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Choice without markets: homeschooling in the context of private education

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Homeschooling is enjoying new-found acceptance in North America. Drawing on a variety of secondary sources and our own data from Ontario, Canada, we find that homeschooling is growing steadily, and is becoming an increasingly legitimated form of education. To understand these changes, we review prevailing sociological explanations that focus on the rise of neo-liberal ideology, and pressures of class reproduction and human capital requirements. We document the contributions of these theories and note their limits for understanding the rising popularity of homeschooling. We then situate homeschooling within a broader context of private education, distinguishing segments that encourage market-consumer, class reproduction, human capital and 'expressive' logics. The combination of large investments of time and effort with highly uncertain outcomes makes homeschooling the most expressive form of private education, which we trace to the burgeoning culture of 'intensive parenting.'

Introduction: homeschooling and the rising tide of private education

Various forms of private education are on the rise in North America as in other continents. Private schools, tutoring businesses, preschools, vocational colleges and homeschooling are all growing steadily.[1] In Canada the proportion of students enrolled in private schools grew by 20% over the past decade. In Ontario, Canada's largest province, both the number of private schools and their enrolments rose by over 40% (Davies *et al.*, 2002). In the United States, enrolments in education alternatives such as magnet and charter schools have risen markedly, from 10 million to almost 14 million (Fuller, 2000, p. 42). Non-traditional forms of private education are also experiencing growth, evidenced by the rising numbers of tutoring businesses (Aurini

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& Davies, 2004), private preschools (Aurini, 2002), proprietary vocational colleges (Sweet & Gallagher, 1999) and corporate training programs (Scott & Meyer, 1994).

Homeschooling is no exception within this trend, and is becoming more diverse. Whereas 30 years ago it was dominated by a coalition of religious fundamentalists and experimental 'unschoolers' (Knowles, 1988; Wahisi, 1995; Nazareno, 1999; Welner & Welner, 1999; Arai, 2000), a variety of subgroups are now emerging, with very different goals that range from nurturing minority identities, to meeting special educational needs, to simply seeking a superior form of education.

Although homeschooling currently affects only one to two percent of the student body, it is 'shedding its image as a social or educational aberration' (Luffman, 1998), and is increasingly stimulating media, policy and academic interest. Yet homeschooling is also sparking controversy and wildly varied reactions. Supporters hail it as a bold alternative that can challenge prevailing public education more than any other school alternative (Bauman, 2002; Hill, 2000; Lines, 2000; Trotter, 2001). In contrast, to opponents any further growth could threaten 'the destruction of public schooling,' which would be 'nothing short of a disaster' (Apple, 2000; Riegel, 2001). Such controversy reflects how homeschooling is becoming an increasingly integral component of the rising school choice movement.

The purpose of this paper is to examine homeschooling within a context of growing private education, drawing on a variety of secondary sources and our own data from Ontario, Canada. Rather than presenting an exhaustive analysis of these data, our intent is to highlight suggestive patterns and trends. For two years we have been examining various forms of private education in Ontario, documenting their growth as well as interviewing key actors, conducting site visits and attending events.[2] To date we have conducted 75 interviews with a variety of actors, including parents, principals, tutors, business people, preschool educators, homeschoolers and representatives from regulatory agencies, franchise associations and instructor training programs. This breadth permits us to highlight trends that run across different forms of private education that may be overlooked in a smaller case study approach.

Our argument is three-fold. First, after examining the secondary literature on homeschooling, we conclude that, despite numerous ambiguities in available data, all suggest that homeschooling is growing markedly across North America. Second, drawing on a variety of indicators, we deduce that homeschooling is enjoying a new level of legitimacy and is attracting more mainstream followers. Third, we situate homeschooling within a framework that distinguishes the logics by which different forms of private education appeal to their clients. Comparing market-consumer, class reproduction, human capital and 'expressive' logics, we argue that homeschooling is the most expressive segment of private schooling, and trace this to a burgeoning culture of 'intensive childrearing.'

The growth of homeschooling

More than other forms of private education, homeschooling is an elusive entity. Without uniform regulations or counting procedures, homeschooling does not lend itself

to traditional data collection methods. Procedures to track homeschoolers vary by province and state. Some practicing families do not register with local authorities, and many appear to be somewhat transient, moving between homeschooling, private schools and regular public schools. Little is known about 'part-time' homeschoolers who register with a public or private school for some of their subjects. All these probably lead to an underreporting of homeschooling (Luffman, 1997, p. 37; Bauman, 2002, p. 6). Nevertheless, all estimates, regardless of their procedures, suggest that homeschooling is growing substantially in both Canada and the United States.

In Canada, older sources suggest that the number of homeschooled children swelled from 2000 to 18,000 between 1979 and 1996, the latter figure representing 0.4% of the student population (Luffman, 1997, p. 30; Basham, 2001, p. 6), while more recent estimates put the number to 80,000 (Hepburn, 2001; Sokoloff, 2002). In the United States, homeschooling has been estimated to have grown annually by 11% to 40% (Ray, 1994; Cloud & Morse, 2001, p. 49). From 1985 to 1995 the number of homeschooled children grew from 50,000 to between 500,000 and 750,000 (Lines, 2000; Basham, 2001, p. 6). A 1999 survey put the figure at 850,000, representing 1.7% of the student population (http://www.life.ca/hs/USA.html), while a 2003 survey estimated 2.2% of all American students are homeschooled (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Reports of significant upward trends in school non-enrolment appear to verify these estimates (Bauman, 2002).[3]

This growth has attracted the attention of scholars and policy-makers, as well as parents. Expanding alongside other private education alternatives, homeschoolers are gaining legitimacy, having won legal victories, have grown more diverse and have attracted more parents from the mainstream.

New levels of legitimacy

Whereas homeschooling has had a dubious legal standing for decades, recent legislative changes indicate a new level of legitimacy. As late as 1980, homeschooling was illegal in most American states, and has only realized legal status in all 50 states since 1993 (Basham, 2001, p. 4). In Ontario, it is now much easier to homeschool than in the past. A new policy permits boards of education to deem that children are receiving satisfactory instruction at home simply by accepting notification from parents. The provincial government no longer requires homeschoolers to follow traditional schooling methodologies, and now recognizes homeschooling as 'a viable alternative to public education' that offers educational experiences that can be 'unique to each family.' Universities can now receive provincial funding for homeschooled youth, and are devising admission policies to accommodate these applicants. These policy changes have been touted as a 'major victory' by Ontario homeschooling associations.[4]

The roots of modern homeschooling lie in cultural values that are distinct from, and sometimes in opposition to, the North American mainstream. As described by scholars such as Mitchell Stevens (2001), homeschooling rose several decades ago through the efforts of two vastly dissimilar groups: religious fundamentalists and the

'unschoolers.' The fundamentalists, disenchanted with the increasingly secular nature of public schooling, saw homeschooling as a way to ensure that their children were exposed to religious teachings. They opted for a structured method of homeschooling that taught the basics and promoted the authority of the family. Meanwhile, after the demise of the Free School movement, author and educator John Holt encouraged small sects of parents to try their own hand at teaching their children. Convinced that public schools, as bureaucratic organizations, only harm children by subjecting them to the inhumane routines of 'technocracy,' unschoolers chose a radically unstructured version of homeschooling that aimed to cultivate children's personal enjoyment of life.

While these two strands are still strong in the homeschool movement, newer recruits appear to live nearer the North American mainstream, and have more purely pedagogical motives, as opposed to expressing their alienation from society's secular or technocratic excesses. Our interviewees all agreed that homeschooling is becoming more accepted in Canada. One homeschooling mother describes her experience:

> [T]wenty years ago, it was still, 'who are these weirdos that are homeschooling their kids? Are they religious fanatics or what?' The idea is becoming more mainstream. People don't get so upset anymore when you say you want to homeschool your child … In Toronto it's already a very large community, we don't even know each other anymore it's so large. I would say hundreds and hundreds in Toronto. Lots of support groups all over.

As another homeschooling mother put it:

> I don't know if there's a typical homeschooling family, they're all over the board. I'm of a growing trend, there's more in the suburbs. In the past, the first impression that most people have is Christian. I'm not that. The second perception is the hippies, back to the land. We're a little bit that way, but not. We live in suburbia.

As homeschooling grows, it is also feeding a small literary industry. Dozens of books now exist on homeschooling.[5] In addition to the sheer volume of titles, what is intriguing is that most encourage parents to choose among methods, rather than promote the original religious or unschool orthodoxies. A now-common theme is that parents should try a mixture of several methods until they find one that suits their children best. The vast majority of these books have practical, not ideological themes, offering advice on how to homeschool for success, how to teach basic skills, how to adopt proven techniques, how to do so on a tight budget, and how to find resources for home teaching. By doing so, homeschooling increasingly resembles the wider choice movement. Rather than strongly advocating that children conform to one or another type of pedagogy, more homeschoolers simply want a tailor-made pedagogy that best suits their child, and are less interested in extreme doctrines.

Blending into the mainspring of society, the public ideals animating the new homeschool movement are commonplace and legalistic, a far cry from the religious calls of fundamentalists, or the utopian doctrines of John Holt's devotees. For example, when lobbying governments, homeschool organizations are increasingly framing their demands using standard notions of individual rights, rather than anti-secular or anti-technocracy claims, knowing that the latter now appear outlandish in a public forum

(for Ontario, see http://www.ontariohomeschool.org). Linking homeschooling to human rights and the need for school choice gives these groups a broader resonance (Davies & Aurini, 2005).

This growing legitimacy is attracting more attention from politicians, journalists and academics. While some may dismiss homeschooling as a still-rare practice that encompasses a small portion of the population, many researchers now see it as a symbol of larger societal trends. Supporters hail it as part of movement that is busting bureaucracy and making education truly humane; opponents link it to a broader anti-democratic movement that threatens the viability of the public school system and its attempts to provide equal opportunity (for example, Apple, 2000; Riegel, 2001). If homeschooling indeed has such far-reaching implications, we need to engage sociological theories of education to uncover its links to societal trends. Our strategy is to examine homeschooling within context of the broader growth of private education.

Three explanations for growth and legitimacy

Why is homeschooling, along with other forms of private education, growing and becoming increasingly legitimate in the eyes of parents and policy-makers? To understand this rise of private education, sociologists offer three types of explanations. The first centers on the rise of Neo-Liberal ideology, and the way that public discourse on education is increasingly imbued with notions of efficiency, accountability and choice (Whitty & Edwards, 1998; Apple, 2000; Stein, 2001; Wells, 2002). Neo-liberals such as Chubb and Moe (1990) have faulted public school systems for lacking incentives to be effective, and have championed the introduction of market competition in schooling, which they argue weeds out substandard educators, and rewards schools that are cost-effective, of high quality and responsive to parental preferences. A fuller menu of educational choice, they argue, is being demanded by parents. According to critics of neo-liberalism, the spread of this type of thinking represents a 'values drift' in which parents increasingly assess school options through a market lens, downplaying goals of social betterment and intrinsic learning goals in favor of extrinsic rewards, competitive advantage, and economistic calculations of self-interest (Gewirtz *et al.*, 1995, p. 150; Ball, 1998). This neo-liberal doctrine is flexible enough to articulate the anti-government sentiment of a variety of groups, including conservative religionists who are attracted to homeschooling (Apple, 2000). Private education providers, in turn, are seen to feed off these beliefs and offer school alternatives to maximize their own personal gain.

The second explanation, human capital theory, is similar, but links this growth more directly to higher demands for job skills. According to this argument, the 'new economy' is raising credential requirements and intensifying labor market competition. Parents, seeking strategic and utility-maximizing choices that can reduce uncertainty, respond by investing dollars in private education, linking it to superior skills needed in educational and occupational contests (Fuller & Rubinson, 1992, p. 10; Goldthorpe, 1996).

The third explanation focuses less on the necessity of acquiring skills than on the role of schooling in class reproduction. Middle-class parents are seen to seek private alternatives as part of a strategy to give their children an advantage in an era of heightened educational competition (Ball, 1998; Whitty & Edwards, 1998). As inherited status becomes increasingly difficult to guarantee, and as fears of downward mobility mount, middle-class parents accordingly invest in private education as an act of status-consciousness, regardless of whether those alternatives boost skill levels.

While these theories are useful for understanding the momentum enjoyed by other private alternatives, each has limitations for the specific task of explaining the growth of homeschooling. To further elaborate this argument, we next discuss the theoretical criteria that are invoked, often implicitly, to explain the rise of educational alternatives, highlighting three levels of explanation.

At the most immediate level, one can examine the *expressed motives* of homeschoolers, using various empirical methods such as interviews or textual analysis. For instance, the theory of neo-liberalism assumes that actors make economistic calculations when purchasing private education services. Likewise, human capital approaches assume that actors are motivated by estimates of monetary payoffs. While that may hold true in some sectors of private education, such motives are difficult to see in homeschooling, which houses an assortment of actors, including religionists, Afrocentrists and alternative pedagogues who lack obvious consumerist orientations to education. As presented in the next suggestion, our data suggest that Canadian homeschoolers aim largely to give their child a tailored educational experience, or maintain the integrity of their family unit. Few pursue homeschooling to attain advantage in status competitions, and many fault other parents for being preoccupied with such concerns, characterizing them as 'elitist.' Indeed, many embrace homeschooling *in reaction* to recent reforms that can be characterized as neo-liberal, such as Ontario's initiatives for standardized tests, tougher standards, 'league tables' and other rating and accountability schemes. Thus, examining expressed motives only, we fail to see how homeschoolers are motivated by class reproduction or neo-liberal ideology.

But behavior and words can be at odds with one another, so it is necessary to also examine a second level: the *outcomes* of a reform, and their *implied interests*. Some private alternatives can be clearly linked to motives of class motives, regardless of their justifying rhetoric, such as elite private schools. While those schools sometimes portray themselves as servants of the public good, or as devotees of cutting-edge pedagogy, their exclusive, segregating character, exorbitant tuition fees and strivings to place graduates in top universities all suggest that class interests are at play, regardless of claims to the contrary. Similarly, some private alternatives can be linked to neo-liberal ideology if they are premised on beliefs about the benefits that accrue from market arrangements. For instance, charter school initiatives are usually founded on assumptions about the value of market competition among schools, and the need to inject entrepreneurial dynamics into education.

However, again we find few links between homeschooling and class-reinforcing or market-promoting outcomes. What is striking about the recent growth of homeschooling is its lack of obvious economic benefit over other forms of school, public or

private. For instance, venerable private schools for the elite have been traditionally valued by parents with very definite socioeconomic goals (see Cookson & Persell, 1985; Maxwell & Maxwell, 1995). In theory, these schools offer access to high-powered social networks, inculcate a prestigious cultural capital or prepare students to excel in academic contests. But homeschooling is seldom oriented toward intense academic competition. It cannot conclusively offer parents advantages for class reproduction or human capital acquisition. Homeschoolers lack networks of famous alumni, recognized social cache, established track-records of academic achievement or a clear competitive advantage. There is no evidence that homeschooling leads to boosted academic success (the claims of homeschooling associations notwithstanding), nor that it bestows prestige, since it lacks high-powered alumni networks. Homeschooling is usually practiced long before children enter educational or occupational contests, and demands copious amounts of parental time and effort, often at the cost of forgone income, both of which can threaten a household's class position. While they are slowly changing, many North American universities still do not even grant admission to homeschooled students.

Similarly, some types of homeschoolers, particularly the 'unschoolers,' engage in educational practices that are explicitly at odds with today's neo-liberal thrust. Whereas conservative politicians in Ontario are raising the degree of regimentation in their public schools, using standardized tests and intensified curricula, many unschoolers are practicing the very opposite, aiming to de-structure education, not to rationalize it further. In economic terms, homeschooling is thus fraught with an uncertainty that makes accurate 'cost–benefit' calculations very difficult. Since some of its current practices often defy neo-liberal dictates, we conclude that homeschooling is not best explained by appealing to class motives or the hegemony of neo-liberalism. However, theoretical explanations sometimes involve more abstract reasoning, and thus we next discuss a third level.

The final level involves how the *broad context* shapes the chances of a movement's success. Here we are in partial agreement with critics such as Apple (2000), but offer a more qualified and nuanced argument. Namely, we agree that neo-liberal ideology forms part of the context in which new private alternatives are emerging, but we view this context as more varied, and having other key features.

Neo-liberalism plays a role in homeschooling mainly by legitimizing it through the logic of 'choice.' There is an elective affinity between market theories and notions of choice, and we find that homeschoolers are increasingly allying themselves with other choice-seekers in Ontario (i.e. with religious groups wanting funds for their schools, reformers seeking charter school legislation and parents demanding tax credits for private tuition). 'Choice' is emerging as a unifying frame for a rather disparate group of claims-makers (Davies & Aurini, 2005). But the growth of homeschooling cannot be reduced to neo-liberal politics.

For instance, there are some straight-forward logistical causes: today it is simply easier to homeschool than in previous decades, given the widespread diffusion of the internet, home computers, educational materials, support groups and, perhaps most important, the largest cohort of university-educated parents (especially mothers) in

world history. Moreover, homeschooling is an offspring of older pedagogical movements with long traditions that prize individualism, non-conformity and community-empowerment. Many of its adherents are former supporters of left-wing 'Free Schools' (Miller, 2002), and are hostile to the conformist, 'rat-race' status-seeking that they associate with public and private schools (Priesnitz, 2000).

At a more macro level, sociologists should heed warnings to not draw overly tight connections between educational and political-economic trends. One of the prime lessons of New Institutional research (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Fuller & Rubinson, 1992; Scott & Meyer, 1994) is that schools are able to 'buffer' or 'decouple' many of their practices from environmental exigencies. That is, education systems are often able to hold economic or political pressures at bay, and comply only ceremonially with external demands. For instance, while governments may order schools to produce more graduates with marketable skills, or to orient themselves to the marketplace or to demonstrate their effectiveness, schools can often deflect these demands in ways that barely touch the everyday life of their classrooms, which can remain largely unregulated.

For instance, Ontario's re-introduction of standardized testing still 'lacks teeth' in that schools are neither rewarded nor punished for high or low scores; the published 'league tables' that rank schools have not been accompanied by supports to parents who may wish to switch schools, nor evidence that parents use those tables to judge schools. Canadian rankings of universities are based almost entirely on their 'inputs' with virtually no attempt to measure their 'outputs.' Our research finds that few new private schools and tutoring businesses engage in any effort to demonstrate their effectiveness in producing skills or other outcomes; instead, they embody new market norms by prioritizing customer satisfaction (see Aurini & Davies, 2004; Davies & Quirke, 2005). Writing from England, Wolf (2002) shows that many of the presumed connections between education and the economy are very loose, and that many attempts to regulate education yield elaborate, time-consuming procedures that, in the end, measure and mean very little. While British reforms may be more severe and represent more of shock to its education system than those in Canada, some British critics see little evidence that those reforms have had any real impact on the economy (Wolf, 2002).

Thus, educational cultures must certainly adapt to political and economic pressures, and these pressures can create havoc for educators, but many of the latter's adaptations can be rhetorical, and allow for the survival of traditions of pedagogy that emphasize the non-economic utility of education. It is therefore misleading to reason that since homeschooling is growing in a neo-liberal context, it must therefore embody a neo-liberal ethos. Instead, beyond a legitimating role, neo-liberal politics and economic pressures are only loosely coupled to this educational trend, at least in Canada. While the surrounding context that promotes school choice is legitimating homeschool organizations, it is misleading to reduce this to market-based or class-based politics.

In this line of reasoning, homeschooling is low in terms of human capital, class reproduction and market logic. With high opportunity costs and uncertain outcomes, homeschooling is a risky venture for parents seeking an economic payoff. The time,

effort and foregone income required by homeschooling can actually threaten a family's class position. If, for instance, a professional middle-class family wants to ensure that its offspring later become middle-class professionals, homeschooling is a less than optimal strategy. Resources could be channeled to options that more probably pay dividends, such as elite private schooling or even tutoring. So, homeschooling is rarely driven by economistic calculation. In the absence of evidence of educational or economic gain, cost–benefit calculations do not appear to drive participation in homeschooling.

A fourth explanation: the expressive motives of homeschoolers

We argue instead that the distinguishing trait of homeschooling is its 'expressive' logic. Rather than seek instrumental advantages, many of its practitioners aim to remove children from market (and bureaucratic) settings, reasoning that they are too precious to be entrusted to the care of others (Stevens, 2001), and focus instead on providing personal attention and tailored forms of pedagogy. Homeschooling also attracts many parents via its cultural benefits, whether to inculcate parental values, strengthen family unity or shield children from societal undesirables like drugs, alcohol, peer pressure or consumerism (Arai, 1999; Marshall & Valle, 1996; Mayberry & Knowles, 1989). Although it may be economically inefficient, homeschooling is a viable alternative for parents who insist that their children be exposed to their favored educational philosophy.

Many parents, we find, desire an educational setting that reflects their personal values, which can be religious or guided by alternative pedagogies. We have been struck during our interviews by how homeschoolers stress the highly individualized nature of child development. Instead of seeking a means to gain marketable skills or a competitive advantage, they prize a customized experience to enhance a child's personality, idiosyncratic talents and sense of self. For instance, one mother articulated her reasons for homeschooling in these terms:

> Every child has some genius in them, something that they're very passionate about, something they're really good at. Our job as parents, or schools, is to find that. And I don't think the public school system does a very good job of that.

Another homeschooling mother takes this further, diminishing the role of professional teachers:

> My second youngest daughter has never been to school. She's so precious, I could never, I call it contaminate. If put her in school, she'd be contaminated. She's just so precious, and innocent. Her innocence would be lost. She'd lose it. … Society, it's not their job to help your kids learn stuff, it's my job.

A consultant and private teacher who runs an organization for homeschoolers describes her philosophy like this:

> I really do believe in individually tailored education programs. I don't think much good comes at the mass level. I don't think you can dictate the pace at which kids learn … It is

> really the system and all of the trappings of it that is the biggest deterrent against kids actually succeeding educational-wise.

This emphasis on children's uniqueness and need for protection is a far cry from a historic emphasis in elite private schools on being toughened by a rigorous and demanding education. A different homeschooling mother distinguished her motives from those with children in elite private schools:

> Private school is just because you want to be elitist. Homeschoolers generally want their kids around them all the time. If my kids aren't near me, I'm like really empty.

In our interviews we found few who voiced the dictums of neo-liberal ideology. Instead most sought the private alternatives, believing that their lighter regulations would enhance their autonomy and would allow them to practice their preferred educational philosophy. Some left secure, well-paying jobs and risked their financial status to enter a highly uncertain venture. Similarly, many homeschooling families make enormous financial and career sacrifices. Indeed, the strongest predictor of home schooling is having a non-working adult in the household; otherwise the economic profile of homeschoolers differs little from their non-homeschool counterparts (Bauman, 2002, p. 10).

These findings have affinities with an emerging literature on 'intensive parenting' (Wrigley, 1989; Hays, 1996; Stevens, 2001; Lareau, 2002; Quirke, 2003). In recent decades, an underlying culture that prioritizes the needs of the individual child has emerged among middle-class parents. This culture increasingly demands educational alternatives that are attuned to children's unique talents. This is, we argue, increasingly pushing more parents into homeschooling and other private education markets. Homeschooling offers the surest parental route for a specialized curriculum to match their child's particular needs.

As this culture of intensive parenting grips the middle class, it is, in turn, channeling a greater variety of parents into homeschooling. Whereas only two decades ago homeschool organizations were dominated by a coalition of religious fundamentalists and unschoolers, now they are recruiting members with more mainstream orientations. We heard that fewer parents are avowed Holtians, and few advocate homeschooling as a way to avoid society's dehumanizing technocracy. Instead, more see homeschooling as providing a menu from which to choose an assortment of pedagogies, with the aim of finding that which suits one's child. One interviewee commented on how homeschooling is increasingly comprised of a variety of techniques and philosophies:

> The gamut runs from that [structured schooling] to the Summerhill style. Because there are so many books available, parents educate themselves, and now they are ready to go toward whatever they feel comfortable with, whatever suits them … Most do a mish-mash of learning. I still know of a few families who go for the total unschooling, which is scary for the onlooker. You'd think that they're not doing anything!

Similarly, a different mother who homeschools her five children using a structured approach, comments on the emerging variety of homeschoolers:

> I teach academics. I'd say 50% of homeschoolers don't teach anything at all. So I'm not like a normal homeschooler. I'm called a structured homeschooler. You go to a conference,

> and I'm the only parent who gives the 'structured' talk. There are all the different speakers, and my talk is overflowing, because they want to know what I do all day.

Our interviewees report that, as homeschooling diversifies, organizations can increasingly offer social supports and information networks to facilitate more tailored forms of education. A mother describes the emerging organization of homeschoolers:

> Every year we have a conference … Publishers are presenting their wares, packaged curricula if you want them. You really get a sense of what's available. There's a community you can ask questions from. Because the books are available, because the support is available, parents feel free to adjust their teaching style to the kid's learning style.

This expressive logic is also visible in some other private education alternatives, particularly in non-elite private schools. Religious schools, for instance, rarely prioritize job skills or competitive advantages. New non-elite private schools, we find, are gaining popularity by providing a medium to match like-minded parents and educators. To the degree that they embody any market-style thinking, it is by their niche-driven specializations, not through calculations of payoffs (Davies & Quirke, 2005). Even the tutoring industry, which should be motivated by the promise of improved schooling outcomes, is increasingly adopting the language of 'individualized' and personalized education. Rather than articulating clear academic advantages, or providing guarantees, these businesses are increasingly organizing around notions of choice and educational customization (Aurini, 2004).

Conclusion

Many forms of private education are growing in Canada, including private schools, tutoring businesses, preschool, vocational colleges and homeschooling. As an aggregate, they are very diverse—attracting clients that span social strata and levels of schooling, with motives ranging from religious to consumerist to elitist to expressive. This multi-faceted nature is not readily accommodated by any one all-encompassing market–consumer, class reproduction or human capital theory.

Within this context, homeschooling is growing and enjoying a new-found legitimacy in North America. As homeschooling diversifies, newer recruits tend to be closer to the cultural mainstream, seeking individualized attention for their children, reflecting the culture of intensive parenting. Unlike other private alternatives, it is animated less by logics of market calculation, class reproduction, or human capital than by an expressive logic. Any theoretical explanation of homeschooling must recognize its loose connection to instrumental goals like financial payoff or skill enhancement, and look to its multiple and diffuse aims.

Homeschooling thus represents a choice without markets. Homeschoolers strongly assert their right to choose yet do not espouse a market ideology, since for many both bureaucracies and markets can potentially threaten the sanctity of their families. Rather than championing educational competition and rigor, many desire a kinder and gentler form of schooling that allows them to evade anonymous bureaucracies or consumer markets. They strongly voice the language of choice without adopting other

components of neo-liberal doctrines, such as the beneficial impact of academic competition and the necessity of educational markets. They hail their right to choose educational alternatives and fault the impersonality of mass public schools, but otherwise avoid endorsing neo-liberal doctrines. They seek freedom from bureaucracy, but rarely equate that freedom with markets or instrumental calculation. Increasingly, their quest is articulated by the culture of intensive parenting, with its focus on the unique needs of the child. In turn, that culture is lending legitimacy to their claims. As homeschooling grows, it is slowly penetrating the mainstream, allied to the burgeoning choice movement, while remaining aloof from its more economistic tendencies.

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Notes

1. We define education as private when it is not governed or funded by state bodies. 'Homeschooling' refers to 'parent or guardians educating their children at home by choice,' as distinct from educating a child at home because he/she is not able to attend school (Luffman, 1997, p. 30).
2. Some of these data were collected with Linda Quirke, who is studying new private schools in Toronto.
3. Homeschooling associations provide much more generous figures. In Canada, one estimates that approximately 100,000 students are currently homeschooled (http://www.life.ca/hs/). In the United States, the Home School Legal Defence Association put the number of homeschooling children between 1.725 million and 2.185 million in 2001–2002 (see http://www.hslda.org/research/faq.asp#1).
4. See http://www.ontariohomeschool.org/ppm131.html
5. Searching the database of a major Canadian bookseller, we found 60 books on homeschooling. No less than 90% of these books have been published since 1997. Of these, 52 were 'how to' books, only two had religious themes and only one made explicit reference to John Holt or unschooling. There are now even books on the topic in the 'for dummies' series. Homeschooling has truly entered the literary mainstream!

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