited abilities (the student had a potential for learning that was not realised); and being transparent (lacking confidence and invisible to those around her).

> I was a student of whom they used to say to my parents, she has ability but she doesn't make use of it, are you familiar with this? (interviewee 16)

> A girl sorely lacking in confidence, who didn't stand out at all, not one of those who … participate much, if the teacher didn't address me I wouldn't … you wouldn't hear me at all. I was sure … that is, I'm still sure that I see people in the street who were at school with me and who don't recognize

me and don't know who I am … because I was always sure that I was transparent, that no-one could see me, that no-one knew me because I had very very little confidence. (interviewee 18)

7.10. Meta-theme – teachers

This meta-theme deals with the manner in which the interviewees describe their teachers. It included the themes: interesting teacher; meaningful teacher; and boring teacher.

For a number of years I had a history teacher we used to call sleeping pill … she would put us to sleep. (interviewee 25)

[During a parents day] and then we got up to go and I remember it as though it were some kind of movie, and then she [the teacher] says to him: [her father's name], I want to tell you something more, you know it still ah … brings tears to my eyes … and then she says to him, I want to thank you that … see, it moves me to this day [the interviewee cries] she says to him "thank you so much for raising such a daughter." … and my dad was in shock … I remember the moment his jaw dropped … and it's hard to surprise my dad, he's a really tough type … (interviewee 22)

7.11. Meta-theme – studies

This category deals with the way in which the interviewees described aspects of their studies at school. It contains the themes: strong in creativity and sport (the areas in which the student excelled, as opposed to other areas); good student; average student; stressful exams (examinations are stressful to the student); deterioration in studies (a drop in grades); difficulty sitting still in class (the student found it hard to sit still in class); doesn't study (the student has no interest in studying).

I was a good student, disciplined ah … I didn't consider whether I should go to school or not, it was quite clear that I should go to school, there was no question about it. (interviewee 15)

However much I studied I was always a poor student. It's unbelievable, my sister would never study and get an eight or nine, and I would study and books and exams and so forth … and I [would get a grade of] seven, six. (interviewee 20)

I was a ten [grade] student in everything … without having to try very hard. Although I was always one of those who made an effort but it was all grades of a hundred on the report card. (interviewee 27)

I was very lazy, it didn't interest me, like [her daughter's name], that's why I don't pressure her, I refused to learn arithmetic and at the age of … in ninth grade I stopped studying, I informed them that I wouldn't be studying any longer. (interviewee 24)

7.12. Meta-theme – social relations

This category contains interviewees' references to social aspects of their schooldays. It includes the themes: social acceptance and few friends.

I was a kind of queen of the class like, I was very domineering. It was like whatever I would say everyone would do and have to do. (interviewee 16)

Socially speaking ah … I wasn't connected to the gang, you know, I had friends who are still my friends now, we four friends from high-school have stayed friends. (interviewee 23)

Table 2 presents the themes grouped according to meta-themes. For both home-schooling and regular schooling interviewees, it lists the meta-themes and their component themes according to their orientation (positive and negative). The themes mentioned by both home-schooling and regular schooling interviewees appear in italic and bold fonts.

8. Discussion

Mapping the memories of school recalled by parents who home-school their children and by those who send their children to school may enable us better to understand the differences between them – differences that may well underpin their divergent educational choices. Such differences between the two groups of parents were indeed found.

The findings show that six interviewees mentioned an entirely positive experience; six mentioned an entirely negative experience; and 16 mentioned a mixed experience.

Upon analysing the text for themes, 30 different themes were identified. Some of these are shared by the mothers in both groups, while others are exclusive to one of the groups. Some of the themes display a positive orientation while others display a negative orientation.

These themes can be grouped into five meta-themes: treatment, attributes, teachers, studies and social relations.

Analysis of the findings points to several interesting observations:

The first observation that emerges from the findings is that "treatment" is a meta-theme exclusive to home-schooling parents. No themes associated with treatment emerged from the interviews with regular-schooling parents.

This may of course stem from objectively different ways in which the parents of the two groups were treated at school and would thus reflect truly different school experiences on the part of the parents. However, one may assume that the parents in the two groups were not treated in absolutely different ways, which would suggest that the discrepancy in their memories stems from something else. Such an explanation would suggest that

Table 2. Themes grouped according to meta-themes.

Meta-theme	Positive/Negative	Home-schooling themes	Regular-schooling themes
Treatment	Positive		
	Negative	Protection; mother is angry; a sense of humiliation; lack of adult attention; I wasn't given sufficient space; inflexible regime and punishment	
Attributes	Positive		
	Negative	Stupid; striving to please at heavy emotional cost; poor student, rebellious	Unexploited ability; transparent
Teachers	Positive	Good relationship with teachers	Interesting teacher; meaningful teacher
	Negative	Teachers don't know me	Boring teacher
Studies	Positive	*Strong in creativity and sport; good student*	*Strong in creativity and sport; good student*
	Negative	*Doesn't study; difficulty sitting still in class; average student*	*Doesn't study; difficulty sitting still in class; average student*
		Inefficient learning at school; poor student	Stressful exams; deterioration in grades
Social relations	Positive	*Social acceptance*	*Social acceptance*
	Negative	Social difficulty	Few friends

home-schooling parents ascribe greater importance, compared with regular-schooling parents, to their own treatment as students. This is an interesting distinction between the two groups.

The second observation that emerges from the findings is also associated with the meta-theme of treatment. All the themes subsumed in this meta-theme that emerged from interviews with home-schooling mothers were negative in nature, describing unpleasant aspects of the attitude displayed toward them at school.

Similar to the first observation, this finding may also be explained in different ways. For example, it could be concluded that the way they were treated by teachers in their youth constituted a meaningful factor for the group of home-schooling parents, or that these parents remembered school experiences in a relatively negative light.

The third observation that emerges from the findings is that there were differences between the two groups with regard to the meta-theme of teachers. Here too, the home-schooling parents referred to their acquaintance and relationships with their teachers, whereas the regular-schooling parents referred to interest and boredom, that is, to learning and content, and said nothing about contact with their teachers.

This tendency of the home-schooling parents to refer to attitudes and relationships (as opposed to the regular-schooling parents) is coherent across two meta-themes (attitudes and teachers), and may indicate a perceptual difference between them.

In addition to these findings, which describe earlier stress differences between the two groups, there are also findings that indicate aspects in which the two groups were not so different. A fourth notable finding concerns the meta-theme of attributes, which refers to the attributes that interviewees attributed to their younger selves, as schoolchildren. Neither home-schooling nor regular-schooling parents mentioned positive themes relating to their attributes as schoolchildren. Similarities between the two groups were also found with regard to the meta-themes of studies and social relations.

In summary, it appears from the findings that parent who chose to home school their children remembered their own schooling in terms of the attitude towards them as students more than the regular-schooling parents did.

9. Limitations and suggestions

The findings presented here suggest a number of fundamental differences between the two groups of parents. However, given its explorative nature, it was intended primarily to offer a system of reference. In this respect, it would be interesting to conduct further studies to test the conceptual framework underlying the present research on a large group of home-schooling parents and parents who send their children to school.

One could furthermore extend this research to other areas of life, not necessarily associated with education, to establish whether the two groups of parents place a different emphasis on reciprocal social relations. While such studies will not produce definitive answers, they would constitute a major step toward a better understanding of what differentiates the two groups of parents.

An additional limitation of the present research was that it indicated a phenomenon but did not address the reasons for it, namely why home-schooling parents ascribed greater importance to their treatment as students than the regular-schooling parents did. Several explanations might be suggested. For one, it is possible that the way the parents were treated

at school was perceived differently by the interviewees in each group, perhaps owing to personality differences. The issue of treatment may have been more significant, a priori, for home-schooling parents, who therefore recalled this experience; whereas regular-schooling parents perhaps ascribed less weight to their treatment at school and therefore did not mention it in the interview. In other words, home-schooling parents may have a greater tendency to focus on reciprocal relations and interpersonal relationships.

Apart from dissimilarity in the experience itself and variations in personality, this difference between the groups might stem from a difference in their respective perceptions of the essence of the learning process. In this regard, home-schooling parents may attribute considerable importance to the interaction between students and teachers and between students and their environment. This perceptional diversity may explain why, when asked about their own learning experience, these parents focused more on interpersonal relationships, compared with the regular-schooling parents, who considered reciprocal relations as a less important element in the learning process and thus did not mention it when recalling their own learning experiences (on the significance of reciprocal relations for the learning process, see Hamre et al. 2014; Hamre and Pianta 2001). Therefore, it would be interesting in further research to examine differences between the two groups in aspects related to personality and aspects associated with the perception of the learning process.

Furthermore, future studies would do well to examine the questions addressed here through the use of more quantitative tools that could enhance our understanding of how representative this conceptual framework is. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods is likely to help substantiate explanations of the differences between the two types of parents.

One should bear in mind that this study portrays a system of reference towards the topic in a single country. It would be useful to conduct such exploratory studies in other countries and to observe points of similarity and difference amongst various countries and cultures.

Despite these limitations, the study is likely to constitute an important step towards understanding the choice in favour of home schooling. As noted, this choice entails very significant social and personal ramifications. The ability to identify the factors involved in making this choice constitutes a platform for a theoretical understanding of this growing phenomenon, and for devising ways of guiding parents and educationalists in matters pertaining to home schooling.

In this respect, the present study chose to address the phenomenon by retrieving parents' memories of their schooldays rather than by taking the conventional route of asking them a direct question about the reasons for making their choice. The parents' descriptions do indeed indicate considerable discrepancies between the groups of parents regarding their memories of school. As pointed out in the discussion section, these differences afford a better understanding of the various perspectives that underlie the parents' diverse choices. The use of an indirect question about the parent's experiences constitutes a novel way of approaching this topic, and is thus likely to generate new insights. This leads to the hope that future studies will follow this path and will substantiate the findings presented here, thereby improving the understanding of the growth in the extent of home schooling.

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Ari Neuman is a senior lecturer 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.

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