# Exploring children's constructions of Covid-19 using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study

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# Abstract

Covid-19 has had a seismic impact on the world and one which continues to reverberate. The pandemic has disrupted day-to-day living in the UK in ways arguably not seen since the Second World War. Research has begun to emerge marking the different ways in which groups and societies have experienced and responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, children have, for the most part, been left out of the conversation. Though not a homogenous group, children can be seen as possessing their own cultural knowledge. Yet, historically, children's voices have been constrained and distorted by adults, either wilfully or not, through prejudicial attitudes and/or adult-centric bias. The present research recognises structural, epistemic injustices faced by children and positions children as best-placed to represent their understanding about the world.

The present research sought to understand how children have constructed the Covid-19 pandemic in ways that respect them as rights-holders, autonomous individuals and meaning-makers. Participatory approaches and constructivist grounded theory methods were used to facilitate more equitable research, with five child co-researchers devising many aspects of the methodology. Each co-researcher (age 9-10) was partnered with a younger pupil participant (age 6-7). Together, research partners integrated drawings with dialogue to co-generate a rich dataset comprising children's constructions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Data were collected and analysed concurrently across two timepoints (July 2021 and November 2021), with dissemination discussions taking place in January 2022.

Co-researchers engaged in constant comparative analysis to progressively sort and synthesise their data, and to inductively raise them to an abstract level. Through collaborative analysis, co-researchers ultimately raised five pivotal concepts from their data, which together formed a constructivist grounded theoretical framework. It comprises ideas about managing significant challenges and changes, while developing a sound knowledge base of their situations. The children's final product, and the process by which their knowledge was

generated, have important implications for Educational Psychology practice and epistemic conduct across wider society.

Keywords: children * covid-19 * participatory * inductive analysis * voice

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# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **CASP** | Critical Appraisal Skills Programme |
| **CCfW** | Children's Commissioner for Wales |
| **Covid-19** | Coronavirus Disease 2019 |
| **CRAE** | Children's Rights Alliance for England |
| **EP** | Educational Psychologist |
| **GT** | Grounded Theory |
| **SES** | Socioeconomic Status |
| **TEP** | Trainee Educational Psychologist |
| **UN** | United Nations |
| **UNCRC** | United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| **UNICEF** | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund |
| **WHO** | World Health Organisation |

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of Thesis

This thesis maps out the steps taken to enable two groups of children to work together and create a constructivist grounded theoretical framework. Built through joint data collection and analysis, the framework encompasses the different ways in which children have come to construct the Covid-19 pandemic. Five co-researchers (ages 9-10) were recruited to devise and guide many aspects of the research. They worked alongside younger participants (ages 6-7) to collect data using creative means, before engaging in dense analytic procedures in order to conceptualise their pandemic experiences.

To the principal researcher's knowledge, there is no existing research conducted with children that has combined participatory approaches and grounded theory methodologies in this way (Canlas & Karpudewan, 2020).

A golden thread that runs through this research is that children's perspectives on many aspects of life can be eroded by adult influence and interpretation; this includes conceptions of what it means to be a child and narratives around their agency. The present research hopes to disrupt dominant ideas about knowledge creation and consider how the meaningful involvement of children can combat social injustices that they face.

## 1.2 Overview of Chapter

Across three sections, Chapter 1 aims to familiarise the reader with ideas that ground this research.

The chapter opens with a discussion of children and childhood, providing a critical take on traditional perspectives, such as the notion that a universal childhood exists. Enduring narratives around children's lack of agency and competency are seen to underlie social and epistemic injustices that they face. Consequently, children are positioned as a marginalised group in their own right.

The second section draws upon different frameworks the principal researcher found to be helpful when conceiving of how children come to know and construct their realities. These perspectives are contextualised within a wider discussion about how white, Western, adult perspectives are privileged over non-dominant knowing fields. From this position, the principal researcher explains why social constructivism and social constructionism provide useful starting points for the research.

The final section of Chapter 1 situates the research in time and place: this research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was itself the phenomenon under study. Evidence suggests there is widespread concern for how children have been impacted by the events of the pandemic but, at least in the UK, there is negligible evidence that children's views about the pandemic have been sought. The chapter concludes with an exploration of how children can be meaningfully involved in research about Covid-19.

## 1.3 Perspectives on Children and Childhood

### 1.3.1 Early Conceptions of Children and Childhood

The status of children within society, and the rhetoric around the very notion of childhood, has shifted exponentially over the last 500 years. In Europe, childhood was recognised as a qualitatively different period of life to adulthood during the 17$^{th}$ century (Ariès, 1960). Until then, children were largely seen as miniature adults and were expected to take up roles as agricultural, domestic and factory workers. Economic growth and family income depended on child labour in many countries (Lowe, 2009) so these young workers needed to quickly measure up to "adult" standards of competence (Petr, 1992). Over the coming centuries, framed by religious discourse rooted in morality and ethics, children came to be seen as deserving of an education and of protection from the ills of the world (Davis, 2011). A range of policies, practices and programmes were gradually established in response (Kosher et al., 2016).

## 1.3.2 Psychological Perspectives on the Developing Child

Though psychology was established as a separate discipline to other sciences in the late 19th century (Leadbetter & Arnold, 2013), it took time for childhood to be recognised as a critical component of the human condition and therefore worthy of study (James & Prout, 2015; Qvortrup, 1993). It was in the 20th century when the field of child psychology became more established. Empirical research was primarily conducted across the Western world (Europe and America in particular) and added to a burgeoning literature base that hypothesised about the psychology of the developing child. Findings from such research heavily influenced how childhood and children came to be conceived in society (Tatlow-Golden & Montgomery, 2021).

### 1.3.2.1 Developmental Stage Theories

An example of Western-derived theories that influenced children's societal status were stage theories of child development. These theories dominated child psychology and conceptualised early development as progression through discrete series of stages. To accrue expertise over time, children required adults to transmit the knowledge, skills and values that they needed (Hutchison, 2018). Such theories were proposed for the whole spectrum of abilities that underlie cognitive, social-emotional and moral development (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1938; Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1936). Some of the most influential stage theories (such as Piaget's theory of cognitive development) were thought to transcend cultures and societies, bringing with them the idea that there exists a universal childhood (Petr, 1992).

Stage theories were attractive as they could be utilised to assess children's progress and determine readiness across a whole host of skills. From a critical perspective, these theories can also be seen to exemplify psychological ideas that reflect Western individualism (explored further in section 1.4.1.5) and positivism (DeJong & Love, 2015). Positivism is inherent to the idea that children are dependent on adults to deliver an "objective" knowledge, making children,

essentially, passive recipients of society (Lansdown, 2005). What constitutes "objective" knowledge in this scenario is determined by adult culture and standards, which themselves provide the reference point for the levels of competence to which children should aspire (Mackay, 1974; Matusov & Hayes, 2000).

### 1.3.3 Challenges to Prevailing Views of Children and Childhood

By positioning children as merely future adults, stage theories constrained children as "becomings" rather than "beings" in their own right (Qvortrup, 2009; Uprichard, 2008). Until they could grow to become rational and literate adults, children were seen as lacking agency and social power to be able to shape their circumstances (Coles, 1986; 2003; Grotberg, 1977). Towards the end of the 20th century, childhood scholars began to shine a light more explicitly on how deficit and dependency narratives were marginalising children as a group. Consequently, childhood research became increasingly oriented towards seeking social justice for children (Esser et al., 2016).

For instance, childhood researchers questioned taken-for-granted discourses about children and childhood. When testing the assumptions underlying particular stage theories, it seemed that children were being underestimated in their abilities (Mayall, 2008). Researchers also challenged the notion that childhood was a universal experience. As stage theories had been largely developed using data collected from Euro-Western samples, the concept of normative childhood development had been conflated with the experience of a Westernised child living in the global North (Dekel & Kark, 2019; Williams et al., 2016).

Defining typical development against a single cultural reference point appeared to not only be inaccurate but damaging. Emerging cross-cultural research revealed significant variation in how children develop and express a range of skills, such as when they learn to walk (Hopkins & Westra, 1989). By comparing such evidence to theories derived from the Western conception of

childhood, a child's developmental trajectory could be considered atypical or abnormal rather than culturally situated (Rogoff & Morelli, 1989).

### 1.3.3.1 Childhood as a Social Construct

Childhood researchers sought a paradigm shift. James and Prout (1990) proposed a new subdiscipline known as the sociology of childhood: its raison d'être was to reconceptualise childhood as a product of discourse (Corsaro, 2003). Though children may be universally considered as *biologically* immature, perspectives about what children should "be" or "do" are socially constructed, and are shaped by specific sociocultural norms (Norozi & Moen, 2016; Rhodes, 1999; Sorin & Galloway, 2006). Indeed, the very nature of being a child varies across time and context. In many countries, existing as a child or adolescent is dictated by your chronological age, however, in many Indigenous cultures, 'stages of life are connected to milestones, such as learning to walk' (Heck et al., 2021, p.382).

Taking the view that childhood is socially constructed, childhood can also be seen as a social identity (Burr, 1995; Burroughs & Tollefsen, 2016). The child's identity and developmental path cannot be separated from how children as a group are conceptualised at that time and in that place (e.g., Graue & Hawkins, 2005). As a social identity in its own right, childhood can be seen as a time in itself, where children are respected as "beings" rather than "future adults" (Peleg, 2013). These ideas emerged at a pivotal time. Empirical research was finding that children's capabilities had been vastly underestimated (section 1.4.1.1), that they actively shape their lives (Christensen & James, 2000), and international policy sought to ratify their right to contribute their unique insight.

### 1.3.3.2 Children's Rights under the UNCRC

Children's rights advocates envisioned the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), signed by the UK government in 1991, as a step towards establishing child-centred societies (Hennum, 2014). Principles within the UNCRC formally granted children the right to enjoy their childhood, to have an education, to play, to be protected from harm,

and to have freedom of expression. Under Article 12, children's right to be heard became enshrined into law; legislation emphasised that children's views must be at the centre of any decisions taken around them, particularly when they impact upon the realisation and enjoyment/fulfilment of their other rights (Lundy et al., 2021).

The UNCRC was seen to have powerful and lifelong implications for protecting young people while fostering their sense of purpose and agency. Children could be recognised as capable of shaping the world around them as it currently is, and had the right to influence how the world could be (Efuribe et al., 2020). Greater appreciation for children's participation is reflected in research where their voices have been more actively sought. Examples included matters related to schooling (Can & İnalhan, 2017), mental health (Kirker et al., 2021), and when gathering information for statutory psychological advice (Fox, 2016).

However, 30 years on from the genesis of the UNCRC, national efforts to increase children's participation in the UK have been seriously lacking. The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE, 2018) reported that the UK had fallen short in adhering to the propositions within the UNCRC and failed to respond to recommendations made by the UN Committee in 2016. The authors cited hundreds of examples spanning education, law and health where 'the best interests of the child [were] not a primary consideration in decision-making' (p.5). Many examples demonstrated how protectionism had been invoked at the expense of empowerment (Caputo, 2017).

Examples of failures to seek children's input on matters affecting them are evident in the current pandemic context (section 1.5.3.1). Respondents in a global survey (Lundy et al., 2021) commented that they believed children had been excluded from decisions about the pandemic because they are still considered to be incapable of providing important insights about the world. With this in mind, one can consider whether children's views are not routinely sought, or are dismissed, because of age-based discrimination (Baumtrog & Peach, 2019).

## 1.3.4 Children as a Marginalised Group

Across this chapter, the principal researcher has highlighted negative attitudes and beliefs about children. These have perpetuated vulnerability narratives which, even if they are borne out of a desire to protect children, further hinder their agency (Biddle, 2017; Olsen, 2019). Despite the drive within childhood studies to shift away from such narratives, they persist (Young-Bruehl, 2012). This may be due, in part, to the patriarchal nature of academic research and its clash with the "feminised" area of childhood studies. That is, as childhood studies have been largely dominated by female scholars, it may be diminished as an area of legitimate intellectual inquiry; this is compared with academic research where there exists a historic bias towards researching the experience and perspectives of men (Cheney, 2019).

Attitudes towards childhood as an area of research perhaps mirror children's 'ascribed low moral status' in society (Mayall, 2009, p.2010). Embedded in broader power structures, Adami and Dineen (2021) suggest that 'systemic childism' (p.365) is at the root of many injustices against children, including poverty, maltreatment and abuse (Gilbert et al., 2009; Nolan & Pells, 2020). Due to children's intersectional identities (given they are also gendered and raced), they can be oppressed in different ways and subject to multiple layers of prejudice (Dineen et al., 2022; Kutsar & Warming, 2014; Ravnbøl, 2009).

Relevant to the present research is the recognition that, due to age-based discrimination, children are habitually excluded from the practice of knowledge construction. As discussed, there is evidence that children's right to be heard has not been given due regard (CRAE, 2018). Children's experience of epistemic oppression represents another structural injustice that hinders the realisation of their social and economic rights.

### 1.3.4.1 Epistemic Injustice: Exclusion from Knowledge Generation

Traditionally, knowledge generation was seen as the domain of philosophers and researchers (Cornwall & Fujita, 2012). Knowledge is now generally understood in a much broader sense, seen to constitute personal insight, practice-based evidence, meaning-making and experiential knowledge (Anyon et al., 2018; Fox, 2011; Hordijk & Baud, 2006; Pinter & Zandian, 2015). The drive to pursue and disseminate knowledge is considered to be inherently human but there are major disparities in what knowledge is considered to be credible and who can contribute (Dotson, 2012; Kidd & Hayden, 2016).

Fricker (2007) recognised the existence of epistemic systems and that the processes of contributing to, and drawing on, such systems are not experienced equally. Centuries of intellectual colonisation have led to white, heterosexual, cisgender, adult perspectives dominating knowing fields and systems (Alatas, 2000; de Sousa Santos, 2007). Knowledge claims derived from non-dominant knowing fields (such as the epistemic systems possessed by minority groups like the elderly or ethnic minorities) are more likely to be dismissed, in turn, dispossessing such groups from the sphere of knowledge creation (Kiguwa & Segalo, 2018; Medina, 2013) (section 1.4.1.5).

### 1.3.4.2 Children's Experience of Epistemic Injustice

Children represent another group whose stories are more likely to be 'shut down' (Baldwin, 2013, p.105) because their epistemic conduct is seen to be inferior. They can be seen as experiencing epistemic injustice on two fronts: in instances where their views are not sought thus excluding them from being heard, and times in which their views are seen as not credible (Klyve, 2019). Both these fronts bring with them epistemological assumptions regarding what adults believe about children and childhood, and 'what knowledge they can testify of' (Adami & Dineen, 2021, p.359).

Burroughs and Tollefsen (2016) examined epistemic injustice in children by invoking Fricker's conception of testimonial injustice (also known as "identity-prejudicial credibility deficit") where somebody is seen as a less credible source of knowledge due to their social identity. For children, testimonial injustice can manifest if they are not believed or taken seriously because they have been discriminated against because of their age (e.g., because they are seen as lacking the maturity to contribute meaningfully) (Bell, 1995; Checkoway, 20171996).

Testimonial injustice can occur within everyday adult-child exchanges and through various dimensions of activity related to their educational, legal, political and religious lives (Carel & Kidd, 2014; Day, 2008; Harcourt, 2021). For instance, despite evidence to the contrary, children who provide eye-witness testimony are, when compared with adults, viewed as much more suggestible and unreliable (e.g., Goodman et al., 1987; Oates, 2007). In clinical settings, Harcourt (2021) observed that professionals 'who have the greatest opportunity to encounter [young people] as knowledgeable seemingly do not reliably treat them as such' (p.732).

To keep true to Fricker's conception of testimonial injustice requires that credibility deficits be ascribed to children as a result of prejudice (Fricker, 2016). Systemic childism would be made visible when the child's youth represents a heuristic for their possession of limited epistemic capacity. Because of their un/conscious beliefs about children as a group, the adult "hearer" subjects the child to identity-prejudicial treatment. Children are therefore discredited as "knowers" by virtue of their age.

### 1.3.4.3 The Role of Adult-Centric Bias

Harcourt (2021) suggests that children's dispossession from knowledge creation can be better explained by relaxing the parameters of Fricker's conception of testimonial injustice. He suggested that children can be undeservedly disbelieved for a range of reasons beyond prejudicial attitudes against children as a whole group. For instance, an adult may judge the

epistemic capacities of a specific child or distort their views because they lack awareness of their own adult-centric bias (Goode, 1986). The concept of adult-centrism refers to implicit perspectives that adults are 'at the centre of everything, while children and young people are scaled and rated with reference to adulthood' (Florio et al., 2020, p.2). The adult may believe they are capturing a child's thoughts but have actually filtered the child's perspective through the interpretation of their own adult lens (Punch, 2002).

It is beyond the reach of this thesis to explore the extent to which adult-centrism itself has grown out of systemic childism. However, the effects of prejudicial attitudes towards children and adult-centrism may overlap, observed through the misuse of power and the underestimation of children's capabilities (Petr, 2003). Adult-centric bias is perhaps most recognisable in times where adults genuinely believe they are acting in the child's best interests. Because adults have their own lived experience of being a child, they may see themselves as well-placed to interpret a child's experiences and perspectives. However, this diminishes the intricate complexities that come with inhabiting others' frames of reference (Robertson, 2005).

### 1.3.5 Centring Children's Perspectives and their 'Indigenous Knowledge'

A consequence of failing to identify the influence of adult-centric bias is that a child's thoughts can become contaminated, with their perspective then perceived as resembling that of their adult interpreter (Mackay, 1974, 2003). Their lived experience could then be 'misunderstood, distorted, dismissed [or] erased' (Bailey, 2014, p.62). To consider how epistemic oppression can be addressed, it is important to return to previous discussions about how children have been seen as "beings" rather than "becomings". By recognising children as having their own culture and access to valuable insider knowledge, adults can begin to take seriously the importance of legitimising children's position as knowledge holders (Christensen & James, 2000). This would also require

recognising the challenges that come with seeking to access the subtleties of another's culture (Punch, 2003).

### 1.3.5.1 Children's Own Culture

In line with social constructionist thinking (section 1.4.1.1), children are seen to have access to a range of symbols and tools that are used to define and interpret their experiences, to engage in continuous negotiation in the pursuit of shared meaning (Carter & Montes Alvarado, 2019; Løkken, 2009). Such shared epistemic resources come through vocabularies and means of communication and expression, with priorities that differ from other epistemic resource bases (Corsaro, 2003; Petr, 2003). With 'perfectly functioning and sophisticated sets of interpretive practices up and running within their social group' (Fricker, 2016, p.7), the child's perspective can shed light on social processes associated with childhood in a way that would not occur to an adult (Clark & Moss, 2011).

This picture is further enriched when we consider the heterogeneity within and across groups of children. Children themselves will draw upon different knowledge systems that comprise different worldviews, traditions, preferences and rituals. These varied resources and capacities are built within their families, schools, online, and the other cultural and community contexts they inhabit (de Sousa Santos, 2007). We can therefore consider one school classroom as containing within it the dynamics of a pluralistic society (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). By honouring such diversity, children can be rightfully respected for the value and knowledge they bring to the world (Murray, 2019).

### 1.3.5.2 Children's Indigenous Knowledge

For the duration of this research, the knowledge created by children will be referred to as "indigenous" (lower case "i'). Children's indigenous knowledge refers to the domain of knowledge that is unique to those with experience of being a child in the present day. Their knowledge includes claims 'that compete with adult understanding on the grounds of race, class, gender, sexual identity, and age' (Malewski, 2005, p.217). Children's "indigenous" knowledge is considered to be the integration of experiential and insider knowledge that has

been elicited through their own methods and, to the best of one's ability, has not been filtered through an adult's lens.

By using the terminology of "indigenous", the principal researcher hopes to reiterate the politics of knowledge production across this thesis. While children possess cultural knowledge, as seen with other non-dominant knowledge systems, it can be pushed to the periphery in favour of more dominant, adult ways of knowing the world (Chilisa, 2020). Due to children's intersectional identities, some will be situated further from the centres of power, and their experience of epistemic injustice may be heightened (Alper et al., 2016).

#### 1.3.5.3 Epistemic Recognition: Importance of Being Recognised as a "Knower"

Children have a great capacity for self-knowledge (e.g., Alderson et al., 2006; Bluebond-Langner, 1978; Bromley et al., 2020) and the power of being positioned as a "knower" should not be underestimated. Congdon (2018) argued that 'the process of becoming a knower is inseparable from the broader project of pursuing a flourishing human life' (p.1) and develops through processes of socialisation (Honneth, 1995). Unfortunately, when self-knowledge becomes distorted, so can the meaning one ascribes to it and to themselves. A function of epistemic injustice is its 'self-fulfilling power' (Fricker, 2007, p.5), where the individual may begin to doubt their own capacity to know, and act in a way that resembles the prejudicial stereotype (Cole et al., 2001).

Rightfully including children within epistemic systems advantages adults just as much as children. Missing out on children's indigenous knowledges ensures ignorance prevails and 'an opportunity for epistemic improvement is lost' (Fricker, 2016, p.5). This recalls psychological work linked with children's creativity and innovation (e.g., Robinson, 2011): children have been found to apply more imaginative and flexible thinking (sometimes referred to as divergent thinking) and this process appears to deteriorate with age (Abbasi, 2011). Imposing an adult lens on knowledge provided by children may serve to divest it

of its meaning and impact, all of which is valuable and highly significant to the knowing child.

## 1.4 Theoretical Foundations and Key Concepts for the Current Study

Section 1.3. provided an overview of the key chronology and discourse around childhood and children as rights- and knowledge-holders. Section 1.4 aims to outline the processes by which children may come to construct their knowledge. The principal researcher specifically considers social constructivist and social constructionist perspectives. As background to the present research, the principal researcher was also informed by three sensitising concepts that she personally brought to the process. For reflexivity purposes, these are explored here.

### 1.4.1 Social constructivism

#### 1.4.1.1 From Piaget to Vygotsky

To outline social constructivist ideas for how children come to know the world, it is important to revisit Piaget. Early 20$^{th}$ century views about knowledge construction were rooted in information-processing theories (Mayer, 1996) and behaviourism (Watson, 1928; Skinner, 1972). However, stimulus-response psychology was criticised for inadequately capturing how people actively participate in the world to change or formulate new ideas (Skinner, 1972). Constructivist ideas, such as those proposed by Piaget, proposed a move away from viewing knowledge acquisition as mechanistic.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development differed from other stage theories. Traditional rationalist ideas saw knowledge as existing in the mind and is discovered as one goes through life, but Piaget's theory was more humanistic (Elbers, 1986). Instead, the child could be seen to idiosyncratically construct knowledge about the world around them. His schema theory (1952) positioned learning as an adaptive process through which knowledge is reconstructed upon

encountering cognitive conflict within one's environment (Posner et al., 1982). By integrating the "knowing" and "acting" other, Piaget's theory contributed to shifting understanding of the child as an active participant in the learning process (Lenkauskaite et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, constructivist ideas did little to dispel concerns about other dualist positions evident in debates around knowledge construction (such as separating nature from culture, the internal from the external, as well as the individual from the social) (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Piaget's ideas were also constrained by the assumption that there is a universal childhood (section 1.3.3) and development is seen to unfold through invariant sequences (Goode, 1986). Indeed, through rigorous empirical research, children were found to demonstrate skills and complete tasks with greater levels of sophistication than could have been anticipated within Piaget's theory (e.g., Butterworth, 1981; Fine & Sandstrom et al., 1988; Stone et al., 1973). Additionally, when certain conditions were adapted, children achieved to an even higher standard (Donaldson, 1978).

#### 1.4.1.2 Social Constructivism

Task context also had an impact on children's success. They achieved to different levels under particular conditions which 'rang[ed] from the wider culture of the child to the minutiae of the experimental procedure, such as the instructions and the presentation of the material' (Costall & Leudar, 2004, p.629). Social constructivist ideas, which emerged from the writing of Kuhn, Lave, and Vygotsky, better emphasised the social nature of knowledge construction (Young & Collin, 2004). These ideas had a significant impact on education systems where dialogic pedagogies became more widely promoted (Daniels, 2016).

##### 1.4.1.2.1 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's perspectives are framed by ideas of the socio-psychological nature of knowledge construction, with no fundamental separation between the individual and the social (Liu & Matthews, 2005). For many aspects of his theoretical system, the social context provides the individual with access to

prevalent systems of meaning (e.g., cultural practices, values, language) which are then individually assimilated. Internal processes, such as consciousness, develop as a result (Wertsch, 1985). Social collectivity is essential for the individual to develop intrapsychic processes that help to a) make sense of the milieu of information available to them and to b) to act on it.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is considered to be historically and culturally relative (Medin & Atran, 2004; Rogoff, 2003). It also foregrounds the idea of learning through responsive relationships, which is seen to be a universally relevant concept (Mishra & Shanwal, 2014). The young child's drive to know the world is intrinsically linked with early caregiver interaction, as they begin to construct the world through repeated and reciprocal acts of sharing attention, emotion, and intention (Winter, 1991). With age comes the increasing importance of the wider family and members of the community, school staff, and their peer group (Corsaro, 2005).

Key aspects of Vygotsky's theory of intellectual development include the mastery of language (which involves mastering word meaning and discourse), concept generalisation, and consciousness (the *meaningful* perception of one's world). To emphasize the interdependency of the individual with the social, Liu and Matthews (2005) refer to the epistemological paradigm underlying this theory as "historical-dialectical-monism". Though these underlying principles can be described as anti-positivist, the methods by which Vygotsky conducted analysis were derived from the traditional scientific method (section 1.4.1.4.1), termed the "logical-historical" method (Vygotsky, 1982). Such methods involve the use of top-down processes, drawing upon 'existing theoretical apparatus' before 'develop[ing] an explanatory principle and defin[ing] its place in a philosophical tradition' (Davydov & Radzikhovskii, 1985, p.51).

### 1.4.1.3 Social Constructionism

As the adopted ontology for the present research, social constructionism also finds its place in Chapter 2: the methodology (section 2.4.1.1). This section

will outline why social constructionism may provide valuable ideas for guiding the present research.

Social constructionism is a relatively new term within psychology, first finding its roots in sociology (Gergen, 1973). Its ideas were built on the premise that what is seen to be real is not a mirror of an objective reality; what individuals come to believe about the world are inventions derived from realities that have been socially constructed. Consequently, 'different ways of understanding the world coexist in parallel and none of them can be said to be the truth' (Burr, 2015, p. 223). Symbols, such as language, provide and sustain discourse around broader systems of meaning for understanding key constructs (Speer, 2005). For instance, the construct known as "money" has come to be understood as something to be exchanged for goods and services because groups have assigned shared meaning to the object itself (Berger & Luckmann, 2011; Burr & Dick, 2017).

Beyond language, groups use a range of tools, such as drawing and song, to engage in continuous negotiation about defining and interpreting experiences in the pursuit of creating shared meaning (Carter & Montes Alvarado, 2019). Such tools are developed through cultural induction, originating and evolving through the narratives of their forebearers. Therefore, meaning endowed in these tools is culturally derived and changes over time (Berger & Luckman, 2011; Pascale, 2011). It would be inappropriate to use empirical methodologies to elicit such meaning given their focus on deriving objective, "scientific" knowledge.

Social constructionism has been critiqued in the medical field for this reason (Bury, 1986; Craib, 1997): if there are multiple realities, how can a doctor ascertain which description (e.g., symptomatology) "should" take precedence over the other when they need to diagnose and recommend a course of action? However, for the purpose of the present research, this is precisely why a social constructionist view is appropriate. By adopting social constructionism, all realities can be legitimised. Children's knowledges are themselves valued, rather than judged against adult-centric standards, and epistemic diversity can be fostered.

## 1.4.1.4 Social Constructivism and Social Constructionism

Social constructivism and social constructionism developed independently within their separate disciplines and are derived from different perspectives. However, they are not fundamentally at odds with one another. Their commonalities are relevant and helpful as an introduction to the present research.

### 1.4.1.4.1 Key Commonalities

Social constructivism and social constructionism can both be said to reject ontological claims that there is a singular reality within the world and that this "truth" can be objectively evidenced (Hammersley, 1992). Positivism, as it is known, has significantly shaped natural and social scientific research (Cleland, 2001). Such research seeks to derive the "laws of nature" through methods including observation, experimentation, and controlling for variables (Boyd & Bogen, 2021). However, under social constructivism and social constructionism, there is no expectation to acquire whole truths.

Berger and Luckmann (1991) can be credited for influencing the development of both social constructivism and social constructionism. Both frameworks represent the shift towards meaning-making and propose that it is not possible to objectively assert what is true in the world. An individual's reality reflects situated knowledge, influenced by the dynamic laws of history and culture relevant to its local context. Knowledge is seen to be jointly constructed and sustained through interaction within one's social networks, which are themselves shaped historically and culturally through collective subjectivity (Redmond, 2015).

### 1.4.1.4.2 Key Differences

#### 1.4.1.4.2.1 Differing Emphasis on the Social and the Individual

One way in which social constructivism differs from social constructionism is through the emphasis put on individual and social factors of learning. The role of the child's social world is held in high regard across these perspectives, but in

sociocultural theory, 'the social precedes the individual' (Robbins, 2001, p.21). Social engagement is recognised as providing the means by which cognitive processes can develop within the mind of the individual (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Indeed, Vygotsky viewed language as playing a key mediating role in the emergence of thinking, reasoning and behaving (Gerber, 1997). Though the individual and the social are interconnected, individuals are thought to assert their agency in order to eventually *liberate* themselves from history and culture, or 'freedom of consciousness from social divisions' (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p.396).

Such ideas differ significantly from those proposed within social constructionism. Common goals within one's social group are seen to prevail over individual ambition as groups of people the world over continually engage with, and are enmeshed in, their historically and culturally specific systems of meaning. In social constructionism, the self is not one who aspires to be 'essentially independent of the community and divested of a background' (Nwoye, 2006, p.120). Instead, bound by the socio-cultural context, social constructionist ideas conceive of the many more extensive and inclusive ways that the self can be understood.

#### 1.4.1.4.2.2 Cultural Orientation

Deconstructing ideas of the self within social constructivism and social constructionism reveals how they differ by cultural orientation. These orientations, individualism and collectivism, exist on a continuum and their influences are now held in high regard across psychological research (e.g., Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012; Hagger et al., 2014; LeFebvre & Franke, 2013; Masuda et al., 2008).

Given its focus on the agentic and autonomous self who seeks liberation, social constructivism can be better aligned with Western individualist perspectives (Lave & Wenger, 1991): these emphasize the individual, their independence and the prioritisation of personal goals and attributes. Conversely, social constructionist thinking advocates for deindividualizing perspectives, where meaning-making is driven by collective processes and is constrained by the tools

that are available to us (Cojocaru et al., 2012; Joranger, 2018). Collectivist perspectives emphasise the embeddedness of individuals within groups and recognise cohesiveness and integration as essential to achieving group goals and aspirations (Hofstede et al., 2010; Taras et al., 2010; Zhou & Kwon, 2020).

#### 1.4.1.5 Prevailing 'Ways of Knowing'

Across Chapter 1, the principal researcher outlined how adult, often Euro-Western, paradigms of knowledge exclude children from epistemic systems (section 1.3.3) (Burroughs & Tollefsen, 2016; Grosfoguel, 2013). Rationalism provided the bedrock upon which individualistic perspectives could develop and come to dominate the knowledge construction debate. These perspectives proliferated discourse about how one comes to know the world, starting with the early philosophers (Plato, Descartes, Locke) and through to more modern theorists (Rogers, Allport, Kelly). Given the dominance of these ideas, they can be bracketed under the umbrella term "mainstream psychology".

Mainstream psychological approaches enjoy a privileged position in psychology due to multifactorial, ongoing historical processes, the most efficacious of which is colonisation (Okazaki et al., 2008). The world over, occupation from colonisers has led to indigenous populations being displaced from their lands, resources and culture (UN, 2009). With this also came intellectual colonisation where populations were dispossessed from their indigenous world views, rituals, languages and knowledge systems (de Sousa Santos, 2007). By marginalising local systems of knowing and being, many had their status as "knower" denigrated, and caused what felt familiar to feel unfamiliar (Kiguwa & Segalo, 2018; Manganyi, 2019). A consequence of intellectual colonisation is that psychology across the globe is heavily influenced by mainstream Western ideas, where local psychologies have been essentially erased (Allwood, 2018).

The application of top-down processes in academic research is also a feature of mainstream psychology. Researchers are more likely to draw upon familiar theories and frameworks to explain what they observe (Gregory, 1970),

and what is most familiar is likely to be those most visible in discourse (e.g., through taught programmes, within the academic literature) (Burton et al., 2007). By drawing upon these ideas uncritically, researchers risk replicating and reinforcing Western ideas of knowledge construction, upholding the notion that they are epistemologically superior.

Mainstream psychological narratives are challenged by critical and community psychologists who take a social justice approach (Fox et al., 2009; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Williams et al., 2016). They carefully curate how to respect and elicit indigenous knowledge to amplify voices within diverse groups. Often, this involves drawing upon decolonising perspectives and using data-driven, "bottom-up" approaches to preserve knowledge (Datta, 2018). Having positioned children as a marginalised group (section 1.3.4), it is possible to consider how such perspectives can alleviate epistemic injustice and challenge epistemic injustice against children while interrogating Westernised constructions of childhood (Cheney, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

#### 1.4.1.6 Privileging the Child's Voice and Indigenous Knowledges

Given the issues discussed across Chapter 1 so far, adults who look to understand the world from the child's perspective have several responsibilities: a) to maximise children's participation; b) take steps to inhabit their frames of reference and reduce adult-centric bias; and c) respect and legitimise children's indigenous knowledge wherever possible. This section will highlight the challenges that come with wanting to meet these responsibilities.

To begin with, one may need to recognise that, even in the social sciences, academia and research are the 'bastions of adult power over knowledge' (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020, p.172). Exemplified through stage theories of child development (section 1.3.2.1), early childhood researchers used frameworks that reflected positivist principles and usually sought quantitative data (Alderson, 2016; Boyden & Dercon, 2012). This may reflect the idea that quantitative research 'is often accorded greater "scientific" status' (Aldridge,

2016, p.145) than qualitative research. More interpretive research may be devalued in favour of what is considered to be “hard” science conducted from a “neutral” position.

There are also concerns that qualitative studies lack rigour and reliability (Rubin et al., 2018). However, one can question whether it is ever possible to conduct research from a position of neutrality (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Though vast datasets may derive patterns and trends of interest, quantitative research can miss much of the complexity and nuance associated with the human condition. More damaging still, the lure of recruiting larger sample sizes, to boost statistical power, can ‘steer research away from studies involving under-served and hard to reach populations’ (Crosby et al., 2010, p.3). Failing to question the top-down nature of knowledge production ‘often places strict limitations on what people can talk about’ (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018, p. 63).

Conversely, through qualitative research that is data-driven, dynamic processes of meaning-making can be captured, preserving nuance and subjectivity (Dallos & Stedmon, 2013; Johnstone, 2017; Reyes & Torres, 2007). These approaches have their roots in feminist theory (Schmidt, 2019), research conducted by Indigenous communities in the global South (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Zavala, 2013) and to discourse around dialogical pedagogy rooted in the radical ideas of Freire (1970). Such ideas are said to require “epistemological curiosity” where there can be co-intentional exploration between researcher and researched about power, what constitutes knowledge, and representation (Cheney, 2019). These ideas are fundamental to decolonising perspectives in research. Their adoption can create space for researchers to meaningfully engage with indigenous knowledges (Chilisa, 2020).

#### 1.4.1.6.1 Participatory Approaches

Participatory approaches with children are ‘a limited but growing practice’ (Cuevas-Parra, 2020, p.8) and provide a way for childhood researchers to embrace decolonising perspectives (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010). Embedding participatory approaches in research with children involves inviting them to

become meaningfully involved (section 2.3.1). The drive to include young people in research about them can be credited to changing perspectives of children and their international rights under the UNCRC (Lundy, 2018; Punch, 2002; Tisdall, 2017).

With participatory approaches, children can become the “researcher” and the “researched”; to seek out and represent knowledge in ways they see fit (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Conventional top-down approaches to knowledge construction can be challenged as children outline the space in which their knowledge is captured. There is opportunity for them to use their own ‘organic forms of sense making’ (Campano et al., 2016) to ‘generate a more inclusive knowledge’ (Cuevas-Parra, 2020, p.3) that may bring transformative possibilities.

In the present research, children were recruited to be co-researchers, who were aged 9-10. The participant with whom they worked was between age 6-7. Age is important to note as children aged 10 or younger have been identified as ‘highly underrepresented’ in participatory action research undertaken with young people (Shamrova & Cummins, 2017, p.407). The enactment of participatory approaches and the ethical challenges they bring are explored in Chapter 2.

## 1.5 Setting the Scene: Covid-19

It is now important to situate the present research within its own historical context and the global outbreak that provides the landscape for this research. For two years, the world has faced a health crisis which has brought challenges unparalleled in recent history. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020) officially characterised the Covid-19 outbreak as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 due to its spread and severity beyond China. Covid-19 is an infectious disease, caused by the virus known as severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, that has caused substantial morbidity and mortality across the globe (Ritchie et al., 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic is an event that has touched the lives of billions of people regardless of whether they have personally contracted the virus. People

have experienced national lockdowns, school closures, and intense confinement measures. Figure 1 provides a timeline, created by the principal researcher, showing some of the pandemic-related events linked to children and their schooling that took place between January 2021 and January 2022. Data for the present research were collected and analysed from July 2021 to January 2022. Therefore, the timeline frames the period preceding the research and during which it took place. The events may provide context for how children understood the pandemic with regard to the information and news that they may have been absorbing, as well as the changes that they were experiencing.

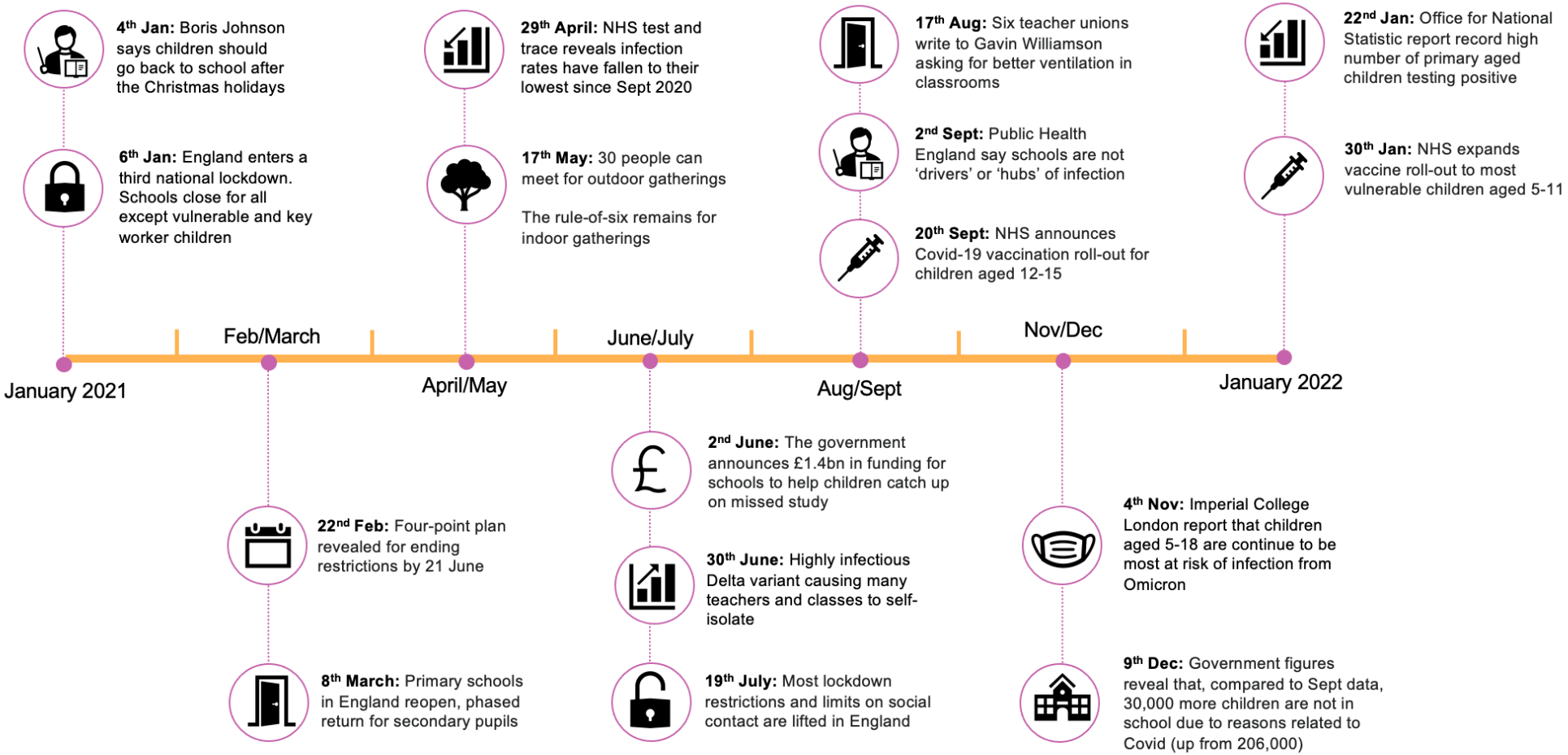


*Figure 1: Timeline of Covid-19 pandemic events involving children from January 2021 to January 2022*

### 1.5.1 Previous Pandemics and Children

Pandemics have punctuated the timeline of human history for centuries. Nevertheless, in the midst of a global health crisis, it can be difficult to appreciate that pandemics are not modern phenomena. The Covid-19 pandemic differs from previous pandemics in key aspects, the most significant being the speed with which scientists were able to learn about the origins of the virus and the dynamics of its transmission (Caspi et al., 2020).

Post-disaster research suggests that children can experience collective trauma even if they were not directly affected (Eisenberg & Silver, 2011) and this can leave a lasting psychological impact (Juth et al., 2015; Mclaughlin et al., 2009). However, a feature that seems to bind pandemics, past and present, relates to the extent to which children are asked about their experiences (Imran et al., 2020; Holt & Murray, 2021). This is despite findings from previous research that children bring valuable insights when engaged in research about, and during, times of conflict (Hart & Tyrer, 2006; O'Connor & Takahashi, 2014).

### 1.5.2 Impact of Covid-19 on Children

Even before the Covid-19 outbreak was characterised as a pandemic, it was clear that the unfolding crisis would have long-term economic, social and political repercussions (The British Academy, 2021). Young people were greatly impacted by pandemic events but were far from the "face" of the pandemic (UN International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2021). This was (initially) likely due to the little relative risk of children dying or falling seriously ill from the virus (Ward et al., 2022). However, children's ability to adapt to major changes to their daily routines were integral to confronting its effects.

With the enactment of strict containment measures across the globe came developing research interest into how pandemic events have affected children's

wellbeing. A systematic review from Chawla et al. (2021) looked for papers that explored the psychological and emotional impact of Covid-19 on young people and identified 102 relevant papers. A significant feature of the literature was the prevalence of depressive and anxious symptoms in young people, which were directly and indirectly linked with their experiences across the pandemic.

A recurrent finding was the moderating effect of socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity and social class on psychological distress (Marques de Miranda et al., 2020; Phillips et al., 2021). For example, low-income families and those living in poor housing conditions were at increased risk of contracting the virus and to be hardest hit by the health and economic consequences of the pandemic (Moore et al., 2020; Tenniglo, 2021). The pandemic exacerbated existing structural inequalities meaning particular groups experienced additional deprivation when it came to accessing critical health, care and educational provision (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2020). Indeed, while anybody could contract Covid-19, outcomes and experiences of the pandemic have not been felt equally: Covid-19 has not been "the great equaliser" (Berkhout & Richardson, 2020; Fisher et al., 2020; Galasso, 2020; Schleicher, 2020).

### 1.5.3. Children's Views of Covid-19

During crises, children's participation tends to be limited (Martin, 2010). Cuevas-Parra (2020) suggests this may be due to environmental constraints and enduring beliefs about children's vulnerability. Engaging children during global crises is bound to bring additional challenges. However, the UNCRC makes it clear that the child's right to be consulted and heard 'does not cease in situations of crisis or in their aftermath' (UNCRC, 2009, p.28). The extent to which children have been consulted during the Covid-19 pandemic has varied across countries (Ambresin, 2021). For instance, governments in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Scotland sought input from young people and utilised their ideas within Covid-19 recovery procedures (Roy & Jong, 2020; Scottish Youth Parliament, 2020). Notably, a global

initiative led by the Big 6 Youth Organisations (2022) galvanised young people aged 14+ to take up leadership roles in Covid-19 response and recovery.

### 1.5.3.1 Seeking Children's Views about Covid-19 in England

In a global survey of 26,000 young respondents (Lundy et al., 2021), only 20% felt that their governments had consulted or listened to them about policy decisions regarding Covid-19. At the national level in England, the voices of young people have been largely absent. Efforts to seek children's views about Covid-19 have, instead, been largely driven by organisations within the charity sector, alongside organisations and professionals who work directly with children (Davies et al., 2020; Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 2020; Sachs & Rigby, 2020; UK Youth, 2020; World Vision, 2020).

Adami and Dineen (2021) found that decisions taken during the pandemic prioritised adults' interests and freedoms in ways that directly discriminated against children. Public health messaging was largely adult-centric (Thompson et al., 2021) and the government did little to establish other channels by which children could communicate following school closures. Exacerbated by a lack of community support, it is likely that child sexual and domestic violence was under-reported during this time (Sidpra et al., 2021).

Policy decisions needed to be taken quickly during the pandemic, but there is little evidence that children were consulted about changes that directly impacted them. An example was when schools opened for a single day on Monday 4th January 2021. Teachers and families had been assured that schools were safe, yet their doors were closed again the next day (From Education to Employment [FE] News, 2021). The initial decision to open schools was described at the time as "reckless" as Covid-19 could spread across children, their teachers, other education staff, and to their respective households (Whittaker, 2021). One young respondent in a survey from Popoola and Sivers (2021) commented that they 'don't understand

how the government can say children are the problem… yet they are sending us to school where we have to mix households' (p.23).

Two years into the pandemic, there remains a lack of meaningful engagement with young people from the UK Government. Recently, the Department for Education (2022) published the Schools White Paper, the first in six years. The paper refers to "levelling up" education, envisioning a new way forward for learning in schools, but makes no mention of children's participation in such endeavours. The authors make parent pledges and guarantee quality teaching for children – referring to 'every actor in the system' (p.51) playing their role in transforming schooling – but pupils themselves were not a part of the conversation.

### 1.5.4 Sensitising Concepts and Reflexivity

The principal researcher now returns to descriptions of the current research. Chapter 1 so far has provided the context for the research and emphasised the need for adults to account for assumptions or biases they may bring to research with children. Engaging in self-reflexivity is fundamental to ensuring the integrity of one's conduct (Bruce, 2007). This section will outline the initial ideas, early expectations, and lines of thinking that the principal researcher brought with her to the present research: these are referred to as sensitising concepts.

Sensitising concepts have been increasingly recognised as integral to the realm of grounded theory research owing to discussions about how existing ideas may influence the extraction of concepts from datasets (Bowen, 2006). Naming these concepts provides context for the research and helps the researcher to be both reflective and reflexive. The principal researcher can be accountable for the times in which her own influence may inadvertently impact co-researchers' contributions. This would serve to reify her own ideas rather than centralising the children's process (Hammersley, 2008; Luckerhoff & Guillemette, 2014). The principal researcher first acknowledged that her own assumptions about how

children have come to construct the Covid-19 pandemic are likely shaped by adult-led discourse, media narratives, and her own direct experience with children.

### 1.5.4.1 Viewing the Covid-19 Pandemic as a Critical Incident

The principal researcher wondered whether children's construction of their pandemic experiences may align with the experience of critical incidents. Definitions of critical incidents vary substantially across the literature (Beeke, 2011), but are generally understood as 'any sudden and unexpected incident or sequence of events which causes trauma within a school community and which overwhelms the normal coping mechanisms of the school' (Department of Education [Northern Ireland], 2018, p.1). Critical incidents are a familiar concept to the principal researcher given her previous role as a teacher: staff were well-versed in the school's critical incident policy and the proactive measures that it advocated should an incident occur.

As per the definition, to classify the pandemic as a critical incident, it would be seen to have traumatised a school community. When school closures were announced in the UK, entire systems were challenged to rapidly assemble a virtual version of school life and learning. Families and school staff faced a range of barriers in responding to these radical changes, such as overcoming inexperience with technology (Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020). Uncertainty and fear around sickness and dying, plus the possibility of exacerbating existing trauma, could further characterise the pandemic as collectively traumatic (Horesh & Brown, 2020; Fegert et al., 2020).

It seems reasonable to suggest that the pandemic has caused trauma within schools. Indeed, the last two years has seen a consistent output of academic literature that indicates young people have experienced trauma-like symptoms tied to the onset of the pandemic and its sequelae (e.g., Bryant et al., 2020; Levita et al., 2020; Solmi et al., 2022). However, when returning to the definition for critical incidents, trauma is worded to occur '*within* a school community'. This definition

indicates that the experience of the critical incident must be localised rather than shared across all school communities, as has been the case with the Covid-19 outbreak.

Having discussed this specific aspect of the definition with colleagues, it seems that the Covid-19 pandemic does not quite meet the criteria for a critical incident. While settings and services may have utilised critical incident frameworks during the pandemic, this was in preparation for such frameworks to be enacted should a specific critical, Covid-19-related incident occur, such as the death of a member of staff (Octavo Partnership, 2020). Taking these ideas together, the Covid-19 pandemic is not a critical incident in itself, rather, the pandemic provided increased risk for related critical incidents to occur. The notion of critical incidents may not be a helpful sensitising concept here. However, this does not take away from the possibility that children's constructions of the pandemic may be coloured by the experience of trauma.

### 1.5.4.2 Key Attachments: The Disruption and Restoration of Relationships as a Result of Pandemic-Related Changes to Schooling

Another sensitising concept identified by the principal researcher relates to children's attachments during the pandemic. When experiencing events perceived to be frightening, the attachment "system" is said to be activated and being able to return to key attachment figures helps to re-establish feelings of security and safety (Bowlby, 1969). When approaching this research, the principal researcher considered whether and the extent to which disrupted attachments may have influenced the ways in which children constructed their pandemic experiences.

Previous research related to children's experience of significant life changes, such as school transitions or seeking refuge, consistently identify relationships as important protective factors (Juang et al., 2018; López-Zerón & Blow, 2017; Wood, 2020). To adhere to national restrictions, everybody needed to engage in large-scale

behaviour change, such as ceasing physical contact outside of one's immediate household. This separation may have disrupted key attachments. Upon their return to school, children will have needed to ease back into friendships and renegotiate relationship dynamics within their classrooms (British Psychological Society, 2020). Their attachment security may have been further affected by fear of further restrictions, closures and/or lockdowns (Steele, 2020).

The principal researcher is likely to have become sensitised to ideas around attachment because of her professional interest in relational approaches to supporting young people (e.g., Bomber & Hughes, 2013; Porges 2009). Additionally, she is involved in ongoing professional conversations about how Covid-19 can be viewed from an attachment perspective (Rajkumar, 2020). It was therefore important to highlight how she may be predisposed to, and therefore more likely to attune to, ideas about how adverse relational experiences have influenced children's constructions.

#### 1.5.4.3 Managing Everyday Considerations During the Pandemic

The final sensitising concept described here relates to children's day-to-day living. Unlike the first two concepts, the principal researcher did not begin the research process with this concept in mind; she was alerted to these ideas after consulting research where children's views about the pandemic were elicited. Popoola and Sivers (2021) generated six interconnected themes about children's insights into the pandemic from responses provided by over 6000 pupils in the UK. One such theme related to young people's considerations for managing day-to-day life against the backdrop of the pandemic. Respondents 'were not all consumed' by the effects of Covid-19 and 'showed us that life did go on, in very important ways' (p.20). This theme was more unexpected and had remained in the principal researcher's thoughts. Hence, it is identified here as a sensitising concept for the present research.

## 1.6 Chapter Summary

Within the present research, children are positioned as bearing epistemic agency despite inadequate efforts to respect their right as knowledge-holders. By ensuring their views have the credibility they deserve, researchers can continue to deconstruct vulnerability narratives around children. To do so, adults must wrestle with how adult-centric agendas can permeate children's lives and impact on their feelings of agency.

The principal researcher discussed the meaningful involvement of children and young people around issues related to the pandemic. Where children's views have been sought, the methods by which their views have been represented are largely adult-led. Forums which encouraged the active involvement of young people generally invited those aged 13 and over. This may be because younger children were seen as less capable of meaningful engagement or that their ideas were seen to be too idiosyncratic to be useful (Barrett et al., 2012).

Informed by the critical perspectives within this chapter, the principal researcher views children as having unique knowledge about the Covid-19 pandemic. By employing methodological approaches that embrace the rich diversity of childhoods that exist the world over (Horgan, 2017), children's knowledge can be elicited in ways that are socially just and promote epistemic diversity.

# Chapter 2: Research Methodology

## 2.1 Overview of Chapter

Chapter 1 described the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that provide starting points for this research. The aim of Chapter 2 is to outline the research methodology. This chapter begins with a statement of the research aims before describing the methodological approaches that were utilised and the assumptions about knowledge upon which they are built. As children's participation was integral to the research, once the research was designed and parameters were in place, the principal researcher adopted a stance of "not knowing" how and what knowledge would be elicited.

In keeping with the idea that using data-driven approaches can best elicit and preserve children's indigenous knowledge, the research applied constructivist grounded theory and participatory methodologies. These methodologies were underpinned by a research paradigm which drew upon indigenous, interpretivist and transformative perspectives. Philosophical positioning of the research paradigm reflected an ontological stance of social constructionism and constructivist epistemology. By adopting this philosophical positioning and utilising methodologies congruent with such a position, the research was designed in a way that enabled children to take ownership of the research process and the knowledge that they constructed.

A visualisation of the research methodology can be found in Figure 2.

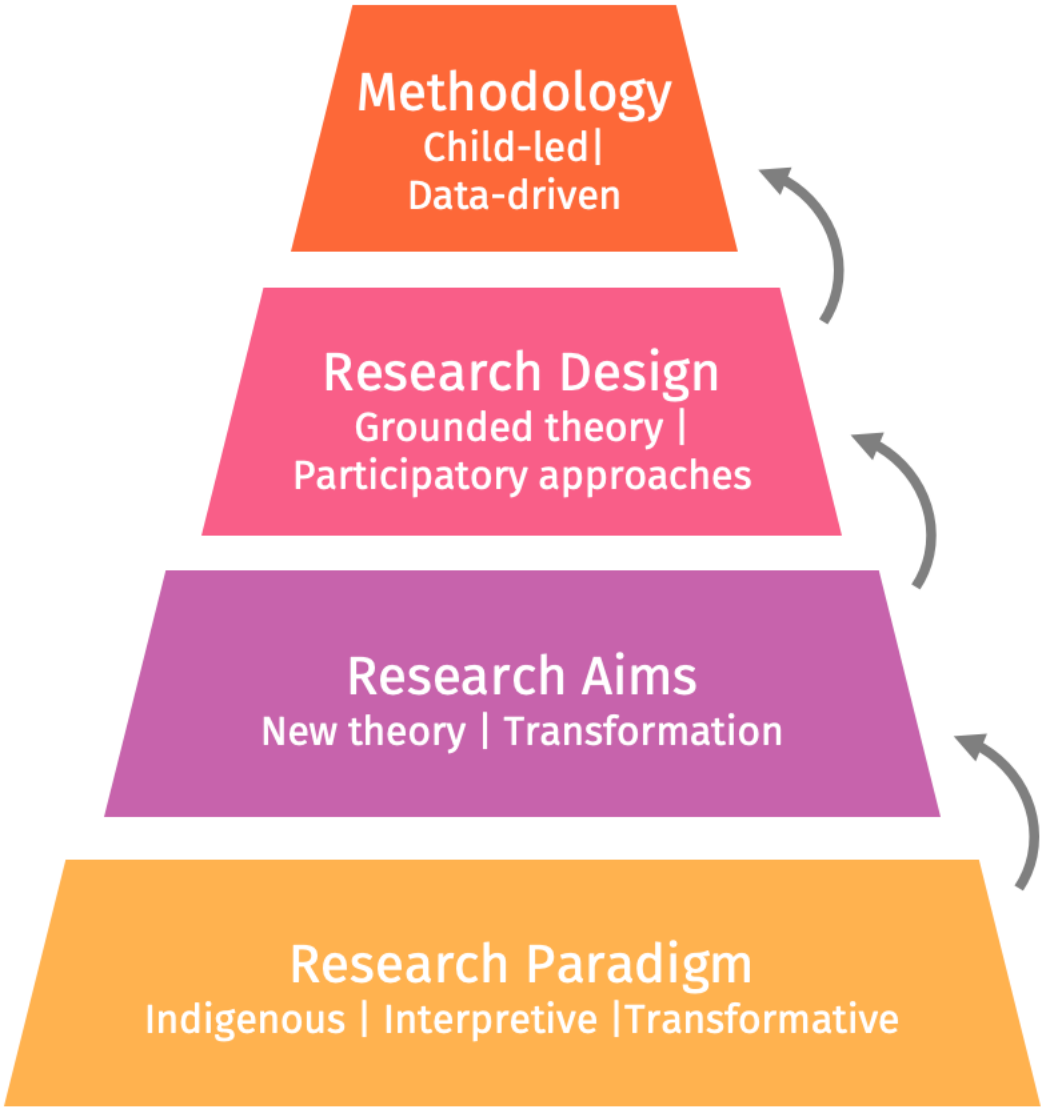


*Figure 2: Visualisation of key aspects of the research methodology*

This chapter will also detail the procedures that led to children building their dataset. Research parameters were established to enact grounded theory approaches in a participatory way; this provided co-researchers with a flexible framework in which they could collect and analyse their data. These approaches enabled co-researchers to build a theoretical framework that conceptualised constructions of the Covid-19 pandemic while keeping children's indigenous knowledge at the centre of their process (Behari, 2014).

## 2.2 Research Aims

The principal researcher developed the following research aims:

1. *To develop new theory which is grounded in data and provides a framework for how children have constructed the Covid-19 pandemic*

An aim of this research was for children to build a theory that comprises children's indigenous knowledge about the Covid-19 pandemic. This requires understanding of *what* children knew and *how* they knew it. It was proposed that emergent theory would develop through children co-creating understanding about their multiple realities; this would provide a contextualised, collaborative construction of how children have made sense of their pandemic experiences.

2. *To facilitate some form of change or action for those involved and potentially further afield*

A tentative second aim of this research was to promote positive change, perhaps addressing barriers that constrain children's voices. By pursuing transformative change, this research has the potential to contribute to an expanding literature base looking to take a decolonised approach to childhood research.

## 2.3 Research Design

The research design is primarily comprised of integrating participatory approaches with grounded theory methodologies. Exploring these in depth provides an understanding of how the procedural elements of the methodology contributed towards meeting the research aims.

## 2.3.1 Participatory Research

### 2.3.1.1 Overview of Participatory Research

Contemporary discourse within childhood research now largely promotes interactionist and ecosystemic ideas in which children are seen as actors and co-constructors of their social worlds (Corsaro, 2020). This has led to an increase in research that positions children as “experts by experience”, that is, understanding that children are best-placed to lead the conversation about how they experience the world (Pösö, 2018). Initiatives to keep children are at the centre of discussions often refer to the elicitation of children’s “voice” (e.g., Wall & Robinson, 2022). While well-intentioned, children’s contributions can be distorted in order to fit adult-centric agendas. In these circumstances, the practices used to support children to share their views cannot be considered truly participative (Gillies & Robinson, 2012). To address these challenges, many researchers have been turning to participatory approaches to more meaningfully include children in research (Kellett, 2005).

Inspired by the humanistic tradition, participatory work is inherently person-centred (Wallace & Giles, 2019). Research can be designed in a way that meaningfully involves children at each turn. Their participation can be said to exist on a continuum (Hart, 1992): a lower-level of involvement may involve children contributing as participants, whereas inviting children to become co-researchers or lead researchers confers higher levels of participation (Holland et al., 2010; Kellett, 2010). With children actively researching the matters that concern them, participatory approaches can be said to ‘facilitate greater collaboration and equality in research relationships’ (Aldridge, 2016, p.5). By reducing the possibility that adult bias may influence children’s views, participatory approaches provide a valuable resource for positioning children at the centre of knowledge construction (McMellon & Tisdall, 2020).

Participatory techniques have previously been used to maximise opportunities for children to formulate and communicate their ideas (Barley & Russell, 2019; Clark, 2011). This has led to greater confidence in the trustworthiness of findings as well as enhancing the potential for their insights to inspire transformative change (Mitchell et al., 2017; Stevenson, 2014). Additionally, such research can help shift the discourse away from the idea that social processes simply happen to children. Instead, children's knowledge is recognised as expertise that can contribute to shaping society in a way that can impact their life and the lives of others (Clark & Moss, 2011; Sommer et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2015).

#### 2.3.1.2 Challenges of Using Participatory Approaches in Research with Children

Kellett (2005) described the paradigm shift required to move away from existing, ineffectual research practices that were traditionally undertaken to understand children's psychological realities. This shift involved challenging the status quo and to call for the uprooting of deeply entrenched practices in academia (section 1.4.1.6). Reconceptualising research presents a complex set of challenges that span ethicality, epistemology and methodology (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018). An overview of the specific challenges brought by reorienting research to foreground participation are now considered.

##### 2.3.1.2.1 Power within the Research Relationship

Power relations are embedded within all human interactions (Smith & Hofmann, 2016). Compared with adults, children's structural position is inferior meaning the power and influence that they wield is constrained (Lukes, 2005; Punch, 2007): reasons include differences in physical size, age, and perceived and/or actual imbalance in social status and authority (Waller & Bitou, 2011). In research relationships, inequalities in the distribution of power are explicit, and these

inequalities are sharpened when the adult is the researcher and child is the "researched" (Davidson, 2017).

Through participation, power relationships between majority and minority communities can be interrogated, 'redressing the silencing and sidelining of non-dominant ways of knowing to recover subjugated knowledge' (Cheney, 2019, p.101). By ensuring children have ownership over key aspects of the research, and therefore their knowledge, power can be redistributed back to them (Gallagher, 2008; Mertens, 2009; Stringer, 2013). It is, however, important to recognise that the mere presence of an adult in the role of facilitator means issues of power and control are likely to endure in some form (e.g., Gol-Guven, 2016). It is also important to consider children's agency when it comes to seeking empowerment. There may be circumstances where children would prefer there to be increased adult guidance when navigating their research aims. By respecting these wishes, the research relationship can be seen as more equitable as children are using their voices to their advantage (Richards et al., 2015).

#### 2.3.1.2.2 Facilitating "Authentic" Voice

It has been suggested that constructing knowledge using participatory approaches leads to the generation of data that are 'more authentic, richer and more reliable than that produced through traditional top-down practices' (Coyne & Carter, 2018, p.24). However, there is no guarantee that this will be the case (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Spyrou, 2011). For instance, any researcher, adult or child, may choose tools that do not suit the unique needs of their participant. There is also the enduring possibility that adults unknowingly impede children's research initiatives by failing to account for adult bias within the process. Another challenge relates to the epistemological tensions that come with the risk of privileging particular children's voices over others' (Spencer et al., 2020).

#### 2.3.1.2.3 The Impact of Intersectional Identities on Children Being Able to Contribute Equally to Research

An aim of using participatory approaches is to elevate all children to equal partners within the research context (Aldridge, 2016). However, children are not a homogeneous group (Murray, 2019). As with adults, children's notions of the self, their identities, social networks and day-to-day living are shaped by the interacting effects of factors such as age, gender, SES and ethnicity (Evans & Holt, 2011). Varying degrees of discrimination operate upon children, resulting in unequal epistemic power dynamics within groups of children. In research, such discrimination may lead to 'the singular, educated and articulate child' being heard over others, and in turn 'downplay[ing] the diversity and individuality of children and their experiences' (Spencer et al., 2020, p.3). This can be referred to as intersectional discrimination (Degener, 2016; Ravnbøl, 2009).

A consequence of intersectional discrimination in participatory research could be that children do not have equal access to the co-construction of knowledge (Sewell, 2016). The research could become a microcosm of society and its pervasive epistemic prejudices, restricting the agency of children who already experience multiple levels of disadvantage (Barnes, 2018; Konstantoni & Emejulu, 2017). Indeed, the challenges described convey the real possibility that, if not carefully managed, the use of participatory approaches could reinforce structural inequalities faced by groups of children in their day-to-day lives. To do so could be particularly damaging for children who are expecting to enter a process that will feel liberating (Lundy, 2007).

### 2.3.1.3 Embedding Participatory Approaches within Current Research

The principal researcher has the responsibility to embed participatory approaches in a way that addresses the potential for intersectional discrimination. Such challenges can be addressed by casting a critical eye over the research design

and the positionality of all individuals involved (Spyrou, 2011). In line with recent studies around social cognition (e.g., Rai et al., 2017), the principal researcher can help co-researchers to become aware of the power they yield in order to ameliorate the possibility of applying their power negatively. The principal researcher can also model the role of "responsible hearer" when facilitating the research (Burroughs & Tollefsen, 2016). Responsible hearing involves taking steps like amplifying voices that may not ordinarily be heard (Mayall, 2008; Stringer, 2013) and tuning into silence as a contribution in its own right (Gersch et al., 2017; Richards et al., 2015).

## 2.3.2 Grounded Theory Methodologies

### 2.3.2.1 Overview of Grounded Theory Methodologies

Grounded theory (GT) is an interpretative method and framework that is often used within qualitative research and where there is little known about a particular phenomenon (Chun Tie et al., 2019). By using inductive approaches advocated by GT, researchers can build new theory from the ground up (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Walsh et al., 2015). This represents a change from dominant, deductive reasoning techniques often applied in social science research (Bowen, 2006). GT methodologies have been used widely to capture phenomena as part of social justice research (e.g., Faija et al., 2017; Lee, 2018; Tsai, 2017).

GT studies are often characterised by the following procedures: researchers collect vast, rich datasets; they interrogate and interact with their data through memo writing to stay "grounded" in their data; they simultaneously analyse and collect more data, engaging in analytic processes such as coding, sampling and theory saturation (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). A product of GT methodologies may be a theoretical framework or substantive theory related to a phenomenon which may later be elaborated and refined into a formal theory (Bowen, 2006). From there, subsequent research may derive hypotheses from this grounded theory to test against other populations (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). It may then be decided that this grounded theory has utility beyond its original investigated context (Holloway & Galvin, 2017).

### 2.3.2.2 Classic vs Constructivist Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) founded the classic GT methodology. At the core of classic GT is the idea that new theory will inductively arise out of the data, a process known as “emergence” (Kelle, 2005). It is presupposed that knowledge can be revealed from a single, definitive and objective reality, independent from human consciousness. This “truth” is assumed to be embedded within the data and can be discovered as long as the researcher remains open to what they may find (O’Connor et al., 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For this reason, classic GT researchers delay their literature review until after they have collected and analysed their data as any imposition of ideas from existing literature may influence the theorist’s openness (Christiansen, 2011). Glaser and Strauss (1967) viewed any preconceived notions brought by the researcher as extraneous variables which must be managed through their conduct.

Over the last fifty years, classic GT has evolved with many iterations and diversified applications, including developments from Glaser and Strauss themselves (Amsteus, 2014; Gibson, 2007; Mills et al., 2006; Redman-MacLaren et al., 2015). One such grounded theorist, Kathy Charmaz (2006), integrated constructivism into the GT methodology to create a novel perspective known as constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist and classic GT overlap but are rooted in distinct research paradigms, offering different ways to pursue lines of inquiry (Carter & Little, 2007; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

The epistemological underpinnings of classic GT are somewhat ambiguous, but many grounded theorists converge on its positivist and objectivist stance (Holton & Walsh, 2016; Urquhart, 2012). This positivist view of knowledge (that what can be known is what simply exists in the world) clashes with the assumptions that knowledge is considered to be socially constructed (as in constructivist GT). Charmaz (2014) aligns constructivist GT with a social constructionist position which rejects the idea that there is an objective reality, and instead seeks only relative truths. Constructivist GT offers researchers and participants the opportunity to jointly

construct understanding by eliciting meanings they have attributed to the phenomenon in question (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Nascent theory is, therefore, constructed rather than discovered.

While classic GT views the researcher's pre-existing ideas as potential contaminants to inductive reasoning, in constructivist GT, researcher bias and assumptions are embraced as useful starting points for data analysis. Conducting a preliminary literature view is encouraged in constructivist GT. Thornberg (2012) expanded upon Charmaz's (2006) previous idea of "theoretical playfulness" and suggested that introducing extant concepts provides a springboard for the creativity and criticality needed to open up novel, fresh thinking. Theoretical playfulness must, however, be weighed up against the researcher's "methodological self-consciousness". The latter refers to any 'taken-for-granted assumptions' that may hinder the research process (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021, p.316), such as the sensitising concepts described in section 1.5.4. The literature review was delayed in the present research because of the use of participatory approaches; the principal researcher will elaborate on this decision in Chapter 4.

#### 2.3.2.3 Using Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodologies in Current Research

The principal researcher decided to use constructivist GT methodologies in the current research but the co-research team were tasked with applying them. The principal researcher set the parameters for the co-researchers to use these methods when collecting and analysing data.

In GT, 'all is data' (Glaser, 2001, p.145). Co-researchers and participants can be encouraged to engage in open and shared exploration of meaning. All epistemic resources and contributions are considered to be valid and salient to how children come to construct their realities (Joranger, 2018; Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Additionally, constructivist GT methodologies provide the opportunity for data analysis to be a collaborative process. By working as a team and holding one

another accountable, it was considered to be less likely that individual co-researchers would force data into their pre-existing ideas about what could be "found". The collaborative element therefore provided some protection against the imposition of top-down knowledge construction processes (Redman-MacLaren, 2015).

## 2.4 Research Paradigm

Researchers approach their work bringing with them different views about the pursuit of truth and knowledge (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). They are guided by theoretical frameworks and philosophical assumptions about the world, including their own thoughts and assumptions about notions of the self within society and the construction of knowledge (Schwandt, 2001). This worldview is made explicit through the research paradigm and permeates all decisions when designing the methodology (Pascale, 2011). Across this section, the principal researcher will make clear the ontological and epistemological stances adopted and how these relate to the wider research paradigm (Elshafie, 2013).

### 2.4.1 Philosophical Assumptions: Ontological and Epistemological Stance for the Current Research

For the duration of the research process, the principal researcher adopted a constructivist epistemology rooted in a social constructionist ontology. An ontological stance conveys assumptions about the nature of reality and existence, and what can be known, while epistemology refers to how such knowledge can come to be known (Pascale, 2011). These stances provide an important backdrop to the data collection and analysis techniques employed across the methodology (Walsh et al., 2015).

#### 2.4.1.1 Ontology: Social Constructionism

Ontology refers to 'the nature of reality' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.37) or 'the study of being' (Crotty, 1998, p.10). By adopting an ontology of social

constructionism, the principal researcher makes the assumption that a universal psychology does not exist (Burr, 2015). Instead, what is perceived to be real is a 'product of the prevailing cultural frame of social, linguistic, discursive and symbolic practices' (Galbin, 2014, p.84).

Embracing social constructionism enables grounded theorists to move away from more traditional forms of GT research and to challenge mainstream accounts of reality (Andrews, 2012). Similarly, by questioning the nature of there being one, true account of any phenomenon, children's indigenous knowledge can be elevated and valued in its own right. With this in mind, working within a social constructionist framework allows the focus to be drawn to *how* individuals come to construct and understand the world as they do. This feeds into the epistemological stance taken by the researcher which is described below.

#### 2.4.1.2 Epistemology: Constructivism

The branch of philosophy known as epistemology refers to the origins and methods of knowing, and the constraints that come with what can be known (Crotty, 1998). At its core, the constructivist paradigm emphasises active engagement within the environment as critical to developing representations of the world (Gordon, 2009). Knowledge is constructed rather than discovered, and in the context of the present research, knowledge is *co*-constructed between individuals through exploration and discussion about their subjective realities.

Compatible with a social constructionist ontology, an epistemology of constructivism emphasises that what can be known is relativist and subjectivist (Gray, 2009). Again, it is assumed that an external, objective reality does not exist (Hugly & Sayward, 1987), but through co-generation, children's constructs about the world can be realised (Olssen, 1995). The subjectivist elements of constructivism emphasise the important role played by the co-research team as co-creators of such constructions; research partners are 'interactively linked so that the "findings" are literally created as the investigation proceeds' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.207). This is

consistent with the constructivist conception of GT given the emphasis on knowledge and reality construction through shared experiences and interactions between participants (Charmaz, 2014).

#### 2.4.1.3 Social Constructionism and Constructivism within the Current Research

In line with the philosophical stance described, it is assumed that there is no absolute as it pertains to understanding the world. Attempting to elicit objective views of the Covid-19 pandemic would fail to capture 'the multiplicity and complexity of the life world of individuals' (Scott & Usher, 2011, p.27). Instead, a social constructionist and constructivist approach welcomes such complexity.

Differential understanding, experience of, and responses to the pandemic are assumed to exist within and across groups (Attema et al., 2021; Martinez et al., 2020). These realities have been built through different systems of meaning-making used across contexts (Connell, 2020; Speer, 2005). For example, a child who has experienced bereavement as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to construct Covid-19 in a different way to a child who has not; and a child who has experienced a bereavement and is religiously affiliated may construct Covid-19 differently to a child who has experienced a bereavement but does not identify as religious.

### 2.4.2 Indigenous, Interpretive and Transformative Paradigm

The principal researcher incorporated elements of three research paradigms to devise an appropriate paradigmatic approach to this research: the approach drew upon indigenous, interpretive and transformative paradigms.

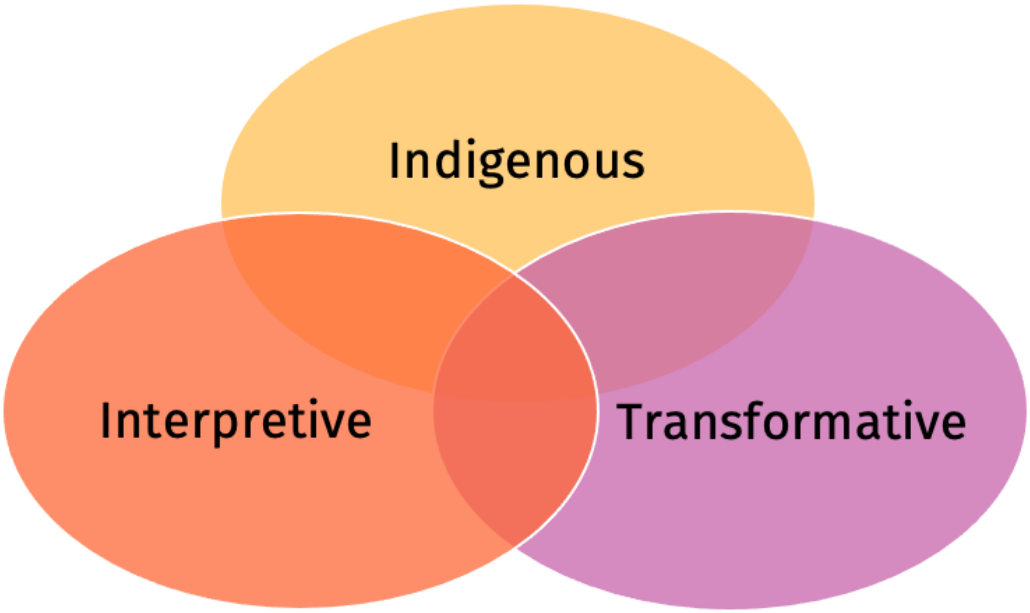


*Figure 3: Venn diagram to represent the paradigmatic approach of the research*

By drawing upon multiple paradigms, the principal researcher aimed to creatively account for the limitations that can come with being guided by a single paradigm (Reagan, 2017). Aspects of each paradigm were expected to hold more or less relevance at different junctures of the process. For instance, undertaking analytic techniques as part of constructivist GT is a process placed 'squarely in the interpretive tradition' (Charmaz, 2006, p.330). On the other hand, the empowerment possibilities embedded within the participatory aspects of the research better reflect the transformative paradigm.

Common to these paradigms (existing in the overlapping area in Figure 3) is the expectation that relationships will develop and that these are key to knowledge construction. More traditional approaches may see the presence of a relationship between "researcher" and "researched" as introducing bias to the process (Galdas, 2017). However, the paradigmatic approach taken here embraces the need to develop rapport because 'we need others to recognise ourselves' (Williams et al., 2016, p.45). This idea is in line with non-dominant research methodologies which

view relationships as important elements within the methodology (Stewart, 2009; Tulk & Starks, 2020).

#### 2.4.2.1 Indigenous Aspects of the Research Paradigm

Indigenous (capitalised "I') methodologies have only recently penetrated mainstream discourse and have been utilised when researching groups whose voices do not enjoy the same status in society as more privileged others (Absolon & Willett, 2004; Kovach, 2010). The principal researcher sought to respectfully draw upon Indigenous paradigms in order to elevate children's ways of knowing the world. In practice, this involved interrogating power relations inherent in the research design and joining alongside children to elicit their contextual ways of knowing (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012).

#### 2.4.2.2 Interpretive Aspects of the Research Paradigm

The interpretive aspects of the research reflect the aim to understand the complex *meanings* children have attached to their pandemic experiences (De Vos et al., 2011). All forms of knowledge are considered to be interpretive. The process by which such knowledge is negotiated is shaped by children's experience relative to the historic and cultural circumstances where they and their ideas were constructed (Gergen, 2007; Schwandt, 2003). The relationships that form and evolve are also integral to understanding that the co-constructed knowledge is inductive, emergent and context bounded (Elshafie, 2013).

#### 2.4.2.3 Transformative Aspects of the Research Paradigm

Themes of power and privilege run strongly through this research so those involved may come to generate emancipatory knowledge. In line with the second research aim, there exists a critical agenda to the research where transformative possibilities may bring positive change. Such possibilities cannot be ascertained ahead of conducting the research, nor should they be, given its constructivist and

constructionist assumptions. The nature of any emancipatory knowledge created will depend on a range of factors including children's research decisions, their commentary, insight, documentation, and aspirations moving forward.

Positive change could occur by reducing power imbalance between adults and children and creating a microcosm of 'a more just and equitable society' (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003, p.29). Transformation may also be achieved within the research team as a result of forming relationships, where participants and researchers alike may construct new version of themselves as a result of re-evaluation and reflection (Losantos et al., 2016). The principal researcher kept in mind that this particular research aim may not be met because participation cannot be assumed to be an inevitable force for empowerment (Gillies & Robinson, 2012; Liebenberg, 2018).

## 2.4.3 Method

### 2.4.3.1 Recruitment

Five children from Year 5 were recruited as co-researchers and ten children from Year 2 were recruited as participants[1] (five participants for pilot data collection, five for [official] data collection). Co-researchers and participants were recruited through convenience sampling within a single primary school in a large, South East London borough. The school educates a highly diverse intake of pupils from a range of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The class teachers leading the two year groups introduced the project to their respective classes and sent out information sheets (Appendix 1). Parameters were kept minimal to preserve the participatory nature of the project. The criteria that children needed to meet were as follows:

- Are enthusiastic

[1] Children from Years 1 and 2 were invited to become participants. Ultimately all pupil participants were recruited from Year 2.

- Committed to the duration of the project (e.g., not planning to move school soon)
- Comfortable using a virtual platform when necessary[2]
- **Year 2:** Keen to share ideas, not necessarily through verbal means
- **Year 5:** Able to articulate their thoughts and ideas

Because data collection and analysis required Year 5 co-researchers to engage in shared discussion, the principal researcher highlighted this expectation at the recruitment stage. It was understood that expecting the Year 5 co-research team to engage in extensive discussion may have deterred applications from children lacking confidence with their verbal ability or those with anxieties around groupwork.

### 2.4.3.2 Participants

In the present research, there were five co-researchers (age 9-10), 10 pupil participants (age 6-7) and one adult principal researcher involved. Children were recruited on a first-come-first-serve basis. The five co-researchers were collectively known as the "co-research team". The 10 pupil participants recruited were assigned to two groups using a random number generator: one group of five were involved in the pilot study and one group of five took part in "official" data collection. (Figure 4).

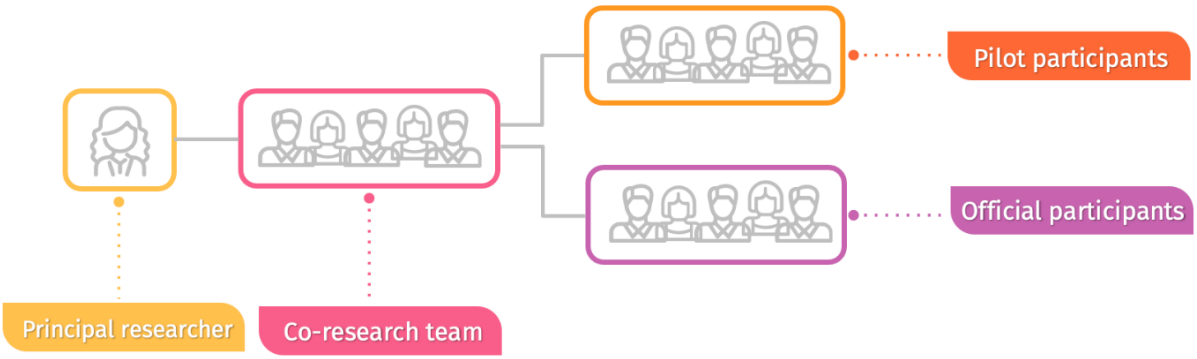


*Figure 4: Diagram to represent the individuals and groups involved in the research process*

[2] Original plans were for the research to take place online.

Each co-researcher was paired with one pilot participant, with whom they practised data collection and analysis, and one official participant, with whom they collaborated to generate the dataset. For official data collection, each co-researcher worked with one pupil participant across two occasions: during initial data collection in July 2021 (known as T1) and again to sense check and collect further data in November 2021 (known as T2). Figure 5 provides information about these partnerships. Ivan was absent at T2 therefore Darwin worked with Albie then Cher.

The demographic composition of the participant group was representative of the diversity within the school and local community (Figure 5). It was assumed that all involved would bring with them a variety of lived experience related to the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrating different levels of developmental thinking and conceptual understanding related to viruses, health crises and the events that occurred. It was also assumed that they would bring different research skillsets, for instance, in communication style, their confidence and the ways in which they build relationships (within their team, with their research partner and with the principal researcher).

Pseudonyms were chosen by the children themselves.

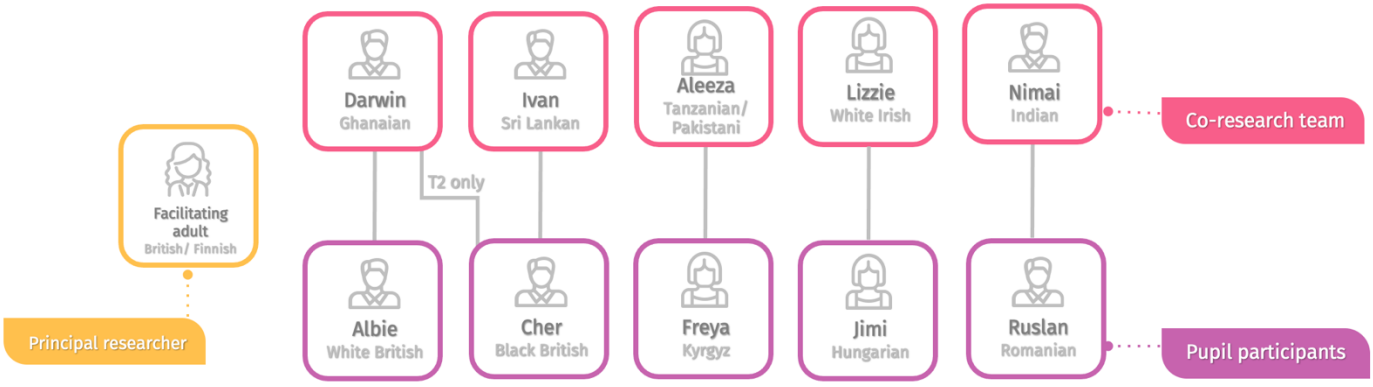


*Figure 5: Diagram to show research partnerships and demographic information*

#### 2.4.3.2.1 Relationship Structures Within the Research

Relationship structures included the dynamics within and between the two different groups of children (co-researchers and pupil participants) and relationships cultivated between the principal researcher and all children involved. As the only adult involved, power within relationship structures skewed in favour of the principal researcher (Waller & Bitou, 2011). Children were also considered to be in a position of power as they had access to the indigenous knowledge which this research aimed to elicit (Losantos et al., 2016). To meet its aims, the research relied upon the active participation of the three parties to interact with one another and co-construct the knowledge needed to build towards theory.

##### 2.4.3.2.1.1 Child-Child Research Partnerships and Inherent Power Dynamics

The establishment of child-child research partnerships created pairs of "experts by experience". There is currently a paucity of research in which children's views have been elicited through creating "buddy partnerships" that involve the age groups here (e.g., Levy & Thompson, 2015). In the present research, pupil participants were positioned as individuals with meaningful experiences, stories and perspectives to share. Co-researchers could root themselves within these areas, recognise their 'interconnected reality' (Tulk & Starks, 2020, p.2), and become an active collaborator in co-constructing their understanding.

Of paramount importance was to provide spaces for children to convey their thinking without the presence of an adult agenda (Clark & Moss, 20011). By connecting child with child, research partnerships could provide opportunities for interaction and reciprocity between children who were much closer in age and space than they would be with an adult researcher. With space to co-construct their understanding with limited adult intervention, the process of co-generation can be viewed as more equitable.

However, as referenced in section 2.3.1.2.3, the power differentials caused by intersectional differences (e.g., age and assigned role) meant that co-researchers had more power in this relationship. Pupil participants may have positioned their co-researcher partner as an authority figure who would be assessing the "veracity" of their claims (Richards et al., 2015). It is, therefore, essential not to take for granted that the application of participatory methods confers equitable relationships and derives more authentic views (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008).

## 2.5 Ethical Considerations

Permission to undertake this research was agreed by the Local Authority (Appendix 2) and the University (Appendix 3). This piece of research depended on high levels of purposeful participation from children to be able to reliably elicit their constructions of the Covid-19 pandemic (Mertens, 2009). However, above all, the principal researcher had a duty of care to all individuals involved. Children and their parents/carers were thoroughly informed as to the details and scope of the research such that they could decide upon the extent of their involvement, should they wish to participate at all (Coyne & Carter, 2018). The provision of consent was viewed as a continuous process requiring separate consent from children and their parents/carers. Written consent was obtained (Appendix 4) and children's verbal consent was obtained at the beginning of each session (Coyne & Carter, 2018; Morrow, 2009). Children were repeatedly reminded of their rights to withdraw and their right to anonymity.

While mechanisms were in place to safeguard children involved in the research, it could not be guaranteed that all children would have a positive research experience. Participants may have been, and continue to be, affected by Covid-19 and talking about their experiences could invoke feelings that are difficult to bear (Kalantari et al., 2012). Co-researchers may be adversely affected upon hearing upsetting information or being reminded of their own experiences (Törrönen & Vornanen, 2014). The principal researcher ensured she was always visible should she be needed, floating between the partnership spaces in as unobtrusive a way as

possible. Co-researchers were assured that they could share their own experiences of Covid-19 if they wished; this functioned as part of the analysis as well as for cathartic reasons (Marx et al., 2017). In line with the school's safeguarding and wellbeing policies, class teachers were informed about any arising concerns.

### 2.5.1 Principal Researcher's Position Statement

A position statement enables a researcher to share aspects of who they are and their experiences, in turn providing context for the perspectives and biases they may hold in relation to the research (Willig, 2013). The principal researcher is a 30 year old, White woman influenced by the British and Finnish cultures, class systems and contexts in which she was raised. She has reached her current position as trainee educational psychologist (EP) as a result of bestowed privilege and experience over the last three decades. The principal researcher previously worked as a primary school teacher and has extensive experience working alongside children in the age groups of interest within this research. Outcomes and reflections across this thesis have emerged as a result of the principal researcher's worldview and experiences that have led her to this point.

This thesis has materialised in order to fulfil the requirements for achieving a Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology. When conceiving of this research, she was driven by experiences of having her consciousness raised across the Doctorate programme (Jemal, 2017). In particular, she has become aware of the extent to which colonially-produced inequalities have served to subjugate people by separating groups from the humanity to which they belong (de Sousa Santos, 2007). Movements such as Black Lives Matter have had a significant impact on the principal researcher, reflected in how this research has been framed politically, culturally and socially. The principal researcher's critical consciousness-raising has been a sharp learning curve, particularly given how events over the last two years have reminded us of the vulnerability of the world and the fragility and preciousness of human life.

The principal researcher has experienced feelings of discomfort about using the term “indigenous” given it is most associated with “Indigenous Peoples” as a collective group. Indigenous Peoples comprise 5% of the global population and number between 400 and 500 million people who live in over 90 countries (The World Bank, 2021). Indigenous Peoples have engaged in resistance against colonisers and occupiers in order to survive and protect their rich and diverse customs and culture (UN, 2009). Indigenous communities continue to reject Western scientific principles in order to preserve their own epistemologies. Many Indigenous epistemologies preserve their profound ‘cultural and spiritual relationships with the natural world [that are] key to their survival as peoples or civilisation’ (UN, 2009, p.43). The principal researcher is committed to using the terminology ‘”indigenous” with the utmost respect.

By referring to children’s “indigenous” knowledge, this piece of research hopes to give deference to non-dominant ideas about how one can come to know the world. The principal researcher has demonstrated a commitment to seeing children as knowledge holders through the proposal to use participatory approaches within constructivist grounded theory methodologies (Redman-MacLaren & Mills, 2015; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). She was committed to embodying the values that underpin these approaches through her own conduct. By formally adopting a position of “not knowing”, she endeavoured to subvert the influence of her own adult-centric understandings (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; Losantos et al., 2016). This enabled her to act as a flexible facilitator who could attune to and pursue further opportunities to democratise the research.

## 2.6 Procedure


*Figure 6: Diagram to show key steps of the research procedure*

The present research was conducted between July 2021 and January 2022. Children had returned to school following two rounds of closures. This period signified a time in which there was a drive to re-establish in-person educational norms and practices (Leahy et al., 2021). The principal researcher and co-researchers met a total of eight times over this period, which includes the research workshop, T1 and T2, data analysis, theory construction and dissemination sessions.

Figure 6 provides an outline for the proposed steps within the procedure.

### 2.6.1 Preliminary Work

As part of the preliminary work undertaken for the research, the principal researcher was able to invest in building relationships with the co-researchers and pupil participants.

### 2.6.1.1 Parent/Carer/Child Forum

Once class teachers had introduced the research to their respective classes, all pupils were invited to join a parent/carer/child forum held over a virtual platform. During this session, the principal researcher introduced herself, her role as a trainee EP and provided an overview of the research. The forum provided a space in which parents, carers and their children could ask questions about the research in advance of deciding whether they would like to become involved. Powerpoint slides from the parent/carer/child forum can be found in Appendix 5.

### 2.6.1.2 Research Workshop

After recruitment, the principal researcher's first action was to hold a developmentally appropriate research workshop with the co-researchers. It was important that researchers felt well-equipped to conduct their project (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2018). As explored in Chapter 1, children are driven to learn about their world and are therefore naturally endowed with research capabilities (Lundy et al., 2011). The workshop was not designed to didactically "teach" research skills but to activate their existing skills and inspire curiosity given the set research parameters (Appadurai, 2006).

The objectives for the research workshop were as follows:

1. To more formally introduce the research to the co-researchers and continue the process of obtaining informed consent for their participation
2. To construct the research question and begin to consider ways in which it could be addressed
3. To build co-researcher confidence by supporting them to acknowledge and practise relevant research skills
4. To draw upon the co-researchers' existing expertise about what may be required within the research, such as the need to foster a trusting relationship with their participant

Held in July 2021, the research workshop (which lasted approximately 1.5 hours) marked the first in-person joining of the principal researcher and the co-research team. Co-researchers were in the same Year 5 class so knew each other well. However, this was the time at which they were joined as a new group united by a new, common purpose. The principal researcher described the group processes that manifested at the outset of the research workshop in her diary (Appendix 6).

The co-researchers were introduced to the participatory nature of the project, positioning them as in charge of devising and leading many of the steps within the methodology, including and notwithstanding:

- generating the research question
- selecting data gathering tools
- collecting data as part of a pilot study
- officially conducting their research
- engaging in data analysis using the constant comparative method
- building an explanatory framework or theory
- discussing how to present their findings and the conditions in which they could be disseminated

As can be seen in Powerpoint slides 6-8 and 16 in Appendix 7, an important part of the research workshop was to show co-researchers that traditional scientific methods of inquiry are not the only kind of research (Oliver, 1997). By exploring ideas around facts, truth and meaning, the principal researcher hoped to demonstrate the philosophical assumption of plural realities and to provide alternatives to adult-centric (conventional) conceptions of research (Horgan, 2017; Mirra et al., 2016).

The principal researcher also shared a story told to her by her interim Director of Studies when devising the research: how her infant grandson kept raising his bib over his face during their virtual lunches, and her realisation that he could have been lifting his bib to emulate masks he had seen those around him wearing. This

provided an example of different ways in which knowledge can be communicated and how meaning can be made.

The team discussed the power and responsibility that comes with being a researcher. Co-researchers identified the importance of establishing a rapport with their participant in order to help them feel safe and confident to share their ideas. Co-researchers thought it was important that their participant saw them as a partner rather than somebody who was assessing them, and this necessitated that they refrain from imposing their own views too strongly. Instead, they discussed how they could use attunement and active listening skills such as using warm facial expressions, adopting a non-judgmental approach, and showing interest by asking follow-up questions.

There was discussion about the power of asking *"Why?"* to promote inference and to evaluate their thinking.aq Darwin wondered whether being asked *"Why?"* when unsure could feel intimidating. Co-researchers liked the phrase *"Tell me more"* to help advance the dialogue and encourage further analysis from their participant.

### 2.6.1.3 Research Question

During the workshop, the co-researchers generated their research question. The co-researchers decided that they wanted to investigate what children "think" about Covid-19. They elaborated that this would involve *"knowing what they think Covid-19 is*", *"what they have been through"* and *"how do they know"* (quotes lifted from the research workshop). This choice of research question was epistemologically consistent with the worldview that there are many possibilities for how Covid-19 has been constructed and subscribes to ideas that 'the meanings that things have for human beings are central in their own right' (Blumer, 1969, p.3).

To generate their research question, co-researchers wrote and shared their ideas on paper (Appendix 8). They then returned to the group and exchanged ideas, finally agreeing on the following:

### 2.6.1.4 Building the Dataset

Building theory from the ground up required the co-research team to gather a rich and nuanced dataset. This section will explore how they chose to access and represent children's indigenous knowledge related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### 2.6.1.4.1 Preliminary Work around the Identification of Tools, Materials and Data

In line with indigenous and participatory research methodologies, decisions about the composition of the dataset, and how data could be elicited, belonged to the co-research team (Chilisa, 2020). This involved choosing tools and materials that they thought could best support their participant to share their perspectives about Covid-19. Co-researchers were introduced to an array of research tools during the research workshop (slide 13 in Appendix 7). These tools went beyond verbal qualitative interviewing and provided ideas about creative research practices, such as making videos or music, engaging in role play, drawing, journalistic interviewing, painting or podcasting. These methods have previously been used in research that has adopted participatory approaches (Barker & Weller, 2003; Barley & Russell, 2019; Clark, 2011; Niemi et al., 2015).

By promoting more creative means of data collection, co-researchers could consider more inclusive approaches to knowledge construction (Quigley & Buck, 2012). Co-researchers could also capitalise on their preferences for how to create knowledge and how to facilitate their research relationship (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018), feeling better equipped to enable their pupil participant to express themselves (Crivello et al., 2009).

It was anticipated that, upon being introduced to more creative methodologies, the co-researchers would opt for multi-media methods of data

generation, and would therefore elicit data in multiple formats. Research in which different data types are integrated is referred to as a Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2011). Such an approach involves the use of different communicative practices to create a diverse dataset which may include data like videos, artwork, or poetry (Anderson, 2012; Clark, 2019; Randall, 2012).

After spending time considering which tools they would like to use, the co-researchers requested the following: a microphone to record a podcast, “flip book” to conduct a journalistic interview, paintbrushes, paint, glitter glue, felt tips, paper card, and colouring pencils. To uphold the participatory nature of the research, the co-research team had full license to mix or change techniques across the process or even agree to change the direction of the research entirely.

#### 2.6.1.4.2 Research Diaries

Charmaz (2014) emphasises the importance of memo writing when conducting constructivist GT research. These ‘analytic notes’ (p.4) are seen as crucial to grasping the dataset and developing sensitivity to ideas for building theory (known as ““theoretical sensitivity”). The principal researcher was facilitating the research, rather than conducting it herself, so memo writing took a different form. Instead, co-researchers were each given their own research diary. It was explained that they could record any and all of their ideas related to the research, such as any hunches that may arise during data collection or about the direction in which they should take the research.

The principal researcher also kept a research diary to ensure she maintained a critical, reflexive stance on her own position (Spyrou, 2011). By noting her own observations and interactions with the team, the principal researcher felt better able to manage any bias, such when she might privilege some ideas over others when supporting the process of data analysis. This diary also served the purpose of recording the dilemmas that the researchers encountered.

The co-research team were observed to use their research diary sporadically across the research. During the preliminary stages, they prepared for data collection by writing a range of notes. Some used their research diaries to anchor themselves within the research question and to record helpful reminders and interesting lines of questioning. Extracts from research diaries can be found in Appendix 9.

#### 2.6.1.4.3 Pilot Work around the Identification of Tools, Materials and Data

Pilot data collection and analysis provided co-researchers with the opportunity to practise their research skills and connect with real-life data. Piloting also helped to identify methodological challenges and to make adjustments in advance of official data collection. Co-researchers worked with the five pupil participants who had been randomly assigned to the pilot group.

Despite having their requested tools to hand, during pilot data collection, each co-researcher chose to give their pupil participant some paper, card, writing and decorative tools, and encouraged them to draw. The principal researcher wondered why the co-researchers reneged on their first choice of tool. Perhaps their familiarity with drawing brought comfort to a situation where they felt a weight of responsibility to facilitate their research relationship.

After pilot work, the principal researcher asked the team why they chose to focus on drawing and talking. Lizzie had switched from podcasting to drawing after asking her pupil participant what they would like to use, demonstrating her sensitivity to her participant's preferences. Others noted that drawing felt like a more attractive and engaging choice, creating a space that felt a little safer for their participant, some of whom seemed nervous. Ivan found that he was able to support his participant by referring to their drawing in order to consider *what* and *who* had been represented.

By enabling the decision making that led to their change in tool choice, co-researchers could tangibly see their own influence over the research design. However, this switch in focus had consequences for the composition of the dataset. Where it had been anticipated that children would create a diverse dataset comprising many different data types, the dataset now comprised drawings and dialogue. In between pilot and official data collection, the principal researcher took the decision to view drawings as part of the process that led to an outcome (Brailas, 2020). That is, participants' drawings were visual artefacts which enabled the process of meaningful dialogic co-construction between research partners (Ellis et al., 2013).

## 2.7 Data Collection, Analysis and Theory Construction

Joined by the premise of embracing all ideas and embodied knowledge, constructions and practices, all individuals (pupil participants, co-researchers and principal researcher) were viewed as active participants in the co-construction of knowledge. From T1 to T2 and beyond, co-researchers iteratively collected data and engaged in data analysis, which required them to alternate between working individually and collaboratively, between themselves, and with their participants. Co-researchers were therefore continually adding to, immersing in, and reflecting on, their dataset.

By combining constructivist GT and participatory approaches, the co-research team were able to inductively analyse their data. These approaches included initial data collection and coding, interacting with and querying the data, sense-checking and gathering further data to account for gaps in understanding. These dense processes (summarised in Figure 7) enabled co-researchers to build towards a level of conceptual understanding where they could theorise about how the pandemic had come to be understood.

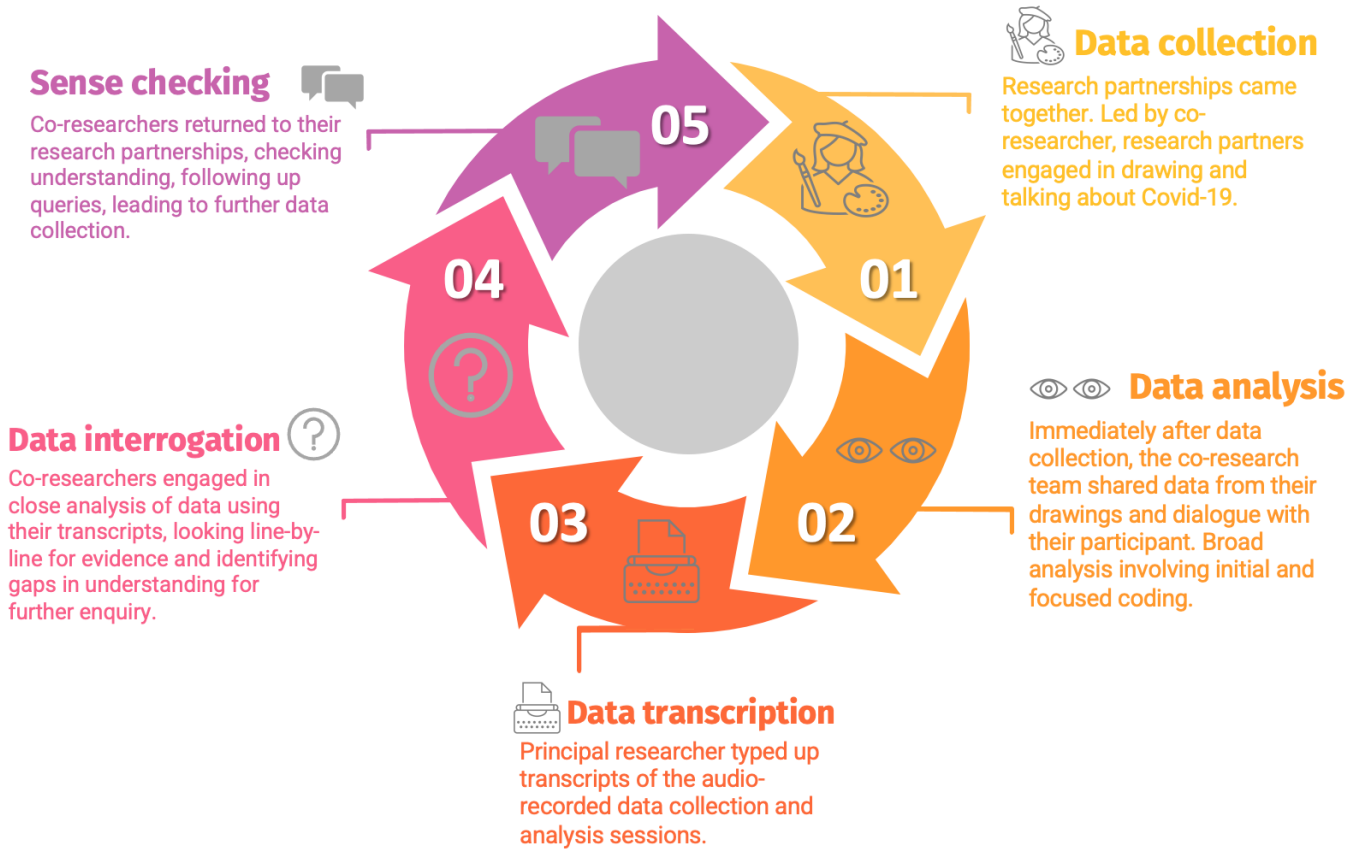


*Figure 7: Visualisation of data collection and analysis processes*

## 2.7.1 Data Collection

At T1, also in July 2021, research partnerships met for the first time. Lizzie and Jimi knew each other prior to data collection and Ivan was friends with Cher's older sibling. Before starting data collection, co-researchers chatted and played games with their participant to establish a sense of collegiality (Shamrova & Cummings, 2017). Co-researchers then introduced their participant to the tools and materials on offer. All partnerships engaged in drawing and talking but each co-researcher took an individualised approached to facilitating data collection. Lizzie additionally produced a short role play with her participant, which served to stimulate further dialogue.

At any age, it can be said that meaning and constructions may not be wholly captured through verbal means (Silver, 2013). By integrating drawing into their

process, co-researchers included a dimension that was familiar and they felt helped to develop a holistic picture of their participant's perspectives. Co-researchers kept their drawings visible during data collection and analysis in order to keep close to the original dataset and facilitate collective meaning-making (Darling-McQuistan, 2017). The drawings were considered to be socially constructed and "polysemic", which refers to the extent to which data can carry multiple meanings (Barley & Russell, 2019; Floyd et al., 2020; Zabotkina & Boyarskaya, 2017).

Data collection and analysis sessions were audio recorded via the Voice Memo application on the school's iPads. These recordings were immediately uploaded to a secure, password-protected drive on the principal researcher's computer. The principal researcher transcribed audio recordings to preserve the raw data and its polysemic meanings. This ensured that the co-research team could revisit their original discussions at any time. Recordings were transcribed by hand so the principal researcher could also immerse in the stories told and language used by pupil participants. This helped her to feel as if she was joining alongside co-researchers as they engaged in their sense-making process (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012).

#### 2.7.1.1 Role of Principal Researcher in Data Collection

By adopting a position of "not knowing", the principal researcher took on the responsibility of facilitating the research rather than directly contributing to the dataset (Gallas, 1995). Part of this role was to support co-researchers to become "responsible hearers" and to keep them aware of the power they yielded in their partnerships (Burroughs & Tollefsen, 2016; Canosa et al., 2018). The principal researcher oversaw the partnerships in action to ensure they were functioning well but stepped back to ensure their participatory space was permeated by the ethos of 'giv[ing] value to children's own culture' (Waller & Bitou, 2011, p.16).

On one occasion, a pupil participant became upset when discussing their grandparent who had passed away after contracting the virus. The principal

researcher joined alongside the partnership to support them through the process. She sensed that the research partnership had built trust between them and that this had allowed the participant to tolerate these difficult emotions (Drake et al., 2016).

### 2.7.2 Data Analysis: Constant Comparative Method

The co-research team analysed the dataset using the constant comparative method, which is the primary analytic method used in GT (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hood, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The constant comparative method guides the development of codes, categories and concepts but keeps the researcher anchored within their dataset to ensure the analysis is built from the "bottom up". In contrast, deductive approaches focus on testing hypotheses, looking to bolster, modify or refute existing ideas (Gray, 2009).

By applying inductive reasoning to their co-constructed dataset, co-researchers iteratively engaged with different levels of coding to raise their data to a higher level of abstraction: co-researchers began with, and continually returned to, the data to *compare* them with previous data in a cycle of *constant* interactions (Fram, 2013).

Figure 8 shows the hierarchy of analytic processes through which data were coded, compared and integrated within the final product. Although initial, focused, and theoretical coding have distinct purposes, depending on the juncture at which they arrived, co-researchers recursively and iteratively engaged in all three.

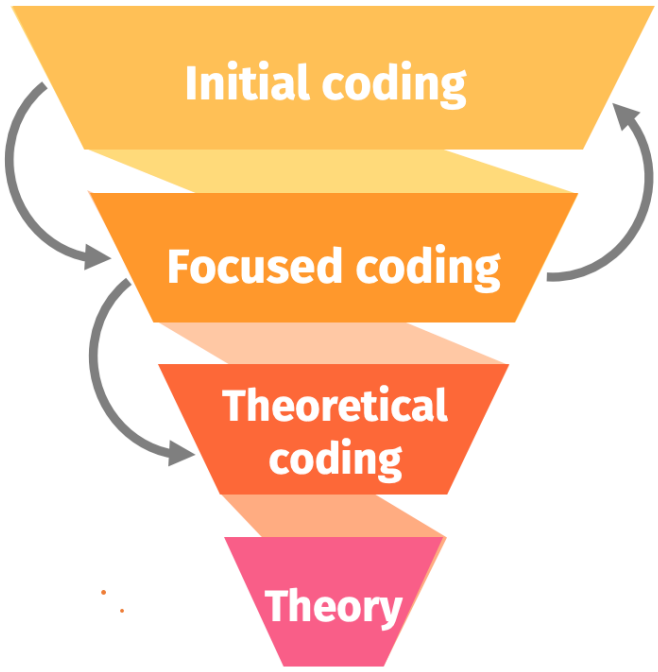


*Figure 8: Diagram showing iterative phases of data analysis*

The principal researcher used an analogy of the 'working skeleton', first mentioned by Charmaz (2014, p.113), to introduce co-researchers to the constant comparative method (Appendix 10). Piles of bones represented the raw data and co-researchers began to sort through the bones by labelling them with initial codes. Joining bones together helped to build categories and further integration brought everything together to create a working skeleton. The analogy is imperfect as it could be assumed that there exists one final product that must look a certain way (i.e., that it would need to end up looking like a human skeleton). The principal researcher explained this to the co-research team and promoted the focus on the processes rather than the finished product, particularly during these early stages.

### 2.7.2.1 Immediate Coding: Initial and Focused Coding

Co-researchers immediately convened after collecting data in their partnerships. They individually studied their drawings and research diary notes to explore meanings embedded within the dataset (Floyd et al., 2020; Zabotkina & Boyarskaya, 2017). They then came together to begin dialogic exploration of their

data. Each co-researcher was given time to share their first impressions of their research experience and any information that they felt was salient to the research question. This represented the first step of collaborative sense-making amongst the co-research team.

All units of information that co-researchers felt were salient were recorded (Appendix 11). These became known as *initial codes:* these codes were interpretive labels constructed by the co-researchers that distilled the information they had identified to be important. Given the important role played by language in meaning-making, the principal researcher worded the codes as close as possible to how they were said by the co-researchers. In the codes can be seen actions, accounts, sentiments and elements of the stories that co-researchers believed reflected how their pupil participant had constructed their pandemic experiences.

Once the "presenting" co-researcher had finished providing their individual thoughts, the listening co-researchers were invited to ask them questions to clarify and further their own understanding: this elicited further initial codes. The process of comparative analysis began organically and almost immediately, with the first occurrence being when Aleeza said, "*My participant also said…."* The time it took for each subsequent co-researcher to represent their data and field questions increased each time because of the growing amount of data that could be compared.

As they engaged in back-and-forth about their data, co-researchers experienced affirmation and challenge from one another. For instance, after Nimai shared what he had learned from his time with Ruslan, he and Lizzie engaged in animated discussion about whether inanimate objects can contract Covid-19 given what they knew about virus transmission across surfaces. Aleeza commented that disagreements should be welcomed as the resulting discussion could function to bring new insights.

While *what* was collected played an important role in determining next steps, the process of studying and making analytic sense of the data brought many questions about the very nature of what was being researched. With this in mind, co-researchers opted to change their research question so it focused not just on Covid-19 as a virus but within the context of the wider pandemic. The research question was altered to:

*What do young children think about the Covid-19 pandemic?*

#### 2.7.2.1.1 Role of Principal Researcher in Immediate Coding

Coding data using GT methodologies usually involves the single grounded theorist using their memos to analytically handle and process their data (Redman-MacLaren, 2015). These reflective memos function to 'capture the comparisons and connections [they] make, and crystallise questions and directions [to] pursue' (Charmaz, 2014, p.162). Because data analysis here involved five grounded theorists, the principal researcher (in her position of "not knowing") aimed to facilitate a space in which co-researchers could "verbally memo" together. She recognised they had approached their research from different viewpoints so utilised questioning as a means to vary levels of intervention and maximise participation across the team (e.g., scaffolding through open vs. closed questioning) (Spencer et al., 2020).

An important function of questioning was to encourage co-researchers to foster their theoretical sensitivity (i.e., abstract and conceptual thinking around their data). As more codes emerged, co-researchers immediately began to identify commonalities and differences. Co-researchers naturally began to compare their data, and because this started so early in analysis, the principal researcher was able to promote the process of more focused coding. Focused coding required co-researchers to organise the large number of initial codes they had constructed into more succinct *focused* codes.

Within the principal researcher's process of recording (Appendix 11), comparisons and connections made by the co-researchers were represented through drawing lines, circling, and creating a key comprised of shapes, similar to a relational or "messy" map (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p.379). This provided a visual representation of co-researchers' comparative process. By identifying patterns, and sorting and synthesising their data, co-researchers could later begin to build categories under which their data could be subsumed (Charmaz, 2014). Appendix 12 provides examples of the initial and focused codes that provided the foundations from which category and theory conceptualisation could begin (Saldaña, 2016).

#### 2.7.2.2 Interrogative Coding: Line-by-Line Coding with Transcripts

After the immediate coding session, the research team dispersed and the principal researcher went away to carefully transcribe the data collection and analysis discussions. Transcribing data analysis sessions helped to preserve the rapid flow of ideas that comprised the path taken towards constructing theory.

The next phase of data analysis involved co-researchers returning to their data collection transcripts. This phase required dense analysis and was known as interrogative coding. Co-researchers read their individual transcripts line by line to closely study the raw data. They used highlighters to identify noteworthy information (i.e., that which related to the research question) and anything of interest that they wanted to clarify or pursue further with their participant. This more incisive process opened up potential for shifting theoretical directions that may not have been identified during immediate initial coding.

Co-researchers informally continued their discussions as they interrogated their data. Interrogative coding was a lengthy process in which the team took several breaks. Once they had finished, the team returned to their initial and focused codes. New initial codes were added and co-researchers began to make more explicit links between their focused codes. They continued their constant comparative process

and began to name a range of categories using the codes and data that would eventually subsume and saturate said categories.

By the end of interrogative coding, co-researchers focused their analysis on the following tentative categories:

- Mental Health
- Emotions
- Support
- Sources of Information
- Changes
- Covid-19 transmission
- Health/sickness/dying
- Good vs. Evil
- Covid-19 vs. Us
- Being instructed
- Caution
- Lockdown
- Online learning

The Powerpoint slides in Appendix 12 provide an indication of the process that led co-researchers to settle on these categories.

#### 2.7.2.2.1 Role of Principal Researcher in Interrogative Coding

Interrogative coding served a dual role in enhancing co-researchers' theoretical sensitivity as well as engaging them in theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sampling involves the co-research team using their analysis to decide what additional data they may need to collect (McCrae & Purssell, 2016). This was arranged as the next step for the research process, where co-researchers would meet again to "sense check" with their participant and collect further data. Charmaz (2014) advocated the idea that further data collection should be pertinent to the analytic categories that have been generated in order to flesh them out.

However, at this stage, co-researchers' categories were by no means definitive. The team were still curious about different conceptual directions they could pursue so the principal researcher sensed it may be too early to focus solely on saturating these specific categories.

As co-researchers conversed and interacted with one another and their transcripts, they seemed to become better versed in their dataset. They also seemed to express their ideas with more confidence. The principal researcher maintained her position of "not knowing" to support the co-researchers to keep open to all possibilities and resist coercing their data into their presupposed categories. For instance, Nimai tended to engage in long bouts of conjecture: the principal researcher used lines of questioning to preserve his ideas while encouraging the whole team to return to their transcripts to consider what may have sparked his curiosities. This helped to raise co-researchers' thinking to an abstract level, keeping their tentative categories in mind, while remaining rooted in their dataset.

#### 2.7.2.3 Sense Checking, Further Data Collection and Analysis

The co-researchers and their pupil participants met again in November 2021 (T2). To check understanding with participants, as discussed, represents an important stage for theoretical sampling. At T2, co-researchers resumed their dialogue in a way that was informed by preceding collection and analysis. Original drawings were re-introduced to pupil participants. In her research diary, the principal researcher observed different verbal and non-verbal cues that suggested the partners were more at ease with one another. Co-researchers appeared to more confidently hold the interactive space and pupil participants made their views more explicit.

Co-researchers shared moments that had resonated with them, how they had interpreted some of what they had shared, and checked that their voice had been accurately represented. Existing data were thickened and, with further questions asked, new data emerged and assumed analytic relevance. Generating new data

through researcher intervention is a process that is problematised by O'Connor et al. (2018). However, within the context of this research, researcher intervention was child-centric, rooted in the original dataset, and in keeping with the expectation that the dataset is co-constructed.

The co-research team reconvened after their second meeting with their pupil participant. Theoretical sampling enabled co-researchers to advance their analysis, providing greater scope for raising emerging categories to an abstract conceptual level. Co-researchers were invited to share individually, as before, but they opted to manoeuvre straight into further comparative analysis, sorting and synthesising their new/adjusted data. Categories changed dimensionally through this constant comparative process.

#### 2.7.2.3.1 Role of Principal Researcher in Sense Checking

At this stage, it was important to re-align co-researchers with their core purpose of working towards theoretical understanding. This required that co-researchers felt confidence in their categories, which were now more robust. An example from the transcript where the principal researcher could be seen to support this process was when she asked*, "Is there something you are curious about but you don't think fits into one of the categories?"*

### 2.7.2.4 Building the Theoretical Framework: Theoretical Coding and Theory Construction

The co-researchers and principal researcher met again to engage in theoretical coding. This form of coding exists at the higher-order stage of the coding hierarchy but co-researchers had by now been honing their theoretical sensitivity for some time. They had become increasingly sensitised to emerging patterns and suggested meanings, leaving them prepared to pursue the highly abstract process of developing concepts. The team considered their categories, how they may be connected, and discussed ways in which they could raise them to an abstract,

conceptual level. They took decisions as to which of their emerging concepts could best analytically account for all their subsumed categories and codes.

Co-researchers finalised their concepts and categories, leading to the formulation of their final product: a theoretical framework that encapsulated ways in which children had come to understand the Covid-19 pandemic. A hand-written copy of the children's framework can be found in Appendix 13.

## 2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has summarised the methodological and procedural elements of the research. By explicating on the techniques used by those involved, the principal researcher demonstrated how an adult-centric agenda was eschewed in order to centre children's indigenous perspectives. Co-researchers engaged in techniques that were oriented towards co-constructing knowledge in ways that were child-led and inclusive. They engaged in increasingly abstract analytic processes to generate a nascent theoretical framework, which is presented in Chapter 3.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Findings

## 3.1 Overview of Chapter

Chapter 2 described the iterative and recursive processes used to enable co-researchers to code, categorise, and conceptualise their data. The fruits of children's work will be presented in the current chapter. The principal researcher will take a holistic approach to describing influences that were seen to shape the children's final product. An in-depth exploration of each concept within the theoretical framework then follows.

## 3.2 Children's Constructivist Grounded Theoretical Framework

Through their inductive analysis, the co-researchers generated a new, grounded theoretical framework comprising five interrelated concepts (in yellow) and subordinate categories (in orange) (Figure 9).

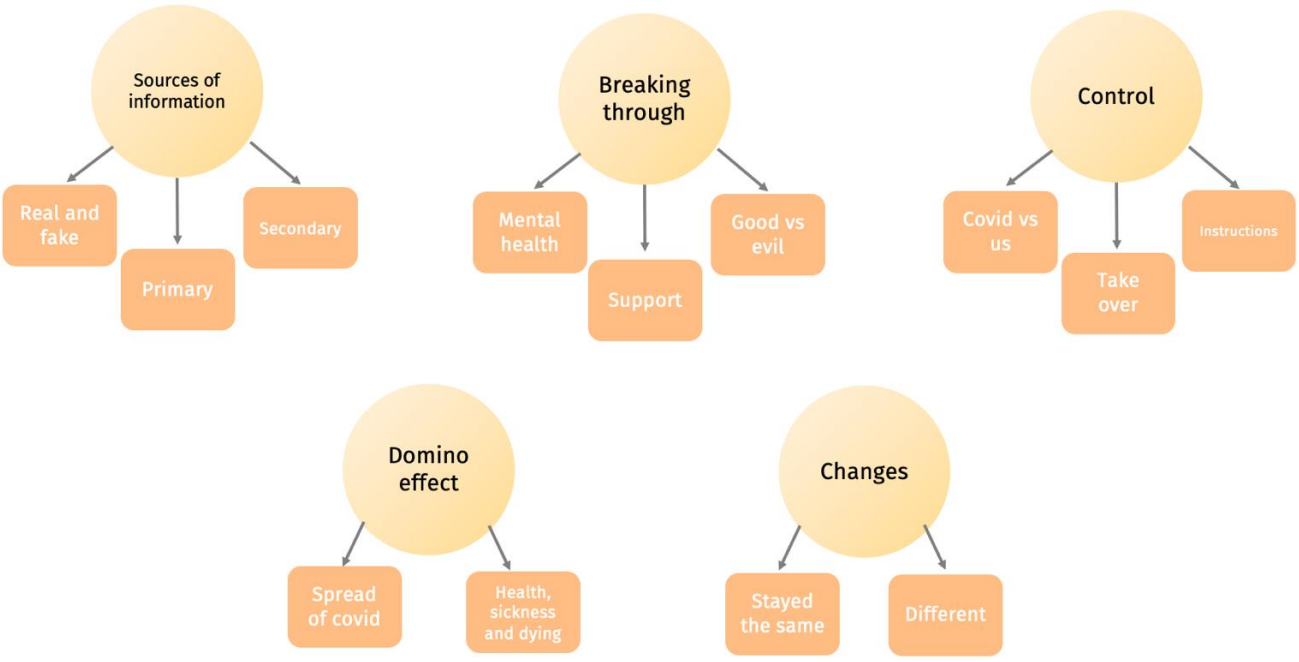


*Figure 9: Children's constructivist grounded theoretical framework*

The framework is grounded in data that encompasses children's socially constructed understanding of Covid-19 and their pandemic experiences. While data were co-generated by research partners, the co-research team undertook the interpretive work needed to raise the analytic level of the data. The subjective beliefs, behaviours and views of all actors in the research are assumed to be embedded within the framework. The varied ways in which children constructed their understanding reflect the underpinning assumption that children differentially experience their realities, unique to their cultural and community context.

Co-researchers selected transcript quotes that they felt illustrated each aspect of the framework (Appendix 14). They found it helpful to consider which stories and ideas they had returned to during data analysis and during times of personal reflection. Illustrative quotes used in the main body of this chapter come from data analysis and were chosen by the principal researcher: it was not possible within time constraints for co-researchers to read and select quotes from data analysis transcripts.

### 3.2.1 Constructing the Final Product

In line with the research paradigm, co-researchers' interpretation of implicit meanings and actions played a crucial role in devising the final framework. They were required to engage in abductive processes in order to abstract data to a higher level of conceptualisation (Dey, 2007). Such processes included integrating their own experiences and using their existing knowledge as a lens through which to conceptualise the dataset (Kelle, 2005).

Co-researchers had conceptual autonomy when producing their final analytic framework. Through constant comparative analysis, they raised codes to categories, then to concepts. They decided whether new data points fit into existing categories, whether new categories or concepts needed to be created or replaced, deciding through ongoing discussion which concepts were most pertinent to their research

question and best represented their data. Therefore, categories and concepts were constructed by, and emerged through, co-researchers' discourse.

## 3.2.2 Collaborative Co-construction

Knowledge that permeates the theoretical framework is considered to be co-constructed by all actors involved in the research. The illustrative quotes chosen by co-researchers (Appendix 14) and the principal researcher provide an insight into how co-researchers conducted their time with their pupil participant (e.g., the questions they asked, directives they followed). The conceptual description within the children's framework cannot be separated from co-researchers' initiatives and the influence of the principal researcher as facilitator (O'Connor et al., 2018). Understanding that this was to be expected, and was therefore acceptable, became a point of contention within the group:

**Lizzie:** *"Not a question, but you sort of went off track. Cos remember when we said that is not supposed to be about you, it's supposed to be about your contestant (sic)."*
**Nimai:** *"I know, I know, I'm not talking about me."*
**Lizzie:** *"You drew on his paper. That does not mean that it's his - what he thinks."*
**Nimai:** *"No, he said why I drew it."*
**Principal researcher:** "*Did it start a conversation?"*
**Nimai:** *"Yeah and you said I could draw some things to help him and this helped him really good."*

Across data analysis, co-researchers challenged one another and their thinking. They aided their discussions with the performance of particular hand actions (that they had been taught in school) to indicate whether they would like to *"agree", "disagree", "build on"* or suggest a *"What if?".* As theoretical decision-making belonged to the whole team, it was important that they reached an agreement before moving on. In many constructivist grounded theory studies, primary researchers lead theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014); in the present

research, a consequence of team decision-making was that crafting the theoretical framework was a lengthy process.

### 3.2.3 Adult Influence

In Chapter 2, the principal researcher described how she facilitated co-researchers' discussion and supported them to develop shared understanding. Where there was difference in opinion or when there were creative tensions, she facilitated further dialogue until they could concur. Co-researchers occasionally looked to the principal researcher for insight, and she responded by redirecting their focus to resources within the group. Having consulted the transcripts, the principal researcher tended to use questioning in order to broaden the discussion, then to narrow it, and to promote theoretical sensitivity. Examples are as follows: *"What is similar about them?"; "What are they all?"; "What else?"; "What stands out looking at all the data we've collected?"; "What kind of sense do you make of that?"; "What did you think he was trying to tell you?"*

## 3.3 Concepts and Categories

Anchored in the dataset, co-researchers agreed upon 13 categories that they felt best comprised the different stories, ideas and meanings they had elicited. From there, co-researchers generated five overarching concepts: 1) Sources of Information; 2) Breaking Through; 3) Changes; 4) Domino Effect; and 5) Control. Examples of codes subsumed within concepts and categories are provided in the next section.

### 3.3.1 Sources of Information

Co-researchers decided that the data for their concept known as 'Sources of Information' could be best accounted for by three categories: 'Real and fake', 'Primary' and 'Secondary'. These had their roots in initial codes such as "News – people said it's not real" and "Search on Google for how to keep safe". The

categories of ‘Primary’ and ‘Secondary’ refer to participants’ use of primary and secondary sources of information to understand what was happening during the pandemic, such as via the television, internet, parents or online.

**Aleeza:** *“There's lots about the news. The news and where they've heard things that come up quite a lot. Things like symptoms, cases, every day, like Sky News or BBC News, they put the amount of death cases that were on that day and amount of death cases in total.”*

-

**Lizzie: “***So we were talking about what can kill COVID. And Jimi said fire could kill COVID. And I was asking him about why he thought that and he said his dad told him he was trying to eat a potato and it was washed. So his dad was saying you need to put it in the oven to kill all the bad stuff on it. So he thought maybe that could kill COVID.”* (Figure 10)

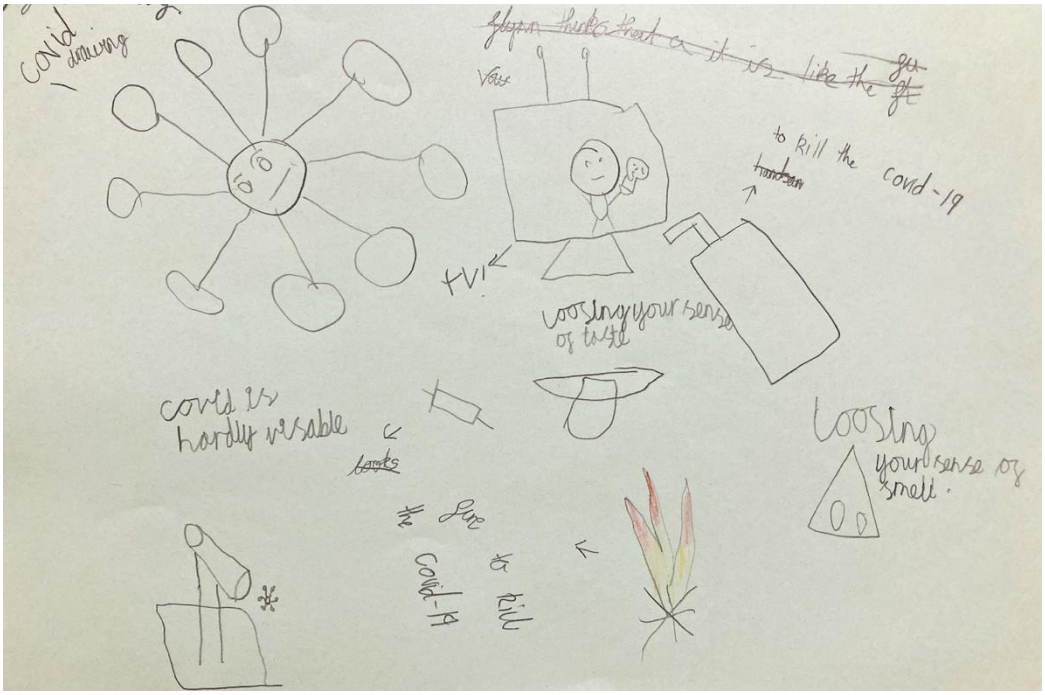


*Figure 10: One of Jimi's drawings*

Aleeza shared that Freya was particularly attuned to ideas that other people think Covid-19 may be “fake” and how this could impact people’s behaviour. Co-researchers noticed the differences in how Freya and Cher consumed information. Cher talked boldly about the importance of adhering to all guidelines, while Freya

took a much more critical approach to information provided across media coverage. The principal researcher wondered how children's wider sociocultural context may have influenced these perspectives.

Raising 'Sources of Information' to the level of a concept demonstrates co-researchers' sensitivity to how their pupil counterpart had come to know what they knew and understood during the pandemic. This also included what co-researchers perceived to be a *lack* of knowledge: for instance, Nimai and Darwin commented that Ruslan and Albie did not know or have an opinion on some of their questions.

An example of a focused code subsumed under 'Secondary' was "The colour of Covid": co-researchers were struck by participants' reference to colour and justification for how they had visualised the virus. Co-researchers' discussion suggested that their ideas around primary and secondary sources came from their History learning at school, which indicates that they were applying learning from the classroom to support processes of conceptualisation.

### 3.3.2 Breaking Through

The categories 'Mental health', 'Being supported' and 'Good vs. Evil' were bound together within a concept that co-researchers termed 'Breaking Through'. Co-researchers had originally decided that 'Mental health' would be a core concept because their discussions had continually returned to ideas around children's mental health and wellbeing. However, with further discussion, Darwin led the charge to raise 'Mental health' to the more abstract idea of 'Breaking Through'. Consequently, 'Mental health' was subsumed to become a category. Co-researchers agreed that former focused codes 'Being supported' and 'Good vs. Evil' could be raised to categories, which, alongside 'Mental health', accounted for all interpretive understandings within their 'Breaking Through' concept.

The focused code known as “Feeling negative emotions” was the most frequent code across the whole process. Early on in the analysis, co-researchers grouped together the emotions that their participants had raised and that co-researchers believed may have jeopardised their mental health: anger, sadness, worry, frustration, feeling trapped (*“like in a cage”*), boredom, confusion, stress. Emotional experiences across the pandemic punctuated many other codes.

**Darwin:** *“I feel like emotions is one of the best categories. Mostly everyone used their emotions. There was more people who were, like, sad about the virus, angry about the virus. Because you become more and more sad. Then you get to the stage when you're depressed. And you're lonely, like they said, trapped. And you just feel like you're just stuck in a deep hole, and you can't get out.”*

Pupil participants reported feeling a range of different emotions. These seemed to resonate with co-researchers as they often wanted to begin data analysis by sharing their sense of how their participant had felt across the pandemic. Co-researchers’ often followed up their directives by asking their participant about the emotional components of their experiences, and this was reflected in the data set.

**Lizzie:** *“There was a lot of confusion and anger because they couldn’t do stuff like see their friends, family members. Loneliness was a big common theme. It was very common to feel angry because they kept on saying they can’t see their family, they’re angry that it happened.”*

The extent to which pupil participants were impacted emotionally varied across the group. For instance, Darwin described that Albie *“hasn’t had much experience in Covid-19”* and did not report being affected by the pandemic until his grandfather passed away. Albie did not share much about this time. However, having looked closely at his drawings, co-researchers suspected that he may have experienced some difficult emotions that he may not have felt confident or able to share (Figure 11).

**Darwin:** *"So what I found out about Albie is that he hasn't had much experience in Covid. So what I think of what he drew… it is like the clouds and the rain when they're sad, then the weather changes, and it's all dark and gloomy, raining on them. Basically, just feeling sad and depressed inside. And he also drew this. This is the virus around earth."*

**Lizzie:** *"Why is he blue?"*

**Darwin:** *"Just to represent how sad he is about Coronavirus. Because he said that his granddad died."*

**Nimai:** *"The person in between the rain is probably Albie."*

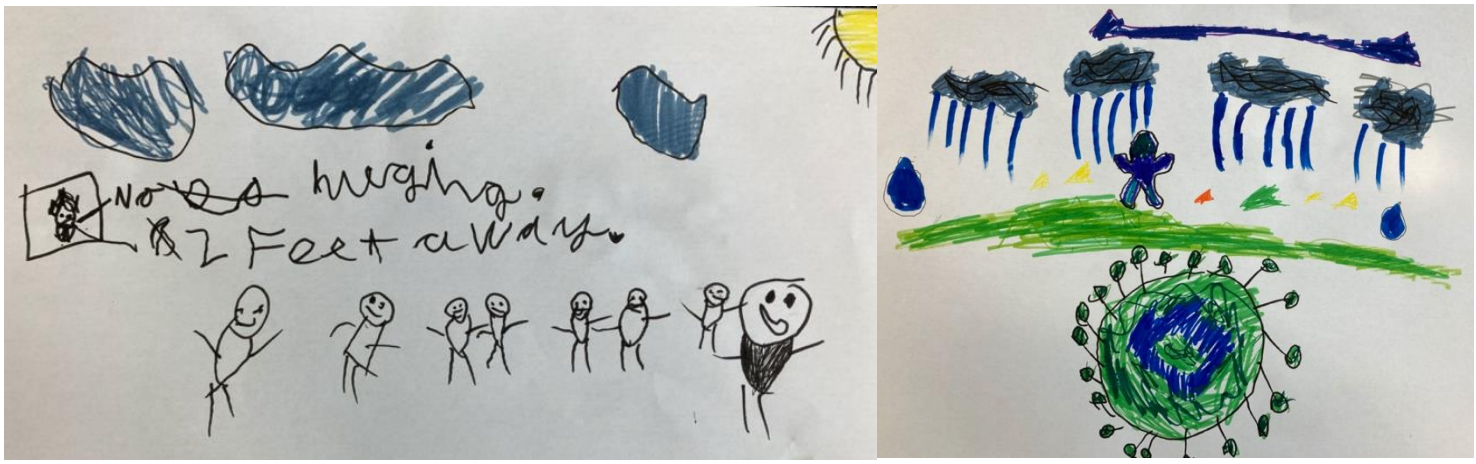


*Figure 11: Albie's drawings at T1*

Through their discussions, co-researchers expressed how they felt their own wellbeing had been impacted by the events of the pandemic. When schools were closed, Darwin reported feeling confused about what was expected of him, such as whether he should ruminate on emerging events:

**Darwin:** "*So I was just a little confused at what to do because I was like... do I do my online work? Do I just do nothing and just sit down and think about what's happening?"*

Co-researchers felt that portions of their dataset reflected a battle between 'Good' and 'Evil', where 'Evil' could refer to Covid-19 itself or people who wanted to exploit it for their own gain. The latter idea was predominantly driven by discussions about Freya's contributions. Freya had frequently referred to "good" and "bad"

people, telling Aleeza that the bad people would want Covid-19 to happen as it made the world a bad place.

Aleeza also shared a story that Freya had told her about a girl and her coat (Figure 12). In the story, a girl had her coat stolen by the class bully, who had taken it because she wanted the girl to get cold and catch Covid-19. She returned the coat because she didn't want to go to prison for her death. Freya had previously shared experiences of schoolfriends not wanting to play with her because they thought she had Covid-19; Aleeza wondered if her story about the girl with the coat reflected some of her worries about how her friendships had been impacted.


*Figure 12: One of Freya's drawings*

**Lizzie:** *"One of the big links is friends and family, we could all relate to that because we may or may not have had to self-isolate and we couldn't see all our friends from different classes because we wasn't allowed to play with them because of our bubbles."*

Pupil participants commented on spending more time at home with family and being separated from loved ones outside of their household. They felt supported, in different ways, by both of these groups, and these ideas were subsumed under the category known as 'Being supported'. All participants had described missing family and friends during the pandemic. Some mentioned that they missed the physical proximity and intimacy they could previously enjoy (e.g., hugs, kisses, whispering in ears). This resonated with co-researchers on a personal level:

**Ivan:** "*We had to self-isolate. I wasn't really able to see my cousins and other family because, if I did, then I would spread coronavirus to them and I really would not like to do that because... family is just like a thing that you can always go to and they'll always be there for you."*

Linked to their 'Good vs. Evil' category, Freya and Jimi had suggested how Covid-19 could be a force for good:

**Aleeza:** *"Being actually in lockdown, it helps to lower global warming because we're outside not buying stuff, not polluting the earth, we're just staying in our home and not polluting anything."*

**Principal researcher:** "*What did you think about that Freya saying that?"*

***Aleeza:*** *"I really like it because I didn't think anyone would even try to say that."*

-

**Lizzie:** *"Someone might have had a bully, and they could take a break from them. They wouldn't feel very sad when they're at home".*

Particularly at T2, co-researchers reported that their discussions had felt *"a bit brighter"* (Lizzie), which may also have reflected growing confidence within the research partnerships. Co-researchers interpreted Albie's drawings at T2 as showing he was feeling much more positive than at T1 (Figure 13). They noted that it was no longer raining and that Albie had drawn himself doing his favourite activity (playing on the computer).


*Figure 13: Albie's drawings at T2*

Co-researchers were keen to highlight that, despite their most frequent code relating to negative emotions, the pandemic had not been entirely experienced to be negative (at both T1 and T2). Pupil participants had described using a range of internal and external coping skills. Darwin and Cher spent some time discussing how they were looking forward to Christmas and *"forgetting about Covid"*. Cher told Darwin that she thought it would be nice to approach people who are feeling sad about the pandemic, *"and tell them not to give up on yourself and join the Christmas spirit"* which would help them to *"start celebrating more happy things".*

Co-researchers only wanted negative pandemic experiences to be considered alongside children's ability to cope and move forward. They chose to give as much importance to the ways in which they successfully managed the pandemic as they did to the negative emotions they experienced. In their framework, the team converged on the idea that Covid-19 was a barrier that children needed to

confront if they wanted to “break through”. The first use of the term ‘Breaking Through’ emerged from discussion around Cher’s drawing (Figure 14). An extract of this discussion can be found in Appendix 15. This conversation was the key driver behind Darwin’s suggestion that ‘Breaking Through’ could work as a key concept.

*Figure 14: One of Cher's drawings*

## 3.3.3 Changes

Pupil participants had shared the range of changes they had experienced during the pandemic and the adjustments they made in response to the crisis. The principal researcher noted in her research diary that co-researchers’ category of ‘Different’ was more substantially fleshed out in comparison to ‘Stayed the same’.

**Darwin:** *"He said it's changing, like the world. Like when time goes on more and more and more, then there's more deaths, more cases, just more of everything. But also less population. That people are dying."*

Changes described by pupil participants included the reshaping of social and cultural norms and practices. This includes changes to routines at school and at home, such as parents/carers' work patterns, dynamics with friends and family and adapting to new ways of living and behaving.

**Nimai:** *"If he really wanted this toy, he wouldn't really be able to get it because the shop will be closed. He's annoyed and sad that he can't go on school trips because mostly everyone likes to go on trips."*

-

**Ivan:** *"Not being used to masks… using online cos it was really hard to cos some people don't have the right devices, self-isolating, social distancing…"*

Pupil participants commented on the difficulties presented by these changes. Freya explained that her family were not able to observe religious traditions for her grandmother's funeral because of the Covid-19 guidelines.

Pupil participants also highlighted the move to online learning as a substantial adjustment. This was widely identified to be a difficult experience and responses varied in their feelings of confidence accessing and enjoying virtual lessons.

**Lizzie:** *"Another thing that was very common was finding it hard to learn online. It was confusing for them to understand it without having a teacher in front of them teaching them".*

Pupil participants discussed modifying their social encounters in order to comply with Covid-19 guidelines; examples included opting to 'high-5' others rather than hug them and refraining from whispering secrets in friends' ears. Jimi, Ruslan, and Albie (until the death of his grandfather) did not report feeling too affected by

these changes. Nimai described Ruslan as *"not phased"* by the pandemic. During their discussion at T1, Ruslan had focused on experiential changes when he himself contracted Covid-19, such as not being able to taste milk in his cereal.

### 3.3.4 Domino Effect

Co-researchers described a sense that once schools closed, events seemed to surge ahead, one after the next, which Lizzie said was like a 'Domino Effect'. Co-researchers also sensed that their pupil participants had tried hard to keep track of what was happening. They described that, while they and their participants had converged on the event which was their *"starting domino"* (the onset of the pandemic), the ensuing chain of events was viewed in different ways. For instance, Freya's focus related to events surrounding her grandmother's death while Cher's focus was on adhering to the different guidelines and *"improvising"* to manage during periods of isolation. Co-researchers understood Freya and Albie's conceptions of the pandemic to differ from the other participants because they had experienced deaths in their families as a result of Covid-19.

Pupil participants felt that their overarching concept of 'Domino Effect' accounted for data that were categorised under 'Spread of Covid-19' and 'Health, sickness and dying'. These had their roots in focused codes such as "Spreading around the whole planet killing anyone" and initial codes such as "A changing world comes from Covid starting".

Co-researchers' questioning demonstrated their eagerness to explore how their research partner understood how Covid-19 spreads. During T1 data analysis, co-researchers themselves engaged in a lively debate around their own understanding. For around half an hour, Nimai and Lizzie called upon existing academic knowledge (including the shared evolutionary history between humans and apes) to debate whether animals or inanimate objects can contract Covid-19,

whether surfaces can spread it, and if these means that the surfaces themselves are *"infected".*

Freya provided Aleeza with a lengthy, more scattered analysis of how she understood the ways in which Covid-19 can spread. She discussed the times of day in which she felt you may be more likely contract Covid-19 and the role of plants and insects in spreading the virus (Figure 15). She changed her mind several times in the process of explaining her thinking to Aleeza.


*Figure 15: Two of Freya's drawings*

Co-researchers shared that all pupil participants provided their understanding of the clinical presentation of Covid-19 and were cognisant of the threat Covid-19 can pose to life and good health. Freya and Albie both experienced the loss of a grandparent due to Covid-19. Some pupil participants described the need to endure the changes discussed in order to protect others from becoming sick. Jimi, Cher and Freya shared their understanding that older people (and those with asthma [Freya]) were at higher risk of dying from Covid-19.

**Darwin:** *"He said that people are dying. Innocent life. He also said to me that it is something that makes you sick and spreads around our planet killing everyone… you won't really figure out if you have it or not."*

## 3.3.5 Control

Ideas around control originated in co-researchers' sense that pupil participants felt *"trapped",* which was a word first used by Freya. They felt that pupil participants had felt trapped inside their houses or trapped because things kept happening to them. However, co-researchers did not seem to use the word 'Control' in the pejorative sense when discussing their categories. For 'Instructions', the word "control" was used to convey what their participants had told them about controlling their *own* actions in order to protect themselves and others. Conversely, categories known as 'Covid vs. Us' and 'Take over' referred to data where participants felt they were being controlled by Covid-19. In these categories, co-researchers included the times in which Covid-19 was anthropomorphised as a villain.

*Figure 16: Ruslan's drawings*

**Nimai:** *"And I asked him to picture Scotland, in his mind from above. So basically, he's in a helicopter or something. And I asked him, once you stop picturing about it, how he felt. He pictured Corona as everywhere, so it's like being trapped and can't visit your home country. And he said really bad because my home country is filled with Corona and I will never get to see my family members. He drew corona this big because he thought it was a growing virus."* (Figure 16)

Participants did not seem to resist the circumstances of the pandemic. They readily adapted their lives, though not all explained why they did so. Most of the participants mentioned ways in which they adapted so they could keep themselves and others safe. Co-researchers recognised that some of the participants seemed to manage this better than others.

Some participants constructed Covid-19 as villainous while citizens were seen as heroic.

**Lizzie:** *"His dad works in the NHS. He also told me that his dad has to go through really stressful things because working in the NHS is not really that easy… He said his dad will save us."*

There was a sense of trust in authority, particularly from Cher, Albie and Jimi. Ruslan and Nimai expressed less favourable views about authority figures, with Nimai referring to Boris Johnson *as "the COVID king"* and Ruslan saying that he did not like him.

**Nimai (interpreting his time with Ruslan):** *"I just realised it's actually not sadness. It's being trapped – taken away from the real world outside which is filled with Corona. Being trapped by Boris Johnson. He's the one who is making us trapped inside our houses."*

Co-researchers considered merging 'Covid vs. Us' and 'Take over' into one category but finally agreed to keep them separate because 'Take over' referred to Covid-19 enveloping the world while 'Covid vs. Us' was more about "*fighting back"* (Lizzie).

**Ivan:** *"Since kids get sick from the virus, they think of it as a bad thing like, if kids get sick, there's a possibility they can die. They said going to the hospital could cure you, or self-isolating could help."*

Examples of "fighting back" also included the different solutions pupil participants came up with for keeping connected with loved ones from whom they were separated.

## 3.4 Visual Representations

After producing their final framework, co-researchers created their own visual representations of their work. They chose to work either individually or in a pair with license to present the framework however they wished (Figures 17-19). Nimai chose not to engage with this activity as he was keen to start writing the script for their video Powerpoint (section 5.4). In addition to the framework, co-researchers opted to include some of their focused codes.

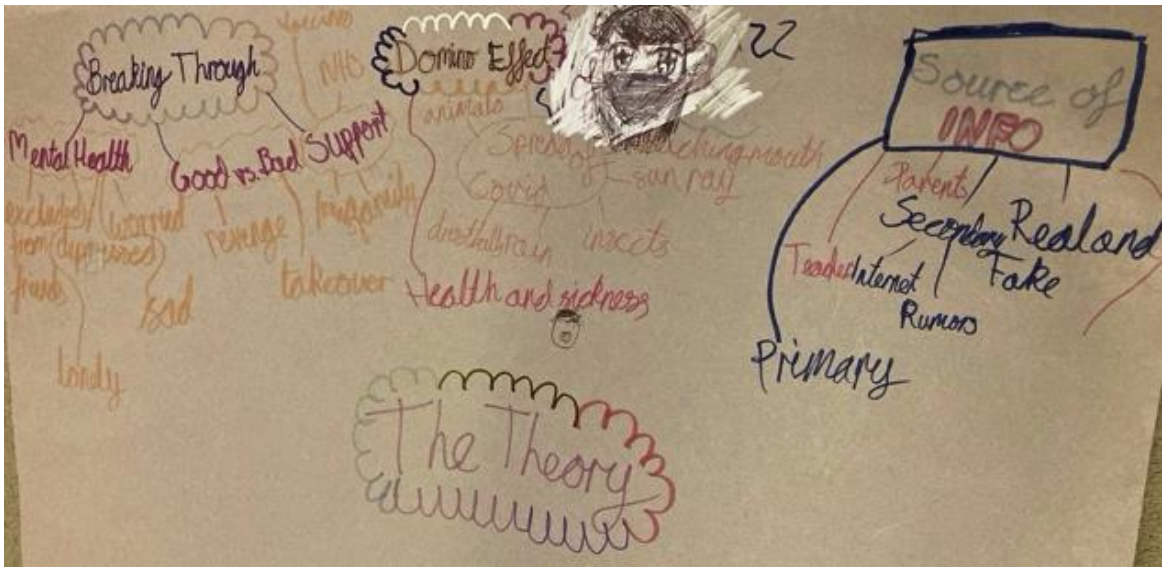


*Figure 17: Aleeza's representation of the theoretical framework*


*Figure 18: Darwin and Ivan's representation of the theoretical framework*

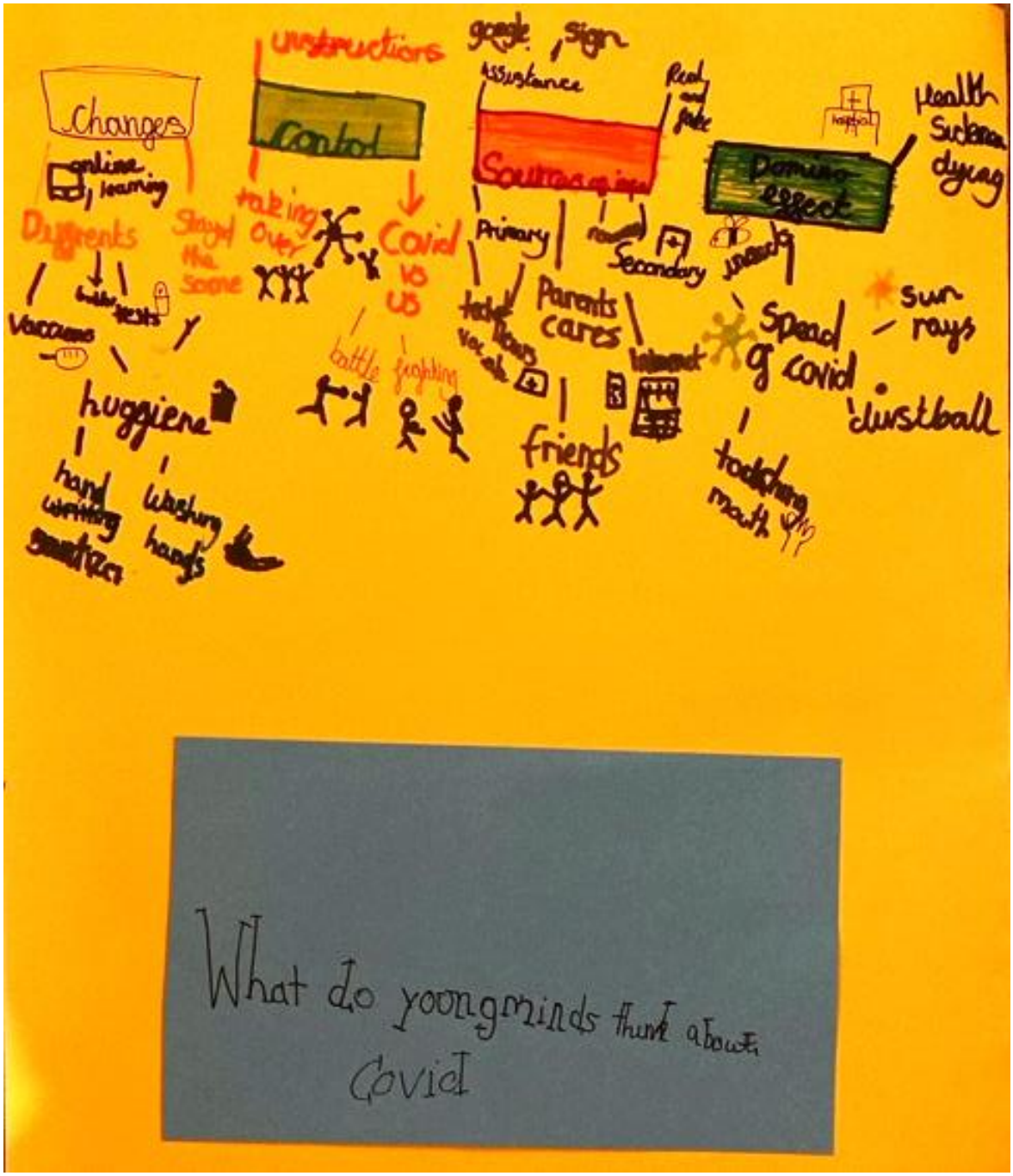


*Figure 19: Lizzie's representation of the theoretical framework*

Whilst creating their visual representations, co-researchers engaged in conversation about ways in which they could have been more exacting and the team enquired with the principal researcher about making some changes to the framework. Visually representing categories and their relationships through diagramming can be helpful at all stages to advance data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, the principal researcher wondered if it may have been helpful to have begun this process at an earlier stage.

## 3.5 Chapter Summary

Co-researchers engaged in complex research practices and the culmination of their work is presented here. They ultimately chose to represent their knowledge through five concepts: Sources of Information, Breaking Through, Changes, Domino Effect and Control. Children took an incisive approach to understanding one another's contributions as evidenced in the quotes taken from data analysis sessions. Their framework contains the wide spectrum of emotions their participants felt and indicates how they and others constructed and acted upon these events.

Co-researchers were impressed by the level of insight shown by participants and how they kept tuned in to the discourse. As part of their 'Domino Effect' concept, the co-researchers explained that the pace at which information developed seemed to make it difficult for their participants to keep track. Having said that, participants thoughtfully managed the information they obtained and were creative in how they conceptualised what was happening at the macro level.

How children described their experiences varied, particularly when describing how they felt about pandemic events and the best ways to respond. Co-researchers recognised storytelling aspects to participants' responses, pitting "good" against "evil", and viewing particular groups of people as pandemic heroes. The pandemic invoked strong emotions in some of the participants while others were curious but content with their situation. Co-researchers got the sense that, given Covid-19 is still

a live event, children are continuing to adjust their understanding as they gain further experience living alongside the virus.

# Chapter 4: Literature Review

## 4.1 Overview of Chapter

In Chapter 1, the principal researcher contextualised the research using social constructivist and social constructionist frameworks. These were used to guide the research prior to data collection but were not directly applied to how children may have conceived of the phenomenon in question (the Covid-19 pandemic). The literature review was delayed until findings had been identified, the reasons for which are explained in this chapter. This chapter will also outline the complexities that come with navigating literature reviews in grounded theory research. Only recently, El Hussein et al. (2017) commented that 'we still do not understand how to conduct a well-rounded literature review within the full grounded theory research process' (p.1201).

A systematic literature review was conducted to explore how the knowledge created by children resonates with existing literature. To do so, the principal researcher shifted away from her position of "not knowing" and anchored herself in the co-researchers' theoretical framework. This chapter explains the timing and impetus for the literature review and outlines how the process was managed (Tummers & Karsten, 2012). The principal researcher began by taking a broad look across published literature before undertaking a more pertinent and focused literature review. An overview and critical analysis of identified literature follows.

## 4.2 Rationale for Literature Review: When, Why and How

Ambiguity abounds when conducting literature reviews for GT research; the *when, what, why* and the *how* continue to be hotly debated (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Deering & Williams, 2020; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Because there is such ambiguity,

the principal researcher was able to conduct the review process flexibly in ways that befit the current research and its aims. The present approach to reviewing literature was considered to be nonlinear, flexible, dynamic and reflexive (El Hussein et al., 2017).

### 4.2.1 The When

Deciding when to conduct a literature review requires the reviewer to take an epistemological stance (Ramalho et al., 2015). In classic GT, researchers are discouraged from conducting a preliminary literature review (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This was in order to protect them from forming preconceptions and filtering data being through these ideas or existing theories (Glaser, 1978). However, delaying the literature review for these reasons is a stance that has been widely criticised. As discussed, it is not possible to approach research from a place of neutrality or 'theoretical innocence' (Charmaz, 2014, p.306).

Constructivist grounded theorists, instead, see the value in exploring the discourse around a phenomenon prior to investigation. Doing so could help to develop theoretical sensitivity (Martin, 2019). Charmaz (2014) encouraged researchers to welcome their curiosities and let them 'inspire a sense of wonder' (Hussein et al., 2017, p.1201), perhaps as sensitising concepts (Hammersley, 2008). If these concepts eventually form part of the review process and resultant analysis, researchers must 'ensure they are well grounded in arguments and evidence and [are] always subject to investigation, revision and refutation' (El Hussein et al., 2017, p.1203).

With these arguments in mind, the principal researcher still determined that it was appropriate to delay the literature review until after data analysis. This was ultimately due to the participatory aims of the research. Because children were undertaking the research, it was important that the principal researcher endeavour to *not* develop theoretical sensitivity in case this influenced how she helped to facilitate

the children's process. It would have been more appropriate for the co-researchers themselves to have conducted a cursory search of relevant materials prior to data collection. However, in line with indigenous research paradigms, it was important to start and finish with children's local perspectives (Walls et al., 2010) and that they use language with which they feel confident conducting their research (Nathaniel, 2006).

### 4.2.2 The Why

Much of the debate around reviewing literature in GT research relates to *when* it should be conducted. The principal researcher felt that being preoccupied with the timing of the literature review obscured the complexities that come with understanding the *purpose* of reviewing the literature (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). For the present research, a literature review was conducted for 2 reasons: 1) to provide an overview of extant findings and to critically appraise them, and 2) to explore where and how the framework sits within the evidence base (Cooney, 2011).

It was challenging to judge how a literature review may be helpful given the aim of reducing adult-centric bias to focus on children's indigenous knowledge. The theoretical framework contains important and valid knowledge in and of itself so the principal researcher did not seek to validate or invalidate the theoretical framework in the context of existing literature. The concepts generated by the children were not open to reconstruction through the literature search because it was crucial to preserve the integrity of their knowledge. To modify the framework in light of adult-led research would reinforce power dynamics that skew in favour of adults' interpretations of children's views and undermine the child-centred ethos of the research.

There is, however, the potential for the framework to be seen differently having appraised existing research, particularly research using child-led methodologies. Sparking such curiosities was felt to be acceptable as long as the

principal researcher returned to co-researchers' transcripts to keep close to their original analysis. With these caveats in mind, reviewing relevant literature was seen as an important and potentially symbiotic opportunity for the theoretical framework: to enrich, and be enriched by, existing literature (Deering & Williams, 2020).

### 4.2.3 The How

#### 4.2.3.1 Literature Review Questions

A systematic literature review was undertaken, reflexively, in order to develop a critical awareness of where the co-researchers' theoretical framework sits within the field. The review of existing literature was guided by the following questions:

- What are the most significant ideas and findings within relevant literature?
- In what ways are they linked with, or challenged by, knowledge created by the co-researchers?
- Are there ways in which the theoretical framework addresses gaps in extant knowledge? What is its unique contribution to the evidence base?
- How can the theoretical framework be positioned within the existing literature base?

## 4.3 Critical Appraisal of Literature

The principal researcher took a flexible approach to appraising existing literature in order to prioritise the needs and aims of the present research. The dynamic reflexive integrative (DRI) Zipper framework was used to guide this process in order to ensure a 'systematic, dynamic, reflexive, and integrative, open ended approach' (El Hussein et al., 2017, p.1206). While Hussein et al. (2017) suggested that existing literature be reviewed simultaneous to data collection and analysis, this suggestion was not applicable given the participatory nature of the research (discussed in section 4.2.1).

The principal researcher began by undertaking a broad search of the evidence base to elicit what research exists linked with children's perspectives of the Covid-19 pandemic. By using the Zipper framework, the principal researcher was helped to iteratively return to the grounded theoretical framework and data analysis transcripts. Having conducted the broad search with this knowledge in mind, eligibility criteria were then established. 17 papers met these criteria and were included in a more focused and pertinent literature review (Dekkers et al., 2009).

## 4.3.1 Establishing Eligibility Criteria for Focused Search

### 4.3.1.1 Overview of Broad Literature Search

The initial, broader search for existing literature was conducted between January-February 2022. EBSCO was first used in order to search the following databases:

1. PsycInfo
2. Academic Search Complete
3. Child Development & Adolescent Studies
4. Education Research Complete

Search terms revolved around COVID-19 and children's views, perspectives and experiences (examples can be found in Appendix 16). Further literature was obtained through Scopus, and through handsearching via Google and Google Scholar. The principal researcher employed additional strategies to reduce the chances of missing key papers, such as including index searching, snowballing and citation searching within relevant papers (Booth et al., 2012; Oliver, 2013).

The literature search yielded hundreds of papers that addressed topics related to young people during the Covid-19 pandemic (Figure 20). This number increased across the days in which the principal researcher undertook the search. Record screening to obtain papers for focused review involved examining titles and abstracts and removing those that did not meet the criteria for inclusion (described in

section 4.3.2.1). There was vast cultural and geographic spread across the papers though the majority were conducted in Europe, America, and East Asia. Materials included primary research and secondary literature presented through journal articles, editorials, reports, commentaries and research letters.

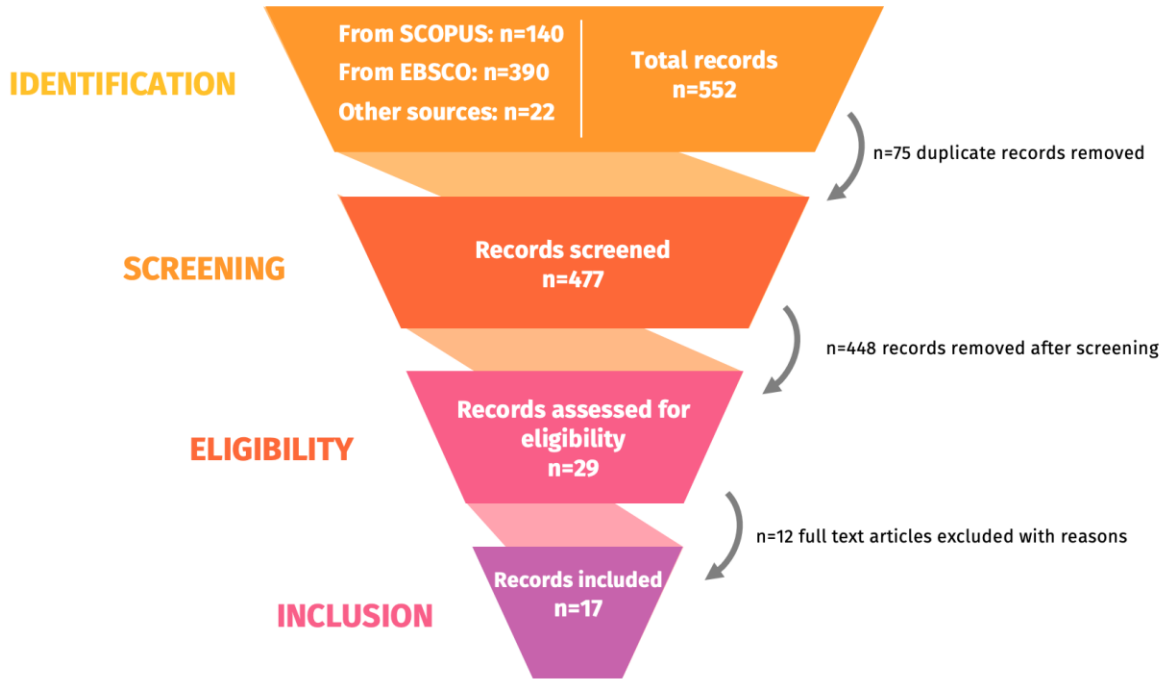


*Figure 20: Diagram to show process of filtering literature for papers to be included in the focused review*

To tap into the broader discourses across these materials, the principal researcher scanned over all titles and some abstracts. What emerged was a deep interest and desire to explore how young people have fared during the Covid-19 pandemic from a range of perspectives.

### 4.3.1.2 Factors within Extant Research that were Considered when Establishing Eligibility Criteria

By scouring the broader literature, the principal researcher was able to identify factors she considered to be important for planning the focused literature search: these factors included the focus of the study, the research design, and the

research timeline. This section will explore each of these factors and how they contributed to the eligibility criteria.

#### 4.3.1.2.1 Study Focus

##### 4.3.1.2.1.1 Impact vs. Perspectives

The broad search identified hundreds of papers looking to explicate on how pandemic events may have triggered behavioural change or psychologically impacted young people (e.g., Babore et al., 2020; Jiao et al., 2020; Korte et al., 2021; Kudinova et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2020). Internalising and externalising symptoms were measured via quantitative means to draw conclusions about how children's mental health has changed, and to suggest interventive methods to mitigate against adverse outcomes (e.g., Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Penner et al., 2021; Radanovic et al., 2021; Spencer et al., 2021; Uccella et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020). Overall, the search suggests there are widespread concerns about the health and wellbeing of young people as a result of the pandemic (Dokken et al., 2020; Goldberg et al., 2022; Viner et al., 2021; Wirkner et al., 2021).

In comparison, literature that focused on children's perspectives of the Covid-19 pandemic was scant, with very few papers seeking out the voices of younger children. The extent to which efforts had been made to capture children's views varied from country to country (e.g., Lundy et al., 2021), but in an editorial letter from a European perspective, Ambresin et al. (2021) made the statement that, even a year into the pandemic, young people had 'no clearly representative voice' (p.674).

#### 4.3.1.2.2 Research Design

##### 4.3.1.2.2.1 Participants and Respondents

###### 4.3.1.2.2.1.1 Children as Direct Respondents

It was interesting to see that some titles referred to eliciting children's/ families' views on the pandemic, but upon inspection of their abstracts, children's views had not been sought directly. For younger children in particular, caregiver reports were often used as a proxy for their views (Bate et al., 2021; Goldberg et al., 2021; Picca et al., 2021; Scarpellini et al., 2021).

Caregivers may be able to provide an authentic sense of their child's perspectives. However, there is always the possibility that children's views become distorted when interpreted through the voices of adults around them (Marques de Miranda, 2020). Obtaining proxy reports in lieu of children's direct views could have occurred for various reasons including the need to obtain data quickly and provide timely information during a rapidly developing crisis (Fegert et al., 2020). Directly seeking children's views also comes with additional methodological and ethical considerations that researchers may not be able to observe.

To reiterate a key message threaded through this research, children may represent and assign meaning to a situation in a way that is inaccessible to their closest adults. It has been suggested that the primary means by which caregivers "know" about their children is due to their disclosures (Kerr & Stattin, 2000) and there are a variety of reasons why a child may not wish to disclose their thoughts to an adult.

#### 4.3.1.2.2.1.2 Age Range of Children

The principal research scanned abstracts for papers that involved adolescents (e.g., Beames et al., 2021; Daniunaite et al., 2021; Haffejee & Levine, 2020) but found that participant age seemed to be an important variable in how children experienced the pandemic (Giannakopoulos et al., 2021; Marques & Braidwood, 2021). For instance, evidence suggested there were age-related effects on young people's response to stress, and changes to their emotional wellbeing and behaviours during the pandemic (Marques de Miranda et al., 2020). The increasing

influence of, and ingratiation with, the peer group in adolescence was also noted (Orben et al., 2020; Sikali, 2020) meaning the effects of school lockdown and social distancing measures may differentially contribute to how older children have constructed the pandemic.

Across the broad literature search, it was evident that younger children have had fewer opportunities to share their views compared with their older counterparts (e.g., pre-adolescents, adolescents, secondary-aged children). Very few studies sought the views of children in the early years (Alter, 2022; Pascal & Bertram, 2021). In Schmidt et al. (2021) and in Pearcey et al. (2020), the views of children aged 11+ were sought directly while parent/caregiver reports were used as proxy for the views of younger children. Schmidt and colleagues explained that they took this decision because they perceived younger children as lacking 'cognitive capacity to understand response categories, to recall specific examples and to self-reflect on their own behaviours' (p.14). This lends further evidence to the notion that younger children may be an underrepresented population because of the continued use of deficit narratives that serve to exclude them from knowledge construction (Shamrova & Cummins, 2017).

#### 4.3.1.2.2.1.3 Participant Location

The broad search yielded research papers that included participants from across many countries. From an ecosystemic perspective, variability in how children perceived their pandemic experiences may reflect the different ways in which governments responded to the pandemic and the unique challenges faced by different cultures and communities (e.g., Li et al., 2022; Heck et al., Power et al., 2020).

Participants in the present research attended the same school in London but represented a culturally diverse group of children. The research was designed in a way that could legitimise and capture different ways of knowing about the world.

Henceforth, it was decided that eligibility criteria would not limit the focused literature search to research conducted within the UK. By capturing diversity of experience from children across the world, it was possible to more meaningfully appraise the ways in which children as a group construct global crises (Mbuagbaw & Cockburn, 2017).

#### 4.3.1.2.2.2 Data Handling: Data Collection, Analysis and the use of Child-Led Approaches

##### 4.3.1.2.2.2.1 Data Collection

Conducting in-person research was not possible during lockdowns so many studies within the broader search gathered data via online surveys and questionnaires (e.g., Rothe et al., 2021; Shahrbabaki et al., 2022). Swank et al. (2021) conducted interviews via an online platform but recognised that this 'may have limited the level of interaction and depths of the interviews' (p.6). Collecting data online enabled researchers to reach different groups of people and build large datasets (e.g., Solmi et al., 2022). A report from the Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021) (CCfW) hoped that in gathering views from over 23,000 young people, children would feel that their voices had been heard.

Where qualitative or mixed methods approaches were used, studies drew upon a wide range of techniques to capture children's contributions. These included arts-based research, interviews using playing cards, holding a virtual Freirean culture circle and creating word clouds (Amrutha et al., 2021; Branquinho et al., 2020; Echarri et al., 2021; Souza et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2021). Several studies encouraged respondents to express themselves creatively and received back poetry, songs, videos and drawings (CCfW, 2021; Smith et al., 2022).

##### 4.3.1.2.2.2.2 Adult-Led and Child-Led Methodologies

The principal researcher appraised the extent to which research in the broader literature was child-led. Children were recruited as participants (though, as

discussed, their views were not always directly sought) and the vast majority of papers employed research designs which were adult-led. There was also evidence of research that gave the appearance of being child-led but adult standards were implicit in the methodology. For instance, Abdulah et al. (2021) asked participants (aged 6-13) to draw times in which they felt lonely, tired, worried or sad when confined to their homes. It was concluded that children had experienced high levels of stress, loneliness and depressive symptoms during this period. The instructions given may have primed children's responses, leading them to create drawings that were incongruous with their authentic impression of their pandemic experiences (Allen, 2017; Parsons, 2013).

Several studies can be said to have facilitated purposeful participation by employing children and young people as active researchers (Hamilton & Wood, 2020). In Lundy et al. (2021), young people worked with the adult researchers to design their study. In a report commissioned by Barnardo's (Davies et al., 2020), the authors conducted research into children's experience of the pandemic in collaboration with "youth colleagues" (young people with lived experience of the Barnardo's organisation). Cuevas-Parra (2020) applied participatory approaches in a similar way to the present research by recruiting co-researchers aged 12-17 to conduct research into their peers' reflections and perceptions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### 4.3.1.2.2.2.3 Data Analysis

Subjectivity is expected when undertaking interpretive research. Those analysing the dataset are required to make inferential leaps like the co-researchers did in the present research. However, when adult researchers undertake the bulk of data analysis, there is a much stronger possibility of introducing adult-centric bias. Some studies within the broader search devised protocols to mitigate against adult-centrism. For example, Swank et al. (2021) undertook reflexive exercises such as memoing and Popoola and Sivers (2021) kept reflective diaries and engaged in

‘ongoing discussion and reflection’ (p.9) when deriving implicit meanings from children’s contributions.

To the principal researcher’s knowledge, no paper engaged children in analytic procedures to the extent co-researchers did in the present research. The closest were Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021) and Souza et al. (2020). Research from Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021) employed participatory approaches where teams of young researchers gathered data from other young people about their pandemic experiences and constructed reports of their findings. Teams were provided with guidance from adult mediators (e.g., provided with sample questions) and did not partake in further data analysis after providing their reports. In Souza et al. (2020), an adult mediator facilitated a virtual culture circle where children provided their testimony about Covid-19, then analysed their own responses to generate themes and elicit meaning from their personal experience.

To make sense of the multifaceted experiences shared by young people across the literature, some authors mapped their responses onto theoretical frameworks or models (e.g., Kallander et al., 2021). Some invoked ideas from mainstream Western psychologies such as Engel’s Biopsychsocial model (1980) (in Branquinho et al., 2020) and Rachman’s three-pathway theory of fear acquisition (1977) (in Korte et al., 2021).

Heck et al. (2021) provided an alternative perspective by interpreting children’s experiences across pandemic literature from an Indigenous-centred worldview. They emphasised the need to integrate a wide range of cultural values, making specific mention of the spiritual aspects of health and wellbeing that are often missing from mainstream psychological models. By excluding factors such as faith, researchers risk missing important influences for how reality is construed, and may further marginalise particular communities (Gopalkrishnan, 2018; Saxton, 2016).

#### 4.3.1.2.2.3 Research Timeline

Given the rapidly shifting nature of the pandemic, it was important to consider the times at which data were collected and analysed (Fegert et al., 2020). Popoola and Sivers (2021) explicitly discussed their research timeline and viewed their findings through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecosystemic Model (1979; 2001). By reflecting on the influence of the chronosystem, they paid regard to children's sense-making as being situated within a specific moment of time and history. The ways in which children conceptualise their experiences are, therefore, likely to vary depending on the time at which their views were sought.

As expected, the broader search yielded literature conducted towards the start of the pandemic (first half of 2020), published in response to the developing crisis. This may represent a time in which pandemic-related concerns and pressures were at their highest (Creswell et al., 2021). A few studies had access to longitudinal data (e.g., Buchanan et al., 2022). Of the children aged 7-11 surveyed in CCfW (2021), children's feelings of safety dropped markedly between May 2020 and January 2021, alongside moderate drops in happiness and increases in worry and sadness. Interestingly, findings from another longitudinal study in Wales indicated that 10-11 year olds did not report reduced life satisfaction from pre-pandemic times (2019) to 2021 (Moore et al., 2022).

## 4.3.2 Focused Literature Review

The purpose of the focused literature review was to consult existing findings about the ways in which children across the globe (limited to research produced in English) have experienced or constructed the Covid-19 pandemic. Appraising and synthesising relevant papers provided an overview of the general theoretical discussion in this area and indicated where the children's framework might sit. Figure 20 shows the process by which papers consulted for broad review were filtered to obtain those included in the focused review.

### 4.3.2.1 Overview of Included literature

Following the broad look at the literature, the principal researcher devised criteria for inclusion in the focused literature review.

Papers were **included** in the focused literature review if:

- The study topic related to children and their perspectives of/ experiences at any time[3] during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Children participated in some form (i.e., were at least directly consulted)
- Participating children were between the ages of 5 and 10[4]

Papers were **excluded** from the focused literature review if:

- No qualitative data were gathered or analysed
- The focus of the study was narrow (e.g., focused only on vaccines or return to school)
- The predominant focus was on measuring or assessing the status of children's physical health, mental health or behaviour across the pandemic

Of the 552 originally identified for the broader search, 17 papers met the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the focused literature review (Appendix 17). Information about the study focus, participants, methodology, findings, and timelines were extracted (Appendix 18). Three papers appeared to meet the eligibility criteria but could not be included because it was not possible to obtain the full text in English

[3] Children in the present study provided both retrospective and current accounts of their pandemic experiences so the principal researcher decided against putting limits on when the research was conducted.

[4] Papers in which adolescents' views were sought were included *only if* this was in addition to gathering the views of younger children.

(Alvaro et al., 2021; Amorim et al., 2021; Tíscar-González et al., 2022). Other materials obtained via hand-searching could not be included because the authors were in the process of publishing their results and/or only limited information could be provided (e.g., via executive summary or community presentation) (Davies et al., 2020; Dickerson et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021).

Each of the 17 papers was examined for its strengths and limitations using tools from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (Appendix 19). The principal researcher held these critiques in mind when situating the theoretical framework within existing research. For instance, several of the reviewed papers used convenience sampling with only more affluent families opting to take part. This trend is often observed in self-report online research (Andrew et al., 2020); eliciting the views of only more privileged children limits representation and the potential to address aims oriented towards social justice (section 2.3.1.2.3).

The 17 papers were guided by diverse methodologies and conducted by researchers who applied different lenses in order to prioritise their specific research aims. Some studies applied arts-based qualitative methods (Abdulah et al., 2021; Amrutha et al., 2021; CCfW, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021), some used mixed methods (Bray et al., 2021; Kirsch et al., 2021), and others held focus groups and interviews via online platforms (Larivière-Bastien et al., 2022; Rios et al., 2021). Research from Buchanan et al. (2022) was conducted most recently so was able to take place in-person, like the present research.

The following appraisal may make reference to other papers from the broader search but only if felt they could contextualise findings within the prioritised papers.

#### 4.3.2.2 Critical Appraisal: Ties between Framework Concepts and Research Findings

The predominant aim of the literature review was to explore findings from existing literature and see how they relate to the indigenous knowledge co-created in

the present research. The five concepts within the co-researchers' theoretical framework were enlisted to structure the review; this kept the children's knowledge at the centre of the process.

#### 4.3.2.2.1 Sources of Information

Across the reviewed papers, children shared the means by which they accessed, received and understood information about the pandemic. In Bray et al. (2021), across six countries, children felt they had 'good levels of knowledge' (p.11). They reported using a range of sources to elicit information, including news reports, the internet, and speaking to peers, family members and teachers. Parents/caregivers were identified as children's main source of information in CCfW (2021) and Bray et al., (2021) (apart from in Sweden where children continued to attend school). Schools were also found to play an important role in enriching children's understanding about the pandemic (Lariviere-Bastien et al., 2022).

Notably, many parents and caregivers who contributed to Bray et al. (2021) 'chose to shield, filter or adapt their child's access to information' particularly with regard to death rates. They did so because they wanted to protect them from distress. 65% of parents/caregivers felt that discussions about Covid-19 helped their child to feel less worried and around 20% felt it was important that their children did not feel they were being deliberately excluded from the discourse. Alter (2022) determined that children were generally 'the last to know' about how the pandemic was developing (p.7).

Participants in Lundy et al. (2021) and Bray et al. (2021) indicated that they did not feel there were adequate efforts to communicate with them using child-friendly information. They wanted to know more, either about the virus itself or what it might mean for them. A minority of participants in Bray et al. (2021) did not want any more information about Covid-19 for various reasons such as not wanting to receive upsetting news or because they were sick/bored of hearing about Covid-19. Canada and Sweden stood out to the authors as their public health messaging seem

to ‘acknowledge children as citizens’ as they shared information ‘in an equitable way to those of adults’ (p.14).

As part of their ‘Sources of Information’ concept, co-researchers in the present study reflected on the different ways in which their participants visually represented Covid-19. There were remarkable similarities to those produced within the focused literature. Drawings produced by children in Thompson et al. (2021) represented Covid-19 as a spiky ball in a very similar manner to those produced by the pupil participants. Children may have seen these images during media coverage (as per the children’s ‘Primary’ category) or absorbed this information from others in their lives (the ‘Secondary’ category). Drawings of houses also featured in drawings within reviewed literature, something that was evident here in Cher and Freya’s pictures.

Co-researchers in the current study were also interested in how their pupil participants used colour. A paper that did not meet eligibility criteria for the focused review described a museum inviting collective collaboration from children across Spain to create a mural (“the 256 colours of Covid-19”). The authors noted the signifying power of colour and how its implicit meanings and emotional associations can establish a 'visual dialogue’ (Echarri, 2021, p.295).

Talk of colour was commonplace across arts-based studies within the focused literature. For instance, a participant in Amrutha et al. (2021) commented that the virus had ‘attacked the whole earth… the black colour shows the darkness… a microscopic devil waiting for all of us outside’ (p.57). Their descriptive comments would not look out of place alongside the narratives that co-researchers in the current study placed under their categories known as ‘Good vs. Evil’ and ‘Covid vs. Us’.

## 4.3.2.2.2 Breaking Through

Despite not being the primary focus of research, the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on psychosocial wellbeing remained a strong theme across the focused literature (n=14). Aligned with the 'Breaking Through' concept in the current research, children in the focused literature reported experiencing a whole spectrum of negative emotions, including stress, worry, fear, sadness and loneliness. In Popoola and Sivers (2021), descriptions of worry and sadness permeated all of their themes. Participants in Buchanan et al. (2022) and Manyukihna (2021) expressed few positive emotions until schools re-opened. The majority of children in Popoola and Sivers (2021) found that their return to school was "really easy", "easy" or "OK" (~80%).

Similar pandemic stressors were reported by children across the review. These included separation from loved ones, worrying about the virus, and experiencing monotony during isolation periods. All of these featured in the present study.

Overwhelmingly in the reviewed papers, children identified being separated from/missing/not seeing friends as the most difficult part of their pandemic experience (n=13). This finding was most pronounced in the youngest age group (age 8-10) who took part in Lundy et al. (2021). Of the children in Alter (2022) who experienced the Covid-19 pandemic in only negative ways (17.6%), at the root of their negative experiences was missing contact with friends. CCfW (2021) and Lariviere-Bastien et al., (2022) reported similar findings, the latter of whom reasoned that younger children may have access to fewer platforms in order to nourish or sustain peer relationship during separation.

The strong emphasis on emotions generated by participants in Popoola and Sivers (2021) led them to raise 'Emotions' to a theme. 'Feelings' were raised to a theme in CCfW (2021). Co-researchers in the current study almost raised 'Mental health' to a concept but ultimately decided against this, training their focus on the idea that children pushed forward despite the difficulties. Co-researchers' depiction

of ‘Breaking Through’ resonated with a finding from Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021) that children had ‘experienced adaptation processes without underestimating the difficulties encountered along the way’.

Upon integrating the reviewed literature, not all participating children felt that they had been adversely impacted. Evidently, many children enjoyed at least some aspects of their pandemic experiences. Many reported having emotionally positive experiences (n=10) including spending more quality time with family (n=6), learning and practising new skills (n=4) and feeling united in their faith (n=2). Children in Manyukhina (2021) felt they developed their creativity across a range of activities at home. These experiences all featured in the present research and were important components of co-researchers’ ‘Support’ category.

For children who found parts of their pandemic experience difficult, they seemed to find meaning, a purpose, or joy in the everyday. Authors commented on participants’ ability to adapt, cope, and be resilient during times of crisis (n=7). Thompson et al. (2021) and Buchanan et al. (2022) reported that children expressed new outlooks and appreciations, noting that they seemed to have a sense of pride as part of being included in larger efforts.

#### 4.3.2.2.3 Domino Effect

Within the co-researchers’ framework, the concept known as ‘Domino Effect’ encapsulated children’s sense of dynamically developing situations during the pandemic. This included their evolving understanding of how Covid-19 spreads and the physical toll it can take on people’s health. Reference to death and sickness were commonplace across the focused literature (n=10), as were concerns about protecting family, friends and vulnerable people (n=11). In Bray et al. (2021), of 390 respondents, the most frequent “things” children knew about Covid-19 were that the virus spreads quickly (28%), that many people have contracted the virus, many have died from it (22%) and that it is dangerous (13%).

Co-researchers in the present study talked enthusiastically about the different ways their participants described how Covid-19 spreads. Thompson et al. (2021) also found there to be 'considerable variability in children's understandings of how the virus may enter the body' (p.2060). In Lundy et al. (2021), there was evidence of children feeling blamed for high transmission rates, due to children at one time being described as "vectors", though this was not something mentioned by the co-researchers.

In the present research, two of the five pupil participants had experienced a family member's death due to Covid-19, and three of the five participants had contracted Covid-19 themselves. In Bhogal et al., (2021), children who had been *indirectly* exposed to Covid-19 reported more difficulties with mental wellbeing and engagement in safety behaviours; this was an effect that was driven by their experience of knowing someone who had died from Covid-19. Fegert et al. (2020) made reference to bereaved families and how their grieving processes had been impacted by pandemic measures, something that was raised by Freya in the current study.

#### 4.3.2.2.4 Changes

The significant adjustments children made as a result of disruption from the pandemic were heavily featured across the reviewed literature. 'Change in the school environment' was identified a key theme in Swank et al. (2021). These ideas were echoed in the present study where co-researchers raised 'Changes' to a concept in their framework given its salience during data collection: they experienced changes to their everyday routines, habits and rituals, to their academic endeavours, and their social and cultural activities. Children in Souza et al. (2022) generated a theme for things they were no longer able to do, calling it "cannots".

Effects of the pandemic brought change to the family system, including household dynamics, family membership, relationships with siblings, and levels of

household stress. In the current study, Cher had described how different her birthday had looked that year and respondents in Swank et al. (2021) and Souza et al. (2022) also noted the different ways in which they celebrated milestones and holidays. Larivière-Bastien et al. (2022) made reference to relationships being compromised during the pandemic; this featured in Freya's description that her friends had not wanted to play with her as they thought she had Covid-19.

Like the co-researchers and participants, the change from in-person to remote learning was a frequent point of discussion in the reviewed papers (n=12). Reports created by young people in Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021) noted the accelerated pace at which teachers, through hard work and sheer will (also in Souza et al., 2020) created online learning environments. Children across these 12 papers discussed the positive and negative aspects of adjusting to learning online, which skewed more towards how difficult it was to learn in this new space. While learning online offered greater flexibility, there was a sense of feeling demotivated during interleaved times of independent study. Children discussed missing teacher communication (Kirsch et al., 2021), praise (Manyukhina, 2021) and feedback (n=6). In three studies, children reported concerns that their academic progress had stalled without having access to immediate, face-to-face teacher feedback.

Change in children's feelings towards school was a key finding in Buchanan et al. (2022). At a pre-pandemic stage of their ongoing five-year research project, some children reported having very negative feelings towards school. However, after experiencing school closures, they seemed to feel differently. They were very pleased to return as they had missed its structure, learning, and most of all, their friends. Respondents in both Larivière-Bastien et al. (2022) and Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021) missed the more informal aspects of being part of the live school community. They referred to more nuanced aspects of school social living such as micro-exchanges and interactions during lessons, and accessing wider school discourses.

Co-researchers raised ‘Stayed the same’ to the level of a category though this had not been particularly fleshed out with data. This idea was referenced in Popoola and Sivers (2021) who noted that Covid-19 ‘was clearly a big part of [children’s] existence’ but that it was ‘not all encompassing’ (p.20). Some children across the focused literature described their hope that the changes brought by the pandemic may have a positive impact on the world and its people. Children in Rios et al. (2021) felt that the pandemic had provided the planet with respite and that global environmental change could be sustained. Similarly, respondents in Smith et al. (2022) commented on being more physically active than normal during the pandemic. They enjoyed walking, riding their bikes and interacting with nature more than usual.

#### 4.3.2.2.4.1 Changes ‘Felt’ Unequally Across Groups of Children

Co-researchers in the present study recognised that the Covid-19 pandemic was experienced variably across their pupil participants. Alter (2022) found that even siblings living within the same household experienced the pandemic situations differently. Authors across the focused literature considered the environmental, cultural and contextual factors thought to underlie these differences.

Appendix 19 shows that children from more privileged backgrounds tended to be more represented across the focused literature. Where there were data to support such conclusions, the more vulnerable groups in society were identified as more likely to feel the strain of the changes brought by the pandemic. For example, the shift to remote learning was repeatedly observed to present a higher level of challenge for children without adequate digital infrastructure (n=5). In CCfW (2021), young people with disabilities said they were less likely to understand online work and to know where to access help for their wellbeing. More privileged groups were identified to have better access to green spaces and space to exercise (CCfW, 2021; Rios et al., 2021). Lundy et al. (2021) suggested that, given the additional challenges faced by marginalised groups, the extent to which children’s rights were breached during the pandemic was not ‘on an equal basis with others’ (p.269)

These findings fit within the broader picture where, unequivocally, marginalised groups have been subject to social, health and environmental injustices during the pandemic. Documented hate crimes of racial attacks directed towards Chinese people increased in the months where the pandemic hit the UK (Gray & Hansen, 2021). Racial and ethnic minority groups have been disproportionately represented in death and unemployment rates (Public Health England, 2020). Children from Black African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani families are already more likely to be living in poverty and have been found to endure additional pressures (Brewer & Patrick, 2021). These include worrying around racial bias related to testing and treating Covid-19; this was described as the 're-traumatization of already-traumatized communities' (Bhogal et al., 2021, p.2).

#### 4.3.2.2.5 Control

With co-researchers' concept known as 'Control' in mind, it was interesting to see how focused literature could contextualise their ideas of *being* controlled and *exerting* control. There was evidence of children positioning Covid-19 as an enemy who needed to be defeated (n=4) and the importance of appreciating the people around them that they felt could help combat the virus (n=3). A participant in Amrutha et al. (2021) described first responders and healthcare workers as 'COVID warriors' and the 'real superheroes of the world' (p.57); this was not dissimilar from the current study and Jimi's belief that the NHS would "save us". Children in Thompson et al. (2021) and Lundy et al. (2021) were critical of their government's response to the pandemic.

In some papers, children demonstrated initiative by taking control of their own schedules (Jiménez Hernández et al., 2021). Children in Thompson et al. (2021) 'offered frequent examples of how they had embraced the changes and harnessed their agency to reflect on what they could do, rather than focus on what they could not' (p.2062). Respondents described findings ways to sustain peer contact (n=7), to entertain themselves (n=9), to keep healthy (n=5), and to help family members at home (n=5).

Children in the reviewed papers also spoke about community action and the different ways in which the earth's citizens retaliated in response to the pandemic. They described exercising social responsibility and citizenship by adhering to rules and procedures around mask-wearing, hand-washing, and social distancing (n=6). Children also offered their own ideas for how people can look after their wellbeing moving forward (n=4). These findings align with contributions from Cher in the current study: she posed advice, to anybody needing support, that going on walks had helped her to keep healthy during the pandemic.

#### 4.3.2.3 Critical Synthesis

Each aspect of the children's framework resonated with findings in the focused literature. However, a major difference was the breadth of understanding provided by the co-researchers as compared with findings in the reviewed papers. Literature had previously been removed for their narrow study focus (section 4.3.2.1), however, some papers determined to be eligible for review were still limited in scope. This seemed to be because some researchers kept to fairly narrow lines of questioning (e.g., asking children just about socialisation or online learning during the pandemic).

Consequently, the research conducted by children in the present study is one of the few more holistic examples of how children have come to understand their pandemic experiences (Thompson et al., 2021). 'Breaking Through' provides an example of how children conceptualised their data in a way that differs from analyses in the focused literature. Positive and negative emotional experiences were generally disaggregated in the reviewed papers (Amrutha et al.,2021; Souza et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2021), while co-researchers in the present study chose to conceptually bind together adverse experiences with an ability to move forward.

Participant groups tended to lack socioeconomic diversity in several studies (n=7) and methodologies sometimes lacked diverse means by which children could share their knowledge (i.e., relied on verbal means) (n=6). Few of the reviewed papers used methodologies that aimed to maximise participation similar to the present study. Most notable were Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021), Lundy et al. (2021) and Souza et al. (2020) where children were involved in data interpretation and analysis. Authors in these studies emphasised the importance of children engaging in participatory dialogue about their collective experiences.

Situating the synthesised papers (including the current study) within the broader literature reveals that a disproportionate focus on deficit may obscure children's resilient attitudes during the pandemic. Children unequivocally experienced disruptions felt to be unparalleled in their lives. However, there has been huge variation in how they felt their experiences impacted their wellbeing. This does not seem to be as simple as respecting the hardships faced by children: adults need to consider the difficult times and embrace children's ability to cope without seeing them as having 'simply and unproblematically "bounce[d] back"' (Thompson et al., 2021, p.2058).

## 4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the principal researcher's systematic search strategy that led to obtaining 17 papers for focused review. Compared with the many hundreds of papers published about the impact of the pandemic on young people, there is a relative absence in the academic pandemic discourse of children providing their perspectives.

A small area of the research community have utilised child-led methodologies to contribute to the picture of children's understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic. Interpretation of children's responses led to many authors interpreting the Covid-19

pandemic as a time of crisis that further eroded children's ability to enjoy their rights (CCfW, 2021; Lundy et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022).

In spite of this, children demonstrated they were capable co-creators of knowledge about the pandemic, describing how they had constructed their understanding. Their contributions to the reviewed literature and the present research emphasize their status as 'intrinsically valuable agents with unique experiences and abilities' (Baumtrog & Peach, 2019, p.216).

# Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

## 5.1 Overview of Chapter

In the current research, children brought fresh ideas and insights that can contribute to the discourse around the pandemic. Having consulted the evidence base, this chapter will return the focus to the children's framework and its implications for research and practice. The chapter will begin by justifying the decision to consider the final product a theoretical framework rather than a theory. Reflections on the overall outcome and process then follow.

This chapter will also outline the strengths and limitations of the proposed framework and the methods by which it was constructed. Key topics from Chapter 1 will also be integrated into notable discussion points, particularly when considering the implications for education professionals and more specifically for EPs. This chapter will also discuss the possibility of transformative change and explore how such change process may have already begun.

## 5.2 Children's Constructivist Grounded Theoretical Framework

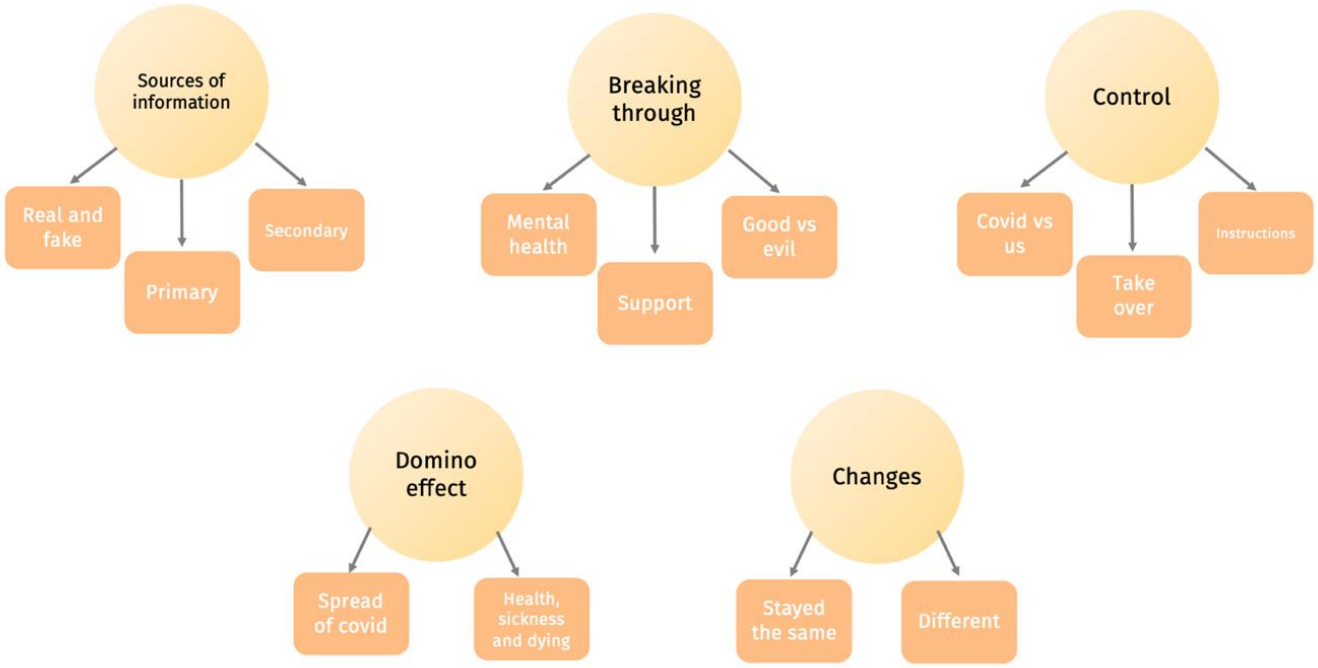


*Figure 21: Children's constructivist grounded theoretical framework (to re-introduce)*

Co-researchers undertook a completely original analysis to conceptualise the varied ways in which children have come to understand, and respond, to the Covid-19 pandemic. The primary research aim was, therefore, considered to be met.

Knowledge represented in the framework is considered to be 'situated, fallible and provisional' (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2021, p.321). Diverse views and voices are embedded in the framework and reflect the diversity of the children's school and surrounding community. Data were co-constructed and, given the key mediating roles of co-researchers and the principal researcher, the influence of all actors is assumed to be represented in the framework.

In line with indigenous methodologies, children's knowledge and initiatives were guiding forces for the research. Co-researchers' analysis was data-driven

meaning they were not constrained by pre-existing categories. Their process allowed them to embrace the nuance and subjectivity within and across children's contributions. Of note to the co-researchers were Freya's monologues and trains of thought about Covid-19, and by using inductive approaches, they were able to preserve the breadth of her ideas and include them within the framework.

## 5.2.1 Rationale for Considering the final Product a Framework rather than a Theory

Because there is ambiguity across scientific disciplines about what constitutes theory (Abend, 2008; Stewart et al., 2011), the principal researcher specifically consulted GT literature to elucidate this topic (e.g., Charmaz, 2014; Morse, 2001). After considering issues related to explanatory power, theoretical saturation, and relationships between categories and concepts, the final product was considered to be a theoretical framework rather than a theory.

### 5.2.1.1 Explanatory Power of a Constructed Theory

Traditional grounded theorists (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) may consider a final product to be a theory if it 'seek[s] causes, and stress explanation, prediction, generality, and universality' (Charmaz and Thornberg, 2021, p.315). In short, the framework would need to have sufficient explanatory power for the phenomenon under study. Classic grounded theorists would, therefore, take issue with the framework's ability to sufficiently explain how children have come to construct the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, it may not yet be possible to derive hypotheses from the children's framework.

However, the present research adopted constructivist, rather than classic, GT techniques, which raises epistemological questions as to whether explanatory power is required for it to be a theory. By adopting a constructivist epistemology, it is not assumed that there is an objective universe that 'is really existing' (Kelly, 1955, p.5)

and for which a single theory can account for a phenomenon. Therefore, it is more appropriate for the present research to define theory as that which 'emphasises interpretation and gives abstract understanding greater priority than explanation' (Charmaz, 2014, p.230). The principal researcher judges the theoretical framework to meet these criteria.

#### 5.2.1.1.1 Theoretical saturation

Constructivist grounded theorists aim for theoretical saturation. Charmaz (2014) indicates that data collection should cease when categories are saturated with properties that account for all patterns determined to be within the dataset. Determining when saturation has been reached also implies an epistemological position, and in line with the research's participatory ethos, the co-research team were in charge of this determination. During the final data analysis session, the co-researchers collectively agreed that they had reached theoretical saturation. That is, they agreed that their framework in its current format contained concepts and categories that accounted for their data and reflected the understanding they had co-generated with their pupil participants.

#### 5.2.1.1.2 Relationships between Categories and Concepts

When visually representing their framework (section 3.4), co-researchers organically re-opened their discussions and began to consider alternative ways of conceptualising their data. Perhaps seeing the framework with fresh eyes after data analysis had stimulated further curiosities. The principal researcher explored this further with the co-researchers who were particularly led by Lizzie in this instance. Lizzie was also noted to have slightly changed the research question in her visual representation of the framework (Figure 19).

Co-researchers had begun to explore relationships and variation between their categories and concepts, but time constraints meant these discussions were cut short. Elements of the framework provide both elegant and parsimonious accounts of children's constructions. However, to comprise the conceptual density

required for a theory, there would need to be additional time for co-researchers to have 'defined, checked, and explained relationships between categories and the range of variation within and between [their] categories' (Charmaz, 2014, p.213).

### 5.2.2 Temporality and Dynamic Characteristics of the Theoretical Framework

Although this was not expressed as an aim for the research, the theoretical framework can be considered temporal in nature. Data were collected and analysed from July to November 2021 so co-researchers can be said to have captured children's *evolving* constructions of the Covid-19 pandemic. An example relates to their discussions about vaccines. While vaccines were more widely discussed at T2, co-researchers opted to subsume their focused code "vaccines to help" under both 'Changes' and 'Control'. They explained that this was because, at this point in time, vaccines had contributed to their constructions of the pandemic, but not yet significantly so. Indeed, these discussions were held at a time where vaccine dissemination was in its infancy and few children could access one (WHO, 2021).

**Lizzie:** *"I think they didn't talk about the vaccine because since COVID has been going around, they've been focusing on COVID, not the vaccine. Just how they feel and how they can't see their friends and all that type of stuff. I don't think they would really focus on the vaccine. They would focus on like, their emotions and what they feel."*
**Nimai:** *"Because Corona's spreading even bigger than the vaccine. Not many people have had the vaccine."*

Co-researchers checked their participant's ideas at T1 again at T2, noting which ideas were significant over time as well as ideas that had become more or less pertinent. However, even if their participant's perspective had changed, co-researchers attended to all their ideas in order to weave together children's knowledge across this time period. The co-researchers' decision to do so may reflect children's ongoing need to make sense of their circumstances amidst the changing nature of the pandemic.

## 5.3. Principal Researcher's Perspective on Process and Outcome

The principal researcher had the privilege of overseeing research partnerships in action, as well as co-researchers' dialogic and analytic exploration. In her research diary, she recorded a quote from Rinaldi (2006) that resonated with her observations: children's interactions presented 'not as an exchange but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result. And it goes to infinity, it goes to the universe, you can get lost' (p.184).

The principal researcher felt that three of the five pupil participants brought with them a strong sense of conviction. The two other participants presented as content but less forthcoming, requiring their partner co-researcher to make greater inferential leaps to analyse their contributions. Nonetheless, co-researchers were devoted to listening and learning from their participant. They worked hard to inhabit their frame of reference and wanted to represent their voice to the best of their ability.

**Darwin:** *"I understand how he feels because having a family who has Covid, and you as well, you're probably gonna feel a little bit scared cos you're probably thinking, 'Oh my family's gonna die from Covid'."*

**Lizzie**: *"He must have been scared in a way because if you're walking on the streets without knowing, you see less people, and people with masks, then you're probably going to be thinking something bad is going on."*

Co-researchers and pupil participants described the rich ways in which they needed to reimagine their social worlds during the Covid-19 pandemic. The data threw up a melange of emotions as they described navigating their worlds in new and different ways. The principal researcher reflected in her research diary about the "sacrifices" children had made to comply with restrictions and wondered whether these were experienced as burdensome. She got the sense that they adapted

willingly, but not necessarily uncritically. Freya, in particular, talked at length about mistrusting information from the media and Cher had wondered about what could lead people to *not* want to adhere to health guidelines.

Covid-19 was largely constructed as an active agent with co-researchers placing great importance on how humans responded to the pandemic. This idea of opposing forces is evident in the binary categories which co-researchers termed 'Covid vs. Us' and 'Good vs. Evil' (subsumed under 'Breaking Through' and 'Control', respectively). The more abstract concepts, and perhaps those with the most theoretical reach, seemed to be 'Breaking Through' and 'Domino Effect'. Ideas around individual and collective action seemed to be relevant here, with the principal researcher noting that 'Domino Effect' encapsulates action happening *around* children and 'Breaking Through' referring to action driven *by* them.

### 5.3.1 Breaking Through: A Sense of Constructive Hope

It was not unique to the present study that children found aspects of the pandemic very difficult to manage, particularly when needing to separate from their social circles. However, there was also a sense that some children did not want to be seen as unable to cope. They wanted to be seen as knowledgeable, responsible, and understanding of the situation.

Within the broader academic literature, studies tended to focus on assessing children for vulnerabilities in their psychological functioning as a result of their pandemic experiences. By considering the present research alongside papers from the focused review, a different narrative emerges in which children possess a sense of 'constructive hope' (Ojala, 2017, p.51). These more hopeful, forward-thinking narratives counter the view that children have been merely helpless victims of the pandemic. Just as crucial is remembering that children did, for the most part, face significant challenges during these times.

## 5.3.2 Socially Constructed Indigenous Knowledge

As outlined in the research paradigm (section 2.4.2), it was anticipated that research partners would grow to know and ingratiate themselves with one another. Like the methodology employed by Buchanan et al. (2022), these developing relationships seemed to promote knowledge construction.

In her research diary, the principal researcher wrote about the development of peer cultures and how they were nurtured by participating children (Corsaro, 2003).

***Darwin:*** *"I know this is a coronavirus thing but I'm kind of in the Christmas spirit as well."*
***Cher:*** *"You can draw here if you want to… I like your drawing."*
***Darwin:*** *"I'm gonna be giving this to you."*
***Cher:*** *"Can I take it home?"*
***Darwin:*** *"Yeah, I drew it for you!"*

Co-researchers were empathetic and repeatedly demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of their pupil participant.

***Aleeza:*** *"You've actually being really brave because you're talking about what happened to your grandma, which is a really painful thing. Really brave. We can also colour in the virus if you want."*

Over time, children seemed to become increasingly bound by their experience of the research itself. Co-researchers described interacting with their pupil participant outside of the research context, such as on the playground (witnessed by the principal researcher herself) and at the school gate. Cultivating relationships through their experience of the research, and drawing upon other shared systems of meaning specific to them, children were able to derive their indigenous knowledge without the need for adult control or interpretation (Tisdall, 2017).

Children made and responded to one another's initiatives prior to, during, and after all sessions related to data collection, analysis, and dissemination preparation. Social processes were crucial to meaning-making and created dynamic processes in which children grappled with how they represent their reality. Driven by activity within the interpersonal context (working with his research partner, Lizzie), a quote from Jimi's transcript seemed to capture him reconstructing his understanding in real time:

**Jimi:** *"I feel like I just changed my mind right now. Because I just feel like this is the thing I need to worry about. That looks very important to me, but dangerous too so I could worry about it more. But I worry about it less now because more people are getting the vaccines."*

### 5.3.3 Tools: Drawing and Talking

Drawings were conduits to supporting and stimulating children's dialogue and were seen, by the principal researcher, as critical for research partners' collective meaning-making. All children talked while they drew, varying in the amount of time spent devoted to talking or drawing (e.g., Albie spent more time drawing than talking; the reverse can be said for Freya). For Albie and Ruslan, whose transcripts were much shorter, drawing seemed to provide a 'nonverbal steppingstone' to being able to elicit and legitimise their knowledge (Søndergaard & Reventlow, 2019.

Drawings were referenced both verbally and non-verbally across data collection and analysis. The principal researcher found herself returning to children's drawings as much as the transcripts when writing up this thesis as this helped her to revisit the processes by which children co-constructed their understanding (Brailas, 2020; Ellis et al., 2013).

Children's use of drawing also reflected social constructionist ideas of how constructing reality is a process that is mediated by what is culturally available. For instance, Covid-19 was frequently represented as a spiky ball in participants'

drawings (Figure 22). This image is one that has proliferated media imagery across the pandemic. Its reproduction across this research (and the focused literature) exemplifies how tools that represent prevailing social discourses drive sense-making processes (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018).

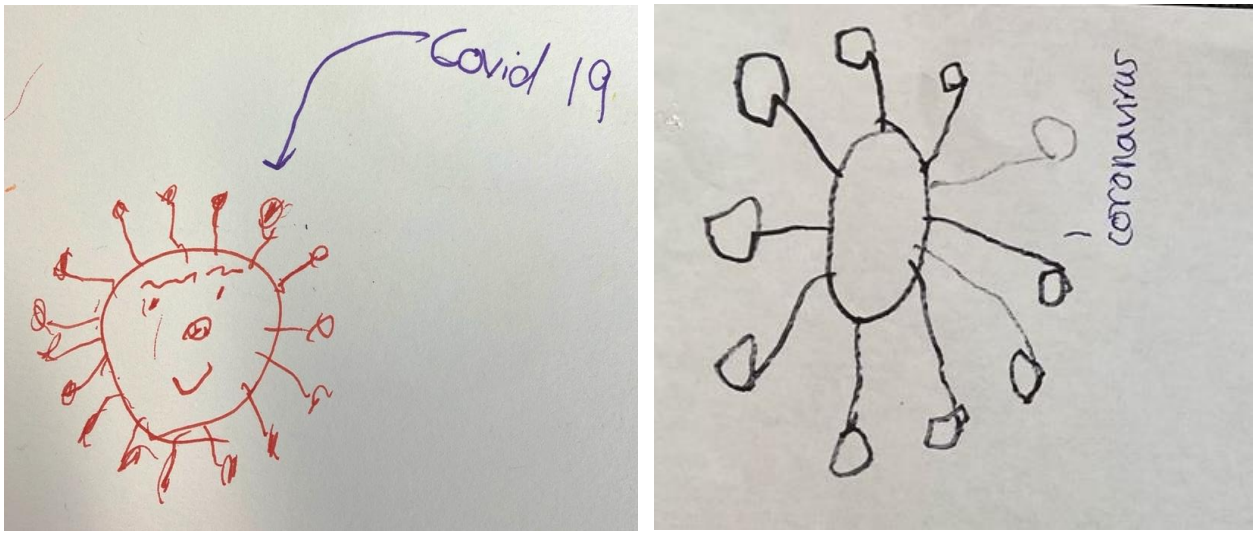


*Figure 22: Additional drawings created by pupil participants*

## 5.3.4 Conscientisation in the Present Research

Having reflected on her own experiences of having her critical consciousness raised (section 2.5.1), the principal researcher wondered whether co-researchers had undergone consciousness-raising themselves. Children in Lundy et al. (2021) (who tended to be older than those participating here) were cognisant of ways in which the pandemic and its effects have not been felt equally (section 4.3.2.2.4.1). This was not something explicitly reflected in co-researchers' findings here: however, the principal researcher picked up on evidence ("breadcrumbs") suggestive of children's awareness about such issues:

***Ivan:*** *"[Jimi] said he had all sorts of different devices, right?... It was probably easy for him and more fun. My WiFi made it hard for me."*

Driven by his experiences during the pandemic, Ivan's contribution could be interpreted as a recognition that the level of challenge presented by the pandemic was not felt equitably across groups of children. This could, perhaps, be a starting point for conversations around social justice and the development of a 'citizen intelligence' (Sauvé, 2017, p.114).

### 5.3.5 Reflexivity: Principal Researcher's Reflection on own Conduct

The principal researcher engaged in a sustained, reflexive process from the inception of this research through to its completion (Christensen & James, 2000). At the outset, she accepted that there would be times upon which to reflect and learn. She found it helpful to refer to her research diary when she felt the flicker of adult-centric bias. During data analysis, she wondered how seamlessly parts of children's interpretations could fit within conventional psychological theories such as positive psychology (Waters et al., 2021) and with ideas around resilience (Place et al., 2002). By recording these ideas in her research diary, she felt better able not to introduce her own ideas and itself focus on facilitating the children's analytic process.

The principal researcher often paused to grapple with how she could utilise her bestowed power (as the only adult involved) to best preserve children's indigenous knowledge and ensure they feel ownership over it. Appendix 20 contains an extract from her research diary in which she describes her recurring dilemma about children's level of participation (Franks, 2011). She came to understand that enabling participation is a dynamic, complex, and messy process that can, at times, feel infuriating (Kim, 2016). For a time, she felt discomfort at having brought the topic of Covid-19 to co-researchers at the outset, rather than taking their lead for what they would like to research (Waller & Bitou, 2011).

These concerns eroded over the course of the research and she felt better able to manage dilemmas about children's participation. What was particularly helpful was the realisation that, when working with children's indigenous knowledge, it can never be possible to completely remove adult influence (see Appendix 21). She came to appreciate the feeling of dissonance that comes with trying to embody the position of "not knowing" and strip her conduct of adult-centrism. These feelings were appreciated because of how edifying it felt when seeing what was accomplished when taking these steps.

#### 5.3.5.1 Sensitising concepts

In Chapter 1, the principal researcher laid out different sensitising concepts she brought to the research. None of these concepts were raised as critical parts of the children's analysis and there were no significant overlaps. Interestingly, two of the three concepts she brought focused on adversity, which aligns better with the ideas that proliferate the academic research literature. Korte et al. (2021) had also contemplated whether children's consumption of pandemic information could be seen as a "critical incident" for exacerbating health-related anxieties in young people. The third sensitising concept, which referred to children's everyday living during the pandemic, was most closely relevant to findings within the present research, and was a concept that had been derived from data provided by other children (Popoola & Sivers, 2021). This lends further evidence to the idea that children have their own cultural knowledge which may be better-elicited by children themselves (section 1.3.5).

## 5.4 Transformative Change brought by the Research

Though transformative change cannot be promised, when using participatory approaches in research, there are possible epistemic implications (Aldridge, 2016). Transformation can occur through feeling recognised as a knowledge holder

(Congdon, 2018) and sharing knowledge can have therapeutic benefits (Harcourt, 2021). In the present research, there was evidence that those involved experienced some positive outcomes.

**Nimai:** *"Miss, are we biologists now?"*
**Principal Researcher:** *"Well, you're talking about biology so sure."*
**Nimai:** *"Yay. I didn't know that was even biology, I didn't know I had that much knowledge."*

Nimai began the research as perhaps the least confident member of the co-research team. He had initially requested to take on more peripheral responsibilities (such as looking after the recording technology) and would occasionally articulate feelings of incompetence. Across the process, the principal researcher sensed a shift in how he conceived of himself and how he regarded his own abilities (Appendix 22). Freya and Maryam were especially keen to keep their drawings, indicating they had grown attached to their creations and perhaps wanted to share them elsewhere. At the close of the final session, co-researchers exited the room skipping, singing, and animatedly talking about having produced theory.

Transformation may also occur as a direct result of the knowledge that children collectively created. Currently, co-researchers are producing a narrated video about their research and the framework. Although they are yet to discuss this with their pupil participants, co-researchers would like to invite others to watch their video. They would like to upload it to their school website and Youtube page, and to signpost to parents/carers and pupils through parents' evenings and assemblies. Concepts within the framework may resonate with other pupils, and adults (parents/carers or teachers) may start to question their own assumptions about children (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010).

The co-researchers' framework is also being published in a new book about embedding voice practices across educational settings to ensure diverse groups are represented (Sewell, in press).

## 5.5 Evaluating the Quality of the Research and Framework

### 5.5.1 Strengths

An advantage of the current research is that it was able to take place in person. While rich and insightful research can be conducted over virtual platforms, face-to-face research confers a number of advantages. In person, the principal researcher and co-researchers could better attune to participants' cues, remaining sensitive to their needs and building a sense of children's understanding beyond what was communicated verbally.

Critical to the success of the present research was the unwavering commitment of all participating children. The principal researcher experienced every child to be bright and inquisitive. Co-researchers were tenacious and thoughtful at every turn. Having worked closely with them during lengthy, dense periods of data analysis, they are evidently five incredibly capable young people with critical minds.

Embedded within the framework, and something that may resonate with other children, was children's strength of character, both during the pandemic and during the research. The principal researcher noted the confidence of many of the pupil participants to tell their co-research partner when they had not quite interpreted them correctly. Co-researchers, too, were determined to push the boundaries of their research, and seemed to want to continue to do so (section 5.2.1.1.2). Children in the focused literature were also found to engage in creative and complex thinking when consulted about their own experiences. In Alter (2022), children's contributions were noted to go far beyond what could have been conceived if the authors had used more traditional research methods for eliciting their knowledge.

Like Alter (2022), a strength of the current research design was its use of decolonising perspectives to keep children's knowledge at its core. When

contextualising the research and conceiving its parameters, the principal researcher consciously drew upon writers and ideas from non-dominant groups to pull away from prevalent Western-influenced knowledge systems (Datta, 2018). Using these approaches and seeing their efficacy has impacted how the principal researcher conducts her everyday practice as a TEP.

## 5.5.2 Limitations

### 5.5.2.1 Situational Constraints

The present research was primarily limited by time and situational demands. The co-researchers in particular devoted a huge chunk of time to the research during school hours. Extending the work, for instance, to develop the framework into a formal theory, was neither pragmatic nor possible.

### 5.5.2.2 Power and Participation

As described in Chapter 2, there was no expectation for children to acquire more power through their participation (Spyrou, 2011). However, in seeking to challenge inequalities within the researcher-researched relationship, an analysis of power is an essential point of discussion.

During data collection, the provision of one-to-one research partnerships aimed to protect against co-researchers privileging some voices over others. This enabled pupil participants who presented as less confident to contribute; had they been part of a group setting, they may have been overlooked for more high-profile speakers (Bradbury-Jones & Taylor, 2015). However, this is not to say that pupil participants had equitable opportunity to contribute. Power skewed in the co-researchers' favour, and while the principal researcher had no concerns that this power was misused, she considered ways in which research partnerships could have been more equitable.

Though issues related to power and responsibility were discussed with the co-research team during the research workshop (section 2.6.1.2), they could have been provided with opportunities to reflect on their *individual* positionality (not just as a team) ahead of conducting their research (Kim, 2016). This could have been through writing a position statement much like the principal researcher in section 2.5.1. Explicitly reflecting on their own positionality ahead of conducting their research would have galvanised co-researchers' methodological self-consciousness in advance of meeting their research partner (section 2.3.2.2).

To continually develop their methodological self-consciousness, co-researchers could have had individual supervision with the principal researcher in between T1 and T2. By providing a reflective space away from the rest of the team, co-researchers may have considered different ways to approach T2. If provided with such a space, Darwin, for example, may have opted to change his set-up with Albie after hearing his passion for computers at T1 (Figure 13).

### 5.5.2.3 Diverse Voices

With an emphasis on capturing children's socially constructed perspectives, the present research was not aiming for generalisability. However, it did hope to uplift the voices of children, a group who can be assigned marginalised status (section 1.3.4). The principal researcher recognises that, while there was cultural diversity across participating children, particular voices were excluded. For instance, there was no representation from groups such as children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This is pertinent given this is a group who have been: a) traditionally exiled from narratives around 'normative' childhood (Williams et al., 2016) and b) specifically identified as disproportionately impacted by the effects of the pandemic (CCfW, 2021; National Children's Bureau, 2021).

Similarly, information about children's SES was not obtained. Without this data, it was not possible to see whether the present research reflects or has existing

bias towards children from more economically advantaged families (e.g., Andrew et al., 2020). The principal researcher also considered the reasons why parents/caregivers may have opted their child out of participating. Across the pandemic, many parents and caregivers felt a sense of inadequacy in their provision of support given the major shift in demands on life and work (Cassinat et al., 2021). These parents/caregivers may have wanted to protect their child from re-experiencing this time through the research (Bhogal et al., 2021; Spinelli et al., 2020).

There were also methodological factors that may have excluded particular children from participating. Co-researchers used their research diaries flexibly (i.e., not just to record through writing) but they did need to engage in lengthy periods of dialogic analysis. Relying heavily on spoken formats for analysis may have excluded children who experience difficulties with verbal communication. It is critical that future work provides an in-depth focus on the perspectives of children with a variety of lived experience (Gersch et al., 2017).

## 5.6 Implications

In this section, the principal researcher will consider implications for education professionals brought by the children's framework and research process. All education professionals are considered to be political actors who have capacity to invest in, and commit to, enhancing the lives of children and young people.

### 5.6.1 Impact of Narratives around Children on their Power and Participation

Mechanisms can be established to increase children's participation but these are unlikely to have a lasting impact until assumptions about children's epistemic capacities fundamentally change (Harcourt, 2021). A helpful precursor to wrestling with one's own assumptions about children is to recognise adult-centrism and the

many ways in which these perspectives overlay education practice. Co-researchers noticed their own power within their research partnership (section 2.3.1.3). Adults, too, can begin to notice the power bestowed on them in order to reflect on how adults' actions and assumptions can constrain children's agency.

Adults can then begin to contend with the tensions that come with wanting to both empower and protect children and young people (section 1.3.3.2). Protection is, of course, vital to safeguarding children's well-being, and the desire to protect children becomes understandably more pronounced during times of crisis and challenge (Save the Children, 2015). Florio et al. (2020) suggest that becoming well-versed in children's rights is a good step towards learning how to balance children's right to protection and participation. Education professionals can become more cognisant of how children's rights can be breached through the simplest of adult-child exchanges through to the imposition of broader power structures (Lundy et al., 2021).

Ideas of protection and participation are, evidently, nuanced and complex. However, in Bray et al., (2021), governments in Canada and Sweden were noted to include children in spheres of information about the pandemic that both protected and informed them. For any matter that relates to them, adults need to ensure children have a rightful place within epistemic systems (Cuevas-Parra, 2020). Not only do the reviewed papers and current research demonstrate that children have important knowledge to share, but that they are ready and willing to do so.

## 5.6.2 Creating Mechanisms to Increase Participation

Across the broader pandemic literature, reports from a range of organisations talked about amplifying the voices of young people in order to leverage their ideas and skills to create tangible change (e.g., Davies et al., 2020). The impact of meaningful engagement from young people, of course, pre-dates the pandemic

(e.g., March for Our Lives, School Strike for Climate). However, now, there may be no better time to envision new paths for young people's participation.

As the world learns to adjust to a new way of living, it is an opportune time to rethink existing systems, policies, and practices with the involvement of the young people for whom they serve (Jiménez Hernández et al., 2021). Education professionals can aspire to provide equal and just environments that symbolise an inclusive and democratic society (Baraldi & Cockburn, 2018; Brough, 2012). Particular mechanisms should be specially devoted to younger children who have fewer opportunities to contribute their knowledge (Alter, 2022; Pascal & Bertram, 2009). Their meaningful engagement can be secured early in life if there are platforms for children of all ages to have their voices recognised.

When considering participatory opportunities for children in school, it would be remiss not to mention the curriculum. Children's experience of the curriculum can be problematic as more traditional knowledge systems are recognised at the expense of other ways of understanding the world (O'Rourke, 2018; Race, 2001). A meaningful, diverse curriculum would be one which adapts as society changes, and as children change society (Blumer, 1969). It would take into consideration what is relevant now and to all the children that it hopes to educate (Popoola & Sivers, 2021; Taylor & Medina, 2013). To do so, curricula and wider learning environments can be shaped by children's indigenous knowledge, such as through pedagogical documentation (Rinaldi, 2006) or learning stories (Carr & Lee, 2012).

As part of her learning experience across the process, the principal researcher realised that, once mechanisms for participation are established, it is important for adults to "step back" (Stephenson, 2009). In doing so, children can begin to develop and mobilise their own networks, in turn developing advocacy skills and creating new paths for themselves (e.g., Anderson & Bigby, 2017).

## 5.6.3 Implications for Educational Psychologists

The principal researcher will now consider implications for her own practice and EP work.

Children in the present research created knowledge that significantly differed from what she had expected (section 5.3.5.1). Their research contributes to an evidence base which demonstrates children are capable and competent knowledge-holders. However, childist attitudes persist (Schmidt et al., 2021). EPs may encounter discrimination against children across their work including times in which children, and their knowledge systems, are homogenised. EPs can draw upon their skills to question assumptions and infuse their work with an appreciation of children's unique experiences and the plurality of ways to come to know reality. EPs can also contribute to dismantling harmful stereotypes by considering how their title bestows them with power additional to being an adult (Fox, 2015). Feedback provided by an EP can significantly influence how children are constructed by those around them (or how they conceive of themselves) (Penn et al., 2001).

Because EPs are constantly engaging with epistemic communities and systems, they also have an ethical responsibility to engage in epistemological curiosity (Freire, 1970). Indeed, EPs can develop anti-oppressive practice by considering how to address epistemic oppression (Sewell, 2016). In joint meetings, are certain individuals ascribed higher epistemic status, and why? When working with young people, are their epistemic resources legitimised? To what extent do we consider the diverse ways in which groups come to know the world, such as through 'performance art, spoken word, mystical insights, mindfulness' (Bailey, 2014, p.67)?

The Covid-19 pandemic provided the backdrop for the current research and will continue to be an important consideration in EP work going forward. When contextualising the framework within the focused literature, it is important that EPs take wider systemic influences seriously, but not to make assumptions about how

pandemic events have impacted children[5]. It may well be the case that EPs work with people who do feel they have been severely impacted by the effects of the pandemic. Under these circumstances, EPs can hold in mind that making meaning can be a powerful means of processing difficult times (Park, 2010). EPs can look to a broad range of research and practice to see how service users can have agency over their stories and how they share them (Reyes & Torres, 2007; Rowley et al., 2020).

Having contextualised the framework within the broader literature base, there are seeds of evidence that younger children are becoming more cognisant of inequalities felt by diverse groups as a result of their pandemic experiences (Lundy et al., 2021). The rights of marginalised communities have been more routinely breached, they have had less money to meet their needs, and were less able to access support or enjoy adequate living standards. As many EPs champion social justice across their work, and given the possibilities that can come with children's participation, children could accompany EPs in working towards addressing such injustices. Children may bring powerful insights for ensuring no further disadvantage is felt because of Covid-19.

[5] Wolpe (2020), a child psychoanalyst, wrote about her experiences supporting children across the pandemic. She expressed concerns about the children with whom she worked as 'they do not seem to express anxiety' and appeared to have 'adapted too quickly and too well' (p.350), perhaps reflecting assumptions made by adults about how children are expected to cope.

## 5.7 Conclusion

After a tumultuous few years, children are learning to live alongside Covid-19 as it circulates the globe as an endemic disease (Lavine et al., 2021). The constructivist grounded theoretical framework created by children offers a unique insight into ways in which children have constructed the Covid-19 pandemic so far. The concepts and categories that make up their framework resonated with existing literature but can serve an important function for enriching the substantive area. Adults and children may be particularly inspired by what is implicated by co-researchers' more nuanced take about managing the emotional aspects of their pandemic experiences, as expressed through their 'Breaking Through' concept.

The principal researcher hoped that the present research would fit a dual purpose of eliciting children's knowledge about their recent experiences and demonstrate what can be possible when adults consciously enable children's participation. At all levels of society, one can appreciate the very human need to make sense of what has happened. There will always be much more that we would like to understand.

Moving forwards, there are bountiful opportunities for meaningfully engaging young people about the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond. As demonstrated in the present research, these are not easily achieved. We may espouse that pooling diverse perspectives on phenomena advantages everybody but this first requires a firm commitment to respecting every child's status as rights- and knowledge-holders.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Information Letters

*Year 5 Participant Invitation Letter (parent/carer)*

### Exploring children's constructions of coronavirus, using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study

*Your child is being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree, it is important that you understand what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.*

#### *Who am I?*

My name is Kara Pirttijarvi and I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London. This research will fulfil requirements for my Professional Doctorate in Educational Psychology after which I can practise as an educational psychologist.

#### *What is the research?*

Over the last year, children's routines have been uprooted and their lives have been profoundly changed. For my thesis, I am interested in understanding how children have made sense of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has impacted their education and other aspects of their lives.

As we continue to live through this global health crisis, it is critical that we listen to children to understand what it means to be a young person growing up and learning during this period of time. Presently, the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) is appealing for research relating to "Changes to the role of education and the future of learning", with a particular focus on the *impact* of COVID-19 on children and young people. As a precursor to understanding its impact, this research aims to explore children's understanding of COVID-19.

This research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that it follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

### *Why has your child been asked to participate?*

All Year 5 children are being invited to participate in this research study. A working group of five children from Year 5s will be selected to work alongside me as "co-researchers". I will be organising a 'research workshop' to help build the group's understanding of how to conduct research. The research team (the co-researchers and myself) will then work together to decide on a final research question that they would like to answer. I will then facilitate the co-research team to work with "participants", made up of five younger children (from Years 1 and 2), so they can use their research skills to find out the participants' thoughts about COVID-19. It will be important that your child is:

- *Enthusiastic and motivated*
- *Keen to talk and share ideas*
- *Committed to the duration of the project (e.g., not planning to move school soon)*

Your child is free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced. There will be no judgement or analysis as to why you may choose to participate or not participate.

### *What will participation involve?*

If you and your child are keen to participate, you are encouraged to attend a virtual meeting on **date** where I will provide a description of the research and answer any and all queries. After the research team has formed, participation will involve:

- Your child attending a 'research workshop' during one afternoon at school which will be a fun, engaging way to introduce them to research skills and different data collection tools
- Your child participating in a 'pilot afternoon' in which they can practise using their research skills
- After deciding on a research question, your child will be supported to think of how to answer their research question using a chosen tool. They will then work with their Year 1/2 participant
- The research team will convene online to discuss their data, where they will be able to add in their own insight about COVID-19. This discussion will be audio recorded.
- After data have been analysed, you may be contacted for a short interview to enrich the data that your child has provided.

*This will be an opportunity for your child to share their experiences of COVID-19 as well as learn how to conduct robust research. It is hoped that findings will be submitted to the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology to add our developing understanding of how young people have been affected by the pandemic. I will not be able to pay you for participating in this research, but*

*your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of our research topic.*

### *What will happen to the information that your child provides?*

- Your child's participation will be safe and confidential. Their privacy and safety will be respected at all times.
- Those participating do not have to answer questions asked of them and can stop their participation at any time.
- Research team meetings will be audio recorded through the 'record' feature on the virtual platform. Any visual information collected by your child (e.g., drawings, scripts, photographs, mindmaps) will be scanned. All data will be immediately uploaded to a password-protected drive. Once synced to the computer, it will be deleted from the original recording device or stored in a padlocked cupboard. Once any audio data are transcribed, they will be deleted from the computer.
- Director of Studies, Mary Robinson, and I will have access to all data.
- Any identifying details (names of places, people) will be anonymised when being transcribed to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be applied to all participant names (e.g., P1 instead of your child's name).
- If you give consent, the anonymised data will remain on the UEL repository for 5 years after the study has concluded, after which there will be a review to decide whether the data will be kept, erased or moved.
- You will have 3 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw the data you have provided. Please contact me if you would like to withdraw your data.

### *What if you want to withdraw?*

Your child is free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you or your child may request to withdraw their data even after they have participated, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

## Contact Details

If you would like further information or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Kara Pirttijarvi

*If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact the Director of Studies, Mary Robinson, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,*
*Email:* m.robinson@uel.ac.uk
*or*
*Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Prof Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.*
*(Email:* t.patel@uel.ac.uk*)*


*Years 1 and 2 Participant Invitation Letter (parent/carer)*

# Exploring children's constructions of coronavirus, using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study

*Your child is being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree, it is important that you understand what participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.*

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This research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that it follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

### *Why has your child been asked to participate?*

All children in Years 1 and 2 are being invited to participate in this research study. If interested and selected, your child will become one of ten children who will partake in this research. Your child will be paired with a child in Year 5 (one of my "co-researchers") and work with them to answer our research question: this will focus on children's understanding of COVID-19. It is expected that your child's Year 5 'researcher' will be creative about how they can encourage your child to share their thoughts: for example, through drawings, photographs, interview, music, role play or video. It will be important that your child is:

- *Enthusiastic and motivated*
- *Committed to the duration of the project (e.g., not planning to move school soon)*
- *Keen to share ideas, not necessarily verbally*

Your child is free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced. There will be no judgement or analysis as to why you may choose to participate or not participate.

### *What will participation involve?*

If you and your child are keen to participate, you are encouraged to attend a virtual meeting on **date** where I will provide a description of the research and answer any and all queries. Participation will involve:

- Working with their Year 5 researcher (and supervised by me) in person. This will take place during school time and will take no longer than 1.5 hours.
- After data have been analysed, you may be contacted for a short interview to enrich the data that your child has provided.

*This will be an opportunity for your child to share their experiences of COVID-19. It is hoped that findings will be submitted to the UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology to add our developing understanding of how young people have been affected by the pandemic. I will not be able to pay you for participating in this research, but your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of our research topic.*

### *What will happen to the information that your child provides?*

- Your child's participation will be safe and confidential. Their privacy and safety will be respected at all times.
- Those participating do not have to answer questions asked of them and can stop their participation at any time.
- Any visual information collected from your child (e.g. drawings, scripts, photographs, mindmaps) will be scanned and all audio data will be recorded and transcribed. All data will be immediately uploaded to a password-protected drive. Once synced to

the computer, it will be deleted from the original recording device or stored in a padlocked cupboard. Once any audio data are transcribed, they will be deleted from the computer.

- Director of Studies, Mary Robinson, and I will have access to all data.
- Any identifying details (names of places, people) will be anonymised when being transcribed to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be applied to all participant names (e.g. P1 instead of your child's name).
- If you give consent, the anonymised data will remain on the UEL repository for 5 years after the study has concluded, after which there will be a review to decide whether the data will be kept, erased or moved.
- You will have 3 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw the data you have provided. Please contact me if you would like to withdraw your data.

### *What if you want to withdraw?*

Your child is free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you or your child may request to withdraw their data even after they have participated, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

## Contact Details

If you would like further information or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me:
Kara Pirttijarvi

*If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact the Director of Studies, Mary Robinson, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,*
*Email:* m.robinson@uel.ac.uk
*or*
*Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Prof Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.*
*(Email:* t.patel@uel.ac.uk*)*

*Year 5 Participant Invitation Letter*

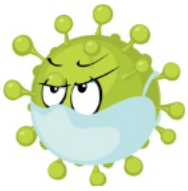
**Exploring children's constructions of coronavirus, using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study**

| | |
|---|---|
| | My name is Kara and I am learning to be an Educational Psychologist. I would like to know if you would be interested in doing some **research** with me. |
|  | I would like to understand what it is like to be **young during the COVID-19 pandemic.** |
|  | I would like **you** to become a 'researcher' with me. This is because **you** know best what it is like being young during the COVID-19 pandemic. |
|  | 5 children from Year 5 will become researchers.<br>To keep you **safe**, the research will all take place **online.** |
|  | To start, you and your research team will learn all about **what research is.** |

| | |
|---|---|
|  | Together, we will think of a **research question.** As a researcher, you will be trying to find out the answer to the research question by working with your own 'participant' – a child from **Year 1 or 2 !** |
|  | How will you find the answer from your participant – well, **you decide!** You could help your participant answer the question using **drawings, video, photographs music, acting** – it is completely up to you! |
|  | You will have a chance to **practise** your research skills until you feel confident. We will then collect our 'data' – remember – **you** are the researcher and the child from Year 1 or 2 is **your participant!** |
|  | **Our team** will then meet up to **talk** about what you did! You will also be able to talk about your **own experiences** with COVID-19. |
|  | If this is OK with you, I will also talk to your **parent and/or teacher** to gather some more information. |
|  | **Your research** may be able to help adults understand what it has been like to be a child during this very different time. It is **very important** that children's voices can be heard. |

## *Years 1 and 2 Participant Invitation Letter (child)*

**Exploring children's constructions of coronavirus, using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study**

| | |
|---|---|
| | My name is Kara and I am learning to be an Educational Psychologist. Would you like to do some **research** with me and **children in Year 5** from your school? |
|  | We would like to understand what it is like to be **young during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.** |
|  | We would like **you** to become a 'participant'. |
|  | 10 children from Year 1 and 2 will become participants. To keep you **safe**, the research will all take place **online.** |

| | |
|---|---|
|  | You will work with a child in Year 5 who will ask you about **COVID-19 (coronavirus).** They might ask you to **draw**, **take photos or video,** or maybe even **act!** It should be a lot of fun. |
|  | If this is OK with you, I will also talk to your **parent and/or teacher** to gather some more information. |
|  | **Your research** may be able to help adults understand what it has been like to be a child during this very different time. It is **very important** that children's voices can be heard. |

## Appendix 2: Ethical Approval from Local Authority

[redacted]

Thu 3/11/2021 3:37 PM

To: Kara Pirttijarvi

Hi Kara,

Thanks you for sending me your research proposal. The Senior Assistant Director thought your proposal sounded really interesting. It will need to be approved at the Departmental Management Team which meets fortnightly on Tuesday mornings. Once approval has been granted, you will be able to go ahead and contact schools for participation within the local authority.

Regards,

[redacted]

Principal Educational Psychologist
Educational Psychology Service

[redacted]

Wed 6/30/2021 5:21 PM

To: Kara Pirttijarvi

Cc: [redacted]

All good.

[redacted]

**From:** [redacted]
**Sent:** 30 June 2021 17:20
**To:** [redacted]
**Subject:** RE: DMT query

Hi [redacted]

I am so sorry I discussed with DMT, and it was agreed but I forgot to let you know.

I am really sorry but research is good to go

Mnzy thanks

[redacted]

## Appendix 3: Ethical Approval from University

**School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee**

# NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

## For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

**REVIEWER:** Kenneth Gannon

**SUPERVISOR**: Mary Robinson

**STUDENT:** Kara Pirttijarvi

**Course**: Prof Doc in Educational and Child Psychology

**DECISION OPTIONS:**

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

**DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY**
*(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)*

**APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES**

**Minor amendments required** *(for reviewer)*:

Dr Trishna Patel is now the Chair of the SREC. Please insert her name and email address (t.patel@uel.ac.uk) in the PILs and other documents in place of Prof Tucker's.

**Major amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

**Confirmation of making the above minor amendments** *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):* Kara Pirttijarvi
Student number:

Date: 01.07.2021

*(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)*

**ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER** *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐ HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐

MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

[X] LOW

| **Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any). N/A** |
|---|

**Reviewer** *(Typed name to act as signature)*: Dr Kenneth Gannon

**Date**: 30/06/21

*This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee*

**RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:**

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

## Appendix 4: Consent Forms


*Consent to participate in a research study (Year 5)*

**Exploring children's constructions of coronavirus, using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study**

**1.** *I have the read the information page relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

**2.** *I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

**3.** *I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

***4.*** *Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw after 3 weeks of providing data; the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

*Consent to participate in the research study can only be taken by ticking all of the above boxes.*
***5.*** *I give consent to my data being stored on the UEL Research Repository for 5 years after the study has concluded. These data can be accessed by anyone who requests theme. As per UEL data management policy, these data will be reviewed after 5 years and thus kept, destroyed or moved.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

Year 5 Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…….

Year 5 Participant's Signature

……..

Year 5 Parent's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…….

Year 5 Parent's Signature

……..

Date: ……..…….


*Consent to participate in a research study (Year 2)*

## Exploring children's constructions of coronavirus, using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study

**1.** *I have the read the information page relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

**2.** *I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

**3.** *I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

***4.*** *Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw after 3 weeks of providing data; the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data in the write-up of the study and in any further analysis that may be conducted by the researcher.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

*Consent to participate in the research study can only be taken by ticking all of the above boxes.*
***5.*** *I give consent to my data being stored on the UEL Research Repository for 5 years after the study has concluded. These data can be accessed by anyone who requests theme. As per UEL data management policy, these data will be reviewed after 5 years and thus kept, destroyed or moved.*

*Please tick the box to give consent:* *Parent* ☐ *Child* ☐

Year 2 Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…….

Year 2 Participant's Signature

……..

Year 2 Parent's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…….

Year 2 Parent's Signature

……..

Date: ……..…….


# Participant debrief letter

Thank you for participating in my research study *'Exploring children's constructions of coronavirus, using participatory approaches: a grounded theory study'*
This letter offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

## What will happen to the information that you have provided?

The following steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data you have provided:

- All spoken data has been recorded and synced directly to a password-protected computer. All visual data (e.g. drawings) will be scanned and saved onto a password-protected computer. Once audio recordings are transcribed, the files will be deleted.
- Director of Studies, Mary Robinson, and I will have access to all data.
- Any identifying details (names of places, people) will be anonymised when being transcribed to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be applied to all participant names (e.g. P1 instead of your child's name).
- If you give consent, the anonymised data will remain on the UEL repository for 5 years after the study has concluded, after which there will be a review to decide whether the data will be kept, erased or moved.
- You will have 3 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw the data you have provided. Please contact me if you would like to withdraw your data.

## What if you or your child has been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise potential harm. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your child's, or your, participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

Phone Number: 116 123
Email Address: jo@samaritans.org
Postal Address: Chris
Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK
PO Box 9090
Stirling
FK8 2SA

Phone Number: 020 7089 5050
24/7 Crisis Messenger Text Service: 85258
Parent Helpline: 0808 802 5544
Parent Email Service:
www.youngminds.org.uk/contact-us/parents-helpline-enquiries/

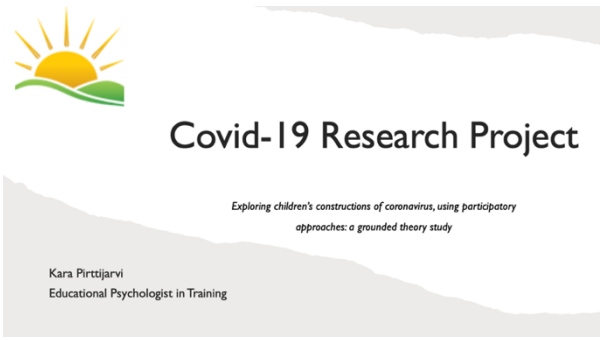
Free and anonymous service
Web address: www.qwell.io
- Counselling sessions from qualified counsellors via an online chat-based platform
- Community and peer-to-peer support via forums

**Contact Details**
You are also very welcome to contact me or my Director of Studies if you have questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted.
Kara Pirttijarvi
Research supervisor, Mary Robinson

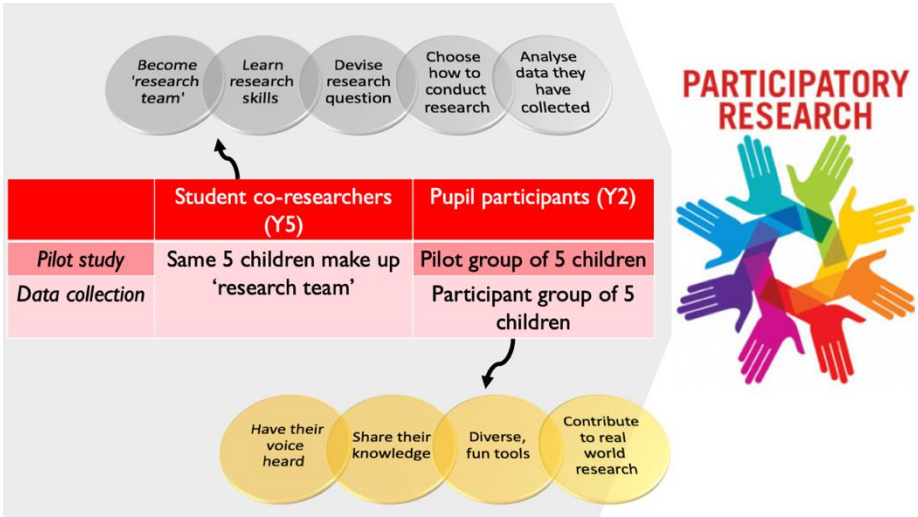
School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
Email: m.robinson@uel.ac.uk
**or**
Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Prof Trishna Patel,
School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

## Appendix 5: Powerpoint Slides from Parent & Carer/ Child Virtual Forum

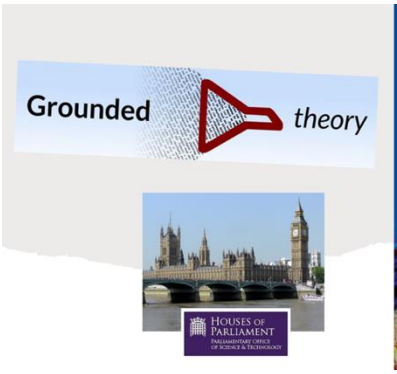
(NB: Original plans for 'sense making' involved parents and teachers. This was changed in order to focus on children's knowledge without the influence of adult interpretation)

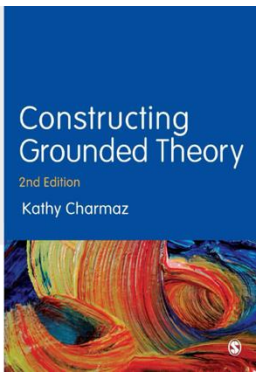






| Wednesday 14th July 2021 | | Friday 16th July 2021 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 16:00 | **Parent and carer virtual forum** | 9:30 | **Research workshop** |
| | Research introduction | | Virtual workshop with Year 5 research team |
| | Questions and answers | | Learn research skills and prepare for the project |
| **Monday 19th July 2021** | | **Tuesday 20th July 2021** | |
| 13:00 | **Pilot data collection** | 9:30 | **Participant data collection** |
| | Practice of data collection with Y2 pilot participant | a.m. | Official data collection |
| | | p.m. | Data analysis |
| **Over the summer break** | | | |
| **Additional interviews** | | | |
| | Informal parent interviews | | Informal teacher interviews |
| | Fill in any gaps in understanding | | Fill in any gaps in understanding |




## Appendix 6: Research Diary Extract - Initial group dynamics

Research workshop 16.07.2021

*They came down the stairs into the playground, flanked by their teacher and there was this sense of boundless energy. I greeted their teacher and we exchanged our Hellos. I asked if they could show me to the garden and the group ushered me there. They chattered away between them. Once in the garden they wandered around amongst themselves telling me how long it had been since they'd been there. They clearly knew each other really well – they've known each other pretty much all since Reception. Energy was boundless. I wondered how much of it was nervous and how much of it was excitement. I got a sense of their togetherness, uniting themselves as separate to me.*

*There were different bits of furniture in the garden space and I invited the group to bring themselves over along with an item on which to sit. I set up my laptop to present the first Powerpoint and when I looked back, the children were sitting all over the place. Niami and Ivan in particular brought themselves as far away as possible from the laptop and sat close together; the bond between them was palpable and I wondered if physical proximity (poking each other, meeting each other's glance etc.) helped to alleviate any anxiety they may have felt about this unfamiliar set-up.*

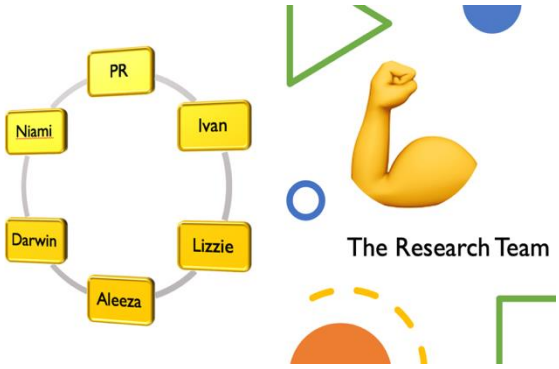
*It took a few minutes for the energy to settle; I was able to bring the temperature down a bit by engaging in some chat about their days so far... After our introductions (including sharing my Bitmoji One Page Profile), we talked about expectations.*

*Almost immediately, Ivan said, "How long are we here for?" and when I said it would be for around an hour – up until playtime – there was an audible "Yesssss" that resounded. I felt immediately positioned as group leader and authority figure. Not long later, Lizzie asked if we would be doing this just today and I said it would be over several sessions (another "Yesssss"). I wanted to make sure they definitely did remember what we were there for so I paused to bring out their consent forms and that seemed to be a helpful reminder.*

Post-pilot study

*The co-research team have known each other for years and have a natural affinity. This seemed a helpful foundation for being able to engage in deep, joint analysis and to feel safe to wonder, to challenge one another and to pursue different ideas.*

## Appendix 7: Powerpoint Slides from Research Workshop






*Storytime..*

What led to this area of research?

~~truth~~ meaning


## Research question

- We need to devise a **question** for us to **answer** through our research

- The question must:

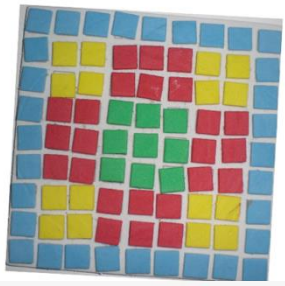
a) Start with a question word

b) Relate to young children's thoughts about Covid-19

c) Be something we can reasonably answer

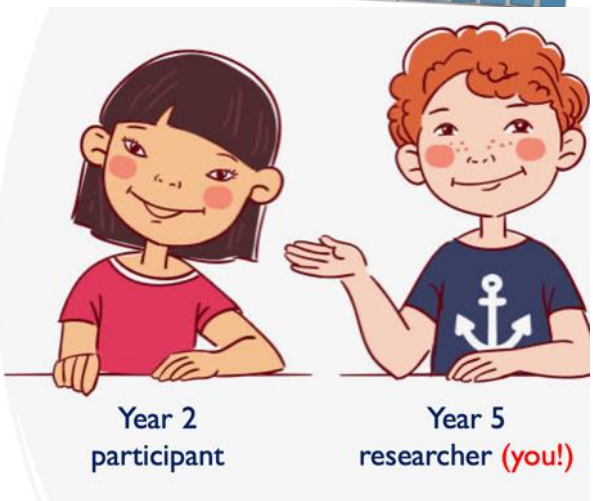
## Methodology

- We need to decide how to answer it
- Mosaic approach = lots of different tools



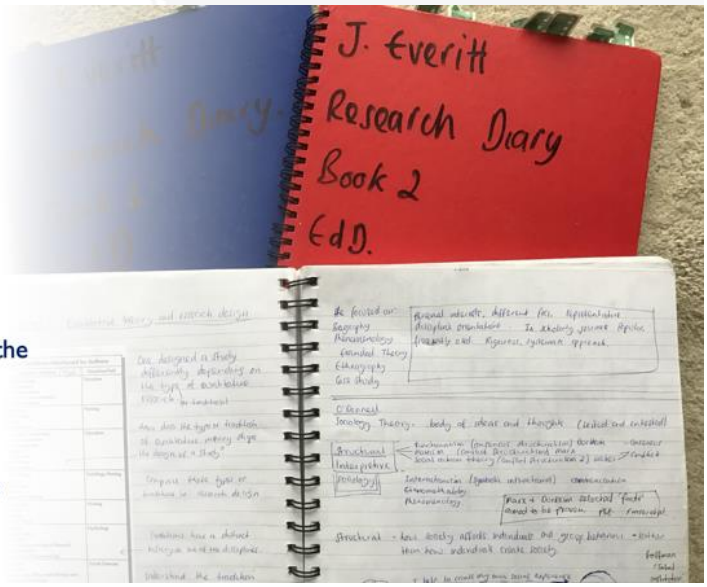
## *Methodology*

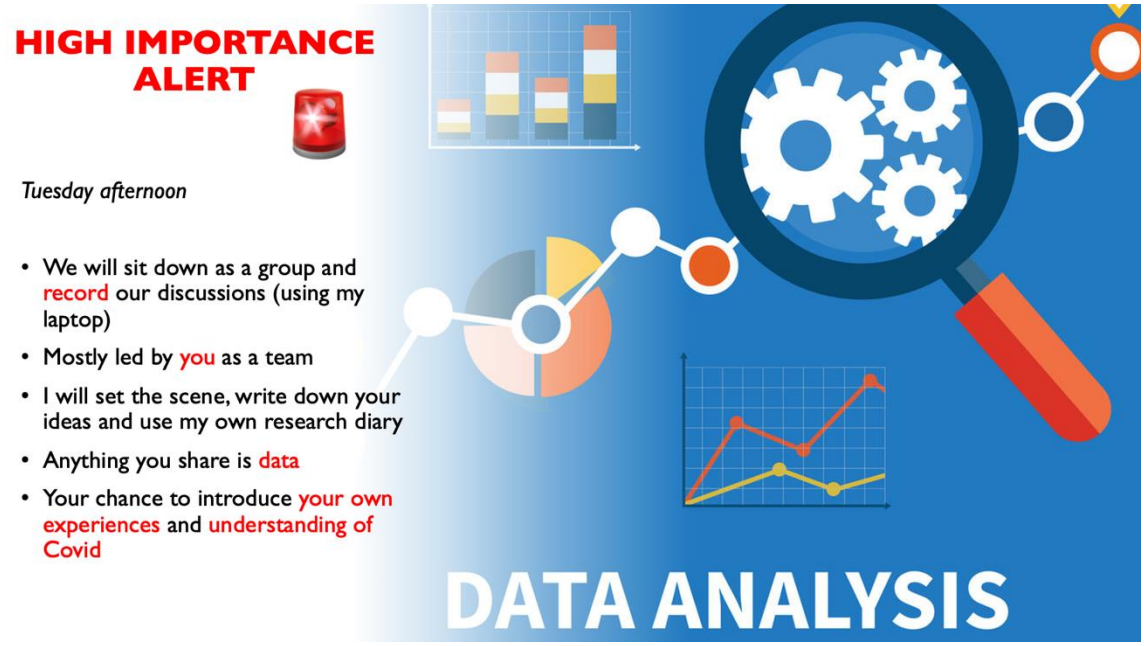
- Paired with a Year 2 child
- Will do the process TWICE
- 1 pilot (practice) on Monday, 1 official collection on Tuesday
- Your mission is to answer your research question
- How?...




## *Research diary*

- Research notes
- Everything will be anonymous
- Write anything linked to the project
  - *Covid-related*
  - *About your participant*
  - *Your thoughts about Covid*
  - *Your thoughts about the project*
  - *Any relevant ideas, thoughts, feelings of experiences*

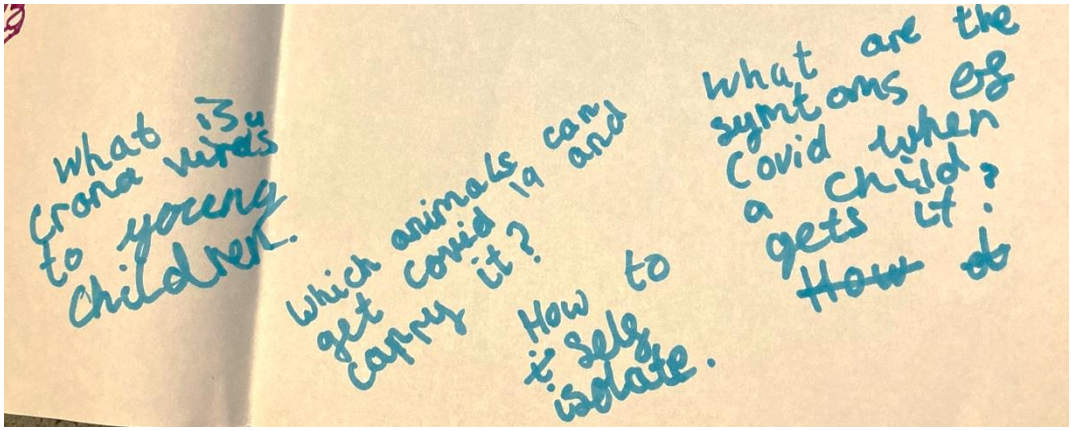


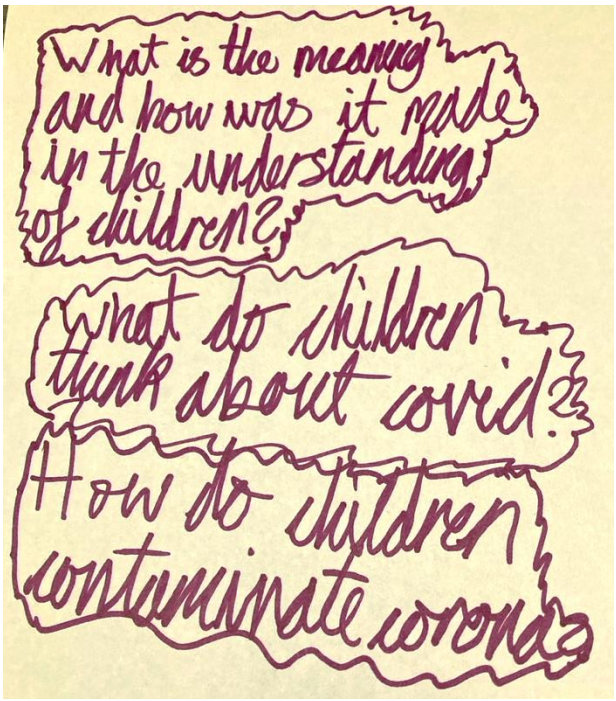



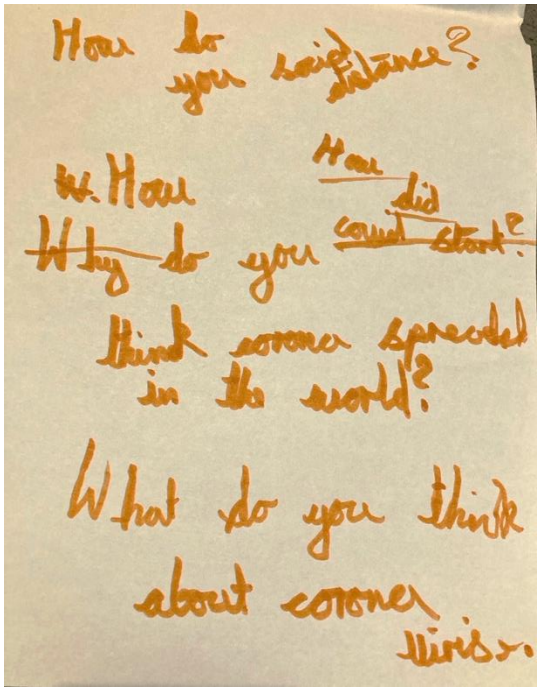

## Why is our study different?

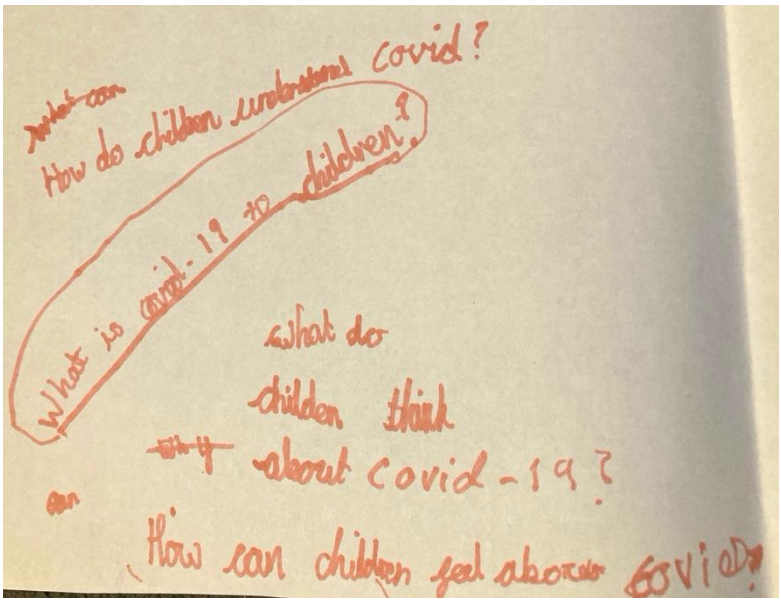
- Usually, scientists and researchers are seen as 'objective'
- But what we know is that… we are HUMAN, and therefore science is always impacted by our humanity (our own thoughts, feelings, experiences, ideas)
- **Tuesday morning:** all about your Year 2 participant and their thoughts
- **Tuesday afternoon**: talking about what you did with your Year 2 participant and sharing about your own thoughts and ideas
- This research needs your creativity and insight to collect as much information as possible to answer the research question

## Appendix 8: Research Workshop: Research Question Brainstorm

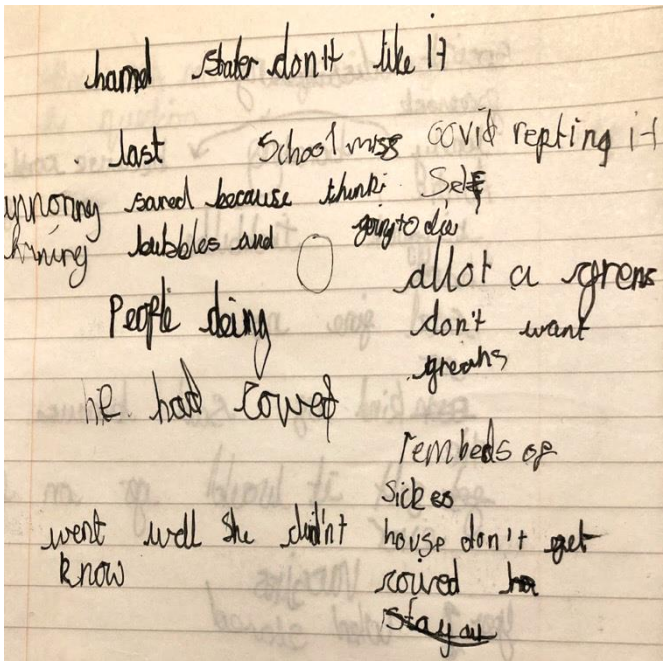


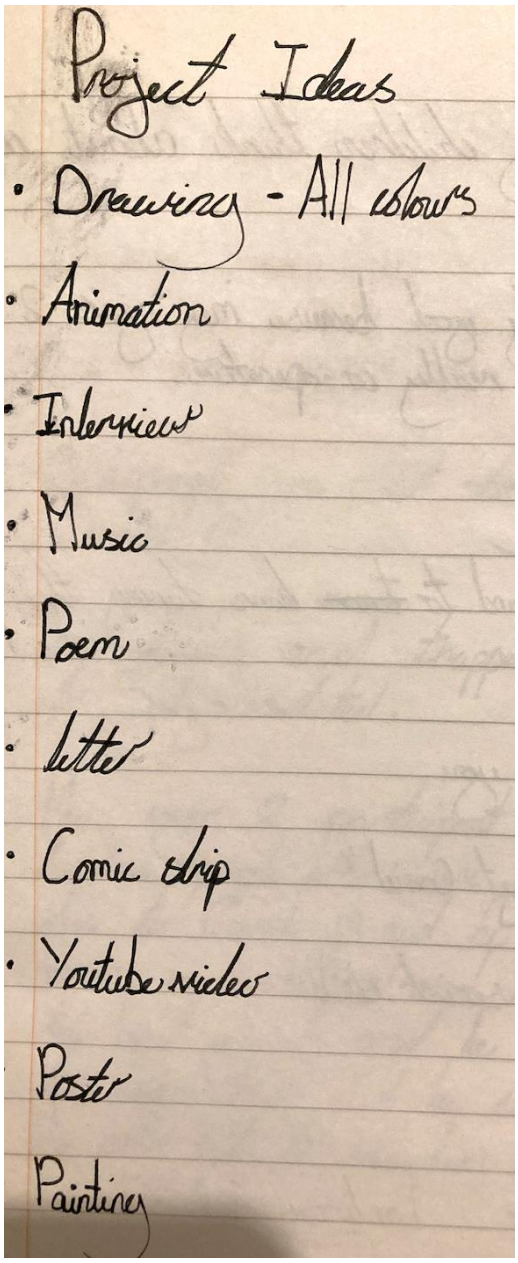



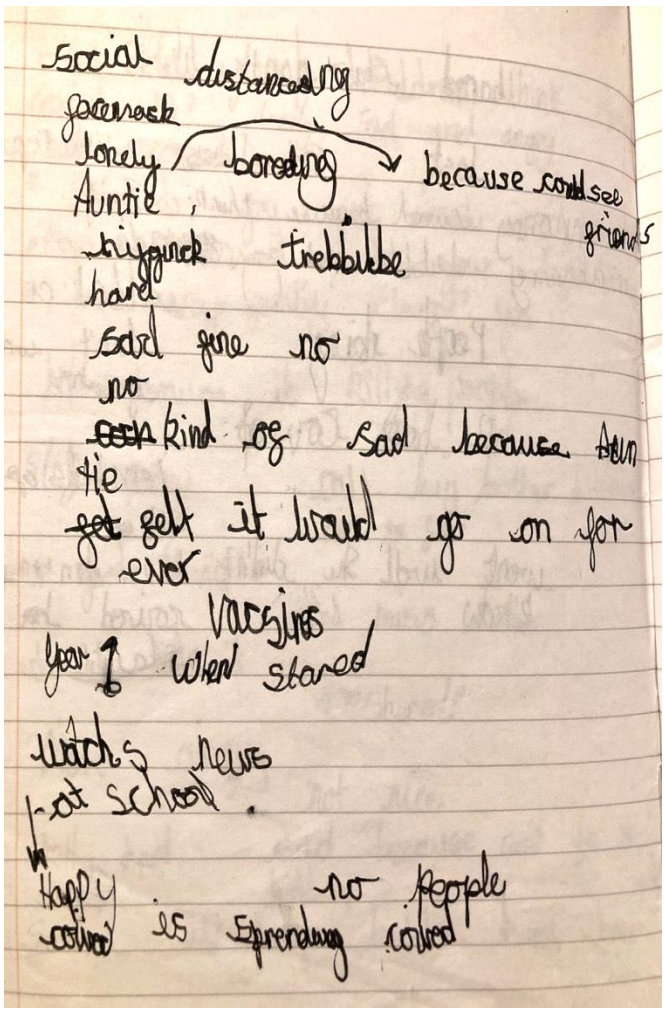



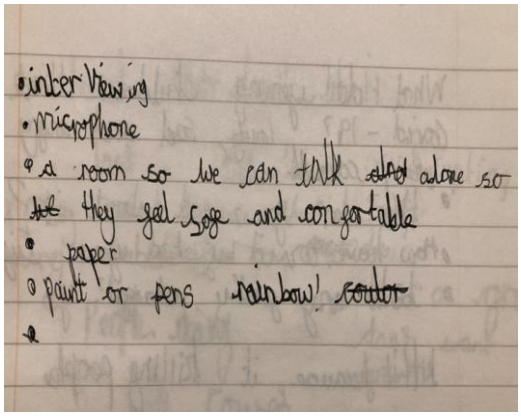



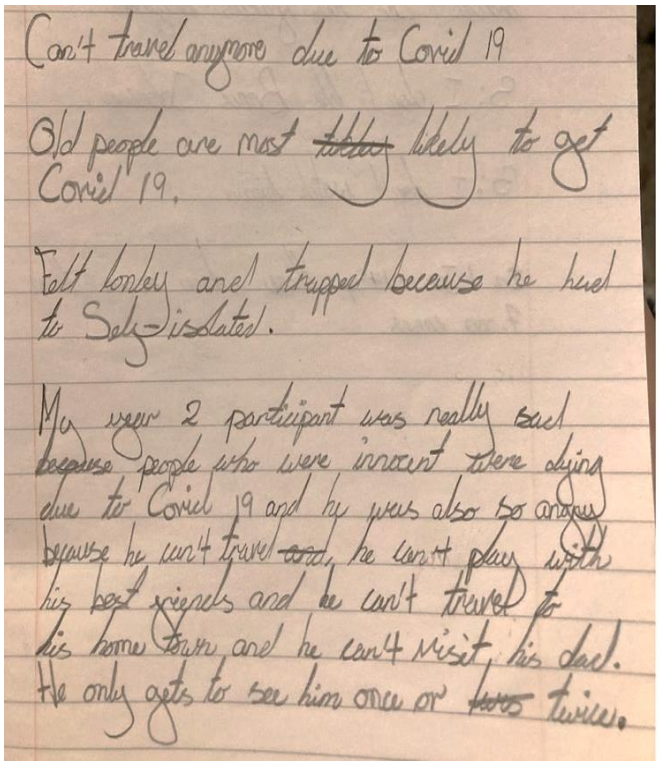
## Appendix 9: Extracts from Co-researchers' Research Diaries



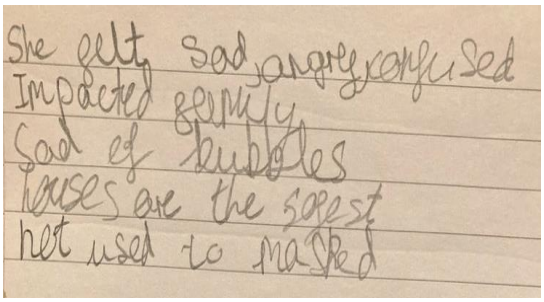


Can't travel anymore due to Covid 19

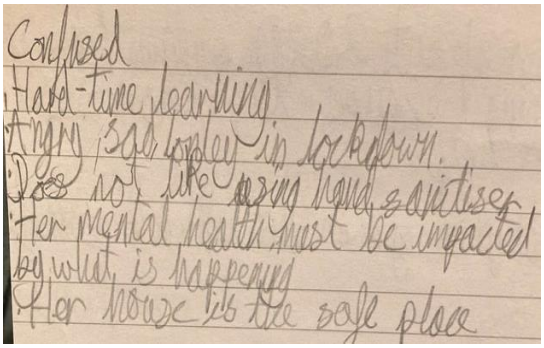
Old people are most ~~likely~~ likely to get Covid 19.

Felt lonley and trapped because he had to Self-isolated.

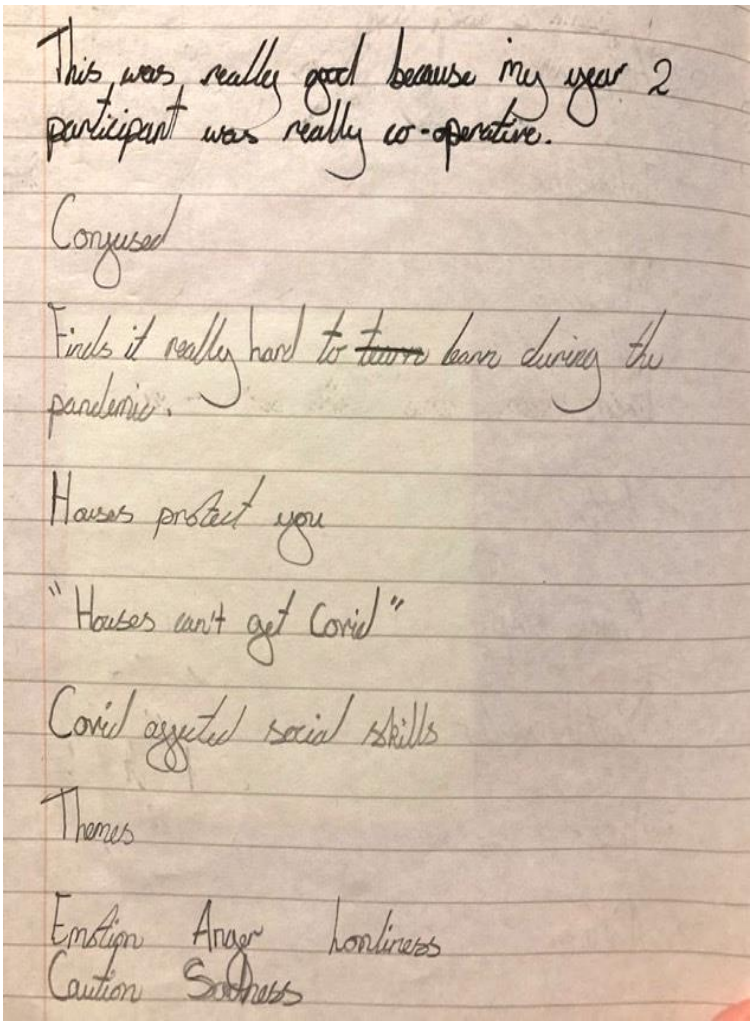
My year 2 participant was really sad because people who were innocent were dying due to Covid 19 and he was also so angry because he can't travel ~~and~~, he can't play with his best friends and he can't travel to his home town and he can't visit his dad. He only gets to see him once or ~~twice~~ twice.



She felt sad, angry, confused
Impacted family
Sad of bubbles
Houses are the safest
Not used to masked



Confused
Hard-time learning
Angry, sad, lonley in lockdown.
Does not like using hand sanitiser
Her mental health must be impacted by what is happening
Her house is the safe place



This was really good because my year 2 participant was really co-operative.

Confused

Finds it really hard to ~~learn~~ learn during the pandemic.

Houses protect you

"Houses can't get Covid"

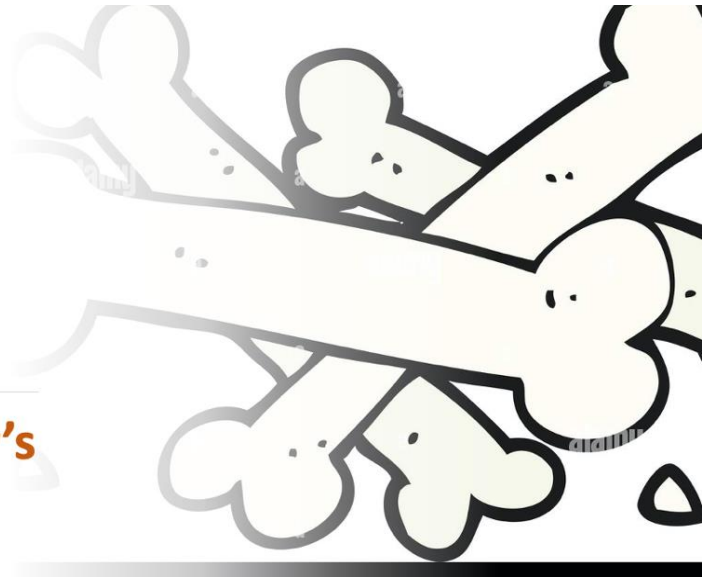
Covid affected social skills

Themes

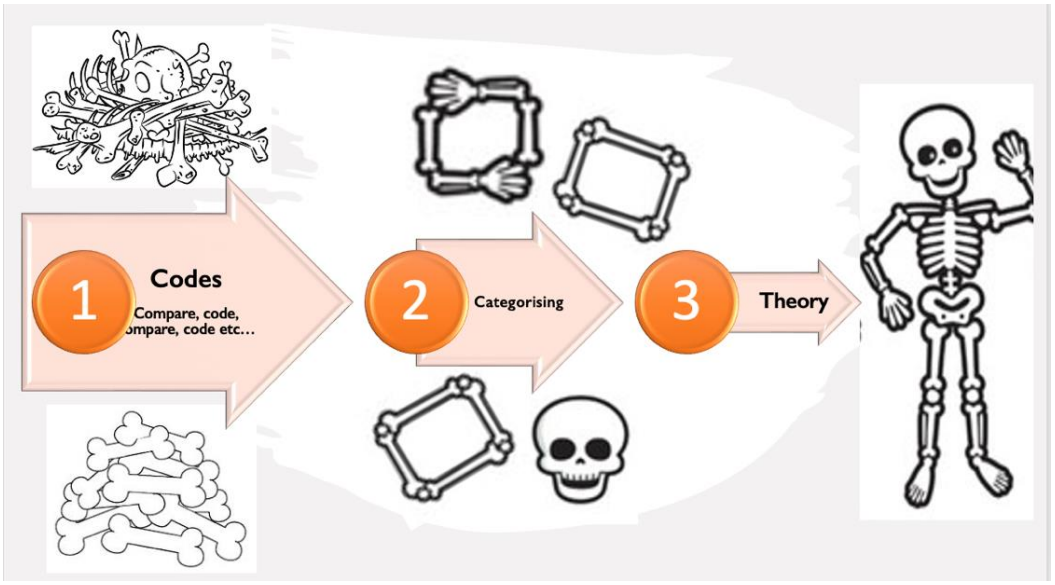
Emotion Anger lonliness
Caution Sadness

## Appendix 10: Powerpoint Slides to demonstrate Constant Comparative Analysis

*'understand acts and accounts, scenes and sentiments, stories and silences from our research participants' views' (p.114).*

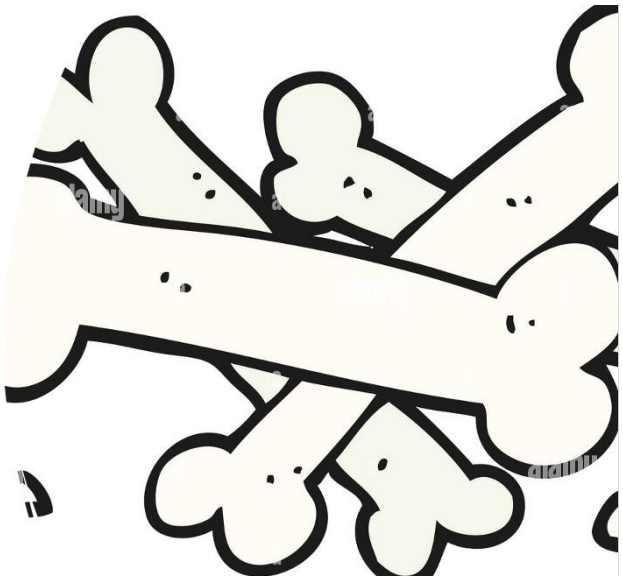


**Coding today's work**

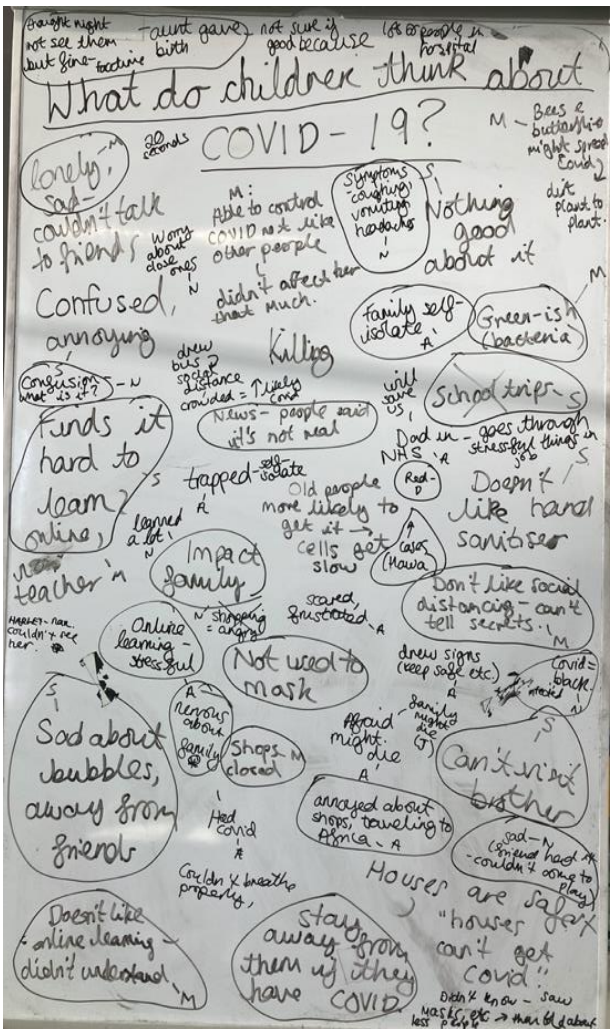


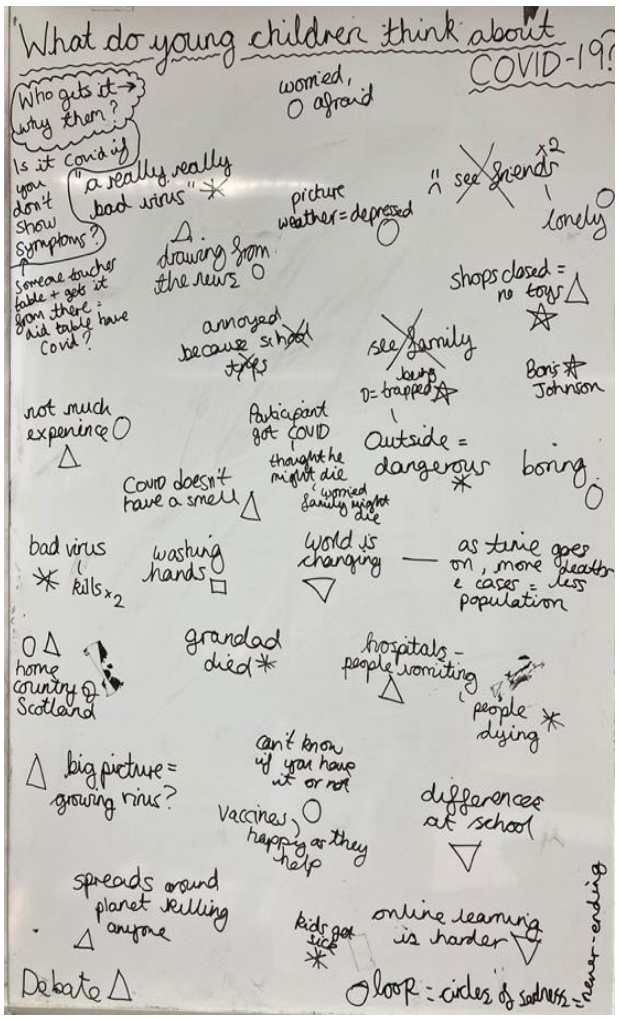

**Coding – today and last transcripts**

- What discoveries will we make today?
- Code, compare, code, compare, code, compare etc…
- Should we care about each other's data? And be involved with it?
- Are disagreements good? Why?



## Appendix 11: Principal Researcher's Hand Recording of Codes



# Appendix 12: Initial Codes, Focused Codes and Category Examples

- Aunt gave birth - thought might not see them but it was fine because of Facetime
- Not sure if Covid is good because lots of people are in hospital
- Bees and butterflies might spread covid as they spread dirt plant to plant
- Nothing good about it
- It is green-ish bacteria
- Family had to self-isolate
- Symptoms – coughing, vomiting, headaches
- Not affected much because I'm able to control covid not like other people
- Felt lonely and sad
- Wash hands for 20 seconds
- Couldn't talk to friends
- Worried about close ones
- Confused and annoying
- Stopped from going shopping - angry
- Feeling weird and not used to the mask
- Signs are a way to think about Covid
- Visiting brother often before but not able to
- Covid is black because it's infecting people
- Concerned and afraid family (and me) might die
- Annoyed about shops, traveling to Africa
- Not possible to go and visit shops because they are closed
- Online learning is stressful
- Nervous about family
- Sad about bubbles because I'm away from family
- Had covid – couldn't breathe properly
- Stay away from them if they have covid
- Houses are safe "houses can't get covid"
- Masks, less people around
- Doesn't like online learning, didn't understand
- Confusion, what is it?
- Killing people
- No school trips
- Social distancing – crowded – covid likely to go up
- News – people said it's not real
- Dad is in the NHS – he will save us. Dad goes through stressful things in his job
- Doesn't like hand sanitiser
- Old people are more likely to get it because their cells get slow
- Trapped feeling because of having to self-isolate
- Finding it hard to learn online
- Impact on family
- Feeling scared and frustrated
- Don't like social distancing because I can't tell secrets
- Covid is red, says cases are red?
- No teacher to help with learning
- Can't see my nan
- Online learning is stressful
- Feelings of always worried and afraid
- Can't see friends
- Picture of weather = depressed
- Questioning - Who gets it? Why them?
- Is it Covid if you don't show symptoms?
- Someone touches table and gets it from there – did table have covid?
- Not much experience of Covid
- Covid doesn't have a smell
- Annoyed because no school trips
- Can't see family
- Feeling trapped
- Outside = dangerous
- Shops closed = no toys
- Boris Johnson
- Covid is boring
- A changing world comes from Covid starting – as time goes on, more deaths and cases means less population
- I had covid, thought I might die, worried family might die
- Hospitals – people vomiting, people dying
- Washing hands
- Grandad died
- Bad virus – it kills
- Worried about home country of Scotland
- Vaccines – happy about them as they might help
- School is different
- Online learning is harder
- Circle of sadness – never-ending
- Kids getting sick
- Spreading around the whole planet killing anyone
- Big picture = growing virus

- Worried, afraid
- Can't see friends
- Picture of weather = depressed
- Who gets it? Why them?
- Is it Covid if you don't show symptoms?
- Someone touches table and gets it from there – did table have covid?
- Not much experience of Covid
- Covid doesn't have a smell

- Annoyed because no school trips
- Can't see family
- Feeling trapped
- Going outside is a dangerous thing to do
- Not able to have thing I want (toys) because shops are closed
- Boris Johnson making decisions
- Covid is boring
- World is changing – as time goes on, more deaths and cases = less population
- I had covid, thought I might die, worried family might die
- Hospitals – people vomiting, people dying
- Washing hands all the time

**Data collection**

- Grandad died
- Bad virus kills people
- Thinking about home country of Scotland
- Thinking about vaccines – happy about them as they might help
- School is different
- No choice about online learning which is harder
- Circle of sadness – never-ending
- Kids getting sick
- Spreading around the whole planet killing anyone
- Big picture = growing virus

## Tentative categories

- Good Vs Evil
- Mental health
- Animals
- Spread of covid
- Online/digital stuff
- Vaccines, tests, test results
- Real and fake: rumours (your friend might say they have covid but they don't), NEWS- something to trust?
- 2 different things happening at the same time, cant always rely on a source and completely trust them
- Starting over
- Danger – high threat
- Escaping/avoiding covid
- Technical vocab from class

- Sickness, dying, health getting worse
- Family
- friends
- Hygiene
- **Breaking through** , keep going
- **Colours for covid**
- **Change/no change -**
- **Army, battle, fighting**
- **Taking over: cells, expanding, growing,**
- empathy
- Bossy instructions from boris johnson: , sometimes queen: isolating, social distancing, 2 metres. Bossy. Act like we were babies, trust to take care of self
- Forgetting about covid

## Tentative categories

- Good Vs Evil
- Mental health
- Animals
- Spread of covid
- Online/digital stuff
- Vaccines, tests, test results
- Real and fake: rumours (your friend might say they have covid but they don't), NEWS- something to trust?
- 2 different things happening at the same time, cant always rely on a source and completely trust them
- Empathy
- How you get covid: through dirt

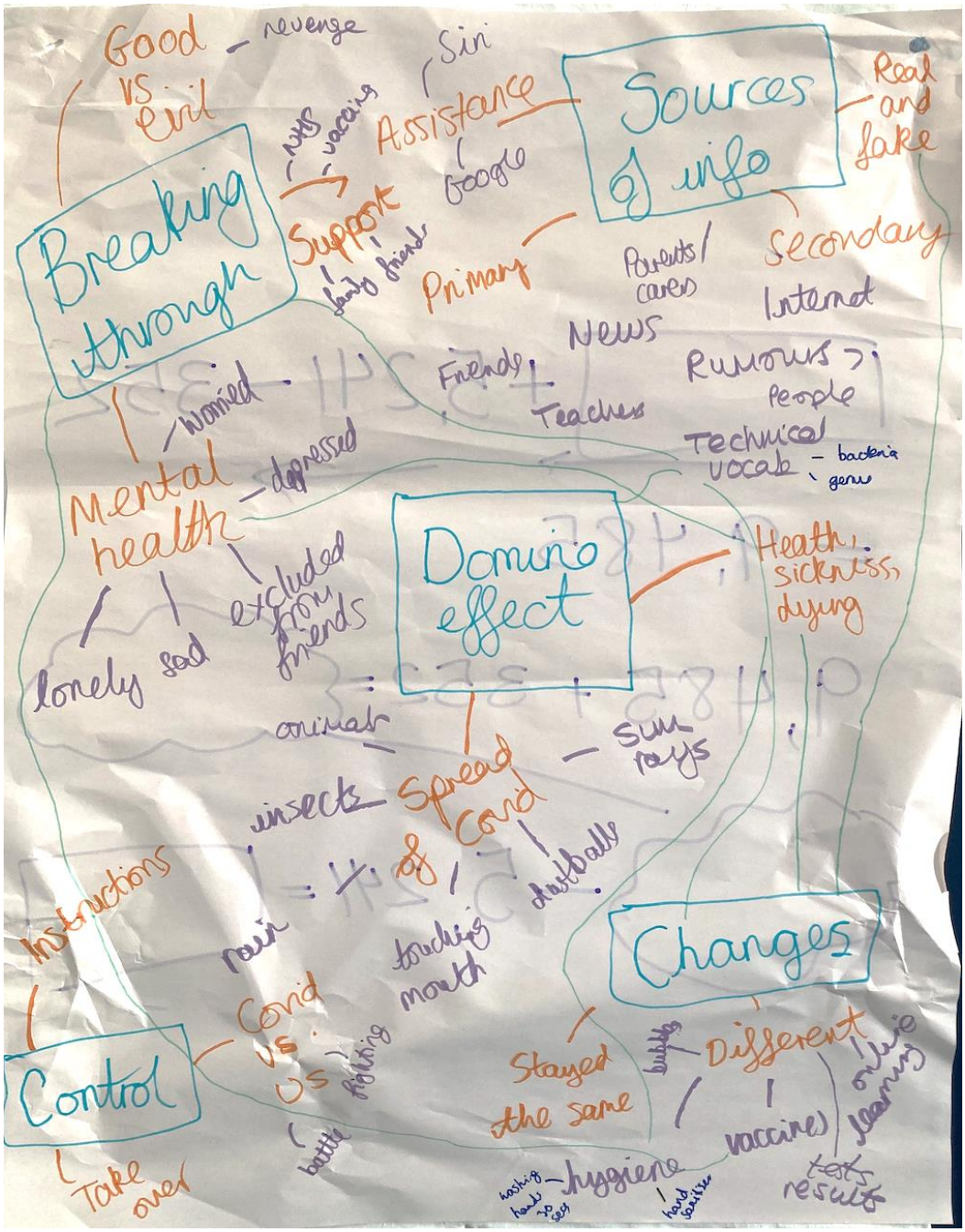
- Sickness, dying, health getting worse
- Family
- friends
- Hygiene
- **Breaking through** , keep going, school being open- walk around without mask, not needing to social distance etc
- **Colours for covid**
- **Domino effect: spead of covid, spread through animals**
- **Change/no change -**
- **Army, battle, fighting**
- **Taking over: cells, expanding, growing,**
- bossy instructions
- Forgetting about covid
- Starting over
- Danger –
- Bacteria, germs, news

## linking categories

- Good Vs Evil
- Animals
- Spread of covid
- Online/digital stuff

- Sickness, dying, health getting worse
- Family
- friends
- **Breaking through (more emotional than physical? Trying to get out of bubble to see friends)** + Mental health (defeating worries you have, leave behind +
- Hygiene + **Change/no change (if you change what you do with hygiene**
- **Colours for covid**

## Appendix 13: Handwritten Version of Theoretical Framework



## Appendix 14: Illustrative Examples

| Concept | Category | Illustrative quotes |
|---|---|---|
| **Sources of Information** | Primary | **Cher:** *"It looks mostly like this one about so I think I'm gonna use red and that colour (purple glitter pen). Yes cos it looks like a dirty colour, a brownish colour."*<br><br>**Cher:** *"I just like thought of things in my head before I came here because when you told me on Friday I was going to come next Friday, I started to think things that I should say."*<br><br>**Darwin (T2):** *"What would you do to save the world?"* **Cher:** *"Even if this wasn't going to happen, if I was a delivery person, I would write a letter to everyone to stay safe and write a note about things you should do to stay safe and don't like get any symptoms to the coronavirus. I could send it as like flyers and photocopy it a bunch of times."*<br><br>**Freya**: *"Some people… on the news they say its fake for some reason but I don't think its fake because lots have people have been getting it so I don't think it's fake."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"Coronavirus... children are gonna learn about it because its spread for about two years and it still affects lots of people's lives and they might die very easily by coronavirus."*<br><br>**Ivan**: *"Is there a way to make it go away?"* **Cher**: *"Yes… to social distance and stay away and wear a face mask…*because *I've seen most people wear face masks and also hand sanitiser… also search Google on how to keep how to keep safe from coronavirus."*<br><br>**Ruslan:** "*Why did you draw him [Boris Johnson]?"* **Nimai:** *"Because he's the one who's putting all the pandemics in and who's putting us in lockdown. So basically, we're free right now. But what if - in another two days we're not – we're just sitting in our seats at home".* **R:** "*He is the one that making all the decisions of putting us in lockdown".* **N:** *"Yeah he is. Not the Queen who normally makes the rules... But this time Boris Johnson is the only one who's putting the rules for the pandemic lockdown".* **R:** *"The pandemic is the ones that he's making".* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | **Lizzie:** *"Do you think… the paper. I touch the paper and I'm ill. And I have Covid. Do you think the paper has Covid and it can sneeze or no?"* **Jimi:** *"No because it's not a human being (laughing). It can't talk, it can't drop things, it can't hold things, it doesn't act like…"* |
| | Secondary | **Albie:** *"Green because it's ugly and dirty…"* **Darwin:** *"How do you know it's green?"* **A**: *"Cos I watch it on the news and when I've seen it on the news, it's green... I saw a lot of pictures and it was always green… I used to research a lot of coronavirus… My granddad told me… his friend had coronavirus."*<br><br>**Cher:** *"Well I always see that shape on television and it always starts with Covid so...".*<br><br>**Cher (T2)***: "You need to use Google cos you can like search up ways to keep safe and ways to keep healthy and also to not ... not to be able to like go to other peoples' houses, you can travel to their houses with a face mask, you can buy a face mask online, any design you like."*<br><br>**Cher (T2):** "*He's telling us things to do and things to not do. It can really help if you watch the news like most of the times to see what Boris Johnson has to say, to watch the live ones."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"Whenever I go on the news, I sometimes see like people doing it in white and red."*<br><br>**Jimi:** *"Well I learned a lot in class, my mum tells me something and sometimes when my mum is taking her shower, she listens to the news and I hear a tiny bit about the Coronavirus… They say mostly about what I don't really know, like words that I don't know... like Newsround"*<br><br>**Ruslan:** *"Red cos its always red on the pictures in news and Google."* |
| | Real and Fake | **Aleeza:** *"You said that some people on the news say it's fake for some reason but you don't think it's fake."*<br>**Freya:** "*Yeah, like, like, like they react like its nothing like it's not powerful but actually it's really powerful because it can kill some people and make them pass away… but I do think it's real because I got it once but it wasn't really that bad… Quite a lot of people think it's not really that like real, so they don't really wash their hands before lunch, and then they might get Coronavirus and then they think 'Why didn't I wash my hands?' And then they're gonna be like – 'Okay now coronavirus is real'."* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | **Freya:** *"The bad people is like the media and the good people are the people who think that COVID is real. Some people think it's real, some people think it's fake."*<br><br>**Aleeza:** *"You drew this picture and said that I feel sad because they can be really nice people. So why do you only nice people get Covid?"* **Freya:** *"Everybody was saying COVID exists. And then people say that, um, sometimes when I watch the news with my granddad and then it says Coronavirus was fake... the news say that the Coronavirus is fake".* **A:** *"Why does the news say its fake?"* **F:** "*Maybe because they thought, 'Because I don't have it yet and I haven't been washing my hands so Covid doesn't exist'... Sometimes they talk about COVID and say how much people have passed away. And say like, if the pressure is going higher or lower… like if it's getting easier to get people to have it or if it's harder for people to have it*." |
| **Breaking Through** | Mental Health | **Darwin:** *"Why was online learning really hard?"* **Albie:** *"Because we couldn't learn that much at my house, it was really hard."*<br><br>**Cher:** *"Because in coronavirus you don't really get to see people. You don't really get to see people that you love. And you'll miss them very much and then you'll start to feel upset that you'll never be able to see them."* **Ivan:** *"And is that true that you can never see them?"* **C**: *"Only if people start to stay safe and do the stuff that is more... that's more appropriate to do like wash your hands. And then you'll maybe get to see them one day."*<br>**Cher**: *"Staying in bed, hoping that they won't like go out anywhere and expect any door knocks on the door for like … if someone special comes they'll just ignore the door and stay in bed. They'll think if you stay in bed it'll help."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"And I don't like having lockdowns cos we can't go school and we have to do online learning and it's hard to do online learning because there's nobody to help you. And if you're older then there's still nobody to help you. If you're older like in another school... like not in a primary school but like in a year 7 school then I think it was better. (drawing) – Done. It was very boring because we couldn't get help in the time in school. And then if you're at home... and then also, if you're a key worker, I was a key worker, then you had to go there - it was boring because we couldn't go with our friends."* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | **Freya** (talking about the girl in her picture): *"She has more feelings, but she's sad but like but like she like is okay because she thinks I can just have some hand gel and then I will be okay. And they won't have COVID. But she's sad because she doesn't know if the hand gel secretly has COVID."*<br><br>**Lizzie (T2):** *"Are you still sad that your mum got COVID?"* **Jimi:** *"No because I'm not getting it again and again. I've only got it once."* **L:** *"Can you get it again?"* **J:** *"Yes but kind of rarely because your body first tries to fight it but you don't know how to fight it yet. But on the second time, you know how to fight it… Your body like has things like bacteria and that fights the Coronavirus away, but sometimes it doesn't do it then they could get Coronavirus again, but the 3rd time is super rare."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"I go to her grave every Sunday cos that's the day she passed away. There's something called the Kida in our religion and I read it."* **Aleeza:** *"What's your religion?"* **F**: *"Islam. It's like a Quran but you have to learn more before… you have to go on the Quran but there might be certain lessons that you don't know about the Quran. The first page of the Kida is the Arabic alphabet. I just finished Kida and my dad said when I finished the Kida I get one big thing and a celebration."*<br>**Freya**: *"We go to their graveyard but there can only be 5 people because we don't want to crowd her grave. And one time actually, the same graveyard with all the other people was on TV once and they actually prayed for the people who died from Covid… We all have our holy books, we have something called Duspy and then you read the words from the Qu'ran on the Duspy… then there's lots of things like… balls on it and then you say each word in the Qu'ran then you move it with your fingers. We can bring that and we can bring other holy things and they buried her stuff, buried her Duspy and they buried her stuff like that she really liked."*<br><br>**Lizzie:** *"How did you feel about COVID when you actually first heard about it? What did you feel?"* **Jimi:** *"I felt like I didn't feel kind of worried actually. I felt like I'm fine. But when it kept on going for like a year then I was a bit more afraid about it, because it kept going on and I didn't know if it would stop."*<br><br>**Jimi:** *"I really didn't think of when I got Covid, I think of when I just felt... I felt like this would go on forever… I was feeling a bit lonely because I was like, in my house doing nothing. It was kind of boring being on my own."* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | **Ivan:** *"You wrote here, 'Don't give up on staying safe', why did you say that?"* **Cher:** *"Because like some people don't think they're gonna be able to live for that long so they just give up on theirselves and they don't take care of their body. I won't survive so I'm just gonna give up but really you can survive it."*<br><br>**Ivan:** *"Have you been doing social distancing, what's that like?"* **Cher**: *"It's kind of hard because sometimes I want... sometimes I want to hug people... when there was no coronavirus, I would hug people if they do something nice. I just have to like pretend to hug them and… thank them and do like a high 5 like that (action)."*<br><br>**Cher:** *"Since you can't really take care of yourself and more people in your family who are like in hospital or looked after, it means you can't visit them because you're worried about your family might also make you sick as well. It makes me feel more supportive for people who need to be looked after and it makes me feel happy that no one gives up on the people who are really sick and you don't give up and say it's too hard to take care of them."*<br><br>**Darwin:** *"How did you feel when you heard that the shops were closing and you weren't able to go to your favourite stores?"* **Albie**: *"I felt really sad cos there was no fun stuff for me."*<br>**Darwin**: *"Why have you drawn a rainy day?"* **Albie:** *"Because when my granddad died, it was a rainy day."*<br><br>**Darwin (T2):** *"What do you think coronavirus is, what is it?"* **Cher:** *"A circle of issues."* **D**: *"Tell me more."* **C:** *"Like issues about people who are not feeling good. And people are upset about what's going around and people who feel not safe about it."*<br><br>**Cher (T2):** *"If you think about Christmas, people will start forgetting about Covid and they will start celebrating more happy things and… say if you like taking a picture and you're not really smiling or looking a bit bored and sad that's why I think everyone should follow the Christmas spirit. It's something that can cure the sadness of earth and make it a brighter place".* **Darwin:** *"You've said lots of things about how Christmas can cure sadness. What else can cure sadness?"* **C:** *"Going to the park daily, having walks, going to a shop with one of your parents to have some fun. Go to a cinema or something to watch a movie or something. Or go to a restaurant and have really nice food."* **D:** *"So are you saying it would make it brighter because of the fun and joy or because of the stars (in the picture)?"* **C:** *"A mix of both because like in the night - sometimes you can like have a mini picnic and look up at the stars and… but I don't really see* |

| | | |
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| | | *the stars often but I think that a little more later in the night, they could come and there would be a lot more spirit to look at the stars. Also go outside and look at the fireworks."* |
| | Good vs. Evil | **Aleeza:** *"So how does it make you feel that people are dying every day from Covid?"* Freya: *"I feel sad because they can be really nice people. Then more bad people will come and there will be less good people. The world will be bad and then the people who die from Covid might not have been throwing rubbish on the floor and then the people who are coming now are probably excited to throw rubbish on the floor".*<br><br>**Freya:** *"(coat picture) Cos she doesn't want to be a liar. She wants to be honest cos she doesn't like her. And then the girl says 'Here, your coat' and then she says, 'Thank you'. And then the girl says, 'But how did you know where it was?' 'I hid it so you will get Covid but now I feel bad'."*<br>**Freya:** "*We just go to the graveyard for a few hours. And one time, my grandma's graveyard went on the TV and they prayed for the people and Covid and they prayed for my grandpa."*<br><br>**Cher:** *"You have to protect us, the children, and that's really important to them, because children are important because they'll turn into grown ups and if you don't have children, you won't have any grown ups. All the grown ups will die and then they'll be nothing else on the planet except animals, plants, insects."*<br><br>**Jimi:** *"I could even have like some superheroes like saving the town from Coronavirus."*<br><br>**Aleeza (T2):** *"You said that this is COVID-19 - I think this one and this one. There's two COVID-19s - the small one and the big one is this one."* Freya: *"Because they want the bad people to get the big contagious one because the big one is like more contagious but for the good people they want the small Covid because the small Covid is not that contagious but it is a bit contagious. But not that contagious."* **A:** *"Why would you think that the bad people will be just coming to litter on the floor when the good people die from COVID?"* **F:** *"Cos maybe... If there's like one more nice people left then the bad people, they're the bad people, they throw litter on the floor. So then the last person that slips on the floor and maybe breaks their spine and dies."* |
| **Control** | Covid vs. Us | **Lizzie:** *"How do people fight Covid? Do they punch the Covid to go away?"* **Jimi:** (laughing) *"No because Covid is invisible. Well, you can maybe see it with a microscope so its hardly visible, hardly visible."* |

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| | | **Nimai:** *"Do you want to go help Jimi? He is your best friend."* **Ruslan:** *"I don't know."* **N:** *"Come on, let's help him."* **R**: *"I don't want to cross my bubble and I already have."* **N:** *"Wait, he's not in your bubble?"* **R**: *"No, he is, but you're not in my bubble."* **N**: *"Yeah because… we're allowed to mix bubbles."* **R:** *"Not anymore, it's still COVID."*<br><br>**Jimi**: *"COVID - its army is getting, like getting killed. It's like two armies. Us vs Coronavirus, in every country. And now we're battling it a lot. And we're winning and the Coronavirus is losing. So Coronavirus is dying slowly."*<br><br>**Lizzie (T2):** *"Why does it have a face?"* **Jimi:** *"It's angry cos like it wants to spread more but vaccines and people are killing it."* **L:** *"What would kill it?"* **J:** *"Hand sanitiser… So one thing I'm thinking about is fire. Cos fire kills lots of bacteria. It heats them up so they die so I'm thinking about, with fire, Coronavirus will die. Because my dad once told me the potatoes have germs on them but the germs will cook in the oven and die."*<br><br>**Cher:** *"So I made a list of some stuff that are symptoms of Covid: sneeze cough cold... and to stay safe and feel more safe, you need to have some safety and some braveness and confidence. And to stay safe you have to improvise".* **Ivan**: *"What does that mean, improvise?"* **C:** *"It means that you can... that you can find another way to make something… keep yourself... to keep yourself more busy. Find another way to do something. Sometimes me and my brother like play some board games together. And, and we also go out at the park with my dad and my sister and my brother and sometimes we play some online games. But mostly what we do we just play some board games most of the times."*<br>**Darwin:** *"So if earth was actually like that, like really dark and everything again – how would you stop it?"*<br>**Cher:** *"I would stop it by going to the people who are making the world like miserable and tell them not to give up on yourself, join the Christmas spirit and yeah... that's what I would do."*<br>**Freya:** *"It's very big cos it, like, spreads around a lot. And like everywhere, but around everywhere. And like, like, people had to make handwash for like, the Coronavirus, and now lots of people are scared of it. So they always wash their hands after they go to toilet maybe. And when they come back from a place they won't stay outside. Like, a lot of people always get it and they passed away sometimes, but some people actually like recover from it. And lots of dirt, like, comes. So people clean their houses so they don't get dust, dirt like bacteria on their stuff in their room or house. And so they like always clean the handles of their doors and clean a lot of things and polish them and make them shiny because they don't want any bacteria* |

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| | | *on it. Because when they touch it, they don't want the bacteria and then the bacteria won't go on them so they clean it."* |
| | Take Over | **Rulan:** *"There's corona everywhere and it's sad. I won't be able to see my family. It is everywhere there."*<br>**Albie:** *"I wanted to travel to a lot of places but we couldn't because everyone had coronavirus."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"Little coronavirus coming out of the big giant coronavirus. The coronavirus is saying 'Come back I want to be stronger'. And then the dustballs are coming out to help me to not get Covid. And more and more and more are coming out. And then the coronavirus is gonna get smaller like this. And all the red dustballs come out and there's only blue dustballs. And then it got really really really small so then now the Covid19 is like this (points) cos it wanted to help me survive and make me not get Covid. Cos I'm then the last person in the world without Covid. They don't want me to go away cos I'm the last person."*<br>**Freya (T2):** "*Well, Coronavirus is not really gone yet. I'm feeling happier because the sickness is not going spreading lots more and… It's starting to be better because not many people are getting it right now and I'm feeling happier."*<br>**Darwin (T2):** *"Have you heard about these vaccines? Apparently it's a new thing coming out that would be incredible."* **Cher:** *"Yeah I know about them. I've heard about the pill. I'm not sure if that's a hospital or something but as some things have changed, you have to like get the vaccine before you go on the plane and travel to a different country."* **D:** *"What does the vaccine do?"* **C:** *"It helps you get less chance of catching Covid cos you don't want to spread any germs on the plane to other people. And also some places around the world are actually blocked off because of Covid before but now some are slowly starting to open."* **D:** *"How come they can do that?"* **C:** *"Because people start like washing their hands and being more responsible."* |
| | Instructions | **Cher:** *"I'm drawing around the circle of sadness about… he's worried that he might catch the virus because… because he's feeling like he's doing something wrong like forgetting to wash his hands and use hand sanitiser when he comes back from anyone where he goes to."*<br><br>**Cher***: "Houses are the safest place. The house is very important because it makes you feel safe and protected from Covid. Because houses can't get Covid."*<br>**Cher:** *"Children at school should not be worried if they catch the germs because all you have to do is keep following the instructions of being able to keep safe like wash your hands, sing happy birthday song, twice, and wash your hands for 30 seconds."* |

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| | | **Ivan:** *"Can you have a place where people are but have no Covid?"* **Cher:** *"Yeah because some countries actually take care of themselves and wash their hands for 30 seconds and do all of that important stuff."* **I:** *"But in the UK is that not happening?"* **C**: *"No some people don't even care about themselves. And they think that if you don't eat then it would help but it would make it more worse."* **I:** *"So people have different ideas of how to look after themselves? People who don't care about their bodies, they are more likely to get Covid?"* **C:** *"Yeah".*<br><br>**Darwin (T2):** *"Now how are you feeling about it?"* **Cher:** *"I'm not feeling so worried about it because of course I follow... I wash my hands for 30 seconds and also I make sure I eat something balanced for breakfast so I can be even more safe. And also sometimes I go out for fresh air or go on a walk to a grass area, not really like a public park."*<br><br>**Jimi:** *"Covid has gone down by a lot because people are following the rules. Like there's like a maximum of 6 people – I'm not really sure - a party or something. I think that's the max. I think you're allowed a few more people than six."*<br>**Freya:** *"If if you have a fan and a bin next to your bed, the fan will get dustballs and then blow it on your bed and then it will make… then it might touch a place on your body and then you will get Covid-19 and so… all of this picture means about Covid-19 and dirt. And lots of dirty things. And there will be… handgel. Make a bottle of handgel because handgel is very important. Lots of handgel. It means about handgel and taps. So you're going to…Lots of water and soap to make bubbles of soap. Bubbles have soap and water. Bubble bubble bubble bubble and bubble. And one more – bubble. Big bubble. And she's also saying, 'wash your hands'. And she's also saying, 'wash…' done."* |
| **Domino Effect** | Spread of Covid-19 | **Jimi:** *"Coronavirus is very strong. Yeah, it can spread like if you have Coronavirus it can spread everywhere. If you go next to someone or you have Coronavirus and you're going to sit next to someone or you sneeze next to somebody."*<br>**Cher**: *"It started from China. I think what happened is because… some people didn't start washing their hands before they eat and germs go into their mouth. And some people started traveling to different countries because they know how it spreaded and maybe they had Covid but they don't know they're going to make it more bad. It's not in all of the countries. I think it's mostly the UK and maybe, I'm not sure, maybe America or something and Canada. I know some countries that definitely don't really have coronavirus – I'm* |

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| | | *not sure if the Arctic has it as not many people go back because it's really cold and I'm not even sure if you can even cough cos its really cold. If you can catch a cold and start sneezing."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"I know that it is like a sickness that people get from foreign country and its very dangerous and it spreads to lots of other people…* Viruses go to other people and they spread it to them and make them sick and flus can spread to other people if they are near to them"<br><br>**Freya:** *"I'm gonna make rain because when there was lots of Covid there was lots of rain cos Covid is from the sky…Yeah because I think that people mostly get it at nighttime."* **Aleeza:** *"At night? When they're sleeping?"* **F:** *"Because it's going to be in their bed and it comes… I think you mostly get it at nighttime now because when you're sleeping, there could be Covid-19 coming in your bed. If you have a bin next to your bed like me then if you have a fan too then the fan can make the dust go on your bed and it will make Covid19… Actually, now I think they have Covid in the morning because you can get Covid in the morning too but I think it's mostly morning because… you know…"* **A:** *"But Covid comes at any time of the day?"* **F:** *"I know but I think it mostly comes at morning because... most people don't have showers then their breakfast. Most people don't wash their hands and have breakfast so then they'll have dirty hands and when they eat it and then…You're spreading the food if you touch it. Then if you don't want to eat it then you bite into it then you ask someone if you want to eat it then they say yes then they will get Covid too. And Covid is contagious so it spreads a lot."*<br><br>**Nimai:** *"COVID Is everyone in the world, so everyone has it*?" **Ruslan:** *"Some of them".* **N:** *"Which ones?"* **R***: "The ones that stand near each other."* **N:** *"Do you think Covid can spread through animals just like humans?* **R:** "*Yes animals and humans are kind of same thing so maybe they can spread."*<br><br>**Freya:** *This is the Covid-19, there's 2 Covid-19s: there's this one - the small one. The big one. This is the person, and all of the other persons made a Covid-19 and its saying 'I'm contagious' and this one is the only left and she has hands in her pockets so she doesn't get it. Then there's lots of rain, then there's sun side and then moon side. There's butterflies on the sun side and fireflies on other side. There's rain to make the Covid-19 stronger… And in the morning butterflies yeah, they can go in dirt and stuff and butterflies can go on flowers and the flowers might be dirty and the butterflies might go on you and they might make Covid-19... because butterflies and bees go on flowers and flowers might be dirty so then the butterflies and bees might go on us or they might sting us and then we will get Covid… And in nighttime, the Covid can be* |

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| | | *contagious because fireflies - they can go in your bed and they can crawl in your bed and then they can just go on you when you're in there. And butterflies are the same thing as the bees that they can go on flowers and the flowers will be dirty and then so they make Covid.*"<br><br>**Aleeza:** *"Do you think animals, plants and insects can get COVID?"* **Freya:** *"Yes pets can. Plants I don't really know."* **A**: *"How do you think insects get COVID?"* **F:** "*Well Coronavirus is like everywhere, on the floor. Up in the sky. On trees and bugs crawl on the floor. Or maybe they fly and they might get Coronavirus. If a bug flies in front in front of a human's face and the human coughs on it then they get Coronavirus (laughing). Bugs are like humans, they can catch a cold, they can catch Coronavirus and if the other bugs get coronavirus then they will spread it to other bugs and other bugs and other insects."* **A:** *"So do you think If I've got Covid and I had a dog right here and I went (coughs) coughed on it and it runs away and then it has COVID, do you think that spreads to humans? Or do you just think it spread to dogs or animals?"* **F**: *"Well, if humans spreads something to its pet or insects, then it will just... it can spread it to you too. Or anybody else because dogs can spread…like allergies. My dad has an allergy of cats. And it's about cat dander and he's allergic to cats so the cat gives him an (inaudible) and he sneezes like a bit."* **A:** *"Right so do you think dogs and cats could get allergies from humans?"* **F:** *"No, because humans don't have like allergies that they can spread. We only have skin, hair and... that doesn't really spread to animals."*<br><br>**Darwin:** *"Who coughs and sneezes?"* **Albie**: *"Everyone in the world".* **D**: *"So Covid is everyone in the world?"* **A:** *"Yeah:"* |
| | Health, Sickness and Dying | **Ruslan:** *"Covid is not really meaning to me much because COVID is dying slowly and slowly and slowly."*<br>**Nimai:** *"So if it dies slowly does that mean? Is it all gone now?"* **R:** *"No, it's not gone now. Like lots of it dies in a day, but not all of it day to day. Just a bit of it."*<br>**Cher:** *"I feel kind of sorry for some people who've lost their loved ones because maybe it's their most favourite of people to like visit a lot."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"Maybe they get Covid so then they can see what it's like, for the bad people. And then they die. So they take a test, it's negative and they just found out it's a little bit sick… And also if you have asthma then you'll be … you're coughing when you have asthma and if you're coughing Covid19, then there's lots and lots of coughing so you might die if you have asthma."*<br>**Freya:** *"If you're older you're more weak than children so you can't control the Covid-19.. the Covid-19 is too strong for the old people who are a bit weak. Even my grandma has to wait for Covid and she was in* |

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| | | *hospital for 2 weeks. And me and my sister had Covid too so we got the stay in her bed with her in her room."* **Aleeza:** *"Do you think you can die from the Coronavirus**?"*** **F:** *"No. Because I haven't heard on news that children are dying from the Coronavirus."*<br>**Freya:** *"Lots of different things happened to each people who get COVID. When I had COVID It was okay. It was just a sore throat and coughs and I just needed to have a little bit of medicine before night and in the morning. But my grandma's one was very bad. She keeped on coughing and she had a fever. And she had to go hospital and she had to pass away."*<br><br>**Freya:** ***"****Lots of sickness stuff are very contagious and contaminating. My grandma was coughing a lot so my dad took her to the hospital and then… So then she was in hospital for 2 weeks and then she passed away and now on Saturdays and Sundays we go to the graveyard but there's only 5 slots.. only 5 people can come because we don't want to crowd her."*<br>**Freya:** *"Because then if you eat the food and your hands are dirty then you're eating bacteria. And then you'll get really sick and you might have a cough. Coronavirus has some symptoms it's very different, some people can have a cough and some people have a sore throat or fever yeah. You mostly get it in night time because like the Covid, it secretly goes in your body and then you won't know. and then it will go in your body and it will settle in different parts of your body like your lungs and then they will stay in there in the nighttime and then in the morning time, you feel a little bit sick, and you have some tea/peace? and then you get a test and then you find out you have Covid".*<br>**Albie:** *"Covid is way worse [than a cold]. That's what my grandad had, he had covid and then he died."*<br>**Darwin:** *"So why do you think it's a bad virus?"* **Albie:** *"It can get a lot of kids get sick and die. And adults."*<br><br>**Jimi:** *"Well, she was next to me while, I came down from my bed. And I just, I just woke up and told my mum and dad I was wheezy**.** And then my mum and dad were like, like running and helping me. The NHS had to come, and they said I'll be alright in a few hours or a few days. And then in the morning, I went back to sleep then I woke up in the morning. I was feeling better and my mum and dad were fine…. I had to go down to my mum's room and I had to stay there for a while you and my mum called the NHS – wait – first she gave me some medicine and it didn't help. Then she gave me an asthma pump that I had when I was little, it still didn't work. Then my mom called the NHS and then they said it would be fine."* |

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| | | **Jimi:** *"I think that it's… children can die from it but only if it's really really really bad but children are more strong than older people cos old people are a bit weak and they can't really fight it well but children can fight it more well because they're more stronger."*<br><br>**Ruslan:** *"One thing I know that's bad about it is that there's a virus that can kill you. My dad, my mum's dad has it. And everyone in my house had it. And I have it… I don't really like it because it can do bad stuff to me. Like, make taste to go away. Make your taste go away. Because it made my taste go funny when I have cereal."*<br><br>**Aleeza:** *"What's it like right now?"* **Freya:** *"It's like a bit lower now. Less people have been dying in England and like less people have been getting it. And most of the people have been recovering because maybe their symptoms weren't that bad, but some of the other people's symptoms were a bit more badder. And like sometimes it depends on the symptoms for your Covid. If you die like, so when you die, it depends on the symptoms that you have. Like if it's like a fever then I think you may be like dying but if it feels a bit low the fever and a little bit of a sore throat and coughing and sneezing then I think you might be able to recover."* |
| **Changes** | Stayed the Same | **Jimi:** *"Well, we're keeping very hygienic. It would be very nice if we kept very hygienic like this time now."*<br><br>**Aleeza:** *"Did they leave the school?"* **Freya:** *"Not forever – they were to Kyrgyzstan because her grandma had cancer but she's coming back in September. My family is back together now."* |
| | Different | **Ruslan:** *"We can't go on school trips anymore. There used to be lots. One time we went to the farm but now we have no school trips. We had one but it was very small and we couldn't have packed lunch."*<br><br>**Freya:** *"Lots of shops are closing that I like. Like Blue Whale. I think its closed now but it was very busy before… Now they do 2 metres and then now I think they're closed… Schools are being closed and we've been having lockdowns. Boris Johnson says we been having lockdowns…[School] changed too much so I didn't like it and I wanted to go back home. Because my friends weren't there because I am a key worker but my friends aren't key workers so I couldn't go there I didn't want to go there but my dad said I still had to go but [teacher] did lots of activities for us because it was turning into December."*<br><br>**Aleeza:** *"What do you think about social distancing?"* **Freya:** *"It's very boring because then we can't do secrets, you don't whisper in their ear secrets."* **A**: *"Do you wish that never happened?"* **F:** *"I wish that never* |

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| | | *happened. Because it's affecting like everybody's lives. Loads of people have got Coronavirus and might die very easily by the Coronavirus."*<br><br>**Jimi:** *"And we can't travel as well. And when I was going to Hungary for Christmas, then it was cancelled. So then we decided to go somewhere else and it was still cancelled. So we had to stay at our friends."*<br><br>**Jimi:** *"And people are just buying everything and they're going crazy in shops*." **Lizzie:** *"Now?"* **J**: "*Well a long time ago because they thought you're not allowed to work from your house to everything. Then go abroad just like everything everything. They're like, buy this, buy that ahhhhh."* **L:** *"Were there a lot of people buying, going crazy buying loads of stuff*?" **J:** *"Yes, because loads of aisles were empty, like with nothing. The shops had a lot of money to buy new stuff. Yeah, but then they were just getting more stuff cos people were buying more stuff, more stuff."*<br><br>**Darwin:** *"Do you really hate coronavirus and don't want it to be here. Or do you think it's changing the world and making it better?"* **Albie:** *"Changing the world because it makes a lot of people sick and people die."*<br><br>**Jimi (T2):** *"Before the Coronavirus, I was like, Yay, I can play all day. Now, I can't remember those things. I don't know. Like what did I do before coronavirus? I don't know."* Lizzie: *"You've kind of forgotten what it was like beforehand."* L: *"Because it has been one and a three quarter years."*<br><br>**Cher:** *"People losing some of their families and not being able to stay with their grandparents and loved ones because they have to like keep inside because they don't want to catch the germs."* |

## Appendix 15: Discussion of Cher's Drawing

**Darwin:** *"I remember she said 2 people live in that house and its really lonely. I can't remember what the circle thing is with spikes around it. It was a really good one when she explained to me."*

**Lizzie***: "I think it's a loop too. She might have felt lonely and sad about Covid, staying in her home and it just keeps on going, repeating, sadness."*

**Nimai:** *"I don't think that's a loop of sadness. Since she said Covid is lightish greenish, they're the same colour so it's probably Corona spreading then this turns into sadness and more sadness. Wait, look! This is blue, it's probably sadness. And Coronavirus represents sadness along with the blue thing."*

**Darwin:** *"I think I know why green is around the sadness. Coronavirus is coming in and squashing the sadness so it's really small."*

**Lizzie:** *"I agree with that, I think it's Covid. I think it could be getting bigger cos Covid makes it even more sad."*

**Nimai:** *"Building onto Lizzie, it's the opposite of what Darwin said. I'm saying I disagree with you because it's probably letting the sadness expand so it has more space so sadness can get to all areas of sadness. This middle is nothing, this is the sad side, it expands all the way including the happy bit."*

**Darwin:** *"Maybe the lines on the outside are the happiness and the sadness is trying to get through the barrier of Covid."*

**Lizzie:** *"Yeah!"*

**Nimai:** *"I don't think so. These things are representing all the things trying to get in the body… if you look at comical books they bang onto a wall. I don't think happiness will try and beat Covid because Covid has beaten happiness. It's trying to turn happiness into sadness."*

**Darwin:** ***"There's a reason why I disagree. Because what I mean is about sadness going through the barrier. The sadness has to get to the happiness so we can just forget about Corona. The corona barrier, not the happy barrier. The sadness is breaking through the Corona barrier so they can get to the happiness."***

**Lizzie**: "*I disagree because what I think her drawing is – the barrier is the happiness trying to keep her happy and this line right here is the Covid – what represents sadness – and it tries to fight it."*

**Nimai:** *"Both of our opinions are actually linked. Should I tell you how? Me saying that Corona is trying to break through the barrier that is trying to push it, they're probably fighting each other."*

## Appendix 16: Databases and Search Terms used for Focused Search

| Database | Filters applied | No. papers |
|---|---|---|
| PsycInfo | Subject Age childhood (birth-12 yrs)<br>English language | 89 |
| Academic Search Ultimate | English language | 162 |
| Child Development & Adolescent Studies | English language | 39 |
| Education Research Complete | English language | 100 |
| SCOPUS | English language | 140 |

**Example search terms**

covid-19 AND child AND (“view” OR “perspective” OR “experiences”)

DE "COVID-19" AND DE "child*" and (perspectives OR experiences)

"COVID-19" AND DE "child*" and (perspectives OR experiences OR view)

covid-19 AND (“children’s view” OR “children’s perspectives”)

"COVID-19" AND DE "child*" and (perspectives OR experiences)

## Appendix 17: Full References for Studies Included in Focused Literature Review


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## Appendix 18: Summary of Reviewed Papers

| Study | Location | Respondents | Methodology and data | Findings |
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| Abdulah et al. (2021) | Iraq (Kurdistan) | N=15<br>Age 6-13 | April 2020 - May 2020<br>Drawings about reflections of negative emotions felt during Covid-19 pandemic<br>Qualitative content analysis | Three themes: 1) fear of infection in children; 2) safety perceptions during home confinement; 3) relationship of children with siblings and parents |
| Alter (2022) | Israel (Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, small communities in southern Israel) | N=50<br>Age 3-6 | March 2021 (after the end of 3rd lockdown in Israel)<br>Semi-structured interviews conducted with a playing cards method<br>Six-stage thematic analysis | Three main categories: 1) sibling relationships; 2) helping parents; 3) ability to be alone |
| Amrutha et al. (2021) | India | N=43<br>Age 9-11 | May 2020<br>Artwork with descriptive notes<br>Thematic analysis | 21 themes, clustered into six groups: 1) positive experiences; 2) negative experiences and fears; 3) safety; 4) gratitude and hope; 5) faith; 6) other |
| Bray et al. (2021) | 6 countries (UK, Sweden, Brazil, Spain, Canada, Australia) | N=390<br>Aged 7-12 | April 2020 – June 2020<br>Online survey for children and parents/caregivers with open/ closed/ word association questions, drawing<br>Open text data analysed using qualitative content analysis | Majority of children accessed Covid-19 information via parents (bar Sweden – which was school); sources by which children accessed information largely matched their preference (generally through parents); children felt they had good levels of understanding about Covid-19 (its spread, mortality rates, its danger); children most wanted to know when the pandemic would end |

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| Buchanan et al. (2022) | England | N=23<br>Age 10-11 'lower-attaining' children | Post-March 2021 but not clear when<br>63 interviews facilitated using activities including drawing, sentence starters, 'blob tree' figures, rating scales<br>Thematic analysis – initially by hand then using Nvivo software | 36 codes derived then framed by Seligman's PERMA model: negative feelings and experience of school closures; new appreciation for school following return; concern about lost learning |
| Children's Commissioner for Wales | Wales | <u>Age 7-11:</u><br>N=11,815 in May'20<br>N=8832 in Jan'21<br><u>Age 3-7:</u><br>232 pictures in May'20<br>221 pictures in Jan'21 | May 2020 and January 2021<br>Online survey including free-text responses and optional picture activity (completed by age 3-7)<br>Content analysis using a coding frame | Missing friends was top response for how lives had changed and rules had impacted how they felt; 'Feelings' identified as a theme; children from BAME backgrounds were more likely to feel lonely, less safe and more worried about food security; more negative feelings reported in Jan'21 compared with May'20 |
| Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021) | 22 countries across 3 continents (Africa, Europe and South America) | N=6867<br>Age 8-17 | Participatory methodology: young people worked in teams to conduct research<br>57 reports generated<br>Scientific reading of reports using Atlas.ti 9 software, inductive analysis and memoing | 5 categories: 1) thinking about school closure (for or against); 2) thinking about alternative teaching (processes, adapting, modifying routines); 3) thinking about teachers; 4) thinking about families (positive and negative experiences); 5) thinking about the return to school |
| Kirsch et al. (2021) | 3 European countries (Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland) | N=1773<br>Age 6-16 | May 2020 - July 2020<br>Online questionnaire 22 questions (of 68 for wider research), Likert scale<br>Open-ended questions analysed using content analysis | Perspectives of distance education, learning experience and school satisfaction varied across countries. Access to stable technology was significant factor in motivating learners; understanding curricular content online |

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| | | | | and with limited teacher feedback was difficult across countries |
| Larivière-Bastien et al. (2022) | Canada (Quebec) | N=67<br>Age 5-14 | May 2020 - June 2020<br>Semi-structured interviews<br>Thematic qualitative analysis | 3 main themes: 1) the irreplaceable nature of friendship; 2) the unsuspected benefits of school for socialisation and 3) the limits and possibilities of virtual socialisation |
| Lundy et al. (2021) | 137 different national contexts across five UN regions | N= 26,258<br>Age 8-17 | May 2020 - July 2020<br>Online survey: 61 (mainly closed-end) questions, 4 open-ended questions; 8-10 year olds had an abbreviated version<br>Children consulted on data collection measures and involved in analysis | 12 thematic briefings/summaries discussed through lens of four principles of UNCRC: 1) non-discrimination; 2) best interests; 3) life, survival and development; 4) right to be heard |
| Manyukhina (2021) | England | N=12<br>Age 6-12 | Autumn term 2020<br>Online interviews with limited structure<br>Analytic technique not described (working paper) | Key findings: 1) Children preferred learning at school than home due to social opportunities and teacher presence/feedback; 2) artistic and other creative pursuits at home supported wellbeing and to develop independence |
| Popoola and Sivers (2021) | UK (across 12 Local Authorities) | N= 6172<br>Primary/ secondary/ college age | May 2020 – July 2020 and October 2020 - May 2021<br>Survey collecting quantitative data and qualitative commentary<br>Reflexive thematic analysis on local data followed by Framework Model Approach to analyse combined dataset | 6 key themes: 1) safety; 2) physical environment; 3) learning experiences; 4) relationships; 5) emotional wellbeing; 6) inequalities |

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| Rios et al. (2021) | Portugal (5 schools across rural and urban contexts) | N=90<br>Age 4-13 | Observation of environmental education classes and online focus groups: discussion focused on participants' experiences with nature during the pandemic<br>Thematic analysis | Three overarching themes: 1) emotions regarding nature and the pandemic; 2) environmental injustice and access to nature during the pandemic; 3) intergenerational environmental injustice |
| Smith et al. 2022 | Aotearoa New Zealand | N=192<br>Age 5-13 | July – October 2020<br>Online survey: respondents could upload drawings, songs, photos, stories<br>Inductive content analysis | 5 categories identified: 'car-less' neighbourhoods positively impacted well-being; 2) community activities brought opportunity to connect; 3) children valued and benefited from natural environments; 4) children benefited from slowing down and spending time with one another; 5) creatively sustaining social connections |
| Souza et al. (2020) | Southern Brazil (Santa Catarina) | N=10<br>Age 7-10 | July 2020<br>Freirean "culture circle" online: thematic investigation; coding and decoding; critical unveiling | 2 generative themes: 1) the good things of the Covid-19 pandemic; 2) the "cannots" of the pandemic |
| Swank et al. (2021) | United States of America (across 5 states) | N=12<br>Age 6-15 | April 2020<br>Interviews conducted online<br>Phenomenological qualitative analysis | 4 themes identified: 1) change in school environment; 2) connection; 3) creative celebrations; 4) hope |
| Thompson et al. (2021) | England and Wales | N=18<br>Age 7-11 | May 2020- July 2020<br>Semi-structured online interviews with participatory drawings<br>Thematic analysis | 3 themes identified: 1) COVID-19 as a deadly contagion; 2) fears and sadness; 3) social responsibility and opportunities to respond positively |

## Appendix 19: Key Strengths and Limitations of Reviewed Papers

| Study | Strengths | Limitations |
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| Abdulah et al. (2021) | Clear research rationale and research aims<br>Clear justification for use of arts-based methods to support children to express themselves<br>Ethical approval obtained<br>Credentials of authors stated and are highlighted to be relevant to the study<br>Themes supported by wide range of children's quotes<br>Clear demographics of participants – age, gender, descriptions of each drawings | Method of introducing study to participants may have primed participants biased what data were collected<br>No elaboration on how researcher bias was avoided, despite its mention<br>Unclear how themes for analysis were generated beyond a mention of qualitative content analysis<br>Quotes do not always seem to align with themes or findings (e.g., children use neutral language, but quotes are put under 'fear of infection')<br>Potentially harmful implications when determining that children involved in study were showing signs of PTSD (Criterion B in DSM-IV) |
| Alter (2021) | Clear research rationale: research is situated in important context for when it took place (beginning of vaccination campaign)<br>Appropriate research methodology to support eliciting views of understudied population<br>Ethical considerations described throughout<br>Clear data analysis procedures with justification | Unclear how recruitment was undertaken<br>Families from medium-high SES households, representative of only more privileged families<br>Adult-led analysis |
| Amrutha et al. (2021) | Direct quotes provided to illustrate points<br>Rationale for utilising creative means of data collection, providing children with different ways of contributing knowledge<br>Transformational possibilities of participation discussed | Short communication paper means lack of clarity on aspects of design<br>Unclear what is meant by 'healthy children' as participants<br>Unclear methods by which paintings were rejected |

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| | | Unclear how themes for analysis were generated beyond a mention of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software<br>Little information about ethical implications of children's participation |
| Bray et al. (2021) | Clear research rationale<br>Survey pre-tested with input from young people<br>Clear recruitment strategy outlined<br>Clear ethical considerations described in detail<br>Explicitly describes how findings can contribute to strategies moving forward | Self-selecting participants, convenience sampling means sample may lack representation<br>Lack of demographic characteristics e.g., SES, SEND<br>Use of online survey means little quality control over how it is conducted e.g., parent influencing child's self-report |
| Buchanan et al. (2022) | Interviews with group who are underrepresented in academic research<br>Creative and diverse means by which children can contribute their views<br>Clear and specific ethical considerations relevant to the group<br>Relationships and knowledge of children given they are taking part in 5-year long project<br>Transformative possibilities outlined based on children's responses | No information on SES<br>Unclear at which point PERMA model was chosen to frame responses (this would influence how data were analysed)<br>Adult-led analysis brought some interpretation that didn't seem to be justified by data e.g., being part of something bigger than themselves (may be from having grown to know the children) |
| Children's Commissioner for Wales (2021) | Adapted survey for younger age groups<br>Pilot study conducted where children were consulted in changes to formatting/wording<br>Ethical considerations include need for actionable response based on children's views | Self-selecting participants, convenience sampling means sample may lack representation<br>Online only (as above)<br>While survey was adapted for younger age group, some questions only posed to age 12-18 could capably have been answered by younger ages |

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| | Encouraged creative means of knowledge contribution | Unclear exactly what themes were identified, extent to which data-driven or driven by children's rights framework applied by authors |
| Jiménez Hernández et al. (2021) | Ethics clearly outlined<br>Clear methodology<br>Child-centred methodology: young people as active researchers<br>Methodology allowed for interpretation of large amounts of data while preserving testimonies<br>Inclusion of quotes from reports to justify analysis<br>Creation of participation network for young people brings transformative possibilities | Researchers encouraged various data collection methods but all relied on verbal means<br>Mention of 'most vulnerable' children not being able to participate but not explained further<br>Responses (therefore categories) seem to link directly to sample questions rather than providing more holistic sense of children's experiences<br>No mention of power dynamics or implications of age difference within teams |
| Kirsch et al. (2021) | Literature review provided comprehensive explanation of existing evidence base<br>Clear research timeline and recruitment strategy<br>Ethical considerations outlined<br>Clear data analysis procedures<br>Inter-rater reliability established after support from third trained coder – acceptable inter-rater reliability for coding process achieved | Occupation status of caregiver used as proxy for SES, has its limitations<br>Families from high SES households involved, findings may only be representative of more privileged families<br>Authors discuss ethical obligation to act on children's voices but do not suggest how they may do so |
| Larivière-Bastien et al. (2022) | Clear recruitment strategy and interview guide provided<br>Discussion of how researcher adapted approach to suit needs of interviewee e.g., level of understanding, using humour<br>Mechanisms in place to mitigate bias e.g., consulting with research team when coding | Some uncertainty around research rationale<br>Limited discussion around ethical considerations<br>Rationale for some exclusion criteria not clear (excluding those with 'severe neurodevelopmental disorder or brain injury') |

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| | Direct quotes provided to illustrate points | Sample lack ethnic diversity (~75% Caucasian) with the rest under 'Other' or 'Unknown'; majority from medium-high socio-economic households<br>No recognition of researcher influence on data collection and analysis and impact this may have had<br>Though themes validated with one child, no information for how this was completed and possible power implications |
| Lundy et al. (2021) | Clear research rationale and study focus<br>Diverse group of young people surveyed<br>Survey co-designed with children, consulted on questions, provided own data<br>Range of open and closed questions<br>Participation increased through distribution of survey across formats, translated into 27 languages<br>Direct quotes from young people representing various age groups and countries<br>Authors outline tangible ways to move forward using children's responses | No information on abbreviated version of questionnaire for 8-10 year old group<br>Lacks representativeness of global child population as predominantly gathered data via digital platforms<br>Unclear how data were analysed beyond use of UNCRC general principles to frame responses<br>Research not yet complete<br>Respondent bias as alluded to by authors – may 'attract respondents who are motivated, already engaged with the issue and therefore willing to take part' (p.266) |
| Manyukhina (2021) | Seemed to use data-driven approach for findings (but methodology does not state this clearly – it is a working paper)<br>Direct quotes from children with age assigned<br>Recommendations derived from children's responses | Still at stage of working report – no peer-review etc.<br>Self-selecting sampling strategy may bias towards more privileged families (as described)<br>Parent always present in room may have impacted children's expression<br>Relied on verbal means of communication from participants |
| Popoola & Sivers (2021) | Clear research timeline, rationale, study focus and theoretical frameworks that guided the project | No age assigned to quotes besides reference to primary/secondary school age<br>Adult-led research design and analysis |

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| | Mechanisms in place to mitigate bias e.g., reflective diary<br>Ethical consideration outlined<br>Participation increased through distribution of survey across formats and forums<br>Data visualisations clearly demonstrate study findings<br>Authors outline tangible ways to move forward using children's responses (questions to guide positive change across education) | No demographic information so not possible to assess for diversity in participant pool |
| Rios et al. (2021) | Clear research rationale and purpose<br>Clear recruitment strategy<br>Ethical considerations clear<br>Illustrative examples provide clarity for findings<br>Disaggregated responses by level of SES<br>Transformational possibilities of participation discussed | Conducted in eco-schools only, not clear why this could not have been widened or if there are plans to do so<br>No age assigned to quotes (perspectives may vary by age)<br>Participatory approaches mentioned but not elaborated, unclear how power differentials were addressed (e.g., through researcher reflexivity during focus group) |
| Smith et al. (2022) | Clear research rationale and purpose<br>Clear recruitment strategy<br>Ethical considerations clear<br>Use of creative means of data collection including poem, songs, stories, drawings, photos<br>Clear data analysis procedures | Authors seem to over-highlight existing research in Findings – this may suggest that their conclusions are less grounded in data and more so reflect extant ideas<br>Online only: may have excluded those who are more comfortable in face-to-face settings and those without technological access<br>Some bias in participation towards those from higher SES areas<br>Possible recall bias as children provided retrospective accounts |
| Souza et al. (2020) | Highly child-led (data generation and analysis) | Participants recruitment via researchers' social network |

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| | Parents asked to withdraw after setting up virtual platform so children could connect and communicate with one another<br>Existing relationships between participants supported efficacy of methods used<br>Clearly outlined procedure<br>Transformative possibilities outlined | Only available to those with stable internet connection to access virtual platform<br>Virtual platform made facilitation difficult for mediator, author states this meant research was less participatory than could have been |
| Swank et al. (2021) | Positionality of researchers explicitly outlined<br>Mechanisms in place to mitigate bias e.g., discussion amongst team about existing attitudes<br>Ethical considerations clearly outlined<br>Clear data analysis procedures<br>Direct quotes provided to illustrate points<br>Authors outline tangible ways to move forward using children's responses | Lack of diversity in participant group (11 of 12 identified as White)<br>No age assigned to quotes<br>Partial convenience sampling means sample may lack representation<br>Interviews conducted online meaning key cues may have been missed<br>Adult-led research design, children's views interpreted by adults, no sense checking |
| Thompson et al. (2021) | Clear interview guide provided<br>Clear, collaborative data analysis procedures<br>Ethical considerations clear<br>Direct quotes provided to illustrate points and provide clarity for findings<br>Though research design is adult-led, authors frequently return to transcripts and children's quotes when interpreting findings<br>Child-centred discussion of findings, focused on children's capabilities | Narrow recruitment strategy (advertised on two groups on Facebook)<br>Lack of diversity in participant group<br>Interviews conducted online meaning key cues may have been missed, drawings hindered by online format<br>Presence and proximity of parents may have influenced responses<br>Authors view the research taking place during first wave of pandemic as a limitation, rather than seeing it as knowledge situated in time |

## Appendix 20: Research Diary Extract - Adults as Gatekeepers

*15.07.21*

*The more I think about participatory approaches the more I become dissatisifed with the research. Like my supervisor said, dilemmas are thrown up all the time when using participatory approaches. I feel like I came into the process very naïve and as I increasingly discover how adults influence and gatekeep so many aspects of children's lives, it's kind of fascinating and horrifying. I am always telling the team that it's their research, it's their decision, it's their choice etc. but when I walk out, I remember: I decide when I arrive, I organise the room, the set-up, I go and pick them up, I dismiss them, and I can never really put a firm date on when I'm next in. In terms of power and control I feel like I can negligibly redistribute power back to them. I am feeling more settled now that I refer to myself as a facilitator; this has helped to absolve some of my negative feelings about the children lacking control over the organisational aspects of the project.*

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*I am writing up my methodology and I think back to the recruitment stage. I knew I couldn't be present to introduce the projects to each class because of Covid (maybe I could have filmed a video of myself that teachers could have played?) and I do wonder about what story their faces may have told had I been there to see their first impressions. I imagine what it may have been like when I was a teacher and how I may have introduced a project like this to my class. Would I have had kids in mind that I thought would be good for it? Ones that are super chatty for instance?*

## Appendix 21: Research Diary Extract - Lizzie's Example

*11.11.21*

*Something happened during analysis that felt quite brutal…! The team were reading over their transcripts from T2 and Lizzie put her hand up empathically wanting to share something they believed to be relevant. She was properly raising her arm and doing that thing where she held her arm with her other hand so it can be higher up. Which was a bit funny because no one else even had their hand raised and it isn't really a thing that we do as part of our research anyway. Either way she was excited. She said she had found something that Jimi had said that was really important. It was the quote where he said, "I think I just changed my mind just now." She read it out loud and I asked her why she felt it to be important. She then went quiet. It all kind of led into a different discussion and the team went back to reading.*

*As I was wandering around, I saw Lizzie's transcript and I realised something – when I had been transcribing (which I do by hand) I had* ***bolded and underlined*** *the quote she had shared. I'd done it for my own reference because I thought it was interesting. Lo and behold I hadn't reformatted back before printing. It had obviously captured her attention. The research has all been about the children's thinking, ideas, leadership etc – then this happens. I felt a bit taken aback by it but in my tutorial, I reflected with my supervisor and – I feel silly for not realising it at the time – but if children have been looking to adults for "the most authentic truth" for the longest time, then of course there will be flashes of that manifesting in the research.*

## Appendix 22: Research Diary Extract – Nimai's Confidence

*11.11.21*

*It isn't really for me to say that this has brought value to him but I can see how this inquiry has made some difference for Nimai. When I think back to the pilot study, I know I developed my own assumptions about how he would fare across official data collection and analysis. My own desire to protect him would kick in – I didn't want him to feel overwhelmed, or like he couldn't do it – but also wanted to respect his agency to not contribute. I feel like he's done his own resource activation across the process and it's probably helped to intervene somewhat by ensuring he felt invited to all aspects and could contribute as he saw fit.*

*I re-read my research diary from 19th July the other day and I noted down that Nimai said, "Life is a project" – wish I'd followed up on that. I also wrote that I thought he had anxiety around speaking and he expressed that he was worried about not being able to "create knowledge" after the research workshop. I like noticing things like this when reading back over the analysis discussions. Nimai's voice was virtually absent during pilot analysis and each time we reconvene, I end up transcribing more and more from him. His debate with Lizzie seemed to be a real turning point – and I wonder if he would say the same thing.*