

# *CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY SYMPOSIUM*

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## **Homeschooling in globalized modernity: perspectives from Belgian families**

This research takes interest in the current growth of homeschooling and aims to develop a sociological understanding of what homeschooling families' motivations and lifestyles (known to be very diverse) could have in common across different contexts. A first set of interviews conducted with homeschooling parents in French-speaking Belgium will be presented.

This proposal takes interest in the current growth of homeschooling. The measurable expansion of this phenomenon in many parts of the industrialized world suggests that this is not a local phenomenon, linked to a tradition or particularity, but an (increasingly) global phenomenon which itself calls for a global explanation. This inquiry currently draws on interviews conducted with homeschooling parents in French-speaking Belgium (Wallonia-Brussels Federation), which I intend to supplement with interviews with homeschooling parents in Indiana. In the long run, I aim to develop a sociological understanding of what homeschooling families' motivations and lifestyles (known to be very diverse) could have in common across different national contexts.

This proposal draws first on the conception that ever-increasing functional differentiation characterizes the advent of modernity (Luhmann 1995). Second, this research explores the idea that homeschooling choices – irrespective of families' nationality, belonging to communities or religious and political views – could be revealing of larger dynamics of withdrawal from such globalized modern society.

Luhmann, but also Giddens, underline the importance of the ideas of “confidence” and “trust” in individuals' relationship with systems. The individual has no choice, if she wants to participate in modern society, but to place her trust in systems and organizations to which she has in fact “ceded control” (Giddens 1991, 191; Luhmann 2000, 14). For Luhmann, “trust” refers to decisions in which one chooses to rely on one actor or organization rather than another (a particular school, hospital, service provider, politician, etc.). “Confidence” as such does not imply a decision but rather refers to a general faith in the (economic, political, educational, etc.) system itself. According to Luhmann, the weakening of “confidence” can lead individuals to experience a form of alienation (resulting from the sense of being trapped in a system that one does not want or no longer wants) and then even try to withdraw from the major systems, “retreat into smaller worlds” or adopt more fundamentalist attitudes (Luhmann 2000, 103).

Building on Luhmann's and Giddens' conceptions of individuals' relations to major systems in functionally differentiated society, I suggest that choosing not to put one's children in schools could be related to a (increasingly global) growing mistrust towards schools and a weakening confidence in the education system on the part of individuals.

To approach the homeschooling phenomenon in its global dimensions, I shall engage with the differences that exist between the two contexts selected for this inquiry (WBF and Indiana), in terms of resources and obstacles families have to deal with in order to homeschool. To address the question of whether mistrust towards institutions is growing and confidence in the system is decreasing on the part of individuals, one set of socio-biographical interviews (Demazière et Dubar 1997) will be carried out in each region.

Through a fine-grained analysis of the (inter- and intra-contextual) differences between families' situations in different regions, we shall aim to test the hypothesis that a deeper sociological phenomenon runs across these situations, which is that individuals' experience of living in advanced modernity sparks the desire to withdraw from participating in various function systems.

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