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Exploring safety of preparatory classrooms through the experiences of children

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Studies emphasise how all learners deserve to learn and grow in a safe learning space while it is considered one of the highest priorities of educational contexts. The voices of teaching personnel often come to the surface more accessibly instead of the voices of pupils increasing the need for research from their perspectives.

Theoretical framework revolves around the definitions of safe classroom spaces from the standpoint of three dimensions; physical, social, and pedagogical safety. Physical safety focuses on the tangible elements of classrooms, the security measures, and the learning opportunities spaces offer. Social safety encapsulates the quality of relationships with peers, the support and acceptance describing these interactions, and the influence of similarities fellow classmates may share. Pedagogical safety touches the aspects of teachers being available and sources for their pupils while acknowledging their diversities.

The aim was to explore what physical, social and pedagogical classroom safety had constituted of for preparatory classroom children in Finland based on their experiences. Six children with asylum-seeking background participated via thematic interviews. Data was analysed applying elements from both theory-driven and data-driven content analyses.

Based on the results, the most significant categories were: a learner-friendly environment, “more than a classroom”, balanced and interoperable peer dynamics, both-sided loving interaction, and teacher as a source. A learner-friendly environment gave new learning experiences to pupils prioritizing resources for them. Peers having commonalities, peers showing dependency and peer relations being influenced by familiar people were identified. The caring of teachers was experienced by the equal treatment of pupils while teachers provided their presence and availability to their pupils continuously. While exploring safety through these dimensions, it is important to remember how safety is also more than just these components; it is about a sense of belonging and acceptance. At the core of safety seems to be reciprocity and dynamism, which are two interactive aspects that have to be considered during research on safety.

Keywords: classroom safety, physical safety, social safety, pedagogical safety, preparatory classrooms, child participants

Oulun yliopisto

Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta

Perusopetuksen valmistavan opetuksen luokkien turvallisuuden tarkastelu lasten kokemusten kautta (Magdalena Roti)

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Tutkimukset korostavat, kuinka kaikki oppijat ansaitsevat oppia ja kasvaa turvallisessa oppimisympäristössä, samanaikaisesti kun sitä pidetään yhtenä koulutusympäristön tärkeimmistä prioriteeteista. Oppilaiden äänten vähäisyys aiheesta lisäsi tämän tutkimuksen tarvetta.

Teoreettinen viitekehys käsittelee turvallisten luokkaympäristöjen määritelmiä kolmesta ulottuvuudesta; fyysisestä, sosiaalisesta ja pedagogisesta. Fyysinen ulottuvuus keskittyy luokkahuoneiden konkreettisiin elementteihin, turvatoimiin sekä tilojen tarjoamiin oppimismahdollisuuksiin. Sosiaalinen turvallisuus kiteyttää ikätovereiden välisten suhteiden laadun, näitä vuorovaikutuksia kuvaavan tuen ja hyväksynnän sekä luokkatovereiden välisten samankaltaisuuksien vaikutuksen. Pedagoginen ulottuvuus liittyy siihen, kuinka käytettävissä opettajat ovat oppilaita varten olemalla myös moniulotteinen lähde, mistä oppilaat voivat ammentaa turvaa.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää mistä valmistavan opetuksen luokkien fyysinen, sosiaalinen ja pedagoginen turvallisuus koostuu lasten kokemusten perusteella Suomessa. Kuusi turvapaikanhakijataustaista lasta osallistui teemahaastatteluihin. Aineisto analysoitiin hyödyntäen elementtejä sekä teorialähtöisestä että aineistolähtöisestä sisällönanalyysistä.

Esilletulleista tutkimustuloksista merkittävimiksi kategorioiksi muodostuivat: oppilasystävällinen ympäristö, enemmän kuin luokkahuone, tasapainoinen ja yhteentoimiva vertaisdynamikka, molemminpuolinen rakastava vuorovaikutus sekä opettaja lähteenä. Oppilasystävällinen ympäristö antoi uusia oppimiskokemuksia priorisoimalla oppilaille tarkoitettuja resursseja. Vertaisia yhdistävät ominaisuudet, heidän välinen riippuvuus ja vertaissuhteet, jotka saivat vaikutuksia lapsille tutuilta henkilöiltä, olivat tunnistettavissa. Opettajien välittäminen koettiin yhdenvertaisella kohtelulla samalla kun aikuiset olivat jatkuvasti läsnä ja käytettävissä. Vaikka turvallisuutta tarkasteltiin näiden ulottuvuuksien kautta, on muistettava turvallisuuden olevan enemmän kuin osiensa summa; se on yhteenkuuluvuutta ja hyväksymistä. Turvallisuuden ytimessä näyttää olevan vastavuoroisuus ja dynaamisuus, huomauttamassa ilmiön interaktiivisesta aspektista.

Avainsanat: luokan turvallisuus, fyysinen turvallisuus, sosiaalinen turvallisuus, pedagoginen turvallisuus, valmistavan opetuksen luokat, lapsiosallistujat

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1 Introduction

Great uncertainty, human suffering and climate crisis unavoidably call for an antidote, some relief, an equilibrium. Factors such as our quick-paced societies, domestic violence and violence in homes and communities, and challenging financial conditions may also increase the need for safety in schools (Hébert, Corcoran, Cote, Ene, Leighton, Holmes & Padula, 2014, p. 95).

Jett and Cross (2016, p. 131, 139) studied teacher educators and pre-service teachers who shared the idea that “all students deserve to learn in a safe space”. There is discussion around safety being a priority in educational settings but more is needed regarding knowledge about what safety actually is and how to establish safe learning for all. What learners consider safe and comfortable needs more attention since learners may not have felt so safe themselves even if teachers were accepting, friendly, and with good intentions (Senior, 2001, p. 258).

It is argued that “space” in relation to safety calls for more thorough discussion and research from the perspective of a pupil (Carter Andrews, Richmond, Warren, Petchauer & Floden, 2018, p. 206). Holley and Steiner (2005, p. 49) express that little is still done on a research level to analyse and understand safety and non-safety whereas it has been used very often so far as a metaphor for “a desired classroom atmosphere”. Additionally, some research has been carried out about the creation of safe spaces from the perspectives of teachers and educators but much less has been done from the opposite perspective, from the perspectives of students and pupils (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p. 49). Carter Andrews, Richmond, Warren, Petchauer and Floden (2018, p. 205–206) believe that it is partly teacher preparation programmes that we need to shift our focus on regarding safety matters since collective structural transformations are needed. One suggested way from the authors in realizing this change is by preparing future teachers better with more skills and knowledge about safety, trauma, youth advocacy and on how to have critical dialogues without being afraid of possible discomfort caused but to aim for increased empathy through these dialogue sessions.

During my bachelor’s thesis work I studied mostly trauma and its definitions in regard to asylum-seeking and refugee background children. In this master’s thesis project, I wanted to continue with a similar topic but with a more empowering approach focusing less on deficiencies. Therefore, safety instead of non-safety found itself relevant for exploration. Virta, Asanti, Junttila, Koivusilta, Koski and Virta (2012, p. 122) recognise that their empirical and theoretical

approach analysing safety from a socio-emotional experiential perspective is very similar to the approaches chosen when studying school well-being (in Finnish “kouluhyvinvointi”). In this study, however, safety is investigated through the experiences of preparatory pupils about their classroom safety which will be divided into three safety dimensions: physical, social, and pedagogical safety.

Why then choose preparatory classrooms as special educational arrangement classrooms to study safety? One important aspect that Senior (2001, p. 249) brings into surface is how much focus has been placed on pedagogic elements of language classes instead of the social aspects of those classes. The author presents language classes as “protective shells” within which learners “feel comfortable enough to share their ideas with others, to experiment with new language forms and to risk making errors” (Senior, 2001, p. 251). Based on these views, I intended to uncover what also the physical and social dimension of safety encapsulates in order to bring forward perspectives that are less looked at.

This study is a narrative study analysing six interviews of former preparatory classroom pupils about their experiences of safety in those classrooms with the guidance of this research question:

“What constitutes physical, social, and pedagogical classroom safety for participants in Finnish preparatory classrooms?”

During the chapters below I will introduce relevant theory about classroom safety and safety dimensions, the methodological framework of this study along with the justifications for the chosen method, and reflections on ethical considerations. Next, you can find the results of this work categorised into the three above-mentioned dimensions. The results found and elaborated on are as follows: a) characteristics of concrete physicality, b) a learner-friendly environment, c) belonging in peer group, d) “more than a classroom”, e) balanced and interoperable peer dynamics, f) caring and suitable teaching personnel, g) adaptability and inclusivity of teacher, h) teacher as a source and i) both-sided loving interaction. Finally, some of the most significant results will be discussed and reflected upon previous theory while the limitations of this project will also be considered.

2 Theoretical framework

In this theoretical framework I will set the foundation for this research. The works of Piispanen (2008) and Hurme and Kyllönen (2014) have guided this process of theoretical decisions. The main reasons why these three dimensions were selected were because the Finnish National Agency for Education (n.d., website) has also divided safety into these areas and I personally found the authors' works eloquent and logical for further exploration. I decided to approach safety using the following understanding: We have as an entity the classroom. The classroom is treated in this work as an environment, as a context, as a space. Environment, context and space are seen as the same point of reference. That space has dimensions which are within and tied to that space. The dimensions chosen for exploration in this study are the physical, social, and pedagogical dimension. Both the frame and its pieces, the space and its dimensions, are investigated from a lens of safety; how a safe classroom space and how those safety dimensions of a classroom space are experienced by children. Since pupils are part of classroom spaces and in constant interaction with those spaces, studying the safety of classrooms via children may simultaneously reflect a fragment of safety of the individual pupil. Through this understanding I intended to bring such an abstract and multifaceted concept like safety closer to the reader, closer to a concrete level.

2.1 Classrooms: Spaces for learning

Safe learning spaces are every child's right (Ntinda, Maree, Mpofu & Seeco, 2014, p. 280–282). The understandings of safe spaces, though, are complex (Turner & Braine, 2015, p. 47, 49; Waterhouse, 2017, p. 20–21). There is no singular starting point for the exploration of its meanings. Piispanen (2008) has approached safety of learning spaces by dividing it into three dimensions: physical, social, and pedagogical. Physically safe and good learning spaces are built in efficient ways construction-wise and facilitate the realisation of various teaching styles to promote inclusive learning (Piispanen, 2008, p. 123–134). A good learning space physically has elements similar to safe home environments and can adapt itself to the changing nature of physical societal structures. Participants of the study of Piispanen (2008, p. 123–134) raised the importance of equipment which enables learning and observation-making along with arrangements considering various sensory demanding learning tasks. On the social safety of classrooms Piispanen (2008, p. 142–156) writes about the supportive atmosphere prevailing in classrooms and the presence of motivation towards coming to school and towards learning. A supportive

atmosphere is one that understands different learners, different ages, different developmental levels of all pupils, and gives opportunities to form healthy relationships through developing interaction skills. Interacting with each other in a space where constructive feedback is practiced hand in hand with joy towards learning, contributes to a good social learning space (Piispanen, 2008, p. 142–156). Piispanen lastly brings forth the pedagogical safety element of classrooms (2008, p. 161–165). She mentions how hands-on and interactive learning is at the centre of teacher's pedagogy. Pedagogy which aims for exploration, contents relevant to children and experimentation reflects more the needs and everyday lives of children (Piispanen, 2008, p. 161–165).

Hurme and Kyllönen (2014) share the views of Piispanen (2008) about the three dimensions of a safe classroom space. According to the authors, the establishment of a safe space enables pupils to channel their energy and capacities towards diverse tasks (Hurme & Kyllönen, 2014, p. 23). Starting with the physical dimension of safety, authors define it as involving buildings and their arrangements, and the surrounding environments (Hurme & Kyllönen, 2014, p. 23–36). Physical safety does not only affect the premises but also the bodily manifestation of pupils referring to the preservation of one's physical integrity. Physical safety elements are, for example, visible rules and working instructions, equipment and its organisation, materials, usage of spaces, security measures, and every pupil having their own space. Physical safety is very often of the most visible aspects of space safety observed both by educators and children. However, cases of physical violence and bullying can take place without educators noticing it (Hurme & Kyllönen, 2014, p. 23–36).

Secondly, authors explain social safety of classroom spaces (Hurme & Kyllönen, 2014, p. 23–36). The elements forming this dimension emphasise behaviours and social interaction. Those interactions shape an atmosphere that is peaceful and of content. Those interactions are characterised by each other's consideration, sensitivity towards the needs of others, freedom, and shared trust. More specifically, authors share social safety being the opportunities given to each child to grow in their unique way. While each child flourishes differently, the peer relations are crucial influencers to that growth. Social safety speaks for peer relations that utilise social skills such as sharing, engaging, self-expression, apologizing, and identification of emotions (Hurme & Kyllönen, 2014, p. 23–36).

Lastly, pedagogical safety by these authors relates to teachers and their ways of teaching. Much of pedagogical safety stems from how teachers execute and deal with learning situations, how

clear and guiding instructions are, how suitable tasks are, provision of constructive feedback along with learning being enjoyable. All these pedagogical parts are linked to how the teachers interact and build a connection with their pupils (Hurme & Kyllönen, 2014, p. 23–36).

While we keep asking about possible definitions of safety of a classroom space, Valerio (2001, p. 24–28) shares her seven elements of a safe classroom that she finds to be highly intertwined. These seven elements are: collegiality, empowerment, role modeling, preparation, shared purpose, reflection, and commitment. The first element is collegiality, which is defined as the deep linkage between pupils and teachers, and the pupils themselves. Valerio adds to this element the components of mutual respect and the appropriate use of humour. The second element is empowerment, which aims to assist pupils to find their strengths and own paths while giving them opportunities to be the ones responsible for their learning. The third element is role modeling, which points to the example by which the teacher is leading in the classroom exemplifying risk-taking, fairness and humility. More specifically on role modeling, it is the mutual understanding of one another's vulnerability which plays an important role in strengthening feelings of safety.

More “components” of safe spaces have been found. Based on Holley and Steiner (2005, p. 57) there were certain building blocks that constituted a safe space. First, there were several attributes of instructors/educators that made students feel safer in a learning space. For instance, learners expressed feeling safe when their educator was not judging or biased but was caring, when their educator was comfortable dealing with conflicting topics, when their educator was supportive, respectful and culturally mindful towards all despite their views, and when their educator established common ground rules encouraging active participation from all. Secondly, peer characteristics had an influence on the experiences of safety of pupils and the impact was positive when peers mastered good discussion skills, were nonjudgmental, and shared openly and genuinely their thoughts. Thirdly, learners also expected from themselves those very elements that they named important about their peers in order for them to feel safe in a classroom. Fourthly, physical space such as arrangements and size of spaces affected feelings of safety. On the contrary, all the opposite characteristics of those building blocks of safety were considered as unsafe space components (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p. 57).

In continuation with the above, Valerio (2001, p. 24–28) states as a fourth element preparation, which helps the teacher plan and organise learning in such a way that facilitates and enables the learning of different and diverse learners within a classroom. The fifth element is having a

shared purpose, meaning, finding a collective goal for all through discussion and listening to each other. As a sixth element, reflection taking place by teachers and pupils, is spotted with the intention to better understand oneself and others in order to treat oneself and others with more respect and understanding. The final element identified is commitment, which keeps each member on their own path of growth while contributing to the whole group (Valerio, 2001, p. 24–28).

Creating “safe spaces” may equal to creating “constructive learning environments” (Delano-Oriaran & Parks, 2015, p. 17). These two authors describe safe spaces as environments where learners “feel secure and empowered to engage in civil, honest, critical, and challenging dialogues about sensitive issues” (Delano-Oriaran & Parks, 2015, p. 17). A safe learning environment is one that lets both teachers and pupils “feel free”, be mutually respected and “feel not threatened”; meaning an environment is without threats (Batelaan, 2001, p. 237). Pupils from another study expressed how in safe spaces they felt they were understood and they felt they were free to discuss also burning matters (Cooper, 2013, p. 496, 503). Those same pupils further expressed how safe spaces for them involved feeling comfortable and unthreatened. However, questions rise if it is possible, for instance, to share by telling and hearing stories of violence and still maintain a safe classroom space (Waterhouse, 2017, p. 20). With this example in mind, one cannot avoid pondering on the ambivalent nature safe spaces incorporate (Waterhouse, 2017, p. 22).

Pupils need spaces where support and nurture are provided and sustained (Senior, 2001, p. 248). Turner and Braine (2015, p. 47) have investigated understandings of the concept of safety in learning contexts. The understandings of safe spaces within school settings meant classrooms where none of the pupils was ever embarrassed “about sharing their opinions”, where pupils felt safe to take educational risks, and where mutual respect was a core foundation within a classroom. Thus, pupils in safe spaces were safe from any harm and felt comfortable (Turner & Braine, 2015, p. 47). “Learning to respect is considered both as a condition for the creation of a safe learning environment and as a condition for living in a democratic society” (Batelaan, 2001, p. 237).

Kulikova and Maliy (2017, p. 720) claim two polarized belief systems exist regarding the understanding and perceptions of researchers about safe learning spaces; 1) individuals who perceive physical and social elements of safety to be binary and 2) individuals who perceive safety

as a “complex structure” involving various differing parts. From the standpoint of Gilemkhanova (2019, p. 1) socio-psychological safety means a backbone element of the quality of an educational environment. To specifically cite Gilemkhanova,

[...] socio-psychological safety of the school is regarded here as a system-forming characteristic of the effectiveness of interaction between the personality and contextual components of the educational environment [...] Thus, socio-psychological safety of the educational environment is described by the degree of matching of individual and contextual levels of the educational environment within the “personality—sociocultural environment” open dynamic system. (2019, p. 1)

Why are safe spaces needed then? Safe classroom spaces are somehow commonly agreed and accepted in educational studies to be the basis for possible learning (Barrett, 2010). Creating safe learning spaces encourages pupils to step outside their comfort zones where most learning takes place (Valerio, 2001, p. 28). When being in a safe learning space, pupils have shown to learn and grow more as learners (Holley & Steiner, 2005, p. 58; Smith, 2011, p. 239–240). Those learning environments have facilitated improvement in pupils’ problem-solving abilities and skill acquisition, partly, due to more accepted and allowed mistake-making (Turner & Harder, 2018, p. 54). To give an example, pupils of another study reported feeling better and having their thinking abilities sharpened (Makaiau & Freese, 2013, p. 145). Those thinking abilities can be put into practice during safe classroom dialogues contributing to the expansion of our understanding(s) of diversities (Makaiau & Freese, 2013, p. 147–148). Not focusing only on the individual benefits but also the relationship between pupil-instructor has been influenced affirmatively in safe spaces (Smith, 2011, p. 239–240).

Hogue, Parker and Miller (1998, p. 99) argue why safe spaces are established; they are established because they are required for survival and strength, by which the authors mean that they are created in order to tackle “very real and painful forms of oppression” (Hogue, Parker & Miller, 1998, p. 99). Importantly, authors (1998, p. 100) believe that making a classroom space safe is therefore a result of all contributions and actions of all individuals involved; the change for a safer space needs to come from within, from genuine desires of individuals involved.

2.1.1 Physical safety

Each classroom is different, unique. There can be a lot of space, shortage of space, desks in specific order, either traditional or modernized chairs, cushions, bouncing sitting balls, works of pupils, learning posters on walls...Everyone can visualize a different classroom based on their own experiences as pupils, based on what has been presented in the media, based on what standards and resources different living areas have. From the writings of Piispanen (2008, p. 117) we can realise how the physical environment of a classroom can add to the feelings of safety and overall well-being of pupils and teachers. Pieces of furniture, colours present in classroom and appropriate lightning were suggested by pupils themselves as components of contributing to their satisfaction in classroom (Piispanen, 2008, p. 117). Especially during darker autumn-winter times in Finland pupils accentuated the necessity of good lightning for their learning and focus preservation (Piispanen, 2008, p. 117).

When contemplating physical safety, the physicality of a classroom is central. What the physical space enables pupils and teachers to do in a classroom influences how individuals perceive it, what individuals learn from it, and what meanings individuals attach to it (Nuikkinen, 2009, p. 105). A physical space which is rich in stimuli, esthetically pleasing and pedagogically designed plays its role on how individuals feel; feeling being welcomed, feeling being cared for, feeling being motivated to learn or feeling being unwanted and stagnated (Nuikkinen, 2009, p. 113, 127). That physical space, a classroom in this case, is considered safe and healthy when it prevents hazards and accidents, and is fulfilling the needs of everyone interacting in it. In more detail, material objects, furniture and equipment are supposed to be arranged in a manner that is ergonomic promoting efficient learning situations (Nuikkinen, 2009, p. 119–120).

What sometimes is left to be undefined is the meaning of physical environment for the sense of security, which according to Harinen and Halme (2012, p. 38) has significant meaning. In schools and in classrooms their physical environments are sources of well-being and safety (Lindfors, 2012, p. 16). Through comparison, safety from a physical perspective consists of environments without bullying, maltreatment, physical and sexual abuse whereas from a pedagogical perspective it does not limit its boundaries to political or legal aspects (Batelaan, 2001, p. 237). Physical safety matters are considered as physical violence incidents and violent incidents towards the actual, physical premises of schools and not as psychological safety matters such as life crises (i.e. death or loss of a familiar person, suicide, war-torture-persecution, accidents or injuries) (Penttilä, 1994, p. 6–7). In this study, recess space is merged with classroom

space to form a larger unit of investigation. As an example, London, Westrich, Stokes-Guinan and McLaughlin (2015, p. 53) have examined recess in several elementary schools arguing that recess has great implications for “school climate”. In their study (2015, p. 53), the purposes of recess were to facilitate “safe, healthy and inclusive play”. After a certain period of time school staff expressed that recess offered emotional and physical safety among other benefits for all (London et al., 2015, p. 53).

Physical safety in the context of schools can be predominantly defined as security measures and threat assessments (Cornell, Mayer & Sulkowski, 2021; Booren, Handy & Power, 2011). Security measures by Cornell, Mayer and Sulkowski (2021) include making school buildings difficult to attack to, recruiting security personnel as part of school staff and plans on how to act in a case of crisis. The measures are preventative actions to stay alert about threatening situations within schools. Part of the measures is also harsh, zero tolerance discipline methods applied to reduce undesired behavioural problems in pupils (Cornell, Mayer & Sulkowski, 2021). However, those discipline methods have been criticized for impeding supportive practices and increasing feelings of non-safety in pupils (Cornell, Mayer & Sulkowski, 2021).

Physical safety is often viewed as being protected from threats, weapons, theft, and violence (Fredrick, McClemon, Jenkins & Kern, 2021). Wang and Degol (2016, p. 318) write about physical safety as represented in studies about school climate. In their study, physical safety was formed by violence and aggression reduction, and safety measures such as security guards and safety monitoring equipment. It is unavoidable for physical safety not to be a matter also about the physical integrity of individuals. Bullying is a multilayered phenomenon that is inseparable from also the physical aspect of safety, hence, something needing to be protected from in learning environments (Fredrick, McClemon, Jenkins & Kern, 2021). Bullying is perceived as a threat not only to the emotional safety of children but also their physical safety due to the many forms bullying takes place. Consequently, separately exploring physical and psychological safety may be of great challenge since both dimensions affect each other due to their interconnectedness (Cornell, Mayer & Sulkowski, 2021, p. 151).

The Finnish National Agency for Education, in Finnish “Opetushallitus”, (n.d.) has given definitions on physical safety in schools. The Agency allocates under the category of physical safety the following: educational buildings, organizational level safety, technical networks and systems, the surroundings of schools such as recess areas, playgrounds, physical education areas, transportation, and traffic infrastructure (retrieved on 18.1.2022 from

<https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/opetustoimen-ja-varhaiskasvatuksen-turvallisuus/fyysinen-turvallisuus>).

According to Raymond (1999), school and classroom safety creates a framework of policies, curricula contents to be taught and practices passed from teachers to pupils to realise safe learning environments. Author continues on teachers being considered responsible to assess risks and hazards in classrooms while executing lessons to develop pupils' abilities to minimize injuries. At the same time, pupils are guided by curricula and their teachers to recognise situations and contextual particularities that are unsafe (Raymond, 1999, p. 5–12). An example from the author is teachers having first aid trainings in order to respond safely when pupils need preliminary health assistance. However, school policies and emergency procedures are the ones instructing teaching personnel in cases of emergencies (Raymond, 1999, p. 5–12).

While still living times with the COVID-19 pandemic around us, its effects on classroom safety cannot be omitted. Murray (2020) explained how safety measures to tackle the transmission and spreading of the coronavirus disease were naturally extended also to schools as they demonstrate key institutions in each society. Author points to the respiratory character of the coronavirus disease which has meant changes in social interactions and spatial arrangements in classrooms as well. Physical safety under these mentioned circumstances in classrooms has been about keeping certain distance from one another, wearing facial masks, disinfecting areas touched and washing hands more frequently. For instance, the author explained how new sitting arrangements in classrooms, and in line with the safety recommendations from governments, can be planned utilising experts specialized in spatial optimization (Murray, 2020). Physical safety has gained new meanings such as usage of protective equipment (masks and disinfectant) and evaluating physical closeness.

2.1.2 Social safety

There are multiple factors that impact how children adjust to and experience school, but one of the most impactful ones has been the relationships with peers (Ladd & Coleman, 1997, p. 52–53). For some, relationships with peers can mean how accepted they feel by others and for others, how many friends they have (Ladd & Coleman, 1997, p. 52–53). Weak and troubled relations with peers go hand in hand with oftentimes negative perceptions towards schooling

leading children to develop lower self-confidence, deteriorated participation in learning, and isolation from the classroom context (Ladd & Coleman, 1997, p. 64). Some of the negative consequences of weak peer relations are long-lasting marking the future relations and aspirations of children (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003).

We as humans are social beings who interact, have the need to interact, and learn through interaction. Virta, Asanti, Junttila, Koivusilta, Koski and Virta (2012) have studied the social dimension of safety in classrooms. For Virta et al. (2012, p. 122) the social dimension of safety integrates the interactions between pupils (peer interactions) and the interactions between pupils and teachers. Those multiple interactions are covering a great part of the school days of children. Those interactions start shaping the roles individuals take within a classroom while they shape and influence the connectedness of all group members within a classroom (Virta et al., 2012, p. 122). Steele Royston (2017, p. 34–38) discusses the interpersonal relationships within a classroom linking them to safety. Steele Royston (2017, p. 34–38) claims that human development and learning processes require interpersonal relationships, which are their foundation. Steele Royston connects safety and positivity together as characteristics of a desired learning environment where effective relations and bonding with pupils are prioritized highly. The author defines safe environments as ones that are built on values of trust and respect so that pupils are able to show vulnerability and take risks.

When it comes to the quality of interactions pupils have within a classroom, there is a need to dive deeper. Virta et al. (2012, p. 122–124) write how much each individual within a classroom is allowed and able to be oneself, express oneself and be accepted as oneself. Authors continue on how pupils in a classroom build relations which make them support or reject someone as part of their already formulated “accepted” behaviours (Virta et al., 2012, p. 122–124). This may reveal the differences in understandings of what positive, constructive and desired interactions are among pupils. As Virta et al. (2012, p. 122–124) explain social interactions are essential factors of how safe and capable pupils feel in a classroom. If pupils are struggling in their interpersonal relations with classmates their learning can be hindered. As Piispanen (2008, p. 176) comments, it is important for pupils to feel cared for – especially by the ones interacting with them in daily situations. Thus, investing in building trust and respect as the foundation of all interactions in classrooms strengthens feelings of social safety (Virta et al., 2012, p. 124).

A classroom usually consists of several pupils, several learners with whom interactions are expected to be established or are more willingly established during formal and informal learning

moments. Relationships with peers in classrooms are dynamic and serve different needs depending strongly on the age and developmental stage of children (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Children select and form friendships, which are closer and more voluntarily formed, and peer relations based on similarities (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Similarities are attributes of an individual that are associated to gender, age, popularity, and academic achievement to name a few. “Demographic characteristics offer children a physically salient means for assessing their similarity” (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003, p. 266). Sedláček and Šed’ova (2020, p. 3) studied peer relations within classrooms pointing out that pupils navigate their way in a social network of fellow pupils finding each one’s “position” in classrooms. That “position”, as authors write, might be an indication of how a child participates in classroom activities (Sedláček & Šed’ova, 2020, p. 3). Participation by the two authors was elaborated as closely connected to social engagement, which was about pupils easily providing help and accepting help from their fellow learners, and aligning with the thoughts and views of peers in classroom (Sedláček & Šed’ova, 2020, p. 8).

Thus, part of the interaction with peers in classrooms has to do with supporting each other (Havik, 2017). Pupils who receive emotional support from their peers may feel more included in their peer circles, which then strengthens their interactions with their teachers as well. Being included by peers has shown to be more meaningful than support from teacher when tackling bullying behaviours and exclusion within a classroom (Havik, 2017). While pupils are at the centre of forming connections with their classmates, teachers are given responsibility for enabling positive peer interactions (Havik, 2017). In a classroom where support and working together exist, connectedness of pupils is visible in pupils’ relations (Sollitto, Johnson & Myers, 2013). Relatedness with peers has effects on how pupils perform in learning tasks (Sollitto, Johnson & Myers, 2013).

What can grow from trustful and respectful relationships is the ability to be vulnerable in a shared safe classroom space (Steele Royston, 2017, p. 34–38). Trust is seen as both a prerequisite and an outcome in this equation of safe space. Learners have expressed that creating safety within a group was very essential to make them “feel free to express confidence and trust in the group, allowing for increased self-disclosure” (Payne, 2001, p. 274). Self-disclosure as part of vulnerability brings interacting individuals closer to each other. Makaiau and Freese (2013, p. 141) go on writing that a safe classroom environment paves the ground for those kinds of self-explorations and introspections. High degree listening abilities are needed in order to create safety in classrooms (Castro, Kluger & Itzchakov, 2016, p. 771). Along with listening in order

to socially interact with others, the individual has to be in a certain psychological state. From a relatively individualistic perspective, our nervous systems continually evaluate how safe our environments are via the sensory information that is being processed by the individual nervous system (Porges, 2007, p. 125). Accomplishing peaceful states indicates of the nervous system determining the surrounding environment as safe (free of harm and risks), enabling social engagement (Porges, 2007, p. 121, 125).

2.1.3 Pedagogical safety

In this study, pedagogical safety is narrowed down to the relationship between teachers and pupils. It has been chosen for its importance when pondering on the roles of pedagogues in the lives of children. Instead of focusing on the academic side of teaching and learning, we are turning our gaze towards the teacher-pupil relation influencing learning. Haapaniemi and Raina (2017, part III) argue that factors contributing towards the formation of pedagogical satisfaction and satisfaction in schools are first of all security (in Finnish “turvallisuuden tunne”), and secondly the awakening of natural curiosity, or curiosity in general. Haapaniemi and Raina (2017, part III) also view learning as a social and emotional phenomenon. For creating such a pedagogically satisfactory environment Haapaniemi and Raina (2017, part III) emphasise four pillars being the following: 1) security, 2) curiosity, 3) interaction and 4) groups.

Mattila (2017, part I, chapter “Kohtaaminen lapsen kanssa”) explains that by encountering someone, another human being, she refers to encounters that consist of caring/care, respect, trust, and appreciation. When adults, for instance teachers and educators, encounter children it is the responsibility of the mature and grown-up adult to safeguard the sense of safety/security, to safeguard the respect towards the personality of the children, and to safeguard the conservation of a respectful and appreciative look (referring to genuine eye contact) with children even when the contents of the encounter may raise negative or uncomfortable feelings in the adults (Mattila, 2017, part I, chapter “Kohtaaminen lapsen kanssa”). Mattila (2017, part I, chapter “Kohtaaminen lapsen kanssa”) continues writing that it is an imperative for the healthy development of children to have at least one adult figure who is a source of safety/security and trustworthy, who “really sees” the child and values highly the existence of the child, who strengthens the beliefs of the child that one can survive and succeed in life in the future as well. These aspirations have a direct effect on the self-confidence and self-esteem of the child.

Mattila (2017, part II) additionally states that establishing and being in a safe/secure interaction with a safe/secure adult increases the sense of security of a child which shapes how a child is going to perceive and interact with others in the future, and what kind of relationships one is going to create. The author (2017, part II) mentions that children need safety constantly and by this the author does not mean that adults who are part of children's lives "protect" children by not facing with them the hardships and challenges of life. Instead, she (2017, part II) encourages adults to be able to be realistic and have emotional capacities to deal with various emotions and situations with children (Mattila, 2017, part II).

According to Saloviita (2014, p. 60) the classroom teacher is seen as the one responsible for recognising the emotional needs of pupils and fulfilling those needs; the caring of teachers fulfills those emotional needs of their pupils. Saloviita (2014, p. 60) mentions that a child participates in school work and the learning processes when one "feels safe". Saloviita (2014, p. 60) continues discussing how teacher's acceptance of each child signals to the child that the teacher really believes one can succeed with their skills and abilities in hand. Saloviita (2014, p. 60) points out that when pupils have been questioned of what makes a teacher a good teacher, one of the elements they find important is the teacher's ability to create a safe learning environment without excessive strictness, austerity, or tight discipline strategies. In summary, feelings of safety, autonomy and capability beliefs in one's abilities stand out as building blocks for the success of pupils in schools (Saloviita, 2014, p. 60).

Ahnert, Milatz, Kappler, Schneiderwind and Fischer (2013, p. 564) argue that teachers may operate as secure bases for their pupils so that they may engage in exploring through various activities and be supported in an emotionally balanced way by their teachers in schools. John Bowlby (1982, p. 668–669) famously wrote about attachment and security bases. For secure bases any kind of behaviour that leads to the sustainability of closeness to one significant figure/person who is perceived to better cope with the outside world, is identified as attachment behaviour. Bowlby (1982, p. 668–669) continues that this type of behaviour is more observable when one is sick, frightened or fatigued and as a result the other comforts, soothes and takes care of the sick, frightened, or fatigued one. One of the fundamental aspects of this kind of bond is that the attachment figure is "available and responsive" resulting in the formation of a "strong and pervasive" feeling of security causing the continuity of this relationship. The relationship with a teacher may be compared to this description of Bowlby's as both present several similarities at their core. For a healthy personality development in children, understanding what a

child is going through internally and building a connection with the child are required pillars (Karppinen & Pihlava, 2017, part 1).

Lee, Butler and Tippins (2007, p. 43) argue that teachers are the ones who are required to be sensitive to their pupils' diversities, and to recognize and approach with sensitivity diverse sociocultural backgrounds of their pupils. By this "sensitivity" authors refer to teachers having relevant strategies, decision-making abilities, values, knowledge, and actions. Authors (2007, p. 43) continue stating that these previously mentioned abilities and characteristics of teachers are fundamental for supporting diverse learners to "learn more securely and meet their needs more equally by providing a safe, challenging, and nurturing environment" (Lee, Butler & Tippins, 2007, p. 43). Pupils given the right to ask teachers whatever they wish without fear of getting embarrassed, and feeling respected and valued regardless of how they succeed in school in comparison to their peers can be seen as another aspect of the kind of relationship a teacher builds with one's pupils (Uusikylä, 2014, "Turvallinen koulu"- chapter). While discussing about sensitivity, another determinant for building a safe space was the modeling of teachers; meaning that teachers also valued and believed that showing their emotions and how they dealt with their emotions not only exemplified a model but also proved that all emotions are acceptable (Sheppard & Levy, 2019, p. 193-201).

Next, some demonstrations of behaviours from teachers who invested in a safe relationship with their pupils will be presented. In the study of Hanna (2014), teachers were depicted as role models who were willing to show vulnerability by being open when they made mistakes and as role models who set high standards both for themselves and their pupils (Hanna, 2014, p. 225–228). Besides, teachers investing in a meaningful relationship with their pupils were the ones who genuinely shared both accomplishments and failures with their pupils (Hanna, 2014, p. 225–228). It crosses our minds that it is teachers, after parents, as the agents who make decisions for and on behalf of children, therefore, they ought to be consistent (Wright, 2010, p. 235). Teachers sometimes need to "create a predictable, dependable, physical and social environment" to increase pupils' sense of safety through the guidance of an adult (Wright, 2010, p. 235).

Sheppard and Levy (2019, p. 193) concentrate on emotions and teacher decision-making. Some of their highlights revolve around themes such as how classroom is perceived as an emotional space and how teachers are involved in the arisen emotions within a classroom. Significantly,

authors found out more about the preservation of a safe classroom space and how this is believed to be an essential priority for the teachers. Their study sheds light on the simultaneous efforts teachers make to regulate emotions within a classroom environment and to take into consideration pupils' own emotions while making decisions in classes to maintain safety. Therefore, creating safe spaces is considered as part of teachers' pedagogical decision-making process and as part of paying special attention to pupils' identities to protect and allow various identities to co-exist (Sheppard & Levy, 2019, p. 197). Based on Sheppard and Levy (2019, p. 198), constructing safe learning spaces predominantly meant a space "where pupils feel safe to hold and express their own feelings and beliefs". In more depth, for some teachers prioritising own pupils' emotions meant creating a safe space for pupils to exist and for others it meant a safe space to feel challenged (Sheppard & Levy, 2019, p. 197–198). Hence, this dynamic character of classroom spaces manifests itself also in the interactions of teachers and pupils with relationships playing an immensely important role in forming an emotionally safe classroom (Zembylas, 2004, p. 185, 193).

A safe classroom is one where showing vulnerability is possible. Safety as a means, a facilitator and/or a precondition for vulnerability is articulated as scaffolding pupils overcome their fears and eliminating anxieties pupils may have about their own views (Tatum, 1992, p. 18). Another author also writes about vulnerability in classrooms and the creation of safe spaces (Willcox, 2017, p. 11). Willcox (2017, p. 11) sheds light on the cases when many pupils in lessons take educational risks and they experience failure(s) they often, disappointingly, also experience not belonging in those classes and classrooms. During those moments, "moments of vulnerability", the author believes that it is of great importance to pedagogically pay extra attention as educators in order to create an even safer classroom environment for all to thrive and create. Teachers can contribute to the creation of safety in classrooms by encouraging vulnerability of pupils, supporting and providing child-appropriate assistance for each learner, paying more attention to details in pupil behaviour and the work of each pupil, facilitating and participating actively in genuine dialogue, and establishing trusting relationships within a classroom (Willcox, 2017, p. 11). In other words, valuing and trying to create a safe classroom, emphatically, "encourages courageous vulnerability, enables creative risks, and minimizes shame" (Willcox, 2017, p. 11). Nonetheless, it is intriguing how sometimes the usage of the word "safe" might compromise the creativity, innovation and even the substance of what learning can be (Willcox, 2017, p. 11).

Creating a safe classroom is a process that ought to be launched from early on and contains that mutual respect, confidentiality, and speaking from each individual's own point of view (Tatum, 1992, p. 18). Teachers are at the core of observing the well-being of their pupils, supporting children construct relationships, and succeed in a safe space (Turner & Braine, 2015, p. 47). However, educators may forget their subjective agency when aiming to claim classroom spaces as objective spaces since in practice they include much subjectivity, several forms of subjectivities (Hogue, Parker & Miller, 1998, p. 95). That is why Smyth (2005, p. 39-41) views safety as a product of mutual efforts, both from the teacher and the pupils, in order to create an enjoyable and appreciating classroom environment. Safe classroom environment is perceived here as something to be developed and, in a sense, as something non-static, not readily made.

2.1.4 Critical perspectives on safe classrooms

Defining the creation of "safe spaces" from a pupil's perspective is something that is "fraught with tension" (Carter Andrews, Richmond, Warren, Petchauer & Floden, 2018, p. 206). Despite the positive definitions of safe spaces and classrooms, researchers have simultaneously studied safety and safe classrooms critically. The purpose of the critique is to give more depth to the concept of safe spaces in education.

Often the concept of "safe space" is used as a metaphorical space in which pupils are free and confident enough to take risks to express their honest thoughts, beliefs, emotions (Barrett, 2010). The author very precisely summarises the three most commonly discussed references and "definitions" when pondering on the meanings of safety; expression of individuality, comfort, and risk-taking. Similarly, while examining teacher and curriculum theory research in the American context, Rom (1998, p. 398) states the metaphor of "safe spaces" consists of the following meanings and implications: "(1) we are all isolated, (2) our isolation is both physical and psychic, (3) we can become less isolated by expressing our diverse individuality, and (4) students thrive in a classroom in which individuality is freely expressed" (Rom, 1998, p. 398).

Dutta, Shroll, Engelsen, Prickett, Hajjar and Green (2016, p. 345) have researched pedagogy of discomfort with an objective to move beyond the rhetoric of classroom safety, which they believe has its roots more in liberal individualism. In more detail, what Dutta et al. (2016, p. 345)

aim to achieve is the critical engagement of pupils and educators in challenging and discomfoting “spaces that are systematically unacknowledged or silenced in the classroom” since they believe it is necessary to include social justice in the safety of classrooms (Dutta et al., 2016, p. 345–346). The authors desire to question status quos and address safety from a deeper, more critical and mindful perspective that thoroughly questions and considers positions and power relations. About those power relations there are many cases where the responsibility of creating a safe space is on the shoulders of teachers (Waterhouse, 2017, p. 27). Author views the teacher as not the constant and not even the primary source of safety creation because learners bring with them multilayered cultural, linguistic and sexual identities. During Holden’s (1997, p. 76) final notes, she emphasises that having a safe classroom does not equal with a classroom without disagreements. Zembylas (2015, p. 165) ponders from an ethical perspective the relationship between comfort and safety and, asks the questions whether safety in a classroom is or not the aspect that directly and always equals to comfort within a classroom.

On safety from a social justice viewpoint, it is critically argued that “safe spaces are not safe but in reality, are ‘warped spaces’ where landscapes reveal topographies of despair which mimic modern technological and capitalist development” (Hodkinson, 2015, p. 145). The author claims that safety is culturally and situation- driven and time located, while all spaces consist of “inherent dangers folded within and without their existence” (Hodkinson, 2015, p. 153, 156). Questions raised to be considered about safety are connected to whether a safe space really is a space where freedom is contained by structure or/and where power is imposed by external parties (Hodkinson, 2015, p. 158). Therefore, the author (2015, p. 161) encourages us to rethink if safe space is just a metaphor “of dominance and power”.

2.2 Preparatory classrooms in Finland

According to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2015), preparatory education is mainly addressing immigrant-background pupils in Finland who are not familiar with the Finnish or Swedish language and need to start learning either one of the two languages from the very beginning to be able to attend school in Finland. The aim of this special education arrangement is to prepare its pupils for successful participation in learning in a mainstream class during comprehensive school years (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2015). Even if Finnish/Swedish language skills are accentuated as the main aims of a preparatory class, we need to

bear in mind that supporting children's acculturation process and integration both in the new school community and the wider Finnish society are core goals of preparatory education, too. Pupils eligible to receive preparatory education are children of preschool age (six years old), comprehensive school age children (from seven to sixteen years old) and sometimes even young adults and adults (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2015). The Agency for Education (2015) has given guidelines based on which pupils from 6-10 years old and pupils over ten years old will be receiving the minimum amount of 900 hours and the minimum of 1000 hours of preparatory education respectively. In practice, this means approximately one year of learning in a preparatory class. Nevertheless, if the pupil is able to follow and participate in the teaching process before completing those amounts of hours, one may automatically be transferred to the mainstream class and vice versa.

In this passage I will be using as a point of reference the Preparatory Education Core Curriculum of the city of Oulu (City of Oulu, 2016) since my home university is situated in Oulu as well. Preparatory classes are mixed ability classes with children from various age, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. That is why learning and teaching is differentiated and a lot more individualised. Pupils' weekly schedules primarily include subjects such as Finnish as a second language and literature, mathematics, arts and crafts, and environmental studies (City of Oulu, 2016). Pupils' age, prior knowledge and personal history are taken into consideration when setting learning objectives, deciding learning contents and choosing appropriate learning-teaching methods. As soon as one's linguistic abilities in Finnish language have developed one starts integrating in mainstream classes and lessons (City of Oulu, 2016). Integration begins with creative subjects such as arts, crafts, music, and physical education. These subjects are more practical and less theoretical leading preparatory pupils build social connections with other children and teachers of the school (City of Oulu, 2016). Integration continues with attendances in other subjects as well based on the language abilities of pupils until full transition to mainstream classes is feasible.

3 Methodological framework

In this section I will cover the methodological approach of this study and the research question, how data for this research was generated, what was the selected analysis method, and what constituted ethics.

This study is a narrative research work. Our narrative nature, our narrative social reality and the intercultural element of narratives altogether urged me to learn more about the narrative as an approach leading me choose it for this project. One could reflect on how our lives and lived experiences are to a great extent continuous narratives, continuously transforming stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Moen, 2006; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Living in the midst of rapid globalisation and growing interconnectedness has heightened the speed and amounts of unfolding stories. “Stories provide coherence and continuity to one’s experience and have a central role in our communication with others” (Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 6–7). Speaking only from a “Western” viewpoint that I am familiar with, when we share our experiences verbally, we mostly do that in the form of narrated stories; making us, partially at least, storytellers in nature (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Since narratives have long existed among humans, they might be viewed as relatively “international, transhistorical and transcultural” (Barthes, 1975, p. 237). Spector-Mersel (2010, p. 211, 213) encapsulates writing that “if social reality is a narrative reality, then narratives are the natural channel for studying it”. It needs to be said that there are many forms of social realities, not just narrative ones in nature, but this research relies on the parts of social realities that are narrative.

Therefore, the research question explored in this work is:

What constitutes physical, social, and pedagogical classroom safety for participants in Finnish preparatory classrooms?

Smith and Sparkes (2009) view narratives as very precious research-wise since they tell us about the macro-level, here the preparatory classrooms, and the micro-level, here the individual. Narrative research is one that has at its scope of focus narratives or aims to answer questions through narratives (Lieblich, Tuval-Maschiach & Zilber, 1998). For this study I intend to explore my research question interacting with the narratives of my participants without imposing novel narratives on them. One of the purposes of this narrative study is to listen to narratives of

participants about their experiences of safety in preparatory classrooms to shed light on meanings of educational contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12).

Another reason why narrative was selected as the methodological approach was that we tell stories to convey meanings and purpose, making narratives meaning-making tools for us (Heikinen, 2002; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 4, 9; Riessman, 1993, p. 2; Riessman, 2008, p. 3; Stephens, 2011). Narratives serve as means to gain and construct meaning which (will) influence the experiences of individuals (Head, 2020; Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Tanggaard, 2009). In this study, I intended to find out what meanings and definitions children give to the physical, social, and pedagogical dimensions of safety through their experiences. “Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and text that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly” (Riessman, 1993, p. 15). Meaning in this study is also perceived as what children have chosen to share; sharing what has been meaningful through memories that have persisted. Narrative stories are vocalisations and interpretations of our lives, which add and generate new meanings (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 6, 9). Some experiences come better to our understanding when they are told in the forms of stories (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 7). Through the act of telling stories, we can “change the meaning of our experiences and actions” (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 7).

Narratives can be determined as entities that capture “the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7). Based on this definition, actions are at the core of narratives referring to the ways individuals try to understand, resolve, or process a situation (Polkinghorne, 1995). The ways narratives are told by the participants include their threads of thought, openness, certainties, and recollections of memories around their learning path. Our narrated stories are affected by, and reveal our societal and cultural contexts that surround us and within which we interact (Head, 2020; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Instead of perceiving narratives as “mirrors” of something, they are nowadays perceived as “constructions of” something (Spector-Mersel, 2010). This shift suggests that reality is “subjective and relativist”, “largely invented by narratives” (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 208). The narratives collected for this study are simultaneously situated in the time of interviewing, in the moments being in preparatory classrooms, in the analysis process, and in the reading moments of the readers of this study.

The focus is not essentially on the factual, direct events told by the narrator but on the narratives told about experienced events because narratives are shaped by past experiences, language, and interactions with others (Head, 2020). Therefore, narratives are products of “a negotiative process” that has taken place between the participants and myself as they are sculptured by diverse influences in order to be constructed in a meaningful manner (Head, 2020). Some of the influences for my participants might have been emotions experienced in preparatory classrooms, then present emotions and thoughts, expectations of the interviews, perceptions of important individuals/groups to them, surrounding societal and cultural influences, compared learning achievements between past, and then present learning contexts. We can see how narratives are deeply linked to individuals, meanings individuals create and assign to something, and personal experiences shaping individuals.

3.1 Data generation

This research focuses on safety of preparatory classrooms based on the experiences of children. Interviews were chosen as my data collection method. Interviews serve as bridges to what individuals think and how individuals behave while revealing about the lives of individuals through language (Tanggaard, 2009, p. 1499; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 84). Even though arranging interviews with preparatory teachers would have been more easily accessible, it would have been an ethically indirect way to learn about someone else’s, in this case pupils’, safety. The interview structure of this research (see Appendix 1) is relying upon the outline of thematic interview structure or otherwise called semi-structured interview outline (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 87). Thematic interview means going through certain questions that are picked to represent some specific theme (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 87; Valli & Aarnos, 2018: part 1). For this research main themes of interview questions were derived from the theoretical framework on elements of safety. These themes were physical, social, and pedagogical safety which guided the formation of the research questions around them. However, the questions formulated for the interviews were transformed from less theoretical ones to more practical ones not using the concept of “safety” as such. That aimed to adapt the language closer to the language and understandings of the participants. Thematic interviews allow the researcher to ask additional questions, not initially listed in the interview structure questions that are generated in the moments of interviewing depending on the responses of participants to find out more

about the participant's story and experiences (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 87; Valli & Aarnos, 2018: part 1).

Qualitative interviews as data collection method were also chosen because of their flexibility (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 85). By flexibility the researcher was able to modify and accustom questions based on the needs of the situation and the participants, repeat questions, and ask questions in different order depending on each participant and each unique situation. That flexibility was utilised in all interview sessions to make interviews more flowing as settings. The researcher had in her mind the definitely-to-be-asked questions based on her interview structure (see Appendix 1) but asked each question in a different order depending on the content and flow of each interview. The appropriateness of the interview structure was tested via two pilot interviews organised before the actual interviews.

The search for participants took place between autumn 2020 and spring 2021. The process included sending several dozens of text messages and emails to primary and secondary preparatory classroom teachers in one area in Finland, phone calls with teachers and school principals from that area, contacting familiar to the researcher preparatory and non-preparatory teachers, uploading two posts on social media platform "Facebook" (group names: "Alakoulun aarreaitta – Ideoita ja oivalluksia opetuksen tueksi" and "VALOA! Maahanmuuttajien valmistava opetus") which consists of general teachers and preparatory teachers respectively around Finland. Two more areas in Finland were contacted via many emails from end of 2020 till spring 2021. Six participants from three different areas around Finland were found willing to take part.

The participants of this study had the following shared characteristics based on which they were chosen. Participants had been in preparatory classrooms because they were not familiar with the Finnish language as they had arrived in Finland to seek for asylum. Children had been in preparatory classrooms for at least 3-4 months and the time passed since being in a preparatory classroom was a few years' time period. Participants were aged between 10 to 16 years old. All children applied Finnish language in a way that they could understand spoken language and express themselves as much as possible.

Jasmine (original names of children were changed to these flower-pseudonyms by the researcher) was a boy from secondary school level, Nemesia was a girl from the last years of primary school level, Sunflower was a girl from secondary school level, Amaryllis was a boy

from secondary school level, Orchid was a boy from secondary school level, and Rose was a boy from secondary school level at the moment of interview. Meeting Jasmine on the day of the interview made us both realise that we happened to already know each other from some years back. Even though it is recommended in some situations to conduct research with not familiar individuals so that some biases can be eliminated, having a shared history helped the participant share his story more freely and in a relaxed manner. Nemesia, Sunflower, Amaryllis and Orchid had had as their second preparatory teacher the same teacher while Nemesia and Sunflower had had the same first preparatory teacher, and Amaryllis and Orchid had also had the same first preparatory teacher but a different one to Nemesia and Sunflower. More than one research participant was preferred because of the polyvocality towards the research topic by having a few more narrators. Multiplicity of voices as multiplicity of narratives with several participants enhanced multiple narrative plotlines of preparatory experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147; Moen, 2006; Tanggaard, 2009).

Despite the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, these six thematic interviews in Finnish language were conducted on a one-to-one basis and in-person with each child. The interviews were conducted in January (1 interview) and March (5 interviews) 2021. For each interview session I had requested 1-2 hours from the teachers to convey availability and presence. The schools of participants took responsibility of assigning us a quiet space for the interviews. All the teachers-linkages were caring by letting children know that they were available to them if they needed anything during the interviews. The sessions started with greetings, exchange of research documents, and a short warm-up game. I had two games from which each child selected one for us. Interacting with each other through the game aimed to accommodate ourselves in the company of each other, set a more classroom-like atmosphere, and set into motion the research-participant positions. After that activity, I introduced and checked the recorders (recording machine and computer recorder without video) carrying out one testing sample with each participant.

This study underlines the philosophical belief that stories emerge from the dialogue between participated children and myself (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69, 72). Each narrator shared what one considered relevant to the mutual interaction and located one's narratives in our interview sphere: the experienced preparatory classroom space (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 65–66; Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). Pace (2018) writes about figuring out which language of expression was the most suitable and comfortable for the children and she adjusted herself to the needs

of the children. Quite automatically, I mimicked the children's ways of speaking, copied similar words, mimicked ways of building sentences in order to bring us closer to each other finding a flow for the dialogues. What we say, think, listen, read and write is affected by each other and everything around us making us stay in an ever-fluctuating dialogue with ourselves and our environment (Moen, 2006). Influenced by Riessman (1993, p. 55–56) and partly desiring that myself, I found most suitable to try keeping the interview interactions more as dialogues, as parts of a mutual conversation. Therefore, my efforts, as Riessman (2008, p. 23) points out, were to establish an atmosphere for the interviews where children would feel free to share anything confidentially, anyhow and in any form they felt most comfortable. Riessman (2008, p. 26) writes that the sensitivity established and maintained in interviews can open doors for “dialogic relationships and greater communicative equality”. In this study, I tried to accomplish those parameters by having dialogues with children rather than interviews of fixed roles and silencing myself. Without the dialogical element I believe it would have made the interview sessions tensed and harder for children to trust and share.

3.2 Data analysis method

For analysing my data, I decided to apply a content analysis. Both narrative approach and content analysis examine the experiences of individuals (Kyngäs, 2019b, p. 13). Content analysis strives to listen carefully to what participants have to say with their articulated words about their understanding of our social world (Berg & Lune, 2014, p. 340–341). Content analysis is also labeled as sensitive to what new may rise from the collected data (Kyngäs, 2019a, p. 8). Another reason for selecting this method was the goal to produce theoretical concepts about this research topic (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 108). Classroom safety as experienced by pupils in this study is explored through three dimensions (physical, social and pedagogical) enabling content analysis to fit this study because it breaks the data into smaller pieces of information to then formulate groups and new concepts (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 122). Content analysis is a method of producing codes about your data which try to bring into the surface more understanding of a research phenomenon (Berg & Lune, 2014, p. 336). It also aims to add clarity to the studied phenomenon by organising the data systematically and objectively, and to summarise the data for the reader (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 117, 122). With the clarity that comes from a content analysis the researcher pursuits to interpret and make trustworthy conclusions about the data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 122).

There are several models of content analyses (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 122–127; Kyngäs, 2019b, p. 14). I have followed the instructions of Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018, p. 122–127). The analysing process started with careful listening of all six interview recordings on my computer and manually transcribing them word to word. Transcribing means converting data from audio format to text format in order to be possible to analyse. Transcription took a lot of time but it simultaneously gave me the opportunity to start getting more familiar with the data in-hand. Then, I read through all transcriptions several times. That process raised the central role of continual negotiation between the research data and the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132).

Next, content analysis involves determining your unit of analysis because they are not predetermined (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 122, 108). As units of analysis, multiple words and longer descriptions were considered. Because children of this study were still on their learning path advancing their Finnish language skills, determining a unit of analysis as “single words” was not feasible. Children often explained and expressed themselves with alternative words or using longer descriptions in order to compensate for a narrower vocabulary.

Moving on, the following three phases of content analysis occurred: a) reduction of data, b) clustering/grouping of data, and c) abstraction (conceptualisation) of data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 122–127). Reduction of data refers to picking what is relevant in order to answer the research question and code the essence of the selected data pieces in a shorter form without losing the meaning of the original, raw data (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 123–124). During the interviews, we discussed with children about their experiences in preparatory classrooms, but also some of their experiences in their then current classrooms to establish a flow of dialogue and to assist children recalling memories when they could compare their various classroom experiences. Despite that, most of the data falling outside preparatory classroom experiences were left out of analysis.

I thus transferred relevant data to three digital files named as physical, social and pedagogical safety. At this point, I also translated the relevant data from Finnish to English language. I will explain why I categorised my data into already existing categories. There are two types of content analyses: inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven). Applying an inductive analysis, the researcher engages with, listens to and is open towards the data to find answers to the research question instead of using a former theory to guide the analysis as it is the case with

deductive (theory-driven) analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). This study followed a combination of both styles. Based on the theory, the three dimensions of safety guided me to firstly group the data into physical, social, and pedagogical safety file-categories. Then inductively, listening to the data itself, I analysed the three group findings of what children experienced as safety. I used the theory since I wanted to find out what children had to say about those exact three dimensions. In the end of the reduction phase, each relevant piece of data was transformed into a simplified piece of text which summarized the core of each relevant piece (see example below).

| Original transcribed data | Simplified core data |
|--|---|
| "Whenever I got plus from tasks I thanked my teacher and went to hug my teacher because I was so happy for him giving me pluses" Jasmine | Physical closeness as act of happiness |
| "When I studied hard and my peers, too, then our teacher decided we can go to mainstream classes because we were good enough" Jasmine | Studying hard to be able to join mainstream classes |

Secondly, clustering is about finding differences and similarities in your data to make clusters/categories (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 124). This usually means producing subcategories first, categories secondly, and upper categories thirdly. Because children's narratives were brief and linguistically unique due to their developing Finnish language level, I could not form subcategories which would have formed categories; there was not so much content to keep deriving from. Less categorising during the clustering phase of my analysis contributed to the preservation of data to be analysed for the abstraction phase. Thus, I formed six (6) categories for physical safety, ten (10) categories for social safety, and twelve (12) categories for pedagogical safety. Thirdly, abstraction is about connecting categories from the clustering phase and generating theoretical concepts (main categories) that will reveal knowledge about the research topic with the interpretive capabilities of the researcher (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, p. 125–127). From this process arose:

- Two (2) main categories for physical safety: a) characteristics of concrete physicality and b) a learner-friendly environment,

- Three (3) main categories for social safety: a) belonging in peer group, b) “more than a classroom” and c) balanced and interoperable peer dynamics,
- Four (4) main categories for pedagogical safety: a) caring and suitable teaching personnel, b) adaptability and inclusivity of teacher, c) teacher as a source and d) both-sided loving interaction.

3.3 Ethics and doing research with children

It is advisable to reflect on why it is different to conduct research with children instead of adults (Gallagher, 2009, p. 67). The most fundamental reason for this study was that less research has been done on safety of classrooms experienced by children. Literature recommends reflecting on what childhood means and how researchers perceive childhood while conducting research with children. The roles of the assumptions of the researcher come into play in every research work. Some authors claim that it is impossible to “really” do research with and for children if the researcher, who has literally once been a child as well, does not deeply reflect on their childhood experiences and memories before engaging with child participants (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007, p. 89). Reflecting upon my childhood experiences and, how I perceive childhood (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology), I have chosen to share the following, most suitable ontological and epistemological positionings of mine.

Ontological positionings aligning with Gallagher’s (2009) work:

- Children are in need of guidance, education, care and support
- Different societies have different ideas about what children are. Childhood is a cultural construction
- Children are vulnerable and dependent upon adults for protection
- Children are competent agents who actively contribute to shaping the social world through their everyday activities
- Children are experts in their own lives (p. 67).

Epistemological positionings resonating with Gallagher's (2009) work:

- The more children that we have knowledge about, the more accurate our knowledge of childhood will be
- Listening to children's views and opinions will help adults to know more about childhood
- To understand childhood, we need to know how it has changed over time
- Knowledge about children is not something that exists 'out there' to be collected. It is something that researchers and children create together through interaction (p. 68).

Procedural ethics include, for instance, seeking permits and approvals from ethical committees before conducting the empirical parts of one's research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I tried to make sure I had the right documents to provide parents of participants, the participants themselves, and the schools of participants when asking for participation in this study. Only in the case of Rose permission was needed first by the city of the participant before getting in touch with the participant and his family. I prepared consent forms for both the parents and the participants in Finnish and in English (see English version in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3). I aimed at explaining the purpose of this work clearly and as shortly as possible. However, a significant limitation was not having the documents in the mother languages of children and families, and the fact that some parents may have had difficulties reading the documents. In cases where reading was challenging the teachers of participants assisted us.

Abebe and Bessell (2014, p. 127) warn about the risks of "creating a formulaic, 'tick-a-box' mentality, rather than promoting a carefully considered set of professional values and behaviours" when deploying such bureaucratic processes. That is why, apart from the consent forms, I also took into consideration the following aspects. As I have already mentioned, I started the interviews with an ice-breaker activity to give time for children and myself to accommodate ourselves to the presence of each other. The ice-breaker was something children and I engaged with together, aiming to pave the way for a collaborative atmosphere also during the interview dialogue. Before the interview questions were explored, children were reminded of the possibility to withdraw or call the session off at any time they felt the need or desire to. It was made clear that even if children had asylum seeking background, questions about their asylum-seeking journeys would not be part of this research. In order to be sensitive towards the stories of children, I listened carefully and patiently, expressed my caring with empathic comments and

facial expressions (i.e. gentle laughter, frowning, widened eyes), kept a relaxed and welcoming posture, and linguistically adjusted my use of language to match the skills of children. The overall climate of the sessions was of high priority for myself, towards which I strived for my best. It has been proved essential to use open-ended questions while interacting with child participants (Pace, 2018). This objective guided me when emphasizing the necessity of having interviews in a dialectic manner. Open-ended questions may allow more space and time for children to elaborate and describe their thoughts and feelings so that researchers can better understand what they are telling them (Pace, 2018). Yet also listening and silence are playing their role especially in research with children (Christensen, 2017, p. 2–3). However, the imbalance of roles between children and myself cannot fully be shifted since I was the one asking questions and children the ones responding or expected to attend to questions.

In addition, one more way to make research more reciprocal and less hierarchical is to share and let children read their parts of the research texts so that they can co-work on the final outcome of the written narratives (Blumenreich, 2004, p. 88). I had asked every participant at the end of our interviews if they wanted us to meet up again when I would have transcribed their narratives, to see if they wanted to remove, add, or modify something. Five participants were content with the initial interview meeting without requesting a second one. From the transcription phase onwards the names of children were changed to pseudonyms, whereas identifying information was removed for privacy and confidentiality reasons; anonymization of participants is considered as a necessary protection measure for the respectful treatment of participants (Wiles, 2013, p. 41–54).

Several authors assign reflective processes at the core of research with children referring to researchers being mindful and critical, reflecting on power relations and weighing the effects of the research on children and their wider relationships (Abebe & Bessell, 2014; Christensen, 2017, p. 2; Hohti & Karlsson, 2014). The experiences of Sunflower required extra sensitivity and being very mindful. Recalling the unjust behaviours of the first preparatory teacher of Sunflower towards her and her classmates brought the experienced intense emotions back. Sunflower relived some of those painful emotions during our interview. Sunflower reassured me that she wanted to share her story with me and have her story shared when I asked if she preferred to withdraw from the study. We stayed for a longer while with Sunflower after the end of the interview to make myself available for whatever she would have needed at that moment. Sunflower requested a second meeting, which was conducted remotely and involving looking at the transcript, making sure how Sunflower was doing, and reaching some closure regarding

the first interview session. Unavoidably, I kept thinking of the wider meaning of the interview for Sunflower and how much she undergone in order to participate; Would this research bring some justice to Sunflower by making her story known and heard by readers? Would this research bring some change and to whose lives?

4 Results

The content analysis of this study brought into the surface nine main categories regarding the physical, social, and pedagogical safety of participants' preparatory classrooms. The categories that emerged show how physical safety is perceived as constituting of the tangible aspects along with how the needs of pupils are taken into consideration. The categories of social safety reflect the ways peers get along in a classroom while categories of pedagogical safety are attached to the roles of teachers. These categories provided answers to the research question being: "*What constitutes physical, social, and pedagogical classroom safety for participants in Finnish preparatory classrooms?*"

4.1 Physical safety

Based on theory, physical safety of classroom spaces is mostly connected to the tangible materialistic elements located in classrooms and how individuals perceive, interact, and utilise them. In the two sections below, we will go through what children experienced as belonging to physical safety.

4.1.1 Characteristics of concrete physicality

Parts of physical safety that children brought up might seem of the most obvious ones but those had stayed best in the minds of participants. Attention was given to the size of the classroom and school, which is something that we might take for granted unless there is something exceptional.

"It [classroom] was quite small, yes, it was not that big, it was quite small" Rose

"The school in Finland is very big" Rose

"We had a very big classroom" Amaryllis

The attention concentrating on the size of the classrooms and schools shows how some details, such as what was part of the classrooms, did not catch the attention of children. Rose mentions how big the school in Finland was comparing it to how schools were back in country of origin.

Regardless of the sizes of the classrooms, participants focused more on what was happening within the classrooms, thus, the social aspect. The classrooms were part of learning without being used so much in creative ways.

When participants were describing themselves in their classroom spaces, one of the participants mentioned:

“The teacher arranged our sitting positions in our classroom” Amaryllis

This expression indicates of the way the teacher utilised the classroom space for learning purposes. The teacher was the one responsible for managing pupils’ sitting arrangements and how pupils used their indicated spaces to learn. Having a seating arrangement can be seen as one form of bringing structure and order as a balancing element for learning, which is a dynamic and fluctuating process. Besides, the participant remembering exactly this aspect of the physical space may validate the importance of order as enabler of focus being placed on the other dimensions of safety.

While the physical aspect of the preparatory classroom participants had been in received some “space” in the narratives of children, their physicality was considered as of secondary value. For example, Orchid told us about his classroom:

“A kind of normal classroom, everything was normal”

This makes a point about how the participant perceived his classroom, holistically thinking. There was not something that the participant had found worth adding to his narrative. What a normal classroom is can vary depending on context and resources, however, here normalcy is attached to a classroom that has suitable furniture for learning.

4.1.2 A learner-friendly environment

In a learner-friendly space the needs of the pupils are acknowledged and prioritized. When participants started their learning in preparatory classrooms, at the centre of learning were their books. The books were selected carefully and accordingly in the following manner:

"Was it so that we first received, at least I, when entering preparatory class, books for first graders and from there onwards for second graders, third graders matching your level and what we needed to learn based on our age" Orchid

The books were supporting children in their learning by being selected not according to the ages of children but according to their levels of knowing. The selection of the right books took place in a reverse order, meaning that the level of pupils was considered first and the age was secondary. Starting with books that aimed to help pupils catch up and make sure they will be able to later on learn in a mainstream Finnish class by themselves can be seen as primarily benefitting the pupils; to prepare pupils well for the future integration in the mainstream classes. While the books were chosen with care for every pupil in the class of Orchid, in the class of Rose, pupils were taken into account during arts lessons. Rose's pieces of art work were displayed in the classroom walls making the participant feel good. This practice might have aimed at making the classroom a space children could shape and organise. The art work pieces were creations of pupils which occupied space specifically meant for them in the classroom.

A learner-friendly environment was found to play a possible role in the various feelings of pupils. Rose expressed how the facilities in schools in Finland were better compared to one's country of origin:

"The school in Finland is very big and things are better, like this [showing furniture], or there is a computer and everything, back home there aren't, yes and here there is a sports hall, gym, back home there is nothing like that maybe a sports field which is not inside but outside" (Rose).

These facilities can be perceived as providing more opportunities for learning and more opportunities for new learning experiences. He was excited when sharing about the facilities in his Finnish school which can be a way of conveying satisfaction with the learning equipment and spaces.

4.2 Social safety

Leaning on the applied theory, social safety of classroom spaces touches the interactions within a learning context especially the interactions of peers, their formations, and their quality. In the three sections below, we will go through what children experienced as establishing social safety.

4.2.1 Belonging in peer group

Few of the participants of this research had had experiences of non-belonging which are situated in the spectrum of safety but in the non-safe end. While participants experienced non-safety, we can derive that belonging is an influencer for the experiences of safety. Thus, both experiences of belonging and non-belonging have at their core belonging as part of social safety with safety including experiences of non-safety.

From the narratives of children, Nemesia's and Sunflower's narratives involved experiences that resonate with non-belonging. Pondering on the aspect of exclusion, Nemesia had made many efforts to be included and stay included within a peer group in preparatory classroom. In her case, the friendships had often started well reminding an infatuated phase when two individuals spend a lot of time together and in elevated spirit. However, something repeatedly happened leading the friendships to come to an abrupt end. What was even more saddening was that Nemesia did not know the reasons why she was constantly left out of peer groups. Here is an extract:

"Yes, but I always liked being with M-friend, then all of a sudden during summer break she stopped talking to me, both M-friend and P-friend, I had not done anything to them, and I didn't know why, then I started being with another friend with whom I like being" Nemesia

Being excluded had left its marks on Nemesia. During our interview sessions, the insecurity when discussing peers and friendships was present. The exclusion was also one of the topics that received most attention in Nemesia's narrative. There was a situation Nemesia recalled when the classroom teacher intervened during a misunderstanding that had taken place, causing the peer group members to apologise and resolve their conflict. Sometimes teachers' assistance is needed to build and strengthen the bonds between classmates while teachers being aware of how their pupils perceive and treat their peers. This requires time during lessons and during recess dedicated to getting to know your pupils in more depth, mediating abilities being in the midst of your pupils' dynamics while giving enough space to the pupils themselves, and interaction practices that promote inclusion. Nevertheless, this challenge is not only dependent on the stance of teaching adults but also on the personalities, social skills, and cultural backgrounds of pupils. These last three are factors outside the realm of influence of the teacher.

Sunflower also remembers a moment where she:

“kicked the ball and peers told our teacher how they did not want me to touch the ball”

Sunflower tried to be part of her peer group during physical education but her peers rejected her. Even though participants recalled moments which may or may not have been reoccurring or persisting in the long run of being in the preparatory classroom, I felt those moments were important to the participants sharing them. In this experience shared by Sunflower, peers were together expressing their discontent with their classmate’s action. What was an unfortunate addition was how the teacher reacted to this instance. Sunflower’s first preparatory teacher punished her by placing her standing still at the corner of the class which also must have added to the experiences of standing out of the peer group.

Sunflower’s narrative revolves around the resilience she showed fighting against the unjust behaviours of her first preparatory teacher. Sunflower was strong and brave knowing when something was not handled fairly. The unjust behaviours of that teacher will be elaborated on a later section but those behaviours made Sunflower stand up for herself. There were cases when the classmates of Sunflower accepted their teacher’s authority and misbehaviours making them bystanders. Sunflower, however, raised her voice leading her to become “a target” of the teacher’s outbursts. Being a target was seen through the grades Sunflower received:

“Yes, why every classmate had good grades and I had bad ones”

Sunflower had to suffer lower grades than her classmates, only because she confronted their first preparatory teacher at times of being mistreated. One could examine the possible connection between Sunflower protecting herself by vocally and proactively putting up against the behaviours of her first preparatory teacher, and to becoming isolated amongst her peers.

To most of us conflict brings into our minds something negative and something painful. Through this work’s analysis, conflicts were part of non-belonging. One of the participants told how some of her peers used to have some sort of clashes and quarrels when spending time together. This is considered as the first situation of conflict out of three and this belonging to the “positive conflict” division. This particular participant exclaimed how it was normal for those peers to interact in such a way and they did not, at the end of the day, mean harm towards their peers. This way of interacting tells us about the various dynamics peer relations manifest. It seems like an inner circle element, that element of conflict, which was accepted and used as a way of being with peers.

"Well, we had clashes/conflicts all the time but it was fun for us/a playful way of being/not serious fighting" Nemesia

This is exactly why from the outside it might be difficult to understand how having quarrels can be fun and positive. However, most quarrels take place with a slight part of tension. If slight quarreling was part of Nemesia and her peers' interaction during recess, that raises questions about how easy or challenging it might have been for fellow peers to join this peer group.

The second out of the three situations of conflict is one shared by Orchid. This participant became very close with one of his preparatory classmates with whom he felt and still feels to have a unique connection and valuable friendship. Orchid shared with me how often during recess times his close friend and himself ended up having fights. Their fights constituted of verbal expressions of clashing thoughts but never of physical harming of each other.

"Hmm, our clashes/conflicts did not last long during primary school times, they were not physical with fists and such, more arguing with words and sometimes swearing to each other but those lasted only one break/recess, after that we were best friends again" Orchid

Even though physical harm was not inflicted, swearing could have been experienced as a form of insult, too. But from the way Orchid shared these occasions, it seems they have been bringing the two boys closer to each other. In a way, the times of verbal conflict might have been tests of trust and how close one could let the other come to the self. Verbal conflicts, paradoxically, tend to necessitate courage to speak your mind to the other person. The fact that these confrontations did not have long durations reveal how they played a more positive role in strengthening the friendship of these two peers. Additionally, the ability of the two peers to bounce back to kind interacting after their conflicts shows their caring for each other and their skills to reconcile. The reason why conflict-category is linked to non-belonging in the two described situations is because there might have been moments of non-belonging, very brief ones, during those two situations involving conflict.

The third situation of conflict, which differs from the two above ones in the sense that it has a negative connotation, is about the fights rising when playing football with peers. These conflicts caused frustration and exhaustion to Orchid who was not involved in the football games at recess times. Conflicts mostly divide individuals and are rooted in differing views. This was the case also with football conflicts but at the same time the interest and passion towards football was a unifying, common denominator for peers engaging in football. Orchid describes how

football was a cultural activity and a matter of pride for fellow classmates and that increased the intensity of emotions around football. Orchid expressed his opinion towards those conflicts revealing how he could not understand his peers fighting for something secondary, less important in a greater scale of values for him.

”Well, mostly it was a football thing, in the countries of the other pupils people play football all the time, so often pupils’ conflicts arose during and about football, but yeah, conflicts about football” Orchid

What caused non-belonging was both the football conflicts from which Orchid stayed away because of not sharing a mutual language with his peers and the differing life values that Orchid cherished guiding him to refrain from participating in conflict-bound football with peers.

4.2.2 “More than a classroom”

In the preparatory classroom of Rose, there prevailed a more flexible approach towards language learning. Instead of perceiving the already familiar languages to the pupils as barriers to learning Finnish, these languages were embraced as possibilities to support Finnish language learning.

”In preparatory class we spoke a lot in s-language, English and Finnish, yes” Rose

This approach sends the message that even if a shared language was still on its first steps of formulation among peers, the various languages brought by peers were accepted, appreciated and used as assets to unify peers. In the preparatory classroom of Rose, something very meaningful happened; A new classmate joined their group having a language that was very similar to Rose’s mother tongue. Having someone with whom it was easy to be understood and with whom one could feel empowered and capable, tied these two classmates firmly to each other. Sharing languages worked as a bridge and a booster for learning. Rose stepped into the shoes of their teacher after the arrival of their new classmate:

”When my close friend from P-country came and he had just been one month in Finland, so he did not understand anything and when the teacher tried to explain something to him he said I don’t understand, so then I explained to him in my mother tongue and he understood” Rose

Rose was active and did not let the opportunity to help his teacher and his new classmate slip away. In this situation, the power balances were shifted when the pupils helped and taught each other, setting their teacher to be on an assisting role. Pupils gaining more agency when being able to influence their learning with their prior skills was essential and encouraging.

In these following passages, the dependency of peers will be elaborated. The shared experiences with Jasmine's classmates created a strong linkage between peers who began to assimilate in regard to needs and wishes. Jasmine's classroom had time every day to engage in play with their peers. Their teacher had set a reward system which provided pupils with time to use games to make learning fun and motivating whereas giving pupils time to get to know their peers. When the time had arrived to move from the preparatory classroom of Jasmine to a mainstream, Finnish-speaking, class there was consensus about the desire to continue learning with the same peer group:

"That (going to different school) was not good, we all said that we wanted to go to the same school to study and to the same class [after preparatory class]" Jasmine

Usually in Finland classmates do not change during elementary/primary school level. If Jasmine and his peers had known from the beginning of their preparatory education that as peers, they would only share paths for a while instead of a longer schooling period, would they still have built such a tight group spirit? Being separated from close peers affects any pupil under that circumstance but Jasmine and peers already being a special and separate group due to their multicultural background, made the importance of same peer group continuity even more predominant. While the phase of making friends outside Jasmine's preparatory classroom had not been activated yet, the separation from preparatory peers felt devastating.

Jasmine's narrative consists of parts which convey worry of being left out of peer group. There was a moment when Jasmine had to select an extra subject for himself while in preparatory. That decision was made as follows:

"Because all of my friends chose textile work and I did not want to go alone to lessons, I chose the same course" Jasmine

Here we can see the power of a liked peer group and the scary emotions triggered by a possible exclusion or lacking behind. Even if Jasmine would have enjoyed another subject, feelings of fear overruled this decision. Being very dependent on the peer group might have also been due to the age of pupils at that time, most peers entering their early adolescence. What in addition

invoked those emotions of fear were the thoughts Jasmine held about learning. Jasmine had clear views on learning being a social process:

"I think if someone wants to study and wants to learn very effectively and a lot, one has to have friends/others, because if one is learning and studying in isolation one will always be sad and not able to study"

This view was mature and showing what Jasmine valued. The participant might have experienced what it was when one was left alone and left out of a peer group expected to advance in one's learning path. The sadness following when one is isolated from their peers is way too heavy and overwhelming to deal with, leaving no room to focus on learning.

Considering of how much time some of the participants' peer groups spent together, the dependency aspect steps into the scene unavoidably. Jasmine and Amaryllis shared in their narratives how they were living along with some of their peers at the same place. Reception centres were places that "forced" children to get to know each other outside school times and to learn co-existing in harmony. When you spend so much time with others, both in and outside school hours, you get used to having the others with you. Knowing about the private lives of your peers more than usual because of living under exceptional conditions, increases the knowledge others hold about you.

As we can see how central others are in the narratives of children, the influence of familiar people is more easily expected to be part of the results of analysing. Connected to the views Jasmine expressed about the social character of learning is the influence of family. In particular, in the case of Jasmine, the role of family in affecting feelings of dependency was significant. Jasmine had close relations with his father who had always cared about the learning and personal growth of his son. For example, Jasmine's father had persistently helped him learn the multiplication tables in mathematics when he was younger by insisting practicing and prioritizing practice over leisure time. Jasmine's father supported his son also during preparatory education and while learning Finnish by sharing his thoughts and wisdom.

"My father always told me if I wanted to learn Finnish I would have to talk with friends, play with friends, go out with friends and so on, and that is how I learned really, to speak Finnish"
Jasmine

The father of Jasmine believed that in order to learn a new language it is vital to get into peer groups, spend a lot of time with peers doing things together, talk with peers, and listen to peers.

This important piece of advice was considered seriously by Jasmine who contently shared how successful in learning Finnish he had been applying this advice of his father. Learning was discussed at home and seen as fundamental in becoming part of the local, mainstream society. While mentioning the influential role of a parent in the case of Jasmine, the role of siblings is the natural, next elaboration. For Nemesia and Rose, the influence of familiar to them people was reflected in their choices of friends. Both participants found themselves with classmates who had similar attributes of personality as their siblings. In the midst of so many new things during preparatory classroom, being able to identify familiarity through peers was helpful. Choosing peers resembling siblings to hang out with indicated how participants valued and looked up to their siblings. Without knowing, their siblings had set good examples and standards for what to look for in new friends.

4.2.3 Balanced and interoperable peer dynamics

Orchid especially remembers how good it was being in his preparatory classroom resulting in memories that are willingly revisited nowadays. Birthdays are special days, days which pupils often want to be remembered and celebrated. In the preparatory classroom of Orchid, the teacher had established a caring habit of celebrating the birthdays of all pupils. Whenever it was someone's birthday, Orchid's teacher took his guitar leading the whole class to sing along the "Happy Birthday"-song for the celebrating pupil. And it was specifically a group effort with peers singing, not only the teacher. The teacher showed with his actions and example how it was important to spread caring in day-to-day situations. In line with day-to-day actions revealing caring is the following excerpt by Jasmine:

"Yes, everyone helped, if I didn't know something I asked [...], I asked my friends/peers for help and my friends asked me"

In the class of Jasmine prevailed a feeling of being cared for by peers. There was no shame in showing vulnerability and not knowing. Peers could rely that in moments of need they would find someone in the classroom ready to assist. There existed a collective pool of knowledge among the peers and assisting was both-sided. Hand-in-hand goes the following example of what made the interactions with peers warm:

“My friend got a chocolate box [as a reward] and he shared it with me and with everyone”

Jasmine

Even though a classmate of Jasmine had earned a reward for his learning efforts in class, he did not think solely of himself. The ties with peers being close and affectionate overrode the individualistic choices putting the shared good first. The fact that this situation was marked in the memories of Jasmine may give weight to the importance of feeling cherished and looked after. Helping, sharing, and being kind are intertwined elements visible in the narratives. For instance, Rose recalled:

“We were all kind to each other, friends towards each other”

The kindness of peers contributed to a classroom atmosphere which was welcoming and considerate. The kindness was not only a way of being of the few but of each and everyone. This kindness made Rose call his classmates friends, not only some fellow peers being in the same classroom. Everyone being kind also allowed learning to happen more smoothly. Amaryllis, however, still remembers a theatrical play that their class came up with to present about their classroom’s atmosphere. This play’s main plot was around the caring between peers. For something to inspire the whole peer group, it had to be something predominant and close to the hearts of peers. When caring was so present, it touched the peers on a deeper level. That caring also united the peers of Amaryllis’ to come together and create a play for others to think about.

In an environment of warmth, equality was something participants raised in their narratives:

“[...] everyone was equal, there was no-one who knew more than others, everyone was equal”

Orchid

Having peers who also had an immigrant background and did not yet know the Finnish language, brought a sense of equality and similarity. In a classroom where everyone was having a shared goal made the pupils feel more equal amongst their peers. Being equal helped Rose to learn more effectively. The existence of hierarchy among peers or the teacher having preferred pupils would have eliminated the positive feelings peers had developed learning surrounded by equal treatment.

Because everyone was equal in the classrooms of Rose and Orchid, children narrated during interviews experiences of togetherness and not of isolation. Orchid specifically recalls how he was never alone in his second preparatory classroom or if someone was left out of the group of

peers, teachers immediately intervened to cut the possible cycle. The teachers, having as their principle to be vigilant about incidents of exclusion, brought safety to pupils. Experiences of togetherness instead of isolation were expressed by Orchid who had his close friend with him when starting to have lessons outside preparatory classroom in the mainstream classes. Rose was also not alone:

“At that time I did not have Finnish friends but I was always with my brother and that close friend from P-country, we went for school lunch together and we were always together, that was good”

The presence of Rose’s older brother and his close friend was a secure base on which the participant could rely on. The time needed to learn enough Finnish and be included by mainstream classroom pupils was filled with constructive experiences of having peers at all times. Similarly, Amaryllis felt protected and less isolated having his older brother with him who could stand by his side if there were cases of bullying. While still a preparatory pupil, some of Rose’s integration lessons with Finnish-speaking pupils in mainstream classes involved him being an outsider in regard to the already formed peer structure. Nonetheless, what alleviated Rose’s feelings of isolation was the presence of the teaching assistant during those lessons:

“No, I was like alone there [mainstream class], I was a bit alone there but there was our teaching assistant, she was always there” Rose

Lastly, Amaryllis shared how all peers were together at all times. The experiences were shared with peers during recess, class, and in general. *“We were all together”*, Amaryllis added. Doing together was visible in the narratives mostly through games. The games being board games and table football (Jasmine) provided opportunities to pupils to have some engaging activities apart from lesson tasks. The teachers had found ways to give time to pupils to cooperate in ways additional to the subject lessons.

All the components of “Balanced and interoperable peer dynamics” indicate how an atmosphere of caring, which is achieved by the efforts of all, accompanied by principles of equality, non-isolation, and doing together, form a foundation that is in equilibrium because peers were suitable behaviour-wise and personality-wise for each other.

4.3 Pedagogical safety

As far as theory is concerned, pedagogical safety of classroom spaces consists of the relationship and connection between teachers and pupils, and makes those relations important and safe. In the four sections below, we will go through what children experienced as belonging to pedagogical safety.

4.3.1 Suitability of teaching personnel

This category is about what participants experienced as needing to feel safe because of their experiences of non-safety. These experiences belong to safety since it can be perceived as dynamic and including non-safety. Most of the experiences of Sunflower unfold around the behaviour of a teacher who was non-caring, non-sensitive to the needs of pupils. Sunflower remembers how their preparatory classroom was having a PE lesson outdoors. Pupils were waiting for their first preparatory teacher as instructed for a long time on their own without a sign of the teacher. When the teacher all of a sudden was spotted by the pupils, she ignored the callings coming from Sunflower, leaving the pupils outdoors for even more time. At that point Sunflower decided to get inside through another door until she entered the same space with her neglectful teacher. It was then when Sunflower and the teacher confronted each other. The first preparatory teacher was not taking responsibility for her actions that led her pupils experience uncertainty which could have been avoided.

The first preparatory teacher of Sunflower displayed more behaviours causing instability and uncertainty to pupils. Sunflower shares:

”And she made three times or once, I don’t remember, she made a test for me and I didn’t know about it, yes and she said that on that day I would have a test but she did not tell me beforehand”

In general, Sunflower was having difficulties learning Finnish during her first preparatory classroom because of her unstable teacher. When one is already facing difficulties in their learning, they seek for assistance and clarity. The unexpected tests conducted for Sunflower proved how the teacher was not understanding towards her pupil. Pupils were mostly informed in advance about an upcoming test to benefit the pupil. However, in the case of Sunflower the pupil had to experience additional pressure and anxiety due to poor teaching. The first preparatory teacher

being non-predictable left the pupil feel even more ignorant and incapable. What else Sunflower recalls from her moments with her first preparatory teacher is the following excerpts:

"L-teacher was angry at me and shouted because I had to eat at school, I could not fast because there were rules at school about needing to eat lunch...I said I didn't want to eat but she said I had to eat at least something or drink only water [...] I was very angry and I told her I didn't want to come to school if it is this way"

AND

"My mum came to school and L-teacher said that I did not come to school...I asked L-teacher why she was lying, really"

We can see how Sunflower was not receiving understanding from her first preparatory teacher. For this participant it was very important and personal to be able to fast during a certain period of time. While lunch is part of Finnish schools, there were no exceptions considered for the participant. Since fasting was something valuable and part of the identity of the participant, the teacher-pupil relationship could have been utilised to find compromises and support for the values of the pupil. Because the connection and trust between the teacher and the pupil was not well-developed, this crucial resource was unavailable leaving the pupil not heard. The trust-building process between the teacher and the participant were also impeded due to the disloyal behaviour of the teacher when the parents of the participant visited school. At those times, the teacher was showing towards the parents that things were going well in school for Sunflower even though that was not the real case. This instability of the teacher was omnipresent also during lessons, making Sunflower feel very much confused about who their classroom teacher really was. The instability of the teacher can be seen as one reason for hindering Sunflower's learning because acquisition of new skills such as language skills demand consistency and repetition.

Part of this category are also the tensions that emerged between the teacher and Sunflower. Based on the example that was provided above from the PE lesson of Sunflower, this participant had the courage to stand up for her and her classmates' rights. Sunflower had a strong sense of fairness and was ready to also act when needed. These situations of confrontation could have been situations of Sunflower giving constructive feedback to the teacher in reshaping future teaching if the "mistakes" of the teacher had been unintentional. These situations having the participant as a defender indicate how threatened Sunflower had felt instead of safe and cared

for. Under these tensed conditions, Sunflower and that teacher managed to reach a compromise when Sunflower desired to fast. This time the classroom teacher was able to accept her pupil coming to school for a shorter number of hours so that lunch won't be part of the school day. What made this compromise slightly unreliable was how the teacher lied to the parents about this participant and how the compromise was realised.

It is not surprising that the perceptions about Nemesia's and Sunflower's teacher were not positive. From what we have presented so far and from the following extracts:

"The teacher was sometimes angry, one time she asked a pupil to look for her/his notebook, the pupil showed it and waited for instructions when the teacher asked why the pupil had not done anything taking the notebook and throwing it" Nemesia

"Because L-teacher...I didn't like her because she shouted" Sunflower

We realise how pupils did not like the teacher and her actions. The first preparatory teacher being emotionally unstable and not capable of regulating her own emotions, especially negative ones, in different learning situations caused pupils not being pleased with their teacher. Especially in preparatory classrooms where pupils spend almost all their hours with the same teacher it is utterly necessary for learning to take place to form silver linings between teachers and pupils.

4.3.2 Adaptability and inclusivity of teaching

Since pupils of preparatory classes among their peers and among their teachers do not often share a common language, teaching sometimes requires flexibility. This flexibility was observed in the narratives of children. For example, participants share:

"During biology lessons we went outdoors with our teacher to search for flowers, mushrooms and berries and took photos of them" Jasmine

"We put grammar into songs, our teacher then played the guitar while we were singing them to learn" Amaryllis

Nature and surrounding environments outside classroom were used as ways to make learning more interactive and experiential. Being in nature and capturing photos may generate feelings

and impact the senses when pupils are able to see, smell, touch. Jasmine being in different learning environments and having a task to complete by identifying elements may have elevated his curiosity while expanding his Finnish vocabulary. While Jasmine mentioned the use of nature, Amaryllis explained how music was used to enhance learning. The teacher of Amaryllis made use of his guitar playing skills and love for music to help pupils remember better. Music can also be viewed as a universal form of expression which in these cases provided an alternative to studying and a bridge between diverse learners. Music was not a platform for the teacher to show-off his skills. Instead, music was made available to the whole class with everyone being involved since the teacher had set a common goal for singing. Along with these adjusted forms of learning, Amaryllis recalled how their class used their body language, hands and signs to communicate with each other. Amaryllis found this very comical at times and it was a way for everyone to feel more included. Using hands and the body to explain something requires the educator to be open-minded to see how these bodily expressions are part of a learning process that is holistic. The adaptability of the teacher of Amaryllis was also experienced when he would tell his pupils in advance about tests. Even though it is widely accepted to give pupils time to prepare for tests, this practice can be interpreted as adapting teaching to the needs of pupils such as need for preparation and revision.

In this second passage, the aspect of inclusivity will be elaborated based on the results of analysis. The second preparatory teacher of Orchid was guided by values of equality and inclusion. Those values were put into practice during teaching. For instance, Orchid remembers the following:

"In my opinion I never observed our teacher having a preferred/favourite pupil in class, I didn't encounter that, everyone in class was equal girls and boys, that was good...The teacher never paid more attention to a pupil than to others, that made the teacher the best teacher who cared for everyone"

The teacher of Orchid gave her attention equally to everyone without praising someone more than other pupils. The teacher managed to keep a balance in interacting with all her pupils. Seeing every pupil in the classroom made this teacher very dear to the participant. The example that this teacher set with her behaviour made her a role model and someone admirable. When teachers show how to be considerate and include everyone in a group, pupils can receive a powerful lasting message shaping their interactions. Alongside the attention Orchid's second teacher was able to provide to everyone equally, comes the stance this teacher had towards peer

exclusion. While giving attention to all her pupils this teacher also paid attention to what her pupils did and how. The teacher actively showed with her behaviour how every pupil ought to be included, involved, and treated respectfully in peer activities. This was manifested in the interventions of the teacher when someone from the peer group was left alone, even though Orchid remembers how rarely someone was left as an outsider. This rarity can be explained by the teacher being adamant in not tolerating peer exclusion and by the teacher setting clear principles; either all peers played together or no-one would play. In addition, Orchid also said:

“And if we had fights (peer fights) she was angry at us asking why we are fighting or if other children started fights against us, she was angry at them”

Similarly, this teacher put a stop to fights by showing her disapproval. Those practices conveyed to pupils what kind of behaviours are expected from them. We can ponder how these behaviours strived for an atmosphere where everyone felt safe and wanted. Both the first and second preparatory teacher of Orchid and their teaching assistant stated to the pupils how much they cared for them and how they treated them like family, like their own children. The feelings of care were deep and followed by respective actions. Adults viewing the pupils as children of their own reveal how committed and attached they have been towards their class. Orchid added that he felt in his preparatory classroom that someone always had his back, someone was there for him, and someone was ready to protect him from any harm.

4.3.3 Teacher as a source

This next main category that was created during the analysis consists of teacher devoting time for pupils, of the availability of the teacher and of teacher having faith in pupils.

Teachers of preparatory classrooms spent a lot of time with their pupils since they provided all the subjects. Jasmine happily shared of the many different ball games they got to practice with their teacher who also was responsible for their PE lessons. Having all the subjects delivered by the same teacher offered more time for everyone to bond. Even though the teacher did not get to decide how many hours or subjects he would teach (externally predetermined), the way he was with his pupils showed devotion and validates why Jasmine felt pleased.

Teachers and teaching assistants of participants always had time for their pupils and expressed that availability. When Jasmine was transitioning from preparatory class to a mainstream Finnish class in another school, his teacher did not want to let him visit the new school alone. Specifically, because Jasmine had told his teacher how he did not know how to get to the new school which mobilized the teacher to help even more. The participant could trust that his teacher would be there for him.

Here are some extracts from the participants:

"Yes, always the teacher and the assistant helped me" Nemesia

"There always was an assistant, she was very nice/good, she always helped a bit during tests" Amaryllis

"And J-assistant always came with me to mainstream classes, English classes and we always talked a lot" Nemesia

"If someone was a new pupil in our class we and our teacher helped the pupil at the beginning, and then the teacher always helped" Amaryllis

The support and help pupils received from their teachers and teaching assistants was always present. Pupils were not left on their own. Pupils could rely that if needed there would be someone towards whom to turn to. The physical presence of teaching adults was also considered as part of getting help. The provision of help had created a culture of helping in the class of Amaryllis since both pupils and teacher were available to assist others. Receiving help when needed also shows how the focus was on pupils, learning was pupil-centred having adults as supporters along the learning process.

Teachers' views about their pupils matter and have an impact on them. Teachers of participants believed in their pupils' skills and capabilities. Jasmine's teacher had stressed the following to his pupils:

"[...] but our teacher always told us that every day is a test" Jasmine

This teacher wanted his pupils to work hard for their learning setting high expectations for them. The high expectations indicate how the teacher had faith in his pupils and wanted them to strive. Showing faith in his pupils can be seen as a way to strengthen the confidence of pupils. Rose's teacher was also capable in evaluating the skills of this participant in mathematics leading to

the participant's visits in mainstream mathematics classes. The evaluation would not have taken place if the teacher had not seen and trusted his pupil being ready to join mainstream mathematics. Jasmine and his peers knew that their hard work would mean integrations to mainstream Finnish classes. While they had a teacher who had placed high standards for them their motivation to learn could have been fueled by that.

4.3.4 Both-sided loving interaction

Trust takes time and is a precondition also for learning. From the narratives we could derive acts and situations that indicate this shared trust. Jasmine explained how their teaching assistant had become their friend. Calling their assistant their friend, highlights how close and familiar they had become with each other. What is more about the relationship between Jasmine, peers, and their assistant is that pupils were able to be vulnerable and not knowing in regard to their Finnish language skills. By this, I refer to pupils being comfortable confusing how to pronounce the name of their assistant correctly. Pupils received a laughing assistant as a response to their mistakes instead of an upset or judgmental reaction. Another situation with a teaching assistant was from Nemesia who said how much she used to talk with her assistant. Because this particular participant had been left out from many peer groups after many efforts to be included, the fact that she gave a lot of herself while being with her assistant demonstrates her being comfortable in opening up to her. Speaking of bonding with teaching personnel, Sunflower said out loud how she perceived her second preparatory teacher:

“She is good, H-teacher is like my mother, she taught me and I was at peace [...]”

This statement exhibits what the second teacher had meant for Sunflower. That teacher had gained the trust of the participant while being a person who exuded tranquility. Feeling at peace may also have derived from the resemblance of the teacher with the mother of the participant. Ideally a motherly/parental figure is one who allows oneself to be themselves without fear of being judged and to whom one can confide in. Speaking of the second teacher of Sunflower in such a manner implicitly tells us of the loving relationship between the two. In addition to this emotional closeness comes the physical closeness that was provided by some of the pupils to their teachers. Nemesia and Jasmine expressed their joy and gratitude by hugging their teaching

adults. Being comfortable with physical contact might be more present in some cultures compared to other ones but this cannot be considered as the only explanatory reason for those behaviours of children. My interpretation based on what else children shared with me is that these children trusted getting so close to their teachers. Touching and being touched can be very personal. If it is believed to be personal in the cases of these children, then it must have required the mutual trust between parties.

The relationship between some of the teachers and participants turned out to be deep and filled with care. There is one extract to demonstrate this:

"Because he (I-teacher, first teacher) understood that we did not know any of the Finnish language, that it was a bit difficult for us" Orchid

The first teacher was able to grasp what was the starting point for the learning of his pupils. The expectations of the teacher were realistic towards his pupils and gentle towards them. The challenges of pupils were handled by the teacher with understanding. Orchid experienced his teacher's empathy through his approach towards the pupils. The teacher was in alignment with the needs of his pupils. Orchid felt understood by his teachers when he recalled his second preparatory teacher. The participant was understood by the second teacher when he made jokes with his peers about everyday things. The pupils were able to enjoy the jokes since their teacher was also engaged with them due to comprehending what was meant to be funny. Orchid provided some additional explanation to the why his second preparatory teacher got their jokes and was on the same wavelength with them. One main reason was her long experience being a teacher for children from other cultures. Having jokes as a form of shared language reveals how comfortable and safe pupils felt.

The care of teachers extended beyond classroom boundaries. Orchid's preparatory teachers wanted to know how his family members were doing. I mentioned above how these same teachers treated their pupils like their own children. Seeing pupils as part of their family affected the loved ones of pupils. The teachers' personal life boundaries and professional life boundaries blurred because of their strong feelings for their pupils. Even till these days the teachers of Orchid genuinely want to hear from the families of pupils. These feelings were equally expressed towards all pupils in Orchid's preparatory classrooms:

"[...] teacher who cared for everyone and who saw if someone had a bad day" Orchid

The teachers of Orchid knew their pupils well knowing when someone was in need of their care and time. Everyone in the class was important.

Alongside the flowing care of teaching adults, the interactions in some of the classrooms were joyful. Some participants described how their teachers were always funny and nice. Orchid said:

”Nicely, all the time we laughed and I-teacher taught us with humour, it was not like now we will do this but he tried to teach us with jokes/humour”

The teacher’s approach was playful and this playfulness made learning enjoyable for pupils. This attitude of the teacher contributed to an interaction that was light and influenced positively the learning of pupils. This influence was seen in the willingness, determination, and satisfaction of pupils to attend school. Through the extracts:

”It was really enjoyable, everyone wanted to go to school” Amaryllis

“It was fun there, we were all the time laughing” Orchid

Orchid remembers that the body language of his teachers was an indicator of how they enjoyed learning with their pupils. Those teachers were always with a smile when teaching. What else indicated of enjoyable times in preparatory class was how quickly Orchid had felt time passing. This participant shared not realizing that all of a sudden, several months had gone by because he had had such a good time learning in their class. The use of humour was essential in the ways Orchid’s teachers interacted with pupils. The feelings that were central in Orchid’s classroom were feelings of content and happiness.

5 Discussion

The focus of this narrative study was to explore how pupils define safety of their preparatory classrooms based on their experiences. Data was generated through six thematic interviews. Data was filtered to provide answers to the research question while leaving out irrelevant data extracts. From the content analysis, nine main results from all the three dimensions (physical, social and pedagogical) were found. The results in physical safety brought forward how participants experienced their classroom as a physical space with its learning opportunities by being learner-friendly. The results in social safety emphasised how the peer relations shaped the positive and negative experiences of participants during interactions showing what attributes composed those interactions. The results in pedagogical safety give details about the relationship between teaching adults and participants and how teachers encountered their pupils. In this chapter, I will go through some of the most significant results linking them to the theoretical framework while pondering on their broader implications.

From the dimension of physical safety, the child-centredness is most worthy for discussion. Nuikkinen (2009, p. 105) has written about the physical space of classrooms being an enabler for teachers and pupils. The physical safety result on learner-friendly classroom environments was composed by the descriptions about the facilities in one participant's Finnish school context. One of the participants accentuated how the facilities such as larger spaces, more sports courts, computers, better desks provided him with more learning opportunities. The learning opportunities can be perceived as motivating pupils to engage in learning while convincing pupils that their learning matters. When resources are possible to be allocated to the improvement of learning environments of pupils it shows how pupils are placed at the centre of beneficiaries.

Results about social safety were interestingly slightly more significant as contributions compared to physical safety due to the space they occupied in participants' narratives. Amaryllis expressed how excited pupils were to attend school while in preparatory classroom. Jarmine's experiences indicated how much he had learned during preparatory education and how grateful he was for his peers and teaching adults. Having positive learning experiences while having learning enhanced due to good peer relations aligns with the thoughts of Sollitto, Johnson and Myers (2013). Sollitto, Johnson and Myers (2013) have discussed about the connectedness among peers which also plays its role in accelerating learning and advancing school performance. All participants apart from Sunflower and Nemesia had experiences of sameness and

unification with their peers. Sharing the reason for being in preparatory education, sharing not knowing any Finnish, in some of the cases living in the same premises, caring for others, and doing activities together such as playing games as part of learning contributed to making the group spirit tight and interconnected.

The connectedness can also be seen as a result of the support pupils in those preparatory classes received from and provided to their peers, as Sedláček and Šed'ova (2020) have also pointed out. Based on Sedláček and Šed'ova (2020), we can see how research participants engaged in preparatory classroom activities through a reciprocal way of being with peers and assisting peers. Connectedness is necessary for tackling experiences of exclusion and bullying. Connectedness and relatedness that are built together and maintained, ask for learning practices and structures along with emotional skills balancing the fluctuating needs and emotional states of all classroom members.

Havik (2017) discusses how good peer relations translates to supportive attitudes and actions towards peers. Specifically in the cases of Jasmine and Rose, pupils shared the knowledge they had with their classmates not leaving them alone in moments of need. Therefore, establishing teaching and learning practices which encourage and allow pupils to interact and cooperate with each other can contribute to the feelings of connectedness. For example, encouragement of interacting refers even to the smallest of moments pupils come up with a thought they would like to share with classmates or assisting pupils change sitting and working places so that they get to be with all their peers. While teaching adults can create opportunities for pupils to work together, having several adults in class who teach cooperatively and with shared responsibility can also model the shapes sharing and supporting take.

Under social safety results fell the category of “more than a classroom”. “More than a classroom” is closely connected to what Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2003) have written about peers sharing similarities and connections made based on similarities. In some of the child cases sharing similar mother tongues with classmates contributed to increasing the time these peers spent with each other during and outside school times. In the case of Jasmine, similarities were “forced” because Jasmine and his peers became very tightly dependent on each other. This was visible when Jasmine picked same courses to keep sharing similar interests and routines with his peers. In classrooms, teaching personnel often set or work together with pupils to set learning and behavioural goals. These goals can be seen as external ways to create similarities and unifying achievements. However, the question arises for teaching personnel on how to identify

similarities in pupils that are of a wide range so that all pupils get to find something in common with fellow classmates; similarities that can be both explicit and implicit in nature. Simultaneously, there is a paradoxical challenge to be able as a classroom group to have everyone develop themselves individually and shape their own characters freely and safely without fear of being different from their peers or partially/occasionally excluded. It is important to bear in mind how pupils entering their early adolescence have a psychologically recognised need and urge to assimilate with their peers by joining groups of similar values and attitudes in order to start formulating their own identities.

Experiencing sameness and similarities were identified also outside of the classrooms of participants. Those similarities from the outside might have affected the process of finding similarities within classrooms. These similarities from the outside are related to the influence of familiar people to the participants. Familiar people such as siblings and parents provided a standpoint for participants from which to feel understood. The personalities of siblings set a framework based on which participants scanned their new classmates in order to find shared attributes. Also, the views of parents on how to feel more connected to new peer groups were welcomed and viewed as affecting feelings of sameness. In the theoretical framework, there is great focus on similarities in classrooms but less on how outside factors affect classroom connectedness. Hence, this result increases our understanding on where some of those similarities come from and are affected by.

Looking deeper on the qualities of peer relations this study found two qualities describing safety: balanced and interoperable peer dynamics. According to Ladd and Coleman (1997, p. 52–64) peer relations that are filled with trouble have an impact on the experiences of isolation within a classroom space. Our results showed both scenarios. On the one hand establishment of equality among peers and peers experiencing everyone being important and cared for led to the presence of balance; balance of pupil receiving equal attention and time. On the other hand, two of the participants experienced being isolated from others due to the not unified peer relations. If these participants' classrooms emphasised everyone's equal treatment, pupils would be encouraged to interact with each other in a caring way. Something noticeable here is that feelings of isolation were also minimal when participants had their siblings in the same classroom. This circumstance is of special occasion since siblings, unless of same age, are not together in mainstream settings. Arranging lessons in schools in ways that mixed ages would be placed together

for some lessons could open opportunities meeting peers outside one's classroom and strengthening the sense of community of schools. Mixing age groups could also familiarize preparatory classroom pupils with mainstream classroom pupils so that transitions are better supported.

By interoperable peer dynamics I refer to the warmth that characterised some of the interactions of participants' classes. This warmth was a reflection and a result of peer dynamics that facilitated doing together in a constructive and healthy way. The warmth of classrooms aligns with the work of Ladd and Coleman (1997, p. 52–53) who stressed peer relations that are strengthened because of each one accepting others for who they are. Peers who shared with each other because they sincerely wanted to and encountered their peers with kindness demonstrated how warmth is practiced. One could question whether that warmth is a way of being that children have learned, is it a tendency of some personalities to express and extend that kindness to their fellow pupils, is it both or is it affected by something additional? For example, some of the participants had planned and performed a theatrical play about their peer dynamics and the caring atmosphere that occupied their classroom. The play was inspired by “something” (here as “care”) that the classroom members were experiencing in their day-to-day encounters, something that was continuous and reciprocal.

Important findings were found also from the dimension of pedagogical safety especially regarding the category of both-sided loving interaction. Participants shared how teachers were empathetic towards the needs of their pupils while being available to provide help. Mattila (2017, I part, chapter “Kohtaaminen lapsen kanssa”) has accentuated the roles of adults as safe sources for children who can really perceive pupils for who they are, who boost the self-confidence of children by believing in them and being a source of trust. Saloviita (2014, p. 60) has written how teachers are perceived as the primary agents for the fulfilment of pupil needs. These writings of Mattila (2017, part I, chapter “Kohtaaminen lapsen kanssa”) and Saloviita (2014, p. 60) are supported by the research findings. Participants' teachers were mostly, except in the cases of Sunflower and Nemesia, aware of how to be there for their pupils and listen to them. Bowlby (1982, p. 668–669) wrote about the adult's responsiveness and presence especially when a child is threatened or scared. This was exemplified somewhat differently in our findings. Participants shared teachers being empathically there for their pupils in situations that did not necessarily involve negative emotions such as fear. Moments of pupils not knowing something may have involved more helplessness than fear to be attended to. Teachers' profession requires emotional resources and strong group management skills in order to fulfill this learning prerequisite of recognising needs and giving of oneself to pupils. However, for the sustainability of safety of

pupils it is paramount to invest and make sure teachers have tools and time to recharge themselves so that high risks of burnout can be prevented and avoided. Based on this study it can be thought that the joy and playfulness that characterised some of the teacher-pupil interactions was a way of relieving stress and refilling energy. Not only did the playfulness and humour increase positivity in those classrooms but it also manifested as a pathway for teachers to express positive emotions. Teachers showcasing various emotions and thus engaging in various emotional situations in classrooms is introduced by Sheppard and Levy (2019, p. 193–201) as one pillar for establishing safety.

As a meaningful addition to the category of “both-sided loving interaction” was the trust that was formed between teachers and pupils. Trust started taking form from various elements such as pupils expressing vulnerability and being open about making mistakes, perceiving teachers as maternal/paternal figures and, showing physical trust through touch and hugging. Willcox (2017, p. 11) has written how trustful relationships and encouragement of showing vulnerability are part of safe learning spaces. The classrooms of participants are indications of how safety is built on mutuality between teachers’ and pupil’ actions as far as trust is concerned. Being a pupil in a learning context where you do not necessarily share a language with teaching adults and peers can be intimidating, calling for delicate ways to establish trust since pupils may feel exposed. This vulnerability was embraced by some of the teachers through the application of teaching styles that were adapted to the needs of pupils. For instance, one teacher taught deploying music as a more inclusive and learner-friendly method. What are the characteristics and behaviours of teachers that enable pupils to start building that necessary for learning trust? This is a question that could be further investigated in future studies considering usage ethnographic and participatory approaches.

Finally, teacher as a source together with adaptability and inclusivity of teaching can be pondered on alongside each other. Teachers as a source shares similarities with how the interactions between participants and adults were loving. Some of the participants experienced their teachers to be sources of faith setting high expectations for their learning path. Teachers’ examples and opinions mattered to the participant influencing the attitude towards learning in general. The expectations teaching adults have for their pupils may also serve as guiding lights for the development of the personality of pupils and as solid bases from where to derive self-confidence in moments of difficulty. This result has something to add to the texts of Mattila (2017, part I, chapter “Kohtaaminen lapsen kanssa”) about teachers protecting pupils from hardships. This result suggests that teachers can act towards the reinforcement of the confidence and learning

identity of the pupils by setting goals, motivators, and realistic expectations so that pupils' agency and abilities will be enhanced to enable surviving challenging situations. In this way teachers can shift the power they have to their pupils preparing them to face challenges more readily. This does not imply that teaching adults are released from their responsibilities to make sure pupils are not exposed to harm which would exceed their capacities.

That is why the results about teachers always being ready to provide assistance and show availability are complementary for the developing agency of the pupils. Teachers of participants made it obvious to their pupils that they were there for them at any time. Teaching assistants of participants accompanied them to mainstream classes making them feel less isolated from the unfamiliar mainstream classes. Rose recalled how his teacher still nowadays asks him if he needs anything when they run into each other in school. It could be deduced that most of the participants required relatively much support and close guidance while learning. For example, teachers of Orchid expressed to their pupils that they are like their own children. This aligns with the thoughts of Uusikylä (2014, "Turvallinen koulu"- chapter) who reminds how in a safe space teachers value each learner regardless of their achievements. Teachers' provision of help can also be distinguished from the teaching methods that were characterised by inclusivity and adaptability. Pedagogical help turn out to be using of creative arts such as music, flexibility in communication which meant usage of body language and teaching considering pupils such as letting pupils know of an upcoming test beforehand. What other practices can be viewed as flexible and inclusive when having language learning as the primary learning goal? In this study pedagogical safety focused on the relationship between teachers and pupils mainly. These possible practices could be studied in the future in regard to safety emphasizing the pedagogy and didactics of the dimension of pedagogical safety.

5.1 Evaluation of the research process and its limitations

The primary aim of this research was to shed more light on what pupils have to tell us about their experiences of classroom safety. Even though finding preparatory teachers would have been more easily accessible for data generation, I feel very grateful for the child participants who were willing to participate. Studying classroom safety of pupils by interviewing teachers would have been an ethical limitation due to the studying of someone's experience through someone else (secondary source: teachers). In alignment with the 12th article of the Convention

of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) this study prioritized the voices and self-expression of children by believing children to be the ones to best represent themselves and their views. Thus, I find this aspect a success for the study and an asset for the wider academic community.

When deciding on the method of analysis, content analysis was chosen. The content analysis of this study is distinct from the traditional content analysis and in some ways even partial. What I mean here is that from all six narratives the raw citations picked by different narrators to be transformed into simplified core of transcribed data did not always share many similarities with each other. Raw citations from each participant's narrative were quite unique making it difficult to have repetitive themes across all interviews. A piece of raw data from each participant has been simplified and used to immediately form a category. Simplified cores of transcribed data were quite similar to raw data in their naming because narrators provided data that was concise making it challenging to elaborate and broaden a piece of data. Counting, for instance, how many times a category was present in the narratives would not have been possible because the narratives of participants did not always have many commonalities. This is one of the most fundamental aspects making one question whether the content analysis of this study is a fully valid content analysis and should it have been chosen as a tool of analysis. However, working with such a compact data made me seek for some flexibilities in ways of analysing. The content analysis of this study can be approached as a preliminary form of analysis being aware of the limitations. Instead, choosing a narrative analysis based on which new narratives would have been configured through the analysis and interpretive process ought to be held in mind as an alternative. Nevertheless, one of the main reasons why content analysis was chosen was the data being more flexibly categorised than adjusted into stories. An aspect that was initially considered but, in the end, rejected was analysing and bringing forward the how and the feelings conveyed during the interview sessions. This aspect could be studied using narrative analysis methods in future studies. What is more, data from the interviews about the current classrooms of participants were left out. However, a comparative stance was picked during some phases of the interviews. The comparison between mainstream classrooms and preparatory classrooms could be selected as a subject of future research in order to determine classroom behaviours and practices that can be applied in both learning setting for improving learning.

It was made clear during the participant recruitment stage through the consent forms that questions regarding children's asylum journey would not be asked since they are outside the topic of this work. This boundary seemed important for the exploration of preparatory experiences

so that children would feel appreciated and encountered as equal learners in the Finnish education system. I feel it is of significant value to know more about the integration experiences of children and how preparatory education can be developed.

While analysing the data, the interviews of Nemesia and Sunflower turned out to revolve more around what some could define as non-safety. I decided to approach safety as a concept that includes as in a continuum all experiences tied to safety. This decision assists broadening the understandings around safety and seeing experiences as not fully either-or but instead as sometimes in-between and affected by the individual experience, the group experience, and the circumstances.

Some of the participants, such as Jasmine, Orchid and Amaryllis, had been to preparatory classrooms several years back. This factor might have affected how much and what children recalled from their preparatory years. As Orchid said, when the experiences have been positive and empowering, remembering is easy and pleasant. What could have been done differently is the finding of pupils who are still in preparatory classrooms or have just moved to mainstream classrooms. An interesting way to study this topic more could be by observing and interacting with pupils in a preparatory classroom to identify processes related to safety. In this scenario it would be fruitful to found out about the individual differences while children are affected by the same classroom rules, practices, dynamics.

6 Conclusions

The concepts of safety are multilayered and unique as to what is our perspective of looking at them. Often adults are the ones who initiate and conduct research in the world of academia and including children in the research process is something gradually receiving more attention especially through participatory research methods. However, more knowledge is needed on the sector of safety in educational settings from the viewpoints of pupils.

Harinen and Halme (2012, p. 6, 29) have stated that as far as Finnish comprehensive schools are concerned, safety has previously been endangered due to both objective factors such as unhealthy premises, and subjective factors such as experiences of fears and bullying. Harinen and Halme (2012, p. 33) describe feelings of being safe as key for determining school satisfaction levels leaning on a child psychology perspective about pupils' sense of safety/security also carrying great meaning for the subjective well-being of individuals. Osterman (2000, p. 359) argues that sense of belonging is a psychological phenomenon in the school setting. Sense of safety in classrooms, for example, can also be perceived as a phenomenon that touches realms of physical, social, and pedagogical safety alongside other realms which could be further identified in future studies.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the armed conflicts that are ongoing both near and far are some of the most noticeable examples of demands for safety. Maslow (2013, part II, chapter 3) writes that some of our basic needs are self-esteem, respect, belongingness, love, and safety. The author specifies that needs such as respect, love relations, belongingness, and safety cannot be gratified by oneself, only from others from the outside, thus, one is very dependent on the environment (Maslow, 2013, part II, chapter 3). The safety and sustainability of safety of our various environments thus call for actions, spreading of knowledge and a change in behaviours towards more empathetic ones. Thinking of classrooms as spaces and environments for learning and growth Jones (2012, p. 58) writes that children ought to feel safe in schools and safe to engage in three ways, which are intellectual, emotional, and social engagement ways, as part of learning processes. Jones (2012, p. 59) believes that relationships established in safe learning space constructed by the teacher is one of the most influential ways to assist children succeed in school and strengthen their self-esteem and identity. As it was shown by the results of this work, the influence and role of peer relations for the feelings of safety of pupils cannot be left unsaid due to their contributions on sameness, connectedness, mutual supportiveness.

Kohli (2011, p. 315, 320) is vocal about the foundations of a stable life being the three interconnected pillars of belonging, safety and success in cases of vulnerable children and youth. The researcher (2011, p. 317) accentuates the significant role of time in helping a safe life grow while “children begin to feel safe in the day to day by finding predictable patterns, shapes and rhythms of living” (Kohli, 2011, p. 317). Recognising the vulnerabilities but choosing to shift our attention on the concepts of safety instead of non-safety has been one of the priorities of this master’s thesis.

Based on this work, the social and pedagogical dimension of classroom safety had some more value compared to physical safety. Having peers who shared similar characteristics or attributes brought children closer to each other while being in a classroom with peers providing and receiving support in a balance manner. Equality was brought forward by one of the participants when pondering on his preparatory classroom experiences. Being treated equally by the teaching adults and every classmate being seen and heard made pupils enjoy learning having those loving experiences leave a permanent imprint on their hearts. Scanning through the three safety dimensions revealed what they seem to have as a shared denominator is reciprocity and dynamism; physical spaces provided opportunities making them non-static, social interactions involved giving and receiving support and knowledge, and relationships with teaching adults were characterised by shared humour, expression of care also through physicality (i.e. hugging) and being seen.

Safety is seen as a basic human need, as a foundation for a solid life, as a prerequisite for learning and development. One could also think of safety being a prerequisite for taking actions towards a more just world. Even though insecurities and instabilities, atrocities and austerities, may propel individuals to form groups to stand up for rights and better conditions, it is also the ones surrounded by the fruits of fairness and safety who wish to share what they have received with others.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview structure

Interview structure (children's interviews), thematic interview

Questions (translated in English for thesis readers, originally in Finnish during interviews)

1. Where and when were you at preparatory class?
2. How was it for you to be in a preparatory class?
3. What did you do during preparatory class?
4. How was your preparatory classroom?
 - a. What was there at your preparatory classroom?
5. How was your teacher(s) at preparatory class?
 - a. What did your teacher(s) do at preparatory class?
 - b. What did you do with your teacher(s)?
6. How were your peers at preparatory classroom?
 - a. Did you have friends at preparatory class?
 - b. What did you do with your preparatory peers?
7. How were the lessons during preparatory class?
 - a. Did you have any favourite subjects?
8. How was it during lunch time and recess time for you?
9. Are there some specific memories or situations that you remember from preparatory class?
10. Is there something more you would like to share with me about your preparatory class?

Appendix 2 Information letter and consent form (children)



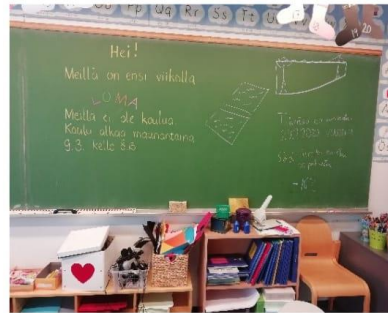
Autumn semester 2020

INFORMATION LETTER

Hello!

I am Magdalena and I study at the University of Oulu. This research is part of my studies. When I complete this research and my final studies, I will be a teacher 😊.

I want to study the safety and security of children when they have been in preparatory classrooms (valo-luokka) in Finland. I will ask about how you have felt in your valo-classroom. I will not ask about the asylum-seeking journey to Finland.



I will have an interview or two with you. It will be only you and me, no other children with us. At the beginning, you and I might do an activity to get to know each other a little. Afterwards, you and I will talk and I will ask a few questions. You can then tell me about your experiences in your valo-classroom. Everything you and I talk will stay only with me. Everything is confidential and I will not tell others about what we have discussed. I will write about all children anonymously in the text of my research. I will use some other name instead of your real name. So, others will not be able to know who the children are in this research.

I will also voice record the interviews, so your and my voice will be recorded. The interview will take place in your school or with Zoom- application with a computer (etänä). When my research is ready, all documents related to you will be deleted. All of the documents about you will not stay with me.

In Finland, because you children participating are underage (under 18- years old), your parents/guardians also need to give their permission for you to participate. Participating is voluntary and no child is obliged to participate. Participating does not affect in any way the asylum-seeking process in Finland. When the research text is ready, you will also be able to read my work, which I will finalise in English 😊.

Thank you very much and with best regards,

Magdalena 😊

CONSENT FORM

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| I have read the Information Letter and I understand what this research is about. | | |
| I understand that my participation is voluntary. | | |
| At any time, I can stop participating and there are no (negative) consequences for me. | | |
| I understand that what I say is confidential and no-one else will know about what I have said. | | |
| I know that the researcher will not use my real name when she will write about me in her text. | | |
| I (my name) _____ give permission and I want to participate in this research. | | |

I write 5 things or activities that I like very much:





Autumn semester 2020

My name

Date and place

My full name/My signature



You can call me or write me a message:

Name: Magdalena Roti

Email address: magdalena.roti@student oulu.fi

Phone number.: 00358451576602 (also What'sapp- application)

Appendix 3 Information letter and consent form (parents)



Autumn semester 2020

INFORMATION LETTER

TOPIC Safety and security in primary preparatory classrooms in Finland from the perspective of children

RESEARCHER Magdalena Roti

SUPERVISORS Maija Lanas and Maria Petäjämäki (University of Oulu, Faculty of Education)

Dear parent / Dear parents,

I am Magdalena Roti and I study at the University of Oulu. This research (master's level thesis) is part of my master's level studies. When I complete this research and my final studies, I will be a primary school teacher.



In this research I want to study the safety and security of children when they have been in primary preparatory classrooms (valmistava opetus/valo-luokka) in Finland. Children, who have come to Finland as asylum-seekers, will participate in this research. In this research, I will not ask about the asylum-seeking process. This research focuses on the experiences of children when they have been in preparatory classrooms (valo-luokka) and how children have felt in those valo-classrooms.

I will interview each child separately, one child at each session. I will interview all children (1-2 times) for a few hours in Finnish or in English, depending on the children. Children who speak Finnish or English can take part in my research. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, interviews will be organised at the children's schools or with Zoom- application with the use of computers (etänä). At the beginning, I might do an activity with the child so that we get to know each other a little. Afterwards, I will discuss with the children and ask a few questions about their experiences in valo-classrooms, so that children can tell me. Everything that we talk with the children will stay only with me. Everything is confidential and I will not tell others what we have discussed. I will write about the children anonymously in the text of my research. Others will not be able to recognise these children.

I will also voice record the interviews, so the voices of children and mine will be recorded. When my research is ready, all documents related to all children will be deleted and destroyed. No documents will stay with me.

In Finland, because children participating are underage (under 18- years old), parents/guardians also need to give their permission for the child to participate. Participating in this research is voluntary and no child is obliged to participate. Participation does not affect in any way the asylum-seeking process in Finland. When the research text is ready, you will also be able to read my work, which I will finalise in English.

Thank you very much and with best regards,

Magdalena Roti



Autumn semester 2020

CONSENT FORM

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| I have read the information letter and understood what this research is about. | | |
| I have understood that the participation of my family and my child in the research is voluntary. I and/or my child can anytime during the process withdraw and/or decline to answer to some question(s) without any (negative) consequences. | | |
| I understand that my child and the comments of the child during the interview(s) will be dealt with confidentiality. My child will not be identifiable from the research and all information will stay anonymous. | | |
| The voices and talking can be recorded during the interviews (voice recording). | | |
| My child will participate in the research. | | |

Name of parent/Names of parents _____

Date and Place _____

Parent's/Parents' signatures _____

If you have any questions, please contact me:

Name: Magdalena Roti

Email address: magdalena.roti@student oulu.fi

Phone number.: 00358451576602 (also What'sapp- application)