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DISCOVERING MULTIGRADE CLASSES AND THEIR CHALLENGES AND
BENEFITS THROUGH TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

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Thesis abstract

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Abstract <p>This Master's Thesis is a narrative research about teachers' experiences in multigrade classes in Finland. By a multigrade class we mean pupils from at least two different grade-levels who are placed together in one class and taught by one teacher. We study teachers' experiences regarding working in multigrade classes through three biographies and we examine the challenges in and benefits of multigrade classes that occur in teachers' experiences. The data consists of interviews of five multigrade class teachers. We answer the first research question with narrative analysis by forming biographies of three teachers and the second research question with analysis of narratives through themes based on challenges and benefits.</p> <p>Approximately every third class in the world is a multigrade class. In 2014 16.4 % of the Finnish classes were multigrade, excluding the Åland Islands. The most common place to find multigrade classes is in small schools but they can also be found, for example within monograde schools. The theoretical framework of this study consists of development and learning theories. In the theoretical framework we examine the most significant of these theories and we introduce the current situation of multigrade classes and their historical overview. The research on multigrade classes is scarce and it concentrates mostly on student achievement. Studies about teachers' experiences can be found to some extent.</p> <p>Based on this research, it is evident that teachers' experiences regarding working in a multigrade class are positive. Teachers considered multigrade classes beneficial especially for pupils' cognitive and social development. Some teachers pointed out the opportunities multigrade teaching can provide for the future in heterogeneous comprehensive schools. As regards to challenges, teaching in multigrade classes was seen time consuming as the planning needed more time in terms of combining several curricula within one class.</p>			
Keywords: combination class, multigrade class, multigrade teaching, narrative research, small school			



Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta

Tiivistelmä opinnäytetyöstä

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Tiivistelmä <p>Tämän narratiivisen tutkielman aihe liittyy yhdysluokkien opetukseen Suomessa. Yhdysluokalla viittamme luokkaan, jossa on yksi opettaja ja oppilaita vähintään kahdelta eri luokka-asteelta. Tutkimme opettajien kokemuksia yhdysluokalla työskentelystä kolmen elämäkerran kautta ja tarkastelemme yhdysluokkien haasteita ja hyötyjä opettajien kokemuksissa. Tutkimuksen aineistona ovat viiden yhdysluokan opettajan haastattelut. Ensimmäiseen tutkimuskysymykseen vastaamme narratiivisen analyysin keinoin muodostamalla kolmen haastateltavan elämäkerrat. Toiseen tutkimuskysymykseen vastaamme narratiivien analyysin avulla haasteisiin ja hyötyihin pohjautuvien teemojen kautta.</p> <p>Joka kolmas luokka maailmassa on yhdysluokka. Vuonna 2014 Manner-Suomen luokista 16,4 % oli yhdysluokkia. Niitä on yleisimmin kyläkouluissa, mutta myös kouluissa, jotka koostuvat pääosin erillisluokista. Tämän tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys koostuu oppimis- ja kehitysteorioista. Teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä tarkastelemme näistä teorioista keskeisimpiä ja esittelemme yhdysluokkaopetuksen tämän hetkisen tilanteen sekä niiden historiaa. Yhdysluokista on tehty niukasti tutkimuksia ja ne keskittyvät pääosin oppilaiden oppimistuloksiin. Tutkimuksia opettajien kokemuksista yhdysluokkakontekstissa löytyy jossain määrin.</p> <p>Tutkielmamme tulosten perusteella voidaan sanoa, että opettajien kokemukset yhdysluokilla opettamisesta ovat olleet positiivisia. Opettajat kokivat yhdysluokkien olevan hyödyllisiä varsinkin oppilaiden kognitiivisen ja sosiaalisen kehityksen kannalta. Osa opettajista nosti esille mahdollisuudet, joita yhdysluokkaopetus voi tarjota tulevaisuuden aiempaa heterogeenisimmille kouluille. Haastavaksi opettajat olivat kokeneet ajankäytön, sillä yhdysluokilla suunnittelu vie enemmän aikaa usean opetussuunnitelman yhdistämisen vuoksi.</p>			
Asiasanat: kyläkoulut, narratiivinen tutkimus, yhdysluokat, yhdysluokkaopetus			

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Master's thesis is a narrative research about multigrade classes. By a multigrade class we mean pupils from at least two different grade levels who are placed together in one class and taught by one teacher. We focus our research on the teachers of multigrade classes and their experiences regarding their classes.

Our research interest for this topic originally began after a discussion about our personal school experiences. From the second to sixth grade, Jyrkinen attended a big school in southern Finland that consisted of only multigrade classes, and she has shared her positive experiences with Laurila. It caught our attention that the multigrade classes in the school Jyrkinen attended were formed due to pedagogical choice. Laurila, on the other hand, has had no personal experience when it comes to multigrade classes. The more we discussed about the topic, the more we realized that we knew very little about multigrade classes and their teaching. Moreover, we noticed that multigrade classes were not mentioned at all during our teacher education studies at the University of Oulu. These factors triggered our interest in finding out how the teaching is implemented in these kinds of classes and how teachers have experienced working in them.

The extent of the multigrade classes is worldwide, and approximately every third class in the world is a multigrade class (Kalaoja, 2006, 226; Laitila & Wilén, 2014; Mason & Burns, 1995, 36; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007; Veenman, 1995, 320-321). In Finland 16.4% of schools (this number does not include the Åland Islands) have multigrade classes, and thus the reality of multigrade classes in the context of the Finnish educational field is also visible (Laitila & Wilén, 2014). A noteworthy observation is that the prime time of studies and experiments of multigrade classes in Finland were in the 1970s and 1980s. The first multigrade class experiments started already in 1972 and continued throughout the 1970's. This trend was also present in the political decision making as the Finnish National Board of Education set up an expert group for researching and standardizing multigrade classes and teaching in 1974. The aim of the group was exclusively to improve multigrade classes and teaching. (Kouluhallitus, 1980, 1-3; Laukkanen, 1978a, 1-17; Laukkanen, Lepistö, Pyykkönen, & Holopainen, 1982, 26.)

Although nowadays a notable amount of Finnish schools have multigrade classes, during the past decades, however, few of the leading educational journals or teacher union magazines

have published up-to-date articles on the situation of multigrade education in Finland or internationally. Furthermore, the research on multigrade classes is scarce and concentrates mostly on student achievement. The latest comprehensive studies, which are constantly cited in later publications, were carried out in the 90's and early 21st century, and not much up-to-date research can be found (Hoffman, 2002; Little, 2004; Mason & Burns, 1995, 36; Mason, 1997; Quail & Smyth, 2014, 80; Veenman, 1995, 320-321; Veenman, 1997). However, today there is a growing international interest towards multigrade classes and their different variations (Hyry-Beihammer & Autti, 2014, 210; Laitila & Wilén, 2014, 268).

Studies regarding the teacher's experiences of multigrade classes have been executed to some extent. The setting of the multigrade classes in these studies varied quite a lot; some had been formed out of obligatory reasons whereas some of them had been formed by choice, out of pedagogical reasons. Mulryan-Kyne (2004), Hoffman (2003) and Aina (2001) have concluded that teachers experienced multigrade classes beneficial for the pupils, providing them positive learning opportunities. Then again, multigrade classes were seen more difficult to teach than monograde classes, and teachers emphasized the challenges that occur in teaching multigrade classes, such as lesson planning. (Aina, 2001, 219; Hoffman, 2003, 5; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 16-17.) The negative experiences of the teachers have also been pointed out by Mason and Burns (1995, 36), who emphasized the fact that teachers would have preferred teaching monograde classes instead of multigrade classes (Mason & Burns, 1995, 36).

Our research has similar focus to these studies since it concentrates on the teachers' experiences of multigrade classes. Nevertheless, we provide new aspects about the factors that affect the teacher's experiences, and therefore, about the factors that influence how the teachers experience the challenges in and benefits of multigrade classes. Unlike any other research, we have focused our research within the Finnish context, and the multigrade classes are examined in different settings. We consider this research relevant and current as it provides valuable information for anyone working in the educational field: teacher students, teachers, principals as well as policy makers. Moreover, the current challenges of education include the need for developing new ways of dealing with the heterogeneity of pupils, more individualized learning and more inclusive education (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 105). These challenges are only a few examples of why, through this research, we wish to contribute to the increasing knowledge and awareness of the opportunities that multigrade classes and teaching can provide to meet these needs.

Based on these needs, we have formulated research questions that form the basis for our research. First of all, we wanted to find out *what kind of experiences teachers have of working in multigrade classes in relation to their biographical contexts* to holistically understand the themes and the core aspects that come to their mind when talking about multigrade classes and teaching. In addition, the second research question completes the first question and focuses on *the challenges and benefits that occur in the teachers' experiences regarding multigrade classes*. To find answers to these questions, we have collected data by interviewing five multigrade class teachers from a few different multigrade class settings in Finland.

2 MULTIGRADE CLASSES AND TEACHING

This master's thesis studies the teaching of multigrade classes from the viewpoint of the teachers' experiences. In this chapter we introduce the theoretical framework of our research. First we define the terms used in the research. Next we introduce the historical overview of multigrade classes as well as the conditions in which they appear. Finally, we discuss the challenges in and benefits of multigrade classes and their teaching.

2.1 Defining Multigrade Classes

There are a number of terms that are used in the literature when referring to multigrade teaching, and they are often used as synonyms. These terms include, for example, multi-grade, multiage, non-graded, combination, mixed-age, composite and multilevel classes. However, in scientific research quite often different combinations of grades are referred to as multigrade or multiage classes (Kalaoja, 2006, 220-221; Mason, 1997; Veenman, 1995, 320-321).

Multigrade class is a class that is composed of mixed age children from more than one grade level and is taught by one teacher (Hargreaves, Montero, Chau, Sibli, & Thanh, 2001, 499; Kolstad & McFadden, 1998, 1; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007, 502; Quail & Smyth, 2014, 1). The formation of multigrade classes is normally due to necessity, and it is used as an administrative tool responding to a small or decreasing amount of pupils (Mariano & Kirby, 2009, 1; Veenman, 1997, 263). All multigrade classes are not similar, therefore their context needs to be taken into consideration. Results of one study about multigrade class cannot necessarily be applied to other types of multigrade classes. Factors such as the education and experience of the teachers, class sizes, and support networks are only a couple of examples that radically affect multigrade classes. (Cornish, 2006b, 1-2.)

Multiage classes, on the other hand, refer generally to classes in which pupils are mixed in terms of age due to pedagogical reasons and the teaching follows the pupils' level of knowhow and skills (Hoffman, 2003, 5; Merimaa, 1996, 10; Ong, Allison, & Haladyna, 2000, 206; Smit & Engeli, 2015). Multiage teaching, then again, is one method that can be applied to multigrade classes as well. In multiage teaching pupils from different ages are divided into groups according to their skill-level and know-how rather than grade level. In

practice, team teaching is often used to guarantee a successful implementation of multiage teaching. (Mason & Burns, 1995, 36; Opetushallitus, 2014, 39; Veenman, 1997, 263.)

The terms multigrade and multiage are closely linked together, and sometimes they are used as synonyms. However, as we have defined in this chapter, multiage teaching is one way of implementing the teaching in multigrade classes, therefore, in this research we will use multigrade class as a holistic term from now on. If needed, multiage class or multiage teaching are specifically mentioned for clarification.

2.2 The Current Situation and Conditions in which Multigrade Classes Appear

Most of the schools worldwide, especially in developed countries, teaching is organized in monograde classes, and these dominate the national educational systems also in Finland. Multigrade schools and classes operate within these systems but are often invisible to those who plan and reform the education systems. (Little, 2006, 4.) There are no valid statistics about the numbers of multigrade classes around the world since many countries do not collect even partial information about them. But the extent of the multigrade reality is there. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007, 1; Veenman, 1995, 320-321.)

There are no specific statistics about the amount of multigrade classes in Finland, and the percentages vary a lot. This can be explained by the various definitions of multigrade classes and different kinds of contexts in which multigrade classes appear. In 2012 the Provincial State Office executed a quantitative research about small schools and multigrade classes in the municipalities of Finland. Excluding the Åland Islands, 2,510 classes out of 15,287 classes were different kinds of multigrade classes, thus 16.4% altogether. One continuum of multigrade classes that consisted of grades 1–2, 3–4 and 5–6 was the most commonly used. (Aluehallintavirasto, 2013; Laitila & Wilén, 2014, 265-266.)

The extent of multigrade classes is even bigger if one includes special education, preparatory classes and part time studying in smaller groups, e.g. in religion classes (Holappa, 2014, 274; Opetushallitus, 2014; Opetushallitus, 2015). On the other hand, the Ministry of Education and Culture's statistics show that the percentage is lower, about 6.5% (Opetus- ja kulttuuri-ministeriö, 2013). From these varying numbers it can be concluded that the definition of multigrade classes is not clear. Even though these percentages vary, it can be stated that

multigrade classes exist in Finland, and they cannot be considered as marginalized phenomena. (Laitila & Wilén, 2014, 267.) However, they are not necessarily recognized by stakeholders working in the educational context (Holappa, 2014).

Little (2006) has categorized multigrade classes into ten different types by the current conditions that give rise to them (Little, 2006). Most of these types are very similar to each other and do not arise in Finland but in developing countries. Based on these types, the most common place to find multigrade classes in Finland are rural schools, which are often small schools (Hyry-Beihammer & Autti, 2014, 209; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007, 501). In small municipalities the amount of students who attend one school can be under thirty which leads inevitably to the fact that different grades need to be integrated into one class. (Kalaoja, 2006, 215-217.)

In some cases multigrade classes are formed temporarily due to the small amount of children in certain grade levels. In these situations, for example, the third and fourth grades are integrated together for one school year. (Laukkanen, 1981, 65; Mulryan-Kyne, 2007.) Policy-makers are obliged to take financial aspects into account and therefore, for instance, hiring two teachers for twenty students is rarely an option.

Moreover, in some schools multigrade classes are founded on purpose instead of monograde groups because the multigrade setting has pedagogical benefits (Little, 2004, 6.) The transition from teaching monograde classes to a multigrade setting requires a new set of attitudes and knowledge from the principal and teachers as well as understanding of how to organize and plan the teaching (Bacharach, Hasslen, & Anderson, 1995, ix). There are some schools in Finland in which multigrade classes are composed because of pedagogic reasons (Ahola, 2007, 33; Aluehallintavirasto, 2013). These schools are relatively rare but they can be found. For example, Poikkilaakso primary school and Roihuvuori primary school in Helsinki use multigrade classes for pedagogic reasons (Ahola, 2007; Hyyrö, 2015, 109-110). Furthermore, multiage schools are getting more and more common in Finland, but no research has been carried out regarding their current situation yet.

2.3 Historical Overview of Multigrade Classes and Teaching

In this chapter we introduce a few of the most essential developments regarding multigrade classes and their teaching, both internationally and nationally. When studying the history of

multigrade and monograde school systems, one has to examine the history of learning centuries back. The earliest observations on children's learning within local communities and families bare resemblance to the early stages of multigrade teaching in which pupils study in mixed-age groups. The history of monograde schooling is much shorter compared to the roots of multigrade schools and to the most contemporary educational systems. (Little, 2006, 9.)

The roots of institutionalized schooling can be found in the late Roman education. In those days there were normally only one teacher together with all the children, despite their age and the size of the group. (Morgan, 2001, 13-15.) The emergence of classes and classrooms took place during the European Renaissance between the 14th and 16th centuries. The shift from ungraded skill based learning to homogenous classes was slow and took over five centuries. (Lawton & Gordon, 2002, 177; Little, 2006, 12-14; Veenman, 1995, 366.) In 1804, Englishmen Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster established a monitorial school system which spread across Europe and became known as the Bell-Lancaster method. (Taylor, 1996, 4-7). The monitorial school system is often said to be the first step towards multigrade classes because in it the learners are divided into large classes according to their achievement level rather than according to their age (Hytönen, 1992, 21; Little, 2006, 15).

There are a number of theoretical and philosophical frameworks that focus on the development and education of children which form the foundation for multigrade classes. There is no specific theory behind multigrade classes and teaching which is why one has to study a number of learning theories. (Bacharach et al., 1995, 9; Hoffman, 2003, 6.) Especially the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky has been paid a lot of attention in literature when discussing teaching and learning in multigrade classes (Hyvärö, 2015, 77; Kalaoja, 2006, 223; Peltonen, 2010, 109; Veenman, 1995, 320-321).

Vygotsky (1896-1934) was interested in the social aspect of learning which lead to the formation of a concept called the zone of proximal development. According to his theory there are two levels of development: the actual level and the potential level. The actual level describes the level in which a child can solve tasks independently. The potential level, then again, refers to a child's learning that is most optimal when it is supported by an adult or a more knowledgeable peer. (Vygotsky, 1978, 86.) Certain amount of guidance and help enhance the child's learning, and therefore, independently the task would be impossible to execute. As the child makes progress, the amount of assistance can be diminished, and this

is called the scaffolding. (Crain, 2011, 246.) According to Vygotsky's theory, learning in a multigrade class would be a more beneficial way of learning for individual students, as the interaction with older or more knowledgeable peers constantly challenges a pupil's development.

Furthermore, some of the other theories referred to in the literature when discussing multigrade classes are the cognitive theory by Piaget, the social learning theory by Bandura, and psychosocial theory by Erikson (Aina, 2001, 220; Bacharach et al., 1995, 9.) In addition to the learning theories, there are two types of schools that support the pedagogy behind multigrade classes and teaching. These schools are the German Jenaplan school by Peter Petersen (1884–1952) which we will introduce in the following chapter, and Montessori school founded in Italy by Maria Montessori (1870-1952) (Hyry-Beihammer & Autti, 2014, 210; Hyyrö, 2015; Kalaoja, 2006, 222; Korpinen, 2010, 20; Raggl, 2015, 128). Moreover, we came across a child-centered pedagogy that can be used as an alternative theoretical basis for multigrade teaching. It is called the Freinet pedagogy and was created by a French educational reformer, Celestin Freinet (1896–1966). (Blackledge & Creese, 2014, 26; Hyyrö, 2015, 66.) This pedagogy emphasizes the link between the school context and the outside world. According to the theory, the starting point for teaching and learning is the pupils' prior knowledge and skills. (Paalasmaa, 2011).

The Finnish Context

In Finland multigrade classes and their teaching have had many different phases. As we mentioned earlier, the Bell-Lancaster method has had a huge impact on the development of multigrade classes and their teaching in Europe, and this is also the case in Finland. The method came to Finland in 1820, and it was considered an effective method when teaching large groups with mixed-aged pupils, and it spread to schools across the country. (Hyötyniemi, 1942, 120; Karttunen, 1972, 9-10.)

At first multigrade teaching was very teacher-centered, and the curriculum was made for separate grades without any common theme. In 1881, however, a slightly different form of the curriculum was developed for multigrade teaching called the *parallel curriculum* in which the grades are taught separately, yet a common theme is taken into consideration for all the grades. In practice this means that the teacher concentrates on one grade at a time, meanwhile other grades work independently. The second form of the curriculum implemen-

tation was the *alternating curriculum* (also known as curriculum rotation or multi-year curriculum cycles) which was established in 1904. According to this method, grades are taught as one group. For example a class that was formed from third and fourth graders, pupils study the third year curriculum the first year and the fourth year curriculum the next. (Cornish, 2006a, 19-20; Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 108; Hyyrö, 2015, 95-96; Kalaoja, 2006, 216-217; Kalaoja, 2010, 103-104.)

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the innovation in multigrade teaching in Finland emerged and was especially influenced by German pedagogy (Kalaoja, 2006, 216). One of these pedagogies was developed in the 1920s by a German professor Peter Petersen (1884-1952) who introduced a school model called the Jenaplan School (Hytönen, 1992, 21). Jenaplan schools emphasize community, unity and learning from each other which has many common resemblances to multigrade classes. The pedagogy highlights the idea that the ideal groups include variations in the pupil's maturity, intellectual accomplishments and interests which is also what multigrade classes provide. (Booth, 1990, 44.) The Jenaplan School has had an effect on the development of multigrade classes and teaching in the Finnish context since Finnish Professor Koskenniemi became acquainted with Petersen's work in the 1940's and started to promote the benefits of the pedagogy. Koskenniemi emphasized that the Jenaplan School would have had possibility of becoming the dominant model in the Finnish school system. (Hyyrö, 2015, 59; Korpinen, 2010, 20; Peltonen, 2010, 107.)

The educational system in Finland was reformed in 1972-1977, and the new National Core Curriculum was established for the compulsory school. Regarding multigrade classes, an expert group was set up by the Finnish National Board of Education to research and standardize multigrade classes and their teaching in 1974. The first multigrade class experiments started in 1972. (Kouluhallitus, 1980, 1-3; Laukkanen, 1978b, 1-17; Laukkanen et al., 1982, 26.) As a result, the amount of articles discussing multigrade teaching grew considerably in teacher's professional journals in the late 1970s (Hälinen, 1978; Jussila & Pakkanen, 1978; Laukkanen, 1978b; Lepistö, 1978; Tuunainen, Huopio, & Pehkonen, 1978).

Regarding multigrade classes and teaching, the biggest leap was taken in Finland in the 1970's when a new kind of *spiral curriculum* (also known as curriculum alignment) was developed. This curriculum was suitable for both monograde and multigrade classes so it offered more possibilities in terms of teaching. In the spiral curriculum, the classes study the same subject matter or common theme, even in combinations of four grades. The theme or

the topic is deepened and expanded in the upper grades. (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 108; Kalaoja, 2006, 217-219; Laukkanen, Muhonen, Ruuhijärvi, Similä, & Toivonen, 1981, 117-118; Laukkanen, 1981, 67.; Little, 2004, 14.)

2.4 Challenges in and Benefits of Multigrade Classes

There are many contradictory opinions on the benefits and challenges of multigrade classes and their teaching. What is considered as a challenge or as a benefit can depend a lot on individual experiences and the context of the multigrade class. On the one hand, it has been stated that having two or more grades in one class creates challenges in terms of class management, differentiation and teaching materials. On the other hand, they are considered to be a better pedagogic solution than monograde classes since they provide opportunities for flexible teaching, child-centered learning approaches and self-directed ways of studying, to name a few. (Kalaoja, 2006, 215; Little, 2004; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004; Vitikka, 2005, 4-5.) The challenges and benefits introduced in this chapter are very general and do not necessarily reflect on all types of multigrade classes.

2.4.1 Planning and Implementing the Teaching

The planning and the implementation of teaching include various aspects, but only the most relevant aspects in the multigrade class context in terms of this research are highlighted in this chapter. Not much research has been conducted on the teacher's experiences regarding the benefits of and challenges in planning and implementing the teaching of a multigrade class. Instead, most of the research conducted regarding multigrade classes concentrates on the student achievements. However, a few studies of the topic have been carried out (Little, 2004; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004; UNESCO/ APEID, 1989).

According to Mulryan-Kyne (2004), teachers think that the most challenging factors regarding the planning and the implementation of the teaching in multigrade classes are related to time. Teachers feel that they do not have enough time to focus on every grade level in every subject nor on every pupil's individual needs. They also think that it is a challenge to organize the lessons in a way that every pupil has suitable tasks. Furthermore, they emphasize that the organization and the planning require a lot of time in multigrade classes and also that classroom management is challenging in multigrade classes. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12.) Darmody & Smyth (2011) emphasize that teachers in multigrade classes find their job more

stressful than monograde class teachers, but then again, the amount of stress does not have an effect on teachers' job satisfaction since both kinds of teachers feel that they are satisfied with their jobs (Darmody & Smyth, 2011, 33). On the other hand, it has been concluded that teachers find multigrade setting a stimulating and interesting setting to work in as the atmosphere is normally busy and productive (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 11-12; Raggl, 2015, 129).

When it comes to planning and implementing the teaching, one of the most important things that a teacher needs to take into consideration is the National Core Curriculum. As Holappa (2014) highlights, the Finnish National Core Curriculum gives the overall guidelines and themes for planning and implementing the teaching, but the local and the school curricula have a noteworthy role as well. Teachers are given the freedom to choose how the contents of the curriculum are implemented in the classroom. (Holappa, 2014.) As mentioned before, there are three models that can be used when planning and implementing these contents in multigrade classes: the *parallel*, the *alternating* and the *spiral curriculum*.

In the *parallel curriculum* model, the pupils are taught separately according to their age and grade-specific curriculum. Kalaoja (2006, 216) argues that teachers often experience this method challenging. The parallel curriculum is commonly used if the multigrade class is founded due to a temporary solution. The lack of knowledge on how to implement multigrade teaching often leads to the use of the parallel curriculum since it is seen as a familiar way of organizing the teaching and making lesson plans especially if the teacher is used to teaching monograde classes. Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) conclude that the parallel curriculum is the most common teaching method in mathematics and literature as they are seen as challenging subjects to teach otherwise. Then again, the challenge of the parallel curriculum model is to keep all students busy, and this may lead to disruptive behavior. Moreover, if a multigrade class is a temporary solution to teaching, it is afterwards easy to change back to teaching monograde classes if the teacher has used parallel curriculum in the multigrade class. (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015.)

Mason and Burns (1995, 36; 1996; 1997) assert that according to their observations and interviews, the majority of teachers use the parallel curriculum model in multigrade classes which can have negative effects on implementing the teaching. They discuss how, especially in mathematics and literature, the use of the parallel curriculum model decreases the curriculum coverage, leads to complex classroom management, reduces the pupils' time on the

tasks and increases the teacher's time on teaching. (Mason & Burns, 1995, 36; Mason & Burns, 1996; Mason, 1997.)

In the *alternating curriculum* model, the grades follow the same timetable. This method is less time-consuming for the teacher in terms of planning; therefore it diminishes the feeling of having full hands. (Cornish, 2006a, 18-20.) The grades are normally formed in pairs of 1-2, 3-4 and 5-6 which means that each year the pupils in the class go to the upper grade with those pupils that are in the same grade level. Thus, half of the pupils in those kinds of multigrade classes change every year. (Hyyrö, 2015, 96.) This can be seen disadvantageous in terms of, for example, the development of the pupils' social skills because the pupils get attached to only those pupils who are in the same grade-level.

Moreover, the alternating curriculum model has faced some other challenges. It is seen challenging for those pupils who need to move to another school that follows the curriculum in different order or who start the school in an odd year, and thus, start from the aims of the upper graders. From a teacher's point of view, this way of organizing multigrade teaching is not that different from monograde teaching. Even though the class is organized like a multigrade class the teaching is implemented as in a monograde class. What the teacher may find burdening is that he or she needs to follow two curricula. (Cornish, 2006a, 18-20.)

The third way of implementing the curriculum is the *spiral curriculum* model in which the grades study a common theme or topic which is then deepened and expanded in the upper grades. This model is often seen more beneficial for the pupils' learning than the parallel or the alternating curricula because in this model, the vertical integration of subject matters works better, differentiation can be implemented more easily, and it provides possibilities for teaching the grades together. In Finland the spiral curriculum model did not receive a warm welcome by the teachers in the 70's. This may be due to the fact that at that time the methods of teaching were very teacher centered. (Kalaoja, 2006, 218-219; Laukkanen et al., 1982, 26-27.) Nowadays the teaching has changed, and integration is used in monograde classes as well. Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) found out in their research that the teachers of Finnish rural schools apply the spiral curriculum when they search for common themes for the grades (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015).

Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) have studied different kinds of teaching practices that are used in multigrade teaching in Finnish and Austrian rural schools. They have identified

two main strategies for teaching: practices that aim at reducing and overcoming the heterogeneity of the students, and practices that aim at capitalizing on the heterogeneity. The practices that reduce the heterogeneity include, for example, the parallel curriculum model and the alternating curriculum model. Then again, the practices that capitalize on heterogeneity are peer tutoring, personal work plans and free work as they are based on the idea of heterogeneity being normal. The focus of these practices is on individualized learning, and they are thought to increase cognitive and social development of the pupils. (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015.)

In addition to the practices capitalizing on the heterogeneity, another way of planning and implementing teaching in multigrade classes is to use the multiage teaching method. The core of multiage teaching is that the pupils can proceed according to their personal level of knowhow and skills, not according to their age (Merimaa, 1996, 10; Ong et al., 2000, 206; Smit & Engeli, 2015). The method of multiage teaching can be implemented in two ways. First of all, the whole school philosophy can be based on multiage teaching, and thus all teaching is organized according to the concept. Secondly, it can be used as a teaching method in some lessons. (Hyyrö, 2015, 108-109.) In multigrade classes multiage teaching can be put into practice in various ways, and the concept of multiage teaching can be present in many lessons. For example, the spiral curriculum is a way to include multiage teaching because in it the differentiation is easily done and all the grades are following the same topic. A common way to include multiage teaching in multigrade classes is co-operating the teaching with parallel grades. This means that the teachers can divide the classes, for example, in mathematics lessons according to the children's level of knowhow. This improves the motivation of the pupils and eases the teachers' workload as the class is more homogenous. Also joint projects can be carried out between the classes, and in them the pupils learn teamwork skills and the teaching is organized with pupil centered learning (Hyyrö, 2015, 96). (Leeds & Marshak, 2002.) In some studies it is difficult to distinguish the multiage and the multigrade teaching because the definitions vary notably.

One essential aspect related to the planning and implementation of teaching is the learning materials. In order to guarantee effective teaching strategies for multigrade teaching, the learning materials need to be sufficient and support the learning in a multigrade setting. The materials should provide tools for the teacher to be able to help and give instructions to a group of children while others can work either individually, in pairs or in groups. Also a number of self-study materials should be available for the children to ensure differentiation,

and the teacher should use them as a part of the teaching strategy. (Laukkanen et al., 1981, 153-154; Little, 2004, 16.) According to Hoffman (2003), teachers should plan their lessons so that the activities can be adapted to serve the varying skills and learning styles of the students and so that they would enable them to proceed according to their level (Hoffman, 2003, 12).

The reality is, however, that there are not much adequate materials available for multigrade classes and teaching. Mulryan-Kyne (2004) states that 16% of teachers considered the textbooks inadequate as they are not made for multigrade classes. One of the challenges that multigrade class teachers face with learning materials is the fact that they still need to prepare most of the material by themselves. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 15.) On the other hand, multigrade classes offer plenty of possibilities for differentiation and variation when it comes to lesson planning and teaching, and the freedom of making one's own materials can be beneficial. Variation makes the teaching intriguing for the children as well as for the teacher. (Kaikkonen & Lindh, 1990, 68.) The way in which a teacher organizes the learning is, after all, one of the main factors that affect teaching and can create differences in ways of implementing multigrade teaching (Cornish, 2006c, 2).

The National Core Curriculum is a key factor in planning and implementing the teaching; however, it often emphasizes teaching in monograde classes and is designed for those purposes. Therefore, it does not meet the needs of multigrade classes and their teaching. In the current Finnish National Core Curriculum from 2004, organizing teaching in a multigrade class context is mentioned in one paragraph (Opetushallitus, 2004, 13). However, The Finnish National Board of Education has taken the multigrade classes into account in renewing the National Core Curriculum in 2016 (Aluehallintavirasto, 2013). A team of experts has been established in order to examine small schools and multigrade teaching for the new National Core Curriculum (Opetushallitus, 2016) which is implemented in the Finnish educational system in the autumn of 2016. The new National Core Curriculum emphasizes the fact that the local curriculum planned for any school has to be applicable also to multigrade teaching (Opetushallitus, 2014). The new curriculum includes multiage teaching, multigrade teaching and, as a new topic, transdisciplinary themes, which are clear improvements from the multigrade perspective since they ease the implementation of multigrade classes.

2.4.2 Opportunities for Pupils' Learning

In this chapter we discuss the opportunities that multigrade classes provide for the pupils' learning by introducing some studies that have been carried out related to the topic. Multigrade classes have been studied internationally as well as nationally to some extent, but for example according to Kalaoja (2006), the research on multigrade classes is not sufficient and has mostly been carried out before the 1990's (Kalaoja, 2006, 226). Moreover, given the wide prevalence of multigrade classes in the world, relatively little research has discussed the pupils' learning outcomes or teaching approaches regarding multigrade classes (Quail & Smyth, 2014, 80).

Studies that have been conducted regarding the learning outcomes of the pupils in multigrade classes often compare the learning achievements of pupils in multigrade classes with those in monograde classes. One of the latest studies conducted on the matter was carried out by Quail & Smyth (2014), and it concludes that pupils' learning results are quite similar regardless of whether they study in a multigrade or a monograde class. On the other hand, Leuven & Ronning (2011) argue that pupils achieve higher learning results if they study in a multigrade class.

The most prominent and the most cited studies regarding multigrade classes and pupils' learning outcomes are by Veenman (1995, 320-321; 1996; 1997) and Mason and Burns (1995, 36; 1996; 1997). They have studied and compared the learning outcomes of multigrade classes and monograde classes from a wide range of countries. Veenman (1995, 320-321; 1996; 1997) concludes that there are no significant differences between the cognitive and non-cognitive achievements between pupils in multigrade classes and monograde classes. On the contrary, Mason and Burns (1995, 36; 1996; 1997) criticize Veenman's findings. According to them, Veenman fails to take into consideration the fact that the pupils who study in multigrade classes are often selected to those classes deliberately by the principal. The formation of a multigrade class can be a temporary solution; thus, knowing the fact that the pupils will only study in the class for some period of time, the principal can place the most qualified teacher and the best pupils in the class. Therefore, Mason and Burns conclude that the impacts of studying in a multigrade class are only slightly negative on the pupils' achievement. If the principal did not affect the class formation and the pupils were randomly selected, the effects on the pupils' achievement would be much more negative.

When it comes to the pupils' learning outcomes and achievements in multigrade classes, one of the advantages that studying in multigrade classes provides for the pupils' cognitive learning is flexibility (Miller, 1994, 9; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 11). Pupils can move forward in their learning in their own pace and according to their level of development without being left behind (Hoffman, 2002, 47). Flexibility in learning and teaching also decreases behavioral problems when children can work independently and according to their own skills and needs (Aina, 2001, 221; Peltonen, 2010, 105).

Due to the fact that multigrade classes are very heterogeneous in terms of the pupils' skills and knowledge, differentiation is a natural way of organizing the teaching. Teachers use differentiation as an effective method to meet the pupils' individual needs and goals. (Karlberg-Granlund, 2010, 53.) According to Mulryan-Kyne's study (2004), especially lower-achieving pupils benefit from studying in a multigrade class as teachers can notice their learning difficulties at an early stage and differentiate the teaching according to each pupils' needs (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 9). In practice, for example, the lower achieving pupils can spend more time on some topics than the others, and the teacher can give them easier tasks. The ones who learn faster, then again, can be offered a chance to proceed to more challenging tasks. (UNESCO/ APEID, 1989.)

Mulryan-Kyne (2004) has studied teachers' perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of multigrade classes from both the teachers' and the pupils' perspective. According to her, multigrade classes are seen beneficial especially in terms of the pupils' cognitive learning. The multigrade setting provides the pupils with possibilities to develop their independent learning skills; they learn to take initiative and improve their study, research and organizational skills. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 9.)

The parallel curriculum model is one way of implementing the teaching in multigrade classes. As we mentioned earlier, according to Kalaoja (2006, 216) this model can create some challenges in terms of teaching and learning, but some academics such as Rakow (2012) consider it beneficial. Rakow states that using this model can have positive influences on the pupils' cognitive learning in terms of revising the contents of the subjects (Rakow, 2012, 36). Due to the fact that teaching two different curricula takes place within the same class, the pupils inevitably observe what is taught to the other grade, and thus the younger pupils can already learn something about the next year's curriculum. Furthermore, the older pupils

can revise and deepen their learning while listening to topics that they are already familiar with. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 10.)

In addition to the positive effects on the cognitive learning outcomes, there are also studies that have focused on the social advantages that studying in a multigrade class can have (Little, 2004, 11). One of the most visible advantages of multigrade classes is that they are an ideal environment for the children to interact and collaborate with each other. (Aina, 2001, 219; Aina, 2001, 219; Bacharach et al., 1995, 9; Laukkanen, 1978a, 83; Laukkanen, 1978a, 83; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12-14.; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12-14.) Through collaboration children learn to make compromises, learn to use self-evaluation and reflection and they become better risk-takers. Also the children's self-esteem as well as the class atmosphere improve. (Ball, 2006, 4; Hess, 2001, 10.)

As we mention in chapter 2.3, from a theoretical point of view, Vygotsky's theory and the concepts of *zone of proximal development* and *scaffolding* are commonly adapted in the learning situations in multigrade classes (Vygotsky, 1978, 86). Multigrade classes are also very heterogeneous, and the pupils' levels of development vary cognitively and socially. Due to these factors, the pupils are often divided into small groups which are heterogeneous in terms of, for example, ability and age, and the aim is to get the pupils to collaborate and share their knowledge according to their skill levels. (Hoffman, 2002, 49). Using this kind of peer tutoring offers opportunities to develop the pupils' learning in the class both cognitively and socially, despite their age and level of knowhow. In peer tutoring the higher achieving and/or the older pupils can improve and deepen their learning by teaching and helping the others. On the other hand, the lower achieving and/or younger pupils learn from the others. (Little, 2004, 10-11.)

Peer tutoring takes place in two ways in multigrade classes. Firstly, it is considered to be formal when it is organized and planned by the teacher, or secondly, it can be informal when pupils spontaneously and incidentally help each other in the tasks. Informal peer tutoring is common and natural in multigrade classes but also formal peer tutoring is frequently used. (Cornish, 2006a, 21; Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 109.) Generally speaking, children often learn better from their peers than from their teachers, and in multigrade classes the co-working is part of everyday life (Lester & Constable, 2006). The skill of taking others into consideration grows naturally. What's more, pupils feel less competition in a multigrade

setting because they are in various levels and have many different objectives set for themselves. In addition to this, they learn to accept and respect differences among the other pupils. (Aina, 2001, 219; Karlberg-Granlund, 2010, 53.)

If the classes have been organized as a continuum of multigrade classes, there are older pupils who have been in that particular class for longer than the younger ones. Since the older ones already know the routines and the rules of the class and the school, they can guide the younger ones and set an example for them. This kind of behavior stretching is seen as an opportunity that the multigrade classes provide. (Hoffman, 2002, 50; Little, 2004, 11; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 10; Opetushallitus, 2014, 36.) Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) as well as Mulryan-Kyne (2004) also point out that in multigrade classes the teachers have an opportunity to get to know their pupils and their families well since they have pupils from each of the grade level for at least two years. This allows them to take the pupils' individual needs into consideration and ensure continuous learning for the pupils. (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 109; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12.)

There are many contradictory opinions on the benefits and challenges of multigrade classes and their teaching. What is considered as a challenge or a benefit can depend a lot on individual experiences and the context of the multigrade class. On the one hand, it has been stated that having two or more grades in one class creates challenges in terms of class management, differentiation and teaching materials. On the other hand, they are considered to be a better pedagogic solution than monograde classes since they provide opportunities for flexible teaching, child-centered learning approaches and self-directed ways of studying, to name a few. (Kalaoja, 2006, 215; Little, 2004; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004; Vitikka, 2005, 4-5.) The challenges and benefits introduced in this chapter are very general and do not necessarily reflect on all types of multigrade classes.

3 METHODOLOGICAL JOURNEY DURING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

For this master's thesis, we conducted a qualitative research. The research questions and methodology were modified several times during our research journey, and in the beginning the research methodology was a combination of phenomenographical and narrative research. However, narrative research was chosen to be the most suitable methodology for this research as it focuses strongly on the narratives (=stories), and the experiences of the teachers were reflected through these narratives (Heikkinen, 2015, 151; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, 2-3; Polkinghorne, 1995, 5-6). Moreover, the usage of narrative analysis allowed us to examine each interview and experience individually which was relevant for this research.

In this chapter we first introduce the research questions and objectives, then look into the narrative research in detail and discuss our data collection process. Next, the data analysis is carefully explained, and finally the ethics and validity of this research are analyzed.

3.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated:

1. What kind of experiences do teachers have of working in multigrade classes in relation to their biographical contexts?
2. What kind of challenges and benefits occur in the teachers' experiences regarding multigrade classes?

The overall aim of this research was to find out what kind of experiences teachers have of working in multigrade classes. The term *working* includes various aspects of a teacher's job, but we did not want to limit the first research question by using specific themes. Every teacher had their individual experiences and approaches to the matter, and the research process was completely data driven. The first research questions is answered in chapter 4 in the three teacher's biographies.

Furthermore, the second research question aimed at finding out what kind of challenges and benefits occur in the teachers' experiences regarding multigrade classes. The aim was not to

gain generalizations about the challenges in and benefits of multigrade classes, but to understand where the challenges and benefits arise from and how can the teachers affect them. The second research question is answered in chapter five but slightly from two different perspectives. First, the challenges and benefits are discussed in terms of the teachers' work and the planning and implementation of the teaching. Secondly, the teachers' experiences of the benefits and challenges are focused on in regard to the pupils' development.

3.2 Narrative Research

Narrative research has a long tradition in the fields of philosophy, study of literature and linguistics. During the recent decades the interest towards narrative research has increased and spread to other fields of sciences. This has also been the case in educational sciences in the early 21st century. (Elliott, 2005, 3; Heikkinen, 2010, 143-144; Lieblich et al., 1998, 4-5.) The basis of narrative research lies in the spoken or written narratives (=stories), but narratives may also be documents or group conversations. (Creswell, 2013, 71.) Amia Lieblich et al. (1998, 2) define that narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials, and it is often used in educational sciences, for example, when researching teachers. The word narrative, however, can refer to number of meanings depending how it is used in a research (Elliott, 2005, 36-37; Kaasila, 2008, 43; Polkinghorne, 1995, 6). According to Heikkinen (2010), the concept of narrative has been used in four different meanings in the scientific discussions. In this research used this concept in three aspects: firstly, as a constructivist methodology which emphasizes the perception in which people construct their knowledge and identity through narratives; secondly, as research data (=stories by the teachers); and thirdly, as a narrative analysis, which configures a new narrative and highlights the themes that stand out. (Heikkinen, 2010, 145-152.)

Education, teaching and learning can be seen as individual or collectivistic construction of narratives. Narratives are a means to develop one's personal and professional growth, and on the other hand, a main tool in teacher research. Therefore, the use of narratives is a natural approach in researching teachers and how they implement and understand their teaching. (Syrjälä, 2015, 262.) The focus is in the narratives as a source and as a constructor of the knowledge. The aim of a narrative research is to explore the different perspectives that people have regarding the same phenomenon. (Elliott, 2005, 3-4.) We were interested in finding out how the teachers have experienced the work in multigrade classes and the challenges

and benefits occurring in them, and thus narrative research fitted into this purpose excellently.

3.3 Data Collection with Half-Structured Narrative and Theme Interview

In narrative research the data can be collected through various methods, such as interviews, documents, pictures and observations (Creswell, 2013, 71). In general, interviews are one of the most common ways to collect data in a qualitative research, and for that matter, in a narrative research. The idea of an interview is very simple; if we want to know what someone thinks, it makes sense to ask them about it. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009, 72.) When we are researching individuals we are interested in their experiences and thoughts, and the aim is to get close to the people that we are researching (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008, 16). Thus a half-structured combination between theme and narrative interview was used to collect data in the empirical part of this research. This combination is a common practice also in narrative research, and it fitted the purpose of our research well.

The starting point of a theme interview is to find out what the interviewee thinks about the already set up themes, and thus the method of a theme interview was suitable for our research. The themes were carefully set in certain order to ensure a continuous flow. The half-structured interview, then again, allowed the interviewers to add clarifying questions as well as change the order of the themes if necessary, and the interviewees could answer the questions freely. (Eskola & Vastamäki, 2015, 24-27; Ruusuvuori, Tiittula, & Aaltonen, 2005, 11-12.) A narrative interview differs from a structural interview notably as a lot of space and time are given for the interviewee and their narratives. The aim of a narrative interview is to get the interviewee to share their most influential experiences and narratives. The narrative questions normally start with "*Tell...*" which encourages to more descriptive and story-like answers. (Kaasila, 2008, 45-46; Polkinghorne, 1995, 6.)

The original plan was to find a combination of teachers who work in different types of multigrade classes; a few teachers from small schools in which the multigrade classes are formed by necessity, a few from multigrade classes that are integrated into monograde schools, and a few from multiage schools which are a deliberate pedagogical choice. This was, however, a bigger challenge than we could have ever expected. The majority of multigrade classes in Finland are formed out of necessity in rural areas. Furthermore, the schools that have multigrade classes integrated in their systems were hard to find because there is no information

available. Multiage schools were the most challenging ones to find as there are no statistics about their existence, they are a relatively new phenomenon in Finland, and the schools do not necessarily have the information even on their internet page. We had to rely on what we had heard from other teachers and teacher students as well as on one Opettaja-magazine article on the matter (Ahola, 2007).

After sending hundreds of emails, asking about it in different Facebook groups and making several phone calls, we managed to find five teachers who were willing to participate in our study. Unfortunately we did not manage to get an interview from any multiage class teacher. Thus, we ended up having three small school teachers and two multigrade teachers that worked within monograde schools. At this point, we decided to leave multiage teaching aside from a deeper investigation in our research.

When we formulated the interview questions, narrative questions were used as the base. In addition, to ensure that answers about certain aspects regarding working in multigrade classes were attained, we created themes that supported the research questions. For this we utilized our Bachelor's thesis "*Discovering Multigrade Classes*" (Jyrkinen & Laurila, 2014). At that point, one of our research questions was related to planning and implementing the teaching in multigrade classes which is why we categorized the questions into the following themes. These were considered the most suitable for this research. The interview questions can be found from Appendix 1.

1. Curriculum Adaption
2. Learning Materials
3. The awareness and assumptions of stake-holders about multigrade classes
4. Cognitive learning achievement
5. Social and personal effects on learning

The aim was to interview the teachers in a private place in which interruptions would be minimalized. It was important that the place of the interview would be relaxing, quiet and natural as possible to ensure the most valid results. This aim was successfully reached. Since all the teachers that we interviewed did not work in Oulu, some of the interviews were conducted via skype. To build a relaxing atmosphere and to gain trust between the interviewer and interviewee, we first chatted a little before starting the interview as Eskola and Vastamäki suggest should be done. (Eskola & Vastamäki, 2015, 30-34.) We did not give the interviewees too much information about our research beforehand since it could have had an

effect on their narratives. All the interviews were recorded with a phone and a recorder to avoid any problems, for example, loss of information (Elliott, 2005, 33). Furthermore, a few practice interviews were held to minimize the interviewers' nervousness and formal approach to the interviews.

3.4 Data Analysis

Our data analysis is divided into two parts as the analysis depends on the research questions and their aims. Lieblich et al. (1998) have formed a model in which they categorize the narrative analysis into four types that ease applying the approach to the needed context. The four narrative analysis types form two pairs: the holistic-categorical content reading and the holistic-categorical form reading. (Lieblich et al., 1998.) Our first research question was based on the holistic-content reading in which the analysis takes into consideration the entire narrative and its content is focused on through certain aspect. In this case the focused aspect was how teachers have experienced working in a multigrade class. Our second research question, then again, fell under categorical-content reading as we did not concentrate on the complete narrative but the separate parts of it with the defined themes. This way we ensured the analysis answers to our research questions in a best possible way.

Polkinghorne (1995) has divided the analysis process into analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. According to Polkinghorne, these are two completely separate ways of approaching narrative analysis. Narrative analysis focuses on creating a new narrative (=story) based on the existing narrative, and it does not concentrate on certain topics or categories. The aim is to configure a new narrative from the data that emphasizes the wanted perspective which in this case is how the teacher has experienced working in a multigrade class and what types of factors have influenced the experiences. Analysis of narratives, on the other hand, concentrates on categorizing the narratives according to certain themes or units (Heikkinen, 2010, 149-150). (Polkinghorne, 1995, 6-15.) In our research these themes were the challenges in and benefits of multigrade classes.

3.4.1 Narrative Analysis

This chapter discusses the narrative analysis regarding research question one. The data analysis started straight after the interviews as the recorded data was downloaded and prepared for analysis. In this case it meant that the interviews were transcribed manually by using Google drive. (Creswell, 2014; Rantala, 2015, 108-109.) Utilizing a computer program for transcribing was considered unnecessary as the emphasis was not on how things were said but on what was said. This allowed us to really apply our minds into the data, and we became familiarized with the contents already in the first phase. Google drive allowed us to modify the documents together in real time and to add memos and it was, therefore, suitable for our way of analysis.

After the data had been transcribed it was read through once more while listening to the interviews. As we divided the transcriptions of the interviews we also thoroughly read each other's transcriptions while listening to the original recordings to ensure the validity and the uniformity of the transcriptions. Next, we started the actual analysis.

The holistic-content reading was chosen for these research questions as the analysis takes into consideration the entire story and focuses on the content of the story by emphasizing certain aspects. Hence, we first scanned through the data thoroughly and highlighted the parts that we considered to be the most important and the most essential regarding our research questions. We were looking for the noteworthy experiences that stood out from the narrative. In a narrative analysis it is important to separate the narratives that are relevant for the research questions (Heikkinen, 2010, 143-144), and this is why only three narratives were chosen for a closer examination. They were the following: Kaija – an experienced multigrade teacher who has a long history of teaching multigrade classes in small village schools, Helka – an experienced multigrade class teacher who has dedicated her career for multigrade teaching and Niina – a newly graduated teacher who is eager and motivated to teach multigrade classes. These cases represent different types of experiences about multigrade classes.

Three biographies were created from Kaija's, Helka's and Niina's interviews by using emplotting. This means that the aim was to include a retrospective explanation in the biographies. (Kaasila, 2008, 47-51; Polkinghorne, 1995, 12.) To ensure the retrospective approach, the biographies concentrate on the most meaningful experiences by these teachers regarding multigrade classes. Questions 1-5, 7 and 19 of our interview questions were mostly used in creating the biographies (Appendix 1). This is because the nature of these questions

emphasized the fact that the teachers were encouraged to talk more freely about multigrade classes without any given framework or themes. After picking up the most significant experiences, the biographies were constructed in a chronological way. This distinguishes these biographies from a description and ensures a comprehensible outcome. (Elliott, 2005, 8-9.) The emphasis was on how their experiences regarding multigrade classes have changed during their career and what kind of factors have influenced the experiences.

3.4.2 Analysis of Narratives

As regards to the research question two, the analysis of narratives was used as it concentrates on finding categories in the narratives which in this case meant challenges and benefits (Polkinghorne, 1995, 5-6). After the data collection process, the first steps were the same as described in the previous chapter; the transcriptions were double-checked and carefully read through by both of us without any presumption. Once the full transcriptions were completed, the next phase was to use the process of coding to reduce the data into themes (Creswell, 2014). The highlighted parts were coded with colors according to our constantly shaped themes to make the transcriptions clearer and more understandable. After going through the themes several times, we classified them into ten themes (Appendix 2). The coding process was led by the data but guided by the research (Rantala, 2015, 111). We left our presumptions aside, and examined the data as open-mindedly as possible.

It was interesting to see how our perceptions based on the five original categories and the results from the data intertwined. The categories were modified roughly and increased notably. Coding is also a link between the theoretical framework and the data, and thus its purpose is not limited to just labeling the data. This way the coding creates new links and connections that would not have necessarily emerged otherwise. (Rantala, 2015, 112.) Here is an example of how we did the coding from the transcription of Laura's interview (Appendix 3, Laura).

INTERVIEWEE: (...) What was the question again? (laugh)

INTERVIEWER 2: What is the first thing that comes to your mind (regarding multigrade class teaching)?

INTERVIEWEE: Well. I guess the fact **there's a lot of planning** and especially now when I am starting my third fourth year as a teacher in this multi-grade class well **I have gained**, lets say, **confidence, and I do not have to plan as much as during my first years.** (*pink*) I do not have to think as much as before what the others are doing when I'm teaching the other half. That is one thing. But the thing is that in a multigrade class when you have lessons with the whole class, the **bigger ones can help the smaller ones** (*light blue*) so that is like really wonderful how **they become really helpful**. And in a way, **the children working independently** (*red*) is probably **much better in a multigrade class compared to a normal class** in which there is only one grade-level. Then they (like) learn that they have **to independently clean up after themselves** and that kinds of things. That is probably the thing that comes to my mind first. The kids being **independent and helpings their friends**, and then **the planning in the teachers' work**, that it demands a lot, at least during the first years.

Meaningful aspects or experiences regarding multigrade classes were highlighted (bolded) and those parts were examined by coding them according to our themes (colors). All the highlighted parts did not fall clearly into a certain theme but were meaningful in regards of the first research question which is why they were only highlighted. Some of the themes, for example social effects, are quite broad and include various aspects. To ensure that we stayed on the same page, the analysis was done together at all times. This means that communication and brainstorming were present throughout the analysis process even though they were not documented.

Furthermore, we concluded that ten categories would be too many. Therefore, broader themes within these categories were looked for. We decided to make a table (Appendix 2) which included the themes from all the interviewees. The second table measured the experiences and their level of relevance and interest to the research questions. (Eskola, 2015, 197.) In order to do this, we used the following scale:

- Tells something but not relevant
- + Gives some insight
- ++ Interesting
- +++ Extremely interesting

To ensure the coherence of the research, we tried to find broader categories from these results were looked for. At this point of the analysis, the data was leading the process and only the most outstanding themes from the data were examined. The final themes that reinforced the research questions ended up being the following: **planning and implementing the teaching, the pupils' cognitive development and the pupils' social development**. Based on the table we decided to give up the themes of *developing one's professional skills* and *classroom management* due to lack of significance. Also, after estimating the connections between the themes, when we were looking for larger combinations, *importance of a colleague/ principal*-theme was dropped out as it did not connect naturally to our final categories.

The final result of the analysis included two different approaches to the challenges and benefits: the teachers' perspective and the pupils' perspective. The teachers' perspective includes *planning and implementing the teaching*. When it comes to the experiences regarding the pupils' development, the themes were divided under two main themes: the *pupils' cognitive development* and the *pupils' social development*. The division between the ten themes can be found in Appendix 2.

The writing of chapter five was the result of process writing. After the themes were categorized, we wrote the chapter theme by theme. First, all the parts that were highlighted with the theme colors were read, and a few suitable quotes were chosen for a more thorough examination. Next, the narratives were linked to each other smoothly. The aim was to make the analysis process evident in order to ensure that anyone can follow our reflections and that the origins of the conclusions are transparent. Quotes were used to reason the interpretations but also to describe the data with examples, as Moilanen and Rähkä suggest should be done (Moilanen & Rähkä, 2015, 69). Finally, the categories were combined with the theoretical framework and conclusions were made holistically (Niikko, 2003).

3.5 Research Ethics and Validity

When it comes to ethics, there are many perspectives that need to be taken into account during several phases of the research process. The researcher should not pressure anyone to take part in their research as the participation should be voluntary and anonymous, and the participants need to be aware of the purpose of the study. (Creswell, 2013, 57-59; Lichtman, 2013, 53.) In this qualitative research we were researching teachers, interviews being our main means of data collection; hence, the number of stakeholders was relatively small.

Regarding the validity, the main question researchers should bear in mind is how well the data answers to the phenomena that is researched. This measures the inner validity of the research. The outer validity consists of the outcomes and conclusions, and if the inner validity is weak, there is not much left for the outer validity. (Elliott, 2005, 22; Hakala, 2015, 23-24.) The inner validity was taken into account during the whole research process, and the final research questions were equivalent to the phenomena being researched. This guaranteed the inner validity and formed the basis for the outer validity.

In order to provide trustworthy evidence, the method of triangulation is also often used in qualitative research. Triangulation means that multiple sources, methods, researchers and theories are used within one research. (Creswell, 2013, 215.) In this research process, there were two researchers which can enhance the reliability of the research since the data is collected, analyzed and interpreted together, and there was a chance to constantly discuss about and reflect on the findings.

During the interviews, the situation was made as comfortable and as natural as possible in order to get good results. The researcher should not use participants just for gathering data, but he or she should make them feel important and acknowledge their value to the research. Building trust is a key factor for reliable results, and the place where the interview is held is essential for ensuring a relaxed atmosphere. (Creswell, 2013, 57-59; Eskola & Vastamäki, 2015, 30-33.) In the beginning of the interview, the interviewees were asked about their job history, background and reason for choosing a teachers profession to create a more relaxing atmosphere and to gain trust. Also, so called easy questions and the short answer questions are asked in the first half of the interview to ensure that the interviewee feels competent in answering the questions before going into the more specific theme questions. We chose neither to explain the objectives of the research to our interviewees nor allowed them to see the questions in advance to ensure valid results. Furthermore, respecting the privacy of the participants was essential with regard to analyzing the data and reporting the results.

The half-structured interview allowed us to add clarifying questions as well as change the order of the themes if necessary, and the interviewees could answer the questions freely (Eskola & Vastamäki, 2015, 24-27; Ruusuvuori et al., 2005, 11-12). Regarding this matter, we noticed a big difference between our way of interviewing the first teacher and the last one. This does not indicate that we did not get a good data from the first one, but during the interviews we, as interviewers, developed ourselves a lot and got a more specified answers

towards the end of the data collection process which ensures a more thorough analysis and interpretation.

When a researcher uses the narrative analysis, they should be critical in analyzing the narratives in terms of how truthful and accurate they are in relation to reality (Heikkinen, 2010, 152-153). Researchers do not have direct access to a person's narratives, and all of them are influenced by the way the person talks and by the interaction between the interviewee and the researcher and by the researcher's interpretation (Riessman, 1993, 8). There is always a chance for understatement or exaggeration. Especially regarding the Finnish people, generally speaking it is common Finns to diminish and be modest about their achievements and success.

When it comes to the reliability of the research, the techniques used for analyzing the data should be clearly established and implemented. Moreover, if there are any presumptions regarding the topic, they should be mentioned too. (Heikkinen, Huttunen, & Syrjälä, 2007, 11-12.) In this research we had to be as transparent as possible and report all the relevant aspects. Every aspect regarding the personal or academic position of the researcher that may influence the study was written down. Moreover, it was essential that we were aware of and reduced our own perceptions towards the topic while analyzing the data.

When it comes to a qualitative research, the validity and reliability are always at risk. The trustworthiness of the participants cannot be completely guaranteed. There are always factors behind the answers that cannot be seen when interviewing people, and this needs to be taken into account in order to present the results accordingly. In this research we have concluded that one cannot make universal generalizations from the five individual experiences. The experiences of the teachers varied a lot, and they are dependent on the context and setting in which the multigrade class exists.

As we reflected the research process, an issue related to the interviews came up. The thesis is written in English but the teachers were interviewed in Finnish. This creates a challenge in terms of the data. Because we quote the data in our thesis, parts of it had to be translated into English. Using translated material could have an effect on the reliability of the research since there is always a chance that the original message has not come across in the translation. To diminish the misunderstandings, a professional translator was used for translating the quotes. In order to ensure the coherence of the results, the original Finnish translations of each quote can be found in Appendix 3. We have coded the translations to make it easier

to find the correct translation and we have placed the codes in the end of each quote. We have constructed the codes according to the first letter of the name of the interviewee and the number in which the quotes appear in the text, for example Laura, L9.

4 BIOGRAPHIES OF THREE TEACHERS WORKING IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSES

As we mentioned before, we interviewed five teachers for this research. In this chapter we have chosen to present three differing viewpoints on multigrade teaching. Kaija's viewpoint comes from a long history of teaching a multigrade class in a small village school. Helka is also an experienced multigrade class teacher who has dedicated her career for multigrade teaching, and the third point of view is from Niina, a novice teacher who is eager and motivated to teach multigrade classes. In this chapter we have left out the biographies of Tommi and Laura since their experiences were quite similar to the other three. However, they are included in the analysis in chapter 5.

All the three interviewed teachers were working as multigrade teachers at the time of their interviews. We considered Niina as novice as she had worked less than five years as a primary school teacher. Niina and Kaija were working in small schools, and Helka in a monograde school that had one continuum of multigrade classes. Their classes were constructed from grades 1–2, 3–4 and 5–6.

This chapter concentrates on the individual experiences of the teachers regarding multigrade classes. First, we will shortly introduce the teachers' background, and then we discuss the most significant experiences in their career regarding multigrade classes. Based on the narratives, we have emphasized the challenges and benefits that they have come across while teaching multigrades classes and how they have coped with them.

4.1 Kaija – From the Small Village School Perspective

Kaija has a long history as a multigrade teacher in a small school. She is from a small town in Finland, and she was a pupil in a multigrade class herself. She has now been a multigrade teacher for over 20 years apart from her absence during her maternity leaves and from working some years as a special education teacher. Kaija ended up studying to become a teacher even though being a multigrade teacher, or teacher at all, was never her dream job. However, it seemed natural to her so she applied for the teacher education program.

“I still remember the situation when (...) there were positions open at the school in the town center, which had monograde classes, and at the small village school, and I made two applications. At the moment when I was supposed

to hand in the applications, I still didn't know which one I was going to give to them. But I guess my own history (...) that it had been a good experience learning and studying in the small school (affected my choice).” (K1)

After graduating it was not obvious for her that she would become a small village school teacher, but somehow that path seemed natural to her. Her childhood experiences of being a pupil in a multigrade class were positive, and she found learning and studying in a multigrade class as attractive. Therefore, she leaned more toward multigrade teaching. First Kaija taught the grades 3–4, but during the past decades she has been teaching the grades 5–6. The school has one continuum of multigrade classes from grades 1–2 to 5–6, and normally the pupils continue the multigrade continuum from first to sixth grade being either the younger or the older part of their class every second year. This year is an exception, however, as they have the 3rd and 4th grades as monograde classes. *“At the moment we have so many students in our school that (...) we have the 4th and 3rd grades as monograde classes” (K2)*. This implies that the school is not using multigrade teaching as a pedagogical means but rather due to obligatory reasons. They could have formed two 3–4 multigrade classes, but the school decided otherwise.

Generally speaking, Kaija described working in a multigrade class as a positive experience. When we asked about the first thing that comes to her mind about multigrade classes, she pointed out the benefits of a multigrade class for pupils' social development.

“The first thing that comes to my mind is, I guess, that the pupils learn how to get along with everyone. That they don't just interact with their own class but the older ones help the younger ones. And also it helps the teacher when the older pupils already know my ways as a teacher, and so I can turn to them and ask them to pass the class culture on to the younger ones in the class as well.” (K3)

Kaija emphasized the social effects of multigrade classes repeatedly during the interview, such as peer tutoring *“Benefits. (.) Well of course that the pupils help each other out” (K4)* and co-working *“children learn how to get on with different types of pupils.” (K5)* According to Kaija's experience, it is beneficial for the pupils that *“they can sometimes be the smaller ones and then the bigger ones” (K6)*. All the pupils learn how to work in different roles, and they adapt rather quickly to new environments and situations if the multigrade

class is organized as a fixed continuum of classes 1–2, 3–4 and 5–6. In this way pupils proceed according to their grade-level and the construction of the class changes every year.

Kaija had experienced challenging the fact that every autumn the new fifth graders join the class and the differences among the students are big. *“On the other hand, it also eases the situation when I do not have to put so much effort into the sixth graders during the autumn”* (K7). She has taken advantage of this situation, and now she feels that she can concentrate on getting to know the younger part of the class and put more effort in them as the older pupils are already familiar to her. She finds this beneficial as she can focus on getting to know only half of the class. The sixth graders help the process as well as they set an example in the class and they are familiar with the teacher’s ways of working.

Another challenge that Kaija had experienced in a multigrade class is also related to the big differences among the students. *“I have to differentiate lot”* (K8). Due to the differences in skills, especially in literature and mathematics, Kaija sometimes finds it challenging to ensure that everyone is doing tasks according to their own level of know-how. Related to this, Kaija started talking about her experiences in using books in multigrade class teaching. The subject she has experienced the most challenging is history. *“In the fifth grade the children should be taught the history of Finland, and then in the sixth grade they should learn about the world history. And then the fifth graders start straight from the world history”* (K9). It can be a challenge in a multigrade class teaching to use the alternating curriculum as sometimes the subjects do not go chronologically, as Kaija pointed out. The teacher has to put more effort into making sure that all the pupils can follow the teaching. Teaching and planning the lessons require a bit more effort when one has to create the material in use.

The principal’s level of awareness came up in Kaija’s interview when we asked how the other stakeholders find multigrade teaching. The principal was substituting her class, and it took him by surprise that there were pupils from two different grades in her class. *“He said afterwards that he had suddenly realized that he should be teaching two classes. The principal should be the one who knows about these things, but it came as a surprise to him that he should teach two separate groups”* (K10). Kaija pointed out that her experience is that people do not really acknowledge multigrade classes. It is seen as one teaching method among others, and parents cannot point out whether it is good or bad. This was also seen in the principal's reaction. The principal works in the school surrounded by multigrade classes on a daily basis but has not really thought how the teaching is actually implemented in the

classes. Kaija feels like it is not a topic people talk about a lot. *“It is seen as self-evident that things are taken care off, and not very much attention is paid to it.” (K11)*

“In the end, I don’t know if there are any big differences (between teaching multigrade and monograde classes), the teacher’s workload maybe the biggest, like when one is teaching two different curricula in the grades 5–6 or in mathematics.” (K12)

Kaija seems like an experienced multigrade teacher who enjoys her work and does not feel the need to change her way of teaching. When she was asked about the differences between multigrade and monograde classes, she did not think there is a big difference. However, when she was asked about her first experience as a teacher in a multigrade class, she emphasized the feeling of having her hands full during the entire lesson and said that the feeling has not changed much during the years. In the planning of classes, one has to take two curricula into consideration, and organizing the teaching may need a bit more time. If she could choose between monograde and multigrade classes, she would continue with teaching the multigrade classes as it is *“a familiar way of working” (K13)* and in her opinion *“increases the teacher’s possibilities to really get to know the students” (K14)*.

Kaija did not emphasize the pedagogical or theoretical benefits of using the multigrade teaching method and according to our conclusion, she rather follows the methods of how things have been done before. When we asked if she has received information about multigrade teaching, she replied *“not much” (K15)*. The teacher education did not prepare her much, except for the field practice that was done in a multigrade class, and so the information comes mainly *“from the village school” (K16)* over time and from experience.

According to our reflections, Kaija represents a typical small school teacher. She was brought up in a multigrade small school system, and she does not see any harm in it. Her personal school memories in a small school eventually had an effect on the fact that she applied for a job in a multigrade class. Kaija does her job well, and she is active, but she has not necessarily given any deeper thought to multigrade classes. As she pointed out before, in relation to the other stakeholders *“(a multigrade class) is not really an issue people pay attention to” (K17)*, and we conclude that she herself falls under that category as well. During the interview she had difficulties in reflecting on the challenges in and benefits of multigrade classes which indicates that she has not been thinking these issues in advance that much and perhaps she takes working in a multigrade class for granted. It is natural as she

works in a small school in which multigrade classes are normally formed out of a necessity, and not out of pedagogical choice. The necessity was clearly seen from her comment about the school having two monograde classes this year. *“I could use some kind of forum for peer support, and for example, I notice now that I haven’t even checked if there are any Facebook groups related to multigrade teaching (...) this kind of peer support sure would be needed.”* (K18) Kaija would like to learn more about multigrade classes, and she feels that a support forum should be developed for multigrade class teachers. This could include, for example, an internet forum for multigrade class teachers and training days provided by the national board of education or by municipalities.

4.2 Helka – Multigrade Class Spokesperson

Helka is an elderly teacher who has had a long and dedicated career as a teacher and especially as a multigrade class teacher. Multigrade class teaching has grown into her as she was a pupil in a small school during her compulsory education, and when she graduated from her teacher education in the 70’s, multigrade classes were relatively popular in Finland. *“I did the school practice (in a multigrade class) and after I finished, I decided, that I want to be a multigrade class teacher.”* (H1) After her first school practice in a multigrade class, she was certain that she wanted to be a multigrade class teacher, and she has been sticking to that thought ever since. Now she teaches in a monograde school that has more than 300 pupils and in which one continuum of multigrade classes exists as three classes with grades 1–2, 3–4 and 5–6. The pupils follow the multigrade continuum from the first grade to the sixth grade being either the younger or the older part of the class every second year.

Helka differs from the other interviewed teachers slightly due to her passion and interest towards up-to-date scientific discussion which she uses to develop her own multigrade class teaching. Already when she was studying to become a teacher, she got interested in alternative pedagogies, and she has applied the knowledge gained from them to multigrade class teaching. *“I started studying also the theory to find out in which ways multigrade classes appear. – I familiarized myself with all of these Dalton and Montessori and Steiner pedagogies where multigrade principals exist.”* (H2) She has also visited a number of schools around the world to see how the teaching of multigrade classes is implemented in other countries regarding the alternative pedagogies, regular schools and teacher education. Helka has a very holistic idea about multigrade classes and their teaching, and she pointed out that

the meaning and the use of multigrade classes is changing. *“The principals of a multigrade class –can be used when one has different kinds of children, children with differing skills and from different contexts together. Then in the multigrade class one can through parallel curriculum teach different kinds of children.”* (H3) According to Helka, the benefits of multigrade classes could be utilized also in big schools by slightly transferring the teaching toward multiage teaching according to the pupils’ individual needs and pace of studying.

“Not everyone is on the same level in one monograde class either. A teacher can get a lot of help from the multigrade class concept to keeping her group functioning dynamically. Already in the teacher education phase, students acquire knowledge about it, and when they go to teach big classes in the field, they kind of have this as a backup. They know how cooperation between teacher colleagues work, how one can choose or make teaching more holistic by using common themes and how one can also make the most of age levels and the social effects. How one can utilize the other in the class being older, and also the smaller ones learn how to behave and function independetly.
“(H4)

Helka has worked also in a teacher education practice school which is why she considers it essential to have multigrade classes in teacher education practice schools. Helka was worried about the fact that the Ministry of Education and Culture proposed closing these schools down. She was determined and wrote a letter to all of the stake-holders emphasizing the importance of multigrade classes in today's world. *“They started to think about how we have different kinds of learners.”* (H5) As Helka pointed out, more and more small schools are being closed down in Finland, and because of this, many pupils need to travel long distances to schools and study in big classes. This has been stated in many studies (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015). In Finland special education pupils are integrated into monograde classes, and because of this, the level of know-how can differ enormously within one monograde class. The big classes and the heterogenous skills and know-how are some of the reasons justifying the usage of multigrade classes in order to ensure teaching that meets everyone’s individual needs.

“If there are, for example, two big classes next to each other, then the teachers can plan the topics together (...) and they can utilize the children’s knowledge

and skills and group them together so that they kind of work as small multi-grade classes in the school.” (H6)

Helka emphasized that multigrade teaching can be implemented, for example, in ability grouping. The pupils are divided into groups according to their level of know-how and skills in specific subjects in cooperation with the other teachers from the same grade level. This is the foundation of multiage teaching, and it has a big role in multigrade teaching as Helka explained. Helka emphasized that she has “*gotten a lot of support from other teachers*” (H7). She has experienced the teacher collaboration as one of the key factors in successful teaching, and she mentioned it often during the interview. “*We have done quite a lot collaboration with the colleagues for the benefit of the children*” (H8). The collaboration includes planning the lessons and the whole school year as well as executing common projects and divided lessons.

When asked about the challenges, Helka brought up the autumn semester when the younger ones join her class. “*Connecting the group is always the most challenging in the autumn*” (H9). Even though the pupils are familiar with the multigrade concept, it always takes time and effort to make the group work well together, and this applies to monograde classes as well. “*Nowadays, the most challenging part has been when one or two new pupils join the multigrade class in the middle of the school year.*” (H10) Helka pointed this aspect out as one of the challenges in multigrade classes, but this can be the case also in other types of classes, not only in multigrade classes. As Helka mentioned, it is even harder if the pupil comes from a completely different school system or a country, but this is a challenge all the teacher face in today’s global world. In addition to these, Helka did not emphasize any other challenges in multigrade classes, but she reflected more holistically how a teacher can take advantage of these challenging factors.

“*Especially in certain subjects, it is a challenge to adapt to a certain age level the things included in the curriculum.*” (H11) When we asked Helka to explain the curriculum adaptation in more detail, she argued that the planning can be a bit harder for a teacher of a multigrade class than it is in monograde classes. She emphasized that integration is a key factor in planning the teaching in a multigrade class. “*Integration in the curriculum is vital. It is important to know how to integrate the subjects, and above all, it is crucial to know how to utilize the transdisciplinary integration.*” (H12). When integration is done well, the repetition becomes important. Helka thinks repetition is one of the biggest benefits of multigrade

classes as the pupils learn the same topics twice without noticing it. *“If you teach the things to them only once, they will forget them.” (H13)*

Moreover, during our interview it became clear that Helka has formed a comprehensive idea during her long career as a teacher about multigrade classes. She had her first positive experiences with multigrade classes already in her childhood and her positive attitude towards multigrade classes grew even stronger during her teacher education and its practices. She has a lot of insight about the matter, and she is familiar with the terms, theories and pedagogies that are referred to when speaking about the multigrade class concept. Helka was more than happy to share her thoughts about the matter with us. She argued that multigrade class teaching is required in the future as the classes are becoming more heterogeneous. She also continued to say that multigrade classes should be included in the teacher education more effectively as well as the amount of research regarding multigrade classes should be increased. In Helka’s opinion teachers and teacher students learn many beneficial skills from teaching multigrade classes, and these skills can be utilized and implemented in any kinds of classes. In the end of our interview Helka summarized her thoughts regarding multigrade classes about the opportunities that they provide for teacher students in the following way:

“When teacher students enter the field, they have in the back of their mind how co-working functions between teachers, how one can choose transdisciplinary unities from the curriculum and how one can also utilize the age level and social aspects. So when others are already older, one can utilize them and in a way younger ones learn to function in the class and they become more independent. Then I was also thinking the learning materials, how one can utilize the different learning materials in multigrade classes and hence, ease teachers’ workload with them.” (H14)

4.3 Niina – Enthusiastic, Newly Graduated Multigrade Class Teacher

Niina is a young woman who has only recently gotten her degree in education and become a primary school teacher. She has a degree also in early childhood education but after graduation, she applied straight to the teacher education program. Since her graduation Niina has been teaching a multigrade class that consists of grades 1–2 in a small school, and she is very excited about her work. The school has three teachers and three classes that consist of grades 1–2, 3–4 and 5–6 in which pupils proceed from the first grade to the sixth grade,

being either the younger or the older part of the class every second year. There also operates a preschool in the school, and Niina's class cooperates with them regularly.

"Well it (teaching) has been in me for a long time. I haven't really even thought about doing anything other than teaching. I want to work with children, and by being in the Scouts, I learned that I am pretty good at it, and that I want to share my knowledge and pass my skills forward." (N1)

Niina has known for a long time that she would like to become a teacher, and it was quite self-evident that she would apply for the teacher education. She is good with children, so a teacher's profession was a natural choice for her.

When Niina was asked how she ended up teaching a multigrade class, she replied that she had been substituting in a 3–4 multigrade class during her studies, and she fell in love with the idea of multigrade teaching. As soon as she heard the same school was hiring a new 1–2 multigrade teacher, she did not hesitate to apply. *"I thought that it would be perfect for me"* (N2). Niina said she was very lucky to get the job, and that it was partly because she had a degree in early childhood education, and therefore *"those three years there spent studying for that degree became meaningful also"* (N3).

"My first experience was during last Christmas when I was substituting for a 3–4 multigrade class, and it sure was quite chaotic. Like, how to get the day running smoothly." (N4) Niina first experienced teaching a multigrade class somewhat chaotic and challenging. According to her, it was so different from, for example, teaching at the university training school in which the pupils should not be kept waiting at all. *"In these multigrade classes they sometimes have to (wait), and it is not necessarily a bad thing."* (N5) Niina has learnt to accept the fact that in multigrade classes teachers quite often do not have time to give their full attention to every pupil. This, however, could have a positive impact on the pupils' learning since they learn to take responsibility for their learning, to take initiative, and they become more independent if the teacher is not available all the time.

"It was quite a shock to a newly graduate teacher. And I am not saying I still would have everything under control. But I've tried to (take into account) all the contents of first and second grades, what should be included, how you get the day running smoothly so that there will be as many small group lessons as

possible, and only first graders' or second graders' topics can be focused on. What does the rest of the class do then? It is a challenge." (N6)

Niina emphasized the fact that because she had only graduated some months earlier, having a multigrade class as her very first class was not the easiest start for her teaching career. In the beginning, she felt there were several aspects to consider as a multigrade class teacher which made it challenging. For example, she was wondering how to take all the contents of the National Core Curriculum for both first and second graders into consideration. Moreover, she was unsure of how the planning should be done and how the teaching should be organized when there are two grades in one class.

"Well, I wouldn't consider our days so chaotic anymore. They are going pretty well now. By no means would I now change to a class of only 25 first or second graders." (N7)

Niina also pointed out that even though she first considered teaching a multigrade class a bit challenging, this feeling has changed as she now has gained some experience and knowledge in teaching a multigrade class. She said that for the time being she would not like to change teaching a multigrade class for teaching a monograde class. *"Great co-workers, two other teachers, and then my own team of a kindergarten teacher and a teacher's assistant, who have been there before, so they have given me a lot of information"* (N8). She emphasizes that she has gotten a lot of support, ideas and information regarding multigrade teaching from her colleagues. She enjoys the collaborative atmosphere and sees it beneficial. However, she pointed out that *"It wouldn't be possible without the facilities and opportunities that we have in the school"* (N9). In her school the facilities are beyond average which allows her to use varying teaching methods, and in her opinion this is one of the main reasons the multigrade class is functioning so well.

When it comes to the learning materials, Niina finds it useful that in their school books are only used in mathematics and literature. The teachers have a big supply for the teaching materials, and the internet is utilized as well. *"The teachers put together suitable material for every group. We adjust the teaching material of the same topic for the three different levels."* (N10) Thus, the differentiation is natural and is present in everyday work in the class as there are three different levels of each task. Students work together and help each other. *"It's so great to see how the older ones teach the younger ones, you realize that you don't have to be everywhere."* (N11) By implementing the teaching this way, the social effects

also increase. When asked about the first thing that comes to Niina's mind about multigrade classes, she emphasized the social effects. She answered that it decreases the teacher's workload when the older pupils mentor the younger ones, and consequently, she can give more responsibility for the pupils. This has beneficial aspects as Niina said when *"the children can progress at their own pace"* (N12) and also *"if a child already masters the contents then they can move forward, it is not a problem."* (N13)

"It really stood out that nothing else was discussed (in the teacher education) but ideal cases (...) It's been very much a case of learning through trial and error. Of course we learned a lot of good things at school, but nothing specifically about multigrade teaching. I don't know if it was ever even mentioned." (N14)

As a newly graduated teacher, the university studies and practices are still fresh in her mind. Thinking about her education, she emphasized that teaching multigrade classes was not taken into consideration in her studies. Niina pointed out some suggestions how the teacher education could be developed regarding multigrade teaching. *"The teacher education programs could prepare the students better and make multigrade teaching more popular and desirable."* (N15) According to her, it would be good if the teacher education in Finland encouraged the teacher students to do practices and apply for jobs in small schools and in multigrade classes. The teacher education could have an impact on making multigrade teaching and its methods more popular among the teacher students.

Overall, Niina is really enthusiastic and motivated about her job. Like we mentioned before, multigrade classes were quite unfamiliar to her, but the way the teaching is organized in her school really caught her attention. She had worked in a multigrade class as a substitute teacher when she was a teacher student, and that experience had an influence on the fact that she actually applied for a job in a multigrade class. Moreover, collaboration with her colleagues and the good facilities in the school have had an effect on the fact that Niina has fallen in love with working in a multigrade class. Her enthusiasm was visible also from the fact that she volunteered for our research when we posted an application online searching for multigrade teachers to participate in this research. Niina is obviously highly interested in learning more about multigrade classes and she is willing to try new methods in action.

5 CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS EXPERIENCED BY TEACHERS OF MULTIGRADE CLASSES

Challenges and benefits in multigrade classes vary notably depending on the narrative and on one's experiences. In this chapter the discussed topics are not necessarily clearly labeled being either benefits or challenges as the teachers had experienced some aspects of multigrade classes both challenging and beneficial. Hence, a clear division cannot be made. This chapter answers to the research question number two: *What kind of challenges and benefits about multigrade classes occur in teachers' experiences.* Moreover, it discusses the challenges and benefits regarding teachers' work, for example the planning and implementing the teaching. Secondly, the challenges and benefits regarding pupils' learning in multigrade classes are examined. Even though the challenges and benefits are discussed also from the pupil's perspective, the analysis is based on teacher's experiences about the matter.

5.1 Challenges and Benefits regarding Planning and Implementing the Teaching

"(The compulsory education reform) carefully considered how the multigrade classes work and how the alternating and parallel curricula principals should be implemented." (Helka, H15)

"It's quite interesting how I get to be part of the curriculum working group. We're renewing the national, municipal and school curricula now. (...) When I opened the curriculum from the computer and showed it to the school assistant the preschool teacher, they were dumbfounded." (Niina, N16)

According to Helka, multigrade classes were taken into account in the compulsory education reform, and especially the alternating and parallel curricula were examined and compared carefully for the needs of the schools. As we mentioned before, the 70's were the most influential period in the development of multigrade classes in Finland, and also Helka reminisces that. Niina, then again, is at the moment involved in developing the curriculum on all levels, from the national to the school level curriculum. She has noticed that the curriculum can sometimes be forgotten from the planning as the case with her colleagues emphasizes. The curriculum sets the aims and the framework for the teaching, and it is the most important tool for teachers when it comes to planning.

Teaching always requires planning, but the significance of planning is emphasized in multi-grade classes in which pupils are a heterogeneous group (Hyyrö, 2015, 178). The foremost factor influencing a teacher's planning of the lessons and the overall school year is the National Core Curriculum. The Finnish National Core Curriculum forms the basis for the planning and implementing of the teaching, yet the local school curriculum also has a significant role in directing the implementation (Holappa, 2014). The National Core Curriculum reform takes place in the Finnish educational system in the autumn of 2016. It emphasizes the fact that the local curriculum planned for any school has to be applicable also to multigrade teaching (Opetushallitus, 2014). As we mentioned earlier, Kalaoja (2006) introduces three ways of implementing the curriculum: the parallel, the alternating and the spiral curriculum (Kalaoja, 2006, 216-218). These methods, then again, guide the rest of the planning process.

"In most of the subjects, I use parallel curriculum. So the fifth graders follow the fifth grade curriculum, and the sixth graders follow the sixth grade curriculum." (Tommi, T1)

"I have made a decision to teach according to the grade level only in mathematics. The fifth graders have a math book intended for fifth graders, and the sixth graders have a math book that is intended for sixth graders." (Kaija, K19)

Tommi has decided to use the parallel curriculum in most of his subjects whereas Kaija mainly teaches with the alternating curriculum, except in mathematics. Based on the interviews, it was clear that the parallel and the alternating curriculum models were common and mostly well-known by name. All of the five teachers used the parallel curriculum in mathematics as it is a subject in which the pupils need to understand the previous matters before going to the next one. This is also concluded by Veenman (1995, 370), Mason and Burns (1997, 287) and Hyyrö-Beihammer and Hascher (2015, 108). It was interesting to notice that none of the teachers used the term spiral curriculum, but some of them were talking about using it without registering it. For example, Tommi explained that he uses the parallel curriculum in almost every subject and the alternating curriculum only in physics and chemistry. Still he mentioned that *"If we start a new topic in mathematics or literature, we first do it together. (...) The start is roughly according to the fifth graders' curriculum (younger)."* (T2) Tommi uses the concept of spiral curriculum at the beginning of the lessons, and after this

he differentiates the teaching and continues according to both the fifth and the sixth grade curriculum. This is one way of organizing the teaching in multigrade classes.

"The subjects proceed with the spiral principal anyway: in many subjects the topics that have been studied in the fifth grade will be deepened in the sixth grade." (Tommi, T3)

"In math and literature both (grades) have their own. And when I teach math here, the second graders are doing some quiet exercises with the school assistant where there will be nothing new for them. (..) And in all the other subjects the theme plan is very useful because it is divided into three years. So during the time they are in grades 1–2, they will study what is included in the curriculum for those two years." (Laura, L1)

The use of the spiral curriculum is evident at the beginning of the class, but as Tommi has noticed, the curriculum is structured in a spiral way, and he uses this as a benefit to his teaching as much as possible. Laura described that she plans all the other subjects except for mathematics and literature from the scratch, and she uses common topics from both curricula. She looks up common themes and makes sure all the necessary areas for both grades are covered within two years. Her municipality has done a three year theme plan based on the curriculum which helps her a lot in the planning. This way she is actually using the spiral curriculum; she is neither going through the curricula every second year nor teaching them side by side, but she has chosen the common themes and is teaching according to them. Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) have noticed the same phenomenon in their research: Finnish teachers describe that they search for common themes for different grades to avoid using the parallel curriculum (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 108). This type of planning is in line with the principles of the spiral curriculum.

Knowing all the three ways of implementing the curriculum and understanding their benefits and challenges is a significant tool for multigrade class teachers. Many of the teachers brought up the challenge of time management and the feeling of having full hands in the multigrade class. When asked about her first feelings of becoming a multigrade class teacher Kaija answered *"The teacher needs to be active all the time. Classes where you can quietly follow (the children working) and just watch are rare"* (K20). So far in her career, she thought this is the most challenging part of being a multigrade teacher. However, over time and with experience, she concludes *"I wouldn't call it rush anymore but more like a feeling*

of having full hands.” (K21) Cornish (2006b) emphasizes that if a teacher uses the parallel curriculum, it can double the workload in terms of planning, teaching and material gathering, and hence it can increase the feeling of exhaustion (Cornish, 2006b, 18). Conversely, the alternating curriculum reduces the workload and the feeling of rush diminishes when one needs to teach only one class (Hyyrö, 2015, 99).

In her interview Laura repeatedly mentioned the feeling of having full hands and the feeling of having inadequate tools to meet the pupils’ individual needs. *“Well it demands quite a lot from the teacher. I mean, in a multigrade class one needs to basically do the planning of two teachers.”* (L2) Laura mentioned that as a novice teacher, the first years were quite demanding, but the workload is getting easier year after year. In the research by Mulryan-Kyne (2004), the feeling of insufficient time was discovered to be the most challenging aspect experienced by the teachers of multigrade classes. In her research 70% of the teachers were concerned that they did not have sufficient time to spend with each grade-level and to take the pupils’ individual needs into consideration. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12.)

“I guess someone could bring up the time management as a challenge from the teacher’s perspective. Having enough time for each individual pupil, having enough time to differentiate. The planning and preparation requires a bit more time and work, but I do not consider them as challenges, they are work. There is a little bit more work (in having a multigrade class) compared to having just a fifth or a sixth grade. Maybe those are the challenges. But I could never consider them as such.” (Tommi, T4)

Tommi has not experienced time management or planning his teaching challenging, but he argued that other teachers would see it as such. Helka and Niina did not bring the issue up in the interviews. As a newly graduated teacher, Niina naturally used a lot of time on planning but did not emphasize it or its relation to multigrade teaching. Brown and Martin (1989) discuss that teachers describe multigrade teaching more difficult than monograde teaching as the planning is more time-consuming (Brown & Martin, 1989). Tommi considers multigrade classes a little bit more time-consuming, but thinks it is part of the work. Then again Laura experienced them quite time-consuming. When asked about the challenges in multigrade classes, Tommi answered as cited above. This comment by Tommi is a great example of how teachers are individuals, and the challenges and benefits, in this case time management, depend greatly on the person. The meaning of individual experiences was emphasized

in the research by Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015). They interviewed 14 multigrade class teachers and highlighted that it is impossible to make overall assumptions or generalizations as the interpretations depend highly on individual experiences and their context. (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015.)

"I myself do not have that big of a role, but they are in groups at the table, they have a task that they are carrying out and tackling by themselves, and the second grader gives the instructions, and the group has to manage on their own." (Niina, N17)

"For example in mathematics and in Finnish, one has to do a lot of differentiation. It is a tough challenge for a teacher to know how to differentiate the right way, to differentiate downward and then again differentiate upward for the sixth graders." (Kaija, K22)

When asked about her teaching methods, Niina explained that in her class the differentiation is constantly used as a means to plan lessons as the pupils normally work in groups. This is natural since the differences between the pupils' skills vary a lot. However, Kaija was the only interviewee who pointed out that she had experienced differentiation rather challenging to implement into practice. In addition to Kaija's experiences, the challenging aspect of differentiation experienced by teachers is also emphasized by Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) in their research about multigrade classes in Finland and in Austria (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 109).

"In P.E. we use differentiation, for example in gymnastics, where we think about the objectives. We have certain objectives for the fifth grade and certain objectives for the sixth grade. (...) From those we chose the lower ones. But of course we made the objectives possible to meet. If the fifth^{5th} graders have what it takes, they can also pursue the higher, sixth grader objectives." (Tommi, T5)

Tommi explained how he uses differentiation as a starting point in organizing physical education classes. Both grade levels have a joint topic and he uses the topic as the basis when he plans the tasks for the different levels. He makes sure that every student can achieve the goals according to the curricula. In addition, the differentiation is easier to execute for the lower grade as they can try the harder tasks if their skills are sufficient. Of course it works

the other way around as well: the higher grade students can perform the easier tasks if their skills are not sufficient for their own task level. This way of planning the teaching in a multigrade class resembles the spiral curriculum model in which the subject matter is deepened and expanded in the upper grades. Kalaoja (2006) mentions that the spiral curriculum has been used very little in Finland (Kalaoja, 2006, 218). In this research some teachers seemed to use it as a holistic way of organizing the teaching, or then again, as a teaching method in some parts of the lessons. None of the teachers used the term spiral curriculum in their narratives although they were often describing how they organize the teaching according to this principle.

"According to the principal of multigrade teaching, they have divided the group based on the pupil's level of knowhow. In other words, they have made two different level groups from the children in two parallel classes. One teacher has taught one group in mathematics and another teacher the others. What else is that than the multigrade principal? They have combined different level pupils from two different classes so the differentiation has become even stronger." (Helka, H16)

"Two teachers could run two classes of grades 5–6 as a team, and then it is even easier to start thinking about multiage teaching. Nonetheless, in the new curriculum it has been emphasized a bit more than earlier how we can clearly benefit from multigrade classes." (Tommi, T6)

From the five interviewed teachers, Helka and Tommi were familiar with the multiage teaching concept, and they thought it is a good way to implement teaching also in monograde schools. They considered it beneficial to combine two same grade level classes as then the lesson planning is done in collaboration with another teacher. One teacher can teach, for example, the more advanced part of the class in mathematics, and the other one can teach the weaker ones. This way the differentiation is stronger. Also different projects between the classes can be educational, and the teacher can use the skills and know-how of the pupils more efficiently. Moreover, by collaborating with another class of a same grade level the social environment expands, and the pupils learn to co-operate in different groups and adjust to them. This method can also be used in bigger schools with monograde classes. Hence, the principles of multigrade classes are not necessarily limited to small schools and multigrade classes. Many researchers also discuss these features in their studies and consider them as

beneficial assets in planning and implementing the teaching in multigrade classes (Hyyrö, 2015, 108-111; Leeds & Marshak, 2002, 12-13; Smit & Engeli, 2015, 136-137).

There is a slight difference between the terms multiage and multigrade teaching which can be seen in Helka's and Tommi's narratives as well as in the research literature. It is obvious that Helka and Tommi are talking about organizing the teaching in a similar way, but Helka uses the term multigrade and Tommi the term multiage. It should be noted how Helka used the Finnish word "palkittaa". This means that the pupils are divided according to their level of knowhow and skills which is equivalent to the definition of multiage teaching.

"We don't really use books that much. Preschoolers do not use any books, the first and second graders have math books, and we use a little bit of the Kirjakuja materials with the second graders. Otherwise we have different kinds of binders and we have materials here and there, and we gather them together. We use computer programs to do task sheets for example for three different levels. So we use the same topic to make sheets for every group and so on. If we had books, I think it would be much harder." (Niina, N18)

"In mathematics and literature, we have used books according to the curriculum, but with the little ones in natural sciences, we have always made a book ourselves." (Helka, H17)

"In mathematics and literature both grades have their own. (...) I look for the material myself. We do not have textbooks for the subjects, so whatever the handled topic is, I search for the material for it." (Laura, L3)

As regards to the learning material, all the interviewed teachers were not dependent on books. Most of the teachers gathered their own materials, with mathematics being an exception in this, as is seen from Helka's and Laura's answers. Niina stood out from the other teachers due to the way the teaching and the use of materials is organized in her school: When a class is taught, the pupils are divided into small groups and they are given the tasks according to their level of knowhow. This way the differentiation is done immediately. Also peer tutoring and group work are extendedly used in Niina's school as the second graders who can read are grouped with the first graders who need more guidance. Instead of books, they use sheets that are made for different levels about the same topic. The teachers have

compiled binders for all the grades and their topics with different levelled sheets and materials. According to Niina, the binders made by the teachers were already very comprehensive when she started working at the school, but she collects and develops more material herself as well. The teachers in this school are in close collaboration together, and multigrade teaching is their shared goal.

Making their own books in all the subjects is a popular format for using materials with many teachers. As Kaija pointed out, *"The history books are not meant to be adapted to multigrade teaching"* (K23). This is what many teachers face when they start to teach a multigrade class. Suitable books for multigrade classes are hard to find. According to the Finnish National Curriculum, fifth grade history should start from the history of Finland and in the sixth grade, the pupils are taught about the world history. This makes the use of spiral curriculum rather challenging, and also, the teacher has to be sure that everyone can follow the lesson when s/he is using the alternating curriculum. Materials and supplies need to be adequate for successful multigrade teaching, and they need to support individual and group-based learning (Little, 2004, 18).

"It's been very much a case of learning through trial and error." (Niina, N19)

"And of course I attended the small school so from there I have gained some knowledge, but maybe not that much information through the (teacher) education. I've had to learn it by doing." (Kaija, K24)

The planning is the key to successful and smooth lessons. Especially in a multigrade class, the teacher needs to be aware that all the grades meet the goals set by the curricula. According to our interviews, it is evident that in mathematics the parallel curriculum is a natural way of teaching. However, one cannot make generalizations regarding the implementation of any other subject, and this is also emphasized by Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015). All the teachers we interviewed have been searching for the best way to teach a multigrade class through experimenting as there is not much information available about planning and implementing the teaching in multigrade classes, especially outside the small school context. Like Niina mentioned, teachers learn by doing, and most of the teachers had experienced the same. Like Kaija pointed out, teacher students do not get much information about multigrade teaching from the teacher education, and therefore the planning is generally dependent on the teachers' own experiences and intuition.

In addition to the interviewed teachers, also Mulryan-Kyne (2007) concludes in her research on “*The preparation of teachers for multigrade teaching*“ that quality teacher education and support is needed to ensure that the potential of multigrade teaching is utilized. The skills and knowledge needed in multigrade classes are not always taken into consideration in the teacher education (Mulryan-Kyne, 2007). Moreover, the teacher education, the pre-service training, as well as the in-service training need to be up-to-date to provide necessary tools for the teachers (Little, 2004). However, there is only little research done about how to plan and implement multigrade teaching, especially in Finland. The aspects of multigrade teaching are not included in the teacher education on a regular basis, and one explanation for this can be the low quantity of research executed. (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015; Hyyrö, 2015; Quail & Smyth, 2014; Smit & Engeli, 2015).

5.2 Challenges and Benefits regarding Pupils’ Development

In this part of the chapter, we focus on the benefits and challenges that multigrade classes offer in terms of the pupil’s development. We have divided them into two parts. Chapter 5.2.1 discusses the benefits that multigrade classes bring and the challenges that multigrade classes present to the pupils’ cognitive development. And chapter 5.2.2 focuses on the benefits that multigrade classes bring and the challenges that multigrade classes present to the pupils’ social development.

5.2.1 Pupils’ Cognitive Development

“If a pupil masters the contents, then they can move forward, it is not a problem in our class, no-one thinks it is exceptional. Or the other way around, if a pupil is not a fluent reader (...) then he or she can safely stay at the lower level. So they can progress in their own pace.” (Niina, N20)

Niina has discovered that multigrade classes provide a flexible environment for the pupils in which they can develop and learn, since they can progress in their own pace according to their skills. It is not seen divergent if one pupil is progressing slower or faster than the others. Even though nowadays child-centered learning is increasing in the schools, and the teacher’s time in front of the class is diminishing, in many classes all the pupils follow the same rhythm and schedule with regard to studying. In multigrade classes the case is often different depending, of course, on how the teacher has planned the lessons, as we discussed earlier. One

thing that was underlined in the interviews was the fact that in a multigrade class, pupils can easily study in their own pace. There was a consensus among Niina, Laura, Tommi and Helka that one of the most visible advantages that the multigrade classes have in terms of the pupils' learning and development is being able to study in their own pace. Inevitably multigrade class teaching is very child-centered and takes into consideration the pupils' individual needs.

Laura emphasized that *“One child is good in one thing, and another is good in another thing. (...) The children study things in their own time.”* (L4) As pupils have different strengths, and they can be in different phases in terms of development, thus their cognitive skills vary a lot. Hence, studying in a multigrade class allows them to move forward as they progress but it is also possible to focus on some topic longer than the others, if needed. As Aina (2001) and Miller (1994) mention, one of the advantages that the multigrade classes and teaching provide for the children is flexibility when it comes to learning (Aina, 2001, 220; Miller, 1994, 9).

“With the fifth graders, differentiating upward is easier because a fifth grader who is very talented in mathematics can easily move on to the sixth graders' topics because it is studied right here (in the same class). (...) Also on the other hand, if there is a situation that one has to strongly differentiate downward, then again with sixth graders, it is easier.” (Tommi, T7)

Differentiation plays a significant role in flexibility. For example, Tommi and Helka emphasized that differentiation is strongly used in their classes, and Tommi had experienced it is easy to implement in a multigrade class context. Differentiation is a natural way of organizing the teaching in a multigrade class as it is very heterogeneous in nature (Karlberg-Granlund, 2010, 53).

“In a way, the children's age difference can have an effect (on learning). When the new third graders start, some of them may have difficulties in reading, and then the fourth graders can suffer from that.” (Kaija, K25)

All the teachers emphasized that there are notable differences among the pupils' skills, and they had used differentiation as a way to take these differences into consideration. However, Kaija was the only teacher who brought up that the pupils' differing skills can have a negative effect on the other pupils' learning. As can be interpreted from Kaija's citation above,

the learning of the older pupils can be affected negatively if the younger pupils' cognitive skills are much weaker. Hence, the teacher has to pay a lot of attention to the younger pupils' learning. There are some studies carried out that focus on the learning outcomes of the pupils in multigrade classes. In contrast to Kaija's experience, for example Mulryan-Kyne's study (2004) concludes that especially those pupils whose cognitive skills are lower benefit from studying in a multigrade class as teachers can notice their learning difficulties at an early stage and differentiate the teaching according to each pupils' needs (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 9).

In addition to being able to study in one's own time and the ease of differentiation, the teachers also mentioned some other opportunities that multigrade classes provide for the development of the childrens' cognitive skills.

"I get to find out what children know and what their skills are. And then also how the teaching can be differentiated and how the children's individual characteristics are also taken into consideration, if they truly have difficulties (...) I can concentrate on them and encourage (the pupils) by doing that." (Helka, H18)

"They, after all, work in the same space and in the same group all the time, so maybe the differences are can be seen more clearly there., You learn to see the different sides to the pupils, both good and bad (...) I get to know them better." (Kaija, K26)

In order to organize the teaching in a way that the pupils' individual learning objectives are taken into consideration and teaching can be differentiated, the teacher has to know what their pupils are capable of. Thus, for example, Helka and Kaija have experienced that in a multigrade class, the teacher gets to know the pupils' skills and knowhow very well. All the interviewed teachers have each pupil in their class for two years which allows them to really get to know the children. Also Mulryan-Kyne (2004) and Hoffman (2003) emphasize the fact that multigrade class context increases the teacher's opportunity to get to know his or her pupils well (Hoffman, 2003, 12; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12).

"Developing one's self-directed learning skills is emphasized in a multigrade class. In a multigrade class the pupils have to take more responsibility for their learning because the teacher is with another group from time to time, so he is

not available all the time. They have to know what is going on and solve problems a little bit more independently or with another pupil.” (Tommi, T8)

”The children probably work much better in a multigrade class compared to a normal class in which there is only one grade-level. (...) They have to learn to independently clean up after themselves. “(Laura, L5)

For instance, Tommi and Laura pointed out that in multigrade classes pupils normally become very self-directed and they are able to take initiative. This is because the teacher does not have time to be with everyone all the time, so the pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and solve problems independently or with in pairs. Most of the teachers also used this as an advantage in planning the teaching. In addition, Laura had received positive feedback from the 3rd grade teachers. *“I have received positive feedback that the pupils are independent and can clean up after themselves. And they have also noticed that they are so wonderful that they give a hand to those pupils who need help.” (L6)* Her colleagues considered Laura’s pupils clearly more self-directed and helpful towards other pupils than the pupils that came from her colleagues’ monograde classes. The fact that multigrade classes are beneficial in terms of developing the pupils’ independent learning skills is also one result of Mulryan-Kyne’s (2004) research about multigrade classes.

”When I teach using the parallel curriculum model, the pupils, in a way, study the same things twice on some level of consciousness. (...) This is, in my opinion, a good thing.” (Tommi, T9)

“The children hardly remember something if it’s taught to them only during one school year. (...) The topics that need to be learned properly have been repeated. And that has been one of the benefits of multigrade classes. The children do not have to rush, but they can spend more time studying the topics and discover more about them.” (Helka, H19)

According to Tommi and Helka, due to the fact that the pupils study in the same class for two years, much of the content of the subjects is repeated during those two years without the pupils even noticing it. When a teacher uses the parallel curriculum model, the pupils inevitably hear and can follow what the other grade is taught. Tommi pointed out that this is the case in those subjects in which he teaches with the parallel curriculum model. He has observed that pupils repeat the topics twice on some level even though the topic itself is not

clearly pointed at for both grade levels. For example, the fifth graders are already familiar with the topics when they begin the sixth grade. Furthermore, sometimes when he goes through some topics with the fifth graders and asks a question, a sixth grader might put up his/her hand to show that he or she remembers this topic. Tommi thinks this is one of the advantages of a multigrade class. Helka agrees with Tommi. She thinks repetition is never a bad thing but a notable benefit. Repetition can take place also when using the alternating or the spiral curriculum model.

Rakow (2012) argues that the use of the parallel curriculum model enables the pupils to revise the contents of the subjects thoroughly (Rakow, 2012, 36). Also Mulryan-Kyne (2004) brings out the aspect of revision. She points out that the younger pupils can absorb knowledge from the older pupils' contents as they hear what the other grade is being taught. (Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 10.) Thus, the next year when these contents are taught to them, they are already familiar with them on some level. The older pupils, then again, benefit from the presence of the younger pupils as they have already studied the contents the previous year, and they can, therefore, constantly revise their learning.

5.2.2 Pupils' Social Development

"A more negative side is seen in the autumn because of the big differences when the fifth graders come; they start in the autumn, and I have already been teaching the sixth graders and I know them. (Kaija, K27)

"It's always very challenging when the new third graders join the class. (...) To get them to function together and to get along with the fourth graders."
(Helka, H20)

The fact that multigrade classes are very heterogeneous was brought up by the teachers, and it cannot be denied. Kaija had experienced that it creates challenges for her when every autumn term the younger group of students (fifth graders) is integrated with the older ones (sixth graders) and the different levels of development between the pupils are notable. Helka had also experienced this rather demanding. However, Kaija and Helka underlined that these challenges occurred only in the autumn. Furthermore, it has to be kept in mind that even though they mentioned this as a challenge, they pointed out it is a challenge for the teacher, not for the pupils. Kaija continued to mention that this can also be seen beneficial since she

already knows the older pupils, and therefore she can focus on getting to know the younger ones.

“On the other hand, it also makes the situation easier that I don’t have to put so much effort into the sixth graders in the autumn, and that there is time to focus on getting to know the fifth graders and to do other things.” (Kaija, K28)

“It helps the teacher when the older pupils already know my ways as a teacher, and so I can turn to them and ask them to pass the class culture on to the younger ones in the class as well.” (Kaija, K29)

Whether the characteristic of heterogeneity in terms of the pupils’ skills is experienced beneficial or challenging depends a lot on the narrative. For example, Kaija had experienced it challenging when the new group of pupils was integrated in the class, but then again, she mentions that it is an advantage when the older pupils can guide the younger ones and, for example, teach them the rules and the habits of her class. This is also listed as one of the advantages of multigrade teaching in the new Finnish National Curriculum (Opetushallitus, 2014, 39). This way, Kaija has turned the challenge of having big differences between the pupils into a benefit through behavior stretching. Like Kaija mentioned, normally the older pupils set an example for the younger ones through which the younger ones acquire the suitable social behavior models. Therefore, the teacher can focus on getting to know the younger pupils and make them feel welcome in the class. Also Hoffman (2002), Little (2004) and Mulryan-Kyne (2004) point out that behavior stretching is considered to be an opportunity in multigrade classes (Hoffman, 2002, 50; Little, 2004, 11; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 10).

“They learn to get along with everyone, it is not just their own class, one could say it is more like the whole school (...) in our village school it is a tradition that we do things together a lot.” (Kaija, K30)

Furthermore, Laura and Kaija were stressing the fact that because there are pupils from mixed-aged levels, multigrade classes are beneficial for the pupils from the social point of view. Kaija pointed out that the pupils work closely together, not only with other pupils from their class, but also with pupils from all other classes. Laura highlighted that *“They have to take the others into consideration a lot more” (L7)*, and according to her, the children learn to get along with everyone. As Aina (2001) and Mulryan-Kyne point out (2004), one of the advantages of multigrade classes is that they are an ideal environment for the children to

interact with each other and collaborate. Through collaboration pupils naturally learn to take others into consideration as well as learn to accept and respect other pupils' differences. (Aina, 2001, 219; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12.)

In the five interviews the only clear common factor that the teachers had experienced as a benefit in multigrade classes was collaboration and peer support among the pupils.

“The pupils collaborate flexibly all the time. Kind of like peer tutoring one another is very common. I think this can be considered clearly as an advantage.” (Tommi, T10)

“The older ones help the younger ones (...) I can always turn to them (the older ones) because they are familiar with my way of working and I can be like “why don't you also teach them (the younger ones).” (Kaija, K31)

“It's so great to see how the older ones teach the younger ones, you realize that you don't have to be everywhere.” (Niina, N21)

Both the informal and the formal way of using peer tutoring can be interpreted from the narratives. All five interviewees pointed out that in a multigrade class it quite often becomes automatic that pupils teach one another and offer help to each other. All the teachers have taken advantage of the pupils' different skill levels in their classes by using cooperative work and especially peer tutoring as a teaching method. Thus, they often use peer tutoring in the formal way (Cornish, 2006a, 21; Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 109).

Niina and Laura use the formal way of peer tutoring with the first and second graders. Niina described that in her class *“There are five pupils in one table. They have a task that they have to solve, and the second grader gives the instructions.” (N22)* Laura uses peer tutoring in a similar way as can be seen from what she states: *“The second graders can read, so they can work in pairs when you pair one who can read with someone who cannot read.” (L8)* They had experienced that the division into groups in which there are both first and second graders has been effective; those pupils who can already read can give guidance to those who are still learning to read. This is in line with Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, 86). It also sets an example for the younger ones and encourages them to make progress in their learning.

Multigrade classes provide a chance to use peer tutoring as a learning strategy, and this is also emphasized in the Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014). Although peer tutoring can also be used in monograde classes, it has been proven to work well especially in multigrade classes (Little, 2004, 10-11). This was also emphasized by the interviewees. Peer tutoring is also a way of implementing the concept of zone of proximal development into practice; pupils help one another to reach their zone of proximal development which would independently be impossible to reach (Hoffman, 2002, 49). Furthermore, according to a study carried out by Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher (2015), teachers had experienced that in multigrade classes pupils learn to offer help, and on the other hand, they learn to ask for help as well (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 109).

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this narrative study was to find out, firstly, what kind of experiences teachers have of working in multigrade classes by examining their biographies. Secondly, the aim of this study was to find out what kind of challenges and benefits regarding multigrade classes occur in the teachers' experiences. In the discussion about the results of the study, we emphasize that the conclusions are made in the context of this research. Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) emphasize it is difficult to identify common practices in multigrade classes as there are a number of definitions and contexts in which multigrade classes appear (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 111). This is in line with this study as well.

In order to find answers to the first research question of *what kind of experiences do teachers have of working in multigrade classes*, we chose the biographies of Kaija, Helka and Niina as they represented different types of experiences regarding multigrade classes and teaching. According to our analysis, three factors stood out from the biographies that have had an effect on the teachers' experiences regarding multigrade classes. The first and foremost factor was the history of the person before they became a multigrade teacher. This includes attending a multigrade class as a child, the studying period in the teacher education and previous work experience. This finding was essential as none of the previous researches on the experiences of multigrade teachers have examined the history of the teachers and its influence on their experiences (Aina, 2001; Hoffman, 2003; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004).

Secondly, our analysis highlighted the importance of team teaching and collaboration with the colleagues in the experiences which is interesting because the teacher's profession is normally considered quite autonomous in Finland. We suggested that because neither sufficient amount of support networks nor materials for multigrade teaching are available for the teachers, therefore shared knowledge is experienced valuable. In addition, as Helka's experience illustrates, team teaching between parallel grades is a corner stone in successful multigrade teaching. The importance of team teaching in multigrade classes is pointed out by Hoffman (2003) as well.

Thirdly, the interviewed teachers' experiences seemed to vary according to the school and the context in which the multigrade classes appeared. This aspect has been considered in most of the research on multigrade classes (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015; Mason &

Burns, 1995, 36; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004). Based on our research, we concluded that the context in which the multigrade class appears does not evidently apply to the way the teaching is implemented or planned in multigrade classes. As can be seen from Helka's and Niina's experiences, the opportunities and pedagogical benefits that multigrade classes and teaching offer can be utilized whether the class is formed due to necessity or to pedagogical reasons.

The second aim of this research was to find out *what kind of challenges and benefits about multigrade classes occur in the teachers' experiences*. Based on our analysis of all the five interviews we concluded that the characteristics of multigrade classes cannot automatically be categorized being either challenges or benefits. For example, in some cases one teacher had experienced some aspect as a challenge whereas another teacher considered the same aspect beneficial.

The majority of the beneficial aspects were related to the opportunities that multigrade classes provide for pupils' cognitive and social development. In terms of cognitive development, Niina and Laura pointed out that the multigrade class context offers flexibility to the pupils and allows them to study in their own pace. This is also emphasized by Hoffman's (2002, 47) study. Due to the pupils' varying skills, the teachers brought up differentiation as a means to meet the pupils' individual learning needs and developmental levels. Secondly, the teachers considered the multigrade classes to provide opportunities for the pupils to take more responsibility for their learning, thus becoming more independent and self-directed in terms of learning. For example, Tommi's and Laura's experiences highlighted that pupils' self-direct learning skills develop in multigrade classes more effectively than in monograde classes. Development of independent studying skills is also pointed out as one of the learning opportunities of multigrade classes by Mulryan-Kyne (2004, 9).

Multigrade classes are heterogeneous in terms of the pupils' development, skills and knowledge, and this factor provides beneficial learning opportunities for the pupils. When it comes to social development, for example, Laura and Kaija mentioned that pupils become very considerate toward other pupils, and they learn to collaborate effectively. In addition to our research, Aina (2001) and Mulryan-Kyne (2004) conclude similar findings in their studies (Aina, 2001, 219; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 12). On the other hand, Kaija and Helka had experienced the aspect of heterogeneity challenging from the teachers' perspective. Every autumn the younger pupils are integrated in the class, and it creates challenges for the teachers to get all the pupils to get along and cooperate. Yet, once the pupils are integrated in the

new class and the pupils get to know each other, the positive effects on social development are notable. This finding was interesting as multigrade classes do not necessarily have to be a combination of grades 1–2, 3–4 and 5–6, and hence, change the formation of the class every year.

Moreover, another social benefit that stood out from the interviews was the concept of behavior stretching. The concept of behavior stretching is used to describe how younger pupils acquire the social behavior model by collaborating with the older pupils (Hoffman, 2002, 50; Little, 2004, 11; Mulryan-Kyne, 2004, 10). However, when teachers talked about “social effects”, it was not always straightforward to interpret what they meant by it as it is a wide term and the teachers did not clarify what they mean by it. Furthermore, there was a clear consensus among the teachers that peer tutoring is one of the advantages in multigrade classes regarding the pupils’ social development. According to our analysis of the teachers’ narratives, the use of both formal and informal peer tutoring are used in a multigrade class context. Through peer tutoring pupils are able to perform tasks that would independently be impossible to do which places the task in the pupils’ zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, 86).

According to the interviews data, there were also some aspects of multigrade classes that were seen as challenges. The most significant challenges were related to the teacher’s work, and more precisely, to the planning and implementation of the teaching. Laura and Kaija had experienced time management challenging as they felt that teachers are required to do lesson planning twice. However, Tommi pointed out time management as well, but he had not experienced it as a challenge but rather as an aspect of a teacher’s daily job. The fact that some teachers had experienced time management challenging may be due to insufficient teacher preparation and training. Teachers are not provided with the tools of taking advantage of the characteristics of multigrade classes, e.g. heterogeneity (Hry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 111; Little, 2004, 17; Mariano & Kirby, 2009, 15).

When it comes to implementing the curriculum by using the parallel, the alternating and the spiral curriculum models, it was a notable finding in our research that the parallel curriculum was not actively used by any other of the interviewed teachers than Tommi. The other teachers preferred using the alternating or the spiral curriculum in theoretical subjects as well as in arts, music and physical education. According to Kalaoja (2006), the spiral curriculum has been used only little in Finland, and the results of this study suggest that this is not

necessarily valid anymore (Kalaoja, 2006, 218-219). Additionally, our finding is in line with a recent research by Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) as they state that the Finnish teachers describe searching for common topics as a way to implement the curriculum, and this way of teaching summarizes the core element of the spiral curriculum model (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 109). In these two ways of implementing the curriculum, the benefits of multigrade classes, such as differentiation, peer tutoring, and the pupils' independence and self-direction become more notable, and this was also discovered by the teachers in our research.

Moreover, a notable finding in our research pertained to the occurrence of the benefits of multigrade classes and teaching: the benefits appear whether the multigrade class is formed out of necessity, for example, due to declining amount of student enrollments or out of pedagogical reasons. As we discussed above, there are a number of aspects that the teachers experience beneficial especially in terms of the pupils' development. In order to assure the emergence of the beneficial aspects of multigrade classes the implementation of the teaching is essential to be suitable. It is important for the teachers to understand when the use of the parallel, the alternating or the spiral curriculum model is in place. The right use of the curriculum implementation modes also diminishes the feeling of having insufficient time, which some of the teachers had experienced challenging.

As a conclusion, the experiences of the teachers varied a lot, but it was apparent that their experiences regarding working in a multigrade class were, for the most part, positive. Everyone was satisfied with their jobs, and we could identify three factors that influence in the background of their experiences. The benefits regarding multigrade classes and their teaching were mainly related to the opportunities these classes provide especially for the pupils' social and cognitive development, whereas the challenges were mostly associated with the planning and implementation of the teaching.

This research journey has been educational, but it has also faced some limitations. In the beginning of the research process, we were interested in including multiage classes and multiage teaching in our research. It was difficult to find multiage class teachers, or teachers at all, for the interview, and therefore, that aspect was excluded from this research. Moreover, since there was two researchers it created challenges for the research process, for example, in terms of schedules and the coherence of the study. Also finding up-to-date studies on the topic was challenging, and it affected the progress of the research from time to time. All in

all, we are very pleased with the outcomes, and by working together, we were able to carry out more extensive research.

Our study is significant for the field of educational sciences as it provides useful information about the planning and implementation of multigrade teaching. Moreover, it discusses the benefits and challenges regarding multigrade classes and examines the reasons behind them. In addition to the multigrade class context, this research provides useful information about child-centered learning, multiage teaching and the holistic use of implementing the curriculum to various educational stake-holders, but the focus could be expanded.

This research process has left us wondering about the relation between multigrade and multiage teaching and the opportunities that they provide in the educational context. Multiage teaching resembles in many ways multigrade classes, and hence, they should not be examined or researched as a completely separate phenomena. According to Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) there is a need for school reforms in Finland as the educational system is facing such challenges as an increasing need to deal with the heterogeneity of pupils, inclusion and individualizing learning (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015, 105). We suggest that further up-to-date studies regarding multigrade and multiage classes and their teaching should be carried out with sufficient amount of data, also from other perspectives than the pupil's achievement. The topic should be studied from the perspective of comprehensive schools and how these models could be implemented as a holistic mean. The new Finnish national core curriculum, which is implemented this year, enables the use of multigrade and multiage teaching; therefore the need for new research regarding this topic is more current than ever.

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APPENDIX 1

TEEMA/KERRONNALLINEN HAASTATTELU

Ennen haastattelua haastattelijat ovat esittäneet itsensä. Haastattelu on kerronnallisen ja teemahaastattelun välimuoto. Se tapahtuu anonyyminä.

1. Kerrotko lyhyesti taustastasi mm.opinnot, työura ja millaisia luokkia olet opettanut.
2. Kerro miksi olet valinnut opettajan ammatin.
3. Kuinka kauan olet toiminut yhdysluokan opettajana ja miten päädyit sen opettajaksi?
 - a. Onko koulussa muita yhdysluokkia?
 - b. Ovatko oppilaat olleet aikaisemmin yhdysluokilla vai onko toimintamalli heille uusi?
4. Kerro mitä sinulle on jäänyt päällimmäisenä mieleen yhdysluokkaopetuksesta?
 - c. Kerro vielä toisesta kokemuksesta.
5. Mitä hyötyjä ja haasteita olet kohdannut yhdysluokkaopetuksesta? Kerro hyödyistä. Kerro haasteista.
6. Kerro mistä olet saanut tietoa yhdysluokkaopetuksesta?
 - d. Oletko itse ottanut selvää yhdysluokkaopetuksesta, sen malleista, opetusmenetelmistä tai tutkimuksista?
 - e. Miten yhdysluokkaopetus otettiin huomioon koulutuksessasi?
 - f. Oletko jäänyt kaipaamaan enemmän informaatiota tai opastusta?
7. Mitkä olivat ensi tuntemuksesi ja kokemuksesi yhdysluokkaopetuksesta?
 - g. Ovatko nämä tuntemuksesi tai kokemuksesi muuttuneet sinä aikana, kun olet toiminut yhdysluokan opettajana? Miksi ja miten nämä ovat muuttuneet?
8. Miten olet kokenut opetusmateriaalien käytön yhdysluokkaopetuksessa?
9. Minkälaisia opetusmenetelmiä käytät?
 - h. Millaista apua sinulla on käytettävissä? Kerro siitä.
10. Kerro miten olet soveltanut opetussuunnitelman integroimista kahdelle (usealle) eri luokkasteelle?
 - i. Miten se käytännössä toteutuu?
11. Kerro oletko kokenut ikäryhmien välillä eroja kognitiivisissa taidoissa?
 - j. Miten olet ottanut ne huomioon?
12. Kerro miten olet kokenut kollegojesi, vanhempien sekä muiden opetuksessa mukana olevien suhtautumisen yhdysluokkaopetusta kohtaan?
13. Millaisia eroja olet havainnut yksiluokka- ja yhdysluokkaopetusten välillä vai onko niitä
14. Jos saisit vapaasti valita, haluaisitko valita yhdysluokan jatkossa? Jos ei/kyllä niin miksi?
15. Onko sinulla vielä jotain mitä haluaisit lisätä tai kertoa meille?

APPENDIX 2

+++ Extremely interesting

++ Interesting

+ Gives some insight

- Tells something but not relevant

	Kaija	Helka	Niina	Laura	Tommi	Total.
Theme 1 Curriculum Adaption	+	+++	+	++	+++	10
Theme 2 Learning materials	++	++	+++	+	+	9
Theme 3 Classroom management	+		+	++	+	5
Theme 4 Cognitive learning achievement	-	+++	+	+	+++	8
Theme 5 Child's individual learning objectives	+	+++	++	++	+++	11
Theme 6 Social Effects	++	++	++	+	+++	10
Theme 7 Peer tutoring	+	+++	++	++	++	10
Theme 8 Big differences among students in skills	++	++	++	++		8
Theme 9 Importance of a colleague/ principal	+	++	++	++	++	9
Theme 10 Developing one's professional skills		+++	-	++	-	5

Themes 1-2 belong to broader theme *planning and implementing the teaching*.

Themes 4-5 belong to broader theme *pupils' cognitive development*.

Themes 6-8 belong to broader theme *pupils' social development*.

Themes 3, 9 and 10 that are highlighted in grey were left out from the analysis as they were not seen important in relevance or going well together with other themes.

APPENDIX 3

Kaija

K1, chapter 4.1

“I still remember the situation when (...) there were positions open at the school in the town center, which had monograde classes, and at the small village school, and I made two applications. At the moment when I was supposed to hand in the applications, I still didn't know which one I was going to give to them. But I guess my own history (...) that it had been a good experience learning and studying in the small school (affected my choice).” (K1)

“Muistan vielä tilanteen kun (...) opettajia haettiin, että meilläkin oli silloin sekä tossa kirkonkylän koululla missä on erillisluokat että sitte pienellä kyläkoululla oli paikkoja auki ja mä tein kaksi hakemusta vielä että, mää. Vielä ku mää menin viemään niitä hakemuksia nii mää en tienny että kumman mää sieltä annan mutta kuitenkin sitte varmaan se oma historia (...) että se on ollu hyvä kokemus itellä se kyläkoulussa oppiminen ja opiskelu.”

K2, chapter 4.1

“At the moment we have so many students in our school that (...) we have the 4th and 3rd grades as monograde classes”

“Nyt on oppilasmäärä sen verran iso että tällä hetkellä meidän koulussa (...) on kolmonen ja nelonen erillisluokkina.”

K3, Chapter 4.1

“The first thing that comes to my mind is, I guess, that the pupils learn how to get along with everyone. That they don't just interact with their own class but the older ones help the younger ones. And also it helps the teacher when the older pupils already know my ways as a teacher, and so I can turn to them and ask them to pass the class culture on to the younger ones in the class as well.”

“Päällimmäisenä mieleen. No varmaan se että oppilaat kuitenkin on, oppii tulemaan toimeen kaikkien kanssa, ei oo vaan se oma luokka, että ennemminkin sen vois sanoa että meidän koulu. (...) isommat auttaa pienempiä ja tavallaan sitte se, kun esimerkiks mulla on mää oon pitäny viime vuonna toiselle luokalle ja nyt ku ne on kutosella, nii tavallaan mää pystyn aina niitten puoleen vetoamaan että ne tietää mun tavat ja sitte että no opettakaas tekin näille”.

K4, Chapter 4.1

“Benefits. (.) Well of course that the pupils help each other out.”

”Hyötyjä. (.) No kyl se nyt tietenki se toisten oppilaiden auttaminen.”

K5, Chapter 4.1

“Children learn how to get on with different types of pupils.”

“Oppii sitte tulemaan toimeen erilaisten oppilaiden, kavereitten kanssa.”

K6, Chapter 4.1

“They can be sometimes the smaller ones and then the bigger ones.”

“Saa välillä olla niitä pieniä ja välillä ne on vähän isompia.”

K7, Chapter 4.1

“On the other hand it also eases the situation when I do not have to put so much effort to the sixth graders during the autumn”.

“Toisaalta se helpottaaki sitä tilannetta että kutosiin ei niin tarvii satsata taas sitte siinä syksyllä.”

K8, Chapter 4.1

“I have to differentiate lot.”

“Eriyttämistä joutuu tekemään tosi paljon.”

K9, Chapter 4.1

“In the fifth grade the children should be taught the history of Finland, and then in the sixth grade they should learn about the world history. And then the fifth graders start straight from the world history.”

“Tällä hetkellä että viidennellä luokalla oppiainesta opetetaan Suomen historiaa ja sitte kuudennen luokan oppiaines on maailman historiaa. Ja ku sitte ku vitoset tulee ja ne alottaaki maailman historiasta.”

K10, chapter 4.1

“He said afterwards that he had suddenly realized that he should be teaching two classes. The principal should be the one who knows about these things, but it came as a surprise to him that he should teach two separate groups.”

“Yhtäkkiä hän huomasi että ainii tässä pitääkin kahta opettaa että vaikka siis rehtori jonka pitäis tietää näistä asioista nii hänellekin oli aivan yllätyksenä että ainii tässä on kaks eri ryhmää.”

K11, Chapter 4.1

“It is seen as self-evident that things are taken care off, and not very much attention is paid to it.”

“Pidetään vaa itestänselvänä että kyllä se siellä homma hoituu mutta ei siihen kiinnitä kovin paljon huomiota.”

K12, Chapter 4.1

“In the end, I don’t know if there are any big differences (between teaching multigrade and monograde classes), the teacher’s workload maybe the biggest, like when one is teaching two different curricula in the grades 5–6 or in mathematics.”

“En mä tiedä sitte loppujen lopuks onko siinä nyt mitään suurta eroa sit, opettajan työllisyys siinä on ehkä eniten sitte et sillon kun vedetään kahta eri opetussuunnitelmaa vitoskutosella tai matikassa esimerkiks.”

K13, Chapter 4.1

“A familiar way of working”

“Tuttu työskentelytyyli”

K14, Chapter 4.1

“Increases the teacher’s possibilities to really get to know the students.”

“Oppilaan tuntemus lisääntyy.”

K15, Chapter 4.1

“Not much.”

“Aika vähän.”

K16, Chapter 4.1

“from the village school”

“sieltä kyläkoululta”

K17, Chapter 4.1

“(multigrade class) is not really an issue people pay attention to”

“Siihen asiaan (yhdysluokkaan) ei varmaan kiinnitetä kovin paljon huomiota”

K18, Chapter 4.1

“I could use some kind of forum for peer support, and for example, I notice now that I haven’t even checked if there are any Facebook groups related to multigrade teaching (...) this kind of peer support sure would be needed.”

“Tämmösiä yhteisiä foorumeja kyllä kaipaa että esimerkiks nyt huomaan että en oo ees facebookissa kattonu että onko siellä mitään yhdysluokkaopetukseen liittyvää ryhmää, (...) tämmösiä vertaistukia varmasti kaipais.”

K19, Chapter 5.1

“I have made a decision to teach according to the grade level only in mathematics. The fifth graders have a math book intended for fifth graders, and the sixth graders have a math book that is intended for sixth graders.”

“Mää oon tehny ratkasun että mä oon tota ainoastaan matikassa niinkun opetan omata-
sosesti, että vitosilla on vitosen matikan kirja ja kutosilla kutosien matikan kirja.”

K20, Chapter 5.1

“Teacher needs to be active all the time. Classes where you can be and follow quietly and watch are rare.”

”Opettajan on oltava koko ajan niinkö aktiivinen, että ne on harvassa ne tunnit kun sää saat olla niinkö ja seurata hiljaa ja kattoa.”

K21, Chapter 5.1

“I would not call it rush anymore but more like a feeling of having full hands.”

“En mä nyt voi sanoa että kiireen tuntu, mutta semmonen täystyöllisyys.”

K22, Chapter 5.1

“For example in mathematics, in mother tongue lessons, one has to do a lot of differentiation. It is a tough challenge for teacher to know how to differentiate the right way, differentiate downward and then again differentiate upward for the sixth graders.”

“Esimerkiks matematiikassa, äidinkielessä nii sitä eriyttämistä joutuu tekemään tosi paljon. Opettaja joutuu sillä tavalla kovan haasteen eteen että osaa eriyttää oikealla tavalla, että alaspäin eriyttää ja sitte taas ylöspäin eriyttää niille kutosille.”

K23, Chapter 5.1

“The history books are not meant to be adapted to multigrade teaching”

”Ei oo tehty yhdysluokkaan niin uusia historian kirjasarjoja, joilla pystyis sillä tavalla vetämään.”

K24, Chapter 5.1

“And of course I attended the small school so from there I have gained some knowledge, but maybe not that much information through the (teacher) education. I’ve had to learn it by doing.”

”Ja tietysti sit ite oon sieltä kyläkoululta nii sieltä jonku verran sitä tietoa tullu mutta ehkä niinkö, ei ei hirveesti koulutuksen kautta kuitenkaa saanu sitä tietoa, että joutunu ite vähä harjottelemaa.”

K25, Chapter 5.2.1

“In a way, the children’s age difference can have an effect (on learning). When the new third graders start, some of them may have difficulties in reading, and then the fourth graders can suffer from that.”

“Tavallaan siinä sit semmoset ikäerot varmaan, et kolmosnelosilla, kun kolmoset alottaa, nii siel on vielä osalla lukemisen taidotkin on tosi heikot että neloset siitä tavallaan kärsii.”

K26, Chapter 5.2.1

”They, after all, work in the same space and in the same group all the time, so maybe the differences are can be seen more clearly there., You learn to see the different sides to the pupils, both good and bad (...) I get to know them better.”

”Ne kuitenkin työskentelee kokoajan samassa tilassa ja samassa ryhmässä nii ehkä ne erot sitte näkyy siellä selkeemmin, että oppii näkemään oppilaista erilaisia puolia, sekä hyviä että huonoja (...) Oppilaan tuntemus lisääntyy”

K27, Chapter 5.2.2

”A more negative side is seen in the autumn because of the big differences when the fifth graders come; they start in the autumn, and I have already been teaching the sixth graders and I know them.

“Negatiivisempi puoli on siellä syksyllä että siellä on aika isot ne erot sitten kun vitoset tulee, syksyllä alottaa ja kutoset on sitte jo itellä ollu ja ne on tuttuja.”

K28, Chapter 5.2.2

“On the other hand, it also makes the situation easier that I don’t have to put so much effort into the sixth graders in the autumn, and that there is time to focus on getting to know the fifth graders and to do other things.”

“Toisaalta se helpottaaki sitä tilannetta että kutosiin ei niin tarvii satsata taas sitte siinä syksyllä, mutta tuota, että on aikaa keskittyä niiden vitosten oppilaan tuntemukseen ja tuntemiseen ja muuhun käytäntöihin sitte.”

K29, Chapter 5.2.2

“It helps the teacher when the older pupils already know my ways as a teacher, and so I can turn to them and ask them to pass the class culture on to the younger ones in the class as well.”

”Mää oon pitäny viime vuonna toiselle luokalle ja nyt ku ne on kutosella, nii tavallaa mää pystyn aina niitten puoleen vetoamaan että ne tietää mun tavat ja sitte että no opettakaas tekin näille ”

K30, Chapter 5.2.2

”They learn to get along with everyone, it is not just their own class, one could say it is more like the whole school (...) in our village school it is a tradition that we do things together a lot.”

”Oppii tulemaan toimeen kaikkien kanssa, ei oo vaan se oma luokka, että ennemminkin sen vois sanoa että meidän koulu. (...) mejän kyläkoululla on perinteenä että tehään muutenki paljon yhteistyötä sitte.”

K31, Chapter 5.2.2

”The older ones help the younger ones (...) I can always turn to them (the older ones) because they are familiar with my way of working and I can be like”why don’t you also teach them (the younger ones).”

”Isommat auttaa pienempiä (...) mää pystyn aina niitten puoleen vetoamaan että ne tietää mun tavat ja sitte että no opettakaas tekin näille.”

Helka

H1, Chapter 4.2

”I did the school practice (in a multigrade class) and after I finished, I decided, that I want to be a multigrade class teacher.”

”Siellä sitten harjoittelin sen kenttäharjoittelun ja kun sen olin tehnyt, päätin, että haluan olla yhdysluokkaopettajana.”

H2, Chapter 4.2

”I started studying also the theory to find out in which ways multigrade classes appear. (...) I familiarized myself with all of these Dalton and Montessori and Steiner pedagogies where multigrade principals exist.”

“Rupesin opiskelmaan sitä teoriaakin myös, että millä tavoin tuota yhdysluokkaa on. (...) Eli kaiken maailman Dalton ja Montessori ja Steiner, missä on tätä yhdysluokkaperiaatetta.”

H3, Chapter 4.2

“The principals of a multigrade class (...) can be used when one has different kinds of children, children with differing skills and from different contexts together. Then in the multigrade class one can through parallel curriculum teach different kinds of children.”

“Yhdysluokan periaatteet otetaan (...) kun tulee erilaisia lapsia, eritaitoisia lapsia ja tulee eri yhteyksistä niin siinä yhdysluokassa voidaan niin kuin rinnasteisen opetussuunnitelman mukaan opettaa erilaisia.”

H4, Chapter 4.2

“Not everyone is on the same level in one monograde class either. A teacher can get a lot of help from the multigrade class concept to keeping her group functioning dynamically. Already in the teacher education phase, students acquire knowledge about it, and when they go to teach big classes in the field, they kind of have this as a backup. They know how cooperation between teacher colleagues work, how one can choose or make teaching more holistic by using common themes and how one can also make the most of age levels and the social effects. How one can utilize the other in the class being older, and also the smaller ones learn how to behave and function independently.”

“Ei kaikki oo samassa osastoluokassakaan samalla tasolla. Ei. Niin kuinka paljon tästä yhdysluokkaperiaatteesta jo sinäänsä saa siihen käyttämiseen ja ryhmien tämmöseen dynaamiseen toimintaan ja saa apuja. Eli saa jo siinä opettajankoulutusvaiheessa opiskelijat siitä tietoa ja kun menevät suurryhmään opettamaan sitten kentälle niin heillä on tavallaan takatassaan tämmöinen, että miten työparityöskentely toimii opettajien kesken, miten opetussuunnitelmasta voidaan valita eli ottaa semmosia eheyttäviä aihekokonaisuuksia ja miten voidaan myös sitten tätä ikätasoa ja sosialisuutta hyödyntää. Eli kun toiset on jo isompia niin miten heitä voi niin kuin hyödyntää ja sitten tavallaan se, että pienemmät oppii sitten olemaan ja niistä tulee semmosia omatoimisiakin.”

H5, Chapter 4.2

“They started to think about how we have different kinds of learners.”

”Sitäpä ruvettiin sitten miettimään siltä näkökannalta että tulee tosiaan tällaista erilaista oppijaa tule.”

H6, Chapter 4.2

“If there are, for example, two big classes next to each other, then the teachers can plan the topics together (...) and they can utilize the children’s knowledge and skills and group them together so that they kind of work as small multigrade classes in the school.”

”Yhdysluokkaopetus jos on esimerkiksi kaksi suurta luokkaa vierekkäin ja opettajat on, niin he voivat yhdessä suunnitella niitä aihejuttuja, ottaa ja jaotella (...) Niin ryhmitellä sitten sillä lailla ja käyttää sitten hyödyksi lasten tietoja ja taitoja tai jotakin tällaisia projekteja, että ne niin kuin pyörii tavallaan semmosina pieninä yhdysluokkina sitten siellä koulussa.”

H7, Chapter 4.2

“Gotten a lot of support from other teachers”

”Saanut tukea sieltä toisilta opettajilta.”

H8, Chapter 4.2

“We have done quite a lot collaboration with the colleagues for the benefit of the children.”

”Me ollaan aika paljon tehty niin sanottua työparityöskentelyä lasten eteen.”

H9, Chapter 4.2

“Connecting the group is always the most challenging in the autumn”

”Yhteen sitominen on syksyllä aina kaikista vaikeinta.”

H10, Chapter 4.2

“Nowadays, the most challenging part has been when one or two new pupils join the multi-grade class in the middle of the school year.”

”Kaikkein haastavinta on ollut nykyään se, että on tullut yks tai kaks oppilasta yhdysluokkaan kesken kouluvuoden.”

H11, Chapter 4.2

“Especially in certain subjects, it is a challenge to adapt to a certain age level the things included in the curriculum.”

”Miettiä ja mitottaa aina siihen ikätasolle kuuluvat opetussuunnitelmalliset asiat. Se jos mikä niin luo haasteita tietyissä oppiaineissa.”

H12, Chapter 4.2

“Integration in the curriculum is vital. It is important to know how to integrate the subjects, and above all, it is crucial to know how to utilize the transdisciplinary integration.”

”Integraatio siinä opetussuunnitelmassa on hirveän tärkeä. Eli miten integroidaan niitä aineita ja tuota se eheyttäminen ennen kaikkea.”

H13, Chapter 4.2

“If you teach the things to them only once, they will forget them.”

”Jos ne otetaan yhden kerran niin kyllä ne unohtaa ne asiat.”

H14, Chapter 4.2

“When teacher students enter the field, they have in the back of their mind how co-working functions between teachers, how one can choose transdisciplinary unities from the curriculum and how one can also utilize the age level and social aspects. So when others are already older, one can utilize them and in a way younger ones learn to function in the class and they become more independent. Then I was also thinking the learning materials, how one can utilize the different learning materials in multigrade classes and hence, ease teachers' workload with them.”

”Kun (opettajaopiskelijat) menevät suuryhmään opettamaan sitten kentälle niin heillä on tavallaan takataskussaan tämmöinen, että miten työparityöskentely toimii opettajien kesken, miten opetussuunnitelmasta voidaan valita eli ottaa semmosia eheyttäviä aihekokonaisuuksia ja miten voidaan myös sitten tätä ikätasoa ja sosialisuutta hyödyntää. Eli kun toiset on jo isompia niin miten heitä voi niin kuin hyödyntää ja sitten tavallaan se, että pienemmät oppii

sitten olemaan ja niistä tulee semmosia omatoimisiakin. Sitten sitä oppimateriaalia mä mietin myös, että miten yhdysluokassa voi hyödyntää sitten erilaisia oppimateriaaleja ja niiden avulla myös helpottaa sitä opettajan työtä.“

H15, Chapter 5.1

” (The compulsory education reform) carefully considered how the multigrade classes work and how the alternating and parallel curricula principals should be implemented.”

”Siellä (peruskoulu-uudistuksessa) oli yhdysluokka hyvin tarkkaan mietitty, että millä tavoin se toimii ja miten vuorokurssit, miten tämmöiset rinnasteiset opetussuunnitelmat vuosikursiperiaatteella, missä kohti ne on niinku paikallaan.”

H16, Chapter 5.1

”According to the principal of multigrade teaching, they have divided the group based on the pupil's level of knowhow. In other words, they have made two different level groups from the children in two parallel classes. One teacher has taught one group in mathematics and another teacher the others. What else is that than the multigrade principal. They have combined different level pupils from two different classes so the differentiation has become even stronger.”

”Yhdysluokka periaatteella niin kuin palkintaneet eli ovat ottaneet kahdesta rinnakkaisesta luokasta niin eritasoisia ryhmiä. Toinen opettanu toista niin kuin matematiikassa ja toinen taas toista. Eli sehän on, mitä muuta se on kuin yhdysluokkaperiaate. Eli yhdistäneet niin kuin kahden eri luokan eritasoisia eli se eriyttäminen on tullut hirveän voimakkaaksi.”

H17, Chapter 5.1

”In mathematics and literature, we have used books according to the curriculum, but with the little ones in natural sciences, we have always made a book ourselves.”

”Matematiikassa ja äidinkielessä on ollut opetussuunnitelman mukaisia oppikirjoja käytössä, mutta ympäristöluonnontiedossa pienemmillä me ollaan ite aina tehty kirjaa.”

H18, Chapter 5.2.1

”I get to find out what children know and what their skills are. And then also how the teaching can be differentiated and how the children's individual characteristics are also taken

into consideration, if they truly have difficulties (...) I can concentrate on them and encourage (the pupils) by doing that."

"Päsen tuntemaan lasten taidot, tiedot ja sitten sen, että miten voidaan eriyttää opetusta ja millä tavoin sitten lasten omat persoonalliset jutut tulevat siellä kans huomioon otetuksi, jos heillä on tosiaan vaikeuksia (...) pystyy niihin pureutumaan ja sillä lailla kannustamaan."

H19, Chapter 5.2.1

"The children hardly remember something if it's taught to them only during one school year. (...) The topics that need to be learned properly have been repeated. And that has been one of the benefits of multigrade classes. The children do not have to rush, but they can spend more time studying the topics and discover more about them."

"Ja eikä se lapsi koskaan yhdessä vuodessa, jos joku on opetettu niin ei se muista seuraavana vuonna (...) Sellaiset, joiden pitää vahvasti tulla mukaan niin ne ovat kertaantuneet. Ja se on ollut sellainen etu yhdysluokassa. Lapsille ei tule sellainen hötkyily, vaan he saavat lillua niissä aiheissa sitten ja vähän itsekin keksiä niihin lisää."

H20, Chapter 5.2.2

"It's always very challenging when the new third graders join the class. (...) To get them to function together and to get along with the fourth graders."

"Suurimpana haasteena on aina se, kun tulee kolmannelle ne uudet oppilaat (...) Saahan ne toimimaan sillä lailla sosiaalisesti yhdessä ja sitten oppia olemaan niitten nelosten kanssa."

Niina

N1, Chapter 4.3

"Well it (teaching) has been in me for a long time. I haven't really even thought about doing anything other than teaching. I want to work with children, and by being in the Scouts, I learned that I am pretty good at it, and that I want to share my knowledge and pass my skills forward."

“No se (opettaminen) on ollut minus kyllä pitkään, et en oo oikeestaan muita ammatteja ees miettiny, että jotenki se et mää haluan työskennellä lasten kanssa ja jotenki mää olen kokenu, partioharrastuksen kautta et mää oon aika hyvä sit siinä, että halu jakaa tietoa ja taitoa eteenpäin.”

N2, Chapter 4.3

“I thought that it would be perfect for me.”

”Totesin, että se ois niin mun paikka.”

N3, Chapter 4.3

“Those three years there spent studying for that degree became meaningful also”

”Sai merkityksen sekin et siel kolme vuotta oli.”

N4, Chapter 4.3

“My first experience was during last Christmas when I was substituting a 3–4 multigrade class and it sure was quite chaotic. Like the fact that how the day runs smoothly.”

”Se mun ensipurasu oli silloin viime jouluna kun mää tein sitä sijaisuutta siin kolmosnelosiin nii oli se aika kaoottinen kyllä. Se et miten se rullaa se päivä.”

N5, Chapter 4.3

“In these multigrade classes they sometimes have to (wait) and it is not necessarily a bad thing.”

“Tämmösis yhdysluokissa se nyt vaa on toisinaan pakko (odottaa) ja sitte ei se nyt välttämättä oo mikää huono juttu.”

N6, Chapter 4.3

“It was quite a shock to a newly graduate teacher. And I am not saying I still would have everything under control. But I’ve tried to (take into account) all the contents of first and second grades, what should be included, how you get the day running smoothly so that there will be as many small group lessons as possible, and only first graders’ or second graders’ topics can be focused on. What does the rest of the class do then? It is a challenge.”

“Olihan se aika paukku vastavalmistuneena opettajana ottaa. Enkä vieläkään voi sanoa että oisin ottanu mitään haltuun. Mutta yrittäny (ottaa haltuun) ykkös ja kakkosluokan kaikki sisällöt, et mitä siel pitäis olla, miten saahaan se päivä kulkemaan nii et tulee mahdollisimman paljon jakotuntei ja et pääsee sit vaan niinku sitä ykkösten asiaa tai kakkosten asiaa käymään läpi. Mitä tekee muut silloin? Se on haaste.”

N7, Chapter 4.2

“Well, I wouldn't consider our days so chaotic anymore. They are going pretty well now. By no means would I now change to a class of only 25 first or second graders.”

“No juu, en mää pitäis meidän päivää enää nii kaoottisena. Se alkaa sujumaan, kyllä. Et en missään nimessä vaihtais nyt niinku itseäni eka luokkaan jossa on 25 oppilasta ja minä. Niinku 25 ekaluokkalaista tai kakkosluokkalaista nii en vaihtais semmosee.”

N8, Chapter 4.2

“Great co-workers, two other teachers, and then my own team of a kindergarten teacher and a teacher's assistant, who have been there before, so they have given me a lot of information”

”Mahtavat työkaverit, kaks muut opettajaa ja sit tää mun oma työtiimi nii lastentarhanopettajan ja koulunkäynninohjaaja, mitkä on ollu siellä aiemmin nii heiltä ihan hirveesti tietoa.”

N9, Chapter 4.2

“It wouldn't be possible without the facilities and opportunities that we have in the school.”

“Se vaatii sen et tota on niinku tommoset tilat ja mahdollisuudet.”

N10, Chapter 4.2

“The teachers put together suitable material for every group. We adjust the teaching material of the same topic for the three different levels.”

” — kolmen tasosii. Et tehdään siit samast aiheest joka porukalle sopivat.”

N11, Chapter 4.2

"It's so great to see how the older ones teach the younger ones, you realize that you don't have to be everywhere."

”Miten hienoo on nähä miten ne vanhemmat opettaa niitä nuorempia, et näkee niinku sen et ei tarvii olla ite joka paikassa.”

N12, Chapter 4.2

"The children can progress at their own pace."

”Saa edetä omaan tahtiinsa.”

N13, Chapter 4.2

"If a child already masters the contents then they can move forward, it is not a problem."

”Jos hallitsee jo sisällöt nii sit pääsee eteenpäin, se ei oo mikään ongelma.”

N14, Chapter 4.2

"It really stood out that nothing else was discussed (in the teacher education) but ideal cases (...) It's been very much a case of learning through trial and error. Of course we learned a lot of good things at school, but nothing specifically about multigrade teaching. I don't know if it was ever even mentioned."

”Se nyt oikeen niinku korostu et siellä (luokanopettajankoulutuksessa) ei puhuttu mistään muust ku ideaalitapauksist (...) Kyllä nyt on aika kantapään kautta on menty ja niinku sillai et kokeile ja opi, ja et kyllähän siel niinku paljo hyvää oppi et mitä voi koittaa työssään, mut ei yhdysluokkaopetukseen et mä sanoisin et ei yhtään mitään, en mä tiedä et onko ees mainittu.”

N15, Chapter 4.2

"The teacher education programs could prepare the students better and make multigrade teaching more popular and desirable."

”OKllä ois niinku pallon heitto siinä, et niinku valmistaa ja tee suositumpii ja halutumpii tällasista yhdysluokkaopetuksista.”

N16, Chapter 5.1

“It’s quite interesting how I get to be part of the curriculum working group. We’re renewing the national, municipal and school curricula now. (...) When I opened the curriculum from the computer and showed it to the school assistant the preschool teacher, they were dumbfounded.”

“Nythän on jännittävä tämä opetussuunnitelma homma et mut lyötiin tonne OPS työryhmään. Tehdään valta- tai kuntakohtasta ja koulukohtasta uutta nii sitä sit pääsee tekemään. (...) Mää avasin koneelta opetussuunnitelman auki et tätä meidän pitäis tehdä nii ne (koulunkäynninasvustaja ja lastentarhaopettaja) oli ihan sillee et, what.”

N17, Chapter 5.1

“I myself do not have that big of a role, but they are in groups at the table, they have a task that they are carrying out and tackling by themselves, and the second grader gives the instructions, and the group has to manage on their own.”

“Itsellä ei oo nii suurta rooliä vaan ku he on viis pöytäporukoissa, heillä on se tehtävä jonka he tekee ja itse ratkasee sen et se kakosluokkalainen antaa ne ohjeet ja ryhmän pitää siit sit selviytyy.”

N18, Chapter 5.1

“We don’t really use books that much. Preschoolers do not use any books, the first and second graders have math books, and we use a little bit of the Kirjakuja materials with the second graders. Otherwise we have different kinds of binders and we have materials here and there, and we gather them together. We use computer programs to do task sheets for example for three different levels. So we use the same topic to make sheets for every group and so on. If we had books, I think it would be much harder.”

”Meillä on aikalaail kirjatonta. Eskareil ei oo mitää kirjaa, eka ja tokaluokkalaisilla on matikan kirjat ja hiukan käytetään kakkosten kans kirjakuja-matskuja. Mut tota muuten nii meillon semmosia erilaisia kansioita ja on tota materiaalia siel sun täällä et me kootaan ne ite. Tehdään noil tietokoneohjelmil sun muil sit monistepohjat sillai et ne on niinku vaik kolmen tasosii. Et tehdään siit samast aiheest joka porukalle sopivat ja näin ees päin, nii tota. Jos meillä olis kirjat nii mä luulen et se ois aikalaail hankalampaa.”

N19, Chapter 5.1

“It's been very much a case of learning through trial and error.”

“Kyllä nyt on aika kantapään kautta on menty ja niinku sillai et kokeile ja opi”

N20, Chapter 5.2.1

“If a pupil masters the contents, then they can move forward, it is not a problem in our class, no-one thinks it is exceptional. Or the other way around, if a pupil is not a fluent reader (...) then he or she can safely stay at the lower level. So they can progress in their own pace.”

”Jos hallitsee jo sisällöt nii sit pääsee eteenpäin, se ei oo mikään ongelma tuol meilläkää, kukaan ei pidä sitä mitenkää poikkeuksellisena tai vastaavasti toisinpäin. Et jos ei ookkaa viel niinku sit iha yht hyvä lukija (...) sit voi jo niinku ihan rauhas viel siel niinku siel alemmal tasol. Eli saa niinku edetä omaan tahtiinsa.”

N21, Chapter 5.2.1

“It's so great to see how the older ones teach the younger ones, you realize that you don't have to be everywhere.”

”Miten hienoo on nähä miten ne vanhemmat opettaa niitä nuorempia, et näkee niinku sen et ei tarvii olla ite joka paikassa”

N22, Chapter 5.2.1

“There are five pupils in one table. They have a task that they have to solve, and the second grader gives the instructions.”

”He on viis pöytäporukoissa, heillä on se tehtävä jonka he tekee ja itse ratkasee sen et se kakosluokkalainen antaa ne ohjeet.”

Laura

Laura (3.4.2 Analysis of Narratives)

INTERVIEWEE: (...) What was the question again? (laugh)

INTERVIEWER 2: What is the first thing that comes to your mind (regarding multigrade class teaching)?

INTERVIEWEE: Well. I guess the fact **there's a lot of planning** and especially now when I am starting my third fourth year as a teacher in this multigrade class well **I have gained**, lets say, **confidence, and I do not have to plan as much as during my first years.** (*pink*) I do not have to think as much as before what the others are doing when I'm teaching the other half. That is one thing. But the thing is that in a multigrade class when you have lessons with the whole class, the **bigger ones can help the smaller ones** (*light blue*) so that is like really wonderful how **they become really helpful**. And in a way, **the children working independently** (*red*) is probably **much better in a multigrade class compared to a normal class** in which there is only one grade-level. Then they (like) learn that they have **to independently clean up after themselves** and that kinds of things. That is probably the thing that comes to my mind first. The kids being **independent and helpings their friends**, and then **the planning in the teachers' work**, that it demands a lot, at least during the first years.

HAASTATELTAVA: (...) Mikäs se olikaan se kysymys? (naurahdus)

HAASTATTELIJA 2: Mitä jäi päällimmäisenä mieleen?

HAASTATELTAVA: Niin. Tavallaan se että **hirveesti suunnittelua** ja varsinkin nyt sitten kun kolmas neljäs vuosi alkaa niin itellä opettajana tässä yhdysluokkaopetuksessa niin nyt sillai tuota on **tullut** semmosta sanotaanko, että **varmuutta ja ei enään niin paljoo tarvii suunnitella kun ensimmäisinä vuosina**. Ihan hirveesti ei tarvii miettiä nyt kun ennen piti miettiä mitä toiset tekkee kun toisia opettaa. Että se on niinku sillä lailla. Mutta onhan se sillai että ku tavallaan yhdysluokalla kun on yhteisiä tunteja niin **isommat pystyy auttaan pienempiä**, että se on niinku ihanaa, että ne niinku **kauhean semmosia auttavaisia ovat sitten**. Ja tavallaan semmonen **omatoiminen työskentely** on sitten varmaan **yhdysluokassa paljon parempaa mitä taas sitten tavallaan normaaliluokassa**, että jos on vaan yks luokka-aste. Että tuota. Sitten ne niinku oppii siihen, että täytyy **itsenäisesti ja sitten täytyy huolehtia omat välineet pois** ja sillai semmonen. Et se on varmaan päällimmäisenä jäänyt mieleen. Et semmonen **omatoimisuus ja tavallaan sen kaverin auttaminen** ja sitten **opettajan työssä se suunnittelu**, että se vaatii ihan hirvittävästi ainakin alkuvuosina

L1, Chapter 5.1

"In math and literature both (grades) have their own. And when I teach math here, the second graders are doing some quiet exercises with the school assistant where there will be nothing new for them. (...) And in all the other subjects the theme plan is very useful because it is divided into three years. So during the time they are in grades 1–2, they will study what is included in the curriculum for those two years."

”Matikka ja äikkä, että niissä on molemmilla omansa. Ja sillen ku mä opetan matikkaa täällä ni sitten kakkoset tekee koulunkäynninohjaajan kanssa sitten jotakin tämmöstä hiljasta työkentelyä, missä ei tuu mitää uutta asiaa. (...) Ja sitten niinku kaikilla muilla tunneilla ne on sitten yhdisteltynä sillai, että on jaoteltu, millon on hirviän hyvä se teemasuunnitelma sillai, ku se on jaoteltu kolmelle vuodelle sillai, että niille tulee sen kahden vuoden aikana. Eli kun ne on täällä ykköskakkosella niin ne tulee, sen kahden vuoden aikana tulee opiskeltua se mitä opetussuunnitelmassa.”

L2, Chapter 5.1

"Well it demands quite a lot from the teacher. I mean, in a multigrade class one needs to basically do the planning of two teachers."

”No sehän vaatii opettajalta aika paljon. Siis sillä lailla, että kun on yhdysluokka niin pitää periaatteessa tehdä kahden opettajan suunnittelutyö.”

L3, Chapter 5.1

"In mathematics and literature both grades have their own. (...) I look for the material myself. We do not have textbooks for the subjects, so whatever the handled topic is, I search for the material for it."

”Matikka ja äikkähän on molemmilla luokka-asteella on omansa (...) Mä ite katon etin sitä materiaalia. Meillä ei oo niinku niihin oppikirjaa, että mä sitten etsin materiaalia millon mikäkin käsiteltävä aihe sitten on.”

L4, Chapter 5.2.1

"One child is good in one thing, and another is good in another thing. (...) The children study things in their own time."

“Toinen on toisessa asiassa hyvä ja toinen toisessa (...) opetellaan eri tahtia asioita.”

L5, Chapter 5.2.1

”The children probably work much better in a multigrade class compared to a normal class in which there is only one grade-level. (...) They have to learn to independently clean up after themselves.”

”Omatoiminen työskentely on sitten varmaan yhdysluokassa paljon parempaa mitä taas siten tavallaan normaaliluokassa, että jos on vaan yks luokka-aste.(...) ne niinku oppii siihen, että täytyy itsenäisesti huolehtia omat välineet pois.

L6, Chapter 5.2.1

”I have received positive feedback that the pupils are independent and can clean up after themselves. And they have also noticed that they are so wonderful that they give a hand to those pupils who need help.”

”On tullut positiivista palautetta, että on itsenäisiä ja osaa huolehtia ne omat jälkensä. Sen ovat kans sielläkin huomanneet, että ne on niin ihania, kun ne auttaa sitte niitä, jotka tarttee apua.”

L7, Chapter 5.2.2

”They have to take the others into consideration a lot more.”

”Tuleehan siinä semmosta niinku toisen huomioon ottamista erilailla.”

L8, Chapter 5.2.2

”The second graders can read, so they can work in pairs when you pair one who can read with someone who cannot read.”

”Kakkoset pystyy lukemaan ja pystyy tekemään parityöskentelyä paljon, että laittaa niinku sen ei lukevan ja lukevan kaveriksi.”

Tommi

T1, Chapter 5.1

"In most of the subjects, I use parallel curriculum. So the fifth graders follow the fifth grade curriculum, and the sixth graders follow the sixth grade curriculum."

"Suurin osa aineista mennään rinnakkain eli 5. luokkalaiset etenee 5. luokan opetussuunnitelman mukaan ja 6. luokkalaiset 6. luokan opetussuunnitelman mukaan."

T2, Chapter 5.1

"If we start a new topic in mathematics or literature, we first do it together. (...) The start is roughly according to the fifth graders' curriculum (younger)."

"Jos meillä lähtee joku aihealue, matematiikka, äidinkieli, niin me lähtään ensin yhteisesti. (...) alotus on suurinpiirtein vitosen opetussuunnitelman mukaan."

T3, Chapter 5.1

"The subjects proceed with the spiral principal anyway: in many subjects the topics that have been studied in the fifth grade will be deepened in the sixth grade."

"Totta kai niinku aineethan kuitenkin menee spiraaliperiaatteella, elikkä tavallaan niitä asioita mitä vitosella ollaan opiskeltu niin niitä sitten syvennellään kutosella monessa aiheessa."

T4, Chapter 5.1

"I guess someone could bring up the time management as a challenge from the teacher's perspective. Having enough time for each individual pupil, having enough time to differentiate. The planning and preparation requires a bit more time and work, but I do not consider them as challenges, they are work. There is a little bit more work (in having a multigrade class) compared to having just a fifth or a sixth grade. Maybe those are the challenges. But I could never consider them as such."

"Varmaan joku sitte ottaa esille myös haasteena, no opettajan kannalta onhan siinä oman ajankäyttö. Se että miten pystyy sitte tuota nii antamaan tarpeeks aikaa yksittäiselle oppijalle, miten pystyy eriyttämään. Jonkin verran enemmän menee aikaa ja on työtä suunnittelussa, valmistelussa, mutta tuota en mä tiijä haasteita, ne on työtä. Vähän enemmänhän sitä on

työtä mitä sitte tuolla, jos ois pelkkä vitonen tai kutonen. Että ehkä ne on sitte niitä haasteita. Mutta mä en oo oikee koskaan osannu aatella niitä semmosina.”

T5, Chapter 5.1

”In P.E. we use differentiation, for example in gymnastics, where we think about the objectives. We have certain objectives for the fifth grade and certain objectives for the sixth grade. (...) From those we chose the lower ones. But of course we made the objectives possible to meet. If the fifth^{5th} graders have what it takes, they can also pursue the higher, sixth grader objectives.”

”Liikunnassahan se menee sitte eriyttämisen kautta. Liikunnassa kuitenkin, jos me aatellaan tavoetasoja ja sillä tavalla, että miten mennään esimerkiksi telinevoimistelussa. Jos meillä on viidennellä luokalla tiettyjä tavoitteita, meillon kuudennella luokalla tiettyjä tavoitteita. (...) Nii sieltä sitte katottiin, että mitkä on niitä alkupään tavoitteita. Mutta taas sitten lähettiin menemään sillä tavalla, että totta kai meillä tavoitteet tehtiin mahdolliseksi myös, että päästään sinne 6. luokan tavoitteisiin. Tietysti 5. luokkalaisetki, jos vaan rahkeet riittää nii sinne vaan eteenpäin kohtia vaikiampaa.”

T6, Chapter 5.1

”Two teachers could run two classes of grades 5–6 as a team, and then it is even easier to start thinking about multiage teaching. Nonetheless, in the new curriculum it has been emphasized a bit more than earlier how we can clearly benefit from multigrade classes.”

”Ja silloin voitais sitte kun on kaksi opettajaa, nii kuitenkin pystyy tiiminä pyörittämään kahta 5–6 luokkaa nii silloin on vielä helpompi ehkä alkaa miettimää sitte niinku vuosiluokkiin sitomatonta opetusta. Kuitenkin uudessa opetussuunnitelmassa on tuotu vähän vahvemmin esille mitä aikasemmin. Niin sillä on ihan semmonen selkeä hyöty, joka yhdysluokista niinku koostuu.”

T7, Chapter 5.2.1

”With the fifth graders, differentiating upward is easier because a fifth grader who is very talented in mathematics can easily move on to the sixth graders’ topics because it is studied right here (in the same class). (...) Also on the other hand, if there is a situation that one has to strongly differentiate downward, then again with sixth graders, it is easier.”

”Vitosen kohalla ylöspäin eriyttäminehän on tässä helpompaa, koska vitosluokkalainen joka, jos on matemaattisesti erittäin lahjakas, niin hänhän voi mennä kutosen kurssiin täysin sujuvasti, koska sitä tehään tässä. (...) Myös toisaalta sitte niinku jos tulee tilanne, että pitää niinku vahvasti eriyttää alaspäin, taas 6. luokan kohalla se on helpompaa.”

T8, Chapter 5.2.1

”Developing one’s self-directed learning skills is emphasized in a multigrade class. In a multigrade class the pupils have to take more responsibility for their learning because the teacher is with another group from time to time, so he is not available all the time. They have to know what is going on and solve problems a little bit more independently or with another pupil.”

”Yhdysluokassahan kuitenkin korostuu niinku tavallaan se oppimisen itsesäätelyn kehittyminen. Eli yhdysluokassa on kuitenkin pakko jonkun verran enemmän pystyä ottamaan vastuuta siitä omasta opiskelemisestaan, koska opettaja on toisen porukan kanssa aina välillä eli ei oo koko ajan saatavissa. Pitää pystyä niinku kuitenkin tuota olemaan kartalla, mitä tehdään, ratkasemaan ongelmia ehkä vähän enemmän niinku itsenäisesti, tai sitte kaverin kanssa.”

T9, Chapter 5.2.1

”When I teach using the parallel curriculum model, the pupils, in a way, study the same things twice on some level of consciousness. (...) This is, in my opinion, a good thing.”

”Kun me käyään rinnakkain, niin oppilaathan tavallaan jollakin tietoisuuden asteella tavallaan niinku käy niitä asioita tuplasti. (...) Nää on musta semmosia hyviä asioita”

T10, Chapter 5.2.2

“The pupils collaborate flexibly all the time. Kind of like peer tutoring one another is very common. I think this can be considered clearly as an advantage”

”Oppilaat tekee yhteistyötä keskenään niinku joustavasti koko ajan. Että se semmone tavallaan vertaisopettajana toimiminen niinku toisilleen on hyvin tavallista. Minusta ne on ihan selkeitä hyötyjä.”