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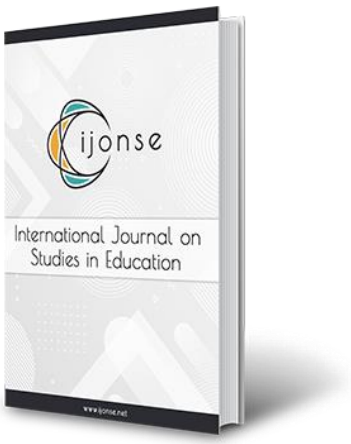

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Elementary School Teachers' Experiences of Implementing the Teacher Classroom Management Method - Case Study in Finland

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Elementary School Teachers' Experiences of Implementing the Teacher Classroom Management Method - Case Study in Finland

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Abstract

The diversity of pupils and their different difficulties challenge teachers' skills and methods in teaching. Some behavioral challenges require rapid intervention and a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach from the teachers. An internationally recognized tool, TCM (Teacher Classroom Management), aims to support pupils' socio-emotional development, improve teacher-pupil interaction, and strengthen school-home cooperation. This pilot study examines teachers' experiences of TCM in Finnish primary school context. The study is qualitative, and the data (N=16) was collected through focus group interviews. According to the results, the teacher's strengthened group management skills were positively reflected in the classroom. Teachers´ positive communication with the class strengthened interaction and made it easier to deal with difficult issues. However, implementing TCM in the school community requires ongoing support. Collegial experiences and renewed group management skills strengthened the teachers' own experience of coping at work. The TCM method provided appropriate group management tools.

Introduction

A child's reactive behavior challenges his or her environment, including the teacher, in many ways in everyday work. A pupil's reactivity can be caused by a variety of factors, such as learning challenges, diagnosed developmental challenges, or conditions in the child's growing environment (Ford et al., 2017). If a pupil's behavioral dysregulation is severe, it usually has a significant impact on the daily life of the classroom (Reyes et al., 2012). Moreover, the way in which a teacher responds to and manages behavioral problems is reflected in the school life of the class. In the worst case, the teacher's actions may even exacerbate the problem. A negative spiral can be created, where a large part of the teacher's time is taken up with the symptomatic pupil and the rest of the class does not get the teaching, support and attention they need. The atmosphere in the classroom becomes negative and problem-focused (Jenkins & Ueno, 2017.) If there are more pupils in the classroom who are reacting with their behavior, the teacher's group management skills are put to the test. If the teacher's group management is not based on planned and structured guidance, the classroom can descend into chaos. (Dicke et al., 2014.) Everyday challenges for children, such as aggressive behavior, can lead to negative development not only in school but also in other environments. For example, early onset violent behavior can lead to later violent acts and other crimes with lifelong consequences (Ford et al., 2017). The accumulation of problems can be prevented

through early anticipation and intervention, which supports both the pupil and his or her family and the teacher (Dicke et al., 2014).

One practical and quickly applicable approach to a challenging situation is to provide additional training to strengthen primary school teachers in the use of group management methods (Webster-Stratton, 2000; Webster-Stratton et al., 2004). In the Finnish primary school studied, the Incredible This study describes the implementation of the TCM method and presents teachers' experiences of its use. The pilot was motivated by the desire to find evidence-based, sustainable, and replicable solutions to phenomena arising from growth environments or services, and to promote service integration. The starting point was that a good everyday life for children, young people and families constitutes a systemic whole, which requires measures that go beyond the traditional Finnish school-social services-health care sectors. Early support reduces the need for burdensome, labor-intensive, and costly interventions - without forgetting its human benefits. The Finnish model of support is structured in a stepwise progression from general to more specific support, with universal programmes such as the TCM group management method at the lowest level.

The piloting of the TCM group management method in Finnish primary education was carried out in close cooperation with the education and family center services. The aim was to strengthen prevention of behavioral problems and holistic situation assessment. It was hoped that the introduction of the model would create a new, common service model for the prevention and treatment of behavioral disorders in children. The Wonder Years methodology can be implemented in the service system, both in the education sector and in social and health services. The idea is that families should receive the support and help they need in a timely manner. As the child grows and the challenges become greater, a light intervention is not enough: at least longer-term, group-based parenting support and often other interventions are needed. In early childhood education and care and in schools, there is also a need for proven effective ways for teachers to support children's growth and development. Teachers also need to know how to help children and families with behavioral challenges. It is essential to support children with consistent tools in all child development contexts.

Based on these premises, this study explicates teachers' experiences of using TCM in Finnish schools. The starting point was the growing concern about pupils who are reactive in their behavior, especially the rapid increase in aggressive behavior of children and the potentially cumulative negative development.

Theoretical Framework

Behaviorally Reactive Pupils at School

Behaviorally reactive pupils challenge the teacher in everyday school life and often undermine the teacher's ability to manage the teaching group (e.g. Nash et al., 2015; Dicke et al., 2017; Jenkins & Ueno, 2017). The reasons behind pupil behavior can be very different (Ford et al., 2017). From the perspective of the pupil, the school and the home, the situation can form a negative cycle where problems accumulate (Harju-Luukkainen, Sandberg & Itkonen, 2018). The cycle starts with minor offenses, tweaking and violent behavior, but can even lead to a crime spiral (Ford et al., 2017). Early intervention is both humanly and financially rewarding (Mejia & Hoglund, 2016).

Internationally, education, social and health services are organized in different ways. In the Finnish context of the welfare state, multi-professional cooperation and crossing traditional sectoral boundaries are considered to achieve sustainable and effective results. This is the best way to support pupils who respond to their behavior, but rapid action across sectoral boundaries is often challenging due to lack of resources. The situation has been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, professional workloads, and the increasing need for help. Teachers' resilience during the pandemic has also been a concern (e.g. OAJ, 2020), with increased workloads and a greater diversity of starting points for pupils. According to the Finnish Basic Education Act (1998/628), pupils are entitled to adequate support for learning and school attendance, including three levels of general, enhanced and special support, throughout their basic education. The aim is to act preventively and according to the individual needs of the pupil. The Finnish school system has long been considered equal, but today the starting point is equality of opportunity (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2022b).

In recent decades, Finnish education has moved from segregative practices to integrative and inclusive teaching arrangements (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2018). Social inequality is on the rise and increased social and regional segregation is challenging basic education and early childhood education systems at both local and national level (Berisha & Seppänen, 2017). A growing phenomenon is school-based segregation: schools can have very different class sizes (Kosunen et al., 2020). However, the Finnish system is well placed to strengthen equality, especially through models of positive special treatment resourcing and cross-sectoral cooperation (see Berisha & Seppänen, 2017; Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2018); Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2022a).

The TCM Method to Support Teachers' Work

A range of programmes and methods are available to support the work of educational, social and health professionals, both for children and parents, including the Incredible Years programme. The programme is a group-based programme developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton, Professor Emerita of Psychology in the United States (Webster-Stratton, 2000). The programme includes prevention and treatment programmes for parents, separate programme components for children, and group management method training for early childhood educators and primary school teachers. According to Webster-Stratton (2000), the first change occurs in the teacher, whose change in behavior results in changes in children's behavior. Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) is designed to promote the socio-emotional development of children aged 3-12, improve teacher-pupil interactions and strengthen school-home partnerships (Webster-Stratton, et al., 2004). The programme is based on social learning theory and behavioral-cognitive theory. It also incorporates ideas from positive psychology and positive pedagogy. The Incredible Years programme has been studied for more than 30 years and has been shown by international research to be a highly effective intervention (e.g. Korest & Carlson, 2022). When teachers adopt a structured, consistent, and ongoing group management approach, it has a significant impact on their working style. The most significant change in working style comes from the teacher's increased awareness to approach behavioral symptoms through a positive framework. The teacher looks at her own classroom management practices to assess whether they serve to enable children to behave in desirable ways. The method's participatory tools motivate pupils to practice new social and self-regulation skills and to work as a group according to expectations. The teacher ensures that each child finds a positive role in the classroom and that the group takes

care of its own members (Webster-Stratton, 2004).

The effectiveness of TCM and its components has been meta-analyzed by Nye et al (2017). The meta-analysis compiles studies on the effectiveness of TCM and how the method and its effects are perceived. The meta-analysis includes nine quantitative, qualitative or a combination of quantitative and qualitative studies. The studies were conducted in five different countries: one in England and two studies in Ireland, Jamaica, the USA and Wales. The meta-analysis systematically reviews and integrates research evidence on the effectiveness of TCM and the experiences of stakeholders. The qualitative section of the meta-analysis shows that TCM enhances teachers' knowledge of pupils' development, abilities and needs. Group management and everyday classroom activities were also strengthened. The use of TCM is reflected in teachers' emotional well-being, calmness, and reduced stress. Teachers also experienced a renewed enthusiasm for teaching. From a pupil perspective, behavior became more task-oriented, with a reduction in disruptive or aggressive behavior. Pupils' social relationships were strengthened, and their appreciation of others, emotional well-being and self-confidence increased, and shyness decreased. Academic skills were further strengthened and participation in lessons increased.

According to another meta-analysis (Classroom management 2022), group management requires both preventive and reactive strategies. The focus is on preventive strategies that encourage pupils to perform on task, to be motivated to learn and to be social. Effective preventive strategies include creating and maintaining a positive classroom climate, structuring lessons carefully and teaching rules and routines clearly to pupils. It is essential that expectations are actively reminded and monitored. Responsive strategies support pupils' commitment to relearning. Effective remedial practices include identifying the causes of pupil behavior, consistency of compensatory measures. It is essential that instructions are given calmly and are proportionate to the level of behavior.

Oliver et al (2011) reviewed a meta-analysis of 12 TCM studies from the USA and the Netherlands. This meta-analysis also found that effective group management focused more on preventive than reactive procedures. The teacher's actions aimed to create a positive classroom atmosphere and focused on paying attention to appropriately behaved pupils. Rules and routines were effective preventive components because they set clear expectations for classroom behavior. Monitoring pupil behavior allowed the teacher to give recognition to pupils who behaved in line with expectations. Teacher group management practices had a significant positive effect on reducing problem behavior in the classroom, according to the meta-analysis.

In Finland, the Incredible Years programme has been running parenting groups for over 15 years and the TCM method was piloted in 2010. Monitoring and more systematic support for the implementation of the TCM method has only started to be developed in recent years (Granlund & Imberg, 2021.) Since 2020, the national home-based activities of the Incredible Years programme have been under the auspices of the Centre for Child Psychiatry Research at the University of Turku, where a national monitoring system was also developed to support implementation and research. The aim of the research is to provide strong research evidence-based information to support decision-making and tools for the development of service systems (Granlund & Imberg, 2021; UTU Child Psychiatry Research Center.) A quantitative longitudinal study on the effectiveness of the TCM method is

underway at the University of Turku Child Psychiatry for all early childhood educators and teachers participating in the 2021-25 TCM method training in Finland.

The TCM Method in the Perspective of International Research

In addition to meta-analyses, TCM has been studied in many countries and settings, and a brief review of these can outline the diversity of research. Table 1 summarizes examples of international studies on TCM.

Table 1. International Studies on TCM

Article	Country	Research design	Sample	Results
Reinke et al., (2020)	United States	Benefits of TCM for children from kindergarten to third grade receiving special education services.	Pupils receiving special education N = 1 817 from kindergarten to third grade Teachers N = 105	TCM reduced concentration problems, disruptive behavior and increased social inclusion of pupils with special educational needs, especially when these pupils participated in mainstream education using TCM tools.
Holmes et al., (2021)	United States	Teacher engagement in TCM training sessions, sustained intervention implementation and pupil behavior over time.	Teachers N = 44	Teacher engagement during TCM training is linked to the embedding of the method and is also reflected in the effectiveness of reducing disruptive behavior in the classroom.
Tveit et al., (2020)	Norway	Effects of TCM on behavioral problems in high-risk children in day care	3-6 year olds N = 1085	The TCM programme improves relations between pupils and teachers. TCM affects the pupil-teacher interactions of all pupils, including those clinically identified as being at risk. The application of TCM in day care has significant preventive effects.
Hyland 2014	Ireland	TCM stakeholders' experiences of behavior management, implementation	Teachers, principals, TCM implementation team N =23, classroom observations N = 22,	Teachers' positive group management strategies increased and negative ones decreased significantly. TCM supported teachers in teaching socio-

Article	Country	Research design	Sample	Results
		processes	surveys N = 11	emotional skills. Some of the TCM methods were perceived as less useful. TCM provided teachers with new approaches to classroom management and enabled peer sharing and collaboration.
Kennedy el al,. 2014	Irland	TCM and teachers' self-efficacy, well-being and job fatigue	Primary school teachers N = 368	TCM group management training has psychological benefits for the teacher, which strengthens the teacher's psychological well-being.
Allen et al., 2020	United Kingdom	Teachers' perceptions of the TCM method	Teachers N = 44	The TCM method changes the teacher's professional ethos to a more positive and pupil-centred one. Interaction focuses on positive issues with both pupils and parents. Teachers' evaluations of the effectiveness of TCM in reducing challenging behavior vary.
Hayes et al., 2020	United Kingdom	The relationship between the TCM method and teacher well-being, fatigue, self-confidence	Teachers N = 80, of which 40 control group	The training and use of TCM has no effect on the work stress, self-efficacy and well-being of classroom teachers.

When considering the effectiveness of universal methods, it should be noted that different school systems, social and health services and related funding systems are structured differently internationally. This calls for systemic and context-sensitive research. In Norway, for example, support for children with behavioral problems is organized and the implementation of methods appears to be systematic and continuous (Nubu). In contrast, the piecemeal nature of Finnish project funding challenges the systematic development of systemic-level activities, method implementation and evaluation of effectiveness (Granlund & Imberg, 2021). Individual projects start and end, with no evidence of their potential benefits and no research-based attachment to existing practices.

Data and Methods

The study combines different disciplinary perspectives to investigate the impact of piloting the TCM group management method during the academic year 2021-2022. The study examines teachers' experiences of the TCM

method through qualitative research, a case study perspective, and an intervention study. The data was collected through thematic focus group interviews based on the research questions. As in intervention studies in general, the study examines what begins to happen during the TCM training process as experienced by the teachers.

Based on previous research, the study examines the teacher's experience from the following abductive perspectives: 1) Teacher's group management skills, pupils, and class group, 2) Home-school cooperation, 3) School community and culture, and 4) Teachers´ job satisfaction.

The TCM group management workshop started in August 2021, and a total of 16 teachers from grades 1-6 from the two pilot schools were selected to participate. The number of applicants exceeded the capacity of the group and eight permanent teachers from each school were selected. The TCM workshop training lasted one semester and took place over six full training days, approximately 3-4 weeks apart. The trainers were trained TCM instructors.

The group workshop training was interactive and included theory and exercises, problem solving, peer discussions and video examples of interaction situations. The workshop included elements of supervision and the introduction of the method in the children's group was supported by practical exercises and phone calls between the training days. The method provides teachers and educators with structured, pedagogical practices and tools based on strong research evidence to support pupils' emotional and interpersonal skills and empathy development (Nye et al., 2017; Webster-Stratton, 2000; Webster-Stratton et al., 2004).

The data collection was based on the themes of the study. The data were obtained through focus group interviews at two different stages of the TCM training process: 1) during the training, when two training days had been completed, and 2) at the end, when all six training days had been completed. The focus group interviews were conducted on a school-by-school basis with teachers from each school separately. Sixteen teachers participated in the study, eight from each school. They were classroom teachers (N = 12) or special education teachers (N = 4). The interviews were conducted using an online conferencing system and were recorded and transcribed in accordance with ethical principles. Each interview lasted almost two hours and was attended by the principal researcher and the teachers involved in the training and research, except for a few absences due to illness.

To analyze the data, the qualitative content analysis started by dividing the data according to the theoretical themes of the study. As the hermeneutic analysis progressed, further content analysis and interpretation of each of the pre-identified themes delved into the qualitative nuances of the data and the understanding of the relationships between the different themes and the whole. As the analysis progressed, it was also possible to discover new abductive perspectives.

The research was conducted with ethical considerations and permits in accordance with the guidelines and recommendations. Participation in the study was voluntary. The transcribed data were pseudonymized and interview recordings were deleted. In reporting the results, no details are provided that would allow the identity of the individual respondent, school, or class to be inferred. Any details relating to pupils, or their parents are not

reported. After the interviews, participants were allowed to delete passages from the data that raised concerns, and this was done once.

From the point of view of reliability, the focus group interviews have their problems: it is possible that teachers were selective about their experiences or that social pressure shaped the discussion towards a prevailing view of certain topics. For example, mutual conflicts were not discussed, although they were not asked about. According to the participants, the interview situations were natural and relaxed. This is also conveyed in the data, where there is open self-reflection and critical remarks about the TCM method.

Results

Teacher's Group Management Skills, Pupils and Class Group

Teachers had become more aware of the importance of positive encounters at both individual and group level due to the TCM method. The importance of encounters that initially seemed small was highlighted in the teachers' perceptions. For example, in practice, mentioning pupils by name in the context of positive feedback has become a common daily practice for teachers. According to teachers, the daily exchange of news had also become an important encounter for all in the classroom. According to teachers, pupils had noticed and brought to the teacher's attention how teachers had become more cheerful and praised and thanked pupils more. In addition, in line with TCM, teachers had ignored undesirable behavior that did not pose an immediate danger, which in some cases extinguished the undesirable behavior. In the past, teachers' attention had been focused mainly on unwanted behavior associated with name-calling, but now there was a strong focus on avoiding this harmful behavior.

> *"I've tried to praise, but every time someone doesn't act like they should, I've said their name out loud and now you're doing so and so. There's a big difference between telling the person next to you when they're doing good and telling the person who's not doing what they should. I still have to practice."*

According to the teachers, the circle of positivity had extended to pupils' interactions with each other and to noticing the good, which they were happy about. To anticipate different situations during the school day, teachers had, in line with the TCM method, given pupils a structure to follow in advance. The training had also led to better anticipation and instruction of different transitions during the school day, which, according to the teachers, had reduced the overall fuss and the need for constant instruction. Further, in line with the methodology, common classroom rules, rewards for desirable behavior and clear sanctions reinforced a shared understanding of expectations for behavior, which contributed to reducing frustration and other negative emotional reactions. Overall, the systematic and planned nature of the TCM approach was seen by teachers as essential and useful in their everyday work.

> *"I remind them of the expectations before you do anything, it's clear that children forget. I've become aware that you have to talk in advance about how you want things done, and it works much better."*
>
> *"The core idea, whether it was praise or incentives or punishments or sanctions, everything was so planned and rehearsed with the children beforehand. In no other method have I encountered such a high level of planning as in this one."*

Finnish teachers are independent in their profession and high-quality teacher training also encourages critical thinking. In this study, not all TCM tools were directly available as such, according to the teachers, but required application to the Finnish context and different classes. For example, in Finnish schools, the teacher is usually responsible for a large group of pupils alone, and when teaching a class group there was no possibility of rewarding individuals, as is one of the ways of reinforcing positive behavior in TCM. In addition, teachers stressed that positivity does not fix everything, and that support for learning and emotional regulation, as well as multidisciplinary collaboration, is still needed. However, from a group management perspective, there was a need for noticing the good and guiding behavior.

> *"Many times the problems can run deep. It's not just how the pupil behaves at school, there can be difficulties at home, ADHD-type, neuropsychiatric problems. This is a method for working with a problematic pupil, but it doesn't solve the pupil's problems."*

According to the teachers who participated in the study, the TCM methods were useful in paying attention to all pupils, both the behaviorally reactive ones and the quiet ones. Teachers felt that pupils would benefit most from TCM if it were applied early, preferably in early childhood education. In this way, pupils would acquire early skills for working in groups.

Cooperation between Home and School

According to the teachers, the application of the TCM method was reflected in their own perceptions of the starting points for building cooperation between home and school. Positive interaction was also essential towards the home, which they had been aware of during the TCM training. Teachers had begun to spend more time on a wide range of information, including positive comments about the pupil and the class in messages sent via the electronic system. Teachers had received positive feedback and praise from some pupils' homes for this new and varied way of communicating. Teachers reported that they had realized how important it is for home and school to concretize ways of working together and how an interactive and positive basis is the starting point for everything. Teachers had realized that parents do not automatically have an idea of the expectations of the teacher and the school in terms of cooperation. These issues need to be discussed and negotiated in an active and constructive way. According to the teachers, the positive and systemic approaches of the TCM method were suitable as a starting point for building cooperation. The teachers consider that in the future they should explain the different aspects of interaction and cooperation to the parents of the new class in a more systematic way and agree together on what kind of practices and goals could be built together.

> *"I believe that the way the school and the teacher interact with the parents also has an impact on the home. If there is something specific that needs to be addressed, it would be good to have a positive contact to build on."*

Teachers hoped that their messages would encourage parents to interact with the teacher more directly and in a more varied way, rather than just being teacher-led. Teachers said that it would be desirable for parents to be active, to ask questions and to participate in a variety of ways in the school. In the wider context, teachers sought to create a broader positive perception and discourse about the school through positive messages.

> *"I wish this could be extended to homes. If through it also pupils who have challenges with homework or something like that, that would get it in a positive way, that the method could spread to the home."*
> *"I think that focusing so much on the good, on what works, is also new for parents, as I have noticed in other contexts. We're so used to thinking about what doesn't work that it somehow becomes a whole new thing, and even parents sometimes find it hard to think about what does work and think that we should continue to reinforce something that does work."*

Teachers said they would handle any more negative issues through phone calls, as it was a softer and more interactive way and reduced the risk of misunderstandings. At the same time, the teacher had the opportunity to discuss the pupil's situation in a more holistic way and listen to the feelings of the pupil's parents. Often the calls were successful according to the teachers and all parties felt empowered by the empathic and understanding encounter. The teachers' perception was that for various reasons, the pupil sometimes fell into a negative cycle, with the pupil receiving constant reprimands in different contexts. In these situations, teachers felt more clearly their role was that of a positive observer. The TCM method had led to a new realization of the importance of one adult supporting the pupil. But getting the best results and breaking negative spirals is more effective when several people work together, understanding and encouraging.

School Community and Culture

According to the teachers, the relevance of the TCM method training was reinforced when colleagues from the same and another school participated in the same training. The discussions and sharing of experiences during the training created a special relationship of understanding and trust with the colleagues. Teachers found that colleagues were thinking about the same problems and that their own work challenges were not their own fault. Sharing problems and feelings of inadequacy eased the professional pressures experienced by teachers. Reflecting on shared challenges and learning new ways of dealing with them, in line with the TCM method, was a meaningful part of the training. Reflection and application of the method was continued collegially together throughout the training and during the somewhat busy school days. Some of the teachers who participated in the TCM training worked in pairs and their experience of the training was particularly rich in terms of the rewarding experience of sharing a common starting point, reflection and trying out new ways of working together. According to the teachers, the impact of the training would have been significantly diluted if they had been the only representatives of their school. The training allowed them to reflect on, identify and become aware of the cultures and ways of working in their own school and in different classes. In particular, the second TCM method of training was seen by the teachers as an enriching experience in terms of reflecting on the culture of their school.

> *"It's quite hectic, but we've exchanged ideas and clearly there's a kind of understanding with the other person who is also in training, you can see that they're trying something out, you can tell from the training."*
> *"I think it's wonderful to have been a partner in the training, so in a way we have the same language. It's been wonderful to see and witness that a lot of things have worked."*

According to the teachers, implementing TCM in the wider school community was a longer process and cultural

change would not happen overnight. Teachers felt that it would be good if as many members of the school community as possible who were interested in the method could participate in the training. Teachers felt that the participation of colleagues in the training would help to sustain the use of the method in the school. However, some teachers were concerned about the permanence of the method and therefore wished to receive maintenance training.

> *"I would miss, even if only for a short time, a gathering and a sharing of feelings. To keep the flame. I feel that in my case there is a danger of slipping into the old style. I could get even more out of it in the future."*

The support, interest and appreciation shown by frontline staff for their work was also important to the teachers. Ongoing TCM training was kept on display in schools and regularly discussed in joint meetings. Inspired by TCM, teachers wanted to further strengthen the positive atmosphere and sense of community throughout the school, where the leadership and direction of the chaperone played an important role. As a result of the TCM training, teachers reported that they got to know their colleagues who had participated in the training in greater depth, which was positive for future collaboration and the development of a common culture in the school. The career paths of the teachers who participated in the training were mixed. Professionally, the young teachers felt that the training gave them a sense of belonging to the working community, provided them with concrete working methods and that the work experience gained deepened the contribution of the training for new teachers. Teachers with longer careers found the training professionally refreshing and the discussions with colleagues meaningful.

Teachers´ Well-being at Work

According to the teachers, participation in TCM training and strengthened group management skills strengthened their ability to cope at work. Firstly, the TCM training was, according to the teachers, excellently organized and did not overburden them, on the contrary, it strengthened their work performance. The training took place over a full day, during which time substitutes were hired for the teachers. As a result, the teachers felt refreshed and focused on the content of the training at the start of the day. The fact that one full day was set aside for the training, rather than, for example, the evening after work or the weekend, was an important gesture of appreciation for their work and well-being. The timetable and rhythm of the training day had also been thought out to keep the participants alert, for example, with sufficiently long lunch breaks and varying working patterns. A few of the teachers expressed a preconceived fear that the training would be too demanding and that there would be too many written assignments, but this concern was unfounded. The exercises were concrete and small tasks linked to their own teaching work.

> *"My fear was that this would be very stressful. But it wasn't, you do things that are useful to you in your work, and they are concrete and enjoyable because of that. I would recommend it to everyone."*

The teachers found the TCM training to be rewarding and supportive of their own ability to cope at work. They recommended the training to all colleagues, including those experiencing fatigue or inadequacy. However, teachers stressed the importance of voluntary participation in the training; they felt that forced participation would not serve the purpose. The training prompted reflection on their own pedagogical philosophy and the roots of their

teaching. The training was perceived as clarifying the core of the teacher's work and as a way of looking at the whole from different perspectives and from a distance. Teachers say that the school day is filled with small achievements, but it is important to remember the bigger picture and the longer-term key objectives of learning and education, including sustainable well-being.

> *"I believe that they may forget what you said but they ever forget how to make them feel, just that encounter and presence. That feeling that pupils have about themselves when they're with our teachers in the classroom. We can't change the world, but hopefully we create a sense of security and hope for the future. One would hope that the school would be a good place to be, somehow that kind of atmosphere could have an impact on their lives."*

During the training, the discussions with colleagues and the opportunity to share everyday concerns, which is something we don't have much time for in a hectic teacher's everyday life, were also very rewarding. Reflecting on one's own work and exchanging perspectives with colleagues from the same experiential background is meaningful. Overall, teachers found the training rewarding, even the best training they had attended. The training was, according to the teachers, structured to be varied and to provide concrete tools. The TCM group management method and its training seem to meet current needs in the Finnish school context, but more research is needed.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to this study, the TCM, a universal teacher group management method developed in the United States and based on strong research evidence, can be successfully applied to the Finnish primary school context. International studies have given similar results. As Kores and Carlson (2022) crystallized in their meta-analysis, positive group management methods are useful for teachers. The same message was conveyed by the experiences of the teachers in this study, although they primarily emphasized the benefits for pupils and the class from the systematic and preventive use of TCM. Teachers in this study also highlighted those pupils who behaved in a desirable way received more positive feedback and less negative feedback, which is in line with the findings of Hyland (2014) and Oliver et al. (2011). Significantly, teachers were more aware of their own actions in terms of group desirability and their significant impact on pupils and the class. This study suggests that the TCM method strengthens the teacher's group management skills and supports positive interactions, benefiting all pupils in the class. It is essential that systemic practices are established in the classroom and commitment to them is ensured.
One of the aims of TCM is to strengthen home-school collaboration (Webster-Stratton et al., 2004), and the teachers in the study had discovered this in a new way. They planned to develop their collaborative practices so that the positivity and systematicity adopted from TCM would become the basis for home-school collaboration. A positive tone of communication can foster a culture of positive attitudes towards school and make it easier to talk about difficult issues. Teachers also reflect on the different perceptions that parents have of the school, the teacher, and the cooperation with the home. Teachers agreed to share more about their practices and aspirations in the future.

Regarding the development of the school community, teachers emphasized that the implementation of TCM is a process that requires continuous support. Participation in training and the use of the method's tools strengthened

teachers' ability to cope with their work. The experiences shared collegially and the practical tools for everyday work were key. The TCM method offers group management tools appropriate to the teacher's field of activity, even if it does not eliminate existing serious problems. The preliminary results of the study suggest that TCM strengthens the positive culture of the school in several ways. Helping pupils who are reactive in their behavior and the well-being of the school community are complex issues and it is not easy to demonstrate immediate changes. More precise conclusions can be drawn later, once the TCM method has been more firmly embedded in the everyday life of the pilot schools.

Teachers perceived that applying the TCM method and participating in the training supported their own well-being and job satisfaction. The training responded to acute everyday challenges in the classroom in concrete ways. The overall organization of the training and the collegial discussions supported professional well-being. As the study by Nye et al. (2017) also shows, in this study, the strengthening of teachers' group management skills was reflected in their everyday classroom life, increasing teachers' experiences of success and calmness, and reducing stress. Good group management skills strengthened teachers' professional self-esteem and enabled experiences of success in everyday teaching by reinforcing a positive cycle.

Schools and teachers have a key role to play in building the future. Global uncertainties, unpredictability and growing inequalities are increasing the importance of schools' core mission. Schools are a place where pupils from different backgrounds learn a range of important skills and social competences. Teachers have a huge responsibility. Any solution that enhances well-being and equal opportunities for learning should be taken seriously and implemented, especially if it has been scientifically proven to support everyday life, such as the TCM group management method.

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