
How to Develop a Socio-Emotionally Safe Environment in the Classroom

Antti Harjunmaa^{1*}, Kaarina Maatta² and Satu Uusiautti³

¹University of Tampere, Finland.

²University of Lapland, Finland.

³University of Lapland, Finland.

*Corresponding author email id: antti.harjunmaa@tuni.fi

Date of publication (dd/mm/yyyy): 17/10/2023

Abstract – How to create a socio-emotionally safe learning environment? This theoretical article discusses the premises of a socio-emotionally safe learning environment in basic education and especially the teacher's role in it. The article analyzes two questions: (1) What kind of interventions have been introduced in basic education to build a socio-emotionally safe classroom environment? and (2) How could a model be created that would broadly consider previous approaches and further strengthen the development of a socio-emotionally safe classroom environment? We present a theory-based categorization of programs aiming to develop a socio-emotionally learning environments followed by introducing the model of Learning-Groups-Limits (LGL) that combines the various perspectives and offers a tool for supporting teachers in their work. In the LGL model, L corresponds to the term "learning" as cognitive safety; G to the term "group" as social safety; and L to the term "limits" as emotional and physical safety. It is essential to support teachers so they can foster a positive learning environment. The article contributes new viewpoints to how to develop new forms of collaboration to strengthen the interaction between pupils and teachers.

Keywords – Socio-Emotionally Safe Learning Environment, Intervention, Program, Teacher, Basic Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Encountering student restlessness in schools is a common aspect of a teacher's daily work. As restlessness escalates, pupils face difficulties in fully engaging in learning and studying [1]. A significant portion of a teacher's responsibilities may be dedicated to maintaining a peaceful learning environment and resolving various difficulties among pupils [2, 3]. The behavior problems and actions of pupils struggling with concentration, can impact the entire class, consuming an unreasonable amount of time, diminishing well-being and motivation, and impeding the ability of both pupils and teachers to focus on the core matter, namely, learning. This often excessively burdens the daily lives of both pupils and teachers. If the situation persists without adequate intervention, pupils' enthusiasm for attending school diminishes, motivation towards education wanes, and the joy associated with studying can completely vanish [4]. The central challenges and problems that pupils encounter during their school years can negatively influence their academic competence, learning of social and behavioral skills and understanding the social dynamics within the classroom [5, 6].

In contrast, early identified adequate academic skills and successes in emotional and interpersonal skills increase the likelihood that pupils will become adults who thrive in life, can function independently, are socially active, use fewer social services, and earn sufficiently for economic well-being [7, 8]. Learning such skills happens best in a safe classroom environment. Because in the future classes are becoming increasingly heterogeneous, there is a need for deeper understanding about the premises of creating a socio-emotionally balanced learning environment [9]. In this article, we focus on the basic education setting and the teacher perspective.

This is a theoretical publication in which our aim is to examine various interventions that have been designed

to create socio-emotionally safe working and learning environments in schools. In this article, we examine interventions that have been introduced in basic education to build a socio-emotionally safe classroom environment. We divide the interventions into four categories that represent slightly different perspectives to a socio-emotionally safe classroom environment. Based on our analysis, we present a model that encompasses the core elements of this environment. Our review is grounded in the scientific literature of the field and previous research, as well as the doctoral dissertation of the first author [2].

When examining a socio-emotionally safe environment, this article seeks to address two main questions:

- (1) What kind of interventions have been introduced in basic education to build a socio-emotionally safe classroom environment?
- (2) How could a model be created that would broadly consider previous approaches and further strengthen the development of a socio-emotionally safe classroom environment?

II. THE CORE ELEMENTS OF A SOCIO-EMOTIONALLY SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Our analysis focuses on the idea of building a socio-emotionally safe learning environment. This can be approached from several perspectives. The most well-known ones are social-emotional learning (SEL), which focuses on teaching socio-emotional skills [10]; the ecological approach, which emphasizes preventive structures [11, 12]; and the behaviorist approach, which aims to guide behavior by influencing underlying causes [13, 14, 15]. In addition to these, there are other approaches, such as the discourse approach and the curriculum-oriented approach [2, 12]. While the first emphasizes the significance of verbal interaction between teachers and pupils, the latter focuses on designing a curriculum that broadly supports pupils' motivation and thus contributes to building the learning environment.

To create a socio-emotionally safe learning environment, it is important to focus on both supporting positive behavior and preventing disruptive behavior. The ecological approach emphasizes the prevention of problem behavior, supporting teachers in their work to minimize disruptive actions in the classroom [11], while a behaviorist approach emphasizes procedures through which teachers can positively influence pupils' classroom behavior. It is essential to create clear structures and agreed-upon rules and consequences in lessons, which is also emphasized in the ecological approach. Classroom routines enhance predictability. Additionally, it is important to provide pupils with positive feedback and opportunities to consciously impact their own learning [16]. Alongside encouraging feedback, specific reward systems can be used to improve motivation for desired behavior [13]. When comparing these presented approaches, it can be observed that the SEL approach represents a more comprehensive perspective for creating a socio-emotionally safe learning environment than the ecological and behaviorist approaches. It highlights the importance of learning emotion and interaction skills in creating a socio-emotional learning environment and emphasizes the teacher's responsibility in this process [2].

Building a socio-emotionally safe learning environment involves the actions that a teacher takes to create conditions in the classroom that support and enable pupils' academic and socio-emotional learning [10]. These actions are not only aimed at maintaining order in the class to allow pupils to focus on learning but also at enhancing pupils' social and moral development. Therefore, maintaining order or classroom management is not the ultimate goal; rather, it serves the ultimate purpose of achieving academic learning and socio-emotional gro-

-wth.

Henley [17] defines the construction of a socio-emotionally safe learning environment as a key skill for teachers and describes a good teacher as one who can reduce disruptive situations and facilitate pupils' intellectual and emotional growth. By preventing disruptive behavior, a teacher can devote more time to academic and other essential learning tasks. Henley [17] considers strengthening pupils' self-control crucial, which involves not only discipline but also collective planning, routines, and good knowledge of pupils. Teachers face the challenge of managing complex, fast-paced, and unpredictable classroom situations [18].

In managing such a complex environment, Martin et al. [18] emphasize the teacher's responsibility as a starting point for classroom functioning. Teachers who can better control their emotions and behaviors have a better chance of success in situations that require quick and sensitive actions [8]. This way, they can be better role models for pupils in controlling their own behavior and responding with appropriate emotional reactions. According to Martin et al. [18], temperament-based classroom management means that the teacher creates an academic and emotionally focused environment for pupils and the entire class community while maintaining it. Based on this definition, teachers are expected to learn and identify pupils' different temperaments and adjust their expectations of pupils' interactions accordingly. This temperament-based approach has been found to be related to effective classroom management and reduced disruptive behavior among pupils [19].

Recently, positive psychological approaches have contributed new perspectives to the development of a socio-emotionally safe learning environment. For example, the consequent development of emotional life, resilience, and moral education also support this kind of learning environment construction [8, 20]. Positive support and reinforcement of pupils' strengths and joy at school [21, 22] and interventions focusing on positive psychological capital at school [23] are based on the idea of enhancing positive behaviors, self-confidence, and compassion for others and themselves as pupils.

The development of a socio-emotionally safe learning environment focuses on how pupils think, feel, and act, and how the pupils' relationships with peers, home. As a result of this, the atmosphere of the entire school community can become positive [24, 25]. Interventions aiming to create a socio-emotionally safe learning environment promote student well-being in six areas: socio-emotional skills (e.g., emotional regulation and social problem-solving), self-perception and relationships with others (e.g., self-esteem and relationships with teachers), positive social behavior, behavior problems (e.g., disruptions in class, aggression, and bullying), as well as mental stress and academic achievement [20].

The socio-emotionally safe learning environment aims to develop functions that enable individuals to maintain positive relationships with others and experience, express, and regulate their emotions in a constructive way. By employing these skills, pupils and adults can actively engage in peer groups, resolve conflicts, and regulate their arousal level according to the demands of learning situations [26]. Therefore, emotional and interactive skills are considered learnable skills, and any deficiencies in these skills can be identified and practiced [27].

One aspect to the teacher's role in the construction of a socio-emotionally safe learning environment is to build classroom rules. The rules are identified as an integral part of effective classroom management [28]. Creating routines that enhance predictability, clear structure, and organization of work can support pupils' sense

of security and prevent challenging behaviors [29, 30]. The teacher must be able to maintain fairness and justice in rules. Pupils are more willing to accept rules that focus on individuals' well-being and learning rather than external, individual factors such as clothing and hairstyle [29, 30].

In sum, the teacher's role in the development of a socio-emotionally safe learning environment can be viewed from numerous perspectives. Based on the introduction, we can distinguish at least the objectives for establishing general positive classroom activities and climate. Furthermore, the socio-emotionally safe learning environment can depend on more specific features such as creating a safe, bully-free interaction and relationships between pupils by improving emotional and interaction skills. From a more behaviorist perspective, the focus can also be on reducing unwanted behaviors in the classroom.

III. PROGRAMS FOR DEVELOPING A SOCIO-EMOTIONALLY SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

To create a socio-emotionally safe learning environment, numerous development programs and corresponding research studies have been conducted. For example, Corcoran et al. [31] have reviewed over 40 interventions related to socio-emotional support from 1970 to 2016. Many of these programs are quantitative studies that focus on pupils' learning progress in reading and mathematics, as measured by standardized tests.

We have categorized the programs for developing a socio-emotionally safe learning environment into four groups based on their objectives: 1) reducing bullying; 2) improving the classroom climate; 3) strengthening emotional and interaction skills; and 4) reducing disruptive or aggressive behaviors. These four categories emerged from our theoretical analysis of the premises of a socio-emotionally safe learning environment and the teacher's role in it. We will examine these in more detail next.

A. *Programs for Reducing Bullying*

Numerous effective interventions and programs have been developed for preventing bullying. Characteristics of an effective method include its duration and intensity, meaning that the method should be sufficiently long-lasting with exercises or activities occurring frequently. Involvement of parents reinforces the effectiveness of the method. One characteristic is the use of disciplinary consequences that take place within an environment perceived as caring by pupils. Researchers encourage schools to build anti-bullying programs based on methods proven effective through research [32].

One such intervention is the Bully-Proofing Your School (BPYS) program, developed in the United States in 1994, which has been shown to reduce bullying [33]. The program follows three principles: raising awareness of bullying in the school through extensive surveys conducted among teachers and pupils, strengthening skills that protect against bullying, and creating a school atmosphere that shows more care, thereby changing bystander reactions to be against bullying. The effectiveness of BPYS was studied over five years in various schools with a total of 3497 pupils participating. The research findings indicated that BPYS had the following effects: pupils were more aware that bullying was prohibited in the school, incidents of bullying and related behaviors decreased, and the sense of safety slightly increased.

The anti-bullying program Dare to Care was established in the United States in 1988 [34]. Its aim was not only to reduce bullying but also to create a safe school environment. Dare to Care offers special support to both victims and bullies through individual and group counseling. Teachers and parents are carefully trained to

adhere to the program's principles. Pupils are taught skills and behaviors to avoid becoming targets of bullying. The program also emphasizes collaboration with external support networks. The effectiveness of Dare to Care was studied by implementing a three-month intervention in the target school, while the control school did not have a similar program. After the three-month research period, bullying significantly decreased in the target school, while the amount of bullying in the control school remained the same. Another study examined the significance of the program's duration on its effectiveness. The results showed that the program's systematic implementation over two years had a significantly greater impact on pupils' positive attitudes towards those who were bullied compared to shorter one-year and three-month programs.

In Finland, the KiVa Koulu program (Anti-Bullying School), developed and extensively tested at the University of Turku since 2007, also aims to create a school atmosphere that protects against bullying [35, 36]. KiVa Koulu is implemented in collaboration with parents. It is based on preventing bullying by strengthening the classroom atmosphere, group interactions, emotions, and their management. An essential part of the program is to influence the entire class's actions, creating an environment of awareness, intervention, and responsibility. The program includes KiVa lessons, where the aspects are systematically practiced. The program also offers concrete support on how to handle bullying situations that have occurred and structured lessons on recognizing, understanding the factors influencing, and preventing bullying. Building KiVa Koulu in a school requires the commitment of the entire school community to implement the anti-bullying program. Numerous studies have been conducted on the intervention, and the findings show that the program can reduce bullying, increase school well-being, foster positive peer relationships, and enhance motivation for learning [35, 36].

B. Programs for Improving the Classroom Climate

The "Työrauha kaikille" model, developed in Finland, focuses specifically on improving work peace [37]. The aim is to enhance classroom atmosphere and increase teachers' classroom management skills to promote work peace. The model seeks to influence the teacher's self-efficacy, shifting the focus from individual pupils to the entire group. It is directed towards upper secondary school classes that face significant work peace challenges and require additional tools for support. The model involves tailored support measures based on group-specific behavior needs and provides clear guidelines for teachers' classroom management.

Similarly, the "ProKoulu" program aims to prevent and address work peace challenges [38]. It is based on the international School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (SWPBIS) approach, which promotes positive behavior and practices based on positive pedagogy principles [14]. Work peace challenges are defined as learning challenges, for which the entire school community shares responsibility. The implementation of ProKoulu spans several years and is seen as a developmental process that systematically and sustainably enhances the school's culture, teachers' educational competence, and student behavior guidance.

Several programs for improving work peace emphasize the significance of parental involvement in guiding student behavior. One such program is "First Step to Success" (FSS), designed to support young children (ages 0-8) at risk of displaying antisocial behavior [39]. The program takes a proactive approach with the aim of impacting the child's development positively. Pupils at risk of challenging behavior are taught protective skills to reduce the risk. FSS consists of three parts: situation assessment, school intervention, and parent training. The school intervention focuses on reducing challenging behavior and improving social skills. During the intervention, an FSS trainer sits next to the student and uses green (desired behavior) or red cards (undesired

behavior) to guide the student. Points are earned for displaying desired behavior. Parent training focuses on reinforcing boundaries, defining expected behavior more clearly, and supporting desired behavior.

In Finland, the “Kouluilo” [Joy at School] project was developed, with special attention to trust in teachers' abilities to create a teaching and learning atmosphere that fosters positive emotions, relationships, thriving at school, study motivation, and success at school [21]. The project targeted primary school pupils and was based on Seligman's positive psychological theory of well-being, which includes the elements of Positive feelings (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). The study aimed to identify and create concrete positive psychological practices and methods in teaching to promote pupils' joy at school. By operationalizing the elements of PERMA, specific practices and pedagogical models were implemented in classrooms during the research year. The school culture fostered positive emotions, a sense of community, recognition and utilization of pupils' strengths, and providing diverse experiences of success to each student. Various activities were included, such as gratitude journals, strength training, class meetings, mindfulness exercises, and mentoring programs. The study found that these new pedagogical methods significantly correlated with pupils' experiences of joy at school. Additionally, the teacher's personality and methods, as well as parental participation and support, were perceived as important factors influencing joy at school. Moreover, the intervention to promote joy at school appeared to have a positive impact on the quality of classroom interaction.

C. Programs for Strengthening Emotional and Social Skills

The Caring School Community (CSCP) program was specifically designed to strengthen the emotional and social skills of at-risk pupils [40]. The program is based on the principles of positive pedagogy, which involves building a caring relationship between pupils and teachers, consisting of three main aspects: 1) recognizing the pupils' needs, 2) the teacher's willingness to address those needs, and 3) the student's perception of the teacher's efforts to meet their needs. Caring relationships are formed when all three principles are present in the school environment.

The importance of building relationships between teachers and pupils is not always self-evident to teachers, and it requires special attention when developing a school [40]. The goal of the program is to help pupils realize that teachers care about them and to learn to care for their peers as well. In the Caring School Community program, teachers are expected to demonstrate respect, care, and patience to pupils by setting a positive example. Noyes conducted research on the implementation of the CSCP program in middle schools. The results highlighted improved teacher-student relationships, attributed by teachers to the implementation of the CSCP program. Both teachers and pupils appreciated the program's approach, and teachers reported that it strengthened the pupils' sense of belonging.

Some programs for strengthening emotional and social skills focus on character education, which includes the pupils' ability to recognize and process the social norms and practices in school [41]. Examples of such programs include the Smart Character Choices (SCC) and Character Plus Way (CPW) [42]. The SCC program is grounded in social learning theory, emphasizing that behavior is influenced by individual desires and needs. The program is based on fulfilling five fundamental needs: physical survival, belonging, enjoyment, freedom, and power within the school context. A study of the SCC program was conducted in 77 classes across 12 schools, and the results showed that both teachers and parents perceived positive changes in pupils' behavior due

to the SCC program.

The CPW program aims to improve the school atmosphere, enhance academic performance, and reduce behavioral issues by emphasizing pupils' moral education [41]. The program's theoretical foundation combines moral development and character education [43]. In two extensive studies, the three-year implementation of the CPW program in schools was found to enhance a positive learning environment, pupils' socio-emotional skills, moral behavior, as well as math and reading performance. The need for disciplinary measures, especially concerning bullying, significantly decreased in schools, particularly among lower-performing schools

Developed in Australia, the FRIENDS program aims to promote children and young people's emotional and social skills, well-being, and prevent depression and anxiety [44]. The program is based on the ideas of cognitive psychology, focusing on how individuals interact with their environment. The program's objectives are to help children and young people identify and manage their emotions, encourage positive thought patterns, provide coping strategies for facing challenges and disappointments, while also strengthening self-concept, self-esteem, and belief in their ability to cope. The program consists of 12 sessions, with guided exercises aimed at achieving the program's goals. The exercises offer practical ways to deal with everyday situations that cause worry or fear. The program emphasizes experiential and peer learning, with a focus on sharing experiences, collaborative learning, and learning together. The program has three structured versions for children and young people aged 4–16 years, and it involves parents to ensure that the skills learned are transferred to the home environment. A meta-analysis of the program's effectiveness in reducing anxiety found limited evidence of its effectiveness for low-risk pupils, although this effect diminished after 12 months. For pupils at high risk of anxiety, the program did not show significant effectiveness.

In Finland, the Yhteispeli project was conducted from 2007 to 2015, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture [45]. According to the project, children's emotional and social skills develop best in an environment that comprehensively supports their overall development. Five key characteristics of a good learning environment were identified: warm relationships, being heard and included, clarity and predictability, competence and success, and joy. Yhteispeli was developed through participatory action research, initially implemented in multiple schools, with a comprehensive focus on the learning environment. This method is referred to as a "whole school" approach, taking into account not only pupils but also the entire school staff, school leadership, and parents' role in supporting pupils' mental health [46]. The intervention was well-suited for primary schools and improved the learning environment, socio-emotional skills of both teachers and pupils, and collaboration between school and home. However, the method also presented challenges in terms of teamwork among staff and could cause conflicts during the implementation phase.

D. Programs for Reducing Disruptive or Aggressive Behaviors

An example of a slightly different approach is the Good Behavior Game (GBG), which has been developed since 1969 [47]. It is a method for creating a positive classroom environment with the core focus on reinforcing positive behavior to reduce aggressive and disruptive conduct. The program involves playing a group game two to three times a week for 10 minutes each time, with the total time spent increasing to 40 minutes over the school year. During the game, pupils practice following class rules, and groups receive rewards whenever they successfully adhere to the rules. Conversely, rule violations result in demerits. The groups compete against each other, and the winning group receives separate rewards. GBG is built around four core elements: class rules,

group membership, behavior monitoring, and positive reinforcement. Several research studies on the program's implementation have concluded that GBG has a positive impact on reducing challenging behavior in pupils. The reward systems used in the program play a significant role in its successful implementation, and it is essential to use them correctly.

The Nurture Group model, developed in England, supports pupils with socio-emotional challenges and differs from the previously mentioned programs as it is not a structured method [48]. Nurture Groups are short-term group interventions with a primary focus on nurturing, and they target pupils who experience social, emotional, and behavioral issues that significantly impede their learning in regular classrooms. Each group consists of 6-10 pupils, and the intervention primarily focuses on primary education, although there are also groups available for secondary education. Each group is led by a teacher and a school support professional. Pupils who participate in these groups continue to be part of their regular class but spend part of their time in the nurture group. The goal is for the student to return to their regular class full-time within one school year. The group's function is to provide individualized support to pupils in areas where they face challenges. The relationship between pupils and staff should be caring and supportive. Daily routines, such as meals, are considered good opportunities for learning various socio-emotional skills. The objective is to apply the Nurture Group's practices throughout the entire school.

Nurture Groups are part of a broader national program for supporting pupils' socio-emotional and mental health called the National Nurturing Schools Programme, which is based on six basic principles: reinforcing the security provided by the student's own class, recognizing the significance of education as a foundation for well-being, acknowledging the importance of language in communication, understanding behavior as an essential part of communication, recognizing the importance of transition stages in child development, and identifying the child's developmental stages of learning [48]. MacPherson and Phillips [49] studied teachers' experiences with nurture groups and found that improved emotion regulation and communication skills, along with training for the teachers and other support staff working with the group, were crucial to the success of the group's activities.

The Aggression Replacement Training (ART) has been implemented and studied as an intervention to enhance pupils' participation, reinforce positive behavior, and reduce resistance [50]. The theoretical foundation is based on the concept of social competence and the perspective of teaching social skills, emphasizing behavior, direct behavior learning, and social skill instruction. Maukonen [50] demonstrated in their study how a student's social status influenced their learning of social skills. Some pupils' roles in the group made it difficult to change their roles to accommodate the newly acquired skills, making the intervention challenging, especially considering the group members' disruptiveness and impulsivity. The researcher also emphasized the school's overall responsibility for teaching pupils' social skills.

IV. DISCUSSION: LEARNING, GROUP AND LIMITS AS THE FOUNDATION

Our article demonstrates how a multitude of interventions have been implemented to construct a socio-emotionally safe learning environment. We categorized these interventions into four main groups, aiming to comprehensively promote the psychological and cognitive growth and development of children and adolescents.

Based on numerous studies, it can be asserted that creating a socio-emotionally safe learning environment also offers a significant opportunity to address the issue of bullying, which poses a substantial threat to the

development of children and adolescents. The right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is legally grounded by various international legal instruments, including Article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Reducing bullying is an integral component of socio-emotional safety. Additionally, strengthening the socio-emotional learning environment seeks to establish a classroom atmosphere where, among other objectives, pupils’ self-awareness of emotions, empathy towards others, social interaction skills, social problem-solving, and decision-making abilities are enhanced. All of these represent important socio-emotional skills. Improving classroom tranquility and mitigating aggressive behavior within the school setting are also crucial for classroom safety.

Nevertheless, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the socio-emotional safety within a classroom, demands a more holistic approach, which can be realized through “the whole school approach” [51, 52]. Pupils should be provided with cognitive safety, social safety, as well as emotional and physical safety [2]. These are achieved by integrating previous interventions into the daily school activities as a central part of routines. In this context, cognitive safety refers to the eagerness to learn and study, accompanied by the joy of learning and intrinsic motivation. These factors can lead to continually improving learning outcomes while enhancing learning motivation. Classroom learning increasingly requires collaboration skills and social safety. Thus, nurturing positive social relationships, encouraging interactive communication, fostering a fear-free atmosphere, and promoting positive cooperation become vital. Emotional and physical safety emerge from the boundaries that guide pupils' behavior, which the pupils themselves also acknowledge. Those working in the classroom must adhere to agreed-upon rules that prohibit various forms of bullying. Positive mutual belonging and respect also characterize the work environment. Cognitive safety is most vulnerable when other safety components are not in place.

Figure 1 presents an integrated overview of a model for enhancing a socio-emotionally safe learning environment, which is based on three fundamental elements common to all introduced programs: Learning-Group-Limits (LGL). In the figure, L corresponds to the term “learning” as cognitive safety. G corresponds to the term "group" as social safety. L corresponds to the term "limits" as emotional and physical safety [2].

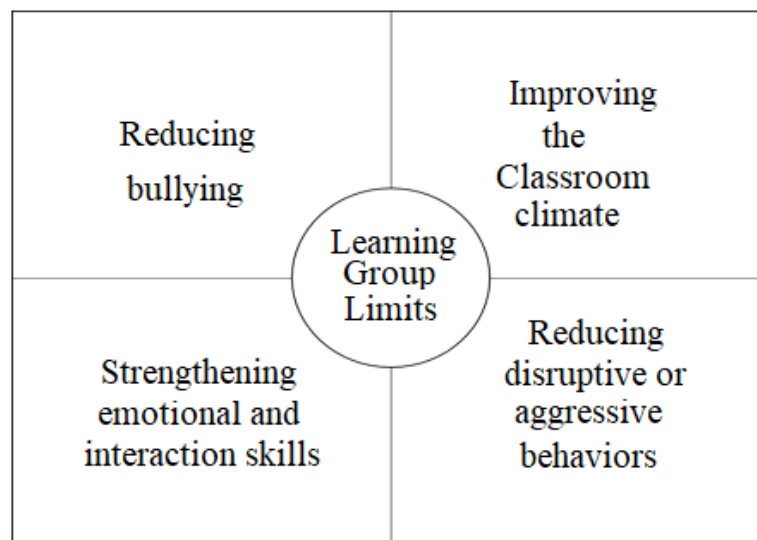


Fig. 1. The Learning-Group-Limits model.

The socio-emotionally safe learning environment can be enhanced through the LGL model. In practice, the whole school as well as every individual teacher should pay attention how to strengthen the fundamental elements of the LGL-model in everyday school life. These elements can be briefly defined as follows.

Learning focuses on how teachers could enforce pupils' experiences in feeling of learning and competence. This element seeks different ways to address the needs of each pupil's cognitive and socio-emotional learning. Teachers need to find ways to differentiate teaching and make sure that basic learning skills are mastered on a sufficient level.

Group focuses on pupils' experiences in relatedness, autonomy and participation. It is vital that school does it utmost to ensure that each pupil is an inclusive part of the class. It is important that pupils find their classroom a place that embraces everyone's involvement and is free from segregation and bullying. Teaching of socio-emotional skills is seen as an integral part of this element.

Limits focuses on the questions of clarity and predictability. Pupils need to know e.g., what to expect during the lesson and the day, what they are supposed to learn and what are the consequences of an unwanted behavior. Teachers need to establish limits, rules and routines in a way that reinforces everyone's experience in an emotionally and physically safe environment.

V. CONCLUSION

Constructing a socio-emotionally safe learning environment serves the balanced growth and development of pupils. The positivity and strong learning outcomes during school years reflect in success both in life and work [53, 54]. Conversely, poor initial school performance, learning difficulties, and challenges in behavioral, emotional, academic, and social development predict difficulties and can lead to outcomes like school dropout and subsequent marginalization [55].

A crucial aspect of ensuring student well-being and learning is also considering the teachers' capabilities for successful classroom work. Teachers need to ensure pupils' teaching and guidance in a way that provides good learning opportunities for each student, offers support and encouragement, and creates a socio-emotionally safe atmosphere for everyone in the class [56]. This is a challenging task, especially for teachers with large class sizes.

Hence, it's essential to create solutions and approaches that empower teachers to feel successful in their work and preserve their well-being. The research on teacher burnout and desires for career change [57] reflects that expectations for teachers to manage the classroom situation alone are overwhelming. Teaching should not merely revolve around maintaining order, depleting resources in an effort to just get through lessons, minimize disruptions, and remove the most significant barriers to learning [58].

Collaboration and co-teaching are required to enhance teachers' ability to provide safe and positive learning opportunities for each student. According to Kolleck [59], teacher collaboration and co-teaching are perceived as threats to teacher autonomy. However, there is also substantial research suggesting that both teacher collaboration and autonomy positively impact teacher motivation. Collaborative culture influences teachers' satisfaction, burnout, efficacy [60], teacher well-being [61], educational reform [62], and student motivation [63]. Teachers benefit from constructing collaboration based on a framework grounded in research knowledge

and considering the demands of everyday work. Building such an operational environment also requires competent leadership, but when realized, it significantly impacts teacher well-being [2].

In this article, we highlighted what a socio-emotionally safe learning environment means for pupils and how the teacher's role in creating one can be viewed. It is essential to support teachers so they can foster a positive learning environment. Collaboration, cohesiveness, and multidisciplinary teamwork are pivotal. This includes not just professional collaboration among teachers but also encouraging interaction, dialogue, and unhurried engagement with pupils, forming the core of a socio-emotionally safe operational environment. We need new forms of collaboration to strengthen the interaction between pupils and teachers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Beaman, R., Wheldall, K., & Kemp, C. (2007). Recent research on troublesome classroom behaviour: A review. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 31(1), 45-60.
- [2] Harjunmaa, A. (2022). *Toimintatutkimus LORRI-menetelmän kehittämisestä luokan sosioemotionaalisesti turvallisen toimintaympäristön tukemiseksi* [Action research on the development of the LORRI-method for supporting a socio-emotionally safe classroom environment]. (Academic dissertation, University of Lapland, Finland.)
- [3] Aarela, T., Maatta, K., & Uusiautti, S. (2016). Caring teachers' ten dos. "For the teacher, they might be just small things, but for the student they mean the world". *International Forum of Teaching and Studies*, 12(1), 10-20. <http://www.scholarspress.us/journals/IFST/pdf/IFOTS-1-2016/v12n1-art2.pdf>
- [4] Aarela, T., Maatta, K., & Uusiautti, S. (2014). Young prisoners' experiences of the positive factors of small group teaching during their basic education—toward the pedagogy of preventing social exclusion. *Journal of Studies in Education*, 4(4), 45-67. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jse.v4i4.6452>
- [5] Entwistle, D. (1995). The role of schools in sustaining early childhood benefits. *Future Child*, 5, 133-144.
- [6] Lechner, C. M., Anger, S., & Rammstedt, B. (2019). Socio-emotional skills in education and beyond: recent evidence and future research avenues. *Research Handbook on the Sociology of Education*, 1(1), 427-453.
- [7] Hyvärinen, S., Sahito, Z., Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2022). The teacher's Educational Psychological Game Sense (EPGS) as the foundation of a student's positive self-conception. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science (IJRES)*, 8(1), 50-69. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijres.2576>
- [8] Hyvärinen, S., Äärelä, T., & Uusiautti, S. (Eds.) (2022). *Positive education and work—Less struggling, more flourishing*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- [9] Rowan, L., Bourke, T., L'Estrange, L., Lunn Brownlee, J., Ryan, M., Walker, S., & Churchward, P. (2021). How does initial teacher education research frame the challenge of preparing future teachers for student diversity in schools? A systematic review of literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 91(1), 112-158. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320979171>
- [10] Everson, C. M., & Weinstein, C. S. (Eds.) (2006). *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice and contemporary issues*. Erlbaum.
- [11] Doyle, W. (2013). Ecological approaches to classroom management. In C. Everson & C. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management* (pp. 107-136). Routledge.
- [12] Wubbels, T. (2007). Classroom Management. In M. Hayden, J. Thompson, & J. Levy (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of research in international education*, (pp. 267-280). Sage.
- [13] Kern, L., & Clemens, N. H. (2007). Antecedent strategies to promote appropriate classroom behavior. *Psychology in Schools*, 44(1), 65-75.
- [14] Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2009). Defining and describing schoolwide positive behavior support. In W. Sailor, G. Dunlop, G. Sugai, & R. Horner (Eds.), *Handbook of positive behavior support* (pp. 307-326). Springer Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-09632-2_13
- [15] Wehby J. H., & Lane, K. L. (2009). Proactive instructional strategies for classroom management. In A. Akin-Little, S. G. Little, M. A. Bray, & T. J. Kehle (Eds.), *Behavioral interventions in schools: evidence-based positive strategies* (pp. 141-156). American Psychological Association.
- [16] Uusiautti, S., & Määttä, K. (2013). Enhancing pupils' study success through caring leadership. *European Scientific Journal*, 2, 398-407.
- [17] Henley, M. (2010). *Classroom management: A proactive approach*. Pearson.
- [18] Martin, N. K., Schafeer, N. J., McClowry, S., Emmer, E. T., Brekelmans, M., Mainhard, T., & Wubbels, T. (2013). Expanding the definition of classroom management: Recurring themes and new conceptualizations. *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 51(1), 31-41.
- [19] O'Connor, E. E., Rodriguez, E. T., Capella, E., Morris, J. G., Collins, A., & McClowry, S. G. (2012). Child disruptive behavior and parenting sense of competence: A comparison of the effects of two models of insights. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 40(5), 555-572.
- [20] Durlak, J., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- [21] Leskisenoja, E., & Uusiautti, S. (2017). How to increase joy at school? Findings from a positive-psychological intervention at a Northern-Finnish school. *Education in the North*, 24(2), 36-55.
- [22] Vuorinen, K., Hietajärvi, L., & Uusitalo, L. (2020). Pupils' usage of strengths and general happiness are connected via school-related factors. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 65(5), 851-863. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1755361>
- [23] Katajisto, M., Hyvärinen, S., & Uusiautti, S. (2021). Changes in Finnish ninth graders' positive psychological capital (PsyCap) in a strength-based student guidance intervention. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 26(1), 321-339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2021.1943469>
- [24] Dodge, K. A., Coie, J. D., & Lynam, D. (2006). Aggression and antisocial behavior in youth. In W. Damon, R. M. Lerner, & N. Eisenberg (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology. Vol. 3. Social, emotional and personality development* (pp. 719-788). Wiley.
- [25] Hamm, J. V., Farmer, T. W., Dadisman, K., Gravelle, M., & Murray, A. R. (2011). Teachers' attunement to pupils' peer group affiliations as a source of improved student experiences of the school social-affective context following the middle school transition. Jo

- urnal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 32(5), 267–277.
- [26] Denham, S.A., & Brown, C. (2010). “Plays nice with others”: Social-emotional learning and academic success. *Early Education and Development*, 21(5), 652–680.
- [27] McGrath, H. (2005). Directions in teaching social skills to pupils with specific EBDs. In *Handbook of emotional and behavioural difficulties* (pp. 325–352). Sage.
- [28] Alter, P., & Haydon, T. (2017). Characteristics of effective classroom rules: a review of the literature. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, 40(2), 114-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406417700962>
- [29] Arum, R. (2003). *Judging school discipline: The crisis of moral authority*. Cambridge University Press.
- [30] Jenson, W.R., Clark, E., & Burrow-Sanchez, J. (2009). Practical strategies in working with difficult pupils. In A. Akin-Little, S.G. Little, M.A. Bray, & T.J. Kehle (Eds.), *Behavioral interventions in schools: Evidence-based positive strategies* (pp. 247-263). American Psychological Association.
- [31] Corcoran, R.P., Cheung, A.C., Kim, E., & Xie, C. (2018). Effective universal school-based social and emotional learning programs for improving academic achievement: A systematic review and meta-analysis of 50 years of research. *Educational Research Review*, 25, 56-72.
- [32] Menesini, E., & Salmivalli, C. (2017). Bullying in schools: the state of knowledge and effective interventions. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 22(1), 240-253.
- [33] Menard, S., & Grotper, J.K. (2014). Evaluation of bully-proofing your school as an elementary school antibullying intervention. *Journal of School Violence*, 13(2), 188–209.
- [34] Beran, T.N., & Tutty, L. (2002). *An evaluation of the Dare to Care: Bullyproofing your school program*. Alberta: RESOLVE Alberta.
- [35] Ahtola, A., Haataja, A., Karna, A., Poskiparta, E., & Salmivalli, C. (2012). For children only? Effects of the KiVa antibullying program on teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(6), 851–859.
- [36] Haataja, A. (2016). *Implementing the KiVa antibullying program: what does it take?* (Academic dissertation, University of Turku, Finland.)
- [37] Kiiski, T., Narhi, V., & Peitso, S. (2012). *Työrauha kaikille: Toimintamalli työrauhaongelmien vähentämiseksi* [Peace to work for everyone: A model to diminish problems]. Niilo Mäki Instituutti.
- [38] Karhu, A., Laitinen, S., Laukkanen, E., Loimusalo, H., Malkki, P., Malmberg, S., Närhi, V., Savolainen, H., Savolainen, P., Selkomaa, M., Suomalainen, A., & Taskinen, K. (2018). Prokoulumalli näkyy työrauhan kehittymisenä ja hyvinvointina Varkauden kouluissa. *NMI Bulletin*, 28(2), 61–71.
- [39] Carter, D.R., & Homer, R.H. (2007). Adding functional behavioral assessment to first step to success: A case study. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 9(4), 229–238.
- [40] Noyes, M.R. (2020). Engaging invisible pupils through SEL: A mixed methods study of student and teacher perceptions of the caring school community program. (Academic dissertation, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, USA.)
- [41] Marshall, J.C., Caldwell, S.D., & Foster, J. (2011). Moral education the CHARACTER plus Way®. *Journal of Moral Education*, 40(1), 51–72.
- [42] Parker, D.C., Nelson, J.S., & Burns, M.K. (2010). Comparison of correlates of classroom behavior problems in schools with and without a school-wide character education program. *Psychology in the Schools*, 47(8), 817-827.
- [43] Nucci, L.P. (2014). The personal and the moral. In M. Killen & J.G. Smetana (Eds.), *Handbook of moral development* [pp. 538-558]. Psychology Press.
- [44] Maggin, D. M., & Johnson, A. H. (2014). A meta-analytic evaluation of the FRIENDS program for preventing anxiety in student populations. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 37(2), 277-306.
- [45] Appelqvist-Schmidlechner, K., Liski, A., Kampman, M., Solantaus, S., Santalahti, P., Anttila, N., Bjorklund, K., Harmes, N., Hursti, M., Makinen, J., Mustakallio-Sorvari, M., Ojala, T., & Pankakoski, M. (2015). *Yhteispeli. Arviointitutkimus menetelmien turvallisuudesta, soveltuvuudesta ja koetusta hyodysta* [Yhteispeli. An evaluation research of the safety, applicability, and experienced benefits of methods]. THL.
- [46] Kampman, M., Solantaus, T., Anttila, N., Ojala, T., & Santalahti, P. (2015) *Yhteispeli koulussa – opas hyvinvoinnin ja vuorovaikutuksen vahvistamiseen* [Yhteispeli at school – a guide how to strengthen well-being and interaction]. THL. <https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/129900>
- [47] Flower, A., McKenna, J.W., Bunuan, R.L., Muething, C.S., & Vega Jr, R. (2014). Effects of the good behavior game on challenging behaviors in school settings. *Review of Educational Research*, 84(4), 546–571.
- [48] Sloan, S., Winter, K., Connolly, P., & Gildea, A. (2020). The effectiveness of Nurture Groups in improving outcomes for young children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary schools: An evaluation of Nurture Group provision in Northern Ireland. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 108, art. 104619.
- [49] Macpherson, E., & Phillips, R. (2021). Primary teachers' experiences of the effectiveness of nurture groups on children's social and emotional skills, academic attainment and behaviour. *International Journal of Nurture in Education*, 7, 15-26.
- [50] Maukonen, M. (2022). *Osallistumista, vahvistamista ja vastarintaa: Tapaus- ja toimintatutkimus ART-aggressionhallintainterventioista* [Participation, reinforcement and resistance A case and action research study on the Aggression Replacement Training (ART) intervention]. (Academic dissertation, University of Helsinki, Finland.)
- [51] Goldberg, J.M., Sklad, M., Elfrink, T.R., Schreurs, K.M., Bohlmeijer, E.T., & Clarke, A.M. (2019). Effectiveness of interventions adopting a whole school approach to enhancing social and emotional development: a meta-analysis. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 34, 755-782.
- [52] Vanner, C., Holloway, A., & Almansori, S. (2022). Teaching and learning with power and privilege: Student and teacher identity in education about gender-based violence. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 116, art. 103755.
- [53] Cordeiro, E.D.P.B., Marques, M.M.C., & Costa, M.T.N. (2021). Socio-emotional education: paths to inspire studies, research and practices. *Revista Tempos e Espaços em Educacao*, 14(33), 1.
- [54] Shoshani, A., & Steinmetz, S. (2014). Positive psychology at school: A school-based intervention to promote adolescents' mental health and well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 15, 1289-1311.
- [55] Forsman, H., Brännström, L., Vinnerljung, B., & Hjern, A. (2016). Does poor school performance cause later psychosocial problems among children in foster care? Evidence from national longitudinal registry data. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 57, 61-71.
- [56] Brackett, M.A. (2019). Ruler: A theory-driven, systemic approach to social, emotional, and academic learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 144-161.
- [57] Klassen, R.M., & Chiu, M.M. (2010). Effects on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction: Teacher gender, years of experience, and job stress. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 741.
- [58] Burden, P.R. (2020). *Classroom management: Creating a successful K-12 learning community*. John Wiley & Sons.
- [59] Kolleck, N. (2019). Motivational aspects of teacher collaboration. *Frontiers in Education*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00122>

- [60] Han, J., Yin, H., & Wang, W. (2016). The effect of tertiary teachers' goal orientations for teaching on their commitment: The mediating role of teacher engagement. *Educational Psychology, 36*(3), 526-547.
- [61] Yildirim, K. (2014). Main factors of teachers' professional well-being. *Educational Research and Reviews, 9*(6), 153-163.
- [62] Moolenaar, N. M. (2012). A social network perspective on teacher collaboration in schools: Theory, methodology, and applications. *American Journal of Education, 119*(1), 7-39.
- [63] Vangrieken, K., Dochy, F., Raes, E., & Kyndt, E. (2015). Teacher collaboration: A systematic review. *Educational Research Review, 15*, 17-40.

AUTHOR'S PROFILE



First Author

Antti Harjunmaa, PhD, Lecturer of Special Education at the University of Tampere. His research interests focus on the school's socio-emotional development, challenging behavior and teacher training.



Second Author

Kaarina Maatta, PhD, is a professor of educational psychology (emerita), University of Lapland, Finland. Her research interests include study processes and caring teacherhood, early education, love and human relationships as well as positive psychology and human resources. <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5658-7021>.



Third Author

Dr. Viet Ha Phung, Thuongmai University, Faculty of Finance and Banking, Department of Public finance, Ha noi - Viet Nam. No 79. Ho Tung Mau.