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Emma Wainwright and Kate Hoskins

Department of Education, Brunel University London, Uxbridge, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on spatial–temporal enactments of home-schooling among low-income families of primary-aged children in England. COVID-19 re-set boundaries and spaces of formal education for children across the globe, bringing it directly into homes and shifting the involvement of parents/carers in their children's education. In England, "home-school" engagement was brought into sharp focus as "home" became a more visible quasi-public space through which multiple government COVID-19 policies were enacted. Despite emerging literature on home-schooling during the pandemic, voices of parents and children from low-income families have been little heard. Here we take a critical family approach and draw on interviews with low-income families to understand how education was negotiated, enacted and reconfigured within the home during the pandemic. Drawing on literatures relating to policy enactment, carescapes and home-school engagement, we offer unique insight into spatial and temporal constraints of the everyday and the necessary reconstitution of wholescale policy enactment among low-income families.

Introduction: "home-schooling a nation"

COVID-19 re-set boundaries and spaces of formal education as schools were closed and learning was shifted into homes across the UK and much of the world (Dimopoulos et al., 2021; Huber & Helm, 2020). The National Lockdown in March 2020 signalled the closure of all schools in England with formal education and responsibility for learning moved into the "home" for most school-age (4–18) children (DfE, 2020).[1] Between September and December 2020 when schools were fully re-opened, many children experienced further and recurrent periods of home-schooling[2] due to self-isolation and school staff shortages. Schools were then closed again in January 2021, reopening in March 2021, with many children then missing periods of school due to COVID-19 infections. On announcing the second national closure of schools and lockdown period, the then UK Prime Minister invoked a particularly functionalist idea of home as he richly

CONTACT Emma Wainwright ✉ emma.wainwright@brunel.ac.uk 🖃 Department of Education, Brunel University London

praised parents/carers in terms of what they were doing for their own families, while reiterating the importance of this for the national COVID-19 approach. In so doing, the Government pledged its support for home-schooling through access to laptops, free school meals and catch-up programmes (https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-address-to-the-nation-4-january-2021).

As "stay home" calls marked home as the frontline in the battle against COVID-19, school closures placed new expectations on parents/carers as they were cast as facilitators, supporters, and teachers, responsible for the delivery of their children's formal education. The primary assumption made by policy during this period was that families would take care of children and their learning in the event of the closure of schools and public authorities (Daly, 2022). This situation was certainly unprecedented in terms of intensity of time and expectations. "Home-school" engagement (Marandet & Wainwright, 2016) was brought into far sharper focus with "home" as a more visible and quasi-public space through which multiple COVID-19 policies were enacted. This paper examines how the national school closure decision was enacted within households and focuses on day-to-day temporalities and spatialities and their implications for everyday rhythms and relations of family life amongst low-income families.

Within growing cross-disciplinary research on families and home-schooling during COVID-19, socio-economic status and low-income families have been variously considered. Prior to the pandemic, the academic attainment gap pointed to evidence of multiple inequalities experienced by low-income families (Reay, 2017). These challenges intensified during the pandemic; from difficulties with providing digital devices and reliable Wi-Fi, to parents'/carers' perceptions that they were less equipped to teach their children at home (Hoskins & Wainwright, 2023; Weale et al., 2021). Research shows that low-income families struggled significantly during this period with their available care and education choices shaped by restricted circumstances (Radey et al., 2021). For many families gaining access to online materials provided by schools created significant challenges, in part due to limited devices (Holmes & Burgess, 2022) and it often meant hard choices like reallocating funds earmarked for food and energy bills (Watts, 2020). As a result, variations in quantity and composition of home-schooling during lockdown increased the social class achievement gap (Goudeau et al., 2021). As the challenges facing families are being interrogated, there is growing recognition that the pandemic served to increase and make visible extant inequalities in society (Cowie & Myers, 2021).

In an appraisal of COVID-19 social policies, Daly (2022, p. 4) argues that we learned "little about the reality of the material and affective labour in care provision during the pandemic". While care has been brought into focus in the aforementioned research, with only a few exceptions (for example Radey et al., 2021), it has by-passed entirely or minimised the everyday impact of home-schooling for low-income families. Notably, there has been a lack of consideration given to the voices of parents/carers *and* children. However, as we argue, everyday family life and the burden of care cannot be extricated from the process of supporting children through home-school, especially for low-income families of primary-aged children.

This paper explores how low-income families have enacted home-schooling and the challenges they have faced. With a focus on day-to-day lived experience, the paper pays attention to the changing temporalities and spatialities of home, and traces the shifting and blurring of boundaries and identities that home-schooling precipitated. In so

doing, we extend the work of Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al. (2022) on "boundary work" within the home to draw children into the narrative and consider more fully the shifting and fracturing of times and spaces that has entailed. As we argue, this is vital for a fuller and more rigorous understanding of the daily experiences of home-schooling during the pandemic that has hitherto been considered.

The paper turns first to consider the literature underpinning our research. We then discuss our wider home-school project, drawing attention to the critical family approach taken. We then explicitly draw out the variously concurrent, disrupted and competing spatialities and temporalities that have emerged through the day-to-day enactment of home-schooling policy. With this focus, we pick up on different constitutive elements of home-schooling (resources and materialities) – the "situated necessities" (Braun et al., 2010) – which shape the limitations and possibilities of context. Through these spatialities and temporalities we explore low-income families' enactment of home-schooling policy and relational experiences of this.

Conceptual framings

The project is framed by three interrelated sets of literature on policy enactment, carescapes and home-school engagement. Here we outline each and their connections to contextualise our discussion of low-income families' experiences of home-schooling.

Policy enactment theory examines how national policies are translated and enacted at a local level (Ball et al., 2011; Braun et al., 2011) and recognises that policy is not static but dynamic and context specific. It moves beyond a language of implementation to consider interpretation and translation in situ (Braun et al., 2010). Taking this approach brings to the fore tensions and disconnections between policy as a structure and the reflexive agency operated individually. Importantly, policy enactment is not a straightforward process taking place at scale but is instead messy and contested (Ball, 1993). Much work in this field, and certainly in education, looks at the role of practitioners within particular institutional contexts. For example, Maguire et al. (2015) discussed how teachers enact national policy on behaviour management, standards and assessment within schools, and Rainford (2021) explored the enactment of widening participation targets within university. Research elsewhere has considered the operationalising and enactment of policy imperatives by professionals in other institutional contexts (Dobson, 2015; McKee, 2015). Policy enactment highlights the individual agency ascribed in the process of enacting with focus placed on the agency of professionals and practitioners who mediate implementation and thus enact national policy at the local level.

Here we argue that this theory needs to more fully consider the literal day-to-day enactment (Wainwright & Marandet, 2019) of policy, especially in the context of home, and what it means for the everyday lived experiences of families. Our project did not look at professionals or practitioners, but at low-income families with primary-aged children. During the home-school COVID-19 period, there was no systematic and consistent mediation by professionals and practitioners due to lockdown and social distancing restrictions (Ferguson et al., 2022).[3] The requirement for home-school propelled a policy decision directly into the home for families to enact, with only limited support provided to the most vulnerable families. Enactment theory is useful as it draws attention to the nuance of contextual enactments of COVID-19 policies within the home; it can

potentially reveal tensions between national policy decisions and localised home-based practises, priorities and resources. It is through a focus on the lived experiences of families' day-to-day enactment that a more complex story of home-schooling through the pandemic emerges revealing similarities and differences between families sharing the same socio-economic status.

Enacting home-school was a day-to-day undertaking that shaped the carescapes of families and home (Bowlby, 2012) in new ways. Carescapes is a useful and evoking concept that draws together the time and space of caring and which originally was set as a provocation to considerations of care over the lifecourse: "care experiences and exchanges are affected by the timescales of the human lifecourse and generational exchanges of care" (Bowlby, 2012, p. 2114). The concept foregrounds the rhythms and relations of care which are so central to understanding the immediacy of the home-schooling experience for families and is poignant for thinking about the very specific set of circumstances linked to age and stage of education that was inflicted on families and between parents/carers and their primary-aged children. As Bowlby and Jupp (2021, p. 423) articulate: "complex and troubling realities of home are often tied up with questions of care", identifying that "time, as well as space, affects caring exchanges and encounters" (Bowlby, 2012, p. 2114). The concept of carescapes weaves through our considerations of home, recognising that through home-schooling, normal relations of care were altered as it became a site of multiple and intense pressures. Moreover, as Bowlby (2012, p. 2114) further articulates, more research is needed to "understand how the wider policy and service contexts within which care relations are embedded change and develop." Putting this concept to work through the lens of policy enactment theory helps us to understand everyday care relationships within the home during periods of home-schooling and alerts us to their times, spaces and rhythms.

Home schooling has also forcefully reasserted questions about the role of parents in their children's education. Parenting has become a key area for policy intervention (Gillies, 2005), whether through explicit classes aimed at "improving" parenting skills or enhancing home-school relations with parents as "active partners" in their children's education (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; McNamara et al., 2000; O'Brien, 2007). Formal education has been framed by increasingly structured and regulated links to home and family (Marandet & Wainwright, 2016). Home-schooling expectations during COVID-19 have worked to further emphasise and formalise parental engagement in education, with parents, notably mothers, engaged in the "double shift" of paid employment and care as a normative expectation (Clark et al., 2021; Kallitsoglu & Topalli, 2021; Smith et al., 2011). COVID-19 has raised important and broad questions of gender equality in relation to care (Clark et al., 2021; Fisseha et al., 2021; Petts et al., 2021) and reframed questions around home-school relations and parental engagement in children's learning through enactment of home schooling.

Home-schooling project

This paper is based on research conducted in 2021–22 as the UK emerged from COVID-19 lockdowns and associated restrictions. It arose from concern and recognition that only a limited range of voices were being commonly heard in relation to home-school experiences in spite of consistent acknowledgement that the pandemic was exacerbating

existing social and educational inequalities (Darmody et al., 2021; Dimopoulos et al., 2021). The main aim was to explore the challenges and negotiations low-income households with primary-aged children faced whilst complying with government lockdown/ stay at home/self-isolation policy requirements. The overarching research question guiding our focus here was: How have home and household spaces and times been re-negotiated and transformed to meet demands of periods of home-schooling in relation to local and national lockdowns and self-isolation? The project received ethical approval from the University's ethics committee in line with BERA ethics guidelines (BERA, 2018).[4]

The project took an interpretive approach based on the autobiographical reflections of low-income families during COVID-19. Research has highlighted that children's COVID-19 experiences have remained largely invisible and marginalised and their voices seldom heard (Pascal & Bertram, 2021). By engaging parents/carers and children, and focusing on relations within the home as shaped by COVID-19 policies, we took a critical family approach that recognises the need to appraise the lived experiences of different family members within the wider structures of their lives.[5] Our recruitment of low-income families was primarily determined by free-school meal allocation (an annual income of less than £7400 after tax and before state benefits).[6]

Family recruitment was via the support of a national charity operating within the London area, which alerted their families to our project. We then snowballed through initial participants. A total of six mothers came forward and indicated their willingness to participate (see Table 1). Interviews were conducted online, with mothers and children interviewed consecutively with parents present during discussion with their children. Consent and assent were raised via initial email communication and reiterated prior to discussions with each family pairing. Recognising the everyday resource and financial struggles of these families (and discussed in detail in Hoskins & Wainwright, 2023), families were provided with a £25 shopping voucher as a thank you for their time and sharing their stories.

Parents/carers that engaged with the research were all mothers, with five of the six being lone mothers. Given the research topic, this is perhaps unsurprising as schooling

Table 1. Details of family interviews.

Parent interviewed	Total number of children	Child interviewed	Age of child	Ethnicity	Household	Home space	Employment status
Rita	1	Aleena	5	Asian British	Single parent	Two-bedroom flat	Unemployed
Rosa	5	Amber	8	White Danish	Single parent	Three-bedroom flat	Unemployed
Laura	1	Karla	8	White British	Single parent	Two-bedroom flat	Part-time call centre worker
Michelle	1	Anna	9	White British	Single parent	Two-bedroom flat	Full-time student
Patricia	1	Tia	11	White British	Single parent	Two-bedroom flat	Part-time hairdresser
Alisha	3	Kareem	9	Asian British	Two parents	Three-bedroom flat	Full-time student

and childcare responsibilities fell disproportionality on mothers during the COVID-19 period (Power, 2020). Gender is an important aspect of identity, which is discussed further in the data analysis. Moreover, with parental engagement in education linked to social inequalities (Wilson & McGuire, 2021), Wilson (2020) highlights the role of gate-keepers in ensuring groups who are typically "hard-to-reach" are not also "hard-to-research". Recruitment was slow and difficult and, despite support of a "gatekeeper" with local networks among low-income families, we sensed strong reluctance and hesitation from parents to reflect back on periods of home schooling. As suggested later, this was linked to negative experiences of sometimes overwhelming struggle and shame.

Interviews were all conducted "at a distance" via Zoom. Interviewing itself is a relational enterprise, a dialogue and encounter between at least two people (Fujii, 2017), and the use of Zoom interviews configures this differently to the usual face-to-face positioning. Online interviews were used due to continued COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. Inevitably, emerging from COVID-19, familiarity with platforms such as Zoom and access to technology has been more pronounced than ever. At the same time, we recognise that the material deprivation among some families limited their access to technology to enable them to participate.

We were thus physically dislocated from our research participants during interviews, yet by asking about their everyday lives through their experiences of home-schooling, we were focusing on issues of relationality and struggle. These conversations exposed dimensions of risk and vulnerability and required an opening up and trust on the part of participants. On reflection, we were surprised at the richness, extent and depth of data from parents and the fluency and length of some of the interviews. Thunberg and Arnell (2021) found that online interviews give participants more freedom and confidence to disclose personal or sensitive information without feeling judged or inhibited. Interviewing at a distance can be a mechanism through which experiences are prised open and participants encouraged to talk as anonymity is enhanced (Greenfield et al., 2000), and this was certainly our experience. The interviews were more challenging with children who gave briefer responses to our questions, and therefore gave only partial insight into their home-schooling experiences and is a limitation of our research (Clark, 2010). Despite this, narratives from all interviewed parents and some children enable a retelling of embodied and emplaced family relations during COVID-19 periods of home schooling.

Parent and child interview data were fully transcribed with transcripts then analysed in their pairings by both researchers to enable links to be made across and between them. Analysis was based on a provisional framework of codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which related to our key research aims. For this paper, the provisional codes linked to the spatialities and temporalities of home-schooling, and became more focused and refined through discussion between the two researchers. Following Kvale (2012) we built verification into the research process through asking open-ended non-leading questions in the interviews and linking our data back to the extant literature. In what follows our coding has been worked into three sets of themes: 1. Spatialities: limited space, sharing space and spatial isolation; 2. Temporalities: new times, finding time and losing time and 3. Shifting relationalities of home school.

Spatialities: limited space, sharing space and spatial isolation

Limited space

All the mothers spoke about limited material space and recognised the limitations of or necessary changes to various aspects of their homes during periods of lockdown, and this was particularly urgent in families with more than one child. For Rosa, recently separated from her husband and with five children, the family had to negotiate and carve up their three-bedroomed flat to accommodate children's learning. In her and her young daughter Amber's (aged 8) recollections, these negotiations worked reasonably well so that space for "peace and quiet" could be found. This required her secondary-aged children to share a bedroom in the upstairs of their flat. Alisha, with three children, explained how they divided their three-bedroom flat to ensure her two older children had some place to learn:

> Alisha (mother): "it was quite okay 'cause he was obviously in his room in his bedroom and my daughter was in her bedroom. And yeah and the little one I kept most of the time in the living room, he was watching TV or playing with his toys".

These examples demonstrate the need to reconfigure limited space and create new spatial boundaries within the home. As Alisha articulates, the work of maintaining these boundaries fell to her with the need to keep her two-year old busy, in spite of her husband being at home having lost his job. This is an example of gendered boundary work with women setting up and maintaining new family practices (Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta et al., 2022) within the home allowing home schooling to proceed.

Rita, who shared a two-bedroom flat with her daughter Aleena (5 years), spoke about needing to use the limited space of her home flexibly, with home-school taking place in different locations – in "the bedroom, on the sofa" – an experience typically repeated for families during lockdown. Home spaces were frequently re-purposed to become spaces for learning as well as sites for necessary continued and enhanced social and domestic reproduction. While this was often a fraught and tense process, Laura's daughter Karla (8 years), in contrast to her mother, enjoyed the flexibility that home-school gave her; no longer restricted by classroom rules, she did her school-work primarily on the kitchen table while eating breakfast and lunch.

As discussed by Aznar et al. (2021), perceived or actual deficiencies of individuals' indoor home spaces became particularly salient during lockdown periods, resulting in increased stress. In our research, mothers expressed how home-schooling was often a stressful process. Michelle articulates the difficulty of dealing with the daily stresses when you are constantly "stuck" in and confined to the limits of home:

> Michelle (mother): "you find new coping mechanisms … they are very limited because they are coping mechanisms that you have to be able to have in your home".

She went on to explain how within the limited space of her and her daughter's two-bedroom flat, she sought out a small space to deal with the emotional burden of home-schooling:

> Michelle (mother): "There were times when I had to go into the kitchen and I've got this lovely little corner. And it's just between the fridge and my cupboards that I can just with my shoulders just lodge in so you can't see my face. And I could just just go in there sometimes

and just have a weep, just a quiet cry and then I could come back and carry on, because it would just be the typical kid things of 'why you making me do this again, I hate you'".

As Smith (2022) relays, care responsibilities were "downloaded" onto women to absorb during lockdown periods with many experiencing feelings of guilt and distress while lacking support themselves. Moreover, these care responsibilities came with managing the emotional state of other family members while lacking any support for themselves (Averett, 2020), further highlighting the gendered nature of the emotional labour of care and mothering that home-schooling entails (Averett, 2021; Lois, 2013).

Sharing space

Wrestling with limited space was an ongoing process of spatial negotiation. With normal routines of work and school that take people out of the home having gone, home became a space to be shared on a continuous basis during school closure periods. The impact of sharing space varied depending upon family circumstances. As discussed above, for Alisha it often meant strict delimitations for family members:

> Alisha (mother): "I was juggling the household, and like going to my son and then coming back to my daughter. They had to log into Google classroom. I had to put them in separate rooms and I was running here and there to help them. And it was for me, it was quite stressful as well, because I had another little one who's two years old, so I had to as well, keep him, like keep him somehow occupied, busy, entertained so he doesn't go to his room or to her room".

This constant need to ensure everyone was "in place" and "on task" was emotionally tiring and spatially stressful.

For Patricia's daughter Tia who has partial hearing, sharing space was a particular struggle. Tia was not just sharing space with her mum, but with pets and noises within the home. Patricia and Tia relayed difficulties experienced in relation to online learning:

> Patricia (mother): "She couldn't hear because it was all muffled, you know at home you've got, there's me in the background, I sort of couldn't go round with the hoover and stuff like that, although the washing machine was on … it just did not work, didn't work at all".

> Tia (11 years): "with the dogs, I couldn't really hear the teacher well".

This idea of home space becoming a shared space, not just between people but between things and domestic tasks was significant and a challenge for family members. "Spatial conflicts" existed not only in human-to-human relations, but also in human-to-nonhuman relations within the home (Million, 2022). For children who possess additional learning needs, challenges of sharing space were heightened and further reinforced social inequalities among families (Natalie & Robinson, 2021).

For Rita it was difficult for her 5-year-old daughter, Aleena, to understand home as a space for schoolwork as it was ordinarily her place of play:

> Rita (mother): "Aleena found it a little bit difficult to get into the routine because she thought 'oh yeah, we're at home and when I'm at home, I can do whatever I like'".

Similarly, Michelle's 9-year old daughter Anna had to use the laptop for schoolwork rather than for games. Usual home-based activities of play – so often now including electronic devices – had to be ignored, curtailed or repurposed for home-schooling (Cowan et al., 2021).

Families also experienced shifting spatial arrangements across different school closure periods. For example, Anna initially worked on the dining room table but for the second lockdown Michelle created a new space for school work in her bedroom: "she put a load of posters in my room … maths posters" to help her with her work. For Anna (9 years), home-school was positive as it was much quieter than school where "everyone is shouting … it was quieter than my classroom", a perception shared by her mother. This aspect of sharing home was positive and allowed her to catch up.

This theme reveals the day-to-day reality facing our participants when enacting the "mandated" policy of home schooling (Braun et al., 2011, p. 591). As Braun et al note "policies also enter different resource environments" where they are differently received, translated and lived. Our participants' varied material resources which we discuss here in relation to space and again later in relation to times are key contextual considerations not addressed or even acknowledged at the national level when the lockdown was imposed. The very different spaces available to our participants to share and repurpose, highlights the tensions of enacting national policy at a family level.

Spatial isolation

Home-schooling brought about a paradoxical experience of simultaneous spatial concentration and isolation. Despite the persistent necessity to share limited space, the "stay-home" requirement created a spatial isolation through confinement, making home-school a particularly intense experience. As Patricia explained:

> Patricia (mother): "there's no one else living here, so it was just me and her literally, and that was the hardest time … it's been on my own, just me and her … you have no other social apart from phone or on video call".

Michelle (mother), struggling with her mum's ill health and additional care concerns linked to this, found it "quite isolating at that time because we couldn't go places in terms of support". As support networks of wider family and friends were curtailed, lone parents such as Michelle and Patricia found the constant parenting pressure particularly isolating.

When the option of receiving a packed lunch from school arose, Michelle jumped at the opportunity it gave her and Anna to "go to the school every day to pick up packed lunch". Not only was this an economic necessity, it also served as an excuse to leave the house, "do something different" and get exercise.

Children too experienced this sense of isolation, with enjoyment of Google classroom and Zoom class sessions in the second lockdown framed as a chance to see friends, even though social interaction was limited:

> Anna (9 years): "I didn't like using the laptop 'cause it got me all confused but I did like doing the Zoom calls [because she got to see her friends]".

> Kareem (9 years): "about online learning what I liked was, I still got to see my friends online I could still see them and you know teachers".

The importance of interaction beyond the home was highlighted by parents recognising that spatial confinement through home-schooling had a negative impact. Here, Rita discusses it in relation to her daughter Aleena's development:

> Rita (mother): "at school, they are playing with friends they're making friends they've got you know they play they do activities together … They sit together on a carpet so they've got you know it's all about listening skills, sitting skills and that she can't have that at our home".

Research has begun to discuss parental concerns about children's social and emotional struggles from confinement to and isolation within the home and from friends (Wijaya et al., 2022). Home-based remote contact was not a sufficient replacement for regular human contact within the school setting (Pascal & Bertram, 2021). In our research, it was 11-year old Tia who best captured the contrast of home-schooling to being at school, as she gleefully explained returning to school: "it's really exciting … because it's like I'm seeing my friends".

Temporalities: new times, finding time and lost time

New times

Home-school turned usual routines on their head and required the quick establishment of new ones, and parents spoke of struggling with this in terms of time and technology. Patricia, who was suffering with her mental health, explained the importance of the normal daily routine for her:

> Patricia (mother): "Just the normal daily routine of getting up, getting dressed, going to school, you know, there wasn't any of that".

For Rita, whose daughter has autism, the disturbance to the usual routine was very challenging:

> Rita (mother): "it's really finding the time and on occasions, I found it really difficult with Aleena, where she wasn't in a mood. So there was a lot of crying 'I don't want to learn anything, I don't want to do this, I … want to play'; so, it was hard to actually fit in that routine … to get the hang of it, you know … ".

She continued that "it needed to be the right time" for Aleena to settle, as this was not the same as school. Substantial disruption to the normal everyday rhythms of life was particularly challenging for some individuals to cope with. Research has shown the importance of preserving daily routines, notably for those with mental health issues and for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (Ludgate et al., 2022), and this tallies with the experiences of parents in our research.

In contrast, Laura's daughter Karla spoke of how much she enjoyed the new routine because it gave her more time; she did not need to get up early and the schedule was determined by her, not school:

> Karla (8 years): "you could do work whenever you want".

Old timings and routines were shaken out which for some people took away the structure of their day, while for others, notably the children in our interview cohort, gave them some agency in terms of start and finish times of the new "school day" and the pace of work. That children could exercise agency during COVID-19 lockdowns is an important recognition (Pascal & Bertram, 2021), highlighting their experiences and active role in policy enactment.

Policy enactment is a relational process, and new times and routines impelled new relations between technology and people, notably with parents and children sharing

devices. At the start of the first lockdown five of the six parents interviewed did not have the devices they needed to meet their own and their children's new learning needs (Hoskins & Wainwright, 2023). The "relentlessness" of home-school brought resource limitations to the fore. Michelle best articulated this change:

> Michelle (mother): "It was every day, it was the amount of time".

This linked to the intensity of time and one-to-one learning that Michelle pursued with her daughter meaning that Anna "couldn't escape"; a contrast Michelle felt to learning at school in a class of 30 students where Anna could at times opt out and switch off. This led to new and challenging situations for parents, especially by the time of the second period of school closures in the third national period of lockdown:

> Rosa (mother): "This third time around, it also affected, especially Amber. She became quite aggressive she didn't want to do her homework, it was like I think it was because she thought that I was the one asking her to do the homework. Whereas I tried to explain to her, but look it's not me, you need to think about that it's just like you have been in school and Miss is telling you what to do. And that was, that was difficult for her".

Home schooling became a shared struggle for families as school closures persisted. Directly enacting home-school expectations from government, schools and teachers was not a straightforward process, but one that shifted across different school closure periods and was linked to available resources. Rhythms of home-school were never settled despite attempts by parents to create new and stable routines (Preece et al., 2023).

Finding time

The need to find time to home-school was discussed by mothers, often with a sense of lacking time:

> Rita (mother): "I had to find time, I had to make sure that I was organised and I was prepared for this".

New forms of temporal organisation were necessary, and felt keenly by mothers who were engaged in paid employment or study:

> Laura (mother): "with work and time and everything else I couldn't put in what I needed to".

For Alisha and Michelle who were both full times students, while they had some flexibility in their timetables, they needed to find the time and space to engage with their own online lessons and assessment requirements, alongside that of their children.

As Rita further explained, home-schooling extended beyond children's online meetings and set work. At the end of the day, parents needed to photograph and upload schoolwork to prove that their child was engaging. This not only stretched the home-school day and activities, but was felt to be a further form of scrutiny through which schools assessed whether parents were supporting their children; a new configuration of parental expectations to engage in their children's everyday learning.

For Michelle, home-schooling enabled her to find more time for Anna's learning. Being very active in her daughter's schooling, Michelle was aware that Anna was not enjoying school and making progress. Not wanting Anna to fall behind, she "supplemented her learning extensively" (Michelle). As she explained:

> Michelle (mother): "I saw it as an opportunity to catch her up … so I made it my mission over the first lockdown 'we're going to do extra work, whatever they assign us … I want to make sure that under my care you've done the best you possibly could'".

Education became a new and significant dimension of the caring relationship and created more intense relations within the home. As Anna expressed, her mother's expectations at first came with a lot of resentment, as she knew her friends were not doing the same. She explained, pointing at her mum: "I got loads from her", marking a difference in her and her mother's expectations for the lockdown period. As a final reflection, Michelle explained that this supplementary learning "was definitely beneficial but that is only because I kind of did it at the expense of my own wellbeing … ", reiterating the negative impact on wellbeing for parents, particularly mothers, during home-schooling periods (Calarco et al., 2020).

Lost time

Michelle's experiences of using home-school as a catch-up for Anna were at odds to the other mothers in our cohort. In discussion about home-school and the return into school, "lost time" and "missed time" came up as key themes. For Rita, it was a sense of regret that her daughter would not be able to do reception again, recognising it as an important stage for language and reading development:

> Rita (mother): "She's not going to have reception again, sometimes I do think though she could have another extra year at reception … to make up that time".

Alisha explained how she felt that home-school had not been "proper" learning time and how her son Kareem had regressed:

> Alisha (mother): "I think it was you know, like he was not, all this time, that he will spend at home, I think it was a missed time … it took him back in learning".

And Rosa explained that the quality of learning between home and school differed:

> Rosa (mother): "from a parent perspective I don't think that it (home learning) gives the same quality of learning … "

For Laura, it was a more recent reflection on receiving her first school report since her daughter Karla had returned to school: "we've just had a school report and it said 'unfortunately I think Karla has suffered with the lockdown'". Karla's school report had left Laura with a perceived sense of inadequacy, as she had not been able to support Karla in the way she would have liked:

> Laura (mother): "I'm not a teacher, and it's really hard anyways to do schoolwork. It was constant arguments and misery and we both end up in tears and it's just … it was enough".

At the national level, tracking of SATs results (year 6 primary school standards tests in reading, writing and maths) has shown a year-on-year drop since the pandemic (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-61980677). Moreover, early studies of COVID-19 learning loss have found that primary aged children have been impacted more than secondary-aged children due to their "inability to seek learning on their own" (Donnelly & Patrinos, 2022, p. 604) and thus the unspoken reliance on others within the home. This sense of lost time and attendant learning loss left parents, except Michelle, feeling guilty

about their abilities to support their children. As the above findings demonstrate, it was mothers that carried the burden of finding time and feeling responsible for lost time during the pandemic.

Shifting relationalities

The relationality of policy enactment is brought into sharp focus with attention to these spatialities and temporalities of home-school. That these spaces and times have been shaped, reconfigured and negotiated is clear from our participants' narratives and is linked to broader gender and socio-economic inequalities of parenting and care. While children expressed some happiness at having periods away from school despite missing friends, their mothers expressed negative affects and emotions:

> Laura (mother): "It's been very hard, I can't lie" … "It made me feel really guilty as a mum, not being able to do enough".

Research has pointed to the stresses of managing competing demands during this time – guilt for not meeting children's needs and worry over children's socio-economic well-being and learning (Kallitsoglu & Topalli, 2021). Certainly, all mothers spoke about doing something "wrong" in their enactment of home-school, with feelings of anxiety, guilt, letting down their children and of failure and shame in this; of not doing things "properly". Indeed, the challenges of participant recruitment strongly indicated a sense of not wanting to share and wanting to forget what had been a traumatic time for families.

Strong's (2021) work on shame is very relevant in the home-school context, arguing that "[s]hame exists in a socio-spatial nexus, an affective economy" (2021, p. 75) and is linked to broader politics of inequality. Our participant cohort highlights the inequality in parenting load and "the burden of care" that disproportionally falls on women. As Gambles (2013) notes, while gender neutrality has dominated policy language, gender specificity, with mothers' role viewed as prioritising the daily care of children while fathers ensure economic security, has remained a strong discourse in popular culture. This is borne out through the narratives here, but also through recruited parents. It was mothers that engaged in the care, support and educational work of home-school and it was mothers whose caring within the home supported children through home-school. As O'Brien (2007) explains, while societal norms and ideologies shape the emotional care work performed by mothers, the demands of the educational system also largely contribute to reinforcing these norms while benefiting from women's unpaid labour. Moreover, these gender inequalities are played out through access to fewer resources and limited capital, providing further structural limitations in which mothers and children have enacted home-school.

While it is vital to recognise the structural restraints of policy enactment, it is important to also explore how parents and children did exercise some agency as they maneuvered within the COVID-19 restrictions to develop new relationalities. Ludgate et al. (2022) highlight some "successful" and positive stories to emerge from lockdown from families with SEN children to avoid falling into deficit narratives around children missing out on education. In examining more creative uses of time, and "more relaxed and personalised routines", they discuss the "creative practices" in which parents and children engaged. Aznar

et al. (2021) argue that creativity helped parents to manage home-schooling, notably limitations of inadequate space. This is important for understanding these day-to-day experiences and brings agency forcefully into discussions of policy enactment. Braun et al. (2011) in their development of policy enactment theory argue that it involves creative processes of interpretation and translation that are imbued in contextual constraints and opportunities.

In the higher education context, Trowler (2014, p. 14) has discussed how enactment of policy can offer a space for "creative reinvention" through the agency required for implementation. In our context, this allows us to explore push back on policy and school-dictated home-school activities. This is seen through a move from formal to informal learning, drawing family members together in shared practices with more flexible uses of time and space:

> Laura (mother): "It got to a point … we stopped doing schoolwork and we did life lessons. So she knows how to put a load of washing on, she can cook pasta, she can make noodles … it was a different kind of learning … it was the only way that could work for our family".

> Patricia (mother): "we did other things, like, we did a lot of baking and showed her normal daily things like how to use, we went out, erm, up to the [place name] took paints, took paper, got some leaves, you know, fun stuff, I suppose, but she's still learning at the same time".

> Rita (mother): "[baking] kept her busy doing something you know, she did a lot of mixing, a lot of stirring, of adding milk … we've never done that before".

These final quotes demonstrate that families did not and were not always able to follow the expected load and pace of home school activities but instead offered new types and ways of learning within and beyond home, reconstituting home-school requirements. Indeed, new experiences of education that COVID induced have precipitated and expediated many families to actively choose a move to home-school permanently in England (BBC, 2022; English, 2021).

Conclusion

Home is a site where "personal and social meaning are grounded" (Papastegiadis, 1996, p. 2), no more so than during COVID-19 as it became the prime location of pandemic experience when Government announced the closure of schools across England. Home had to absorb work normally carried out elsewhere and altered everyday experiences for many families through home-schooling. Home was dramatically recoded and redefined during this period with changing spatialities and temporalities structuring families' day-to-day existence. It is therefore vital to closely understand home-schooling experiences during this time, and particularly those of low-income families for whom home-school took on a particular inflection.

Policy enactment theory, with a renewed focus on the home and the relations between parents/carers and children, enables us to move the scale of analysis from national policy to the contextually rich day-to-day experiences and realities of policy implementation. It carefully reveals the tensions between policy announcement, and ensuing struggles with home-based practises, priorities and resources. A focus on parents/carers and their children in relation to the spatialities and temporalities of home is necessary as home-

schooling has been a deeply relational process; the enactment of national policy within the home has recreated and reshaped these familial relationships in very immediate and intimate ways. It forged new carescapes comprising shifting care relations and learning activities in ways that worked for individual families, whether helping with household work, cooking, or crafting, and which once again reshaped parent–child interactions. This can be construed as asserting active agency and parental decision-making; a push back on school dictated home-school activities. However, there are clear limits to this that a focus on spatialities and temporalities highlight. Moreover, as children returned to schools, these new carescapes shifted again, and have seen a continued shift, with recent concerns over continued loss of schooling as children's school attendance has not reached pre-COVID levels (DfE, 2023).

As our analysis has shown, socio-economic status and gender have emerged as critical intersectional inequalities to understand home-schooling experience. The constraints of low income, compounded by limited material resources, lone parenthood, paused support networks, gendered care work, ill health and vulnerability underpin these shifting family activities and relations to shape families' experiences of home-school. Based on our findings, government, local authorities and schools need to clearly recognise and understand the day-to-day implications of school closure and the resource limitations that inhibit the possibility of learning within the home. Future school closures must be limited and minimised, with learning resources provided promptly and funded by the state. Furthermore, it is vital that parents/carers are offered both financial support and knowledge to best enable and facilitate children's learning. As we move on from the pandemic period, there is clearly much more work to do to accelerate the progress of children from low-income families who suffered so much during the COVID-19 lockdowns and ensure greater preparedness for any future schools' closures.

There are limitations to this study. Recruitment of families and conversations with the children in our sample were challenging especially with COVID-19 restrictions and project timeframes. We recognise that our findings lean towards parents' experiences, rather than those of children and further research is needed on the differences and similarities experienced within families during this time. Moreover, though we have highlighted intersectional issues of gender and socio-economic status, this small sample does not allow us to draw conclusions in relation to race and ethnicity. There is a need to ensure research recognises the structural constraints of families' lives that enabled or hindered their ability to enact home-schooling, while also flagging the multi-faceted implications of this for reinforcing social inequalities among families whose children possess additional learning needs or where family members were suffering poor physical or mental health.

Notes

1. Schools in England were closed to all children except those of key workers and vulnerable children (those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health and Care Plans).
2. We use the term home-schooling in this paper as this was the term deployed through policy discourse. However, we recognise that home-schooling has a long history that commonly refers to educating children at home rather than school (see Kraftl, 2013; English, 2021). The term home-learning is therefore sometimes used to refer to periods of school closure to capture the learning children were undertaking at home under the care of their parents/carers.

3. Certainly, within some homes across the UK during COVID-19 lockdown periods, there has been close intervention and policy enactment in the form of school and social service support, but this was uneven and based on family circumstances.
4. Approval no. 30934-MHR-May/2021- 32671–1
5. Questions to parents focused on their approach to home schooling, challenges faced and support needed, financial and resource implications, and experiences of juggling home schooling with care and work commitments. Questions to children focused on their feelings and experiences of home schooling, notably of what they enjoyed and what they found difficult.
6. We recognise this operates as a crude measure that does not indicate the complexity of everyday lives and fails to capture the precarity of families who are reliant on insecure or low paid work, and without additional financial security. However, as the project focused on schooling, and with a small sample size, this measure could be consistently used to draw a parallel across the participants.

Disclosure statement

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