

# **Family Resilience in the Time of COVID-19: A Cultural Probe Study with Children and Families at Home in Finland**

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## Abstract

The study examines the social impacts of the novel Coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, on childhood and family life at home in Finland. The study takes on a rights-based, participatory, and relational approach in exploring children's intrafamilial relationships, activities, and social well-being within the shared space of home and in the broader context of the COVID-19 crisis. It seeks to investigate how COVID-19 conditions and constraints have inevitably altered children's everyday lives with a focus on (1) family relations and childhood, (2) activities and use of the home space, and (3) further reflections and hopes for COVID-19. In light of conducting fieldwork during a pandemic, the study employs the physically distanced and unobtrusive design of the cultural probe package and online survey questionnaires. Inside the cultural probe package is a variety of visual, written, and creative child-centered yet interactive tools and tasks (e.g., drawing, activity card game, photo-voice, ranking, sentence completion) designed to provide children and their families with a playful, explorative, and meaningful opportunity to reflect upon family and home life pre and post-Corona Spring. Participants are four families composed of children (ages 5-15) and parents living together in the capital region of Finland. A thematic analysis of the data illustrates the similarities, differences, and exceptional coping strategies that highlight family resilience during times of crisis. Results demonstrate an increase in and value of family time, time outdoors, as well as newfound (and virtual) hobbies and interests. Moreover, the participatory methods enabled intergenerational collaboration and engagement among the researcher, children, and their families. The contributions of the study are three-fold: (a) to develop systematic yet meaningful participatory methods and ethics in child-centered research, b) to examine Finnish childhood, intergenerational relationships, and everyday family life, and (c) to highlight a family resilience framework in mitigating the harmful social effects of a generation-defining phenomenon such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, family resilience, Finnish childhood and family life, cultural probe package, participatory research methods, children's social well-being



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## **List of Acronyms**

**RPR** The Right to be Properly Researched Manuals

**PRA** Participatory Rural Appraisal

**UNCRC** United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

**UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The novel Coronavirus, COVID-19, global health crisis has shaken the social foundations of the world. The SARS-CoV-2 - the virus that causes the COVID disease - is believed to have emanated from Wuhan, China at the end of 2019 and has spread rapidly to most - if not all - regions of the world. It has brought with it an unprecedented level of uncertainty, challenging notions and visions of the future for societies. The recent state of emergency, the unpredictable developments of COVID-19, and the ongoing implementation of COVID-19 measures and restrictions such as lockdowns, social distancing, distance learning, and remote working, have inevitably altered the daily structure, routines, experiences, and perspectives of society, institutions, families, and children globally. Although the COVID-19 crisis has remained relatively stable in Finland (Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020), the COVID-19 crisis has indefinitely exacerbated inequalities among the most vulnerable families and children, with some being disproportionately affected by the rapid social changes in the past year (Salin, et. al., 2020; Koskela, et. al., 2020). Given the important role of the Finnish state in ensuring equality, trust, and well-being, the pandemic has been a "stress test" for many of its institutions, particularly schools and the family unit (Koskela, et. al., 2020). For children and childhood, educational institutions have been especially challenged, given the multitude of functions and care they serve in children's everyday lives.

While the stability of the Finnish welfare state has been disrupted by increases in parental responsibility, changes in livelihood, economic hardship, social isolation, and in some cases, loss of a loved one (Koskela, et. al., 2020), it has also opened up the possibility for resilience, adaptation, and positive growth (Walsh, 2020) - both subjectively and relationally; collectively and individually. The concept of resilience - or *sisu* - is one that is deeply ingrained in Finland's unique and epic feat of history, politics, and culture. In situations of crises - whether it be war, recessions, or a pandemic - identifying the structural, sociocultural, and relational resources that assist rather than dismiss perseverance in overcoming adversity is paramount. COVID-19 has been a curse and a blessing that has undoubtedly affected us all albeit in varying ways. Adapting or maladapting to the "new normal" can afford new possibilities for increased family resilience or disruptions to family cohesion. The study responds to the Finnish government's need for research that addresses the immediate and long-term social impacts of COVID-19 particularly on children and families " (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Indeed, urgency is expressed to implement measures that aim to mitigate the harmful social effects of this exceptional generation-defining experience.

## **1.1 Research Statement**

The following research study examines the social impacts of the novel Coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, on children, childhood, and family life at home in Finland. The study takes on a rights-based, participatory, and relational approach in exploring children's intrafamilial relationships, activities, and social well-being within the shared space of home and in the broader context of the COVID-19 crisis. It seeks to investigate how COVID-19 conditions and constraints have inevitably altered children's everyday lives with a focus on (1) family relations and childhood, (2) activities and use of the home space, and (3) further reflections and hopes for COVID-19. In light of conducting fieldwork during a pandemic, the study employs the physically distanced and unobtrusive design of the cultural probe package and online survey questionnaires. Inside the cultural probe package are a variety of visual, written, and creative child-centered yet interactive participatory tools and tasks (e.g., drawing, activity card game, photo-voice, ranking, sentence completion) designed to provide children and their families with a playful, explorative, and meaningful opportunity to reflect upon family and home life pre and post-Corona Spring.

## **1.2. Personal Motivation**

The COVID-19 outbreak in the spring of 2020 led the researcher to move from Norway and university life to Finland. During a time of uncertainty, she and her Finnish husband decided to move and settle in Finland. This milestone led to a growing interest in and personal connection to Finnish culture, childhood, and family life. Moreover, exploring the social impacts of the novel Coronavirus, COVID-19, as a global and local health crisis was a timely and significant project that the researcher sought to endeavor. In addition, the researcher was inspired by her academic experience in the MPhil Childhood Studies program at NTNU. It was during a workshop training week for a course on participatory methods and ethics, led by professor Tatek Abebe, that the researcher learned about the value and impact of participatory approaches. Indeed, the hands-on experience using multiple and creative participatory tools and techniques was a novel and promising outlook on research that was both powerful and insightful, given the researcher's prior experience in psychological and experimental research. Particularly during these exceptional pandemic times, the researcher's mission for her MPhil thesis project was to create participatory, *feel-good* research *for* and *with* children and their families - an opportunity for a timely and meaningful family project.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to highlight children and families' own views and experiences during COVID-19 that may inform or influence academic and public opinion, as well as policy intervention in mitigating the harmful social impacts of COVID-19 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). The study acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's concluding observation that calls for more age inclusive and child-centered research, theory, and training in the competitive welfare state of Finland (Alanen, Sauli & Standell, 2003; Office of the Ombudsman for Children, 2011; Council of Europe, 2011). Moreover, while contemporary child research is primarily focused on the individual, pedagogical, and psychological risk factors and vulnerabilities of children in times of crises (Walsh, 2020; Cuevas-Parra, 2020), this study aims to showcase the significance of *family resilience* by reflecting on the everyday taken-for-granted, meaning-making practices, and relational resources in supporting children and families' well-being in times of adversity. Furthermore, there is an apparent need for a participatory investigation that prioritizes children's definitions of well-being particularly during the COVID-19 global health crisis (UNICEF, 2020). Hence, the following research study values and applies a rights-based, participatory research approach *with* and *about* children rather than *on* children (Ennew, et. al., 2009). In exploring *family resilience* and children's social well-being within the family and the home, the study hopes to address potential strategies to help children and their families reflect, cope, and adapt with what seems to be "the new normal".

### **1.5. Research Aims and Objectives**

In investigating the social impacts of COVID-19 on Finnish childhood and family life at home, the research study aims to (a) situate and understand childhood at different yet interrelated scales of analysis, (b) create innovative rights-based, participatory, child-centered yet relational research, (c) highlight a *family resilience framework* in supporting children's social well-being during the COVID-19 crisis. More closely, the objectives of the study are to:

- Contextualize and analyze childhood through the (1) structural impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, on the (2) sociocultural context of Finland, and the (3) micro-level relational everyday lives of children and families
- Design systematic yet explorative, participatory research that genuinely engages and highlights children and their families' own perspectives and meaning-making experiences in supporting family resilience and children's



social well-being in mitigating the harmful social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Thus, the research firstly contextualizes the historical, political, and sociocultural developments of Finland and how this has shaped and continues to shape Finnish children, childhood, and family life. Secondly, through empirical work, it explores key processes of *family resilience* experienced relationally through (1) family dynamics and childhood, (2) family activities and use of the home space, and (3) individual children’s and families’ further reflections on their experiences and hopes for COVID-19. These three main themes further inform the research questions of the empirical study listed below:

### 1.6. Research Questions

**Table 1.** Matching themes with main and detailed research questions

Themes	Main Research Questions	Detailed Research Questions
Family Dynamic and Childhood	What are the roles, relations, and dynamics of the family? How is the life phase of childhood experienced?	How has COVID-19 affected family roles, relations, and dynamics? How has it affected experiences of childhood?
Family Activities and Use of the Home Space	What are the activities and meaning-making practices of children and their families? What are the spaces and places important to children and their families?	How has COVID-19 affected children and families’ activities and meaning-making practices? How has COVID-19 affected the ways in which children and families utilize, experience, and value the spaces and places at home?
Further Reflections on COVID-19	What are children and families’ personal experiences and hopes for the future?	How has COVID-19 affected children and families’ personal experiences and hopes for the future?

### 1.7. Thesis Outline

The thesis consists of eight chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces the research topic, personal motivation, purpose of the study, aims and objectives, and the research questions.

**Chapter 2** presents and critically outlines the theoretical frameworks that underpin the research study, namely the foundational principles of Childhood Studies, as well as the application of a *family resilience framework* in the research study in supporting children’s social well-being during times of crises.

**Chapter 3** provides the background and context of the research study. It contextualizes the geographical, historical, political, economic, social, and cultural developments of Finland, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, and how these influence changing family life, children, and childhood.

**Chapter 4** presents the methodological approaches behind the empirical study. It highlights the value of rights-based, participatory, systematic yet explorative research *with* and *for* children and their families.

**Chapter 5** explores the applications of the cultural probe package and innovative participatory methodological approaches to the design and data collection stages of fieldwork during a pandemic. Moreover, it discusses the advantages, limitations, and potentials of the various visual, written, and creative participatory tools and ethics applied in the empirical study.

**Chapter 6** presents the empirical results and findings through a three-part thematic analysis of (1) family dynamics and childhood, (2) home space and activities, and (3) children and families' further reflections on their experiences and hopes for COVID-19.

**Chapter 7** continues with a discussion of the overall research study drawing on the results from the findings in the background and context (chapter 3) in tandem with the empirical findings (chapter 6).

**Chapter 8** concludes the research project and addresses the potentials and further implications of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks**

The current research study is grounded in a contemporary sociological approach to theorizing children and childhood. The following chapter presents, critically discusses, and relates the foundational tenets of Childhood Studies to the current research study. It presents its moral, political, and theoretical principles that analyze childhood as a “social construction” and that view children as “active social agents” that are “worthy of study in their own right” (Prout & James, 1997, pp. 7). Nevertheless, in moving beyond foundational principles of children’s individual “agency”, “voice”, and “participation”, the study argues for a multi-level analysis – a structural, sociocultural, and relational – in understanding, contextualizing, and analyzing childhood. Furthermore, the study integrates a *family resilience framework* and its relational key processes in supporting children’s social well-being in times of crisis.

### **2.1. Childhood as a Social, Structural, Relational Phenomenon**

#### **2.1.1. Understanding childhood as a social construction**

Rather than conceptualizing “childhood” as a universal and biological stage of developmental and social immaturity (Jenks, 2004), a contemporary and sociological approach in understanding “childhood” acknowledges the specific social and cultural influences in determining ideas, beliefs, and experiences of a plurality of childhood(s). Building upon the key tenet of Childhood Studies that views “childhood” as a “social construction” (Jenks, 2004), the current study explores childhood as a social, structural, and relational phenomenon determined by the changing dynamics of time and place (Montgomery, 2003). Hence, key to understanding changing childhood is an examination of wider structural processes, such as the political, economic, and societal discourses, trends, and pressures (Mayall, 2009) of a particular time and place (Montgomery, 2003) on the everyday lived experiences of children, their cultures, and social relations. The research study argues that in order to better approach the sociological study of childhood, it is essential to systematically investigate and critically zoom in and zoom out of a variety of dynamic and interrelated scales – understanding and analyzing “childhood” through macro-, meso-, and micro-level lenses. This is further elaborated in the next section.

#### **2.1.2. Analyzing childhood as a generational category and structural feature in society**

In order to reflect upon the changing conceptualizations and experiences of children and their sociocultural worlds, the research study argues for a generational and structural approach in analyzing childhood(s). It adopts Alanen’s (2009) “generational

order" and structural analysis of "childhood" and "adulthood". Firstly, the study of generational relations explores the relationships between individuals located in different life stages such as "childhood" and "adulthood" (intergenerational relations) as well as between individuals sharing a life stage (intragenerational relations) (Alanen, 2009; pp. 160). Alanen's (2009) "generational order" views "children" and "adults" as distinct social categories or positions that develop generational identities through (1) a system of social ordering (i.e., wider structural, societal, cultural forces), and (2) everyday routine engagement with one another (Alanen, 2009). In other words, it views "children" and "adults" – their interdependent position, identity, and relation to one another – as influenced by a particular structural, sociocultural, and societal order (Alanen, 2009). Along these lines, Mayall (2009) also perceives "childhood" as a structural feature of a particular society, which, like "adulthood" is subject to political, socio-economic forces, "but in specific ways" (pp. 175). According to Mayall (2009), the key to analyzing childhood as understood and operationalized within, for example, families is the relation between the state (or society more generally) and families. Mayall (2009) states: "these forces impact the character of childhoods in relation to social institutions (outside families), in relation to how social institutions shape families, and also in relation to how childhood is worked through within families" (Mayall, 2009, pp. 175).

In sum, Mayall's (2009) and Alanen's (2014) "generationing" or "structural-relational" approach operates, in this particular study, as a systematic, analytical, and multi-scalar framework in analyzing childhood, which explores:

1. The generational structures that are composed of generational categories (positions) of childhood and adulthood, and linking them into reciprocal interdependency, as well as relationships of power
2. The material, social and cultural processes in which children and adults, as both individual and collective actors, are involved, and in which also their everyday activities are embedded so that generational (re)structuring is recurrently effected
3. The cultural systems of meanings, symbols, and semantics through which existing generational categories and their interrelationships are produced and rendered culturally meaningful

(Alanen, 2009, pp. 168)

Hence, the study argues that empirical research must consider "the organisation of social life, its (changing) divisions, their intersections and the resulting complexity in individual lives and social relations" (Alanen, 2014). In this case, the COVID-19

pandemic is considered as part of a broader structural process that has and continuous to impact and re-define contemporary Finnish children and childhood as well as other generational categories. The study of intergenerational relations - in this case, adult-child relations at a family level - can provide valuable insights into the lived experiences and meaning-making practices of Finnish childhood and family life with particular reference to the novel Coronavirus epidemic.

### **2.1.3. Childhood as a Relational Phenomenon**

The research study strives to move beyond the foundational principle that childhood should be studied irrespective of the perspectives and concerns of adults (Jenks, 2004; pp. 77). Rather, children's social relationships and cultures - which include adults - are worthy of study "in their own right". Indeed, as opposed to stereotyping "children" and "adults" as dichotomized oppositions to one another, it views notions of "power" (Christensen, 2004), "agency" (Valentine, 2011), and "participation" (Hart, 1992) as situated on a continuum based on the everyday negotiations between and among inter- and intra-generational relations. This is not to assume that adults and children are the same (Punch, 2002) or should be viewed as entirely "equal", it simply acknowledges the context-dependent, cultural, intersectional, dynamic, fluid, and relational nature of "power", "agency", and "participation". In this line of thought, Christensen (2004) claims that power is "not nested in categorical positions, such as "adult" or "child", but rather in the social representations of these that we make, negotiate, work out and work within social life." In other words, power is complex and dynamic, and cannot be reduced to preconceived notions of "adult power" over children. Thus, power moves between different actors and different social positions, it is produced and negotiated in the social interactions of child to adult, child to child, and adult to adult (pp 167).

The current research study focuses on children's social relations with their families which include their primary caregivers (i.e., mothers, fathers), as well as their sibling(s), hence different generational categories living together at home. Particularly in the context of Finland, the idea of the modern "nuclear family" consists of an internal system or structuring of generational relations, linking to each other the husband/father, the wife/mother, and their children. This implies that "intrafamilial relations are thus dependent on the reciprocal action taken by various members of the family" (Alanen, 2004, pp. 165).

## **2.2. Children's Social Well-Being within the Family and Home Space**

The concept of "well-being" can be open to numerous definitions and methodological approaches (Crivello, Camfield & Woodhead, 2009). The current study focuses on the social well-being of children and their families. In this case, "well-being" is ultimately a reflection of both personal and society's values and attitudes (Honkanen, Poikolainen & Karlsson). Rather than pre-defining traditional or universal markers of well-being, well-being is conceptualized, much like childhood, as a social, structural, relational or reciprocal phenomenon. A sociocultural approach defines well-being as both an individual and relationally produced experience bound by place, time, and interaction (Alanen, 2014). In other words, the focus is on the relationships and interaction between people and their environment, and how children use, experience, negotiate and value the home space.

The home space is considered as more than a physical place. It can also be explored as a sociocultural and relational space where well-being can be co-constructed, negotiated, and experienced. "Space and place are constitutive dimensions of children's lives" (Honkanen, Poikolainen & Karlsson, 2018, pp. 184). Exploring how children, "as local experts" of their familiar and important environments - whether it is the home, school, or neighborhood - construct meaning in their everyday places and spaces is of utmost value in understanding childhood experiences. Indeed, whereas "place" refers to the physical environment, "space can refer to a mental state, meaning emotions and senses, for example, of feeling good or experiencing well-being in a certain place. A transformation from place to space" (Honkanen, Poikolainen & Karlsson, 2018, pp. 191). On the other hand, "home" is also defined as a "political conception of social space" to which children's spatial and temporal boundaries are "determined by public discourses and local cultures of parenting" (Forsberg & Strandell, 2007, pp. 396). Nevertheless, Forsberg and Strandell (2007) argue that "children do not passively adhere to adults' definitions; rather they play an active part in the negotiations" (pp. 396). In fact, when referring to their after-school time alone at home, Finnish children appear to have a "personal and direct ownership of the home" (Forsberg & Strandell, 2007, pp. 397).

How children and families experience well-being or ill-being at home or in Finland may be different than in other countries such as Ethiopia (Camfield, 2012) or Bangladesh (Camfield, Choudhury & Devine, 2009). Indeed, subjective and relational constructions of well-being or happiness are influenced by the social and cultural context of these constructions (Camfield, Choudhury & Devine, 2009). However, regardless of the sociocultural context, identifying positive relationships or connections - whether it be

direct or extended family, mentors, or peers - as important markers or resources for well-being and resilience are universal (Camfield, 2012). Moreover, adult-child relations in Finland, the family unit operates as a foundational and integral part of children's care and everyday lives (Koskela, et. al., 2020). The research study is interested in how family well-being has been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic characterized by change and disruption in everyday life, routine, and the home environment. Co-researching with Finnish children and families about their subjective and relational experiences within the home space hopes to enable opportunities to reflect and express how families', together, have changed, re-arranged, adapted, and coped within the confines of their home in light of the COVID-19 conditions and constraints of lockdowns, social distancing, working from home, and distance learning.

## **2.4. Family Resilience in Times of Crisis**

In relation to children's subjective and social well-being, the research study integrates the concept of "family resilience". "Well-being" and "resilience" are thought of as mutually reinforcing characteristics that are beneficial to the collective (i.e., the family), the dyadic (i.e., marital, sibship), and the individual (i.e., the child, mother, father) (Prime, Browne & Wade, 2020). In diving into a structural, sociocultural, relational, as well as, empirical approach to Childhood Studies, the current research study applies Walsh's (1999; 2010; 2016; 2020) *family resilience framework*. The *family resilience framework*, originally intended for clinical and psychological practice, has for almost three decades been applied to a variety of different cultures, social groups, contexts, and crises (Walsh, 2010). It is thus considered a reliable and replicable framework in supporting children and families through crises. It views family - direct, indirect, and extended - as a functional and relational unit with the potentials of working together in unison in times of crises.

In the case of Finland, the social stressors wrought by crises, such as economic uncertainty, loss, trauma, or general disruptive changes in everyday life, can have short-term and long-term risks on individual family members (i.e., caregiver well-being), dyadic relations, (i.e., marital relations, sibship), that can ultimately have a negative "cascading" effect to child adjustment (Prime, Wade & Browne, 2020). Indeed, during Finland's 1990's recession, economic hardship negatively affected parental mental health, marital interaction, and parenting quality, which ultimately deteriorated children's mental health (Solantaus, Leinonen, Punamäki, 2004).

In highlighting families' capacities and opportunities for "resilience" - adapting, coping, and overcoming challenges in the face of adversity (Walsh, 2016) - the application of a *family resilience framework* moves away from the focus of individual risks and vulnerability factors towards highlighting the relational resources available within and outside the family and direct environment. It contextualizes crises through an ecological or multi-level lens that acknowledges the (1) wider structural disruptors, (2) the societal, environmental, and cultural resources, in relation to (3) the micro-level potentials in addressing intrafamilial adaptive or maladaptive mechanisms that further impact family functioning and child adjustment to crises situations (Prime, Browne & Wade, 2020). In today's COVID-19 crisis context, Salin, et. al. (2020) categorize family coping strategies into three levels: (1) macroenvironmental (e.g., services and support provided by society), (2) relationship level (e.g., family time), and (3) individual level (e.g., personal time) (pp. 6). Results in their study found that "relationship level" coping strategies, such as "the role of marital and parental relationships, as well as that of the family as a whole" were the most prevalent, hence the most significant, as opposed to individual or macroenvironmental coping strategies (pp.5). Salin, et. al.'s (2020) study on Finnish families' coping strategies during the COVID-19 lockdown inspired and further informed the design of the methods in the current research study. The coping strategies identified in Salin, et. al.'s (2020) study - such as "outdoor time", "family time", "alone time" - are compared and contrasted with the results in the current empirical study in the Data Analysis (chapter ?). On the other hand, Koskela, et. al.'s (2020) study on how Finnish parents had cope during remote learning recognizes schools' and teachers' role in promoting resilience in families (pp. 18) claiming that: "there was a possibility of coping resiliently through knowing their child, helping the family to adapt, and developing positive routines, which were easier when school and teachers collaborated meaningfully" (pp. 16).

In terms of its application, the *family resilience framework* includes several key processes that aim to "strengthen families through adversity" (Walsh, 2010). It views the clinician or researcher as a *facilitator* in collaborating with families in identifying and encouraging such key processes.



- 
- Belief systems*
1. Making meaning of adversity
    - Relational view of resilience
    - Normalize, contextualize distress
    - Sense of coherence: view crisis as meaningful, comprehensible, manageable challenge
    - Facilitative appraisal: explanatory attributions; future expectations
  2. Positive outlook
    - Hope, optimistic bias; confidence in overcoming challenges
    - Encouragement; affirm strengths, focus on potential
    - Active initiative and perseverance (can-do spirit)
    - Master the possible; accept what can't be changed; tolerate uncertainty
  3. Transcendence and spirituality
    - Larger values, purpose
    - Spirituality: faith, contemplative practices, community; connection with nature
    - Inspiration: envision possibilities, aspirations; creative expression; social action
    - Transformation: learning, change, and positive growth from adversity
- Organizational processes*
4. Flexibility
    - Rebound, adaptive change to meet new challenges
    - Reorganize, restabilize: continuity, dependability, predictability
    - Strong authoritative leadership: nurture, guide, protect
    - Varied family forms: cooperative parenting/caregiving teams
    - Couple/coparent relationship: mutual respect; equal partners
  5. Connectedness
    - Mutual support, teamwork, and commitment
    - Respect individual needs, differences
    - Seek reconnection and repair grievances
  6. Mobilize social and economic resources
    - Recruit extended kin, social, and community supports; models and mentors
    - Build financial security; navigate stressful work/family challenges
    - Transactions with larger systems: access institutional, structural supports
- Communication/problem-solving processes*
7. Clarity
    - Clear, consistent messages, information
    - Clarify ambiguous situation; truth seeking
  8. Open emotional sharing
    - Painful feelings: (sadness, suffering, anger, fear, disappointment, remorse)
    - Positive interactions: (love, appreciation, gratitude, humor, fun, respite)
  9. Collaborative problem solving
    - Creative brainstorming; resourcefulness
    - Share decision-making; repair conflicts; negotiation, fairness
    - Focusing on goals; concrete steps; build on success; learn from setbacks
    - Proactive stance: preparedness, planning, prevention
- 

**Figure 1.** Key processes in the family resilience framework (Walsh, 2016, pp. 319)

Indeed, the research study relates Walsh's (1999; 2010; 2016; 2020) *family resilience framework* and its key processes such as "meaning-making of adversity", "positive outlook", "spirituality", "family organizational patterns (i.e., flexibility, connectedness, collaboration)", "communication and problem solving (i.e., open emotional expression, pleasurable interactions, humor) with the methodology and methods. These key processes are believed to be elicited or supported in the empirical use of the cultural probe package. This is further discussed in chapter 5 Methods.

To summarize the theoretical frameworks chapter, the current research study aims to understand, examine, and analyze changing childhood(s) through (1) the structural context of the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) the sociocultural context of Finland, as well as (3) the relational processes of everyday childhood and family life at home in order to gain a holistic understanding and exploration of children and families' well-being and resilience in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

## Chapter 3: Background and Context

The present chapter illustrates the historical, political, and cultural background and context of Finland, and how these elements have ultimately shaped and continuously re-define conceptualizations and experiences of childhood and family life. Furthermore, it locates these within the context of crisis – drawing parallels on how Finland has fared during the 1990’s recession period in parallel to today’s ongoing COVID-19 global health crisis.

### 3.1 Historical and Geographical Developments



*Map 1. Map of Finland by Worldometer*

#### 3.1.1. Finland as a Historically Unique Nordic Country: Divisions and Isolation

Finland is characterized by its “frontier setting”, being geographically located at the latitudinal tip of Europe (Mead, 1977). There is evidence of settlers being present in Finland around 7000 BCE, with a major wave of groups entering the region around 4000 BCE from what is now Russia (Britannica, 2011). Finland is distinct from its Scandinavian neighbors (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland) in that it shares a large border with Russia. Thus, Finland is placed between two major cultures - Scandinavian and Russian (Mead, 1997). This partly explains a degree of cultural differentiation between the Western regions of Finland - which are concentrated along the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia and have a higher number of Swedish-speaking inhabitants - and the Eastern regions which have characteristically fewer Swedish-speaking populations (Mead, 1977). In fact, Finland was divided between the Swedish and Russian empires for much of its history, being handed over to Russia by Sweden in 1809 and becoming an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia (Latomaa and Nuolijärvi, 2002). This autonomy led to the gradual formation of the Finnish state. Despite these regional differences, Finland has a unified national identity making the nation ethnographically unique (Mead, 1977). This is due, in

part, to the fact that the region has been geographically isolated from the rest of Europe up until the 19th century because of ice obstruction (Mead, 1997). This implies that Finnish people have not had access to the benefits of trade for much of their history and have had to make due in a self-sufficient manner.

### **3.1.2. Finnish National Identity: Collective and Individual Resilience, Equality, and Duty**

The national concept of *sisu* can be seen as an extension of this independence, it being a signifier of *willful perseverance*. The concept itself dates back hundreds of years and is related to other concepts like resilience, action mindset, and perseverance (Lahti, 2013). The concept of *sisu* played an integral role in the mythology surrounding Finland's Winter War against the Soviet Union during the Second World War. *Sisu* is the property that enabled the small nation to defend against the much larger Soviet force, a seemingly impossible task. The collective dimension of *sisu* (i.e. that Finland is nationally characterized by it) is built - bottom-up - from the resilience of the individual Finns who comprise the collective. After World War two, this characteristic was transferred to the creation of farmland for tens of thousands of displaced Finns following the Russian armistice of 1944 (Mead, 1977). As a result, the Finns managed to clear a substantial amount of forest land in Eastern Finland, allowing for the continuation of rural life for the displaced population (Mead, 2007). By the 2000s, there is almost no distinction between the rural farming areas of those who were displaced during the second world war and those who had pre-existing farming lands. This is largely due to farming legislation introduced by the Finnish Government to provide equal monetary support for machinery, equipment, and technology to farmers (Mead, 2007). This is evidence of the inherent equality of the Finnish people, which has since become a central feature of their political culture (Leijola, 2004). Equality is also historically rooted in Finnish identity, as it was the first European country to introduce universal suffrage in 1906, allowing Finnish women to vote in parliamentary elections (Latomaa and Nuolijärvi, 2002).

The triumphant success against the USSR during the second world war and the successful integration of displaced Finns led to a period of heightened territoriality. As a result, Finland is more territorially minded than many other countries (Mead, 1977). This is evidenced by the fact that Finland still has mandatory military service for all men to this day. While the justification for mandatory conscription is justified on the basis of Finnish territorial sovereignty against the threat from Russia (Nokkala, 2009). Finnish men undergo 6-12 months of mandatory training, with intermittent callbacks (for re-training) throughout their life course (Ahlbäck, 2016). This training is culturally represented in terms of manhood, marking the turning point from boy to man and

marking the role of each individual man in defending the country (Ahlbäck, 2016). Thus, we can not only infer from the mandatory military service that Finland is uniquely concerned with its geographic sovereignty, but also that the period of service itself functions to strengthen a sense of national duty and commitment to one's nation. At the same time, there are modern demographic changes that have challenged these territorial and nationalistic drives.

### **3.1.3. Technological and Economic Developments**

Another important historical development is the move from rural to urban, which has been primarily facilitated through the high level of Finnish technological competencies - leading to a change from the rural Finn to the urban Finn (Mead, 2020). This development happened rather late for Finland, relative to other European nations, as net migration in large cities was mostly negative until the 1990s. The most significant development in terms of technology was the creation and expansion of Nokia, the world's largest mobile phone company from the 1990s to the early 2000s. The company itself had a significant impact on the Finnish economy (Ali-Yrkkö et al, 2000), helping it emerge out of a major recession in the early 1990s. This breakthrough has initiated a culture of tech entrepreneurship with internationally recognized companies like Rovio (angry birds), Supercell, and Oura growing rapidly. Moreover, Finland has invested in startup culture trying to create incubation centers for future success stories like the companies mentioned above. The increase in business and startup activity has led to greater urbanization around the major cities like Helsinki, Turku, and Tampere.

To sum up, Finland has a long national history and unified culture that has formed in response to the geographic and culturally unique setting within which it is located. At the same time, Finland is a relatively young state, having gained independence from Russia only in 1917. With increases in global interconnectedness and the success of the Finnish technological industry, Finland is becoming increasingly urban and is beginning to lose its rural national heritage. Finland has been increasingly cooperative at the regional and international level, becoming members of the United Nations in 1955, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1986, the Council of Europe in 1989, and the European Union in 1995 adopting the Euro as its currency in 2002 (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). The next section will look at the specific ways in which globalization, increased urbanization, and economic competitiveness has shaped Finland's cultural character in the last 30 years.

## **3.2 Population, Language, and Culture**

### **3.2.1. Population and Religion**

Finland has a population of 5.5 million persons (Worldometer, 2021), with the primary spoken language being Finnish - 92.3 percent have Finnish as their first language (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). Finnish and Swedish are the two official languages of the country according to the constitution, with public administration requiring equal access to services in both languages. The Swedish-speaking population is a minority amounting to 5.7 percent of the total population (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002) and being geographically concentrated in the Western regions. Saami is also spoken by a governmentally recognized minority of Saami people who reside in the northern edges of the country.

The Lutheran Church was the “only official religion in Finland” from the 16th century until the Russian autonomy period of 1809-1917 when the Orthodox Church rose in prominence (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002, p. 116). Though the country is majority Lutheran to this day, there are a multitude of religions being practiced in the country, a trend that began with the Religious Freedom Law in 1922 (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). The major trend in the recent decades has been a move toward secularization, with traditional Lutheranism becoming a more cultural and secular form of Finnish history and nationalism rather than a fundamentally religious institution and phenomenon (Kuusisto et al., 2017).

### **3.2.2. Finnish Culture: Forest Nature, Sauna, Summer Cottage**

As Finland has become more urbanized, so has the importance of dedicated family time in nature (Rantala & Puhakka, 2020). “Jokamiehen oikeus” or “every man’s right” is a legal and national cultural principle by which each person has the right to explore, roam freely, camp, and forage in Finnish forests (Tuunanen et al., 2012). The principle is consistent with the Finnish preoccupation with the outdoors, as 96% percent of Finns engage in outdoor activities (Rantala & Puhakka, 2020). Moreover, summer villas - *mökki* - are plentiful with around one villa per ten inhabitants - 475,000 cottages (Statistics Finland, 2007). Spending time in summer villas can thus be characterized as a national leisure activity (Statistics Finland, 2007). Interestingly, engagement with nature is not a *top-down* (i.e. parentally enforced) process but rather an intergenerational and interactive process that engages children and youths (Rantala and Puhakka, 2020). In fact, Rantala and Puhakka (2020) provide recent evidence that suggests that time in nature serves several functions that are beneficial for children and youths, namely: (a) that it enables relaxation, (b) it creates distance from the pressures of everyday life, and

(c) it affords increased and more intimate interaction within families through novel forms of interaction and exploration. Moreover, they found that the more time families spent in nature, the greater the positive impact on the family dynamic.

### **3.2.3. The Finnish Language**

The Finnish language is unique in that it is independent of the Scandinavian languages and Russian. It is broadly classified as Uralic and subclassified as Finno-Ugric (Laakso, 2020), a category to which Hungarians, Estonians, Mordvins, and Finns belong. Finnish has remained linguistically distinct from other languages and has not strongly integrated words from other regions, having 80 percent of its undivided stem words being of old Finnish origin and only 20 percent being loaned, with the oldest Finnish words dating back 6000 years (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). The Finnish language became codified through Mikael Agricolos' biblical work in the 16th century, with the period of Old Finnish ending in the 19th century, Early Modern Finnish Emerging in the 1820s, and modern Finnish in the 1870s (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). Interestingly, although the country is small in terms of population, the Finnish language is divided into various dialects that have strong regional variation (Britannica, 2021). These dialects, however, are similar enough such that all variations are comprehensible by most Finns (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002).

Finnish persons are competent at foreign languages, as foreign language education is an important part of the Finnish school system (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). Finns have had to develop foreign language skills in order to trade and cooperate with their neighbors. With the onset of globalization and with English becoming the lingua franca of the international domain, Finns have begun to increasingly prefer English as their foreign language of choice (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002).

Finland is a world leader in literacy, having a fully literate (i.e. 100%) public (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). This is a consequence of the Finnish states prioritizing education from its inception. In the 1870s there were only four state-run Finnish-language schools for boys and no such schools for girls (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). Extending education to all became an important theme in the 1920s after Finland gained independence, with the 1919 Constitution obligating free compulsory education (Latomaa & Nuolijärvi, 2002). Consistent with the linguistic division, education is provided in Finnish and in Swedish at all levels.

### **3.3 Children, Childhood, and Family Life**

#### **3.3.1. World Renowned Finnish Educational System: Social Equality and Problem Solving**

Contemporary education in Finland has a tertiary structure, with basic education consisting of grades 1-9 from the ages of seven to sixteen, upper secondary being split into general upper secondary schools and vocational schools (ages sixteen to nineteen) and tertiary schools (universities, polytechnics). The country has performed exceptionally well on international educational assessment tests like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which Finland led in 2000 and 2003 (Sahlberg, 2011). This was pronounced to be an educational miracle, with the system being studied greatly by educational scientists. The Finnish model is based on equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism, and trust, which itself reflects changes in Finnish policy from agrarianism to a more urbanized "knowledge economy" (Sahlberg, 2007).

1985 marked a significant date for the development of the modern system, as it is when the Finnish Government introduced municipal control over education. This led to increased autonomy over curriculum design and greater freedom for individual teachers to plan and organize their own teaching (Laukkanen, 2008). It also led to increased educational flexibility, allowing for maximally effective teaching depending on the needs of different social contexts. This was further ratified in 1994, as the National Board of Education decided to only give very broad guidelines for the contents and aims of teaching (Laukkanen, 2008). Problem-solving became a central feature of the educational system, as "local needs could be taken into consideration and special characteristics of schools could be taken into account" (Laukkanen, 2018, p. 310). At the same time, the Finnish Government began a systematic evaluation system for education in 1995 (Laukkanen, 2018). Because the Finnish basic education system does not have any nationally instituted examinations, there was a need to study the efficacy of the system through non-test-based means. This has led to increased cooperation between teachers at the ground level, administrators, and governmental agencies. Moreover, it has led to increased cooperation between different schools and regions, creating a sense of self-ownership on the part of educational stakeholders (Laukkanen, 2018).

What is interesting is that Finland has emphasized the careful management of the educational system itself, rather than being preoccupied with testing and evaluating individual students. This approach has led to direct benefits for the educational attainment of the students themselves, which is evidenced by their success in international tests like the PISA test. But this success is broad rather than narrow, with the Government giving attention to the education of *all* and not only to the academically

gifted. For example, 19.7% of Finnish students receive extra support for learning difficulties, while the median international rate was only 6% (Laukkanen, 2018). This is evidence of the inherent equity of the Finnish educational system, where the health of the system is not defined merely by the success of a small minority of students, but by the level of attainment for *all* students. This implies that Finnish teachers also have a broad range of qualifications, providing support for many different kinds of learners. One important factor is that Finnish teachers are highly esteemed and well educated, with a master's degree being an employment pre-requisite.

### **3.3.2. Family Demographics**

The predominant family structure in Finland is that of a married couple with children (64%), followed by a cohabiting couple with children, a mother and children and a father with children (Statistics Finland, 2020). The average number of children in Finnish families is 1.8, leading to a projection of population decline in the future (Statistics Finland, 2020). The total number of families with children in 2019 was 558,302 which was 3,664 decline from a year before (Statistics Finland, 2020). Thus, there are slow demographic changes occurring in the Finnish family structure, although it is currently quite traditional (i.e. predominantly married couples) in its constitution and makeup.

### **3.3.3. Societal Values: Self-Direction, Creativity, Trust**

Tulviste and Ahtonen (2007) found that Finnish parents valued benevolence as a primary trait for their children to espouse. Among this category are sub-values such as kindness, niceness, friendliness, et cetera. The second most important value for Finnish parents was self-direction, through independence and creativity. Trustworthiness and belief in one's own abilities were also important values for Finnish parents. Finnish parents endorse hedonic values like "being happy" and "enjoying life" which are posited to relate to the freedom and stability of the Finnish welfare state (Tulviste and Ahtonen, 2007). Conversely, Finnish parents do not place importance on their children being characterized as *obedient, leaders, smart or influential persons* (Tulviste and Ahtonen, 2007). It is interesting that these values mirror the values espoused by the Finnish educational system. For example, self-direction is a key characteristic of teachers, and independence and creativity are emphasized by the educational system. Also, a lack of emphasis on exceptionalism (i.e. lack of interest in children being leaders or influential) is consistent with the notion that each person has value beyond their identification in a particular social hierarchy. Finnish parents care more about their children being happy than that they are professionally successful or influential in the future. This is consistent



with recent world happiness reports, with Finland being the happiest country for the fourth year running (Rowan, 2021). This happiness is not only tied to parental values but also to the values that help create the social and cultural system that define the country.

#### **3.3.4. Welfare State of Finland**

Finland is characterized as a welfare state which is modelled around maximizing benefits and well-being for individuals and also for families. In the system, women have a high level of participation in work life and there is a comprehensive system of social security that includes free education, strict labour laws, free health-care, and other social services (Leinonen et al., 2003). The system is dependent on a functioning economy, which is challenged in times of recession or dramatic changes in social dynamics. One such event was the 1990s recession which is comparable in its effects to the great depression of the 1930s in the US, an event that led to substantial cuts in social welfare (Heikkilä & Uusitalo, 1997). Interestingly, there was not an observable increase in the number of families living below the poverty line during or after the recession, because the social security system was robust enough to maintain a minimum welfare standard (Heikkilä & Uusitalo, 1997). This is evidenced by the maintenance and exceptional performance of the Finnish educational system (which is free of charge) and the resulting success of Finnish students ten years later in the PISA tests.

### **3.4 Finland in Crisis**

#### **3.4.1. Parallels between the 1990's recession and COVID-19**

The degree of economic strain during the recession was associated with quality of parenting (Leinonen et al., 2003), showing a relationship between large-scale social events and the individual experiences of children. Since Finnish women are employed at almost equal rates to men (currently 70.7 to 72.5) large scale events impact both mothers and fathers in a similar manner (Statistics Finland, 2021). This implies that children from families wherein both parents face economic difficulties are at greater risk of punitive behavior and of receiving less emotional support (Leinonen et al, 2003). By implication, childrens equality was challenged during the recession in an unforeseen manner.

While the 1990s recession did not stop children from attending schools and other social networks that enhance their wellbeing, COVID has led to unprecedented restrictions in this regard. For example, because education has become largely digital during COVID, childrens ability to adapt and succeed in the new learning environment is

at least partly dependent on the parents abilities to provide support and resources for that end (Koskela et al., 2020). This has challenged the central concept of equality that underlies the Finnish welfare model as the advantages and disadvantages of online learning became enhanced based on the parental and familial context of the child.

The problem is magnified when considering the various roles played by the educational system in children's lives. The concept of equality not only relates to equal educational access but also "means that all students receive a free two-course warm meal daily, free health care, transportation, learning materials, and counselling in their own schools" (Sahlberg, 2007, p.154). For children from more disadvantaged backgrounds, these services are essential to their well-being, with school meals being the "only warm meal of the day" for many children (MTV, 2020). This has posed serious challenges for municipal authorities as they must balance these challenges with a number of other conflicting and equally important challenges during COVID (MTV, 2020).

Just as the Finnish government was able to ensure basic levels of social welfare during the 1990s recession, ensuring that poverty did not increase, the government has managed to provide a baseline degree of service to children during COVID. The radical change in children's everyday lives, has however, significantly increased the role of parental involvement in children's well-being. Whereas the educational system served as an equalizing variable during the recession, such functions have been minimized due to the social distanced nature of children's everyday lives during COVID. Thus, the resilience of families has become a central feature of importance for children during these challenging times.

Such resilience was evidenced during the recession by the changes families made in order to cope with the realities they faced. Finnish families adapted to the economic hardships brought about by the recession through structural adjustments like reducing expenditures, postponing important purchases and cancelling holiday plans (Leinonen et al., 2003). Interestingly, although COVID has not presented the same degree of economic hardship (the employment rate being higher in September 2020 than Septmeber 2016, Stastics Finland (2020b)), it has led to similar structural adjustments for families. Families have had to cancel holidays, constrain their leisure activities, postpone important purchases because of the increased responsibility in the family home, among other relevant changes. It is therefore interesting to use the recession period as an informative case study in order to better understand the current situation and future trajectories.

### 3.4.2. COVID-19 Timeline in Finland

To end this section, a quick overview of the COVID timeline in Finland will be given, followed by a summary of this section.

**January 2020:** the first case was reported in Finland on January 29 (Yle, 2020).

**March 2020:** the Finnish Government declares a state of emergency, leading to the closure of schools and restrictions on social gatherings (Yle, 2020b). The First death was reported on March 21 (Yle, 2020c).

**May 2020:** schools are reopened on the 14th of May with new regulations like the avoidance of unnecessary contact between students, and less students per classroom and other shared spaces (Yle, 2020d). New daily deaths were close to zero between May 2020 and October 2020, with total deaths being below 400 in October (Worldometer, 2021).

**October 2020:** Total cases exceed 10,000, with a new record daily case number of 344 on the 30th of October (Iltasanomat, 2020).

**December 2020:** On the 28th of December Finland receives Pfizer and BioNtech COVID-19 vaccines which are administered on the 29th (Yle, 2020e). Total deaths before the New Year (i.e. December 31) is 561, while total cases is 36,107 (Worldometer, 2021).

Hence, Finland was not as severely impacted by COVID-19 as other European countries. The highest daily deaths was 43 persons, which is relatively low (Worldometer, 2021).

## **Chapter 4: A Systematic yet Meaningful Approach to Participatory Research Methodology**

Extending the discussion on the theoretical frameworks (chapter 2), this methodology chapter aims to adapt and build upon the aforementioned moral principles in Childhood Studies from theory to empirical research. Hence it discusses the relevant methodological frameworks and prior literature that seek to improve child-centered research by moving beyond theoretical issues of “voice, participation, agency, interpretation, representation, and ethics” (Canosa & Graham, 2020; Hammersley, 2017). It does so by arguing for ethical or rights-based social research that is both systematic yet explorative, as well as child-centered yet relational. Namely, it draws inspiration from (1) the *Right to be Properly Researched* Manuals by Ennew, et. al., 2009, (2) the participatory Mosaic approach by Clark and Moss (2001; 2005; 2011), and finally, (3) the design-led approach of the cultural probe package. These operating methodological frameworks along with their complimentary associated characteristics are outlined below. Furthermore, the chapter ends with how these were applied in the planning stage of the empirical study.

### **4.1. Methodological Frameworks**

#### **4.1.1. A Rights-Based Approach: Designing Ethical Research for Children**

The shift from adult-exclusive to the meaningful inclusion of children and young people in research can be attributed to (a) the paradigm shift in Childhood Studies and the acknowledgment of children and young people as competent social actors, (b) UNCRRC’s recognition of children as rights-holders, and (c) the development of participatory research methods (Cuevas-Parra, 2020, pp. 3). The current study takes on a rights-informed approach to child-centered research. The *Right to be Properly Researched* manuals by Ennew, et. al. (2009) and its applications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) articles 3.3, 12, 13, and 36 serve as a starting point, a guiding principle, and an ethical commitment to child-centered, participatory research that is systematic and rigorous (Manual 1, pp. 19; Abebe & Bessell, 2009). These translations of human rights to research include children’s rights: (1) to be involved in high quality “scientific” standards in research (art. 3.3), (2) to participate in all matters that concern them (art. 12.1), (3) to freedom of expression (art. 13.1), and (4) to protection from harm in the research process (art. 36) (Ennew, et. al., 2009, Manual 1, pp. 18). The importance of systematically abiding by these applications of rights to research is further clarified below.

#### **4.1.2. Scientific Social Research: A Systematic yet Explorative Approach in Generating Knowledge**

The current study strives to conduct research that respects children's rights to be involved in research that "conforms to the highest possible scientific standards" (Ennew, et. al., Manual 1, pp. 18, 2009). "Scientific social research" is defined as qualitative or descriptive research that is systematically informed, designed, carried out, documented, and reported (Ennew, et. al., 2009). Firstly, each stage in the research process - from formulating research questions (Alderson & Morrow, 2020), to the data collection stage (Abebe, 2014), up until the dissemination of the findings (Van Blerk & Ansell, 2007) - is systematically and critically informed by a rights-based approach (Ennew, et. al., 2009), as well as, the aforementioned moral principles featured in Childhood Studies. To reiterate, children (and their families) are viewed in the research process as "competent", "social actors" worthy of study "in their own right". Moreover, each stage in the research process is critically and explicitly accounted for and systematically contingent upon one another, for example by matching research questions to research methods (see table 2 at the end of this chapter).

Secondly, scientific social research consists of multiple methods. The use of multiple methods enables the triangulation of information gathered from multiple and various tools and techniques, as well as different parties or groups of participants involved in the research (Punch, 2002; Ennew, et. al., 2009; Beazley & Ennew, 2006). In other words, the systematic use of multiple methods enables the researcher to cross-check and compare and contrast data collected from a variety of sources before reaching conclusions (Ennew, et. al., 2009; Punch, 2002). Moreover, it enables the researcher to avoid biases and overreliance on a single method (Punch, 2002). Hence, the triangulation of multiple methods is believed to yield reliable results and replicable data gathering methods, all with the intent of respecting and representing children's own views, opinions, experiences, and interests (Ennew, et. al., 2009). Nevertheless, the purpose of scientific social research does not necessarily depend on a "single neat answer as triangulation might suggest, but rather, it reveals the complexities of lived experience" (Clark & Moss, 2011, pp. 6).

Beazley & Ennew (2006) coined the "tyranny of the quantitative" which spotlights the preference for and overreliance on single-method, quantitative and controlled methodologies in opposition to qualitative and descriptive research. This misconception is believed to limit the potentials of innovative, genuine, and ethically sound opportunities for research that aims to inform public and policy opinion of the everyday lives of local groups and communities. Rather than viewing quantitative and qualitative

methodologies as separate entities, research should strive to find a balance between traditional or controlled methodologies (e.g., statistical surveys) and explorative or creative methods (Punch, 2002; Ennew, et. al., 2009). This is particularly important in accounting for research that seeks to understand the complexities and interdependencies of local group's everyday lived experiences, histories, relations, cultures, both outside and within the research process. These cannot be reduced to a single method or form of numerical analysis. Social scientific research then consists of both systematic yet explorative research that views the research process as "knowledge creation rather than knowledge extraction" (Clark & Moss, 2011, pp. 4). Indeed, as opposed to "extracting" the truth from participants, the study views data collection and the research process as opportunities for creating meanings *with* and *for* children and their families. As a matter of fact, it accepts the "messiness, ambiguity, polyvocality, non-factuality, and multi-layered nature of meaning in "stories" that research produces" (Spyrou, 2011, pp. 162). Instead, the quality of child-centered, participatory research is largely dependent on how and to what extent it is contextually and situationally informed (Ennew, et. al., 2009; Spyrou, 2011), how methods are systematically used and analyzed (Beazley & Ennew, 2006), and how thorough the research process is transparent (Spyrou, 2011; Honkanen, Poikolainen & Karlsson, 2018) as well as ethically sound (Abebe & Bessell, 2014).

#### **4.1.3 A Participatory Approach to Research: Co-Researching *with* Children and Adults**

The UNCRC's article 12.1 acknowledges children's basic human right to participation in all matters that concern them. Inspired by Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in development studies, participatory research prioritizes marginalized or disempowered groups' - such as children and young people's - own perspectives, interests, and opinions as integral in informing research and policy interventions (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). Indeed, in respecting children and young people's right to participation, participatory research strives to involve child (and adult) participants in various (and ideally all) stages of the research process (Grant, 2017). This in turn is believed to enable participants to gain a sense of ownership of *their* data, and in some ways, achieve a sense of empowerment (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). Indeed, participatory research invites researchers, as well as non-academically trained individuals, such as children and adults in the community in the research process. This collective and collaborative effort to explore or work towards improvement in their everyday lives is viewed as meaningful and impactful.

Similar to PRA techniques is Clark and Moss' (2001; 2005; 2011) Mosaic framework to participatory research that adapted itself to "seeing and listening" young

children. The Mosaic approach provides a child-focused, yet all-inclusive and collaborative framework that acknowledges even the youngest children as competent and active agents in their own lives. Despite the central focus on children, the Mosaic approach also highlights the importance of including adults - namely primary caregivers, practitioners, and stakeholders - in order to complete the community picture of children's everyday lives. In this manner, the Mosaic approach views child-centered research as a "tangible focus for those responsible for young children to reflect together on children's perspectives, led by the children themselves" (Clark & Moss, 2011, pp. 9). Thus research should not undervalue children's already-established, meaningful relationships and interdependence with the adults (and other generational categories) important in their lives. Abebe & Bessell (2014) mention that "ultimately, children's relationships with family, friends and community remain of greater value and influence in their lives than research-based relationships" (pp. 130). Indeed, including adults in the research process is believed to help even the youngest, pre-verbal, children in the family or community to participate, while ensuring that children's "voices" are genuinely being heard. Indeed, in Childhood Studies research, "children's voices" have been exclusive to 10-12 year olds while neglecting the voices of younger age groups (McNamee & Seymour, 2012). It is believed in this study that the inclusion and assistance of adults, particularly primary caregivers or close relations, could lead to more collaborative, genuine and profound interpretations of young children's voices. Furthermore, involving key adult actors, such as practitioners or stakeholders within an institution or organization, can initiate collaborative and intergenerational learning through meaning-making experiences throughout the research process (Cushing & van Vliet, 2016). This could potentially lead to positive and more inclusive social change that includes children's interests, views, and opinions in the decision-making process (Wyness, 2012).

Indeed, a participatory approach to research *with* and preferably *by* children and adults views the data collection process as a co-production of knowledge. In other words, as a collaboration and meaningful conversation between the researcher as *facilitator* and children and adults as *co-researchers* (Clark & Moss, 2001; Honkanen, Poikolainen & Karlsson, 2018; Beazley & Ennew, 2006; Cuevas-Parra, 2020). The researcher's role as *facilitator* then is to design, provide, listen, learn, and, wherever possible, hand over control to participants (Beazley & Ennew, 2006) in reflecting on their own experiences and everyday lives. The rich combination of data pieced together "in a Mosaic" between and among the researcher, children, and adults forms a "living picture" of children's everyday lives.

However, it is important to bear in mind that no research is inherently "participatory" (Beazley & Ennew, 2006; Spyrou, 2011). Indeed, Beazley & Ennew

(2006) coined “the tyranny of the quantitative” as well as the “tyranny of participation”. The “tyranny of participation” points out that participatory research does not directly equate to the empowerment or genuine engagement of children and their communities. Participatory research runs the risks of, for example, coercing their participation in accordance with specific research agendas, or researchers leaving the fieldwork site without necessarily empowering children and their communities. It is important to recognize and be mindful of the ways in which we interpret “children’s views and also their silences” (Clark & Moss, 2011, pp. 9). In efforts to present reliable and genuine child-centered research, participatory research and analysis must be culturally situated, critically aware of situated and negotiated adult-child power relations (Christensen, 2004), reflexive and flexible in its techniques (Clark & Moss, 2011; Abebe, 2009). In sum, the purpose is to facilitate the co-construction of meanings through a genuine, reflexive, flexible, and collaborative effort. This can furthermore be achieved through a variety of tools, techniques, and methods that ensures children’s and adults’ genuine engagement.

#### **4.1.4 Using Multiple Methods: Freedom of Expression and Genuine Engagement**

In order to realize children’s rights to participation and freedom of expression, methods and techniques need to be found and used in order to help children express their views in research freely (Ennew, et. al., 2009, Manual 1, pp.18). As previously mentioned, the research study argues for the use of multiple methods in co-constructing and generating knowledge. The use of different visual, verbal, creative, group-based, or individual-based methods provides a variety of opportunities that are suitable for and are all-encompassing of participants’ different ages, gender, literacy levels, interests, and preferences (Grant, 2017). Hence, the design of these creative methods aim to account for children’s varied experiences, interests, competencies, and ideal means of communicating (Punch, 2002). The creative methods used in participatory research are primarily visual to accommodate for differences in ages, literacy levels, and in this particular research study, language barriers. Verbal methods (e.g., interviews) may not work with younger children or shy children (Ennew, et. al., 2009). Visual techniques may also be an ideal means of communication when a topic is difficult to talk about (Beazley, 2006). Nevertheless, a Mosaic framework for listening that combines the “visual” with the “verbal” utilizes tools that enable young children to communicate their ideas and feelings to adults in other and more genuine symbolic ways. Indeed, in arguing for a balance between traditional and explorative methodologies, creative methods may serve as “a springboard for more talking, listening, and reflecting” (Clark & Moss, 2011, pp. 8).



A combination of visual, creative, and traditional techniques is not only participant-centered but is found to be more appealing than traditional methods, such as one-on-one interviews or questionnaires (Punch, 2002). "Children who experience difficulties in expressing themselves verbally or in writing may find that images allow them to express themselves more easily and make their participation in research more pleasurable, especially when they are involved in aesthetic creation" (Spyrou, 2011, pp. 153). Moreover, these participatory methods can also be applied to research *with* adults and are not limited to children (Punch, 2002). Indeed, multiple methods have been shown to sustain not only children's but also adults' interest and genuine participation in research projects. Thus, the appropriate multiple participatory tools and techniques must be carefully assessed and contextually and situationally appropriate in order to ensure that children's as well as adult's relational experiences, views, and opinions are respectfully represented (Ennew, et. al., 2009). Clark & Moss (2011) suggest that these forms of expression or modes of communication can, for example, be closely aligned to how children might choose to communicate with friends and family. For example, if children and parents enjoy drawing together as a hobby, it would be complementary to include drawing as a participatory tool in the study.

Consequently, such use of mixed methods with multiple actors can be both beneficial as well as problematic. According to Punch (2002), the problem with using innovative techniques is that the drawbacks and limitations of using them are not always scrutinized. Reflexivity should be a central part of the research process with children, where researchers critically reflect not only on their role and their assumptions but also on the choice of methods and their application (Punch, 2002). Researchers should engage in a critical reflection of the use of such 'child-centered' methods in order to explore the advantages and disadvantages of how they work in practice and the implications for the analysis of the different kinds of data that are generated. Thus, it heavily relies on and requires the researcher's reflexivity, planning, flexibility, and transparency of the advantages and disadvantages of the applications and implications of each method (Spyrou, 2011). "At the same time, critical, reflexive researchers need to move beyond the claims of authenticity and account for the complexity behind children's voices by exploring their messy, multi-layered and non-normative character" (Spyrou, 2011). The choice of methods not only depends on the age, competence, experience, preference, and social status of the research subjects but also on the cultural environment and the physical setting, as well as the research questions and the competencies of the researcher. A fundamental aspect of human-centered research is to respect individuality and take account of major group differences whether they be class, age, gender, disability, ethnicity, or culture. (Punch, 2002)

#### **4.1.5 Protecting Children from Harm: Moving Beyond Procedural Guidelines**

The use of multiple methods “while creating ample opportunities for rich insights”, “presents unique sets of personal, moral, ethical, and methodological dilemmas” (Abebe, 2009, pp. 452). In promoting and progressing rights-based, ethical research *with* and *for* children, research must move beyond formal ethical procedures and guidelines (Abebe & Bessell, 2009). In protecting children against harm, the research must carefully assess the harms and benefits of the study throughout the research process (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). As mentioned earlier, a rights-based approach to child-centered research anticipates, addresses, and tackles ethical dilemmas and concerns throughout every stage of the research process – from the planning stages up until the dissemination of the findings (Alderson & Morrow, 2020; Ennew, et. al., 2009; Van Blerk & Ansell, 2006). It is thus the researcher’s primary duty to prevent and protect children and other participants involved in the research process from harm.

According to Abebe & Bessell (2009), three different types of ethics are distinguished: (a) procedural ethics, (b) situational ethics, and (c) what Abebe and Bessell (2014) term “local ethos”. Firstly, procedural ethics consists of the formal ethical procedures and guidelines to which researchers, institutions, and ethical boards must abide too. Abebe and Bessell (2014) view formal ethical guidelines as a “multi-layered bureaucratic process, that runs the risk of creating a formulaic, ‘tick- a-box’ mentality, rather than promoting a carefully considered set of professional values and behaviours” (pp. 127). In this light, ethical research with children must strive to “bridge the gap between formal ethics and local ethos” by developing and accounting for an ethical framework that respects and responds to formal guidelines, as well as local contexts and social practices (Abebe & Bessell, 2014, pp. 130). Promoting and progressing ethical research with children then, “requires a reframing of ethics from formal proceduralism towards the articulation of values, the recognition of local ethos and a commitment to engaging seriously with children around the nature and meaning of ethics” (Abebe & Bessell, pp. 131). The current research study hopes to realize this approach to ethics throughout each stage of the process.

#### **4.2 Planning Fieldwork in Times of COVID**

The following section discusses how the methodological frameworks listed above were applied to the current empirical study by outlining the planning stages of the research process. In planning for fieldwork during a pandemic, there was a need to re-assess and re-configure participatory research. In this section, the physically distanced and unobtrusive use of the cultural probe package and online survey questionnaires are

introduced, as well as the ethical strategy planned prior to commencing fieldwork with children and families.

#### **4.2.1 Fieldwork during a Pandemic: Re-thinking Participatory Research**

There was a need to re-assess and re-configure the participatory approach and data collection process in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Access from gatekeepers (i.e., educational institutions) was not feasible during the unpredictable developments of the novel Coronavirus pandemic. Hence the opportunity for ethnographic fieldwork, which requires building trust and rapport over extended periods of time, seemed impossible given these circumstances. Consequently, the researcher had to accept the limited opportunities for fieldwork. This led the researcher to investigate alternative and creative ways to conduct child-centered and participatory fieldwork at a distance. The researcher came across the physically distanced and unobtrusive design-oriented method of the cultural probe package.

#### **4.2.2. The Cultural Probe Package: Valuing Reflexivity and Aesthetic Design**

As opposed to controlled and traditional methodologies, the cultural probe package is an explorative and design-led approach that values play, exploration, and subjective interpretation in understanding glimpses of local cultures or groups (Gaver, et. al., 2004). The cultural probe package was first used as an experimental design strategy by Gaver, Dunne, and Pacenti (1999) in gathering insights about elderly communities from different countries to inspire neighborhood design projects. These packages were exchanged via mail between the researchers and researchees and consisted of various "cultural probes" - such as maps, postcards, photography - intended to "provoke inspirational responses" and open up "a space of possibilities" for discussion with diverse groups of elderly communities about their meaning-making practices and everyday lives (pp. 22). Unlike traditional methods, such as questionnaires, these cultural probes are considered an attractive medium to participate in research that is playful, unexpected, participant-centered, hence unassuming of certain groups, cultures, and ages. In fact, the exchange of the cultural probe package serves as a friendly, and approachable mode of communication that is both unobtrusive and insightful. In combating distance between research relations, the cultural probe package relies on its visual and attractive aesthetic, its functional design, the provocativeness or playfulness of its tools or probes, and its informal, conversational, and user-friendly language (Gaver, et. al., 2004). These elements are believed to be essential in genuinely engaging its users in research. Indeed, the design-led approach of the cultural probe package has in recent years been used in research for children and families. It has been adapted to

explore researcher's empathy in understanding family relations at home (Horst, et. al., 2004), children's educational interests and needs in improving school subjects (Wyeth & Duercke, 2006), as well as intergenerational relations and play between children and their grandparents (Vetere, et. al., 2008).

Hence, the cultural probe package highlights the value of a participant-centered design approach that coincides with the aforementioned methodological frameworks and characteristics of rights-based, participatory, multi-method, and explorative child-centered research. Moreover, in light of the COVID-19 health and safety regulations, as well as respecting Finnish families' privacy during these times, the physically distanced and unobtrusive user experience of the cultural probe package (with support of the online survey questionnaires) enables families to participate in *feel-good* research in a *familiar group*, within the *privacy* of their own home, and *without the intrusion* of an outsider researcher. The details of the cultural probe package and its participatory tools are further elaborated in the following chapter on Methods.

#### **4.2.3. The Cultural Probe Package as an Ethical Strategy**

Prior to informing, contacting, and recruiting potential families for data collection, the "notification form", project description, and ethical strategy (Ennew, et. al., 2009; Beazley, 2006) of the research study was designed, reviewed, submitted, and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Moreover, the research project is supervised by professor and program leader of the MPhil in Childhood Studies, Tatek Abebe, and approved by the Department of Education and Lifelong Learning at NTNU. The research study closely adapts the RPR's "eleven ethical rules" such as: protecting research participants from harm, respecting cultural traditions, knowledge and customs, establishing as much equality as possible among research relations, avoiding unrealistic expectations, respecting privacy, and ensuring honesty and confidentiality. Additionally, designing the cultural probes for children as well as multiple family members came with additional ethical dilemmas to consider. These potential dilemmas are based on previous research done on the design and user experience of the cultural probe package. In what follows, I will explore these ethical issues in relation to research with children and how the cultural probe package enables us to overcome them. It is important to note that in respecting children's rights to be protected from harm in the research, ethical concerns and challenges are reflexively thought through and handled throughout the research process, hence the ethical strategy consists of the planning, whereas any further ethical accounts during data collection are in the next section on Methods.

**Research Relations.** Despite the limited opportunities for ethnographic research that values building rapport and trust over time, the cultural probe package aims to provide an opportunity for a meaningful family project. The research is meant to be collaborative and fun, and equality must be established as much as possible. This is done by allowing sufficient time to learn from participants and develop research approaches that are sensitive to the local culture, the current pandemic times, and participants' interests and ways of behaving and thinking (Ennew, et. al., 2009).

The researcher's role as *facilitator* is to be informed, reflexive, and flexible in creating *feel-good* research that provides child-focused yet all-inclusive methods for children and their families. In the empirical study, children and their parents are co-researchers or *data gatherers* in the research project. In referring to Clark and Moss' (2011) participatory Mosaic approach, the responsibility of data collection and interpretation is thus shared and pieced together among and between research relations. In respecting children and families' time schedules and privacy during these COVID-times, e-mail correspondence, SMS messaging, and online survey questionnaires should enable familiarity, communication, and collaboration in the research project. The researcher thus extends her role as a considerate, professional, yet friendly and approachable young researcher that is genuinely interested in getting to know children and their families. Furthermore, as a foreigner, the researcher must always respect and adhere to local codes of conduct and behavior.

**Creating unity in the package.** A family is not homogenous as there are differences among family members, such as ages, genders, interests, skills, as well as different levels of motivation. The package should be playful enough to provoke responses from children yet be serious enough to interest the adults. Ideally, the package design values professional content that has a playful – but not childish or condescending – appearance (Horst, et. al., 2004; Gaver, et. al., 1999)

**Language and other skills barriers.** As mentioned previously, the cultural probes or participatory tools should be as visual rather than verbal as possible (Gaver, et. al., 1999; Punch, 2002) in order to accommodate for different ages, interests, literacy levels, as well as language barriers. Evidently, the cultural probe package and instructions were back-translated by two native Finnish speakers to ensure that the instructions do not get lost in translation.

**Privacy within the family.** Privacy and self-censure are additional concerns in using relational, multi-actor methods. If the package is accessible for all family members, this may lead to self-censure. When all family members have access to the information, how

can we ensure that children reveal their genuine responses? This could be avoided by not asking about topics that are considered too personal or sensitive (Horst, et. al., 2004). The idea of *feel-good* research was to keep it light and therefore not uncover aspects of the family life that children and parents did not wish to reveal. It can be seen as a limitation of the study, but the researcher argues that it is a form of respect of privacy, especially in the local context of Finland, as people are, culturally speaking, private and rational and do not usually disclose private or emotional information with others (cite).

**Respecting Privacy and Anonymity.** All data material will be anonymized and deleted at the end of the thesis project in June 2021. Families and individual members' names will be replaced by a pseudonym of their choice (refer to the *family team* exercise in Methods chapter). All personal information that might reveal who the participants are (including creative tasks such as hand-drawn map of their neighborhood, family scrapbook, photographs, etc.) will be returned to the families and deleted from the researcher's private device or computer. If the researcher is interested in using a drawing or other snippet of the data material collected, further consent will be obtained by the participants to publish such data in the thesis report. The final online survey questionnaire further addresses these ethical concerns to ensure that participant's right to privacy and anonymity is fulfilled.

**Combating distance.** It is recommended by Gaver, et. al. (1999) to reduce the distance of "officialdom" through the approachable tone and aesthetics of the probe materials. It should not be too professionally finished to give a more personalized, inviting, and informal feeling. It is also essential to establish clear, collaborative, and amicable communication between the researcher and families. The cultural probes or participatory tools are meant to spark or inspire dialogue between researcher and participant.

Another important element in designing participatory methods is to be reflexive about the order in which methods are presented to participants (Beazley, 2006). Hence why the decision to order the themes as (1) family dynamic, (2) family activities and home space, and lastly (3) children's further reflections and experiences on COVID-19 were set in place as to not have an intrusive experience when being introduced to the research project and process. The first theme enabled the researcher to get to know the individual family members, family relations as well as the family dynamic. The second theme invited the researcher into glimpses of everyday family life and activities and the privacy of their home space. Lastly, the third and final theme drove towards a more

serious route in uncovering children's own personal challenges, experiences, and hopes during the COVID-19 pandemic. These three themes and the multiple participatory tools used to gather data on these themes are presented and critically discussed in the next chapter on Methods.

## **Chapter 5: Applications of Creative, Collaborative, Engaging, and Unobtrusive Cultural Probe Package Methods**

Following a rights-based, participatory approach to child-centered yet relational research, the methods chapter presents the practicalities of fieldwork and the multiple methods applied in the empirical study. Firstly, it discusses the sequential process of the design and data collection stages. Secondly, it presents and critically accounts for the advantages and limitations of each of the participatory tools and techniques used in the cultural probe package and online survey questionnaires. Furthermore, it relates these participatory methods to key processes in the family resilience framework (Walsh, 2016) in supporting children's social well-being. In so doing, the chapter exemplifies and offers insights into how researchers can adapt and develop innovative participatory approaches that could be applied to conducting research with children and families in similar contexts of the COVID pandemic and beyond.

### **5.1 Data Collection Stage**

#### **5.1.1. Participants and Sampling Procedure**

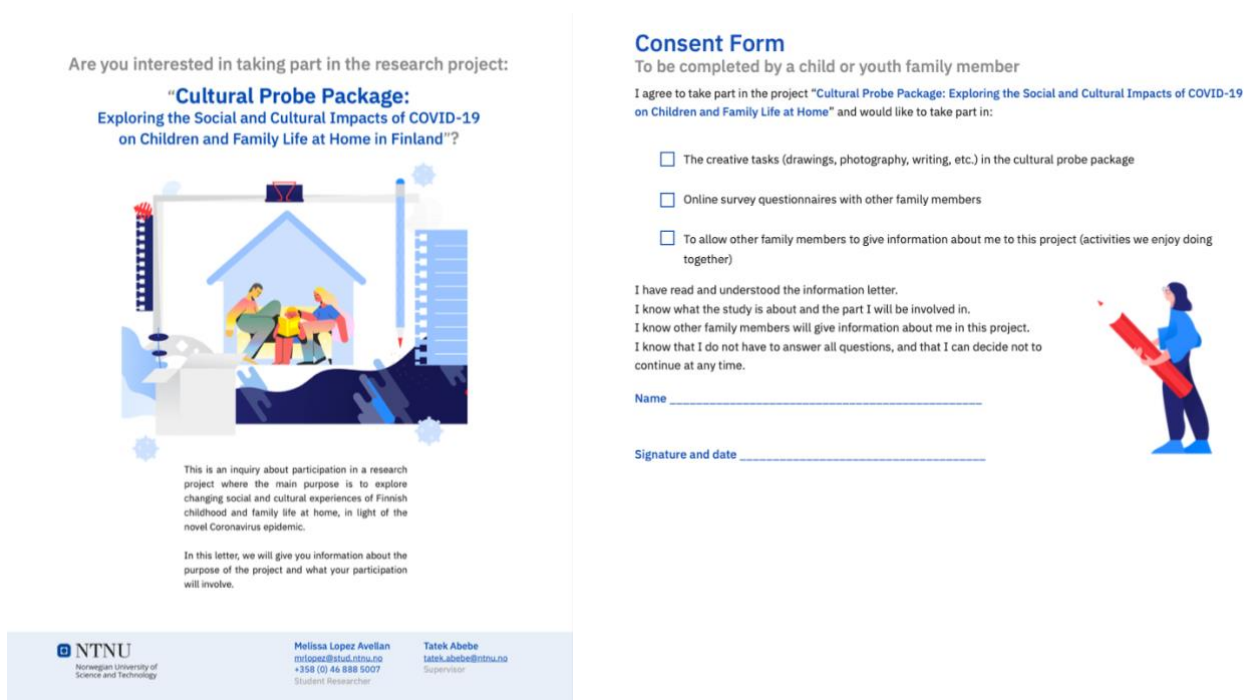
Four families were recruited through the researcher's close relations and volunteered to take part in the research project. The researcher had not met these families prior to the research, thus controlling for bias in the data collection process and analysis of results. These four families were composed of a mother, a father, and two or three children, boys and girls. The youngest children in the family were between 5-7 years old, while the older siblings were between the ages of 10-15. These families were Finnish, with the exception of Family D who were bi-cultural or bi-national. These families had a similar family composition and social demographic: parents were in their 40's and mostly working from home, and all families lived in a suburban house in the capital region of Finland (cities of Espoo and Vantaa).

#### **5.1.2. Information Letter and Consent Forms**

Throughout the early and mid-weeks of November 2020, families were individually contacted, and communication between the researcher and the families was established via email. Families were first given a brief introduction to the researcher and the research project. Once families expressed interest in volunteering in the research project, an electronic copy of the information letter and consent forms were sent out to families in order for them to gain a deeper understanding of the research study and what their participation entailed. The information letter and consent forms followed the



Norwegian Center for Data Research (NSD) template for ethical research and data protection rights. Notably, in rights-based, participatory research, informed consent should be obtained by all participants involved in the research study. This includes both adults' and children's informed consent (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). Hence the research includes both an adult and child-friendly version of the information letter and consent forms. In assessing children's competencies to give informed consent, their ages, genders, sociocultural context, educational background, and literacy levels were accounted for in the design of the child-friendly version (elaborated in the following paragraph) (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). Hence, the child-friendly version was essentially a simplified, translated, and condensed version of the adult one. In the information letter, both parents and children were informed about the research topic and intent, what their participation involved, the data collection timeline and methods, their rights to voluntary participation, privacy, and confidentiality, as well as other data protection rights (Alderson & Morrow, 2020; Ennew, et. al., 2009) (see appendix A).



**Figure 2.** Information letter cover page and children's consent forms in English

In addition, it was important for the researcher to design information letters that were informative, ethical, as well as visual (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). The incorporation of visual and aesthetic elements such as the use of colored fonts (Adobe InDesign) and child-friendly illustrations (*Icons8*) hoped to communicate to potential participants the child-focused, playful, and explorative nature of the research - an opportunity for a meaningful family project. In fact, the researcher was inspired by the informational pamphlets in Finland, whether they covered information about the seasonal flu vaccination or the current art exhibitions in town. It was evident that Finnish society was

accustomed to the pairing of information and visual aesthetics in everyday life. Thus, the written and visual design of the information letter and consent form was culturally appropriate (Alderson & Morrow, 2020) and attracted families to the research in a meaningful way. In fact, it was well-received by families, as one parent mentioned: “your research sounds interesting”, while another said: “well-done, it looks very professional”. Moreover, one parent mentioned that their children were excited to participate as the family enjoys arts and crafts. Indeed, the research project, with the help of the informational letter, introduced families to the participatory, creative, and child-centered research approach that was perhaps unheard of or unfamiliar to them.

### **5.1.3. Re-thinking Research Relations**

In the sociocultural context of Finland, it seemed disingenuous to develop research relations over Zoom video calls, or any sort of research relations at all for that matter. The researcher had to be considerate and respectful of families’ privacy and time by not forcing their participation in any way that would tread on their private lives and well-being for the research’s benefit. Especially during these pandemic times, wherein institutions and families were preoccupied with more pressing matters, it was essential to be considerate of family and children’s time and genuine interest in volunteering in a stranger’s research project. Therefore, straightforward and virtual research relations were established. The only chance the researcher got in meeting these families face-to-face was when she delivered the packages for the first time (with the exception of one family as both parents were busy with work meetings from home). A parent from each family was kind enough to open the door, not only to receive the package, but also to meet the researcher. The in-person meeting was brief yet meaningful. To the researcher’s surprise, the parents expressed gratitude for the research project, stating that it was an important topic to research on. Moreover, the researcher truly appreciated the parents repeating the research project and timeline in their own words, as to make sure that they understood the project wholeheartedly and were determined to do a “correct” job in it. Moreover, the researcher only met two children from two different families during this introductory encounter. One appeared shy and hid behind her father, yet still curious to see who this stranger was at the door. The other, who was a child from a bi-cultural English-speaking family, was chatty and enthusiastic to show the researcher her latest arts and crafts projects.

### **5.1.4. Data Collection Timeline**

The data collection process began at the end of November and ended in mid- or late-December of 2020. There were variations in the start and finish of the process for each

family. Families were involved in the data collection process for approximately 2-3 weeks. The data collection timeline can be thought of in three successive stages:

- (1) On the last week of November, the 1st online survey questionnaire was sent out to families who had agreed to participate in the study via email correspondence. Once background information was gathered about the families, the researcher had a week to design, translate, and create the cultural probe packages and participatory tools (elaborated later in the chapter) for each family.
- (2) On the 1st week of December, the cultural probe packages were delivered to families' homes. Families were given a week to complete the tasks inside the cultural probe package at their desired pace. Once completed, the researcher retrieved the cultural probe packages from families. Once the packages were retrieved, the researcher translated, stored, and organized the raw data from each family, and designed the final and follow-up online survey questionnaires accordingly and for each family.
- (3) On the 3rd week of December, the final online survey questionnaires were created, translated, and sent out for families to answer. The data collection stage was officially completed on the 4th week of December.

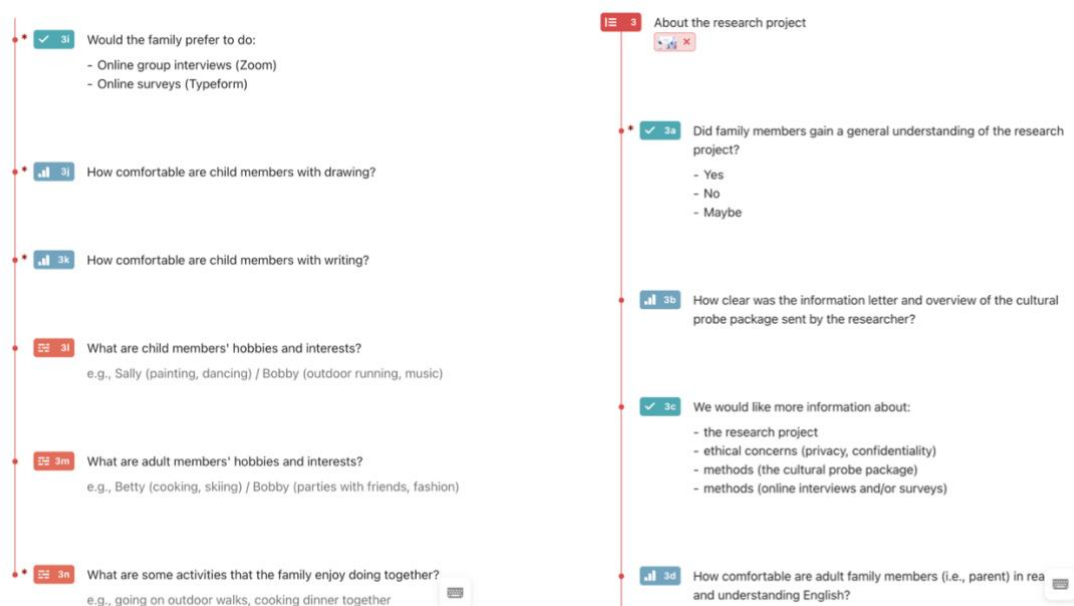
#### **5.1.5. Online Survey Questionnaires**

Initially, the research study sought to conduct online group interviews with the families. However, parents stressed that they were preoccupied with work, and children were not comfortable with video calls with a stranger. There was also the significant issue of language barriers as parents spoke and understood English quite fluently, yet children did not. In light of this, the researcher had to be flexible and adapt to and accommodate participants' preferences. Instead of online video calls, families opted for online survey questionnaires. Subsequently, the researcher designed online survey questionnaires through an online, design-based survey creator called *Typeform*. Much like the information letter and consent forms, these online survey questionnaires aimed to reach out to families by adopting a simple, convenient, and approachable design alongside conversational yet professional language that included both open- and close-ended questions. Moreover, the use of *Typeform* enabled the researcher to virtually upload illustrations, edit colored fonts, and upload images to combat distance, prompt discussion, and facilitate engagement from children and their families (see appendix B).

**The 1<sup>st</sup> online survey questionnaires.** were sent out to families to gather (1) background information on the family (such as names, ages, occupations, extended

family members) and their home (how would they describe their home, whether they lived in a house or in an apartment). Moreover, it gathered information about (2) individual and family hobbies and interests. Furthermore, it sought to gather information about (3) the family in relation to the research project. It asked questions regarding language proficiency in English, language preference, the level to which children were comfortable with or enjoyed writing and drawing. Lastly, the first online survey questionnaire inquired whether families had gained a general understanding of the research, whether the information provided was clear, and if there were any areas that needed more clarification with regards to the research topic, methods, or ethics. Families gave an average of 5 out of 6 ratings on their understanding of the project. One parent stated that “the information was sufficient, nothing further is needed”. One family however had ethical concerns regarding anonymity in photographs and videos, which was addressed in person when delivering the package at their doorstep. This feedback enabled me to adapt my subsequent methodology and enquiries for fieldwork in ways the scientific rigor of the research and its ethical concerns are met.

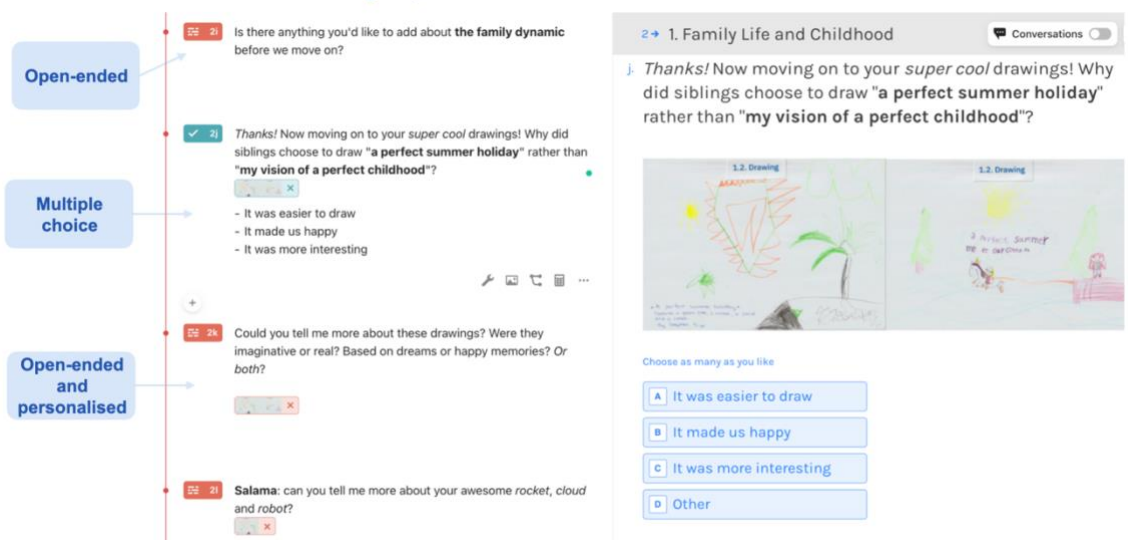
**Figure** Excerpts from the 1<sup>st</sup> online survey questionnaire using Typeform



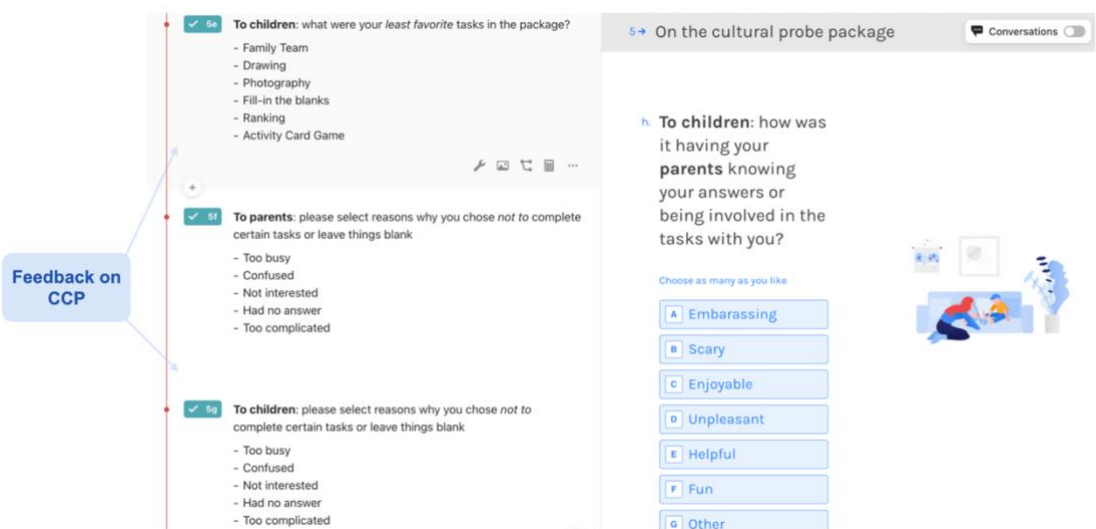
**Figure 3.** Excerpts from the 1<sup>st</sup> online survey questionnaire using Typeform

**The final online survey questionnaire.** Once the cultural probe packages have been retrieved and the raw data organized, stored, and interpreted by the research, a final online survey questionnaire is designed to help the researcher, children and families to (1) make sense and follow-up on the raw data, (2) gather feedback on their experiences using the cultural probe package and the various participatory tools or cultural probes, and lastly, (3) address ethical concerns on privacy, confidentiality, and

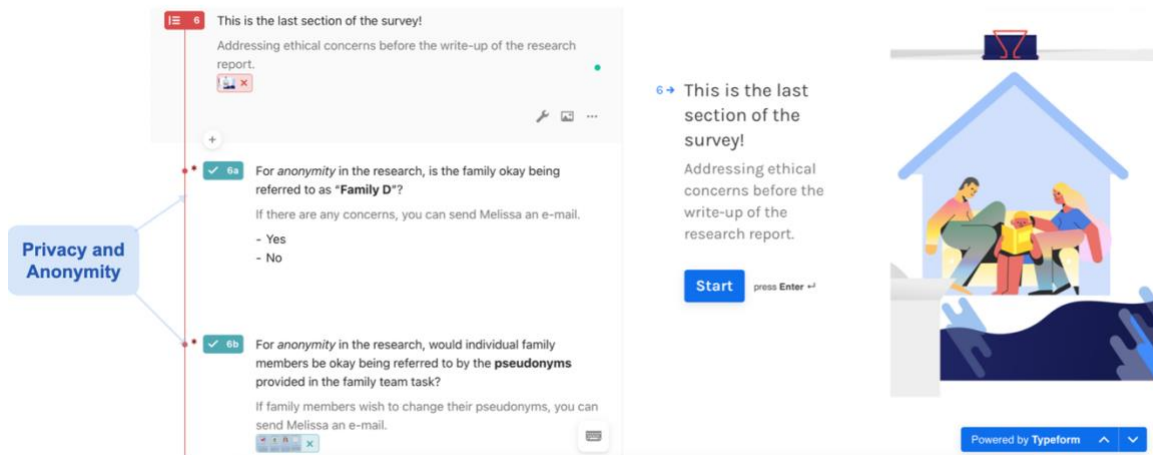
permission to use their data in the final report, as well as to provide closure in the research project. Each family received a personalized final online survey questionnaire, based on their raw data. Once more, the use of illustrations, colored fonts, as well as image uploads of their data designed by the researcher on *Typeform* helped combat distance and enable communication and joint-interpretation of the raw data. Moreover, the use of conversational language and the combination of open-ended, close-ended, and playful questions aimed to engage both parents and children in answering the survey as a family.



**Figure 4.** Final online survey questionnaire and the use of different follow-up questions



**Figure 5.** Final online survey questionnaire and feedback on the cultural probe package



**Figure 6.** *The final online survey questionnaire and the opportunity to address ethics and provide closure in the research project*

### 5.1.6. Creating the Cultural Probe Packages

Once information from the first online survey questionnaire was collected about each family, the cultural probe package was refined, designed, and translated accordingly. Inside the package, children and families will find:

- (1) the printed information letters and consent forms
- (2) a welcome note from the researcher and an instruction sheet
- (3) an activity booklet containing all three color-coordinated themes and a checklist or step-by-step instructions of the participatory tasks to complete in each theme
- (4) creative materials (such as markers, glue, drawing paper)
- (5) 3 envelopes for the three different themes which contained the essential tools and materials for each theme to maintain intrigue and organize the data
- (6) a packaged gift for the family as a token of appreciation (face masks and reflectors) to be opened last



**Image 1.** The cultural probe package and participatory tools





**Image 2.** The cultural probe packages

## 5.4 Participatory Tools

The following section presents the advantages, limitations, and potentials of the various written, visual, and creative, task-based participatory tools or probes included in the cultural probe package. These are divided into three themes: (1) family relations and childhood, (2) family activities and use of the home space, and (3) children and families' further reflections on COVID-19.

**Table 2.** Matching research questions to research methods and participants

Theme and Research Questions	Participatory Method	Participants	Data Collected
<p>1. Family Relations and Finnish childhood</p> <p>What is Finnish childhood?</p> <p>What is a Finnish family dynamic?</p>	<p>1.1 Naming and Family Mapping</p>	<p>Children and adults</p>	<p>To gather data on individual family members and the overall family dynamic</p>
<p>How has this changed since the outbreak of COVID-19?</p>	<p>1.2 Drawing</p>	<p>Children</p>	<p>To gather an overview of socio-cultural experiences or conceptualisations of Finnish childhood</p>

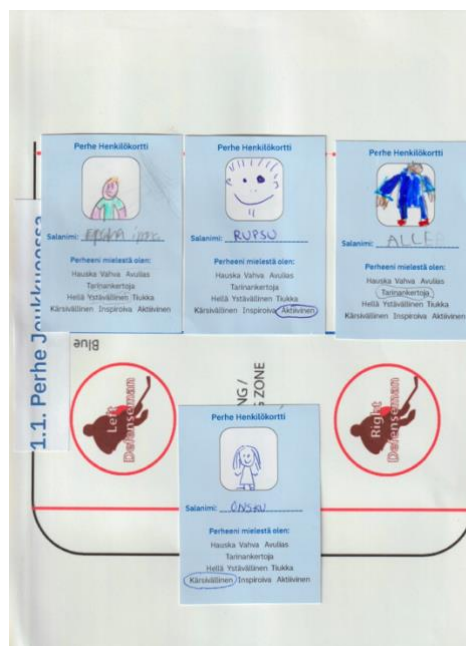


2. Home Life and Activities	2.1 Photo-voice	<p>Children take digital photos using polaroid cut-outs with prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A space at home that makes me happy</li> <li>• Where we spend the most time as a family</li> <li>• A device or object that keeps you entertained</li> <li>• A space I like to spend alone time</li> </ul>	Children	To gather valuable snippets and spaces of the physical home during COVID-times
How is Finnish childhood and family life experienced within the home?	2.2 Gratitude Chocolate Bar Break	Children get a chocolate bar break. The chocolate bar is re-packaged to include a task: write 4 things you are grateful for	Children	To provide a playful break and reward while assigning an unexpected, feel-good task
How is the home space used?	2.3 Activity Card Game	<p>Each family member draws a card with a task and brings along another family member to join:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cook a nice warm meal together</li> <li>2. Go on an outdoor walk</li> <li>3. Sit down, relax and have a conversation about where you'd like to go but can't</li> <li>4. Joker: choose a special activity of your choice</li> <li>5. Get moving with some physical exercise</li> </ol> <p>On the back of the card, the family member writes down about what happened, who joined, how it made them feel.</p>	Children and Adults	To provide an opportunity and gather information about meaningful family interaction and activity
What are the family activities?				
How has this changed since the outbreak of COVID-19?				
3. Children's Experiences and Reflections on COVID-19	3.1 Postcard	Write a postcard to someone you miss	Children	To learn about the impact of social distancing on children
How has COVID-19 affected, challenged and/or strengthened experiences of Finnish childhood and family life at home?	3.2 Ranking	A group activity wherein families had to discuss, rank and write about the family strategies (such as family time, alone time, time outdoors, technology) that helped them cope during COVID times	Children and adults	To learn about family's coping strategies and priorities within the family home during COVID
	3.3 Sentence completion	Children fill-in the blanks and write a letter to the researcher. The letter asks about children's experience using the cultural probe package and their experiences and hopes during COVID	Children	To learn about children's experiences and hopes during these COVID times
	3.4 Protection shield	Children decorate a Christmas tree by writing their hopes and wishes for the new year	Children	To learn about children's hopes during these COVID times and to end data collection on a positive and hopeful note

The information and reflection is supported by previous literature on these participatory tools, support from the first and final online survey questionnaires, as well as Walsh's (2016) key processes in the family resilience framework. It is important to note that analysis of the results from these tools are further discussed in the ensuing Data Analysis chapter.

### 5.4.1 Family Relations and Childhood

The first theme in the activity booklet introduced the family. It sought to explore: *what is Finnish childhood? What is a Finnish family dynamic? How have these changed since COVID-19?* Every family is unique. It is essential to introduce the four families to gain a general understanding of the individual family members as well as the collective family. Moreover, these are believed to influence the data and the data gathering process. These introductions are based on materials gathered from the 1st online survey questionnaire and the *family team* exercise.



**Image 3.** Family A's family team map

**Family A** is composed of a father, a mother, and their two sons. Family A lives in a house with a small yard. Together, they enjoy being active and spending quality time together, whether it be playing outdoor games, board and card games, or drawing, reading, and eating as a family. The boys in the family especially love ice hockey. Based on this common family interest, the researcher thought that the *family team* should be a hockey team, which Family A agreed was fitting. As left-winger, we have the older brother *Epana Ipana* who is 9 years old. Besides hockey, *Epana Ipana* enjoys playing

football. In the *family team*, *Epana Ipana* is described to be the friendly one in the family, and his “friendliness and being attentive to others helps keep a positive environment at home”. As center, we have the father *Rupsu*. *Rupsu* is an “active” father who “organizes a lot of the outdoor activities” and indeed, “there have been a lot of activities” during these COVID times. As right-winger, we have the younger brother *Alle* who is 6 years old. Aside from hockey, *Alle* also likes music and playschool. During these COVID times, *Alle* has been the “storyteller” of the family and has helped the *family team* by “entertaining the family on many occasions and coming up with many games”. Finally, we have the mother, *Onsku*. *Onsku* enjoys shopping and jogging in her own time and is the “patient” mother who manages to “keep the peace at home”. Since COVID-19, Family A has experienced more parental and sibling responsibilities.



**Image 4.** Family B's family team map

**Family B** is composed of a father, mother, two young girls, and an older boy. They live in a house where everyone has their own rooms, and outside you can find a big garden. Together, the family shares an interest in music, movies, and games. Based on the family’s various talents in music, the researcher thought the *family team* should be a music band. However, this was not made clear in the instructions. Nevertheless, Family B’s uniqueness in the *family team* exercise shined in their creative choice of pseudonyms. The mother is *Facemask* (*Kasvomaski* in Finnish). As a chemistry teacher, *Facemask* enjoys writing educational materials, and in her free time, she sings and does gardening. Much like the mother, the father, *Aleksanteri*, enjoys singing as well as DIY building. The youngest girl, *Elsa*, is 7 years old. *Elsa* likes to play the flute and dance ballet. While her older sister, *Window Curtains* (*Ikkunaverho* in Finnish), plays the oboe, enjoys body rhythm, and scout. Although Family B revealed that there had been no significant changes in familial responsibilities since COVID-19, the eldest son, *Piano* had been a “kind” older brother to the youngest *Elsa*, as he is “always prepared to help his

youngest sister with her activities". During these COVID-times, *Elsa*, "the storyteller" of the family, helped keep the *family team* entertained "as she chatters all the time telling stories". While her older sister *Window Curtains* is the "active" one in the family, finding new passions such as baking and cooking, which has helped "especially now that more food has to be made, given that the family is home more often than ever". The mother *Facemask's* "patience" had been quite useful, particularly since "the children's rooms have become messier more quickly than usual". Lastly, father *Aleksantari's* "kindness" has "helped the family spirit even during COVID's stressful times".



**Image 5.** Family C's family team map

**Family C** is composed of a father, a mother, a boy and a girl, and their pet dog *Sohvi*. They live in a house with five rooms. As a family, Family C enjoys swimming and going for outdoor walks with their dog. The father, *Sanpa* enjoys ice hockey and football, while the mother, *Anne*, likes to go riding. Their 11-year-old son *Karhu* (bear in English) enjoys scouts and athletics, while their 7-year-old daughter, *Lode* does team gymnastics. With this in mind, the researcher came up with the idea of the *family team* being an Olympic team. However, the instructions were unclear for the family. Nevertheless, there was an endearing addition to the family, which was their 12-year-old pet dog *Sohvi*. Family C has experienced more parental responsibilities during these COVID-times. The mother, *Anne*, was "helpful" as she "always helps the children when needed and gives support". While the father, *Sanpa*, is described by the children as "strong". The older brother, *Karhu* is described as "patient" as he is usually "calm and listens, and does not do things in a hurry". Lastly, we have the youngest daughter, *Lode* who has been the "active" one in the family. *Lode* "wants to try everything new and learn new things" during these COVID-times.



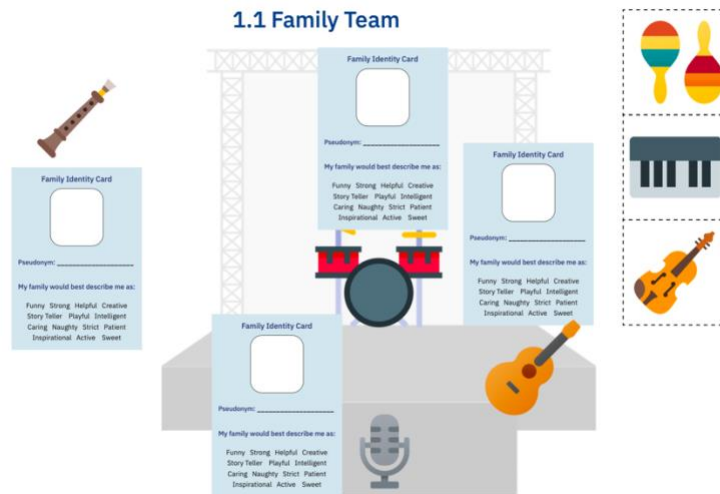
**Image 6.** Family D's family team map

Lastly, we have **Family D**. Family D is composed of a bi-cultural family as the father is Finnish and the mother, Australian. Hence Family D is English-speaking. The family have two very young children, a boy, and a girl, and just like Family C, included their beloved pet *Harley* in the research. They live in a spacious, 3-bedroom house. As a family, they enjoy swimming, playing board games, dog training, cooking, and baking. In light of this, the *family team* was a cooking and baking team, however, the children would have preferred arts. *Sydney* is the older sister who is 7 years old. She enjoys arts and crafts, playing guitar, and swimming. Her younger brother, *Salama* is 5 years old, making him the youngest in the research project. *Salama* likes robots, and just like his older sister, likes to swim and do arts and crafts. The father is *Adam* who likes to go out for walks, play golf, hockey and go to the gym, while the mother, *Fiini*, enjoys pilates, dog training, and handicrafts. During these COVID-times, Family D believes that there have been more parental and sibling responsibilities. Interestingly enough, each family member was given multiple and similar characteristics. All family members in the *family team D* were described as "funny", "strong", "helpful", "intelligent", "caring", "naughty", "active" and "sweet".

#### **5.4.1.1. Family Team Exercise**

The *family team* exercise was the first task in the cultural probe package that introduced individual family members as well as glimpses into the family relations and dynamic. Firstly, the *family team* exercise enabled individual family members to introduce themselves through *family identity cards*. It provided an opportunity for each participant to identify themselves by drawing a playful self-portrait and by picking a pseudonym of their choice for the research project. The opportunity of research participants in providing pseudonyms hoped to provide a sense of ownership, control and choice over the data and research project. Secondly, as a family, members of the *family*

team had to discuss and assign characteristic(s) to each member and place or position them on the *family team map*.



**Figure 7.** Family team map originally planned for Family B

The researcher was reflexive in choosing which type of *family team* suited each family based on information from the 1<sup>st</sup> online survey questionnaire on their individual and collective hobbies and interests. The personalization of each package was meant to create a personalized and approachable introduction for a fun and meaningful family project. Unfortunately, the instructions were unclear for most of the families as shown above in the family team maps. Perhaps this was either lost in translation, too complicated, or simply not clearly instructed. Moreover, the researcher made the mistake of making Family D a *baking and cooking team*, as children *Salama* and *Sydney* would have preferred an *arts and crafts team*. Nevertheless, the researcher decided to make the most out of this mishap by following it up in the final online survey questionnaire.

Nevertheless, the opportunity to choose a pseudonym revealed the sociocultural similarities, differences, and uniqueness of each family. For example, some members of Family B gave themselves pseudonyms that were humorous yet relevant to the current COVID-times. Some members from Family A and C, for example, gave pseudonyms that relate to the Finnish language and culture, while those in Family D gave ones that they simply liked or were personal to them. Another interesting observation to note is that Family D, who is the bi-cultural or English-speaking family in the project, circled multiple characteristics for each family member, whereas the Finnish families only circled one. Was this perhaps a decision influenced by cultural differences? In the Finnish language, a single word can carry a lot of weight or meaning as well as connotation. Furthermore, the *family team* task seemed to be a fitting first exercise in the package as it introduced the families to the research project through an interactive and icebreaking activity. This,

in turn, helped build social and group cohesion at the start of the data collection process (Abebe, 2009). This group cohesion is particularly important as both children and parents are handed over the responsibility, independence, and collaboration in collecting data for the research project. Overall, the *family team* exercise, although confusing or unclear, was thought of as an “interesting”, “fun”, and “creative” first task by the four families. Indeed, this hoped to have enabled family resilience key processes of “connectedness” within the family by acknowledging and accepting “individual needs and differences” as well as “dependability” and “equal and mutual respect” among family members during times of adversity (Walsh, 2016, pp. 319).

#### **5.4.1.2. Drawings**

The second task in getting to know the children and their families was the drawing exercise. Children were given the task to either draw *my vision of a perfect childhood* or *a perfect summer holiday*. The objective of the drawing task was to explore experiences of Finnish childhood and address the research questions of *what is Finnish childhood? How has this changed since COVID-19?* The drawing task was decidedly included in the package as children, in the 1st online survey questionnaire, expressed an interest and liking for drawing and considered it as a hobby. These drawings enabled children to get creative either individually or with their sibling(s) in expressing what seemed the most meaningful to them in the life phase of childhood. Indeed, as the first individual exercise, it seemed like a fun and appropriate warm-up to more challenging activities, and for children themselves to become more familiar with the cultural probe package and research process. Drawing can be considered a useful and unique tool as “the image can be changed and added to, which gives children more control over their form of expression, unlike an interview situation where responses tend to be quicker and more immediate” (Punch, 2002, pp. 331).

Interestingly enough, all children chose to draw *a perfect summer holiday* as opposed to *my vision of the perfect childhood*, the reason being that it was “easier to draw” or “conceptualize”. This limitation reflects Spyrou’s (2011) argument that children’s drawings are selectively produced “out of a number of possibilities and therefore cannot be authentic depictions of social reality”. On the other hand, other authors argue that drawings can be used as an explorative, “rich visual illustrations which directly show how children see their world” (Punch, 2002, pp. 331). Moreover, an additional concern was that some siblings may have “copied” one another in their drawings. However, this is not necessarily a problem since it provided a shared activity among siblings and the drawings highlight shared sibling experiences and thus family experiences of childhood.

Overall, the drawing exercise revealed insightful and whimsical results in children's lived, remembered, and imagined realities of the life phase of childhood. This is a prime example of how creative methods not only gathers a variety of insights into children's worlds - such as real-life, imagined, or hoped-for realities - but also helps researchers and the readers gain a deeper perspective of children by learning about their individual interests, personalities, and aspirations. Evidently, children's drawings were followed-up in the final online survey questionnaire and enabled further discussion on the theme of family holidays and experiences of childhood. Most importantly, this opportunity for creativity and self-expression supports the participatory, *feel-good* nature of the data collection process which incorporated children's interests and passions for drawing. According to the final online survey, children very much enjoyed the drawing task, and most even considered it as one of their favorite tasks in the package. With all this being said, the drawing exercise is believed to have enabled "inspiration" through "creative expression", "envisioning possibilities", as well as, "pleasurable interaction" - and in the case of Family B "humor" - among siblings in accordance with Walsh's (2016) family resilience framework.

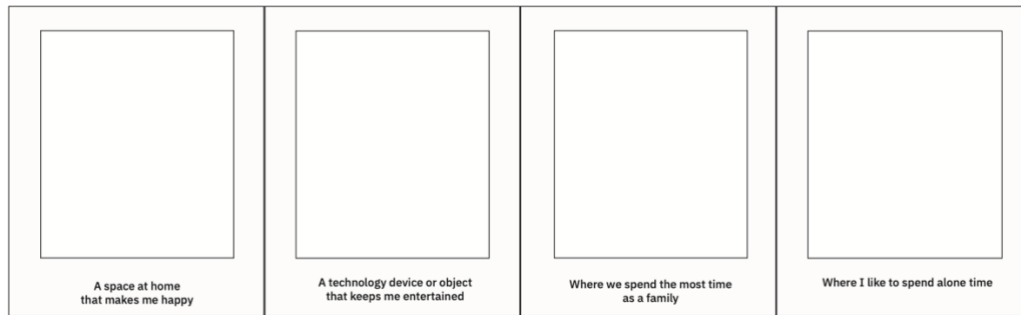
#### **5.4.2 Family Life and Activities within the Home Space**

After being introduced to the family dynamic and children's memorable experiences of Finnish childhood, the second theme in the cultural probe package invited the researcher more closely into the family's everyday lives. The second theme explores family life, shared activities, and use of the home space, and how these have changed before and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

##### **5.4.2.1. Photo-voice**

Photo-voice was an individual task meant to gather information about the home space - how it is used, shared, negotiated, and valued by each of the children. Children were instructed to take photos with the help of photo frame cut-outs that were provided in the package. These photo frame cut-outs were inspired by polaroid pictures with written captions on them (view image below). The prompts or captions were intentionally broad to give children the freedom of choice to move around the home and choose or capture a focal point, area, or object that both fitted the prompt and captured something personal and valuable to them. In the photo-voice task, the children were asked to hold these frames up, take a picture with either a mobile phone or camera, write a short description on the back of the frame, and lastly, with the help of their parents, send these pictures to the researcher's email.



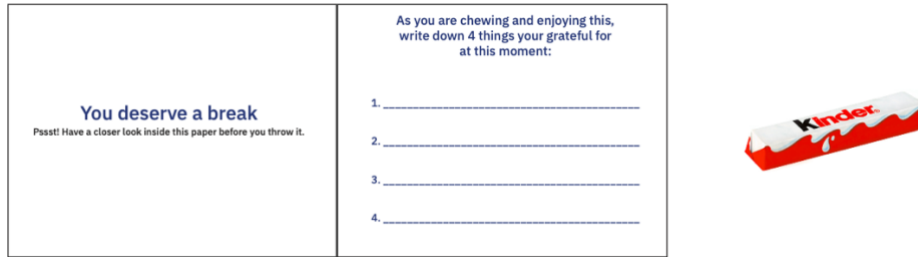


**Figure 8.** *Photo-voice frames*

The first notable advantage of using these photo frames were that they automatically blurred the faces of family members or private spaces of the home. This respected the notion of privacy within the home and anonymity in the research that parents were most concerned about. Moreover, the help of parents in sending children's pictures enabled them to double-check whether they were comfortable sharing certain spaces of their home prior to submitting them to the research. In terms of its methodological value, photography offers an easier alternative to drawings as it does not depend on the "children's ability or perceived ability" in drawing (Punch, 2002). Furthermore, photo-voice enabled photo-elicitation and follow-up discussions in how children and their families experienced changes in the home space in the final online survey questionnaire. In light of these advantages, the photo-voice task gathered information on children's subjective well-being in home places and spaces where they *enjoy alone time* or a personal *favorite space* at home. In addition, it gathered insights into collective and key family resilience processes (Walsh, 2016) of "flexibility" in "reorganizing" the home space and "adapting to new conditions" (further explained in the Data Analysis chapter).

#### **5.4.2.2. Gratitude Chocolate Bar Break**

In order to maintain participants' interest throughout the data collection process, it is important to provide participants, or in this case, data-gatherers, with a well-deserved break and reward in order to keep their motivation (Gaver, et. al., 2004). The researcher had the idea of providing a chocolate bar break or reward that included a meaningful surprise task: the gratitude chocolate bar break.

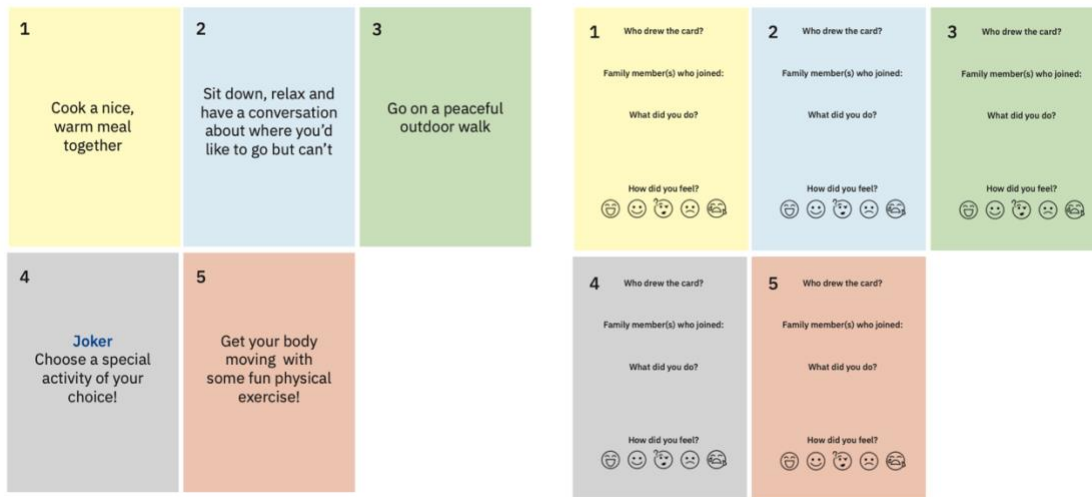


**Figure 9.** *Chocolate bar break and gratitude list*

The Kinder chocolate bar was re-packaged by the researcher and included a *gratitude list* task. Upon unwrapping the chocolate bar, children would find instructions to write *four things they were grateful for*. This provided meaningful as well as playful responses from the individual children as well as a meaningful shared break between siblings. Indeed, the gratitude list brought about reflections on what children and siblings were grateful for both COVID-related and beyond. Practicing gratitude is believed to facilitate resilience processes that “affirm strengths and courage” through reflection and recognition of “mobilizing kin, social, community networks” as positive and relational resources.

#### **5.4.2.3. Family Activity Card Game**

The activity card game included a stack of colored cards that aimed to elicit fun, dynamic, and interactive activities among family members. The aim of the activity card game was to provide an opportunity for meaningful family interaction. Moreover, it sought to encourage wellness activities during these COVID-times such as “get your body moving with some physical exercise” or “cook a nice warm meal together”. In addition, this activity was most helpful as a precursor for the final online survey questionnaire which gathered rich information on the changes in family activities, routines, and schedules since the Corona spring.



**Figure 10.** Family activity cards (front and back)

Each family member had to draw a card from the stack. The family member responsible for drawing the card had to complete the assigned task and invite other family members to join in. Lastly, he or she must fill in the short questions on the back of the card which asked basic information such as: *Who drew the card? Who joined? What did you do? How did you feel?* For the last question, children could color the smiley that suited the mood during the activity limiting the request for written tasks, especially for the youngest children. The activity card game is believed to elicit a variety of family resilient key processes, namely “spirituality” and “connection to nature”, as well as “social action”, “balance of work/family strains”, “seeking reconnection” through “pleasurable interactions” and “open emotional expressions”.

### **5.4.3. Further Experiences, Reflections, Aspirations on COVID-19**

The third and final theme in the cultural probe package highlights children’s further reflections, personal experiences, and hopes relating to COVID-19. *What are children’s personal experiences during COVID-19? How has COVID-19 affected their hopes for the future?*

#### **5.4.3.1. Postcard**

The children received one postcard each. The designs on the postcards were anthropomorphic illustrations of animals demonstrating friendship. Yet they are also culturally meaningful for children and families in the context of Finland. The researcher thought it was fitting as these illustrations elicited endearing emotions and memories of enjoying the company of a friend or loved one.

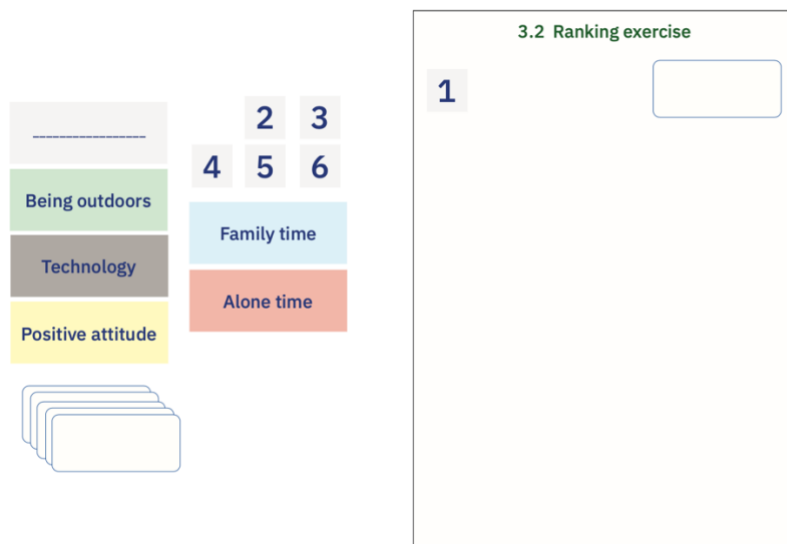


**Figure 11.** Postcards by Finnish stationary brand Putinki, designed by Mira Mallius

The postcard task was meant to explore how COVID-19 constraints such as social distancing, for example, affected children personally and socially. The results from children’s postcards gathered information about the people, outside of the family home, that was important to them or whom they miss or would like to see during these COVID-times. Moreover, the postcard was meant for children to keep and eventually mail to the dedicated special person. Through children’s messages, the postcard task is believed to have contributed to children’s “open emotional expression” and assertion of a “positive outlook” by “tolerating the uncertainty” and instilling “hope” towards the person that they miss. These messages are further interpreted in the Data Analysis chapter.

#### **5.4.3.2. Family Ranking Exercise**

The *family ranking* exercise was an interactive group discussion and decision-making task for the whole family. Families had to discuss, rank, and explain their “family strategies” that helped them cope during these COVID times. The researcher included suggested strategies such as family time, alone time, technology, outdoor time, as well as a blank strategy wherein families could decide what to include or what was missing from the suggested ones. These suggested strategies were influenced by the collective or family hobbies gathered from the 1st online survey questionnaire as well as informed by prior research done on Finnish families’ experiences and coping strategies during lockdown (Salin, Hakovirta, & Anttila, 2020).



**Figure 12.** Family ranking exercise

The ranking exercise aimed to learn more about families’ meaning-making practices, strategies, and priorities in mitigating the harmful social impacts of COVID-19 conditions and constraints. Moreover, it was meant to elicit inspirational responses as well as positive emotions, similar to the gratitude chocolate bar break and the family team exercise. Indeed, the *ranking* exercise hopefully reminded them of how the family has managed to work together in coping during these challenging times of change. The results from the *ranking* task yielded interesting similarities and varied results from all four families. From the *ranking* exercise, it gathered information on how the families experienced and managed increased family time, technology use, and time spent outdoors since the Coronaspring. Families were then asked how the ranking process was like or how it played out. For families C and B it came about easily. Family B mentions: “By discussion, a collective agreement came about surprisingly easily”. While Family B: “re-ranked it a few times and noticed what is important during the process” and added that the task was led by *Sydney*. For Family B, “all things seemed important, so it was hard to put them in order. We finally thought about it through what spring would have been life if those things hadn’t worked”. Overall, the task was enjoyed by the families, and parents had the opportunity to provide deeper insights into the families’ challenges, advantages and further reflections during COVID. The family *ranking* task is believed to inspire “mutual communication, support, collaboration and problem solving” through “creative brainstorming”, “shared decision making”, as well as a “proactive stance” in the families’ “resourcefulness” and “preparedness, planning, and prevention” (Walsh, 2016).

### 5.4.3.3. Sentence Completion

Whereas the *ranking* exercise relied on children as well as parents' insights, the last arduous task was a written exercise to gather children's own experiences with (a) using the cultural probe package, (b) their experiences, and (c) further reflections on the COVID-19 pandemic.

A note from [ ]

Dear Melissa,

I created these activities with my family. We were a [ ] team!

My role in the project was [ ]. My sibling in the project was [ ]. During the tasks, my mother was [ ], and my father was [ ]. I enjoyed doing the tasks with [ ]. In the process, I discovered new things about my family, such as [ ]. I also discovered [ ] about myself! I really enjoyed [ ]. I did not enjoy [ ]. I wish there were more [ ] in the package.

These are my thoughts and experiences of Corona times that I'd like to share with the researcher.

The most challenging part of COVID has been [ ]

The most positive part of COVID has been [ ]

I am grateful for [ ] for helping me through these times. I hope that [ ].

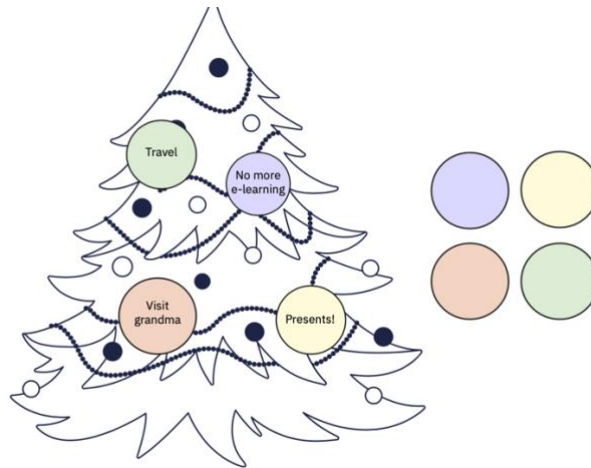
I am looking forward to [ ].

**Figure 13.** Sentence completion or fill-in the blanks

This was the least favorite task of the children, perhaps because it was a written task that might have reminded them of schoolwork (Punch, 2002). As later revealed in the Data Analysis, children's experiences and engagement using the cultural probe package depended largely on the family dynamic. Some children chose to leave certain aspects, especially those with less positive topics, blank or with no answer. Nevertheless, the sentence completion task hoped to encourage resilient key process of children's "meaning making in adversity" by facilitating "causal/explanatory contributions and future expectations" in "normalizing and contextualizing distress".

### 5.4.3.4. Protection Tool

To end the research, the final task was the "protection tool" (Ennew, et. al., 2009, Manual 2). A protection tool is used in participatory research to ensure that children are left with positive emotions when completing a difficult or distressing task, or in this case, in providing a positive ending and closure to the research. Protection tools can be culturally positive or comforting symbols.



**Figure 14.** Protection tool: christmas tree and decoration balls

Given the fact that the research was conducted approaching the Christmas and New Year holidays, the researcher thought it was appropriate and culturally relevant to have the protection tool be a Christmas tree. Children had to decorate the Christmas tree by writing down their hopes and dreams for the new year on Christmas decoration balls and paste them on the tree. Indeed, the information gathered was that Christmas, snowy winter, and presents were a special time for children, and children were all looking forward to COVID and COVID-related restrictions ending. This in turn hoped to end the research process with key resilient processes of a “positive outlook” in providing “courage” through times of adversity and “hope” in looking forward to the New Year.

#### **5.4.3.5. Token of Appreciation**

Finally, the families were instructed to open a packaged gift at the very end. This gift was meant to be a token of appreciation for volunteering and participating in the research study. Participants were gifted face masks and reflectors appropriate for the winter and COVID-times. The cultural probe package was then retrieved by the researcher for data analysis, then returned to families’ doorsteps thereafter featuring a “Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays” final note.

## Chapter 5: Data Analysis

The data analysis chapter provides a thematic analysis of the data gathered from the cultural probe package and online survey questionnaires. The chapter is divided into the three themes of the study (1) family relations and childhood, (2) family activities and the home space, and (3) children and families' further reflections and hopes for COVID-19. The data analysis illustrates the similarities, differences, and exceptional changes, experiences, and meaning-making practices during times the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 5.1 Family Relations and Finnish Childhood

#### 5.1.1 Individual and collective efforts in strengthening the family team

**Table 3.** Family teams

	<b>Family A</b> <i>Hockey team</i>	<b>Family B</b> <i>Music band</i>	<b>Family C</b> <i>Olympic team</i>	<b>Family D</b> <i>Arts and crafts team</i>
Father	<b>Rupsu</b> "active"	<b>Aleksanteri</b> "kind"	<b>Sanpa</b> "strong"	<b>Adam</b> "funny, strong, helpful, creative, story teller, intelligent, caring, naughty, strict, patient"
Mother	<b>Onsku</b> "patient"	<b>Facemask</b> "patient"	<b>Anne</b> "helpful"	<b>Fiini</b> "funny, strong, helpful, creative, story teller, intelligent, caring, naughty, strict, inspirational, sweet"
Eldest	<b>Epana Ipana</b> (boy, 9) "friendly"	<b>Piano</b> (boy, 15) "helpful"	<b>Karhu</b> (boy, 11) "patient"	<b>Sydney</b> (girl, 7) "funny, strong, helpful, creative, story teller, playful, intelligent, caring, naughty, strict, inspirational, active, sweet"
Middle	-	<b>Window Curtains</b> (girl, 11) "active"	-	-
Youngest	<b>Alle</b> (boy, 6) "storyteller"	<b>Elsa</b> (girl, 7) "storyteller"	<b>Lode</b> (girl, 7) "active"	<b>Salama</b> (boy, 5) "funny, strong, helpful, creative, playful, intelligent, caring,



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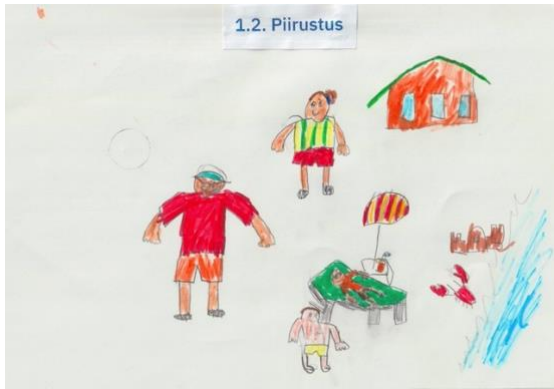
				naughty, patient, active, sweet"
				<b>Harley</b> (dog)
Pet	-	-	<b>Sohvi</b> (dog, 12)	"funny, strong, helpful, creative, story teller, intelligent, caring, naughty, strict, patient, inspirational, active, sweet"

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The results in family team exercise revealed the uniqueness of each family, their different roles, and their dynamic. It also provided an opportunity to follow-up on the individual family members' assigned characteristic(s) by asking: *could you think of an example of how this characteristic helped the family team during these COVID-times?* This managed to relate the *family team* exercise to COVID-19 and yielded interesting further results in the family roles and dynamic. Some similarities to bring forth here are: the youngest children in Family A and B were considered the "storytellers" of the family keeping the family entertained at home. The mothers, on the other hand, were considered as "patient" in keeping the peace and order during these chaotic times. The fathers in the families were described as "active", "strong", and "kind" organizing activities and being kind despite the COVID-stress. Whereas the youngest ones were "active" or "storytellers", the eldest siblings were attributed to being "patient", "friendly" or "helpful" in being attentive to others. Overall, this exercise illustrated that each family member offers a unique characteristic to the *family team*. These different yet seemingly complementary traits among individual family members has had a special role to play in the family dynamic, especially during the changes and challenges of these COVID times.

**5.1.2 Finnish childhood memories, traditions, and hopes for a family holiday somewhere far and tropical or near and dear at the summer cottage**

A consistent theme among most of the children's drawings was a family holiday trip to somewhere warm and tropical. This perhaps reveals children's common experiences of childhood through family vacations being abroad, for example, at a beach in Thailand. All families reported disruptions to these travel expectations or family traditions due to COVID-19's travel restrictions.

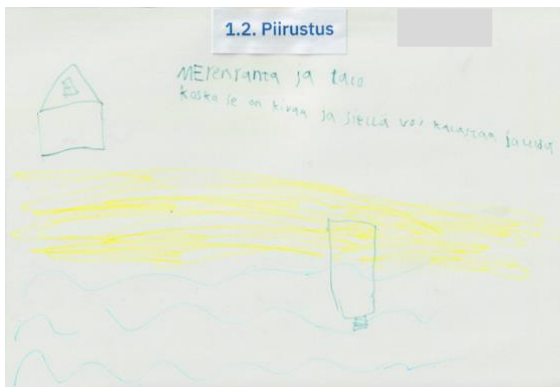


“Beach Chill: the family by the ocean in Thailand. He drew this because he says we had a super fun vacation there earlier”  
by *Epana Ipana* (boy, 9) from Family A

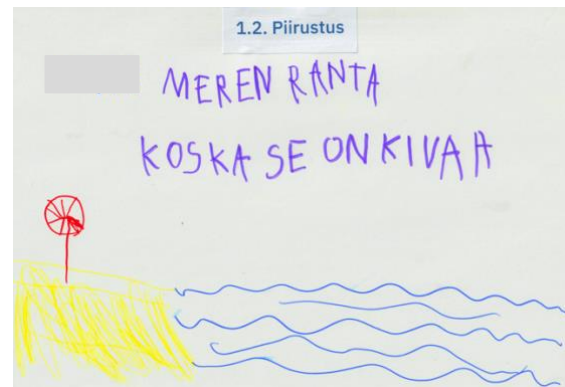


“Elsa jumps from the chair to the sea. It was wonderfully peaceful. The rest of the family doesn't show up in the picture, but are also on the beach”  
by *Elsa* (girl, 7) from Family B

*Epana Ipana* from Family A depicted a drawing of him and his family by the ocean in Thailand which was inspired by memories of their previous time there. Similarly, *Window Curtains* and *Elsa* from Family B's were also based on last year's Christmas trips to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.



“Seaside and taco because it's nice and warm and there you can fish and swim”  
by *Karhu* (boy, 11) from Family C



“Lode by the sea because it's nice”  
by *Lode* (girl, 7) from Family C

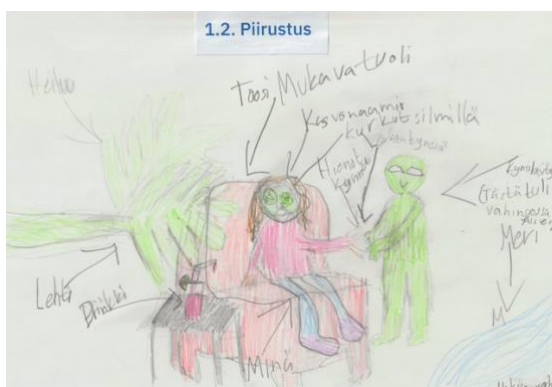
Likewise, Family C elaborated that *Karhu* and *Lode*'s drawings were “based on times lived and dreams of the future”, and mentioned that “right now, we should be enjoying swimming, sunbathing, etc. in South Africa” referring to the family's cancelled travel plans to South Africa. The timing of the research project, being so close to the Christmas holidays, elicited these childhood expectations, experiences, and memories meaningful to children and their families. All four families agreed that they were looking forward to travelling abroad once COVID-19 ends or traveling restrictions ease.



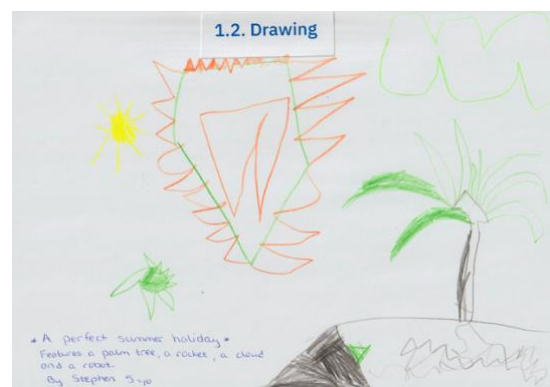
“A perfect summer me at our cottage” by Sydney (girl, 7) Family D

Another Finnish tradition in the summer is spending time at *mökki* which is the family’s summer cottage (Statistics Finland, 2007). This was depicted in a drawing by Sydney from Family D who was inspired to draw a recent scenery from last summer. When asked to list the first five things that comes to mind when thinking about the summer cottage, Family D mentioned: “swimming, playing, fun, smoke sauna, bbq meals”.

In addition to childhood experiences, memories, and yearnings of family trips either abroad or at the summer cottage, the drawings provided insights into children’s unique personalities and individual ways of self-expression. *Window Curtains* from Family B, much like her chosen pseudonym, enjoyed including a comedic element to her creation. She included funny annotations to go along with her drawing, which was a self-portrait of her being pampered by a manicurist that “became an accidental alien”. While *Salama* from Family D enjoyed being creative in his drawing by including his love for robots.



“A perfect summer holiday” by *Window Curtains* (girl, 11) from Family B



“A perfect summer holiday: features a palm tree, a rocket, a cloud and a robot” by *Salama* (boy, 5) from Family D

It is important to follow-up on children’s drawings by asking them about their own interpretations, meanings, and intent of their creations (Ennew, et. al., 2009).

Sydney's drawing of her riding a unicorn at the summer cottage was in fact based on real-life memories of last summer. The unicorn is her floatie and the woman watching her on the left is *Fiini*, her mother. Whereas *Alle*'s drawing of a football match in Portugal, for example, was apparently "completely imaginary" yet representative of his love for football and his longing to one day watch professional football player Ronaldo in person.



"He drew a football match at a stadium in Portugal. Ronaldo is there. Our family is watching the game and getting hot dogs. The main reason for this vacation / drawing was to see Ronaldo and just be on vacation" by *Alle* (boy, 6) Family A

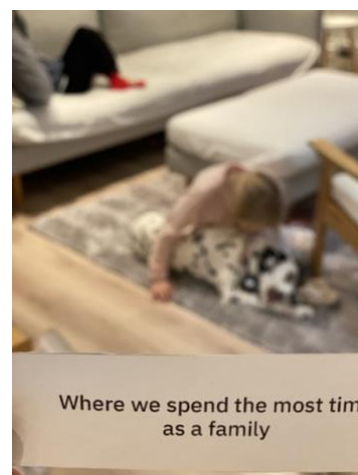
## 5.2 Family Life, Activities, and Use of the Home Space

### 5.2.1. The home as a valuable social and safe space for children and families

The results from the photo-voice exercise demonstrated striking similarities among the different families in how the home space is used and valued. The living room or dining room, for example, was considered a social space, where families would gather around to play games, eat, or watch movies or television together.



"Where we like to spend time as a family" by *Epana Ipana* (boy, 9) from Family A



"Where we spend the most time as a family" by *Sydney* (girl, 7) Family D

The bedroom space, on the other hand, was considered a private and special space for children to enjoy their alone time. Particularly during these COVID-times, when most parents and children have experienced individual responsibilities (i.e., remote schooling and working from home) all within the shared space of home, it was important for families to set aside alone time. In the final online survey questionnaire, Family B noted that it is “very important that everyone has their own bedrooms. Especially in the spring, during distance learning, it was good that everyone found their own, peaceful place”.



“Where I like to spend alone time: I like to keep my room door closed so that I get my own time” by *Window Curtains* (girl, 11)  
Family D



“Where I like to spend alone time: My bed. I can rest and calm down there” by *Alle* (boy, 5)  
Family A

Moreover, when prompted to capture *a space at home that makes them happy*, children had selected a variety of interesting spaces in the home. The home space for most families extends to the outdoor areas of the home. Family B mentioned having a big garden where the mother *Facemask* enjoys gardening. Children from Family B, *Elsa* and *Window Curtains* are happiest and kept entertained utilizing the outdoor space of their home. When the weather permits, they enjoy spending time at their gazebo and jumping on the trampoline.



"A space at home that makes me happy: bouncing high and doing tricks makes me happy" by *Elsa* (girl, 7) Family B



"A space at home that makes me happy: the gazebo is a wonderful place to eat" by *Window Curtains* (girl, 11) Family B

On the other hand, Family C enjoys bathing and using the sauna indoors. Sauna is a fundamental activity and culturally significant part of the Finnish home (cite). In Finland, there are more saunas at home than there are cars (cite). Family C says "the family likes to take a sauna and bathe. Outdoors activities are done together and phones are for when we are "alone".



"A space at home that makes me happy: because it's warm and there's bubbles" by *Lode* (girl, 7) Family C

The results or photos showcased by the children gathered valuable snippets and glimpses of the physical home and how they cherished them. During these COVID-times of remote working and distance learning, more time is spent together at home while individual family members are pre-occupied with their own business (cite). The questions about the families' use of the home space was followed-up in the final online survey questionnaire by asking how the family managed or re-organized the home space to accommodate for everyone's needs. Family C mentioned that they "made a workstation for distance work. A basketball hoop was set up in the backyard". While parents from

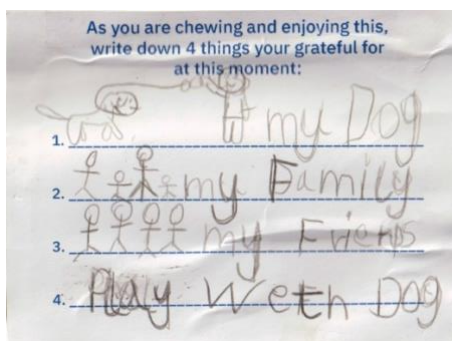


Family D say “they changed the play room to their bedroom and now they have desks for work and school work in all bedrooms and the living room”.

### 5.2.2. Expressing gratitude for life in Finland, family, friends, and traditions

Children from Family B shared their gratitude for the upcoming Christmas holiday and festivities. Siblings *Elsa* and *Window Curtains* both mentioned that they were grateful that “it’s almost Christmas” and that they “can make gingerbread”. This provided the researcher with an opportunity to follow-up in the final online survey questionnaire on what Christmas meant to the children and families, and how they felt about the changes happening this year due to Corona. Family B says: “Christmas is associated with traditions and thus security. Because it is so close to Christmas it’s definitely on everyone’s mind. Normally we spend Christmas with relatives. Now we have to come up with new ways to see them, for example outdoors”. For Family C, Christmas: “is a fun, calming time and the children are looking forward to seeing Santa. We have previously spent Christmas with close family (parents and siblings) but this time we will be with each other only”. Indeed, inquiring about what Christmas meant for the families added another layer in getting to know more about experiences of Finnish childhood and meaning-making practices of Finnish families.

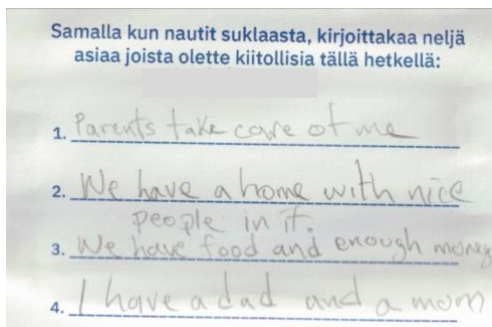
Moreover, children from Family’s A and D shared their gratitude for having a home and good social relations in their lives, such as a good family, nice friends, and loving pets. Siblings *Alle* and *Epana Ipana* even identified individual family members they are grateful for such as their mom and dad or little brother. This in turn gained more insight into family relations and the overall family dynamic. In addition, children from families C and D, mentioned their beloved pet dogs in the list of things they are grateful for during Corona.



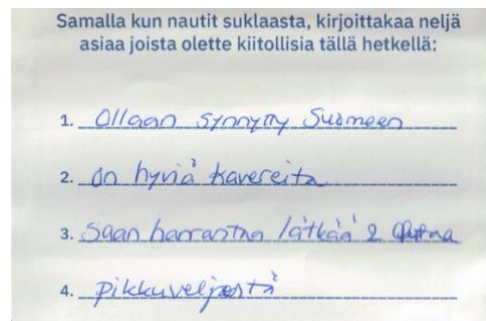
“Four things I’m grateful for this moment: 1. My dog, 2. My family, 3. My friends, 4. Play with dog” by *Salama* (boy, 5) Family D



“Four things I’m grateful for this moment: 1. That I can spend time with friends, 2. That I can be with my family, 3. That I can visit friends, 4. That I get presents on my birthday” by *Sydney* (girl, 7) Family D



"Four things I'm grateful for at this moment" by Alle (boy, 6) Family A



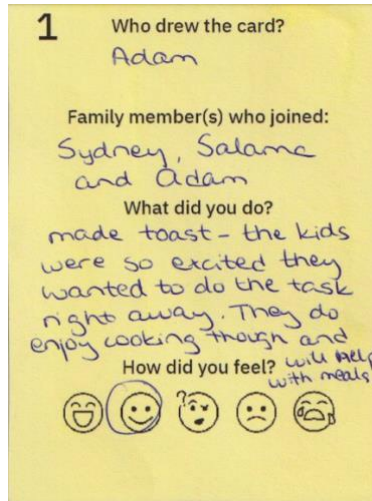
"Four things I'm grateful for at this moment: 1. We were born in Finland, 2. There are good friends, 3. ? 4. Little brother" by Alle (boy, 9) Family A

As featured above, *Epana Ipana* from Family D wrote that he is grateful "to be born in Finland". There was a need to follow this up, to which he answered: "because there are good people in Finland and there is food". Perhaps the gratitude task reminded children of the positive aspects in their lives and how fortunate they are to be in a safe place like Finland during the global health crisis. Results also showed that children were not as much affected by the COVID changes at all as Christmas and presents were on their mind. Furthermore, the children described the chocolate bar break as a pleasant surprise and thoroughly enjoyed it. Siblings *Lode* and *Karhu* from Family C went so far as to list it as one of the things they were grateful for on their list. Another important observation is that siblings from families B and C had identical answers. Perhaps this activity was interactive as siblings enjoyed eating the chocolate bar while they thought of things they were grateful for together. This is a prime example or key feature in designing feel-good research.

### 5.2.3. Everyday playful and interactive activities and routines both outdoors and indoors improve family well-being and engagement in the research project

The family member who drew the first card from the stack had to *cook a nice warm meal together* with another family member. From Family B, *Window Curtains* and her mother *Facemask* made omelet. From Family C, everyone joined in cooking chicken drumsticks. From Family D, both *Sydney* and *Salama* joined their father *Adam* in making toast.





“Cook a nice warm meal together” by Family D

Through the activity card game, families provided information on their at-home cooking and dining habits. For all four families, scheduling family time was in sync with eating meals together. Indeed, on scheduling family time, Family B mentions: “the schedule is built around meals. We try to eat at least one meal together”. Moreover, for most of the families, cooking was an activity that had increased either slightly or a lot during these COVID-times. For families B and C, cooking food together is now being done once or twice a week. While for Family D, “the kids didn’t care about cooking before. My guess would be that at some point it seemed all we were doing was cooking”.



“Have a conversation about where you’d like to go but can’t: South Africa” card drawn by Lode and everyone joined

Card number 2 was a playful and social activity that required family members to *have a conversation about where they’d like to go but can’t*. The results from this card task enabled conversations between several family members that so happened to triangulate with results from the drawing exercise of *a perfect summer holiday*. Family C

brought up their cancelled trip to South Africa once more as they were “planning to experience the safari, where other family members (e.g. father) hadn’t been yet. Also, South Africa is one of the worlds most interesting places”. Similar to this, Family A “lied in bed dreaming of a trip to Thailand”. Family D, on the other hand, went on a more imaginative and creative route in their discussion as their dog *Harley* was the family member responsible for drawing the card:

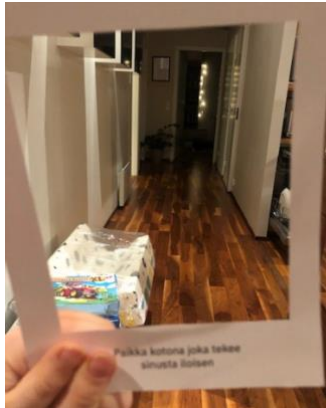


“Have a conversation about where you’d like to go but can’t: we talked about where *Harley* would like to go and the kids guessed to a dog amusement park. The kids want to go to Disney World.” card drawn by *Harley* and *Salama*, *Sydney* and mother *Fiini* joined

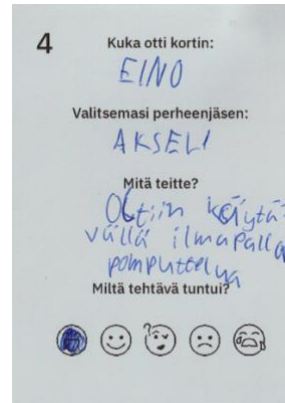
Card number three and five had families *go on a peaceful outdoor walk* as well as some physical exercise. It led to the question of: how does the family stay physically active during these COVID-times? For Family A, *Epana Ipana* and his father *Rupsu* evidently enjoyed a nice game of hockey. For families C and D, having a pet dog helps motivate the families to exercise and spend more time outdoors. Family C says since Corona, “the dog has gotten more runs in the forest. We have done aerobic exercise at home and gone jogging”.

Moreover, in efforts to get more physically active, families have now joined online exercise classes. In the activity card game, mother *Fiini* and the two kids *Salama* and *Sydney* did some stretching and started taking online yoga classes. While mother *Facemask* and father *Aleksanteri* from Family D have done online aerobics (*jumppa* in Finnish). On the topic of exercise during COVID, Family D says: “there is too little exercise in general and especially during Covid, when you don’t even leave home. Exercise is often done through activities like gardening”.

Card number 4 was *joker*: choose a special activity of your choice. *Alle* from Family A drew this card and decided to write about the time he played with a balloon bouncing in the hallway with his older brother, *Epana Ipana*. There is a link between this activity and results from the photo-voice exercise as *Alle* says that the hallway space at home makes him happy “because he can get crazy there”.



“A space at home that makes me happy: the hallway because I can get crazy there” by *Alle* (boy, 6) Family A



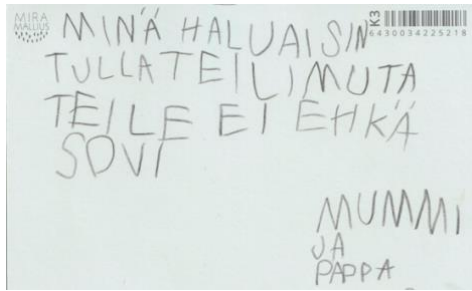
“Choose a special activity of your choice: there was a balloon bouncing in the hallway” card drawn by *Alle* and joined by *Epana Ipana*, Family A

Another connection is drawn with Family D’s results for the joker card. It confirmed the family’s love for arts and crafts as the family decided to draw together. *Sydney* drew a picture of the Opera house “(the one)”, mother *Fiini* drew a winter scene and once more *Salama*’s drew and expressed his love for robots.

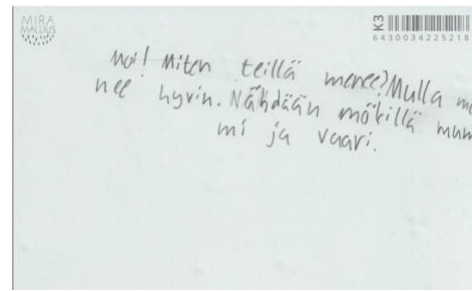
In Family B, father *Aleksanteri* drew the joker card and decided to read aloud an evening fairytale book to his girls *Window Curtains* and *Elsa*. *Aleksanteri* added “reading books is nice but we have too little time to do it”.

The *activity card game* task had indeed presented family activities and how these have either increased or changed before and after COVID. When asked whether this task interfered with the family’s daily work or school schedule, most families responded that it did not interfere at all. Family D’s *Salama* and *Sydney* for example were looking forward to doing the tasks daily inside the package, as shown in one of their activity card games above. However, Family B reported that it interfered somewhat.

#### 5.2.4. Children miss their grandparents, cousins, and friends but are hopeful

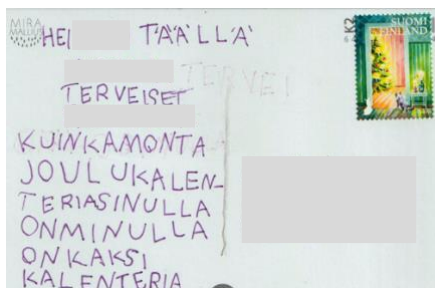


"I would like to visit you but it might not be okay for you, grandma and grandpa"  
by *Alle* from Family A

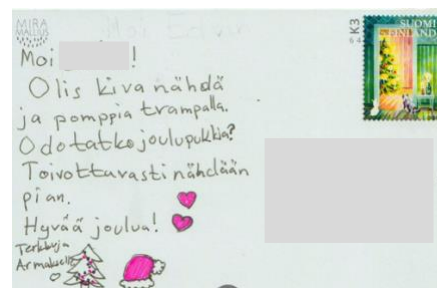


"Hi! How are you? I am doing well. See you at the cottage, grandma and grandpa"  
by *Epana Ipana* from Family A

Family A's children *Alle* and *Epana Ipana* dedicated their postcards to their grandparents. *Alle* writes: "I would like to visit you but it might not be okay for you, grandma and grandpa", whereas *Epana Ipana* wonders how they are and writes how he is looking forward to seeing them at the cottage. In the follow-up, Family A says that the children "miss them somewhat, they just want to see them more often" and that they keep in contact online.

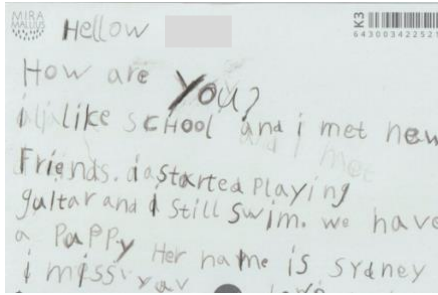


"Hi \_\_! Elsa here, regards from Window Curtains. How many Christmas calendars did you get I got two calendars"  
by *Elsa* (girl, 7) from Family B



"Hi \_\_! It would be nice to see you and bounce on the trampoline. Are you waiting for Santa Claus? Hope to see you soon. Merry Christmas!"  
by *Window Curtains* (girl, 11) from Family B

The girls from Family B wrote letters to their cousins who live further away. *Elsa* and *Window Curtains'* postcards were written in a positive light reflecting the well-anticipated Christmas time for the children. *Elsa* mentions that she got two Christmas calendars this year and *Window Curtains* wonders if her cousin is excited to see Santa Claus. Although the cousins rarely see each other due to the long-distance, they continue to keep in touch through Whatsapp video calls during these COVID-times.



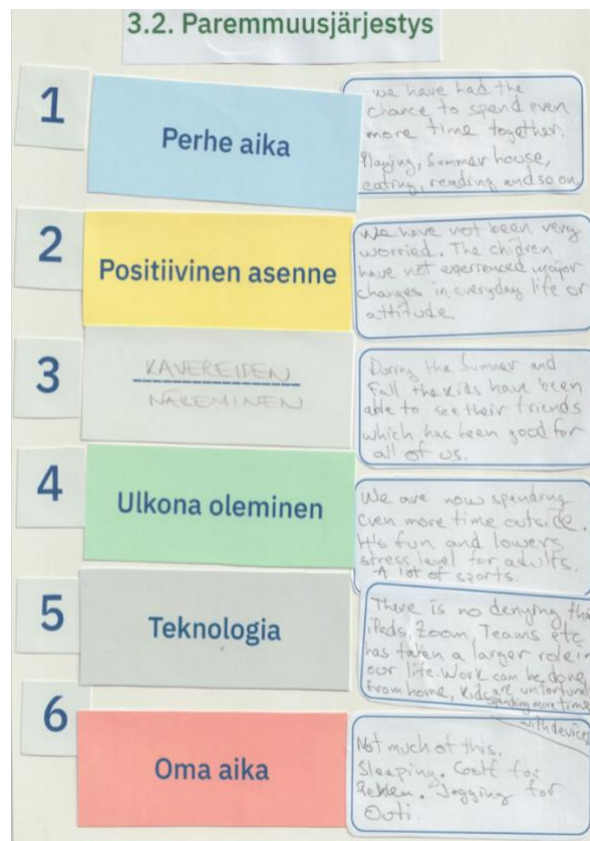
"Hellow\_\_ How are you? I like school and I met new friends. I started playing guitar and I still swim. We have a puppy her name is *Harley* I miss you love *Sydney*"  
by *Sydney* (girl, 7) from Family D



"\_\_\_\_ I MISS YOU SO MUCH SALAMA"  
by *Salama* (boy, 5) from Family D

Siblings *Sydney* and *Salama* from Family D have dedicated their postcards to their school friends. In *Sydney*'s letter, she writes an update on all of the exciting new things happening in her life such as meeting new friends, picking up the guitar, and getting a new puppy. While her brother writes that he misses his friend so much. *Sydney* writes to her friend that moved to a different country, whereas *Salama* writes to his friend who switched daycares. Family D says that *Sydney* and her friend usually meet once a year, but they are not sure about this year perhaps due to COVID travel restrictions. While *Salama* and his friend have regular playdates "if everyone in both families are healthy".

### 5.2.5. Valuing Family time, outdoor time, seeing friends, and a positive attitude



Ranking Exercise by Family A

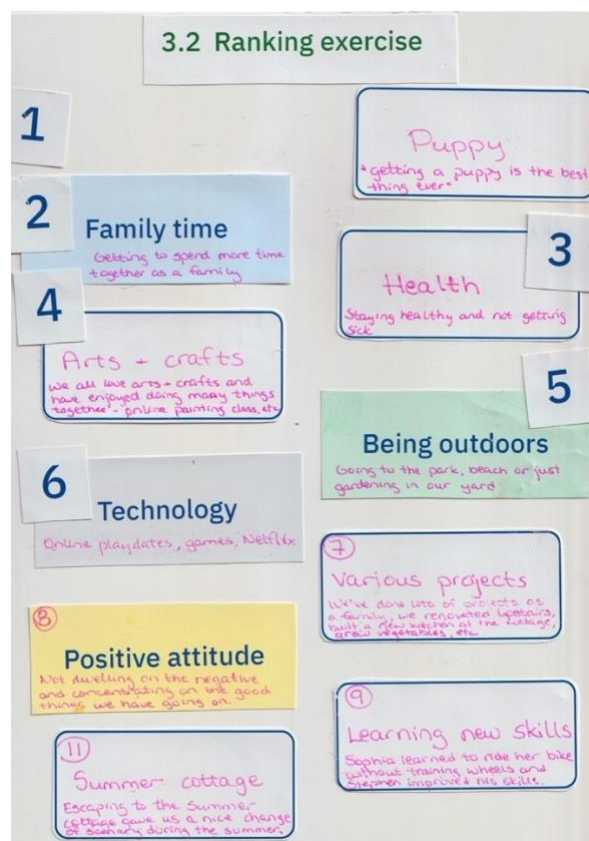
**Family time.** Family time was ranked as one of the top 3 coping strategies for all four families. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, families have noticed an increase in time spent together. Families A and C ranked family time as their number one strategy. Family A remarks that although the family had not experienced any major changes in everyday life or attitude, they “have had more the chance to spend more time together. Playing, summer house, eating, reading and so on”. Family C says “it is nice to be together with close family” and that COVID has “made them closer through increased time spent together”. Family B, ranking *family time* as their number two agreed with Family C. Lastly, Family C ranked *family time* as their third on their list, stating: “This is what *Elsa* thinks is most important. Increased family time has been a positive aspect of Corona. Maybe we’ve become a little closer as a family. At least we’ve gotten to spend more time together”.

**Alone time.** On the other end of the spectrum, *alone time* for families A and C was ranked on the bottom. Family B did not include *alone time* on the list, but instead added a variety of family group activities in their ranking list such as “various projects”, “arts and crafts”, “summer cottage”. Family A comments: “Not much alone time for the family except for the adults Golf for *Rupsu*. Jogging for *Onsku*”. Nevertheless, *alone time* was



ranked as number two by Family B who points out: "Going to school and working was possible because everyone had the opportunity to organize their own space for it".

**Blank: Seeing friends.** An interesting similarity was presented in families' choice of strategy in the blank option. Families decided to list another social aspect in their lives which, for families A and B extends outside the family home. Under *family time* there is *seeing friends*. Family A refers to how COVID restrictions developed and how this impacted opportunities to see their friends: "In spring, we didn't see our friends at all. During the summer and fall the kids have been able to see their friends which has been good for all of us". While Family B combines strategies of *seeing friends* with *time outdoors*: "it was important that we were able to see friends and relatives in our yard and have parties together". As well as online: "going out and sharing moments with friends via video call has been really important". On the other hand, families B and C added their pet dogs to the list. Family C says: "nice jogging buddy", whereas Family B says: "getting a puppy is the best thing ever. When asked what their pet dog means to them, Family B says: "Harley is everyone's baby. We all enjoy playing with her and training her. Sydney joined us at puppy school and we all practice obedience training with her at home".



Ranking Exercise by Family D

As mentioned above, Family D was creative with the *ranking* exercise, and added a couple of new and interesting coping strategies that were personal to their family. According to their *ranking* list, they have enjoyed various family activities as well as projects together. They were able to add more information on the home space in this task than in the photo-voice exercise, mentioning that: "we've done a lot of projects as a family, we renovated upstairs, build new kitchen at the cottage, grow vegetables, etc.". Moreover, the family had experienced the switch from in-person to online courses mentioning online yoga as well as online painting. Indeed, not only has the family kept active as a family, but the children had to use these COVID-times as an opportunity renovate the home as well as learn new skills such as learning to play guitar and learning how to bike. Following-up on Family D's experience with online courses and social interaction, they were asked how online activities were the same or different than in-person activities. Family D reveals that: "online doesn't give you the same closeness as in-person does, but we are getting used to it. Sydney's birthday party was online in April and although she had fun she wanted a "real" party this fall. Online is an ok replacement, but not the "real thing". But some things, for example guitar classes are pretty much impossible online".

**Technology.** Evidently, all families have experienced a significant increase in technology use. Both parents and children have gotten accustomed to courses and social interaction online. Most parents are working from home having online work meetings, the older children have experienced distance learning, and the younger children online play dates. Family A listing technology as 5<sup>th</sup> on their list says: "There is no denying that iPads, Zoom, Teams, etc. has taken a larger role in our life. Work can be done from home, kids are unfortunately spending more time with devices".



3.2. Paremmuusjärjestys		
1	Teknologia	Koulunkäynti ja töiden tekeminen oli mahdollista teknologia avulla.
2	Oma aika	Koulun käynti ja työssäkäynti on mahdollista, kun: koululle on mahdollisuus järjestää omaa aikalista.
3	Perhe aika	Tämä on läsnä olemisesta tärkein. Perheen yhteisen ajan lisääminen on ollut perinteinen asia koronasta.
4	<u>YSTÄVÄT</u>	Ulkoilma ja yhteiset hetket videopuheluiden avulla ystäviensä kanssa ovat olleet tällä tärkeitä.
5	Ulkona oleminen	Oli tärkeää, että pystyttiin tapaamaan ystäviä ja sukulaisia puolelta ja viettämään aikaa ja uusia ystäviä.
6	Positiivinen asenne	Positiivinen asenne olisi voinut olla mikä tahansa muuten ruusua. Positiivista asennosta on lausuttu koko koronajakson.

Ranking Exercise by Family B

Family C agrees as there is “too much time spent on phones” and lists technology as number 5 on their list as well. In the final online survey questionnaire, families were asked to highlight a positive and negative aspect of the increased technology use. Family B ranked technology as number 6 on their list. For Family B a positive aspect of technology use is that they “keep in contact with people that live abroad more often than before and the kids have mastered online play dates. And sending messages helps with learning to read and write. Adults save time with work without the daily commuting.” Opposite to Family B is Family C who ranked technology as number one on their list. On listing out the positives, Family C says: “During distance learning, it was important that everybody had devices for school activities”. Family C’s mother *Facemask* being an upper secondary school teacher perhaps informed the decision to list technology as the first coping strategy as it was indeed a big change for children, parents and school teachers. In terms of listing out the negatives of increased technology use, parents are definitely concerned about children’s extended use of “Youtube” and in general “too much time spent on screens”.

**Time Outdoors.** Fortunately, families in Finland have every opportunity to spend time outdoors and surrounded by forest, sea, lakes and nature. During these COVID-times, time outdoors has increased and is valued more than ever before. Families had a variety of options to write about as time spent outdoors is valuable to Finns (cite) and *time outdoors* was used for a variety of activities. Family A wrote: “we are now spending even more time outside. It’s fun and lowers stress levels for adults. A lot of sports”. For

Family C, *time outdoors* meant: “peace of mind, endurance”. Whereas Family B, as mentioned above, considered outdoor time as a way safer way to socialize with friends and loved ones. Moreover, for Family B *time outdoors* meant “going to the park, beach, or just gardening in our yard”. Family B also added spending time at their summer cottage in their list of coping strategies: “escaping to the summer cottage gave us a nice change of scenery during the summer”.

**Positive Attitude.** The ranking position of the suggested strategy *positive attitude* was varied among families. However, as Family B notes: “A positive attitude could have been any number. It has been needed during the entirety of COVID”. On the other hand, Family A mentions that the family maintains positivity as they “have not really been worried. The children have not experienced major changes in everyday life or attitude”. Family C says “yes it will work out”. While Family D mentions: “not dwelling on the negative and concentrating on the good things we have going on”. The *positive attitude* strategy led to an interesting and pertinent follow-up question: *If there was any advice you would give to other families during these COVID-times, what would it be?* Family C advises to “do outdoors activities and spend time together”. Family B recommends that “when there are negative messages from the news, it is good to focus on the things that are going well in the family”. In a similar light, Family C “focus on what is important in life and remember this is just teaching us to concentrate on what is truly important to us”.

### 5.2.6. Differences in engagement in the research process based on family dynamics and children’s collective hopes for COVID-19 restrictions to end

Dear Melissa,

I created these activities with my family. We were a yoog team!

My role in the project was Sydney. My sibling in the project was Salama. During the tasks, my mother was Fini, and my father was Adam. I enjoyed doing the tasks with family. In the process, I discovered new things about my family, such as nothing. I also discovered nothing about myself! I really enjoyed everything. I did not enjoy —. I wish there were more break tasks (the grateful list) in the package.

These are my thoughts and experiences of Corona times that I'd like to share with the researcher.

The most challenging part of COVID has been Seeing Grandma.

The most positive part of COVID has been Nothing.

I am grateful for mom for helping me through these times. I hope that COVID ends.

I am looking forward to Christmas.

A note from Sydney (girl, 7) Family D

Dear Melissa,

I created these activities with my family. We were a super team!

My role in the project was Salama. My sibling in the project was Sydney. During the tasks, my mother was Fini, and my father was Adam. I enjoyed doing the tasks with family. In the process, I discovered new things about my family, such as my tummy. I also discovered how much I miss visiting loved ones about myself! I really enjoyed working with my family. I did not enjoy NTF/NTF. I wish there were more tasks in the package.

These are my thoughts and experiences of Corona times that I'd like to share with the researcher.

The most challenging part of COVID has been Social distancing.

The most positive part of COVID has been Santa's elves leaving surprises.

I am grateful for family time for helping me through these times. I hope that Corona ends.

I am looking forward to Christmas.

A note from Salama (boy, 5) Family D

Hi Melissa,

We did these tasks with my family. We were the right team. My role in the project was nice and my sibling's role was also also nice. During the assignments, my mother was helpful and my father was creative. I liked completing the tasks with everyone.

During the project, I realized new things about my family, e.g. we are a good family. I learned from myself that I am skillful. I liked that there were fun tasks. I didn't like that some tasks were hard to understand. I would have liked to have had more discussion tasks in the package.

These are my thoughts and experiences from Corona times I want to share with the researcher:

The most challenging part of COVID is that there are so many limitations.

The most positive part about COVID is that you are allowed to be at home with your family.

I hope Corona ends soon. I am grateful that I have seen friends because it has helped me in these times. I look forward to Corona ending.

A note from *Alle* (boy, 6) Family A (translated)

Hi Melissa,

We did these tasks with my family. We were a good team. My role in the project was observer and my sister's role was teller. During the assignments, my mother was riding and my father was present. I liked the assignments with my dad.

During the project, I realized new things about my family, e.g., nothing. I learned from myself that (N/A). I liked that chocolate. I didn't like that (N/A). I would have liked the package to have had more (N/A).

These are my thoughts and experiences from Corona times I want to share with the researcher:

The most challenging COVID in time is that you can't see friends. The most positive thing about COVID is that nothing.

I hope that I get gifts. I am happy about that school because it has helped me in these times. I look forward to new year.

A note from *Karhu* (boy, 11) Family C

Hi Melissa,

We did these tasks with my family. We were a good team. My role in the project was nice and my sibling's role was also nice. During the assignments, my mother was calm and my father was funny. I liked doing assignments with my family.

During the project, I realized new things about my family, e.g. we are healthy. I learned from myself that (N/A). I liked being able to draw a dream vacation. I didn't like that (N/A). I wish there had been more space in the package.

These are my thoughts and experiences from Coronatimes that I want to share with the researcher:

The most challenging part of COVID is the cancellation of activities.

The most positive part about COVID is that it was allowed to be with the family.

I hope COVID ends. I am grateful that I have a family because it has helped me in these times. I look forward to the continuation of activities.

A note from *Epana Ipana* (boy, 9) Family A (translated)

Hi Melissa,

We did these tasks with my family. We were a super team. My role in the project was to be actively involved and my sister's role was a storyteller. During the assignments, my mother was busy and my father was helpful. I liked doing the task with Elsa.

During the project, I realized new things about my family, e.g. (N/A). I learned about myself was that I am quite good at drawing. I liked getting chocolate. I didn't like that there were a lot of tasks. I wish there had been more rewards in the package.

These are my thoughts and experiences from Corona times I want to share with the researcher:

The most challenging part about COVID is not to see friends.

The most positive part about COVID is that you got to wake up later.

I hope we run out of interest. I am happy that I can be outdoors with my friends because it has helped me in these times. I look forward to traveling again.

A note from *Window Curtains* (girl, 11) Family B (translated)

In the sentence completion or fill-in the blanks exercise, children's answers revealed the similarities of how children fared during the pandemic, such as the challenges of not seeing their friends or grandparents, as well as their negative feelings towards restrictions on activities. Moreover, it showcased their collective hopes for COVID ending and activities to resume as normal and a positive outlook in looking forward to Christmas and traveling abroad in the near future.

## Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

### 7.3. Discussion

#### 7.3.1. Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

The theoretical, methodological, and ethical concerns prominent in Childhood Studies and participatory fieldwork bring about issues of children's individual "voice", "agency", "power", "interpretation", and "representation". In overcoming such issues, the value of a culturally situated, relational, transparent, committed, and systematic approach is necessary in promoting child-centered research. The theoretical frameworks of a social, structural, and relational approach in understanding childhood "in its own right" and uncovering key family resilience processes in supporting children's social well-being in times of crises coincides with the methodological characteristics of *The Right to be Properly Researched* Manuals by Ennew, et. al. (2009) as well as Clark and Moss' Mosaic approach (2011) to participatory research. In applying these operating frameworks and characteristics with the design of the cultural probe package and online survey questionnaires helped realize the innovative value of aesthetic design, conversational language, and a multi-method and multi-actor approach as successful in engaging children and their families' in *feel-good* and meaningful research about their everyday lives and the impacts of the COVID-19.

Information gathered from the 1<sup>st</sup> online survey questionnaire clarified children's and families' interests and needs and served as a useful communication tool between the researcher and the families. The reflexive and visually aesthetic and functional design of the cultural probe package as well as the online survey questionnaires is believed to contribute to (a) combating distance between the researcher and the families, and (b) engaging children and families' in the research study – an opportunity for a playful, yet meaningful family project. Indeed, designing participatory research *for* and *with* children and their families provided intergenerational collaboration between and among children and parents as well as siblings. Hence, the empirical work supports Clark and Moss' (2011) Mosaic approach in "seeing and listening" to children. Parents' support, communication, cooperation, and assistance during tasks enabled their youngest children to participate in the study. Rather than having an outsider researcher involved intruding in their everyday lives – which is culturally and contextually insensitive or disruptive - the study argues that it is more meaningful to have the parents and siblings or social relations close the children. Indeed, as co-researchers and data gatherers in the project, children and their families were free to complete the task-based participatory tools within the comforts of their home and with the people closest to them.

Broad questions or themes were initiated by the researcher, yet children and families identified the key aspects. The data gathered from the various creative – and primarily visual - tools were used to “probe” or “elicit” responses, which were then followed up and further explored in the final online survey questionnaire. Hence, it is crucial to strike a balance between more traditional and creative methods (Punch, 2002). The use of a variety of participatory techniques is valuable to sustain children and their families’ interest. The creative tasks as offering children and families different and interesting alternative to their usual schoolwork or work (Punch, 2002). In accordance with Punch (2002), Innovative methods can be more interesting and fun for all parties involved. Many adults might also benefit from them and find them more appealing than traditional methods.

Nevertheless, in addressing the research study’s limitations, it acknowledges the constraints of time and resources. The small sample of four families with a similar demographic can be argued as non-representative. However, the research study specifies that the project is not meant to be a generalized representation of all families living in Finland, rather it takes on a case-study approach in uncovering the similarities and uniqueness of these four specific families. Moreover, the pressures of time and the constraints of conducting fieldwork during a pandemic had seemingly impacted the rushed and abrupt timeline of data collection process. The researcher is incredibly fortunate and grateful to the four families who volunteered, cooperated, and proceeded in an organized fashion despite the chaos of the pandemic, and the approaching Christmas holidays. Nevertheless, most families mentioned that the cultural probe package did not interfere with their everyday schedules.

### **7.3.2. The Social Impacts of COVID-19 on Finnish Children and Families’ Well-Being**

As previously mentioned, COVID-19 did not impact children and families to the same extent as other countries wrought by more severe cases of unemployment, fear, political upheaval, and multiple losses. Although the COVID-19 pandemic had presented a “stress test” to the educational system, to the economy, and to families and children, Finland has fared reasonably well in terms of providing the everyday basic needs of individuals in a welfare state society that functions successfully based on equality, equity, and resiliency. The fact that COVID-19 had not severely impacted the everyday lives of children and their families – in comparison to most countries - was shown in children and families’ own experiences and positive attitudes in looking forward to the Christmas holidays. Nevertheless, based on the results of these four families, there were striking similarities in the increase and value of family time (which included pets) as well

peaceful or active time spent outdoors. Children and parents' schedules were organized around meal time and alone time was scheduled at the end of the day where children could enjoy resting in their bedrooms. There were slight changes and disruptions to experiences in childhood and family life, such as cancelled trips abroad, increased parental and sibling responsibility, and the increasing parental concern of extended use of technology. Nevertheless, technology was seen as both a positive and negative adaptation in everyday life, as social and creative activities as well as connections to friends and extended families were maintained primarily through online video meetings. Families' report that it is not the same as in-person time, yet children and their families seem to have accepted these disruptions and decidedly move on with their lives in hopes that these restrictions would end some time soon. The families are grateful that there is indeed high trust in their government and society in operating in an organized and timely fashion. Finnish families and children, in general, learn to not stress over matters that cannot be controlled and instead maximize on what they can control whether it be individually or together as a family. The results drawn from the package showcase the value of the family unity as well as the sociocultural values of peaceful or active time in nature, individual contemplation, and joint-family activities in Finland.

### **7.3.3. Family Resilience in Times of COVID-19**

Nevertheless, we must take into account the COVID-19 timeline and its evolving future developments. In applying a *family resilience framework* in its conceptual and methodological frameworks, the design of the participatory tools and tasks inside the cultural probe package not only respected children's rights to participation in research, but also elicited key processes of family resilience and social well-being in light of these COVID-times. It managed to provide an opportunity for children and their families to reflect on how they have experienced, coped, and persevered throughout the COVID-19 restrictions whilst acknowledging the phenomenal ways in which they have worked together as a family. Additionally, the research project not only helped families reflect, but also elicited everyday meaning-making practices and fun, collaborative, and meaningful activities especially through the gratitude list, the activity card game, and the ranking exercise.

## **7.2. Conclusion**

To conclude, the MPhil research study consisted of three distinct analytical components in uncovering changing experiences in childhood in light of the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) it gathered contextual information on the geographical, historical, political, social, cultural backdrop of Finland, and how it has fared during times of crisis,

and (2) develop innovative participatory approaches using the cultural probe package and online survey questionnaires, and (3) analysed childhood and family life based on the interests and perspectives of children and their families. It explored how COVID-19 conditions and constraints have inevitably altered the everyday lives and meaning-making practices of four families consisting of young children, their siblings and pets living in the capital region of Finland. This research is an excellent example of the ways in which participatory methodologies need to be adapted and reworked in different fieldwork contexts to generate useful insights into childhood and family life. The research demonstrates that participatory research does not necessarily mean certain “child-friendly” methods (e.g. drawing) but instead introduces a successful balance between child-centered and relational, as well as systematic and explorative. The use of questionnaires can, in fact, be made participatory, in the ways in which they are co-developed and applied in collaboration with adults meaningful to the children. The potentials of adapting a *family resilience framework* in child-centered participatory methodologies during times of crisis, presents a replicable and reliable framework that ensures that children’s participatory and provision rights are respected. It not only highlights children’s and their relational frameworks views, interests, and opinions, but offers a practical approach in addressing children’s individual needs according to the sociocultural, environmental, and relational resources available. The research hopes to kickstart the innovative design of the cultural probe package to a variety of family compositions, in different contexts of crises, and in various sociocultural settings. Moreover, with more time, resources, and a team of researchers allotted to conducting such research, it hopes to conduct meaningful and practical solutions through longitudinal studies in identifying risks and coping behaviors that inevitably change over time, especially following the ongoing and unpredictable developments of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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