

# **Towards Geographies of ‘Alternative’ Education: A Case Study of UK Home schooling Families**

In this paper, I argue that geographers could undertake more extensive analyses of ‘alternative’ educational spaces – spaces that explicitly offer non-mainstream, non-State-sanctioned forms of learning in contexts where it is assumed that children will go to school. I base my discussion upon interviews with thirty UK-based homeschooling families. In seeking to advance geographical research on education, I make three key contributions. First, I exemplify how focussing on learning-itself – and not just spatial contexts for learning – uncovers how spatial experiences and discourses are key to the constitution of alternative educational practices like homeschooling. Second, I attend to the temporalities of feeling that underpinned parents’ approaches to learning. Finally, I explore how these first two issues were re-conceptualised by homeschoolers in a spatial discourse that distinguished ‘home’ from ‘school’. However, in attempting to anticipate future research, I consider the multiple and contradictory ways in which homeschooling constituted an ‘alternative’ educational space – and attend to some of the potential political and moral dilemmas that accompany the focus upon feeling and emotion that runs throughout my analysis.

**Key words:** *learning; children’s geographies; parenting; family; emotion and affect; temporality*

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## **Introduction**

The past five years have witnessed significant developments in geographical studies of education. Several recent papers have reviewed and prospected a disparate range of research, each setting out agendas for ‘geographies of education’<sup>1</sup>. In the earliest review, Collins and Coleman (2008) considered the constitution of school boundaries to be one key feature of the spaces, communities, practices and identities produced inside and outside schools. Very differently, Hanson Thiem (2009) noted that much work on geographies of education has been ‘inward-looking’. It has focussed, for instance, upon education provision and distribution or ethnic segregation in school catchments (Johnston et al., 2008). Critiquing this work, Hanson Thiem (2009, 156) makes a persuasive argument for more ‘outward-looking’ geographies of education that would enable geographers to (re)theorise the *contexts* in which education systems operate and of which they are productive: in particular, of neoliberal mode(l)s of economic restructuring, citizenship and skill-sets (also Ruddick 2003). Finally, Holloway et al. (2010) make an equally compelling case for geographies of education that (re)connect with over a decade’s work in children’s geographies (see, for instance, Valentine 2000; Holt 2007; Hemming 2007; Hopkins 2010). Such work has considered issues as diverse as the built environment of schools, the (im)mobility of school and university students at various scales, and the (re)production of cultural-political ideals through everyday institutional practices.

I am sympathetic to all three approaches; indeed, I do not intend to re-review work on geographies of education with yet another new ‘spin’. However, this paper is most resonant

with Holloway et al.'s (2010, 594, emphasis added) claim that geographies of education must “move the *subjects* of education – the children, young people and adults involved in learning and teaching – into the foreground”. A corollary of their contention – albeit a tantalising brief one – is that:

“we need to expand our interpretation of what count as spaces of education [...to] pay greater attention to the home, pre-school provision, neighbourhood spaces and after-school care, as well as thinking more deeply about the ways in which people learn in subsistence agriculture, family businesses, paid work and so on” (Holloway et al. 2010, 595).

Although substantive work by Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) has added flesh to this claim, the implications of this list of learning spaces are considerable (also Wainwright and Marandet 2011). Holloway et al. (2010) are suggesting that education happens in a more diverse range of places than has hitherto been acknowledged by geographers – in what I am calling ‘alternative’ education spaces. This poses a challenge for geographers to articulate exactly what is meant by ‘education’ and, by extension, how *alternative* education practices operate in the production of social spaces.

The key contribution of this paper is to begin to think through in more detail some possibilities for alternative geographies of education. It does so both conceptually and empirically, via an analysis of United Kingdom-based homeschooling families. By ‘alternative’, I refer to particular kinds of learning praxes that are only implicit in Holloway et al.'s brief list; more explicitly, Woods and Woods (2009, 3) contrast ‘alternative’ with ‘mainstream’ education thus: as “forms of education grounded in alternative philosophies and cultures [...where] we take a fairly pragmatic view [...] of what constitutes mainstream education, thinking of it as the main conventions of publicly funded school education as

generally understood in Western countries”. Woods and Woods (2009) are acutely aware of the difficulties that inhere in this dualistic distinction. Thus they acknowledge the danger of rendering mainstream education as a monolithic entity, where considerable variety exists. Yet it is not too controversial to claim that there exist many alternative education practices that *knowingly* distance themselves from mainstream and especially State-sponsored schooling, whether or not they acknowledge that mainstream schooling can be massively diverse. Such practices include Steiner schools, homeschooling, Montessori schools, Forest schools, informal learning and youth work to name but a few; many take place physically ‘outside’ mainstream education spaces although some (like Forest Schools) may carve out space within or distinct relationships to mainstream education. Neither is it too problematic to claim that geographers have paid scant attention to avowed alternatives to mainstream education (exceptions include Jeffrey et al. 2004; Kraftl 2006; Cameron 2006; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011).

Even if we accept that alternative education practices may not necessarily be divorced from the mainstream, there are nevertheless significant reasons for exploring how those practices and spaces are articulated *as* alternative. First, consideration of alternative modes of doing education presents the opportunity for critical reflection upon assumptions about learning that pervade in mainstream educational systems. As bell hooks (2003, 21) observes, ‘dislocation’ from familiar education spaces (in her case, public schooling and colleges) provides “the perfect context for free-flowing thought that lets us move beyond the restricted confines of a familiar social order”. Second, and consequently, a willingness to engage *knowingly* alternative practices may be critically affirmative. As Gibson-Graham (2008) so powerfully illustrate, the project of charting post-capitalist economic spaces is one that not only dismantles the image of global capitalism as ineluctable reality but reframes it as just one possible way of ordering the world amidst a plethora of alternatives (also Brown 2009). Thus,

Hanson Thiem's (2009) assertion about the centrality of education spaces to the production of neoliberal orders maybe taken elsewhere (Hanson Thiem implies but does not expand upon this observation). Amidst progressive, activist and radical work in geography (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010), it is equally important to assess the role of education spaces in the (co)production of such alternative lifestyles, spaces and praxes, as it is in the (co)production of neoliberal restructuring.

Finally (and I expand on this later) geographers could contribute further to debates around what education actually *is*. That is, to better apprehend the complexities of how education takes place, how *learning* is practiced, idealised and talked about, and what distinguishes 'learning' from other social practices. Much of this work has, of course, taken place in education studies, sociologies and philosophies of education (Ball 2004; Gulson and Symes 2007; Bailey 2010) and I review relevant geographical work later in the paper. Yet there is considerable room for more diverse social-cultural geographical theorisations of space to be developed in educational research. As I demonstrate, spatial discourses and practices are central to the articulation of homeschooling as an alternative mode of learning.

This paper begins with an introduction to homeschooling, reviewing relevant research from cognate disciplines. The paper then turns to analysis of thirty in-depth interviews with UK-based homeschooling families. I explore how some of the spatialities and temporalities of homeschooling were entwined with ideas about how children learn from and within everyday family life. In the last section of my analysis, I return to the three justifications for alternative geographies of education raised above: I consider directly what practices and spaces constitute 'alternative' education and the extent to which they can be considered 'alternative'. I do so by scrutinising what I call a dualistic spatial discourse between 'school' and 'home', where, following recent critical educational theorists like James Conroy (2010) I argue that geographers might intervene in moral debates about who can and should provide for

children's learning. In closing, I consider the possible contribution of this paper to geographies of education, and to a lesser extent geographies of parenting and childhood.

### **Introducing homeschooling: practice and research**

Simply put, homeschooling is the practice of educating one's children at home instead of at school. Homeschooling is considered an 'alternative' educational practice only in those countries where it is expected (if not mandated) that children must attend a school of some sort (in the majority of cases, a State-funded school). Usually, homeschooling is undertaken by the parent(s) or carer(s) of a child; frequently, this is the mother. In some cases children have attended school and later been withdrawn – sometimes soon after starting, sometimes during secondary education. In other cases, parents/carers make the decision never to send their children to school. Less commonly, children may attend school 'flexibly' – for instance spending two days a week at school and three learning at home. The majority of children do take State-sanctioned exams (such as GCSEs in the UK), either returning to school when they reach the appropriate age or learning with tutors at home. The simplicity of this definition belies the complexity of homeschooling. Such complexity is particularly apparent in the spaces that families use for learning, where the home is more accurately just one (often less significant) context for learning. Since there is little extant research about the spatial complexities of homeschooling, this issue is explored in more detail, through interviews with UK homeschoolers, in the next section of the paper. In the rest of this section, I review recent research on homeschooling by education studies scholars.

*Homeschooling: global distribution, legality and demographic profiling*

Homeschooling is a more-or-less global phenomenon, occurring in many countries in both the Minority Global North and the Majority Global South. But its distribution is uneven, both in terms of numbers of learners and legal status. In the United Kingdom, where homeschooling is legal, around 50-150,000 children are homeschooled, although there is no accurate record and most figures are estimates (Conroy 2010). In the United States, there are around 2 million homeschooled children (1.7% of the total student population) (Gaither 2009). The unprecedented increase in homeschooling in many contexts since the 1970s is also significant. In the USA, numbers of homeschooled children increased from 50,000 to 850,000 (1.7% of the US student population) between 1985 and 1999 (Aurini and Davies 2005).

It is worth briefly noting the varied legal status of homeschooling. In most contexts, homeschooling is not simply 'legal' or 'illegal'; even where it is legal (as in the UK and Australia) families *may* be subject to scrutiny, being constantly required to justify their decision. The legal status of homeschooling is also dynamic: homeschooling had been legal in Brazil until new legislation in 1987; in Russia, recent plans for the modernisation of the education system would effectively outlaw homeschooling<sup>ii</sup>. The legal status of homeschooling reflects a complex series of situated moral debates about the relative status of the State and the family in children's upbringing. This paper does not discuss the *legality* of homeschooling further (see Kunzman 2009). However, through interview material, it does engage with dualistic *spatial* discourses apparent in the distinctions that UK homeschoolers make between the moral foundations for learning at home versus learning at home.

Several studies have attempted to construct demographic profiles of homeschoolers.

Estimates are that between 75% and 90% (Bielick et al. 2001) of US homeschooled children are white. In the most comprehensive but now outdated profile, Mayberry et al. (1995) found that the majority of parents (97%) were married and that 76% held either postsecondary or

college-level qualifications. Collom and Mitchell (2005) note that mothers provide about 90% of home education, whilst working fathers tend to be employed in higher-earning job classifications and are usually either in professional or self-employed occupations. The geographical spread of US homeschooling is also noteworthy, where “[h]omeschool households [...] were more likely to be found in western states and least likely to be Northeasterners” Stevens (2001, 13). In the UK context, Rothermel (2003) estimates that approximately 15% of homeschoolers are working class. In a relatively large survey, she also found that – contrary to the US situation – only 49% of parents held a post-secondary qualification.

However, there are at least two reasons to be wary of the kinds of demographic data presented above when undertaking research on homeschooling. First, in most countries the numbers of children being homeschooled are *estimated*. Therefore it is impossible to establish whether the studies cited above provide accurate proxies for homeschooling populations. They are included here only to provide a flavour of the socio-economic backgrounds of homeschoolers. Second, evidence from my research – albeit anecdotal evidence from respondents’ *perceptions* – suggested that the *UK* homeschooling population may be a little more diverse than that in the United States, for instance:

“Everyone has a *very* different philosophy and background for home educating [...]. It can make this kind of place [class organised by and for homeschoolers] very political. I always assumed, I’m university educated, my late husband, the children’s father was, that you go to school, and that’s that. But there’s people here from all walks of life who didn’t go to university, maybe didn’t stay at school that long” (Mary<sup>iii</sup>, mother of four children aged 2 to 15, originally from United States)

“Being a home educator in London has its positives and its negatives. One of the things that people say is ooohhh, they’re home educated, they’re going to be anti-social and that sort of thing, have no friends, not come across, you know, different kinds of people. And oh my goodness, that’s one of the things that’s difficult, that my kids have had *too* many friends, from all kinds of families” (Louise, mother of two children, twenty and eighteen; original emphases)

Significantly, Louise emphasised that her observations about the demographic characteristics of homeschoolers were specific to London. It may well also be the case that parents whom I interviewed cited the diversity of homeschooling families in order to anticipate charges of exclusivity that had been made against them in the past (cf. Apple 2000; Lois 2009). Yet, it is my sense, at least, that the characterisation of the typical homeschooling family as white, middle-class, well-educated and headed by a married couple is slightly less appropriate for the London region than for the USA, for example.

### *Parents' reasons for homeschooling*

Much research on homeschooling has been devoted to analysis of parents' choices to home-educate. The justifications for homeschooling are complex and multiple. Before focussing on self-reported reasons of individual families, Gaither (2009) notes several contextual factors which paved the way for huge increases in homeschoolers in the 1980s. These factors were both social and spatial in nature. First, post-war mass suburbanisation, accompanied by vast improvements in housing quality (and a concomitant degradation in the quality of school buildings) provided an increasingly appropriate environment for homeschooling. Second, the rise of feminism functioned as, in some cases, an inspiration for counter-cultural practices such as homeschooling and, in others, as a catalyst for a backlash amongst conservative families where mothers stayed at home. Finally, there arose disillusionment with the increased bureaucratisation and secularism of public schools and growing fears about the appropriateness of public schools for young people (for instance around bullying and standardised testing).

Families' self-reported reasons for homeschooling are diverse. Princiotta and Bielick's (2006) US study found that parents gave the following reasons for homeschooling: concerns

about the school environment (31%); religious/moral concerns with school curriculum (30%); dissatisfaction with provision for children with special educational needs (7%) and physical or mental dis/abilities (7%). Summarising several similar studies, Collom and Mitchell (2005, 277) suggest that “the decision to homeschool is motivated by four broad categories of concern: (a) religious values, (b) dissatisfaction with the public schools, (c) academic and pedagogical concerns, and (d) family life”. For many parents, the decision to homeschool may be a combination of many of these factors. Again in the US context, several authors have emphasised religious grounds for homeschooling (Stevens 2001), differentiating between a majority of highly mobilised, politically-conservative Christian families who lobbied aggressively for the legalisation of homeschooling in the 1980s, and a minority group comprised of striking religious diversity – including Mormons, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Catholics and Pagans (Stevens 2001; Cooper and Sureau 2007).

Several excellent papers have explored the relationship between homeschooling and parenting practices. For some parents, homeschooling is an alternative kind of privatisation: a strategic choice to fulfil parental investments in childhood Katz (2008). In several geographical contexts, middle-class parents reportedly use homeschooling as a way for their children to gain a competitive advantage through ‘cherry-picking’ educational resources that poorer families cannot afford (Apple 2000). Quite differently, other studies have shown that parents are not simply fearful or critical of public schooling: rather, they justify their choice to homeschool via appeals to their self-understanding of their efficacy as parents (Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007). In other words, parents understand the role of a ‘good parent’ to be to educate one’s children. Similarly, in-depth research with mothers has uncovered how homeschooling is often viewed as a ‘natural’ extension of particular kinds of ‘good mothering’ (Merry and Howell 2009). Lois’ (2009) work is particularly noteworthy for its sensitive analysis of justifications and counter-arguments – often based around appeals to

‘natural’ mothering instincts – that homeschooling mothers provide for what is considered by mainstream society to be a ‘deviant’ form of mothering. Despite a relatively substantial body of research on families’ reasons for homeschooling (Rothermel 2003), I return to parental justifications in my own analyses, specifically in order to tease out how spatial discourses matter to the articulation of ‘alternative’ educational practices.

### ***Geographies of homeschooling***

The trends and justifications summarised in the previous section indicate that the *geographies* of homeschooling are significant, as the socio-economic and cultural contexts of homeschooling appear to have profoundly affected its uptake in different countries (Gaither 2009). In the present paper, though – echoing Holloway et al. (2010) – I argue that it is important to begin with the experiences of those engaged in homeschooling. The principal justification for doing so is to provide richer detail about how the kinds of contextual debates signalled in the previous section are articulated by those who do homeschooling. A second justification is to foreground how certain kinds of human experiences that have been favoured in recent cultural geographies (emotions, affects, embodiments) are co-implicated in the production *of* such ‘contextual’<sup>iv</sup> debates as those regarding the morality of homeschooling.

The paper presents findings from interviews with thirty homeschooling families, undertaken during the first half of 2010. Interviewees were recruited through a process of self-selection. During early 2010, I made my first of several day-long observational visits to homeschooling clubs in London. There, I met one parent who agreed to post some text about my research on an electronic mailing list for homeschoolers. The response to that one post was both overwhelming and humbling; I have still not yet been able to talk with all who responded.

Nevertheless, I undertook interviews with thirty homeschooling families in a variety of contexts. Some parents invited me to their homes; I met other families at clubs or classes for homeschoolers, often undertaking fluid interviews with changing groups of parents (and often children) over a period of a few hours. Ten of the interviews were undertaken over the telephone. Where possible, the interviews were tape-recorded, and always with respondents' permission; during some of my observational visits, it was not appropriate to record some of the more general discussions, although I draw upon these data as well as verbatim quotations in this paper. All adult interviewees were parents; the majority (over two-thirds) were mothers. The interviews followed a very simple oral/life-history structure (Riley and Harvey 2007), beginning with the years before the decision to homeschool, then asking in detail about the moments surrounding that decision, following the family's experiences through to the present. The interviews were also structured via a series of thematic prompts about the spaces and places in which learning took place (in material and conceptual senses), the interaction between learning and 'everyday life', and the ambitions that families held for homeschooling. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and two hours; some group discussions took over four hours. Recorded interview data were transcribed and all material was subject to thematic analysis. The rest of this paper proceeds through three of the key themes that emerged in the course of my analysis and focuses on approaches to learning as articulated by parents.

### *Learning spaces*

As noted in the paper's introduction, the content, processes and curricula for learning are, arguably, the domain of education studies and policy analysts. Indeed, the early sections below will contain observations familiar to readers well-versed in these literatures, especially

on homeschooling (but I include them here in order to contextualise the later sections of my analysis for a wider readership). Perhaps this is why a sizeable proportion of geographical studies of education concentrate on what happens *around* learning: on the design of learning spaces (Kraftl 2006); on the spatialities of power in school spaces (Pike 2008); or, on the linkages between children's experiences of school and socio-spatial constructions of identities or citizenship (Valentine 2000; Weller 2009). Many of these studies consider what facilitates, flows from or hinders learning – but say far less regarding the content and experience *of* learning as a spatial practice. There are some important exceptions, however (Holloway et al. 2001; Pykett 2009). For instance, whilst contextualised by concepts of national identity, Gagen's (2004) study of early-twentieth-century playgrounds nevertheless engages contemporaneous work on child psychology to explore how the instruction of children's bodies would lead directly to the development of a child's consciousness. Similarly, Ploszajska's (1996) historical geography of English schools between 1870-1944 demonstrates how three-dimensional model building in geography classes exemplified new pedagogies that valued 'child-led' learning.

These studies emphasise that learning is a spatial practice. This is particularly pertinent to alternative education practices like homeschooling, beginning with its fundamental premise that learning could better take place *out* of school, at home. Many families spoke about how they used their homes to facilitate their children's learning:

“We have a formal space in the kitchen. I bought in lots of books for my son, including the [UK] National Curriculum to start off with. And *loads* of books from the library – quizzes, general knowledge, stuff for boys! But we follow his interests too. So if he has an interest in engineering we follow that. My philosophy is that learning is everyday life. Repetition doesn't work, I go by the idea of 'readiness to learn' [gestures scare quotes with hands]. They will just do it. So learning is taking time to allow him to grow [pause] I want him to perform well, read and write, but also to be confident and reassured”  
(Olivia, mother of one child, ten)

“At home we began with formal learning. With books. But now in terms of the kitchen table – which is where a lot of homeschoolers do learning at home – it’s more important to have what I call proper materials, clay, painting, laid out each day so that they can choose what they want to do [and] do a really good job, feel what the proper materials are like. So apart from that we don’t really organise the format of each day...we might change it sometimes, deliberately or not, but we’ll go out to museums, to the Royal Institute, to the woods. A lot of homeschooling is not at home!” (Alison, mother of two children, three and six)

Significantly, as Alison suggests, most parents had spent the majority of their early homeschooling careers in home-spaces – such as at the kitchen table. However, they then knowingly told of the ‘mistakes’ they had made by attempting initially to do school at home. They looked back with horror at how they had tried to replicate the content, organisation, learning styles and, in some cases, ‘teacher’-child relationships that characterise school. Alison and Olivia were typical of a move from ‘schooling at home’ to ‘child-directed’ or ‘autonomous’ forms of learning, captured by Olivia’s notion of sensing a child’s “readiness to learn” rather than imposing strict learning regimes. In order to achieve a measure of child-led learning, most families relied on a literal and metaphorical spatial shift: moving away from the strictures of formal learning “with books” (Alison), and out of the family home. Each family differed in the extent to which a child’s activities were truly ‘autonomous’ or were structured by adults (Alison hints at a mixture). Indeed, some parents do retain a ‘school at home’ approach: in the USA particularly, many parents chooses to buy-in curriculum materials from specialist companies (Stevens 2001).

My interviewees articulated a sense in which child-led learning – as Olivia put it – should be a learning experience that was embedded within, not distinct from, the experiences of everyday life. This philosophy rendered the home just one in a series of *diverse* learning spaces.

“We say that we do our learning in a series of three landscapes. For us, being outside is really key. So we have firstly what we call our core landscapes, places like our local park, the woods. Then we have industrial landscapes. I

suppose IKEA is the best example. It's controlled but it's also free, the children can rest but they can also play in the play area, where other children are playing. And they can come face-to-face with 'another world' [gestures scare quotes with fingers and laughs]. And then finally we have open landscapes. Like the marsh [pause] say with [son's name] at the marsh I let him run way out in front of me, he's nine. Maybe three hundred, four hundred metres, even out of my sight. And that's a really important kind of space where he can learn that he doesn't have to see me, and I can learn it too" (James, father of five homeschooled children, all under 18)

"[U]sually we spend the morning inside, perhaps doing drawing or reading; and then the afternoon it's going outside, where they can breathe out. The same goes for where we're outside – maybe we'll get out of the city, to the mountains or something, where they can really breathe out" (Susanne, mother of two children, five and eight)

Space was central to the pedagogies that homeschoolers created; interviewees emphasised a combinative approach to learning whose vitality lay in moving-between different places. James had formalised his family's approach into a series of "landscapes", notable for not simply being 'natural' places, but also for the *ordinariness* of a trip to IKEA. Susanne characterised such moving-between as central to the daily rhythms of homeschooling: the effect of "breathing out" in contrast to more concentrated activity indoors. Thus, most homeschoolers were at pains to suggest that homeschooling rarely took place 'at home'. However, it could be argued (although against the grain of my interview data) that all of their 'everyday' activities both inside *and* outside the home was a multi-stranded, porous idea, "stretching across space and time, absorbing memories, fantasies and other places" (Bennett 2001, p.6; also Tolia-Kelly 2004). Arguably, then, the kinds of knowingly 'everyday' spatial *learning* practices in which families engaged were as much constitutive *of* the idea and experience of home (and family practices) as home was of learning (Morgan 2011). Whilst there is not space in this paper to reflect further on the notions of home propounded by parents in my study, I do want to note that ideas about 'home' and 'learning' reinforced one another – just as they do in other alternative educational practices like Steiner schooling (Kraftl 2006).

Finally, like Alison, many interviewees attended to the material details that rendered spaces suitable for learning.

“[W]e had some salt on the windowsill because we spilled some salt water. And it evaporated and the salt was left behind. And we just left it there. What a great lesson that they could just see on the windowsill every time they walked past!” (Diane, mother of five children, ten to 22)

Diane’s account was typical of homeschoolers: learning was not only part of everyday life but embedded in the banal, material details of childhood experience (see Horton and Kraftl 2006). In Diane’s case (compared with Olivia’s), learning *was* repetitive: but Diane espouses a very different kind of repetitive experience than the kinds of ‘learning by rote’ of which educational theorists have been critical (hooks 2003, 8; Holt 2004 [1976]). John Dewey put it best:

“How many [school students] acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? [...] If I ask these questions, it is not for the sake of wholesale condemnation of the old education. [...] It is to emphasize the fact, first, that young people in traditional schools do have experiences; and, secondly, that the trouble is not the absence of experiences, but their defective and wrong character [...] from the standpoint of connection with *further experience*” (Dewey 1997 [1938], 26-27) emphasis added)

The point is that repetition is not bad for learning *per se*. Rather, here are contrasted two styles and thus moralities of acquiring knowledges, skills and habits: one purportedly stultifying, the other creative and, ideally, emancipatory. Importantly, neither are statically associated with *particular places* (respectively ‘traditional schools’ and ‘progressive sites of learning’). Rather, it is in the connection with what Dewey calls “further experience” – shorthand for how things are “put into practice” outside school and at home (Dewey 1997 [1938], 20) – that learning may acquire the ‘right’ character. But, I argue, *spatial* experiences *are* crucial here, where learning was found or distributed throughout the banal spatialities of everyday life (for Diane, above). Learning as, thus, immanent to everyday life.

### *Spatialities and temporalities of feeling*

This section acknowledges the temporalities inherent to many interviewees' approaches to homeschooling. It explores the temporalities of feeling that connected children to their parents and to material environments that, in their world-view, were overflowing with learning potential. Several quotations in the previous section touched on the multiple temporalities of homeschooling; respondents discussed the changing rhythms of the homeschooler's day and the imminence and immanence of repetitive learning experiences. Here, I propose two further temporalities. The first relates to Olivia's earlier belief that "learning is taking time to allow [children] to grow". Homeschooling represented a distinctly different pace of learning and – by implication – a less hurried pace of life. The debates around the pressures upon children in mainstream schools will no doubt be familiar to many readers and my interviewees assumed these criticisms. But inherent to the alternative ways in which they valued everyday spaces was a sense of *slowness* that altered the quality of learning and the relationship between parents and children. This sense of slowness was often directly related to understandings of autonomous or child-led learning:

“Diane: OK so here's an example [of autonomous learning], we started the Normans, I don't remember why now, maybe we went on a museum visit and it just sparked off, you know? We had intended to move forward with that [pause] whatever that means. And we did discuss the Normans a bit, we dressed up as Vikings, we did cooking, looked it up on the web, everything in the house went back to the Vikings for a bit. But it was time to play that mattered” (Diane, mother of five children, ten to 22)

“Susanne: learning is a process of seeing what they pick up. Literally as well as, you know...what they learn. It's talking. It's spending time listening to see what interests them. [...] It's not easy to start off with, but it turns out it's actually quite a natural thing, a natural thing to do. I think a lot of people call it autonomous learning [pause] I don't know if it needs a name but it's just about being more relaxed and talking.

Interviewer: is there any structure?

Susanne: there's still a bit of structure but it's about feeling what's right” (Susanne, mother of two children, five and eight)

The notion of what Susanne calls “spending time” was bound up with other temporalities and spatialities. Having “time to play” (Diane) and “being more relaxed” (Susanne) were dynamically entwined with a far quicker temporal experience: being *spontaneous* through what Susanne calls “feeling what’s right”. In many interviews, it became apparent that homeschoolers understood learning less as a product of cognitive reflection and more as something felt, something instinctual, even “natural”, as Susanne had it, that was a product of multiple, relational temporalities of different speeds. As Lois (2009) shows (and as I found), many mothers view homeschooling as an extension of so-called ‘natural’ parenting styles that include long-term breastfeeding, attachment (through wearing a papoose) and baby-led weaning. Thus, ‘spending time’ and ‘being spontaneous’ were a necessary corollary of one another; both were implicated in mothers *feeling* what their children needed next.

Significantly, this process was not, of course, entirely non- or pre-cognitive. Diane and Susanne described habits of being – bodily dispositions – that were *perhaps* less instinctual than they were learned as a form of collective, embodied social capital through friends and parenting groups (Holloway 1998; Holt 2008). As Sarah explained:

“I had already known home educating parents. Partly through La Leche League. I guess it just became a normal part of that group of parents. It seems to be those that were taking the natural, nurturing kind of approach right from day 1, breastfeeding, listening to what the children needed. So home education seemed a natural way to go on. Not having this regimented style of parenting. More about attitude than what you do. Not trying to get the children to fit into your schedules, specifically, that they apparently need ‘later’” (Sarah, mother of one child, seven)

Many parents described coming to homeschooling through socialisation with other mothers, or through meeting families who homeschooled before they did. Here, though, I do not want to repeat the findings of previous research on parenting cultures, nor to emphasise the (undoubted) influence of social and educational capital upon parents. Rather, I emphasise that – whether cognitive, pre-cognitive or socialised – homeschoolers articulated the central

importance of emotion and *feeling* to their approaches. Amidst much geographical interest in emotion (for a provocative overview, see Pile 2010), I want to highlight two particular issues about emotion and homeschooling that might inform future geographical research on alternative (and, indeed, mainstream) learning spaces.

First, parental emotions were tied to complex and overlapping forms of *temporality*. Yet these temporalities of feeling were not simply cited as a good-in-themselves; rather, they were often central the philosophies and practices of learning. Homeschooling was characterised by the nurturing of a *slowly*-matured, intimate relationship between learner and educator, developed through non-confrontational conversation, wherein learning was not distinguished from the course of everyday life (see Holt 2004 [1976], 13-17). At the same time, that slowness also appeared to beget a far faster temporality: a spontaneity wherein one might simply ‘sense’ what was right for one’s child. It was my sense that ‘taking time’ was figured as a metaphor for a mode of feeling – bodily disposition – that enabled parents a sense of empathy for the emotional and material needs of their children.

Second, I want to highlight at this juncture that homeschooling does not always resemble the rosy ideal figured in the kinds of overwhelmingly positive spatialities and temporalities of feeling above. Reflecting upon the moment she withdrew her child from mainstream education, Susanne demonstrated considerable anxiety:

“Initially it was relief it was getting her away from school. But then very worryingly I didn’t have the faith in myself. I didn’t want to stuff up her life because I couldn’t teach her all she needed to do. But then if you do far more research into it, what other families achieve and all the other approaches. Then you get a lot more confidence. It’s a very freeing experience. I’m very *glad* she’s out of school (Susanne, mother of one girl, 14, speaker’s emphasis)

As I suggest in the next section of the paper, many parents withdrew their children from school because they felt that the pressure upon their children (from standardised testing, for

instance) was too great. Yet, upon withdrawing their children, some mothers – like Susanne – felt that that pressure had been transferred onto their own shoulders. Indeed, here we witness a further, but relatively common spatiality and temporality of feeling amongst mothers in particular: the anxiety that was entailed in the moment of withdrawal itself, looking-forward to an unknown and unsettled future *outside* school. Susanne persevered – suggesting that support from other parents had provided confidence and rendered the withdrawal of her daughter from school a ‘freeing’ experience. Significantly, none of my interviewees spoke about whether they felt *ongoing* anxiety– whether from themselves or from other, especially more experienced homeschoolers – that they were going to ‘stuff up’ their children’s lives, as Susanne put it. Yet future research might explore further how homeschooling parents and, indeed, parents of children in other alternative educational spaces deal with this ongoing emotional pressure.

*What kind of ‘alternative’? Spatial discourses of ‘home’ versus ‘school’ in critiquing the State’s role in providing education*

So far in this paper I have focussed upon the spatialities and temporalities of homeschooling, exploring some of the many material spaces, practices and emotions that characterised how homeschoolers approached learning. I have – following my respondents’ own views – all-but assumed that homeschooling represents an ‘alternative’ form of education, along the lines of the definition I provided in the introduction to this paper. In this final section I want, however, to more carefully scrutinise this assumption. I interrogate and complicate the difference between ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ education by looking at the different registers in which this difference was articulated by homeschoolers. This is an important task if geographers are to sensitively analyse the ways in which ‘alternative’ educational spaces

are constituted. Once again, I argue that geography matters, profoundly, in this analysis, if only because each register observes different kinds of interaction, spaces and scales. I focus upon three overlapping registers which I have characterised (admittedly simply) as follows: the emotional; the political; the moral.

Firstly, in the *emotional* register, homeschoolers articulated a very clear sense that homeschooling *was* alternative from mainstream schooling. From the spatialities and temporalities of feeling discussed above, they formulated a clear, knowingly spatial discourse in which ‘home’ and ‘school’ were framed dualistically. Homeschoolers’ schematisation of home and school rested upon a distinction between what each place *did* to children’s bodies. Danielle and Jenny explained why they decided to withdraw their children from mainstream school:

“A couple of things happened. One was that the children were making father’s day ties. And the children were told not to tell anyone, it was supposed to be a surprise. But when they were making them, my daughter piped up in class, my Mummy has told me that teachers are not allowed to make me keep secrets. The teaching staff apologised to me. And I said to them you should *never* ask a child of five to keep a secret from their parents, no matter how well-intentioned. That was where I was at with the *school system*. I hated the fact that at just over four she was being taught cursive hand-writing, when she could barely say please and thank you” (Danielle, mother of two, five and seven, speaker’s emphasis)

“We took [autistic son] out of school when he was five. That was mainly because he was becoming so physically ill at school. He was having nosebleeds, asthma attacks, panic attacks – and, he had depression. He would write notes saying he wanted to die. [...He] has sensitivity to touch and smell. So for one hour he was taken out of the classroom to work with a support worker. And for the entire time she sat putting her acrylic nails on. And she didn’t say a word to him. And when he came home [son] said it was awful. He couldn’t stand the smell. And his teacher didn’t even know he spoke. And he’s really articulate. So we thought if we’re fighting so hard for this then we might as well home educate. So the decision was easy” (Jenny, mother of one, twelve).

Jenny and Danielle (like other parents) narrated their decisions to withdraw their children as a series of *encounters* and ‘last straws’ that were symbolic of a particular kind of space

(‘school’). In their narratives, they set these kinds of experiences with school against the kinds of child-led home-based learning witnessed in the paper thus far. The crucial point here is that the opposition between home and school – in the emotional register – was space- and time-specific. The spatial dualism between home and school was manifest in the startling kinds of bodily experiences (cursive handwriting, smells) and emotions (for Jenny, “it was awful”) that characterised particular encounters with particular teachers in particular schools. The distinction between home and school was thus a locally-scaled and not, of necessity, a wholesale critique of ‘the mainstream system’. It goes without saying, for instance, that whilst experiences like Danielle’s do take place in other mainstream schools, hers was a relatively unusual story. Thus, in this register, the spatial dualism between home and school was locally-scaled and emotionally-charged; and the idea of homeschooling as an alternative spatial practice was retained.

Second, parents articulated varying *political* beliefs about mainstream schooling. The picture here was more complex than that at the emotional register. On the one hand, parents like Danielle and Jenny (above) did use their own experiences to extrapolate broader critiques about mainstream schooling. They viewed certain kinds of practices and interactional habits as symbolic of a schooling *system* (not just a localised space) that was inappropriate for both learning and children – citing examples like learning cursive handwriting, lying, and an inability to recognise non-normative modes of verbal expression. Many parents were, therefore, anti-school, whether or not they accepted that mainstream schooling was more diverse than their particular experiences might suggest. For them, emotional experiences were central to their expression of a politicised commitment to viewing the home as a sphere superior to mainstream schooling. This commitment constituted a faint echo of feminist and activist work around “the centrality of intimate, emotive, embodied experience in the constitution of both personal radicalisation and empathetic collectivities” (Horton and Kraftl

2009, p. 2985; Brown and Pickerill 2009). In other words, their emotional experiences were central to an ‘anti-school’ view that underpinned their political commitment to homeschooling.

On the other hand, several parents harboured similar political beliefs about the nature of childhood (or, rather, held particular socially-constructed views of childhood) but were not ‘anti-school’.

“At the time [of withdrawal], I wanted them to *be* children. Not about having the latest trainers or whatever. It can be, not always, but it can be quite pressurised in school. I feel that you can’t get your childhood back. And if you spend a lot of your time sitting, and writing, and putting your hand up, and being quiet. *I’m not anti-school*. I want to say that now. But I felt I wanted them to have a freedom, that I had in my childhood they would have an Enid Blyton childhood. And they did. And I think, hopefully, it’s made them quite independent people. Which they are. They’re quite self-sufficient” (Louise, mother of two children, twenty and eighteen; emphasis added by author).

However, Louise – like several mothers – made it very clear that she was not “anti-school” at a political level. Elsewhere, she acknowledged alternatives to and, crucially, within mainstream schooling that could provide the kinds of childhood experiences she valorised (compare Holt 2004). Whilst some homeschoolers drew an inexorable link between their intimate, emotive encounters and a more generic, politicised critique of mainstream schooling, others were more careful to acknowledge the diversity of mainstream schooling (compare Dewey 1997; hooks 2003). Thus, dualistic spatial discourses of ‘home’ versus ‘school’ were complicated on this more politicised register.

The third register connects some of the emotional geographies of homeschooling with a series of ongoing *moral* debates about the relative responsibility (and right) of parents and the State to educate children. These debates are complex and extend into questions about the legality of homeschooling and the respective rights of the State and parents to *care* for children (e.g. Kunzman 2009). However, I want to look at one particular set of arguments

outlined recently by James Conroy (2010) in response to the Badman review of homeschooling in the UK (HMSO 2009). Danielle raised the issue at stake most succinctly when she spoke about the moment she withdrew her children from a mainstream school.

“I was so relieved. I remember we wrote the letter, deregistering them from school. Then we walked to the postbox. And we all cried on the way home. I felt it really was them and us. I felt it was just distant. Leave your child at the door, because I’m [school teacher] a far better-qualified person to look after your child. And forgive me, I don’t agree” (Danielle, mother of two girls, five and seven)

Once again, Danielle’s experience was typical in that her emotions were foregrounded in a spatial discourse that dichotomised home and school (in this case as ‘distant’). It is important, though, to distinguish the register at which distinctions between school and home were being made here. That is, even if parents did not harbour thorough-going anti-State sentiments, many of them did challenge assumptions about who, in Danielle’s words, was a ‘better-qualified’ person to look after their child – which ever political party was in power.

During interviews, many parents explicitly connected the everyday exigencies of homeschooling with a broader critique of the State’s role in children’s upbringing. As Lees (2011, 10, original emphasis) has observed, homeschoolers experienced what might be termed a “paradigmatic ‘gestalt switch’” in their realisation that “schools cease to *be* education”. In other words, homeschoolers had come to recognise an alternative set of moral and practical assumptions about child-rearing and responsibility that represented a world view that was incommensurable with ‘traditional’ (for want of a better word) models of education in the UK Lees (2011, 8-9). Once again, they were not ‘anti-State’; rather, their critique rested upon the premise that the State did not have ultimate *moral* responsibility for certain facets of (their) children’s learning, and that homeschooling represented an alternative – if often unrecognised and implicitly endangered – conceptual space wherein that learning could take place.

These apparently irresolvable differences related in significant ways to academic critiques of British (and Western) approaches to education and the policing of non-State educational alternatives, especially within family or community settings. These critiques characterise Westernised education as ‘schizophrenic’, in two ways. First, Indigenous educators such as Deloria Jr. and Wildcat (2001, 47-56) identify a schizophrenic metaphysics at play in Western thought that places science and religion in conflict. The effect has been (in their example, for both indigenous and non-indigenous communities in the USA) that knowledge – and by extension education – has, progressively, been partitioned into specialised disciplines that are perpetuated through the mere acquisition and memorisation of a-contextual ‘facts’. This process has rendered knowledge the realm of experts and allowed the spatial separation of ‘learning’ and ‘everyday life’ and is, in my experience, one of the major critiques of mainstream forms of learning that many alternative learning spaces, not just homeschoolers, draw upon when articulating their pedagogic approaches. And, ultimately, it is this separation which has, in part, been seen as the epistemological basis for the sometimes violent ways in which the responsibility of education has been wrested from communities and families to the State along (neo-)colonial lines (see de Leeuw 2009, on Indian Residential Schools in Canada; see hooks 2003, on the effects of this system in ethnically-diverse public school settings; see Kiddle 1999 on Traveller communities in the UK).

I am not comparing the treatment of indigenous North Americans or even Travellers with homeschoolers. But these examples echo faintly with a thorough-going sentiment amongst many homeschooling parents that connected the negative school experiences (like lying) with what they saw as the *symbolic* violence writ by the assumption that children go to school, thus replacing an intimate parent-child bond with one of State-subject:

“There were two things. One is that I absolutely struggled with my daughter being in mainstream school at not even four and a half. I hated taking her to

school. I hated the formality of the system. She was full-time before she was four and a half. And I felt the State was actually taking my children away from me. And, you know, I was the mother that after every school holiday I cried at the end” (Charlotte, mother of one, ten)

Educational theorist James Conroy (2010) draws upon this sentiment to identify a second kind of schizophrenia that neoliberal governments have displayed in successive waves of intervention into children’s lives. He argues that since the mid-1980s, governments (on the political right and left) have

“increasingly encroached on the territory once deemed the preserve of professionals, providing evidence of a kind of schizophrenia. On the one hand, the widespread suspicion of professionals has seen the substantial growth of centralization while, on the other, the belief in markets has given rise to the growth of forms of voluntarism” (Conroy 2010, 326).

Conroy goes on to discuss the Badman Report (HMSO 2009), a review of homeschooling in the UK that recommended far greater scrutiny of homeschooling families, even whilst homeschooling remained legal<sup>v</sup>. Thus, the State has begun to encroach not only on professionals and voluntary or ‘third sector’ agencies (like religious or community groups) but on the realm of the family. The implication is, then, that those who dare to choose are subject to increasing scrutiny: ‘alternatives’ are valued under a neoliberal regime but the ability to carry through those alternatives is stifled. I return to this point in the paper’s conclusion.

Let me be clear here that I am not arguing – and nor does Conroy (2010, 339) – that the existence of *schools* is unjustifiable in either moral or pedagogical terms. If we presuppose that the continuation of liberal democracy requires children to acquire certain habits and skills that will render them governable citizens, then schools probably should remain central in that particular process. But,

“the objection of many parents, most especially those of a religious or conservative bent, might be to the creeping encroachments of the state

beyond the legitimate aspiration and responsibility to educate for such citizenship. The elision into para-educational matters is often a concern for parents. After all, in Britain, the legislation that enables girls as young as fourteen to seek, independently of their parents, contraceptive help and abortion must at least raise a question of legitimacy when the same parent is expected by the same state to support their child financially up to the age of twenty-five if they remain in the educational system” (Conroy 2010, 339).

Thus, homeschoolers (like Danielle and Louise) argued that the *emotional* or affective bonds promulgated between parents and their children outside of school were, in their view, more appropriate for their children. In both practical and ideological senses, the nature of these bonds was contrasted directly with the sometimes violent ways in which bond-breaking and bond-remaking took place in schools under the ‘creeping encroachments’ Conroy identifies in the above quotation. Many parents were furious about the Badman review; if anything, it re-mobilised a sense that the State misunderstood and under-estimated the capacity of parents to care and provide for their children. Parents like Charlotte and Danielle (in their final quotations above) directly linked their moral right to homeschool to the kinds of emotional bonds that they felt could *only* be cultivated in a family-like environment. They articulated what could be the basis for alternative forms of learning that escape the double ‘schizophrenia’ articulated by Deloria, Jr and Wildcat (2001) and Conroy (2010): that is, an increasing recognition that intimate, caring, loving spaces could be the basis for more inclusive, effective forms of learning (see, for instance, Merry and Howell 2009; hooks 2003). This is a potentially exciting avenue of research for alternative geographies of education. Amidst ongoing interest in emotion, affect and intergenerational relations, geographers could theorise how love relations might figure and be configured in alternative learning spaces.

I do want to cite a word of caution here, though. Critical readers will note that some of my respondents (like Louise), and Conroy himself, evoke a sense of the ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ impulses (especially of mothers for their children) that feminist and queer scholars have

carefully deconstructed over the past twenty years. Similarly, in privileging intimate relations between parents and children, for instance, there is a sense that this sets up particular kinds of feeling towards, acting with and relating to children that many parents may – for whatever personal or contextual reasons – find it hard to achieve. And, indeed, there is a danger that it could be assumed that such loving, intimate relations cannot take place outside of the family, or of family-like spaces, although several educational theorists have begun to map out how love and intimacy might work in non-family settings (Deloria Jr and Wildcat 2001; hooks 2003). These issues require far more thought than space allows here. But many providers of alternative education – not just homeschoolers – cite love, intimacy, trust and care as emotional impulses or habits that are central to learning. Therefore, it is incumbent to consider the political and moral implications of these commitments *to* emotion as some of the very defining elements of alternative educational spaces.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has been to begun to articulate several ways in which geographers might understand alternative education practices. It has drawn upon in-depth interviews with homeschooling families to exemplify some of many ways in which spatial practices and discourses were invoked by homeschoolers. The paper has made three principal contributions to this end. These are summarised below, along with some tentative, partial suggestions about future geographical research on alternative education spaces.

Firstly, the paper focussed upon experiences of homeschooling families. It analysed a range of spatial practices and discourses that homeschoolers drew upon to facilitate their children's learning. In distinction from much – but far from all – research in geography, it focussed upon the spatialities of *learning-itself*, and not only the material spaces, identities and power

relations that surround learning. Homeschooling occurred from the home out: homeschoolers began trying to provide 'school at home', but, increasingly, articulated forms of autonomous learning that were predicated upon diverse, dynamic and combinative *spatial* experiences. Thus, many homeschoolers attempted to efface artificial boundaries between 'learning' and 'everyday life', emphasising the sheer ordinariness of trips to IKEA or everyday happenings within the home. This list is of course partial: future work on homeschooling, in different contexts, might apprehend an array of other spatial practices, if only because homeschooling is such a diverse and situated practice. Geographers may also explore similar spatialities of learning in other alternative educational practices, such as Montessori, Steiner or Forest Schooling, Care Farming, informal learning, democratic and human-scale education. I want, in particular, to promote *comparative* studies of alternative learning spaces: that tease out the linkages and disjunctures between different kinds of alternative spaces; that account for flows and associations of people, ideas and practices at regional, national or international scales; and that critically assess the (possible) relationships between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' learning spaces, which are often more apparent than this paper has allowed. Such an approach may, for instance, take its inspiration from Gibson-Graham's (2008) invocation to map diverse practices that undermine and offer alternatives to neoliberal/global capitalist formations.

Secondly, I stressed multiple temporalities of homeschooling that were intimately bound up with conceptions of autonomous learning in, for instance, parents *taking time* to listen to their children's needs. They were also inter-connected with the kinds of spatial practice noted above where, for example, moving between inside and outside spaces afforded the opportunity for children to 'breathe out'. Many participants connected the temporalities of homeschooling to a *feeling* of what was right for their children. Most parents meant this in a two-fold way: in terms of a longer-term feeling that the decision to homeschool was

(‘naturally’) right for their family; and in terms of an ongoing disposition to ‘sensing’ what was right for their children in any given situation. I hinted at the possible connections of these findings with a mass of emergent work in sociology and geography that has accentuated the significance of bodies, emotions, affects, materialities and (non)cognitive practices to the production of social spaces. I acknowledge that in trying to emphasise the *timing* of these kinds of emotions, affects and practices, this paper has not done this work justice, and future research may explore the nonrepresentational geographies of home- and alternative-learning practices in far greater detail.

Finally, I outlined a link between the spatial-temporal practices of homeschooling and difficult debates about the relative role of the State and parents in children’s learning (indeed, in the upbringing). Thus, the paper left many of the nonrepresentational geographies of homeschooling deliberately implied in order, as Lorimer (2008, 551) puts it, to “refine, recalibrate, extend or conjoin its [NRT’s] original mandate with cognate sorts of social concern”. That cognate area of concern was with whether, how and where a practice like homeschooling may be posited as an ‘alternative’ educational practice. I explored a discursive spatial dualism posited by homeschoolers, where ‘home’ and ‘school’ were associated with radically, if not incommensurably, different modes of feeling, timing, learning and, crucially, relating between adult and child. I argued that – predicated upon this spatial dualism – homeschooling parents challenged the role of the State in taking ultimate responsibility for their children. Their experiences echoed critiques of the interventionist – if not violent – ways in which apparently ‘schizophrenic’ States have attempted to gain governmental legitimacy over educational alternatives through recourse to calls for greater scrutiny. The choice of terminology – ‘schizophrenia’ – might be provocative, if not offensive to some readers. Indeed, it might gloss the complexity of what I argued were *multiple* and complex ways in which homeschoolers themselves saw the distinction between

home and school. But the term does highlight the contradictory and difficult position that many homeschoolers found themselves in: they felt ‘out of place’ in the school system *and* increasingly marginalised in the very alternative space – the home – in which they thought that they should have the moral right to provide for their children’s learning without intervention.

In future, geographers could consider alternative education practices like homeschooling as critical milieu in which to explore ongoing constructions of childhood, the family and intergenerational relations (see James and Prout 1997; Hopkins and Pain 2007). As I argued in the last part of the paper, they could consider the difficult politics and moralities involved in privileging emotional/affective intimacies in learning. There is a need for very careful analyses – with a sensitive, critical deployment of nonrepresentational theories – of the mobilisation of such intimacies in the production of spatial discourses that prop up particular constellations of family life, or that undergird distinctions between ‘home’ and ‘school’ spaces.

Finally, some of the contradictions noted in this paper mean that, at least in the UK, the State has and will continue to have a significant role to play in defining alternative educational practices, like homeschooling. Therefore, future studies of alternative educational spaces must account for the multiple, contradictory ways in which ‘alternatives’ are implicated in, contrasted with, and contextualised by overlapping imperatives on registers that are emotional, political and moral. Alternative geographies of education might be all the more powerful if – in Hanson Thiem’s (2009) terms – they not only explore the *difference* that alternative education spaces seek to make, but if they also consider the ways that they reflect upon, constitute and are shaped by mainstream (or ‘neoliberal’) regimes.

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<sup>i</sup> I use this term as a shorthand in this paper, but acknowledge Hanson Thiem's (2009) and Holloway et al.'s (2010) caution about a coherent 'sub-discipline' going by this name. If anything, this paper seeks to add further diversity and complication to the research agendas noted here.

<sup>ii</sup> Source: <http://www.hslida.org>, last accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> All of my respondents wished remain anonymous; all names provided with interview quotations in this paper are pseudonyms

<sup>iv</sup> I use scare quotes around the term 'contextual' in this instance as a nod to poststructural/nonrepresentational injunctions to avoid assuming the opposition and ontologically-assured status of structure and agency, or the causality of 'large-scale' over 'small' (Jacobs 2006). There is neither space nor a need to rehearse recent work on emotion, affect and embodiment here, but readers seeking a way in might start with Lorimer's (2008) recent and previous reviews and an edited collection by Anderson and Harrison (2010).

<sup>v</sup> The Badman Report (HMSO 2009) was commissioned partly amidst fears that homeschooling families used homeschooling as a cover for child abuse. There is no evidence to substantiate this fear (Conroy 2010) and, the new coalition Government of May 2010 onwards has not (yet) accepted any of the recommendations of this report.