1. Introduction to this volume

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The focus of this volume

From an international perspective, national school systems have been significantly conditioned by two global trends since the end of the twentieth century. On the one hand, there is the movement towards an inclusive school system adapted to all pupils' learning conditions, manifested, among others, by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006. On the other hand, there is the rapidly growing focus of school systems on standards and standard testing (Hamre, Morin, & Ydensen, 2018; Hopmann, 2007). The latter trend has resulted in increasing challenges for public education, where standards and standardisation have shifted the mass schooling project towards a strong emphasis on goal achievement for all students (Wermke et al., 2024). In this field of tension, one school profession, the profession of special educators (SEs), has been central, as it has traditionally had a special focus on those students for which the instruction in regular classrooms and the schools lack appropriate educational solutions. While much is known about how global trends have changed national school systems and teaching professions (cf. Wermke & Salokangas, 2021; Wahlström, Alvunger, & Wermke, 2018), we know little about how these trends have affected special education professions internationally (Cameron et al., 2018; Wermke, Höstfält, Krauskopf, & Adams Lyngbäck, 2020). The inclusion movement has led to a reduction in their traditional workplace and special schools, with the consequence that SEs now work much closer to regular teachers (Ainscow, 2016). At the same time, with an emphasis on achieving certain standards for as many students as possible, teachers in regular classes need more professional help to support all children to achieve the expected goals (Magnússon, 2015).

It is, therefore, not surprising that special education professions have grown in size and increased in relevance in many national school systems (Haustätter & Kuippis, 2015; Wermke, Höstfält & Magnússon, 2024). That is why knowledge about this profession in terms of its practices, its body of

knowledge, and its intersection with other professions in the mass education project is greatly needed to further understand the complex relations within the school systems of the twenty-first century and contribute to a further development towards a genuine school for all (Ainscow, 2020). Moreover, even if the described trends are global, they do not form national school systems and professions in exactly the same way. How these trends affect national contexts depends heavily on context-specific particularities (Schulte & Wermke, 2019). The contexts for special education work can differ significantly both across time and space (Wermke et al., 2020), with a significant impact on the profession itself. Comparative studies of SEs in various systems will contribute to a further understanding of how SEs act within the nation-specific organisation of schools. Nation-specific differences thus become analytical devices that determine how certain professions take form in different contexts.

Against this backdrop, this book volume presents studies on the formation of special education professions since the 2000s in Germany and Sweden.

Due to significant similarities and differences between both school systems, a comparison of Swedish and German special education professions is especially interesting. Both national contexts share important similarities as democratic, Western and meritocratic school systems, and both aim to fulfil the UN CRPD to achieve a genuinely inclusive school for all. Historically, the education systems in Sweden and Germany have similar roots, but they have developed very differently over the recent decades (Wermke & Salokangas, Barow & Östlund, 2020). The Swedish comprehensive school system has for a long time been characterised by late differentiation and ambitions to reduce segregated provision of special educational support. In contrast, Germany has an early ability-tracked school with a highly developed special school system. We restrain our focus historically with empirical data, starting from the 2000s. Since this time, the mentioned megatrends, inclusion and education standards have gained strong power globally. We are consequently interested in how the historically emerged professions responsible for pupils with disabilities have been formed in the most recent 25 years. However, we still provide an even longer historical background, as it is needed to understand the recent dynamics of the special education professions.

This volume has an explicit theoretical interest. We want to understand the nature of special educators (SEs) as a school profession. By doing so,

we want to theorise the various factors that impact SEs' professionalism. A major premise for this ambition is that we understand education professions as embedded in education organisations, that is, school systems. We argue further that the profession-organisation interaction is also conditioned by context-specific particularities. Consequently, we investigate the hybridisation of bureaucratic standards in organisations, and professional norms and solutions. This is a significant contribution to the further development of theories of professions since most professions exert their occupation in large organisations in order to handle large groups of clients. SEs and teachers are as examples of this, as are doctors in hospitals, judges in courts, or officers in the army (Harris-Jenkins, 1970/2010). In addition, investigating the relation between how an occupation professionalises and how this process is conditioned by particular contextual particularities will further contribute to how we can understand professions, professionalism and professionalisation comparatively. This is particularly important in an era of frequent school system rankings and policy transfer between different countries (Hopmann, 2007). This volume reports the main results of a research project, which was financed by the Swedish Research Council between 2021 and 2024. In this project, the editors and authors of the book examined, in Germany and Sweden, the following aspects to gain further understanding of the nature of special education professions. We investigated (1) union journals' descriptions of SE professions in Germany and Sweden from a historical perspective, (2) SEs' perspectives on their practice in the nation-specific school systems and, finally, (3) special education students' belief in inclusion and special education practice.

The volume is structured in three parts. *Part I* presents the background of our project, which concerns several dimensions. Both school systems are presented from a contemporary and historical perspective. We particularly focus on the dynamics of German and Swedish special education organisations and professions. Moreover, we present a review of international research on SE working conditions and professionalism, the projects' methodological foundation and our theoretical vantage points. This first part is supposed to frame the empirical studies presented in *Part II*. For the sake of the volumes' coherence, the empirical chapters build on the theoretical and methodological considerations, presented in part I. Therefore, they are rather descriptive and concentrate mainly on the empirical findings.

This means that they comprise only brief former research and method sections. In this book, we employ the findings, presented in the empirical chapters, in a comprehensive theorising endeavour. This is done in *Part III*, which contains our discussion chapter in which we relate our theoretical starting and our empirical studies to each other.

International comparative studies indeed come with limitations. We focus here, first of all, on the interaction between nation-specific particularities, both from a historical and contemporary perspective, regarding the (re)formation of special education professions. Consequently, we cannot describe each case in all-encompassing detail. We are highly aware that there are significant differences between federal states in Germany and between municipalities in Sweden when it comes to the organisation of special educational needs. However, in this international comparison, we employ a more abstract perspective, which tries to build the study on what is seen as similar within a specific national case. In other words, we analytically assume the prototypical or collective existence of Swedish and German SEs, from which the individual SE in his or her specific context can deviate to a certain extent (Schulte & Wermke, 2019). The fact that there are differences of certain types between domestic and local contexts is part of the national conditions that are the focus of this comparison. Moreover, both education systems in focus experience a crisis regarding their schools in special education organisations. By citing Dostoyevsky's Anna Karenina: All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way; hence, we argue that the type of crises experienced in the different systems are of explanatory value for our theorisation. Therefore, we do not evaluate whether Swedish or German organisation of special education is better or worse. Rather, we view them as path-dependent contextual solutions that have grown forth over time with particular consequences (ibid.).

Before we present each chapter, a brief discussion about terminology and translation must be conducted to eliminate misunderstandings. In particular, the historical chapter employs outdated terms and descriptions for people with identified special needs, such as 'feeble-minded', 'dumb', 'deaf-mute', and 'idiots', among others. From a contemporary perspective, these are considered deeply insulting and are thus only used as historically contextualised terms and not further commented on. We exemplify by showing the terminology of the time, and how societal perspectives on people with disabilities have

changed. As this book is written for a present-day international audience, we will use the terminology 'pupils in need of special educational support', 'pupils with disabilities' rather than disabled pupils.

The terms for special schools have also been historically dynamic. For example, in the case of Germany, terms such as 'auxiliary school' ('Hilfsschule') and auxiliary classes ('Hilfsschulklassen') refer to schools/classes for pupils with learning disabilities. Later, they were called 'Sonderschule' (roughly translated as special needs schools). Today, mostly, the term 'Förderschule' (roughly translated as support or nurturing schools) is used. Similar changes can be seen in Sweden, where quite recently (in 2023), the terminology for special schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities has changed from 'särskola' (special needs school) to 'accommodated comprehensive school' ('anpassad grundskola'). However, we adjust our terms to English language standards, that is, we use the term 'special schools'. In order to make the analytical meaning of this term visible, we contrast the term special schools with 'general schools' for the 'mainstream' or regular schools in particular contexts.

The discussion on the organisational terminology is mirrored in how our professions have been called in focus. In Germany, 'auxiliary teachers' ('Hilfsschullehrer*innen') became Special school teachers ('Sonderschullehrer*innen') and are today support school teachers ('Förderschullehrer*innen'). We will use the term 'SEs (short: SEs)' or special education professionals to denote the profession studied in this volume as in the Swedish case the situation is more complex. Part of the contemporary history of Swedish special education professions is the existence of two such professions or professional groups. One group is called 'special education teachers' ('speciallärare'), and the other 'special pedagogues' ('specialpedagoger'). The education of both is, to some extent, very similar, as they are both three-term postgraduate education programmes (90 credits), and both require previous training as a preschool teacher or a regular teacher. Both educational paths also show considerable overlap regarding their content, even though they also differ. Moreover, as we will show later in Chapter 2 and in Chapter 8 of this volume, these groups have similar or equivalent tasks in the school system. Due to the greater similarities, in particular in relation to their counterpart, and in favour of the coherence of this book, we will mostly use the terms 'SEs' and 'special education professions'. However, in

the chapters that analyse the distinction between both groups, we only use the following terms: 'special education teachers' ('speciallärare') and 'special education pedagogues' ('specialpedagoger').

The chapters of this volume

Part I: Framing the special education professions and their investigations

Chapter 2, following this introduction, presents in detail the contemporary national contexts of our two national special education professions and their history prior to the time of our study.

In Sweden, approximately 1% of all students attend special schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities ('anpassad grund- och gymnasieskola'). An additional 1% (roughly) receive support in special classes ('särskild undervisningsgrupp'). A very small number of students attend state-run schools for children who are blind, deaf or have severe speech impairments. Additionally, a market of privately run schools with focus on special needs has grown forth, particularly in the larger cities (Tah, 2021).

According to the Swedish Education Act, special educational support should be provided in general schools (Barow & Östlund, 2020). Consequently, most of Swedish SEs work occurs in regular school settings. Since 2007, there have been two parallel education programmes for future SEs: *special education teacher training* ('speciallärarutbildning') and *special pedagogue training* ('specialpedagogutbildning'). Both constitute studies at the postgraduate level and both programmes require undergraduate qualifications in educational professions (mostly as teachers) and a certain amount of professional experience for entry. There is also a significant shortage of graduated SEs in Sweden.

Germany has an ability-tracked school system, including an extensive organisation of special schools for various special educational needs. There are up to ten different types of special schools connected to disability categorisations, and over 4% of students attend special schools (Barow & Östlund, 2020). In Germany, SEs undergo a five-year undergraduate training, which is a combined bachelor's and master's programme directed to several specialisations, followed by a 1.5-year period of in-service training.

Both Sweden and Germany share historically similar special education initiatives in the form of private institutions established primarily for deaf

and blind children. Until the 1960s, both countries expanded their model of special education, with Sweden creating various new forms of auxiliary classes (resource classes) and even arranging for 'particular special education' in the form of clinics. As for Germany, it reached a big milestone during the NS dictatorship when the auxiliary school was included in the group of special schools, becoming detached, from then onward, from the regular school. The first different dynamics in both countries can be noticed in the 1960s when Sweden started its process of establishing an integrated approach by mostly abolishing resource classes as part of its comprehensive school system. From 1970 to 1980, the first steps towards an inclusive school system can be observed in Sweden under the term 'integration'. The first genuine signs of inclusive schooling at scale can be discovered in Germany during the new century, while Sweden, surprisingly, took some steps backwards from the vision of inclusive education in later years (Magnússon, 2022). In Germany, general schools with inclusive education and special schools co-exist.

Chapter 3 presents a research overview of SE professions in various contexts. Here, we clarify which body of research our project aims to contribute to. There is currently very little comparative research on the special education profession and its practices, although SEs, as described earlier, are under high pressure from international trends. More knowledge on the relation of SEs to contextual particularities will help us to understand the development of practices of and for inclusion, which can be more or less successful in different contexts.

For a long time, explanations of special education professionalism were restricted to and focused on those activities carried out within special schools. Thus, 'disability-related' professionalism has traditionally been proclaimed by the particular place of support (special school) and its responsibility to the corresponding pupils. Since the 1970s, when special schools, defined as an identity-forming place for SEs, started being questioned based on integrative/inclusive demands, special education as a discipline and profession has also been challenged. Some of the demands for change range from the dissolution of special education professionalism to various attempts to re-define it against the background of changed tasks while still advocating for the preservation of the special education discipline. Nonetheless, what constitutes special education professions between inclusive and special schools is far from fully resolved. Moreover, what makes special education 'special' and what part,

if any, it plays in the implementation of inclusion is also not fully resolved. Currently, special education fields of action, particularly in-school inclusion, are incoherent, diverse, and characterised by great complexity. Moreover, the conducting of national and international comparative studies remains insufficient.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological foundation of our comparative study on SEs in Germany and Sweden. We embed our work in a qualitative research paradigm. In a comparative research project like the one this book describes; the issue of methodology becomes unavoidably multi-dimensional. On the one hand, we use different methods to gather different types of data. In this chapter, we describe the methodologies of the project, beginning with an ontological placement in an interpretative paradigm, then our views on the field of comparative education, and thereafter, each of the methods used to gather data. We also detail how the different materials gathered in the various sub-studies of this project have been utilised and present our ethical reflections, including how our data collection has followed research and data management legislations.

In *Chapter 5*, we describe the overarching theoretical framework for our project and this volume. The chapter presents an analytical toolbox inspired by profession and organisation theory. Due to this interrelation between the professional groups and their institutions, as written earlier, our perspective includes the existence of professionals in organisations. To understand the organisation of special education, we suggest the classic work of Henry Mintzberg on the structuring, structures, and contingencies of organisations. Mintzberg (1979) proposes various configurations on how various stakeholders in the organisation build power relations and communicate with each other, always in relation to the organisational aims, or what is seen as those to be such aims. Both configurations and aims are indeed dynamic in other words. Moreover, we combine this profession-*cum*-organisation theoretical focus with ideas on the nature of professional knowledge and how it can change or remain stable.

How professions organise their knowledge and practices is of significance because decisions made and practices developed draw on how professionals perceive a problem. Concerning this aspect, we have followed Thomas Skrtic's argument that professionalism is based on theoretical paradigms and presuppositions that have historically emerged in a professional culture, that is, the

profession's knowledge traditions, theories, practices and discourses (Skrtic, 1991). In order to analyse the dynamics of our professions' knowledge base more in detail, we refer to the work of Michaela Pfadenhauer (2003). She provides us with an understanding of how professional knowledge is organised and interacts with contextual particularities and organisational frames. According to Pfadenhauer (2003), the generation of theories from practical lifeworld domains is a highly specific social-historical process. Professional theories must be secured economically, politically, and institutionally in order to stay relevant.

Moreover, according to Pfadenhauer (2003), professionals actually provide fewer solutions for various problems in their domain; they rather own certain solutions, which often have historically emerged for certain problem types. Professions have the capability to cope with diffuse, often very complex, problems by redefining them regarding just this, their professional knowledge base. First, from such a re-defined problem, it becomes possible to find a solution. The specific problem to be met is consequently adjusted to a group of problems/type of problem to which a professional solution exists. Finally, professions and professionals must spend effort to generate role and product expectations with their clients on what can actually be expected from them. This kind of expectation management must make the professions' proficiency visible for society. Displaying proficiency means symbolic representations and also ritualised techniques of how a certain professional image is maintained. Displaying proficiency aims to produce trust, legitimate certain behaviours, produce obedience, and enforce expectations, that is, the maintenance of the social status of the one who displays proficiency.

Part II: Investigating special educators from comparative perspectives

After the five chapters of part I, which are assumed to present an umbrella of our project, we present six chapters with sub-studies conducted within it.

In *Chapter 6*, we use a questionnaire similar to that found in Chapter 9 to investigate and compare German and Swedish SEs' professional work, academic training, and education attitudes – since these are considered key elements in the definition of the special education professional. Our findings show that, due to the diverse and complex fields of action and competencies in special education, the nature of SEs in both contexts are rather fragmented.

We describe both data sets by using three alternatives to special education services, according to Reiser (1998). In both contexts, special education services can be additive to general education practices, integrated with them, or integrated into a systemic pedagogy that addresses all pupils in a genuinely inclusive school. In Germany, special education services are mostly additive, whereas integrated special education services are more frequently represented in Sweden. In this context, SEs can also work systemically and not only in terms of person-related special education service for the regular schoolteacher or general school. This is due to Swedish SEs' capacity to work systemically with organisation development. They are, however, also responsible for other special education services, which then can be provided additively or integrated.

Based on the rather scattered answers to the question regarding their current fields of work and requirements on the German side, it can be assumed that there is even greater uncertainty compared to Sweden. Possibly, to avoid precisely this uncertainty, German SEs refer to reasons for their career choice as a SE that correspond to the self-image of the traditional special education profession, which is tied to special schools and to individual pupils with disabilities, who are to be 'helped', and this often happens in an additive service way.

Chapter 7 tells us how the dynamics of both nation-specific professions are mirrored in German and Swedish SE union journals over time. Comparing the findings of both analyses reveals several small similarities, but mostly differences. The most relevant conclusion in this chapter is that the context plays a crucial role for the professionalisation of SEs. When looking at special education professions by comparing of the contexts in time and space, the particularities of the cases become visible. In addition to the context of the school system, the potential impact of inclusion as a global educational trend also becomes apparent. How inclusion is to be realised by the particular school system has a significant influence on the SEs in the system. This happens not only indirectly via the school system but also directly in the professions and their understanding of themselves, their knowledge and their understanding of their role.

An important commonality is that in both countries, there is a shift in the position within the organisation of the school. In Sweden, this concerns the position of the SEs who are moving more and more into the

centre of the school organisation and closer to leadership. In Germany, the shift is of an even greater magnitude because here, the whole profession is expected to shift from the special school to the general school. In both national cases, this change brings uncertainty about the exact position taken by professionals. This also concerns the question of the exact mission that is carried out by the profession, as these are related to the respective position. In connection with this, the formal education of SEs in Germany and in Sweden is also in question. In the Swedish context, the discussion revolves around the questioned necessity of two training programmes for one profession.

While SEs in Sweden are recognised as part of the general school, the profession struggles with the internal differentiation between its two professional groups, which are not distinguished from the outside. For SEs in Germany, this position has yet to be consolidated. In this context, the different specialisations of SEs seem to be problematic. On the one hand, because the group does not perceive itself as a whole but divides itself into different groups along the different specialisations. On the other hand, because the specialisations seem to be of little relevance for their work in the general school, they are seen from the outside as a group that is supposed to be responsible for one area. However, even more important for the SEs in Germany is the distinction between teachers who already have an established position in the general school. Here again, the structure of the organisation and the implementation of inclusion come into play. The division of the organisation makes it difficult to create a clear position for SEs.

Chapter 8 presents a comparative interview study with Swedish and German SEs working in general school settings to gain an understanding of how the SEs in general schools operationalise inclusive education; and how this work is conditioned by nation-specific particularities. Drawing on the interview analyses, this chapter presents a device for an understanding of SE work in inclusive schools employing three levels (individual, group, and organisational) related to three domains (educational, social, and administrative). Using this matrix, we explain national differences in the work of SEs in inclusive schools.

Our comparative analyses show that Swedish and German SEs differ in their legitimacy among regular teachers and regarding a powerful mandate attributed to them by state policy and school leaders. Consequently,

inclusive schools appear to be a more welcoming place for SEs in Sweden than in Germany. In the former context, they possess much more capacity to organise the work of doing and nurturing inclusion. To qualify this, in Sweden, as shown in our context description, SEs are solely employed in their schools and today have, in many cases, leadership and school development roles. The appropriate work with students needing special support is highly prioritised by the Swedish school inspection today, and this relates to the fact that the operationalisation of inclusive education is connected to achieving learning outcomes, since the provision of special education support draws on the student's individual right to receive the support needed to achieve curriculum goals.

Another difference in the power of SEs relates to the nature of the school system as such. In Sweden, it is comprehensive, drawing on an ideology of *one* school for all children (Wermke et al., 2024). The tracked school system in Germany, building on the educational idea that learner groups must be as homogeneous as possible, pursues the idea of *a* suitable school for all. This might also be a powerful, even purposeful, hindrance to inclusion. Furthermore, in Germany, SEs relate their professional status to a highly complex system of special schools and their sophisticated specialist training concerning various special educative categories. The regular school as a foundation for inclusion might as well be another world for German SEs – following rules, having another language, or, as a German SE expresses it in the interviews: 'My colleagues from the special school do not want work in inclusive settings. In inclusive settings you must subordinate yourself'.

In *Chapter 9*, we compare two total-population studies of Swedish SEs between 2012 and 2022. In 2015, a report was published entitled *Special professions? The work and education of special education teachers*, with the aim of mapping the professional role of special education teachers and their perceptions of their education and its relevance. The study that formed the basis for the report in 2012 was carried out by the research group around Kerstin Göransson (Göransson et al., 2015). We replicated this questionnaire study in 2022. Ten years have passed since then, which means that the school's activities and the education and professional role of SEs have undergone changes. This is the focus of this chapter.

Also in this chapter, we diagnose a dissolution of boundaries concerning the professional tasks and functions of Swedish SEs. On the one hand, our

profession in focus has increased in status and importance. On the other hand, it has, according to our argument, paid quite a high price for its new importance today. Not only has their status increased extensively, so has their workload. Furthermore, their professional mission has been significantly bureaucratised. The profession does not specialise in a restricted number of education problems and their solutions; Swedish SEs must be generalists in covering all the problems of schooling. Simply said, SEs in Sweden have more importance in school in the 2020s than ever before, but they are also responsible for all important things regarding schooling: students shall achieve standards, the school climate shall be healthy, school problems must be mapped, IEPs have to be established and implemented, colleagues must be guided, and guardians consulted. SEs are in charge of school improvement and are often part of the school management. Do not forget that there is also the traditional function, which is to help individual children at risk. Finally, all these activities must also be documented and embedded in administrative structures.

To reduce the complexity and risks in their work, SEs will, in the end, only concentrate on high-stakes issues in their work portfolio, such as the pupils in great need of special support (i.e. their traditional core). In other words, due to their working conditions, SEs are forced to emphasise well-known solutions, such as establishing individual learning groups, and abandon complex, inclusive approaches, which might inherit a higher risk of failing concerning aspects that must be documented for superiors.

Another problem with this Swedish situation and its related dissolution of boundaries from a knowledge-based perspective is that one might wonder if SEs can have specialised solutions for all the problems to be solved. Eventually, they can at best only know which other professions may have a solution to specific problems. This would lead to the knowledge body of the profession being rather weak, replaceable and thus potentially threatened by other professions with claims in the field of schooling. Simply put, one could ask what the exclusive competencies of SEs would be that no other professions can do their tasks as well or even better, namely teachers, psychologists, nurses, etc. We argue that the eventual absence of exclusive special expertise also makes the status of the Swedish profession vulnerable or at least much is expected of them to make their *special* contribution visible to clients and society.

In *Chapter 10*, we switch to a special education students', that is, future SEs', perspective. The aim of the first chapter, from this perspective, is to show similarities and differences between relevant beliefs concerning the opportunities and limitations of inclusive and non-inclusive education for special education students in both countries. Academic and professional training is an important part of a profession's nature. Here, the core practices and beliefs on the efficacy of its professional work are supposed to be developed. We argue in this chapter, however, that the prior experiences special education students have from before their academic training are significant as well. It has been shown that beliefs can change within these stages. Conversely, it has also raised the question as to whether students' beliefs manifest themselves in educational training contexts whose curricula are explicitly oriented towards inclusion education today. In this chapter, we thus discuss the data from a questionnaire on inclusive and special education beliefs that students in Germany and Sweden have answered.

Swedish and German special education students show different perspectives on inclusive education. In Sweden, our findings present a consistent and more positive orientation toward inclusive education. The Swedish participants believe in the suitability of inclusive settings for all pupils, emphasising their positive impact on self-confidence among pupils with disabilities. Moreover, the Swedish respondents favour heterogeneous groups over homogeneous ones. In this chapter, we argue that school organisations are stabilised by the students who decide to enter academic training to become a SE. Students enter the prospective career both with their own school and professional experiences. Due to the tracked nature of the German school systems, most German SE students at university had attended a theoretically directed school form (Gymnasium). This school form is characterised by significant homogenisation of students, considering high cognitive learning conditions and higher social-economic status. Simply put, German students have few experiences of heterogeneity and inclusive education. This group, with its particular experiences in the school system, apparently reproduce defensive inclusion beliefs even in their professional education. Their future colleagues in Sweden have significantly different experiences when they enter the academic SE training. However, even here, the respective organisation is stabilised in its current form. Swedish students have been socialised in a comprehensive school as pupils. In addition, when they enter the special education

training, they are, due to the entrance requirements, experienced teachers in the same organisation. They have had extended experiences with special education and inclusive education. Another interesting phenomenon found in this data is that both student groups share wishes for significant psychiatric competence in their special education knowledge body. Hence, an internationally common denominator of special education or SEs today is a strong belief in a necessary neuro-psychiatric special education knowledge base.

Chapter 11 continues examining the SE student perspective. In this chapter, we compare, by using interviews with German and Swedish students, both student groups' images of their future special education practice. This chapter confirms the findings of the previous chapter, namely that special education students in both contexts think significantly differently about their prospective professional work. This is in accordance with Chapter 10. We can also see that, in particular, Swedish special education students see their professional future as close to or part of school management but also characterised by a dissolution of professional boundaries and an increase in workload. German students, in contrast, prepare themselves for special schools or additive special education services for individual pupils in general schools.

When German students speak about special education, the first and foremost response is didactical, as they reason about the challenges and opportunities of differentiated instruction. This response is closely linked to the theme of cooperation between different teaching professions, whereby differentiation also seems to go hand-in-hand with different professional responsibilities in the classroom. In this context, cooperation is described as a basic requirement for inclusion. Unfortunately, according to the German student, the role model of the teacher as a 'lone fighter' could make intensive cooperation difficult. Therefore, many students anticipate tensions within the different professions and their responsibilities.

The SEs in Sweden have, in comparison, other images of future practice. For example, the respondents raise the importance of being the one who acts as an umbrella over the whole school. This implies both a leadership role at the school and cooperation with the school's leadership. It means an ambition to work with special education questions on an overarching organisational level. The Swedish students raise issues in relation to general teachers that are different from those of their German counterparts, where one main concern is that teachers want to have SEs as constantly available

support. The respondents also highlight conflicts between the teachers, on the one hand, and SEs on the other. There is the expectation that teachers will believe that SEs are supposed to solve everything in the school. On the other hand, the same respondent mentions teachers who refuse to seek assistance from SEs and even the pupil health teams at their schools. Interestingly, the topic of inclusion was not discussed in the Swedish interviews at all. This is particularly conspicuous as inclusion is a central topic in their education, not only as a single course with a focus on inclusion but, in fact, also as a running theme throughout the programmes.

Part III: Theorising on the formation of special educator professions in time and space

In the last part of our volume, we put together the various parts and chapters of this book to achieve the main interest of our project and this publication. This volume has an explicit theoretical interest. We want to understand the nature of SEs as a school profession. By doing so, we want to theorise about the various factors that impact SE professions. A major premise for this ambition is that we understand education professions as embedded in education organisations, that is, school systems. We also argue that profession-organisation interactions are conditioned by context-specific particularities. Consequently, we investigate the hybridisation of bureaucratic standards in organisations and professional norms and solutions.

Chapter 12 presents, consequently, the finishing line of this volume. In an extended way, we take the reader through various theoretical themes of the project. In theme (1), *No education profession without special education organisation*, we show that the formation of our professions in focus must be understood as complementary dynamics to the organising of special education in various school types (both special and general). In theme (2), *SEs in School Organisations*, we discuss the interplay of organisational and professional logic in the described complementary dynamics. Context-specific particularities condition the interplay. One particularity we can put forward is the power and discretion attributed to the respective special education professions. The power relates to how, in a national school system, the right of students to achieve particular learning outcomes is valued by the state government. In our Swedish case, the right of special education support is operationalised by goal achievement. By law, every student has the right to

receive support to at least achieve a 'pass' in all school subjects, if he or she is at risk for failing. This legal construction attributes SEs a significant systemic value and, therefore, power in local school organisations.

However, this importance and increase in status come with a price. Hence, in this section, we present theme (3), *Dissolving and defending professional boundaries*. Swedish SEs' workload has grown and become bureaucratised significantly. In addition, they are forced to act as special education generalists. We argue that the absence of a particular specialist knowledge can be problematic. Too general work tasks can lead to an autonomy paradox. To reduce the complexity and risks in their work, SEs will, in the end, only concentrate on high-stakes issues in their work portfolio, such as the pupils in great need of special support (their traditional core). In contrast, the German SEs would rather remain in an organisational support sphere, where defending their professional claims and function is easier. In other words, SEs in this national context build their existence on specialist knowledge and support domains. They are reluctant to increase their impact on the world of general schooling.

This argument of specialist vs. generalist knowledge is further developed in theme (4), *SEs' knowledge body and their clients*. Here, we discuss the nature of the special education profession's body of knowledge and expertise in relation to other stakeholders and interest groups in the school organisation. A professional knowledge body can be seen as a collection of certain solutions, often grown historically, as a hybrid of experiential and academic textbook knowledge. Professional work is thereby an adjustment of problems to existing solutions. This perspective also explains how solutions are reproduced, confirmed, and defended within professional groups, as well as legitimised for clients and the public. The problem with a dissolution of boundaries (as in the context of Sweden) is from this perspective that clients can wonder if SEs can have specialised solutions for all the problems to be solved. Eventually, they can, at best, only know which other professions can have a solution. This would lead to the knowledge body of the profession being rather weak and replaceable, and thus potentially threatened by other professions with an interest in the field of schooling.

In theme (5), *Interprofessional cooperation of SEs*, we show that interprofessional cooperation is highly ambitioned for both national special education professions. Interprofessional cooperation is intended to create more flexible solutions. For example, in Swedish schools and municipalities pupil health

teams exist, comprising various professions, most often SEs, school psychologists, school medicals, or social workers. In Germany, the cooperation issue most often revolves around the SE–teacher relationship in general schools with inclusive education settings. Based on earlier research, we argue that problems of ambiguity, uncertainty, and unclear power relations in interprofessional cooperation settings are to be expected, but the biggest problem with such issues is, however, not the eventual frustration of professionals involved in the process. Rather, it is much more problematic that ambiguities, confusion, and uncertainty lead to more inflexibility and less innovative solutions, that is, the opposite of their expected goals. In the end, solutions with the lowest risk for all professions involved or the smallest common denominator become the modus operandi: more of the same solutions, agreement on fuzzy, but less conflict-loaded problem definitions, and putting responsibility on pupils and guardians.

In theme (6), *Professional fragmentation*, we discuss the specific Swedish phenomenon with two professional SE groups, with quite similar missions, but different names, that is, special education teachers (speciallärare) and special education pedagogues (specialpedagoger). This distinction has caused several issues for the Swedish special education profession, primarily due to a lack of clarity about the groups claims and expertise. The explanation for this awkward situation is simple. The quest for two different groups, with the formally stated focus, did not come from the practical level of schools but was a political decision. It relates to policy shifts towards inclusive education in the 1990s and education standards in the later 2000s. We argue that such a fragmentation of professions better suits decentralised systems, where SEs, without professional group loyalty or union backup, can easily adjusted to local conditions and needs. They can also adjust to changing policies, reflecting altering political needs. Special education professions can thus be seen as very easily steered.

In theme (7), *special education professions in various contexts*, we propose a model that aims to support the comparative understanding of how the work with pupils with special educational needs is operationalised by SEs. The model combines two continua with each other. In the two continuum poles 'Specialist professions' are contrasted with 'Generalist professions', and 'Special schools' are contrasted with 'General schools'. Put the two continua

together, a four-field model emerges, displaying four configuration types (by its four quadrants), which illustrate, among others, the German and Swedish contemporary situation of inclusive education and their dynamics. For example, the Swedish case exemplifies a type of inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in general schools in which SEs work, which can be described as generalist SE. However, the special education system today is moving slightly, and in two different directions, towards more special schools and specialist SEs and more specialist SEs in general schools. In the German case, special education activities have traditionally been processed by special education specialists in special schools. With increasing requirements to create genuine inclusive learning environments, special education professions move toward a configuration of specialist SEs working in general schools.

Since inclusive education in our two contexts is mostly operationalised by placement and operated by more or less specialist SEs in general schools, issues of interprofessional cooperation – first of all with general teachers – evolve. We aim to theorise on this in the eighth theme, *The relation of special and general teachers in general schools*. Here, we present another model developed in our project, in which four types of SE–teacher relations emerge. Again, the model at hand combines two continua. The first continuum describes the nature of the work of SEs with pupils in need of special education support in general schools. This continuum has the pole of *additive special education services*, which refers to when SEs fly in/fly out to regular classrooms supporting individual pupils in need or take those pupils out for a restricted time of individual instruction. The other pole is the integrated approach, in which SEs' and general teachers' work are integrated. The second continuum in this model evolves between two poles that describe the power relation between teachers and SEs in inclusive schools and classrooms. This relation can be hierarchical. This means that one profession is superior to the other. The other pole on the continuum is a cooperative interprofessional relation, in which both professions have an equal decision-making capacity to organise inclusive settings. The model developed displays both hierarchical relations between SEs and teachers in inclusive schools. In Germany, SEs active in general schools are subordinated teachers; in Sweden, the relation is vice versa. The Swedish version, however, enables an integrative special education provision, because SEs have the power to work more systemically. In the

German version, often only additive special education services are possible because teachers in this context often avoid cooperation.

The discussion section finishes in the ninth and final theme, with a reference to our volume's title: *special education professions between inclusion and education standards*. In the tension field between inclusion and education standards, SEs in both contexts were challenged. In Sweden, they were very destabilised by changed in relation to inclusive education, but stabilised again in the wake of education standards reforms. In Germany, with the states' focus on education standards have led to a further stabilising of the special education systems. This finding is paradoxical. However, it remains to be seen if, conversely, a weakening of the standard fetishism in many Western school systems enables the professions in focus in this volume to once again work towards a genuine school for all and if doing so would result in a decreased status.

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