ACTA UNIVERSITATIS GOTHOBURGENSIS
GOTHENBURG STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES 508

SENCOs' Agency in Swedish Upper Secondary Schools

A lifeworld phenomenological study of how Special Educational Needs Coordinators navigate and manage their everyday worklife

Jonas Udd

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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Abstract

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The research interest in this thesis concerns what it means to be and to act as a SENCO. More specifically, the thesis explores nine SENCOs' lived experiences of agency. To study this, focus has been directed towards existential aspects of their everyday worklife, such as intersubjectivity, corporality, temporality, spatiality and ethics. The research gap this thesis wants to address is further knowledge regarding the professional role of SENCOs in upper secondary schools, with a specific focus on agency.

The study utilises a lifeworld phenomenological approach. To get access to the participants' lived experiences, a hermeneutically informed research design was employed. Three interviews were conducted with each participant, and on two occasions between these interviews, the participants wrote diaries. The empirical material generated for the study was analysed utilising the hermeneutic circular motion. The analysis was aided by phenomenological theory.

Findings in the study suggest that the participating SENCOs utilised intersubjective relationships to create and maintain agency and to deal with an unclear definition of their role and remit. There seemed to be a continuous push-and-pull movement regarding the demarcation of the SENCO role and remit between agents within and outside of school. Between these agents and settings, SENCOs performed competitive and collaborative boundary work. In addition, the participants' moral responsibilities seemed central to their choices of tasks and missions, as an expression of equity and equality, alluding to a professional ethos. Furthermore, several findings in the thesis highlighted the ways in which existential

aspects characterised how the participating SENCOs maintained and created agency, especially when acting as agents of change.

A further conclusion of this thesis is that the participating SENCOs everyday worklife appeared to be in a continuous state of becoming. Moreover, dealing with different understandings and attitudes towards inclusion appeared to be prevalent.

Finally, the professional role of the participating SENCOs seemed to become political when they displayed a political agency rooted in their morale, understood here as an expression of a professional ethos. In this, the participating SENCOs seemed to represent a view on education that contrasted current neoliberal tendencies, such as marketisation, measurements, standardisation, quality control, and viewing students as customers.

Förord

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roliga rum hade nog min avhandling inte blivit färdig än på några år. Tack också till Maggie för alla samtal över lunch och fikor! Tack till Anders ”Ante” Lindqvist för att du är en hedersknyffel med hjärtat på rätt ställe. Tack till Susanne Westin för att du så förtjänstfullt och vänligt läste min inledning och bakgrund med din hökblick och djupa kunskap på området! Jag vill även rikta ett stort tack till alla er som varit och är aktiva och engagerade i SWERA:s doktorandråd – det var tre mycket roliga och lärorika år. Särskilt vill jag nämna Maria R, Gustav, Jonathan, Josef, Tina, Marina, Maria L, Sandra, Malin, Alex, Jeanette, Maria W, Line, Linnéa, Marie och Sara. Tack även till the Panda Patrol: Yi, Camilla, Lea och Erika – utan er hade forskarutbildningen under pandemin varit en mycket gråare plats.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The role of a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) in Sweden[1] has been described as a "spider in the web", a "communicative hub" and a "jack of all trades" (Göransson et al., 2017; Göransson et al., 2015a). To manage their work, SENCOs establish and uphold relationships with students, teachers, and other agents both within and outside of school (von Ahlefeld Nisser, 2013; Aspelin et al., 2021). Within schools, SENCOs cooperate with teachers, other middle leaders, the schools' local governing body, and the student health team among many others. Outside of the school environment, SENCOs cooperate with legal guardians, caregivers, social services, residential care homes, logopaedic professionals and youth/child psychologists, to name a few (Klang et al., 2017; Möllås et al., 2017). Furthermore, SENCOs move between different arenas in the school organisation, from the individual to the group to the organisation as a whole (Göransson et al., 2015b; Höstfält, 2024; Klang et al., 2017; Lindqvist et al., 2016). In sum, the extant research on SENCOs in Swedish schools suggests that their work consists of a plethora of tasks and missions as well as continuous work with creating and upholding professional relationships; this work is set in various arenas within and outside of the school organisation.

However, research also indicates that SENCOs face challenges in fulfilling their remit; for example, SENCOs seem to struggle to define and demarcate their tasks and mission (Göransson et al., 2017; Klang et al., 2017; Magnússon, 2024). Moreover, SENCOs seem to struggle to prioritise the strategic aspects of their work, such as preventive work and school development, while their colleagues, local governing bodies and others expect them to focus on more immediate and operational tasks. SENCOs also need to continuously negotiate their position with colleagues, and the boundaries of their mission and profession are often in a state of flux (Göransson et al., 2019; Magnússon & Göransson, 2019; Svensson et al., 2024). The complexities and dynamics in the work of SENCOs described above suggest that SENCOs need to create and maintain agency to be able to fulfil their remit. They need to have agency to be able to act within and between various

[1] This research focuses primarily on this profession in compulsory schools in Sweden.

settings, inside and outside of school and in collaboration with a multitude of different professions and students with whom the SENCOs continuously create and uphold professional relationships.

The SENCO as a profession[2] in Sweden was created at the beginning of the 1990s, partly in response to a growing need for support in Swedish schools among students in mainstream education. The creation of the SENCO profession was also a response to critiques towards how the teaching of special educational needs students (SEN students)[3] had been organised up until the middle of the 1980s. Previously, SEN students were primarily supported in segregated settings by special educational teachers (SETs). However, during the 1980s and 1990s, SEN students became increasingly integrated in mainstream education following reformation towards a unified school system in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s (Malmqvist, 2015). This meant that schools contained a more heterogenous group of students than had previously participated in mainstream education, which was designed to provide students equal opportunity to obtain qualifications to apply to higher education and to create various pathways to the job market (Lundahl et al., 2010; Möllås, 2009; Ramberg, 2015).

Today, within upper secondary mainstream education, there is still a growing need to organise educational support to create an equitable school for all students (Hjörne, 2018; SOU 2021:11). According to the Swedish School Act all students in upper secondary school have a right to provisions enabling them to participate in education on equal terms (SFS 2010:800). Facilitating these provisions and creating an equitable school for all students is a shared endeavour between all in school professionals, but for SENCOs, this work is central to their intended remit (SFS 2017:1111).

The research interest that is the concern of this thesis is what it means to be and to act as a SENCO. As suggested above, SENCOs' everyday worklife is multifaceted and dynamic (Göransson et al., 2017; Göransson et al., 2015a). In addition, SENCOs work to create provisions commensurable to students' needs

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[2] According to Freidson (2001), there is some agreement on the traditional criteria for a profession, and these describe how the profession rests on theoretical knowledge acquired through higher, specialised education, which gives legitimacy within a certain area of expertise. Within the framework of this thesis, SENCOs are referred to as a profession, leaning on previous research such as Göransson et al. (2019) and Lindqvist et al. (2016).

[3] Here the concept of a SEN student is utilised to distinguish from students who are not in need of special support in school even though the mission of SENCOs in theory is to create an equitable school that is organised in such a way that no student ends up "in need of support" and thus being labelled as a "special educational needs student".

to make the school experience equitable for all. SENCOs also work continuously to encourage and maintain school development to level thresholds and dismantle barriers in schools' learning environments (Klang et al., 2017; Möllås et al., 2017). Coincidentally, research suggest that the struggle of SENCOs in their professional role and work seemingly can be restricted in many ways. They are restricted by a professional role that constantly needs to be negotiated with agents within and outside of school (Göransson et al., 2017; Klang et al., 2017; Magnússon, 2024), restricted by disparate demands on their tasks and missions from various stakeholders within and outside of school (Göransson et al., 2019; Magnússon & Göransson, 2019; Svensson et al., 2024) and restricted by a professional role and remit that is not clearly defined in policy or practice (Göransson et al., 2017; Klang et al., 2017; Magnússon, 2024). Given this, it is the lived experiences of SENCOs of having the ability to act – to have agency – that is the phenomenon in focus of this thesis. More specifically, SENCOs' agency when they attempt to act within their remit, uphold said remit and fulfil that remit.

1.1 Lifeworld Phenomenology and SENCOS' Agency – What About It?

In this thesis, agency is studied through the lived experiences of the participating SENCOs of how they create, maintain, and uphold their ability to act, to fulfil their remit in their everyday worklife in Swedish upper secondary schools. To study this, a specific focus has been directed towards the existential aspects of their everyday worklife: aspects, such as how SENCOs utilise intersubjective relationships, their bodies, schools' spaces, ethics and boundaries and further, how these aspects of their everyday worklife intertwine in their lived experiences. The research gap this thesis wants to address is further knowledge regarding the professional role of SENCOs in upper secondary schools, with a specific focus on the agency of the SENCOs.

SENCOs in Sweden are part of schools' student health teams and work to create a school for all students in collaboration with in-school professionals as well as with professions outside of the school environment. One central aspect of SENCOs' remit is acting as agents of change, encouraging and maintaining school development to level thresholds and dismantle barriers in schools' learning environments (Bladini, 1990). How SENCOs perform this work in upper secondary schools is something that needs to be further researched because most research on SENCOs in Sweden has focused on compulsory school (e.g.

Göransson et al., 2015b; Göransson et al., 2019). SENCOs' work includes working with individuals, groups and schools' organisations, often on a weekly basis. Thereby, SENCOs are situated within and in-between various professional environments that require them to continuously work with their professional relationships and to utilise the physical spaces in school to fulfil their remit (Gerrbo, 2012; Klang et al., 2017; Möllås et al., 2017). Moreover, the existential aspects of the SENCO profession, such as intersubjectivity, embodiment, spatiality, temporality and ethics of the profession, are even less researched (see Appendix 1) – a situation that motivated the lifeworld phenomenological approach in this thesis. An approach which enabled studying the plurality, ambiguity and multifaceted aspects of the profession. Thus, this thesis was approached with the intent of creating a better understanding of the existentiality of the profession, that is, what it means to be and to act as a SENCO in Swedish upper secondary schools. This is studied through the lived experiences of nine SENCOs of their ability to create and maintain agency (i.e. their ability to act and fulfil their remit) in their everyday worklife.

The study is empirical and utilises a lifeworld phenomenological approach (Bengtsson, 2013b) to study the existential aspects of the SENCO profession. Within lifeworld phenomenology, experiences are understood as lived. Lived experiences are usually unreflected and experienced in the natural attitude, a taken-for-granted attitude of human everyday life (Bengtsson, 2013b). A further goal of the thesis was to understand the context within which the everyday worklife of SENCOs were formed in Swedish upper secondary schools. The concept everyday worklife is based on Schütz's (1932/1967) work on the phenomenology of the social world wherein the everyday life is the main world in which there are several different possible subworlds with specific cultures, items and possible actions that define and delimit them; the everyday worklife is understood as one such subworld in this thesis.

1.2 Aim and Research Questions

The overarching aim of the thesis was to explore what it means to be and to act as a SENCO in Swedish upper secondary schools. This was studied by focusing on the agency of SENCOs and utilising a lifeworld phenomenological approach (Bengtsson, 2013b) and hermeneutics as the analytical method (Gilje, 2020; Ödman, 2007).

The thesis consists of four articles and an integrating essay. The first of these four articles focused on the way SENCOs' everyday worklife changed during the COVID-19 pandemic and on the challenges and opportunities that arose in their everyday worklife during the pandemic. In addition, the article explicated how the SENCOs dealt with these changes, challenges and opportunities. The second article explored SENCOs' lived experiences of agency by focusing on their lived body, lived space, and professional ethos. The third article explored how intersubjective relationships were interwoven with SENCOs' agency. The fourth and final article explored SENCOs' boundary work and how they dealt with tensions and resistance between agents and settings in their everyday worklife. Together, these four articles formed insights into certain existential aspects of the SENCO profession such as its temporality, corporality, spatiality intersubjectiveness and ethics. The following sections present the overarching research question for the entire thesis and the specific aims and research questions for each of the four articles.

1.2.1 Overarching Research Question for the Whole Thesis

How do SENCOs in Swedish upper secondary schools create and maintain agency in their everyday worklife?

1.2.2 Specific Aims and Research Questions for Each Article

Article I

The aim of this article was to explore nine SENCOs' lived experiences of the changes, challenges and opportunities which arose when working in Swedish upper secondary schools through the spring term of 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. This exploration was guided by the following research questions:

(i) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of how their everyday worklife changed during the pandemic?
(ii) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of dealing with the challenges and opportunities which arose in their everyday worklife during the pandemic?

Article II

The second article aimed to explore the methods and strategies SENCOs in upper secondary school utilised to have agency to fulfil their remit. This was studied through the lived experiences of: (i) embodying the SENCO role, (ii) how schools' environments were utilised and (iii) professional ethos. Thus, the research questions for this article were as follows:

(i) What are the SENCOs lived experiences of utilising their body and various school environments to manage their ability to act in their everyday worklife?
(ii) How can SENCOs' actions be understood as aspects of a professional ethos?

Article III

The aim in the third article was to characterise how the professional relationships of SENCOs in upper secondary schools were created and maintained in their everyday worklife to enact inclusion in practice. Three elements of their everyday worklife were specifically addressed: (i) how they managed relationships; (ii) the interplay between their relationships and ability to enact inclusion in practice and (iii) their navigation of different views on inclusion and special educational needs provisions. Consequently, the research questions of the article were as follows:

(i) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of how they manage their relationships in their everyday worklife?
(ii) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of how relationships interplay with their ability to enact inclusion in practice in their everyday worklife?
(iii) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of navigating different views on inclusion and special educational needs provisions in their everyday worklife?

Article IV

The aim of the fourth article was to explore SENCOs' boundary work in Swedish upper secondary school. This was studied through the lived experiences of SENCOs working with various agents within and between in-school settings. Accordingly, the research questions for this article were as follows:

(i) What characterises SENCOs' boundary work in their everyday worklife?

(ii) How do SENCOs deal with tensions and resistance that arise in their boundary work?

1.3 The SENCO – One Profession or Several?

In Sweden there are two professions within the student health organisation of a school that have somewhat overlapping tasks and missions, these are *speciallärare* (SWE, literally *special teachers*) and *specialpedagoger* (SWE, literally *special pedagogues*). The *special teachers* work primarily as teachers in the classroom or with small groups of students with a focus on students with disabilities or students who are in special needs in Swedish or mathematics. In contrast, *special pedagogues* primarily work to organise and manage equitable education for all students through special educational provisions and inclusive provisions on individual, group and organisational levels in school.

There is no crystal-clear demarcation between special pedagogues and special teachers; they have similar educations and they share, to some extent, both tasks and missions in their everyday worklife (Göransson et al., 2017; Göransson et al., 2015a). In the interest of communicating the results of this research internationally, the UK term "SENCO" has been used in the thesis to describe the Swedish profession of the *special pedagogue*. Even though there is no exact correspondence between the professions: *special pedagogue* in Sweden and the SENCO in other countries, the similarities between the professions are enough to describe the profession in this way, see also Abbott, (2007); Cole, (2005); Göransson et al., (2015a); Lindqvist, (2013).

A further comment on the nomenclature of special educational professionals is that there is variety in how this is dealt with in different research studies. Sometimes, when special education teachers (SETs) are studied together with special pedagogues (SENCOs) in the Swedish context they are referred to collectively as special needs educators (SNEs) (Göransson et al., 2019). To further complicate matters, sometimes when these groups are studied in comparative approaches both SENCOs, and SETs can be referred to as Special Educators (SEs) (Jortveit et al., 2020; Takala et al., 2015). To deal with this issue within the boundaries of this thesis, SENCOs will be referred to as SENCOs only when, in reference to actual SENCOs or Swedish special pedagogues, other special educational professionals will be referred to as SETs, SNEs or SEs depending on the choices made by the cited authors.

In the thesis, there is some confounding regarding previous research results with SEs and SNEs because these can refer to SETs and SENCOs or similar professions. However, this issue cannot be solved within the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the choice to utilise the term "SENCOs" only when SENCOs or special pedagogues were actually described in the corresponding reference was made to at least create transparency regarding the profession that is the focus of this study.

1.4 The Disposition of the Integrating Essay

The thesis began with this introductory chapter, which described the research interest of the thesis, including the overarching aim and research question, as well as the aims and research questions for each article in the thesis. In addition, the role of the SENCO has been outlined and the knowledge to be contributed by this thesis was explained.

The remainder of the thesis continues as follows: In the second chapter, reforms of the upper secondary school and the development of the SENCO profession are outlined to provide a background to the knowledge goals of the thesis. The third chapter presents the previous research upon which this thesis builds. Research on the agency of SENCOs is at the forefront, but there is also research included on the professional role of SENCOs, as well as research on inclusive and special needs education in upper secondary schools and phenomenological research on inclusive and special needs education. In the fourth chapter, the theoretical approach used in this thesis, lifeworld phenomenology, is explained. Relevant analytical concepts are also elaborated and clarified in this chapter. In the fifth chapter, the methodology and methods utilised in the study are described. In the sixth chapter, the results are presented. The discussion is presented in the seventh chapter, and the eighth chapter contains a Swedish summary of the thesis.

Chapter 2 Background

In this chapter, the context in which SENCOs in upper secondary schools perform their work is explicated. Starting with the 1960s, a brief historic overview of national reforms important to how the worklife of SENCOs were formed is provided. A specific focus is placed on events that are of importance for this thesis; therefore, this background should not be considered a comprehensive historical overview of the development of upper secondary schooling in Sweden. Rather, by addressing important events, such as the reforms of upper secondary schooling and the development of the SENCO profession from the 1960s, a backdrop to the knowledge goals of the thesis is provided.

2.1 Unification of Upper Secondary School

To explain the unification of Swedish upper secondary schools, a summary of the unification of compulsory schooling needs to first be presented. The reason for this is that this initial unification led to an expansion of upper secondary school and a growth in heterogeneity in the student population. The unification process worked in tandem with a labour market vying for educated individuals and a political urge to enrol 100% of the student population in upper secondary schools (Lundahl et al., 2010; Malmqvist, 2015; Ramberg, 2015; Svensson, 1996).

In 1946, a school reform was launched by the government that, among other things, aimed to unify compulsory school and transform it from a parallel school system into one unified compulsory school of nine years (SOU 1948:27)[4]. When the reform was put into effect in 1962, after a series of governmental investigations starting with the 1957s advisory school committee (SOU 1959:35), compulsory schooling was unified. However, the ninth year was divided into different tracks depending on whether pupils were aiming for upper secondary studies or direct entry into the job market (Curriculum for Compulsory Schools 1962, or Lgr62); thus, a residue of the former parallel system was still in effect. This came to an end in 1970 because of the 1969 curriculum (Lgr69); the different tracks in the ninth

[4] An SOU, (SWE: Statlig Offentlig Utredning) is a Swedish Government Official Report, such a report details the findings, conclusions and suggestions from a national official inquiry.

school year became one and preparatory vocational studies were removed from the lower secondary curriculum. Prior to the unification of the compulsory school, the form of education a pupil received was mainly dependent on their gender, place of residence and social class (Wärvik et al., 2021) the reform aimed to change this: "From 1962, with the implementation of grundskolan [compulsory school], all children would receive a common educational foundation, independent of gender, place of residence, or social class" (p. 208). The unification of the compulsory school system and efforts to level aspects pertaining to gender, social class and place of residence and make all students eligible for upper secondary education had ramifications for upper secondary education in that there was an increase in heterogeneity among the students. Due to this development and then political ambitions of enrolling 100% of the student population in upper secondary education, there was now a growing need for support for students in upper secondary school (Lundahl et al., 2010; Malmqvist, 2015; Ramberg, 2015; Svensson, 1996).

Upper secondary education has a long history in Sweden, but it was not until the early 1970s that the previously different educational options were organised under the same educational umbrella, a unified upper secondary school (Larsson & Westberg, 2024; Ramberg, 2015). At the beginning of the 1960s, mainstream upper secondary education was still divided into different organisations bearing within them a traditional social stratification mirroring class society at large (Lundahl et al., 2010). In the wake of the new reform in 1964 (Prop. 1964:171) a new curriculum was formulated, Lgy65 (Curriculum for Upper Secondary School, Swe: *gymnasium*) that was launched in the 1966/67 schoolyear. This curriculum was followed by Lgy70 which was launched in 1971. There were several purposes for the reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, but one central purpose was to strive to match education and societal needs and to open up educational choices for students, thus avoiding too early and too narrow educational pathways for students in upper secondary education (Larsson & Westberg, 2024; Lundahl et al., 2010).

The next large reform of upper secondary education in Sweden took place in the early 1990s when a new curriculum was formulated, the 1994 curriculum (Lpf94). During this reform, vocational preparation in upper secondary education was set at three years long and was clearly established as a programme within a unified upper secondary school under the umbrella of the new curriculum (Giota & Emanuelsson, 2018; Lundahl et al., 2010). The change to a three-year-long programme within the upper secondary school with the same core subjects in all 16 programme areas was a challenge for students who in current nomenclature

would be called SEN students – those with learning difficulties or school fatigue (Helldin et al., 2022). Students who were not eligible for the national programmes were enrolled in a preparatory programme, the seventeenth upper secondary program. The reformation of upper secondary education in the early 1990s had socio-economic and equitable imperatives as well, aiming to reduce class and gender bias in schooling (Lundahl et al., 2010). In addition, the reform brought with it ideas to bolster and support the professionalisation processes of SENCOs, as well as teachers (Göransson et al., 2015b; Nilsson Lindström & Beach, 2022).

In the 1990s, parallel to the strive for professionalisation of teachers (Nilsson Lindström & Beach, 2022) and SENCOs (Göransson et al., 2015b) came major organisational changes of the school system. Marketisation and decentralisation were broadly introduced, and municipalities became responsible for the organisation of their own schools. Moreover, management ideas, such as goal orientation and a focus on results combined with freedom of choice and freedom to influence became paramount and started to change the entire Swedish school system, including upper secondary schools (Lundahl et al., 2010; Magnússon, 2020). One could argue that these changes were somewhat problematic in relation to the mission of SENCOs to create a school for all students. It has been suggested that marketisation, freedom of choice and individual responsibility can exacerbate and perpetuate inequalities in schooling related to class, ethnicity, gender and special educational needs (Berhanu, 2020; Dahlstedt, 2007; Dyson & Berhanu, 2012; Wallström, 2018).

In the 2000s, following a national official inquiry in 2008 (SOU 2008:27), a new curriculum was launched (Curriculum for Upper Secondary Education 2011, or Gy11). With this reform of upper secondary schools, the government wanted to create upper secondary programmes with different purposes. There was motivation for vocational programmes that matched the skills that were desired in the job market, and an emphasis on further education was downplayed. Students could still choose these courses, but they were not obligatory, as they were in the academic programmes. The reform also introduced apprenticeship training on a large scale.

The Gy11 reform was criticised by the political parties in opposition. The opposition claimed that the reform would enhance class differences and create difficulties for students from vocational programmes to change career paths further in life (Lundahl et al., 2010). The reform was also criticised for forcing students to make career choices at too early an age and, in addition, for making it difficult for students in the vocational programmes that were planning to

participate in higher education. You could argue that this reform had a strong focus on stakeholders who were the receivers of students completing the schooling – in this case, they were largely the labour market and higher education where desired competences and the discourse on life-long learning were dominant, leaving the idea of *Bildung*[5] behind (Lundahl et al., 2010).

To further strengthen the development of schooling in Sweden a national official inquiry was launched in 2015 (SOU 2017:35), which aimed to improve knowledge outcomes, improve quality in teaching; and increase equity between schools. With regard to the inquiry (SOU 2017:35), some inclinations in its direction can be inferred from the suggestions provided. Inclusion in school practice was mentioned but was criticised for not being successful and as primarily catering to the average student, whereas SEN students and the *high-achieving* and *gifted* students were suggested as not receiving the challenges and stimulation which they require and are entitled.

In 2020, a national official inquiry focusing on equity in education tried to encapsulate what needed to be done to create an equitable school system (SOU 2020:28). This is important for SENCOs as well as for SEN students because among SEN students, there are disproportional numbers of individuals regarding socioeconomic status, gender and ethnicity (Ainscow, 2020; Berhanu, 2020; Dyson & Berhanu, 2012; Magnússon, 2020). In addition, segregated solutions and the possibility of exclusion for newly arrived migrant students in Sweden are currently risks in the school system (Bunar & Juvonen, 2022), concerns which also intertwine with the professional role of SNEs (Johansson, 2022; Johansson et al., 2024). Furthermore, inequalities in education might exacerbate school failures among already vulnerable groups as a consequence of economic inequality, which is currently a growing issue in Sweden (SOU 2019:65). Moreover, approximately 15% (SOU 2021:11) of all students in mainstream compulsory education in Sweden are not eligible for upper secondary education after finishing ninth grade. This prompted a national official inquiry focusing on active support for SEN students and the work of student health organisations, which usually include SENCOs (SOU 2021:11). These developments are an integral part of the worklife

[5] In the context of this thesis, the concept of *Bildung* is understood in contrast to education which has specific educational goals and is clearly delimited. *Bildung* concerns a holistic view of learning that includes the whole human being, their transformation and ethics, situated in a cultural context. In addition, the Greek concept Paiedeia encapsulates most of the same aspects that are used to define *Bildung* in this thesis (National Encyclopaedia, 2025; c.f. Dyngeland & Engelsrud, 2024).

of SENCOs in Swedish upper secondary schools and thereby are also of interest to contextualise the focus of this thesis.

There are also other current tendencies in the Swedish school system. A re-centralisation might be gaining momentum (Andersson et al., 2024; Wermke et al., 2024) and a slew of national official inquiries aiming to reform a wide array of aspects related to schooling in Sweden are launched. Current examples include the conditions for SEN students in school (SOU 2023:95), more pathways to the job market for upper secondary students (SOU 2024:74), reformed teacher training programmes (SOU 2024:81) and peace and quiet and a sense of safety in the school environment (SOU 2025:8). There is also one national official inquiry investigating the possibility of a new curriculum (Gy25) and a new grading system for upper secondary school (SOU 2025:19), as well as an aim at making the teaching profession more attractive on the job market (SOU 2025:26).

In summary, one can note that since the unification of the upper secondary school in Sweden, we have seen push-and-pull movements in policy between different interest groups, such as political parties, governments, teacher organisations, the labour market and teacher unions, all trying to influence how the upper secondary school is managed and organised. For this thesis, the integration of SEN students in upper secondary mainstream education in the early 1980s combined with a unified school system and the resultant larger, much more diverse group of students attending upper secondary school are of interest. In addition, achieving equity and equality in education and the possible tension between the ideals of *Bildung* and a more instrumental approach to education are interesting in relation to the worklife of SENCOs. A question that remains to be answered is how the SENCO profession fares in this changing educational and societal landscape? A complete answer is not within the scope of this thesis, but some of the tensions between the professional role and remit of SENCOs in relation to these issues will be described in the following section.

2.1.1 Meeting the Challenges of a Heterogenous Student Population in Upper Secondary School – SETs or SENCOs, a Political Tug of War

The reformation of upper secondary school ties into how school development approached the growing heterogeneity of the student population and a growing need for their support. Before 1962, no specific education programme existed for teachers who would be working with SEN students in compulsory or upper

secondary school (Norgren et al., 2024). However, in 1962, a one-year programme was initiated for teachers who would work with SEN students in a *broad* setting (Bladini, 1990).

During the 1970s, discussions concerning special needs education started to evolve from teaching students in segregating settings to integrating them into regular classrooms[6]. This led to the recommendation, following the 1974 SIA-inquiry (*Skolans Inre Arbete*, or "Schools' Inner Work") (SOU, 1974:53), to start abolishing segregated special education and start integrating SEN pupils into regular classrooms instead (Malmqvist, 2015). This national official inquiry (SOU 1974:53) and the LUT-74 inquiry (*Lärarutbildningsutredningen* or "The Teacher Education Investigation) led to the initiation of a SET training programme (Höstfält, 2024; Malmqvist, 2015).

Before the introduction of the SENCO profession in the early 1990s, SETs worked to create support for students. Until the early 1980s, SETs had, according to Bladini (1990), three different functions: First, they taught in special needs classes, for which they solely took full educational responsibility. Second, they assisted the regular teachers and helped them integrate SEN students. The third and final function was that of *agents of change,* which was a role that followed the SIA and LUT inquiries and the new curricula for compulsory schools in the early 1980s (Bladini, 1990). Being agents of change was a new function for the SETs, which also changed the dynamics in their relationships with regular teachers. The SETs started to demand and/or suggest changes to the teachers' work regarding the methods of teaching and how the teachers' work was organised (Ahlberg, 2007). The changes that followed in the wake of the national official inquiries in the 1970s, aimed to make the work with SEN students more proactive and an integrated part of the schools' normal organisation, instead of being something added, something *special* (Bladini, 1990). The changes towards being agents of change and working proactively became central parts of the remit of SENCOs (Malmgren Hansen, 2002) and are issues of interest to this thesis regarding the relationship between SENCOs' agency and their remit.

In 1981, two further national official inquiries were introduced, both focusing on a reformation of upper secondary school (SOU 1981:96; SOU 1981:97). The SOU 1981:96 aimed at reforming upper secondary school to meet the challenges

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6 The school form in focus in this thesis is mainstream education only. Sweden has a parallel school system consisting of mainstream upper secondary school and upper secondary school for pupils with intellectual disabilities, which has its own curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2025).

of the projected future society, considering a more diverse society and a job market in flux. Moreover, a specific focus on special needs was formulated because the aim was to enrol 100% of the eligible student population in upper secondary school. Concurrently, in the SOU 1981:97, the risk and problem of student dropouts were indicated as an important focus. The inquiry explicated the reasons for dropouts and possible strategies for schools and student health teams to assist students at risk of dropout with staying and graduating upper secondary school. In the discussion of SOU 1981:97, the difference between the organisation of the student health teams in compulsory school and upper secondary school was stressed:

> The pupil health teams' services, which are relatively abundant in primary schools in the form of counsellors, psychologists, SETs and more intensive class management work have no equivalent in upper secondary schools. The extent of such resources can certainly be discussed, but many pupils who have been dependent on these efforts feel abandoned in the new and different school world that upper secondary school represents for them. The pupils who belong to the risk groups, risk being left to their fate in this way. (p. 86, author's translation)

To this day, students in risk groups (e.g. students at risk of dropping out of upper secondary school) are still an important part of the work of student health teams and part of the responsibilities of SENCOs when working to create a school for all students (Andersson et al., 2024).

In 1986, the Government's Committee on Education's report rooted in the SIA inquiry, was launched, (DsU: 1986:13). This report's work led to the later creation of the SENCO training programme. In the report, the number of SETs educated was suggested to be decreased by 50%, following the conclusion that the SIA inquiry had shown that SEN students did not need special help from SETs to the extent believed earlier (Malmgren Hansen, 2002; Malmqvist, 2015; Sahlin et al., 2004). Concurrently, more special needs education competence was introduced into regular teacher training programmes at universities and the role of the SET was deemed to soon become obsolete. The SET training programme was consequently shut down and removed from universities at the beginning of the 1990s, and the new SENCO training programme was launched (UHÄ, reg nr D1-1452-90).

At the end of the 1990s, a reform of the teacher training programme at universities was set forth. The national official inquiry preceding the reform (SOU 1999:63) focused even more on the abilities of individual teachers and teacher

teams to include all students in mainstream educational settings (Ahlberg, 2007; SOU 1999:63). The national official inquiry also included three levels of special needs competence for teachers. These specialisations were later removed from teacher training programmes (Aspelin & Östlund, 2020; SFS 2001:23). Consequently, during the 1990s, in policy documents, there was a distinct shift from the use of special needs *teachers* (*speciallärare*) to the use of special needs *pedagogues* (*specialpedagogers*) and special needs pedagogy (*specialpedagogik*), in contrast to special needs teaching (*specialundervisning*) (Höstfält, 2024; Malmqvist, 2015; Wermke et al., 2024).

In the 2000s, the SENCO training programme as well as special needs education as an academic subject was criticised in investigations by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (*Högskoleverket*) (2005; 2006). Subsequently, during the latter half of the decade, in 2008, the SET training programme was resurrected. This meant that there were now both SET and SENCO education programmes parallel to each other at universities. Concurrently, in 2008, a new teacher education programme was launched (SOU 2008:109) that differed profoundly concerning the view on special needs education in comparison with the earlier teacher education approach (SOU 1999:63). The major difference was, according to Malmqvist (2015), the return of a more categorical perspective[7] (Nilholm, 2005; Persson, 2019) in the policy text. Moreover, the earlier teacher education approach was criticised for the dislocation of SEN students' problems from the individual to the context. Inclusion was similarly criticised and deemed an *ideological vision* that fails when encountering reality, leaving SEN students without adequate support (SOU, 2008:109, p. 188). In addition, it was suggested that support should be provided by experts (i.e. SETs) and not regular teachers. This support was suggested to be provided within a regular classroom or in segregated settings. In addition, in 2010, a new education act (SFS 2010:800) was put into effect, which is the current one (the Education Act was further revised on July 1, 2025).

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[7] Special needs educational perspectives describe different approaches to how one can understand students' special needs. This is common knowledge among SENCOs and part of their education and professional language. Two of the more frequently used perspectives are the categorical perspective and the relational. These describe two dichotomic approaches to special needs. The categorical perspective views the needs as inherent to the students, something medical and internalized, which the individual carries. While the relational perspective views the student's need as something external to the student, which arises when the student meets the environment, culture, social aspects and practicalities of the school environment. (For more on this, see Nilholm (2005) and Persson (2019)).

In 2012, the Swedish Government Agency for Higher Education started an investigation regarding the need for a SENCO training programme. The investigation was motivated by the argument that, since the SET training programme had returned, there was no need for both. Instead, a suggestion was made by the government that SENCO competence should be offered as an optional orientation within the SET training programme, thereby abolishing the need for a SENCO training programme. However, this suggestion was scrapped following an investigation, leaving both approaches as current viable choices at universities (Högskoleverket, 2012).

In summary, there is an ongoing debate since the unification of the upper secondary school on how to deal with the heterogeneity in the student population. Central points of the debate are whether students should obtain support in segregated settings or should be included in a regular classroom. In addition, there is the question of whether the students themselves are bearers of their difficulties or if the difficulties arise in meeting the school's organisation of education. These different approaches have historically been labelled the categorical and relational perspective, respectively. However, these are ideal types (Emanuelsson et al., 2001), and to associate SETs and SENCOs with either of these approaches in practice would be to oversimplify the remit of each profession. However, ideologically and politically, there seems to be a tug of war between political forces. Some tend to favour either a more categorical or relational approach to how support in schools should be organised. A political struggle has possibly led to the bifurcation of what could have been one profession into the two current professions, SETs and SENCOs, which have similar educational programmes and overlapping remits.

2.1.2 Challenges and Renegotiations of the SENCO Role in a Changing School Landscape

Given the background described above, the SENCO profession seem to be continuously challenged and under renegotiation. (Bladini, 1990; Göransson et al., 2015a; Malmqvist, 2015). Furthermore, it is interesting that SENCOs are *agents of change* in their professional roles since this is one of the more challenging aspects of the profession where tension seems to arise in schools – it has been an ongoing issue following the development of the professional role of SETs as agents of change in the beginning of the 1980s (Bladini, 1990; Göransson et al., 2015a; Malmqvist, 2015; Möllås et al., 2017).

The roles of SENCOs and SETs have recently been further accentuated in policy. Since July 2023, the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800) has now explicitly mentioned SETs and SENCOs as part of the student health organisation. Whether this will help strengthen both professions is yet to be seen. However, if we look elsewhere for a comparison in the UK, for example, where the professional role of SENCOs is more clearly defined in policy, they still face challenges similar to those in Sweden when it comes to the ability to delimit and demarcate their profession and professional remit (Cole, 2005; Curran, 2019).

Moreover, the Swedish school system and the special needs educational professions have gone through other changes in recent decades, possibly moving away from the Nordic model (Taneja-Johansson & Powell, 2024), where *Bildung*, increased social mobility, class equalisation, inclusion, democratic decision-making for all students, equal rights and social justice have previously been prevalent (Lundahl et al., 2010), and towards more neoliberalistic tendencies (Magnússon, 2020). Distinctive in these changes are, decentralisation, privatisation, marketisation of the school, the view of students as customers and a gradual introduction of neoliberal ideas in teacher education and in the management and regulation of Swedish school organisation and personnel (Beach & Lindström, 2015; Houtsonen et al., 2010; Magnússon, 2020). One could argue that there exists a tension and juxtaposition between the changes towards neoliberalism and a market orientation of the current Swedish school system and the Nordic model and the idea of a school for all (Beach & Dyson, 2016; Dahlstedt, 2017; Harling, 2017; Magnússon, 2020; Sjöström et al., 2017; Wermke & Beck, 2023).[8] In addition, regarding marketisation and commodification within schooling it is suggested by Tomlinson (2012) that a SEN industry developed in tandem with the inclusion movement, making SEN a commodity in the school market. This is further discussed in a Swedish context by Levinsson et al. (2023) and Norlund et al. (2024).

2.2 The Current SENCO Training Programme in Sweden

Within the boundaries of this thesis, it is of interest to add some insights into the content and aims of the current SENCO training programme to understand the

[8] For a contrasting, and phenomenological, interpretation of *Bildung* in relation to neoliberalism, see Dyngeland and Engelsrud (2024).

intentions of the profession. Therefore, a short summary of these areas is provided in this section.

The SENCO training programme comprises 90 higher education credits, part time, over three years on a second-cycle level and leads to a postgraduate diploma in special educational needs. To apply for the programme, one must have a degree in the field of education and at least three years of work experience in an appropriate profession.

According to the current degree ordinance (SFS 2017:1111), the practical skills and abilities of SENCOs include preventive work to remove obstacles and difficulties in different learning environments; critically and independently perform pedagogical evaluations of difficulties in organisations, groups and among individuals; create the individualised educational programmes for SEN students with involved agents; have the ability to support children and students and develop learning environments; have deepened ability to function as a qualified dialogue partner and advisor in pedagogical issues for colleagues, parents and other involved agents; demonstrate knowledge of functional impairments, including neuropsychiatric diagnoses; and have the ability to independently perform follow-up and evaluation, as well as to lead the pedagogical work aiming to meet the needs of all children and students.

In the degree ordinance for the SENCO training programme (SFS 2017:1111), there are also educational goals that pertain to professional judgement and a professional approach to the SENCO role. Here, the SENCO student should show self-awareness and empathy; demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the field of special education, taking into account relevant scientific, social and ethical aspects with particular consideration for human rights; demonstrate the ability to identify ethical aspects of their own research and developmental work; demonstrate insights into the importance of teamwork and collaboration with other professional groups; and demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and to continuously develop one's competence.

Moreover, according to the degree ordinance (SFS 2017:1111), students in the SENCO training programme should also develop certain knowledge and understanding in the field of special educational needs, such as demonstrating knowledge of the scientific basis of the field and insight into current research and developmental work, as well as knowledge of the connection between science and proven experience and the significance of this connection for professional practice. Students should also demonstrate knowledge of functional impairments,

including neuropsychiatric difficulties and demonstrate in-depth knowledge and understanding of special education.

In summary, one can conclude that the SENCO training programme has a wide focus spanning from practical skills and abilities to questions regarding the ethics of the profession as well as in-depth knowledge of special education and current research within the field of special needs education (SFS 2017:1111).

2.3 Students in Mainstream Upper Secondary School – a Heterogenous Group

This section discusses the move away from a segregated school system in Sweden towards an integration of SEN students in mainstream education due to the advent of the inclusion movement, which has influenced how Sweden organises and manages education for SEN students from the early 1990s to today. The focus of this thesis is on the agency of SENCOs in upper secondary schools and not explicitly on inclusion. However, the development of the inclusion paradigm and its intertwinement with how schooling for SEN students is understood and debated makes it an issue that needs to be further addressed within the scope of this thesis. The outlook starts by focusing on international policy relevant to the inclusion of SEN students in mainstream education and ends by considering some aspects of where we are today with inclusion in Sweden in relation to the Nordic model, *Bildung* and a school for all students.

Three international policy documents are central for the organization of the education of SEN students in Swedish schools, the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* (CRC) (1989), the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (1994), and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) (2006). The CRC was ratified in Sweden in 1990 and made law in 2020 (UNICEF) the CRPD was ratified in 2009. The CRC and the CRPD are central policy documents, not only in schools, but in the whole of Swedish society concerning the rights of children and persons with disabilities. In contrast, the Salamanca statement is more specific in purpose. It targets education at the school level in hope to change society, and its focus is explicitly on special needs education and inclusion (Ainscow, et al., 2019; Rosenqvist, 2007).

The Salamanca statement is, still to this day, central in the formulation of the goals in UNESCO's work with education, which can be seen in, for example, *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education* (UNESCO, 2017) and in the *Global Education 2030 agenda* (UNESCO, 2015b). However, the Salamanca

statement is not above critique. The document has been questioned concerning ambiguities that enables a deficit orientation of special educational discourse that actually undermines change (Ainscow et al., 2019) or allows a variety of different interpretations of inclusion (Magnússon, 2019). Thereby, the Salamanca statement itself becomes the bearer of a *conservative discourse* that "protects resistance to the reforms it foreshadowed" (Ainscow et al., 2019, p. 672). With that being said, inclusion and equity in education are such important parts of the *normative face* (Ahlberg, 2007) of education in Sweden that this needs to be included in this thesis since the impact on the education of SENCOs and the impact on praxis in schools is undeniable (Ainscow et, al., 2019; Ahlberg, 2007; Malmqvist, 2015; Rosenqvist, 2007).

The above-mentioned policy has brought with it some shifts in perspective that are of importance for the schooling of SEN students in Swedish upper secondary schools. This shift in perspective, which is important for the context of this thesis, is a shift towards *inclusion*. In the Salamanca statement, the idea of inclusion becomes clear in the view of how educational settings are supposed to be flexible in accordance with the variation among students and not the other way around (i.e. students should adapt to a system that is set). However, the Salamanca statement not only targets schools. Its aims are also societal and of equity and equality, working through schools by means of inclusion to combat discrimination:

> Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system. (UNESCO, 1994, ix)

The ideas regarding inclusion are continuously debated and developed through the work of supranational organisations such as the European Agency of Special Needs and Inclusive Education through their reports and statistics and through policy guidance by UNESCO (e.g. 2015a; 2015b; 2017; 2020).

During the 1960s, as mentioned previously, SEN students started to become integrated into mainstream education to a further extent. However, there were still segregating solutions in effect in compulsory school as well as in upper secondary schools (Ahlberg, 2007). In the 1970s, comparative studies on the effects of these segregated solutions were performed, and the results showed that these solutions did not have the desired positive effects on SEN students. This, among other things, led to an investigation of the internal workings of the schools in 1974 (SOU

1974:53), wherein the perspective on SEN students was widened and the focus started to shift from the individual student and towards the *social* and *organisational* context of SEN students. More importantly, in the wake of this shift in perspective, recommendations to abolish segregated special education and instead move towards the *integration* of SEN students in mainstream education followed (Ahlberg, 2007). The integration[9] of SEN students into mainstream education continued through the 1980s, and most of the teachers in Sweden were educated in the principles of a *school for all*. The view on the schooling of SEN students at this time slowly began to show some similarities to today's concept of *inclusion*. However, it was not until the 1990s that the idea of *inclusion* became part of the vernacular and started to make its way into a normative praxis in Swedish schools (Rosenqvist, 2007).

The concept of inclusion has been problematised in research since the Salamanca statement, and Göransson and Nilholm (2014) claim that a concept such as inclusion is a carrier of ideas of how a school and a classroom should exist. Göransson and Nilholm (2014) identified the following four different hierarchical understandings of inclusive education in a conceptual analysis of the research literature from the field of inclusive education:

> (A) Placement definition – Inclusion as placement of pupils with disabilities/in need of special support in general education classrooms
>
> (B) Specified individualised definition – Inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of pupils with disabilities/pupils in need of special support
>
> (C) General individualised definition – Inclusion as meeting the social/academic needs of all pupils
>
> (D) Community definition – Inclusion as creation of communities with specific characteristics (which could vary between proposals)
>
> (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014, p. 268)

In their discussion Göransson and Nilholm (2014) highlight that reviews within the field of special educational research "seem to overlook the fact that the definitional problems (of inclusion) indicate differences in beliefs about what

[9] Note that at this point in time *a school for all* is a question of integrating SEN students in mainstream classrooms. It is not inclusion, in the sense of inclusion as that there is a variety among students in a group and the learning environments, didactics and supportive provisions should be equitable and commensurate for all students' needs.

schools can and should accomplish" (p. 275). Moreover, Göransson and Nilholm (2014) focus on who has or should have the power to define *what version of inclusion* should be used; they argue that this is a political issue. In addition, Göransson and Nilholm (2014) call for an openness among educational researchers concerning these matters as to be able to suggest *new ideals for school systems* in contrast to politics which, to some extent, are "stuck in the present" (p. 276). In addition, how inclusion is *enacted on a praxis level* (Magnússon, 2019) could possibly aid the understanding of how SENCOs create and maintain agency in their everyday worklife. This is an area where SENCOs (and SETs) have been identified as facing challenges, when trying to create inclusive practices (Wermke et al., 2020). Moreover, a recent report from the Forum for International Research in Education (FIRE) concludes that segregating solutions in schools still exist in all 31 member countries of the European Agency Statistics on Inclusive Education (EASIE), among them Sweden:

> Overall, it can be concluded that all countries use some form of fully segregated settings for some learners, indicating that all countries face the challenge of further developing their inclusive education systems. (Ramberg & Watkins, 2020, p. 97)

The idea and ideals of inclusion are debated issues in Sweden (Bagger & Lillvist, 2021; Bernmalm, 2022; Göransson et al., 2019; Göransson et al., 2015a) and disparate understandings and views exist on how to define the idea of inclusion and how to enact inclusion in practice (Buli-Holmberg et al., 2023; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Inclusion is suggested as a vision yet to be realised in the Swedish school system (Magnússon, 2019; Taneja-Johansson & Powell, 2024) and some research shows that Swedish schools are moving away from the ideas of inclusion, a school for all and the Nordic model towards more segregated special needs educational solutions in school (Giota et al., 2023; Taneja-Johansson & Powell, 2024). This tendency has also been noted by the CRPD, which notes that in Swedish schools there is an "increase of segregation measures in education as well as the lack of a clear mechanism to monitor and implement inclusive education" (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2024, p. 12). What seems to be a move away from the ideas of inclusion towards more segregating practices in Swedish schools could be argued to go against the ideological vision of inclusion (Isaksson & Lindqvist, 2015) and the *normative face* (Ahlberg, 2007) of inclusion and special needs education in Sweden. How does this tie into the focus of this thesis regarding SENCOs' agency in upper secondary schools?

I would like to argue that even though inclusion is not an explicit part of the examination objectives in the SENCO training programme (SFS 2017:1111) or mentioned in any of the guiding documents for Swedish upper secondary school (SFS 2010:800; SFS 2010:2039; SKOLFS 2024:662), it is still relevant to address in this thesis because it intertwines with the remit of SENCOs, notwithstanding the lack of a formal definition. Inclusion can still be argued to be a normative aspect of schooling for Swedish SEN students (Ahlberg, 2007; Barow & Magnússon, 2024; Magnússon, 2024) as well as a commitment to supranational policy such as the CRPD (2006), the Salamanca statement (1994) or the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2015b) and therefore a policy, an ideological, as well as a practical aspect of the everyday worklife of SENCOs. It is an aspect that sometimes must be dealt with in the practicalities of the everyday worklife of SENCOs and thus is something that is included in the discussion of this thesis. Moreover, questions concerning inclusion and its different definitions and forms are an area of the educational research literature with which this thesis was engaged while it was being written. This is elaborated in the research overview, in the articles and in the discussion below.

Chapter 3 Previous Research

The following chapter consists of an overview of research on the worklife of SENCOs. It consists of the following sections: Section 3.1, Introduction to Previous Research; Section 3.2, The Agency of Special Educational Needs Professionals; Section 3.3, The Professional Role of SENCOs and SNEs in Sweden; Section 3.4, SENCOs and SNEs – Relational and Communicative Hubs in School Organisations; Section 3.5, Special Needs Educational Support in Upper Secondary Schools; Section 3.6, The Ongoing Struggle to Create Equitable Education in Upper Secondary Schools, and, Section 3.7, Phenomenological Research in the Field of Education.

In addition to this section on previous research, there are individual research overviews as part of the four articles presented in the thesis. They can be seen in the included articles and in the searches performed (Appendices 2–5). The themes for the research overviews in the four articles are special needs education during the COVID-19 pandemic and the professional role of SENCOs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Article I); inclusive educational spaces, the body in education and ethics of special educational professionals (Article II); inclusion and the intersubjective relationships of SENCOs (Article III); and agentic and collaborative aspects of the role of special education professionals and differences and similarities regarding the professional role of special educational professions in the Nordic countries (Article IV).

3.1 Introduction to Previous Research

The research overview was based on searches in six different databases: the Swedish databases Avhandlingar.se and SwePub and the international databases: Education Research Complete, Scopus, Education Collection and Web of Science. The search also included examining reference lists and specific journals within the field: *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *Journal of Inclusive Education*, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *Indo Pacific Journal of Phenomenology, Phenomenology and Practice* and *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*. In Appendices 1 and 6, information on the searches for the integrating essay can be

found. In Appendices 2, 3, 4 and 5, the searches performed for the four articles in the thesis are presented.

The searches were conducted using the following method: Search words were chosen in relation to the research questions, the aim of each article and the integrating essay (see Appendices 1–6). When searches yielded more than 200 results, the first 200 hits, viewed chronologically starting with the most recent, were browsed by reading titles and abstracts. In addition, different combinations of search words were used to delimit the searches further to yield a manageable number of hits within the area of interest. When results were found that were within the scope of the thesis or article in question, they were added to an EndNote library and a PDF file of the full research text was downloaded. The downloaded material was then skimmed and research found to not be within the scope of the thesis was excluded. If a search yielded 200 results or less, all results were examined in the same manner. Results from health care research, sociology and criminology were excluded; these were the most common research areas apart from education to appear in the search results.

3.2 The Agency of Special Educational Needs Professionals

Research on agency in the field of educational science seems to have primarily focused on teacher agency (Leon, 2023; Pantic, 2017; Priestley et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017) and student agency (Cook-Sather, 2020; Vaughn, 2020; Warnby, 2024). There was some research of interest for this thesis at the intersection of teacher agency and inclusion, an area of study in which there has been a surge of interest during the past decade (Li & Ruppar, 2021; Pantic, 2017); this research is touched upon in the research overview and the discussion below. However, explicit research on the agency of special needs educational professionals was scarce, especially in the context of high school and upper secondary school. Hence, there was hope that this thesis would specifically contribute to a budding corpus on SENCOs' agency and, more generally, on the agency of special needs educational professionals.

In the overview below, international research is at the forefront. The reason for this is twofold. First, research on SENCOs' agency is scarce internationally and even more so in the context of Sweden. Second, and more importantly, the integrating essay in this thesis is written in English so that it can contribute to and communicate more broadly within the international field of research regarding

SENCOs' agency specifically and regarding the agency of special educational needs professionals generally. Moreover, research on primary and lower secondary education is also included under the umbrella of agency – otherwise, the research overview would be too scarce, and I suggest that the similarities regarding agency are more prevalent between different school forms than the differences; however, that is a suggestion that is open for debate.

The research overview below focuses on agency, special needs education and inclusion broadly and more specifically within these three overarching themes are several different aspects of agency. The prominent themes are collaboration; policy enactment; self-efficacy; professionalism; individual and collective agency; informal networking and informal relationships; boundaries within and outside of school; negotiation; embodied and temporal aspects of agency; instructional practices; teacher identity; meaningful work/sense of purpose; reflexivity; agency as discursively bound; agency to deal with tensions and dissonance at the workplace; tensions between individual agency, structural barriers and facilitating factors within school – set in relation to neoliberal tendencies of measurements, control and standardisation.

Regarding research on SENCOs' agency, Lin et al. (2024) studied SENCOs as agents of change for SEN students in a qualitative socio-cultural study of five different primary schools in New Zealand. In their results, they conceptualised six different themes on how the participating SENCOs exercised agency in their work towards inclusion. The themes were as follows: (1) advocacy for students with SEN, (2) commitment to the SENCO role, (3) professional competence, (4) self-efficacy, (5) participating in decision-making and (6) collaboration (Lin et al., p. 5-7). In their discussion, Lin et al. (2024) explicates the idea of the temporal and spatial nature of SENCOs' agency which is "simultaneously oriented towards the past, present and future" (p. 8) and is dependent on the resources at hand, human and non-human. In their discussion, they continue to develop their results by explicating the ecology of culture, structure and resources, which were interrelated with SENCOs' agency. This leads to the suggestion that "the work of inclusion cannot be accomplished by SENCos alone but requires an ecology of inclusion, involving interactions between culture, structure, resources, other agentic actors and SENCos themselves" (Lin et al., p. 8). The authors suggest that these results have implications for policymaking.

Moreover, Lin et al. (2024) argue that if SENCOs are to attain agency, the whole ecology of inclusion needs to be addressed in policy, instead of focusing solely on SENCOs' capacity to perform their work. See also Lin et al. (2023) for

further arguments regarding the personal and contextual factors of SENCOs' teacher identity in New Zeeland. The results by Lin et al. (2024) are further substantiated in the New Zeeland context by Kearney et al. (2017), who highlighted collaborative aspects of the professional role to ensure flexibility and autonomy in the day-to-day practice of SENCOs, which was also stressed in a Swedish context in the work of Paulsrud and Nilholm (2023), especially in the enactment of inclusion in practice.

Collaboration seems to be a central result in most of the research on the agency of special educational professionals, particularly collaboration with other professions within and outside of school when trying to enact inclusion in practice. This was emphasised in a study by Lindqvist et al. (2011), who stated the following:

> There seems to be a quest for more cooperation among different occupational groups in order to make schools more inclusive. Such a standpoint rests upon the assumptions that different occupational groups have associable interests and that they have, or could be convinced to have, a mutual interest in making practices inclusive. (Lindqvist et al., 2011, p. 145)

Collaboration has been studied by several researchers, and even though agency was not the explicit aim of these studies, agency was nonetheless part of the results, sometimes implicitly and in other cases explicitly. von Ahlefeld Nisser (2017) studied how an inclusive school culture can be promoted through collaborative consultation among teachers in Sweden. Building on data from critical reflections by special educational professionals and one researcher on leading collaborative consultation von Ahlefeld Nisser (2017) identified collaborative consultation as a means which can promote an inclusive school culture given that the very concept of inclusion encompasses how professionals collaboratively scrutinise their "practice, strategies, and values" (von Ahlefeld Nisser, 2017, p. 874). In conclusion, the author suggested that the very act of collaboration bears the possibility of action towards the creation of an inclusive school culture, which "is revealed in how we collaboratively interpret situations, express thoughts and criticism, discuss learning strategies and problems, and propose justification for actions" (von Ahlefeld Nisser, 2017, p. 888). Similar results were reached by Tuomainen et al. (2012) who studied SEs' social networks in part-time special education environments in Finland, where SEs were identified as key professionals in the school. The SEs collaborated with teachers, mediated relationships and fulfilled the role of experts regarding knowledge about special needs and inclusion. The SEs also functioned as relational experts and worked in collaboration with agents within and outside of school. To facilitate these collaborations, SEs needed,

according to the authors, "relational agency". Tuomainen et al. (2012) defined relational agency, employing Edwards (2005), as "a deliberately cultivated capacity to identify and productively collaborate with experts having relevant knowledge and competence" (Tuomainen et al., 2012, p. 35).

Further results on the importance of functioning collaborations for agency are presented by Melasalmi et al. (2023) in their study on Finnish preservice teachers. These teachers developed their agency through relational interprofessional work within institutional boundary spaces. Within these boundary spaces, challenges arose, such as the negotiation of professional boundaries, and experiencing agency in the profession was seen as a prerequisite to claim professionalism. Similar results regarding interprofessional collaboration have been presented by Paloniemi et al. (2023) and by Lassen (2024) regarding middle leaders and their ability to create functional joint efforts with colleagues and local management. This was mirrored in research by Struyve et al. (2018) on the agency of SENCOs when they acted as teacher leaders. Yet, according to the authors, experiencing agency as teacher leaders was only possible when certain criteria were met. To experience legitimacy and exercise agency as teacher leaders, SENCOs needed to be recognised as expert knowledge sources, school leaders needed to entrust SENCOs with power and teachers had to perceive themselves as first-line helpers, meaning that SENCOs' agency became constrained in the absence of such legitimacy. Similar results were reached by Cameron et al. (2018) and Jortveit et al. (2020) in a comparative study of Swedish and Norwegian SEs.

The expectations of other in-school professional groups of SENCOs in relation to how SENCOs themselves view their tasks and mission also evoke questions regarding the agency of SENCOs. This was highlighted in a Swedish study by Lindqvist et al. (2011), who compared answers given by various professional groups within schools on a questionnaire regarding the professional role of SENCOs. The questionnaire respondents were preschool teachers, teacher assistants, SENCOs, SETs, class teachers and subject teachers from one municipality (N = 938). Their answers regarding what SENCOs should do differed, especially in their views on school development and providing special needs educational support to individual pupils. No one in the study, apart from SENCOs, thought that it was important for SENCOs to work with school development, whereas several groups (SETs, teacher assistants, subject teachers and class teachers) thought it was important for SENCOs to provide special needs educational support for individual pupils. This was interesting in regard to the remit of SENCOs, in which an important aspect is to initiate and continue school

development as agents of change (Göransson et a., 2015a; Klang et al., 2017), whereas individual support is commonly associated with the professional role of SETs. The results of Lindqvist et al. (2011) were corroborated in a similar study on SNEs and support-teachers' occupational roles in relation to the inclusion agenda in Swedish compulsory school noted by Göransson et al. (2017).

The role of the SENCO in Swedish compulsory school and pre-school has also been studied by Lindqvist (2013). She argues that the introduction of the SENCO role at the beginning of the 1990s challenged the established structures in school, and despite opposition to SENCOs' remit from several other professional groups within school, it still managed to partly establish a new occupational role within the Swedish school system. Lindqvist (2013) also highlighted the dilemma inherent in the professional role of SENCOs, that they are supposed to work for a school inclusive to all students while at the same time, as special needs educators, are "representing the notion that mainstream education cannot deal with all pupils in school" (p. 205). Moreover, the negotiation between various occupational groups in schools regarding why pupils need support and how this is going to be organised is a prevalent challenge within the SENCO mission of enacting inclusion in practice. The different views on the remit of SENCOs is one central reason why SENCO agency is such an interesting and important issue in research on this professional group. Agency, the capacity to act, is arguably at stake when SENCOs continuously need to negotiate their role and position with other professionals within the school. The need to negotiate the remit and boundaries of the SENCO role is a central result in research in Sweden as well as internationally, e.g. Cole (2005); Curran and Boddison (2021); Fitzgerald and Radford (2017); Göransson et al. (2019); Göransson et al. (2017); Magnússon and Göransson (2019).

Regarding collaboration, it is of interest for this thesis to explicate some further research on this matter in relation to agency. Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) has performed a study focusing on barriers and facilitators for collaboration among SENCOs, SLTs and National Educational Psychological Service psychologists (NEPS) in Irish post-primary schools in relation to a policy context on inclusive and special education. In their findings, collaboration seem to be dependent on a series of facilitating factors such as "an entry process before beginning collaborative work, shared understanding between stakeholders, school staff having up-to-date knowledge of SEN, and NEPS psychologists having a good understanding of individual school contexts." (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023, p. 16). The barriers identified were excessive workloads, insufficient time and disparate understandings of collaboration. These results share similarities with those of

Conn and Davis (2024) regarding policy implications for collective agency to enact inclusive education in Welsh schools. Regarding policy implications and their relation to practice, such results also seem to transcend national boundaries, as argued by Kay et al. (2022). In addition, Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) identified the SENCO role as "nebulous" and decidedly changeable and diverse between schools, something also noted in an English context by Maher and Vickerman (2018) as well as in Sweden by Göransson et al. (2015a). Moreover, SENCOs need to develop "interpersonal leadership and management skills" (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023, p. 17) to be able to initiate school development and further inter-professional collaboration, something previously noted by Lassen (2024) and Struyve et al. (2018) regarding SENCOs as middle leaders and agents of change.

Further research focusing on the enactment of the role of special needs educational professions also reveals their ability to create and maintain agency even though agency, once again, might not be explicit in the research. For example, in Klang et al. (2017) six Swedish SNEs' work was studied through a method involving observations, diaries and interviews, and the empirical material was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results of the study showed that the SNEs enacted their professional role quite differently and seven distinct categories of work tasks were discerned in the material: "teaching, social relational work, assessment, informing and following up on pupil cases, supporting and providing materials, school development and practical chores" (Klang et al., 2017, p. 401). Klang et al. (2017) concluded that the SNE profession was complex and the SNEs could be viewed as a "jack of all trades" (Göransson et al., 2015a). In addition, according to Klang et al. (2017), the creation of inclusive learning environments relies largely on the supervision of teacher colleagues, something that, in turn, seems to be built on informal relationships and networking. These informal aspects of networking for the creation of inclusive learning environments were also suggested by Tuomainen et al. (2012).

In their discussion, Klang et al. (2017) questioned the ability of SNEs to claim professional jurisdiction[10] and how it seems to be dependent on negotiation in the school context and not judicially governed through the Swedish School Act. This negotiation seems to be central to establishing the ability of SNEs to enact their role, something which could be interpreted as their ability to act as SNEs – in other

[10] Professional jurisdiction is a central concept in the results in previous research on SENCOs. The concept comes from theories of professions and was coined by Abbott AD (1988) and denotes how "professions compete with each other for expertise-based jurisdiction over solvable problems" (Furness, 2019, p. 353).

words, to exercise professional agency. Moreover, how policy might create hurdles for the work of SNEs is discussed, especially regarding their ability to create inclusive learning environments. How policy can affect the creation of inclusive learning environments has been further corroborated in studies by Paulsrud and Nilholm (2023); Gunnporsdottir and Johannesson (2014) and Köpfer and Oskarsdottir (2019), who argue that the development of inclusive practices cannot be dependent on teacher agency alone but needs to focus on organisational aspects of school development as well as following up with individual SEN students, or as Skoglund (2023) argues:

> It is not enough with stored professional capacity, there needs to be a transformation to collaborative inclusive capability in action, and better follow-up and monitoring with the students on how it is functioning. (p. 202)

These arguments echo Mu (2021) who stated that an individual professional's agency can obfuscate, or possibly even hide, systemic and structural issues, which are then left unresolved. This line of reasoning will be elaborated upon at the end of this part of the literature overview.

In the introduction to this chapter, it was mentioned that research on the agency of teachers for inclusion was of interest as well, given the scarcity of research on SENCOs specifically and special educational professionals in general regarding agency. Therefore, the rest of the overview focuses on research on the agency of teachers for inclusion, starting with Li and Ruppar (2021), who conducted a systematic literature review on teacher agency for inclusive education. Their interest was in probing the relationships among teacher agency, social justice and inclusion. This was done as an attempt to help bridge the gap between attempts to create inclusive education, which is equitable at its core, and realising it in practice in a sustainable way.

Li and Ruppar (2021) argued that focusing on teacher agency for inclusive education would not only aid the implementation of inclusion but would also support special educational professionals in their work to create and maintain inclusive education:

> Understanding the relationship between teacher agency and inclusion would help policy makers and researchers develop a support system for both in-service and pre-service special education teachers. It also acknowledges special education teachers' roles as active decision makers and school change contributors. (Li & Ruppar, 2021, p. 43)

The analysis by Li and Ruppar (2021) were conceptualised using two understandings of teacher agency. The first was proposed by Pantić and Florian (2015), who defined teacher agency as having four different aspects: sense of purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity. This approach was paired with the thinking of Priestly (2017), who suggests iterational, projective, and practical evaluative elements to understand and disentangle teacher agency. In their results Li and Ruppar (2021) concluded that the reviewed articles in general displayed the three aspects of teacher agency, as suggested by Priestly (2017), coupled with five core aspects of teacher agency: (1) inclusive teacher identity, (2) professional competence, (3) inclusive professional philosophy, (4) autonomy and (5) reflexivity. Li and Ruppar (2021) argued that their study had four main implications for teacher development and education. First, teacher education and teacher development should emphasise the five core aspects of teacher agency mentioned. Second, teachers should be prepared to deal with challenges, policy and dilemmas that put inclusive education at risk. This should be prepared through teacher education and professional development. Third, diversifying participants in teacher education or pursuing interprofessional collaborations could create a means to "develop collaborative skills, sophisticated repertoires for reconciling dissonance, and creativity in pursuing extracurricular space for students." (Li & Ruppar, 2021, p. 56). Fourth, efforts should be made to develop a projective orientation in the ability of teachers to envision an alternative future for both teacher education and teachers' professional development. Such a development could nurture a collective ability for teachers to envision several future possibilities and thus be able to set new goals for themselves as well as for their students. Such a projective orientation, according to the authors, "affords teachers a critical examination of their own efforts in challenging and resisting the discourses on schooling and dis/ability and in interrogating notions of normalcy and difference." (Li & Ruppar, 2021, p. 56).

These results from Li and Ruppar (2021) regarding the importance of thinking differently, collaborating and establishing innovative ways of meeting a diverse group of students' needs for teacher agency are further corroborated by Lakkala et al. (2024) in their conceptual analysis of a systematic literature review. Similar themes have also been presented by Lyons et al. (2016) in a qualitative study on inclusive schools in Canada. They highlighted the collective aspects of teachers committed to creating inclusive learning environments, emphasising both individual and collective agency, as well as collective efficacy in collaborations among professionals within the school.

To further this reasoning concerning teacher agency for inclusive education, a scoping review performed by Miller et al. (2022) is of interest. This scoping review aimed to study empirical research focused on teacher agency for inclusive education. The previously mentioned results concerning teacher agency, such as collaboration, collective agency, various instructional strategies and teacher identity, were corroborated in this scoping review, but the authors also highlighted "family–school–community connections" as a further means for enabling inclusive education. The family–school–community partnerships seemed to function in two different ways in the reviewed literature: (1) the power dominance of the schools' ability to set the agenda regarding educational decision-making and (2) the ability of individual teachers to engage family and community stakeholders to advance inclusive measures created agency for the teachers. In the discussion, Miller et al. (2022) noted that the question of educational placement of SEN students continues to be a common issue within school systems that "historically and persistently educate students with disabilities in separate settings" (p. 1170). What was also evident in the review was that inclusion was viewed as a project that was not yet finished but rather was something that is continually in motion and dependent on the agency of the teachers involved.

Naraian (2014) has contributed to the understanding of the agency of teachers in preparation for inclusive education, or more specifically, for critical special education and inclusive education. Naraian's (2014) study questioned the idea of agency as an ability internalised by teachers, which would then be transferrable between various cultural contexts or physical settings. Instead, building on Holland (1998); Holland and Lave (2001), Naraian (2014) argued that agency is an ability that develops over time and is inseparable from local discursive practices.

According to Naraian (2014), the purpose of the study was to "underscore the potentially infinite meanings of inclusion when considered as a form of socially just teaching, while always presuming teachers' agency in their efforts to accomplish its goals" (p. 3). Regarding the agency of teachers for inclusion Naraian (2014) concluded that discourses that promote polar positionality, such as inclusion versus exclusion might become insufficient in dealing with the practical complexities of creating inclusive schooling. Instead, the author suggests a pedagogy of deferral that privileges pragmatic arbitrations regarding day-to-day decisions to ensure a long-term commitment to efforts that attempt to disrupt ability norms, advocating for equity and inclusion in schools. The author continues to argue that this line of reasoning demands an approach that shuns a singular focus on linear time to be able to deal with issues of special and general educational

time, since inclusion's "temporary nature" is so evident in the empirical material of the study. Instead, the author argues for a circular notion of time in which agency does not unfold in real time but in "real-enough time" (Naraian, 2014, p. 24), meaning that by acknowledging the "potential" of students instead of evaluating them against expectations, the teacher enters a different form of time:

> By recognizing the potential of the student as always in process, unfolding, and unfinished, they defer the outcome of student performance. As a form of "living in the future" such deferral continually privileges the unobserved and unfinished capacity of the student. (Narain, 2014, p. 25)

The objective of this shift of perspective is to maintain a centrality of "personhood" in the pedagogy, thereby enabling a form of inclusion that is sensitive to the unobserved and unfinished future self of the student.

Regarding professional competence and agency, Mu et al. (2015) have studied this, utilising a sequential mixed methods design, to examine professional competence among inclusive education teachers in Beijing, a profession similar to that of SENCOs. Building on research that views teacher competence as dependent on a triad of attitudes, knowledge and skills, e.g., Liakopoulou (2011); Singal (2008), the authors move to add a fourth, agency. In their findings, Mu et al. (2015) identified agency as a fourth pillar that builds the competence of inclusive education teachers.

The importance of inclusive education teachers' agency is discussed by Mu et al. (2015) in relation to the lack of funding for and resources directed to schools including SEN students in general education and how "agentive power consciously and constantly drives them (teachers) to look for various resources appropriate for the education of students with disabilities" (p. 583). The authors identify inclusive teacher agency as a key component of their professional competence, which helps them handle practical conundrums and problems. In conclusion, agency is suggested as a fourth dimension of inclusive education teacher competence, which is inextricably interrelated to the ability to seek and achieve support and resources for including SEN students in mainstream education.

The findings of Mu et al. (2015) are corroborated in a quantitative study of Chinese inclusive education teachers' agency by Wang et al. (2017), who discussed the correlation between the agency of inclusive education teachers and professional skills. This is discussed through the lens of how ecological support and teacher experience moderate agency and skill. The results of the study suggest that inclusive education teachers who actively look for support within and outside

of school boundaries fostered skills and competence to teach SEN students. This implies that inclusive education teacher agency is important for teacher professionalism. Wang et al. (2017) discussed how the professional histories of inclusive education teachers and their past experiences influenced their agency according to a temporal-relational approach. It was hypothesised that inclusive education teacher agency was moderated by current and previous professional experiences. In conclusion, the authors stipulated that professional development may well be dependent on inclusive education teachers' agentic ability to "navigate to resources, construct a supportive ecology" (Wang et al., 2017, p. 120). These results share clear similarities with the studies in New Zealand Lin et al. (2023); Lin et al. (2024) and Kearney et al. (2017) that were mentioned earlier. Wang et al. (2017) concludes by discussing the positive implications a growing focus on inclusive education teachers' agency possibly will have for policy making, teacher education and as a viable defence against neoliberal ideologies and practices which "can (in)advertently leave students with special needs on the margin" (Wang et al., 2017, p. 120).

Finally, the relationship between the agency of inclusive education teachers and their resilience to structural challenges imposed by the neoliberal governing of schools has been further studied by Mu et al. (2024), who claim that to aid teacher development and combat teacher burnout, inclusive education teachers need to be re-empowered and re-professionalised. The authors hope that this will build teacher resilience and liberate teacher development from the constraints of "centralised, standardised, and neoliberalised quality control" (Mu et al., 2024, p. 1766). However, on a contrasting note Mu (2021) questions the prevalence of ideas such as agency (and resilience) in the inclusion paradigm and wonders if a focus on individuals' abilities might obfuscate systemic issues and herald neoliberal interpretations of questions regarding inclusion and equity in education. In the following quote, this is explained:

> In neoliberal times, when such projects of agency and resilience exhaust the self, the discourse of agentic and resilient model individuals becomes a dehumanising agenda, with 'responsibilisation tending to secure self-exploitation' (Bourdieu, 1998a, p. 97). The self-righting agenda also leads to deficit discourse towards the non-resilient and the nonagentic. In contexts of special and inclusive education, for example, when children cannot accommodate to socially dominant and expected norms, parents and teachers are often blamed for not having enough resilience and agency to produce capable children (Tomlinson, 2019 [sic, 2017]. (Mu, 2021, p. 826)

Mu (2021) continues the argument by claiming that agency and resilience do not necessarily contribute to structural changes or development. Instead, they can contribute to reproducing structural problems, and he continues to say that "uncritical and irreflexive agency and resilience can conceal system cracks in current inclusive education and shroud structural problems under the cloak of agentic and resilient role models" (Mu, 2021, p. 826-827). However, through a sociological lens, the author argues that that this is not the "death knell" of resilience and agency; instead, these could be reframed through sociology and get to the root causes that create structural problems for education at large and inclusive education specifically.

These results by Mu (2021) that question an uncritical approach to individual agency are corroborated to some extent by a study from Sözer-Boz et al. (2024), who found that special educational professionals experiencing burnout also had high levels of agency and felt that their job was meaningful, possibly indicating that a high level of agency is not necessarily unequivocally positive for the individual professional.

To further the reasoning about the interrelation between neoliberalism and agency, a final study needs to be addressed, this one by van de Putte et al. (2018). This study critiques the possible consequences of the combined forces of the inclusion movement and neoliberal audit mentality, where individuals, such as SENCOs, in their role as agents of change are held solely responsible for transformations towards inclusive schooling. van de Putte et al. (2018) attempt to deconstruct how agency has become individualised, and instead of approaching agency as internalised and embodied within individual agents, they argue for an approach that draws on the posthuman thinking of Barad (2007), where agency is recognised as an assemblage made up of an entanglement of multiple agencies, human and non-human. This approach aids the authors in rethinking agency and avoiding blaming or burdening individuals for the sole responsibility of creating change towards inclusion in school, thereby problematising the "responsibility-blame discourse (van de Putte et al. p. 886) and contributing to a discourse of collaboration instead. In addition, van de Putte et al. (2018) argue that this approach enables them to rethink inclusion as a concept in which individuals can meet as a community and become part of an assemblage, creating a school where diversity is the norm, legitimising the participation of SEN students in mainstream schooling and avoiding framing inclusion as a discussion only about the placement of students.

In summary, this section of the research overview has shown that agency is a notion utilised to understand a plethora of various actions and possible understandings of the SENCO profession as well as similar special educational professions, all inextricably interwoven with the phenomenon of inclusion and how it is enacted in practice. In the discussion section below, this will be discussed further, along with the results of this thesis in relation to the previous research cited here.

3.3 The Professional Role of SENCOs and SNEs in Sweden

To be able to ask questions about what it means to be and to act as a SENCO, one must understand what the role entails in Sweden. When reviewing this field of research, a wider scope than only the upper secondary school was utilised because research on SENCOs in upper secondary schools in Sweden is still scarce.

Lansheim (2010) aimed to problematise the work of SENCOs from a societal perspective using a narrative approach by collecting life stories from newly graduated SENCOs and SENCOs still in education. She wanted to discern how the participants understood their mission and shed light on who defined and delimited that mission. She contextualised the setting of her research by using the shift in the early 1990s from a school governed by a national board to decentralised schools governed by each municipality. She argued that the work of SENCOs was influenced by the way they were governed locally in schools and municipalities. She also stressed how stakeholders within and outside the school organisations, such as principals, teachers and politicians, influenced how the role of SENCOs was defined and delimited. The results showed that SENCOs were struggling to define and delimit an often-unclear remit. This remit was set in a social context in which the SENCOs were forced to navigate several parallel coexisting views on *normality* and *deviation* (Lansheim, 2010, p. 59).

The shift from a centralised governing of Swedish schools to decentralised control, as described by Lansheim (2010), in combination with a shift in how SEN students were viewed – a shift from a view of students *with* school problems to a view of students *in* school problems – also influenced the professional role of SENCOs. She argued that the combination of these shifts was taxing for the schools' organisation, and this added pressure that made the organisations stressed. When stressed, those in schools tend to resort to traditional solutions, such as segregation of students, instead of upholding the idea of an equitable *school*

for all, as also noted by Gerrbo (2012) as well as Buli-Holmberg et al. (2023). These segregating solutions possibly lie in conflict with an inclusive school and the values regarding equity in education. According to Lansheim (2010), this creates a dilemma for SENCOs, as they aim to develop their organisations towards inclusiveness, while they are simultaneously being forced to deal with conflicting ideas when trying to create inclusion in practice. It is a struggle between two points of view with conflicting basic values. It is also a struggle between different stakeholders for the mandate to define school problems. In this struggle, the SENCOs in their work are suggested to not have clear and distinct authority over the power of definition.

Göransson et al. (2015b) present similar, yet more differentiated, results as Lansheim (2010). The results from Göransson et al. (2015b) stem from the first total population study of SNEs in Sweden. The study in question was central to the field of study since large surveys on SNEs' tasks and missions were lacking. The aims of the study were to delineate the SNEs' role by first identifying how the education of SNEs influences their professional values and knowledge. Second, it wanted to identify what tasks constituted the work practice of the SNEs, and third, determine what mandate the SNEs had to claim authority of the right to define, identify and work with specific school problems.

The results of the study suggested that the SNEs represented a relational view of school difficulties. Most of the participants claimed that it was the school as an organisation that had problems meeting the requirements of the SEN students; it was not the students who had problems living up to the demands set by the school. Furthermore, the SNEs believed that their knowledge of their area of expertise rested solidly on a scientific basis and provided them with tools to meet a variety of differences among pupils (Göransson et al., 2015b). The SNEs also viewed themselves as capable of leading school development; developing inclusive learning environments; conducting consultation on special needs; and holding counselling and consulting meetings with parents, colleagues and other collaborative partners. The SNEs also included teaching on an individual, group and class level, where SEN students were included as a part of their area of expertise.

The results also indicated a difference between SENCOs and SETs. The SENCOs viewed themselves as more proficient when it came to leading school development on different levels, whereas the SETs viewed themselves as more competent when working on an individual level. The SENCOs also viewed themselves as more competent in matters of counselling, consultation and

performing qualified meetings with teachers in groups as well as teachers individually. The SETs viewed themselves as more proficient in teaching groups of students that included SEN students compared to the SENCOs (Göransson et al., 2015b).

Differences between SENCOs and SETs are also apparent in the tasks they perform in their worklife (Göransson et al., 2015b). The SENCOs and the SETs share some tasks, such as individual teaching, collaboration with caregivers, collaboration with school health organisations and investigation, documentation and constructing individual action programmes for special support. There are tasks that neither of the two *professional roles* in question performed, such as teaching regular classes/groups and collaborating with the school administration on a municipal level. There are also tasks that are more or less exclusive for each group, which, among others, include teaching small groups of pupils (the SETs) or providing consultation, guidance and coaching to groups of teachers (the SENCOs). Furthermore, the results showed differences in tasks within the two groups depending on where they were employed (e.g. in a primary school, lower secondary school, upper secondary school, special needs schools or within a municipality's school administration). Göransson et al. (2015b) conclusively discerned three different *professional roles* among special needs educators: *a counselling and collaborative role*, *a teaching jack-of-all-trades,* and *a teaching special needs educator* (author's translation, p. 28).

In the study by Göransson et al. (2015b) some characteristics for SENCOs employed in upper secondary school were highlighted. Their professional role is very similar to SNEs in compulsory school, but they do not teach small groups to the same extent. Moreover, SENCOs in upper secondary school spend time having qualified conversations with individual students, something which seldom occurred among SNEs in other school forms. The task they spent most time on according to the authors were pedagogical investigations, creating development plans for SEN students and documenting their work. In addition, it is suggested that SENCOs in upper secondary school spend less time teaching individual students in comparison with SNEs in compulsory school.

The results of Göransson et al. (2015b) regarding SNEs' (both SENCOs and SETs) also concern their professional jurisdiction – a professional jurisdiction here defined as "authority to define and delimit certain areas of knowledge and tasks/missions" (author's translation, p. 28). To analyse professional jurisdiction, a comparison has been made between the work-related values and tasks the SNEs attempt to claim and the actual tasks that comprise their everyday work. The

authors also made a comparison between the aforementioned areas and the reasons given as to why the educators applied to become SNEs in their education. The results indicated a discrepancy between the reasons why the SNEs chose their line of work and the tasks that comprised their worklife. They chose their education and line of work for egalitarian reasons aiming to perform work with school problems in a proactive and relational manner but found themselves performing tasks that were more in line with a traditional, categorical view of SEN students – tasks, such as teaching small groups or giving individual solutions to school problems for pupils, in contrast to more inclusive ideas, such as changing the learning environment, coaching groups of teachers or working with school development on an organisational level. The results also suggest that the SNEs who worked close to, or directly with, the pupils had a harder time claiming a relational view on challenges facing pupils in need of special support compared to those who worked at the municipality level.

Göransson et al. (2015b) concluded the study by analysing the SNEs' difficulties claiming professional jurisdiction by using four points of departure: (1) governing documents, (2) basic teacher training in relation to where the special needs educators were working (a majority of the special needs educators in lower secondary and upper secondary school had a basic teacher education aimed at compulsory schools), (3) how different professional groups defined school problems, and (4) claiming legitimacy towards the general public's opinions by allying oneself with a certain social class. The analysis showed that the SNEs had developed negative abilities to claim professional jurisdiction over several of the aforementioned arenas. The authors stated that the problems of claiming professional jurisdiction could be a consequence of a lack of judicial support in the governing documents for the *professional roles* of the SNEs. Furthermore, they explored the idea that it was harder for a majority of the SNEs to obtain the authority to define problems within a school because they did not work in organisations in which their basic teacher training provided them with legitimacy to work within as teachers.

In conclusion, regarding the study by Göransson et al. (2015), concerning the ability among SNEs to claim professional jurisdiction, the authors state that the SNEs had not been as successful as, for example, doctors or psychologists in allying themselves with strong social classes. The authors further this example by highlighting the omission of the role of the graduated SNE in the Swedish Education Act, in which both doctors and psychologists are explicitly included (SFS 2010:800). This changed in July 2023 however, the Swedish Education Act

(SFS 2010:800) was revised and SENCOs were explicitly mentioned as parts of the student health organization. Finally, according to Göransson et al. (2015) it becomes apparent that SNEs, in comparison with other professional groups, have problems claiming professional jurisdiction. School psychologists and counsellors also aim to coach and counsel teachers individually and in groups. Moreover, people who do not have the same education and a formal degree as SENCOs have claimed the same title, as it is not exclusive to people with a SENCO degree.

The professional role of SNEs has been further scrutinised when Möllås et al., (2017) using multiple case studies to examine the professional role in the everyday practice of six SNEs. The six SNEs were among the respondents to a survey carried out by Göransson et al. (2015b) and they are all employed as SNEs in primary and lower secondary schools. The research questions focused on the contextual conditions that helped create the professional role of the SNEs and which tasks comprised their everyday practice. The strategies that SNEs deployed to strengthen and shape their roles were also central to the results. The authors contextualised the results by placing them in a historical setting, as well as describing the lack of definition of the role of the SNEs in the Swedish school system's governing documents. Therefore, the approach to the study was motivated by how the roles of SNEs were shaped in a local context. To aid the analysis, Möllås et al. (2017) made use of Abbott's (1988) theories concerning profession in order to discern power structures and determine who had the mandate to claim professional jurisdiction within the field of special needs education. The researchers also made use of the work of Ball 1994) and Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins (2011) to encapsulate the importance of the concrete and abstract contextual presuppositions that delimited the role and mission of the SNEs. These were: (1) "the schools' historic, socio-economic, and cultural environment", (2) "spatial availability and flexibility" and (3) "organisation of the special needs pedagogy" (author's translation, Möllås et al., 2017, p. 15). See also Lindqvist and Nilholm (2013) for an explication of the role of local leadership for the organisation of inclusion and special needs education.

Möllås et. al. (2017) noticed a dissonance between prevalent values in the schools that were challenged when the SNEs defined school problems or tried to introduce ideas to develop the organisation. Nonetheless, colleagues and principals still highlighted that the SNEs had "different competences and specific abilities as strengths" (author's translation, Möllås et al., 2017, p. 16). Their social sensitivity and responsiveness were often mentioned in this context. The schools' different historic, socioeconomic and cultural environments all had a direct and very

concrete impact on the tasks the SNEs were expected to perform. Moreover, the researchers noted that the participants in the study had a collection of different themes or strategies to aid, shape and strengthen their roles: (1) "personal and professional competence", (2) "creating relationships and being present", (3) "independent leadership and taking initiatives", (4) "the role of dispatch central and supportive link" (author's translation, Möllås et al., 2017, p. 29). Moreover, Möllås et. al, (2017) suggest that it was important where the SNEs' room/office was situated at the school. Furthermore, the size and furniture of the room seemed to influence what actions the SNE could choose to perform. In addition, it was also important for the role of the SNE how personnel resources, such as teachers and their different competences, were organised across the school. The study also indicated that the complexity of the division of labour grew in relation to the size of the workplace.

In conclusion, the research concerning the professional role of SENCOs and SNEs in Sweden tells a tale of a complex worklife made up of a multitude of possible tasks, choices and missions. Moreover, it was evident how dependent the SENCOs and SNEs were on communication, relationships and collaboration with the SLTs in schools. Furthermore, their ability to manage their professional boundaries was central to their ability to fulfil their remits. In addition, there was tension in the normative aspects of the SNEs' work, which became evident when the inclusion paradigm was questioned explicitly or implicitly in the school.

3.4 SENCOs and SNEs – Relational and Communicative Hubs in Schools' Organisations

Within the field of school research, much has been done concerning communication and relationship (e.g. Aspelin & Jönsson, 2019; Holmgren, 2006; Lilja & Claesson, 2018; Ljungblad, 2019; Nordenbo, 2008; Nordevall, 2011; Plantin Ewe, 2019). Not as much research has been performed explicitly on SENCOs from this perspective (Aspelin et al., 2021) but some research has focused on the communicative and relational aspects of the work of special educational professionals and will be addressed here.

In an action research project von Ahlefeld Nisser (2009) studied the work of SENCOs and their communicative skills, building on Habermas' (1981) theory of argumentation. The aim of the study was to shed light on the circumstances that

create opportunities for *deliberative communication* between SENCOs and other stakeholders in preschool settings. A further aim was to weigh in on the discussion of the professionalisation processes of SENCOs' remits. von Ahlefeld Nisser (2009) argued that it is important to define the function and mission of SENCOs to aid the professionalisation process. She claims that the work of SENCOs is highly complex because they constantly move among several different stakeholders and arenas within a school organisation, such as pupils, legal guardians, teachers, the student health organisation and the administration of the school. SENCOs are expected to function as a link, dialogue partner, and facilitator among these different arenas and stakeholders. In addition, she claims that the SENCOs' remit demands that they are competent pedagogical communicators who can argue for a specific course of action in an ethical way. The results regarding ethics as a central aspect of the SENCO profession are corroborated by Göransson et al. (2015b); Öhman (2022) and Borg et al. (2024).

According to von Ahlefeld Nisser (2009) the *communicative SENCO* is dependent on the school administration and a school leader who consciously and actively lets the SENCO use their communicative and pedagogic ability, knowledge and skills. In addition, she argued that to be able to function as a *communicative SENCO,* they must be able to act communicatively on several different levels. This includes the organisational and personal levels, which means that SENCOs must have the ability to talk about SEN students with different stakeholders within and outside of school in a way that the stakeholders understand. To facilitate this, a communicative approach needs to be applied on an individual, group and organisational level.

The results by von Ahlefeld Nisser (2009) are corroborated by Göransson et al. (2015b) who aimed to delineate the SNEs' professional role and their results suggest that the SNEs' represent a relational view on school difficulties. Moreover, the results show that competence in counselling, consultation and performing qualified meetings with teachers in groups as well as teachers individually is important for the profession. This is important, as it is conducive to their ability to lead school development towards an equitable school for all students, see also Andersson (2013); Bernmalm, (2022); Möllås, (2009); Tveit, (2014).

In his thesis Gerrbo (2012) aimed to shed light on the complex web of interactions among teachers, SENCOs and pupils. The author notes that closeness with students, dialogue and personal involvement is central for the teachers and SENCOs to understand individual students and be able to bridge the gap between "desired development or outcome and the pupil's current ability or level of

knowledge" (author's translation, Gerrbo, 2012b, p. 253). Gerrbo (2012) suggests that when teachers, SENCOs and the school as an organisation fail to create inclusive solutions for SEN students, the schools tend to succumb to defensive solutions. These defensive solutions are defined as exclusive by the nature of the organisation. The defensive solutions highlight the tension in different views on how the inclusion of SEN students should be enacted in a school. These results are in line with those of Möllås (2018) and Möllås et al. (2017), who noticed a dissonance between prevalent values in schools that are challenged when SENCOs define school problems or try to encourage ideas to develop school organisations. Nonetheless, colleagues and principals still highlight the SENCOs' competence and strengths, emphasising their social sensitivity and responsiveness to others, which has also been noted by von Ahlefeld Nisser (2013).

Corresponding results to those of (2009); von Ahlefeld Nisser (2013), Gerrbo (2012), Möllås et al. (2017) and Möllås (2018) have been suggested by Aspelin et al. (2021) in an exploration of the role of relationships and relational competence for SEs in Sweden. In their findings four main themes were identified:

> (1) Special educators perceive positive relationships as the basis for their work, (2) Special educators perceive relational competence as mainly realised by an accepting attitude, (3) Special educators perceive relational competence as realised by finding a personal connection to the student, (4) Realisation of relational competence through the development of trusting relationships." (Aspelin et al., 2021, p. 676–679)

Their discussion noted that the participants in the study viewed positive social relationships as a foundation for the work of SEs, and they claimed that they could not do their work without these relationships. Furthermore, the results suggest that positive social relationships between students and SEs are particularly important for this line of work because SEN students have "specific needs of positive relationships with adults" (Aspelin et al., 2021, p. 681) because of their vulnerability in school. In addition, the researchers problematised the focus on building and upholding relationships among the participants. The problem identified was that the work seemed to lack a foundation in educational theory and seemed to be primarily experience based. Furthermore, they questioned the issue that the SEs seemed to view their work as primarily "relational", which was emphasised as interpersonal rather than as one form of relationship among many, such as between student and organisation or between student and group. Finally, the question of what these results might have for SE education is discussed.

Finally, in this section on SENCOs' and SNEs' roles as relational and communicative hubs in school, focus is directed to a comparative interview study with SNEs in Sweden and Germany. In this study, Wermke and Beck (2023) tried to understand how inclusion was operationalised through special educational needs provisions in mainstream education. Swedish SNEs distinguished themselves from the Germans in that they had an acknowledged leadership position. Furthermore, the role seemed to shift from a specialist to a consultant, working more at an overarching level in the school. The difference between the enactments of the role of SNEs was, to some extent, attributed to the rather high level of autonomy Swedish schools had locally due to the decentralisation of the Swedish school system. Moreover, from their results, the researchers concluded that inclusion was a multidimensional undertaking that included educational, administrative and social aspects and was performed at several different levels in school: individual, group and organisational. In addition, Swedish SNEs also had more power to enact inclusion compared to their German counterparts, probably because of their employment at one school and due to support for their mission in policy and power handed down from school leaders, which reinforced them in roles such as leaders and school developers.

The importance for middle leaders, such as SENCOs, to have a formal leadership position was further emphasised in a study by Bryant and Walker (2022). They highlighted that formal recognition was crucial to be able to enact policy and create inclusive initiatives for students. Formal structures to support the functioning of SENCOs as middle leaders were also important for creating procedures that considered students' rights. These structures were also determinants for SENCOs to be able to form teams that cooperated to create support for a diverse group of students. In addition, in the study by Wermke and Beck (2023) they argue that a strong focus on goal achievement in school today follows the rising focus on standardisation and testing in the wake of OECD and PISA has created a close relationship between assessment and special needs educational provisions in that these have been prioritised in the governing of schools. This line of argument adds validity to the explanation for the relatively high status of SNEs in Swedish schools as compared to German schools. The level of power that SNEs have in Swedish schools compared to those in Germany might also have to do with the ideological underpinnings of a school for all.

3.5 Special Needs Educational Support in Upper Secondary Schools

It has been mentioned previously in this thesis that there is not as much research performed on upper secondary school as on compulsory school regarding SENCOs specifically and special needs education and inclusion generally. However, there are some research of interest for this thesis on upper secondary school and a short overview of this will follow.

In a total population survey of all upper secondary schools in Sweden regarding special educational needs resources, Ramberg (2013) points to a difference between independent and municipally run schools. The latter had a higher degree of trained SNEs (at nine out of ten schools, or 90,3%), but only three out of ten (32%) independently run schools had SNEs. Ramberg (2013) stated that when "predicting the presence of special educational resources at upper secondary schools, it is more than eight times (OR = 0.118) more likely for public schools to have a special educator/special teacher employed" (p. 457). The researcher also discussed the availability rate of special support at the schools. He identified a difference regarding this, possibly related to parents' educational levels; special educational resources were more likely to be found at schools where parents' educational levels were higher. He suggests that this could be interpreted as highly educated parents possibly being more efficient in acquiring special support for their children and/or choosing schools with high levels of special educational support. These potential differences in availability in special educational support related to class stratification and free school choice add weight to questions regarding how equitable marketisation and free school choice reform are on a social level, as also suggested by Dahlstedt and Fejes (2019), Helldin (2002) Magnússon et al. (2015), Magnússon (2020) and Sivertun (2006).

Ramberg (2016) also studied differentiation in Swedish upper secondary schools. He suggests that there was already a differentiation hierarchically between different schools and programmes, but there was also differentiation within schools through ability grouping. The study showed that ability grouping was more common within the foundation subjects, especially in mathematics, even though ability grouping had been shown previously to possibly have many negative effects on students, especially for those considered low achieving. Moreover, in a further study, Ramberg (2017) stated that special needs educational provisions were primarily provided outside of ordinary classes in special groups designated for such provisions. In addition, he highlighted "that while the support provided by the

schools' special educational professionals is located both within and outside of the students' regular classrooms, support provided outside the students' regular classes is far more dominant" (Ramberg, 2017, p. 68). To further this reasoning, he emphasised that special educational support is a complex issue, and one cannot solely focus on *where* this support is given but also on *how* it is provided. He also suggested that it might be less of a stigma and social exclusion for students to receive their support in a regular classroom setting.

Ramberg's (2017) study raises question whether ability grouping and other sorting of students based on their performance are in keeping with the ideas of an inclusive and equitable school, similar critical reasoning can be found in Giota et al. (2023); Macqueen (2013); Nilsson (2025); Ramberg (2015); Sverrisdottir and Johannesson (2020). An added perspective to the question of ability grouping can be found in Bergdahl (2022) whose study, among other things, showed that SENCOs were invited to parallel breakout rooms with teachers as way of creating support for students during the COVID-19 pandemic. This could be viewed as a possible beneficial aspect of the changes brought by the pandemic in that "Special needs pedagogues work with all students in need in a breakout room without the stigma of being 'called out of the classroom." (Bergdahl, 2022, p. 8). These results allude to the inherent stigma of being called out of the classroom to a segregated setting as a means of support, even though the breakout rooms seemed to be a version of ability grouping.

In a study by Öhman (2023) on upper secondary school students' experiences of receiving special educational provisions, certain aspects became apparent in the students' narratives. The importance of relationships, a sense of *belonging* and relationships with other students were emphasised, as well as relationships with school personnel. This was exemplified by "how schooling can be transformed from exclusion to participation" when a student "is met with secure relationships and high expectations" (author's translation, Öhman, 2023, p. 18). In addition, a sense of *becoming* was also highlighted, even though this was not as commonly experienced as a sense of belonging. Moreover, power aspects of inclusive and exclusive processes were noticed in the empirical material. These were identified as subtle processes, such as the choices made by the students but also in the various courses of action in which they found themselves. For example, when the schools' power was manifested in how the students were excluded from the ordinary classroom and put by themselves because of acting out behaviours seen as disruptive when facing difficulties. Similar results have been reached in another study by Öhman (2025) in which Swedish vocational students' experiences of

special support were studied. In the results, ambivalence among the students regarding their experiences of special support was identified. The support supplied was "not special in a didactical or pedagogical sense [it was] merely localized outside the regular class and schedule(d) with a smaller amount of students" (Öhman, 2025, p. 18). Moreover, inclusive and relational practices were primarily identified in vocational subjects, whereas support in academic subjects was segregated and individualised. For more on SEN in Vocational Education and Training (VET), see also Björk-Åman et al. (2021); Mårtensson et al. (2024) and Paul (2022).

Results similar to those of Öhman's (2023, 2025) have previously been noted by Möllås (2009) who argued that communication is central for SEN students to experience a sense of participation in upper secondary school. Moreover, for the students to succeed with their studies certain factors seem to be necessary such as

> […] interaction with peers, teaching situations that generate interest, and content and implementation tailored to the student's needs and circumstances, effective workplace-based training, and regular follow-ups with a mentor/class teacher. (author's translation, p. 231)

In addition, Möllås (2009) claimed that there were no contexts within school organisations that were of no importance for the inclusion of SEN students in upper secondary schools. Formal contexts of special interest were transfer conferences when students transferred from lower secondary school to upper secondary school, student health team meetings and student reviews at class conferences. The researcher argued that schools are such complex networks of relationships between various organisational levels that it would be impossible to make a delimitation and claim that certain contexts are of no importance for the inclusion of SEN students. Furthermore, she claimed that there were no shortcuts in understanding a "student's abilities, interests and experiences of difficulties" (Möllås, 2009, p. 231); it is only through open communication that this can be laid bare. Finally, she highlighted the risks and importance of informal meetings. These are important aspects of teachers' and SEN students' interaction and communication. However, if too much time and weight are put on informal meetings, they run the risk of not leading to anything concrete because they are not properly documented or investigated. This can lead to losing track of the big picture because information does not always reach the intended recipients and there is an ensuing insecurity regarding who has responsibility for certain actions (Möllås, 2009).

The complexities of inclusion were also highlighted in a study by Bernmalm (2022) on the experiences of upper secondary students with severe physical disabilities when integrated into various communities of mainstream upper secondary education. He suggested that the students dealt with stigmatisation as a form of boundary work and experienced inclusion to a larger degree outside of the regular classroom than within. By utilising concepts such as belonging, identity, normality and deviancy, he tried to approach the analysis of his empirical material to better understand the participants' experiences of the integration process. In the results, three versions of boundary work to manage stigma were presented: (1) *downplaying* or (2) *claiming* disability status and (3) "distancing oneself from social interaction where the disability status may get unwanted attention" (Bernmalm, 2022, p. 215). The author concluded that the results in the study "reveal a reality dominated by boundary work and impression management" (p. 215) for the participating students.

3.6 The Ongoing Struggle to Create Equitable Education in Upper Secondary Schools

The unified upper secondary school is a school form that is aimed to be equitable and inclusive. In the developments leading up to the reforms in the beginning of the 1990s "an upper secondary school for all" was the guiding principle or watchword of the time (Johansson, 2012). Upper secondary school is optional in theory, but in reality, it is more or less mandatory since there really are no other options for young people who have left compulsory school, whether they are being eligible for upper secondary school or not (Helldin et al., 2022; Johansson, 2012; Ramberg, 2015).

Regarding the question of the differentiation of students among various programmes, Johansson (2012) argued that despite the change the school system went through after the Gy11 curriculum, schools returned to more differentiation between vocational programmes and programmes aimed at higher education, leading to a less inclusive school system; this was also argued by Lundahl (2011). Moreover, special educational provisions given in upper secondary school were by Johansson (2011) suggested to be both inclusive and exclusive depending on the situation and the identity of the student receiving the support:

> The support offered to the students in the study greatly strengthened other processes in the students' identity formation. In this way, the support contributed to both inclusion and exclusion processes for the students at the

> school. The special support became part of a further increased differentiation among students and between students and groups of students and the support thus reinforced students' different value, even if the purpose of the support was the opposite. From the data, a picture emerges where I believe the "specialness" of the support can be questioned and discussed. (author's translation, Johansson, 2011, p. 56)

What is also suggested in current research is that, despite the reforms of upper secondary schools since the 1960s and onwards, inequalities regarding gender bias in recruitment to the various upper secondary programmes prevail and might even be continued inherently through the reforms themselves (Mellén & Angervall, 2022). Moreover, the reproduction of class as a consequence of the supposed "free" school choice following the marketisation processes in the Swedish school system might hamper the professional and social mobility of some upper secondary school students (Mellén, 2017). In Sweden, research regarding the intersection of gender, disability and special needs education is an area in which there is a need for further research, which is highlighted in an anthology from the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (2017).

The prevalence of students who are neither in education, employment nor training (NEET) among those identified with special needs is high (Westling Allodi, 2024). To avoid young people ending up in NEET, preventive measures aimed at groups of young people with mental illnesses and/or disabilities have been set forth in Sweden. This has been done as one way of dealing with declining equity in the Swedish school system. Westling Allodi (2024) claims that students with disabilities are at a high risk of not becoming eligible for upper secondary education and are therefore at risk of becoming NEET. Moreover, the report states:

> According to studies that collected young people's own experiences of school, risk factors for problematic school absenteeism are the following: problems with schoolmates, lack of support from adults, learning difficulties, problems during transitions. Students succeed in their education in schools that are perceived as a safe haven, where the students feel safe and cared for, and that they belong to a community, and the school succeeds in reducing the impact of previous traumas. (author's translation, Westling Allodi, 2024, p. 8)

The importance of SEN students attending and finishing upper secondary school has also been studied in Norway. Båtevik (2019) highlights the importance, especially for women, of attending and finishing upper secondary school. For men, having a driver's licence seems to be as important as finishing upper secondary

school to avoid long-term unemployment. The status of former SEN students in the job market has been further studied, and the results show that emphasising the importance of creating support commensurate to students' needs in school is not only a question of school results and wellbeing but a question which is related to developments for people over a life-span (Myklebust, 2002; Myklebust & Båtevik, 2014; Skjong & Myklebust, 2016). These results was corroborated in the Swedish context by Yngve's (2020) study on the use of ITC support to bolster SEN students' participation in upper secondary education. In addition, this was similarly discussed by Ramberg (2017), who suggested that segregated support risked stigmatising SEN students, and by that increasing the risk of them drooping out of school and thereby possibly becoming marginalised in the labour market.

The research above leads us to the question regarding those students who are not eligible for national programmes in upper secondary school and instead are enrolled in the Individual Programme (IP) – an introductory program for students not eligible for vocational or preparatory programs. In a study by Dovemark and Beach (2015), they suggest that attending the IP possibly increased the risk of marginalisation and a life in the precariat for students. These issues were linked to the policy of freedom of choice and a view among the staff of the students at the IP as "young people at risk" or "low-ability learners" which seem to have made "academic teaching very low key" and instead focus was on manual labour.

> The focus on manual labour at the cost of academically oriented studies thus not only prevented them from passing courses to get onto a national programme, it contributed to further their academic isolation and social categorisation as intellectually limited, uninterested, lazy and inept. (Dovemark & Beach, 2015, p. 591)

Dovemark and Beach (2015) also emphasised the risk this development entailed and stated: "we have to be aware of the differentiation created within the Swedish school system and the risk there for habituating students towards marginality and a life in the precariat" (p. 591). These results are contrasted by a study by Andersson (2013), who instead suggests that an introductory programme can function as a bridge between lower and upper secondary school leading to a diploma and a way forward into higher education or the labour market.

In summary, in research regarding upper secondary schools, the question of equity in education is prevalent. This specifically pertains to SEN students but also to the intersection of SEN, gender, ethnicity and social class. A further conclusion drawn from the literature overview regarding upper secondary school is that there are still ample opportunities for additional research on upper secondary school.

Much still needs to be accomplished, especially regarding the professional roles of SETs and SENCOs as well as on how SEN students fare in upper secondary education.

3.7 Phenomenological Research in the Field of Education

Phenomenological research within the field of education focusing on special needs educational professionals, special needs education, the role of relationships in school and inclusive education are of specific interest for this thesis. The searches performed for this section can be seen below in Appendix 1. The searches were executed following the same method as for the other searches, as explained previously. The searches yielded a wide scope of different phenomenological approaches, something which was to be expected given the pluralistic nature of the phenomenological movement, philosophically as well as empirically (Bengtsson, 1991, 1999b).

3.7.1 Challenges to the Role of SENCOs, SETs and SEs

There seem to be certain challenges associated with the role of special needs educational professionals in school identified in the research presented above, these challenges are to a large extent mirrored in the phenomenological research in this section. Research suggested that recruitment and retention of SENCOs, SETs and SEs were issues that need to be further researched as well as acknowledged and dealt with in practice. This should be acknowledged and dealt with to aid recruitment, bolster retention and battle burnout.

Harby (2022) studied the lived experiences of newly qualified SENCOs in England using phenomenological theory, building on van Manen (1990). Focus in the thesis were how the participants understood their professional identity and Harby (2022) utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), drawing on Smith (2009), to analyse the empirical material. In the analysis, common and disparate themes were distinguished and among these, four subordinate themes were identified: (i) the impact of relationships, (ii) shared responsibility, (iii) personal attributes and, (iv) knowledge (Harby, 2022). The results in the study indicated that there were facilitating factors as well as barriers for newly qualified SENCOs to develop professional identity. Some important barriers identified were that there was a lack of professional support for newly qualified SENCOs and the

role was experienced as surprisingly wide and varied by the participants. Moreover, there was a lack of knowledge among other agents within school what the SENCO role entails which also created barriers. These barriers were a challenge to a professional role, which was suggested to suffer from issues regarding recruitment and retention.

Facilitating factors in Harby's (2022) study seemed to mirror the barriers in that these entailed: a clearly defined role, education of other agents within school about the SENCO role, continuous professional development of SENCOs and careful induction and recruiting of SENCOs – preferable SENCOs with the right teacher background. The right teacher background seemed to aid the newly qualified SENCOs to establish themselves, building rapport with colleagues and developing professional identity (Harby, 2022). The results regarding the teacher background and having the right sort of experience for the role were stressed by Harby (2022):

> SENCos must be qualified teachers […] and participants in this study stressed the importance of having significant experience to support colleagues, alongside competent leadership and communication skills. They describe how having (or not having) these skills, alongside other characteristics they had identified as supportive, impacted on how they were perceived by others, and their confidence, ultimately affecting the development of their professional identity. This has significant implications for those who are recruiting to the post in order to appoint someone with the appropriate skill set or to have awareness of skills that will need to be developed. (Harby, 2022, p. 138)

Moreover, Harby (2022) suggested that more formalised support for SENCOs, who are part of SLTs, is needed to aid them in their emotional wellbeing. SENCOs in SLTs seemed to experience the emotional impact of the role more vividly compared to those not in SLTs.

The results from the study by Harby (2022) shared similarities with a thesis by Wisinski (2024) which focused on the retention and attrition of SETs in K-12 schools in Illinois, USA. Wisinski (2024) created a hermeneutic phenomenological research design, building on van Manen (1990) and Gadamer (1960/2013), to study the lived experiences of 16 SETs who had persisted in their positions for more than four years. The theoretical framing for the analysis was Bronfenbrenner's (2006) bioecological model of human development. According to Wisinski (2024) the study was motivated due to the high rates of attrition and burnout among SETs, which in turn have impacts for the support of SEN students. In the analysis two main themes were identified, internal and external supports, these had several subthemes (Wisinski, 2024). The subthemes

underneath the umbrella of external support included "the role of family, colleagues, administrators, and mental health support" (Wisinski, 2024, p. 163). The themes relating to internal support included "having a sense of purpose, personal belief systems, effective coping skills, and resilience" (p.163). In the results Wisinski (2024) highlighted the importance of creating support structures for SETs to scaffold professional longevity:

> […] findings from this study both suggest that fostering an environment that prioritizes the development of internal supports while also providing access to external supports for SETs is crucial to enhancing job satisfaction and emotional well-being which are factors both known to prevent burnout. Such an environment not only recognizes the unique challenges faced by SETs but also celebrates their contributions to creating an inclusive educational environment for SWD (Students With Disabilities) (Wisinski, 2024, p. 165)

Wisinski (2024) suggested further research focusing on retention and resilience among SETs, including specific demographic aspects such as populations of SWD, gender and race but also among special education administrators who, according to the author, is a vastly under-represented profession in educational research (Wisinski, 2024). Corresponding results regarding SETs was reached by Hesham Abdou Ahmed (2023) when utilizing a phenomenological research design to study SETs mental well-being in public schools in Indianapolis, USA, after reopening schools during COVID-19. The results suggested that certain stressors in SETs worklife might have been exacerbated following the reopening of schools. An individual approach to support and to safeguard SETs' mental well-being was suggested by the author.

Corresponding results to those of Wisinski (2024); Hesham Abdou Ahmed (2023) and Harby (2022) was reached by Mrstik et al. (2019) who in a phenomenological study noted that a way to combat special education attrition was to break the isolation of SEs. One way forward suggested in the research is to involve SEs in extracurricular activities since teachers of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) involved in such activities showed lower rates of burnout. These results are further substantiated in a phenomenological case study by Lee and Garwood (2025) of SEs' in self-contained educational settings. The researchers wanted to "examine the unique role-related stressors and burnout experienced by special educators serving youth with EBD." (Emotional/Behavioral Disorders) (Lee & Garwood, 2025, p. 2). Building on previous research they suggested that burnout among SEs can be related to the ambiguous role of SEs, high workloads due to teacher shortage and the role

conflicts SEs encounter in their worklife. Using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2018) the authors identified three overarching themes (each with three subthemes) (i) finding your boiling point, (ii) alternative education altering mindsets, and (iii) fostering sustainability. In their discussion, Lee and Garwood (2025) highlighted role conflicts and role ambiguity in the SE role, which they related to the unique, multifaceted and complex role of the SEs. These aspects made this role particularly stressful, especially in relation to a high workload and expectations from a variety of stakeholders on the SEs' work. In addition, the sustainability of the role was discussed. To create sustainability, the joy and support the SEs experienced in their work was central, thus emphasizing the importance of relationships in SEs worklife: "particularly the relationships they have built with families, students, colleagues, and the larger community" (Lee & Garwood, 2025, p. 8).

In summary, phenomenological research on challenges to the professional roles of SENCOs, SETs and SEs suggested that these are ambiguous roles that were especially susceptible to burnout. Also, retention, and recruitment of these professionals was an issue which needs to be addressed and solved to enable schools to develop equitable education for all students.

3.7.2 The Ethics and Intersubjectiveness in the Work of School Professionals

Regarding the importance of relationships in school, Holmgren (2006) examined the relationship between teachers and pupils in the classroom and focused on the ethical dimension of the interrelationship. Holmgren (2006) used an ethnographically influenced method and paired it with phenomenological points of departure and hermeneutics. The interpretation and analysis were supported by Lévinas (1986/1998) ethical philosophy. The conclusions Holmgren (2006) reached were that the intersubjective relationship between teacher and pupil was characterized by *fragility and vulnerability, co-dependence, asymmetrical relationships, confirmations and engagement* – all of which influenced the intersubjective relationships between teachers and pupils and demanded that all took responsibility for the Other (p. 107). Following this conclusion, Holmgren (2006) stressed the importance of *dangerous communication* and a *radical dialogue* (p. 107). The ethical relationship presupposed a confirmation of the Other's existence and otherness, their singularity and alterity (see also Castillo et al., 2022). Furthermore, Holmgren (2006) supported the argumentation by building on the theory of Løgstrup (1994/2020) that we always, more or less, are within someone else's realm of

power and claimed that we are "subjected to each other's powers and exposed to risk when we are communicating." (author's translation, p. 107). The danger within communication were, according to Holmgren (2006), that our "lives are performed in relationships" (p.107) it is not the communication in itself that is dangerous. Therefore, the radical dialogue in an intersubjective relationship demands *a listening to* and *a welcoming of* the Other, a confirmation of their singularity and alterity – what Løgstrup (1994/2020) defined as the *Ethical Demand*. Holmgren (2006) did not identify much listening or welcoming in his empirical material, but when it appeared, it opened up the relationships to *transcendence in communication* (author's translation, p. 125). However, there were only glimpses caught of "openness to the Other's singularity and alterity" (p. 125).

Similar to Holmgren (2006), Lilja (2013) took an interest in the relationship between teachers and pupils. Lilja (2013) examined the relationships between teachers and pupils using lifeworld phenomenological theory and strengthened her analysis with the support of Løgstrup (1994/2020) and Merleau-Ponty (1999). In the study, Lilja (2013) concluded that when a trustful relationship between teacher and pupil was established it created opportunities for the pupil to be seen and to be approached by the teacher in the best way possible for the pupil – this also created ample opportunities for learning. Lilja defined four dimensions of trustful relationships between teachers and pupils (i) To care (ii) To listen (iii) To set boundaries (iv) To meet resistance. Lilja noted that the common denominator for the four dimensions was that *the ethical demand* (Løgstrup, 1994/2020) often was met; "the teacher meets and receives the pupil in different manners depending on the situation." (author's translation, p. 180). When the teacher met the pupil and acknowledged them, when the teacher was *for* them and *for* the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014) in the interrelational meeting, possibilities for the pupils' well-being, sense of security, and possibilities for learning were created (Lilja, 2013). Lilja's findings were in line with Holmgren (2006) who also stressed the importance of the ability to build relationships among teachers and SNEs to be able to deal with social school difficulties among students. Finally, Lilja (2013) argued that to handle social school difficulties in a professional manner demanded a *closeness* and a *relational competence* among the personnel (p. 268). Similar results focused on the importance of relationships for SNEs was reached in a phenomenological study in South Africa by Lourens et al. (2024) regarding SNEs' work after returning to face-to-face teaching in school after the COVID-19 pandemic. Corresponding results regarding collaborative practices but between school leaders, general teachers and SETs were suggested in a thesis in the socio-

constructive paradigm by Sciullo (2016) where the research design was inspired by the hermeneutic phenomenological method suggested by Lindseth and Norberg (2004).

Even though grading is not in focus in this thesis, the importance of ethics and relationships when grading students, corroborates the importance of the interrelational aspect of school professionals' work. Rinne (2014) studied pedagogical tact when teachers explained grades to students in grade conferences in Swedish upper secondary schools. Rinne (2014) utilized phenomenology and hermeneutics in her study, building on theories by van Manen (1991) regarding tact in teaching. In the analysis two themes were disclosed, (i) conferences that end in agreement and (ii) conferences ending in disagreement. These result served as a foundation for a further analysis by Rinne (2014) who moved to distinguish five themes in the empirical material, namely: (i) "grades as taken for granted", (ii) "grades as responding to students' presumed wishes", (iii) "grades as encouragement", (iv) "grades as "borderline"" and (v) "MVG as a starting point for grading" (p.145-190). Rinne (2014) discussed grading as a human-existential action which was relational and demanded pedagogical tact of the teachers. The results suggested that grading involved dimensions not expressed in the governing documents for Swedish upper secondary schools, dimensions related to human existentiality such as relationships and a care for students' emotions. In addition, pressures by local leadership or students' parents to give high grades to students were also identified in the study. Rinne (2014) suggested that a possible explanation for this was an increase in competition between schools and a rise in the importance of economic factors in school. These results suggested that grading might not be such an unambiguous task as indicated by policy makers and politicians, instead, grading is complex and intertwined with human existentiality.

To sum up this section of the chapter regarding the role of relationships and ethics in school personnels' work, one can conclude that relationships are a central aspect, possibly essential, for work in school. These relationships always have an ethical content and the personnel, and the students are in an asymmetrical relationship that demands the personnel to attend to the students' faces, heeding the ethical demand by being for the students and for the world.

3.7.3 Policy and Inclusion – a Holistic Understanding through Various Phenomenological Lenses

Existential aspects that are not explicitly expressed in governing documents, as mentioned in the study by Rinne (2014), are interesting from a general perspective in this thesis. However, explicit changes in policy regarding the work of special educational professionals are of specific interest. Therefore, the focus in this last section of the literature overview will focus on phenomenological research on policy and inclusion to create an understanding of previous research delving into lived experiences of inclusion and policy changes among in-school professionals.

Curran (2019) performed a phenomenological study of SENCOs in England as policy enactors following the reformed SEND code of practice from 2015. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was utilised and typological concepts in the analysis were borrowed from Ball et al. (2012). In the results it was suggested that SENCOs took upon themselves to narrate certain aspects of the policy changes, both statutory and non-statutory elements of the policy, which they found relevant for their context. This was something SENCOs took upon themselves rapidly and they started to incite school wide changes and developments. Curran (2019) noted that SENCOs took upon themselves to function in this capacity, irrespective of whether they were part of an SLT or not, suggesting an interesting juxtaposition in the SENCO role – as narrator and interpreter of policy:

> This presents an interesting juxtaposition; the SENCos were assuming a lead role in driving school change yet lacked the formal status that SLT membership can bring, which, it could be argued, is essential to effect change. However, SENCOs did not perceive this to be necessarily a barrier. (Curran, 2019, p. 84)

In the results, Curran (2019) shed light on how SENCOs viewed their interpretation and implementation of policy as "both a concern and an opportunity" (p. 84) since it gave them the freedom to control the process while it also could lead to various interpretations on local levels. In addition, it was indicated that the SENCOs did much of this work without anchoring the changes and development broadly in the SLTs, while at the same time being highly invested in the SEND reforms and a possible development of an inclusive ethos in school:

> SENCos were clearly invested in the SEND reforms, which led to feelings of responsibility which extended beyond the operational elements of special educational needs provision and encompassed feelings of accountability,

> both for children and parents and for developing an inclusive ethos. (Curran, 2019, p. 90)

Curran (2019) raised concern in her discussion whether the solitary role of the SENCO, in combination with them being highly invested in the role, engendering feelings of accountability and responsibility, might have ramifications for their well-being, and in the long run, might challenge retention of SENCOs in school. This suggests risks relating to the role in England similar to the SEs in the US as suggested by Mrstik et al. (2019); Lee and Garwood (2025) and Wisinski (2024). For more on SENCOs' perspective on implementing the 2014 SEND reforms in England, see Tysoe et al. (2021).

Regarding research on inclusion utilising phenomenology, Suprihatiningrum (2022) studied teachers understanding of inclusive science education for students with disabilities (SWD) in Indonesia, utilising a descriptive phenomenological approach (Giorgi, 2012; Giorgi et al., 2017). In the results Suprihatiningrum (2022) suggested that there was a positive attitude among teachers to include SWD in the regular classroom. However, there seemed to be a lack of understanding, or even stagnation, among the participants regarding inclusion, and it seemed to be understood primarily as special needs education. SWD were placed in a segregated setting dubbed *the inclusion room* when tasks in the classroom became to challenging for them. This indicated that inclusion was understood as integration rather than inclusion and it bares resemblances with ideas regarding inclusive-special education which Suprihatiningrum (2022) problematises in dialogue with works by Haug (2017); Hornby (2015); Takala et al. (2009) and Warnock and Norwich (2005). In conclusion it was suggested that the efforts of including SWD in regular classrooms might have more to do with antidiscrimination than teaching a specific curricular content. Moreover, it was indicated that inclusive policies on a national level are not completely applicable in schools (Suprihatiningrum, 2022).

The question of inclusion has also been studied by Abu-Alghayth (2025) in Saudi-Arabia, focusing on instructional collaboration in inclusive and mainstream settings. In the study it was teachers lived experiences which were analysed. The phenomenological design of the study was descriptive, building on the work of Giorgi (2009) and Moustakas (1994) among others. The analysis generated three themes (i) school culture, (ii) work pressure, and (iii) facilitating factors – among which the facilitating factors were more of interest for this thesis. The facilitating factors for developing instructional collaboration in inclusive settings were: "(a) financial support/salary increases, (b) teacher and school administration professional development, and (c) a reduction in the burden of teacher

workloads." (Abu-Alghayth, 2025, p. 331). These results thereby corroborated those regarding high workloads by Wisinski (2024) and Mrstik et al. (2019), collaborative practice according to Lee and Garwood (2025) and professional development as suggested by Harby (2022). In the discussion two further factors were suggested by Abu-Alghayth (2025) as central for achieving well-functioning collaborations in inclusive settings, namely, breaking teacher isolation and establishing *sustained* teacher collaboration. This is in line with the reasoning by Mrstik et al. (2019) and Lee and Garwood (2025). Corresponding results regarding inclusion was also reached by Corral-Granados et al. (2023) who utilised an IPA-approach studying early years staff experiences of working with inclusion in a nursery class in England. In the results it was highlighted that teachers, as well as SENCOs, should endorse ideas of lifelong learning and working contracts which reflect the actual working hours put in by these professional groups who are dealt heavy workloads.

The previous results in this section regarding inclusion are corroborated in a phenomenological comparative case-study by Authelsingh et al. (2024). In their study, inclusive education policies and practices in Mauritius and Ontario, Canada, were in focus. In the study the lived experiences of six students with disabilities were examined, additional empiric material came from the parents' insights into their children's school situation. In the findings both commonalities and differences were identified. A prominent commonality was positive school experiences, these were associated with contributing factors such as "supportive teachers, inclusive environments, and peer interactions" (Authelsingh et al., 2024, p. 196). Whereas a common difference was the level of knowledge about inclusive education polices, which varied among the participants. The authors suggested that this is in area in need of development:

> Although it is not surprising that students were not aware of specific policies, this does suggest a need for better dissemination of information regarding inclusive education policies, so that students with disabilities and their families are able to make informed decisions and action plans. (Authelsingh et al., 2024, p. 196)

Corresponding results to those of Authelsingh et al. (2024) were reached in a study by Khanna and Kareem (2025) who utilised a phenomenological research design when studying parent's experiences of inclusive schooling in government schools in India. In the study the collaboration between SEs and parents was highlighted, and suggestions were made regarding the need for development of

interprofessional collaborations to enable inclusive schooling for children with learning disabilities.

The tension between the idea of inclusive schooling and more medical approaches to education was studied in a phenomenological study in Spain regarding psychopedagogical assessment procedures of students with SEN (Simón et al., 2024). In the study, emphasis was put on a clash between the duty among educators to promote an inclusive educational system leaning on supranational policy such as the CRPD (2006) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2015b) and psychopedagogical assessment procedures. These procedures risked affecting the students' self-esteem through victimization and stigmatization. Moreover, it was suggested that such assessment procedures might limit the expectations of the teachers on the students in an individualistic and deterministic sense, making teachers believe that supporting these students might be something out of their control. In addition, this model of assessment also risked stimulating "the search for pathology" (Simón et al., 2024, p. 814) in schools. On the other hand, diagnosis and categorization lead to funding which could aid schools in supporting these students. However, an issue with this system was suggested to be that it prompts schools to continuously ask for funding for every supplementary task needed of them. Thus, emphasizing the paradox inherent in what has been called "grant addiction":

> In this way, schools hold governments responsible for all the challenges and innovations that the former need and hope that these will come hand in hand with additional funding, which paradoxically blocks the innovative and autonomous development of schools. (Simón et al., 2024, p. 814)

Simón et al. (2024) argued that to create a truly inclusive educational system, they must find a new way of thinking since the current way of doing assessments was a barrier and not a facilitator. The authors suggested an inclusive assessment with a more holistic approach, leaning on Ainscow et al. (2012), an approach to assessment that respected ecological aspects beyond that of the school.

Previous results regarding inclusion are here given nuance through a study by Humphrey and Lewis (2008) who utilised IPA to analyse the lived experiences of inclusion in mainstream education among pupils with high-functioning autism (AS) in four secondary schools in England. In the results, it was suggested that several barriers existed for inclusion. Barriers associated with how AS is constructed and understood by the participants in relation to their peers; how special interest can be an asset while social naivety can make a pupil with AS targets

for bullying. This suggested that the AS pupils' relationships with their peers could function both as a barrier and an enabler for successful inclusion in school. Moreover, relationships with teachers and other staff as well as experiencing appropriate support when studying was central for inclusion, if this support did "not immediately mark pupils out as 'different'" (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008, p. 39). In addition, experiencing a feeling of being different as well as the same with other pupils was prevalent among the participants. The pupils in the study felt that they needed to negotiate difference continuously and they experienced both acceptance and rejection in their efforts to assimilate themselves in the mainstream school environment, (see also Josefsson & Taneja Johansson, 2024 and Oskarsson et al., 2025). However, Humphrey and Lewis (2008) also vied for caution in view of their results and argued that these must be put into a bigger picture if one wants to understand the full gist of an inclusion process. The lived experiences of individuals are important, yet other aspects, such as studies of inclusive practices in the classroom and experiences from other stakeholders, e.g. parents, teachers and other professionals involved in the inclusive processes, are central to better understand how to include pupils with AS in mainstream education (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

Studying inclusion with the aid of phenomenological theories seems to enable a holistic understanding of the concept of inclusion. In a phenomenological case study by Ferm Almqvist and Christophersen (2017) they utilised lifeworld phenomenology as a point of departure, building on Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) and Bengtsson (2009), to understand arts inclusion from a holistic perspective. The authors identified five dimensions of inclusion in their analysis, (i) providing arts education for all, (ii) being connected to something larger, (iii) allowing access to different forms of expression and communication, (iv) establishing preconditions for holistic inclusion, and (v) developing special arts education (Ferm Almqvist & Christophersen, 2017, p. 467-471). In their reflections, they asked phenomenologically informed questions regarding the understanding of inclusion, specifically how it can be enacted in practice with respect to the balance of a non-dualistic approach – thus, emphasizing the holistic nature of a phenomenological understanding of inclusion. These results regarding inclusion were corroborated in a study by Olsson et al. (2020) who studied Swedish elementary school teachers' perception of inclusion. Here, a holistic understanding of inclusion was identified in an interpretative phenomenological analysis. Moreover, inclusion as a human right and as participation were emphasised by the teachers in the study:

> The teachers highlighted inclusion as logical and believed that everyone should participate. A school only meets human rights requirements if everyone participates and, they said, only when fulfiling [sic!] this can a school be called inclusive. (Olsson et al., 2020, p. 570)

There are also research suggesting that thinking or working with a phenomenological understanding of the lifeworld could be a way to develop in-school practice among special educational professionals such as SENCOs. Oskarsson et al. (2025) utilised a lifeworld phenomenological approach (Bengtsson, 2013b) building on the theories of Merleau-Ponty (1945/2014) about the embodied lifeworld. Oskarsson et al. (2025) suggested that SENCOs working with children with AS in preschool could benefit in their work by understanding their worklife phenomenologically. This could possibly open up for an understanding of the holistic and pluralistic nature of the lived experiences of different perceptions among children with AS and inform choices of support for them in school. To advocate for a holistic approach or understanding of teaching SEN students in this way bare similarities with the argumentation put forth by Heshusius (1984). He championed a holistic phenomenological-theoretical view of special education. A holistic view sharply contrasting mechanistic approaches in education, which, according to him, leads to boredom, meaninglessness and loss of lust for learning among students:

> [..] programmed and sequenced materials, the worksheets, the remedial training models and approaches, so often used as ends in themselves, have no real sense, they make no sense – they are nonsensible. Indeed, when fragmented and sequenced before we are allowed to engage in it, life makes no sense. (Heshusius, 1984, p. 363-364)

See also Dall'Alba (2009) for a similar and phenomenologically informed argumentation regarding higher education and the existentiality and ambiguities inherit in becoming a professional.

In conclusion of this chapter regarding phenomenological research in the field of education some important themes need to be highlighted. There seem to be challenges regarding the professional role of special educational needs professionals regarding recruitment, retention and burnout. These seem to be related to an unclear professional role, high workloads and a lack of professional support. Moreover, relationships seem to be central to in-school professionals, both as a way of aiding sustainability of professional roles under much stress, but also to enable teachers work – especially the importance of the relationship between teachers and students was prominent in previous research. Finally,

phenomenological research on the status and role of inclusion in policy and practice seem to be bear with it the same issues as in other research traditions. There seem to be a lack of clear definitions of inclusion and there are common issues when attempting to enact inclusion in practice. However, a holistic understanding of inclusion seems to be enabled by thinking about it phenomenologically.

Chapter 4 Theoretical Framework

In the following chapter the theoretical framework for this thesis is presented. It starts with a short overview of the roots of lifeworld phenomenology and the concept of the lifeworld. This is followed by an overview of central phenomenological concepts which are utilised in the analysis in the study.

4.1 Lifeworld Phenomenological Theory

In lifeworld phenomenological theory, the lifeworld has primacy and is therefore central to this study. It was Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) who formulated the concept of the lifeworld as it is in extension used in this thesis when he developed modern phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology project was an attempt to create a solid base for knowledge formation within science (Husserl, 1954/2020; Ruin, 2020). Husserl formulated the conditions of the lifeworld as an epistemological endeavour, yet he had an ulterior motive, namely, to let science approach people's everyday lives. Phenomenology as a philosophical movement along with the concept of the lifeworld was subsequently developed by Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927/2010), Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2023) and Schütz in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1932/1967). Based on the writings of these four philosophers as main sources, Jan Bengtsson (1949–2013) developed an ontological philosophical ground for a lifeworld approach to performing empirical phenomenological research, the *lifeworld phenomenological approach* which came to be known as *the Gothenburg tradition* (Bengtsson, 2013b). The current thesis was written and performed in keeping with this tradition. Within this tradition several theses have been written, such as the work of Claesson (1999), Johansson (1999), Berndtsson (2001), Hugo (2007), Carlsson (2011), Levinsson (2013), Lilja (2013), Rinne (2014) and Vikner Stafberg (2017).

The lifeworld is a pre-reflective world in which we live our lives, its pre-reflectiveness means that it is normally taken for granted in what Husserl (1954/2020) called the natural attitude. The natural attitude could be described as our un-reflected acceptance of the lifeworld's definitiveness (Bengtsson, 1991). In

this study the lifeworld is understood by drawing on Bengtsson (2013b), who asserted the dual nature of the lifeworld when performing scientific studies:

> On the one hand, the lifeworld is a factual ground that cannot be overcome through philosophical reflection or scientific research (the philosopher and the researcher are always already in the world), and on the other hand, the lifeworld is a theoretical ground for empirical research (the theoretical resources for research). (Bengtsson, 2013b, p. 2)

The quote by Bengtsson above elucidates how we as humans always are in the lifeworld, it is where we live our lives, we cannot escape it, and it is taken for granted. Naturally, to study peoples' lifeworlds we need to actively reflect upon them and in that, breach the natural attitude to lay bare and penetrate the preconceived notions that permeates the lifeworld. In this study this has been done through a hermeneutic iterative process (Bengtsson, 1999a; Gilje, 2020; Ödman, 2007) in which the design of the study was fashioned to aid in the work of laying bare and penetrating the taken-for-granted nature of the participants' lifeworlds. The design of the study is further explicated in the section on methodology and methods.

Within the boundaries of this thesis, the concept of the lifeworld is utilised to approach the *everyday worklife* of the participants through empirical study of their lived experiences of agency when working as SENCOs in Swedish upper secondary schools. The concept of everyday worklife is derived from Schütz's (1962) explications of the social world and how it can be divided into different modifications of the superior *everyday lifeworld* such as the scientific world, the religious world, and the fantasy world (Bengtsson, 1999b; Schütz, 1962) and in this case, the everyday worklife.

Moreover, in the lifeworld phenomenological approach, life and world cannot be separated. This means that life and world are intertwined and interdependent (Bengtsson, 2013b) in a form of in-betweenness:

> (...) the lifeworld is neither an objective world in itself, nor a subjective world, but something in between. Ambiguity is a necessary feature of intertwinement. World and life are interdependent in the sense that life is always worldly and the world is always what it is for a living being. Thus, the world is open and uncompleted to the same extent as life. Life and world have identity, but it is not permanent or objective or universal. In this way, life and world are always already a unity that can be separated only afterwards(…) (Bengtsson, 2013b, p. 6)

In addition, similar to how life and world are intertwined and interdependent, the same applies for our minds and bodies, as another distinctive characteristic of the lifeworld phenomenological approach. Bengtsson (2013b) argues, leaning on Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023), that we as humans are body-subjects, we are being-to-the-world through our lived bodies and Bengtsson (2013b) states that in "lifeworld ontology, body and mind are mutually dependent on each other. The mind is embodied and the body is animated. (…) The lived body is both physical and mental, object and subject, integrated in 'my own body" (p. 6). Meaning that this is a fundamental aspect of the lifeworld phenomenological approach, for all human beings, researchers and participants alike. The lived body is present in everything we do and experience, it is how we as humans are being-to-the-world.

Within lifeworld phenomenology, it is the lived experience that is of interest. Lived experiences are unreflected (pre-predicative) experiences. This is the taken-for-granted nature (the natural attitude) of unreflected experiences in the lifeworld (Bengtsson, 1999a). It is this first-person perspective, the lived experiences of the participating SENCOs that is the focal point of this study. This is also the explicit reason for the choice of theoretical approach in this thesis. It is an attempt to understand what it means to *be* and to *act* as a SENCO, with a specific focus on agency. Agency is understood here as the ability of SENCOs to act, uphold and fulfil their remit in their everyday worklife.

Within phenomenology there is a striving to go back to the things themselves, to be true to the things, things which are always for someone intending them (Bengtsson, 1999a; Husserl, 1954/2020). In the case of this study the "things", the object of study, the phenomenon, are the participating SENCOs' lived experiences of agency. Phenomenology is also characterised by the move away from dualistic and monistic approaches. Instead, a pluralistic approach is advocated – an approach wherein one can turn to the things themselves and be accommodative and flexible to them, where subject and object coexist and are interrelated (Bengtsson, 1999a, 2013a, 2013b; McPhail, 1995).

4.2 Phenomenological Analytical Concepts Utilised in the Thesis

This section contains an explication of the various analytical concepts utilised in the study. First the concepts of horizon and intentionality are touched upon, followed by a section on embodiment, intersubjectivity and lived space. Those sections are accompanied by a section explicitly addressing agency from several

different perspectives. Lastly, the use of habitual world of practice and boundary objects in the thesis are explained.

4.2.1 Horizons and Intentionality

The lifeworld is a social and historical world. In the lifeworld every object is part of a social and historical context wherein every object possesses an internal and external horizon that are co-experienced or appresented to the subject (Husserl, 1954/2020). This means that every object refers or alludes to another object within the same context. This is the object's external horizon, whereas its internal horizon consists of the specific unique inner properties every object possesses – these are presented to the subject from the subject's spatial perspective (Bengtsson, 2001). The subjects' experience of these objects are not limited to the concretely experienced through vision, sound or touch. The abstract also possesses these properties, or as Husserl formulates it:

> For everything that exhibits itself in the life-world as a concrete thing obviously has a bodily character, even if it is not a mere body, as, for example, an animal or cultural object. i.e., even if it also has psychic or otherwise spiritual properties. (Husserl, 1954/1978, s. 106)

Similar to Husserl (1954/1978), Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) utilises the idea of horizons when deliberating on human perception and how this relates to nature and culture. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023), whilst perceiving objects, the objects also carries horizons of that which are not regarded actively at the moment. That is what is appresented to us, that which is not in focus but ubiquitous in the seen:

> In vision (…) I apply my gaze to a fragment of the landscape, which becomes animated and displayed, while the other objects recede into the margins and become dormant, but they do not cease to be there. Now, along with these other objects I also have their horizons at my disposal, and the object I am currently focusing on – seen peripherally – is implied in the object throughout the exploration, it is the correlate of the imminent power my gaze has over the objects that is just glanced over and the power it already has over the new details that it is about to discover." (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, s. 70)[11]

[11] Both Swedish and English translations of phenomenological texts in German and French are used in the thesis but in direct quotes the English translation of phenomenological works are utilised.

In the quote above, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2014) describes the power in the gaze, but it is also a recognition of that which is appresented in the experienced in a certain context. The lifeworld according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2014) is physical and concrete but also cultural and abstract, it is nature and culture at the same time. It is a world the embodied subject lives in and experiences his own existence, but also a world that the same subject is facing where the experiences take place, a world in which the horizon is always open (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 345). The horizon in human perception functions as an analytical tool in this thesis to aid the understanding of participants' different horizons, such as their temporal horizons, horizons of knowledge, and the horizons delimiting the regional worlds of their lifeworld. However, it is also a question of the researcher's horizon of knowledge (Gadamer, 1960/2013; Gilje, 2020) and how to move that horizon further, in this instant, aided by the hermeneutical design of the thesis' empirical study. This will be further deliberated on in the methodology section.

This leads us to the idea of intentionality, a central concept within phenomenology. Intentionality is important to touch upon in an empirical study using lifeworld phenomenological theory because lived experiences within lifeworld phenomenology are intentional, which means that the subject is always directed towards something, perceiving it, or more accurate, intending it. When a subject is perceiving an object, the object carries properties. These are the objects' own, and in the experience, the properties of the object appear as real concrete components, while the subject who perceives the object carries previous experiences and a self-awareness of the ongoing experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023; Ruin, 2020). A subject thus carries a pre-understanding of what it experiences and is directed towards this something. There is an expectation, an anticipation in the awareness that makes it intentional (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023). An example of this could be a SENCO intending a learning environment with a specific student's needs in mind, seeing possible developments, adding certain provisions and thereby makes it available for a more heterogeneous group of students. Thus, creating a learning environment, inclusive to a heterogeneous group without making specific aspect explicit which possibly could be stigmatising for the SEN student the SENCO had in mind.

Moreover, our awareness is also intentional in that it is situated in time, in our drives and in our perception. These are carried by an intentional arc that stretches back and forth in time and situates us in a specific context:

> So let us say (…) that the life of consciousness – epistemic life, the life of desire, or perceptual life – is underpinned by an "intentional arc" that projects

> around us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation, or rather, that ensures that we are situated within all these relationships (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 137)

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) distinguished between two different types of intentionality: act-intentionality and operative intentionality. Act-intentionality is directly linked to an intending subject who intends certain objects, aware of the operation performed. Operative intentionality can be described as more basic, original and non-objectifying in relation to the intended objects (Schiermer, 2015; Zahavi, 2003). Operative intentionality is a pre-predicative aspect of experience. The pre-predicative experience opens up via an intentional arc towards memories, past experiences, culture, history, etc. – these constitute the non-thematic backgrounds that govern the experience. This means that we must always consider the pre-predicative act when studying lived experience because pre-predicative understanding is always present; we are in the world with a memory, an environment, a historicity (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023).

It should be mentioned in this context that a further approach to the concept of intentionality, *collective intentionality*, has been suggested by Searle (1983; 2002; 2007). According to Searle, collective intentionality is way of distinguishing between collective behaviour which are the sum of individual intentions and collective behaviour which are "not the same as the summation of individual intentional behaviour" (Searle, 2002, p. 92). Searle (2002) argues that the reverse reasoning of this is that we cannot analyse *we-intentions* as "sets of I-intentions" (p. 93). Searle (2002) exemplifies this by imagining watching a group of people sitting in various places in a park and suddenly they all must seek shelter under a roof from a rainfall. He compares this to a group of ballet dancers performing an outdoors ballet in the same park where all the participants suddenly must run and converge on one point, under the same roof. Watching from the outside without knowing the intentions of the participants in these two groups, the behaviour could be seemingly identical, yet there is, according to Searle a distinctive difference in the intentions of the participants in the two examples:

> […] part of the difference is that the form of the intentionality in the first case [the rain] is that each person has an intention that he could express without reference to the others, even in a case where each has mutual knowledge of the intentions of the others. But in the second case [the ballet] the individual "I intend"s are, in a way we will need to explain, derivative from the "we intend"s. That is, in the first case, even if each person knows that the other people intend to run to the shelter and knows that the other people know that he intends to run to the shelter, we still do not have

> collective behavior. In this case at least, it seems no set of "I intend"s, even supplemented with beliefs about other "I intend"s, is sufficient to get to the "we intend." Intuitively, in the collective case the individual intentionality, expressed by "I am doing act A," is derivative from the collective intentionality "We are doing act A." (Searle, 2002, p. 92)

In this integrating essay, act intentionality and operative intentionality as well as, collective and individual intentionality will be utilised to analyse and interpret the lived experiences of agency among the participants, as described in the discussion section. This approach is utilised to understand collaborations and both individual and collective aspects of agency, aspects which seem to be central for SENCOs to fulfil their remit. A further deliberation on the concept of intentionality in relation to performing empirical research with qualitative design is discussed further below in the sections regarding ethics and credibility.

4.2.2 Embodied Intersubjectiveness – Intertwined with Lived Space and Lived Time

Another central characteristic of the lifeworld phenomenological approach is *lived body*, humans as body-subjects. It is through the lived body that body-subjects obtain access to the world and that access is granted through perception (Berndtsson, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023). Therefore, it is of importance to this study how the SENCOs experience their bodies in their everyday worklife in relation to physical rooms as well as in relation to the professional relationships they have. Lifeworld phenomenology allows researchers to study SENCOs in their everyday worklife through their lived physical experiences and their lived physical perception, i.e., their lived bodies. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) developed the concept of lived body when examining how nature and culture is manifested in the perceptive subject's body (Bengtsson, 2013a). The lived body constantly stands in relation to the perceived objects. The distance between the things and the lived body can be overcome, and objects become incorporated but, of course, are never the same. Common examples of this are a blind person's white cane, the glasses of a person with poor eyesight (Berndtsson, 2001, 2024) or a competent cyclist's bicycle (Bengtsson & Berndtsson, 2015b). Furthermore, according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023), the lived body is constitutive for intersubjective relationships in that relationships are intercorporal – it is through the lived body we reach out to others in the intercorporal act of getting to know one another. Therefore, it is of interest in this study to understand the embodied experiences of the

participating SENCOs when communicating and creating relationships with other agents in their everyday worklife.

When studying SENCOs' everyday worklife, relationships and communication becomes immediate. This is corroborated by previous research that suggest that relationships are central to SENCOs' work. In lifeworld phenomenological theory, human relationships are considered intersubjective. There exists a reciprocity between people in a situation and even though we never have complete access to our fellows' lifeworlds we still obtain some access to them through intersubjectivity (Bengtsson, 2013a). Through Merleau-Ponty's (1945/2023) work on the lived body, people can be understood as psychophysical subjects who communicatively and intersubjectively share each other's lifeworlds – we transcend each other's worlds and through communication, we reach each other. Bengtsson (2013a) formulates intersubjectivity in this context as it "lives in the tension between the otherness and sameness of individual human beings" (p. 50). Moreover, communication is important to creating and upholding qualitative relationships and Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) emphasises the importance of language in intersubjective relationships. According to him, language is a manifestation of people's inner being and provides the psychic bonds that connect people to the lifeworld and fellow human beings. This approach to language makes communication central for humans to understand and meet one another intersubjectively.

To study SENCOs lived experiences of agency in their everyday worklife is to also study their lived experiences of inhabiting spaces as lived bodies; this is inevitable, given the theoretical approach to this thesis. Existence, according to Heidegger (1927/2013), is spatial in its primordial form; the room constitutes itself a priori. We as humans cannot imagine ourselves void of spatiality; the idea is terrifying. To understand the lived experiences of spatiality, this thesis makes use of the concept *lived space*.

The lived space is not the same thing as the geometrical room or the place where a body is situated. The spatiality of existence can therefore not be defined by the location of a bodily existence (Heidegger, 1927/2013). This could be exemplified by the student who is in attendance in the classroom but is elsewhere in his or her imagination or maybe lost in a smart phone. The lived space is also not mathematically quantifiable in the same way as the geometrical room is. The distance from the student's classroom to the SENCO's office, the principal's office or the nurse's office can differ even though they are situated right beside each other in the same corridor in the same building. The perceived distance in the lived

space is different depending on the purpose and the meaning of the visit. This insight is important for this thesis and the analysis of the empirical material in that to be able to understand and interpret what it means to *be* and *act* as a SENCO one needs to be able to interpret how the SENCOs are to the room and how they are being-toward-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023).

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) developed the idea of the body's spatiality and spoke of a positional spatiality and a situational spatiality as a specific way of being-toward-the-world. He argued that the room never transcends the body's borderline, and the subject does not perceive its body's different parts as he or she perceives other things in a room. A subject is not in a room as an object in a box, the subject constitutes the room and inhabits the room (Bengtsson, 1998a, 1998b). My hand lying on my desk beside my keyboard as I am reading this text is not lying there in the same manner as my copy of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. The various spaces where the SENCOs' everyday worklife unfolds, the classrooms and corridors, the offices and auditoriums, the nooks and crannies, the school cafeteria, the teachers' lounge, all these spaces, and many more, such as the digital rooms during the COVID-19 pandemic for example, are areas where SENCOs perform their work. This is studied in this thesis using the phenomenological concept *lived space* to better understand how the different spaces which are prevalent in the SENCOs' everyday worklife might function as barriers or facilitators to their agency.

How to perceive and understand time is also important for the results in this thesis. Time has been written about extensively within the phenomenological movement and to understand the results regarding how SENCOs perceive time and how agency relates to time there are some points of interest which need to be explicated.

To begin with, some issues pointed out by Heidegger (1927/2013) regarding time is of interest to explain. Heidegger views temporality as the ontological foundation for existence's existentiality. Meaning that temporality is primordial and consequently a sentient subject counts on the existence of time. Hereby, humans cannot imagine living outside of time more than we can perceive ourselves as void of space or body, these existential features are a priori human existence. The experienced time, the *lived time*, is the phenomenological time whereas the mundane or vulgar concept of time is the chronological time. One could say that chronological time relates to phenomenological time in the same way as the geometrical room relates to lived space. Chronological time is something which we measure with a chronometer in the same way as we measure a room with a

measuring tape and quantify it in smaller and smaller pieces; meters, decimetres, centimetres; hours, minutes and seconds. School is to a high degree subordinate to the chronological time and is quantified, chopped up and scheduled and chronologically situated within specific hours during a day, a week, a month, a term and a school year. This has very little to do with the students' or the personnels' lived time where one can experience a lesson to end far too quickly while the other experience it as the clock stands still and it never becomes recess – a recess which is experienced as far too short by everyone.

In addition, time does display other properties as well. Time is part of the intentional arc according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023). Or, as Heidegger (1927/2010) remarked, how our present stands in relation to our past and our immediate future. "Temporality temporalizes itself as future that makes present, in the process of having been" (Heidegger, 1927/2010, p. 334). Merleau-Ponty (1945/2014) also made use of temporal horizons in his explanation of how we experience lived time and spoke of a field of presence in relation to the horizons of temporality.

> Everything sends me back to the field of presence, as if to the originary experience where time and its dimensions appear in person without any intervening distance and with an ultimate evidentness. This is where we see a future slipping into the present and into the past. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 439)

Accordingly, the lived experiences of the participants in this study were not only set in specific places, but these were also set in a specific time. The empirical material for this thesis was generated during the spring term of 2021. This denotes the chronological time of when the empirical material was generated for the study. However, time is not only an issue of the measure of minutes and seconds. From a phenomenological perspective, time is something more than a denotation of a place on a timeline; time is lived. This was important for the study in the analysis of the empirical material because lived time aids in the understanding of how the participating SENCOs viewed and used their allotted time in relation to their work with SEN students as well as in interactions with colleagues and other agents in their everyday worklife. How time intertwines with action when initiating a project was further explored by Schütz (1951/2011):

> In order to project my future action as it will roll on, I have to place myself in my phantasy at a future time when this action will already have been accomplished, when the resulting act will already have been materialized. Only then may I reconstruct the single steps which will have brought forth

> this future act. What is thus anticipated in the project is, in our terminology, not the future action but the future act, and it is anticipated in the future-perfect tense, modo futuri exacti. This time perspective peculiar to the project has rather important consequences. First, I base my projecting of my forthcoming act in the future-perfect tense upon my knowledge of previously performed acts which are typically similar to the prescribed one, upon my knowledge of typically relevant features of the situation in which this projected action will occur, including my personal, biographically determined situation. But this knowledge is my knowledge now at hand—now, at the time of projecting—and must needs be different from that which I shall have when the now merely projected act will have been materialized. (Schütz, 2011, p. 78)

4.2.3 The Habitual World of Practice

To further untangle the everyday lifeworld in this thesis, the professional practice of SENCOs is viewed as an expression of a *habitual world of practice* (Bengtsson, 1995, 2013a, 2013b). A habitual world of practice is the ingrained, embodied professional practice that includes concretely observable things, such as the use of language, tools, possible actions or how the classroom is utilised, but also the abstract and the embodied aspects of professional practice. If the mind of the SENCO "has settled in the body as a way of thinking, seeing, feeling and being as a professional" (Bengtsson, 2013a, p. 8), the professional act could be viewed as embodied. Within the lifeworld, the habitual world of practice is taken for granted and invisible, but is made visible, in this instance, by explicit scientific study. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic turned the participants' habitual world of practice on its head which to some extent enabled the empirical study in that the participants' natural attitude already were breached by the unprecedented influence the pandemic had on their practice – this is further deliberated on in the first article of this thesis *SENCOs Lived Experiences of Working Through the COVID-19 Pandemic in Swedish Upper Secondary School* (Udd & Berndtsson, 2023).

4.2.4 Boundary Work – Where Phenomenology and Interpretative Sociology Meet

Finally, in this thesis (in Article IV) the concept of boundary work (Gieryn, 1983; Langley et al., 2019) was utilised to analyse SENCOs' agency. The reason for applying this theoretical concept in a study within a lifeworld phenomenological approach was that professional boundaries became prominent in the empirical material generated, yet there were no ready analytical concepts within lifeworld

phenomenology to deal with this in the analysis. Regionalisation, intertwinement, chiasm, sub-worlds and horizons deal to some extent with these matters but to actually make contact with the empirical material to elucidate the actions performed in the professional boundary areas between persons and settings, an analytical tool specifically designed for this was needed.

Therefore, argumentation was made in the fourth article for applying the sociological concept *boundary work* to analyse and interpret the SENCOs' lived experiences of creating and maintaining agency in the boundaries between agents and settings within as well as outside of school. Furthermore, certain subdivisions of the concept of boundary work were also utilised in the study, namely *competitive* and *collaborative boundary work* (Langley et al., 2019) where competitive boundary work was utilised to analyse and interpret when SENCOs were "defending, contesting and creating boundaries" (p. 11) and when they were "negotiating, embodying and downplaying boundaries" (p. 28). The utilisation of sociological concepts within a lifeworld phenomenological study was argued for in the fourth article based on how Alfred Schütz in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Schütz, 1932/1967) was inspired by Edmund Husserl, Henri Bergson, George Herbert Mead, William James and Max Weber in his work of creating the philosophical underpinnings for interpretative sociology (Barber, 2021; Schütz, 1932/1967, 1932/2002, 1951/2011, 1962, 1964). This situates Schütz work as a hub connecting his thoughts to sociology as well as phenomenology, much like an intersection for conceptual thought, with one foot in the interpretative sociological tradition and one in the phenomenological, enabling the usage of sociological concepts in a lifeworld phenomenological study, as can be seen in the fourth study of this thesis, Udd (2024).

4.3 Agency Understood Phenomenologically

Finally, *agency* as an analytical concept within a lifeworld phenomenological study needs to be addressed, especially given the aim of this thesis to explore what it means to be and to act as a SENCO in Swedish upper secondary schools. Agency, the ability to act or human action, is central within the phenomenological movement and has been so from the very start as can be seen in the writings of Husserl as well as in the following generations of phenomenologists (Erhard & Keiling, 2021; Ruin, 2020; Zahavi, 2003). This also holds true for how the lifeworld is understood in the Gothenburg tradition (Bengtsson, 2013b). In the Gothenburg tradition the lifeworld is to a certain extent defined and understood by the actions

possible within it, specifically, how certain actions are definitional of different regions of the lifeworld. For example, the action of SENCOs within their everyday worklife are definitional of that regionalisation and would be considered weird, absurd or out of place in other regions of their lifeworld (Bengtsson & Berndtsson, 2015a).

The agentic concepts of specific interest in the four articles in this thesis are agency *beyond dualism* of body and mind, in other words, agency understood through phenomenological theory (Baldwin, 2021; Barber, 2021; Borren, 2021; Morgan, 2021). Such agentic concepts are *embodied action* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014), *in-order-to-motives, because-of-motives and reciprocity of motives* (Schütz, 1932/1967). As well as *ethics* and *moral* in action (Levinas, 1969) and *political action* (Arendt, 1958/2018) – all aspects of *agency* as understood through phenomenological theory. These aspects of agency will be explicated below in the final section of the thesis's theoretical framework.

Embodied action is agency understood through Merleau-Pontys *being-toward-the-world*. As human beings, we are beings who are being-toward-the-world, meaning how *the being* is communicated by the *perceiving subject* and how nature and culture is manifested in the perceptive subject's body (the *lived body*). Through the lived body, the subject obtains access to the world and that access is granted through perception which in turn could be an active choice according to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023); the choice to turn one's gaze and intend a specific phenomenon. Embodied action is also connected to the intentional arc mentioned above and as such situated in lived time and "our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation, and our moral situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 137). Furthermore, following Merleau-Ponty's connection between agency and the intentional arc, agency is constituent to both act-intentionality as well as object intentionality, thereby distinguishing between the pre-predicative aspects of agency and the aware subject that intends action, thoughts, or objects. Suggesting that the participating SENCOs' actions can be either thought through and acted on deliberately or more intuitively acted out, spontaneously without prior conscious deliberation.

Schütz's (1932/1964) understanding of agency places action within the social everyday world, giving agency a distinct connection to *lived time* and the reciprocity of *motives* in human relationships: "The prototype of all social relationship is an intersubjective connection of motives. (p. 14)". Furthermore, Schütz explicates different motives for actions and touches upon the discrepancy between *intention* and *outcome* and how they play off one another (Barber, 2021). In doing that, Schütz

(1932/1964) defines an *in-order-to-motive* and *because-of-motive* and connects them in the intersubjectivity of relationships through the *reciprocity-of-motives*, meaning that peoples' different motives shift in conjunction with the intersubjectiveness of their relationships. An in-order-to motive would for a SENCO in this context be characterised by a plan to achieve something specific in a planned and though out way whilst a because-of-motive would be characterised by a reaction by the SENCO to something happening in their everyday worklife. The reciprocity-of-motives could be further explained as how SENCOs and other agents in their everyday worklife collaborate to find mutual or aligning motives for actions in their intersubjective relationships.

In addition, because agency and intersubjective relationships stand at the heart of this thesis the quality of these relationships needs to be analysed and interpreted. Such relationships can be between professionals within and outside of school and relationships between SENCOs and both SEN students and their caregivers. Relationships between school personnel, caregivers, students and other professionals are an area were ethics and morals are central and crucial for the quality of the relationships (Aspelin et al., 2021). This is analysed and understood within the boundaries of this thesis by the use of Levinas' (1969) concept of *attending to the Other's face*. Attending to the Other's face is a way of approaching and coming to an understanding of the ethical aspects of human interrelations. Levinas claims that our very capacity for action is rooted in and guided by an ethical sensitivity and moral obligation towards the Other (Levinas, 1969; Morgan, 2021) which manifests in action as *attending to the Other's face*.

Finally, agency expressed as labour, work and action according to Arendt (1958/2018) is utilised in the meta-synthesis in the integrating essay of this thesis. In the introduction of *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1958/2018) Margeret Canovan explains how Arendt argues in a phenomenological analysis for these three fundamental forms of activity which are distinct in the human condition:

> …labor, which corresponds to the biological life of man as an animal; work, which corresponds to the artificial world of objects that human beings build upon the earth; and action, which corresponds to our plurality as distinct individuals. (p. xxi)

According to Arendt (1958/2018) it is only when we take *action* and enter the public realm (the *zoon politica*) that we exercise agency in the sense of plurality (Arendt, 1958/2018; Borren, 2021). This sense of plurality means that *action* "is the

only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter" (Arendt, 1958/2018, p. 7).

SENCOs' ability to act is understood as central to their professionality, as an aspect of their professional proficiency. The professionality of SENCOs is much discussed in previous research and relates to questions regarding their ability to claim professional jurisdiction, demarcate the profession and take action in a remit, which is seldomly clearly defined when boundaries are in a constant state of flux. Drawing from the writings of Arendt (1958/2018) enables the analysis and the interpretation to pin down questions that pertain to assumptions and normativity in SENCOs' professional role, thereby saying something of the existential aspects that possibly implicitly politicises the SENCO profession. This approach to the analysis in the integrated essay is an attempt to interpret what it means to *be* and to *act* as a SENCO in an everyday worklife characterised by ambiguities, heterogeneity and plurality. This is a means to understand how SENCOs adapt to an uncertain everyday worklife in which changes in tasks and missions are common and fluctuating professional boundaries are the norm. This means that to be able to analyse SENCOs' agency, the unexpected occurrences, the ambiguities and complexities of their everyday worklife need to be scrutinised; this is where Arendt's ideas regarding human agency prove helpful. Arendt (1958/2018) claims: "Action, is in fact, the one miracle-working faculty of man" (p. 246) explicating the fact that in human affairs it is sensible to "expect the unexpected" (Canovan, 2018, p. xxix).

Moreover, action according to Arendt (1958/2018), is something that is both a carrier of hope and opportunity yet at the same time also frustrating in that we cannot foresee or control its effects. Through action, things are set in motion, and a chain of events starts, which inevitably becomes intertwined and catches up with other people in the public arena. This stands in contrast to the things that we produce through work; these can perish, decline and crumble while "action has no end" (Arendt, 1958/2018, p. 233), suggesting that there is an indeterminacy to action in that we cannot foresee the chain of events that will be set in motion by the initiating actor. According to Arendt (1958/2018), this is both a blessing and a curse in that we cannot nullify or have complete control of that which we have set in motion. Yet, one must act, in order to fulfil the remit of the SENCO profession, as seen in this study, for example in how the SENCOs act as agents of change to create a school for all students.

In studying the lived experience of agency among SENCOs in upper secondary schools the different aspects of agency explicated above create opportunities to

explore, analyse and understand how and why SENCOs act the way they do and how their agency is created, formed and upheld in their everyday worklife.

Chapter 5 Methodology and Methods

In this chapter, the research design, methods, analysis and deliberations on methodology as well as on ethics in the study are presented.

5.1 Methodological Considerations

In a lifeworld approach the design of an empirical study is informed by phenomenological theory (Bengtsson, 2013b). To study peoples' lived experiences, one must be flexible and accommodative to the object of study. The choice of methods was chosen in relation to the aim of the study and the research questions to be true to the phenomenon under study and to facilitate phenomenological insights. The methods used in this study were *semi-structured lifeworld interviews* (Kvale et al., 2014) and *reflective open-ended diaries* (Wildemuth, 2017). Three interviews were conducted with each participant, and on two occasions between these interviews, the participants wrote diaries. These two methods of generating empirical data combined with the design of the study created an opportunity to be both flexible and accommodative towards the phenomenon studied.

In qualitative research using interviews and diaries where the lived experiences of participants are the object of study, the questions of who should participate and how many participants are needed are central to the quality of the study. Both the aim of the study and prior qualitative research in the field were used as focal points and references to answer these questions (Larsson, 2005; Patton, 2015). The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore what it means to be and to act as a SENCO in Swedish upper secondary schools. To fulfil the aim of the study, participants with a SENCO degree who were experienced enough to be able to reflect on their own professional role and worklife were needed. It was gauged that the least acceptable amount of experience should be three years of working as a SENCO. The logic behind this reasoning was that an upper secondary programme is three years in length, meaning that a SENCO who had worked for three years, in theory, would have the experience of following a student from their first years of study to graduation.

Moreover, leaning on Patton (2015), the goal of creating the group of participants was to establish the possibility for a spectrum of experiences; therefore, individuals with different work experiences were desired to create a heterogeneous group of participants, as can be seen in Table 1. To create a heterogeneous group, the participants were chosen through *purposeful sampling* based on heterogeneous group characteristics. Their heterogeneous characteristics were the following: that they worked in small, medium and large schools (Skolverket, 2024); in rural, suburban and inner-city settings; at preparatory for higher education, vocational and introductory programmes; and had different durations of work experience. A further criterion for the selection of the participants was that they were currently working as SENCOs at an upper secondary school. Finally, the participants needed to have a SENCO degree according to *SFS 1993:100*, or later versions of the same degree.

Regarding the number of participants, the goal was to have enough to create a heterogeneous group. To create a heterogeneous group of participants and generate enough empirical material to facilitate the study, eight participants was gauged as the minimum number to allow for all the heterogeneous characteristics mentioned above to be represented. However, to ensure this number and account for attrition, the decision was to find 10 participants. This turned out to be a well-informed decision since one person did leave the study after the first interview for personal reasons. However, this was not the only obstacle encountered in the research project.

Initially, the research project was designed to include face-to-face interviews, in which the last of the three interviews was to take place at the participants' schools, partially as a walk-and-talk interview. This idea was spurred by a phenomenologically driven curiosity to examine how the participants embodied their work and what role spatiality had for the professional role of SENCOs. Inspiration for studying this was drawn from Bengtsson (2003, 2011, 2013a) and Alerby et al. (2014); Alerby and Hörnqvist (2006). It was also informed by previous research suggesting that different parts of a school building can function as important arenas for SENCOs in their work to create learning environments supportive of all students (Gerrbo, 2012; Möllås, 2018). However, this became impossible to do at the time of the study due to COVID-19 restrictions, as upper secondary schools closed their buildings and administered distance educational solutions. In addition, visiting researchers were not allowed to enter the school buildings at the time. Therefore, the design of the study had to be changed; how this was done and the changes that were made are explicated below.

5.2 Methods

The empirical material was generated through interviews and diaries aided by lifeworld phenomenological dimensions to capture the lived experiences of the nine participating SENCOs. The interviews were performed as *semi-structured lifeworld interviews,* and the diaries were *reflective, open-ended diaries* (Kvale et al., 2014; Wildemuth, 2017).

The participants were interviewed four times each: one introductory interview and three research interviews. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, all the interviews had to be performed with the use of digital technologies. The introductory interview was not recorded, and it was conducted to inform participants about the aim and design of the study and for the researcher and participants to get to know each other a little. Because the interviews were digital, the informal parts of typical face-to-face interview situations, small talk before and after, coffee breaks, etc. were absent; therefore, an initial interview, or possibly more aptly described as a "conversation", was called for. This helped with establishing rapport (Gray et al., 2020; Seitz, 2016) as well as with creating an understanding among the participants regarding the content and design of the study and insights into the ethical aspects of the study.

The initial interview was followed by three research interviews with each participant, with roughly one month passing between each. The interviews in this study were primarily performed using Microsoft Teams; however, telephone calls and Google Meets were used on three occasions due to technical difficulties. Issues concerning interviews performed over distance, such as telephone calls or through Zoom or Teams, include the possibility of missing non-verbal cues and technical difficulties that can arise, which might affect the interviews negatively (Novick, 2008; Opdenakker, 2006; Thunberg & Arnell, 2022). There are also concerns that empirical material generated through distance interviews will not be as rich as in-person interviews; however, this is not necessarily the case. Some research suggests that, when discussing sensitive issues, distance interviews actually enable participants to open up because the distance diffuses the situation to a certain extent and offers a degree of anonymity, thus enabling the participant to be more relaxed in the interview situation (Sipes et al., 2022; Thunberg & Arnell, 2022).

Moreover, distances interviews are time efficient and enable long-distance participation (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022), which was the case in this study in which participants from northern, south and the middle of Sweden were represented. Such a geographical spread among the participants would not have been possible

within the boundaries of this study if traditional face-to-face interviews had been used. However, a limitation following the digital interviews was that there were no possible observations of the different educational environments utilised by the participating SENCOs. This means that only the descriptions of the SENCOs' lived experiences constituted the empirical material in the study. Finally, what is important to note is that distance interviews are not a substitute for, but an alternative to, in-person interviews, and they have their own rules and logic (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022), something which was considered in this study as seen in the design with the initial interview and the following three interviews interspaced with diary writing.

During the research interviews, the sound from the interviews was recorded on an external source, a dictaphone placed in front of the speaker of the telephone or computer. The interviews were designed to be between 60 and 90 minutes in length. The shortest interview was 51 minutes and the longest was 85; the average interview was 73 minutes. This rendered almost 33 hours of audio interview material.[12] I listened to all the interviews in their entirety several times; during the first listen, the interviews were summarised and time stamped so that it would be easier to find the different topics discussed in the interviews. In the summaries, initial notations regarding possible themes and existential aspects of the participants' everyday worklife were notated as well.

A semi-structured lifeworld interview seeks to elicit and understand lived experiences among the participants and is therefore constructed with respect to the existential aspects of the lifeworld. Existential aspects such as lived space, lived body and lived time, embodied action and intersubjective relationships. Moreover, the design of the interview guides is open to the plurality and ambiguity of the lifeworld and the participants various lived experiences, thereby functioning more as a guide than a specific set of questions which are supposed to be asked in a specific order (Bengtsson, 1999a; Kvale et al., 2014).

The first interview guide was designed in relation to the aim and research questions and was informed by phenomenological concepts, previous research and the researcher's own experiences from working as a SENCO, upper secondary school teacher, first-teacher and vice-principal. This interview guide was tested in a pilot interview with a former SENCO to see if the questions worked and to try out interviewing in an online environment (Gray et al., 2020; Seitz, 2016). The pilot interview went well, and it was important for the researcher to become more

[12] In the first article, the total amount of time of recorded material had been miscalculated. In that article, it is reported as 26 hours and 25 minutes.

familiar with interviewing in a digital environment. The second interview guide was designed using the first interviews and diaries as inspiration, together with follow-up questions and ideas that were written down during those initial interviews but were not asked at the time. The third interview guide was designed using the same strategies as in the creation of the second interview guide. All the interview guides can be found in Appendices 11, 12 and 13.

A further method for generating empirical material was used in the study: reflective open-ended diaries (Wildemuth, 2017). Reflective open-ended diaries provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect upon and contemplate their everyday worklife between the interviews. The participants wrote diary notations between the first and second interviews and between the second and third interviews during the spring term of 2021. There were no word limitations in the diaries. Instead, the participants were directed to write something every week, at least once, during a period of four weeks for both occasions of diary writing; 61 pages of diary notations were generated. There were three themes with four questions each in the first diary and in the second diary there were only four questions. The questions in the first diary stemmed from the authors' experiences and insights from previous research. The second diary had questions that were formulated in relation to early findings in the interviews that the participants were to reflect upon. Two participants (SP2 and SP10) did not write diaries for personal reasons; these participants received the diary questions at the same time as the others and were informed that they would be asked these questions during the following interview instead. The diary questions used in the study can be found in Appendices 14 and 15.

The participants in the study were found by posting a question (see Appendix 7) in three different Facebook groups for SENCOs, which at the time had around 30,000 total members. These groups were closed, and individuals were required to request membership in them. The administrators of the groups had to be solicited to make posts asking for participants for any research project. After an initial posting, there were 13 people who were interested in taking part in the project. Two of those interested were working in lower secondary schools and were not chosen to be part of the study for this reason. The last interested person was rejected because of being employed as a SET, even though the individual had a SENCO degree. The participants were informed of the research project through a letter that included a form for informed consent (Appendices 8 and 9). The participants were all invited for a first initial interview/conversation where the researcher and participants had a chance to converse for a while and some basic

questions about the participants' employment and education could be asked (Appendix 10). The research project was further explained at these meetings, and the participants were informed of the ethical aspects of the study. The same information was included in the information letter that was sent via e-mail. The participants were also made aware that their headmasters would be informed of their participation in the project (all the headmasters were contacted and were positive about their SENCOs taking part in the research project). The study included SENCOs working in vocational programmes (Voc.), preparatory programmes for higher education (Prep.) and introductory programmes (Intro.).

Study Participant 1 (SP1)
SP1 had worked as a SENCO for six years when the interviews were conducted. Previously, the participant worked as a teacher in upper secondary school. At the time of the study, the participant worked 80% as a SENCO and taught 20% at an upper secondary school. The school was run by a municipality and the SENCO worked at all the different programmes at the school: vocational, preparatory and introductory programmes. The school was situated in a small rural town in Sweden. There was only one SENCO working at the school.

Study Participant 2 (SP2)
SP2 had, at the time of the interviews, worked as a SENCO for five years. The participant previously worked as an upper secondary teacher. The participant worked full time as a SENCO at an independent school; the school was situated downtown in one of Sweden's three largest cities. The students came primarily from the suburbs surrounding the city. The school only had preparatory programmes for higher education. There was only one SENCO working at the school.

Study Participant 3 (SP3)
SP3 had worked as a SENCO for approximately four years at the time of the interviews. Previously, the participant worked as an upper secondary teacher before becoming a SENCO. The participant worked full time as a SENCO at a school run by the municipality. The school was situated downtown in a medium-sized town in Sweden. The school had preparatory programmes for higher education, as well as vocational and introductory programmes. There were several SENCOs working at the school. The participant had four designated programmes, both vocational and preparatory, for which the participant was responsible.

Study Participant 4 (SP4)
SP4 had worked as a SENCO for six years at the time of the interviews. Previously, the SENCO worked as an upper secondary teacher. The participant worked full time as a SENCO at a school run by a municipality. The school was situated downtown in a small town in Sweden. The students came primarily from the surrounding area. The school had only preparatory programmes for higher education, and there were two SENCOs working at the school.

Study Participant 5 (SP5)
SP5 had worked as a SENCO for 12 years at the time of the interviews. Previously, the participant worked as teacher at the lower and upper secondary levels in school before becoming a SENCO. The participant worked 80% as a SENCO in an independent school situated downtown in one of Sweden's three largest cities. The school had only preparatory programmes for higher education, and the students came primarily from the suburbs surrounding the city. There was only one SENCO working at the school.

Study Participant 6 (SP6)
This participant had worked as a SENCO for 11 years at an upper secondary school at the time of the interviews. Previously, the participant worked as a preschool teacher. The participant worked full time as a SENCO at an independent school located downtown in one of Sweden's three largest cities. There was one more SENCO working at the school. The students came primarily from the suburbs surrounding the city. The school had only preparatory programmes for higher education.

Study Participant 7 (SP7)
(Left the study after the first interview for personal reasons.)

Study Participant 8 (SP8)
This participant had worked as a SENCO for eight years at the time of the interviews. Previously, the participant worked as an upper secondary teacher. The participant worked full time as a SENCO at a school run by the municipality. The school was situated downtown in a small town in Sweden. The school had both vocational and preparatory programmes, as well as introductory programmes. The SENCO worked at one of the programmes and led a group of nine other SENCOs. The students came from the town and adjacent municipalities.

Study Participant 9 (SP9)

This participant had worked as a SENCO for six years at the time of the interviews. Previously, the participant worked as a teacher in an upper secondary school. The participant worked full time as a SENCO at a school run by a municipality. The school was situated in a small town in Sweden. The school had both preparatory programmes for higher education and vocational programmes, as well as introductory programmes. The SENCO worked in both preparatory and vocational programmes. Three other SENCOs were working at the school. The students came from the municipality where the school was situated, as well as from adjacent municipalities.

Study Participant 10 (SP10)

SP10 had worked as a SENCO for 16 years at the time of the interviews. Previously, the participant worked as a middle school and lower secondary school teacher. The participant worked full time as a SENCO at a school run by a municipality. The school was situated in a rural area in Sweden and had only vocational programmes. The students came from the surrounding area but also from other parts of the country. There was only one SENCO working at the school.

Table 1. Characteristics of Study Participants

Participant	Years in Profession	School Form	Programme Type	Location
SP1	6	Public	Prep, Voc, Intro	Rural small town
SP2	5	Independent	Prep	City
SP3	4	Public	Prep, Voc, Intro	Medium town
SP4	6	Public	Prep	Small town
SP5	12	Independent	Prep	City
SP6	11	Independent	Prep	City
SP7	-	-	-	-
SP8	8	Public	Prep, Voc, Intro	Small town
SP9	6	Public	Prep, Voc, Intro	Small town
SP10	16	Public	Voc	Rural area

Note: Prep = Preparatory; Voc = Vocational; Intro = Introductory

5.3 Analysis

The analytical approach used in this thesis research is hermeneutical. Theoretically, the thesis leans on the work on hermeneutics by Gadamer (1960/2013), Heidegger (1927/2013) and Schütz (1932/1967), whereas the analytical process was inspired by Ödman (2007) and Gilje (2020). The text was also written in correspondence with previous research done in the phenomenological hermeneutical tradition, such as Bengtsson (1999b), Berndtsson (2001), Berndtsson et al. (2007), Finlay (2009, 2014), Gustavsson (2000) and Henricsson (2022). Central elements aiding the analytic process were the *hermeneutical circular movement*; the principles of *subjectivity, mercy* and *suspicion*; *first-order interpretation/emic concepts*; *second-order interpretation/etic concepts*; *thick descriptions* and a reflexive approach to one's own *horizon of knowledge*. These elements have worked as guidelines in the analytical process, and how they have been utilised is explained below.

First, something needs to be said about the idea of the hermeneutical circle. Ödman (2007) describes the hermeneutical circle, or spiral, as the movement between the parts and the whole. Whether hermeneutic analysis should be viewed as a circle or a spiral is discussed by both Ödman (2007) and Bengtsson (1999b), and the central argument concerns the risk that a circle implies circular analysis, in which one ends up at the same spot where one started. In contrast, the image of the spiral instead conveys the idea that one moves further forward or deeper in the analysis. Perhaps Gilje (2020) has a better solution for this problem; instead of an image of a concrete noun, such as a circle or spiral, he describes a circular *movement*. Thus, avoiding describing it as a thing in which we step and focuses instead on the agent's active part of doing hermeneutic analysis. In this thesis, Gilje's (2020) approach is utilised, and hermeneutical circular movement is used to conceptually describe the analytical process. Furthermore, to perform hermeneutical analysis, the empirical material needs to be rich enough. This is sometimes referred to as *thick descriptions* (Gilje, 2020). The study's design, including three interviews and two periods of diary entries, was utilised to hermeneutically deal with the author's prior knowledge of the field of research but also to create thick descriptions (Gilje, 2020). Thick descriptions allow one to move between the part and the whole in the hermeneutical circular movement. Furthermore, thick descriptions enable a hermeneutic interpretation when testing themes and validating or re-evaluating them against the material as a whole.

The empirical material in this study was interpreted by moving back and forth in a hermeneutical circular motion between small items in the material and out

again to the complete empirical material. This approach to analysis concerns the unit of analysis in this study, which could be said to be both the individual participant's interview answers and diary notations, as well as the complete empirical material as an entity in itself. This is one characteristic of hermeneutic analysis: to move between parts or small items of the empirical material to the totality of the empirical material.

Ödman (2007) exemplifies this movement and interpretation as similar to laying out the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. At first, we only see a large number of different pieces; we do not know exactly what they depict, and it is hard to understand how one could be able to find some structure or meaning in the material. However, one starts to sort them. In the case of this study, the pieces of the puzzle were the participants' individual answers to questions in the interviews and diaries. These were initially sorted using colours, intuitively at first (Berndtsson et al., 2007; Ödman, 2007), After a while, some pieces could fit together, making parts of the whole. This was when themes in the empirical material were formulated for the first time.

Initial themes were quite broad, such as "communication", "the COVID-19 pandemic" and "relationships"; further on in the analytical process, the themes became more specific and narrower, such as "being the students' spokesperson", "lacking a physical room" and "having a clear definition of the professional role". Later in the analysis, these narrower themes were exemplified by direct quotes from the empirical material, providing them with substance and meaning. Under the wider theme of *communication,* the narrower theme *of being the students' spokesperson* was exemplified with several different quotes – one being used in the second article to show how "the student is always at the centre" (SP1, interview) for the participating SENCOs in their everyday worklife. Under the wider theme of the *COVID-19 pandemic,* the narrower theme of *lacking a physical room* and what that meant for the professional role of the participating SENCOs were exemplified in the following section in the first article of the thesis: "SENCOs tried to compensate for this lack of shared lived rooms in school via digital means, which turned out to work to some extent but not as well as when sharing a lived room in school" (Udd & Berndtsson, 2023, p. 873). On the topic of the wider theme of *relationships,* one aspect of it was that having *a clear definition of the professional role* aided in sustaining professional relationships because this made the relationships less loaded with tensions. This was exemplified with several quotes in the fourth article of the thesis (Udd, 2024), one being the following: "I am not a school nurse, I am not a student counsellor, and I am not a teacher" (SP2, interview). These examples

from three of the four articles in the thesis serve as illustrations of how the hermeneutical circular movement functioned in the analysis to move between the parts and the whole of the empirical material.

Another central aspect of a phenomenological study with a hermeneutical design is the interpretation; one could argue that it is the very core of hermeneutics to interpret (Gadamer, 1960/2013; Gilje, 2020; Gustavsson, 2000; Ödman, 2007), how the material was phenomenologically interpreted will be explicated below, starting with the example of the jigsaw puzzle already introduced.

One issue with the example of a jigsaw puzzle is that it has a set image, a known whole, whereas the empirical material in this, or any other hermeneutically informed empirical study, does not have a set final image, only interpretations of a final image relating to the aim and research questions of the study. Therefore, in the process of interpretation, a limitation of the analysis was found in direct relation to the research questions in focus (Gustavsson, 2000). These become the focal point of the interpretative process (see the research questions listed in the introduction of this thesis). Nevertheless, Ödman's (2007) example of the puzzle serves as a way of understanding the process of performing an analysis using a hermeneutical approach, moving back and forth between the parts and the whole to gradually see how the pieces fit together to create a cohesive and coherent image.[13]

In the interpretations, two guiding concepts helped distinguish between the participants' choice of words and the researcher's concepts: first-order interpretations and second-order interpretations. First-order interpretations, or emic concepts, are the participants' own choice of words, whereas second-order interpretations, or etic concepts, are the researchers' concepts (Gilje, 2020; Schütz, 1932/1967). The distinction between emic and etic concepts is important within a hermeneutic analysis because one needs to clearly distinguish between the researcher's interpretations and the participants' statements. This can be exemplified using the same excerpts from the articles and the empirical material as used previously when explaining the analytical process of the hermeneutical circular motion.

In the first example regarding communication and being the students' spokesperson, the elucidating quote used in the article was "the student is always at the centre" (SP1, interview). This is an example of an emic concept, an expression by a participant regarding the importance of communication for the

[13] For a further deliberation on coherence in interpretations, see Gustavsson (2000).

professional role and for being the students' spokesperson. The participant's statement was descriptive in character, but what does it mean that the student is always at the centre? Phenomenologically, human relationships do not exist within different persons but between persons who shift back and forth between being both subject and object in relation to each other. Bengtsson (2013a) explains intersubjectivity as something that "lives in the tension between the otherness and sameness of individual human beings" (p. 50). Thus, reciprocity exists between people in a mutual relationship in which both act as subjects and objects in relation to each other's singularity and alterity.

A further phenomenological interpretation of the intersubjective relationships is that they always have ethical content. There is a moral imperative guiding SENCOs in intersubjective relationships in their everyday worklife. This was interpreted in the study by using the concept of *attending to the face of the Other* (Levinas, 1969), which opened up an interpretation of SENCOs' choices of actions during the pandemic, explaining why they transgressed professional boundaries that they had previously defended and upheld. The interpretation went as follows: since "the student is always at the centre" and SENCOs in the study saw themselves as the students' spokespersons, they transgressed boundaries *attending to the face of the Other* because keeping the student at the centre became more important during the COVID-19 pandemic than defending professional demarcations. This is an example of how phenomenological concepts, intersubjectivity and attending to the face of the Other were used in this thesis to hermeneutically interpret an emic statement such as "the student is always at the centre". The same approach to interpretation was utilised in the analysis of all empirical material for this thesis.

When performing hermeneutic analysis there are four further guidelines[14] to aid the researcher by setting boundaries for the interpretation. Gilje (2020) suggests such guidelines or boundaries that have been utilised in the interpretative part of the analysis in this thesis. These four principles are (1) subjectivity, (2) mercy, (3) suspicion and (4) a reflexive approach to your own horizon of knowledge.

The principle of subjectivity, from Gilje's (2020) perspective, means that the researcher should take the participants' subjective views and intentions seriously. One should strive to reconstruct what the participants believe to be true and aim to understand why the participants have the views of the topic that they have. In

[14] Added to the previous three: the hermeneutical circular movement, thick descriptions and emic or etic concepts (Gilje, 2020).

this study, this was done through the hermeneutic analysis of the material by going back and forth between the parts and the whole. However, it was also done through the design of the study, when possible, such as asking follow-up questions for clarification and examples during the semi-structured interviews and constructing follow-up questions and other additional questions for each new interview and the second diary. Moreover, member checks (Gerrity et al., 2013) were used during the interviews when the participants were asked questions regarding their answers, such as "do I understand you correctly if I say…?" and "so if I summarise what you just said, is this what you meant?" This approach was also used in the second and third interviews to clarify statements by the participants from a previous interview or diary entry.

The second principle, the principle of mercy (Gilje, 2020) suggests that the researcher should try to develop interpretations that depict the participants as reasonable individuals. In the interpretation, a rule of thumb was to ask myself and my co-author (on Articles I and II), my main supervisor associate professor Inger Berndtsson, if we were merciful enough in the interpretations. The principle of mercy assumes that when we regard others as unreasonable, it is usually because we do not understand the basis of others' actions or standpoints. In the study, the principle of mercy was a guideline in the interviews regarding which follow-up questions were asked, as well as in the interpretations in the analysis for the articles and the integrating essay. The first article in this thesis was co-authored (Udd & Berndtsson, 2023) and the analysis was performed together during several occasions in 2022 in a lecture hall where quotes from the empirical material regarding changes, challenges and opportunities were presented on a large whiteboard and discussed. First, the content of the quotes was discussed, such as the emic concepts, the participants' own words. This was followed by attempts to understand them using phenomenological concepts, such as lived body, lived space, intersubjectivity or attending to the face of the Other.

When the principle of mercy proves insufficient for the interpretation, it is okay to use other principles of interpretation, such as the principle of suspicion (Gilje, 2020). The principle of suspicion is used when participants seemingly have acted subconsciously or semi-subconsciously, which is common when individuals are guided by norms or traditions. This form of interpretation stands in contrast to the principle of mercy. In this thesis, the principle of suspicion has not been used to the same extent as the principle of mercy, but it was utilised in the interpretation and during the interviews when the concept of inclusion was discussed. Inclusion is such a normatively tinged concept (Högskoleverket, 2006) but is not an explicit

part of the policy document of Swedish upper secondary schools (SFS 2010:800; SFS 2010:2039; SKOLFS 2024:662) or the examination objectives in the SENCO training programme (SFS 2017:1111). However, the concept still seemed to be present in the participating SENCOs' training programmes, the participants' everyday worklife and in research on SENCOs' discourses around special needs provision and SEN students (as seen in the previous literature review) – it is also explicit in supranational policy documents (CRPD, 2006; UNESCO, 1994, 2015b) and in the public discourse surrounding SEN provisions in school (Bagger & Lillvist, 2021; Barow & Magnússon, 2024). Therefore, the principle of suspicion was utilised to explicitly discuss inclusion with the participants, and direct questions were used in contrast to the more open questions that normally constitute a semi-structured interview. This can be seen in the interview guide for the second interview in Appendix 12. This was done to be able to breach the natural attitude concerning these possibly normative and taken-for-granted inclusive aspects of the ideological underpinnings (Högskoleverket, 2006) of the SENCO profession.

Finally, in a hermeneutic analysis and hermeneutically informed research design the idea of the researcher's *horizon of knowledge* must be touched upon (Gadamer, 1960/2013; Gilje, 2020). Ödman (2007) claims that misunderstandings and misinterpretations are commonly rooted in one's own prejudice or preconceived notions, which in turn can obfuscate the participants' statements – a failing to catch the participants' *aim, content and intentions*. The author proceeds by arguing that the goal with hermeneutic analysis is not to create "correct" interpretations but to create interpretations that can be tested against the empirical material as a whole – one method of doing this is to create opposing interpretations or alternative interpretations and test these against one's previous interpretation and against the material as a whole. This is done to avoid bias in the interpretations, such as bias on account of the researcher's horizon of knowledge. In this thesis, this was done in the analytical process when, together, the first author and the second author of Articles I and II interpreted the empirical material and tested different interpretations with each other. This was also done together for the third article but to a lesser extent. For the fourth article, the final interpretations were made solely by the first author during the spring term of 2024, but to aid in the interpretations, all of them were recorded orally on a recording device and listened to several times afterwards to try to take a step back from being immersed in the empirical material in the analysis. This strategy proved helpful for the analysis. Moreover, in the review process of the published articles, the analysis was tested

further, especially in the fourth article, where one peer reviewer critiqued the conclusions drawn from the material (which, according to the reviewer, seemed too far drawn from material that was not very far reaching). This was an astute critique, and the conclusions were rewritten before publication so that they were closer to the participants' original aim, content and intentions. This can be seen in the published version of Article IV (Udd, 2024).

The transcription, how it was performed and what role writing had in the hermeneutical analysis must also be described. To enable hermeneutical analysis, the empirical material was transcribed verbatim, rendering 515 pages of text. This was done using the transcription function in MS Word, followed by a readthrough where corrections of mistranscriptions were performed. For each article, different parts of the empirical material were of interest, and these were identified in relation to the research questions in each article. During the transcription process, ideas for themes and interpretations occurred spontaneously; these were written as footnotes in the transcribed material. These footnotes were later utilised when thematising the material and in the analysis. Some of them were just whims and ideas that did not lead anywhere; others proved helpful in thematising and analysing the material. This approach was informed by Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) but was also inspired by the writings of Berndtsson (2001), Henricsson (2022) and Johansson (1999) when attempting to create a direct and original connection with the empirical material in how it is displayed in its full complexity and plurality. This also informed the writing process, where a rich and full language was desired to capture the aim, content and intentions (Ödman, 2007) of the participants while simultaneously being empathetic and responsive to the complexity and plurality of their lived experiences (Rinne, 2011; Saevi, 2013). This was a process which required patience and responsiveness to "the human givenness of phenomenological seeing and writing" (Saevi, 2013, p. 1) which is central for the writing process and the quality and communicability of a hermeneutic phenomenological text (Saevi, 2013).

Finally, in the integrating essay of this thesis, a further analysis was performed in the form of a meta-synthesis, inspired by Gullick and West (2020), of the accumulated results in the four articles. The different aspects of agency according to Arendt (1958/2018, 1981) and collective intentionality (Searle, 1983, 2002), mentioned previously in the theory chapter, functioned as the analytical tools in the meta-synthesis together with the previously utilised analytical concepts in the study.

5.4 Ethics

The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore what it means to be and to act as a SENCO in Swedish upper secondary schools. This was studied through four articles focusing on different aspects of agency and through the overarching research question: How do SENCOs in Swedish upper secondary schools create and maintain agency in their everyday worklife? The focus of this thesis did not depend on any information about minors, sensitive personal data or other aspects that fall under the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans Act (SFS 2003:460). Therefore, an application for an ethical review was not warranted for this study. The entire research project adhered to and followed the General Data Protection Regulation (European Parliament and Council of the European Union) and a data management plan (GU 2022/662) was established and updated accordingly. These aspects of research ethics are so-called procedural ethics and are regulated in laws, statutes and local policy documents. However, ethics in practice is an equally important aspect of research ethics. This is described below.

The study participants' everyday worklife consisted of much interaction concerning minors and potentially sensitive data regarding said minors' health. Because the interviews were semi-structured and the diaries open-ended (Kvale et al., 2014; Wildemuth, 2017), they constituted a risk that the participants would become more specific regarding certain students or personnel than the study required. This begged the question of how to avoid sensitive data from emerging in the study. This was dealt with in the following way: Under the umbrella of an overarching theme of research design and ethics, this problem was framed as a question of *risk avoidance* (The Swedish research council, 2024), which was understood and dealt with through the lens of *ethics in practice* set in contrast to *procedural ethics* (Giraud et al., 2019). Procedural ethics involves seeking ethical approval from a board of ethics and "basic questions about the ethical behaviour of researchers *vis-à-vis* work with human subjects" (Giraud et al., p. 3). In contrast, ethics in practice are directly linked to the specifics of the research design and the situations that might occur in the actual fieldwork. Situations that are hard to foresee yet must be dealt with in the moment require an ethical ad hoc ability from the researcher. One important point of view regarding this reasoning is that this does not mean that the researcher can throw caution to the wind, commence with the research project and deal with ethical issues as they appear on the fly. To make informed deliberate decisions ad hoc, one must be prepared and know the research field's particulars, as well as the laws defining and regulating the use of sensitive

personal data. Moreover, the participants in the study have to be well informed of the purpose of the study and what the research project does *not* entail as a form of *good research practice* (The Swedish research council, 2024). This was important for limiting the participants to topics that were within the scope of the aims of the study.

The solution to the conundrum explicated above was that when the participants' informed consent was received, the aim of the study was made explicit; in addition, what was not the aim of the study was also made explicit. In the information letter and in the oral information to the participants, it was emphasised that the interviews should not touch upon any of the areas that fell under the *Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans Act* (SFS 2003:460) This was repeated before every interview in addition to before the initial conversation. Furthermore, the themes in the interviews were discussed at a general level and extrapolated to the interrelational and organisational levels. Moreover, it was explained in the written and oral information that the interviews and the recording device would be stopped immediately if an interview started to lean towards more specific or personal information. This information was repeated before and during every interview, as necessary. During the interviews, the recording device was never stopped. However, on three occasions with three different participants, they were each asked politely not to continue to pursue the example they had started to formulate, as it seemed to be heading in a direction that could expose sensitive information. This was received well, and the participants stopped their examples and described the central issue they were explicating only on an overarching level. The diaries also had an introduction, where these matters were formulated. The first was presented orally and the second was presented in writing. Thus, the participants were reminded of the importance of not mentioning anything that would be considered sensitive personal data, according to SFS 2003:460. In summary, good research practice was central throughout the thesis project. Rules concerning information, informed consent, confidentiality, publication, retention and the archiving of material as they are stated by the Swedish Research Council (2024) were followed, and the data management plan was revised accordingly as the research project developed.

In addition to ethics in practice and procedural ethics, a brief statement should be included about *relational, situational* and *culturally specific* ethics (Tracy, 2010). The area studied in this thesis was normative in many ways (Ahlberg, 2007) and lay close to the participants' hearts, which can be seen in the results regarding their perceived moral obligation to SEN students. This was dealt with carefully, with a

great deal of empathy for the participants. In certain situations, the sensitive concepts and norms permeating the participants' everyday worklife were discussed explicitly so that the participants could respond freely to the questions. This was something that the researcher was prepared to deal with as a form of *ethics in practice*. This held true for the eventual disruptive effects on the participants' everyday worklife as well. The disruption that was addressed was the fact that the interviews, as well as the diary notations, took time and that the participants spent more time reflecting on their practice than they had previously. This was experienced positively by the participants. However, this positive effect might have influenced the answers in the interviews and the notations made in the diaries. These issues could possibly affect the *credibility* (Larsson, 2005; Tracy, 2010). This line of reasoning leads to issues regarding the quality and validity dealt with in this study, which are the final methodological issues addressed in this integrating essay before the presentation of the findings.

5.5 Credibility

Questions regarding the quality and validity of the research project include several methodological challenges that are of interest upon which to critically reflect. Primarily, this reflection draws conceptualisations from Larsson (2005); Patton (2015); Tracy (2010) in relation to the phenomenological setting of the study.
Staying true to the things themselves is central to the phenomenological movement, and within the boundaries of the study's methodological approach, there is a need to deliberate on the *intentional arc* and *appresentation* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023) of the researching subject and the participants. These concepts became a question for the methodological setting within a lifeworld phenomenological approach concerning the *validity* and *quality* (Larsson, 2005; Patton, 2015) as well as *credibility* (Tracy, 2010) of the study.

The intentional arc and that which is appresented are important in the study during interviews, during the reading of the diaries and in the transcription of the interviews. I have, as a researching subject, been turned towards different objects during the entire process of the research project, *intending* them, harbouring experiences – the past, present and possible futures in an intentional arc (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023). The same applies while reading previous research, in interviews, when transcribing and reading the transcription and in the analysis of the empirical material. Furthermore, this also holds true for the participants – their *intentional arcs* are *appresented* in their lived experiences. To analyse what this means

methodologically for the study, as well as how it might influence the *quality* and the *validity* of the planned study, was therefore important to avoid *confirmation bias* (Larsson, 2005; Patton, 2015) or *personal bias* (Gerrity et al., 2013).

The solution to the issue of what is appresented to the intending object lies within a hermeneutically informed design of the project and in the hermeneutic analysis. As mentioned previously, experiences and prior knowledge were taken into account in the design of the project, with three interviews building on each other and interspaced diary notations to avoid confirmation bias as well as expanding the knowledge horizon of the researcher. Therefore, this project was firmly positioned in an interpretative phenomenological tradition rather than a descriptive phenomenological tradition (Bengtsson, 1999a; Farrell, 2020). This leads to a discussion of the credibility of the study.

How do we ensure that the hermeneutic interpretation of the empirical material has credibility? Part of the answer lies in the concept *rich rigor* (Tracy, 2010). To ensure rigour as rich as possible in the study, the empirical part of the research project stretched over six months and included three interviews with each participant, as well as two periods of diary notations interspaced the interviews. Because the project spanned over half a year with several instances for generating empirical material, it was of interest to discuss whether some sort of maturation could have occurred among the participants regarding their views on their professional role. This question was asked of the participants, as can be seen in the third interview guide (Appendix 13). The answers were not cohesive and ranged from participation in the study not altering their understanding at all to some who claimed that they had reached new insights regarding their professional role and worklife. All participants claimed to have appreciated the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss their experiences

The design and the different methods used to generate the empirical material for the study were chosen to enable the participants to provide answers in different varieties, thus addressing potential bias in the empirical material (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2010). The hermeneutically informed design with three interviews and two diaries building on each other, also provided opportunities to discuss the answers and the participants' eventual attitude changes during the process which in turn functioned as a tool to handle the threats this change could mean to the *credibility* (Tracy, 2010) of the study. Furthermore, *member checks* (Gerrity et al., 2013) were used in the interviews, which created the possibility to address both *understanding* and *interpretation* in the capture of the participants' lived experiences. This approach to the interviews aided in the interpretation of the material and helped keep the

study true to the complexity and intertwinement of the different elements of the SENCOs' worklife and create *meaningful coherence* (Tracy, 2010).

Moreover, by interpreting the empirical material in the hermeneutical circular movement, the risk of overestimating the conclusions that can be drawn concerning the significance of the findings in the study exists (Gilje, 2020; Ödman, 2007). Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the results were restrained and tested against the material as a whole. Furthermore, to avoid confirmation bias in the interviews, restraint was prevalent (Kvale et al., 2014; Ödman, 2007). In addition, the interpretations were discussed with supervisors and in several different seminars, as well as undergoing peer review processes for the two articles that have been published to date.[15] These occasions helped to test the interpretations as they were examined and questioned by academic peers, which aided the interpretations and the validity of the research as a whole.

Furthermore, what knowledge claims can be made in a lifeworld phenomenological study using a hermeneutically informed design and hermeneutical analysis? Because the study was qualitative with few participants, the focus was not to reach conclusions on an aggregated level that would be generalisable. On the contrary, the aim was to seek in-depth knowledge concerning the lived experiences of the everyday worklife of these nine individuals (Finlay, 2009; Rovio-Johansson, 2019), specifically their sense of agency.

However, even though generalisability was not the aim of the study, the explanatory power and transferability of the results between persons and settings might be very strong, lending the study *heuristic* and *practical* qualities (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2010). The results also stand in relation to previous research, and the similarities as well as the differences to that research aid in the transferability of the results between person and settings. Viewed in light of the heterogeneity (Patton, 2015) of the participants, the study could possibly have the benefit of demonstrating that certain aspects of the participants' everyday worklife are common among SENCOs. This reasoning builds on what Bengtsson (1999b) suggests in being sensitive to the plurality and richness in the various perspectives among participants in a scientific study – what was captured of their lived experiences in the four articles and the integrating essay of this thesis. This would, in turn, enable the text to validate a reader's lived experiences or contrast their assumptions about the everyday worklife of SENCOs, see also Levinsson (2013); Rinne (2011) and van Manen (1990) and Henriksson (2004). These thoughts lead

[15] This was written on August 25, 2025. At that time, two articles were published and two were under review.

us to the findings chapter of this thesis, in which such aspects are further explained and then deliberated on in the conclusion and discussion chapter.

Chapter 6 Findings

In the following sections, the findings for each of the four articles that were part of the research are summarised.

6.1 Article I

Title: SENCOs' Lived Experiences of Working Through the COVID-19 Pandemic in Swedish Upper-Secondary School
Author: Udd, J.; Berndtsson, I. (2023)
Publication: *European Journal of Special Needs Education*

Article I presents a study of SENCOs' lived experiences of working through the COVID-19 pandemic in Swedish upper secondary schools. The aim of the article was to explore nine SENCOs' lived experiences of the changes, challenges and opportunities which arose when working in Swedish upper secondary schools through the spring term of 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The rationale behind the aim was to create a better understanding of the changes, challenges and opportunities that arose for SENCOs during the pandemic. Thus, the following research questions were applied: (i) what are the SENCOs' lived experiences of how their everyday worklife changed during the pandemic? (ii) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of dealing with the challenges and opportunities which arose in their everyday worklife during the pandemic?

Analytically the article drew from the phenomenological concepts of *lived body* and *lived space* as formulated by Merleau-Ponty (1945/2014) and; *intersubjective relationships* according to Schütz (1932/1967). The ethical aspect of the SENCOs lived experiences were analysed using Levinas' (1969) concept *attending to the face of the Other*. In addition, the SENCOs' lived experiences of their professional practice were further disentangled using the lifeworld phenomenological concept of *the habitual world of practice* (Bengtsson, 2013b).

The findings of the study showed that the participating SENCOs faced several changes and challenges during the pandemic. Their workloads seemed to increase, and new tasks were added to their remit. Moreover, ad hoc solutions to find in-school educational solutions for students who could not study from home had to

be created continuously. In addition, mental health issues and students facing difficulties in handling their studies online from a distance arose as problems. Challenges regarding the schools' mission to level socioeconomic differences among students seemed to become more prevalent, which added to the challenges for the participating SENCOs. There were also issues regarding what seemed to be an exacerbation of previous challenges associated with the SENCO role, such as an increased amount of "firefighting" (i.e. responding to urgent matters that arise at the expense of planned activities and long-term goals), teaching small groups of students or individual students and a decrease in preventive work. The embodied aspects of the profession also seemed to suffer during the pandemic, according to the participants. Examples of embodied aspects include reading a room of peers, establishing trustful relationships and giving support or consolation by means of physical contact or eye contact. Opportunities that arose during the pandemic, according to the participants, seemed to be a development of digital communication and digital meetings with an array of various agents within as well as outside of school. Moreover, professional relationships between the participating SENCOs and teachers seemed to develop in a positive direction, as the competences of SENCOs became more sought after when the teachers had to adapt their teaching to the online environment.

In the discussion, it was suggested that SENCOs' line of work in upper secondary school is dependent on a web of qualitative intersubjective relationships to experience agency in their everyday worklife. These relationships are strengthened when they are embodied in the lived space, something that did not transcend into the digital environment. Informal and existential aspects of the everyday worklife seemed integral for the participating SENCOs' relational work to function in a satisfying manner. Communication and meeting in the online environment seemed to work well for the participating SENCOs, aiding them in their work and possibly adding these aspects as part of their remit. However, the online environment and distance education did not seem to work as well for the students, especially when it came to the schools' responsibility to level socioeconomic differences; these seem to have been exacerbated by distance education according to the analysis in the article. Moreover, previous challenges for the SENCO role seemed to have become more severe during the pandemic, and new tasks were added to the role, potentially widening the participants' remit.

The situation during the pandemic also evoked questions regarding the demarcation of the profession and what happened to the boundaries of the profession during the pandemic. Questions regarding the participants' ability to

claim professional jurisdiction became prevalent. Something that previously has been noted in current research. Finally, the participating SENCOs' morale and their professional ethos were discussed, and it seems that they experienced a moral obligation towards their students, which guided them in what tasks they acquired in their everyday worklife during the pandemic. However, this moral obligation might have inadvertently undermined their attempts to claim professional jurisdiction and demarcate the profession by making the boundaries of the profession unstable. However, it is stipulated in the discussion that malleable boundaries and a receptivity to the pluralism and ambiguity of the everyday worklife might be central to what it means to be and to act as a SENCO.

6.2 Article II

Title: How Special Educational Needs Coordinators Utilise their Body, Schools' Environments and Ethics to Create and Maintain Agency in Swedish Upper Secondary School
Authors: Udd, J.; Berndtsson, I. C., (2025) (This article is currently under review.)

The second article in the thesis focused on the intertwinement of lived body, lived space and professional ethos in SENCOs' everyday worklife. In the article an attempt was made to understand how the participants lived experiences of body, space and ethos interacted with their sense of agency. The motivation for this approach was to try to elicit and understand some of the possible existential underpinnings of the SENCO profession. This was studied through the lived experiences of: (i) embodying the SENCO role, (ii) how schools' environments are utilised and (iii) professional ethos. Thus, the research questions were: (i) What are the SENCOs lived experiences of utilising their body and various school environments to manage their ability to act in their everyday worklife? (ii) How can SENCOs' actions be understood as aspects of a professional ethos?

In the analysis, the phenomenological concepts *lived body* and *lived space* were used, building on the writings of Bengtsson (2013a), Heidegger (1927/2013) and Merleau-Ponty (1945/2014). To further aid the analysis Levinas' (1969) concept *attending to the face of the Other* and *intersubjective relationships* according to Schütz (1932/1967) were used.

The findings in the article suggest that central elements to the participating SENCOs' everyday worklife were communication and an empathetic acknowledgement of the Other. The participants also seemed to rely on embodied

aspects of their everyday worklife, such as being in tune with their own bodies, as well as others. In communication, the SENCOs interpreted embodied signals by listening outward and inward. The embodied aspects seemed to be tightly interwoven with the participants' agency; this was also evident in how they inhabited the room as lived bodies, where abstract as well as concrete aspects of the learning environments were utilised to create agency. Moreover, the ethical aspects of the participating SENCOs' everyday worklife, such as standing up for students' and teachers' rights, seemed to anchor the professional role by being central to what it meant to be and to act as a SENCO. Finally, the intertwinement of distinct spatial, corporal, intersubjective and ethical aspects of the participants' line of work seemed to be possible characteristics of the existentiality of the SENCO profession.

In the discussion, the tightly interwoven aspects of ethics, intersubjective relationships, corporality and spatiality in the participating SENCOs' everyday worklife were suggested as pivotal for them to navigate the professional networks in which they work. Moreover, the SENCOs in the study seemed to be pragmatic to what was needed in the moment in the creation of special educational provisions for students, moving in a span between theoretically dichotomic perspectives. This suggests an ethical approach in which SENCOs are sensitive to students' needs, notwithstanding if the provisions are viewed as categorical or relational. Furthermore, the intertwinement of the ethical aspects of intersubjective relationships and the striving to create a school for all students might aid in understanding the ethical underpinnings of the development of social justice and equity in education.

In addition, it was suggested that a stronger focus on professional ethics is needed in SENCO training programmes to aid SENCO students in developing self-efficacy and identity regarding their new profession. Finally, the results in this study suggest that empathy, compassion and the wherewithal to stand up for and defend students' and teachers' rights are central existential aspects of the SENCO profession. Further research utilising theoretical approaches empathetic to existential aspects of professions, such as phenomenology, is suggested to aid in a better understanding of the human condition among in-school professionals.

6.3 Article III

Title: Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs): Gatekeepers for Inclusionary Ideals – the Role of Professional Relationships in an Era of Neoliberal Marketisation of Swedish Schools
Author: Udd, J. (2024) (This article is currently under review.)

The third article delved into the issues regarding intersubjective relationships that were touched upon in the two previous articles in the thesis. The article was written against the background of an antagonistic juxtaposition of the inclusion movement and the Nordic model vis-à-vis the neoliberal marketisation of the Swedish school system. This was done to try to understand and highlight the tensions that possibly arise in the everyday work lives of SENCOs in upper secondary school and the importance of qualitative intersubjective relationships when enacting inclusion in practice. The following research questions were addressed: (i) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of how they manage their relationships in their everyday worklife? (ii) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of how relationships interplay with their ability to enact inclusion in practice in their everyday worklife? (iii) What are the SENCOs' lived experiences of navigating different views on inclusion and special educational needs provisions in their everyday worklife?

The analysis was aided by the phenomenological concepts *in-order-to-motives*, *because-of-motives* and *reciprocity-of-motives* (Schütz, 1932/1967) and *attending to the face of the Other* (Levinas, 1969). Schütz's concepts were used to analyse and interpret the lived experiences of actions and choices made by the SENCOs in their intersubjective relationships and how these were temporally situated in their lived time. Levinas' (1969) concept was utilised similarly but to interpret and analyse the ethical aspects of the participants lived experiences.

The findings in the study suggested that professional relationships with a plethora of agents within and outside of school were integral for the participating SENCOs. Much of the relational work they performed seemed to be anchored in informal aspects of their everyday worklife. However, this work was not free from frustration; the participants needed to be accommodative to their colleagues to reach functioning professional relationships, even though they sometimes wanted to put their foot down and be more assertive. Moreover, the findings implied that the participating SENCOs needed to work their way into trusting relationships with colleagues, who sometimes viewed the SENCO profession as somewhat

intrusive. The apparent intrusiveness became evident when some participants tried to advocate for inclusive measures, something that created tension and resistance among other school personnel. However, a common lived experience was that creating a school inclusive for all students was a shared endeavour that required all involved personnel to contribute to the collaboration. This made the participating SENCOs focus to a large extent on creating functioning professional relationships. However, there was one baseline that triggered a reaction, which endangered the relationships, and that was when the students' rights to education, self-worth or dignity were at stake. When they were at stake, the participants sacrificed their professional relationships to stand up for the students. This was apparently grounded in the participants' ethical values, and they drew on basic human rights and the acknowledgement of the students to motivate their actions.

In the discussion, it was suggested that intersubjective relationships can create agency for SENCOs to enact inclusion in practice. However, the relationships in the study seemed largely informal and not always robust enough to withstand the tension and pressure associated with different views of inclusion among school personnel. This led to the participating SENCO sometimes sacrificing their professional relationships to stand up for what they believed to be students' rights to education, dignity and self-worth. Moreover, the participants' capacity to act as agents of change and middle leaders might have been endangered by fragile professional relationships. In their relational work, the participants seemed to be guided by a professional ethos that was not explicitly formulated. Therefore, questions were raised on whether the SENCO profession might need further education on how to build and sustain professional relationships and whether an explicit professional ethos for SENCOs should be formulated. Finally, in the discussion, the tension between the Nordic model and the inclusion movement vis á vis the neoliberal marketisation of Swedish schools was called into question and consideration was given to whether this might exacerbate tensions in school between agents when SENCOs work to enact inclusion in practice. Moreover, the possibility that building relationships could be understood as a political[16] action when SENCOs are driven by moral incentives to enact inclusion in practice was also discussed.

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[16] What I suggest here is an interpretation of the political in the professional role of SENCOs. An interpretation inspired by Chantal Mouffe's (2005) explication of the political, which is set in contrast to politics. She drew on Heidegger (1927/2013) to argue that the political is an ontological aspect of human interaction and constitutive to society, whereas politics is ontic, something that concerns the various actions of conventional politics. In the meta-synthesis in the integrating essay, I draw on the writings of Hanna Arendt (1958/2018) in a similar manner.

6.4 Article IV

Title: Special Educational Needs Coordinators' Boundary Work in Swedish Upper-Secondary School
Author: Udd, J., (2024)
Publication: *European Journal of Special Needs Education*

In the fourth article SENCOs' boundary work was in focus. This was studied through SENCOs lived experiences of working between agents and within and between in-school settings. The reason for focusing on SENCOs' boundary work was to better understand how SENCOs work between various agents and settings to fulfil their remit. The research questions applied in the fourth article were as follows: (i) What characterises SENCOs' boundary work in their everyday worklife? (ii) How do SENCOs deal with tensions and resistance that arise in their boundary work?

The analysis utilised the lifeworld phenomenological concept *habitual world of practice* (Bengtsson, 2013b) to understand and interpret the habitualised, taken-for-granted and embodied everyday worklife of the participants. The concept of boundary work (Gieryn, 1983; Langley et al., 2019) was also utilised in the analysis, specifically competitive and collaborative boundary work, as suggested by Langley et al. (2019). Competitive and collaborative boundary work were used to understand and interpret lived experiences of tensions, resistance and alignments in the participants' everyday worklife.

The findings in the article suggested that the participating SENCOs' boundary work was in a continuous state of becoming and that it was thoroughly intertwined with their agency, especially when they attempted to act as agents of change. Furthermore, the participants' collaborative boundary work seemed to rely to a large extent on the quality of their professional relationships. The participating SENCOs' competitive boundary work became central because there seemed to be a lack of clear definitions of their role and remit, and they had to continuously demarcate the profession and create, contest and defend professional boundaries. These findings imply that it is part of the participating SENCOs' habitual world of practice to continuously and simultaneously be engrossed in competitive and collaborative boundary work. In addition, when questions regarding lived experiences of the enactment of inclusion in practice were discussed, the participants' boundary work became apparent. When they acted as agents of change and tried to encourage school development towards inclusive measures,

tension and resistance seemed to arise between various agents in their everyday worklife. Thereby, it is suggested that collaborative and competitive boundary work became fundamental for the participating SENCOs to be able to enact inclusion in practice. The participants seemed to go to great lengths to retain the ability to encourage inclusive measures when acting as agents of change. This implies that inclusion is an embedded and embodied aspect of the participating SENCOs' habitual world of practice, which is important for what it means to be and to act as a SENCO.

In the discussion, questions regarding a movement away from the ideological vision of inclusion as formulated in the Salamanca Statement towards more special educational solutions in Swedish schools were raised. This is interesting, especially considering that several of the participants experienced tension and resistance towards the ideas of inclusion in their everyday worklife. The importance of qualitative professional relationships and playing "the long game" in school development, making incremental changes over time, were discussed. These seemed to be ways in which several of the participants handled the tensions and resistance that arose in their everyday worklife when acting as agents of change and encouraging school development towards inclusive measures. Moreover, the participating SENCOs' ability to mitigate tensions and defuse possible conflicts when acting as agents of change seemed to be central to their professional proficiency, especially since there were plenty of different definitions and understandings of inclusion in their everyday worklife. Finally, a suggestion was made that it would be interesting to try to understand inclusion as a boundary object (Langley et al., 2019; Leigh Star, 2010). A boundary object is a concrete or abstract thing that is malleable enough to retain a core identity even though it is used and understood differently by various agents. If such an understanding of inclusion is possible, it may enable practitioners as well as researchers to collaborate regarding inclusion and inclusive measures without having a consensus regarding the definition of the concept of inclusion.

6.5 Summary of Findings

In the following sections, two summaries of the findings are explicated: one regarding communication and interaction and one that focuses on how the participating SENCOs are situated in time and disclose themselves through actions.

6.5.1 SENCOs' Agency

The findings of this study regarding SENCOs' agency are summarised in the following section and further analysed in a meta-synthesis of the accumulated results reached in the four articles of the thesis. In addition to the theoretical concepts utilised in the four articles in the thesis, two further theoretical concepts are used, which were expanded on previously in the theory chapter. These two concepts are collective intentionality (Searle, 1983, 2002) and agency according to Arendt (1958/2018, 1981). These are utilised in conjunction with the analytical concepts used in the four articles to fulfil the overarching aim of the thesis, which was to explore what it means to be and to act as a SENCO in Swedish upper secondary schools and to answer the overarching research question:

- How do SENCOs in Swedish upper secondary schools create and maintain agency in their everyday worklife?

6.5.2 To Communicate and Interact – Central Strategies, Rooted in a Professional Ethos

In the findings summarised above, there are certain aspects that are prominent, which all pertain to SENCOs' agency in one way or another. One such aspect is the importance of intersubjective relationships (Schütz, 1932/1967) for the agency of the participating SENCOs. Intersubjective relationships are important enough for the participants in the study to claim that they stand at the heart of what it means to be and to act as SENCOs. The agency of the participating SENCOs seemed to be dependent on qualitative intersubjective relationships, especially since the lack of a clear definition of the professional role created a situation in which the role could be very diverse, depending on the needs and opinions of the organisation, various groups and individuals. Moreover, the participants' intersubjective relationships (Schütz, 1932/1967) seemed integral to their ability to navigate and manage their everyday worklife, something that became apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic. To be the "spider in the web", a communicative hub between agents and settings, became much harder and to some extent impossible during distance education and thereby also apparent in its importance for the agency of the participating SENCOs. In particular, the importance of the informal and spontaneous actions performed between meetings and lessons in corridors and student cafeterias became palpable when the participants were deprived of this opportunity during distance education. However, it seems that

when tensions arose in these relationships, they did not seem robust enough to withstand the pressure put upon them, and the participating SENCOs sacrificed their relationships with other agents when they perceived that students' rights were at stake.

The informal and spontaneous actions of the participants in their everyday worklife seemed to be examples of an operative intentionality that described the unreflected actions rooted in the pre-predicative non-thematic background of their professional role (Bengtsson, 2013a; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023). Thus, the agency of the participating SENCOs, through these results, can be understood as embodied and embedded in their habitual world of practice. Mening that the reason for these actions might not be thematised at all by the participants. Instead, they are possibly normative and culturally specific aspects of their professional roles, aspects which are not usually expressed explicitly. In addition, the relation between the participants' professional ethos and their choice of tasks in their everyday worklife became accentuated during the COVID-19 pandemic when they transgressed the boundaries of the profession, which they had previously defended, to ensure the wellbeing of the students. This indicates that the moral incentive to attend to the Other's face (Levinas, 1969) superseded the drive to demarcate the profession and claim professional jurisdiction. This suggests that the ability to act on behalf of students is central to what it means to be and to act as a SENCO – it is a profession that is rooted in a professional ethos where the rights of the students stand at the heart.

Regarding changes, challenges and opportunities in the participants' everyday worklife during the COVID-19 pandemic, light was also shed on the importance for them to have access to the physical room in their profession. This was made concrete through lived experiences of not being able to support or comfort students by addressing them directly, looking them in the eyes, putting a hand on their shoulder or giving a hug for comfort. Moreover, meetings with colleagues also suffered from being void of the physical room, in which participating SENCOs previously could feel the room, read body language and other embodied signals, gauge the moods and attitudes of others and work with that accordingly. By inhabiting a lived space as lived bodies (Bengtsson, 2013a; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023) the participants seem to be enabled to fulfil their remit and have agency. This was constricted during the pandemic because the embodied aspects of the profession did not seem to transcend the digital room. These results suggest that SENCOs need to share a lived space with other agents to navigate and manage their everyday worklife and thereby have the agency to fulfil their remit.

The findings in this study suggested an intertwinement of the participating SENCOs lived body, educational spaces and professional ethos. These existential features explicated in the findings seem to constitute central aspects of the participants' profession, a profession that has distinct ethical and intersubjective aspects, as shown previously. The fact that the profession also showed corporal and spatial aspects in relation to lived experiences of agency was not surprising, yet interesting, nonetheless. Being in tune with our bodies, as well as with other people's bodies in communication and intersubjectivity, is a fundamental feature of how we as humans are being-towards-the-world (Bengtsson, 2013a; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023). This was expressed by the participants as aspects of their everyday worklife, something that enabled them to act, especially in regard to creating inclusive learning environments. Moreover, the participating SENCOs seemed to utilise the whole school building as well as adjacent areas to fulfill their remit. By adapting to the spatial needs of co-workers and SEN students, the participants created agency to fulfill their remit while simultaneously displaying an ethical approach to the Other (Levinas, 1969), meeting them in an environment where they felt at home and at ease. In addition, the findings in the study suggested that creating inclusive learning environments can be sensitive because it entails initiating and continuing school development on both the group and organisational levels and thereby, to some extent, changes or disrupts other agents' habitual world of practice (Bengtsson, 2013b). The results also suggested a phenomenologically driven understanding of inclusive learning environments as open and changing, ambiguous, pluralistic and dependent on the intersubjectitvity of humans being-towards-the-world, and as such, conducive to SENCO agency when acting as agents of change.

The results in this study also pertain to the idea of a broad definition of inclusion (Haug, 2017) and the participating SENCOs' strove to create inclusive communities (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017) within schools. Both are approaches to inclusion that the participating SENCOs seemed to ascribe. When tensions arose in participants' intersubjective relationships, there were often discussions around issues of inclusion of SEN students in ordinary classrooms that were at the root of these tensions. There seemed to be a lack of reciprocity of motives (Schütz, 1932/1967) for actions fostering inclusion in SENCOs everyday worklife. The understanding of SENCOs' agency was furthered in this reasoning using Schütz' (1932/1967) ideas of because-of-motives and in-order-to-motives for actions. These concepts helped lay bare the intertwinement of the formal and

informal in SENCOs' actions when creating and maintaining intersubjective relationships.

It was interesting to note that there were several different understandings and views of inclusion present in the participating SENCOs' everyday worklife. These understandings and definitions of inclusion seemed to be mutually incompatible. Thus, when tension and resistance arose regarding these matters, SENCOs either avoided using the concept of inclusion or agreed to call it something else to avoid collaboration to disintegrate. This also seemed to hold true for the perspective on when certain inclusive measures should be implemented. Several of the participating SENCOs seemed to agree on making incremental changes over a longer period of time so as not to disrupt the habitual world of practice (Bengtsson, 2013b) for their colleagues. This could be understood as driven by a professional ethos as well as being the embodied boundary work (Langley et al., 2019) in SENCOs' habitual world of practice. These results regarding when certain inclusive measures should be implemented are expanded below when SENCOs' lived time is further analysed.

Regarding the participating SENCOs boundary work (Gieryn, 1983; Langley et al., 2019), it was suggested that the participants continuously performed their work in the boundary spaces between various in-school settings and agents within and outside of school. The findings implied that the participants' professional roles were in a continuous state of becoming, meaning that the profession is not static. It is a profession in which change is an embodied and embedded aspect. The findings regarding the participants' boundary work tied into SENCOs' agency in several different ways. The participants' collaborative boundary work (Langley et al., 2019) seemed inextricably intertwined with their ability to act, which was especially evident in their use of intersubjective relationships (Schütz, 1932/1967) to aid this ability. The intersubjective relationships in the participants' everyday worklife seemed to compensate for the lack of clarity surrounding their tasks and mission. By fostering qualitative intersubjective relationships, the participating SENCOs managed the demarcation of their remits in relation to other agents within and outside of school. However, collaborative boundary work did seem to be intertwined with competitive boundary work (Langley et al., 2019) as well. The participants defended, created and contested boundaries regarding their remit in relation to other professionals as well as in relation to legal guardians and SEN students. In addition, when tensions and resistance arose in the participating SENCOs' collaborations, they seemed to find ways to either downplay or negotiate boundaries to have agency; this was especially clear when questions regarding

inclusive provisions and the creation of inclusive learning environments were discussed.

As a finishing note regarding the agency of the participating SENCOs in this summary, something needs to be said about the interplay among ethics, boundary work, intersubjective relationships and agency in relation to the neoliberal development of Swedish upper secondary schools. The drive of SENCOs to develop inclusive learning environments and defend students' rights to participation and being included in mainstream education, notwithstanding their special educational needs, could be understood as an action that challenges the instrumentality of a neoliberal school system focused on measurements, standardisation and quality control. Therefore, I would like to propose the argument that the participants' approach to inclusive education becomes politically charged, even though the action to create inclusive schooling is not an explicit political action in itself. Through their actions (speech included), SENCOs disclose themselves and become distinct from other agents in their everyday worklife, in which their actions can be understood as an expression of political agency. This will be further deliberated on below, using the theories of Arendt (1958/2018, 1981) regarding labour, work and action.

6.5.3 To Be Situated in Time and Disclose Oneself Through Actions

To further the analysis of the agency of the participating SENCOs, two additional analytical concepts are utilised (supported by the concepts already used). These two concepts are collective intentionality (Searle, 1983, 2002) and agency according to Arendt (1958/2018, 1981). Initially, a further look will be taken on the results regarding incremental changes in school development as a response to different approaches and attitudes towards inclusion.

The participants' approach to their colleagues when facing different understandings and/or attitudes towards inclusion could be understood as an expression of a professional standing where the ability to act is more important than taking a firm explicit position on a certain interpretation of inclusion. This is shown in the participants' willingness to accept special educational needs provisions at the moment, for example segregating or individual support for students, to achieve inclusive changes over time. Using Schütz (1932/1967) understanding of motives for actions aids the interpretation in that there sometimes is a lack of reciprocity-of-motives between the participating SENCOs

and other agents within school regarding how to enact inclusion in practice as part of school development. Other agents' because-of-motives drive the participating SENCOs to develop their in-order-to-motives to counter the lack of a reciprocity-of-motives in collaborative boundary work (Langley et al., 2019). In these collaborations, boundaries between various agents were downplayed to create a consensus in present time regarding changes made in the habitual world of practices (Bengtsson, 2013b) of various agents in SENCOs' everyday worklife. These results also suggest an interpretation regarding how the participants were in tune with their lived time through their understanding of the temporality of certain tasks within their mission.

The temporality of the SENCO profession, in the example from the previous paragraph, concerns finding a consensus in present time to create slight changes which over time will generate larger changes in the future. This is a skill which I would argue is an important aspect of a proficient SENCO; to understand how a task is temporally situated in a larger mission. It is a skill that in this study is seen as utilised to have agency to initiate and continue school development, exemplified here with the development of inclusive learning environments. This skill presupposes an understanding of how tasks within a mission are situated in the flow of time. The understanding of this particular skill is phenomenologically explained by understanding how an action relates to the intentional arc (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2023) where past experiences inform and make the present, thereby creating a possible desired future. Moreover, this is what Schütz (1951/2011) described as the "time structure of the project" (p. 78), which also includes the discrepancy between the observer and the originator of a project, something that to some extent also explains the occurrence of lack of reciprocal motives.

According to Schütz (1951/2011), the observer and originator of a project view the same action from two different vantage points. In this example, the SENCO views a certain task as part of a larger project spanning several years, for example, school development aimed at creating inclusive learning environments, whereas another agent might view the same action in relation to the present and immediate future, for example, teaching a certain content in a specific course that needs to be finished at the end of the term. This example was explicated in the fourth article of this thesis when SENCOs, teachers and principals had different understandings of how to interpret inclusive provisions and whether to include or exclude students from the classroom. The discrepancy between the observer and the originator was described by Barber (2021) in the following way, leaning on Schütz's (1932/1967) approach to temporality in agency: "there can be differences between the

perspectives of an actor, who knows the in-order-to motive of her working act, and of an observer who may have access only to a limited temporal segment of such an action" (Barber, 2021, p. 124). These interpretations suggest that lived time is an important, embedded and embodied aspect of SENCOs' habitual world of practice that indirectly and directly influences SENCOs' capacity for action, their agency.

The question regarding collaboration and reaching a reciprocity-of-motives between different agents within school bring us to the question of the possibility of reaching a collective intentionality (Searle, 1983, 2002) between agents involved in the participating SENCOs' work. I would like to propose an argument that reaching a collective intentionality between different professions in school is difficult based on the results in this study. Different professions may share tasks with each other, but their missions or projects are sometimes quite different. One important aspect of SENCOs mission is to work as agents of change on organisational, group and individual levels in school. The changes SENCOs primarily are intended to initiate and enact are to create a school that meets the needs of all students. This does not always align with other professions' tasks, missions or attitudes towards and understanding of SENCOs tasks and mission. I like to exemplify this argument by contrasting the mission of teachers with that of SENCOs.

Drawing from the examples in the articles in this thesis teachers might be focused on teaching a certain content at a certain time, in a certain room, in a certain way, focusing on the learning requirements in their respective subject and thereby asking for certain SEN provisions following the logic of their reasoning. This can be seen in the fourth article, when teachers wanted segregating solutions for SEN students to aid them in fulfilling the goals of the subject at hand where learning a specific content at a specific time became the defining characteristic of inclusion. Concurrently, the SENCO in this example interpreted inclusion more in line with a community definition and saw pedagogical as well as social benefits with having the students included in the classroom, not because of placement only, but for reasons connected to a professional ethos of care for SEN students' social wellbeing as well as for the school's development of inclusive learning environments. This suggests that different professions have different projects within school and interpret the same project (student's learning, school development and inclusion) in different ways, which sometimes can be at odds with each other, even though all want the best for the student. Therefore, collective intentionality becomes an unrealistic goal to achieve for some of the professions

within the school. However, this does not mean that I argue that SENCOS, teachers and school leaders' tasks are incompatible. On the contrary, when collaboration works, these professions, along with other involved agents, complement each other, forming a cohesive whole. What I suggest here is that there does not need to be a consensus regarding interpretations of various phenomena in school, such as inclusion. What needs to be agreed upon are the actualities and practicalities involved regarding commensurate provisions for all students in school from day to day in relation to more long-term goals of schooling.

Even though I argue that collective intentionality might be hard to achieve, the concept of collective intentionality still aids the analysis through a *via negativa* because it indicates that the differences between various professional groups' projects in a school creates issues and tensions when trying to reach a collective intentionality because their projects, their understandings of student's needs or, for that matter, inclusion, possibly have different time structures. Therefore, this question is probably better understood using the understanding of agency as different motives for action, as suggested by Schütz (1932/1967). Understanding SENCOs' attempts to fulfil their remit and various other agents' actions and attitudes towards SENCOs' work as different motives for action suggests that a reciprocity-of-motives can be reached, but a collective intentionality might be harder to reach because these do not align in the different projects among various agents. This indicates that there is a plurality among involved agents whose different projects are intertwined but not the same. They share tasks and to some extent missions, but these cannot be the same and are not supposed to be either – therefore, collective intentionality becomes, at most, an ideal to strive for. The explanatory power in the concept of collective intentionality, on this occasion, primarily sheds light on the plurality of professions and their different projects within schools and how SENCOs navigate and manage their everyday worklife to uphold and create agency to fulfil their remit. This line of reasoning leads us to finish this section on the topic of plurality and political agency, building on the thinking of Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) regarding labour, work and action.

As described in the theory section above, Arendt's thinking regarding agency was divided into three different aspects: (1) *labour*, which describes the human labour for sustenance and survival; (2) *work,* which describes the artificial objects man creates while following "rules, protocols, procedures" (Borren, 2021, p. 169); and (3) *action*, which "corresponds to our plurality as distinct individuals" (Canovan, 2018, p. xxi). Initially, I would like to argue that to understand human

action as plurality disavows notions of a collective intentionality as noncompatible because the very idea of action according to Arendt is that individuals form a plurality when taking action; only as *animal laborious* or as *homo farber* (working man) could we function as a collective in the sense of a collective intentionality. As Arendt (1958/2018) herself formulates it, "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (p. 8). This understanding of plurality becomes important when analysing SENCOs' agency in that we cannot view SENCOs as animal laborious because their work is not necessary for human sustenance and survival. In contrast, as a *homo farber* (working man), it may be possible to analyse SENCOs' agency by building on the ideas of Arendt. If SENCOs' agency to some extent could be viewed as *work,* it would be in the function of a distinct and defined professional role that enacts, enables and creates a school, which meets the needs of all students following the "rules, protocols, procedures" (Borren, 2021, p. 169) of the SENCO profession, to the extent that they exist. However, considering the results of this thesis (and previous research), this seems highly unlikely because the lack of a clear definition of the remit and professional role of SENCOs is more common than the opposite.

In the previous analysis, I suggested that SENCOs' habitual world of practice (Bengtsson, 2013b) is a place of change, a world of becoming. SENCOs are even labelled *agents of change*. SENCOs function as agents of change to create equity in education. Thus, creating a school that meets the needs of all students becomes a question of equality. Equality in education is a response to the plurality of humankind (Beach & Dyson, 2016). Men are not the same; we do not have the same needs, it is our plurality that distinguishes us (Arendt, 1958/2018). Therefore, schooling cannot be the same for everyone. Thus, a school that meets the needs of all students must be a question of equality – equal rights to education (Beach & Dyson, 2016; Berhanu, 2020). This is where I would argue that SENCOs disclose themselves as distinct actors in their everyday worklife, entering the public realm as distinct human beings – taking *action* in Arendt's (1958/2018) sense of the word. Taking action, occurs when SENCOs try to initiate and continue school development to create an equitable school for all students. SENCOs disclose themselves through actions aimed at creating a school that meets the needs of all students, thereby becoming distinct as persons and professionals. When paired with equality, this forms the two prerequisites for action to be possible in human plurality, according to Arendt (1958/2018). Moreover, I would argue that the plurality of man is what makes SENCOs work in school possible and difficult at

the same time. This is the paradox of the human condition – exemplified here through SENCOs' lived experiences of agency – it is both freedom and dependence; it is both power and a lack of power.

Therefore, I conclude this meta-synthesis by suggesting that the central results in this thesis regarding SENCOs' agency are that their dependence on intersubjective relationships as well as a professional ethos are necessities – necessities that balance the scale of SENCOs' agency when it occurs as *action* and not as *work* or *labour* in Arendt's (1958/2018) sense of the words. This is exemplified by how SENCOs strive to create a school that meets the needs of all students and defends students' rights to participation and inclusion in mainstream education, notwithstanding their special educational needs. These actions could be understood as actions that challenge the instrumentality of a neoliberal school system focused on measurements, standardisation and quality control. These actions could be understood as representations of another ideal, an ideal where *Bildung*, equality and equity in education are at the forefront. This is when SENCOs' agency opens up for creativity and the unintended, the unpredictable and the plurality and ambiguity of their everyday worklife. This is when SENCOs act, display political agency and disclose themselves as persons and professionals trying to fulfil their remit in creating a school that meets the needs of all students.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

The findings in this thesis are summarised below as conclusions that lead to a discussion regarding SENCOs' agency and suggestions for future research.

One central conclusion in this thesis is how the participating SENCOs utilised intersubjective relationships to create and maintain agency. The participants seemed to rely on intersubjective relationships to deal with an unclear definition of their remit in their everyday worklife. Moreover, in the results, there seemed to be a continuous push-and-pull movement regarding the demarcation of the SENCO profession and remit between agents within and outside of school. Between these agents and settings, SENCOs performed competitive and collaborative boundary work to manage their profession and remit. Intersubjective relationships were integral to this boundary work. In addition, the intersubjective relationships seemed to be anchored in informal aspects in the everyday worklife of the participating SENCOs and seem to be crucial for them to function as communicative hubs in school – the role of the spider in the web.

Moreover, the importance of the participating SENCOs' moral responsibility, their professional ethos, is a prominent conclusion. The participants' moral responsibilities seemed central to their choices of tasks and missions in their everyday worklife. The SENCOs in the study stood up for teachers to have the prerequisites needed to perform their work and continuously stood up for inclusive ideals and defended the rights of every student to participate and be included in mainstream education, seen here as an expression of equity and equality. However, it was a professional ethos that was alluded to but not explicitly defined. The participating SENCOs seemed to create and maintain agency through communication and empathy, which was anchored in a moral responsibility to the Other.

Furthermore, several findings in the thesis highlighted the ways in which existential aspects characterised how the participating SENCOs maintained and created agency. Among these, intercorporality, temporality and inhabiting the lived space as lived bodies were notable. These were existential aspects of the participating SENCOs' profession that were intertwined and embedded in their habitual world of practice, spreading throughout the school building and beyond to meet the corporal and spatial needs of students and coworkers. In addition,

temporality seemed to be central to the participants' ability to initiate and continue school development through an understanding of the temporal structure of their projects when acting as agents of change.

Furthermore, the role of inclusion and the creation of inclusive learning environments in the everyday worklife of SENCOs as aspects of creating a school for all students are important conclusions as well. Inclusion as an idea and ideal seems to be intertwined and integrated in the habitual field of practice of SENCOs as well as in their professional role, even though inclusion is not explicitly mentioned in either national guiding documents or in the examination objectives of the SENCO training programme. The participating SENCOs seemed to function as gatekeepers for ideals regarding inclusion. Inclusion became an idealistic and ethical project for SENCOs, rooted in basic human values and a respect for students' singularity and alterity. The participating SENCOs' approach to inclusion seemed to be primarily based on a broad definition of inclusion or a community approach. However, accepting special needs educational solutions seemed to be a strategy for the SENCOs to have the agency to create inclusion gradually, thereby the participating SENCOs sometimes seemingly represented a hybrid version of inclusion or inclusive special needs education. In addition, understanding inclusive learning environments through the participants' lived experiences suggested that these were open, ambiguous and intertwined with existential aspects characteristic of the human condition.

A further conclusion of this thesis is that the participating SENCOs' everyday worklife appeared to be in a continuous state of becoming. Being in a state of becoming seemed to be a prerequisite for the participants to be as agile as was needed to have agency in their ambiguous and pluralistic everyday worklife. Moreover, dealing with different understandings and attitudes towards inclusion appeared to be prevalent in the participants' everyday worklife to such a degree that this could be argued to be aspects of their habitual world of practice. The professional role of the participating SENCOs seemed to be characterised by the need to be able to handle an ambiguous and ever-changing everyday worklife. This means that a central part of the professional role was to be able to act as agents of change in a habitual world of practice characterised by change.

Finally, the professional role of the participating SENCOs seemed to become political when they disclosed themselves in the public arena, displaying political agency driven by the moral incentives of attending to the face of the Other and acting as gatekeepers for inclusionary ideals. In this, the participating SENCOs seemed to represent a view on education and schooling that was characterised by

Bildung, equity and equality, thereby contrasting current neoliberal tendencies, such as marketisation, measurements, standardisation, quality control and viewing students as customers.

7.1 Discussion

In this section, the findings and conclusions presented above are discussed, in relation to the previous research cited in the third chapter.

The findings and conclusions in this thesis present insights into certain themes that were prominent in the participating SENCOs' everyday worklife. Examples of these themes are the importance and intertwinement of formal and informal aspects of collaboration and qualitative relationships for the participants to fulfil their remit. Further key findings are how the participating SENCOs acted according to their professional ethos in their everyday worklife, attempting to create an equitable school that supported the needs of all students. Moreover, how the participating SENCOs' professional role was embodied, spatial and temporal and how these aspects of the profession were embedded in their habitual world of practice were other dominant themes. In addition, various understandings, attitudes to and interpretations of inclusion were plentiful and sometimes created tensions and resistance in the SENCOs' everyday worklife. Finally, the interplay between the agency of the SENCOs and structural issues associated with neoliberal influences on the Swedish school system were also aspects of the results of the study.

Regarding the professional role of SENCOs, the findings in this thesis share many similarities with the study by Lin et al. (2024) on how SENCOs exercise agency in their work for inclusion, which were summarised in the following themes: advocacy for students with SEN, commitment to the SENCO role, professional competence, self-efficacy, participating in decision-making and collaboration (Lin et al., p. 5–7). These themes, apart from the one regarding self-efficacy, which was not studied, were corroborated in the results of this thesis. Moreover, in the discussion Lin et al. (2024) explicated the idea of the temporal nature of SENCOs' agency which is "simultaneously oriented towards the past, present and future" (p. 8). The results regarding how SENCOs are situated in time are endorsed by the results of this study as well as echoed in the research of Naraian (2014), in which time was not understood as linear but circular, exemplified in the participants attempts to live "in the future" by "recognising the

potential of the student as always in process" (p. 25) instead of evaluating them against certain expectations.

Naraian (2014) also critiqued discourses that advocate for polar opposites, such as inclusion versus exclusion, because such positions become meagre intellectual constructs when dealing with the complexities of creating inclusive education in practice. Such complexities can be understood through this thesis as being collaborative and relational aspects of SENCOs' work when trying to create inclusion in practice. In addition, Naraian (2014) argues for a pedagogy of deferral that is pragmatic, dealing with day-to-day business and an extended commitment to the creation of equitable and inclusive education. This is a commitment to a project that is sensitive to the possibilities to be, in the future self of the students. These results are corroborated in this thesis, exemplified by how SENCOs made incremental changes in the present time to create inclusive learning environments in the future to aid SEN students as well as to avoid debilitating collaborations with other in-school professionals and legal guardians making demands.

Regarding collaboration, barriers and facilitators in the work between other professional groups and SENCOs, as suggested by Holland and Fitzgerald (2023), a "shared understanding between stakeholders" (p. 16) was a central facilitating factor. This is something that the SENCOs in this thesis strived for, as can be seen in their attempts to create a reciprocity-of-motives in their collaborations with other agents. A barrier in the study by Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) was disparate understandings of collaboration, which became apparent in the current study regarding collaboration for inclusion. These results evoke questions in relation to creating inclusive schooling and having collective agency in collaboration, as suggested by Conn and Davis (2024). Moreover, the importance of the informal aspects of SENCOs' collaborative work suggested in this thesis also evoke question regarding the inherent risks of this undocumented somewhat spontaneous work, thereby further corroborating suggestions made by Möllås (2009).

Moreover, if there are multiple barriers to creating inclusion, in collaborations as well as in policy, this cannot be alleviated by SENCOs' agency alone. This thesis suggests that this is a collective endeavour, as previously argued by Paulsrud and Nilholm (2023); Skoglund (2023); Gunnporsdottir and Johannesson (2014) and Köpfer and Oskarsdottir (2019). These discussions share similarities with the study by Li and Ruppar (2021), who examined the relationship between teacher agency, social justice and inclusion to understand how one could realise inclusive education in practice, which is equitable at its core. Li and Ruppar (2021) argued that the

focus on teacher agency for inclusive education would also aid and acknowledge SETs' "roles as active decision makers and school change contributors" (p. 43). In their results, they suggested that agency could enable teachers to think differently, collaborate and establish innovative ways of meeting a diverse student group. These results are further corroborated by Lakkala et al. (2024) and Lyons et al. (2016), who also argued for individual and collective agency and collective efficacy. This is echoed in the results of Khanna and Kareem (2025) and Miller et al. (2022) who also highlighted family-school-community partnerships for enabling inclusive education. In addition, Miller et al. (2022) moved to suggest that inclusion is a project that is continuously in motion and dependent on teacher agency and collaboration, highlighting the importance of the collective effort involved in creating inclusion in school, something this thesis corroborates along with Abu-Alghayth (2025); Authelsingh et al. (2024) and Lee and Garwood (2025).

The findings in this thesis and the cited literature in this section suggest that when attempting to have agency to develop equity and equality in education through inclusive measures, collaboration within the whole ecology of school organisations is needed (e.g., Kearney et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2024; Möllås, 2009; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2023; Öhman, 2023). Moreover, the findings in this study suggest that to accomplish the development of a school for all students, SENCOs need relational agency as well as professional agency, something also suggested by Lindqvist et al. (2011); von Ahlefeld Nisser (2017) and Tuomainen et al. (2012). This also pertains to the dilemma highlighted by Lindqvist (2013) of SENCOs working for inclusion while at the same time being associated with special needs education and as such are "representing the notion that mainstream education cannot deal with all pupils in school" (p. 205). These results also pertain to ideas of avoiding stigmatising students through segregating solutions, as also suggested by Giota et al. (2023); Johansson (2011); Nilsson (2025) and Ramberg (2017). Maybe this issue possibly could be alleviated through inclusive special education as suggested by Holland and Fitzgerald (2023). Alternatively, this is what SENCOs' work looks like when you take a snapshot in time as suggested in this study – that SENCOs' work of creating inclusion through incremental changes is the work of inclusion and not a hybrid version between inclusive education and special needs education. Instead, if you zoom out and look at the big picture, what looks like special needs education is stepping stones towards inclusion in a school development project spanning over several years. This is an insight that is possible through understanding the time structure of a project aided by the concept of lived time, according to Schütz (1932/1967).

The conundrum regarding the ability of professionals within mainstream education to deal with a heterogeneous group of students in school also pertains to the ongoing negotiation between various occupational groups in school regarding what sort of support SEN students should receive. This is a question that has been abundantly discussed within the field of inclusive and special needs education (e.g. Cole, 2005; Curran & Boddison, 2021; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Göransson et al., 2017; Göransson et al., 2019; Magnússon & Göransson, 2019). This discussion also relates to central results in this thesis regarding SENCOs ability to claim professionalism and agency through their intersubjective relational work between various in-school professionals, similarly suggested by Melasalmi et al. (2023); Paloniemi et al. (2023) and with a focus on middle leaders by Lassen (2024). In the case of teacher leaders, this is suggested by the works of Struyve et al. (2018); Cameron et al. (2018) and Jortveit et al. (2020). These results imply that a clearer definition and more formalised aspects of SENCOs' work could aid in the development of interprofessional collaborations. This is probably also related to the results in this thesis regarding professional skills and professional competence, where agency is a key factor, as argued by Mu et al. (2015) and Wang et al. (2017).

In addition, the findings in the current study also speak of the ambiguous and changing role of SENCOs, similar to what was noted by Holland and Fitzgerald (2023), Maher and Vickerman (2018) and Göransson et al. (2015a). These results also tie into the informal aspects of the SENCO profession when establishing and managing professional relationships (a central conclusion in this thesis), corroborating the results of Tuomainen et al. (2012) and Klang et al. (2017). Moreover, the ability to enact the role of the SENCO entailed negotiations of the role's boundaries in attempts to claim professional jurisdiction. As such, it became an important aspect of professional agency, as shown in this thesis and previously discussed by Klang et al. (2017) regarding SNEs. This line of reasoning also pertains to the negotiations involved when trying to live up to or contrast expectations of other professionals, students or legal guardians regarding tasks and mission of SENCOs, as shown in this thesis and by the corroborating results of Lindqvist et al. (2011) and Göransson et al. (2017).

On a contrasting note, regarding the idea of agency as a positive and integral aspect of the SENCO profession, the tension between schools' structure and organisation, SENCOs wellbeing and agency in regard to neoliberal tendencies in schools is discussed. Neoliberal tendencies in this case would for example be "centralised, standardised, and neoliberalised quality control" (Mu et al. 2024, p.

1766), see also Dahlstedt and Fejes (2019) and Magnússon (2020). The idea that agency could function as a form of coping strategy and foster resilience to neoliberal governing and neoliberal practices was suggested by Mu et al. (2024). However, this was contrasted by Mu (2021) when discussing whether a focus on individuals' abilities might obfuscate systemic issues and advertise neoliberal interpretations of inclusion and equity in education. The author argues that agency and resilience can contribute to hiding and reproducing structural problems and moves to suggest that "uncritical and irreflexive agency and resilience can conceal system cracks in current inclusive education and shroud structural problems under the cloak of agentic and resilient role models." (Mu, 2021, p. 826–827).

The audit mentality of neoliberal ideologies has been further critiqued by van de Putte et al. (2018) for how professionals, such as SENCOs, are solely held responsible for transforming schools towards inclusion in their role as agents of change. Instead, van de Putte et al. (2018) suggested an understanding of agency that shuns the idea of agency being assigned to individuals and instead put forward an understanding of agency as an assemblage made up of multiple agencies, human and non-human. This approach also enables van de Putte et al. (2018) to rethink inclusion as a community where diversity is the norm, thus avoiding inclusion being a question of placement and instead focusing on student participation in a community in general education. In contrast with the results of van de Putte et al. (2018) and Mu (2021), Wang et al. (2017) argued for how the focus on inclusive education teachers' agency can influence policymakers and possibly function as a defence against neoliberal practices and ideologies that might marginalise SEN students.

The ambiguous nature of agency discussed here alludes to the suggestions by Sözer-Boz et al. (2024), who found that special educational professionals experiencing burnout also had high levels of agency and felt that their job was meaningful. This possibly indicated that a high level of agency was not necessarily unequivocally positive for individual professionals. Moreover, the ambiguity in and lack of definition of the SENCO role, as shown in this thesis, coupled with high workloads, could have a negative impact on recruitment and retention of special educational professionals as well as increasing the risk of burnout among these professions, as suggested by Curran (2019); Harby (2022); Lee and Garwood (2025); Mrstik et al. (2019) and Wisinski (2024). These results raise questions regarding the sustainability of such professional roles, and how individual and collective agency and structural and organisational aspects of schooling intertwine with the psychosocial work environment for special educational professionals.

Finally, the results from previous research and the current study evoke questions regarding the analysis in this thesis of the tensions and resistance that arise in SENCOs' everyday worklife and their intertwinement with the agency of SENCOs. Here, tensions and resistance are understood as a lack of reciprocity of motives between involved agents. However, could these tensions and resistance instead be understood as expressions of structural deficiencies in school organisations? Or possibly intertwined with the lack of a formalised and distinct professional role and remit of SENCOs? Do SENCOs need to have agency to compensate for the lack of functioning structures, organisation or formalisation of their remit in their everyday worklife? Further, does the agency of the SENCOs contribute to continuing these possible faulty structures, organisations and definitional issues regarding their profession and remit? Consequently, does agency become integral for the individual SENCOs to perform their mission because of a lack of clear organisational structures and a formalised definition of the profession? This suggests that lived experiences of having agency could mean that there are low levels of structure and organisation. This means that agency is needed for SENCOs to fulfill their remit. However, agency becomes that which compensates for a lack of formalisation of the remit, definition of the profession and absence of clear structures, while simultaneously continuing and obfuscating the deficiencies for which agency compensates. These questions suggest that SENCOs' navigation and management of their everyday worklife depend on their agency. However, it also suggests that high levels of agency might indicate a lack of a definition of the profession, low levels of structure and a deficient organisation. Thereby, high levels of agency possibly become a double-edged sword, which creates opportunities for SENCOs to act while simultaneously obfuscating organisational deficiencies and lack of definitions of the professional role and remit of SENCOs.

7.2 Future Research

The current study suggests that in-school professionals have somewhat different projects in which collective intentionality seems to be difficult to achieve, exemplified here with various understandings and attitudes towards inclusion. Could it be fruitful, as suggested in Article IV, to think with Bowker and Star (Bowker, 1999; Leigh Star, 2010) regarding inclusion on this matter? To pursue the idea of investigating inclusion as a boundary object? Or are the aspects that

would have to retain stability within the concept between different settings and interpretations not stable enough and therefore the idea would crumble? At least this idea might be worthy to pursue through a literature review and meta-analysis of research on inclusion and special needs education, focusing on the work of creating a school for all students, and see if any boundary objects can be identified and analysed further.

Other ideas for future research drawing on the results of this study are further comparative studies between special education professionals in different countries and cultures. It would be interesting to try to establish some sort of coherence in nomenclature and characteristics between the roles and remits of the different cultural and national contexts in which professionals act. Disentangling the issues with the nomenclature regarding special needs educational professionals in the field of inclusive and special needs education is something that, in the eyes of this author, should be attempted by the research community.

Moreover, the intertwinement and relationship between individual in-school professionals' agency and structural issues following neoliberal aspects of schools' work and organisation seem to be an area that merits further research. In addition, in relation to the results in the first article of this thesis, post-covid studies of special educational needs professionals' worklife and professional roles need to be performed. Studies should attempt to understand if there were changes to the role and remit that have become permanent and how these professionals have fared regarding their work environment and wellbeing post-covid.

Finally, research approaches that are sensitive to the human condition, the existentiality, and the being of man, such as different versions of phenomenological empirical research, need to be further applied to the field of inclusive and special needs education, especially to let the voices of professionals and students be heard. Perhaps a sequential mixed methods design in a larger research project to elicit both lived experiences and statistically valid results for a large population regarding questions of agency, inclusion, special needs education, professional roles and equity in education would yield insightful results.

Chapter 8 Swedish Summary

Denna avhandling behandlar specialpedagogens yrkesroll på svenska gymnasieskolor. Fokus i avhandlingen är specialpedagogers levda erfarenheter av agens. Yrkesrollen specialpedagog har beskrivits som ”spindeln i nätet”, ”ett kommunikativt nav” och ”mångsysslare” (Göransson et al., 2017; Göransson et al., 2015a). För att utföra sitt uppdrag skapar och upprätthåller specialpedagoger professionella relationer med elever, lärare och andra aktörer både inom och utanför skolans organisation (von Ahlefeld Nisser, 2013; Aspelin et al., 2021). Inom skolan samarbetar specialpedagoger bland annat med lärare, elevhälsans professioner och skolledningen. Utanför skolans organisation samarbetar specialpedagoger med vårdnadshavare, BUP, socialtjänst, HVB-hem och logopeder, för att nämna några (Klang et al., 2017; Möllås et al., 2017). Specialpedagoger rör sig också mellan och i en mängd olika sammanhang inom skolans organisation alltifrån individ till grupp till skolan som helhet (Göransson et al., 2015b; Höstfält, 2024; Klang et al., 2017; Lindqvist et al., 2016).

Sammanfattningsvis kan man utifrån den forskning som används i denna avhandling säga att specialpedagogers arbete består av en mängd uppdrag och uppgifter samt ett ständigt pågående arbete med att skapa och upprätthålla relationer med en mångfald av aktörer inom och utanför skolans organisation.

Samtidigt visar forskning att specialpedagoger möter utmaningar när de försöker fullgöra sitt uppdrag, till exempel kämpar specialpedagoger med att definiera och upprätthålla gränser för sin profession, sina uppgifter och sitt uppdrag (Göransson et al., 2017; Klang et al., 2017; Magnússon, 2024). Specialpedagoger verkar även få kämpa för att få att prioritera de strategiska aspekterna av sitt uppdrag, som förebyggande och främjande arbete, när kollegor, vårdnadshavare och skolledning många gånger hellre vill att de utför mer direkt operativa uppgifter. Specialpedagoger måste även förhandla om sin position och gränserna för professionen och dess uppdrag är ofta i rörelse (Göransson et al., 2019; Magnússon & Göransson, 2019; Svensson et al., 2024). Komplexiteten och dynamiken i specialpedagogers arbete indikerar att de behöver skapa och upprätthålla agens, förmågan att agera/handla, för att fullgöra sitt uppdrag. De behöver agens för kunna handla inom och mellan olika miljöer i och utanför skolan

i samarbete med en mängd andra aktörer, med vilka specialpedagogerna ständigt upprättar och upprätthåller professionella relationer.

Specialpedagogyrket som det ser ut idag skapades i början av 1990-talet som ett svar på ett växande behov av stöd till elever i svensk skola. Skapandet av yrkesrollen var även ett svar på den kritik som riktats mot hur elever i behov av särskilt stöd fick sitt stöd i skolan fram till mitten av 1980-talet. Tidigare fick elever i behov av särskilt stöd företrädelsevis stöd i segregerade miljöer. Men under 1980- och 1990-talet blev elever i behov av särskilt stöd alltmer integrerade i den vanliga skolan som en följd av utveckling mot en enhetsskola i Sverige under 1960- och 1970-talet (Malmqvist, 2015). Detta betydde att skolors elevunderlag blev alltmer heterogent samtidigt som enhetsskolan skulle ge alla elever lika möjligheter till högre utbildning och skapa olika vägar in på arbetsmarknaden (Lundahl et al., 2010; Möllås, 2009; Ramberg, 2015).

Inom gymnasieskolan finns det fortfarande idag ett växande behov av att arrangera stöd till elever för att skapa en skola som är rättvis, jämlik och likvärdig för alla elever (Hjörne, 2018; SOU:2021:11). Enligt svensk skollag är skolan erlagd att skapa en utbildning som erbjuder alla elever det stöd de behöver; en skola på lika villkor oavsett elevernas stödbehov. Att skapa stöd och erbjuda en likvärdig utbildning för alla elever är ett delat uppdrag mellan alla skolans professioner, men för specialpedagoger är detta centralt i deras tänkta uppdrag (SFS 2017:1111).

Forskningsintresset i avhandlingen rör vad det innebär att vara och agera som specialpedagog. Som det är presenterat ovan är specialpedagogers uppdrag mångfacetterat och dynamiskt (Göransson et al., 2017; Göransson et al., 2015a). Specialpedagoger arbetar med att skapa särskilt stöd och anpassningar åt alla elever som behöver detta för att göra skolgången likvärdig för alla elever. Specialpedagoger arbetar även med skolutveckling på individ, grupp och organisationsnivå för att utjämna trösklar och ta bort hinder i skolans lärmiljöer (Klang et al., 2017; Möllås et al., 2017). Samtidigt visar forskning att specialpedagoger i sitt värv kan bli kringskurna på många vis. Kringskurna av att ständigt förhandla om innehållet och avgränsningen av sin yrkesroll med aktörer inom och utanför skolans organisation (Göransson et al., 2017; Klang et al., 2017; Magnússon, 2024). Kringskurna av att ständigt hantera disparata krav på vilka deras uppgifter och uppdrag ska vara från en mängd personer och organisationer inom och utanför skolan (Göransson et al., 2019; Magnússon & Göransson, 2019; Svensson et al., 2024), och kringskurna av att deras yrkesroll inte är tydligt definierad vare sig i policy eller lokalt på deras arbetsplatser (Göransson et al., 2017; Klang et al., 2017; Magnússon, 2024). Givet detta är det specialpedagogers

förmåga att handla – deras agens – som är i fokus i denna avhandling. Mer specifikt specialpedagogers agens när de försöker handla inom sitt ansvarsområde, upprätthålla detta och fullgöra sitt uppdrag.

8.1 Syfte och forskningsfrågor

Det övergripande syftet med avhandlingen var att utforska vad det innebär att vara och agera som specialpedagog i svenska gymnasieskolor. Detta studerades genom att fokusera på specialpedagogers agens med hjälp av livsvärldsfenomenologisk teoribildning (Bengtsson, 2013b) och hermeneutik som analytisk metod (Gilje, 2020; Ödman, 2007).

Avhandlingen består av fyra artiklar och en kappa. Den första av dessa fyra artiklar fokuserade på hur specialpedagogers yrkesvardag förändrades under COVID-19 pandemin och vilka utmaningar och möjligheter som uppstod under pandemin. I artikeln utforskades även hur specialpedagogerna i studien hanterade de förändringar, utmaningar och möjligheter som uppstod. Den andra artikel utforskade de deltagande specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av agens genom att fokusera på levd kropp, levt rum och professionellt etos. Den tredje artikeln undersökte hur intersubjektiva yrkesrelationer var sammanflätade med de deltagande specialpedagogernas agens. Den fjärde och sista artikeln undersökte specialpedagogernas gränsarbete och hur de hanterade spänningar och motstånd som uppstod mellan aktörer och miljöer i deras yrkesvardag. Nedan följer en kort översikt av den övergripande forskningsfrågan för avhandlingen samt syften och de specifika forskningsfrågorna i de fyra artiklarna.

8.1.1 Övergripande forskningsfråga för hela avhandlingen

Hur skapar och upprätthåller specialpedagoger i svensk gymnasieskola agens i sin yrkesvardag?

8.1.2 Specifika syften och forskningsfrågor i avhandlingens fyra artiklar

Artikel I

Syftet med denna artikel var att utforska nio specialpedagogers levda erfarenheter av de förändringar, utmaningar och möjligheter som uppstod i deras arbete på

svensk gymnasieskola, vårterminen 2021, under COVID-19 pandemin. Arbetet med artikeln guidades av följande forskningsfrågor:

(i) Vad är specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av hur deras yrkesvardag förändrades under pandemin?
(ii) Vad är specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av att hantera de utmaningar och möjligheter som uppstod i deras yrkesvardag under pandemin?

Artikel II

Den andra artikeln syftade till att utforska de metoder och strategier specialpedagoger på gymnasiet använder sig av för att ha agens till att fullgöra sitt uppdrag. Detta studerades genom levda erfarenheter av (i) att förkroppsliga specialpedagogens yrkesroll, (ii) hur skolans olika miljöer används, (iii) professionellt etos. Följaktligen var forskningsfrågorna för artikeln dessa:

(i) Vad är specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av att använda sig av sin kropp och olika skolmiljöer för att hantera sin förmåga att agera i sin yrkesvardag?
(ii) Hur kan specialpedagogernas agerande förstås som aspekter av ett professionellt etos?

Artikel III

Målet med den tredje artikeln var att karakterisera hur de deltagande specialpedagogernas professionella relationer skapades och upprätthölls i relation till deras arbete med att skapa inkluderande lärmiljöer. Tre element i deras yrkesvardag var särskilt i fokus: (i) hur de hanterade relationer; (ii) samspelet mellan deras relationer och förmåga att genomföra inkludering i praktiken, och (iii) hur de navigerade olika uppfattningar av inkludering och specialpedagogiskt stöd. Forskningsfrågorna i artikeln var följaktligen dessa:

(i) Vad är specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av hur de hanterar sina relationer i sin yrkesvardag?
(ii) Vad är specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av hur deras relationer samspelar med deras förmåga att skapa inkludering i praktiken?
(iii) Vad är specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av att navigera olika uppfattningar av inkludering och specialpedagogiskt stöd i sin yrkesvardag?

Artikel IV

Syftet med den fjärde artikeln var att studera specialpedagogers gränsarbete i svensk gymnasieskola. Detta studerades genom de deltagande specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av att arbeta med olika aktörer inom och mellan olika skolmiljöer. Forskningsfrågorna för denna artikel var följande:

(i) Vad karakteriserar specialpedagogers gränsarbete i deras yrkesvardag?
(ii) Hur hanterar specialpedagoger spänningar och motstånd som uppstår i deras yrkesvardag?

8.1.3 Teoretisk ansats och analytiska begrepp

Avhandlingen är skriven med hjälp av fenomenologisk teoribildning, närmare bestämt livsvärldsfenomenologi (Bengtsson 2013b). Inom livsvärldsfenomenologin är det den levda erfarenheten som är av intresse. Levda erfarenheter är de oreflekterade (pre-predikativa) erfarenheter människor gör i den naturliga inställningen, det förgivettagna i deras livsvärld (Bengtsson, 1999b). Livsvärlden är en förreflektiv värld som vi lever våra vardagliga liv i, dess karaktär gör att den normalt tas för given i det som Husserl (2020) benämner den naturliga inställningen. Den naturliga inställningen skulle kunna beskrivas som vår oreflekterade acceptans av livsvärldens giltighet. För att studera människors livsvärldar behöver vi naturligtvis aktivt reflektera över dem och därigenom bryta den naturliga inställningen och blotta och tränga igenom de förutfattade och förgivettagna uppfattningar som genomsyrar livsvärlden, detta gäller för både forskare och deltagare. I denna studie har detta gjorts genom en hermeneutisk iterativ process (Bengtsson, 1999a; Gilje, 2020; Ödman, 2007) där studiens utformning är designad för att hjälpa till i arbetet med att blotta och tränga igenom deltagarnas naturliga inställning för att förstå något om deras livsvärldar. Det är förstapersonsperspektivet och de levda erfarenheterna av de deltagande specialpedagogerna som är fokus i denna studie. Detta är också anledningen till valet av teoretiskt ramverk i avhandlingen, det är ett försök att förstå vad det innebär att vara och agera som specialpedagog med specifikt fokus på agens. Det finns en strävan inom fenomenologin att gå tillbaka till sakerna själva, att vara sann mot sakerna, detta har gjorts i denna studie genom att försöka tränga igenom och blottlägga deltagarnas levda erfarenheter (Bengtsson, 1999a; Husserl, 2020). Det finns också en önskan att fjärma sig från dualistiska och monistiska synsätt inom den livsvärldsfenomenologiska teoribildningen. I stället förespråkas ett

pluralistiskt förhållningssätt, ett förhållningssätt där man kan vända sig till sakerna själva och vara tillmötesgående och flexibel mot dem. Inom fenomenologi är sakerna alltid för någon som intenderar dem (Bengtsson, 2013a, 2013b). I denna avhandling är studieobjektet, själva fenomenet, specialpedagogers levda erfarenheter av agens. Detta studeras med hjälp av de fenomenologiska begreppen *levd kropp*, *levd tid*, *levt rum*, *intersubjektivitet*, *för-att-motiv*, *därför-att-motiv* och *reciproka* (ömsesidiga) *motiv* samt *att vara till den Andres ansikte* och *habituellt praktikfält*. Även *gränsarbete* används i analysen, ett begrepp lånat från sociologisk teoribildning.

8.1.4 Metod och genomförande

I studien har två kvalitativa metoder för empirigenerering använts, semistrukturerade livsvärldsintervjuer (Kvale et al., 2014) och dagböcker med öppna frågor (Wildemuth, 2017). Dessa metoder valdes för att kunna vara öppen och lyhörd inför deltagarnas levda erfarenheter. Nio specialpedagoger deltog i studien. Samtliga var anställda på ett gymnasium och hade en specialpedagogexamen och tidigare erfarenhet av att arbeta som lärare. Deltagarna blev intervjuade fyra gånger vardera. Först i en inledande sonderande intervju där studiens syfte, design och etiska ramverk gicks igenom och förklarades. Vidare dryftades även praktiska detaljer runt deras anställning som vilka program de arbetade på, vilka professioner som fanns på skolan, hur många elever som gick där, vilka program de erbjöd och vilka program specialpedagogen arbetade mot. Denna intervjuguide samt övriga intervjuguider finns som appendix till denna avhandling. Den inledande sonderande intervjun följdes av tre forskningsintervjuer som byggde på varandra och de dagboksanteckningar deltagarna skrev mellan intervju ett och två och intervju två och tre. Denna design var hermeneutiskt inspirerad och byggde på idén om att forskarens egen förförståelse parad med insikter från tidigare forskning skapade förutsättningar för att konstruera den första intervjuguiden och de första dagboksfrågorna. Men om projektet skulle nå bortom detta, till nya insikter, krävdes en explorativ process i den hermeneutiska cirkelrörelsen där varje ny intervjuguide och den andra dagbokens frågor byggde vidare på det som kom fram i de föregående intervjuerna. På detta sätt var inte bara analysen hermeneutisk utan även designen av studien var inspirerad och informerad av det hermeneutiska tänkandet.

8.1.5 Sammanfattning av studiens resultat

Nedan följer en sammanfattning av var och en av de fyra artiklarna i studien. Detta följs av en sammanfattning av studiens övergripande resultat och slutsatser, en diskussion och några avslutande tankar om vidare forskning.

Artikel I
Titel: *SENCOs' lived experiences of working through the COVID-19 pandemic in Swedish upper-secondary school*
Författare: Udd, J.; Berndtsson, I. (2023)
Artikeln är publicerad i: *European Journal of Special Needs Education*

Syftet med den första artikeln var att utforska nio specialpedagogers levda erfarenheter av de förändringar, utmaningar och möjligheter som uppstod i deras arbete på svensk gymnasieskola, vårterminen 2021, under COVID-19 pandemin.

Analytiskt utgick artikeln från de fenomenologiska begreppen *levd kropp* och *levt rum* så som de formulerats av Merleau-Ponty (1945/2023) och *intersubjektiva relationer* enligt Schütz (1932/1967). De etiska aspekterna av specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter analyserades med hjälp av Lévinas (1969) begrepp *att vara till den Andres ansikte*. Dessutom analyserades specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av sin yrkesutövning med hjälp av det livsvärldsfenomenologiska konceptet *habituellt praktikfält* (Bengtsson, 2013b).

Resultaten i studien visade att de deltagande specialpedagogerna ställdes inför flera förändringar och utmaningar under pandemin. Deras arbetsbörda tycktes öka och nya uppgifter lades till deras ansvarsområde. Dessutom var det nödvändigt att kontinuerligt skapa ad hoc-lösningar för att hitta pedagogiska lösningar i skolan för elever som inte kunde studera hemifrån. Problem med psykisk ohälsa hos elever verkade även öka och många av dem hade svårt att hantera distansstudier online enligt de deltagande specialpedagogerna. Vidare verkade utmaningarna kring skolornas uppdrag att utjämna socioekonomiska skillnader mellan elever växa under distansstudierna, vilket också bidrog till utmaningarna för de deltagande specialpedagogerna. Det fanns också problem med vad som verkade vara ett förvärrande av tidigare utmaningar relaterade till specialpedagogrollen, till exempel en ökad mängd brandkårsutryckningar, undervisning i små elevgrupper eller undervisning med enskilda elever, och en minskning av det förebyggande och hälsofrämjande arbetet. De förkroppsligade aspekterna av yrket verkade också bli lidande under pandemin. Så som att känna in ett rum med kollegor, etablera

förtroendefulla relationer eller ge stöd eller tröst genom fysisk kontakt eller ögonkontakt. Möjligheter som tydliggjordes under pandemin verkade vara en utveckling av digital kommunikation och digitala möten med en rad olika aktörer både inom och utanför skolan. Dessutom verkade de professionella relationerna mellan de deltagande specialpedagogerna och lärare på deras arbetsplatser utvecklas i en positiv riktning när specialpedagogernas kompetens blev mer efterfrågad i takt med att lärare var tvungna att anpassa sin undervisning till onlinemiljön.

I diskussionen synliggörs att de deltagande specialpedagogernas arbetsuppgifter är beroende av en väv av kvalitativa intersubjektiva relationer, för att de ska kunna ha agens i sin yrkesvardag. Dessa relationer stärks vanligtvis när de är förkroppsligade i det levda rummet, något som inte överfördes till den digitala miljön. Informella och existentiella aspekter av yrkesvardagen verkar vara en förutsättning för att de deltagande specialpedagogernas relationsarbete skulle fungera på ett tillfredsställande sätt. Kommunikation och möten i onlinemiljön föreföll fungera bra för specialpedagogerna, vilket underlättade deras arbete och eventuellt blev dessa aspekter till en ny del av deras yrkesvardag. Onlinemiljön och distansutbildningen framstod dock inte fungera lika bra för eleverna enligt de deltagande specialpedagogerna, särskilt inte när det gällde skolornas ansvar för att utjämna socioekonomiska skillnader mellan eleverna, något som i stället tycktes ha förvärrats av distansutbildningen. Dessutom verkade tidigare utmaningar för specialpedagogrollen ha blivit än mer utmanande under pandemin då nya uppgifter lades till yrkesrollen, vilket potentiellt kan ha breddat de deltagande specialpedagogernas ansvarsområde även framgent. Situationen väckte också frågor om avgränsningen av yrket och vad som hände med gränserna för yrket under pandemin. Frågor om specialpedagogers förmåga att hävda professionell jurisdiktion blev påtagliga, något som även tidigare har uppmärksammats i aktuell forskning. Slutligen diskuterades specialpedagogers yrkesmoral och deras professionella etos. Det verkar som om de deltagande specialpedagogerna erfar en moralisk skyldighet gentemot sina elever, vilken vägleder dem i vilka uppgifter de tar sig an i sin yrkesvardag. Denna moraliska skyldighet kan dock oavsiktligt underminera deras försök att hävda sin professionella jurisdiktion och avgränsa sitt yrke genom att den gör gränserna för yrket instabila. Men å andra sidan, som det påpekas i diskussionen, kanske formbara gränser och en mottaglighet för pluralismen och tvetydigheten i yrkesvardagen kan vara centralt för vad det innebär att vara och agera som specialpedagog.

Artikel II
Titel: *The Intertwinement of Lived Body, Lived Room and Professional Ethos in Special Educational Needs Coordinators' Everyday Worklife*
Författare: Udd, J.; Berndtsson, C. I. (2025) (Artikeln är för närvarande i review.)

Den andra artikeln syftade till att utforska de metoder och strategier specialpedagoger på gymnasiet använder sig av för att ha agens till att fullgöra sitt uppdrag. Detta studerades genom levda erfarenheter av (i) att förkroppsliga specialpedagogens yrkesroll, (ii) hur skolans olika miljöer används, (iii) professionellt etos. Motivationen för detta tillvägagångssätt var att försöka få fram och förstå några av de möjliga existentiella grunderna för specialpedagogprofessionen.

I analysen används de fenomenologiska begreppen *levt rum* och *levd kropp* med utgångspunkt i Bengtssons (2013a) och Merleau-Pontys (1945/2023) arbete. För att ytterligare stödja analysen används Lévinas (1969) begrepp *att vara till den Andres ansikte* och *intersubjektiva relationer* enligt Schütz (1932/1967). Artikeln är inspirerad av de fenomenologiska idéerna om utbildningens rum och byggnader som utvecklats av Bengtsson (2011) och Alerby et al. (2014).

Resultaten i artikeln tyder på att centrala karakteristika i de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag är kommunikation och ett empatiskt erkännande av den Andre. Specialpedagogerna i studien verkar också förlita sig på förkroppsligade aspekter av sin yrkesvardag som att vara i samklang med sin egen kropp såväl som med andras. I sin kommunikation tolkade specialpedagogerna förkroppsligade signaler genom att lyssna både utåt och inåt. De förkroppsligade aspekterna i specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag verkar även vara tätt sammanvävda med deras agens. Detta var också tydligt i hur deltagarna bebodde rummet genom sina levda kroppar där abstrakta såväl som konkreta aspekter av lärmiljöerna användes för att skapa agens. Dessutom verkar de etiska aspekterna av de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag, såsom att stå upp för elevers och lärares rättigheter, förankra yrkesrollen etiskt och moraliskt och blev genom detta talande för vad det innebär att vara och agera som specialpedagog. Slutligen tycks sammanvävningen av distinkta kroppsliga, rumsliga, intersubjektiva och etiska aspekter av de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag vara kännetecken för specialpedagogprofessionens existentialitet och möjligen bidrar dessa aspekter till att möjliggöra specialpedagogers arbete med att genomföra inkludering i praktiken.

I diskussionen föreslås de tätt sammanvävda aspekterna av etik, intersubjektiva relationer, kroppslighet och rumslighet i specialpedagogers yrkesroll vara centrala för att de ska kunna navigera sin yrkesvardag. Detta verkar också hjälpa de deltagande specialpedagogerna när de argumenterar för inkluderande åtgärder på olika nivåer i skolan. Dessutom föreslås att ytterligare existentiellt driven forskning inom området skolans lokaler/utrymmen och lärmiljöer är motiverad. Vidare verkar arbetet med att skapa inkludering i praktiken och de etiska aspekterna av intersubjektiva relationer ha en stark sammanflätning; detta kan utgöra viktiga aspekter av specialpedagogers professionalitet och förmåga att skapa kvalitativ och likvärdig utbildning för alla elever. Tillika kan sammanflätningen av de etiska aspekterna av de intersubjektiva relationerna och strävan efter att skapa inkluderande utbildning underlätta förståelsen av den etiska grunden för utvecklingen av social rättvisa och jämlikhet i utbildning. Dessutom föreslås det att ett starkare fokus på yrkesetik i specialpedagogutbildning skulle kunna hjälpa specialpedagogstudenter att utveckla professionell självkänsla och yrkesidentitet. Slutligen föreslås en omtolkning av inkluderande lärmiljöer som något öppet och föränderligt, beroende av människor vilka bebor pedagogiska levda rum som kroppssubjekt. Dessa resultat indikerar att ytterligare forskning som är öppen och lyhörd för mänsklighetens existentialitet inom området inkluderande utbildning behövs.

Artikel III
Titel: *Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs): gatekeepers for inclusionary ideals – the role of professional relationships in an era of neoliberal marketisation of Swedish schools*
Författare: Udd, J. (2023) (Artikeln är för närvarande i review.)

Artikel tre fördjupar sig i de frågor om intersubjektiva relationer som berördes i den första artikeln. Den här gången är det dock inte COVID-19 pandemin som är utgångspunkten, utan artikeln är skriven mot bakgrund av en föreslagen antagonistisk motsättning mellan inkluderingsrörelsen och den nordiska modellen å ena sidan och den nyliberala marknadsanpassningen av det svenska skolsystemet å andra sidan. Detta görs för att försöka förstå och belysa de spänningar som kan uppstå i specialpedagogers yrkesvardag och vilken betydelse kvalitativa intersubjektiva relationer kan ha när inkludering ska genomföras i praktiken.

Analysen genomfördes med de fenomenologiska begreppen *för-att-motiv*, *därför-att-motiv* och *reciproka motiv* (Schütz, 1932/1967) samt *att vara till den Andres ansikte* (Lévinas, 1969). Schütz begrepp användes för att analysera och tolka levda

erfarenheter av de åtgärder och val som specialpedagoger gjorde i sina intersubjektiva relationer, medan Lévinas begrepp användes på liknande sätt men för att tolka och analysera de etiska aspekterna av deltagarnas levda erfarenheter.

Resultaten i studien tyder på att skapandet och upprätthållandet av professionella relationer, med en mängd aktörer inom och utanför skolan, är en viktig del av specialpedagogyrket. En stor del av det relationsarbete som de deltagande specialpedagogerna utförde verkade vara förankrat i informella aspekter av deras yrkesvardag. Detta arbete är dock inte fritt från svårigheter – de deltagande specialpedagogerna verkar behöva vara tillmötesgående mot sina kollegor för att uppnå fungerande professionella relationer, även om de ibland ville sätta ner foten och vara mer bestämda. Resultaten tyder dessutom på att deltagarna kan behöva arbeta upp ett förtroende hos kollegor som ibland ser specialpedagogyrket som påträngande. Detta blev tydligt när vissa deltagare försökte förespråka inkluderande åtgärder, något som då ibland skapade spänningar och motstånd bland annan skolpersonal. En framträdande levd erfarenhet hos de deltagande specialpedagogerna var att de ansåg att det var en gemensam strävan att skapa en skola som var inkluderande för alla elever, vilket krävde att all inblandad personal bidrog till samarbetet. Detta fick de deltagande specialpedagogerna att i stor utsträckning fokusera på att skapa fungerande professionella relationer, men det fanns en baslinje, vilken inte fick överträdas enligt deltagarna, och om så gjordes reagerade de på ett sådant sätt att det kunde äventyra deras professionella relationer. Detta uppstod när elevernas rätt till utbildning, egenvärde eller värdighet stod på spel. När detta stod på spel offrade deltagarna i studien sina professionella relationer för att stå upp för eleverna. Detta var uppenbarligen grundat i specialpedagogernas etiska värderingar, och de använde sig av grundläggande mänskliga rättigheter och ett erkännande av eleverna som unika individer med ett självklart egenvärde för att motivera sina handlingar.

I diskussionen framförs att de deltagande specialpedagogernas intersubjektiva relationer skapar agens till att genomföra inkludering i praktiken. Dessa relationer verkar dock till stor del vara informella och inte tillräckligt stabila för att stå emot spänningar och motstånd som uppstår när skolpersonalen har olika syn på inkludering. Detta leder till att deltagarna ibland offrar sina yrkesrelationer för att stå upp för vad de anser vara elevernas rätt till utbildning, värdighet och egenvärde. Dessutom verkar specialpedagogers förmåga att agera som förändringsagenter och mellanledare äventyras av bräckliga yrkesrelationer. I sitt relationsarbete verkar de deltagande specialpedagogerna vägledas av ett professionellt etos som inte är explicit formulerat. Därför väcks frågan om specialpedagoger kan behöva vidare

utbildning i hur man bygger upp och upprätthåller professionella relationer och om en explicit yrkesetik för specialpedagoger bör formuleras. Slutligen i diskussionen lyfts relationen mellan den nordiska modellen och inkluderingsrörelsen i förhållande till den nyliberala marknadsanpassningen av den svenska skolan fram. Frågan ställs om relationen mellan dessa kan förvärra spänningar i skolan, i förhållande till de olika aktörer specialpedagoger samarbetar med för att skapa en likvärdig skola genom inkludering. Dessutom diskuteras möjligheten att relationsskapande kan förstås som en politisk handling när specialpedagoger drivs av moraliska incitament för att genomföra inkludering i praktiken.

Artikel IV
Titel: *Special Educational Needs Coordinators' Boundary Work in Swedish Upper-Secondary School*
Författare: Udd, J., (2024)
Artiklen är publicerad i: *European Journal of Special Needs Education*

Syftet med den fjärde artikeln var att studera specialpedagogers gränsarbete i svensk gymnasieskola. Detta studerades genom de deltagande specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av att arbeta med olika aktörer inom och mellan olika skolmiljöer. Anledningen till att fokusera på specialpedagogers gränsarbete var att bättre förstå hur specialpedagoger arbetar mellan och i förhållande till olika aktörer och sammanhang för att utföra sitt uppdrag.

I analysen används det livsvärldsfenomenologiska begreppet *habituellt praktikfält* (Bengtsson, 2013b) för att förstå och tolka aspekter av deltagarnas habitualiserade, förgivettagna och förkroppsligade yrkesvardag. Begreppet *gränsarbete* (Gieryn, 1983; Langley et al., 2019) används också i analysen, specifikt, *konkurrerande* och *kollaborativt gränsarbete*, så som dessa föreslagits av Langley et al. (2019). Konkurrerande och kollaborativt gränsarbete användes för att förstå och tolka levda erfarenheter av spänningar, motstånd och anpassningar i deltagarnas yrkesvardag.

Resultaten i artikeln tyder på att de deltagande specialpedagogernas gränsarbete var i kontinuerligt tillblivande och att det var sammanflätat med deras agens, särskilt när de försökte agera som förändringsagenter. Dessutom tycktes de deltagande specialpedagogernas kollaborativa gränsarbete i stor utsträckning vila på kvaliteten i deras professionella relationer. De deltagande specialpedagogernas konkurrerande gränsarbete blev centralt i resultatet eftersom det i många fall

verkade saknas tydliga definitioner av deras roll och uppdrag. Följaktligen kände flera av deltagarna att de kontinuerligt var tvungna att avgränsa yrket och skapa, bestrida och försvara yrkets gränser. Dessa resultat antyder att det är en del av de deltagande specialpedagogernas habituella praktikfält att kontinuerligt och simultant vara upptagna av både konkurrerande och kollaborativt gränsarbete. Dessutom, när frågor om levda erfarenheter av skapandet av inkludering i praktiken diskuterades blev specialpedagogers gränsarbete än tydligare. När de agerade som förändringsagenter och försökte skapa skolutveckling inriktad mot inkluderande åtgärder tycktes det uppstå spänningar och motstånd mellan olika aktörer i de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag. Därmed blev kollaborativt och konkurrerande gränsarbete grundläggande för att specialpedagogerna skulle kunna genomföra inkludering i praktiken. Specialpedagogerna i studien verkade anstränga sig för att behålla förmågan att uppmuntra till och genomföra inkluderande åtgärder när de agerade som förändringsagenter. Detta tyder på att inkludering är en inbäddad och förkroppsligad aspekt av de deltagande specialpedagogernas habituella praktikfält, och därmed även viktig för vad det innebär att vara och agera som specialpedagog.

I diskussionen lyftes frågor angående rörelsen bort från den ideologiska visionen om inkludering som formulerats i Salamancadeklarationen mot mer specialundervisning och segregerande lösningar i svensk skola. Ett specifikt fokus riktades mot de deltagande specialpedagogernas levda erfarenheter av spänningar och motstånd mot idéerna om inkludering i sin yrkesvardag. Vikten av kvalitativa professionella relationer diskuterades samt betydelsen av att se de långa tidslinjerna i skolans utveckling och att i dessa göra små stegvisa förändringar över tid. Att genomföra små stegvisa förändringar över tid verkade vara sätt på vilka de deltagande specialpedagogerna hanterade de spänningar och motstånd som uppstod i deras yrkesvardag. Särskilt när de agerade som förändringsagenter och initierade och genomförde skolutveckling riktad mot att skapa en skola för alla elever. Dessutom tycktes de deltagande specialpedagogernas förmåga att mildra spänningar och lösa eventuella konflikter när de agerade som förändringsagenter vara central för deras professionella skicklighet, särskilt eftersom det fanns många olika definitioner och förståelser av inkludering i deras yrkesvardag. Slutligen fördes ett förslag fram om att det skulle vara intressant att försöka förstå inkludering som ett gränsobjekt (Langley et al., 2019; Leigh Star, 2010). Ett gränsobjekt är något konkret eller abstrakt som är formbart nog att användas och förstås på olika sätt av olika agenter men trots detta bibehålla en stabil kärna i sin begreppsliga identitet. Om en sådan förståelse av inkludering skulle vara möjlig

skulle det kanske möjliggöra för praktiker och forskare att samarbeta kring inkludering och inkluderande åtgärder utan att det råder konsensus om definitionen av begreppet inkludering.

8.1.6 Slutsatser

En central slutsats i denna avhandling är hur de deltagande specialpedagogerna använde sig av intersubjektiva relationer till lärare, elever, vårdnadshavare och en mängd andra aktörer för att skapa och upprätthålla agens. Deltagarna verkade förlita sig på dessa relationer för att hantera en oklar definition av sin yrkesroll i sin yrkesvardag. Det verkade även som att det pågick en rörelse fram och tillbaka i avgränsning av de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesroll och ansvarsområde mellan aktörer inom och utanför skolans organisation. Mellan dessa aktörer utförde de deltagande specialpedagogerna både kollaborativt och konkurrerande gränsarbete för att hantera sin profession och sitt ansvarsområde. Intersubjektiva relationer verkade vara väsentliga för detta gränsarbete. De intersubjektiva relationerna verkade även vara förankrade i informella aspekter av deltagarnas yrkesliv och direkt avgörande för deras förmåga att fungera som kommunikativa nav i skolan – den så kallade spindeln i nätet.

Vikten av deltagarnas moraliska ansvar, deras professionella etos, är även det en framträdande slutsats i denna avhandling. Deltagarnas moraliska ansvar verkade vara vägledande för hur och vilka uppdrag och uppgifter de valde att fokusera på. De deltagande specialpedagogerna stod upp för att lärare ska få de förutsättningar som krävs för deras arbete. Specialpedagogerna stod även upp för inkluderande ideal och försvarade elevers rättigheter till deltagande och inkludering i den ordinarie undervisningen, sett här som ett uttryck för rättvisa och jämlikhet i utbildning. Detta var dock ett uttryck för ett professionellt etos som det anspelades på, det var inte explicit uttryckt. De deltagande specialpedagogerna verkade skapa och upprätthålla agens genom kommunikation och empati, förankrade i ett moraliskt ansvar gentemot den Andre.

Flera resultat i avhandlingen satte ljuset på de sätt vilka existentiella aspekter karakteriserade hur de deltagande specialpedagogerna upprätthöll och skapade agens. Bland dessa var intersubjektivitet, etik, mellankroppslighet, tidslighet och att bebo det levda rummet som kroppssubjekt framträdande, dessa existentiella aspekter var sammanvävda med och inbäddade i deltagarnas habituella praktikfält och utspridda i skolbyggnaden och bortom denna – allt för att möta de kroppsliga och rumsliga behoven hos medarbetare och elever. Till yttermera visso verkade

temporalitet vara centralt för deltagarnas förmåga att initiera och fortsätta skolutveckling genom deras förståelse för olika projekts tidsliga struktur, detta var särskilt viktigt när de agerade som förändringsagenter.

En ytterligare slutsats, viktig för denna avhandling, är den betydelse inkludering och skapandet av inkluderande lärmiljöer har för de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag, sett här som aspekter av att skapa en skola för alla elever. Inkludering som idé och ideal verkar vara sammanvävda och integrerade i deltagarnas habituella praktikfält såväl som i deras yrkesroll, detta trots att inkludering inte explicit nämns i vare sig svenska skolans styrdokument eller i specialpedagogutbildningens examensmål. De deltagande specialpedagogerna verkade fungera som grindvakter för inkluderande ideal. Inkludering verkade bli ett idealistiskt och etiskt projekt för deltagarna, rotat i grundläggande mänskliga värden och en respekt för elevernas särprägel och annanhet (singularitet och alteritet). De deltagande specialpedagogernas syn på inkludering verkade vara präglad av en bred definition av inkludering eller inkludering som skapandet av gemenskap på skolorna. Dock verkade det vara så att flera av deltagarna accepterade vissa specialpedagogiska lösningar, till exempel specialundervisning, som en strategi för att skapa inkludering gradvis, därmed verkade det som att specialpedagogerna representerade en sorts hybridvariant av inkludering eller möjligen en inkluderande specialpedagogik. Dessutom verkar det som att inkluderande lärmiljöer förstådda genom deltagarnas levda erfarenheter antyder att dessa är öppna, tvetydiga och sammanvävda med existentiella aspekter som är karakteristiska för det mänskliga varat.

En ytterligare slutsats i denna avhandling är att de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag verkar vara i ett ständigt tillstånd av förändring, rörelse och tillblivelse. Att befinna sig i ett tillstånd av tillblivelse verkade fungera som en förutsättning för deltagarna att vara så rörliga som behövdes för att bibehålla agens i en tvetydig och pluralistisk yrkesvardag. Det verkade också som att hantera olika förståelser och attityder till inkludering var påtagligt i deltagarnas yrkesvardag, detta så till den grad att det skulle kunna betraktas som en aspekt av deras habituella praktikfält. Yrkesrollen hos de deltagande specialpedagogerna verkar vara karakteriserad av förmågan att hantera en tvetydlig och föränderlig yrkesvardag. Detta verkade betyda att en central aspekt av deras profession var att kunna agera som förändringsagenter i en yrkesvardag karaktäriserad av förändring.

Slutligen, deltagarnas yrkesroll verkade bli politisk när de trädde fram i den offentliga arenan och förevisade en form av politisk agens, driven av moraliska incitament att vara till den Andres ansikte och agerade som grindvakter för

inkluderande ideal. I detta verkar de deltagande specialpedagogerna representera en syn på utbildning och skola som karakteriseras av bildning, rättvisa, likvärdighet och jämlikhet; detta föreslås kontrastera samtida nyliberala tendenser i skolan som marknadisering, mätbarhet, standardisering, kvalitetskontroll och en syn på elever som kunder.

8.1.7 Diskussion

Resultaten och slutsatserna i föreliggande avhandling har gett insikter i vissa teman som var framträdande i de deltagande specialpedagogernas yrkesvardag. Exempel på sådana teman är vikten av och sammanvävningen av informella och formella aspekter i de relationer och samarbeten som möjliggjorde att deltagarna kunde fullgöra sitt uppdrag. Ytterligare centrala resultat var att de deltagande specialpedagogerna agerade utifrån ett professionellt etos för att skapa en likvärdig skola som gav stöd till alla elever oavsett deras behov. Hur deltagarnas professionella roll skulle kunna vara förkroppsligad, rumslig och tidslig och hur dessa aspekter var sammanvävda och integrerade i deras habituella praktikfält var också framträdande resultat. Vidare var olika attityder till och sätt att förstå och tolka inkludering vanligt förekommande i deltagarnas levda erfarenheter, något som ibland skapade spänningar och motstånd i deras yrkesvardag. Slutligen, samspelet mellan de deltagande specialpedagogernas agens och strukturella aspekter, vilka associerades till nyliberala influenser i det svenska skolsystemet, var också resultat i studien.

Vad gäller resultaten kring specialpedagogers yrkesroll och hur de skapar och upprätthåller agens i denna studie, så delar dessa många likheter med resultat i studien av Lin et al. (2024)[17] angående hur specialpedagoger i Nya Zeeland skapar agens för inkludering. Dessa resultat var sammanfattade i följande teman: ”att stå upp för elever i behov av särskilt stöd, engagemang för den specialpedagogiska yrkesrollen, professionell kompetens, självförmåga/egenförmåga, deltagande i beslutsfattande och samarbete” (författarens översättning, Lin et al., s. 5–7). Dessa resultat (förutom de om självförmåga/egenförmåga som inte studerades här) stöttas av resultat i denna studie. I sin diskussion utvecklar Lin et al. (2024) idén om hur agensen i specialpedagogyrket är tidslig, det är en agens som är ”simultant orienterad mot dåtiden, nutiden och framtiden” (författarens översättning, s 8). Dessa resultat rörande specialpedagogyrkets tidslighet styrks av resultaten i denna

[17] All forskning refererad till i den svenska versionen av diskussionen står att finna i avhandlingens kapitel 3.

avhandling och bär även spår av det Naraian (2014) hävdar rörande tid, som av henne förstås som cirkulär snarare än linjär. Detta exemplifieras med hennes deltagares försök att leva ”i framtiden” genom att ”erkänna elevernas potential då de alltid är i process” (författarens översättning, s. 25), i stället för att utvärdera dem gentemot specifika förväntningar.

Naraian (2014) kritiserar även diskurser som förespråkar polära motsatser, som till exempel inkludering ställd mot exkludering, då sådana positioner blir urvattnade intellektuella konstruktioner när man försöker hantera komplexa frågor som till exempel hur man skapar inkludering i praktiken. Just sådana komplexiteter kan genom resultaten i denna avhandling förstås som de relationella och kollaborativa aspekterna av de deltagande specialpedagogernas arbete, aspekter vilka verkar vara förutsättningar för att skapa inkludering. Naraian (2014) argumenterar även för ett ”anståndets pedagogik” (*pedagogy of deferral*) som är pragmatisk i hanterandet av det som dagligdags görs i skolan men har ett utsträckt engagemang i att skapa likvärdig, inkluderande utbildning. Detta är ett åtagande som är lyhört för varats möjligheter i elevernas framtidsjag, alltså en öppenhet för vad eleverna kan komma att bli. Dessa resultat stärks genom föreliggande avhandling, exemplifierade i hur de deltagande specialpedagogerna gjorde gradvisa förändringar i nutid för att i en framtid ha skapat inkluderande lärmiljöer och på så vis stötta elever i behov av anpassningar och/eller särskilt stöd. Samtidigt verkar detta arbetssätt också hjälpa de deltagande specialpedagogerna undvika att förstöra samarbeten med andra professioner inom skolan och med kravställande vårdnadshavare.

Vad gäller samarbete så var en gemensam förståelse mellan olika intressenter en viktig möjliggörande faktor för de deltagande specialpedagogernas arbete, något även Holland och Fitzgerald (2023) hävdar rörande specialpedagogers arbete på Irland. Detta blev synligt i denna avhandling genom deltagarnas strävan efter att hitta motiv till olika handlingar och aktiviteter i samförstånd och samarbete med andra intressenter. Ett hinder i samarbetet var olika förståelse för samarbetet, något som blev påtagligt i denna studie vad gällde förståelse och attityder till inkludering. Även de informella aspekterna av specialpedagogers arbete blev framträdande här då dessa möjliggjorde för specialpedagogerna att skapa och upprätthålla agens i sin yrkesvardag. Samtidigt finns det en fara med det informella i skolans arbete, något Möllås (2009) påpekat, då detta arbete ofta är outtalat och inte heller dokumenteras.

Till yttermera visso, om det finns många hinder i samarbeten och policy för att skapa inkludering i praktiken, kan det inte avhjälpas av specialpedagoger allena.

Resultaten i denna avhandling indikerar att detta är ett kollektivt arbete, något som tidigare föreslagits av bland annat Paulsrud och Nilholm (2023), Skoglund (2023), Gunnporsdottir och Johannesson (2014), samt Köpfer and Oskarsdottir (2019). Denna diskussion har många likheter med resultaten i studien av Li och Ruppar (2021) som undersökte relationen mellan lärares agens, social rättvisa och inkludering för att förstå hur man skulle kunna förverkliga en likvärdig, inkluderande undervisning i praktiken. Li och Ruppar (2021) argumenterade för att om fokus ligger på lärares agens för att genomföra inkluderande undervisning skulle detta hjälpa att erkänna speciallärares "roll som aktiva beslutsfattare och bidragande till skolförändring" (författarens översättning, s. 43). I deras resultat föreslår de att agens skulle kunna hjälpa lärare att tänka annorlunda, samarbeta och etablera innovativa sätt att möta en heterogen elevgrupp, se även Lakkala et al. (2024) och Lyons et al. (2016). Dessa resultat bekräftas även av Khanna och Kareem (2025) samt av Miller et al. (2022) som också betonade vikten av samarbete mellan skola och hem för att möjliggöra inkluderande utbildning. Dessutom föreslog Miller et al (2022) att inkludering är ett projekt som är i ständig rörelse och beroende av lärares agens och samarbete, vilket understryker vikten av den kollektiva insats som krävs för att skapa inkludering i skolan, något som denna avhandling bekräftar i dialog med Abu-Alghayth (2025); Authelsingh et al. (2024) samt Lee och Garwood (2025).

Resultaten i denna avhandling och den citerade litteraturen i detta avsnitt tyder på att när man försöker skapa likvärdighet i utbildning genom inkluderande åtgärder krävs samarbete i hela skolorganisationernas ekosystem (e.g., Kearney et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2024; Möllås, 2009; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2023; Öhman, 2023). Dessutom tyder resultaten i studien på att om man vill uppnå utveckling av en skola för alla elever behöver specialpedagoger relationell agens såväl som professionell agens, något som även föreslagits av Lindqvist et al. (2011); von Ahlefeld Nisser (2017) and Tuomainen et al. (2012). Detta gäller även det dilemma som Lindqvist (2013) lyfter fram, att specialpedagoger arbetar för inkludering samtidigt som de förknippas med specialundervisning och därmed "representerar uppfattningen att den ordinarie undervisningen inte kan hantera alla elever i skolan" (författarens översättning, s. 205). Dessa resultat för även tankarna till idéer om att elever i behov av särskilt stöd kan uppleva sig stigmatiserade när stödet ges i segregerade miljöer, något som tidigare föreslagits av Giota et al. (2023), Johansson (2011), Nilsson (2025) och Ramberg (2017). Kanske skulle denna fråga kunna hanteras genom inkluderande specialundervisning som föreslagits av Holland och Fitzgerald (2023). Ett alternativ till denna tolkning är dock de resultat

i denna avhandling som föreslår att specialpedagogers arbete kan verka som specialundervisning när man tar en ögonblicksbild av det. Men i själva verket är det ett inkluderingsarbete sett på lång sikt med stegvisa förändringar vilka inte ska söndra pågående samarbeten och medarbetares habituella praktikfält. Om man i stället zoomar ut och ser på helheten, är det som ser ut som specialundervisning i själva verket ett steg mot inkludering i ett skolutvecklingsprojekt som sträcker sig över flera år. Detta är en insikt som i denna avhandling möjliggjorts genom att förstå olika projekts tidsstruktur med hjälp av begreppet levd tid, enligt Schütz (1932/1967).

Utmaningen för de olika professionerna inom skolan att möta en heterogen elevgrupp gäller också den pågående förhandlingen mellan olika yrkesgrupper i skolan om hur och vilket stöd elever i behov av särskilt stöd ska få. Detta är en fråga som diskuterats flitigt inom forskning på inkludering och specialpedagogik (e.g. Cole, 2005; Curran & Boddison, 2021; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Göransson et al., 2017; Göransson et al., 2019; Magnússon & Göransson, 2019). Denna diskussion har också en koppling till centrala resultat i denna avhandling rörande specialpedagogers förmåga att hävda professionalism och agens genom sitt intersubjektiva relationella arbete mellan skolans olika professioner, något som även föreslagits av Melasalmi et al. (2023), Paloniemi et al. (2023). Dessa resultat tyder på att en tydligare definition och mer formaliserade aspekter av specialpedagogers yrkesroll och uppdrag skulle kunna bidraga till utvecklingen av interprofessionellt samarbete. Detta hänger förmodligen också samman med de resultat i avhandlingen som anspelar på yrkeskunskaper och yrkeskompetens, där agens framträder som en nyckelfaktor, något som även framhålls av Mu et al. (2015) och Wang et al. (2017).

Resultaten i föreliggande avhandling visar även på specialpedagogers tvetydiga och föränderliga roll, något som tidigare noterats av Holland och Fitzgerald (2023), Maher och Vickerman (2018), samt Göransson et al. (2015a). Dessa resultat länkar även tillbaka till de informella aspekterna av specialpedagogyrket när det handlar om att etablera och hantera professionella relationer (ett centralt resultat i denna avhandling), vilket även bekräftar tidigare forskning av Tuomainen et al. (2012) och Klang et al. (2017). Dessutom innebar förmågan att utöva roller som specialpedagog och speciallärare förhandlingar om dessa rollers gränser i försök att hävda professionell jurisdiktion, som sådan, blev detta en viktig aspekt av professionell agens, vilket tidigare föreslagits av Klang et al. (2017). Detta resonemang gäller även de förhandlingar som ingår i arbetet med att leva upp till eller kontrastera andra yrkesgruppers, elevers och vårdnadshavares förväntningar

på specialpedagogers uppdrag och uppgifter, vilket visats i denna avhandling men även tidigare av Lindqvist et al. (2011) and Göransson et al. (2017).

Som en kontrast till diskussionen om agens som en positiv och väsentlig del av specialpedagogers yrkesroll, lyfts här spänning mellan skolors struktur och organisation, specialpedagogers välmående och agens i relation till neoliberala tendenser i skolan upp till diskussion. Neoliberala tendenser skulle i detta fall kunna exemplifieras med ”centraliserad, standardiserad och nyliberaliserad kvalitetskontroll” (författarens översättning, Mu et al. 2024, s. 1766). Tanken att agens skulle kunna fungera som en copingstrategi och främja motståndskraft mot nyliberalt styre och nyliberala metoder föreslås av Mu et al. (2024). Detta kontrasterades dock av Mu (2021) när han diskuterade om fokus på individers förmågor kan dölja systemiska problem och främja nyliberala tolkningar av inkludering och jämlikhet i utbildning. Författaren hävdar att agens och resiliens kan dölja och reproducera strukturella problem och föreslår att ”att okritisk och oreflekterad agens och resiliens kan dölja systemfel i dagens inkluderande utbildning och hölja strukturella problem under en mantel av handlingskraftiga och resilienta förebilder” (författarens översättning, Mu, 2021, s. 826–827).

Granskningsmentaliteten inom neoliberala ideologi har kritiserats ytterligare av van de Putte et al. (2018) för hur den håller enskilda professionella, som till exempel specialpedagoger, ansvariga för att omvandla skolor mot inkludering i sina roller som förändringsagenter. I stället föreslår van de Putte et al. (2018) en förståelse av agens som förkastar idén att agens är individuell och föreslår i stället en förståelse av agens som ett assemblage av flertalet agenser, mänskliga och icke-mänskliga. Detta tillvägagångssätt gör det också möjligt för författarna att ompröva förståelsen av inkludering som en gemenskap där mångfald är normen, och därigenom gör det möjligt att undvika att inkludering blir en fråga endast om placering av elever och i stället fokuserar på elevernas deltagande i en gemenskap i utbildningen. I kontrast till resultaten från van de Putte et al. (2018) och Mu (2021) argumenterar Wang et al. (2017) för hur fokus på inkluderande lärares agens kan påverka beslutsfattare och eventuellt fungera som ett försvar mot nyliberala metoder och ideologier som kan marginalisera elever i behov av särskilt stöd.

Agensens tvetydiga karaktär som diskuteras här anspelar på resultat presenterade av Sözer-Boz et al. (2024), som fann att specialpedagoger som upplevde utbrändhet också hade hög grad av agens och ansåg att deras arbete var meningsfullt. Detta tyder på att hög grad av agens inte nödvändigtvis är otvetydigt positivt för enskilda yrkesutövare. Dessutom kan den tvetydiga och otydliga definitionen av specialpedagogyrket, som visats i denna avhandling, i kombination

med hög arbetsbelastning ha negativ inverkan på rekrytering och bibehållandet av specialpedagoger och liknande yrkesgrupper i skolan, samt öka risken för utbrändhet, något även föreslaget av Curran (2019); Harby (2022); Lee och Garwood (2025); Mrstik et al. (2019) samt Wisinski (2024). Dessa resultat väcker frågor om hållbarheten hos dessa yrkesroller och hur individuell och kollektiv agens samt strukturella och organisatoriska aspekter av skolan samverkar med den psykosociala arbetsmiljön för specialpedagoger.

Slutligen väcker resultaten från tidigare forskning och den föreliggande studiens analys av de spänningar och motstånd som uppstår i specialpedagogers yrkesvardag och sammanflätning av dessa med deras agens flera frågor. Här förstås spänningar och motstånd som en brist på ömsesidighet i motiv till handlingar mellan olika berörda aktörer. Men skulle dessa spänningar och detta motstånd i stället kunna förstås som uttryck för strukturella brister i skolorganisationer? Eller möjligen sammanflätade med bristen på en formaliserad och tydlig yrkesroll och ett tydligt avgränsat ansvarsområde för specialpedagoger? Frågan väcks om specialpedagoger behöver ha agens för att kompensera för bristen på fungerande strukturer, organisation eller formalisering av deras ansvarsområden i deras yrkesvardag? Men, bidrar inte då specialpedagogers agens till att dessa potentiellt bristfälliga strukturer, organisationer, och definitionsfrågor rörande deras yrkesroll och ansvarsområde fortsätter att existera? Blir agens därmed en förment väsentlig förutsättning för att specialpedagoger ska kunna fullgöra sitt uppdrag som en följd av bristen på tydliga organisationsstrukturer och en formaliserad definition av yrket? Detta tyder på att levda erfarenheter av hög grad av agens kan innebära att organisationen har en avsaknad av struktur. Det betyder dock samtidigt att specialpedagoger behöver agens för att fullgöra sitt uppdrag. Agens blir på detta sätt det som kompenserar för bristen på formalisering av ansvarsområden, definitionen av yrket och avsaknaden av tydliga organisatoriska strukturer, samtidigt som den fortsätter att dölja de brister agensen kompenserar för. Därmed blir möjligen en för hög grad av agens ett tveeggat svärd, som skapar möjligheter för specialpedagoger att handla samtidigt som det döljer organisatoriska brister och avsaknad av tydliga definitioner av specialpedagogers ansvarsområde och yrkesroll.

8.1.8 Implikationer och förslag till framtida forskning

Föreliggande studie indikerar att skolpersonal i viss mån har olika projekt, vilket gör att kollektiv intentionalitet kan vara svår att nå, exemplet här var olika

förståelse och attityder till inkludering. Skulle det kunna vara fruktbart, som föreslaget i fjärde artikeln, att tänka med hjälp av Bowker och Star (Bowker, 1999; Leigh Star, 2010) rörande inkludering i detta fall? Att försöka undersöka inkludering som ett gränsobjekt? Eller är de aspekter som skulle behöva vara stabila inom konceptet mellan olika miljöer och tolkningar för instabila och därmed så faller tanken redan på idéstadiet? Kanske vore det ändå intressant att undersöka detta genom en litteraturöversikt och en metaanalys av forskning på inkludering och specialpedagogik med fokus på olika definitioner av inkludering och hur inkludering förstås i praktiken för att se vilka eventuella gränsobjekt som framträder?

Ytterligare idéer till vidare forskning utifrån resultaten i denna studie är komparativa studier av specialpedagogiska professioner i olika länder. Det skulle vara intressant om det gick att etablera någon form av koherens vad gäller nomenklatur och karakteristika mellan yrkesroller och ansvarsområden mellan olika kulturella och nationella kontexter. Att reda ut och nysta upp just definitionen och ansvarsområden av de specialpedagogiska yrkesrollerna i en internationell kontext vore något som borde göras i min ögon.

Även sammanflätningen av och relationen mellan individuell skolpersonals agens och strukturella frågor som uppkommit i kölvattnet av neoliberala influenser på skolors arbete och organisation borde vara ett område att beforska ytterligare. Även forskning som berör de specialpedagogiska professionernas situation post-covid behöver göras. Studier skulle kunna fokusera på att förstå om aspekter av förändringar i yrkesroller och ansvarsområden har blivit permanenta och hur det är ställt med olika specialpedagogiska professioners arbetsmiljö och välbefinnande.

Slutligen, forskningsansatser som är lyhörda för det mänskliga varat, som till exempel olika versioner av fenomenologisk forskning, borde appliceras i än högre grad inom inkluderingsfältet och det specialpedagogiska fältet, särskilt som ett sätt att låta elevers och personals röster göras hörda. Det vore intressant att se en mixed-methods-studie i ett större forskningsprojekt inriktat mot att få fram både levda erfarenheter och statistiskt säkerställda resultat rörande frågor om agens, inkludering, specialpedagogik, professioner, yrkesroller och jämlikhet, likvärdighet och rättvisa i utbildning.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 (Integrating essay)

Search – Scopus 250403	**Antal träffar**	”Upper secondary school” + Swe*	Phenomenolo* + Swe*	Lifeworld*	Hermeneuti*
SENCO	250	2	8	2	2
”Special Needs Edu*”	740	5	8	1	
”Inclusive edu*”	11 362	15	174	3	35
”Special needs teach*”	131	2	0	1	0
”Special edu*”	28 497	47	210/2	4	35
”Special teach*”	438	1	2	0	1

Search – Swepub 250403	**Antal träffar**	Gymnasi*	Fenomenolog*	Livsvärld	Hermeneuti*	Agens
Specialped*	4752	128	15	17	33	4
”Särskilt stöd”	180	12	2	1	2	0
Inkluder*	5009	133	16	2	11	27
Anpassning*	1581	34	9	8	3	5
Speciallär*	112	8	0	0	1	0
Specialundervis*	60	5	2	0	2	0

Search – Web of Science 250403	**Antal träffar**	"Upper secondary school" + Swe*	Phenomenolo* + Swe*	Lifeworld	Hermeneuti*
SENCO	226	1	7	1	2
"Special Needs Edu*"	3152	15	35	3	8
"Inclusive edu*"	10 389	15	167	4	31
"Special needs teach*"	83	1	0	0	0
"Special edu*"	62 263	65	444/14	5	61
"Special teach*"	292	1	0	0	0

Search – Education Research Complete 250404	**Antal träffar**	"Upper secondary school" + Swe*	Phenomenolo*	Lifeworld	Hermeneuti*
SENCO	384	1	6	2	2
"Special Needs Edu*"	2570	20	24	4	5
"Inclusive edu*"	12 494	16	161	6	25
"Special needs teach*"	430	2	0	1	0
"Special edu*"	64 363	63	336	4	36
"Special teach*"	397	1	1	0	0

Search – Education Collection 250407	**Antal träffar**	”Upper secondary school” + Swe*	Phenomenolo* + Swe*	Lifeworld	Hermeneuti*
SENCO	389	1	14	4	6
”Special Needs Edu*”	384	0	0	0	0
”Inclusive edu*”	19 775	25	205	2	30
”Special needs teach*”	214	2	1	2	0
”Special edu*”	106 923	37	1053/16	6	97
”Special teach*”	608	0	2	0	0

Appendix 2 (Article 1, title: *SENCOs' lived experiences of working through the COVID-19 pandemic in Swedish upper-secondary school*)

Search – Scopus 220321	**Antal träffar**	+ Pandem*	+ COVID*	+ Lockdown	+Lock-down
SENCO	237	6	6	1	0
"Special Needs Education"	487	3	4	2	0
"Inclusive education"	6415	62	64	9	1
"Special needs edu*"	521	3	4	2	0
"Special needs teach*"	91	0	0	0	0
"Special edu*"	24 488	213	230	34	1
"Special teach*"	370	1	2	0	0

Search – Web of Science 220321	**Antal träffar**	+ Pandem*	+ COVID*	+ Lockdown	+Lock-down
SENCO	81	5	5	3	0
"Special Needs Education"	239	5	4	1	0
"Inclusive education"	4503	48	56	3	0
"Special needs edu*"	258	5	4	1	0
"Special needs teach*"	42	1	1	0	0
"Special edu*"	15 183	167	191	31	1
"Special teach*"	161	1	2	0	0

Search – Education Collection 220321	**Antal träffar**	+ Pandem*	+ COVID*	+ Lockdown	+Lock-down
SENCO	146	3	4	1	0
”Special Needs Education”	1666	15	15	6	0
”Inclusive education”	6947	70	67	6	0
”Special needs edu*”	17	0	0	0	0
”Special needs teach*”	190	0	0	0	0
”Special edu*”	765	2	3	0	0
”Special teach*”	20	2	1	0	1

Search – Education Research Complete 220321	**Antal träffar**	+ Pandem*	+ COVID*	+ Lockdown	+Lock-down
SENCO	322	8	8	2	1
”Special Needs Education”	1987	13	14	7	2
”Inclusive education”	9135	36	31	2	0
”Special needs edu*”	2011	13	14	7	2
”Special needs teach*”	407	0	0	0	0
”Special edu*”	54 407	265	269	32	5
”Special teach*”	342	0	0	0	0

Appendix 3 (Article 2, title: *The Intertwinement of Lived Body, Lived Room and Professional Ethos in Special Educational Needs Coordinators' Everyday Worklife*)

Scopus 230928	**Number of hits**	+ ethic*/+agency	+ room/+agency	+ spac*/ + environment*	+ body/ +agency	+ corp*	+ agency/ +SENCO	+ environment*/+ body/+agency
SENCO	227	3	1	2	8	1	9	8
"Inclusive edu*"	8716	175	75	404/94	173	49	209	1372/32/28
"Special needs edu*"	30 636	716/31	390/11	19	14	2	21	93
"Special needs teach*"	122	0	3	1	3	1	1	14
"Special edu*"	28 844	348/16	281/6	501/95	696/16	174	704/10	2851/83
"Special teach*"	421	9	9	10	8	1	3	58

Web of science 231002	**Number of hits**	+ ethic*/ +agency	+ room/ +agency	+ spac*/ +environment*	+ body/ +agency	+ corp*/ +agency	+ agency/ +SENCO	+ environment*/+ body/+agency
SENCO	99	0	2	1	5	0	4	1
"Inclusive edu*"	7019	150	115	394/80	171	69	292/3	1174/35/0
"Special needs edu*"	2597	32	25	56	57	26	115	300/9/0
"Special needs teach*"	66	0	0	1	2	0	2	6
"Special edu*"	49 340	483/31	1155/	45	1025/26	408/21	1164/4	3943/94/3
"Special teach*"	205	4	2	4	8	3	6	24/1/0

Education Collection 231004	**Number of hits**	+ ethic*	+ room	+ spac*	+ body	+ corp*	+ agency	+ environment*/+ body/+agency (+agency)
SENCO	166	1	1	1	6	0	9	14
”Inclusive edu*”	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
”Special needs edu*”	18	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
”Special needs teach*”	207	0	2	3	0	1	5	25
”Special edu*”	846	19	15	18	9	7	41	137/9/0 (41)
”Special teach*”	603	7	14	10	8	9	21	75/1/0 (3)

Education Research Complete 231011	**Number of hits**	+ ethic*/ +agency	+ room/ +agency	+ spac*/ +agency	+ body/ +agency	+ corp*/ +agency	+ agency/ +SENCO	+ environment*/+ body/+agency (+agency)
SENCO	362	0	4	6	7	1	14	14/0/0 (0)
”Inclusive edu*”	10 980	219/6	108/1	405/23	177/10	73/2	291/3	1604/28/0 (36)
”Special needs edu*”	2 405	30	20	38	34	7	70	239/6/0 (8)
”Special needs teach*”	423	1	1	3	2	1	1	11/0 (0)
”Special edu*”	61 852	602/17	574/10	565/20	681/21	419/17	1 488/13	4615/79/0 (78)
”Special teach*”	392	4	11	4	7	4	7	26/3/0 (0)

Appendix 4 *(*Article 3, title: *Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs): gatekeepers for inclusionary ideals – the role of professional relationships in an era of neoliberal marketisation of Swedish schools)*

Search – Scopus 230426	**Antal träffar**	+ relation*	+ "intersubjective relation*"	+ profess*	+informal*	Phenomenolog*	Agency
SENCO	222	24	0	47	1	6	9
"Inclusive edu*"	8252	1403	1	1569/ +informal 16	63	110	196
"Special needs edu*"	600	85	0	109	8	6	20
"Special needs teach*"	112	20	0	31	1	0	1
"Special edu*"	26821	4007	3	4522/ + informal 56	203	145	657/+relation*101
"Special teach*"	408	66	0	108	4	2	3

Search – Web of Science 230426	**Antal träffar**	+ relation*	+ "intersubjective relation*"	+ profess*	+ informal*	+ Phenomenolog*	+ Agency
SENCO	104	8	0	16	0	4	4
"Inclusive edu*"	22929	3917	1	3897/+informal 49	336	355	1509/+ relation* 55
"Special needs edu*"	2368	532	0	388	24	27	105
"Special needs teach*"	59	12	0	17	1	0	2
"Special edu*"	47053	7039	1	5201/+informal 57	252	267	1087/+ relation* 196
"Special teach*"	197	27	0	46	1	0	7

Search – Education Collection 230427	**Antal träffar**	+ relation*	+ ”intersubjective relation*”	+ profess*	+informal*	Phenomenolog*	Agency
SENCO	155	26	0	35	3	3	5
”Inclusive edu*”	13	5	0	5	0	0	0
”Special needs edu*”	18	1	0	5	0	0	0
”Special needs teach*”	200	32	0	24	3	2	4
”Special edu*”	800	250	0	183	13	6	39
”Special teach*”	590	132	0	107	5	2	20

Search – Education Research Complete 230427	**Antal träffar**	+ relation*	+ ”intersubjective relation*”	+ profess*	+informal*	Phenomenolog*	Agency
SENCO	348	44	0	57	2	3	12
”Inclusive edu*”	10 022	1787	1	2,202/+relation* 415/ +SENCO 5	82	99	253/ + relation* 61
”Special needs edu*”	2247	530	0	402/+relation* 123/	20	19	68
”Special needs teach*”	420	19	0	26	1	0	1
”Special edu*”	52 278	7493	1	12206/ +relation* 2121/+SENCO 13	250/+profess* 88		1166/+profess*268 /+relation 58
”Special teach*”	212	28	0	60	0	1	4

Appendix 5 (Article 4, title: *Special Educational Needs Coordinators' Boundary Work in Swedish Upper-Secondary School*)

Search – Scopus 240422	**Number of hits**	+ boundar*	+ fringe*	+ gap*/ +agency	+ network*/ +agency	+ agency/ +tension*	+ inclusion*/ +tension*	+ profession*/tension*	+ tension*/+network*
SENCO	230	2	0	7	2	10	56	49	8
”Inclusive edu*”	9794	71	3	396/ 14	315/8	225	4384/113	119	200/8
”Special needs edu*”	682	4	1	23	16	24	191/5	115	11
”Special needs teach*”	122	1	0	3	3	2	17	34	0
”Special edu*”	28 987	129	4	797/18	608/19	709/9	4059/95	4675/49	238/8
”Special teach*”	423	1	0	2	16	3	35	106	0

Search – Web of Science 240422	**Number of hits**	+ boundar*	+ fringe*	+ gap*/ +agency	+ network*/ +agency	+ agency/ +tension*	+ inclusion*/ +tension*	+ profession*/ +tension*	+ tension*/+ network**
SENCO	108	2	0	4	0	5	30	18	4
”Inclusive edu*”	7 249	61	2	322/17	264/11	300/12	3374/80	1335/27	148/5
”Special needs edu*”	2653	15	0	95/8	127/9	117/0	489/8	391/4	27/2
”Special needs teach*”	66	0	0	3	1	2	13	22	0
”Special edu*”	50 107	206	6	1237/42	1533/54	1200/11	4012/	61	235/8
”Special teach*”	211	1	0	5	11	6	22	42	0

Search – Education Collection 240424	**Number of hits**	+ boundar*	+ fringe*	+ gap*/ +agency	+ network*/ +agency	+ agency/ +tension*	+ inclusion*/ +tension*	+ profession*/ +tension*	+ tension*/+ network*
SENCO	164	5	0	18	11	17	88	98	12
”Inclusive edu*”	14	0	0	3	0	0	7	10	0
”Special needs edu*”	31	1	0	0	1	1	8	11	1
”Special needs teach*”	359	0	0	9	4	9	50	76	0
”Special edu*”	1448	6	0	44	25	58	183	371/5	7
”Special teach*”	1066	0	1	7	22	30	84/0	201/0	2

Search – Education Research Complete 240430	**Number of hits**	+ boundar*	+ fringe*	+ gap*/ +agency	+ network*/ +agency	+ agency/ +tension*	+ inclusion*/ +tension*	+ profession*/ +tension*	+ tension*/+ network*
SENCO	358	2	0	10	9	14	86	62	11
”Inclusive edu*”	11 227	95	2	304/9	256/8	302/12	8495/170	1759/57	238/8
”Special needs edu*”	2430	10	1	53/2	76/3	70/1	766/18	394/10	50/2
”Special needs teach*”	423	0	0	3	2	1	24	22	0
”Special edu*”	62 227	182	11	1208/26	1126/43	1497/14	6658/109	7063/102	500/21
”Special teach*”	395	1	0	3	6	8	39	68	0

Appendix 6 (SENCOs' agency, integrating essay)

Search – Scopus 240819	**Number of hits**	+ agency/profession*	+ action/profession*	+ "action space"/action-space	+ "space of action"	+ work/agency	+ efficien*/agency	+ proficien*/agency	+ efficacy/agency
SENCO	238	10	6	0/0	0	50	2	2	3
"Inclusive edu*"	10 439	237	782	0/0	1	1808/54	180	66	446/9
"Special needs edu*"	701	24	50	0/0	0	96	12	4	18
"Special needs teach*"	124	1	9	0/0	0	31	2	0	6
"Special edu*"	29 729	724/168	1104/277	0/0	0	4017/163	531/85	304/7	1030/16
"Special teach*"	427	3	22	0/0	0	77	19	4	7

Search – Web of Science 240820	**Number of hits**	+ agency/profession*	+ action/Profession*	+ "action space"/action-space	+ "space of action"	+ work/agency	+ efficien*/agency	+ proficien*/agency	+ efficacy/agency
SENCO	105	4	2	0/0	0	24	0	0	3
"Inclusive edu*"	7572	316/86	592/134	0/0	1	2445/147	111	52	638/29
"Special needs edu*"	2719	119	106	0/0	0	880/61	44	29	151
"Special needs teach*"	67	2	4	0/0	0	27	0	0	10
"Special edu*"	51 039	1235/220	1502/281	0/0	0	10259/463	1250/39	567/14	2767/86
"Special teach*"	216	6	10	0/0	0	54	6	1	9

Search – Education Collection 240826	**Number of hits**	+ agency/profession*	+ action/Profession*	+ ”Action space”/action-space	+ ”space of action”	+ Work/agency	+ efficien*/agency	+ proficien*/agency	+ Efficacy/agency
SENCO	166	8	10	0/0	0	20	2	0	5
”Inclusive edu*”	9066	26	618/32	0/0	0	1528/74	84	90	464/9
”Special needs edu*”	17	0	1	0/0	0	1	0	0	0
”Special needs teach*”	208	5	12	0/0	0	36	2	3	5
”Special edu*”	103 527	6037/1136	3513/800	0/0	0	12 227/1114	1514/102	2396/134	3063/62
”Special teach*”	605	21	30	0/0	0	101	10	5	13

Search – Education Research Complete 240827	**Number of hits**	+ agency/profession*	+ action/Profession*	+ ”Action space”/action-space	+ ”space of action”	+ Work/agency	+ efficien*/agency	+ proficien*/agency	+ Efficacy/agency
SENCO	372	15	12	0/0	0	56	3	0	4
”Inclusive edu*”	11576	314/80	694/17	0/0	0	1831/97	123	87	446/14
”Special needs edu*”	2458	72	88	0/0	0	330/26	23	13	106
”Special needs teach*”	424	1	5	0/0	0	25	2	2	4
”Special edu*”	62 734	1510/241	2839/346	0/0	0	6080/261	8609/18	771/10	1733/36
”Special teach*”	395	8	24	0/0	0	81	7	2	5

Appendix 7
Facebookinlägg på specialpedagogforum

Deltagare sökes till studie om specialpedagogers yrkesvardag.

Är du utbildad specialpedagog och verksam på ett gymnasium? Då kanske du är intresserad av att vara med i en studie om specialpedagogers arbetsvardag? Studien utförs inom ramen för mitt doktorsavhandlingsarbete på Göteborgs universitet. Deltagandet involverar tre stycken intervjuer (Digitala eller irl om det görs Covid-säkert) utspridda över 6-8 månader samt dagboksskrivande, ca. en anteckning i veckan under 4-5 månader. Jag söker tio deltagare med variation avseende år i yrket sedan specialpedagogexamen, stora och små gymnasieskolor, kommunal och privat huvudman, teoretiskt-, praktiskt-, och introduktionsprogram samt deltids och heltidsanställning som specialpedagog.

För mer information hör av dig till mig: Jonas Udd, Doktorand på Utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet.

Mejl: jonas.udd@gu.se

Mobil: (…)

Vänligen

/Jonas Udd

Appendix 8
Till dig som är specialpedagog på gymnasiet

Information och förfrågan om deltagande i en studie om specialpedagogers yrkesvardag

Specialpedagoger har ofta en komplex yrkesvardag med många uppgifter och uppdrag - dessa involverar elever såväl som andra individer från skola och hem samt representanter från olika myndigheter och organisationer. Syftet med studien är att skapa förståelse för hur specialpedagoger skapar, förhandlar och upprätthåller handlingsutrymme i denna komplexa yrkesvardag.

Studien fokuserar på tre olika områden av specialpedagogers yrkesvardag, dessa är: 1. De yrkesrelationer specialpedagogen skapar och upprätthåller 2. Specialpedagogens verktygslåda 3. Lärmiljöer och andra rum i specialpedagogens yrkesvardag.

Studien avser att ge en fördjupad förståelse för specialpedagogers möjligheter att handla i sin yrkesvardag. Denna kunskap och förståelse kan sedan exempelvis användas för att utveckla och förbättra specialpedagogutbildningen vid Göteborgs universitet samt i förlängningen också bidra till att utveckla gymnasieskolors arbete med elever i behov av särskilt stöd.

Du som deltagare i studien ska arbeta på gymnasienivå och ha en specialpedagogexamen från 1993 som tidigast samt ha minst tre års yrkeserfarenhet som specialpedagog. Du och övriga deltagare i studien kommer att väljas med syfte att få en spridning inom gruppen mellan stora och små gymnasieskolor, kommunala och privata huvudmän samt deltids- och heltidsanställda specialpedagoger. Sammanlagt tio personer kommer att delta i studien. Gymnasieskolan är fokus för studien då studier av detta slag är mycket få inom sagda skolform.

Metoder för datainsamling är intervjuer och dagboksanteckningar. Samtliga deltagare ska medverka i tre intervjuer över en period av 6-8 månader. Dagboksanteckningarna pågår mellan intervju ett och två samt mellan intervju två och tre. Du som deltagarna förväntas skriva dagboksanteckningar en gång i veckan som ett minimum men du får självfallet skriva mer om du så vill. Intervjuerna kommer att genomföras på din arbetsplats eller över digitala kommunikationsformer som Teams eller Zoom. Varje intervju beräknas ta 60-90 minuter. En av intervjuerna kommer delvis att vara en promenadintervju i och runt skolans lokaler, de två övriga intervjuerna genomförs förslagsvis sittande i ett lugnt och avskilt rum på din arbetsplats.

Du som deltagare har rätten att inte besvara frågor du känner att du inte vill besvara och du har rätten att närsomhelst dra dig ur och avsluta ditt deltagande i studien.

Skolledaren på din arbetsplats kommer att vara informerad om att du ingår i en studie, men kommer inte att få någon information om vad som sägs under intervjuerna eller vad du skriver i din dagbok. Du som deltagare och den skola du arbetar vid kommer i studien att vara helt anonymiserade. I intervjun använder vi inte skolans namn, någon elevs namn, ditt namn eller någon i personalens namn, detta som skydd för din och andras integritet.

Ingen känslig information om elever i allmänhet eller elever i behov av särskilt stöd är av intresse och ska inte beröras i studien. Inte heller frågor rörande någons etnicitet, politiska tillhörighet, religiösa eller filosofiska övertygelser, fackliga verksamhet, hälsa, sexuell orientering, sexliv, lagöverträdelser, domar och/eller rättsliga påföljder av något slag är av intresse. Om en intervju skulle verka vara på väg mot ett av dessa, eller liknande ämnesområden, förbehåller jag mig, som forskare, rätten att tillfälligt pausa intervjun och inspelningen av densamma så att ingen känslig information kommer i dagern.

Materialet kommer att hanteras, behandlas och sparas på ett konfidentiellt och säkert vis så att ingen obehörig kommer åt materialet, allt i enlighet med Vetenskapsrådets forskningsetiska principer. Då Göteborgs universitet är en myndighet så lyder organisationen under offentlighetsprincipen vilket gör att studiens empiri kan begäras ut för granskning av andra personer som bedöms vara behöriga för detta, därför är det av högsta vikt att du och din arbetsplats är helt anonymiserade. Du som deltagare kommer att få fylla i en blankett rörande informerat samtycke innan studien påbörjas, blanketten ser du nedan.

Om du har några ytterligare frågor så besvarar jag dem gärna via mejl eller telefon. Jag som genomför studien heter Jonas Udd och är doktorand vid institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik, Utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten, Göteborgs universitet.

Vänligen
Jonas Udd
2020-11-24
Göteborgs Universitet

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Appendix 9

Samtycke till att delta i studie rörande specialpedagogers yrkesvardag

Jag har läst och förstått den information om studien som anges i dokumentet *"Information och förfrågan om deltagande i en studie om specialpedagogers yrkesvardag"*. Jag har fått möjlighet att ställa frågor och jag har fått dem besvarade. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen.

☐ Jag samtycker till att delta i studien som beskrivs i dokumentet *"Information och förfrågan om deltagande i en studie om specialpedagogers yrkesvardag"*

☐ Jag samtycker till att mina personuppgifter behandlas på det sätt som beskrivs i dokumentet *"Information och förfrågan om deltagande i en studie om specialpedagogers yrkesvardag"*

Plats och datum	Underskrift och namnförtydligande
……..	…….
……	…..……..…….

Appendix 10
Frågor till "lära-känna-varandra-intervjun"

Nedanstående frågor är en hjälp i urvalet av deltagare till studien för att skapa spridning vad gäller år i yrket sedan specialpedagogexamen, anställningsform och arbetsplatsens förutsättningar

- Vilket år tog du specialpedagogexamen?
- Hur länge har du arbetat som specialpedagog?
- Vad har du för grundutbildning? (Behörighetsgivande utbildning till spec. ped. -programmet.)
- Är du anställd deltid eller heltid som specialpedagog? Om du är deltidsanställd, på hur många procent är du anställd? Har du något ytterligare uppdrag på skolan? Har du annan/andra anställning/anställningar?
- Är du anställd på en verksamhet med privat eller kommunal huvudman?
- Vilka gymnasieprogram finns det på skolan?
- Antal elever på skolan?
- Hur stor är personalstyrkan? (Både undervisande personal och övrig personal)
- Vilket/vilka program arbetar du med?
- Hur ligger skolan placerad? Centralt? Förort? Landsbygd? Samhälle? Stad?
- Hur ser skolans upptagningsområde ut? (Varifrån kommer eleverna?)

Appendix 11

Intervjuguide 1

Yrkesval

- Berätta om hur och varför du blev specialpedagog
    - Är yrket så som du föreställde dig det?
        - Det förväntade i yrket
        - Det oväntade i yrket
    - Ägnar du för mycket tid till något?
        - Det icke önskvärda
    - Ägnar du för lite tid till något?
        - Det önskvärda läget
    - Vad skulle du vilja förändra/utveckla?
    - Vad fungerar väl?

Arbetets organisation

- Kan du berätta om ditt uppdrag?
- Kan du berätta om dina arbetsuppgifter?
    - Hur ser organisationsstrukturen ut på skolan?
    - Hur ser chefsstrukturen ut?
    - Hur skapas dina uppdrag?
    - Hur skapas dina uppgifter?
        - Möten
        - Arbetslag
        - Elevhälsan
            - EHT-möten
            - Yrkesgrupper
        - Samarbete
        - Styrning och ledning
            - Vad, hur, när, var, vem/vilka, varför, vems
        - Makt
            - Arbetsbeskrivning
            - Formell
            - Informell
            - Problemformuleringsprivilegium
            - Tolkningsföreträde
            - Sista ordet

Relationer

- Berätta om de kontaktytor du har i och utanför skolan
- Berätta om de relationer du upprätthåller för att utöva yrket
- Berätta om de relationer du skapar för att utöva yrket
- Vilka relationer behöver du för att kunna utföra mitt arbete?
- Hur arbetar du för att skapa, utveckla och upprätthålla dessa relationer?
- Hur påverkas ditt handlingsutrymme av relationerna?
- Hur påverkar du relationerna för att skapa handlingsutrymme?
    - Grupper
    - Hierarkier

  - Den andre
  - Etiskt ansvar
  - Det specialpedagogiska uppdraget
    - Uppgifter
    - Uppdrag
    - Möten
    - Det formella
    - Det informella
    - Rum
    - Artefakter, don, ting, saker
    - Metoder
    - Makt
      - Arbetsbeskrivning
      - Formell
      - Informell
      - Problemformuleringsprivilegium
      - Tolkningsföreträde
      - Sista ordet

Levt rum

- Var sker ditt arbete?
- Varför där?
- Hur påverkar de platser/rum du utför ditt arbete i vad du kan göra?
- Hur påverkar du de platser/rum du arbetar i och vad som går att göra där?
- Hur påverkar rummen/platserna ditt handlingsutrymme?
- Hur påverkar du rummen/platserna för att skapa handlingsutrymme?
  - Berätta om skolans lärmiljöer
    - Hur arbetar du med dessa?
    - Vilken betydelse har de för ditt arbete? Hur, varför, när för vem?
  - Berätta vad tycker du om skolans arkitektur i relation till ditt arbete?
  - Hur påverkar arkitekturen förutsättningarna för ditt arbete?
    - Planlösning
    - Klassrum
    - Biytor
      - Korridorer, café, skrymslen, vrår, kopieringsrum, förvaringsytor
    - Elevutrymmen
    - Ute – inne
    - Bamba
    - Personalens fikarum
    - Vägen till och från skolan för dig, övrig personal och elever

Saker, ting, don

- Berätta om de ting/saker du använder dig av för att uträtta ditt arbete
- Vilka verktyg använder du dig av för att utföra ditt arbete?
- Hur påverkar verktygen ditt handlingsutrymme?
- Hur använder du verktygen för att skapa handlingsutrymme?
- Vad måste en specialpedagog ha i sin verktygslåda? Varför?

- Hur använder du verktygen?
- För vad används de?
- Är de samma för andra?
- Använder andra verktygen och i sådana fall hur?
- När ett verktyg inte fungerar…
- När ett verktyg ”går sönder”
- När ett verktyg inte får avsedd verkan…
- I vilka sammanhang ingår verktyget/verktygen?
    - Utredningar
    - Åtgärdsprogram
    - Anpassningar
    - Åtgärder
    - Hjälpmedel
    - Lärmiljöer
    - Nationella styrdokument
    - Lokala styrdokument och handlingsplaner
    - Utbildning
- Berätta om de metoder du använder dig av för att utföra ditt arbete
    - Utredningar
    - Åtgärdsprogram
    - Anpassningar
    - Åtgärder
    - Hjälpmedel
    - Lärmiljöer
    - SUG
    - Inkludering
    - Exkludering
    - Integrering
    - Handledning
    - Enskild undervisning

Inkludering

- Berätta vad inkludering innebär för dig.
- Berätta om hur dina kollegor och andra samarbetspartners ser på inkludering.
- Berätta om hur dina elever ser på inkludering.
    - Vad innebär det konkret i verksamheten?
        - Vad, hur, när, varför, vem, vilka?
        - Verktyg, lokaler, rum. Relationer?
        - Hur skapas och upprätthålls samt används inkluderande lärmiljöer? Vad är en inkluderande lärmiljö?

Appendix 12

Intervjuguide nr 2

Vad har du tänkt på sedan senaste gången?
Vilka är dina största utmaningar?
Vad ser du för möjligheter att utveckla och förändra ditt arbete?
Hur hittar du balansen mellan att utsätta relationer för tryck och när du backar? När är du balettdansös och när sätter du dig i bulldozern?
Hur upprätthåller du gränser?
Hur skapar du gränser?
Hur balanserar du samarbete och självständighet?
Hur utvidgar du gränser vid behov?
Behöver du backa tillbaka ibland när du försökt vidga en gräns?
Vilka är de svåraste nitarna du gått på? Varför dem?
(Att vara överallt. Att undervisa. Att vara bollplank. Att förväntas kunna hjälpa med det som man inte kan.)
Betydelsen av ett externt nätverk?

Covid-19

Hur har Covid-pandemin påverkat ditt arbete?
Vad har förändrats? Hur har det förändrats?
Vad vet du nu om ditt jobb som du inte visste innan?
Vilka förgivettaganden har uppdagats? Vilken är den saknade kon? Vad har du fått syn på?
Vilka förändringar vill du permanenta?
Vad vill du sluta göra som du fått syn på?
Vad vill du ska sluta ske på skolan som du fått syn på?
Hur har ni arbetat med stöd under pandemin?
Hur har pandemin påverkat elever i behov av stöd?
Hur har pandemin påverkat ditt handlingsutrymme?
Vilka verktyg har pandemin tvingat dig att använda?
Vilka verktyg har du fått bygga om eller lägga på hyllan?
Hur har pandemin påverkat ditt arbete med relationer?
Hur har pandemin påverkat de rum du arbetar i?
Har skolan flyttat in i hemmen?
Har ditt arbete flyttat in i ditt hem och din fritid?
Hur arbetar du med gränser under pandemin?

Inkludering

Vad innebär inkludering för dig?
Arbetar du med ett inkluderande perspektiv?
Arbetar skolan med ett inkluderande perspektiv?
Arbetar övriga kollegor med ett inkluderande perspektiv?

Appendix 13
Intervjuguide nr 3
(Följdfrågor: Hur tänker du? Hur känner du? Vad menar du? Hur har du agerat? Hur skulle du vilja agera?)
Vad har du tänkt på sedan senast?
Har din förståelse av din yrkesvardag förändrats av deltagande i denna studie?
Vad kännetecknar en yrkesskicklig specialpedagog?
Hur bemöter du motstånd i ditt arbete som specialpedagog?
Hur gör du för att göra dig förstådd när du talar med elever, vårdnadshavare och de olika yrkesgrupper du möter?

Delaktighet
Vad betyder delaktighet för dig i ditt yrkesutövande?
Har debatten kring inkludering gjort att du får ändra hur du utövar ditt yrke?

Att använda kroppen i yrket
Det kom fram i flera av intervjuerna att detta var något de nu saknade i och med pandemin
Hur är kroppen betydelsefull för dig som specialpedagog?
Har du fått syn på något mer rörande detta i och med digitaliseringen av gymnasieutbildningen?

Det personen tar med sig in i yrket
Vad är det som gör att du är specialpedagog på det sätt du är?
Vilka erfarenheter är viktiga för det du gör i din yrkesvardag?
På vilket sätt syns din specialpedagogutbildning i din yrkesvardag?
Syns dina värderingar i det du gör i din yrkesvardag?
Vad kan du göra för att förändra din yrkesvardag, hur gör du?
Hur kvalitetssäkras specialpedagogers arbete?
Vad är det som avgör yrkets förutsättningar?

Gränser
Vad tar du spjärn emot i ditt arbete? (Ideologiskt, praktiskt, teoretiskt, identitet)
Vad kontrasterar du dig emot?
Vad är du inte som specialpedagog?

Skolkultur
Hur skulle du definiera skolkultur?
Spelar skolkultur in i hur du kan utföra ditt arbete?

Vad har ni för skolkultur på er arbetsplats?
Är du del av skolkulturen?
Hur upplever du skolkulturen i relation till ditt arbete?
Hur förhåller du dig som specialpedagog till det som ”sitter i väggarna”?
Hur kan den hjälpa ditt arbete?
Hur kan den begränsa ditt arbete?
Hur gör du för att försöka förändra skolkulturen?
Hur gör du för att försöka upprätthålla skolkulturen?
Finns det subkulturer? Vilken betydelse har dessa för din yrkesvardag?

Appendix 14
Teman dagbok 1

De rum jag arbetar i.

- Hur påverkar de platser/rum jag utför mitt arbete i vad jag kan göra?
- Hur påverkar jag de platser/rum jag arbetar i och vad som går att göra där?
- Hur påverkar rummen/platserna mitt handlingsutrymme?
- Hur påverkar jag rummen/platserna för att skapa handlingsutrymme?

De verktyg jag använder mig av.

- Vilka verktyg använder jag mig av för att utföra mitt arbete?
- Vad händer när ett verktyg inte fungerar som det är tänkt?
- Hur påverkar verktygen mitt handlingsutrymme?
- Hur använder jag verktygen för att skapa handlingsutrymme?

De relationer jag skapar och upprätthåller i mitt arbete.

- Vilka relationer behöver jag för att kunna utföra mitt arbete?
- Hur arbetar jag för att skapa, utveckla och upprätthålla dessa relationer?
- Hur påverkas mitt handlingsutrymme av relationerna?
- Hur påverkar jag relationerna för att skapa handlingsutrymme?

Appendix 15
Teman dagbok 2

I denna sista dagbok har jag fyra frågor till dig att reflektera över. Om det går att ge konkreta exempel från din yrkesvardag för att klargöra en reflektion gör gärna det. Skriv minst en anteckning i veckan med start v. 18. Mejla mig dina reflektioner senast måndag den 24 maj.

- Vad kännetecknar en yrkesskicklig specialpedagog?
- Hur sätter du gränser för ditt arbete som specialpedagog?
- Hur bemöter du motstånd i ditt arbete som specialpedagog?
- Hur använder du ”kroppen som verktyg” i ditt arbete som specialpedagog?

I dina anteckningar, tänk på att anonymisera personer, verksamheter och platser. Tänk även på att elevers eller kollegors hälsa, känslig information om elever i allmänhet eller elever i behov av särskilt stöd inte är av intresse och inte ska beröras i dagboken. Inte heller frågor rörande någons etnicitet, politiska tillhörighet, religiösa eller filosofiska övertygelser, fackliga verksamhet, hälsa, sexuell orientering, sexliv, lagöverträdelser, domar och/eller rättsliga påföljder av något slag är av intresse och ska följaktligen inte heller beröras i dagboken.

Appendix 16
Analys artikel 1 – den slutgiltiga analysen skedde under hösten 2022

Teman i empirin

Fler elever är i behov av stöd

- Några få elever trivs bättre och presterar bättre: De med sociala svårigheter samt de med hög frånvaro – dock inte rätt över, vissa har fortsatt problem med närvaron
- Fler elever har hamnat i risk för att inte nå gymnasieexamen

Nya grupper av elever är i behov av stöd

- Elever som tidigare var högpresterande har nu tappat motivationen, de saknar struktur och har svårt att prestera
- Elever som låg på E-nivå får inte det stöd som de tidigare har fått genom det sammanhang de befunnit sig i på skolan där de kunnat fråga kompisar, läraren, någon i korridoren eller andra vuxna i skolan de litar på

Anpassningar och stöd på distans räcker inte till för att eleverna ska klara kunskapskrav eller må bra

- Elever loggar in på lektioner men slår inte på kameran och svarar inte på frågor – lärare vet inte om de faktiskt är där
- Vissa elever har fått komma in ändå som en form av anpassning eller särskilt stöd
- Svårigheter för vissa lärare att lära sig flera digitala forum och vill att elever ska använda de forum som läraren är bekväm i
- Organisation och schema har fått förändras för att få fjärrundervisningen att fungera
- Alla deltagare verkar ha landat i att de måste ta in eleverna i viss utsträckning, men särskilt då de som behöver anpassningar eller särskilt stöd. Praktiska problem i glesbygd, schemaproblem för lärare och elever, konflikter med vårdnadshavare och skola om elevers behov, ”vi är på bristningsgränsen”, ”Vi håller näsan över vattenytan”, ”vi kämpar på fram till sommaren”
- Svårigheter för specialpedagoger att hitta balansen mellan att kravställa elever och lärare och att vara förstående mot dem. I slutänden måste de ändå jobba med förståendet/empatin vad det verkar för annars pajar relationen och den ses som en absolut förutsättning för att kunna utföra arbetet som specialpedagog ”utan relationer har jag ingenting”.

Skolans kompensatoriska uppdrag har försvårats

- Elevernas hemmiljö skiljer sig åt, vissa har egna rum andra inte, vissa har många syskon, vissa är trångbodda, vissa har föräldrar hemma som hjälper dem med uppgifter och att skapa struktur, vissa har föräldrar som inte kan jobba hemifrån, någon elev har fått sitta på balkongen för att få studiero vid digital undervisning
- Spec ped försöker hjälpa elever med vardagsrutiner, att gå upp, gå ut och gå, käka frukost, göra sig i ordning, äta, träna osv
- Spec ped försöker hitta sätt att kompensera att de inte är på plats. Det blir mer administrativt arbete i form av dokument, uppföljning och telefonsamtal, chat, mejl och sms
- Spec ped försöker hitta sätt att göra de mer informella delarna av arbetet som att springa på någon i korridoren, fika en stund, sitta ned i bamba eller uppehållsrum och snacka via digitala medium men det fungerar olika väl för dem
- Att kunna trösta och lugna går inte på samma sätt när den fysiska närheten inte finns

Det förebyggande arbetet har fått stå tillbaka för det åtgärdande arbetet

- Förebyggande arbete och skolutvecklingsarbete har fått läggas på is och man ägnar sig åt åtgärdande arbete och försöker rädda det som räddas kan

Rutiner, struktur och sociala sammanhang som kommer med att gå till skolan är borta

- Elever äter inte frukost, de stiger inte upp ur sängen, de kommer inte ut, de tränar inte, de gör sig inte i ordning, de går inte till bamba, de träffar inte kompisar, de träffar inte andra vuxna än sina föräldrar

Kommunikationen har förändrats

- Det kommer inte elever eller lärare eller annan personal till spec peds kontor
- Spec ped kan inte gå runt och söka upp elever eller personal
- De där små stunderna av informell kommunikation i fikarum, elevuppehållsutrymmen, bamba och korridorer är borta
- Det är dock enklare att få till möten med vårdnadshavare och BUP, och andra instanser, ställtid är borta, restid är borta, elever vars föräldrar tidigare inte kom till skolan loggar in på digitala möten – detta är sådant spec ped kommer att fortsätta göra

- Nya kommunikationsvägar har öppnats upp där spec ped får fler möjligheter att kontakta elever och andra – detta är sådant spec ped kommer att fortsätta att göra

Att etablera nya relationer är svårare

- Mellan: Elever och elever, elever och personal, spec ped och annan personal, spec ped och elever
- Vissa elever har nu gått halva sin utbildning på distans utan att lära känna vare sig klasskamrater, lärare eller övrig skolpersonal

Psykisk ohälsa bland elever verkar öka

- Det är långa köer till BUP
- Utredningar ligger på vänt
- Att kunna trösta och lugna går inte på samma sätt när den fysiska närheten inte finns
- Oro för mörkertal vad gäller måendet bland eleverna då det är många som är svåra att fånga upp digitalt

Appendix 17

Analys artikel 2 – den slutgiltiga analysen skedde under våren 2025

KROPP Teman	**Tolkning**
Rysningar, känna av sin egen kropp, det som sker i maggropen	Kommunikation, förkroppsligad
Att signalera med kroppsspråk, mimik, signaler	Kommunicera, förkroppsligad, känna in
Att läsa in med kroppsspråk, mimik och signaler	Perception, öppenhet för den Andre
Att lyssna, att vilja se den Andre	Centralt för yrkesrollen
Att vänta ut den Andre, ge tid, förstå den Andres upplevelse av tiden	Att kroppsligt men i stunden otematiserat förstå den Andres levda tid och inte låta den egna levda tiden styra
Att lugna den Andre	Etik centralt i yrket - lågaffektiv
Att tänka på hur man uttrycker sig med kroppen men också på vad man säger, vilka ord man väljer	Etiskt förhållningsätt till kommunikation
Att veta när man ska vara fysisk och inte – att inte ha kroppskontakt kan vara lika empatiskt som att ha det	Att vara specialpedagog är att vara rätt i den stunden för just den personen. (SP6, intervju3, 1.01.10)
Att använda kroppen mer impressivt än expressivt	Pedagogisk takt, kropp och etik är sammanflätat i det intersubjektiva mötet
Det är något självklart, det är något man snappar upp	Detta är otematiserat i livsvärlden som en del av den naturliga inställningen
Att ha ett öppet kroppsspråk och vara lätt att läsa av	Ett etiskt förhållningsätt gentemot elever i behov av stöd som kanske inte har förtroende för vuxna eller har svårigheter att läsa kroppsspråk
RUM Teman	**Tolkning**
Att ha öppen dörr, låta folk trilla in, ha en välkomnande miljö, ha kontoret situerat där personal och elever passerar förbi	Att möta den andre, att vara tillgänglig, att arbeta runt eventuellt obehag att ta sig till spec peds kontor genom att göra det mysigt och välkomnande och tillgängligt – ta bort fysiska avstånd och på så sätt underlätta för de som upplever rummet som hotfullt eller besvärligt/ångestladdat
Att röra sig i lika miljöer för att möta elever och personal	Det levda rummets sammanflätning med spec peds agens
Att inte vara inkluderad i alla samtal i fikarummet pga att vara specialpedagog	Spec peds arbete görs i viss mån vid sidan av, inte dela av den intersubjektiva gemenskapen alltid, är något annat i lärares ögon – kanske både en förutsättning för yrket såväl som ett hinder i det tvetydliga varande specialpedagogens yrkesroll intar
Att byta rum/miljö beroende på kollegans behov	Det levda rummet fungerar som förklaring till detta – samma rum upplevs olika beroende på vem du är men också vem du delar rummet med.
Att fånga upp det spontana	Att vara lyhörd och möta den andre - korridorsmöten

Att använda många rum – att ha så många kanaler som möjligt	Att möta den Andre i dennes behov
Förändringar i relationer när skolan byggdes om	(SP4, intervju 1) 1.05.15
En skolas fysiska hjärta, vart är det situerat?	Kanske olika beroende på vem du frågar? Är det alla dessa hjärtan spec ped måste förstå och kunna använda sig av?
Att vara i klassrummet, att vara synlig, göra konkreta saker för elever och personal	Spec peds görande, deras agerande skapar förutsättningar för arbetet inte bara följder av agerandet/görandet.
Att möta personalen var som helst – inom lagens, moralens och rimlighetens gräns	Specialpedagogers arbete ska inte handla om specialpedagogen – det ska handla om andra
Att känna in rummet och att arbeta på ingivelse	Rummet och kroppens sammanflätning
Vad gör ett djur eller utomhustillvaron för det levda rummet och relationen i detta? Klappa ett djur, köra häst, promenera ihop, sitta på kuskbocken ihop, vara i verkstaden med handledare	Att blicka bortåt, att inte vara invasiv, att dela något annat än att mötas direkt i blicken, vad händer när två personer möts utan att möta blickar?
ETIK Teman	**Tolkning**
Belöningen i att hjälpa, att få respons,	Intersubjektiva i relationen, empati och att bry sig om den andre, reciprocitet
Att våga visa sig sårbar att ta kontakt med kollegor och andra	Att visa mod som specialpedagog, etiska ansvaret gentemot den andre gentemot yrkesrollen
Empati, nyfikenhet, människokärlek	
Att hitta balanser i relationer	
Hur de pratar om elever, hur lärare och annan personal pratar om elever, vilka ord som används	Etiskt ansvar för den Andre
Att våga utmana, våga vara kritisk och utmana men samtidigt vara ödmjuk	Pedagogisk takt?
Att vänta ut, att ställa frågor, att använda tystnaden	
Att stå upp för elever men också för lärare	
Att agera i tempo med de som har behov	Det är andra i fokus och annat än spec ped
Att svar snabbt på mejl, att få saker gjorda, att omsätta det omvårdande och empatiska i konkret faktisk handling	
Att samarbeta och utveckla en skola i samklang med ledning, elever och personal	Reciprocitet i arbetet och motiv
Att kunna blicka bort från individens behov och förändra organisationen så alla elever kan deltaga i undervisningen	
Att använda tystnaden, att vänta, att häva impulser i interaktion, att ge utrymme och tid åt andra att formulera sig – att lära sig leva i ovisshet	Kärnan i spec peds arbete – att kunna möta den andre på dennes arena
Att balansera i organisationen vid förändringsarbete och lyssna in elever och personal och ledning så att förändring sker på ett för dem hanterbart sätt	Spec ped som empatisk förändringsagent

Att uttrycka sig konkret och begripligt	
Att bygga självständighet hos andra – att hjälpa dem till självkänsla och självförtroende	
Att vänta ut eleven men ibland behöver man agera snabbt för elevens bästa – balanser och avvägningar	
	Spec ped verkar hantera motstånd genom att byta position, komplexiteten i uppdraget skapar utmaningar men också möjligheter att hantera dessa utmaningar Det holistiska i yrkesrollen/uppdraget. Kroppen konstituerar hela uppdraget. Hur de talar, hur de går, hur de sitter, hur de ser på andra eller inte ser på dem.
	Att de känner ett behov av att hälsa och vara glada och trevliga signalerar ju något – vadå? Rummens utformning och plats hänger ihop med det arbete som går att utföra. Även god organisation skapar handlingsutrymme. Vad är det för regionala världar och horisonter som finns här? Vilka avskuggningar (i enlighet med Husserl) har tingen? Hur rummet och relationer hänger ihop med handlingsutrymme.
	Kroppen får inte vara ett hinder. Betyder det att den måste vara en tillgång? Var och hur blir specialpedagogen till på skolan? De gemensamma mötena är viktiga för så många aspekter av yrket – inte bara för att skapa förändring det skapar också förutsägningar för att skapa förändring. Spec ped verkar ha lika stort behov av att vara i sociala sammanhang som att vara utanför dem i vissa situationer
	Att ge andra utrymme skapar handlingsutrymme – men ger aningen mindre kontroll? Rummets avskuggningar – vad bär klassrummet med sig kulturellt? Vad finns i den intentionala bågen? Rum som bjuder in till samtal och viss typ av möten är viktiga – relationen mellan det fysiska rummet och vad som går att göra där och vilken betydelse det får för yrkesutövandet och samarbetet Strategier för att utöva yrket som är explicit rotade i – som utgår från kroppen.

	Spec ped as the Other, de är inte lärare men de vill inte verka vara ett hot på något sätt – vad är det för gränser de jobbar med? Kroppen i specialpedagogik är ett utrymme som behöver utvecklas

Appendix 18

Analys artikel 3 – den slutgiltiga analysen skedde under hösten 2023

Tema: Intersubjektiva relationer	**Analys**
1. Relationen är central – en förutsättning för att kunna arbeta som specialpedagog	Den levda erfarenheten av relationer, det intersubjektiva i relationen. Det sociala sammanhanget
2. Skapa delaktighet	Relationer är konstituerande för specialpedagogens handlingsutrymme.
3. Att vara tillgänglig i rum och i tid och digitalt och känslomässigt, mejl, lärplattform, rummen på skolan, ta sig tid	Det är svårt att sära på rummet och relationen i en analys, det hänger ihop i livsvärlden… hur göra där, låta dem vara sammanflätade? Svårare att starta upp relationer online.
4. Tydlig rollfördelning	En av de stora skillnaderna mellan specialpedagoger och lärare är att de har olika uppgifter i samma uppdrag, detta blir dock otydligt i relation till vad som ska vara prioriterat när och vad som måste vara på plats för att det ena och det andra ska kunna ske. Funderar på om detta kan förklaras med olika typer av rationellt handlande enligt Schütz?
5. Användandet av det formella – mötesstrukturer, styrdokument	Den ökade arbetsbelastningen i form av enskilda fall och annat gör att den informella delen av arbetet försvinner? (Vad menar jag med informell? Icke uttalad? Okänd av ledning? Vad? Icke definierad i arbetsbeskrivning?) Den ökade mängden av enskilda fall förstärker klassiska svårigheter med specialpedagogens yrkesroll, svårigheter som länge aktivt försökts jobbas bort.
6. Användandet av det informella	Är detta de elever som tidigare har klarat sig genom att fråga en kompis, fråga i korridoren och vara med på lektionerna?
7. Att vara elevens talesperson	Se hela bilden, förstå vad varje uppgift har för del i sammanhanget – problemet med allt lärande är kanske att det under processen och innan är svårt att förstå vad delarna i helheten har för funktion – först i efterhand förstår man.
8. Att sätta press på relationer	När och varför – etik, moraliskt grundat, uppdraget specialpedagog
9. Språkbruk – hur formulerar du ett problem	Hur och varför, vem har problemformuleringsprivilegiet?
10. Att veta när det är läge att sätta ned foten	Hur och varför, etik, att stå upp för elever, moraliskt grundat beslut, bränna relationer?
11. Bekräfta andra	Varför – värdering, bygga sammanhang, professionen i relation till uppdraget

12. Att vara del av en skolkultur	Hur, varför – värdering, uppdrag, relationer
13. Att vara styrd av ens värderingar	Ta ett etiskt ansvar för relationen. Att se den Andre. Lögstrup, Levinas
14. Att lyssna på den andre – att erkänna den andre	Värdering, varför, hur Relationens betydelse för att eleverna ska våga lita på lärarna och vila i processen trots att de känner sig ovetande och kanske upplever en avsaknad av kontroll.
15. Att arbeta med gränser för vad specialpedagogens arbete	Hur och varför är – inte sugas in i arbete eller uppgifter pga empati – att ta spjärn mot saker – att kontrastera sig
16. Att ta plats och bli lyssnad på är en utmaning	Kommunikationen blir osäkrare och intersubjektiviteten i relationen blir lidande.
17. Att upprätthålla alla kontaktytor med föräldrar kollegor och övriga är en förutsättning	Handlingsutrymmet minskar för att hen träffar färre människor. Relationerna hjälper att skapa handlingsutrymme?
18. Relationen som en del av yrkesskickligheten som specialpedagog	Det är fokus på självständighet, agilitet och agens. Ständigt kunna ställa om. Ständigt kunna möta den Andre. Aldrig fastna eller stånga sig blodig
19. Att röra sig i alla ytor på skolan som ett led i att få relationer att fungera	Rummens utformning och plats hänger ihop med det arbete som går att utföra. Även god organisation skapar handlingsutrymme. Vad är det för regionala världar och horisonter som finns här? Vilka avskuggningar har tingen? Hur rummet och relationer hänger ihop med handlingsutrymme. Det sker en horisontförskjutning och de intersubjektiva relationerna förändras mellan spec ped och elever/lärare som en följd av att det levda rummet har flyttat in i det digitala rummet. Vad har hänt med livsvärldens sammanflätning och de mellanrum som finns mellan människor?
20. Det är någonting med struktur, det formella, det informella, organisation och det relationella – möjligheten att förändra, möjligheten att utveckla organisationen – när det formella inte funkar eller är för begränsande kommer det informella in som en möjlig väg att öppna upp för möjlighet att agera att förändra att utveckla att hitta stödmöjligheter till eleverna.	Organisationens vikt för att skapa handlingsutrymme. Att ta plats, Att kunna formulera sig, Att det finns forum att göra sig hörd i.
21. Tröghet i organisationer – svårt att få till förändring	Vad, men varför? Fördelar/nackdelar?

22. Du behöver vara lyhörd för skolkulturen för att kunna arbeta som specialpedagog framgångsrikt	Hur och vad, respekt, relationer, olika professioners funktion
23. Mötesplatser ute i skolan viktigt för relationerna	Skola som plats fungerade kompensatoriskt men den gjorde även tröskeln högre för att ta kontakt med specialpedagogen, den digitala tröskeln är inte lika hög så där blir det lättare för lärare att ta kontakt med spec. ped., samtidigt som det också blir fler elever som behöver stöd då den kompensation skolan som plats erbjuder försvunnit.
24. Att vara brobyggare mellan lärare och elever	Tydliggörande pedagogik. Först vid distansen går budskapet hem för då kan man inte kompensera för det den typen av pedagogik gör
25. Att vara inkännande	Hur, varför, ligga två steg före, erfarenhet, känna samhörighet
26. Att vara generös i relationer	Vad, att våga sträcka ut handen, att möta den Andre
27. Att vara modig	Vad, att våga stå upp för ideal, att våga iscensätta förändring
28. Att förstå den andre	Vad, att lyssna och se den Andre på riktigt
29. Att nudga – vara runt i organisationen och så små frön	Vad och hur, att skapa förändring genom små aktiviteter, det måste inte vara det stora och omstörtande, dessa är svåra att få igång medan respekt för kollegor och elevers vardag och små förändringar är mer acceptabla
30. Att inte provocera – att tona ned det specialpedagogiska	Vad och hur, tona ner hur man uttrycker sig, inte prata ”specialpedagogiska”, välja rätt uttryck, läsa av och förstå medarbetare
31. Att använda tystnad och häva impulser	Vad och hur, vänta på den Andre, inte förhäva sig, inte bli för mycket, skapa gemensamhet kring uppdrag och hur man förstår problem.
32. Att balansera – att möta en känsla med logik – inte känsla mot känsla, att kontrastera?	Vad, hur och varför, hitta balanser i intersubjektiva relationer och intersubjektiva nätverk
33. Ensamarbetet att inte kunna bonda med andra	Varför man skevar runt i hus och relationer
34. Att gå på känsla, professionell intuition	Hur och vad, förkroppsligat, magkänsla,
35. Att inte vara rädd i mötet eller samtalet	Vad och hur, specialpedagogiskt mod, att arbeta med människor och relationer, det är själva stoffet i specialpedagogers arbete

Appendix 19

Analys artikel 4 – den slutgiltiga analysen skedde under våren 2024

Teman	**Analys av empiriska exempel**
Konkreta gränser	Klassrum, skolan, utanför skolan – BUP, socialkontoret, vårdnadshavare, HVB-hemmet osv.
Abstrakta gränser	Yrkesroller, uppdrag, uppgifter, identiteter, relationer, EHT, Teamledargrupp, förstalärare, gränser mellan olika nivåer i organisationen – individ, grupp, skola – utanför – samhället.
Sammanflätningen av konkreta och abstrakta gränser	Olika uppdrag, uppgifter möts – olika tolkningar och syften av/med boundary objects
Relationens funktion i gränsarbetet	Att hantera närhet och distans och röra sig däremellan, vara elevers, vårdnadshavare och lärares talesperson, att skifta roll och perspektiv beroende på sammanhang och mottagare
Det formellas funktion i gränsarbetet	Arbetsbeskrivning, utbildning, policydokument, tjänsteplanering, formaliserad kommunikation – möten,
Det informellas funktion i gränsarbetet	Relationer, arbetet ute i skolbyggnaden, den öppna dörren in till kontoret, att ha förtroende och vara artig men inte be om lov, kommunikation
Levd kropp, levt rum, levd tid i gränsarbetet	Kroppsliga gränser, materiella, rumsliga, tidsliga osv… det outtalade man känner i kroppen.
Intersubjektivitet i gränsarbetet	Because of, in-order-to and reciprocity of motives
Etik i gränsarbetet	Yrkesetik där allt inte kan vara förformulerat – ett etiskt omdöme – ett professionellt etos som kompass i gränsarbetet, empati
Uppgifter i gränsarbetet	Ge enskilt stöd, stöd i smågrupper, viss undervisning, utreda, göra åtgärdsprogram, följa upp åtgärder
Uppdrag i gränsarbetet	Skapa inkluderande lärmiljöer, handleda lärare, arbeta med skolutveckling,
Ting i gränsarbetet – boundary objects – donsammanhang – abstrakta och konkreta ting – det medpresenterade i boundary objects – tingens avskuggningar	Elev i behov av särskilt stöd, åtgärdsprogrammet, anpassningar, åtgärder, skolutveckling, inkluderande lärmiljöer,
Motstånd i gränsarbetet	Problemformulering, aktiviteter, förändring, upprätthållandet av olika gränser,

Yrkesrollens definition i gränsarbetet	Demarkering av yrket, att hävda professionell jurisdiktion, att hitta rätt balans för att skapa och upprätthålla agens, erkännandet av andras kompetens,
Det spec ped är men även det spec ped inte är	Förälder, vän, kollega, expert, lärare, specialpedagog, speciallärare, fixare, elevassistent, provvakt, mellanledare, skolutvecklare, förändringsagent
Den yrkesskicklige specialpedagogen – vad som är kännetecknande för den i gränsarbetet	Görs arbetet i en boundary infrastructure? Utbildningens betydelse, betydelsen av att kunna styrdokumenten, att ha ett långsiktigt perspektiv, att se examensmålen i relation till eleven och lärares arbete,
Skolutveckling som boundary object	Abstrakt tolkning av ett boundary objekt – vad finns för konkreta exempel?
Marknadisering och nyliberalism	Instrumentella mätvärden, skolval, homogenisering av elevgrupper – sammanflätat med spec peds arbete. Föräldrar som behandlar skola som marknad och personal som någon som ska leverera något. Att ha utbildats normativt/ideologiskt och möta en annan verksamhet… Homogena elevgrupper ger odynamiska skolmiljöer där vissa problem helt saknas och andra blir framträdande
Att medvetet gå över gränsen för uppdraget som spec ped.	Att ha mod, att brinna för eleven, att stå upp för läraren, att ha siktet inställt långt in i framtiden, att göra uppgifter som de inte tycker hör till uppdraget
Vissa saker är de mer tydliga med som att de inte vaktar prov eller är spec lärare.	Att sätta tydliga gränser för sitt uppdrag, att inte göra det som de inte tycker hör uppdraget till, att avgränsa uppdraget
Att normalisera det specialpedagogen gör genom att vara med på många ställen, betrakta allt som pedagogik	Avdramatisera uppdraget, göra sig ofarlig
Att skapa förändring, skolutveckling, professionsutveckling	Att ta sig an uppgifter man inte tycker att man borde göra för att skapa förändring över tid, att låta lärarna sätta agendan, att se skolutveckling över tid, ”en trappa med tusen små steg”

The research interest in this thesis concerns what it means to be and to act as a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in Swedish upper secondary schools. The focus of the study was directed towards existential aspects of the participating SENCOs' everyday worklife. The research gap addressed is further knowledge of SENCOs' professional role in upper secondary schools, specifically their agency. The study utilised a lifeworld phenomenological approach and a research design informed by hermeneutics. The analysis employed the hermeneutical circular movement, aided by phenomenological theory. Findings suggest that intersubjective relationships, boundary work, and ethics are central aspects for SENCOs to create and maintain agency. Moreover, SENCOs professional role appeared to be in a continuous state of becoming, and the participants dealt with different understandings and attitudes towards inclusion regularly. Finally, the professional role of the participating SENCOs seemed to become political when they acted according to their professional ethos. This thesis is of interest for researchers in educational science, educators at universities and in-school professionals.



Jonas Udd has a background as a teacher and SENCO in upper secondary school. His research interests concern inclusive and special needs education.

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