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Every cloud has a silver lining – Finnish guardians' experiences of the positive outcomes of emergency remote schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

In spring 2020, the majority of schools worldwide were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition from face-to-face schooling to remote learning at home was sudden and dramatic. Indeed, the term emergency remote schooling (ERS) might describe the situation more accurately. This study asks the question: What kind of positive outcomes did guardians report during emergency remote schooling? A survey was conducted among guardians of children in comprehensive schools, general upper secondary schools and vocational schools (n=60) and their answers were analysed through qualitative content analysis. This study is situated in the notions of 'space' and 'time' as previously developed by Lefebvre (1991) and Massey (2005; 2008). While space and time are essentially intertwined, they are also shaping and being shaped by our social lives. As a positive outcome, guardians reported growing awareness of modern day education. Guardians appreciated being able to get closer to present-day schooling and gain more knowledge of teaching and learning in general. Secondly, during emergency remote schooling, guardians recognised children's manifold roles and relations within schooling, as learners taking responsibility in their own studies and developing their study skills but also in relation to peers and to social aspects of schooling. Lastly, during ERS, guardians reported more flexibility in time management and increased communality in family life.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, emergency remote schooling, survey, guardians' experiences, space and time

Introduction

> "The premises of schools, educational institutions, universities and universities of applied sciences as well as civic education and other liberal education institutes will be closed down, and contact teaching will be suspended. As an exception, however, pre-primary education organised in schools and contact teaching for grades 1–3 will continue for the children of parents working in sectors critical to the functioning of society. A further exception is that contact teaching will continue to be arranged for pupils who require it according to a decision on special-needs support; however, parents and guardians who are able to arrange childcare at home are still requested to do so. The above-mentioned arrangements will enter into force on Wednesday 18 March 2020." (Government Communications Department, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2020)

The above quote is part of the English press release in which the Finnish Government and the President of the Republic informed the Finnish nation about the additional measures to address the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to move from face-to-face schooling to *emergency remote schooling* (ERS) taking place at home. In practice, this meant organising studies with the help of digital devices through online connections, using digital learning environments, and in some cases self-learning (ibid.). In Finland, school closures lasted for two months during the first wave of the pandemic, yet shorter breaks in face-to-face teaching have taken place even after this, based on the situation in different parts of the country. We recognise the seriousness of the situation and the challenges that have followed from it for schools and families alike, however, in this study we aim to concentrate on the positive by asking *what kind of positive outcomes do guardians report during emergency remote schooling?*

Traditionally, distance or remote learning has referred to an institution-based learning where students and teachers are usually apart; students are following the curriculum of a specific study program and technology is widely used for the interaction between students and teachers, either in real time with the teacher (synchronously) or without the real time interaction through online resources made available for the students (asynchronously) (Keegan, 1980; Schlosser and Simonson, 2006). In this study, we use the concept of emergency remote schooling (ERS) (see also, Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust and Bond, 2020; Vuorikari, Velicu, Chaudron, Cachia and Di Gioia, 2020) for several reasons. First, the transition from classroom to home was unplanned due to the transition happening at short notice. Second, we do not aim to study either teaching or learning as such; instead, we aim to understand guardians' experiences of school-related issues taking place in the home environment in general, and thus we consider the term 'schooling' as a more holistic concept. Last, the concept of homeschooling has been actively used in recent studies (see for example, O'Sullivan, McGrane, Clark and Marshall, 2020) to describe schooling during the pandemic. However, in its original form, homeschooling is parent-led education at home, based on the parents' own decision to educate their children outside the official educational system (Kunzman and Gaither, 2020), which to our knowledge does not fully relate to the present situation. In this study, we follow Hodges et al.'s (2020) definition based on which emergency remote teaching (here schooling) is a temporary solution in a crisis situation involving fully

remote teaching solutions. Thus, the aim is not to recreate a robust educational ecosystem but to offer temporary access to instruction and support in a quick and reliable way.

As the transition to ERS was sudden, there was no time for careful planning of how to organise schooling remotely with the help of, for example, video conferencing tools or different digital learning platforms. In Finland, the digitalization of schools has progressed at a varied pace; teachers' digital competences have developed moderately while students' digital skills have to be further developed (Tanhua-Piiroinen, Kaarakainen, Kaarakainen and Viteli, 2020). During ERS, digital competences among both teachers and students have been the focus. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre's report (Goman et al., 2021) suggests that many learners' capabilities for studying remotely have been inadequate and the support from schools has been insufficient, mirroring similar findings from other international contexts (Greenway and Eaton-Thomas, 2020; Gudmundsdottir and Hathaway, 2020). Besides digital skills and overall resources for studying remotely, students' and teachers' wellbeing during ERS has been a concern (Goman et al., 2021; Sainio et al., 2020). Even though we are focussing on the positive in this study, we recognise the results of recent studies (Bol, 2020; Van Lancker and Parolin, 2020) according to which ERS might even increase inequality among students with different socioeconomic backgrounds when it comes to, for example, resources available for studying remotely.

Despite the crisis situation, positive outcomes during ERS have already been reported: according to the recent study by Sainio et al. (2020) on educational staff and other support staff experiences, students' ICT skills and self-regulation improved, their social pressure reduced and studying conditions were more peaceful. Furthermore, teachers recognised that they became more familiar with the students and the cooperation with the families developed, since more personal contact channels were used to discuss school related issues. In the Finnish Parents' League (2020) survey, guardians reported ERS as a time of family communion and siblings getting closer to each other, and guardians becoming more aware of their children's schooling in general (see also, Lammi-Taskula et al., 2020). Students have appreciated a more flexible timetable, the development of skills to work online, more peaceful studying conditions, more time online, and less bullying (Herkama and Repo, 2020). Guardians have also valued the increased family time and the reduction of time pressure (Paju, 2020). Furthermore, students in secondary schools have noticed becoming closer with their families (Save the Children, 2020).

Our study concentrates on guardians' experiences of ERS for two central reasons. First, earlier research (see for example, Bæck, 2017; Epstein, 2011) indicates that guardians' active role and the cooperation between home and school is important for children's academic success and overall well-being, and guardians' participation in their children's schooling is also outlined in regulations concerning education in Finland (Basic Education Act, 628/1998; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014). However, research (Räty, Kansanen and Laine, 2009) also shows that not all the guardians are equally involved in their children's schooling, and that guardians' socio-economic backgrounds affect their participation in their children's education (Koskela, 2016; Lehti and Laaninen, 2020). Bæck (2009), in her study of Norwegian guardians' views on home-school relations, found that even though guardians felt welcomed in school, the relationship with school staff remained distant and they felt excluded from

central discussions. Second, during ERS, guardians have been part of their children's schooling in a more profound manner since school activities have taken place in the home space. Therefore, guardians are important informants in understanding how ERS has affected the everyday lives of families. For these reasons we invited guardians of school-aged children to take part in the online survey where we asked them to reflect on whether something good might have come out of ERS.

Understanding positive experiences of ERS through space and time

Theoretically, we have applied ideas of spatiality and temporality in interpreting guardians' experiences of ERS. Organisation of space and time in the home environment during ERS has affected the ways guardians have experienced ERS positively. During the pandemic, people have been forced to distance themselves socially from each other and spend more time at home (see for example, Committee for the Future of the Parliament of Finland, 2020). For many, the passage of time has slowed down due to the changes in their everyday lives and in their social relations (Ogden, 2020), and also the sense of space has altered due to the restrictions on mobility (Bissell, 2020). Hence, 'space' and 'time' appear as useful concepts in understanding how everyday lives have been constructed spatially and temporally during the pandemic. This also applies to guardians' experiences of ERS, since school related tasks with online sessions and independent study tasks were carried out in the home space, intertwined with the time management of both students themselves and their guardians. This study is inspired by theoretical discussions on spatiality and temporality, previously developed by Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1991, 1993, 2008), and Soja (2010), among others. We do not aim to present a concise description on the issue; instead, we give a brief overview of the main characteristics of how space and time as social constructs might be useful in interpreting guardians' experiences of ERS.

According to Warf and Arias (2009), space has traditionally been subordinate to time; at the time of the Industrial Revolution, human actions and social lives were often viewed as historical, happening in a certain time that progressed linearly. In this 'equation', space was marginalised. Though there were attempts to put space into focus within social theory, for example Chicago School's studies on space in relation to ethnic minorities in urban settings in the 1920s, it was not until the 1970s, that space came to matter more explicitly (Warf and Arias, 2009). So-called 'spatial turn' in human and in social sciences refers to an idea where space is understood not as a static entity but one that actively constructs human lives and societal life (Gulson and Symes, 2007), and which is relevant to understanding human experiences and production of cultural phenomena (Warf and Arias, 2009). Space is not simply a concept used by geographers or architects; besides being something physical and material, it is also a complex social product (Soja, 2010). This is in line with one of the earliest theorists of space, Henri Lefebvre (1991), who stated that space has to be understood not just as a physical environment but also as socially constructed, produced and reproduced by social actors. Moreover, for Massey (1991, 2008) space is a meeting place of social relations, movements, understandings, and experiences, which 1) is not a static entity, 2) does not necessarily have boundaries in the sense of division and isolation, 3) does not have one, unique identity but instead is full of inner conflicts, and 4) is nevertheless, unique and one-of-a-kind.

Even though scholars (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1993, 2008; Soja, 2010) of spatiality have actively criticised the earlier emphasis on historicism, the time-centered social thought, time is relevant for space, and vice versa (Gambetti and Jongerden, 2011). Space and time should not be placed against each other. They are not separate entities; instead, they are interrelated, and space is one of the factors that produces time (Massey, 2008). As Crang and Thrift (2000, p.1) state, "space without time is as improbable as time is without space". For Soja (2010), space and time are the most fundamental and encompassing elements of our social worlds, and we are just as much temporal as spatial beings.

Finally, we acknowledge the fact that when space is taken seriously, as a fundamental part of our social lives, the power aspect is always at stake: spaces are never neutral or apolitical, since they are full of expectations, values, and norms (Hyry-Beihammer, Estola and Hitunen, 2014). Furthermore, space both enables and challenges possibilities for agency and participation (see for example, Massey, 1993; McGregor, 2004). In our study, home creates a spatial and temporal context of ERS. Home as a space is physical and material but it also consists of temporal rhythms, cultural and symbolic meanings, and subjective expectations attached to it (Dyck, Kontos, Angus and McKeever, 2005). To summarize, we follow the idea of space actively constructing our daily lives, not simply being a backdrop in which certain actions take place, and spaces being constructed by social actors (see for example, Alanko and Juutinen, 2019; Holland, Gordon and Lahelma, 2007). Furthermore, we agree that time is an important element whose interconnectedness with space deepens our understanding of ERS. According to Levine (2005), the sense of time pressure is related to western notions of our lives being so strictly scheduled. Moreover, Julkunen, Nätti and Anttila (2004) note that a lack of time is typical in wealthy societies where people have a vast array of activities to spend their time on. Moreover, due to the lockdown of societies, time has been released from school related and free time activities for other purposes. Since guardians are expected to support their children in their schooling (Baeck, 2009; Epstein, 2011; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014), we do not consider the home 'free from school' even before the pandemic. It should be noted that during ERS, many guardians have also worked remotely at home, which in turn, has affected how the home environment has been organised spatially and temporally. In our research data, around a third of the guardians reported that they were working remotely while their children were studying at home. This altered the ways that home space was utilised for work, studying and leisure but also the ways that the passing of time were viewed in the families. Normally, when children attend school in a specific physical environment according to a given timetable, space and time structure the schooling in a more predictable manner.

Understanding guardians' experiences through qualitative methodology

Our aim in this study is to understand guardians' experiences of the positive outcomes of ERS. We lean on qualitative methodology where the emphasis is on understanding people's subjective experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). The first author's research interests in family sociology and home-school cooperation gave impetus for this study (see for example, Alanko, 2018). In spring 2020 the lockdown was still ongoing, which inspired the first author to gather research data while the experiences of ERS were still fresh in the mind of guardians. While planning the research process, the main motive was to gain insight into how ERS was supported by schools during the

pandemic, and how the interaction between home and school was promoted. We recognise the importance of examining the experiences of guardians, as their traditional role as supporters of their children's schooling changed during the pandemic (see also Carretero et al., 2021). Furthermore, as the private sphere of home suddenly turned into a place of schooling - often parallel to guardians themselves also working at home - we felt it important to explore guardians' experiences more profoundly.

The participants and the research data

The pandemic also affected the research process in relation to research data. As we relied on qualitative research methodology, aiming to understand guardians' experiences of ERS on a deeper level, open or semi-structured interviews might have corresponded to this aim more precisely. However, as the lockdown of societies affected the interaction between people, the first author made the decision to conduct an online survey. At the beginning of May 2020, an invitation to take part in the survey was shared on the first author's social media sites (Facebook, Instagram), expecting this to be shared widely around Finland. The invitation included a link to the Webropol site where participants were able to fill in the survey anonymously.

The survey consisted of eight background questions (guardian's gender, age, place of residence, education, occupation and work situation during the pandemic, age and school level of children and the type of possible support children need at school), followed by open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences. In the open-ended questions, guardians were asked to reflect on the following themes in relation to ERS: digital technologies used for ERS, experiences of home-school cooperation and support received from school during ERS, guardians' own role in supporting children's ERS, and positive and negative outcomes of ERS. In this study, we concentrate solely on the positive outcomes of ERS.

Analysis

In total, 60 guardians took part in the survey. Most of the respondents were female (95%), residing in the northern part of Finland (63%). The average age of the respondents was 41 years, and most reported having either a university degree or degree from a university of applied sciences (58%). Around a third of the respondents reported working from home during the pandemic. The rest reported having parental leave (12%), being unemployed (7%) or working outside the home (18%). Four respondents identified as students and three respondents reported a hybrid situation where they varied working at home and in the office. Most of the guardians had either two children (43%) or one child (36%) and in 12 families, there were three or more children. 83% of the respondents reported having children only in comprehensive schools; either in primary schools (7–12-year-olds) (48%) or in lower secondary schools (13–16-year-olds) (15%), or both (20%). There were three families with children in both early childhood education and in comprehensive schools. 10% of the respondents reported having children both in comprehensive schools and in post-compulsory education (either in general upper secondary school or vocational institutions).

For the purposes of this study, the open question where guardians were asked to reflect on the positive aspects of ERS has been analysed by both authors. However, guardians also mentioned positive outcomes in other parts of the survey and all of these were also included in the analysis. For the sake of comparison, out of 60 respondents, fifty-five guardians reported positive outcomes of ERS, while fifty guardians also shared negative outcomes of ERS. The analysis of the research data can be described as an inductive content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In general, guardians wrote lengthy answers in the survey. We began the analysis by reading through all the survey answers and making notes of the positive outcomes. After having gone through the research data, we turned to the question that specifically dealt with the positive outcomes. We created a table into which we started to list meaningful expressions related to the positive outcomes of ERS described by the guardians. After this phase, we had over a hundred meaningful expressions listed in the table. The next phase consisted of reading these expressions and reviewing for similarities and differences in order to create themes that best described guardians' experiences. The main themes will be discussed in detail below. We use direct quotes from the survey answers where the respondents are indicated by R1-R57.

Positive outcomes of emergency remote schooling

Based on the research data, we created three main themes that represent guardians' experiences on the positive outcomes of ERS. The first theme, growing awareness of modern day education, consists of experiences through which guardians describe how they have gained more knowledge about schooling in general. The second theme, recognising children's manifold roles and relations within schooling, contains guardians' views on their children as learners taking responsibility in their studies and developing their study skills, but also in relation to peers and the social aspect of schooling. Finally, the third theme, flexibility in time management and increased communality in family life, concentrates on the experiences of guardians that relate to their family life in general during ERS. Each of these themes will be discussed below, with reflections also being made on the earlier research. In the discussion part of the article, we continue to deepen the findings with the theoretical ideas of space and time.

Growing awareness on modern day education

Guardians' participation in their children's education has been recognised to be of high importance (Basic Education Act 628/1998; Epstein, 2011; Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014), though their role is often regarded as supportive (Blomberg, 2008; Orell and Pihlaja, 2020). During ERS school life became part of the home space in a new way since online lessons and other school related tasks became part of everyday life at home. The first theme, guardians' growing awareness of modern day education, consisted of several experiences of how guardians felt they had gained more knowledge of schooling and thus, became more familiar with their children's school life (see also Finnish Parents' League, 2020). As children were at home studying online or independently, guardians were exposed to the everyday practices of schooling, as the following quotes from our research data show:

> "Now I have much more knowledge as a parent, about what is being studied at school and how studying takes place." (R9)

> "Learning new modes of action (...), having been able to follow teaching and child's learning more closely". (R37)

Our aim in this study was not to explicitly study the modes of learning or the actual teaching practices of ERS. However, guardians shared their experiences of how the school day was organised in general, and what kind of digital platforms were used for studying. For example, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Google Hangouts and Google Classroom were often mentioned. Moreover, study tasks were delivered as messages through different communication channels and platforms. Following Massey's (1991) ideas, the context of ERS blurred the boundaries of home and school, since the home space became intertwined with schooling practices through online connections, and this allowed guardians to get more involved with their children's schooling.

Traditionally, guardians engage in their children's schooling through checking and reminding them about homework (see for example, Orell and Pihlaja, 2020). However, guardians in our study felt that this role had changed, and even deepened during ERS. The younger children, especially, needed support and guidance from their guardians during the school day.

> "I've been able to get familiar with my children's learning on a new deeper level, more than by just checking the homework." (R27)

If children fall behind in learning or they have difficulties with learning or schooling in general, they are entitled to support (see for example, Basic Education Act, 628/1998). In the survey, 29% of the guardians reported having children that receive either enhanced or special needs support at school. Even though guardians are aware of their children's special needs in learning or schooling in general, these became more concrete to guardians during ERS. This was apparent based on the research data, as indicated in the survey answer below.

> "It has been an interesting experience, to dwell into the school world, and also the challenges caused by the child's difficulties in reading and writing have become more concrete. I have to take my hat off to school! Things have been organised, and help has been available for the study tasks on a short notice, and even oral exams on the tables have been organised." (R16)

Our study suggests that ERS might have had a positive effect in this respect; guardians have been able to follow their children more closely and have obtained more knowledge about schooling in general. The transition from face-to-face schooling to the home environment enabled guardians to get closer to their children's everyday life as students. In Finland, guardians mainly hold a positive view and a strong trust of the educational system (Jauhiainen and Alho-Malmelin, 2004; Tikkanen and Lempinen, 2018). Studies (see for example, Lawrence, 2015; Silvennoinen and Klas, 1996) have shown that in order for guardians to support their children's educational paths and schooling in general, they need to have knowledge of the educational system and how schooling takes place. Through gaining more general knowledge on modern day schooling, guardians also reported getting more familiar with their children's manifold roles in relation to schooling, and this will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Recognising children's manifold roles and relations within schooling

As home became a space of schooling during ERS, guardians were able to follow their children's schooling more carefully and this revealed several issues which may have been hidden previously. Based on the research data, we cannot claim ERS contributing to the improvement of children's study skills, nor guardians being able to evaluate this in a situation where, for example, atypical teaching methods are being used and the circumstances of schooling are overall unconventional. However, the research data draws a picture of how guardians view the different roles and duties of their children in relation to schooling.

First, guardians appreciated being able to observe their children more closely as students doing their study tasks and concentrating on their studies, as the quotes below indicate. Instead of emphasising specific study skills, guardians' experiences related strongly to their children's ability to adjust to the situation that followed from ERS. The unusual situation revealed children's schooling abilities to the guardians.

> "I was able to follow the child's progress in her studies in a more profound manner, compared to a normal situation." (R26)

> "To follow our child's concentration on her studies has been a revelation for us parents." (R53)

> "Children have found more competencies, persistence and the ability to face the new situation openly and with vigorous spirit." (R26)

In the public discourse, the younger generation who have lived their whole lives in the digital era has been often labelled as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), yet this has been claimed to be a myth (see for example, Hietajärvi, 2020). Furthermore, recent studies (see for example, Tanhua-Piiroinen et al., 2020) have indicated that not all the students have good enough digital skills for ERS. However, only a few guardians in our study reported the improvement of their children's digital skills as a positive outcome of ERS. Findings to the contrary can be found in a study from nine EU countries; the majority of the guardians reported their children gaining new digital competencies during the ERS (Vuorikari et al., 2020).

The National Core Curriculum for Basic education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014) asserts that students in comprehensive schools gain transversal competence - that is a combination of attributes that consists of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and will - through education, and that students also take responsibility in their own studies. Comprehensive schools also prepare children for future studies (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014). During ERS, home has created a different kind of space for schooling activities, and guardians reported their children practicing and gaining various competencies in relation to their studies. For example, as a positive outcome of ERS, many guardians noted their children gained more responsibility for their own actions in relation to studying. Moreover, guardians noted their children being able to organise and plan their study activities (see also Carretero et al., 2021). These were outlined in research data with following comments:

> "Older child has learnt to take responsibility for his own study tasks." (R17)

> "A motivated and self-regulated young person has succeeded in effectively taking over the organisation and logistics of her own work." (R53)

> "Children received a hefty coaching for upper secondary school. Their personal targets for development and strengths surfaced more." (R2)

While guardians appreciated ERS allowing them to observe their children as students doing school related tasks in the home space, another positive outcome of ERS related to social aspects of schooling. Guardians noted that the social pressures of schooling were reduced during ERS (see also Goman et al., 2021). Often, this was related to children being bullied at school. Home space offered a safe environment and a long-awaited break from bullying. Guardians also suggested that while social pressure was absent at home, this had affected their children's ability to manage their study tasks better.

> "The child has felt better because the school's negative environment is absent (bullying background exists)." (R23)

> "There is no social stress". (R44)

> "The younger child has done his study tasks vigorously since no one knows if he gives a wrong answer." (R17)

Finally, guardians emphasized that during ERS, children were able to organise their own studies according to their own wishes, as the timetable was often considered relatively flexible (see also Carretero et al., 2021).

> "Peace to study, able to proceed at one's own pace, and a clear timetable for returning the study tasks. Possibility to ask for help through Teams when needed." (R22)

Space and time conceptualisations appear especially relevant when interpreting guardians' experiences in relation to this theme. Namely, home space has offered a safe place for studying, free from the possible social pressures of school life. Furthermore, students were often able to plan the timetable for studying themselves, and this was also considered a positive feature of ERS by their guardians. Indeed, guardians' views on a more relaxed pace of life was often mentioned as a positive outcome of ERS. This was clearly outlined in the quote above (R22) from our research data, where the respondent also refers to children themselves appreciating it in relation to schooling. Guardians also noted that this was heavily related to overall experiences of family life during the pandemic, and this will be discussed next in more detail.

Flexibility in time management and increased communality in family life

The third theme of the guardians' positive experiences about ERS considers time management and family communion. A general belief seems to prevail that we live our life in the fast lane (see for example, Anttila, Anttila, Liikkanen and Pääkkölä, 2015). The present time is often described as hectic and even fragmented. Time pressure and haste are discussed, both in relation to working life and free time. Research (see for example, Gershuny 2005) does indicate that time pressure or haste has increased among people, though studies also show that there is also an increase of family- and free

time in the long run (see for example, Gershuny 2000). The most recent study on Finnish people's time use indicates an increase in negotiating time management in families while society has changed, being open 24/7 and working life has become more fragmented (Anttila, Oinas and Nätti, 2015).

One of the most noted issues in relation to positive outcomes of ERS was a slower pace of everyday life. ERS challenged the concept of time and experiences of it by the guardians. When children studied at home, there was no morning 'hassle' to deal with and the schedule of the day was described as more flexible:

> "The child is not so tired when [s/he] has been able to sleep in the mornings for a longer time. The studying can be divided into sections and has been able to have breaks without the schedule. There has been more common time together." (R55)

The changes in family time because of ERS were said to give more freedom in relation to time management in the everyday lives of the families. Children were not as tired as they used to be because of the possibility to adjust the daily schedule in relation to their own needs (see also Carretero et al., 2021). These findings are in line with recent studies, such as Herkama and Repo (2020) and Goman et al. (2021) which highlight the possibility for the students themselves to control their time management in relation to schooling. The flexibility of time management also increased the possibility to spend more time with siblings.

> "Peaceful mornings and preparing for the school day. Doing things together with the brothers and sisters, for example the physical education hours." (R40)

> "An older child has been allowed to spend more time with a younger sibling and the school tasks could have been done at their own pace." (R18)

Guardians outlined that studying at home during ERS also affected relations between siblings, since they could, for example, do homework together (see also Finnish Parents' League, 2020). As a positive experience, there was more peace and a leisurely pace in the family life on a general level. During ERS, the social circle of the families got smaller and guardians experienced proximity to the families in a positive way.

> "We have become closer to each other as a family. With permission, we have been able to just hang out and bustle around at home. I myself have been able to jump aside from the working life for the moment and to spend peaceful days where the mornings are sanctified to the schoolwork and then the afternoons to everything else." (R28)

The unusual situation of the pandemic was also experienced as a chance to step back or have a pause from hectic daily working life. The sense of time pressure and strictly scheduled lives are said to be typical features of western ways of life (see for example, Julkunen, Nätti and Anttila, 2004; Levine, 2005). Within the research data, ERS challenged the use of time in families in a new way, also experienced positively, even though a global pandemic comes with significant concern and uncertainty.

Discussion

In this study, we have explored guardians' experiences of ERS in Finland, where we have been able to enjoy a globally recognised, highly performing, educational system (see for example, Niemi and Lavonen, 2020). As elsewhere, in Finland the COVID-19 pandemic has caused several challenges in schooling: both learning-wise but also in relation to children's social and emotional well-being. However, our aim in this study has been to identify positive outcomes, since we believe that every cloud has a silver lining. We also believe that the crisis situation might even reveal something about school life in general, and at least, inspire all parties to critically evaluate the modern day schooling, not least in relation to digital technologies and their usage in school related activities.

Our study findings reveal several positive outcomes of ERS as experienced by the guardians of school-aged children. First, and even though the home environment as a space of schooling does not compare to that of a school class, guardians reported gaining more knowledge of how and what children learn at school. During ERS, they were able to get more deeply involved in their children's schooling and gain insight into their children's diverse roles as students. Besides observing their children's ability to plan, organise and carry out the required study tasks, guardians noted a number of other positive outcomes of ERS: the lack of social pressure, the peace to study at one's own pace and avoiding bullying have been highly appreciated positive outcomes. Finally, guardians valued the increased family time that followed from the lockdown of society; life suddenly became more relaxed and quieter.

Theoretically speaking, space and time are factors that can rightfully be used to also understand the positive outcomes of ERS as experienced by the guardians of school-aged children. Home became a space for children's schooling full-time and offered an opportunity for guardians to be more involved with their children's schooling. In relation to Massey's (2005; 2008) and also Lefebrvre's (1991) ideas on the interrelation of space and time, and space constructing and being constructed by social relations, this study outlines changes in family relations and also guardians' views on their children's relations within schooling. Following Massey's (2008) ideas on time, the findings emphasise more flexibility in time management as guardians highlighted the students' possibility to control and decide more of their schedule with schooling. Hence, ERS has also allowed students to take more responsibility in their studies, enabling agency and participation in a new manner (see also McGregor, 2004). During the pandemic and ERS, time was described as stagnant and the use of time in the families was challenged; in other words, the pace of daily life changed a lot, and a certain kind of freedom in schooling affected the lives of the family members and their experienced communality. This exceptional crisis period gives fruitful ground to explore the conceptualisation of space and time. Theoretically, transition from the official school space to the home environment has enabled guardians to relate to their children's educational reality in a more profound manner. ERS also inspires to further reflect Massey's (1991) idea of space being actively intertwined with other spaces. In the case of ERS, digital technologies have allowed interaction of students and teachers regardless of space, through online connections. In our future studies, it would be fruitful to explore how online connections create virtual spaces for schooling and how different parties take part in those.

Finally, the pandemic has caused several challenges in relation to schooling. An evaluation report by Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (Goman et al., 2021) points out that more attention should be paid, among many issues, to interaction and support for learning since learning environments are diverse. The pandemic has forced educational professionals, but also students and their families, to view schooling in a new light. Even though in Finland the digitalization of school has proceeded on many levels, there is still room for improvement. In the public discourse, it has also been emphasised that no technology can replace face-to-face contact, and that especially younger children and those with special needs do need real life contact when it comes to schooling (see for example, Committee for the Future of the Parliament of Finland, 2020). Furthermore, everyday life at school offers important social contacts and relations for all students. Comprehensive school is said to prepare children for future life, both working life and other aspects of life, which will entail elements of acting remotely with the help of digital technologies and online connections. More research is needed especially from students' perspective as to what has worked well during ERS in relation to their studying practices. Furthermore, a Finnish study on time management reports that especially families with little children experience shortage of time (Ylikännö, 2015). The pandemic has forced families to stop and slow down, and as our study shows, guardians have appreciated this greatly. Thus, we ask whether changes in families' time management continue to change after the pandemic? Despite the various reported challenges about ERS, our research data suggests that some good has also emerged from the situation.

There are several limitations in the study. First, the sample size is relatively small. However, we have followed qualitative methodology which does not aim to generalise based on the research data. The results of this study also seem to resonate strongly with the earlier research. Moreover, the survey question on possible positive outcomes of ERS was presented on a very general level but we consider this to have allowed guardians to reflect openly on ERS, not simply concentrating on one aspect of it, for example, on learning or teaching. Furthermore, the participants of our study create a rather homogenous group of guardians, since they are well educated, and mainly female. Even though we have not analyzed our research data in relation to guardians' socioeconomic background, we can always ask how our study sample affects the findings, and whether our study gives too positive a view on the outcomes. However, participants of our study have also criticised ERS, and that aspect is the subject of future research. Thus, we do not claim that the negative issues do not exist. We also acknowledge that our research data includes mainly mothers' experiences of ERS; thus, fathers might offer different aspects on the issue. This study has offered the views of guardians and further studies, especially from students' perspective, are needed. Our research data offers several insights into ERS, and these will be elaborated more in future studies.

Conclusion

Based on our study findings, there are several points to be considered for the post-COVID world of schooling practices. First, to be able to support children in school related activities, guardians need knowledge of modern day education. Even though by necessity, ERS has offered a space for guardians to gain more knowledge of what and how their children learn and study nowadays. In the post-COVID school, this interaction between school and home has to continue to be of utmost importance. Second,

guardians have appreciated the slower pace of everyday life during the pandemic. This has also allowed their children to plan their timetable and school related activities more freely. Based on this, we encourage the discussion to continue in relation to how to organise school days in a way that best promotes students' learning and overall well-being in post-COVID world. We consider aspects of space and time to be fruitful tools in this: how schooling is organised time-wise and how space is being understood and used for schooling. Moreover, home as a space for school related activities has to be recognised as supporting the work of the official school. Related to this, the diversity of children's socio-economic backgrounds has to be taken into account when planning, for example, the application of digital technologies into schooling.

Third, digital technologies have played a central role during ERS. Though guardians in our study did not refer to these in relation to positive outcomes, we do consider it important to continue developing the ways that digital technologies are being used in modern day schooling. As ERS has proved, digital technologies can be utilized for school related activities, even with younger children. However, more detailed planning and consideration of when and how digital technologies will be used is also needed in the post-COVID world. Fourth, our study findings point out the importance of acknowledging schooling's social aspects. Schooling does not only refer to developing children's cognitive skills; instead, we need to continue to stress the importance of supporting children's peer relations and social well-being at school. Guardians in our study have expressed how their children have had the longed-for relief from social stress, and even from difficult bullying experiences, during ERS. Hence, there is still much work to be done to ensure that both the home and the school can offer a safe space for (school related) activities for all children. Lastly, post-COVID world will not be the same as before, even in relation to schooling. We encourage all parties to acknowledge the positive that has come out of the crisis situation, yet to keep in mind the challenges and continue the work to develop the schooling practices.

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