

**Small steps and stronger relationships: Parents' experiences of home schooling children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**

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**Abstract**

During the current global pandemic parents and carers in England and across the UK have been asked by the Government to 'home school' their child/ren and a plethora of resources has been produced and made available to assist with this. The perceived detrimental effects of being absent from school has been a driver for the Government in ensuring that schools remain open for as long as possible and the current pandemic situation is replete with narratives of 'loss'. Little attention has been paid to any potential benefits for children and families of home schooling or the opportunities it provides. This paper reports on a small-scale online survey that explored the experiences of parents' home schooling their child/ren with SEND during a global pandemic in England. The findings are revealed through a qualitative methodology merged with post qualitative concepts that emerged post-analysis. Novel findings regarding possibilities for creative and inclusive learning practices, family bonding and children's improved social and emotional wellbeing are revealed in the paper.

**Keywords: SEND, Home schooling, parent teachers, minor and major gestures, alternative education**

**Introduction and rationale**

During the current pandemic schools in England have closed, many parents have been made redundant or furloughed and mobility and goods have been restricted. Other parents have

been asked by their employers to work from home. During this stressful and restricted period, parents have also been asked by the UK Government to ‘home school’ their children and teachers have been required to provide digital online learning opportunities for parents to do this. A plethora of resources and information have been developed and made available to help with this, including some from the Government <https://www.gov.uk/home-education>.

The problem with calling this temporary form of education provision ‘home schooling’ or ‘home education’ is that it obscures a small but growing body of research that shows that home education happens for many families on an ongoing basis within the social context of face-to-face communities (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019; Safran, 2010). Under normal circumstances, home schooling encompasses a broad spectrum of educational philosophies, methods, curricula, styles and approaches. It includes everything from ‘unschooling’ – a philosophy of repositioning life, family relationships and learning to respond to children’s interests and needs without curriculum – right through to structured formal home-tutoring and every approach in between.

A mixed-methods doctoral research project with 242 home-educating families in the UK (Fensham-Smith, 2017), found that home schooled children’s learning primarily happened within the context of face-to-face local communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). This type and form of provision incorporated participation in family face-to-face workshops, activities groups, museum trips and so on. Socialising with, and being socialised into, learning communities offline was key to how parents positioned the relative success of home education, their identity and sense of belonging. This enabled parents to facilitate a highly personalised and flexible programme of education for their children. This study and others help us to begin to move beyond understanding home education as a form of provision that is confined to didactic parent–teacher relationships, formal curriculum and the confines of learning at the kitchen table (Fensham-Smith, 2019).

It is known that having a child with special educational needs and disabilities places additional pressure on families, not to mention cost. Children with SEND often need highly specialist resources and pedagogical approaches, and may need highly structured, predictable routines, calm, uncluttered learning environments and patient, specialist teachers (Author, 2012; 2017). Where parents choose to home school their child under normal circumstances (for example if they feel their child's needs are not adequately met in a formal school environment), they can of course in that situation still use outside learning space and visits to museums and parks. This is not the case at present. Currently anecdotally, parents are experiencing severe challenges in providing and maintaining a home environment that enables children with SEND to cope and parents and carers are forced to act as 'gatekeepers' for children's well-being (Canning and Robinson, 2021). A recent study (Skipp, Hopwood & Webster 2021) has reported how families have found home schooling their children very difficult, with parents struggling to work their full-time job and home school at the same time. Parents reported how their children had lost skills and abilities as a result of lockdown, and were concerned this would impact on children's future life chances. In the current pandemic context, communities of practice for parents to share ideas, challenges and success can only occur in online forums, most notably social media groups.

Therefore, a forced, narrow and uncritical application of the term 'home schooling' during a highly uncertain period could risk misrepresenting the concept and experience of home schooling for children and families, undermining the diverse tapestry of what education is and what learning could be. In addition, home as a safe space is invaded by external expectations. School and meetings with agencies, once separate, have become part of home, blurring the boundaries (Canning and Robinson, 20201).

## **Policy**

The Special educational needs and disability code of practice (0-25 years) (Department for Education/Department of Health, 2015) provides guidance for children and young people with SEND in formal education settings. The emphasis on early assessment, identification and support for children with SEND is clearly articulated as is the requirement for a co-ordinated education, health and care response and collaboration and communication with children and parents. With regard to home-schooling the guidance is less clear. Although the CoP (DfE/DoH, 2015) contains a section on children with SEND being educated at home, it is brief and understandably focuses on home education that occurs as a result of parental choice rather than Government decisions. Nevertheless there are some interesting points that are relevant to this paper. For example the Local Authority owes no duty to assess children being educated at home for SEND under section 22 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (p215). However, where children attending schools and colleges have been identified with SEND if parents and LAs decide together that home schooling is the most appropriate option then LAs must support the family with necessary resources.

### **This study**

The study reported on here aims to build on previous research mentioned above about home schooling / home education, and more generally to explore and record the experiences of parents as they navigate their way through the current restrictions whilst ensuring the health and wellbeing of their family. Whilst the study initially embraced a qualitative interpretive methodological process, data engagements also revealed post-qualitative concepts and ideas. Therefore, the article will merge these two paradigms in a novel approach to reporting survey data.

### **Research questions**

The research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of parents' home schooling their children during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. How do children with SEND respond to home school experiences?

## **Methods**

It was decided that an online survey had the potential to reach more participants than other methods and provided the flexibility to allow response as and when convenient, without the influence of a researcher present. A key advantage of online qualitative surveys is openness and flexibility to address a wide range of research questions of interest to social researchers, as the method allows access to data that range in focus from peoples' views, experiences, or material practices, through to representational or meaning-making practices ( Braun *et. al* 2020). An online survey captured descriptive statistics and frequency counts in terms of challenges and opportunities of home schooling in the current pandemic. The survey was open to all parents of children with SEND aged between five and 16 residing in England and was promoted via social media.

Data were analysed to answer the research questions at the first level allowing common and discrepant themes to emerge subsequently. Research questions identified *a priori* themes and thereafter emerging themes were identified. Qualitative content analysis provided the opportunity to organise, condense and categorise data through a process of interpretation of and inference from participants' original expressions. This was an inductive process rather than being theory guided and deductive. A process of reducing and clustering to form initial codes or sub-categories that described followed. The unit of textual analysis was an extract from a transcription with factual connection to an idea and issue. After initial codes had been identified in data of two or three transcripts, codes were compared with each other according to similarities and differences to determine which data 'look alike' and 'feel alike' as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 347). The data analysis was informed by processes of

thematic analysis – a foundational analytical method designed to identify, represent and report thematic patterns that occur within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006).

## **Consent**

Central to the issue of consent is the concept of *informed consent*, which relies on potential participants being fully informed of all the relevant issues relating to a study prior to providing formal consent. Diener and Crandall (1978: 57) define informed consent as:

The procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions.

The fundamental importance of consent, freely given, to research participation reinforces the view that the researcher should always explain fully the purpose, process and intended outcomes of research and seek consent on that basis (Mason, 2004). Furthermore, participants should be competent to make decisions relating to participating in research, make such decisions voluntarily, without pressure from researchers or research funding bodies, and fully comprehend the nature of the study and the implications of its outcomes to them personally (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). It could be argued that in the absence of such comprehensive and thorough informed consent, participants are more accurately described as ‘research subjects’ than ‘research participants’ (Smyth and Williamson, 2004).

Following British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) guidelines, in this study adult participants were provided with full information relating to the nature of the study, how it would be conducted, how data would be stored and their right to refuse consent and withdraw from the study at any point. The implications of the outcomes of the study for them, including how the study would be disseminated, their right to confidentiality and anonymity during and after the study, were discussed. Information relating to the study was provided in advance of seeking consent, in order that participants had sufficient time to consider the

implications and information prior to giving consent. Where relevant, participants' identities have been protected with the use of pseudonyms in all documents and dissemination material. Data were stored securely and password protected.

## **Findings**

A total of 71 parents responded to the online survey. 19 (26.8%) had more than one child with SEND. 57 (81.4%) resided in a two-parent household, 10 (14.3%) in a one parent household and the remainder in a multi-generational/extended family household. 44 respondents (63.8%) were birth parents, 16 (23.2%) adoptive parents, 3(4.3%) were foster carers and the remainder had both biological and adoptive/fostered children with SEND.

The findings illuminated many successes and positive stories of home schooling during lockdown as well as a number of challenges.

## **Success stories from the qualitative data analysis**

Within the data, many success stories were reported by parents and carers in relation to the home schooling experience for their children. What was notable was the unexpectedness of the majority of these positive, 'successful' moments for families. Paying particular attention to educating children and learning within the home environment, this section reports on the positive aspects of home schooling during a pandemic.

When asked to report on their experiences of educating their children during the first lockdown in England, participants noted how children had been "more receptive to home schooling", with added benefits of routines being relaxed and reduced social pressure. The reported "relax on education" was commented on by other parents on six occasions, where it was considered beneficial for both children and parents to take a slower pace, with other, more pressing areas taking centre focus, such as children's mental health and building

stronger familial relationships. Figure 1 outlines the reported positive aspects of lockdown for parents and families.

*Figure 1 about here*

Increased family time arising from the lockdown enabled families to learn together and for children to develop new skills was considered by 20 participants to be beneficial learning that the children would not have achieved in school. For example, the added freedom of designing their own 'curriculum' enabled families the opportunity to do new things:

We have chosen our own topics to focus on. Things they wouldn't have learnt if they had been in school and they have really enjoyed this

We've learnt lots through play and being outdoors, our children are very outdoorsy and physical

Daughter has learned all times tables with daily practice on walks

[Our son] has enjoyed picking his own topics and that makes learning easier.

Learning together as a family was discussed by 24 parents within the survey and ranged from learning new skills, being playful and creative and understanding their children's abilities:

He is wonderful at designing and if I give him an idea for a design he creates then has taught himself Adobe Illustrator AMAZING

Following his own interests and fun, it's the formal part like spelling and maths that's hard. Reading together is nice

It has been good getting to know things that my son struggles with and to explore learning with him in different ways



I have managed to teach life skills and be able to be creative and introduce play into learning

Aside from learning together, some parents reported on how their children had been teaching each other, finding new ways of interacting meaningfully, and in turn, improving sibling friendships and understanding of each other's needs. Parents reported:

My eldest has been coaching my youngest in how to strategise in a game they both like. He's also enjoying learning to code

My daughter tries to help her SEND brother

My 3 year old has started to support her brother more and done learning with him. We got to see how his learning was and what he enjoyed

For some parents, the benefit of 'improved relationships' also extended to those connections children have with/in their local community. Parents expressed a sense that there were occasions when they felt their situation was better understood, and opinions less judgemental, as a consequence of new, 'shared', experiences:

Seeing other people see how hard it is to be stuck at home with a child who cannot go anywhere, and *not* being castigated for putting the child at risk by going out to buy groceries!

This time together also enabled parents to be able to understand their children and their associated needs better, an opportunity that they would not have had before lockdown. For example, parents commented:

Not realising some of the amazing things they are able to do already, because they usually hide it at home

We've got to know each other better without the pressures of school or health appointments getting in the way. We've all learnt to relax and not to be on edge waiting for the next meltdown

I have also been able to get to grips with the learning difficulties my child faces when home schooling him. Positive as he is getting one to one support

One parent was keen to share the successes of home schooling, identifying this period of lockdown as being valuable *for herself and her child*:

“Unexpectedly, I have found that I really enjoy home learning and if I could enhance that experience by safely accessing museums/galleries/castles/workshops etc etc I am pretty sure that I would continue this with my SEND son. It sounds selfish and I do feel guilty saying this; but I have become really quite resourceful and have enjoyed being such an active part of my son's education”

In particular, reduced stress levels were reportedly notable in young children, having subsequent impact on children feeling calmer and having reduced anxiety and fear. Seven parents reported on benefits for children from *not* regularly attending school, and, in line with previous comments, mental health benefits and behavioural changes were reported:

My eldest mental health has greatly improved as he doesn't have to navigate the social intricacies of being at school

No end of day 'come down' aggression

Our eldest has really benefitted emotionally from not being in the classroom, we've embraced 'let the children simply be children'

Of particular gain, parents had noticed how children were relaxing in the home environment and how this subsequently was conducive to home learning. Parents reported that children

were in a better position in terms of their mental health to learn in this environment, and subsequently started to identify new possibilities for educational and personal development, and their own contributions to this:

Youngest less anxious about school, more positive interaction at home... actually worked better as he felt safer. Also I have a better idea of what academic work my children do and are capable of

Children much calmer in home environment

Children becoming more confident in their learning abilities and school work

My eldest son is autistic and suffers from anxiety. He's more relaxed and is blossoming without the pressures to go socialise out of the house

Support from school was commented upon on occasion in relation to how children were managing the transition to online learning, and in particular regarding the work that had been set. Where comments on this were made, some were very positive:

Great support and communication from school children engaging well in virtual lessons with teachers

My eldest is really enjoying home school, all the social pressure of school have been removed and he is more relaxed and working well with the work the school are providing him with

Form teacher sends lots of praise to child. This has been motivating as they have a good bond

In all, whilst these are a few of many positive reportings of increased time together, building relationships and understanding children more, it was clear that for some parents, being able to use the time at home to be with their children had been successful for them in a wide range

of ways. In total from 70 participants, there were 59 reported ‘unexpected positives’ that arose from the first lockdown, ranging from increased family time, educational benefits and having fewer pressures and subsequently feeling less stressed.

### **Challenges of home schooling**

Whilst many reported positive aspects of home schooling have been detailed, it is impossible to ignore the challenges of home schooling children with special educational needs and disabilities. Although the success stories enable a greater understanding of the strengths of increased family time and relationship building, for some families, the lockdown brought on by the pandemic has caused increased levels of challenge as children and parents adapt to a new way of living and learning at home. Whilst this is not the main focus of the paper, it would be un-ethical to exclude this data from the discussion.

Parents were asked ‘how has lockdown been for you and your children?’ Of the 70 responses, 32 focused on the negative aspects of lockdown life. Home schooling was mentioned by four respondents, alongside associated changes such as different routines (7), difficulties in understanding the change (3) and children missing their friends (2). With the lockdown, parents also noted changes in children’s behaviour, and a decline in their mental health and well-being (see figure 2).

*Figure 2 about here*

The most challenging aspect of home schooling reported by parents was juggling the needs of the family (16 out of 70 respondents), particularly struggling with the complexity of balancing multiple children’s different needs and working from home. One participant spoke in detail about this, and about the associated guilt that she had felt with ‘failed’ attempts at home schooling, (in the way she felt was expected), and balancing the needs of her children:

It has been difficult, almost impossible to do any kind of home schooling, we tried it in week one but had so many meltdowns and felt that my children's and my own mental health needed to come first. However I am plagued with guilt about this and I constantly worry that I will be judged for making this decision when they return to school. However, I genuinely tried. Both children needed my support in totally different ways.

Other parents commented on the challenges of educating their child with a lack of appropriate support from the school, expressing frustration that the work set was not in line with the individual needs of their children and the format in which to learn was not suitable:

My son hasn't really understood what was going on, the school work was not differentiated for his ability, and the teachers rang once said they'd check in and never did.

These concerns were further supported as parents reflected directly on their own 'teaching' abilities and the challenges of home schooling children adequately:

Knowing what the best way is to develop the work. I am not a teacher. I am not familiar with the process of delivering tasks to a child and having little clarity myself what's expected from the child

In relation to routines, it was frequently reported that children struggled with the lack of routine, or with new routines where this was being guided by parents' perception of what was expected of them. This was often linked to children's behavioural changes and anxiety when discussing routines:

My SEN child has found it very difficult with lack of normality and routine so went back to school part time after Easter, this had a knock on effect to my 11 year old

The lack of social engagement has particularly affected my child who is very gregarious and loves to talk and play.

The lack of its normal structure and routine has had a negative effect on behaviour.

Returning to school presented challenges as parents debated whether or not they wanted their children to return. Concerns related to medical vulnerability, children's ability to socially-distance, and to schools having the resources to both support their child with SEND to the required level, *and* to be able to manage new protocols and their child's reaction to them:

At the moment I don't want him to return as the teachers will be preoccupied supporting social distancing and the other kids, giving them no time to give additional help needed to children with SEN. Also I don't believe the changes needed to ensure social distancing will help with my child's existing anxieties

Ten parents felt conflicted about the possibility of their child/ children with SEND returning to school explaining:

We are torn. Both need to go but I am shielding. That's why we asked for temp[orary] residential

It will be a huge challenge: I dread the anxiety and resistance. I also need some breathing space and time to work, but fear the impact on unsettling him again – especially as it's likely very different to before. And will keep changing

It's going to be very difficult but we are extremely keen.

Eleven parents indicated their intention to continue to home school their children until such a time that they felt it safe for them to return. One parent explained that she would not be returning her child to school following the lifting of restrictions:

I won't be sending my child back as COVID has shown me what I thought before. That [it] is school that is the problem that causes all my daughter's anxiety/distress, self harm/aggression. I just never had the confidence to do it before, I should [have] taken her out a long time ago!

Acknowledging the many positive aspects of home schooling and 'lockdown learning', parents were better able to identify the possibilities of learning in different environments, and in ways that they felt were meeting their child's need more appropriately.

Overall, home schooling children during the lockdown presented many challenges for families owing to a wide range of reasons, including the change in routine, expectations from the school, children's behavioural changes and ability to cope with change, and balancing parent and children's needs in terms of work and education. However, what the lockdown and home schooling experience has taught some parents, is that by having this opportunity to get to know their child and their needs in more depth, they can make informed decisions about what is best for them, and act accordingly.

## **Discussion**

This article reports on a small-scale online survey that explores parents' experiences of home schooling their child/ren with SEND during a global pandemic. Whilst enforced home schooling has resulted in inevitable challenges for parents there are clearly positive success stories that have thus far been hidden in the deficit narratives around 'children missing education' and the 'lifelong disadvantages' resulting from this. The authors propose an alternative lens by which these findings might be further considered as explained below. This lens emerged from the findings and is not therefore discussed in earlier sections of the article.

### **Shifting the deficit narrative with 'minor' encounters:**

Even before the current pandemic began, ‘home schooling’ was already taking place within an ideology of education that largely implicates ‘alternatives’ as deficit models of learning – intruders in the territories of regulated systems and utilitarian outcomes which constitute the major. The idea that there is an *especially* relevant mode of learning, and that it has a specific place and form, continues to play out in the discourse around ‘educational loss’ dominating pandemic-related educational research and public-facing news since March 2020, (for examples see Green, 2020, and Pensiero et al, 2020). That ‘home schooling’ has been given a profile at all has perhaps been more to do with the titling of ‘alternative’ educational models which have been allowed to gain some recognition in the main, through association with major ideologies, ‘home *schooling*’. For parents answering to the ‘Experiences of Home Schooling and SEND’ study, this means that there is no neutral space of inquiry where responses are assumed to be easily given, but rather that parents are already operating within extremely pervasive ideas regarding what a comparative education at home should look like. Unsurprisingly in this landscape, ‘loss’, (of mental well-being, parents’ confidence to home school, consistency in learning etc.), featured significantly in parents’ responses to the questions posed. The affect of any ‘minor’ shifting from this rhetoric of deficit is therefore potentially very powerful, should we choose to look harder at such data.

Erin Manning’s writing on ‘THE MINOR GESTURE’, (2016: 1) “...works to create a field of resonance for the minor”. The ‘minor’, (a concept originally proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari), is a philosophical idea not generally linked to traditional qualitative research practices such as method, since it relates less to ideas that are ‘applied’, tested and concluded, and more to research practices which value self-seeding and open-endedness. As we went through the data for this study however it became clear that the ‘minor’ was pushing through, albeit somewhat limited to the language forms through which the data had been originally gathered.



The minor is described by Manning as a ‘gestural force’ which opens up an experience to the possibility that it could be something else - a momentary thought or sense in-forming that shifts *what is known to be*, to *what could be*. The minor tendency is always entangled with the ‘major’, explained as, “... a structural tendency that organises itself according to a pre-determined value” (Manning, 2016: 1). The major maintains its influence because it relates to social narratives that are commonly understood and agreed, (for example, ‘learning which has the *most* value is something that can be pre-planned, is measurable, and takes place in a school with qualified staff’). The major is believed to be the place where significant events that can make a difference occur, and where any changes to this are navigated and their value agreed. In addition, the narratives or ‘rhythms’ of the major are relatively easy to identify, collect and categorise. They are the smooth, relatively fixed, macro narratives by which we are able to argue that the world can be understood as something contained and secure. Hence, (and in this particular period of uncertainty), they naturally draw the mainstay of our attention. The minor and major are not binary concepts but operate together, minor gestures and sensed ‘cues’ disrupting and mobilising the structural pathways of the major, problematizing its pre-determined values and normative standards (Manning, 2016: 1). As such, *neither* are fixed and the possibility for change is always-already present through the ‘quiet’, but nuanced, power of the minor that runs its course, ‘through the banks of what has been taken as given’, (Ingold, 2016: publication commentary).

The minor-major find themselves in this study doing the work of concept more-than theory since the intention in writing again about the research, (i.e, post the usual ‘findings’ section), is to resist generalising parents’ experiences, to resist moving purely with the content of the data, and instead to pay attention to those moments that seemed to cue (and affirm) a different possibility for respondents. As a concept that is ‘working the field’ of this research, the minor is particularly adept at speaking to divergent ways of being in the world – thinking,

sensing and modes of expression that continue to be on the margins of the 'common'. As such, the minor offers some consonance with the peripheral idea of home schooling, and with the lived reality of being disabled in a world still largely orientated by ableist practices and politics. Paying attention to minor gestures 'in data' keeps perception open to the complexity of life, by affirming divergence and attuning to learning which is *in-forming*, (becoming-possible). It shows itself in brief comments, tones and intonations, and sometimes through what is absent in the huge body of data and suggests that parents are sensing these minor moments of hopeful shifting alongside the very significant challenges of home schooling and SEND. Within these moments there is important learning which is in excess to the kind often viewed as 'useless' in our consumer times. This is learning which perhaps has no *immediate* utilitarian value, but which elicits a sense of freedom and well-being; learning which brings about self-motivation, 'nourishment and hope', (Nuccio Ordine, 2017).

### **Why is this important? 'Minor' possibilities**

For many parents who, even prior to the pandemic, were trying to navigate the SEND system and gain access to a consistent education for their child, the latest crisis will bring yet more complexity, and without the comfort that many have of this being a 'temporary' phase.

Concerns about mental health across the whole of the UK population have taken centre stage. How parents of children with SEND are not only 'coping', but also encountering moments that potentially offer a counterbalance to feelings of anxiety and loss, should be of real interest to society in general. Minor moments thus suggest a brighter picture or 'imagined future', which as Jaeggi, (2021) reminds us, are not the flights of romantic fancy sometimes supposed, but rather are grounded in lived experience and daily practices. The data has revealed that for some families, home-based learning has uncovered the possibilities of more relaxed and personalised routine, where children respond well to a slower pace and tailored support. Without the lockdown and forced change in routine, these possibilities might not

have been imagined or indeed, enacted. What we see in the data, is the strengthened bonds between family members, the relationships and the discovery of children's talents and abilities and it is important to recognise this in light of increasingly negative reports of the lockdown experience for families (Skipp, Hopwood & Webster 2021).

### **What does 'absence' bring?**

Yet, without the face-to-face communities of learning, (de Carvalho & Skipper, 2019), or access to a variety of environments, parents are posed with the challenge of educating their children with confidence, in a way that accommodates their needs appropriately. The data has demonstrated how online learning, frequently purported as the 'future of accessible learning', is actually an *inaccessible* mode of learning for some children with SEND, and/or their parents. Evident are reports of increased frustrations at the unsuitability of learning resources and lack of support from educational professionals. When normative borders are blurred, (home/school, teacher/parent), the absence of associative (major/reliable) narratives, in turn opens up new space for resonating with *affective* moments that can be a powerful force in counterbalancing anxiety. Parents sensed this shifting for themselves, and alongside their children, in moments of playful discovery, often when the anxiety relating to the perceived 'home-educator' role was surpassed by the deep care to prioritise family well-being.

Playfulness as an approach to activity is replete in divergence, discovery, creativity, and care for 'the moment at hand'. Creativity showed itself in minor moments where 'curriculum' became fluid and responsive to family needs on a daily, or even momentary, basis. It showed itself in affective, felt-sensed, realisations that 'learning' in this pandemic period is conditional to its own rhythms –directed by family situations and motivated by choice, 'treats' and shared interests. It showed itself in families working and playing through the jarring moments of 'teacher-parent' roles in familiar spaces which had become unfamiliar.

Creativity seeds creativity – it makes space in the big narratives to re-imagine ways of being with learning that previously were felt to be un-touchable. In pandemic times where permission to ‘be’ with learning differently is discovered affectively through minor forces, collectively these encounters, although brief, may be ‘good enough’ to affect significant change. Minor moments may be sensed simultaneously as contradiction, permission, relief and hopeful possibility – *essential* moments of temporary control needed to work through relatively ‘uncontrollable’ tempos. Of significance, was shining a light on the positive outcomes of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown, challenging the common narratives of loss, struggle and hardship (see O’Hagan & Kingdom 2020; Greenway & Eaton-Thomas 2020) as this discourse can often overshadow the moments of success, development and possibility amongst families.

## **Conclusion**

This article sought to offer a re-calibration to the current narratives of ‘lost education’, and to celebrate the successes that some parents and carers have encountered as a result of home schooling their children during a pandemic. The aim was not to explore the tensions between performativity narratives and policy relating to formal education in schools and colleges but to provide an insight into the challenges and opportunities of homeschooling for parents of SEND during extraordinary circumstances. Providing a platform for parents to voice their opinions, to be heard and listened to has enabled us to learn more about the daily home schooling experiences in homes across the country. The data presented in this article outlines that for some parents, the lockdown period has been invaluable, as they have been able to strengthen relationships and bonds with their children. This sustained period of time, time which they would not normally have had, enabled parents to learn more about their children - to identify their strengths, and to understand better their children’s needs and the role they might play in this.

Grappling with the change, parents and carers have reimagined the role of the educator, identified through their perceptions of their new roles as they co-created curricula to meet the needs of their children and families. Whilst at times this brought on challenges as children struggled with changing routines or faced issues with the environment in which they were studying, parents were able to creatively shift the rhythms and narratives of home schooling through the inherent playfulness of family interactions. Naturally, this brought on feelings of guilt for some parents as they struggled to maintain formal learning that was set by educational settings, as they sought to balance learning needs with other needs, and as parents questioned their role and ability to be 'a teacher'. Yet on a daily basis it transpired that parents found new understandings regarding family mental health and well-being. This included the benefits of spending time together outdoors, relaxing, and adapting or co-devising new routines, and in turn finding ways of working together that benefitted the whole family unit if only for those brief, minor' moments, that offered emotional 'nourishment'. This was ultimately considered by parents to be extremely valuable.

Creative practices wove their way through home schooling approaches as parents fashioned ways of learning with a scarcity of resources, and without 'learning lost'. What transpired were moments of understanding that challenged the dominant narratives in society today that children are 'falling behind' or 'missing out on learning'. In fact, children learned life skills, they spent time with their family, they played and spent time outdoors, and they directed their own studies and engaged in activities more suited to their needs than what the formal curriculum can offer. For parents, this was more important, more successful and more valuable than any other form of learning or educational practice. For children, this increased their confidence, offered moments for relaxation, and provoked positive behavioural changes as children were no longer required to 'navigate the social intricacies of being at school'.

We now know that these practices are beneficial for some children, and we need to look forward and consider how we can continue to support children as they transition to, and between, formal learning environments in educational settings. We must consider how future policies are developed that take into account the ways in which children are learning at home, and challenge perspectives on alternative education practices. We have questioned the idea of home schooling in this paper by offering new ways of viewing this practice. It is essential that the narratives surrounding home learning and teacher/parent roles are disrupted so that more accepting and inclusive practices of learning at home can now be celebrated and encouraged.

#### Recommendations

Creative and inclusive learning practices embraced by parents and enjoyed by children during the pandemic must be valued by educators and policy-makers so that parents feel confident to support their children during future lockdown situations

Given the emphasis in the SEN CoP (DfE/DoH, 2015) for LAs to support families with appropriate resources and the reported lack of specialist available resources by parents in this study, any future lockdown situations need to commence with an assessment of this.

## References

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