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What are we educating towards? Socialization, acculturation, and individualization as reflected in home education

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the educational objectives of parents who homeschool (or practice home education) in terms of the widely accepted division of primary educational objectives, namely, socialisation, acculturation, and individualization. Using qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews, 30 homeschooling mothers were interviewed about their educational goals. The findings indicated that a significant number of the objectives cited by the interviewees were associated with the primary objective of individualization. In some cases, parents were interested in achieving goals of socialisation and acculturation in their children's education. This analysis may help identify the pedagogical ideology of parents who chose to homeschool, thus informing the policy-making. In addition, the case of homeschooling offers an example of the struggle among the three primary objectives of education, against the backdrop of far-reaching changes underway around the world in the post-modern era, which poses a challenge for educational policymakers, as well as school systems.

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Introduction

The present research examined the educational goals of parents who homeschool in terms of the widely accepted division of the three primary objectives of education. It was based on the assumption that the example of homeschooling might shed light on the conflict between these three primary objectives of education, in general, in the current postmodern era.

The primary objectives of education

What are the objectives of education? This has always been a fundamental issue of educational practice and research. Education is usually implemented by adults with the aim of shaping the character of young people. Thus the critical questions are what they are aiming for, or in other words, what they see as the model for these young people and how they envision the graduates of the education system.

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Without answers to these fundamental questions, it is impossible to provide proper education directed at specific goals. If you don't know where you want to go, you cannot plan the route to get there. It is necessary to define objectives in order to plan a successful educational process that guides young people through a transformation that leads to fulfilment of the objectives of the education system.

In the present research, we focused on the educational objectives described by scholars such as Lamm (1972, 1976, 2000), Egan (1997), and Rorty (1999). These researchers combined different views of educational objectives to form a theoretical model of three ultimate, or primary objectives, one focusing on society, one on culture, and one on the individual (for more on this subject, see Harpaz 2004; Tsabar 2014).

Socialisation

The objective that focuses on society, which Lamm referred to as socialisation, is based on the premise that education should equip young people with tools that enable them to function in the society in which they live. This principle is based on the perception of human beings as social creatures that need to live and function in their society. Therefore, they must comply with the social standards and guidelines that organise various aspects of personal interaction, such as spousal, family, employment, political, and other relationships. Abiding by these standards and guidelines helps individuals successfully fulfil their role in society and function as spouses, parents, professionals, and the like.

Lawy (2014) argued that a key assumption in the modern discourse is the need to prepare young people for life as citizens. Accordingly, a major role of the education system is to produce effective democratic citizens by means of active socialisation of their students. Schoolchildren are not yet citizens; they need proper preparation for this role. Schools are expected to teach them clear rules and provide them with training, as well as the knowledge and skills needed to become capable citizens.

Education aimed at socialisation requires a curriculum that teaches young students the customary way of life in their society. This includes teaching them the accepted behaviour patterns, customs, approaches, information, skills, values, and ideals of their social group. The social group may be, for example, a family, community, ethnic group, socioeconomic class, or nation.

Such a curriculum may be explicit or hidden. The rules and daily routine of the school provide students with an example of the rules and routines of other institutions. The values and behaviour of the teachers and principals serve as a model and indirectly affect the students. The different areas of study are deliberately designed to contribute to socialisation. In most countries, social studies tend to present the nation's interpretations of history, geography, economics, and politics. In the humanities, socialisation is reflected in the presentation of the creation and preservation of human culture (often with emphasis on the national culture). As agents of socialisation, schools develop curricula aimed at showing the importance of knowledge about life in the society, which is not likely to be acquired by normal experience outside the education system (Schubert 1986).

Acculturization

The objective that focuses on culture, known as acculturization, is based on the premise that education is intended to teach young people the views, values, and beliefs that form the cornerstones of the culture to which they belong. Different societies hold different values

and precepts and the educational process aspires to pass them on to its younger generation. Those who successfully complete the educational process in the spirit of acculturation are expected to apply the values, principles, and beliefs that they learn at school in all their activities.

Egan (1999) claimed that acculturation through education is based on the assumption that culture is comprised of products of “great minds,” cultural treasures such as books, paintings, plays, and music. The products, as well as the emotions and approaches associated with them, are placed in a hierarchy according to the general society. In this respect, education becomes a process of revealing the hierarchy of cultural treasures and setting the standards for their evaluation. Thus the curriculum consists mainly of content, and the educational process promotes acculturation through the different hierarchies. Cultural treasures are perceived as fixed, significant values that are not influenced by present events. They serve as the standards for evaluating experiences, products, and events. Teachers represent the cultural standards and the curriculum is constructed in a way that assures that students develop properly, in keeping with the different hierarchies. Access to the most valuable cultural treasures requires expertise in a broad range of knowledge and skills.

Individualization

The objective that focuses on the individual, which Lamm referred to as individualization, is based on the view that education should enable each person to fulfil his or her potential in a process of self-realisation. In other words, this approach holds that rather than imposing a predetermined model, it is important to allow youngsters to develop according to an image that suits them, based on their inner selves. Those who successfully complete the education process in the spirit of individualization choose actions that enable their self-realisation, free of cultural or social coercion.

Individualization differs from the other two primary objectives in that it is absent of any attempt to impose a model determined by society (as in the case of socialisation) or by culture (as in acculturation) on the young person. Instead, individualization focuses on enabling people to express their own unique character. Furthermore, individualization is new compared with the other primary objectives. Socialisation and acculturation are well-established concepts, but individualization was first embraced in the education system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

One of the pioneers in the field of modern education, Dewey, claimed that the purpose of education was development (Samuel 2015). His philosophy focused, among other things, on personal growth and self-fulfilment. In his writings, Dewey referred to growth not only in the sense of biological development, but also as moral, aesthetic, intellectual, and religious experiences. He believed that education should enable people to realise their abilities, and that this would lead to a thriving society. According to Dewey’s approach, the educational process is one of interaction and adjustment between children and the curriculum, and the quality of a school depends upon the degree to which it creates a desire to continue to grow and provides the means to do so. He saw education as a continual process of teaching how to learn. Dewey argued that instruction must begin in the children’s world of experiences, and that forcing them to study subjects such as reading and geography would be harmful to their nature and social experiences. Dewey presented examples of activities, such as gardening, building, baking, and sewing, that comprise our cultural world (Samuel 2015).

Su (2007) wrote about a society of bottom–top learning. In such a society, the educational process does not begin with a definition of goals. Instead, a learning society develops from an understanding of how individuals learn, and this determines the structure of teaching. Su described three components of the learning society: lifelong learning, individualization of learning, and learning beyond education.

According to this view, lifelong learning is learning that is not restricted, as in the past, to a certain period of time, but includes activities that should continue throughout life, according to changes in the world and society. Learning beyond education refers to learning in order to develop one's personal strengths. It contributes to the promotion of humanity. Learners decide whether or not the material taught is valuable. This is a selective type of learning, aimed at ensuring the development and improvement of society as a whole.

In education aimed at individualization, numerous subjects and activities are presented to learners, who chose from them according to the relevance to their personal lives. The individual decides what to study and in which combination; there are no learning patterns before this choice is made. Individualization may be implemented in schools in different ways, ranging from the concept of a flexible school to inclusion of information technology that enables flexible curricula and independent learning.

In his book about curriculum, Schubert (1986) described how to teach individualization. According to his theory, those who advocate independent learning want their students to work on separate projects, each tailored to his or her personal interests. Such tailoring can be achieved by means of learning aids, such as textbooks, multimedia equipment, and computer programmes. Classroom teachers may implement another version of individualised learning, by building projects that fit the different personal needs and aspirations of each student. In some cases, the teacher may draw up a contract specifying the work that the student must carry out, the date of submission, and expectations, which the student signs. Other teachers who adopt the objective of individualization allocate time to talk with each student regarding his or her studies. In these conversations, personal aspects of the student's life emerge, enhancing the teacher's ability to create meaningful learning.

Self-regulated learning is a key concept in education towards individualization (Boekaerts 1997; Boekaerts and Corno 2005; Cohen 2012; Zimmerman 2002, 2008). Self-regulation is considered essential for personal development in the spirit of individualization; without it, people can not define their own objectives for fulfilling their personal potential, develop ways of action to achieve them, or act according to them (Aviram 2010).

The skills of self-regulation are perceived as essential not only for learning at school, but also for independent learning and updating knowledge after one leaves school. Learners with self-regulation differ in many ways from those who need intensive external supervision. They rely upon inner sources and motivation (self-regulation) to control their independent learning process and begin the learning activity by setting goals for expanding their knowledge. They are also aware of what they already know and feel about the field of study and whether they have the ability and motivation to specialise in it.

In the case of students who are not yet able to regulate their learning, teachers may offer supportive guidance. It is important that teachers help students define study goals and adjust them over time. Goal definition is a skill in itself and teachers should encourage students to set their own standards and goals (Boekaerts 1997).

In practice, these three approaches are implemented in different combinations, with varying mixes of the three types of primary educational objectives. However, it is important

to understand that these three objectives are liable to contradict each other. Each focus dictates different and sometimes conflicting educational goals, with corresponding content, courses of action, desired results, and evaluation of both process and outcomes.

Against this background, there is constant competition among the three approaches to the objectives of education. Those who focus on the objective of socialisation call for education that endows young people with the tools required to function in society; those who see acculturation as the primary objective promote education that instils values and beliefs that are appropriate for the culture in which they live; and those who place most emphasis on individualization support education that enables personal self-realisation (Aviram 2010; Egan 1997; Harpaz 2004; Lamm 1976).

Homeschooling

Against the background of this division of education objectives, we examined the educational practice known as homeschooling (or home education), which has been gaining momentum over recent decades. In the homeschooling framework, parents choose not to send their children to the formal (public or private) education system, opting instead to educate them at home (Neuman and Aviram 2003, 2008).

Homeschooling has become increasingly popular in the last decades of the twentieth and early twenty-first century. A growing number of countries have extended their compulsory education legislation to include homeschooling; in these places, parents who educate their children at home in compliance with set conditions, which differ among countries, are regarded as meeting the requirements of the compulsory education law. In the United States, for example, homeschooling is legal in all states; the same is true in England, Canada, France, Portugal, and other countries. However, in other places, such as Germany and Albania, there is no legal homeschooling option (Monk 2009; Neuman and Guterman 2013; Petrie 2001; Waddell 2010; Yuracko 2007).

The number of families that homeschool is also growing; it is still not a practice of massive proportions, but a considerable number of children are educated at home in many countries. For example, it is currently estimated that about two million children are homeschooled in the United States. In Great Britain, the number is about 800,000, and in Australia it is about 30,000 (Neuman and Guterman 2013). These numbers represent a significant increase in the number of homeschooled children worldwide. For example, in the United States there has been an increase of 2000% in the last 40 years, from approximately 13,000 homeschooling families in the 1970s to approximately two million today (Aurini and Davies 2005; Blok and Karsten 2011; Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Ray 2010; 2011).

There are two main streams of homeschooling, known as structured homeschooling and unstructured homeschooling, or unschooling. In structured homeschooling, parents teach their children at home according to a set curriculum (although it may differ from family to family) and at regular times. In unschooling, learning is considered an integral part of people's daily life, so that it is unnecessary to allocate specific time slots for this purpose. Furthermore, advocates of this type of education believe there is no need to determine subjects of study (that is, the curriculum) in advance. Learning occurs at all times, regarding all subjects that are relevant. These two approaches also differ greatly in their definitions of the objectives of education and how it should be implemented (Aurini and Davies 2005; Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Morrison 2007; Ray and Wartes 1994; Ricci 2011).

Homeschooling and the primary objectives of education

It is interesting to examine the three primary objectives discussed earlier in terms of homeschooling. We view homeschooling as an educational alternative, similar to other alternatives such as paedo-centric education, open education, and democratic education (Dewey 2012; Holt 1983; Neill 1953; Nyberg 2009), which is associated with the primary objective of individualization. Accordingly, examination of the objectives of education as perceived by the homeschooling parents can be expected to reveal that they are associated primarily, and perhaps even exclusively, with individualization.

Method

For the purpose of this investigation, we employed qualitative methodology and in-depth interviews. We chose to employ a qualitative method based on the view that this approach, and in-depth interviews, in particular, would best enable us to understand how parents perceived the objectives of education.

Research sample

Thirty mothers who engaged in homeschooling in Israel participated in the study. The researchers approached the participants at homeschooling gatherings and asked them to participate in the research.

All of the participating mothers had children of elementary-school age. We chose to interview the mothers (and not the fathers) because in the vast majority of cases, the mother is the significant adult who spends the most homeschooling time with the children. This was also the case among the families that participated in the current study – in all of them, the mother was the dominant adult in the homeschooling activities.

Research tools and research procedure

Interviewers visited each mother in her home. After hearing a detailed explanation about the research and its purpose, each mother signed an informed consent form.

In a semi-structured in-depth interview, the researchers asked each mother what she considered the purpose of education. This question was asked directly, but the information regarding their view of this issue was also drawn from the mothers' responses to other questions that did not directly address the subject of educational objectives. We recorded all the interviews.

Data analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using ATLAS.ti 7, a hermeneutic text analysis software that enables the researcher to attribute themes to text segments and examine the relationships between these themes.

In the first stage of the analysis, the text was analysed using *in-vivo* themes that arose during the interviews. In the second stage of the analysis, these *in-vivo* themes were divided according to the three primary objectives of education (socialisation, acculturation, and

individualization). In this process, the researchers attributed each theme to one objective only.

Following Lincoln and Guba's (1986) concept of peer debriefing, one researcher conducted an analysis, which was then reviewed by the second researcher. The two researchers resolved any disagreements regarding the analysed data in a discussion.

Results

The results of the interview content analysis are presented below in three groups, corresponding to the three primary objectives of education. The themes that arose during the interviews are specified for each of the primary objectives.

Primary objective – individualization

A clear majority of the interviewees (28 out of 30) indicated objectives that were associated with primary objective of individualization, and the largest number of quotes – 124 – was recorded for this primary objective (Some of the quotes were relevant to several different goals associated with this primary objective.)

As noted, this primary objective is associated with a perception of education as a tool to help young people express the traits with which they have been endowed, or as one of the interviewees put it:

It is not possible to change one's personal structure; you can only help it. In order to help it, you need to give me the tools: come on, give me the tools now to cope with this thing so that I will know what to do. (Participant 24)

The goals associated with the primary objective of individualization that arose during the interviews were self-realisation, self-regulation, self-respect, independence and self-confidence, cultivation of curiosity and inquisitiveness, and happiness.

Self-realisation

This goal was cited in a large number of quotes. The interviewees indicated that it was important to them that their children identify the fields of interest and areas in which they enjoyed being involved. Furthermore, it was also important to them that their children then study, explore, and become involved in these areas. The parents perceived the involvement of their children in areas that were of interest to them as self-realisation.

to be who they are and to go for the things they love doing. Ah ... don't know, to convey to them that ... it's terribly important that they grow up and that they do the things they love doing and that they don't do things that they don't [love], because you need to do it for some reason or other. (Participant 23)

and work in a profession that will be good for them ... I wish for their sake that it will be something productive and that they can enjoy their work and everything that they choose and that it will truly be good. (Participant 29)

... I think a person needs to understand what his destination is in life and to choose a profession according to this. Let's say that most of his time will be dedicated to this thing and of course not to something else. (Participant 5)

The interviewers also presented the goal of excellence, which is frequently used to describe academic achievement, as representing self-realisation.

the matter of excellence, which I have recently been trying to teach myself, because I discovered that this is not my strong point ... the matter of excellence to get into something that you want, as if you want to achieve, and to do what you love, yes as if another 50 years will go by, they'll look and say wow, as if I am doing what I love, I made an effort and achieved what was important to me, I don't want them to make an effort for things that are not important to them. (Participant 8)

According to the interviewees, choosing an activity that the children loved was preferable to trying to achieve external goals or doing something because "everyone is doing it." In other words, they saw self-realisation as more important than social conformity.

... you don't need to follow the flock. Just because everyone is doing something does not mean that it is right, what is good for you what is right for you and my children it seems to me that they have it many times they do things that are non-conventional and they are fine with this. (Participant 22)

We really want them to go with what they love and from there they will grow and so this is what I truly think that this is the genuine place, that will really grow them and will bring to them the wealth and all the joy because ... I say, great [they] can get their doctorate and everything, but they will be frustrated and will not love what they are doing, and every day they will get up feeling irritable, so what is this doctorate worth? (Participant 24)

It's important for me to show them what's customary compared to what the things are that we believe. That it is also possible to do differently because [it's] allowed to be different. Also that they should have enough self confidence to stand up for what they want and to be themselves not necessarily within the overall array [of society]. It starts with boys with long hair who can receive, over the years they received and will continue to receive such reactions and others, and all sorts of things that we are allowed to break and which we are allowed to do differently and there are things that we usually do according to society. Our education process it's to impart in them the norms that we truly believe that stems from their inner self. To preserve their individuality. (Participant 19)

The interviewees also expressed a belief that selecting an activity that the children loved would lead to high-quality activity, derived from self-motivation.

... thinkers and researchers that will not accept things as self-evident or as something that was said and cannot be changed. So it will be and people who take an interest in what is interesting for them and it doesn't bore them, classical music or being a dancer. So they should be a dancer or it doesn't matter what he does, what he wants from within his own inner truth. From his desire, from his conscious agreement with himself about what he intends to do. (Participant 19)

Self-regulation

Interviewees indicated that they wanted their children to be capable of different aspects of self-regulation. This ability may be expressed in independent decision-making, as well as various aspects of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is expressed in the ability to recognise one's own desires, abilities, and limitations, and to perform actions that are suited to these desires, abilities, and limitations.

... independence – that you are capable of making your decisions and you can rely on yourself and also that you lean on someone else and that they also lean on you, it's not to be a burden... (Participant 9)

they should have enough tools to understand how to achieve what they want. Everything requires and involves challenges that they understand and know that this is the situation and that they need to do all sorts of actions in order to reach what they want. (Participant 27)

They will be sure of themselves, will know what they want, [will be] focused on their goals and then they can achieve every goal without ah ... being pushed towards it rather they will be pushing themselves. (Participant 30)

... know yourselves your weaknesses the places where you do not need help the places where you do need help and learn to know yourselves. (Participant 3)

... to know himself is something more gentle, to give peace of mind, this place that is connected to yourself to know who you are, to know what you love, the most simple things. (Participant 10)

Self-respect

The interviewees indicated that they wanted their children to have self-respect:

I think that the most important value from my point of view is the matter of respect and also a lot of self respect. In other words to respect myself because I deserve it ... to be very clear to myself and to be at peace with myself, things that are very important to me. (Participant 17)

Independence and self-confidence

The interviewees also suggested that in order to fulfil oneself, a person needs traits such as independence and self-confidence. Independence enables people to conduct their lives without depending on others, and self-confidence enables them to feel that their conduct is significant and valuable.

We do, from a very young age I think, we do things some of which we are crucially aware of, in the direction of independence. Be it that we include them from a very young age in work around the house that they won't get to their first degree [studies] and will, for the first time, need to cook for themselves, like their mother let's say. (Participant 21)

That they will be free people with self confidence, that love themselves, that they [feel] good about life, that know what they want and know to go after what they want, and even also to make an effort to acquire something that they need. (Participant 23)

... less dependent on what the environment [those around them] is doing, thinking, wanting, that is up to a certain limit, but ah ... faithful to themselves, know what their qualities are, what their capabilities are, have self-awareness, are aware of their own value. (Participant 14)

Cultivation of curiosity and inquisitiveness

Some of the interviewees indicated that for them, one of the goals of education was to develop curiosity and inquisitiveness, which would help the children learn and cope with challenges.

We truly want to maintain their curiosity, which is something that pushes them to study. (Participant 15)

Happiness

Many interviewees indicated that a key educational goal for them was happiness – they wanted their children to be happy. For some, this could be achieved by self-realisation, activities that result in inner gratification, and attempts to do good for oneself.

First of all it is like raising happy and joyful children who feel good about what they are doing and are faithful to themselves. (Participant 31)

... who feel good about life, that they are realising their calling, that they are happy, that they are living happily. (Participant 5)

To do the best that you can for yourselves. (Participant 3)

Primary objective – acculturation

Half of the interviewees (15 out of 30) indicated objectives that were associated with the primary objective of acculturation. Twenty-nine quotes were recorded for this educational objective. (Some of the quotes were relevant to several educational goals associated with this primary objective).

The educational goals associated with acculturation that arose during the interviews were morality and integrity, a positive attitude to others, family values, and religious values.

Morality and integrity

Some of the interviewees indicated that they wanted their children to have a proper moral code and a moral compass that would guide them regarding what was and was not permissible.

First of all truth, truth, integrity (Participant 1)

Want them to be very ethical with themselves and to develop their own opinions for themselves and to learn what is permitted and what is forbidden. (Participant 29)

Positive attitude to others

Interviewees said that they would like their children to have a positive attitude towards others. This might be expressed in the children's ability to see the viewpoint of others, be tolerant towards and respectful of one another, and strive to be good to others.

To see the other as they are is closely linked to family, it's linked to that place in the morning with brothers and you need to be considerate of others, prominent, I think that family is the strongest place that you are exposed to it, you learn there. (Participant 10)

I want them to really be decent human beings ... that they won't hate other people and that gender and religion and political opinions won't play a part with them. (Participant 29)

Values of ... respect for yourself, respect for those around you. (Participant 17)

I want them to be good people. (Participant 6)

A human being that can manage in our world, socially ... he's a human being ah ... honest agreeable manner, pleasant, that's enough as far as I'm concerned. (Participant 13)

Family values

Some of the interviewees indicated that they wanted their children to have good family relations.

That was one of my home education goals: I very much wanted the family to be united as a family. (Participant 15)

that they should be good siblings. (Participant 6)

Religious values

One of the interviewees indicated that she wanted to educate her children according to religious values.

Even before the home education we decided that for the children to really choose we needed to educate them as religious. (Participant 11)

Primary objective – socialisation

Less than half of the interviewees (13 out of 30) indicated objectives that were associated with the primary objective of socialisation. Twenty-four quotes were recorded for the primary goal of socialisation. (Some of the quotes were relevant to several of the themes associated with this primary objective).

The educational goals associated with the primary objective of socialisation that arose during the interviews were functional life skills and social skills.

Functional life skills

The interviewees indicated that they wanted to expose their children to the “real” world and teach them skills and tools that would help them function successfully as adults in the future.

First of all I think of giving [them] some sort of exposure to the world. (Participant 10)

They are capable of doing what they need to do to umm ... to exist [and] establish a home. (Participant 5)

I think that the most significant advantage [of home education] is the ability of the children to be exposed to the real world ... my life is open to them, if shopping is needed, if errands need to be run, if a shower is needed, they can join me in all of these. When they are big this is less significant, because they already know what it's like, but when they're small, to see how adults behave in the real world it teaches a lot more than shutting them up in a room with one teacher and to learn... (Participant 11)

Some of the interviewees noted that there was no way of knowing how the world will look when their children become adults. Against this background, one said that it was important to teach them attributes that would help them succeed, and not knowledge.

The world today has changed a bit, and people with a degree are left empty-handed. So maybe it's not the right thing to direct them to a degree, but rather to a profession. So I'm no longer sure what the right thing is ... What is right for now might not be right in [another] 10 years, so we need to be flexible. (Participant 20)

The world is developing so rapidly that nobody can promise that what is right for the children today will really be suitable in another 20 years. I think that 20 years from today, there will be an excess of academics, an excess of people with education. Knowledge cannot guarantee anything. Actually, self-confidence, creativity and initiative are the things that are needed. (Participant 7)

In comparison, another goal that emerged was that of acquiring skills that will be helpful for studying at university in the future. One of the interviewees said she wanted her daughter to earn high scores on her matriculation exam, which would enable her to study at university.

It puts on pressure, as if it does not suit me that my child should learn to read in grade 6. Anyway I want and need him to be a good student, for him to do his matriculation exams, that he should do his matriculation exams and get good grades. That's a must. (Participant 6)

Another interviewee noted that she wanted to teach her children advanced learning skills, so that they would succeed in their university studies.

Independence, I want them to acquire good learning habits whether in terms of learning strategies such as how to summarize material, again not [to be doing this] for the first time at university. (Participant 11)

Social skills

Some of the interviewees indicated that they strove to teach their children social skills that would help them function in society as adults. In particular, two such social skills were mentioned: the ability to listen and good manners.

I Very much want to teach them for example to know how to listen. To listen, pay attention, and even more to listen. (Participant 15)

Table 1 is a summary of the goals that emerged from the interviews, and the corresponding three primary educational objectives. The numbers below the column headings in the table represent the number of interviewees that referred to one or more goals associated with each of the primary objectives.

Discussion and conclusions

The findings of the present research indicated that although the educational goals of the interviewees were linked to all three primary objectives, very strong emphasis was placed on the primary objective of individualization. More interviewees cited educational goals associated with individualization (28) than with acculturation (15) and socialisation (13). Furthermore, there were more quotes associated with the primary objective of individualization (124) than the objectives of acculturation (29) and socialisation (24). These findings could be important in educational policy-making, both as a tool for mapping homeschooling, as well as evidence that the educational objective of individualization is not prevalent only among homeschoolers.

A tool for mapping homeschoolers

It is interesting to note that approximately half of the interviewees nonetheless referred to educational goals that are associated with socialisation and acculturation. In other words,

Table 1. Summary of educational objectives.

Primary objective	Individualization	Acculturation	Socialisation
Number of interviewees	28/30	15/30	13/30
Number of quotes ^a	124	29	24
Secondary objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-realisation • Self-regulation • Self-respect • Independence and self-confidence • Cultivation of curiosity and inquisitiveness happiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morality and integrity • Positive attitude to others • Family values • Religious values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functional life skills • Social skills

^aThe number of quotes in which this objective appeared in all the interviews. Note that there was some overlapping, because some of the quotes were relevant to more than one primary objective.

some of them recognised the importance of teaching their children social skills and cultural values, and did not see promotion of self-realisation as their only goal.

It seems, then, that in addition to the other customary divisions of homeschooling, such as homeschooling and unschooling, or pedagogical and ideological homeschooling (Van Galen 1988), it is also possible to divide homeschooling families by the primary educational objectives they adopt, based on the relative weight they ascribe to different educational goals.

This division could be helpful, for example, in guiding government policies on homeschooling. For example, one of the major concerns about the growing prevalence of homeschooling is that children raised in this framework do not undergo socialisation processes, an omission that could potentially damage the unifying fabric of society (see, e.g. Després 2013; Merry and Karsten 2010; West 2009). However, the findings of this study indicate that, at least in some cases, homeschooling parents want to integrate socialisation-oriented (and acculturation-oriented) goals in their children's education. In this respect, one could say that the government and the homeschooling parents share a common interest (for more on this, see Medlin 2013). It is important for policy makers to take into account that a public education system interested in strengthening its relationship with homeschoolers could offer to participate in and guide the socialisation of the children who are homeschooled.

In contrast, the case of parents whose sole educational objective is individualization might indeed raise concern that the children might not undergo socialisation processes. It is important to distinguish between these two possible situations and perhaps devise a different policy for each.

Individualization: not just among homeschoolers

If we accept the common wisdom that socialisation processes help maintain and develop the society in which we live, the tendency of the participants in this research to prioritise educational goals associated with the objective of individualization could be perceived as part of the broader dismantling of the social system in the postmodern era.

The transition from the modern to the postmodern era is affecting many aspects of our lives, including those pertaining to work, leisure activities, livelihood, economy, medicine, communication, family, society, and more. The hallmarks of the modern era, which was characterised by comprehensive ideologies and absolute truths, are now being replaced; nowadays, there is a prominent absence of ideology and the recognition of different truths (Aviram 2010; Docherty 1993; Grenz 1996; O'Donnell 2003).

The loss of ideologies and belief in absolute truths, and the rapid changes occurring in all walks of life in the post-modern era raise doubts about the values that form the basis of the primary objective of acculturation. They also cast doubt on the practices developed to achieve the primary objective of socialisation, because both the objective and the practices are based on the premise of an "absolute truth" and an "absolute right."

Under these circumstances, and in light of the undermining of the belief in the importance of these two primary objectives, we are left with the third primary objective – individualization. This objective is not necessarily dependent on universal values or social positions, but promotes personal self-realisation. Therefore, it may be influenced less by the loss of ideologies and loss of belief in an absolute truth.

In the constant struggle among the three primary educational objectives (acculturation, individualization, and socialisation), individualization is accorded greater emphasis in the postmodern era than it was in the past. As the present findings indicate, this is demonstrated in the homeschooling community. However, it is interesting that there is consensus among contemporary educators and researchers of education that at least one educational goal associated with individualization, namely, self-regulation, should be adopted in conventional schools, as well.

For example, numerous articles published in the past decade have maintained that we should be teaching “21st-century skills” in our schools (Griffin, McGaw, and Care 2012; Larson and Miller 2011; Rotherham and Willingham 2010; Silva 2009; Trilling and Fadel 2009). One of the key skills in this context is self-regulation, one of the central objectives mentioned by the homeschooling interviewees in this study, and a subcategory of the primary objective of individualization. Thus it seems that nowadays, the public education system, and not just in the homeschooling community, is placing greater emphasis on the primary objective of individualization, compared with the other two primary objectives.

It is important to take this into consideration not only when devising policy regarding homeschooling, but also when devising policy regarding education in general. It is easier for a society to promote its goals through the primary educational objectives of socialisation and acculturation than it is through individuation.

Limitations of the study

This study examined a small group of homeschooling parents, and did so using qualitative tools. A study of this type can be useful in creating a conceptual framework for examining the educational values of homeschooling parents. However, in order to achieve more extensive mapping, it would be necessary to study a larger number of participants, enabling statistical comparison of their responses. Such research would require construction of a closed questionnaire, which might be based, among other things, on the findings of the present study. The questionnaire would require participants to rank the level of importance of different educational goals, which would be divided according to the three primary objectives. Such research would facilitate a comparison between homeschooling parents and those who send their children to conventional schools, and also among the different streams of homeschooling.

In addition, the current study examined the declared attitudes of parents to educational goals, but did not investigate their actual educational practices. It would be interesting in future research to study this issue not only at the declarative level but also in terms of performance. Such research could, for instance, analyse the learning processes and study materials employed in terms of the primary educational objectives they represent.

Finally, the current study examined the attitudes of homeschooling parents as a whole, without differentiation by the types of homeschooling they practiced. It would be interesting to examine this issue as part of such a quantitative study as suggested earlier.

The present research examined educational goals in terms of one of the most widely accepted division of primary objectives: socialisation, acculturation, and individualization. This perspective enables a deep understanding of educational trends, in general, and of those associated with the development of alternatives to the school system, in particular.

In the past few decades, an increasing number of educational frameworks have been developed to provide alternatives to the conventional school system. Homeschooling is only one of these; others include, for instance, private school systems, networks of schools based on specific worldviews (such as democratic or community schools), magnet schools (such as those that focus on nature or on environmental studies and sustainability), and others.

The approach presented in the present article may contribute to a better understanding of these changes in light of social developments and changes in parents' perceptions of the purpose of education. In other words, we have shown how the intensive growth of alternative education systems may be, among other things, an outcome of a cultural trend that focuses more on the educational goals associated with individualization compared with other objectives.

In addition to its contribution to examining the situation from a broad theoretical perspective, this perspective on educational trends may also have practical implications. Among other things, it highlights the growing need of parents for responses to various educational needs according to their worldviews and educational outlook.

Against this background, the approach presented in the present article presents a challenge to the policy makers and to the education system, as it reveals a focus on individual needs at the expense of the broader common cultural and social denominator. This gives rise to the question whether, and if so, how the conventional education system can respond to the growing view among parents that education should promote individualization, which, by definition, recognises wide variance among students and makes it difficult to find a common denominator among educational goals and processes.

Thus, despite the limitations of the research cited here, the present article offers a contribution to the theoretical understanding of homeschooling and of alternative education, in general, as well as the educational practices of parents and educators. We therefore hope it will provide a basis policy-making as well as for further research in this field.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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