

## **I. Introduction**

Finland has drawn the attention of the world because of its great achievements in the Program for International Student Assessment conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2000, 2003 and 2006<sup>13)</sup>. Scandinavian countries have educational systems, which are based on comprehensive welfare services<sup>5)</sup>. In recent years, much attention has been paid to the promotion and methods of inclusive education<sup>2)</sup>. In Finland, the comprehensive school system, which aims to ensure equal opportunities for learning, was introduced during the educational reforms of the 1960s, following in the footsteps of the Nordic countries. A comprehensive school is one that provides compulsory education for a total of 9 years—6 years in elementary school and 3 years in junior high school. Because of the national economic crisis of the 1990s, local governments, acting autonomously, started to close local special needs schools with the aim of providing special education within the walls of regular schools<sup>1)</sup>. At present, although local special schools still exist, the national special needs schools in Finland play a central role in the comprehensive education system of each municipality. Within comprehensive schools that provide regular education in each municipality, a system of Three-Tiered Support is provided, including special support<sup>7)4)</sup>. Three-Tiered Support includes ‘General support’, ‘Intensified support’ and ‘Special support’. General support is provided in regular classes by class teachers. Intensified support, in its various forms, is provided by special education teachers, including individual and small group support. Special support is provided in special classes by special education class teachers. In recent years, students with special educational needs have been recognised. There has been an annual increase in the number of students receiving support<sup>11)</sup>. In this study, students who have special educational needs and are suspected of having or are likely to have developmental disorders (without a diagnosis), are referred to as ‘SEN students’. Nakata<sup>7)</sup> conducted a survey on the implementation of the Three-Tiered Support in Finland in a comprehensive school and found that the teachers are the key to this system and that they work together to change the form of support based on the characteristics and situation of the SEN students.

In this study, we focus on class teachers who provide general support in Finland, an advanced country in terms of inclusive education. The purpose of this study is to clarify the thoughts of class teachers, how they support SEN students, how they accept them into regular classes, how they realise inclusive education, how regular classes which have SEN students change and grow and what thoughts teachers develop through their experiences.

## **II. Methods**

### **1. Schools and teachers participating in the survey**

The schools are located in the medium-sized city of Salo, south of Finland and near the ancient city of Turku, with a population of 52000<sup>10)</sup>. The city was once famous for its steel industry. The first author conducted fieldwork in 2016 and 2017 in School A and School B, with the aim of clarifying the reality of

Three-Tiered Support<sup>7)</sup>. Also, as part of this study, the first author conducted interviews in the same schools from 1 to 17 March 2019. School A was established in 2016 following the merger of a 6 year-old elementary school and a 9 year-old special needs school. It is a comprehensive school with about 460 students. The regular classes have about 20–25 students per class and the special classes not more than 10 students per class. School B is a comprehensive school with about 160 students and only elementary school departments, where each class has about 14–25 students. There are one or two classes per grade and one special class.

Teachers participating in the survey were class teachers or special class teachers with class teaching experience. Table 1 shows the profile of each teacher.

Table1 The participants of the research

	Gender	Current position	Teaching history	Number of cases analyzed
Teacher C	Female	special class teacher	24 years	1
Teacher D	Female	special class teacher	28 years	3
Teacher E	Male	special class teacher	9 years	3
Teacher F	Female	class teacher	Over 30 years	4
Teacher G	Female	class teacher	17 years	2
Teacher H	Male	class teacher	30 years	4

## 2. Interview

In this study, we conducted semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured questions were translated into Finnish in advance (by a Japanese person living in Finland for the past 21 years). The interviews were scheduled mainly by the Principal and conducted during the teachers' working hours. Each interview lasted about 1 h. The interviewer recorded the interview only after receiving consent from each participant. The author spent some time outside of the interviews observing school life and connecting with school employees and students.

The interviews concentrated on two main questions. The first question was about the first SEN student that the interviewed teacher had supported. The second question was about an SEN student who had had a strong impact or made an impression on the interviewed teacher. The Research questions are 1) What problems occurred in classes with SEN students? What type of support did class teachers provide? 2) How did class teachers feel, and how did they understand and support SEN students? How did that experience change class teachers? What did they learn? 3) How did SEN students and their classmates feel, understand each other and behave? How did students change in relation to SEN students?

## 3. Analytical methods

The grounded theory approach<sup>9)</sup> was used in this study to aid the analysis. The initial interview data for

each teacher was broken down into individual units of meaning and labelled. Labels were then arranged into categories and category groups. Consequently, a time series flow representing the psychological process of each teacher emerged from the labels and a category diagram was prepared.

### **III. Results**

#### **1. Categories**

The analysis generated 13 category groups, 54 categories and 118 subcategories (Table 2). From here on, the category groups are enclosed in square brackets [], and the categories are enclosed in angle brackets <>.

First of all, we describe the category groups below. [SEN student] refers to the state of the SEN students or their behaviours exhibited in class. [Classmates] describes the reactions of classes that have an SEN student in the group. [Parents] indicates how the parents of SEN students understand their condition. In [Daily Support: SEN student], [Daily Support: Classmates], [Daily Support: Parents], [Interventional support] and [Special support], we are concentrating on the support provided. [Daily Support: SEN student] refers to the daily support provided for SEN students by class teachers. [Daily Support: Classmates] and [Daily Support: Parents] refer to the SEN-related support a class teacher is providing for the classmates and parents of SEN students, respectively. [Interventional support] is a category group used when daily support does not have any positive effects. [Special support] includes support methods that can be incorporated following [Interventional support]. The changes in SEN students and their classmates, observed after different forms of support were provided, are grouped under [Effects of support]. In addition to that, the [External conditions] category group describes unexpected changes in SEN students' surroundings, and [Emotional experience] refers to the emotions experienced by class teachers during and after supporting a class with SEN students. Furthermore, the thoughts that class teachers had were classified as [Thoughts on support] and the new views that class teachers acquired through their experiences as [Acquired views].

Secondly, we describe each of the categories.

#### **[SEN student]**

<Differences> represents the unusual and unpredictable behaviour of SEN students, their emotional ups and downs and their unstable condition that can change from day to day. This category also includes cases of learning issues and disabilities (e.g. deaf SEN students). <Obstructive behaviour> includes SEN students with ADHD tendencies that lead to problems with concentration and distracting classmates and class teachers. <Dangerous behaviour> refers to situations where SEN students may act dangerously and violently towards other pupils.

#### **[Classmates]**

The first category, <Classmates understanding an SEN student> represents classes that, as a result of spending a lot of time with SEN students, show an understanding of SEN students' characteristics. Then, students who gradually noticed differences between SEN students and other students are described as

Table2 Identified category groups and categories with representative quotes

<b>SEN student</b>	
Differences	For example, if things don't go well at school, or if they don't go the way the student (SEN) wants, the student (SEN) just crawled under the chair and groaned. (C129)
Obstructive behaviour	There was a student (SEN) who dropped a pen and interrupted the class. (F14)
Dangerous behaviour	When we were walking side by side outside, a student (SEN) suddenly pushed another student down the street. (E67)
<b>Classmates</b>	
Classmates understanding an SEN student	The students in the class were talking to the student (SEN) face-to-face in an easy-to-understand way. (H19)
Classmates uncomfortable with an SEN student	The students in the class were surprised (E80) and wondered about all the things that happened with this student (SEN). (E81)
Classmates avoiding an SEN student	Students who want to do their job well do not want to be with the SEN student in their group. (H92)
Classmates attacking an SEN student	The student (SEN) was involved in many fights. (D66)
Classmates scared of an SEN student	I think other students were afraid of that student (SEN). (G90)
Classmates mimicking an SEN student	Other students began to realise that if they mimicked the student's (SEN) behaviour, they would also draw the teacher's attention. (F51)
Class out of control	Safety was really compromised just by having the student (SEN) in the class. (G38)
<b>Parents</b>	
Understanding parents	In this case, the parents understood from the beginning. They said it was good to do it at that pace. (E57)
Uncooperative parents	But in the case of this student, at the very beginning, I really didn't get permission from the parents to do a diagnosis, or to do more tests (E70), because they didn't understand. (E71)
<b>Daily Support: SEN student</b>	
Preliminary preparation	Normally, freshmen and 1st grade elementary school students can visit the school to see their teachers in the spring before entering the school. (G3)
Goal setting	We started school in the fall, and right at the beginning of the new semester, we set goals that we needed to achieve by the Christmas break. (D18)
Observation	And then, for example, I give them a warning, and then I just looked at the students after they'd finished. (F41)
Environmental adjustments	So, for that student, I tried to follow the same routine on schooldays. (C133)
Adjusting physical distance	So, I was trying to stay within a metre of this student (SEN) to protect the safety of the class. (E74)
Individual learning support	This student can't read, so even in mathematics, when SEN student tried to solve the assignments, I had to read the question out. (D17)
Individual interaction with an SEN student	We (the teacher and the SEN student) have to talk about something bad that day, when the SEN student did something bad. (H86)
Encouraging an SEN student	When students have to do difficult tasks, if they have a teacher who really makes you happy, they will be able to do it. So, I've been thinking about what I can do and what I can do with my students. (D116)
Searching for support	I started thinking about other ways to provide support, not just detention. (E93)
Collaboration with other teachers	Depending on the subject, I could make arrangements so that other teachers could support the student (SEN) in the same way as I did. (H89).
<b>Daily Support: Classmates</b>	
A bridge between an SEN student and others	When the student (SEN) was attacked by classmates, I explained to them that everyone has weaknesses and what kind of weakness the student (SEN) has. (D68)
Enlightening about an SEN student	At the beginning of the new semester, I explained to the class about the student (SEN). (H54)
Advising about an SEN student	When I got to know these three students better (SEN), I could not only calm the class down, but I also knew what to say to them. I could advise them (classmates) how to deal with the students (SEN). (E90)
Classmates' observation	Of course, I had to be aware of other children too. (F34)
<b>Daily Support: Parents</b>	
Sharing information	For example, when the class had a nervous student (SEN), I started contacting the parents (SEN student's parents) a lot. (E39)
Parental approval	Of course, the first thing I did was to get permission from the parents of the Asperger student to tell the class about these traits. (C142)
<b>Intervention support</b>	
Investigation of the cause	I thought the SEN student should be tested and diagnosed really soon. (E72)
Searching for new support methods	After that, I talked with the student (SEN) and the student's (SEN) parents. (D12)
<b>Special support</b>	
Special support for an SEN student	In the case of students with learning disabilities, we talked about how it would be better for them to repeat the year so that they can study at a slower pace and take three years to learn what others are studying in two years. (E55)
<b>Effects of support</b>	
No progress	So, then I couldn't help him anymore. (G28)
Positive changes in an SEN student	As for those two students, this supplementary class helped them understand the subject. (D20)
Positive changes in classmates	By the time the new school year started and the Christmas holidays started, bullying had gradually stopped. (D74)
Progress of an SEN student caused by special support	After repeating a year, students who couldn't read at all before still make mistakes of course, but they can read better than before. (D37)
<b>External conditions</b>	
Unexpected changes in external conditions	The student's (SEN) mother had just been phoned to come to school and happened to see the student in such a terrible situation that she understood it wasn't normal. (G27)
<b>Emotional experience</b>	
Confused	I talked to parents and asked if the student's (SEN) strange behaviour was due to illness or the child's personality. (E42)
Sense of difficulties	Teachers get tired when students make mistakes all the time. (H81)
Helplessness	At the same time, I couldn't pay close attention to another 23 students, so I left them alone (G62), yet I felt that I was doing all I could. (G63)
Accomplishment	I was able to see that I could do something and it made me feel great. (E101)
Relief	This was my first experience, and I was really relieved this student (SEN) was relocated. (G37)
<b>Thoughts on support</b>	
Implementing best support methods	I think it's important to find the best way to support the students (SEN). (G173)
Avoiding enforcement	Of course, parents decide whether to repeat a year. (D32)
Learning through equality	Basically, everyone in my class is equally important. (C5)
Regard for students	I became interested in students who had to be protected and who had to be specially protected. (D105)
Understanding the reasons for SEN students' behaviours	I was thinking that the student (SEN) didn't behave this way on purpose. (F134)
Diagnostic understanding	If SEN was diagnosed, the parents could understand that the background of their child was a little different and why it was difficult (H65). When they understood that it was due to a disease, they could feel relieved (H66).
Accepting changes in oneself	I found that I should think about how I could change (F31), how I could change my mind-set about the student (F32).
<b>Acquired views</b>	
Respecting individual students	Understanding the student can help find appropriate support. (G170)
Considering the future	I've always tried to think about what these students are going to be like 10 years from now. (D127)
Understanding SEN students' viewpoint	I remember how hard it was for me to speak and study in a foreign language all day, so I can understand how the student (SEN) feels. (H43)
Implementation of support that respects SEN students	Although there may be students in the class who need special support, having these students in regular classes isn't always a good solution. (H63)
Gaining parents' understanding	Now, really working with parents is the key, and it's so important. (G71)
Self-growth through inclusive education	My thoughts on inclusive education had completely changed after I spending some time in the class with the students (SEN). (E19)

Note: The table contains a sample of teachers' quotes. Each quote is labeled with a capital letter (corresponding to a teacher) and a number. Category groups are highlighted with a dark background. Categories are positioned to the left and quotes to the right of the table.

<Classmates uncomfortable with an SEN student>. <Classmates avoiding an SEN student> characterises students who want to get on with their learning but feel uncomfortable being around SEN students and ultimately avoid being paired with them because of their obstructive behaviour. When their understanding of SEN students decreases even more, students start to bully and attack SEN students (<Classmates attacking an SEN student>) and imitate their behaviour (<Classmates mimicking an SEN student>). In some cases, when SEN students display dangerous behaviour, students start to be afraid of them (<Classmates scared of an SEN student>). Finally, class teachers might lose control of the class—this is described under <Class out of control>.

### **[Parents]**

This category group was divided into two categories. <Understanding parents> describes parents who understand and accept the support proposed by the class teacher. In contrast, some parents deny the condition or problematic behaviour of their SEN child (<Uncooperative parents>).

### **[Daily Support: SEN student]**

The first category, <Preliminary preparation> includes gathering information in advance to prepare to meet and accept SEN students in the class. It also includes obtaining specialised information relevant to the characteristics of the SEN students and doing pre-school interviews. After an SEN student enters the school, goals taking their issues into account (within specific time frames) are set (<Goal setting>). Throughout the schooling period, SEN students are observed (<Observation>) and, when needed, environmental adjustments are introduced according to their characteristics (described by the <Environmental adjustments> category). <Adjusting physical distance> describes the specific support measures that ensure the safety of the whole class (including SEN students), such as adjusting the seats of SEN students in the classroom. Furthermore, class teachers may adapt learning methods if SEN students have any difficulties with learning (<Individual learning support>). They connect with SEN students and discuss any problems the student may have encountered, trying to assess not only their understanding of the subject but also their mood and condition (<Individual interaction with an SEN student>). <Searching for support> describes a continuous process of looking for better ways of providing appropriate support while monitoring the condition of SEN students. The support also includes motivating and <Encouraging an SEN student>, as well as praising their progress when deserved. Finally, the <Collaboration with other teachers> category relates to sharing information and expertise between the teachers who support SEN students.

### **[Daily Support: Classmates]**

The category, <A bridge between an SEN student and others> explains the role of class teachers in conveying a message, for example that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. With the approval of SEN students and their parents, the class teachers may explain and discuss the characteristics of SEN students with other students in the class, indicating reasons for their behaviour (<Enlightening about an SEN student>) and helping classmates deal with them (<Advising about an SEN student>). <Classmates' observation> is about

class teachers always keeping an eye on individual students and the class as a whole, ensuring the safety of the group.

### **[Daily Support: Parents]**

The category <Sharing information> involves class teachers and parents of SEN students working together (e.g. SEN students' experiences at school and at home). Also, class teachers try to get <Parental approval> before implementing any support methods.

### **[Intervention support]**

To provide a better and more suitable support and reduce the problematic behaviour of SEN students, class teachers introduce a system of tests and diagnoses by specialists, called <Investigation of the cause>. Additionally, <Search for new support methods> is conducted to review new support methods. It involves experts, parents and individuals (SEN).

### **[Special support]**

To aid the learning of SEN students, <Special support for an SEN student> is provided. It is established to suit the unique characteristics of each individual (SEN) student and may range from repeating a year of study in the same grade to changing schools to create an environment suitable to the challenges facing the SEN student.

### **[Effects of support]**

Effects of the provided support are relevant to both SEN students and their classmates. The category <Positive changes in an SEN student> refers to the cases when the daily support led to positive changes in SEN students, whereas <Progress of an SEN student caused by special support> attributes the progress to special support. On the other side of the spectrum, the category <No progress> describes cases when no positive effects were observed. Daily support affects SEN students' classmates too. In some cases, it is a positive result of class teachers trying to keep the students informed about SEN students. In other cases, classmates learn about SEN students on their own by observing the daily support they receive. Effectively, classmates may be supportive when SEN students exhibit problematic behaviour and then accept them as members of the group. That falls into the category of <Positive changes in classmates>.

### **[External conditions]**

This category group describes changes in external circumstances, including a change of schools or parental status. This category group consists of only one category, <Unexpected changes in external conditions>.

### **[Emotional experience]**

Class teachers can react with various emotional responses. Some of them feel <Confused> about the behaviour of SEN students. That may have many reasons, one being insufficient information about their characteristics, condition or background. A great deal of energy is needed to provide constant support for SEN students while simultaneously attending to other students, and this may give class teachers a <Sense of difficulty>. Consequently, an insufficiency of skills required to support SEN students and a feeling of

powerlessness when not being able to guide the class may lead to <Helplessness>. Even when struggling to support SEN students, class teachers may feel <Accomplishment> when they see the positive effects of their work. Also, there's the feeling of <Relief> when class teachers receive help (from, for example cooperative parents) or in some cases, when SEN students are relocated to a different school.

### **[Thoughts on support]**

Class teachers are always thinking about the best ways of providing support for SEN students and are <Implementing best support methods>. In doing that, they are <Avoiding enforcement> as regards SEN students, their classmates and parents. It means that although they are trying to do their best, they are not pushing solutions, leaving the final decision to the parents. Class teachers acknowledge the importance of equal educational opportunities, reflected in the <Learning through equality> category. They have <Regard for students> and show active interest in children who need support. They understand that the behaviour of SEN students is not intentionally malicious (<Understanding the reason for SEN students' behaviour>). In their work in supporting SEN students, they account for the characteristics based on the diagnoses. They believe that a <Diagnostic understanding> may help parents to understand their children. Class teachers are aware that sometimes they need to change as well to provide better support (<Accepting changes in oneself>).

### **[Acquired views]**

Class teachers understand that each student is different and that the support methods students need are also different. Acknowledging this is described in the <Respect and understanding individual students> category. In addition, class teachers have a long-term perspective—they are <Considering the future>, which includes not just the current semester but also the future life of SEN students and classmates in society. They are <Understanding SEN students' viewpoint>: they know what SEN students are experiencing and what type of support they need. They respect the right to proper support in the right environment (<Implementation of support that respects SEN students>). They also acknowledge the great importance of parents' understanding of SEN students (<Gaining parents' understanding>). Finally, class teachers, through providing support for SEN students, understand the idea of <Self-growth through inclusive education>, often changing their image of a teacher and how a teacher can develop as a professional.

## **2. The process of support in regular classes for students with special needs in Finland**

The relationships between the categories and the category groups were analysed. These relationships are depicted in Figure 1. There, 13 category groups are linked using arrows in chronological order. This is described in the three stories below.

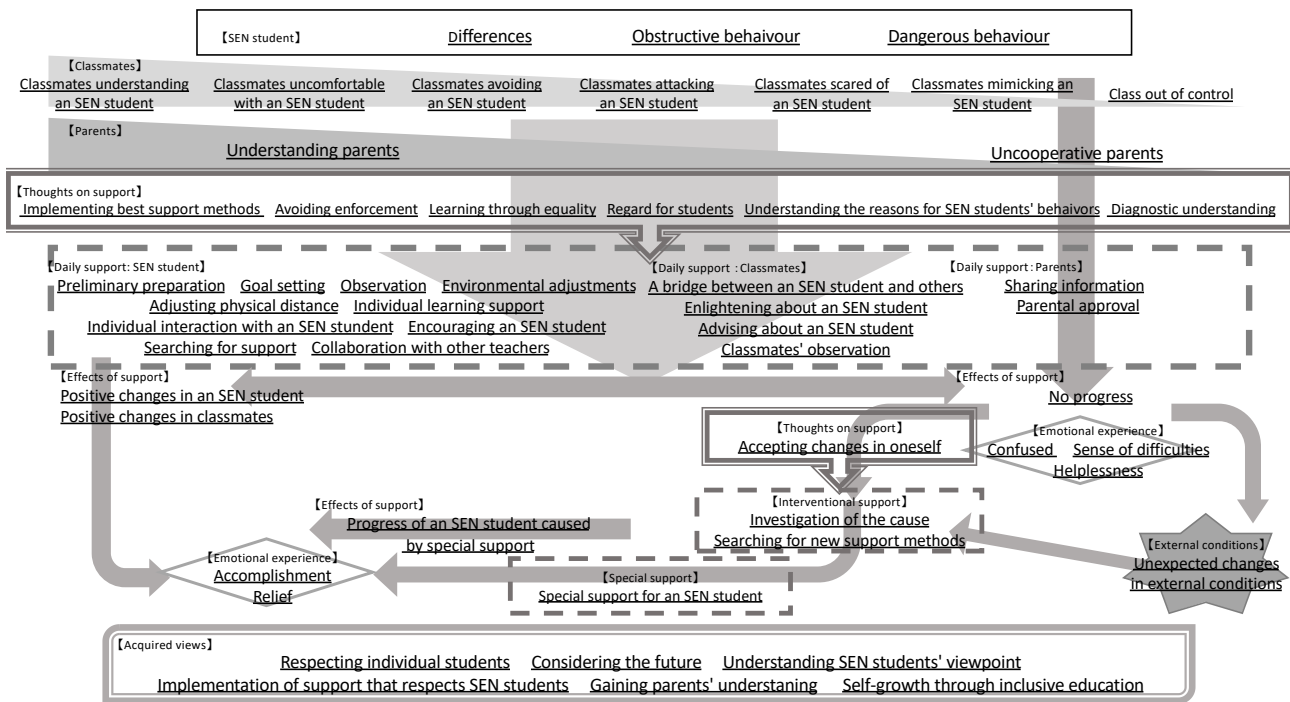
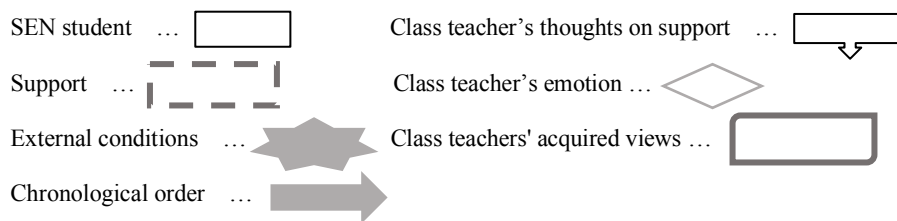


Figure1 The process of support in regular classes in Finland for SEN students



Note: The Finnish class teachers' experiences with classes that include SEN students, their thoughts and emotions when providing support for SEN students and their classmates and their methods in terms of realising inclusive education.

### 1) Class teachers' thoughts on the support and daily support they provide in regular classes

In the beginning, SEN students display <Differences> when compared with their classmates, sometimes also showing <Obstructive behaviour> or <Dangerous behaviour> (in the square at the top of Figure 1). In consequence, class teachers search for support methods (<Implementing best support methods>) and, for that purpose, try <Understanding the reasons for SEN students' behaviours>. Class teachers have <Diagnostic understanding>. Depending on the condition of the SEN student, they try to flexibly change the type of support. This leads to providing appropriate support and to improvements in understanding on the part of parents. Class teachers do not force anything on SEN students, their classmates or parents (<Avoiding enforcement>). This is to understand and respect the views of SEN students, their classmates (<Regard for students>) and parents. They try to create equal opportunities for education (<Learning through equality>). Class teachers provide daily support for [SEN student], [Classmates] and [Parents] while having [Thoughts on support] (dotted square in the middle of Figure 1).



## **2) The positive effects of support and the class teacher's sense of accomplishment**

When class teachers can obtain classmates' and parents' understanding of SEN students, they can get a sense of accomplishment (positioned left of Figure 1). If class teachers have difficulties in obtaining this understanding, it may make them feel confused and helpless (shown on the right side of Figure 1). [Classmates] consist of seven states. In Figure 1, the classes' levels of understanding of SEN students are ordered from left to right. Each consequent step shows decreasing understanding, visualised by the triangle in the background. Similarly, [Parents] are presented below, and the triangle in the background represents <Understanding parents> (left side) and <Uncooperative parents> (right side). With the agreement of the parents of SEN students, class teachers may incorporate <Enlightening about an SEN student> in the class. Class teachers try to explain to other students the characteristics of SEN students and the reasons for their actions. Through these explanations, they pass on the message that everyone has weaknesses, not only SEN students. This is how class teachers build <A bridge between an SEN student and others>. In addition, they may give students specific advice regarding how to deal with SEN students (<Advising about an SEN student>). By playing an intermediary role between SEN students and other students in the class, class teachers further connect SEN students with the class. Such daily support can lead to <Positive changes in an SEN student> and <Positive changes in class>. The class learns how to deal with SEN students and starts to understand their characteristics by observing interactions between class teachers and SEN students. In some cases, students in the class can be supportive, for example by saying 'Don't worry about it' when an SEN student is panicking. Positive changes give class teachers a feeling of <Accomplishment>.

## **3) The lack of effect of daily support and teachers' confusion**

Sometimes daily support yields <No progress> in the behaviour of SEN students and no positive changes in their classmates. That may, in turn, make class teachers <Confused> and feel that they do not know how to provide support. Also, <Obstructive behaviours> and <Dangerous behaviours> lead to <Classmates scared of an SEN student> or <Classmates mimicking an SEN student>. Furthermore, with <Uncooperative parents>, class teachers may lose control over the class (<Class out of control>). This leads to more confusion for class teachers (<Confused>) and provokes a <Sense of difficulties>. Ultimately, class teachers may have a feeling of <Helplessness> or that they have limitations and are lacking certain professional skills. However, in those serious situations, class teachers start investigating the causes. They change their way of thinking and support methods (<Accepting changes in oneself>). Then they can introduce [Interventional support] (<Investigation of the cause> and <Searching for new support methods>) that aim for the best possible support for SEN students. This encourages discussions with specialists and clarifies the causes in more detail. When necessary, specialised tests are performed. Expert tests and diagnoses lead to appropriate support. Furthermore, class teachers start to observe SEN students more carefully. This [Interventional support] contributes not only to the clarification of the problem but also to making the parents of SEN students understand and accept their characteristics.

Another possible outcome of [Intervention support] may be the decision to introduce [Special support] (e.g. relocating the SEN student to a different school or repeating a year at the school). <Progress of an SEN student caused by special support> describes the positive effects of special support. Those positive changes may give a feeling of <Accomplishment> to class teachers. They may also feel <Relief> when their involvement with the case terminates because of the change of [External condition] (e.g. the relocation of the SEN student).

#### **4) Views acquired by class teachers through their experience of inclusive education**

Class teachers' ideas about how to provide daily support may change after gaining experience of supporting a class with SEN students ([Acquired views] surrounded by a double-lined square at the bottom of Figure 1). First, by supporting a variety of SEN students, class teachers can reconsider that all students learn in different ways. They understand the importance of paying attention to personal differences between students (<Respecting individual students>). In addition, class teachers gain a long-term perspective as regards providing support for SEN students and their classmates that impacts on their future lives in the society (<Considering the future>). By working together with SEN students, they start <Understanding SEN students' viewpoint>, which emphasises the challenges facing SEN students. Furthermore, class teachers recognise that <Gaining parents' understanding> is vital to providing effective support. Finally, class teachers notice how they change and grow as a result of their work with SEN students and the class (<Self-growth through inclusive education>).

### **3. Cases**

To clarify the three representative models of the processes, interviews with two teachers are given below.

#### **1) Teacher C (Model 1): SEN student experienced positive changes due to the effects of daily support**

Although Teacher C was in charge of a regular class, many SEN students were transferred to the class of Teacher C, because the teacher had a deep regard for all students (<Regard for students>). Teacher C mentioned that it felt like being a special class teacher, and it is important for Teacher C to create equal educational opportunities (<Learning through equality>).

*'Basically, everyone in my class is equally important'.*

*'I think it's good that even children who need special support (SEN) can learn from other kids. They are role models to them (SEN) and allow them (SEN) to grow'.*

An SEN student with Asperger's syndrome tendencies joined the class of Teacher C. The SEN student was experiencing frequent emotional ups and downs and, in times of emotional distress, was hiding under the desk. Moreover, the SEN student liked routine. Those behaviours revealed <Differences> between the SEN student and the rest of the class. Taking into account the characteristics of the SEN student, the class teachers began to fix the daily schedule of the class and introduced routine activities (<Environmental adjustments>). It brought positive effects not only for the SEN student but also for the entire class.

With the consent of the SEN student's parents, Teacher C explained the reasons for the SEN student's behaviour and characteristics to the class (<Enlightening about an SEN student>). In addition, the teacher asked the class to share with everyone what they are good at and what they are not good at. Through that special activity, the SEN student could describe their own weaknesses to their classmates, allowing them to understand the student better (<A bridge between an SEN student and others>). That kind of support led to <Positive changes in class>, and the classmates accepted the SEN student. When the SEN student was in a panic, they were saying 'Don't worry' and tried to keep away and wait until the SEN student had calmed down. The daily support also produced <Positive changes in an SEN student>, and problematic behaviours disappeared over a short period of time. Also, Teacher C noticed that learning how to deal with the SEN student and how to react to their behaviour was an important building block for both the student and their classmates' future lives in society, where people are diverse (<Considering the future>).

## **2) Teacher E (Model 2): SEN student needed [Interventional support]**

This was the first year of work as a class teacher for Teacher E. In the class, the SEN student was displaying <Dangerous behaviour>, such as pushing classmates and tumbling to the floor. During the daily support, Teacher E was <Adjusting physical distance> for the purpose of ensuring the safety of the SEN student and the class. Also, <Individual learning support> was provided for the SEN student, including after-school tutoring. However, the parents of the SEN student did not recognise the problem and did not want to listen to Teacher E (<Uncooperative parents>). In addition, while providing daily support, Teacher E had to deal not only with the SEN student's dangerous behaviour but also with other students in the class complaining about the SEN student. In consequence, no changes in the SEN student and the class were seen. Teacher E began to think that the current daily support measures were not effective and thus felt <Confused>. The teacher was wondering what was really causing the problems, which the SEN student was experiencing. At that time, Teacher E started <Searching for new support methods> and began an <Investigation of the cause> of the SEN student's problematic behaviour. The teacher wanted to find the best way to help the SEN student and talked about this with the parents. Then, the parents accepted the teacher's proposal to have the SEN student examined by a specialist. After the diagnosis was clarified, support methods were improved.

This case is an example of how a diagnosis that revealed the roots of the problem could help support SEN students. Also, <Enlightening about an SEN student> through the diagnosis helped the class to understand that the SEN student's obstructive and dangerous behaviour was not intentional. The classmates could learn how to interact with the SEN student. This resulted in a <Positive change in class> and inspired a positive feeling of <Accomplishment> in the teacher. Through this experience, Teacher E acquired the idea regarding <Implementation of support that respects SEN students>. Teacher E said:

*'I have really grown as a teacher. I can look for and find good things in people (students)'.*

*'My view of inclusive education had changed in my first year as a class teacher. Before I thought it was a way of cost-reduction on behalf of the government'.*

Teacher E started to think about personal change as a teacher (<Self-growth through inclusive education>). In other words, the teacher's view on inclusive education has changed.

#### **IV. Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to clarify how class teachers support SEN students in regular classes, how they accept SEN students into their class and how they realise inclusive education. The study also describes how classes incorporating SEN students change and grow over time as a result of the support provided and tries to investigate ideas class teachers acquire through their experiences. The following three points are considered.

##### **1. Psychological process of class teachers**

In this study, three main stories were presented from the angle of a psychological process. In some cases, such as in the first model of the process, class teachers can get a sense of accomplishment by seeing the effects of the daily support they provide. The important factor is to increase understanding of SEN students, particularly as regards classmates and parents. In contrast, at times, for example in the two other models, teachers may feel helpless when facing difficulties and when their attempts to provide the best support possible do not yield the expected results. That kind of emotional experience resembles the Japanese teachers' sense of difficulties that they face when they are taking care of children with ADHD <sup>12)</sup>. This study shows that obtaining classmates' and parents' understanding of SEN students is essential for Finnish class teachers for providing support. In cases where there was not enough understanding and cooperation, class teachers faced more difficulties.

In those cases, Finnish teachers tended to turn towards <Accepting changes in oneself> and [Interventional support], with the aim of investigating the cause of the problems in detail. This can be attributed to research-based thinking that Finnish teachers learn during their teacher training <sup>3)</sup>. In this study, research-based thinking is a means of recovering from difficult situations.

##### **2. Support for SEN students, their classmates and parents**

In their daily support activities, class teachers often engage in individual dialogues to better understand students. They are evaluating the learning progress and emotional state of the SEN students. They acknowledge the importance of hearing students and their opinions on a daily basis. [Intervention support] involves discussing possible support measures with experts, the parents of SEN students and, in some cases, the SEN students themselves. Class teachers are active in their pursuit of finding proper support methods for every individual. Depending on the case, being in a regular class might not suit the needs of the SEN student. In addition, the study reveals that class teachers are <Avoiding enforcement> as regards SEN students and their classmates and parents. They have <Respect and understanding of individual students> and put an emphasis on the <Implementation of support that respects SEN students>. This shows how important it is to

Finnish teachers to know and understand all their students. We've also heard from them that they value equality in the class and that for them, it is important to respect the rights of the SEN student and to provide appropriate support.

Furthermore, an overview of the type of support Finnish teachers provide emphasises the importance of individual involvement. Mironova <sup>6)</sup> points out that Finnish teachers value individual engagement with their students and that the feedback they receive is an important factor in determining their support policy. Finnish teachers are free to choose their teaching methods and materials, and their profession is recognised as socially dignified <sup>8)</sup>. This indicates that their judgement is respected <sup>8)</sup> both in their workplace and in the society. In turn, class teachers respect the individual opinions of students (along with SEN students) and parents. Importing these kinds of values to Japan and applying them as part of the support system is important for improving the Japanese education system.

### **3. Support as a bridge linking SEN students with classmates and parents**

Class teachers are trying to bridge the gap between SEN students and their classes as both are equal parts of the equation. To make this possible, all students, including SEN students, have to acknowledge the fact that everyone has strengths and weaknesses (<A bridge between an SEN student and others>). The class has to be aware that the SEN student is one of them and is working towards their own goals (<Enlightening about an SEN student>). But it is not only the class teachers who are building the bridge. In some situations, students were able to understand the SEN student's characteristics by themselves just by observing the interactions between the SEN student and the class teachers on a daily basis.

In addition, class teachers are forming another bridge, in this case, between SEN students and parents. This becomes particularly important when daily support measures are ineffective and [Interventional support] has to be considered. It involves discussing the problem, not only with experts but also with parents, and requires parents' understanding. Clarifying the problems that are faced by SEN students and evaluating their condition is important for both coming up with better support methods and connecting SEN students and parents, who play a significant role in supporting their children. This kind of view as regards teachers playing a bridging role, as well as having individual dialogues with students and parents, is an element that will also be valued in the Japanese education system.

### **4. Future issues**

This study focused on Finnish class teachers. The survey revealed the fact that Finnish class teachers place an importance on the dialogue with SEN students and their parents. A positive change due to this dialogue was also reported. In the future, there will be a need to clarify the characteristics of the dialogue between Finnish teachers and students, including SEN students, and the characteristics of the dialogue with parents. In addition, it is important to gather more data from a bigger and more diverse group of participants in terms

of background and locations.

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## Author contributions

(公開査読につき省略)

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