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Towards geographies of 'alternative' education: a case study of UK home schooling families

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In this paper, I argue for the development of geographies of 'alternative' education. In light of growing geographical interest in education, I argue for a focus on sites that explicitly offer non-mainstream, non-state-sanctioned forms of learning in contexts where it is assumed that children will go to school. I exemplify my discussion through interviews with 30 UK-based homeschooling families. In seeking to advance geographical research on education, I make three key contributions. First, I exemplify how focusing 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 consider the multiple and contradictory ways in which homeschooling constituted an 'alternative' educational space, discuss whether and how geographers should seek to affirm (all) such spaces and attend to some of the potential political/moral dilemmas that are provoked by the place of emotion in homeschoolers' accounts. Third, I outline briefly some implications of this paper for further research on geographies of education, and family/inter-generational relations.

Key words learning; children's geographies; parenting; family geographies; emotion and affect; temporality

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Introduction

The past 5 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'.[1] 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 focused, 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, Hemming 2007; Holt 2007; Hopkins 2010; Valentine 2000). 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 another new 'spin'. However, this paper is most resonant with Holloway *et al*.'s 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' (2010, 594; emphasis added). A corollary – albeit a tantalisingly 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

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practices operate in the production of social spaces. Thus, a broad aim of this paper is to foreground the experiences and motivations of some of the 'subjects' of education who operate outside mainstream schooling: parents who home educate their children. Specifically, the paper attends to some of the emotional geographies that characterise homeschoolers' experiences, where feelings of intimacy and love are, in large measure, constitutive of what makes homeschooling an 'alternative' space to mainstream schools (compare Valentine 2008).

Given the centrality of intimacy and the term 'home' to the practice of homeschooling, this paper is also tangentially situated within geographies of the home (Blunt and Dowling 2006). Ironically, as I indicate later on, many homeschoolers undertake a significant proportion of their learning *outside* the home. Nevertheless, they enrol a disparate array of interconnected local spaces (libraries, parks, museums) into practices that constitute knowingly *family*-like relations (Morgan 2011). The home becomes one element in this repertoire of spaces and, recursively, 'home' is afforded an extended sense that seeps beyond the boundaries of a particular building (Jacobs and Smith 2008). Several geographers have shown how notions of domesticity and privacy have a constitutive relationship with that which is assumed to be 'outside': public spheres of work and state governance (e.g. Blunt and Dowling 2006, 18). The later sections of this paper consider some of the controversies surrounding this relationship with respect of homeschooling. Other studies of home have also sought to explore how family practices are managed in light of ostensibly non-home-based concerns – such as work (McDowell 2007), childcare after school hours (Forsberg and Strandell 2007) and complementary forms of home-learning (Holloway and Valentine 2001; Wainwright and Marandet 2011). This paper complicates these relationships because homeschoolers do not consider their children's learning to complement that at school – in the vast majority of cases their children do not attend school at all. Thus, I argue that notions of work (in the sense of women's domestic labour and childcare), learning and family home-lives are particularly complicated in the case of homeschooling, because learning is simply deemed immanent and imminent to everyday life. By highlighting some of these complications, the paper therefore offers an extension to previous research on the home and the family.

Notwithstanding linkages with geographies of home, the key contribution of this paper is to think through the potential for geographies of alternative *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 contrast 'alternative' with 'mainstream' education 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. (2009, 3)

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 distinctive 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 Cameron 2006; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011; Jeffrey *et al*. 2004; Kraftl 2006).

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. The first two reasons provide important justifications for this paper, whose discussion I open out in later sections of the paper, but that require more sustained analysis than is possible here; the third reason provides a framing that I broach more directly through empirical analysis. The first reason is that 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 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' (2003, 21). Towards the end of this paper, I explore a common feeling amongst homeschoolers – that the school system aims to 'break' intimate, emotional bonds between parents and children – to unpick assumptions about the role of the state in providing education for children.

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Again, I highlight the centrality of emotion, and the management of emotive relationships, to questions of which spaces (in this paper, the state-controlled school or the home) are most appropriate for children's learning. As I suggest briefly in the paper's conclusion, such attention to 'alternative' ways of doing parent–child/teacher–pupil relationships should also prompt geographers to (re)consider the constitution of intergenerational and family relations, which have become a focus for study in recent years (Hopkins and Pain 2007). 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 (also Brown 2009). Thus, Hanson Thiem's (2009) assertion about the centrality of education spaces to the production of neoliberal orders may be taken elsewhere: amidst progressive, activist and radical work in geography (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010), I will argue in the final sections of the paper that it is equally important to carefully and critically chart how diverse *education* practices may challenge, avert or even be constitutive of neoliberal forms of governance and/or capitalist orderings.

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 take place, how *learning* is practised, idealised and talked about. Much of this work has, of course, taken place in education studies, sociologies and philosophies of education (Bailey 2010; Ball 2004; Gulson and Symes 2007) 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, mobile practices and place-specific emotions and intimacies are central to the articulation of homeschooling as an alternative mode of 'child-led' learning. Building upon previous work that has characterised child-led learning as imminent to the flow of everyday life, I demonstrate how such forms of homeschooling exhibited contrasting, but entangled, spatio-temporal rhythms – combining a sense of slowness with a performative spontaneity to children's needs. However, I also argue that homeschoolers viewed learning as *immanent* – that is, that the banal materialities and disorderly mess of everyday environments are suffused with learning potential.

This paper begins with an introduction to homeschooling, reviewing relevant research from cognate disciplines, and reinterpreting some historical trends in homeschooling through a geographical lens. The paper then turns to analysis of 30 in-depth interviews with UK-based homeschooling families. First, I explore how some of the spatialities of homeschooling were entwined with ideas about how children learn within everyday family life, emphasising the immanence of learning to banal, material and messy spaces. I then discuss how those spatialities were entwined with what homeschoolers viewed as alternative dispositions to time – spontaneity and slowness. This allows me to introduce the importance of emotional intimacy to homeschooling parents. Thus, in the last section of my analysis, I return to the first two justifications for geographies of alternative education raised above. I consider directly which emotions, 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, prevalent amongst homeschoolers, between 'school' and 'home'. Drawing upon critical educational theorists like Conroy (2010), I argue that geographers might intervene in some difficult debates about who should provide for children's learning. In closing, I consider the possible contribution of this paper to geographies of education.

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 2 days a week at school and 3 days 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

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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 50 000–150 000 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 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.[2] 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. It also reflects uneven ways in which conflicting neoliberal governmental ideals (especially around the privatisation of education versus its surveillance) are being rolled out in different national contexts (Hanson Thiem 2009; Conroy 2010). 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 school.

Several studies have attempted to construct demographic profiles of homeschoolers. Estimates are that between 75 per cent and 90 per cent (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 per cent held either post-secondary or college-level qualifications. Collom and Mitchell (2005) note that mothers provide about 90 per cent 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 per cent of homeschoolers are working class. In a relatively large survey, she also found that – contrary to the US situation – only 49 per cent 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. There's people here from all walks of life who didn't go to university, maybe didn't stay at school that long. (Mary, mother of four children, aged 2 to 15, originally from United States)[3]

> 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, aged 18 and 20; original emphasis)

Significantly, Louise emphasised that her observations about the demographic characteristics of homeschoolers were specific to London: already, in contrast with previous studies on homeschooling, it is important to note that locality plays a significant role in the kinds of educational experiences that parents and children have. 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. Lois 2009). Yet the characterisation of the typical homeschooling family as white, middle-class, well-educated and headed by a married couple is slightly less

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appropriate for the London region than for the USA, for example.

Thus far, then, in supplementing previous work on homeschooling, I want – being mindful of the reliability of demographic data – to highlight two differently scaled trends in the geographies of homeschooling. At the international scale, the rolling out of ostensibly neoliberalised education and childcare policies is occurring unevenly: in the United States, the picture has been one of legalisation and increased freedom over time; in Germany, homeschooling has always been illegal and remains so; in the United Kingdom, it remains legal but has been subject to increasing scrutiny. At the same time, I have also suggested attention to the sub-national, even local, contextual factors that may affect families' experiences of homeschooling (in the above case, in terms of encounters with socio-cultural diversity). I pick up some of these contextual factors later in the paper.

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 focusing on self-reported reasons of individual families, Gaither (2009) notes several contextual factors that 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 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. (2005, 277)

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). Relatedly, as Hanson Thiem (2007) argues, in mobilising a politics of scale through local and national parental collectives, US homeschoolers were first able to legalise and now legitimise the privatisation of their children's education (also Stevens 2001). 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). 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 – 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 the last part of my own analyses in this paper, specifically in order to tease out how spatial discourses matter to the articulation of 'alternative' educational practices.

Geographies of learning in homeschooling

The trends and justifications summarised in the previous section indicate that the *geographies* of homeschooling are significant, as the socio-economic, legal and political contexts of homeschooling have profoundly affected its uptake in different countries. In the

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present paper, though – echoing Holloway *et al*. (2010) – I argue that it is equally important to begin with the spatial practices and discourses 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' debates as those regarding the morality of homeschooling.[4] I do so initially by exploring homeschoolers' experience of *learning itself*, as a spatial practice.

Arguably, the content, processes and curricula for learning are the domain of education studies and policy analysts. Indeed, I know that the early sections below will contain observations familiar to readers well-versed in these literatures, especially on homeschooling: but I include them to contextualise the later sections of my analysis for a wider readership. Perhaps, though, this is why most 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 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*. 2000; 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 and 1944 demonstrates how three-dimensional model building in geography classes exemplified new pedagogies that valued 'child-led' learning. Yet these are isolated examples and I know of no studies that have considered learning itself in alternative settings.

Project methodology

In extending the above work, the current paper presents findings from interviews with 30 homeschooling families, undertaken during 2010. Interviewees were recruited through a process of self-selection.[5] 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 humbling; I have still not yet been able to talk with all who responded. Nevertheless, I undertook interviews with 30 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 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 in which learning took place, the interaction between learning and 'everyday life', and the ambitions that families held for homeschooling. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours; some group discussions took over 4 hours. Recorded interview data were transcribed and all material was subject to thematic analysis. This paper focuses on interviews with parents, since they provided the greatest detail on approaches to learning and the broader justifications for doing homeschooling. The rest of this section of the paper proceeds through two key themes in respect of those learning approaches: movement, mess and immanence; slowness, spontaneity and feeling. The subsequent section of the paper explores how homeschoolers' approaches to learning intersect with (arguably broader) concerns around the kind of alternative that homeschooling presents to mainstream education.

Movement, mess and the immanence of learning

It will not surprise readers familiar with research on homeschooling that most parents framed their homeschooling biographies in terms of a move from 'schooling at home' to more flexible, child-led forms of learning (see, for instance, Rivero 2002; Stevens 2001):

> 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. (Olivia, mother of one child, aged 10)

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> 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 these days apart from that we don't really organise the format of each day [...] 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, aged 3 and 6)

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 'school' at home. Alison and Olivia were typical of a conceptual shift from 'schooling at home' to 'child-directed' or 'autonomous' forms of learning, rather than imposing strict learning regimes.

Yet this conceptual shift was just one kind of 'movement' associated with children's learning. A less-well acknowledged element of homeschooling is the more literal *mobility* of homeschoolers' learning. In one sense, once the home was no longer seen as a surrogate school, there was no *a priori* compulsion to use the home for learning at all.

> 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 say with [son's name] at the marsh I let him run way out in front of me, he's nine. 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 aged under 18)

Like James, many interviewees emphasised an expressly geographical, combinative approach to learning whose vitality lay in moving-*between* different places. James, for instance, 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.

James' quote indicates two further ways in which spatial mobility intersected with learning in homeschoolers' experiences. Firstly, several parents indicated that their combinative approach was reflective of a rhythmical notion of learning.

> [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, aged 5 and 8)

> Most [homeschoolers] want a formal learning programme but not sending their children to private schools. But flexible enough that they can say, we want to go to this museum, or to this foreign country for a few months. It's semi-formal. Not the hassle you have at school. (Andrew, father of two children, aged 14 and 16)

> Our routine? It depends. The space varies. If I'm feeling guilty that I haven't been an educator that week, then the next week I'll have a concrete effort to put in maximum effort and get things ready. Other times we'll just flow and see what happens. We have a small house, too. We manage in a small space. (Juliet, mother of one child, aged 8)

Seen in light of the above quotations, homeschooling was characterised by movements that were scaled in various ways, in both spatial and temporal terms. Homeschoolers used the rhythms of a day to foster changes in bodily disposition that allowed for periods of concentrated, formalised learning and periods when (in Susanne's words) their children could 'breathe out'. These kinds of rhythms are replicated in other alternative learning approaches – for instance, in Steiner education, where teachers use dance and other physical activities to balance periods of quieter, desk-based learning (Kraftl 2006).

Secondly, several parents highlighted that many of their best learning experiences happened *on the move*. For James (above), this meant having a space where his children could simply run. Other parents stressed the value of car-travel, or walking:

> Sometimes we'll just go for a walk. There's something about the act of walking. I've no idea what! Anyway, I mean, it's perhaps it's because you don't have to face each other all the time. It's just easier to talk, to look around you, I personally think the physical activity makes you think differently. It takes the pressure off *having* to learn. I think that's what I'm trying to say. It just flows from there. (Jane, mother of three children, aged 4, 11 and 15)

Once again, homeschoolers' experiences of learning echoed those in other alternative learning spaces. As Knight (2009) points out, many alternative pedagogical philosophies share a commitment that physical movement (often play) and informal dialogue may lead to diverse forms of learning. In Forest schools, for instance, Sylvester (2011) showed how non-confrontational, physical activities like cooking over a fire led to changes in behaviour, sparked off conversations and engendered informal learning amongst disaffected teenage boys. Somehow (and Jane struggled to

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articulate this), walking was indicative of the kind of learning relationship that homeschoolers tried to create: one that was non-pressurised, non-confrontational and that flowed from the embodied acts and rhythmical cadences of movement.

Thus, most homeschoolers were at pains to suggest that homeschooling rarely took place 'at home'. Rather, the geographies of homeschooling were characterised by combination and, especially, by movement.[6] However, it could be argued, as I suggested in the introduction to this paper, that all of their 'everyday' activities inside *and* outside the home still recursively reconstructed home as a multi-stranded, stretchy, porous idea (Tolia-Kelly 2004). Arguably, the kinds of knowingly 'everyday' spatial *learning* practices in which families engaged were as much constitutive 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 quite different ways in other alternative educational practices like Steiner schooling (Kraftl 2006).

These arguments around the constitution of home mirror and to some extent expand what several homeschooling researchers (e.g. Neuman and Aviram 2003) have found regarding the intimate relationship between homeschooling as a way of learning and homeschooling as a way of life. However, I argue that previous homeschooling research on child-led approaches to learning has suggested that learning is largely a matter of temporality. That is, that in working at a child's own pace, and in situating learning within the flow of home life, learning is temporally *imminent* to everyday life. Yet my argument is that – as I have already shown – homeschoolers paid significant attention to the spacing of learning as much as its timing. The distinction is more than semantic: I contend that learning was as much spatially *immanent*, because the kinds of performative movements in which homeschoolers engaged were constitutive of learning as an encounter that could happen any*where* as well as at any time. This observation was reinforced by several interviewees, who paid close attention to the banal *materialities* of spaces that held learning potential. Like Alison (who spoke of 'proper materials', above), two mothers related movement to the material immanence of 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, aged 10 to 22)

> It's important to move around. When you're in the kitchen, it's hard to suspend your disbelief. When you're in the kitchen, you've got to pick the cereal off the table, someone wants a drink, the phone rings, the baby [...]. In school you don't have [that]. In a family space it's shared. It's *for* the family. You have to constantly try to *create* a space. For a long long time, we didn't *eat* at our table, because it was piled with [learning] fodder [...] it was covered with stuff, with books, with sticky, it was really disorganised. And I loved it when my husband came home and said, it looks like you had a great day. They [the children] couldn't like always tell him. And so the mess, it showed him what we'd been doing. (Casey, mother of five children, aged 2 to 15)

Learning was embedded in the banal, material details of childhood experience (see Horton and Kraftl 2006). Like many parents, Diane and Casey valorised not only the kinds of happenstance that characterised their non-teleological approaches to learning, but the material remnants, expressions and constitution of those approaches within home spaces. Where other forms of learning and knowing the world value rationalised forms of order, they valorised mess, clutter, stuff and disorganisation (compare Law and Singleton 2005). For Casey, this set the homeschooling environment as a *space* apart, not simply a time apart, from mainstream schooling.

Slowness, spontaneity and 'feeling what's right'

Thus far, I have sought to emphasise some of the spatialities of homeschoolers' approaches to learning via notions of movement, immanence and mess. This section explores more briefly two particular temporalities (or, rather, dispositions to time) that consolidated that sense of immanence: slowness and spontaneity. Speaking about slowness, one parent observed:

> 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, aged 10)

Inherent to the alternative ways in which parents 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:

> 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, aged 10 to 22)

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> 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. […] it's about feeling what's right. (Susanne, mother of two children, aged 5 and 8)

At the same time, 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. Amidst much geographical interest in emotion (for a provocative overview, see Pile 2010), I want to highlight how (in this case) parental emotions were tied to complex and overlapping forms of *temporality*. Homeschooling was characterised by the nurturing of a slowly matured, intimate relationship between learner and educator. 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 – a bodily disposition – that enabled parents a sense of empathy for the emotional and material needs of their children.

As Lois (2009) also shows, many mothers view homeschooling as an extension of so-called 'natural' parenting styles that include long-term breastfeeding, attachment and baby-led weaning. Significantly, as Lois argues, these are parenting styles that can be shared and learned as much as 'natural'. Diane and Susanne described how their slow/spontaneous bodily dispositions were formed in part through collective, embodied social capital, learned 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, aged 7)

Like Sarah, many parents felt that these 'natural' approaches resonated with their own feelings and thoughts about parenting, and they reported considerable success in their slow/spontaneous approaches. Nevertheless, there was some diversity amongst my respondents in this regard. Some mothers were more unsure and anxious about adopting 'natural' learning styles. Reflecting upon the moment she withdrew her child from mainstream education, Susanne remembers:

> 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, aged 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 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. Thus, temporal notions of slowness and spontaneity were constitutive of the immanent approaches to learning that the majority of my respondents had taken – even if in some cases it had taken time to come to terms, emotionally, with their many implications for family life.

What kind of 'alternative'? Spatial discourses of 'home' versus 'school' in critiquing the state's role in providing education

So far I have focused upon some of the many spaces, timings, 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 in the introduction to this paper. Next, though, I want to more carefully scrutinise this assumption. I interrogate the difference between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' education by looking at some different examples of the ways in which this difference was articulated by my interviewees. This is an important task if geographers are to sensitively analyse the ways in which 'alternative' educational spaces are

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constituted. Once again, geography (especially scale) matters, profoundly, in this analysis. My analysis picks up from the end of the previous section by exploring how parents' (and to a lesser extent, children's) emotions were central in critiques both of practices internal to particular mainstream schools, and of broader assumptions around the state provision of UK schooling.

It was apparent that homeschoolers articulated a very clear sense that homeschooling *was* alternative from mainstream schooling. They formulated a clear, knowingly spatial discourse in which 'home' and 'school' were framed dualistically. Homeschoolers' schematisation rested principally upon a distinction between what each place (and the people that populated it) *did* to children's bodies, and what they and their children felt about this (see also Lois 2009). 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 children, aged 5 and 7; 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 child, aged 12)

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 and school buildings. The distinction between home and school was thus 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. It is also important to point out that some of the movements and forms of immanence I outlined in the previous section are not unique to homeschooling – indeed, they may appear in some mainstream schools in other guises (for instance, in an increasing tendency for UK primary schools to use Forest school visits and techniques). Thus, whilst we can say that homeschooling is viewed both by practising parents and mainstream educational professionals as an 'alternative' educational practice, when viewed at a local scale the boundaries between the two are uneven, blurred and contingent upon particular emotional-embodied experiences.

Despite the contingencies around individual parents' decisions to de-register their children, such local concerns were embedded in a broader framework of moral, legal, political and emotional discourses that surround homeschooling. These relate broadly to complex and uneven attempts to both incorporate and regulate alternative forms of education (and especially homeschooling) in different national contexts. When my interviewees reflected on this context, *emotion* once again played a central role. 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, aged 5 and 7)

Like other parents, Danielle articulated her emotions within a spatial discourse that dichotomised home and school (in this case as 'distant'). It is important, though, to distinguish the scale and level of abstraction at which distinctions between school and home were being made here. That is, in her description of the moment she withdrew her children, Danielle recalled her emotions (and her children's) to make a more abstracted argument, which challenged what she deemed mainstream educational assumptions that schools were 'better qualified' to look after her child.

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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 has observed, homeschoolers experienced what might be termed a 'paradigmatic "gestalt switch"' in their realisation that 'schools cease to *be* education' (2011, 10; original emphasis). 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' models of education in the UK (Lees 2011, 8–9). 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 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, in two ways. First, indigenous educators such as Deloria Jr. and Wildcat (2001, 47–56) identify a contradictory metaphysics at play in Western thought that places science and religion in conflict. This process has gradually rendered knowledge the realm of experts and allowed the spatial separation of 'learning' and 'everyday life'. And, ultimately, it is this separation that 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 a thorough going sentiment amongst many homeschooling parents that connected local, negative, emotion-laden school experiences (like lying) with what they saw as more global *symbolic* forms of 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 child, aged 10)

Educational theorist James Conroy (2010) draws upon this sentiment to identify what he terms a form 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.[7] For him, 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. Thus,

> 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 more appropriate for their children. In 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 the capacity of parents to care 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. It was in this conceptual and moral distancing from the state that homeschoolers articulated

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an 'alternative' theorisation of learning, and the right to provide learning, that was based upon a recognition of the role of intimacy, care and love (see also Merry and Howell 2009). For homeschoolers, then, the difference between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' was in the end relatively clear cut: a function of a discursive, moral, pedagogical, performative and, perhaps most significantly, emotional dualism between home and school.

I do want to cite some words of caution here, though. Many readers will note that some of my respondents (like Louise), and Conroy himself, evoke a sense of 'natural' impulses that feminist and queer scholars have carefully deconstructed over the past 20 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 (nuclear) family, or of family-like spaces, when in fact they could.

Conclusions

The words of caution with which I ended the last section lead me to a number of concluding points around my UK-based study of homeschooling specifically, and around geographies of alternative education generally. The first is that, amidst critiques that some emotional geographies are adding to an 'ever-expanding shopping list of expressed emotions' (Pile 2010, 17), it is important that geographers attend critically to the attachment and deployment of particular emotions (like love) as justifications for particular political or moral positions. In that light, specifically, one element of this task would be to trace how loving, intimate relations may actually be evident in other alternative educational settings, or indeed in some mainstream educational settings, and to reflect upon the differential mobilisation of emotions like love in the service of different pedagogic, political or spiritual beliefs. A brief but illuminating step along the way would be hooks' (2003) discussion of love in ethnically diverse public schools in the USA, where she theorises love as a disposition that allows gestures of welcome, hospitality and openness to others' viewpoints. This task would therefore enable further critical reflection upon *both* alternative and mainstream educational spaces, and enable critical reflection on the possible boundaries and points of connection between them. It is, at the very least, incumbent upon geographies of education (of whatever form) to consider the political and moral implications of commitments *to* emotion as some of the very defining elements of alternative educational spaces.

My second, related point is to question in what ways it might be politically progressive to affirm alternative educational spaces. Several theorists (such as Connolly 2008) have sought to counter the entanglement of right-wing, evangelical Christians with American capitalism. Since a significant proportion of homeschoolers in the USA hold related beliefs (Stevens 2001), then my call to chart and affirm alternative educational practices may appear to run against the political grain of Connolly's work and Gibson-Graham's (2008). As it happens, I do not want to affirm the more right-wing elements of homeschooling that ostensibly privatise their children's education (Apple 2000). Rather, I want to highlight that the picture around alternative education is more complex than this. Significantly, many homeschoolers in the USA and a large proportion in the UK (including all but one of the families I interviewed) do not hold right-wing and/or Christian convictions. There is enormous diversity in terms of the spiritual and political beliefs of many homeschoolers, who are at most held together by a conviction to educate their own children. Outside of homeschooling, there exists yet more diversity: democratic and radical educators inspired by Paolo Freire; Marxist-influenced Forest school practitioners who work with disadvantaged young people in a search for social and environmental justice; Human-Scale schools, which work with severely bullied children in order to aid their reintegration into mainstream schools. I am therefore not arguing that we should affirm any and all alternative learning spaces, because they are so varied. On the other hand, that is what makes them interesting and my argument is therefore a simple one. Given the many gains made by charting how diverse economic practices may challenge the seeming monolith of global capitalism (Gibson-Graham 2008), it is my contention that a careful, critical and especially comparative documentation of alternative *educational* practices would be just as worthwhile. Indeed, if it is the task of critical educational geographies not only to chart the multiply scaled effects of neoliberal restructuring, but also to highlight how the spaces of neoliberalism are constantly being made and contested *by* educational processes (Hanson Thiem 2009), then this should be an important task indeed.

At the same time, this paper has sought to extend a body of work in geography that has focused upon what Holloway *et al*. (2010) term the 'subjects' of education. In particular, it has done so by focusing on the spatialities of *learning itself*, which I argued have been largely, but not completely, ignored in many geographical studies of education. I analysed a range of spatial practices and discourses that homeschoolers

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drew upon to facilitate their children's learning. I extended previous work on homeschooling, which has highlighted how children's learning (at least in child-led approaches) is deemed to be 'imminent' to everyday life and to an individual child's changing needs. Instead, I argued that homeschoolers paid close attention to the *immanence* of learning: the idea that the banal materialities and disorderly mess of everyday environments are suffused with learning potential. I demonstrated how homeschoolers deploy various kinds of movement (from walking to travelling between potential learning sites) in order to foster different rhythms and learning experiences for their children. In some measure, these spaces were constitutive of ideas beyond learning – especially of expanded notions of the home that have been theorised recently (e.g. Jacobs and Smith 2008), but also of the family. I then argued that those spatial concerns were intimately bound up with a two-fold temporality. Several parents advocated both a *slowness* – taking time to listen to their children – at the same time as a *spontaneity* that they argued was proper to 'natural' styles of mothering. Many participants connected the temporalities of homeschooling to a *feeling* of what was right for their children, and I argued that emotion plays a particularly important role in homeschoolers' understandings of (why they do) what they do.

Finally, I outlined a link between the spatial-temporal practices and emotions *internal* to homeschooling approaches, and difficult, broader debates about the relative role of the state and parents in children's learning (indeed, in their upbringing). Thus, the paper left many of the nonrepresentational geographies of homeschooling deliberately implied in order, as Lorimer puts it, to 'refine, recalibrate, extend or conjoin its [Nonrepresentational Theory's] original mandate with cognate sorts of social concern' (2008, 551). 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 responsibility for their children.

In the above sense, this paper should not just have significance for geographies of (alternative) education, nor be seen simply as a call for such work. In addition, geographers could consider alternative education practices like homeschooling as critical milieux in which to explore constructions of the family and intergenerational relations (Hopkins and Pain 2007; Valentine 2008). As I argued in the last part of the paper, they could help us consider the difficult politics and moralities involved in privileging particular kinds of emotional/affective intimacies. 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 possible distinctions and connections between 'family' and 'education' spaces.

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Notes

1 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.

2 Source: http://www.hslda.org (accessed 21 June 2011).

3 All of my respondents wished to remain anonymous; all names provided with interview quotations in this paper are pseudonyms.

4 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).

5 Given the relative lack of visibility of homeschooling in the UK, and suspicions amongst homeschoolers around increased state regulation at the time of my research, it would have been extremely difficult to obtain a systematic sample rather than the snowballing approach I used. I recognise that, despite the relative diversity of families who took part, this is a self-selecting sample and – given also that this is an in-depth qualitative study – make no claim for this sample to be representative of UK homeschoolers.

6 There is not space to consider the possible contribution of the paper to work on mobilities, but for an excellent, critical overview, see Adey (2009).

7 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.

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