

**Self-compassion in learning – primary school teachers’  
perspectives**

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Master’s Thesis in Education  
Spring Term 2023  
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## ABSTRACT

**Lakaniemi, Sonja & Pulkkinen, Iina. 2023. Self-compassion in learning - primary school teachers' perspectives. Master's Thesis in Education. University of Jyväskylä. Department of Teacher Education. 92 pages.**

This qualitative study explores Finnish primary school teachers' perceptions and teaching methods on self-compassion. The aim is to discover how it is part of the existing teaching practices and modes of thinking. In addition, the places of development are demonstrated regarding how the skills of self-compassion could be practised in primary school.

The dataset was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews, in which six primary school class teachers in Finland participated. In the interviews, teachers described situations in which students had encountered failure, challenges, or struggles during learning and reflected on their actions in those situations. In addition, the methods for teaching emotional skills and preconceptions of self-compassion were covered.

The teachers comprehended self-compassion as beneficial for example in considering failure as a normal part of learning. Students' responses to failure were described from the negative indicators of self-compassion. Importantly, however, the teachers described utilising the positive indicators to enhance self-compassion in processing failure with a student. Overall, a great extent of examples was illustrated on how socioemotional skills are practised in daily situations and specific lessons. However, learning emotional skills was mainly limited to strength-centred exercises.

The results are promising in terms of positive attitudes towards self-compassion and its recognised potential in learning. This thesis suggests that self-compassion is already enhanced in the existing practices to some extent, but more research is needed.

Keywords: self-compassion, learning, emotional skills, education

## TIIVISTELMÄ

**Lakaniemi, Sonja & Pulkkinen, Iina. 2023. Itsemyötätunto oppimisessa - alakouluopettajien näkökulmia. Pro gradu -tutkielma. Jyväskylän yliopisto. Opettajankoulutuslaitos. 92 sivua.**

Tämä laadullinen tutkimus tarkastelee itsemyötätuntoa suomalaisten alakoulun opettajien käsitysten ja opetusmenetelmien näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tarkastella, miten itsemyötätunto on osana opettajien opetusmenetelmiä sekä ajatusmalleja. Lisäksi tavoitteena on osoittaa kehityksen paikkoja, jotta itsemyötätuntoa voitaisiin harjoitella entistä paremmin.

Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla, joihin osallistui kuusi alakoulun luokanopettajaa. Haastatteluissa opettajat kuvasivat toimintaansa tilanteissa, joissa oppilaat olivat kohdanneet epäonnistumisia tai hankaluuksia. Lisäksi haastatteluissa kartoitettiin tunnetaitojen opettamisen menetelmiä ja ennakkokäsityksiä itsemyötätunnosta.

Opettajat tunnistivat itsemyötätunnon hyödyt esimerkiksi epäonnistumisen normalisoinnissa osaksi oppimista. He kuvailivat oppilaiden reagointia epäonnistumistilanteissa pääosin negatiivisena itsemyötätunnon osatekijöiden näkökulmasta. Merkityksellistä oli, että opettajat kuvailivat hyödyntävänsä itsemyötätuntoon liitännäisiä toimia oppilaan epäonnistumisia käsiteltäessä. Opettajat esittivät myös lukuisia esimerkkejä sosioemotionaalisten taitojen harjoittelumisesta, vaikkakin harjoittelu rajoittui lähinnä vahvuuskeskeisiin harjoitteisiin.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset antavat lupaavia viitteitä opettajien myönteisistä asenteista itsemyötätunnon hyödyntämisestä oppimisen tukena. Tulokset antavat osviittaa siitä, että oppilaiden itsemyötätuntoa tuetaan joissain määrin jo olemassa olevilla käytänteillä, mutta lisää tutkimustietoa tarvitaan.

Avainsanat: itsemyötätunto, oppiminen, emotionaaliset taidot, opetus

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Educational systems have been built regarding the future (see e.g., OECD, 2023). Global organisations, international institutions, and national authorities have generated holistic educational objectives such as future competencies as in the Learning compass 2030 (OECD, 2019), lifelong learning (see European commission 2019, OECD, 2021b), and transversal competences (see OPH 2022; POPS 2014). These objectives include important skills such as student agency and reflection (see OECD, 2019, 2021c, 2023; POPS 2014; Tomperi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, for many of the mentioned policy documents, positive pedagogy (see Avola et al., 2019; Fredrickson, 2001; Leskisenoja & Sandberg, 2019) and a growth mindset (see Dweck, 2008) have been adopted as driving forces to emphasise the developmental potential of any skills of an individual (European commission, 2019, p. 11; OECD, 2019, 2021c, 2023; POPS 2014, p. 14–19). In general, education has its emphasis on positive experiences and emotions in learning for they have been connected with better school performance, well-being, school satisfaction, and motivation for instance (see e.g., Avola et al., 2019; Leskisenoja & Sandberg, 2019; OECD, 2021c, 2023). For these reasons, positive experiences offered by school are desired (POPS 2014, pp. 25, 28, 48, 100–101).

However, to achieve a balanced learner self-image for future agency, we suggest more attention is paid to the encountering of experiences that may undermine the balance of a learner's mindset and self-beliefs. In our bachelor's thesis (Lakaniemi & Pulkkinen, 2021), Finnish 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students primarily considered failure as a negative experience with various immediate external events as consequences, rather than learning or gaining insights from it. Failure was described as part of learning, but the students seemed to have challenges in further describing their thoughts of such experiences, which means they may be unable to process them further (Lakaniemi & Pulkkinen, 2021). For this reason, the encountering of failure in educational contexts needs more attention.

Research suggests a difference in whether failure is disregarded by seeking for comfort in positive matters or strengths, or if the negative experiences and

emotions are encountered, reflected on, and processed (see Miyagawa et al., 2020). To investigate the encountering of failure and create a sustainable basis for the competences of learning, self-compassion is a factor to be explored further (see Tomperi et al., 2022). A compassionate attitude towards self aids people in confronting challenges, which are inevitable in life (Grandell, 2015; Neff, 2003a, 2018). Self-compassion has been studied in the global fields of psychology, and the studies have been used to create forms of psychotherapy (see e.g., Germer & Neff, 2013; Harris, 2019; Kuyken et al., 2010).

Self-compassion has been connected to increased well-being (see e.g., Kirby et al., 2017; Muris & Petrocchi, 2017; Neely et al., 2009; Zessin et al., 2015) and resilience (Leary et al. 2007; Yustika & Widayarsi, 2021). Moreover, it has been studied to positively correlate with for example performance outcome (Kwan, 2022; O'Hare & Gemelli, 2023) as well as feedback perception and self-improvement motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012; Laudel & Narciss, 2023). Hence teaching self-compassion is beneficial in terms of both learning and the well-being of a student.

In Finland, self-compassion has not yet gained much attention within empirical research, but the course seems to slowly be changing. Neff's (see e.g., 2003a, 2011, 2016) groundbreaking studies have influenced works by Kielinen (Neff & Kielinen, 2016, 2021) and Germer (Germer & Neff, 2013; Germer et al., 2010). Regarding the Finnish educational field, self-compassion is only beginning to make inroads into academic literature, as in Trogen's (2022), and Tomperi and colleagues' (2022) works. Among empirical studies in education, there are some works to be mentioned: theses (see e.g., Kaarto, 2017; Komulainen, 2021; Lindholm, 2020; Peuramäki, 2022), doctoral thesis of Lahtinen (2021), and articles (see Ahlvik, 2018; Ahonen, 2013; Kumlander et al., 2018; Lahtinen et al., 2020; Lappalainen et al., 2023; Postareff et al., 2021; Sorkkila & Aunola, 2019).

In this thesis, self-compassion is considered as a skill which can be learnt and taught through pedagogy – most importantly, it should be learnt. In our bachelor's thesis, the results indicated that self-compassion was to some extent present in the 6<sup>th</sup>-grade students' perceptions about failure in learning, however

remaining on a superficial level (Lakaniemi & Pulkkinen, 2021). Therefore, the potential of self-compassion may not yet be fulfilled in educational contexts in Finland. This inspired us to now investigate teachers as the designers of the psychosocial dimensions of a classroom environment and in a central role in supporting the students' development as learners and human beings (see e.g., Dietrich et al., 2015; Lenzi, 2017; OECD, 2021a; Ryan & Deci, 2020; Shernoff, 2013; Stefanou et al., 2004; van Manen, 2015, 2016).

The research task of this study is to explore self-compassion in Finnish primary school teachers' descriptions and perceptions through the route of qualitative research. The aim is to discover whether and how self-compassion is already a part of the existing modes of thinking and teaching practices. Moreover, the objective is to find potential places of development for self-compassion to be practised explicitly as an emotional skill in primary school. With these emphases, new insights of self-compassion can be generated not only for the primary school classroom but a general educational context as well.

To investigate self-compassion within the descriptions of the Finnish primary school teachers, three distinct areas will be explored. Firstly, to build understanding on how the teachers perceive self-compassion, their preconceptions on self-compassion and its potential in learning will be covered. Secondly, the teachers' descriptions of students' encounters with failure are reviewed in terms of the three components of self-compassion to investigate the observations as well as actions of the teachers. Thirdly, the descriptions of the support offered by teachers to develop students' emotional skills will be explored to possibly recognise existing practices enhancing self-compassion.



## 2 SELF-COMPASSION IN LEARNING

Self-compassion is understood as an underlying self-regulating strategy which assists cognitive and emotional processes aiding a learner to healthier and acceptive insight into failure and the emotions it evokes (Neff, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2023; Neff et al., 2005). With a compassionate attitude, a learner could encounter challenges with acceptance of the incomplete nature of oneself holding a possibility for improvement (see Dweck, 2008; Neff, 2011). Thereby, self-compassion could be considered essential in terms of maintaining motivation after struggles in learning (Breines & Chen, 2012). The idea of learning self-compassion skills supports growth of reflective, persistent, and self-aware learners, corresponding to the concepts of a learner, and learning overall in the Finnish national curriculum for basic education (POPS 2014, pp. 14–15).

### 2.1 Self-theories and self-compassion in the moment of failure

Students inevitably encounter challenges during learning but respond differently to them. There are differences between individuals on how they experience failure and how it affects their future performances (Dweck, 1999; 2016; Nurmi, 2015). Differences can be found in self-beliefs, emotional regulation strategies, and moreover, the motivation to try after failure (Dweck, 1999; Nurmi, 2015; Breines & Chen, 2012; Miyagawa et al., 2020).

Dweck (1999) has explained the different attitudes towards failure with differences in mindsets. The theory of mindsets draws a contrast between students' beliefs on abilities being malleable or non-malleable (Dweck, 1999, 2008; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). These beliefs are essential when a student encounters failure since it is reflected in behavior: whether they are willing to put effort into trying again (Dweck, 1999, 2008). A student with a growth mindset considers failure motivating since it presents the information on what one does not master yet. Hence, failure aids in finding places for development and improvement. On the contrary, a student with a fixed mindset

experiences failure unmotivating, since the idea of abilities being inborn and permanent excludes the willingness to put effort into trying again since failure has already labelled what they can do (Dweck, 1999, 2008).

It seems that considering the different mindsets of students is important when they are desired to show persistence and willingness to learn (Dweck, 1999, 2006, 2008). The same idea is present in the Finnish curriculum guiding teachers to support and maintain students' motivation to learn (POPS, 2014, p. 20). Students holding on to a fixed mindset tend to find setbacks more difficult than students with a growth mindset (Dweck & Master, 2009). Thereby, there has been a growing interest in changing mindsets of learners towards a growth mindset (Burnette et al, 2022; Kwan, Hung & Lam, 2022).

However, changing the mindset from fixed to growth might be challenging. Teaching a growth mindset has been focusing on messages teachers convey to students (see chapter 3.2) (Dweck, 2008). Current studies argue how beneficial it is to teach the features of a growth mindset if a student has adopted the idea of a fixed mindset (Kwan et al., 2022). Kwan and colleagues (2022) argue that intervening in a fixed mindset with teaching the features of a growth mindset might be harmful for a student. They claim that the psychological processes behind the mindsets are different and thereby a student with a fixed mindset benefits from different interventions (Kwan et al. 2022).

It is suggested that finding the right psychological tools for coping with challenges in learning might be as important as changing the mindset or improving a growth mindset (Yeager & Walton, 2011; Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Walton, 2014). Self-compassion could offer an insight into this (Kwan et al. 2022). It can be viewed as an emotional regulation strategy which aims to neutralise negative emotional patterns failure might evoke (Neff et al. 2005).

According to Kwan and colleagues (2022), students with a growth mindset are known to have better coping mechanisms to deal with failure. Students with a fixed mindset are known to feel more emotionally defeated and discouraged, and their attributions to failure include more intrinsic, personal factors (Kwan et al., 2022). The study of mindsets does not necessarily explain how students with

a fixed mindset could learn a healthier way to cope with failure, other than adopting a growth mindset (see Dweck, 2008). Some studies suggest that utilising self-compassion has a promising impact on students dealing with failure (Neff et al. 2005).

Kwan, Hung, and Lam (2022) have studied how self-reflective and self-compassionate strategies could be enhanced to improve coping with failure in learning. They found that regardless of the mindset being fixed or growth, students benefitted from self-compassion. However, students with a growth mindset benefitted more from self-reflective strategies, and students with a fixed mindset more from self-compassionate strategies (Kwan et al., 2022). This indicates the importance of understanding the different psychological processes connected to the experience of failure and which strategy could be helpful in a situation.

Neff and colleagues (2005) studied the role of self-compassion in academic failure. The results are promising for moderating reactions to failure and reducing its impact on self-esteem. The results showed that self-compassion decreased negative emotions and avoidance-oriented behavior after a failure. When self-compassion is utilised, there is less performance orientation in whether self-worth is being defended (Neff et al., 2005). These results indicate the benefits self-compassion may hold when experiencing failures in academic settings.

Similar results have been concluded from the study of Miyagawa and colleagues (2019). They studied self-compassion's relation to beliefs about failure. As a result, self-compassion was found to link with a belief that failures are not only part of learning but also learning opportunities (Miyagawa et al., 2019). The study indicates promising results on advantages of utilising self-compassion in the moments of failure to turn the experience into learning.

Studies have shown that self-compassionate people have high achievement goals but are not devastated when the goals are not reached: self-compassion seems to ease perfectionism and performance standards (Neff, 2003a). Neff (2011) describes that self-compassionate students are intrinsically motivated: they have

curiosity to learning and development. Similarly, Wagner and colleagues (2017) found that self-compassion links with being curious and having interest to learn new (Wagner et al., 2017). Therefore, utilising self-compassion when struggling can be considered supporting a healthy perspective to failures and motivation to learn.

## **2.2 Components of self-compassion**

Self-compassion is a practice of treating oneself with understanding and kindness when facing obstacles, suffering, or pain (Neff, 2023). Compassion is a warm and caring feeling arising from others' suffering which motivates desire to help rather than doing harm (Goetz et al., 2010). To feel self-compassion requires turning inward to connect with the present emotions, feeling a connection to others suffering, and taking a tender and nurturing approach towards oneself (Neff, 2011, 2023).

Self-compassion can be considered as a response to the observation of people valuing kindness and a compassionate attitude towards others but being overly harsh towards themselves (Neff, 2003a). Confronting limitations and struggles might lead to negative self-talk and -thoughts (Neff & Vonk, 2009). Whereas Dweck (2006) has described the situation as having a fixed mindset, making a learner discouraged Neff and Vonk (2009) explain the behavior with a type of tunnel vision in which flaws and imperfections are not recognised as part of being a human.

Neff (2023) has conceptualized self-compassion with three components (see Figure 1), of which the first one is responding to suffering with kindness rather than self-judgement. The second component emphasises understanding distress as part of the human experience rather than isolating oneself as the only one experiencing setbacks. The last component includes paying attention to emotions and thoughts suffering may cause with mindful rather than overidentified manners. These components are partly overlapping but demonstrate a dynamic system aiming to alleviate one's suffering (Neff, 2023).

**Figure 1**

*Conceptualisation of self-compassion according to Neff (2011, 2023)*

Self-compassion		
<b>self-kindness</b>	<b>feeling of common humanity</b>	<b>mindfulness</b>
versus	versus	versus
<b>self-judgement</b>	<b>isolation</b>	<b>over-identification</b>

According to Neff (2011), self-kindness is the tendency to care and understand rather than be overly critical or judgmental to oneself. Personal flaws are treated with gentleness, and the tone towards oneself is soft, supportive, and comforting (Neff, 2023). Neff (2023) explains that most of us try to be supportive and kind to our loved ones who are struggling. However, people tend to be harsher with themselves in a similar context leading to unkind and harsh thoughts. With self-kindness it is possible to comfort and ease our own suffering rather than being self-judgemental (Neff, 2023). Self-judgement includes hostility, demeaning, and critical tone which may have a harmful impact on us (Neff, 2003a). Self-judgement tends to focus on past or future failures, and it includes fear or anxiety towards failure (Barnard & Curry, 2011).

A sense of common humanity involves recognising failure, making mistakes, and feeling inadequate as a common experience for everyone (Neff, 2011). Understanding mistakes as part of human experience helps to feel connected to others rather than isolated and lonely. The irrational thought of being the only one suffering or making mistakes causes blame and distress. Feeling of isolation is an emotional reaction to failure, narrowing understanding of reality to a tunnel vision, as Neff (2023) puts it. With a feeling of common humanity, it is possible to accept setbacks as part of being human (Neff, 2023).

Mindfulness includes taking a meta-perspective towards oneself while being openly aware of the present moment with all emotions and thoughts that might arise. It involves turning inward to observe emotions and thoughts with an open mind without suppressing, denying, or exaggerating them. The mindful

approach enables putting experiences into perspective (Neff, 2011). A mindful approach to failure recognises that negative thoughts and feelings aroused from failure are nothing more or less than that – thoughts and feelings (Neff, 2023).

The thoughts and feelings are handled with curiosity, which requires taking a step back to observe the emotions and thoughts from a distance (Neff, 2023). This approach aims to have greater objectivity into thoughts and feelings (Neff, 2011). Over-identification describes the action of negative reactivity to thoughts and feelings, which hinders achieving a mindful approach to oneself. The term over-identification describes exaggerating, fixating, or getting caught up to thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, it describes suppressing, ignoring, or sweeping them away, as well (Neff, 2023, 2011, 2003b).

According to Bernard and Curry (2011), the components of self-compassion overlap, and strengthening one component might foster the development of the others. For instance, supporting self-kindness may foster the feeling of common humanity and mindfulness through facilitating observing the negative emotions and thoughts and thereby fostering mindfulness by enabling being present in the moment. When a person is tender and understanding to oneself, it may result in less shame on failure. Hence, people may not experience the need to withdraw or belief of being the only one with flaws, and therefore share their struggles and stay in contact with others. Moreover, feeling connected to others may foster self-kindness and mindfulness. Connectedness to others may help adapting to the imperfect nature of being human when witnessing other people making mistakes: empathy is turned inward (Barnard & Curry, 2011).

### **2.3 Distinctions of concepts around self-compassion**

Existing research indicates that self-compassion is associated with some other skills and psychological resources of an individual. In academic literature, the concept of self-compassion relates to, for instance, resilience and perseverance, and there are some varieties in those connections as well as the

conceptualisations. Hence it is important to discuss these concepts and differentiate the meanings (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Distinctions of main concepts used around self-compassion*

<p><b>Self-compassion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compassion, kindness and empathy towards self (see e.g., Gilbert, 2009; Neff, 2003a, 2011)</li> </ul>
<p><b>(Academic) resilience</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The skill to bounce back after a setback (see e.g., Kaplan, 2013; Rutter, 1990; Scafer &amp; Moos, 1992)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Perseverance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying again, finishing what one has started (see e.g., Duckworth et al., 2007; Kaplan, 2013)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-esteem</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall feeling of self-worth influencing psychological functioning (see e.g., Breines &amp; Chen, 2012; Tafarodi &amp; Swann, 1995)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-indulgence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overly compassionate attitude towards oneself leading to carelessness and non-persistent behavior (see e.g., Neff 2003a)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Self-pity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immersing into problems and exaggerating the feeling of suffering (see e.g., Kahn, 1965; Neff 2003a; Stöber, 2003)</li> </ul>

Resilience, or academic resilience, is about an individual's skill to bounce back after an adversity (see e.g., Kaplan, 2013; Rutter, 1990; Scafer & Moos, 1992). There are some differences in the conceptualisation; mainly about the essence of resilience being either a protective factor for risks, and/or uncomfortable outcomes, or a sum of self-referent processes that imply early stages and/or outcomes of processes of resilience (Kaplan, 2013, p. 45). In this thesis, self-compassion is considered as one of the self-referent factors constructing resilience, as it has been found to be resourceful in adverse life events (Neff, 2003a).

The quality for continuing to take actions towards completing a challenging task is called perseverance, or tenacity, as in the Finnish national curriculum for basic education (FNCCBE 2014; POPS 2014). Perseverance includes a set of skills

which results in trying again and finishing what one has started (see e.g., Duckworth et al., 2007; Kaplan, 2013). The difference is that perseverance is more of a static personal trait, helping an individual maintain engagement with a task, whereas resilience represents adaptation to a situation, and its possible challenges (see e.g., Duckworth et al., 2007; Kaplan, 2013).

Self-compassion and self-esteem are closely related concepts, and studies have found similarities and differences between them (Neff, 2023). Self-esteem has been defined by multiple scholars (see e.g., Swann et al., 2007; Crocker et al., 2003). Self-esteem, or global self-esteem, is understood as an individual's overall feeling of self-worth (Stets & Burke, 2014). Breines & Chen (2012) present that self-compassion is distinguished from self-esteem since compassion towards oneself is possible even though a person does not have an overall feeling of self-worth.

High self-esteem has a link to persistence after a failure (Baumeister et al. 2003). However, maintaining high self-esteem has been studied to hold dysfunctional behavior models such as dismissing negative feedback, diminishing failures, and attributing failures to external causes (Sedikides, 1993). In some cases, maintaining high self-esteem can be described as ego-defensive behavior which includes downward social comparisons (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Neff & Vonk, 2009; Neff, 2003a). On the other hand, low self-esteem is connected to responding to failure by decreasing motivation for academic tasks, whereas higher self-esteem could protect from such response (Park et al., 2007).

High self-esteem might promote narcissistic characteristics, but they are not associated with people with high self-compassion (Neff, 2003b; Leary et al. 2007). Self-compassionate people tend to have high self-esteem which might be because of a kind perspective to oneself which promotes positive insight to oneself and reflects on self-esteem (Neff, 2003b). Self-compassionate people have more realistic self-appraisals and react to stressors in a more balanced way (Leary et al. 2007).

Promisingly, high levels of self-compassion are studied to correlate with mental well-being even when factors relating to high self-esteem have been



excluded (see Neff, 2009). These results suggest the remarkable role of self-compassion in mental well-being (see also Muris & Petrocchi, 2017; Zessin et al., 2015; Macbeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff et al., 2005, Neff et al., 2007, Neely et al., 2009). For instance, Muris and Petrocchi's (2017) meta-analysis indicates that self-compassion acts as a protective factor for psychopathology. Similarly, Macbeth and Gumley (2012) studied that self-compassion leads to lower levels of mental health symptoms. Zessin and colleagues (2015) studied that self-compassion has benefits on well-being, especially for psychological and cognitive aspects. Moreover, studies of self-compassion have held promising results on resilience and coping in day-to-day life struggles (Leary et al. 2007; Yustika & Widayarsi, 2021). These studies suggest that teaching self-compassion could be beneficial for the mental well-being of a student.

In some cases, self-compassion has evoked concerns of self-compassion leading to self-pity or self-indulgence. Neff (2003a) explains that self-pity is a perspective in which people immerse themselves in problems and ignore failures as part of life. Self-pity includes separating oneself from others and exaggerating the feeling of suffering. Self-pity has similarities to over-identification since Neff (2023) explains over-identification including exaggerating, fixating, or getting caught up to thoughts and feelings. Similarly, self-pity is explained as an emotional response to stressful events including feeling sorry for oneself and overindulging in failures, losses or hardships and fixating into suffering (Stöber, 2003; Kahn, 1965).

Stöber (2003) explains that despite self-pity being directed towards oneself involves attracting attention or empathy from others. However, this might cause rejection from others. After a while, people are expected to accept adversities and move on (Stöber, 2003). Thereby, self-pity might complicate connecting with others. Self-compassion might be confused with self-indulgence, as well. Self-indulgence holds the conception of being overly compassionate towards oneself. The overly compassionate approach is believed to lead to choosing unmotivated, careless, or non-persistent behavior. It is a belief that self-compassion leads to giving up or not bothering to try (Neff, 2003a). However, self-compassion

research suggests that an acceptive approach to personal failures makes people more motivated to make improvements and changes to their personal weaknesses (Breines & Chen, 2012; Neff et al. 2007).

As mentioned in this chapter, self-compassion has been studied to have benefits to learning from multiple perspectives (see e.g., Miyagawa et al., 2019; Wagner et al., 2017; Kwan, 2022; O'Hare & Gemelli, 2023). Moreover, self-compassion is beneficial for learning since it has been connected to for example better performance outcome (Kwan, 2022; O'Hare & Gemelli, 2023), feedback perception and self-improvement motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012; Laudel & Narciss, 2023). However, how self-compassion could be learned in the classroom remains unclear. Therefore, we suggest taking a closer look at how a teacher, as a facilitator of a learning environment, could support students' self-compassion.

### **3 A TEACHER DESIGNING THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEARNER**

A learner's socioemotional development and interpersonal processes are affected by the learning environment (see Meyer & Turner, 2002, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Turner et al., 2003). Furthermore, socioemotional skills are explicitly practised within educational environments for they are perceived as central life skills (see European Commission, 2019; OECD 2021a, 2021c; OPH 2022; POPS 2014). A teacher is in a central role managing these learning situations as well as the classroom atmosphere (Prashanti & Ramnarayan, 2020; van Manen, 2016). To build understanding on how the pedagogical choices of a teacher impact a learner, these aspects will be discussed in this chapter. On the one hand, these impacts are direct in nature within the teacher-student-relationship, and on the other hand, indirect for affecting through the created psychosocial learning environment.

#### **3.1 The classroom as a supportive learning environment**

How the classroom environment can support learning can be exemplified through self-determination theory (STD) (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020). Ryan and Deci (2000, 2017, 2020) explain that self-determined motivation is formed in an environment which supports the fulfilment of three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy includes the idea that individuals can choose and have an impact on their own actions in a learning situation, whereas competence refers to the sense of being capable of learning. Relatedness denotes the feeling of belonging to a group of people – to a classroom for instance (Määttä, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020). People tend to seek for circumstances in which these psychological needs are met, and a classroom can work as an environment offering these experiences (Määttä, 2020).

Important motivational practices include offering ways to the students to have an influence and make personal connections in learning, which respond to STD as for autonomy (Määttä, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020; Shernoff, 2013, pp. 127–149). Other factors for student motivation through personal connections are for instance utilising creativity and connecting school, home, and the real world (see e.g., Shernoff, 2013, pp. 127–149). Research in various educational settings with classroom environments suggest that supporting student motivation enhances student engagement (Shernoff, 2013, pp. 127–149).

From the perspective of STD, it is crucial for learning that the student feels competent (Määttä, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020). The teacher is of influence in the students' experience of capability in terms of extrinsic encouragement and affirmation (see e.g., Hattie & Timperley, 2007; van Manen, 2016), which will be discussed further in section 3.2. In addition, the students' ability to consider their own skills, strengths, and places of development is essential for self-efficacy (see Bandura, 1989, 1997, 2012; Dweck, 2008, 2013, 2017).

In order to achieve a sense of competence and maintain it, the environment must actively enable the feeling of being capable (Määttä, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020). However, the feeling is not accomplished by just any success or completion of a task but also requires reasonable challenges and overcoming them (see Niemi et al., 2022). Based on the growth mindset (Dweck, 2008, 2013, 2017), educators should encourage students to put effort into the tasks and take a risk to find their potential.

Taking risks and encountering challenges in learning also sets the learner in a vulnerable position. In a classroom context, they are out of their comfort zone and may not succeed in their attempt (see e.g., Dweck, 2008, Vygotsky, 1978; Wass & Golding, 2014). Vulnerability is inevitable in learning, considering that one cannot develop their skills by always repeating the same task routinely (see Vygotsky, 1978; Wass & Golding, 2014). At the same time, accepting this kind of vulnerability is not a self-evident matter in a community – which in question here is the classroom or the entire school community of learners.

Exposing oneself as vulnerable is not possible in an unsafe environment, and so an unsafe classroom could hinder learning (van Manen, 2015, pp. 77–137). A safe learning environment has been found to play a vital role in for example students' school liking (see Niemi et al., 2022) and sense of community (Lenzi et al., 2017). Safety must be established together as a community, and it requires sensitivity and skill of all participants (see e.g., Prashanti & Ramnarayan, 2020; van Manen, 2015, pp. 77–137).

Lastly for SDT, the learning environment must offer a feeling of relatedness in order to enhance self-derived motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020). By relatedness, Ryan and Deci (2000, 2017, 2020) mean the opportunities to interact and connect to others, as well as care for others. If one cannot relate to others or do so as objects and not persons, the quality of the relationship is reduced, which can then affect the well-being of the relationships as well as the people (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 316).

Another important factor regarding the psychosocial classroom environments is emotions (Meyer & Turner, 2002). According to Ryan and Deci (2017, pp. 351–381), "Socioemotional growth is impacted by classroom climate and evaluations". Meyer and Turner (2002, 2006; see also Turner et al., 2003) have also concluded that emotions are a part of interpersonal processes closely connected with motivation and cognition in learning within the psychosocial learning context. They suggest educators and researchers acknowledge the sensitivity of students to their own and others' experiences in the classroom, which is a close-knit community (Meyer & Turner, 2006).

Emotional skills are considered as a central skill factor today (European Commission, 2019; OECD 2021a, 2021c; OPH 2022), and they are included in the objectives of Finnish basic education (POPS 2014). Practising emotional skills is integrated into the primary education curriculum as in the transversal competence of everyday life skills, as well as within objectives in teaching Finnish, physical education, environmental studies, religion, and music (POPS 2014, pp. 20, 102, 138–139, 142, 157, 293). Hence in education, emotions are an inseparable part of learning as well as the community as a learning environment.

### **3.2 The role of a teacher in a supportive and safe classroom environment**

The rather autonomous role of a teacher as the organiser of the classroom environment is essential (van Manen, 2016), and so it is important to be considered in detail. Van Manen (2016, p. 70) explains that the classroom atmosphere affects the “general sense of being” and “the positive well-being of a child”. Therefore, a teacher should be sensitive in establishing and maintaining a positive atmosphere that supports a child’s feeling of safety and confidence (see Prashanti & Ramnarayan, 2020; van Manen, 2016, p. 69–70). To create and maintain the classroom as a safe and supportive environment, a teacher must acknowledge the classroom as a community: the pedagogical situations are created together among the members of the classroom (van Manen, 2016, pp. 67–76).

Previous research indicates that the sense of community relates to lower probability of feeling unsafe at school (see Lenzi et al., 2017). Prashanti and Ramnarayan (2020) similarly suggest teachers foster a cooperative, supportive classroom, where students’ thoughts and ideas are allowed without fear of being humiliated or not accepted. Furthermore, Muhonen and their colleagues (2018, p. 77) suggest that utilising these student-initiated dialogues in teaching, as in actively encouraging and supporting student talk, “may be as strong facilitator(s) of beneficial learning experiences contributing to student outcomes as prior-planned teacher-initiated dialogues”.

Niemi and colleagues (2022) have concluded that besides the classroom atmosphere and relationships, teacher and peer support are found to be among the strongest contributors to students liking school. In particular, a teacher’s actions in the learning environment have a significance on how supportive the students experience the learning environment (Niemi et al., 2022). A teacher can also affect student motivation, engagement, and in the end, learning (see e.g., Roorda et al., 2011; Shernoff, 2013, pp. 127–149).

In previous research, teacher support is considered related to various positive outcomes of students’ learning and development. Social support from a

teacher has been connected to such things as positive academic emotion (Chen et al., 2022; Cayubit, 2022) and the decrease of problematic student behaviour (Bussemakers & Denessen, 2023). Academic support has been found to enhance a profound approach to learning (Dietrich et al., 2015; Stefanou et al., 2004), self-esteem (Shernoff, 2013, pp. 151–174), and motivation (Dietrich et al., 2015; Pitzer & Skinner, 2017) for instance.

The academic support a teacher offers to a student is of great impact for the process of building knowledge (see Muhonen et al., 2018). Van Manen (2015, p. 147) suggests a tactful teacher does not “construct or control a child’s every possible experience”. The role of the teacher is to evoke deeper thoughts to a question (van Manen, 2015). Ryan and Deci (2017, p. 368) likewise suggest teachers promote students’ autonomous motivation by offering time for pondering, giving hints when a student cannot move forward in their thoughts, and responding to students’ questions and answers.

The support offered to students can have a great impact on the learning outcomes. A study made by Turner and colleagues (1998) illustrates that teaching was successful in mathematics classrooms that included practices for perceiving failure as a potential learning experience, enhancing students’ understanding over only correcting answers, using scaffolded instruction, and offering convenient challenges. The results in these kinds of classrooms were also positive for the students who were not mathematically “gifted” (Turner et al., 1998). This highlights the importance of considering the pedagogical choices of a teacher within the classroom.

Social support from the teacher, within the teacher-student relationship, is an important factor influencing student engagement and satisfaction (see e.g., Roorda et al., 2011; Shernoff, 2013, pp. 127–149). Tactful educators have caring attentiveness to each child and situation (van Manen, 2015), and compassionate love from the teachers has been found to affect the quality of teacher-student relationship (see Virat, 2022). According to van Manen (2015, p. 35), the correct manner of pedagogical tact cannot be assured by any universal rules: “Pedagogical sensitivity is sustained by a certain kind of seeing, listening, and

responding to a particular child or group of children in ever-changing situations”.

A teacher can increase their knowledge of a student by investing in the teacher-student relationship, which can then be utilised in offering individual support (see e.g., Cayubit, 2022; Prashanti & Ramnarayan, 2020). However, the teacher-student relationship is not only important for academic support, but van Manen (2015) reminds educators that a student needs to be seen and acknowledged by the teacher every day. It is not only about learning the contents and skills in school, but how the student builds their perception of self; a student reflects the self through the adults present in their lives (van Manen, 2015).

According to van Manen (2015, p. 23), gaining a pedagogical perspective is necessary for all teachers: “A teacher might teach to the heads of the students but fail to be sensitive to their hearts”. Therefore, a teacher may fail in seeing learners as humans by only viewing the learners within all the external goals of education (van Manen, 2015), of which a similar concern has been proposed by Ryan and Deci (2017, pp. 351–381). Educators should try to understand students growing up as learners and human beings through the experiences in the multifaceted environment at school (Ryan & Deci, 2017, pp. 351–581; van Manen, 2015).

Overall, teachers can enhance the positive emotions by for instance encouraging, scaffolding, expressing care, and reinforcing the students’ feeling of capability (Shernoff, 2013, p. 130). Encouragement and feedback are a great factor in learning and therefore important to consider (van Manen, 2016). Feedback influences the formation of a student’s expectations of capability (see Viljaranta, 2017). The self-belief works as a basis on the behaviour: a student chooses how to operate in a learning situation based on their personal belief of their capability and expectancy of success. Moreover, they must value the task to engage in and put the effort in (Viljaranta, 2017).

It is important that a teacher recognises how the feedback is given (van Manen, 2016, p. 35). For instance, praising students’ intelligence, which would instill confidence and desirable qualities, has been related to developing fear of failure, avoiding risks, and doubting themselves (Kamins & Dweck, 1999;



Mueller & Dweck, 1998). A study of Miyagawa and colleagues (2020) supports this with the findings that in the moment of failure, a student comforted with emphasising their strengths is likely to result in avoiding the risk of failure. Therefore, the theory of mindsets includes the idea of educators not to be praising the qualities of the children but focusing on praising the effort which teaches children the qualities of the growth mindset (Dweck, 2013).

Van Manen (2015) agrees on the matter of praise: it might be given because of some beliefs of praise making a child feel good about themselves and achieving more, and therefore it is considered good for the child's self-esteem. However, praising might lead to unrealistic self-beliefs of skills (van Manen, 2015). A teacher must be careful about how and in which situation the praise is given: praising by singling out some students may lead others to feel incapable, ashamed, or jealous (Dweck, 2008, pp. 71-74; van Manen, 2015, p. 142-143).

In conclusion, self-beliefs seem to be formed in combination with individual experiences and the environment (see e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2017; Shernoff, 2013; Turner et al., 1998; van Manen, 2015). The feedback teacher gives, construes beliefs which are reflected on behaviour in learning situations (Dweck, 2008; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; van Manen, 2015). It seems to be crucial what is done in a situation in which learning becomes more challenging. There lies a seed for teaching and learning important skills and observations about emotions which are experienced before, during, and after learning.

The role of a teacher in a classroom environment is central (see van Manen, 2016), and therefore important to carefully consider in terms of students' experiences, learning, and engagement. Teacher affects the students on many levels, both academically and socioemotionally (see e.g., Lenzi et al., 2017), which requires tactfulness in order to enhance the students' learning and development with such affection (van Manen, 2015). By building trust in teacher-student relationships, organising a safe atmosphere, and offering convenient support and encouragement to the students, the teacher not only teaches but supports the growth of the students as human beings (Ryan & Deci, 2017, pp. 351-381; van Manen, 2015).

## 4 RESEARCH TASK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research task of this study is to build understanding on how self-compassion is perceived and promoted in a Finnish primary school context. To fulfil this task, self-compassion is explored in the context of Finnish primary school teachers' perceptions and teaching methods. The aim is to learn whether and how self-compassion is a part of the teachers' existing modes of thinking and teaching practices. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to provide information about the practices used in primary school classrooms, and potential places of development to further enhance those practices.

1. What kind of preconceptions do the teachers have on self-compassion and its potential in learning?
2. How are the three components of self-compassion present in the descriptions of students' encounters with failure?
3. How do the teachers support the development of students' emotional skills with the existing pedagogical methods?

## 5 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

This empirical qualitative study was conducted following an interpretive and constructionist philosophical approach to describe and build understanding on self-compassion as part of the educational context and teachers' perceptions (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 51–52). This study utilised the approach of social constructionism for exploring self-compassion as a construct of the interaction between an individual and the social environment, a classroom. The data was collected with a semi-structured interview with six Finnish primary school teachers. The analysis followed a qualitative iterative method according to Tracy (2020). Research ethics were carefully considered throughout the study to implement responsible research according to the guidelines for good scientific practice set by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2019).

### 5.1 Research Context

This study was conducted as empirical qualitative research. In previous studies, self-compassion has mainly been studied with quantitative methods since it is often measured with tools such as the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) (see Neff, 2023). In this study, the aim however is not to explore the numbers and correlations of self-compassion and its quantitative qualities, but to build understanding on how self-compassion is promoted and perceived. These descriptive qualities, which quantitative experiments and surveys cannot reach (Tracy, 2020, pp. 1–24), must be revised through qualitative methods to propose questions such as “how” and “what kind of” (Patton, 2015, pp. 2–47).

The meanings conveyed within an educational environment are part of a broader context which includes the communal, cultural, and societal levels (see e.g., Hicks, 1996). Teaching as teacher-student interaction connects the social and psychological dimensions, and so the reality and meanings of phenomena are constructed in the diverse interaction between an individual and the environment, which can be explored within everyday procedures (see Hicks,

1996). Hence this study approaches self-compassion from a social-constructionist perspective (see e.g., Patton, 2015). The interest is on how self-compassion is perceived and promoted by Finnish primary school teachers.

The difference between social constructionism and social constructivism shall be briefly reviewed, since they are easily confused (Patton, 2015, pp. 121–128). Michael Crotty (1998) has distinguished the two by referring to social constructivism as an individual internal processing of meanings, whereas social constructionism includes the social dimension in creating and transmitting meanings. In the present study, the pedagogy of self-compassion is the focus – which indeed includes the social dimension of meaning-making in teaching (Hicks, 1996). As for self-compassion on its own, it is an emotional skill of an individual, including mental processes that could be regarded from the constructivist approach (see Crotty, 1998; Neff, 2003a).

Since this study focuses on building understanding of self-compassion as a social construct through teachers' perspective, the epistemology behind the study lies within interpretivism (Tracy, 2020, pp. 51–52). According to Tracy (2020, p. 51), the interpretive view considers “reality and knowledge ... constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice”. The knowledge offered by this study is not only mediated through the authors, but also through the participants. In addition, the offered knowledge as collected data is further understood through a hermeneutical method, which is required to comprehend any text (Tracy, 2020, pp. 51–52).

## **5.2 Participants and Research Data**

The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with teachers. The set criteria for the participants were primary school teachers in Finnish basic education. Class teachers were considered as the primary target regarding this study, for they spend most time with one class of students and therefore largely manage their own classroom community (see section 3.2.). Hence class teachers were expected to have various methods and examples to share on supporting

students' growth and development as both learners and human beings. Narrowing down the criteria for possible participants can also be considered as a factor enhancing depth and trustworthiness of the results (Tracy, 2020, p. 174).

The participants hoped to be variously experienced in teaching. This way, the knowledge and resources of the participants would best respond to the reality in the educational field – teachers have varying backgrounds in terms of experience, training, and education. Other criteria, such as prior knowledge on self-compassion was not required since the study was designed to reach their experiences and thoughts on the subject through the descriptions of everyday situations and pedagogy in general.

The participants were recruited by systematically contacting possible participants by email or phone in autumn 2022. The recruitment of participants was not randomised, and all the contacts were familiar to the authors of this study. Most of them were contacts from a professional setting, and some were contacts from other connections. The six teachers contacted first, and all of whom then participated, are class teachers. The participants have a varying number of years of experience in teaching: from two years to more than twenty years.

The recruitment process included applying research permits. Information about the research was delivered to the participants and their superiors, the head teachers, in the form of a research bulletin (see Appendix 1) and a privacy notice. In addition, according to the municipalities' guidelines on conducting research, the documents, and any further information such as the research plan were delivered to the local administrations if required. Consent for participation was then collected from each participant (see Appendix 2), and a research permit from the head teachers (see Appendix 3) and correspondingly from the municipalities if required. These considerations, corresponding to the contents of the privacy notice, are further discussed in section 5.5.

### 5.3 Data Collection

The data was collected by implementing six semi-structured interviews between November 2022 and March 2023. There are varying recommendations on the number of interviews, and so it was decided to begin with six, which is often considered the minimum for a qualitative dataset (Tracy, 2020, pp. 174–175). Tracy (2020, p. 174) also suggests researchers aim for saturation rather than a specific number – at some point, the interviews do not generate change in the emerging results. After conducting the six interviews, the last interviews had not provided divergent perspectives to the main results, and no more interviews were considered necessary.

The interviews were implemented in a live meeting or remotely based on the participant's wish, to reach the teacher conveniently and comfortably (Tracy, 2020, p. 186–189). The interviews were recorded. The set time for the interview was based on the schedules and wishes of the participants, hence the time frame of the interviews was so broad. In addition, receiving the research permits from some municipalities' administration took more time than was anticipated.

Interviewing as the data collecting method was chosen for its possibilities on thoroughness and mutual discovery (Tracy, 2020). According to Tracy (2020, p. 156), “interviews enable the researcher to stumble upon and further explore complex phenomena that may otherwise be hidden or unseen”. As presented previously, self-compassion is often studied with quantitative methods, and so this method offers information of the lived experience rather than the quantities or connections (see e.g., Neff, 2023; Tracy, 2020; van Manen, 1997).

The interviews were planned as respondent semi-structured interviews (see Tracy, 2020, p. 159), also called standardised open-ended interview (Patton, 2015). Respondent interviews are used to gather information from social actors in a similar position with appropriate experience to share, such as professionals (Tracy, 2020, p. 159). To enable the sharing of these experiences by offering space but holding multiple uniform interviews, a semi-structured interview schedule was established (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 157–158; Patton, 2015, pp. 437–441).

There are two main reasons why a semi-structured interview was chosen as the convenient method for this study. Firstly, open-ended questions do not limit or guide the participants' responses quite as much as a structured interview (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 157–158; Patton, 2015, pp. 437–441). Secondly, the defined structure of the interview offered the necessary support for the participants to ponder on the experience and knowledge corresponding to the themes explored (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 157–158), since their existing knowledge on self-compassion could not be entirely predicted.

As Tracy (2020, pp. 161–164) suggests, the interview schedule (see Appendix 4) was carefully planned as for the chosen questions, the manner, and order of the questions. Creating the interview began with defining the topics based on the revised literature, forming questions on what was desired to be investigated, and examining them within the research questions (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 161–164). The process continued with forming the questions as interview questions; simple, understandable, and neutral (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 161–170).

The systematising of the interview questions was a thorough process to achieve authentic answering of the participants (Patton, 2015, p. 445). The interview schedule was prepared as logically proceeding and supporting the understanding of the phenomenon throughout the interview. It was tested before implementing the data collection to ensure clarity and validity of the questions (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2021).

In the beginning of the interview, the participants were encouraged by reminding of the value of their participation, and that the questions did not seek for correct answers but their experiences and perceptions (Patton 2015, p. 428). To be accessible, it started with simple inviting questions to further build rapport (Tracy, 2020, p. 164–165). These questions concerned the participants' associations of success and failure, and their observations on students' encounters with failure. The interview proceeded to experience questions that remained on a simplistic level (Tracy, 2020, p. 166–167). The participants were able to describe their reflections in a generative manner, still generating important insights from either their personal or professional experiences.

In the latter part of the interview, the questions were planned more specific and in-depth as in directive questions, with some typology, elicitation, and data-referencing questions (Tracy, 2020, pp. 168–169). These kinds of questions have more control and focus on specific areas of interest (Tracy, 2020, pp. 168–169). Before conceptualizing self-compassion, the participants were asked whether it had been introduced to them before and how they would conceptualize it. The theoretical conception (Neff, 2003a, 2023) was then briefly discussed, and the participants were to reflect on self-compassion from their personal perspective.

To explore the participants' pedagogical practices, they were asked to describe how socioemotional skills are practised in their classrooms and how they support students in challenges or disappointing situations. Furthermore, concrete examples of pedagogical practices were approached from classroom rules and defined case examples such as a student encountering disappointment when evaluated exam papers are returned. These questions were designed to further investigate the teacher-student-relationship and the classroom environment perspective regarding self-compassion – not to directly ask how the participants teach self-compassion. The aim was to reach the genuine experiences of the participants and avoid leading questions (Patton 2015, p. 458).

At the end of the interview, the participants were offered an opportunity to share their professional opinion through critically evaluating the phenomenon and reflect on the topics in a summative manner (Tracy, 2020, pp. 169–170). The interview was designed carefully to first build understanding and then proceed to further discuss themes that are closely connected to self-compassion as well as provide formal conceptualisations and previous research findings. This setting in the interviews prompted the participants to share critical and in-depth thoughts that are especially valuable for research (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 168–169).

The interviews were held separately by the authors for practical reasons, which was enabled by the semi-structured interview schedule. Since the questions and topics were planned, set, and rehearsed co-operatively in advance, the interview could be implemented separately. The presence of two interviewers was not considered necessary, since the data set was to be compiled from the



transcriptions, not solely from situational deductions (see Patton, 2015, p. 665; Tracy, 2020). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to create a comprehensive data set and to be able to utilise triangulation in the analysis (see Patton, 2015, pp. 665–668). To further ensure consistency between the interviews, the authors shared their experiences of the interviews with each other.

The length of the interviews was planned as twenty to thirty minutes and for the most participants it was correctly predicted. The realised length of the interviews varied from twenty minutes up to an hour. The length of the transcription documents was eight to nine pages for each interview, written single-spaced in 12-point font, Times New Roman. The final dataset consisted of fifty-four pages with the previously mentioned formatting.

## **5.4 Data Analysis**

The data was analysed with qualitative methods. The process was creative and systematic, and is reported as transparently as possible, as research literature suggests (see e.g., Alasuutari, 2019; Eskola & Suoranta, 2008; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2020). The main objective of the analysis was on converting these carefully implemented interviews to answering the research questions. Semi-structured interviews enable organising the data according to the interview questions and similar responses (Patton, 2015, p. 439), which was utilised in the beginning.

The data analysis was conducted as a pragmatic iterative analysis, and so the data was handled in multiple cycles (Tracy, 2020). Iterative data analysis includes reading the data and using existing models, theories, and explanations in a reflective process to build understanding (Tracy, 2020, p. 209). All cycles of the analysis were implemented carefully based on the data, so that no detached or unfounded conclusions would be made (Patton, 2015, pp. 570–573).

The data analysis began with transcribing the data and reading the data during the process (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 212–213). However, three of the interviews were done remotely via a communication platform, and so the interviews were conducted with a technologically mediated approach (Tracy,

2020, p. 186–189). The transcriptions of the remote interviews were produced automatically on the platform, and hence the traditional manual transcription was not necessary. To ensure the quality of the transcriptions as well as familiarisation with the data, the transcriptions were carefully read through, simultaneously listening to the recordings (see Tracy, 2020, p. 212).

The other three interviews were transcribed in a precise manner regarding the verbal expressions, from word to word to maintain any passages from the interview. Both processes were finished with a fact checking round to ensure all data was included in the transcriptions (Tracy, 2020, pp. 201–206). The transcribing was done individually by the authors by dividing the task in half – three interviews for each. However, the authors discussed after the interviews and during the transcription process to share ideas and preliminary findings. After transcribing, the authors went through the transcriptions collaboratively to share the information and grasp on the entire dataset.

The data set was stored in electronic format in a private and secure network disk drive managed by the University of Jyväskylä, which was considered as making the reviewing and organising of the data set effective and practical for the authors. The data was first organised chronologically, corresponding the transcriptions, but each interview was separate. The data was organised and analysed together with both authors present, building a consistent understanding of the dataset (Tracy, 2020, p. 279–280).

The first cycle included the data immersion phase and primary-cycle coding. During primary-cycle coding, the data was read, essential words and phrases as fractures were highlighted, and initial coding was conducted based on them. An example of this coding phase is shown in Table 1. Some of these initial codes were used as the first-level codes, which are reviewed next.

**Table 1***An example of primary-cycle coding*

Citation from the data	Translation of the data	Initial coding
Itkeminen ja itsetunnon mureneminen. Ja semmoinen alakuloisuus ja sellainen heikko luottamus siihen, että osaisi mitään helposti. Niin tulee sitten sellainen, että mä oon iha huono ja mä en osaa mitään. Pienen epäonnistumisen takia se koko maailma romahtaa.	Crying and crushed self-esteem. And kind of depression and weak confidence that one can't do anything easily. I'm so bad and I can't do anything. A small failure makes the whole world collapse.	"Crying" "Crushed self-esteem" "Weak confidence" "So bad" "A small failure makes the whole world collapse"

The words and phrases describing what is in the data are called first-level codes (Tracy, 2020, p. 219–220). To establish the descriptive first-level codes, the primary coding phase was repeated twice – this ensured another fresh glance on the dataset, possibly recognising something that was not noted during the very first cycle (Tracy, 2020, p. 219–220).

According to Agee (2009, p. 432), “Good qualitative questions are usually developed or refined in all stages of a reflexive and interactive inquiry journey”. After primary-cycle coding and reflecting on the dataset, the preliminary research questions were evaluated and reformed. The first question previously emphasised the contrast between success and failure and the participants’ response to those experiences, which was unnecessarily large of a framework. The participants’ preconceptions of self-compassion were discovered as more significant for the aim of this study. The second question was reformed in more detail to correspond with the components of self-compassion (see section 2.2). Similarly, the third question was revised by narrowing down the framework: overall promoting the development of self-compassion transformed into a more detailed approach.

The specification of the research questions enabled more detailed consideration of the data linked to self-compassion. The analysis then continued by creating the first-level codes based on primary coding cycles (see Table 2). The analytic second-level codes could be created based on first-level codes.

**Table 2***An example of first-cycle coding*

<b>Initial code</b>	<b>First-level (descriptive) code</b>	<b>Second-level (analytic) code</b>
Crying and crushed self-esteem	Weakened self-esteem	Self-judgement
Weak confidence	Weakened self-confidence	
I'm so bad	Self-criticism	
A small failure makes the whole world to collapse	Lack of broader perspective (to failure)	Over-identification

The secondary-cycle coding included forming analytic secondary codes, in which connections were drawn between similar codes within the data (Tracy, 2020, pp. 225–227). During this cycle, the constant comparative method was used to also compare each code and the data and make code descriptions (Tracy, 2020, p. 220). In addition, the process included hierarchical codes, in which patterns and similarities in the second-level codes were assembled in categories (Tracy, 2020, p. 226). This categorisation supported the further process of synthesising and meaning making of the codes (Tracy, 2020, pp. 208–235).

In Table 3, the secondary-cycle coding is illustrated – this is a fracture of the hierarchical code and category “Components of self-compassion”. The components were explored for the second research question. In the beginning of the secondary-cycle coding process, the elements found in the participants’ descriptions were not yet recognised as the components based on the conceptualisation of self-compassion by Neff (2003a). After creating multiple corresponding second-level codes for the components, the theory could be connected to the results.

**Table 3**

*Secondary-cycle coding: participants' descriptions of students responding to failure*

<b>First-level code</b>	<b>Description of the code</b>	<b>Second-level code</b>
Weakened self-esteem, self-confidence, and/or self-belief Self-criticism High demands	Students indicate negative thoughts of themselves, their capabilities, or learning outcomes. Behaviour is neglecting, avoiding, or careless when anticipating or facing difficulties in learning.	Self-judgement
Withdrawal Bursts of strong emotions Defensive behaviour Lack of broader perspective	Students suppress or exaggerate their emotions in the moment of failure. Students do not see the situation in a broader perspective.	Over-identification

The conclusions during the analysis phase were formed in interaction with previous theoretical concepts and the data itself (see Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). When the second-level codes from the dataset were gathered and the hierarchical codes were established, the results were begun to be connected even further to academic literature (see Tracy, 2020).

## **5.5 Ethical Solutions**

This study was conducted in a manner required by General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR 2016). The storing of any data was implemented carefully, following good scientific practice (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The entire study follows ethical guidelines of the Research Ethics Advisory Board (TENK 2019). The study respects honesty, openness, and carefulness from the research plan to final report. The authors followed a reflective and critical approach to their own actions in the study, and carefully considered ethical requirements (TENK, 2019).

The realisation of the standards of data protection was recognised and planned in the beginning of the study. The authors completed courses Processing personal data in scientific research and the Basics of data management in the University of Jyväskylä. In addition, the authors evaluated that Data Protection

Impact Assessment (DPIA) was not necessary for this study, as no high risks were found in the planned data processing (University of Jyväskylä, 24.02.2022).

The measures taken to establish an honest and ethical study included creating the required documents to report the study: a research plan, data management plan, research bulletin, privacy notice, and consent for participation. The research plan and data management plan were thorough and transparent schemes of the different phases of this study, including how data would be managed throughout the study. These set plans were carefully followed, and information was offered to the participants throughout the study.

Information of the study was first offered to the participants, as well as the head teacher, as a research bulletin and privacy notice. The research bulletin summarised the purpose and meaning of the study, and the privacy note illustrated the data management, rights of the participant, and possible archiving of the dataset. Consents to participate in the study were then collected from the participant and the head teacher. In addition, research permits were applied from the municipalities with all the required documents described above, according to the regulations of the local authorities.

Throughout the study, the privacy of the participants was considered according to the measures named in the privacy notice. The consent forms collected from the participants were stored securely with no access to third parties. No unnecessary data about the participants was collected at any time, and responsible databases were used with a careful manner to store the collected data (TENK, 2019).

The interviews were recorded with audio, either on a personal phone or laptop, and the recordings were immediately transferred to the secure and private cloud storage and disposed of from the device. Therefore, no personal data from the interviews were stored in any device's storage. Notes were taken during the interview to ensure the documentation of the answers in case the recordings had not functioned, and as a tool for highlighting certain responses or initial reflections of authors. These notes were stored as any other data, responsibly on the secure network disk drive of the University of Jyväskylä.

The recordings from the interviews were transcribed as soon as possible. The recordings were then disposed of after the transcriptions were completed, and so the participants were not directly identifiable in the data that was being analysed. All the data was stored in an appropriate manner on a private and secure network disk drive managed by the University of Jyväskylä with no access to third parties. The text editor used to complete this study was secured with a double-factor authentication and licensed by the University of Jyväskylä. No personal data was stored in any third-party applications.

As good scientific practice suggests, the participants are not identifiable in the results or any publications (see Tuomi & Sarajarvi, 2018). Any citations from the interviews are used for demonstration in a manner that no participant can be identified. Responses including any sensitive or personal information were not used as citations. All data, including the documents stored on the network disk drive of University of Jyväskylä as well as the consent forms, will be duly disposed of after this study is completed.

The authors and some of the participants were familiar with each other before the conducted interview, which might influence the reliability of the study – positively or negatively (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). On the one hand, familiarity might ease the atmosphere of the interview - Iphofen and Tolich (2018) suggest not viewing the participants as “data machines” but valuable collaborators. On the other hand, relationships are considered as possibly compromising validity or causing biased answers if the participant aims to for example provide the data the researcher is looking for (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018).

In this study, this issue was responded with non-judgemental, neutral, and professional attitude before, during and after the interview (Tracy, 2020). Following Patton (2015, p. 445), sequencing the interview questions was considered thoroughly to provide comfortable, accurate and honest responses. In the beginning of the interview, it was stressed that there are no correct answers and the participants’ actions are not critically evaluated; the aim is to find out what is already done to build students’ self-compassion. The purpose of this was to show encouragement and non-judgemental interest (Patton 2015, p. 428).

## 6 RESULTS

The results are presented according to each research question. The first section illustrates the teachers' preconceptions on self-compassion and its possible advantages in an educational context. The second section explores the three components of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a; 2023) within the teachers' descriptions of students' encounters with failure. The third section exemplifies the practices the teachers utilise to practise and promote emotional skills.

### 6.1 What kind of preconceptions do the teachers have on self-compassion and its potential in learning?

The prior knowledge of self-compassion among the participants was enquired, which led to the result that the term was only familiar to two participants. Self-compassion had been introduced to one participant on a course in teacher education in a university, but they did not remember the context. For the other, the term had been presented in a parenting context.

Despite the term of self-compassion being rather unfamiliar to most participants, all of them could conceptualise it in a general context. The most common explanation was "compassion towards self", which was used by three participants. The other three approached the term from the perspective of encountering failure; most conceptualisations included mercifulness, empathy, and being gentle towards oneself. In other words, the central values of self-compassion are already present in the conceptualisations, although the term was unfamiliar for the most part.

The participants were given a research-based conceptualisation of self-compassion, according to Neff (2023), after their initial descriptions. After the explanation, one participant announced to have seen a video earlier, which they now recognised as related to self-compassion. The video had compared self-talk to how friends talk to each other – if one had a friend being as hard on us as we are on ourselves, we would not be friends with them. This indicates self-



compassion being integrated to the life of the participant, without them explicitly recognising it.

One participant considered experience and skills a central factor in terms of self-compassion: more self-judgement occurs in things they consider themselves good at and more self-kindness when inexperienced. However, another participant reported experiencing more self-judgement in the beginning of their teaching career than now. While the participants had these individual approaches towards self-compassion, the positive indicators of the three components of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a; 2023) were identifiable throughout the interviews as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*The components of self-compassion in the participants' personal approaches*

<b>Self-kindness</b>	<b>Common humanity</b>	<b>Mindfulness</b>
acknowledgment of being too hard on oneself	seeing failure as humane and common	start by admitting a failure, accepting emotions and not always being the best version of oneself
not afraid of failure and if it takes place, one can be merciful	if one never tries, one can never fail, but when one tries, something might fail	processing a failure; why did it happen?
being merciful because cannot and should not know how to do it all due to little experience	one cannot be like a robot, but the humanity is present	if something keeps bothering, one can sort it out
viewing own actions realistically and without blame on oneself	sharing the experience with colleagues for peer support; they have likely gone through the same	turning a failure into a positive, being grateful about the learning experience: choosing another way next time

Later, the participants described parts of self-compassion being about identifying situations: whether passing a failure with a mantra is enough or if it is needed to process and reflect to develop themselves. In addition, the potential of self-compassion was acknowledged in terms of personal life, professional conduct,

learning, school, and children's entire lifespan. They described wishes and existing practices for utilising self-compassion among students (see sections 6.2 and 6.3). These results indicate the participants were able to understand and connect self-compassion to their pedagogical practices despite the term itself being unfamiliar.

In terms of learning, the participants recognised the potential of failure as a learning experience. They described it as a moment to think of what went wrong and what could have been done differently. Mistakes were also illustrated as normal, and one participant noted that school would hopefully be a safe place to practise experiencing failure (Example 1). They also pondered that it may be quite a lot required of a young primary school student to reflect on failure and consider it as a learning experience, but a teacher should support the students to orientate themselves to it.

#### Example 1

The school's task is to kind of offer some experiences of failure in some situations. I mean convenient experiences that one can survive from and see that okay, these kinds of things come and go. It's such a normal part of life, so I think it's good, at least hopefully, to practise them here (at school). [Kyllähän koulun tehtävä tietyllä tavalla on kans tuottaa jonkunlaisia epäonnistumisen kokemuksia joissaki tilanteissa. Siis sopivan kokosia, mistä selviää ja näkee et okei, tämmösii tulee. Et kuitenkin se on niin normaali osa elämää, nii täällä (koulussa) on hyvä niitä mun mielestä, toivottavasti ainaki, harjotella.]

The participants were asked to reflect on possible advantages and disadvantages of self-compassion. The suppositions on advantages surpassed the disadvantages in number and extensivity, and the mentioned disadvantages were presented as hypothetical thoughts that might not actually happen or even concern self-compassion. The descriptions of the advantages are presented in Table 5. Overall, the participants suggested self-compassion as only a beneficial thing. They described it as a skill or a tool that can be advantageous in various contexts. There was a consensus suggesting that people should be more friendly and merciful towards themselves, and so self-compassion is beneficial for that

matter. A wish was also proposed for the participants' children to grow not being self-judgemental, and for the school community to be more compassionate by practising self-compassion first.

**Table 5**

*The advantages of self-compassion*

Category	Description
Life skills	emotional skills in how one experiences life, disappointments, and own actions; understanding oneself in different situations in life; maintaining the ability to work
Motivation	developing oneself in the areas where failures have occurred
Emotion regulation	tools to reflect on emotions
Physical well-being	being hard on oneself causes feeling physically awful
Mental health	important to be friendly towards oneself, good influence for the well-being of the mind, positive mindset, preventing anxiety and depression in a performance-oriented society, failures don't define the person
Self-esteem	creating a positive self-image, protecting self-esteem
Compassion in the community	one can treat others well after they treat themselves well; compassion is also needed

The participants expressed it was difficult to construct any disadvantages of self-compassion. The only disadvantage that emerged, concerned the idea of an individual having too much self-compassion, and so one would be too forgiving to understand the meaning of matters, learn about their mistakes, or bother to try. This idea will be discussed in more detail in the discussion.

## **6.2 How are the three components of self-compassion present in the descriptions of students' encounters with failure?**

The participants' descriptions of students' encounters with failure emphasised the negative indicators of the three components of self-compassion (see Table 6).

The descriptions focused equally on self-judgement, over-identification, and isolation. The positive sides of the components were described in the participants' actions after students had encountered failure. Utilising features of self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness were described through comforting and helping a student understand failure in a larger perspective and helping a student with emotional regulation after failure.

**Table 6**

*The components of self-compassion in participants' descriptions*

self-judgement	weakened self-esteem, self-confidence, and/or self-belief self-criticism high demands
self-kindness	offering comfort and/or gentleness guiding to mercifulness
isolation	failure in front of others peers picking up
common humanity	failure as a common learning experience performance separated from human dignity teacher showing humanity
mindfulness	(allowing) emotions and/or reactions anticipating and/or easing emotion expressions failure as motivating and/or encouraging
over-identification	withdrawal bursts of strong emotions defensive behaviour lack of broader perspective

In the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked to give associations with failure. These associations included weakened self-esteem, self-belief, and confidence in learning and negative emotions such as frustration, disappointment, and discouragement. These associations were present in the descriptions of students' encounters with failure, as well. Self-judgement of the

students was present in the descriptions of being self-critical and having high demands. Students being self-judgmental and failing were described to threaten self-beliefs, confidence, and self-esteem. These beliefs were desired to be restored by pointing out what the student can already do well and highlighting their strengths, as in the following example:

#### Example 2

“I have noticed that you are quite harsh towards yourself, and I think you are doing a great job” and then I will point out what the student is already good at and try to show the strengths to support the self-esteem in these situations especially. [“Oon huomannut vähän tämmöistä, että olet aika ankara itseäsi kohtaan, ja että minun mielestäni sä teet tosi hyvää työskentelyä” ja just, että osoittaa niitä paikkoja, missä hän on jo taitava. Ja justiin yrittää nostaa niitä hänen vahvuuksiaan esiin siinä, että tukee itsetuntoa niissä hetkissä varsinkin.]

The descriptions regarding students with high demands and/or self-criticism were mentioned in relation to learning outcomes in which typically a high-achieving student was described to achieve an unsatisfying grade. In these descriptions students were described to indicate negative thoughts about their learning outcomes, such as bad grades. Moreover, these students were described as rarely experiencing challenges or struggles during learning:

#### Example 3

So-called A-level students who might get an eight from a test, and it is totally the end of the world. They might cry and you can see in the class, that everything is not alright. [Semmosii niin sanottuja kymppin oppilaita, jotka saattaa vaikka saada jonku kasin kokeesta, ja se on ihan maailmanloppu. Ne saattaa vaikka vähä itkee sitä tai jotenki huomaa luokassa, et nyt ei oo kaikki ok.]

In the beginning of the learning process, students experiencing failure was considered undesired in order to avoid discouragement and reluctance to try again after failure. The descriptions included the idea of some of the students not tolerating it if they failed in the beginning of learning new which may cause raging or giving up: “Some cannot tolerate that they fail right away. Some may

even rage or quit. [Jotkuthan ei voi sietää sitä, että he ei onnistu heti, tai joillekin se voi olla ihan semmoinen raivon tai luovuttamisen paikka.]” Participants expressed a concern on students experiencing constant discouragement when learning new: “It is not always that learning new is, for example, a constant discouragement that I won’t learn, and I can’t. [Se ei ole aina se uuden opettelu, vaikka semmoista pelkkää lannistumista siitä, että en opi ja en osaa.] “

Descriptions included students encountering failure from the perspective of isolation. In these descriptions, examples were presented about students making mistakes and failing in front of others or students diminishing their own or peer’s success or reacting to their failures harshly. The participants illustrated the situations in which students making mistakes were visible to others. Performing in front of others was described to be more challenging to students being prone to anxiety and nervousness due to their personal characteristics or temperament. In these situations, peers had a possibility to observe and judge someone’s performance, for instance in move-tests, as in the following example:

#### Example 4

I have students who easily grasp others’ failures and might laugh, shake their heads, or express some kind of small gesture, which might cause a terrible feeling for someone making a mistake. [Mullakin on semmosia oppilaita, jotka herkästi tarttuu siihen muitten epäonnistumiseen, tai saattaa joku lyhyt naurahdus taikka pään pyörittely tai joku pienikin ele... Voi tää, joka epäonnistuu, ni saaha hirveen tunteen siitä omasta epäonnistumisesta.]

Making a mistake in front of the class was not the only situation in which students were described to get mocked at. Students who succeeded and got good grades could be tried to put down with peers’ mean comments about putting an effort into schoolwork. In these situations, some of the peers might be pointed out in a negative stance if they put effort into learning.

### Example 5

There has been negative commenting on someone's success. If someone gets a good grade, they are mocked as a nerd or said that "they have been studying two weeks for the test". They push the success down with this kind of comments. [On ollu myös semmosta, että kommentoidaan negatiivisella tavalla sitä, et jos joku onnistuu. Jos joku saa hyvän koearvosanan, ni se on hikke tai et ollaan et "no se on lukenu joku kaks viikkoo siihen kokeeseen". Nii painetaan sitä toisen onnistumista alaspäin tommosilla kommentteilla.]

The descriptions of students facing failure included features of over-identification. These features were students lacking a broader perspective on their mistake, causing bursts of reactivity, withdrawal, or getting stuck to the loop of emotions and thoughts caused by a mistake. Strong emotional bursts as reactions were described to be caused by, for instance, insecurity, frustration, or disappointment:

### Example 6

They might get frustrated about the failure and let it out with strong expressions, emotions, and sounds. Somehow, they lack self-regulation skills, which might cause bursts of anger in some. [Saattaa turhautua siihen omaan epäonnistumiseen ja päästää sen taas silleen tosi isosti ulos, että isojen tunteiden ja isojen äänien tai sillä lailla, että jotenkin ei pysty hillitsemään itsesäätelyä. Se voi tulla semmoisena kiukkupurkauksena ulos jollakin.]

Some of the reactions were described not to correspond with the seriousness of the mistake when considered from a broader perspective. The descriptions of a student encountering failure included phrases such as "ends the world" and "a small failure makes the whole world collapse" which shows that some students might comprehend failures without considering them in a broader perspective.

The participants described students showing neglective, avoiding or careless if anticipating difficulties or after them in retrospective situations of failure. Students were described to diminish the importance of schoolwork and possible dissatisfaction to a grade by nasty laughing or having careless attitude.

The example shows struggling to observe and encounter the emotions in a balanced manner but rather passing them with denial and suppression which are features of over-identification:

#### Example 7

Others might chuckle at that (failure) negligently that the failure does not matter. In a way they are diminishing the importance of, for instance, test grades. [Toiset on sellasia jotka naureskelee vähä sille jutulle (epäonnistumiselle), ikäänku välinpitämättömästi, että tällä nyt ei oo väliä, tää meni epäonnistuun, tavallaa ehkä vähättelee niitä asioita, esimerkiksi jotai koearvosanoja]

The participants described examples of situations in which they supported a student in their encounter with failure. These descriptions included offering support to change the emphasis towards self-compassion. In the moments of failure, the participants described guiding students to be gentle and understanding towards themselves, which indicates teaching features of self-compassion. Example 8 describes how a teacher guides a student to enhance self-kindness and understanding failure from a broader perspective. The teacher assists students to put the failure into a context regarding their skills. In the following example, a teacher helps the student understand failure as a single case apart from other things the student can already do:

#### Example 8

“Let's think about what other good qualities you have”, so that it doesn't all go down the drain just because of one failure ... you could look at the bigger picture and think to yourself, “yeah, I actually know how to do quite a lot of other things, even though I may not be able to do this particular task right now”. [Mietitäänpä, että mitä muuta hyvää sinussa on”, että se ei lähtisi vajoamaan sen yhden epäonnistumisen takia ihan kokonaan ... osaisi katsoa sitten vähän isommassa kuvassa, että ”joo, osaanhan mie nyt oikeastaan aika paljon jotain muuta, vaikka just nyt nimenomaan tätä hommaa en osaa”.]

Participants described showing compassion to students in times of setbacks. They described situations in which they offered comfort with a gentle approach to a student making mistakes, which could possibly teach self-kindness to



students. For example, in a situation in which a student had answered incorrectly in the classroom, a teacher described having a gentle and sensitive approach to students' mistakes and never saying "not like that" but rather encouraging that a student is close to the right answer.

Teachers described telling students that everyone makes mistakes sometimes, and they are an inevitable part of learning, which illustrates building understanding towards mistakes as a part of being a human: "And somehow try to make it clear that these things happen to everyone and it's just a normal part of life. [Et jotenki koittaa sitä niinku tehdä, tehdä selväks et näitä sattuu kaikille ja että kuuluu ihan normaaliin elämään]". The participants described a broad range of emotions and reactions which failure might cause and their actions to ease them: allowing, accepting, and validating different reactions and emotions in moments of student's failure and offering support based on their student knowledge.

### **6.3 How do teachers support the development of students' emotional skills with the existing pedagogical methods?**

The participants extensively illustrated pedagogical practices they utilise in their classrooms to support the development of students' overall skills on emotions and interaction. In the analysis, practices regarding emotional skills, encountering failure, and processing emotions were found and distinguished from the practices of socioemotional skills and interaction. All these examples aim to support the students' emotional regulation and reflection on learning-related emotional experiences. The categorisation of the pedagogical practices is presented in Table 7.

**Table 7***Pedagogical methods used to develop emotional skills and encounter failure*

Category	Example
Teacher as an example	Messing around, humour Exiting comfort zone Modelling desirable communication Discussing own failures
Encouragement	Praise on doing a good job Encouraging to learn despite the risk of failure Predicting success Staying close to the student
Support after a disappointment and/or failure	Compassion Focusing on the existing strengths Going through the what and why's
Teacher-student-relationship	Individual support based on student knowledge Predictive actions
Teaching methods	Daily practices and routines, integration Discussions Opportunities to try again Expert lectures Specific exercises
Creating a safe atmosphere	Expected respectful behaviour Written rules Teacher intervening

The participants viewed themselves as role models for the students. For instance, the teacher messing around and using humour was described as a way of breaking the ice, showing the students an example of not being too serious-minded, and being able to laugh at one's own failure. In addition, going out of their comfort zone in teaching was mentioned as a good example for the students.

The overall gentle and accepting communication was presented as a desirable way of a teacher modelling interaction skills to the students. The

descriptions also included a teacher wording out their experiences of failure, using mantras like “it’s okay”, and explaining that something did not work out according to the plan and will be done differently in the future. Therefore, a teacher can represent humanity in their own actions:

#### Example 9

In my opinion, it’s quite healthy to show the students that (a teacher) isn’t a perfect creature, who knows everything about anything. It’s okay sometimes that a teacher is not perfect in everything. Admitting their mistakes. [Se on musta ihan terveellistä näyttää oppilaillekin et (opettaja) ei oo jotenki semmonen täydellinen, joka tietää ihan kaikesta kaiken ja muuta. Et on ihan ok joskus, että opekaan ei oo kaikessa ihan täydellinen. Myöntää virheensä.]

Encouragement was emphasised in supporting students in various challenging situations. The main objective of offering support was to aim for a successful experience for the student. The participants described supporting a student in challenges by being close to them, but enabling a feeling of an independently achieved successful experience:

#### Example 10

Let the student try to succeed and support them in a way that they feel like “okay, I succeeded at this”. But hopefully not a feeling like “I was so bad that the teacher had to help me with almost everything”. [Antaa sen oppilaan yrittää onnistua siinä ja tukee sillä tavalla, et sille tulee sellanen fiilis et “okei, mä onnistuin tässä”. Mut ei kuitenkaan toivottavasti sellanen fiilis, että “mä olin nii huono, et ton open piti suunnilleen auttaa kaikessa tässä”.]

The participants described a compassionate attitude towards upset or disappointed students being a way for comfort and validating the students’ emotions. The illustrations of offered support after a failure included two approaches: focusing on the existing good and strengths or going through the what and why’s with the student. One participant described sensitive feedback as important to consider, for example when a student has answered incorrectly

to a question in the classroom. This type of sensitivity and encouragement was presented as a normal, and rather natural part of teacherhood.

Student knowledge was described as fundamental in offering emotional support to students, as the individual needs of students are met with different kinds of support. For instance, the participants characterised some students needing more space after failure than others before they are ready to take in teacher support. In extreme cases, when a student is withdrawn into themselves and does not share their thoughts, the participants considered it challenging to offer support. However, based on student knowledge, the reactions of students in challenging situations such as returning exam papers can be predicted. If disappointment of a student is anticipated, the participants suggested to act beforehand or be tactful in the moment to make the situation easier:

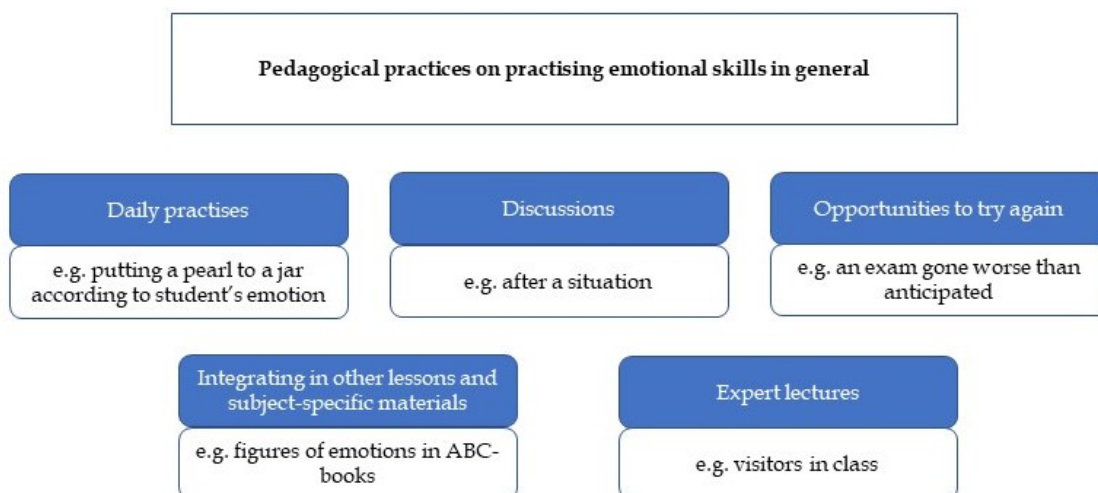
#### Example 11

In situations like that (anticipated disappointments), I often return the exam papers individually. In a way that everyone can pick them up from me so that I can verbalise what has happened in the exam, what the grade is, and what it means. [Mä semmosissa tilanteissa (kun on odotettavissa pettymyksiä) monesti vaikka jaan ne kokeet yksitellen. Sellai et jokainen saa ne hakee multa, et mä pystyn sanallistamaan sen, että että mitä siinä kokeessa on tapahtunu, mikä sen arvosana on, mitä se tarkoittaa.]

The participants extensively described teaching methods used in the classrooms to learn emotional skills. The category consists of several methods presented in Figure 3. Daily situations and discussing them together with the students were considered very important in practising socioemotional skills in authentic contexts. Practising those skills was also noted to be integrated into subjects such as religion and Finnish. However, one participant described sometimes having a bad conscience of taking time from subjects to teach emotional skills.

**Figure 3**

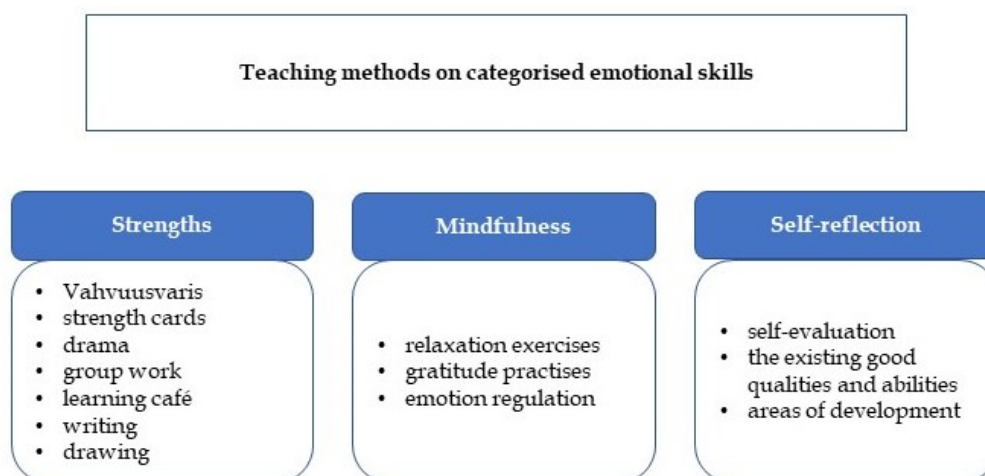
*Pedagogical practices illustrated by the participants*



The participants were asked to specify how emotional skills are learnt in their classrooms. One participant considered the question hard for emotional skills as individual processes are rarely practised since the socioemotional skills are often emphasised. However, all participants described multiple practices with the focus on the students' internal emotional processes (Figure 4). The largest category consisted of strength-centred practices and mindfulness exercises were described by one participant. A mention of self-evaluation included recognising both the good in oneself and the places for development, therefore categorised as self-reflection.

**Figure 4**

*Teaching methods on emotional skills as internal processes*



Creating a safe atmosphere was illustrated through the desirable behaviour that is expected, the teacher intervening to undesirable behaviour, and the rules that are created. The classroom rules were described to include general rules about considering and respecting others. The participants noted that in terms of harmful reactions or actions in the classroom, a teacher intervenes and reminds the students of respect towards others and oneself.

As laughing is a common way of reacting to, as well as coping with, failure, a question was asked about whether the rules include a mention about how to react to other student's failure – such as no laughing. The participants illustrated these kinds of matters as unwritten rules that are included in the expectation of sensitivity. Even though this kind of rule was mentioned, laughing was also described as a desirable reaction to failure. This phenomenon will be discussed further in the next section.

## 7 DISCUSSION

The research task of this study was to explore self-compassion in the context of Finnish primary school teachers' perceptions and teaching methods. The aim was to explore whether and how self-compassion is a part of the existing modes of thinking and teaching practices. Moreover, the objective was to find potential places of development for self-compassion as an explicit emotional skill practised in primary school. Six class teachers from various Finnish primary schools participated in a semi-structured interview, in which the understanding, approaches, and pedagogical practices regarding self-compassion were enquired.

The results suggest that the potential of self-compassion and its advantages were recognised and only seen as beneficial. The teachers described students' encounters with failure from the negative indicators of the components of self-compassion, but illustrated utilising the positive indicators to help students bounce back after failure. Therefore, self-compassion was present in the existing perceptions and pedagogical choices. In addition, the teachers illustrated methods for practising emotional skills as internal processes, however they were mainly limited to strength-centred exercises. In other words, self-compassion or its components were not eminent in the existing teaching practices, but they were in greater emphasis in the support offered by teachers.

Most of the teachers did not consider self-compassion as a term they are familiar with. Self-compassion is still rarely present in Finnish research, pedagogical documents, or teaching materials, even though it has attracted interest in various fields of research and literature during the last decade (see e.g., Grandell, 2015, 2018; Kumlander et al., 2018; Lappalainen et al., 2023; Neff & Kielinen, 2016, 2021; OPH, 2022; Postareff et al., 2021; Trogen, 2022). It is a relatively new concept first suggested by Neff (2003a) and has gradually taken over the international research field (Barnard & Curry, 2011). However, in the newest guidebook of the Finnish National Agency for Education self-compassion is one of the central topics (Tomperi et al., 2022, pp. 21–37). This indicates

promisingly that self-compassion could be on its way to the Finnish educational field.

The teachers in this study were able to grasp the notion of self-compassion, which indicates that the central values of self-compassion are already present to some extent. They also expressed wishes about people being gentler and more merciful towards themselves. In today's world, such emotional skills are needed, as illustrated by OECD (2019, 2021a) and European Commission (2019) for instance.

The teachers recognised the advantages of self-compassion and considered it as beneficial, especially for mindset and mental health. These advantages of self-compassion have been illustrated in research: self-compassion decreases negative and enhances positive mental states (see e.g., Barnard & Curry, 2011; Germer & Neff, 2013; Lahtinen et al., 2020; Lahtinen, 2021; Neff, 2011, 2023; Postareff et al., 2021). In terms of learning, self-compassion has been connected to for example better performance outcome (Kwan, 2022; O'Hare & Gemelli, 2023), feedback perception and self-improvement motivation (Breines & Chen, 2012; Laudel & Narciss, 2023), well-being (Neely et al., 2009; Kirby et al., 2017;), resilience (Yustika & Widyasari, 2021), and coping with chronic academic stress (Zhang et al., 2016).

One disadvantage of self-compassion was propounded in the interviews: if there could be too much self-compassion resulting in carelessness and indifference towards learning. Neff (2023) has argued this conception by separating self-compassion from self-indulgence, which are confused in this issue. While self-indulgence is associated with behaviour that ensures immediate pleasure, it is disadvantageous in the long run (Neff, 2023). Self-compassion, on the other hand, is about making choices, even difficult ones, to achieve health and development in the longer term to really care for oneself (Neff, 2023). Moreover, self-compassion has been studied to connect with perceiving failures as potential learning experiences and part of the learning process and thereby understanding it should not be avoided (Miyagawa et al., 2019).



Therefore, self-compassion is not about making oneself too comfortable, but creating a balanced, reflective, and self-respectful attitude that is not shaken by challenges and failures but developed through them (Neff, 2003a, 2023). Despite the previous concern, this idea of failure as a learning experience was also included in the illustrations. The teachers described failure as a normal part of learning and life, which they wished to pass as an important thought to the students. This indicates the teacher's understanding of failure as an educational experience.

In this study, one teacher questioned whether it is too demanding for a young primary school student to consider and reflect on failure as a learning experience. As we discuss the results regarding the components of self-compassion next, it must be noted that the descriptions of the students' encounters with failure can represent common responses in any age group (see Neff, 2003a, 2023). With a self-compassionate attitude, even a young student could learn to better regulate their emotions, accept failure as part of developing themselves, and being kind to themselves (see Neff, 2003a, 2023). This can then help the student to further reflect on the experience, rather than dispel it for instance, but of course in accordance with their individual abilities for reflection and development.

The three components of self-compassion were explored in the teachers' descriptions about students' responses to failure. The components of self-kindness versus self-judgement, feelings of common humanity versus isolation, and mindfulness versus over-identification were all described, but the descriptions emphasised the negative indicators. This raises a concern of these students possibly showing low levels of self-compassion. Lower levels of self-compassion have been linked to mental health problems, whereas the higher levels of self-compassion protect well-being (Muris & Petrocchi, 2017; Kirby et al., 2017; Zessin et al., 2015; Macbeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff et al., 2005, Neff et al., 2007). For instance, self-judgement was present in descriptions of students with high demands on learning and self-criticism after failure. Self-criticism, as well,

is studied to be a risk factor for psychological disorders (Werner et al., 2019; Shahar et al. 2014).

Isolation was present in the moments involving peers: failing in front of them or peers' negative actions to failure. These descriptions are related to the classroom atmosphere since they involve other students' presence and influence. The result emphasises the importance of teachers investing time and consideration to group dynamics to improve feeling of connectedness in a group and creating a positive learning atmosphere, which is supported by previous studies (OECD, 2021a; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020). Connectedness to others may help adapt to the imperfect nature of being a human when witnessing others making mistakes, and empathy for others can be turned inward as self-compassion (Barnard & Curry, 2011).

Over-identification was discovered in descriptions of students withdrawing into their shells after failure, expressing exaggerated emotions after failure, and incapability to put failure into a larger perspective. However, the described moments of over-identification might include other perspectives than low self-compassion. When students are still learning strategies for self-regulation, teaching self-compassion could be helpful in adapting healthier attitudes towards themselves when struggling with negative emotions (Neff, 2003b).

Whereas the students' encounters with failure were described from the negative indicators of the self-compassion components, the teachers presented their ways of helping students after a failure utilising the positive indicators. According to Barnard and Curry (2011), supporting any of the positive indicators might foster development in the other indicators. For instance, the teachers described enhancing the feeling of common humanity as acknowledging to students that they are not alone with their failures. They supported fostering self-kindness through showing empathy, offering comfort, and being gentle and understanding towards the struggling student. This may result in less shame caused by failure as well as ease observing emotions and thoughts and thereby foster mindfulness by enabling being present in the moment even though it might be painful (Barnard & Curry, 2011). They utilised features of mindfulness

by responding to emotions with a variety of techniques. These actions could have a possibility to lead students to better understanding and acceptance of their emotions which is part of mindfulness in self-compassion theory (Neff 2023; Neff 2003b).

This is promising from the perspective of a teacher introducing self-soothing strategies to students which might help students adapt features of self-compassion. Hence students would be encouraged to improve themselves after mistakes (Breines & Chen, 2021). Overall, the support of a teacher is considered crucial for students' overall learning and development (see Chen et al., 2022; Dietrich et al., 2015; Shernoff, 2013; Stefanou et al., 2004, van Manen, 2015).

The extensive role of the teacher has been highlighted in academic literature (see e.g., Bussemakers & Denessen, 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Dietrich et al., 2015; Shernoff, 2013; Stefanou et al., 2004, van Manen, 2015). The teachers recognised and described their pedagogical role in an extensive manner. Other than the traditional idea of teaching as information transfer, pedagogy was illustrated through a teacher being a role model. In terms of this study context, the teachers illustrated trying to change the classroom culture around failure to less judging with their own example. Van Manen (2015) emphasises the importance of this – children reflect themselves through the adults of their life.

Moreover, building the teacher-student relationship and gaining student knowledge was described as a great factor in offering individual support and making predictive choices on for example situations where the students' emotions could hinder the possibility of viewing their performance as a learning experience. The relationship has been investigated as an important factor for students (see e.g., Cayubit, 2022; Prashanti & Ramnarayan, 2020; Roorda et al., 2011; Shernoff, 2013) and it seems to be an important resource for teachers as well.

Regarding challenging educational situations for the student, one teacher considered it important to be tactful in offering support to enable autonomous experiences of success for individual students, which would support the students' feeling of autonomy and capability as for SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017,

2020). In other words, a student should not be made to feel like they cannot solve a problem themselves.

As for supporting students with their encounters with failure, the teachers described their methods as supporting the students to keep things in perspective and learn identifying the experiences in which further reflection is needed. By these actions, mindfulness and self-kindness can be enhanced (Neff, 2003a, 2023). The teachers also considered the character of failure important – a failure rarely is final and determines something permanently. Hence with perseverance, one can learn and succeed, which responds to Dweck's (2008) theory of mindsets.

The teachers' descriptions included concerns of failure affecting the students' self-esteem and willingness to try after failure. Therefore, the described actions focused on restoring the confidence through praising what the student is already good at and has strengths in – supporting the feeling of capability (see Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017, 2020). This kind of approach could easily neglect the learning of accepting the emotions of failure and processing the experience (Neff, Tomperi et al., 2022, pp. 21–37). In Miyagawa and colleagues' (2020) study, strengths as self-reflection manipulation were connected to the negative indicators of self-compassion, which then predicted negative perceptions of failure and the view of evading it.

The emphasis of strengths and positive experiences in maintaining self-esteem has been investigated as harmful (see Miyagawa et al., 2020), yet positive pedagogy is a researched and widely utilised approach to education (see e.g., Avola et al., 2019; Fredrickson, 2001; Leskisenoja & Sandberg, 2019; Shernoff, 2013, pp. 14–16). By no means are we diminishing the benefits of a positive take to learning and life – quite on the contrary. To sustain a positive attitude through the challenges of developing as a learner and a human, a question shall be asked: do Finnish students get to practise a balanced self-esteem and learner self-image in a learning environment that protects them by dispelling, or supports them to reflect on potential learning experiences?

We argued in our previous thesis (Lakaniemi & Pulkkinen, 2021), that the Finnish curriculum only includes failure as something to cope with – mentioned

four times in the document in total, whereas success was mentioned twenty-four times and presented as empowering and desirable (Lakaniemi & Pulkkinen, 2021; POPS 2014). The concern of weakened self-esteem in the moments of failure is reasonable, but instead of dispelling the experience of failure, self-compassion is an emotional skill for developing a sustainable and understanding relationship between a learner and their challenges (see e.g., Neff 2003a, 2011, 2023).

The teachers described the overall practising of emotional skills and interaction to be implemented in two different ways: by integrating them to daily routines and subject-specific materials, and by organising a specific lesson or shorter session with explicit focus on the skills. The role of daily situations and routines as part of teaching those skills was considered important, which is recognised in pedagogical literature (see e.g., Meyer & Turner, 2006, 2010; Tomperi et al, 2022; van Manen, 2015).

Organising lessons or sessions to practise emotional skills were recognised mainly as teaching about strengths, of which various exercises were illustrated. This indicates the implementation of methods from positive psychology, aiming towards positive emotions and individuality in learning, which have been connected to positive outcomes in learning (see e.g., Avola et al., 2019; Fredrickson, 2001; Leskisenoja & Sandberg, 2019; Shernoff, 2013, pp. 14–16). Other than strengths, emotional skills as more of individual processes were only described as part of discussions and routines that arise from daily situations, or as integrated in other subjects. According to van Manen (2015), daily situations hold a great educational potential that should be utilised.

Largely, practising emotional skills was illustrated in relation to others, as socioemotional skills, not focusing on individual reflection. Only one teacher illustrated methods for practising emotional skills individually: utilising relaxation, gratitude, and mindfulness tasks in addition to learning and talking about emotions. They reported the exercises being very beneficial and liked by the students; the teacher had observed the skills for identifying and verbalising emotions developing among all students. Better mind control and introspection have been connected to well-being, resilience, and motivation (see e.g., Breines &

Chen, 2012; Dweck, 1999; Kuyken et al., 2010; Kwan et al., 2022; Lahtinen, 2021; Nurmi, 2015) This indicates that implementing mindfulness exercises is beneficial and holds great potential in the educational context.

Another participant recognised self-evaluation as a method for individual self-reflection. This is a commonly used way to add the learner's own perceptions into the evaluation process, which also develops their skills on evaluating themselves and further development of self-image (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hotulainen & Vainikainen, 2017). Studies on self-compassion in the evaluation context have connected self-compassion to more realistic self-evaluation (see Barnard & Curry, 2011; Leary et al., 2007), which is important in learning to reflect on their learning process in a developing, sustainable manner. For this reason, self-compassion should also be acknowledged within the context of self-evaluation.

## **7.1 Evaluation of the study**

This qualitative study includes strengths and weaknesses to be critically considered to discuss the quality of the study (Patton, 2015, p. 679). According to Tracy (2020, p. 272–274), transparency and self-reflexivity is needed throughout the study. Thereby, this section aims to critically evaluate and reflect on the decisions made in different phases of the study.

Firstly, the semi-structured interview schedule was formed according to Tracy (2020) to respond to the research task and purpose of the study. However, the choices made in this phase must be critically evaluated. According to Patton (2015, p. 441), collecting information from each person with the same questions diminishes the potential pursuit of topics which were not anticipated beforehand. Thereby, it may reduce the individual differences between the responses (Patton 2015, p. 441). To respond to this issue, the last questions of the interview were planned to offer more space for those topics.

The strengths of the selected interview method were utilised. To build the trust and rapport, the interview started with simple questions (Tracy, 2020, p.

164–167). The interviews then proceeded naturally from question to question which indicated successful sequencing of questions. Before any interview questions, the teachers were encouraged to share their experiences and thoughts as they are, not to seek for correct answers, which enabled a valuable view of their perceptions. Lastly, the teachers were asked critical questions on self-compassion to investigate specific areas of the phenomenon (Tracy, 2020, p. 168–170).

The aim of the interviews was to reach the genuine experiences of the teachers and avoid leading questions (Patton 2015, p. 458). Hence the teachers were not asked directly how they teach self-compassion, but the term was approached from multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, the teachers were informed about the topic of the study, self-compassion, in the research bulletin, privacy note, and consent form for participation. This may have affected their idea of desirable or appropriate answers (Patton 2015, p. 458). Therefore, it raises a question if self-compassion was perhaps subconsciously adopted as a part of the teachers' pedagogy in their descriptions.

The arrangements of the interviews hold two important notions. Firstly, since half of the interviews were technically mediated, the approach has strengths and weaknesses to be evaluated. According to Tracy (2020, p. 186–187), the advantages of a technically mediated interview lie within cost-effective access to geographically distributed people, increased sharing, engagement, thoughtfulness in shameful topics, and possibility of self-transcribing.

The disadvantages, on the other hand, include decreased availability to nonverbal communication and increased possibility of distractions during the interview (Tracy, 2020, p. 188–189). These possible disadvantages were evaluated and estimated not to be too significant regarding this study, since the data was collected through the speech of the teachers, and so it was concluded that the interviews to this study could be conducted remotely. The challenges during the conducted interviews were met as slight distractions during the interview that did not affect the comprehensibility of the recordings.

Secondly, on the arrangements, the six interviews were divided between authors so that both authors individually conducted three interviews, due to practical and flexible aim. However, the chosen method must be critically considered. According to Patton (2015), triangulating interviews to several interviewers reduces the potential bias of a single person conducting the data collection. As a response, the questions asked were corresponding with each interview despite the interviewer. Moreover, the interviews were recorded and transcribed to avoid biased views on the data and enabling analysis to be made by both authors, which is considered strengthening the validity of the study (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2021).

Regarding the authors' agency within this study, providing information about their background and prior knowledge is needed. According to Patton (2015, p. 700–709), any information of the authors, both personally and professionally, that could have affected any phase of the study must be considered. Therefore it is important to report the authors have conducted a qualitative research on their bachelor's thesis on failure as a potential learning experience. Therefore the prior knowledge includes comprehending failure as an integral part of learning, which contains a lot of potential to be learnt from when the attitude towards it could be switched from negative towards neutral, even positive (Lakaniemi & Pulkkinen, 2021).

The perspective of the previous research has had an overall influence on how self-compassion has been considered throughout this study: as a tool in maintaining students' enthusiasm and willingness to learn even after failure or struggle. However, the prior knowledge combined with the familiarity with the perspectives of this study has created a strong basis for the authors' contribution to this research (see Tracy, 2020, pp. 2–4). The basis has been utilised in carefully creating this study in co-operation of the authors.

To achieve a high-quality qualitative research, this report has been written as sincerely and honestly as possible aiming for transparency (Tracy, 2020, p. 272). Thereby, challenges during the analysis process are discussed. During the data analysis process, difficulty to categorise the data in terms of the three



components of self-compassion were met. The components were overlapping, as introduced already in the theoretical background.

The components were utilised to find how self-compassion was present in the descriptions of teachers and the components offered frames to data analysis and to the results. The categorising of self-compassion into components was considered as a tool to find the descriptions including features of self-compassion. These components were chosen to offer frames to the analysis and decrease the subjective interpretations of what actions can be construed as containing features from self-compassion.

Moreover, there was a time limit in the analysis process which affects the rigour of the study. According to Tracy (2020, p. 271–272), rigour is a marker of quality referring to care and effort taken to ensuring the appropriateness of the study. It must be denoted that the time limit affected how it was possible to implement the analysis process. In this study, the analysis process was carried out as described in section 5.4.

Taking advantage of two authors by separating the data, implementing the primary coding cycle individually and after this, coming back together to compare the codes, would have strengthened inter-code reliability (Tracy, 2020, p. 277). In the given time limit and with a broad dataset, the described process was interpreted overly time-consuming. However, actions were made to strengthen the credibility of the analysis process by consulting, collaborating, and working together in the same interactive coding scheme, as Tracy (2020, p. 277) suggests. The analysis was conducted co-operatively, mostly in the same room to ensure the ease of collaboration.

Triangulation of data collection with observations and student interviews would have offered deeper understanding to the complexity of the studied phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p. 546). By utilising observations in the classroom, it would have been possible to observe teachers' conscious and unconscious actions towards teaching self-compassion, as Hicks (1996) suggests. Observation studies were excluded from the data due to the credibility of the authors: lack of experience in studying self-compassion or observation as a research method.

Therefore, interviews were chosen to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon and offer an overview for the further qualitative self-compassion studies.

However, the limited perspective regarding the data must be considered further. The data is based on the teachers' descriptions of their experiences and actions in students' encounters with failure. Therefore, these descriptions rest upon the teachers' interpretations of the possible struggles and failures of the students. Critically, students' interpretations of such situations may be different. In addition, not all experiences of failure are necessarily visible to the teacher. Hence the study is limited to the teachers' interpretations of whether the students are experiencing failure. The chosen method does not reach to each and all situations in which self-compassion could have been utilised by students in the classroom and thereby the data is limited.

These results are contextual and tied to the time and place in which the study has been conducted. The teachers described their subjective experiences, thoughts, and attitudes according to their current knowledge of the phenomenon. The study does not aim for generalisation but rather describing and providing more depth understanding on the chosen phenomenon (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, pp. 97–98). Thereby, the results of this study are not generalisable to the whole Finnish primary education but rather provide insight to the further study (see Patton, 2015, pp. 710–713, 719–720).

## **7.2 Suggestion for further research and practical applications**

Since self-compassion has largely been studied with quantitative measures, qualitative methods would add valuable insights of self-compassion in parallel with the correlations found in quantitative research. This thesis with qualitative methods generated knowledge of how self-compassion is present in the current educational practices and pedagogy as well as what is done to develop a self-compassionate attitude. These kinds of qualitative insights can be utilised in developing the pedagogical methods and practices used in education. Therefore,

the value of qualitative studies must be recognised better regarding self-compassion.

In addition, this thesis demonstrates the direction in which qualitative studies could focus in terms of research on self-compassion. In observation studies, the discourse around self-compassion in the classroom could be investigated further. Those studies could provide more information on how teachers implicitly teach self-compassion by meanings they convey during teaching, and how a compassionate attitude is present in the classroom interactions. This thesis only provides a background to the moments in which teachers described using components of self-compassion.

Moreover, further research on how the classroom environment relates to self-compassion among students is suggested. The results of this thesis illustrate the importance of the quality of the classroom environment from the perspective of learning or strengthening self-compassion. Thereby, a possible perspective is to study teachers' self-compassion with the SCS (Neff, 2003b) and compare them to students' measured level of self-compassion.

In future research, interviewing students would enable reaching the situations which are not necessarily as perceptible. Hearing their perspectives would build understanding of their perspectives on how teachers' actions aided them towards learning self-compassion. In regards to the investigated positive influences of self-compassion on mental well-being, the Finnish educational field could benefit from a more thorough approach to self-compassionate attitudes among students in all educational levels.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

On the basis of these results, a question was established about whether enough attention is set on individually and explicitly practising emotional skills like self-compassion. These skills are learnable, and by the reason of the recognised benefits of these skills, it is important to practise them in an explicit manner (see e.g., Barnard & Curry, 2011; Germer & Neff, 2013; Neff, 2011, 2023; Postareff et

al., 2021). Promoting self-compassion was more prominent in the described support offered by the teachers than planned pedagogical practices. In other words, the teachers do already promote self-compassion in the classroom, but do it rather implicitly, and rarely include it in practising emotional skills explicitly.

We suggest more attention in teacher education, educational literature, and guidelines for education are given to the pedagogical methods for enhancing students' self-compassion in daily situations, as well as teaching self-compassion explicitly. With the educational practices implemented by teachers, it surely cannot be guaranteed that students adopt the skill for life, but teachers are highly influential (see e.g., van Manen, 2015).

The task of Finnish education has been described as supporting the growth of students into balanced people with a healthy self-esteem (POPS 2014, p. 16) and emotional skills have been presented as one of the most important skills for future working life (see European Commission, 2019; OECD 2021a, 2021c). Therefore, the educational field must respond to the need. Self-compassion as a protective and performance-enhancing factor shall encourage educators to take a better look at it (see Neff, 2003a, 2011, 2023).

As a final conclusion, learning skills of self-compassion has multiple benefits on students' overall well-being and development as a learner and human being. Teachers play a vital role in helping students adapt these skills, especially in the moments of failure. In the future, teaching skills of self-compassion hopefully becomes part of everyday teaching practices in Finnish education. After all, the world needs kindness and caring – towards ourselves and others.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Research bulletin

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

OPETTAJANKOULUTUSLAITOS

KASVATUSTIETEIDEN JA  
PSYKOLOGIAN TIEDEKUNTA



10.10.2022

## TIEDOTE TUTKIMUKSESTA

### 1. Pyyntö osallistua tutkimukseen

**Sinua pyydetään mukaan tutkimukseen** “Self-compassion in learning - primary school teachers’ perspectives” [“Itsemyötätunto oppimisessa – alakouluopettajien näkökulmia”],

jossa kartoitetaan alakouluopettajien toteuttamia opetuskäytänteitä ja ylläpitämää kulttuuria itsemyötätunnon näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan opettajien jo mahdollisesti toteuttamia opetuskäytänteitä ja näkemyksiä oppilaan itsemyötätunnon kehittymisen tukemiselle. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kuvata näitä edellä mainittuja, joiden perusteella on tarkoituksena tarjota ehdotuksia oppilaan itsemyötätunnon kehittymisen tukemiseen alakoulussa.

Sinua pyydetään tutkimukseen, koska työskentelet alakoulussa luokan-, erityisluokan- tai aineenopettajana.

Tämä tiedote kuvaa tutkimusta ja siihen osallistumista. Liitteenä on toimitettu tietosuojailmoitus, jossa on kerrottu henkilötietojesi käsittelystä.

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen edellyttää, että sinulla on kokemusta suomalaisessa alakoulussa opettamisesta. Työskentelyvuosiesi määrällä ei ole merkitystä tutkimuksen kannalta. Tutkimukseen osallistuu alakoulun opettajia Suomesta noin 6 kappaletta. Osallistujien iät ja sukupuoli vaihtelevat.

Tämä on yksittäinen tutkimus, eikä sinuun oteta myöhemmin uudestaan yhteyttä.

### 2. Vapaaehtoisuus

Tähän tutkimukseen osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista. Voit kieltäytyä osallistumasta tutkimukseen, keskeyttää osallistumisen tai peruuttaa jo antamasi suostumuksen syytä ilmoittamatta milloin tahansa tutkimuksen aikana. Tästä ei aiheudu sinulle kielteisiä seurauksia.

Peruuttaessasi suostumuksesi henkilötietojesi käsittelyyn, sinusta siihen mennessä kerättyjä henkilötietoja, näytteitä ja muita tietoja ei voida käsitellä osana tutkimusta, vaan ne hävitetään, mikäli niiden poistaminen aineistosta on mahdollista.

### 3. Tutkimuksen kulku

Tutkimus etenee niin, että Sinun kanssasi sovitaan haastatteluajankohta, jolloin Sinua haastatellaan toiveesi mukaisesti joko videovälitteisesti tai kasvotusten. Haastattelu sisältää kysymyksiä toteuttamistasi opetuskäytänteistä luokahuonekulttuurissa sekä ajatuksiasi oppilaiden tunnetaitojen tukemisesta, erityisesti itsemyötätunnon näkökulmasta. Haastattelu ei vaadi valmistautumista, vaan saat tarvittavat tiedot haastattelussa. Sinua haastattelemassa on yksi haastattelija. Kasvokkain toteutetut haastattelut nauhoitetaan ja videovälitteiset tallennetaan videonauhaksi litterointia ja myöhempää analyysia varten. Haastattelun kesto on noin 30–40 minuuttia ja se on kertaluonteinen sisältäen lyhyen tutustumisen, nauhoitetun haastattelun ja lyhyen purkuhetken. Haastattelija tekee muistiinpanoja haastattelun aikana.

### 4. Tutkimuksesta mahdollisesti aiheutuvat hyödyt

Haastatteluiden perusteella pyritään muodostamaan ehdotuksia opetusjärjestelyistä, jotka tukisivat oppilaiden itsemyötätunnon kehittymistä entistä paremmin. Aiheesta on vain vähän, jos ollenkaan, tutkimustietoa suomalaisen koulujärjestelmän kontekstissa. Näin ollen tutkimusaiheen tarkastelun potentiaalia on vielä hyödyntämättä. Tästä syystä Sinun osallistumisesi tutkimukseen on merkityksellistä ja tarjoaa uutta näkökulmaa tälle tutkimuskentälle.

Edellä käsiteltyjen perusteiden pohjalta myös tämän tutkimuksen aineiston arkistointi voi olla merkityksellistä mahdollisia jatkotutkimuksia ajatellen. Lisätiedot tästä mahdollisesta arkistoinnista ovat luettavissa liitteenä toimitetusta tietosuojailmoituksesta.

### 5. Tutkimuksesta mahdollisesti aiheutuvat riskit, haitat ja epä mukavuudet sekä niihin varautuminen

Tutkimukseen osallistumisesta ei odoteta aiheutuvan riskejä, haittoja tai epä mukavuuksia.

### 6. Tutkimuksen kustannukset ja korvaukset tutkittavalle sekä tutkimuksen rahoitus

Tutkimukseen osallistumisesta ei makseta palkkiota.

Tutkimuksella ei ole rahoittajia.

### 7. Tutkimustuloksista tiedottaminen ja tutkimustulokset

Tutkimuksesta valmistuu Pro gradu -opinnäytetyö.

Lopullinen opinnäytetyö tuloksineen jaetaan tutkittaville, ja heidän toiveestaan voidaan tutkimuksen tuloksista ja niistä johdetuista pohdinnoista koota myös visuaalinen tiivistys.

Tutkittavat eivät ole tunnistettavissa tuloksista ja julkaisuista. Julkaisuissa voidaan käyttää yksittäisiä esimerkkejä tutkittavien vastauksista, mutta ne valikoidaan siten, että henkilöt eivät ole niistä tunnistettavissa.

**Tutkittavien vakuutusturva**

Jyväskylän yliopiston henkilökunta ja toiminta on vakuutettu.

Jyväskylän yliopiston vakuutukset eivät ole voimassa, jos tutkittavan kotikunta ei ole Suomessa.

**9. Lisätietojen antajan yhteystiedot****Pro gradu -tutkielman toteuttajat:**

Sonja Lakaniemi

Maisteriopiskelija

p. [phone number]

[email address]

Iina Pulkkinen

Maisteriopiskelija

p. [phone number]

[email address]

**Työnohjaaja:**

Josephine Moate

Yliopistonlehtori

p. [phone number]

[email address]

## Appendix 2

### The consent form for the participant

Kopio 1(2)

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO



#### SUOSTUMUS OSALLISTUA TIETEELLISEEN TUTKIMUKSEEN

*Self-compassion in learning - primary school teachers' perspectives [Itsemyötätunto oppimisessa – alakouluopettajien näkökulmia]*

Olen ymmärtänyt, että tutkimukseen osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista ja voin milloin tahansa syytä kertomatta keskeyttää osallistumiseni tutkimukseen tai peruuttaa antamani suostumuksen. Keskeyttämisestä ei aiheudu minulle kielteisiä seuraamuksia. Keskeyttämiseen asti minusta kerättyjä tutkimusaineistoja voidaan edelleen hyödyntää tutkimuksessa.

Olen saanut tutkimustiedotteen sekä tietosuojailmoituksen, ja minulla on ollut mahdollisuus esittää tutkijoille tarkentavia kysymyksiä, joten olen saanut riittävät tiedot tutkimuksesta ja henkilötietojeni käsittelystä.

Antamalla suostumukseni osallistua tähän tutkimukseen tutkittavana hyväksyn, että

- minulta kerätään tietoa tiedotteessa kuvattuun tutkimukseen ja
- minulta kerättyjä henkilötietoja kerätään, käytetään ja käsitellään tietosuojailmoituksessa kuvatun mukaisesti.

Lisäksi, antamalla suostumukseni osallistua tähän tutkimukseen tutkittavana:

Olen saanut tarpeeksi tietoa tutkimuksesta, ymmärtänyt saamani tiedot ja harkinnut edellä mainittuja kohtia.

Kyllä  Ei

Haluun osallistua tutkimukseen ja ymmärrän, että minusta otetaan video- tai ääninauhoite tutkimustarkoitusta varten, mutta se on tutkimustuloksissa ja julkaisuissa käsitelty niin, että minua ei voi niistä tunnistaa.

Kyllä  Ei

Suostun siihen, että anonymisoitu haastatteluni voidaan sisällyttää arkistoitavaan tutkimusaineistoon.

Kyllä  Ei

#### Vahvistus:

Tutkimukseen osallistuvan allekirjoitus, nimenselvennys ja päivämäärä

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#### Pro gradu -tutkielman toteuttajat:

Sonja Lakaniemi  
Maisteriopiskelija  
p. [phone number]  
[email address]

Iina Pulkkinen  
Maisteriopiskelija  
p. [phone number]  
[email address]

#### Työnohjaaja:

Josephine Moate  
Yliopistonlehtori  
p. [phone number]  
[email address]



## Appendix 3

### The consent form for the head teacher

Kopio 1(2)



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

#### REHTORIN SUOSTUMUS AINEISTONKERUUN TOTEUTTAMISEEN ORGANISAATIOSSA

Suostumuspyyntö luokan-, aineen- tai erityisluokanopettajan osallistumisesta tutkimushaastatteluun Pro gradu - tutkielmassa "*Self-compassion in learning - primary school teachers' perspectives*" [*"Itsemyötätunto oppimisessa – alakouluopettajien näkökulmia"*],

jossa kartoitetaan alakouluopettajien toteuttamia opetuskäytänteitä ja ylläpitämää kulttuuria itsemyötätunnon näkökulmasta. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan opettajien jo mahdollisesti toteuttamia opetuskäytänteitä ja näkemyksiä oppilaan itsemyötätunnon kehittymisen tukemiselle. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kuvata näitä edellä mainittuja, joiden perusteella on tarkoituksena tarjota ehdotuksia oppilaan itsemyötätunnon kehittymisen tukemiseen alakoulussa.

Olen saanut tutkimustiedotteen sekä tietosuojailmoituksen, ja minulla on ollut mahdollisuus esittää tutkijoille tarkentavia kysymyksiä, joten olen saanut riittävät tiedot tutkimuksesta ja tutkittavien oikeuksista sekä henkilötietojen käsittelystä.

Antamalla suostumukseni toteuttaa aineistonkeruu edustamassani organisaatiossa hyväksyn, että

- tutkittavalta opettajalta kerätään tietoa tiedotteessa kuvattuun tutkimukseen ja
- tutkittavalta opettajalta kerättyjä henkilötietoja kerätään, käytetään ja käsitellään tietosuojailmoituksessa kuvatun mukaisesti.

Olen ymmärtänyt saamani tiedot, olen harkinnut edellä mainittuja kohtia ja olen päättänyt, että hyväksyn aineistonkeruun edustamassani alakoulussa.

Kyllä  Ei

#### Vahvistus:

\_\_\_\_\_

Koulun nimi ja paikkakunta

\_\_\_\_\_

Paikka ja päivämäärä

\_\_\_\_\_

Rehtorin allekirjoitus

\_\_\_\_\_

Nimenselvennys

#### Pro gradu -tutkielman toteuttajat:

Sonja Lakaniemi  
Maisteriopiskelija  
p. [phone number]  
[email address]

Iina Pulkkinen  
Maisteriopiskelija  
p. [phone number]  
[email address]

#### Työnohjaaja:

Josephine Moate  
Yliopistonlehtori  
p. [phone number]  
[email address]

## Appendix 4

### The interview schedule

- Ensin puhumme epäonnistumisista ja sitten itsemyötätunnosta.
- Tässä vaiheessa ei tarvitse tietää mitään itsemyötätunnosta, vaan aihetta käsitellään ensin ikään kuin sen ympärillä, arkisten asioiden kautta.
- Kun itsemyötätuntoa käsitellään tarkemmin, se määritellään ensin ja siten varmistetaan, että ymmärrät, mitä se tarkoittaa.
- Tärkeintä tässä haastattelussa on, että vastaat kysymyksiin oman ymmärryksesi ja tietämyksesi kautta - en hae mihinkään kysymykseen "oikeaa" vastausta, vaan haluan kuulla ajatuksistasi.
- Jos jokin kysymys tai sen asettelu tuntuu hankalalta, tuen siinä mielelläni.

#### 1. Kandissamme kysyimme tämän saman kysymyksen 6. luokan oppilailta:

1.1. 3-5 assosiaatiota mitä tulee mieleen sanasta onnistuminen / epäonnistuminen?

1.2. Miten suhtaudut omiin epäonnistumisiisi yleisesti/luokkahuoneessa?

1.2.1. Jos epäonnistut jossakin, mitä ajattelet siitä?

1.2.2. Mikä auttaa epäonnistumisen hetkellä?

1.3. Millaisia tapoja olet havainnut oppilailta olevan suhtautua epäonnistumiseen?

#### 2. Kandimme tuloksista selvisi, että kuudesluokkalaisten oppilaiden oli vaikeampaa käsittää, sekä käsitellä, epäonnistumista kuin onnistumista, mutta totesivat, että epäonnistumisen jälkeen on mahdollista kehittyä.

2.1. Valmiudet oppilaan tukemiseen epäonnistumisissa:

2.1.1. Millaiseksi koet oppilaiden tukemisen epäonnistumisten hetkellä?

2.1.2. Millaisia valmiuksia koet kertyneen urasi eri vaiheissa (koulutus, työelämä, lisäkoulutukset) oppilaan tukemiseen epäonnistumisissa?

#### 3. Pohjustus: Itsemyötätunto on osa tunne- ja vuorovaikutustaitoja. Itsemyötätuntoa ei olla tutkittu suomalaisessa peruskoulussa juuri ollenkaan. Tästä syystä haluamme selvittää ajatuksiasi ja kokemuksiasi ensin tunne- ja vuorovaikutustaitoihin liittyen, sitten ennakkokäsityksiäsi itsemyötätunnosta. Emme etsi oikeita vastauksia, sillä niitä ei ole!

- 3.1. Miten tunne- ja vuorovaikutuksen harjoittaminen ja opetteleminen on sisällytetty opetukseen luokallasi? (Oppimistilanteissa, opetusmateriaalit, ryhmätyöt, kouluarki, erilliset oppitunnit)
- 3.2. Millaisia itseen liittyviä tunnetaitoja opetellaan?
- 3.2.1. Miten näitä tunnetaitoja harjoitellaan konkreettisesti?
- 3.3. Missä yhteydessä olet havainnut puhuttavan itsemyötätunnosta? Onko se ollut yhteydessä oppimiseen?
- 3.3.1. Mitä itse ajattelet itsemyötätunnon tarkoittavan?
4. Itsemyötätunnon määritelmä: Itsemyötätunto on itseen kohdistuva lempeä tunnetaito, johon liittyy ymmärrys ja ystävällisyys itseä kohtaan ja inhimillisyyden tunnustaminen. Kandimme tulosten perusteella olisi hyvä oppia käsittelemään epäonnistumisia ja niiden aiheuttamia tunteita paremmin, sekä näkemään se oppimiskokemuksena. Tässä itsemyötätunto on erityisen hyödyllinen tunnetaito.
- ystävällisyys itseä kohtaan
  - tunne yhteisestä inhimillisyydestä (esim. haavoittuvaisuus ihmisiä yhdistävänä tekijänä)
  - Kyky havainnoida ja tunnistaa omia tunteita
- ➔ Jossain määrin näitä voidaan jo harjoitella kouluissa
- 4.1. Millainen on oma suhteesi itsemyötätuntoon - miten hyödynnät itsemyötätuntoa itse; esim. elämässä, työssä?
- 4.2. Mitä ajatuksia sinussa herättää sanonta "moka on lahja"? Mitä se tarkoittaa?
5. Oppimisessa epäonnistumisen riski on aina olemassa - kehittyäkseen yksilön täytyy mennä epä mukavuusalueelle ja ottaa riski "kasvojen menettämisestä" tai häpeän kokemuksesta (haavoittuvuus). Kandimme kyselyssä kuudesluokkalaiset ajattelivat epäonnistumisista seuraavasti: "Ei se haittaa", "epäonnistumisista selviää, ei aina voi mennä putkeen" ja "no ei se mitään, ihmisillä sattuu virheitä". Kiinnostuimme näistä "mantroista", sillä näissä vastauksissa on jo havaittavissa pintaraapaisu itsemyötätuntoon. Haluamme selvittää, miten itsemyötätunnon kehitystä voitaisiin tukea entistä paremmin:
- 5.1. Tila epäonnistua luokassa:
- 5.1.1. Miten haluaisit oppilaan kohtaavan epäonnistumisen?
- 5.1.1.1. Millä tavoin luot tällaisen tilan oppilaalle?
- 5.1.2. Millaisia toimintatapoja tai yhteisiä pelisääntöjä luokkahuoneessasi on sen suhteen, miten oppilaiden tulisi suhtautua muiden tai omiin epäonnistumisiin?

- 5.1.3. Miten mallinnat oppilaille sitä, millä tavalla itselleen ja muille tulisi puhua epäonnistumisen tai haasteen hetkellä?
6. Itsemyötätunto osana luokkahuoneen ilmapiiriä:
  - 6.1. Millä tavalla tuet oppilaita riskienotossa ja heidän kokeillessaan jotakin haastavaa?
  - 6.2. Miten tuet oppilasta haasteiden hetkellä oppimistilanteissa?
  - 6.3. Oletko kohdannut tilannetta, jossa oppilas olisi summatiivisen arvioinnin (esim. koenumero, todistus) vuoksi kokenut epäonnistuneensa oppimisessa? Miten tuit tai tukisit oppilasta tällaisessa tilanteessa?
7. Kilpailua tai vertailua vähentävä kulttuuri:
  - 7.1. Millaisia havaintoja olet tehnyt oppilaiden keskuudessa tapahtuvasta keskinäisestä vertailusta? (esim. millaisia tilanteita?)
  - 7.2. Minkälaisia keinoja olet käyttänyt tällaisissa tilanteissa?
8. Mitä hyötyä tai haittaa itsemyötätunnosta voisi olla oppilaan
  - 8.1. oppimiselle ja kehitykselle?
  - 8.2. hyvinvoinnille?
  - 8.3. muita näkökulmia?
9. Onko sinulla lisättävää/muutettavaa, tai jokin näkökulma, joka ei tullut esille aiemmin?