Parents as educators during lockdown: juggling multiple simultaneous roles to ‘keep atop’ home-schooling amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

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ABSTRACT

As from the first quarter of 2020, the spotlight in global news has shone brightly on the Covid-19 pandemic story. One of the major shifts occurred in education as efforts to stem the spread of the virus prompted school closures. Schools gradually shifted to online teaching, and parents were thus forced to combine their regular jobs with supporting the education of their children. Through the collection of qualitative data from focus groups held with various stakeholders, this paper seeks to explore the emerging home-schooling scenario in Malta and the unplanned for and unprecedented adaptation to an online education environment, in order to examine the novel challenges and tensions that emerged between family, school and work. Despite being conducted in a relatively small nation state, this study offers the possibility of opening a dialogue within the global context with ramifications of a new paradigm shift in education, re-shaped by the novel coronavirus.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 31 May 2021
Accepted 8 December 2021

KEYWORDS

Education crisis; home-schooling; inequality; online teaching; pandemic; parents; school closures

Introduction: setting the background

As from the first quarter of 2020, the spotlight in global news has shone brightly on a single story which has become the common human reality – that of the COVID-19 pandemic – thus afflicting everyone and everything to make overnight adaptations to a new way of life. One of the major shifts occurred in education as efforts to stem the spread of the virus through the non-pharmaceutical interventions and preventive measures such as social distancing and self-isolation prompted school closures. According to UNESCO, more than 98.5% of the world’s students were no longer receiving their typical education as from March 2020, with nearly 1.3 billion students becoming homebound with their parents and extended families. However, education did not halt, switching instead to an online environment, with students attempting to navigate distance learning from the teachers’ virtual classrooms and consequently parents taking on new roles as home-schooling became the norm.
The shift from school-based teaching to remote learning from home did not unfold in a similar pattern in different countries. While for some children remote learning has been little more than a nuisance to be put up with temporarily, for others it has exacerbated their learning disadvantage that goes beyond the acquisition of literacy and numeracy, a learning disadvantage that would have still been the same had the school gates remained open. Students who were already disadvantaged when attending school physically, became even more so at home, in matters that go far beyond teaching and learning. Sahlberg (2020) regards the revelation of the negative repercussions educational inequalities can have on the quality of education as ‘the silver lining in the COVID-19 pandemic’ (361), consequently problematising ‘this global social experiment that came unexpectedly with the COVID-19 pandemic’ (364). This is due to the fact that school systems all over the world are functioning ‘according to the logic of consumption rather than of creation’, with students ending up as compliant consumers of knowledge taught at school – ‘But when teaching is suddenly disrupted, consumption suffers, and these students are in trouble’ (ibid, 364). With compliance being the main modus operandi for teachers and schools, where learning from home was based on the identical in-class pedagogic rationality Sahlberg (2020) reveals how home-schooling turned out to be a difficult, time-consuming, and moreover frustrating experience. A dilemma as to the parents’ role in home-schooling cropped up: ensuring that children followed the school schedule and completed assigned tasks or being responsible for their teaching and learning at home?

In Malta, all education institutions closed on the 13th of March 2020 and remained closed until the end of the scholastic year. Schools gradually shifted to online teaching, with this not necessarily referring to synchronous real-time interaction between teacher and student, but to some form of communication with the provision of feedback. This communication best suited to the teacher’s needs could take any form from emails, a weekly posting of handouts and tasks to be ‘taught’ by the parents, ready-made videos, recorded lessons, as well as interactive online lessons in real time. A working group within the Ministry for Education and Employment made up of representatives from the state, church, and independent sectors, in addition to teachers’ unions, developed the minimum requirements for online teaching that were communicated to both parents and educators in a number of circulars (Ministry for Education and Employment 2020a, 2020b), while simultaneously exploring the impact of this particular situation on the curriculum.

The Working Group issued a number of recommended guidelines for educators and schools to be followed during the first lockdown school closures, mainly revolving around student communication; dissemination of educational material; and student feedback. All educators were ‘expected to communicate with their students to provide and educational service’, using their discretion over the preferred online platform to reach students. Educators were also expected to plan the communication and dissemination of educational material ‘in a manner realistic for themselves and their students’, whilst covering the most important parts of their relevant syllabi. Furthermore, ‘no pressure should be placed on educators to carry out live teaching through video streams or otherwise’. Educators were also encouraged to provide ‘realistic and timely feedback’ to maintain the students’ motivation and scaffold the learning process. However, expecting educators to correct all the tasks carried out by students was deemed as unrealistic, with the general public being invited to maintain grounded assumptions regarding the type and extent of feedback provision. This resulted in distinct and diverse teaching and learning scenarios. Students’ learning
entitlement was further ensured via the provision of an internet connection and a laptop 'loan' to those identified by the school without access to this mode of communication. Schools eventually re-opened in a staggered manner according to year groups at the end of September 2020, with strict protocols revolving around social distancing, hygiene, and class bubbles. At the time of writing this paper, a second national partial lockdown has been announced, with school closures from the 15th of March 2021, being in force till the 11th of April 2021, and with synchronous online teaching to take place.

Consequently, parents were thus forced to combine their regular jobs (which were not always possible to perform remotely from home) with educating their children. This paper seeks to explore the emerging home-schooling scenario surrounding the first COVID-related school closures in March 2020, and the unplanned for and unprecedented adaptation to an online education environment, in order to examine the novel challenges and tensions that emerged between family, school and work, and the overall effect this had on the major stakeholders who are ultimately the students. The narratives of the educators and the parents that unfurled in the online focus groups about the home-schooling/remote learning experience yielded themes related to issues revolving around teaching and learning, the use of technology, parent-teacher (and vice versa) communication, school support, inequality, as well as the positive aspects of this circumstance.

The Maltese education system throughout the compulsory school years, right up to the tertiary level, along with the examination system, closely follows the English model (Sultana 1997) due to two centuries of colonisation under British rule, before joining the European Union in 2004. It is a tripartite system of state, church, and independent schools. Education is free of charge for those students who attend the state sector, a section which constitutes 70% of the compulsory school age population. Despite this study being conducted in a relatively small nation state within the Euro-Mediterranean context, it has far reaching implications at a transnational level. The findings and ensuing larger-scale research offer the possibility of opening up a dialogue within the European and wider global context with ramifications of a new paradigm shift in education, re-shaped by the novel coronavirus. This may offer a response to the distressing concern voiced by Krishnan (2020) about the state of the education system at present:

> Education today is in crisis. Even before the novel coronavirus pandemic struck, in many parts of the world, children who should be in school aren’t; for those who are, their schools often lack the resources to provide adequate instruction … Historically, education has been the shortest bridge between the have and the have-nots, bringing progress and prosperity for both individuals and countries, but the current education system is showing its’ age … it is losing its’ relevance in an era of innovation, disruption and constant change, where adaptability and learning agility are most needed’. (n.p.)

The findings emanating from this small-scale research can spur us on to re-think access, equity and quality, as well as success in schooling provision.

**Literature review**

**The schooling response to COVID-19**

In order to curb the COVID-19 pandemic which is primarily a health crisis, many countries worldwide decided to close all education institutions. This decision resulted
in a dilemma faced by policymakers between closing schools (thus reducing contact and saving lives) and keeping them open (thus allowing employees [in this case, students’ parents and guardians] to be on the workplace and maintain the economy) (Burgess and Sievertsen 2020). This dilemma proved to be more difficult in view of the consideration that going to school is the best public policy tool available to raise skills, as from the economic point of view, the main reason of attending school is to increase a child’s ability, ultimately leading to the preparation of the future workforce.

Most European countries announced school closures by the third week of March 2020 as part of their measures to limit contact between people and slow down the spread of the virus (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister and Crosier 2020). According to the UNICEF monitoring, nationwide closures impacted about 98.5% of the world’s student population (UNESCO 2020). Learning support was provided to students at home in diverse ways: via books and materials taken from school; through various e-learning platforms; and with the help of quickly developed national television programmes or lessons on social media platforms, resulting in an uneven implementation of at-home learning (Carpenter and Dunn 2020). Some education systems even announced early Easter-break holidays at the beginning of school closures in order to prepare for distance learning support. Teaching was significantly re-organised, with COVID-19 re-delineating learning as a distant, screen-based activity restricting most learners to online teacher support, with ‘the discourse around the re-opening, or indeed, the closing of schools [being] fraught, divisive, and largely inconclusive’ (Harris and Jones 2020, 243). Education systems around the world are contending with similar challenges emanating from constantly evolving circumstances, the increasing complexities within the outside community, and external narratives within their diverse contests. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to rapid, unprecedented reform that is ‘reform out of necessity rather than deliberate and thoughtful planning’ (Netolicky 2020, 394). Consequently,

the distance learning and teaching we have turned to – or pivoted to … is not a well-planned and deliberate model of best practice but a temporary response to a crisis. We are doing the best we can in the circumstances, with little lead in time and minimal upskilling, and most of it is not ideal. (ibid, 391, original emphasis)

The mass closure of schools led to the rise of ‘pandemic pedagogies’ (Williamson, Eynon, and Potter 2020, 108) as a global norm since the opening months of 2020 when distance education, remote teaching, and online instruction have acquired a renewed significance. Educators rose to the occasion by switching to online teaching under extremely overwrought conditions and in tightly constricted timeframes.

This pandemic has dismantled schooling, but it has not dismantled learning. The education architecture of schools may have been replaced, albeit temporarily, but learning and teaching continue. It now takes place everywhere, in kitchens, in gardens, in streets, in bedrooms. It takes place in any space where there is something to be questioned, understood and learned. A few short months ago, online learning, blended learning, remote learning were viewed as options, as additions, as exciting possibilities. Now, they define education, globally. (Harris 2020, 323)

The ‘platformisation of schooling’ (Hillman, Bergviken Rensfeldt, and Ivarsson 2020, 7) has enabled the movement of public education into students’ homes, thus altering educators’ spatial and temporal relations with their students. Williamson, Eynon, and Potter
(2020) coin the ‘Bring Your Own School Home’ (BYOSH) movement, in relation to the ‘Bring Your Own Device’ (BYOD) movement when technological devices are brought from home into school, due to the reverse situation unfolding as a result of the COVID-19 school closures. This movement has created an environment where personal screen-time is taken over at the same time as the physical spaces of the home are colonized and co-opted… routines are disrupted… spaces are invaded by devices and screens which have now … melted into the foreground… roles are renegotiated and re-imagined under terms and conditions no-one thought would ever apply. (111)

Emergency remote teaching has been critiqued as a form of experimentation on students, teachers and parents – an ‘experiment [that] will reshape schools, the idea of education, and what learning looks like in the twenty-first century’ (Anderson 2020).

The remote teaching situation places onus on the family’s role in their children’s education more than ever before, since they are expected to complement the input from school, while being the prime drivers of learning in conjunction with online materials (Burgess and Sievertsen 2020). However, this is a role that not all parents can carry out successfully with their children at home. Moreover, the scenario of prolonged school closure and the ensuing ‘imposed’ confinement, puts new pressure on parents, be they key workers leaving their house for the workplace every day, remote workers, as well as those who are unemployed. While more time together may bring family members closer, both literally and metaphorically, this may also exacerbate negative family dynamics (Motiejunaite-Schulmeister and Crosier 2020).

Home-schooling: the unfolding experience

… while the pandemic has left many without jobs, others are struggling to do two at once. The closure of schools to all but a few pupils has forced parents and other carers to combine their regular jobs with educating their children. Some, at least, are relishing the extra time together. But many feel overwhelmed and inadequate, fearing that they are failing on both scores. (The Guardian 2020)

These are typical scenarios of home-schooling as experienced by parents in average, representative, archetypal households. Research carried out in the UK by the National Foundation for Education Research (Eivers, Worth, and Ghosh 2020) and Ofsted (Carr 2020), and in the US by the Network for Public Education (Strauss 2020) about emergency remote education yielded a number of concerns. Most of the pupils received some remote learning tasks, with offline provision, in the form of worksheets and recorded video, being more common than ‘live’ online lessons. Online lessons were more prevalent among secondary and post-secondary students. Pupil time spent on schoolwork was related to income and parental education, the higher the household income and parents’ level of education was reflected in more time on tasks. Lower-income parents spent more time supporting their child’s schoolwork. It was an emotional toll for both educators and students on various counts. There were concerns about privacy issues, in terms of online classes being crashed by student family members, as well as issues with online live classroom management. Moreover, there were feedback problems due to the teachers’ inability to observe body language. Remote learning has presented teachers with a workload burden, in addition to the teachers’ reported lack of confidence in delivering lessons through remote methods. Complete alignment of
the curriculum with remote education proved to be problematic for certain subjects. One of the greatest challenges in the implementation of distance learning was the provision of access to both devices and connectivity, with schools going out of their way to provide laptops and an internet connection. Schools also served as community centres, being engaged in the distribution of food, the provision of emotional support services, as well as bridging families and social services. The first priority for students during the school closure period was their physical and emotional health, with academic performance coming second – such a belief being a common concern among teachers, administrators, and parents alike.

While taking all this into consideration, one also must keep in mind that homeschooling unfolded within different household scenarios constituted by a variety of family typologies and settings. There are ‘privileged’ households with a quiet private workspace for each individual family member (both adults and school age children), ample devices to be distributed equally, and generous broadband packages. Employees and furloughed workers worry about their future, the freelancers and self-employed struggle to find work, while the unemployed barely get by on social benefits in the knowledge that job prospects are very dire. Some working parents can do home-schooling during the day and catch up with work after the kids’ bedtime, while other jobs have to be done within regular working hours. Others whose job does not allow them the privilege of working from home must leave their kids alone, often under the care of an older sibling (who would still be a child). These pressures may be more acute for single parents or those whose children have special educational needs as they can no longer rely on grandparents, other relatives, or friends for help. Furthermore, other families may be experiencing bereavement due to COVID-19 deaths in the immediate family. Both children and adults are under an unusual strain, routines have vanished while uncertainty about the bleak future breeds anxiety across generations. For many households it is simply a matter of getting by as they feel pressure to meet an unrealistic academic workload while understandably lacking the teachers’ expertise and experience. Lockdown does have its compensations, however, a fact realised by both parents and educators alike. Kids may cherish the extra time spent with parents and the extra attention lavished upon them, what is usually a weekend luxury for them. On the other hand, while older siblings might help out with their younger siblings’ home-schooling, they crave their own space and the company of other adolescents. Baker and Chrysanthos (2020) note how school closures during the pandemic have given parental engagement a new meaning as parents were given an unparalleled insight into their children’s teaching and learning, thereupon being able to observe their strengths and weaknesses directly as learners. Parents have been engaged on a new level, thus taking on a deeper role in strengthening the bond between families and schools. Parents have also learnt that learning goes beyond literacy and numeracy attainment, as learning from home gives students the opportunity to ‘learn how to learn’ by gaining skills in independence, self-direction and resilience, thereby harbouring creativity as a result of learning that never actually stops (Sahlberg 2020). Educators can refocus, albeit temporarily, their teaching from meeting standardised testing targets and similar accountability measures, to reigniting their students’ curiosity about the world around them, all the while recording the results of their efforts and ultimately sharing this information with policymakers (Trombly 2020).
About a third of scholastic year 2019–2020 was sacrificed to the pandemic, as for most children, the school year ended in March since online learning and worksheets are no substitute for qualified teachers in physical classrooms, despite the vigorous efforts of all the stakeholders involved – educators, parents, students, and schools (Dynarski 2020). Home-schooling is challenging for children and carers alike, with the latter undergoing the difficulty of ‘teaching’ in home-schooling, for parents are not ‘real’ teachers who do more than educate kids and parents have not been doing what teachers do in this emergency situation (not that these were the expectations). Schools enable parents to go to work, besides providing to the basic needs of the most vulnerable students, with parents consequently missing out on the childcare aspect and the often-unacknowledged pro-bono social work during home-schooling (Ellen 2020).

People rightly applaud NHS staff and key workers, but perhaps our educators also deserve a lot more appreciation than they generally get. It’s a tough job; sometimes the toughest parts aren’t even in the official job description. During lockdown, parents may have been committed, patient, resourceful and lots of other great and admirable things, but they have not been teachers. (ibid n.p.)

Sellgren (2020) reports how parents are reduced to tears as they attempt to balance work with educating, while feeling that they are failing at both since they cannot do two jobs well at once, thus feeling compromised both as parents and as employees. Juggling one’s job and home-schooling may prove to be more difficult for those with younger kids who lack the motivation and self-discipline to work independently, coupled with isolation from classmates. Parent–child/offspring relationships thus suffer because of the struggle over homework assigned by the school. Moreover, there is a different dynamic between children and their parents, compared with children and their teachers, that leads to more disagreements and squabbles, exacerbating the parents’ feelings of guilt and stress. Moreover, what rendered this experience more chaotic was the variety in the quality of lessons and work set, the online platforms used and the level of pastoral support on offer within and among schools. According to Manjoo (2020), parental burnout was a frequent, if not rampant occurrence as a result of the high level of emotional and mental stress brought about by juggling remote working and home-schooling. The kids’ mental health is also at stake (Bloch 2020). The family system that is under enough stress with COVID-19 lockdowns is worsened by the stressed parents who are forced to switch to teachers without any preparation. Hogan (2021) voices her concern about the children’s mental health priorities as having been pushed to the side, with physical measures for the pandemic having stolen the limelight. The level of communication between home and school (O’Brein 2020) was identified as another factor that made home-schooling a success or otherwise. Poor communication encompassed elements such as one-way communication, lack of feedback provision, limited social presence and reduced opportunities for interaction. The home-school divide that was consequently uncovered by this novel home-schooling experience forced upon teachers, parents and students alike without any choice or distinction brought about unsettling realities over the ‘unheard’ voices of the parents and the ‘schooling’ taking place at home. This is aptly captured by Ghidiu (2020):

In some way, the education system seems designed to draw a distinction between HOME and SCHOOL. The SCHOOL decides what, how, and when to learn, and the HOME is meant to
support that learning through engaging with the school’s plan. Honouring the learning that happens at home is not the focus of the school, nor the origin of students’ education plans. But learning is quite literally happening exclusively at home right now, so that seems like the best place to look to see how it’s going. Families are there, waiting to hear from us. Waiting to share their stories, waiting for us to ask the most important questions: ‘How are you?’, ‘What do you need?’, ‘How are we doing?’, ‘What’s next’. (n.p., original emphasis)

The COVID-19 education crisis and its aftermath: possible ways forward?

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a global crisis for education systems, impacting the lives of millions of children and young people around the world, while simultaneously uncovering the cracks and fissures present in the system. As Chapman and Bell (2020) state,

> It is our belief that while the pandemic is a global disaster that has claimed many lives and caused much misery, the disruption caused by COVID-19 offers an opportunity for education systems to do things very differently. The danger is that forces of conservatism will attempt to recreate an ‘old normal’… So, education in a post COVID-19 has a significant opportunity to rethink and reimagine schools as bastions of social mobility. (231)

Educational equity will be the most challenging issue in a post COVID-19 education system since the learning loss experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be more acute than those from advantaged backgrounds, with school closures making educational as well as health and wellbeing inequities starker (ibid 2020). Following the reports by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020a, 2020b) that focus on equity, literature suggests rethinking the education ecosystem by asserting inclusion and educational equity as the primary reform drivers; rethinking educational provision that encompasses diverse learning spaces; developing inclusive pedagogies that cater for the needs of all students, including the disadvantaged; and reinforcing collaboration among schools, families and the wider communities (Chapman and Bell 2020). Trinidad (2020) identifies student engagement and health as rising concerns related to equity issues brought to the fore by the pandemic. Educators problematise sustainable academic engagement amid economic uncertainties, physical health, social isolation, and personal tragedies of sickness and health. Besides these issues themselves burdening mental health wellbeing, this is further aggravated by the challenges of social isolation and lack of structure.

Notwithstanding,

> The pandemic has been a great leveller, everyone has been touched by it, to varying degrees. Universally, it has stopped us all in our tracks. Whatever bridge we have crossed, however, there is no returning, whatever we think or hope or want. The past now is a very different land. (Harris 2020, 325)

A polarisation in the contemporary discourse surrounding COVID-19 has been generated by the voices calling for the repositioning and remodelling of education due to the possibilities put forward by the pandemic, against those voices urging a retrofit of COVID-19 practices into the previous education system, to the ‘old normal’ (ibid 2020). However, Harris (2020) argues that one of the major fault lines in the operation of the ‘old’ education system is PISA and the other large-scale assessments dictating policymaking, that are no longer part of the current education discourse.
In a few short months, educationalists around the world have been jettisoned into a rapid reassessment of everything they valued, knew and trusted... Compared to the sheer force and momentum of this global pandemic, decades of education reforms have hardly made any impression at all, barely left a dent on schools and school systems. (ibid, 322)

The ‘digital divide’ has been a major key player in discrepancies among students’ home-schooling experiences. The less affluent and digitally savvy individual families are, the further their students are left behind (Tam and El-Azar 2020), with the pandemic-induced school closures highlighting disparities in access to digital devices and the Internet connectivity. Consequently, certain children have been denied the opportunity to learn in the home-schooling period. The OECD thus warns schools to beware of technology-assisted teaching and learning that amplifies existing inequalities in access and quality of learning further –

This is not only a matter of providing access to technology and open learning resources but will also require maintaining effective social relationships between families, teachers and students, particularly for those students who lack the resilience, learning strategies or engagement to learn on their own. Technology can amplify the work of great teachers, but it will not replace them. (OECD 2020b)

**Methodology and research design**

The main purpose of this small-scale research centres around the exploration of the emerging home-schooling scenario necessitated by the pandemic school closures and the accompanying unplanned for and unprecedented adaptation to an online education environment. This paper seeks to examine the novel challenges and tensions that emerged between family, school, and work, and the overall effect this had on the major stakeholders, who are ultimately the students. Focus groups were chosen as the data collection method given the researchers’ wish to collect qualitative data from the stakeholders’ first-hand experience within a safe, online environment, given the isolation and social distancing protocols in place during the data collection period.

The desire for this small-scale project emanated from the researcher’s direct experience as College Director at the leadership helm of thirteen state primary and secondary schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic that brought about an overnight closure of schools and an unprecedented move to ‘home-schooling’. Due to her leadership position, she was a direct observer, as well as being at the receiving end of parents’ complaints about the absence of online schooling, school leaders’ frustration about the lack of centralised direction regarding teaching, and educators’ reactions to home-schooling that ranged from anxiety to proactivity to complete nonchalance. It was a baptism of fire of leadership in crisis during uncertain times that led to the successful re-opening of schools in September 2020 to the eventual switch to online schooling at the time of writing (March 2021). She acknowledges her positionality as researcher, however, she attempted to avoid potential biases in the interactions with participants. While acknowledging that the author has a significant immersion in the work, this did not lead to particular ways of engaging with and interpreting the data. No educators from the college she leads were involved and she never introduced herself as College Director, but as a faculty member, the guise adopted to write this article.
The data for this small-scale study was collected via online focus groups with three categories of stakeholders who experienced home-schooling due to the forced school closures that came about because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020. The participants were educators from the primary and secondary sector teaching in state, church and independent schools (the majority of whom happened to be parents of school-age children and could thus provide an additional teacher-parent perspective), as well as parents working in different sectors (finance, information technology, further education) whose offspring attended primary and secondary schools in the church and state sectors, some of whom with a statement of needs. The educators were recruited randomly via a Facebook post outlining the study and inviting voluntary participation. Those educators who registered interest after reading about this proposed study were asked to sign a consent form and were provided with additional details about the study and proposed data collection method. The parents were recruited via purposive sampling by the researcher to have narratives across a variety of sectors, moreover, encompassing students with different learning needs. This means that via her job-related acquaintances, the researcher invited parents from diverse backgrounds in order to be given a picture of the home-schooling experience for different types of students.

The focus group method was chosen as a data collection method as it offers the possibility of gathering detailed information regarding participant perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about the phenomenon of home-schooling, providing raw data that allowed themes to be distilled (Morrison, Lichtenwald, and Tang 2020). Focus groups provide the opportunity for immediate, rich, and detailed feedback, facilitating a group dynamic whereby participants interact with one another, thus providing a richer narrative than can be generated via individual interviews (Willig 2013). Moreover, compared to interviews, they are relatively cost-efficient (Cyr 2016), especially in terms of time and effort. The focus groups were conducted online via Zoom due to the social distance and gathering restrictions being enforced at the time of data collection. Consequently,

Although one of the main benefits of field research is gathering first-hand experience by getting out of the ‘armchair’ and entering the sites under study, the COVID-19 pandemic has made this methodological approach incredibly difficult. In fact, the virus has, in many ways, pushed us back into the armchair – both in a physical and metaphorical sense – and required us to utilize new methods to conduct research from our own homes. (Howlett 2021, 12 original emphasis)

Online real-time focus groups via Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)-mediated technologies, in my case Zoom, resemble face-to-face communication in similarly allowing participants to interact with each other (Chen and Hinton 1999), while also allowing researchers access to verbal and non-verbal cues (Sullivan 2012). Findings suggest the viability of Zoom as a preferred method of data collection due to its’ relative ease of use, cost-effectiveness, data management features and security options (Archibald et al. 2019). This ‘cyberspace location’ proved to be positive, despite presenting certain drawbacks. The online participants involved in this study were noticeably more comfortable and felt relaxed and at ease, as was evident by the length of the online focus groups as well as the fact that the researcher had to initiate the end of these Zoom meetings, as
participants were not rushed to end the calls. Moreover, they exposed details about themselves and their everyday lives (Jenner and Myers 2019) that are not normally shared in face-to-face focus groups. Synchronous digital approaches may also shift the researcher-participant power dynamics due to their increased agency and power in our exchanges (Fujii 2018) via their control to our access to the field than in traditional settings, in addition to access to our personal life or workspace in a way that would not be possible in face-to-face interactions. Due to the online space situated within the participants’ own homes/personal spaces, there were interruptions by children that however gave an added value to the data through a presentation of the actual juggling act of home-schooling and work by the parents. The focus groups were moderated by the researcher, allowing the flow of the narrative among the participants, and asking for clarifications or further details when needed.

Easy recording was facilitated by the built-in tool in Zoom as the focus groups were recorded with the consent of all those involved. The focus groups recordings were transcribed and having an online recording of the session allowed the researcher to observe body language and other non-verbal cues. Thematic analysis of the empirical data yielded the themes that will be discussed in the following section. Common themes started emerging after several readings, leading to a narrowing down of six contributing factors that are explored in the ‘Presentation, discussion and analysis of data’ section further below. This small-scale study was conducted in full compliance of research ethics norms. The researcher sent out to all participants a detailed study information sheet; a ‘permission to participate’ document; an indication of the time commitment; as well as a link to join the Zoom meeting. Anonymity and confidentiality are respected as neither participant nor institution names appear or any other means of personal identification. The participants have been given fictitious names.

The following are the focus group questions related to home-schooling:

(1) Describe a typical day during school closure.
(2) How have the duties and tasks assigned to your role unfolded during this period?
(3) How are you adapting to and managing home-schooling/remote teaching?
(4) What problems have you encountered in this period of online instruction?
(5) How are students experiencing school closure?
(6) Is there a silver lining in this situation? What positive aspects have emerged?
(7) Coronavirus shows us that it is time to re-think everything. How should we look at education and schools in a post-pandemic world?

Presentation, discussion and analysis of data

Analysis of the focus group data yielded several themes revolving around the pandemic-induced home-schooling experience that unfolded between March and June 2020. The themes emanating from the parents’ and educators’ focus group narratives centre around: (1) juggling one’s job and home-schooling; (2) the quality of the ‘online’ teaching provision; (3) the actual home-schooling experience; (4) equity and access; (5) home-school communication; and (6) the positive aspects of the home-schooling experience. These issues are presented in the following section below.
Parents as multi-taskers: juggling work and home-schooling on top of additional family needs

The greatest challenge faced by the parents was keeping up with one’s full-time job while attempting to home-school children, especially in the absence of online teaching provision from the school while being expected to teach their offspring syllabus topics that were completely new. Steve, a father of two who works in the very competitive private IT sector, went through feelings of extreme frustration as there’s this perception that if you’re working at home, you can somehow balance the work life and the parental life… that’s not possible. … you really wish to help the kids and you can’t … I didn’t have time for them.

The lack of structured learning provision from the end of the school exacerbated this frustration.

It wasn’t a structured thing like there is no school and there’s going to be correspondence with the kid, starting at eight and finishing at two o’clock, for example. Forget the education – we need to keep the kids busy – but when you are at home, locked in … you feel that you’re failing … I had this dilemma to decide: Should I prioritize my kids [and fail at work] or should I prioritize my job? The thing is if you fail at work, you’re still kind of failing your family.

Steve’s experience strongly aligns with Sellgren’s (2020) findings of parents’ feelings of failure at both work and home-schooling, thus feeling compromised as both primary carers and employees. Jane, a teacher at a church school, expresses her exasperation as a teacher-parent,

My two kids attended the same school I teach and I think I was on the parents’ blacklist as I couldn’t manage both my students and my kids at the same time, so I tackled their homework during the weekend. This was very frustrating for me as a parent.

Jane is hereby admitting that her job as a teacher took precedence over the home-schooling of her own children.

Guilt feelings also featured very highly in these parents’ lives due to work and family commitments. Anne recounts how

At one point I felt that I was being pulled in completely different directions without knowing where to focus my attention. I realized that I couldn’t perform in the best way possible everywhere as this would just break me … I made the decision to just do the basic at work so as not to get fired.

This led to the ‘parental burnout’ mentioned by Manjoo (2020), moreover, given the concentration of all the previously compartmentalised aspects of adult life in one enclosed space. Maxine, a post-secondary school teacher with a special needs son admits that exhaustion took over,

When I was delivering online lessons, I made sure that Darryl was involved in independent work, but this didn’t always transpire accordingly, so there were occasions when I delivered online lessons with Darryl in my lap.

Being stuck inside the house proved to be an added burden.

When you go out to work you have a boundary – your work life, where you can focus on the task in hand, then when I go home and am with my son, I can focus on him only … Life at home became one single thing.
We can detect signs of the negative family dynamics as pointed out by Motiejunaite-Schulmeister and Crosier (2020) at play. Moreover, this loss and eventual blending of boundaries led to fragmentation as parents struggled to reach accountability expectations both at work (which varied across the job sector) and within the household.

The success of these multi-tasking parental roles was also dependent on the type of job and the schoolchildren’s age. Maria, another post-secondary school teacher whose two kids attend the senior years of primary and secondary school respectively, describes her family’s home-schooling setup as a somewhat positive one:

I had an advantage over the other parents since I was also working from home and could follow my kids very closely. We set up the house in such a way that the kids were not in their rooms, but in my vicinity, so I could monitor them all the time.

Maria’s case can be regarded as a home-schooling experiment that was successful, with parents as the ‘prime drivers of learning’ (Burgess and Sievertsen 2020).

The provision of ‘online’ teaching … and learning

The inconsistency in online teaching provision seems to be a bone of contention among the parents and the educators concerned, exemplifying the ‘pandemic pedagogies’ outlined by Williamson, Eynon, and Potter (2020). Distance education, remote teaching, and online instruction gained a novel significance and magnitude. However, this switch to ‘online teaching’ that happened in tightly constricted timeframes unfolded in very different ways in the Maltese education scenario, with parents and students being at the receiving end. Steve voices his main apprehension

A lot of people were unprepared. For me, the core thing is that it’s so difficult to give an opinion as there was a different approach everywhere – it was left too much to improvisation.

Graham, a teacher trainer, tells the other side of the story,

In April, May and June, my role was to train teachers on MS Teams. The situation caught everyone unawares, we were never really trained to do online teaching so it’s a bit unfair, accusing teachers of not doing enough … Most teachers did their best, in my opinion.

Moreover, he voices the anxiety of the educators ‘We were doing lessons as usual, then school closed. My big question was ‘How am I going to finish the topics’ … No-one knew what was going to happen, how long it was going to take, this pandemic thing’. This ‘platformisation of schooling’ (Hillman, Bergviken Rensfeldt, and Ivarsson 2020) that enabled the movement of public education into students’ homes unfolded as a reform that was born out of necessity, rather than deliberate and thoughtful planning (Netolicky 2020), thus the unpreparedness among educators and parents alike. Parents, however, think otherwise.

I do meet other parents, but just as the reality is different from school to school, the reality could be different from class to class. Why? Because I think the issue is that it was left up to the individuals to decide how to operate. (Steve)

This emergency remote teaching scenario is thus being critiqued as an experiment on students, teachers, and parents (Anderson 2020). This varied range of practices among
educators turned parents into home-schooling teachers albeit tutors. Maxine describes how
we used to receive all the material by email on Monday morning ... then it’s up to the parents to plan for the week, assign daily work, check that kids do their homework, give them explanations, and then on Friday, homework answers were sent for parents to also correct the work.

Parents in this study were thus expected to act as the prime drivers of learning, while complementing the input from school (Burgess and Sievertsen 2020).

Online teaching also received its’ fair share of criticism. Amanda, a teacher at an independent secondary school voices an alternative school of thought.

As a parent to my daughter, I felt that it was too much that she was stuck to her laptop from half eight to three every day ... For the kids, the enthusiasm started waning pretty fast ... towards the end, even our diligent students had had enough of it ... ... I honestly believe that replicating the whole classroom experience online is not the way forward.

This also led to the dilemma regarding the parents’ role in home-schooling as identified by Sahlberg (2020) about ensuring that their children followed their school timetable to the letter, or else being responsible for their teaching and learning at home, irrespective of how and when it took place.

The experience of home-schooling

Home-schooling for the parents was a somewhat arduous task as they were faced with the insurmountable challenge of keeping up with a full-time job and teaching their kids a new syllabus, while also doing their best to keep them focused and motivated. Steve voices the main issues that turned home-schooling into a challenge:

Some people didn’t have access to hardware ... Some people can’t even follow a lesson. ... Where there were parents who didn’t work, so could follow the kids – for me, that’s another key difference ... Another thing is the fact whether the teacher had a plan for online learning or if it was completely unstructured. And when it comes to the LSE, we had the case where the LSE² kind of disappeared, apart from telling you, ’If you need me, tell me.

Some of the issues mentioned here allude to Tam and El-Azar’s (2020) ‘digital divide’ as the focal matter that determined discrepancies, incongruities and inconsistencies among students’ home-schooling experiences. A typical day of home-schooling was a far cry from a normal day at school.

It was very difficult to create a routine. Initially, we went on to writing times for the activities ... But in our case, it broke down very quickly, as the moment you are not there to supervise that it’s happening, the kids get bored ... so at that point everything became more unstructured. (Steve, with his wife Molly confirming that both daughters are looking forward to attending school in September)

Parents did feel overwhelmed and inadequate, experiencing a sense of failure as both employees and home-schooling parents, mirroring findings in The Guardian (2020) and Sellgren (2020). Adele, an early years educator does admit that ‘we expected too much from parents as finally, we have to keep in mind that they are not educators ... they want the best for their kids, but they’re not trained to do it’. Moreover, non-Maltese
speaking parents were riddled with the extra burden of an ‘unfamiliar’ language and culture in mainstream schooling, so they ‘literally gave up even attempting to attend online lessons as they had no support whatsoever from educators’ (Molly). This would thus create a learning gap for these foreign students who make up a good percentage of the state school population. But parents are not ‘real teachers’ (Dynarski 2020) ultimately, so can they actually expect to be blamed?

Home-schooling was a positive experience for other reasons within and beyond the parents’ control. Maria admits that ‘when compared with other parents, I can state that we were privileged as both my husband and me are educators, we were both working online from home, so could explain material to our son’. Moreover, ‘the element of structure remained’, with both her kids being occupied with online lessons and schoolwork during the day. Notwithstanding, the lack of structure turned home-schooling into a constructive occurrence for both Maxine and her son Darryl. ‘We also tried to create structure, up to a certain extent, but our structure was very flexible, and we adapted according to Darryl’s needs on that particular day … It seems that his home-schooling experience is more positive than what he had at school, it’s not that school isn’t a positive experience, but it’s tiring and takes a lot of work’. These atypical home-schooling experiences for parents illustrate the new meaning of parental engagement (Baker and Chrysanthos 2020) and ultimately, parental agency, in the students’ teaching and learning process during the pandemic-induced school closures.

Educators also give their version of the home-schooling experience. As a teacher-parent, Graham describes provision for home-schooling lessons within his household in order for his students and teachers on professional development sessions to get the best experience possible.

I preferred to do asynchronous lessons because I’m a father of two young children, my wife is a teacher too … Having two kids, one with severe special educational needs on the autism spectrum, it’s not easy doing lessons in the morning when the kids are awake. Both me and my wife waited for the kids to sleep at ten pm and we’d start recording our lessons.

The blurring of lines between his personal and professional lives was an added discomfort for Ronald – ‘I felt a bit wary as suddenly there were no boundaries online … my home was their home … I didn’t show my face on the screen as I didn’t feel comfortable’. Can this be interpreted as a case of ‘Bring Your Own School Home’ (Williamson, Eynon, and Potter 2020) movement having a negative impact on the educators’ personal lives due to the private, physical spaces of their homes being invaded by their students? Graham was deeply concerned about the high rate of student absenteeism online during the schools closure period

Teaching students on a screen is a bit difficult as you can’t force them to switch on the camera, especially having sixteen-year-olds … Many students went off the radar … more than 75% of the students never went online, not just online live lessons but to check out the material we were sending … No-one turned up for live lessons, no-one viewed the material, no-one submitted assignments.

This was not the situation in independent, fee-paying schools where, according to Amanda, ‘the parents prioritise education and definitely won’t allow their kids to miss out on online lessons. All my students participated fully’. It is therefore, indeed a case of education serving as the shortest bridge between the have and the have-nots (Krishnan
2020), with the have-nots, in Graham’s case, ending up with less during the school closures period.

A widening of the gap for disadvantaged students?

Home-schooling widened the already-existing gap between the haves and the have-nots, which resulted in students with a statement of needs and those coming from a migrant or particular social background getting less than their peers in terms of learning provision, thus exposing the pandemic as a great leveller (Harris 2020). Maxine speaks about her son Darryl, while highlighting the difficulties faced by other students in a different situation. ‘If I hadn’t been there to help him, he would have regressed considerably … Someone has to make sense of the resources sent by the teacher and someone has to help him. Graham reiterates the importance of home support,

I feel that if students do not have the right support at home, online teaching doesn’t work for them … What I mean by support is not only technical knowhow – that was a hurdle for parents … maybe even the fact that parents didn’t prioritize education.

It is indeed the case of educational inequities becoming more acute due to school closures (Chapman and Bell 2020). Graham further argues that truancy increased online mainly due to the social realities of certain students.

I don’t think that devices presented a problem as even if they can’t afford a tablet or laptop, everyone has a smartphone. Some parents didn’t have internet access at home, let alone books … The fact that parents are working doesn’t help as you don’t know what students are doing at home alone.

It is not always a matter of the ‘digital divide’ argument as projected by Tam and El-Azar (2020) where students lag behind due to their parents’ lack of affluence and digital savviness. Student engagement also emerges as a rising concern (Trinidad 2020).

Students with a statement of needs were short-changed in this home-schooling arrangement, mainly due to issues revolving around their educators. Maxine shares her experience, explaining how

There was no co-ordination between the teacher and the LSE, as the LSE received the material at the same time that we did. The LSE offered to make adaptations of the worksheets in my place, as at the beginning, I used to carry out the adaptations myself, but it used to take me a couple of days to receive the adapted worksheets, so that meant that my son lagged behind with regards to the work his classmates were doing concurrently.

A wide discrepancy in provision brought about unnecessary suffering and hardship for these students and their immediate household members. The online environment presented these students with further drawbacks, as depicted by Maxine’s account of how Darryl totally missed out on the social aspect for more than a school term. ‘He did need interaction with his classmates – but this was missing. And when they had the online show-and-tell sessions, the online medium turned out to be very difficult for him’. Doesn’t this lead us to rethinking the education system by encompassing an educational provision that develops inclusive pedagogies and learning spaces catering for all the students’ needs, as envisaged by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020a, 2020b)?
The home-schooling situation exacerbated parents’ worries about the students’ progression towards the next level in the coming scholastic year. The major concern was on closing the already-present gap.

There is no indication that this gap is going to be addressed or else that a needs-based assessment will be carried out. It seems that it’s going to be business as usual… Only those students whose parents afford to pay for private lessons or seek external help can consider themselves lucky. (Maria)

Will the opportunities offered by the pandemic disruption for education systems to do things very differently as argued by Chapman and Bell (2020) be taken up? If not, social distinctions are thus set to become more pronounced. The lack of socialisation at such a crucial age was another source of apprehension.

**Home-school communication: an open channel?**

The home-schooling period uncovered the lacunae that were present in the interaction between parents and educators when schools were closed during the second term of scholastic year 2019/2020. According to Molly, ‘From our end, any communication was addressed to the child without any interaction with us’. Maxine had a similar but somehow different experience.

Communication was very formal in the sense that we received emails with resources and homework. Then, they set an email address for students and material was sent directly to them. Still, I have to access this email address as my son is not so familiar with the computer.

Due to this identified lacuna, parents resorted to setting up a strong communication channel amongst themselves. ‘Communication between the parents and the class teacher would have rendered the situation much easier as parents needed someone to tell them that they were doing fine … We have a parents’ chat and a lot of the comments revolved around the fact that they simply felt lost’. These lacunae bring to the fore the home-school divide (Ghidiu 2020) highlighted by all the learning happening exclusively at home, with parents waiting to share their stories that went by unheard and unnoticed. On the other hand, Maria had a completely different experience thanks to an open, two-way communication channel between the parents and the school. ‘In our case, the Year 6 teacher had set up a dedicated email address to facilitate communication which took place directly with us parents, not with the kids… when they had online sessions, we could be present as parents and talk to the teacher after the lesson if necessary’. This provides an excellent example of the reconceptualisation of parental engagement as described by Baker and Chrysanthos (2020) to an extent and level that was absent prior to the pandemic-induced school closures. Jane formed a strong bond with the students’ households as ‘I had a lot of contact with parents … called students at home … parents became involved as a team with the teacher … I got closer to the parents as they were inviting me inside their house via online teaching’. Teacher presence online and the maintenance of actual student communication online contributed to a conducive environment, thus confirming O’Brein’s (2020) observation of the home-school communication level as a success factor in school closures.
Is there a silver lining in the March 2020 school closures?

Despite the havoc brought about by the pandemic, school closures and the ensuing home-schooling experience were a learning curve for students and parents alike. In Maria’s words,

They learnt organizational skills and I also learnt as a parent. I learned to appreciate them and certain qualities they possess that I never had the opportunity to observe before as we were just stuck in a rut, rushing from one thing to the next.

Parental engagement was thus transformed (Baker and Chrysanthos 2020) as parents acknowledged that learning goes beyond literacy and numeracy attainment, incorporating numerous holistic skills (Sahlberg 2020).

Teachers also observed their students in a different way. In Amanda’s words, ‘Some kids became more autonomous, learned to do research on their own, became more conversant with technology … things that will prepare them for the real world’. Moreover, the home-schooling scenario turned out to be a blessing for statemented students in certain aspects. Maxine describes how, ‘My son was less frustrated, had less tantrums, was less tired … I also often asked myself whether the school environment was always the best one … we also observed a marked improvement in certain aspects, for example, handwriting in Maltese as he had more time and because the educational programme was tailor-made to his needs’.

Ronald further problematises the education system as it is for all students, ‘We’ve had the opportunity to change the school system … We’re criticising what was, but not questioning what can be – to make education relevant for life’. Is it a case of following Sahlberg’s (2020) call for educators to refocus their teaching from meeting standardised testing targets and related accountability measures to reignite students’ curiosity about the world around them?

Conclusions and recommendations

There is a young but slowly expanding literature on the effects of COVID-19 on education, even though the pandemic-induced school closures started unfolding worldwide in March 2020. School closures and their aftermath on schools, students, educators, and all stakeholders alike have sparked a wave of research activity in this somewhat short one-year time-span, with more to come soon even when we ‘return’ to a quasi-pre-pandemic world, or what is becoming known as the ‘new’ normal. This gives us the much-needed burgeoning space to critique and problematise the noticeable polarisation in the contemporary discourse around ‘post-pandemic’ education reform which calls for a repositioning and remodelling of the education system alongside a ‘retrofit’ to the ‘old normal’ (Harris 2020).

As such, this study provides invaluable insights into the home-schooling scenario of scholastic year 2019/2020 and the unplanned-for adaptation to an online education environment with the ensuing challenges and tensions that emerged between family, school and work for the parents who acted as their kids’ ‘teachers’ during this period. The author will now present the main conclusions to be elicited from the study.

The greatest challenge faced by the parents was keeping up with their full-time job (in terms of accountability and good performance) and home-schooling their children, the success of which depended on school-structured learning provision, the children’s age
and the guardian’s job type. Guilt feelings and stress emanated from the parents’ inability to give their full input in both areas (work and home-schooling), exacerbated by the blurring of boundaries between personal and professional lives. This is in line with Strauss’s (2020) findings about parents’ feelings of failure at both work and home-schooling, leading to rampant and recurrent ‘parental burnout’ (Manjoo 2020).

The inconsistency in online teaching provision was a major sore point in the parents’ home-schooling experience, as there was a wide range of ‘acceptable’ practices both within and between schools, ranging from weekly emails with handouts, to online lessons, to no feedback whatsoever. Parents, many of whom are not trained teachers, had to structure the ‘home’ school day and provide explanations. This leads us to problematise ‘home-schooling’ by the parents/guardians who are not ‘real’ teachers (Dynarski 2020), with online learning and worksheets providing no substitute for qualified teachers in physical classrooms. Synchronous online teaching also received its’ fair share of criticism.

The home-schooling experience was problematic for parents when the school failed to provide a daily structure, with kids losing focus and motivation under their ‘teacher’ parents who were often at a loss when it came to explaining new syllabus topics. The lack of structure proved to be a bonus for students with needs whose parents could work around a completely tailor-made programme. Educators voiced their concerns about student absenteeism online, their lack of control over students’ behaviour, as well as students hailing from ‘troubled’ social backgrounds. Emergency remote teaching can indeed be regarded as a form of experimentation, or indeed trialling, on students, teachers, and parents alike (Anderson 2020), experienced in a distinct manner and to varying degrees by the diverse stakeholders involved.

Home-schooling widened the already present gap for disadvantaged students, mainly those with additional learning needs, as well as those coming from a migrant or ‘difficult’ social background, whose experience mainly depended on the level of home support provided. Can this be considered as a matter of technology-assisted teaching and learning amplifying existing inequalities in access and quality of learning (OECD 2020b)? Parents voiced their anxieties about progression to the next scholastic year and the kind of ‘catch-up’ to be provided, if at all, provoking doubts about sending kids back to school.

Parents experienced different levels of home-school communication, which provided their empowerment or lack thereof in their kids’ home-schooling. Lack of communication between the educators and the parents urged the latter to form a strong bond amongst themselves, thus helping each other out with their kids’ schooling. Educators, however, report the formation of a strong bond with students’ households, with some providing adequate opportunities for the kids themselves to socialise online. A new meaning can thus be attributed to parental engagement and its transformed significance (Baker and Chrysanthos 2020).

Parents also state that the school closures period was positive as they could observe their kids more closely, thus learning more about their previously unnoticed qualities and character traits. The online environment also gave educators a similar opportunity. Students also mastered new skills of organisation, independence, resilience, and technology that were not catered for in a physical schooling environment. This somewhat challenges Sahlberg’s (2020) presentation of a home-schooling dilemma in the parents’ role due to the latter’s attempt at replicating the consumption model of schooling ‘at home’.
The author will now present the limitations of the study, plus recommendations for further research. The participant parents and educators must be understood within the context of their work and everyday life. Despite having educators from the state, church and independent sectors, and parents whose kids attend the three sectors, this study does not claim to be representative of the national home-schooling experience. A diverse range of participants in terms of parents and educators would have yielded disparate home-schooling narratives. The author has used a considerable number of grey literature sources, among which are newspaper articles and blogs, which are hereby recognised for their limitations in not being peer-reviewed. However, given their uniqueness and currency in terms of the topic under research and the fact that the peer-reviewed scholarly publications in this regard are still in their infancy to serve as the sole literature source, the researcher countered this limitation by choosing high-quality and reliable sources that contributed to her data sources.

This small-scale study lends itself to a research project on a larger scale, moreover, given the novel issue under exploration. A comparative study can incorporate schools from both primary and secondary levels across the three sectors in order to be able to compare data according to level and sector. This comparative study can also consider diverse households, as well as parents from different job sectors and cultural origins. It can also be taken beyond a national level to explore parents’ home-schooling experiences at a European and Mediterranean level. A larger scale study may include other stakeholders such as students, school leaders, school counsellors, social workers, and psychologists, as well as outside community members who have a direct involvement with the school. Other data collection methods besides focus groups may provide a textured layer of this home-schooling experience.

Despite this study being conducted in a relatively small nation state within the Euro-Mediterranean context, it has far reaching implications at a transnational level, with the possibility of opening up a dialogue within the European and wider global context, with ramifications of a new paradigm shift in education, re-shaped by the novel coronavirus, in terms of theory, policy and practice.

Notes

1. Students with a statement of needs are identified as such by the government-appointed Statementing Board, following a psychological report submitted by the Head of School in conjunction with the Inclusion Co-Ordinator and the parents/guardians. These statemented students are supported in class by a learning support educator on a full-time one-to-one or shared basis.
2. LSE refers to the learning support educator who supports students with additional needs in the classroom on either a full-time one-to-one or shared basis.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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