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# Between Home and School: Exploring Parents' Experiences of Educating in a Pandemic

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## Abstract

Drawing on open ended survey data constructed during the Spring-Summer of 2020 at the height of COVID-19 related lockdowns, this chapter explores parents' experiences of parenting young people with specific learning difficulties during a pandemic using a theoretical model based on the work of Bourdieu, previously developed by Ross. Bourdieusien principles underpin this study of parents' individual sense-making of home-schooling their children. This sense-making is highlighted as framing parents' interactions with professionals working with their children. There is a particular focus on parents' attempts to procure and engage with appropriate support for their children with specific learning difficulties. Systemic expectations relating to home-schooling and parents' roles in this are delineated and clarified. The intersection of systemic expectations on parents and their interactions with professionals is deconstructed to highlight the difficulties parents encountered with their ever-shifting roles during the course of home-schooling their children. Recommendations for practice are then drawn out.

**Keywords:** send, parent voice, Bourdieu, specific learning difficulties, inclusion

## 1. Introduction

During 2020 and 2021, education worldwide underwent a seismic shift. Universities moved online at short notice [1, 2], school districts and local authorities shifted overnight to remote learning, teachers altered curricula and families had to adapt to the new way of working imposed as a result of COVID-19. In the United Kingdom, the terms 'home-schooling' and 'remote learning' were often used to refer to education delivery following lockdown in March 2020 [3]. However, it is important to consider the immediacy and temporality of this type of learning in contrast with education which is planned as remote/online. As noted in [4], 'Emergency remote teaching is a temporary teaching solution to an emergent problem.' This was the case with the first wave of lockdowns in England, where schools moved to 'emergency remote teaching' over one weekend in March 2020.

Time to consider pedagogy and delivery of learning was limited; changes were made in special educational needs (SEN) legislation to allow for this. The legal duty in England for schools to implement all provision for young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was relaxed. Thus, where proscribed provision was not in place, local authorities had used 'reasonable endeavors to discharge the duty,' [3] to source provision, they were protected somewhat from adverse legal

proceedings. Pragmatically, this meant that young people with EHCPs did not have full, statutory provision to support their curricular access. The effects of lockdowns and ‘emergency remote teaching’ on young people with ‘special educational needs and/or disability’ (SEND), without EHCP-defined provision remains poorly studied in an English context. While dyslexic young people’s experiences of ‘emergency remote teaching’ have been explored in higher education [1, 5] and amongst school children in Spain [6], Italian children’s progress in reading over lockdowns has been evaluated [7] and parental views of effects of remote learning have been explored in several national contexts [4, 5, 8, 9], little-to-no research exists in an English context. Parental conceptualization and navigation of systems to deliver ‘emergency remote teaching’ for children with dyslexia and/or other specific learning difficulties (SpLD) due to COVID-19 within the English context is lacking.

This study aims to fill that gap in knowledge and presents results of an ‘online social survey’ [10] in the form of a ‘web survey’ [10] administered between April and June 2020. Data analysis used a framework developed by Ross [11, 12], informed by Jenkins ‘orders of interaction’ [13], and underpinned by Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and practice [14, 15]. Technology and infrastructure implicated in ‘emergency remote teaching’ is considered both in terms of effective use and access to appropriate devices. The survey aimed to explore the following areas of parental experience through both closed and open-ended questions:

- parents’ internal conceptualization of ‘emergency remote teaching’ and their role in its implementation, drawing on their own experiences and sense-making.
- How parents’ conceptualization of ‘emergency remote teaching’ informed and/or prompted their interactions with others, such as their children and their children’s educators.
- Parents’ capacity to meaningfully navigate institutional expectations, barriers and roles related to ‘emergency remote teaching’ based on their internal sense-making, interactions with others and own agentic capacities.

## **2. Education: the COVID-19 changes**

In this section, practices to support young people with SpLD are briefly discussed, with reference to the changes that took place following COVID-19 school closures in England. The roles of parents within school-based support systems for young people with SpLD are outlined. An overview of shifts in these roles due to COVID-19 and ‘emergency remote learning’ is given, drawing on existent literature. Finally access to resources is discussed and the use of technology in supporting young people is outlined, drawing on pre- and post-COVID-19 experiences. Importantly, barriers to engagement with education and ‘emergency remote teaching’ are also discussed here.

### **2.1 Supporting young people with SpLD**

#### *2.1.1 Legal frameworks*

Frameworks for supporting young people with SEN in England were updated in 2014 [16]. Formerly, the tiered system of support categorized young people’s needs by the amount/type of additional or specialized input they received in

school [17]. The current framework does not differentiate between young people's levels of need when considering non-statutory support/intervention. However, where statutory provision is in place, young people's EHCPs detail their needs and the provision which must be in place. Dyslexia and other SpLD are the principal need for many young people: 14.85% of young people with non-statutory provision and 3.8% of those with EHCPs [18]. Few young people with SpLD have an EHCP, as it is expected within policy that their needs are met in mainstream settings, through high quality teaching and school-based intervention packages. The nature of the package or support program for young people largely depends on the school. There is a paucity of robust evidence detailing what works to support learners with SpLDs [19]. Policy stipulates that young people and their families should be meaningfully engaged in support processes. However, this is not always the case [20, 21], particularly for young people who do not have statutory protection for their provision.

### *2.1.2 COVID-19 and young people*

COVID-19 and the swift change to 'emergency remote teaching' did not allow adequate space or time for consideration of the pedagogical needs of different groups of students whether in higher education [1, 2, 4] or in the school systems [7, 22, 23] of various countries. In England, the picture was much the same, to the extent that statutory provisions for young people were 'relaxed' [3] and young people without statutory provision were not supported in school at all. Places were only available for those with an EHCP or fulfilling other criteria (see [3]). As such, schools supporting young people with additional needs such as SpLDs were left to fend for themselves and to design their own curricular provision.

Despite legal frameworks and guidance necessitating 'reasonable adjustments' for young people with SEN, COVID-19 appeared to erase protections written into law and policy. 'Best endeavors' were sufficient even for those with statutory documentation [3]. There was little protection afforded for young people with SEND such as SpLD within COVID-19 legislation.

## **2.2 Parents within their children's education**

### *2.2.1 Roles in policy frameworks*

Within policy, according to Bourdieu, certain categories are defined and formally recognized within certain fields [14, 24]. In education in England, teachers are granted 'Qualified Teacher Status' following completion of formally accredited training [25]. The roles of teachers such as Special Educational Needs and Disability Coordinators (SENDCos) [26] or Specialist Dyslexia/SpLD teachers [27] are clearly defined within policy and practice through legislation or professional accreditation. Others working in schools may also have certain statuses dependent on their respective qualifications and professional pathways. However, the role of 'parent' is less clear both within policy and practice.

Largely parents advocate for their children within policy and proactively seek to secure appropriate support, through their relationships and interactions with professionals [28]. Policy frameworks [16, 26] expect parents to be meaningfully engaged in the organization of support provision for their children. However, the reality of this may be different. Steps taken to engage parents/carers in processes differ at local level but are largely controlled by Local Authorities in England. As such parents'/carers' capacity to engage fully and effectively alongside their families through these sometimes-complex processes is limited [20, 21]. This has changed



little since governmental evaluations of pilot studies, undertaken before the introduction of new policy frameworks [29], particularly for those without statutory provision, such as those with SpLD.

### *2.2.2 COVID and parental support for young people*

Despite little research on ‘emergency remote teaching’ experiences of young people with SpLDs and their families in an English context, there is substantial evidence that the roles of parents differ substantially from those they embody in a non-COVID world. Parents were largely in a supporting role that saw them oversee technical difficulties in online teaching [4]. At other times, whether engaging in remote learning online or through paper-based materials, parents/carers found themselves in the position of teachers and supporting their children to engage, access and undertake their learning. Young people’s ‘parents became their teachers, their tutors and advocates’ [28]. Parents reported in several studies that online learning was particularly burdensome for them because they did not have the technical knowledge to support their children (or themselves where applicable) to access the relevant websites, applications or conferencing software [4, 5]. The support processes in place provided asynchronous text-based support, as well as some video or live sessions with real-time instruction. However, there was little evidence of specific differentiation to support young people with SEN, even within Higher Educational settings, where students were overall more self-sufficient [2]. As such, it is likely that provision to support young people with SpLD in England, was patchy at best and somewhat inconsistent. The lack of research, however, makes it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about support/adjustments for learners during COVID-19 lockdowns and parents’ related roles.

## **2.3 Resourcing and supporting education for young people with SpLD**

### *2.3.1 In-school and using tech*

There is some work on the use of different assistive technologies to support young people with SpLD, in UK education settings. However, much of the research uses incomparable metrics, epistemologies and methodologies, making it impossible to draw robust conclusions on what technology is best-suited to different learners [19]. Young people may have access to different technologies according to their statutory EHCP support measures. However, a substantial barrier to the use of assistive technology in schools is the cost; even for technology, this cost factor has a high impact on both well-being and academic outcomes [30–34]. The same can be said of 1:1 or small-group instruction [35]. Thus, we can see that some effective support interventions are prohibitively costly and therefore, many young people do not have sufficient access to them.

### *2.3.2 COVID and remote learning: using tech*

Much of the work relating to COVID-19 shows that most instruction moved online [4, 5, 8], with some paper-based work delivered where digital infrastructure was lacking [8, 36]. However, moves were made to secure access to appropriate technology and internet access for families who did not have those resources in place. Literature shows that access to paper-based materials required parents to support their children’s learning; this was problematic for working parents. Access to printers or devices to submit work for marking/feedback was also noted as problematic for some families [4, 9]. The overall themes arising in studies undertaken in

other national settings were that lack of access to appropriate devices and reliable internet connections made accessing 'emergency remote learning' very problematic for families. Cost of technologies and internet access were a barrier to families to access online learning. Many families in England did not have the resources in place at home and subsequently could not access online teaching [37].

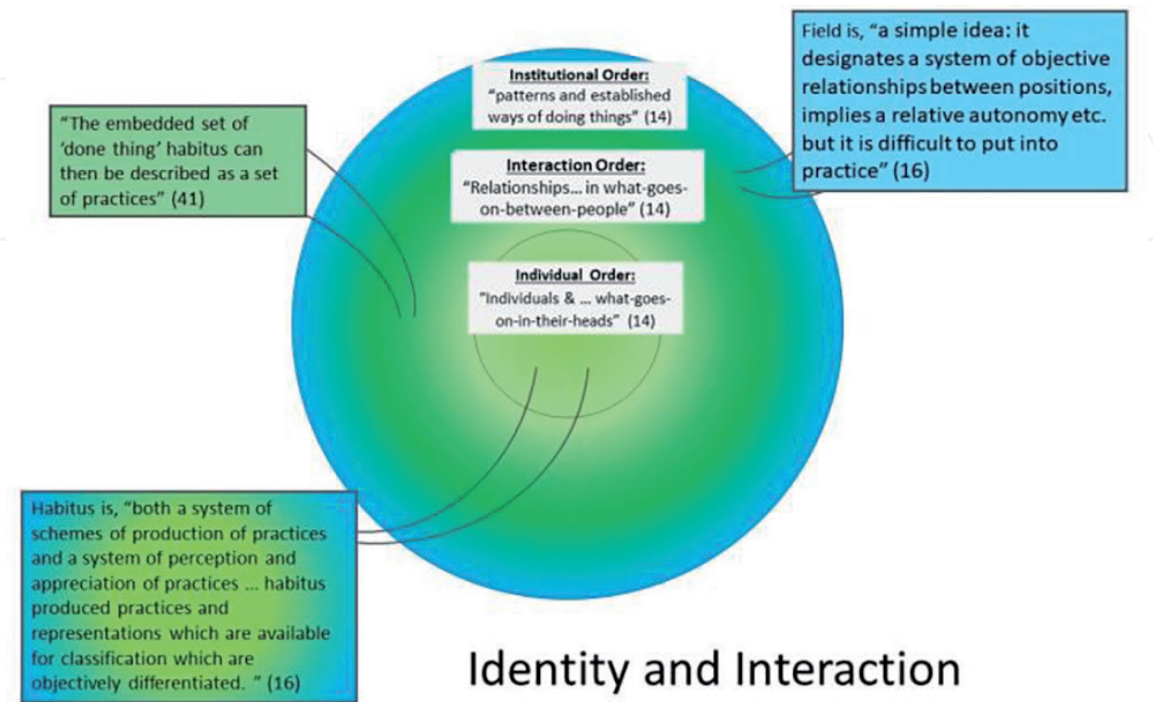
### 3. Theorizing 'sense-making' and interactions in education

Theories underpinning the Jenkins-Bourdieu analysis framework are discussed here, with reference to prior work undertaken by the author, addressing strengths in the framework. Visual representation of the connections is also given.

#### 3.1 Jenkins and Bourdieu: a united framework

The unifying concept between Jenkins' and Bourdieu's social projects is the notion to which they both ascribe: the inseparability of social actors and the social context in which they operate. The connections made between Jenkins' and Bourdieu's frameworks are shown in **Figure 1** [38].

Parents and young peoples' sense-making in education has been explored through the knitting together of Jenkins' 'levels of interaction' with Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'habitus' and 'practice' into a single theoretical framework [11, 12]. This framework provides a robust and effective way of bridging the subjectivist-objectivist gap perceived by Jenkins in Bourdieu's theoretical project [39], and allows for a thorough consideration of objective, external social structures as well as those (re)produced internally [40]. It also gives insight into how identity is constructed and how individuals make sense of the world around them. However, analysis of data for this project and other work undertaken in the COVID world have shown how challenging it is to apply this framework to static social settings without consideration of the wider social world outside a particular field. Here and



**Figure 1.**  
*Identity and interaction- a visualization.*

in previous work [11, 12], education has been the field under consideration. While policy, schools and family settings have all been considered effectively, there has been little exploration of the effect on education of changes in other ‘fields.’

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Research aims**

This research explores the experiences of parents/carers of young people with dyslexia arising from schools’ rapid switch to ‘emergency remote teaching.’ This was undertaken via an online survey, with closed, Likert scale and open-ended questions. This report focuses on responses to open-ended questions but occasionally draws upon closed questions to provide context for participants’ responses. The questionnaire explored use of technology and other strategies implemented during initial COVID-19 lockdowns. This chapter investigates parents’/carers’ experiences of ‘emergency remote teaching’ during 2020.

### **4.2 Data construction and participants**

All work was undertaken in line with BERA ethical guidelines [41] and in full consideration of the Teachers’ Standards for England [42], due to the researcher’s part-time position in a mainstream secondary school. Data was constructed between April and June 2020 via an online survey. In line with Bryman [10], this small-scale survey took the form of a structured interview and a self-completion questionnaire. Some elements were ranked responses, some used a Likert Scale, and others were closed questions, which is similar to a self-completion questionnaire. In addition to these questions, there were items on this survey where participants could provide open-ended responses in a text box. This was done to gain understanding of frequencies of response as well as reasons for those responses.

The survey was built using MS Forms and was disseminated through the researchers’ personal network, as well as via social media, specifically through the researcher’s Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn platforms throughout this time. The researcher’s own network was approached personally with an overview of the research purposes via WhatsApp. The survey form was also accessible via the researcher’s business website. The call for participants was presented alongside a small introduction on social media and was open to all. The initial page of the survey then gave full information on the project’s purpose and aims. This survey was part of a larger project where parents, teachers and other educators, and students were asked about their experiences of accessing education during the initial wave of COVID-19 lockdowns [43]. The survey garnered 123 responses. A total of 47 parents/carers responded to the survey, of which five responses were not usable: the parents/carers did not have children with SEN. This exclusion criterion was built into the survey design: parents were asked whether they had children with SEN and where they did not, they were thanked for their time and the survey ceased. The overall response rate for the survey was relatively low, given that there were 155,825 children with documented SpLD within English education in 2019–2020 [18]. However, there are various factors, which may account for this. It is unclear how many young people have formal diagnoses of SpLD; there may be other young people whose needs are not formally identified or are such that they are not on school SEN registers as noted by the British Dyslexia Association [44]. While there is substantial data available relating to young people in England such as the National Pupil Database [45], there is no capacity built into it; this allows researchers to

contact students, their parents/carers or teachers individually. Subsequently, researchers are dependent on professional networks, personal contacts and paid-for survey promotion tools to connect with the target population. Even within targeted sampling, there are often high non-response rates [10]. As such, where parents/carers are in a time-poor, high-stress situation often with relatively poor access to the internet, it is unsurprising that the response rate was not as high as might be hoped. That said, this study does not attempt to capture large-scale, reproducible and generalizable data. Rather this survey aims to take a snapshot of people's experiences of supporting their children through learning during COVID-19 lockdowns to gain understanding of what barriers and facilitators to learning they experienced.

**Table 1** shows school-types attended by participants' children. Participating parents, teachers/educators and students were assigned a participant number according to the timestamp on their response to the survey. As such, parents here are numbered in the order they participated in the wider survey rather than parents having a separate identification number system from other respondents.

All data was cleaned and identifying features removed for analysis. Files containing participants' personal details are encrypted and password protected. Information is also stored on password protected hardware and is process/stored in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 [46]. The Researcher and their organization are also registered with the Information Commissioner's Office [47].

4.3 Data processing and analysis

Data was saved to MS Excel files on exportation from the survey in MS Forms, and was password protected. Categorical and ranked responses were explored using MS Excel and graphing functions in MS Forms to provide some context for findings. This aims to help improve transferability of conclusions by adding to the thick description sought in qualitative research [48]. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were then manually exported from the Excel data files and pasted into word documents for each participant. These word documents were saved under each participant's identifier number and later imported in to QDA Data Miner Lite [49] for analysis.

A framework for analysis based in Jenkins' and Bourdieu's work was in place for data analysis. However, very little research had been undertaken into COVID-19 and 'emergency remote teaching' at the start of this project. As such, initial open coding was undertaken using a grounded theory approach [50]. On initial reading of documentation, core categories were identified. These related to parents' experiences of remote learning versus expectations, roles and technology. Following initial reading, a further reading of each parent's responses was undertaken and the coding framework was refined further until data saturation was reached [50]. For data-tri-angulation, initial findings from analysis were shared, in the form of a report, with

School type	Number of parents
Mainstream secondary	15
Mainstream primary	13
Independent secondary	3
Independent primary	0
Other	11

**Table 1.**  
*Participant overview.*



participants who had provided email addresses. They were offered the opportunity to comment on findings and address any inconsistencies. There was no feedback that suggested findings were erroneous; several participants did write positively in response to the report. The potential for further triangulation and deeper understanding of data was also built into the project design. The survey sought participants for further interviews as a further phase of the project where outcomes from the survey would inform real-time interviews with participants. These interviews were undertaken in Summer 2021 and analysis is ongoing at the time of writing.

The Jenkins-Bourdieu framework then underpinned data analysis using core-categories to address research questions. This was done through the exploration of coding intersections in QDA Data Miner Lite. The researcher explored code-intersections which related to each of the three levels of interaction separately by exporting them to MS Word files and reading them. Nine code-intersections were produced: 3 for each 'levels of interaction' [13]. The coding-intersection outputs were then read by the researcher and coded by hand with specific consideration of the research objectives. Each output was read at least 3 times and coding was undertaken until data saturation was reached. The grounded theory approach, followed by the Jenkins-Bourdieu coding process highlighted the need for a more sophisticated model, capable of addressing the complex dynamics of field-field interactions, and their effects on individual actors and inter-actor dialog. Fields' interdependent natures also needed 'space' to be adequately addressed. Foundations for this model are laid in sections 5 and 6. The model is discussed in Section 7.

## **5. Results**

Here, findings from Jenkins-Bourdieu-based data analysis are presented. Data is drawn from open-ended responses to questions and contextualized with reference to participants' responses to quantitative questions. First, parents' individual sense-making of 'emergency remote teaching' is discussed. Parents' conceptualization of it versus the reality, and how they are implicated is explored. Finally, institutional barriers and facilitators affecting parents during 'emergency remote teaching' are discussed. Where participants are quoted, square brackets indicate editing by the researcher; all spelling is as written in the survey.

### **5.1 Individually**

#### *5.1.1 What is remote learning/teaching?*

Of all 42 respondents, only three families did not have work set online. Thus, for almost all parents, 'emergency remote teaching' meant online teaching, although 7 parents reported schools did also provide paper-based work-packs.

Parental conceptualization of remote teaching differed in some areas, but an area of agreement was that there should be an interactive element. One parent's (55-mainstream secondary) role within a remote learning provider led them to state that, 'Merely setting task and research to complete is not teaching. There also needs to be an interactive element ... built into teaching material.' Parent 107 (Mainstream secondary) also felt that 'Face to face learning is essential especially in subjects like maths & sciences.' A lack of interaction in real time appeared to cause concern that there would be gaps in learning, according to parent 12 (Mainstream secondary). While only three families did make reference explicitly to a connection between interactive teaching and lost learning, those that did appeared to feel strongly about its importance.

Some parents felt that because work was set online, schools were, 'Not providing online learning just suggested links,' (parent 42 – mainstream primary) and that their children, 'didn't feel that the teachers are communicating or supporting ... learning' (parent 73). However, being given links and choice over what was undertaken was positive for parent 52 (mainstream primary) who noted that, 'They are providing many different ideas and allowing parents to set appropriate tasks and timings.' This was echoed by the 10 parents who noted that there was no pressure on them to complete everything or for work to be handed in.

#### *5.1.2 How is remote learning/teaching delivered?*

Parental experiences of remote learning were largely unified in that work was delivered online, with the exception of three families. A substantial proportion of parents reported that they could submit work on paper (nine families) or that there was no expectation to submit any work (10 families) upon completion. This was in addition to the 23 families who could submit work online. Most parents did not specify the platforms used but some did use MSTeams, Class DoJo or Google Classrooms at the start of lockdowns. The platform for dissemination was not cited as problematic by any parents; rather the practicalities of online learning were the barrier for some, with parents not having the capacity to support their children. In this survey, 35 children had access to their own devices. The switch to online instruction is within a context where two-thirds of parents reported that their children used no assistive technology in school. Thus, there has been a substantial culture and experience change for most families.

Twenty-four families reported that work took more time to complete at home than in school, which suggests that the volume of work set was substantial. As noted by parent 60 (mainstream secondary), schools had 'given far too much work for the time available' and were 'determined to work their way through the curriculum with little account of how online learning is very different.' Only five families found that time spent on remote-learning was in line with in-school working. One family (parent 91), whose independent secondary school routinely used iPads found 'Remote working no different to that when in school.' This differs substantially from others' experiences of online learning, who felt that 'reliance on technology has made it significantly more difficult,' (parent 57 – mainstream secondary). Having said that, only 9 families reported that accessing technology was harder at home, versus 17 who found it easier and 18 who found it in line with school access. As such, we can see that remote/online working was not a straight 'switch' for parents/carers and their children, but there were variations in experiences.

#### *5.1.3 What does remote learning/teaching mean for me?*

Delivery of teaching materials relied heavily on technology and on parents. With parents working at home, time/availability to support children was a pressure point for families. As noted by parent 113 (mainstream primary), 'I don't have the time to encourage him or help him when he's struggling.' They felt that 'work has clearly been set on the basis that the children will have access to computers to compete the work, or at least a printer with an unlimited ink supply!'

It is of note that 27 parents (64%) felt that work was pitched at the right level; with only 30% finding it too complex, they still felt work took longer at home. This suggests then, that there was too much work set and/or that the work needed substantial differentiation by parents. This echoes parental views of 'normal' lesson delivery, where two-thirds of parents were unaware of differentiation for their children or felt that teachers did not adapt their children's work.

Differentiation was minimal and parents were key in addressing this: parent 57 (mainstream secondary) reported that they, 'have had to adapt [work] for our daughter, which has taken a lot of time.' Other parents reported that work was set but that they as parents were expected to ensure that work was done, either through choosing a daily program of study for their children and/or through adapting work set so that their children could access it. Differentiation of work and adjustments for young people with SpLD was a point of contention for many families. Parent 55 (mainstream secondary) noted that there was 'a huge amount of 'project work' set which I expect is perceived as self-differentiating.' They felt that the school was not adjusting work, as did parent 73 (mainstream secondary) who noted, 'My son says that the school is not adapting work for him,' and parent 101 (mainstream primary) who said that 'nothing had been adapted for SEN' until the week that the survey was taken in mid-May.

## **5.2 Interactionally**

### *5.2.1 Home-school communication: paper versus reality*

Some families believed that lack of interaction would lead to knowledge gaps irrespective of young people's needs and capacity to engage with remote learning. Of respondents, 29 families were not confident or neutral in respect to teachers' ability to deliver online learning, with most families reporting that learning was not interactive or real-time. This lack of confidence may underpin families' concerns around gaps in learning.

However, this view was not universal. Some families felt that online/remote teaching was very successful for their children; 13 families reported high confidence in teachers' ability to deliver remote learning. Parent 39 (mainstream secondary) noted that, 'teachers have been emailing C and marking all his work online. Feedback has been excellent. As they are not dealing with bad behaviours, the focus is all on teaching and learning.' Parent 91 (independent secondary) found remote learning effective and noted that, 'Contact with subject staff and learning support staff is always available.' Other parents experienced contact with staff differently. Parent 99 (other) found that, 'not all tutors are chasing him for the work he is supposed to have done' and that understanding what was expected work-wise was challenging.

Parent 119 (mainstream secondary) perceived a difference in delivery dependent on teachers noting that 'some teachers have adapted better than others. Some subjects [are] being taught by the teams' platform; other subjects there has just been work set by email.'

Where delivery of lessons was problematic, it was largely attributed to difficulties in accessing platforms or loss of routine for learners, as found elsewhere [51, 52]. Parent 109 (mainstream secondary) found that 'work isn't user friendly. Platforms used like 'show my homework' is inconsistent and not very user friendly.' Parent 60 (mainstream secondary) found that their daughter, 'misses the routine, and her friends, and her timetable.' Despite some difficulties in sequencing and organizing work, some parents did appreciate flexibility and feedback from teachers. As parent 42 (mainstream primary) noted, 'They are reassuring all parents not to stress about it. Explaining all children are different. Learn in different ways.' This appeared to provide comfort emotionally and pragmatically, allowing for responsive management of children's workloads.

### *5.2.2 Home-school: communication prompters*

Although some parents found communication from school efficient and accessible, and prompted by positive experiences, others disagreed. This theme arose from

qualitative responses from some parents around communication and the forms it took; it was not a specifically structured question. However, communication between families and professionals was described in several extended answers. The issues raised were useful for consideration when addressing pragmatic outcomes from remote learning.

Lack of differentiation prompted parents to contact schools to request appropriate work. Some parental communication did result in adapted work for children. Parent 60 (mainstream secondary) noted that for her daughter, 'Some of the teachers have thankfully responded to her need for 'private' questions and I would like to see that continued as it really helps with her social anxiety.' Parent 110 (mainstream primary) found that following contact with her child's schools, the 'Teacher has emailed me more appropriate work.' Other parents found contacting teachers was less fruitful.

Parent 12 (mainstream secondary) did not have clear communication with their child's school stating, 'I'm not clear how he is at school... he says he finds things popping up on the screen distracting.' This suggests that delivery of learning was not adapted for their son. Parent 119 (mainstream secondary) found that individual contact with the school was less effective than collective action reporting. They felt the need to work alongside other parents to contact the school and request differentiated learning materials. Parent 119 (mainstream secondary) commented, 'At the start of the situation there was no adjustments in place for my child... we had to make a complaint to get this changed... all the students of one subject have complained too.' Parent 113 (mainstream primary) had 'spoken with the SENCO Manager at the school 3 times now and each time I am told they are not putting on any additional resources or remote teaching for children with SEN.' Despite contact, the school made no concessions during the first lockdown for her child and others with SEN. These themes were present in a large number of responses: schools did not differentiate work appropriately. However, given other work on SEN and the difficulties expected in relation to provision (see changes in policy highlighted in sections 2.1.2 and 2.2.2), the lack of differentiation was unsurprising.

### *5.2.3 Home versus school: parents' shifting roles*

Some parents have found their new roles as 'teachers' a positive experience, as noted by parent 35 (mainstream primary): 'We can discuss on a one-to-one level, make connections across subjects easier because I don't have to stick to lesson plans.' Other parents had less positive experiences: 'I don't have the time to encourage him or help him when he's struggling' (parent 35 – mainstream primary). Others described an expectation for them to step in to teach (parent 123 – mainstream primary), 'there is assumption and agreement that parents will intervene (and I do).' The shift in roles was a theme in over half of extended answers. Parents experienced changes in how they supported their children. Parents were key in actors as facilitating young people's ability to access their work through remote learning. This finding echoes outcomes in other studies undertaken during COVID-19 related remote learning.

## **5.3 Institutionally**

### *5.3.1 Home setup: expectations versus realities*

Parents had substantial expectations placed on their resourcing and capacity at home as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns. Most parents responding to this survey had appropriate technology and devices to access learning (37 families). However,



five families did not have sufficient devices. Parents also had to manage competing demands of work and supporting their children at home.

Parent 113 (mainstream primary) reported that school was, ‘not adapting the work at all. Both my husband and I are working full time... I am working full time at home whilst home-schooling 2 children.’ Parent 52 (mainstream primary) also noted that at home ‘he has the attention of an adult to help and keep him on track.’ Parents reported that they intervened to support their children’s learning despite their work commitments. This echoes findings from elsewhere and demonstrates the structural barriers in place [4, 5]; what if parents are not available to work with their children, or what should parents do, where they are without access to appropriate technology to facilitate their children’s remote teaching?

Parent 57 (mainstream secondary) noted that, ‘The reliance on technology has made it significantly more difficult’ to access remote learning. Parents and children simultaneously working from home caused substantial difficulties for some families: they did not have sufficient access to devices. Parent 58 (mainstream primary) said, ‘We only have one tablet with a small screen.’ Other parents noted the importance of having access to a device: ‘He has he own device [which] enables access. Technology is very important’ (parent 26-other). Other families with limited devices had to prioritize which child could use it and when. This caused substantial difficulties for them.

### *5.3.2 School setup: curricular burdens*

Parents felt that ‘emergency remote teaching’ highlighted their children’s difficulties, particularly with literacy; 18 families (43%) reported that their children found learning harder at home than at school. Parent 55 (mainstream secondary) asserted that, ‘It has really highlighted my child’s struggle with reading and being independent.’ Parent 35 (mainstream primary) also found this, stating, ‘the reading required for online learning (it can be text heavy) emphasizes his difficulties with literacy and memory. However, multimedia like YouTube ... make it easier for him.’ This shows that families could to some extent ‘bypass’ reading to access class learning by using other learning strategies. However, parent 35 (mainstream primary) ultimately settled on ‘purposefully decid[ing] not to follow the curriculum.’ No other parent in this study actively chose to go ‘off plan’ for their children, which although not high frequency, is highly important as an apparent outlier within survey respondents.

### *5.3.3 Resources and systems*

As discussed above, parents viewed access to ICT as essential for engagement with remote teaching. There was also the expectation within parents’ sense-making/ conceptualization of remote learning that they would be ‘available’ to support their children at home with learning, despite their own professional demands/roles. Lack of resources has been noted as problematic by parents, both within the home-sphere and within school. Parent 109 (mainstream school) felt that their child would benefit from technology, ‘but I canning [can’t] afford it.’ Conversely, parent 108 (mainstream primary) noted that, ‘School can’t afford a device for every child.’ There was reference made to free/integrated software addons, accessible to schools. Other parents asserted the importance of read-aloud software, touch typing, and dictation/speech-to-text capacities to support their children’s learning.

Some parents found that remote learning was beneficial, as access to technology facilitated their children’s learning (parent 109 – mainstream secondary;

parent 39 – mainstream secondary). The freedom to use different technologies such as readers, Google searches and touch-typing, facilitated access to learning for some learners, according to their parents. Other parents noted that use of ICT and the systems implemented for 'emergency remote teaching' exacerbated their children's difficulties, with children's social needs not being considered initially (parent 60- mainstream secondary). 'Screen use exacerbates... issues with attention and concentration' (parent 102- mainstream primary) and some young people may be '... vile if [they have] been on technology too long' (parent 105- mainstream secondary). Difficulties interpreting pop-up information were also reported; it is likely that 'chat' functions were the reason for these difficulties, given that many software packages have that feature.

## **6. Discussion**

In this section, how parental conceptualization of 'emergency remote teaching' underpins home-school communication, and the resulting roles adopted by parents during remote teaching is discussed. Connections between parents' understandings of 'emergency remote teaching' and their engagement with institutional processes are made. Reference is made to resourcing, structural expectations on them and their capacity to navigate them, and links are made with existent literature.

### **6.1 Individual sense-making**

Parental sense-making of home-schooling tended to focus on what they hoped for – interaction in real time with specific and personalized instruction for their children – in contrast with the reality. The reality encountered tended to be remote digital delivery through written instruction and/or some video resources. Parents found themselves in the position of facilitator of learning, which took place online for the most part, which echoes other work undertaken in the COVID-19 climate [4, 5]. While some parents felt that their children could complete more work than in school (parent 39-mainstream secondary), others' feelings are summarized clearly by parent 96 (other), who said of their son's experiences, 'He needs a teacher.' Time to support their children and (lack of) access to devices/internet were recurring themes in parents' sense-making of emergency remote teaching, which again chimes with other work on parents' and learner's experiences during COVID-19 [4, 5]. As noted elsewhere, personal sense-making (of parents in this case) underpins their interactions with other individuals [13, 14]. Parental views and experiences of 'emergency remote teaching' influenced interactions substantially due to the gap in expectations versus reality of their experiences.

### **6.2 Interaction and exchanges**

Parental conceptualization of 'emergency remote teaching' showed that some parents felt that interaction – ideally in real time – was a crucial element of teaching. This chimes with work undertaken elsewhere that found many students had difficulties accessing asynchronous learning [2, 36]. Lack of consistency in provision was noted in other studies on COVID-19 instruction [37]. Parents in this study reported different levels of satisfaction and confidence in their children's teachers' ability to deliver lessons. There was also considerable variation in how work was delivered across and within institutions. Some teachers were better able to adapt than others, which had been noted by parents. This suggests

that even within individual schools, variation in implementation of ‘emergency remote learning’ policy is substantial, leading to notable differences in what is on paper versus the reality of remote lesson delivery. This echoes work relating to both school [36] and higher education [1, 6], where provision was developed in the first instance by educators independently according to their strengths, with institutional policies following later.

While parental advocacy has been discussed elsewhere [28], here parental roles have been developed from advocacy for their children towards ‘parents-as-teachers.’ Where young people had SpLD, parental knowledge of technology was not always secure; they felt that schools were not providing sufficient support and training, which echoes work on higher-education by Gould [2]. However, parents’ own tacit knowledge of technology was implicitly relied on, due to structural expectations placed on them during COVID-19 related lockdowns. How work was set also impacted parental roles; remote work which needed printing; if access to specific websites/resources was necessary; work being too difficult for children and so on meant that parents often adjusted work in place of teachers. Other studies also highlight the demands placed on parents, and their construction as parents-as-teachers by both pragmatic, personal actions and through systemic expectations [4, 5, 8].

In this study, access to devices was unproblematic, with a substantial majority of families having sufficient devices for their children. This is in contrast with other work [5, 36]. Nevertheless, systemic processes and expectations had a substantial influence on parents’ sense-making of what ‘remote teaching’ should be. We can see that parents’ sense-making of teaching depends on systemic decisions on provision strategies (particularly for those with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties [22] who are without formalized, statutory provision [3]) as well as their own resources and tacit knowledge.

### **6.3 Institutional issues**

Families’ difficulties in accessing devices echo in the work by Misirli and Ergulec [4] and Kaiper-Marquez et al. [5], where access to technology was vital for accessing work, and the ‘expected’ know-how associated with that technology was not always realistic for families. Given that statutory provision implementation required only ‘best endeavors’ [3], it is unsurprising that work was often unsuitably differentiated for learners without statutory provision; a substantial proportion of those learners have SpLD [18] and find accessing learning problematic even when they are in school under ‘normal’ circumstances [28]. Parents felt the ‘reading burden’ of the curriculum was substantial, reporting that where their children had no access to multi-sensory learning and/or reader-technology, their ability to engage well with remote learning was limited. Structures that already disadvantaged those with SpLD have been replaced (through ‘emergency remote teaching’) by structural expectations, such that learners with SpLD are substantially disadvantaged and their curricular access is limited where those expectations are not met – either by parents or their schools.

As asserted by Bourdieu [14], education is a site of production and re-production of practices and social relations. Consciously or otherwise, all but one parent in this study acted to propagate systems in place. They all tried to follow the curriculum delivered by professionals and so doing, acted to propagate oppressive systems which impeded their children’s ability to access the curriculum. Only one parent felt able to act agentically and remove systemic, curricular burdens from themselves and their child. This shows the power of parental hopes for their children to ‘fit

in' with social systems (SEN provision), even when those systems act to oppress children due to their SpLD.

#### **6.4 Interdependence and interaction between levels**

The findings from this study demonstrate an overlap and interdependence between the levels of interaction. While this is not new and has been shown elsewhere [12, 40], this analysis demonstrates the interdependence between levels both from individual towards institutional and vice versa. The levels are mutually constituting and self-(re)producing, which echoes Bourdieu's view of the self-propagation of social worlds [15]. For example, parents' sense-making of 'emergency remote teaching' was based in systemic decisions/practices by their children's schools as to how it would be undertaken. Parents had little influence over initial decisions relating to provision designed. Rather they conceptualized 'emergency remote teaching' through their own experiences of it systemically, and via their interactions with their children and professionals. Interactions sometimes prompted changes in systemic practice (for example, private messaging or emailing of more appropriate work); at other times no change occurred. The power and capacity to engage with systems through interactions and effect change in those systems influenced parental sense-making. Constant, cyclic (re)conceptualization of parents' experiences of remote teaching and their positions/roles within that took place. Consideration of this was not fully possible within the Jenkins-Bourdieu framework as cyclic reciprocity and interdependence between all levels was not fully addressed. As such, further theorization was necessary and prompted by findings in this study.

### **7. 'Circles of interaction'**

#### **7.1 Habitus clash: a dynamic process**

COVID-19 caused waves across entire legal and social frameworks. Education was a field hit particularly strongly in the process. Many of the embedded practices, expectations and roles were upended through changes in other social fields such as health, law and politics. A model that addressed the dynamism connected to such a seismic and rapid shift in a systemic social practices was necessary. The model had to allow for consideration of individuals' sense-making and agency in a framework that connects those to interactions between social agents in a field. The structures and boundaries of that field must also be considered to address expectations, roles and practices which (re)construct the field, its habitus and associated practices. However, as demonstrated in national, local and individual responses to COVID-19, fields rarely (if ever) exist in isolation, and responses to external events occurring in one sector of society are likely to impact other areas. Within a Jenkins-Bourdieu-based theoretical model, as described above, there is not sufficient and explicit capacity to these inter-field effects. As such, consideration of 'habitus clashes' [53], derived from Ingram's [54] interpretation and use of Bourdieu's concept of 'dialectical confrontation' [55] are useful here.

'Habitus clash' is a simple phrase used to explain the time and space within which habituses, practices and values from different (and sometimes opposing) fields intersect [53]. The intersection is then a site where a social actor must process and make sense of the clash. They will then determine how (and if) the different



systems are to be embodied into their own habitus, practice and values. Much as snooker balls respond to impact in demonstrations of Newton's law of Conservation of Momentum – they are repelled instantly or may move together with a change of direction and speed – so also social actors upon experiencing a 'habitus clash' may change their direction, their views and the way that they interact with others implicated in the clash. As such, a dynamic, moving model where interactions between fields can be easily visualized is necessary.

7.2 Circles of interaction: conceptualizing the dynamics of the social world

In the early COVID-19 world, the clash of habitus connected to lockdowns and national responses to the crisis instigated shifts in practice and socially determined values across various sectors. These shifts then impacted education. Within education itself, different actors' experiences, interactions and roles were upended with very little time to make sense of those changes. The 'Circles of Interaction' model has been developed as a framework, which actively considers the impacts of changes in one sector of the social world on, and in, other sectors. **Figure 2** shows the 'Circles of Interaction,' which are explained and defined below.

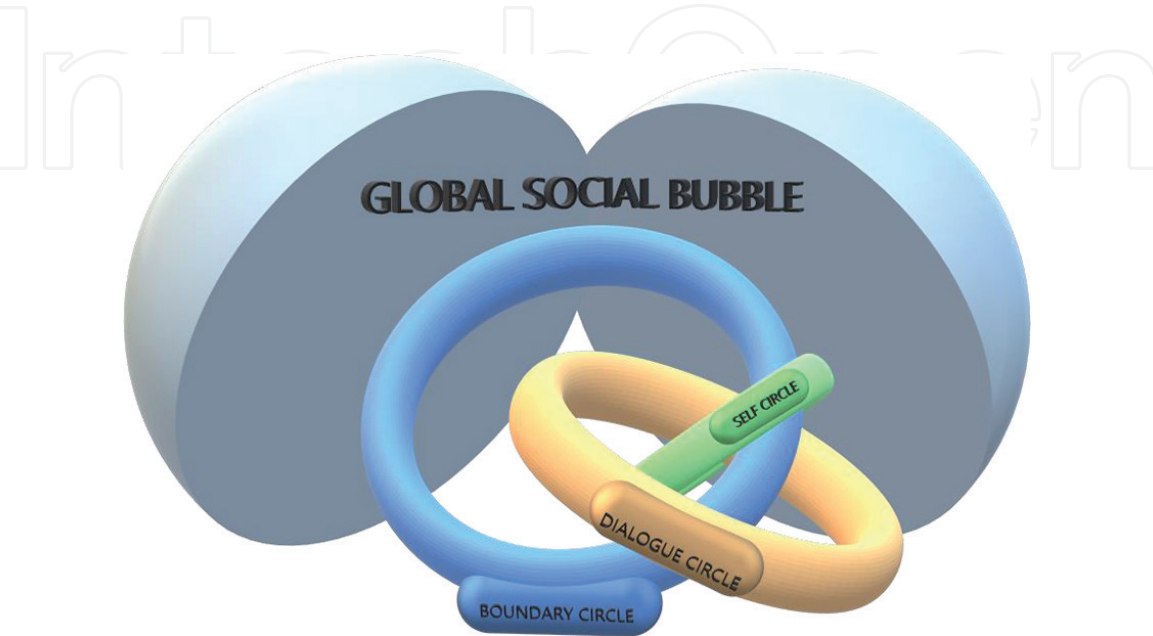
The 'Circles of Interaction' comprise three interconnected but mobile rings, which are free to move within the 'Global Social Bubble.' The three circles represent different levels of the social world and are described below:

The 'Boundary Circle' represents and encapsulates institutional practices that create and define objective social structures. Its large size demonstrates its power-capacity (arising from institutional agency), relative to other elements of the social world.

The 'Dialog Circle' is the space where interactions between social actors are considered, and the changes made through those interactions are delineated. The relative-power held in those interactions, through the roles individuals embody, is explored and its connection to changes in the 'Boundary' and 'Self' Circles is addressed.

The 'Self Circle' is the internal space where social actors make sense of the world around them and enact agency within their own experiences. Their sense-making and agentic capacity is informed by structures and institutions in the 'Boundary' and 'Dialog' Circles and is considered within this space.

Many 'Circles of Interaction,' representing different sectors of the social world exist within the 'Global Social Bubble.' These sets of circles then move around and



**Figure 2.**  
*Circles of Interaction.*

interact. As they interact and shift their balance, the balance of sense-making, interaction and social structures of those inhabiting the circles is upset and altered. This shift is represented by the changes in physical points of contact between the circles; where the contact points alter due to changes external to the circle or changes within the circle, so a 'habitus clash' occurs. New habitus emerges at the points of contact caused by those clashes. COVID-19 has instigated habitus change in the education 'Circles of Interaction' through changes in other sectors' 'Circles of Interaction.' These changes have then impacted education. Parents' sense-making of 'emergency remote instruction' is inextricably linked to its structural implementation by schools and educators. This conceptualization and sense-making underpin interactions with educators; parent-teacher interactions are connected to potential systemic changes to remove barriers to learning for children. Where systemic barriers are then removed (or not), sense-making of remote learning must be re-visited. Changes in other social sectors such as health, employment and the economy affect other sectors and those sectors' 'Circles of Interaction' collide, move and instigate new habitus and practice. COVID-19 and this project have shown how the interdependence of social sectors can be modeled dynamically and robustly through the 'Circles of Interaction.'

## 8. Conclusions

Although this is a small-scale study, the fact that it chimes with so much of the body of work relating to COVID-19 remote-teaching suggests that the findings are important. The voices of those who support young children with specific learning difficulties are missing from much discourse, and as a group, their needs often go unidentified and unmet. COVID-19 has highlighted and brought to the fore the difficulty families face when supporting their children with SpLD. Families are untrained, often lacking the material and time resources in a pre-COVID-19 world [11, 40]. COVID-19 has exacerbated these pre-existent difficulties and added to the burdens experienced by already-overstretched families. Parents lack training to support their children and often lack the physical devices needed to support children in remote learning. These devices and training would also be useful in regular schooling [19]. Investment in technology to support children and their families by central government is crucial to meeting their needs and would be beneficial in the event of future school-closures/remote teaching. Systemic expectations on parents must be grounded in families' realities and resources. Flexibility is key and empowerment through constructive communication edifies all parties and improves practice.

Teachers need training and consistent expectations from their schools, local authorities and ultimately, the Department of Education in the implementation of remote teaching, with a particular focus on online learning. That way the needs of those with SpLD can be met through 'friendly' practices, which will ultimately benefit all learners [28].

This study has prompted the development of a new theoretical framework 'Circles of Interaction,' grounded in Bourdieusien principles and drawing on Jenkins' sociology of identity. Further development through careful application of this framework is necessary to consolidate its principles and transposability to sectors other than education.

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