Chapter 8

A Former Special Educational Needs Teacher's Critical Reflections About Lesson Plans and Adjustments:
Educating Students With Intellectual Disability

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ABSTRACT

This chapter engages in a retrospective analysis of a teacher's previous teaching experiences at a Swedish special-needs secondary school for pupils with intellectual disabilities. The chapter aims to explore the potential of reflective practice in supporting the professional development of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) teachers, with the goal of improving the education and outcomes of their students. The chapter evaluates lesson plans centered on democratic values and student agency, using critical reflection within a step-by-step approach. Through this evaluation, the chapter presents implications for practice that illustrate how self-reflection and teacher-researcher collaboration can serve as practical tools for sustainable improvements in special-needs schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities, particularly with a focus on advocacy and conditions for learning. Through this evaluation, the chapter presents implications for practice that illustrate how self-reflection and teacher-researcher collaboration can serve as practical tools for sustainable improvements in special-needs schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities, particularly with a focus on advocacy and conditions for learning.

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has found that teacher education alone does not provide teachers with the necessary skills to manage the teaching situations that can occur in didactical encounters with students who have significant disabilities that require extensive and differentiated adaptation of the educational milieu (Bosma & Goei, 2021; Lindsay et al., 2013; Norwich et al., 2021; Roberts & Webster, 2022). Besides the learning-related issues, the teachers must cope with students' behavior, social skills, and emotional well-being. The fact that educators may not always have the necessary training, resources, or support to meet the needs of their students effectively can lead to feelings of uncertainty, stress, and burnout, which in turn can impact the quality of education provided to these students (Carter, 2018). To create an inclusive environment that enables these students to access education and participate fully, teachers need didactic tools as well as mental spaces that allow them to reflect critically on their practices. Inclusive teaching means providing all students equal access to participation and learning opportunities. The teacher's ability to critically reflect on his or her practice can be linked to what Schön (1983) defines as being a reflective practitioner. Schön highlights the importance of practical knowledge, which he believes differs from the knowledge presented in textbooks or scientific articles. The concept of reflection can be considered a process in which thoughts are analyzed in relation to particular events or situations, which can lead to greater awareness. Teachers' self-reflection is defined as their ongoing reflective practice (Bie, 2014). The present chapter is written in the context of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) teaching targeting teachers' efforts to enable inclusive schooling for students with intellectual disabilities and co-occurring autism.

More specifically, I wrote this chapter a year after the finalization of my dissertation project. The thesis (Klefbeck, 2022) aimed to contribute knowledge about how teacher-researcher collaboration could encourage teachers to develop their practice, enabling students with intellectual disability (ID) and autism educational participation (Klefbeck, 2022). The narrative synthesis of the articles included in the thesis discerned six factors of importance to developing teaching practices in the Swedish special-needs compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities, thereby promoting contextualized inclusion for pupils with ID and autism:

a. the importance of collaborative work, b. focus on the pupils' participation in learning situations, c. distance to own teaching by video-based reflections, d. structured observations and analyses of how the design of lessons affects pupils' learning, e. changed focus from pupils' behavior to teaching and learning, and f. more generally, continuity regarding professional development over time. (Klefbeck, 2022, p. 1)

In this chapter, the dissertation project is in the background; instead, I look back at the struggles and shortcomings of my former assignment as a SEND teacher (1997–2017). The retrospective analysis focuses on the time span 2014–2017, when I had a teaching assignment in a Swedish special-needs secondary school for pupils with autism and intellectual disabilities. This specific period is the focal point of analysis because it co-occurred with a school reform in the Swedish special-needs secondary school (GySär13, 2013). The adjusted curriculum required decisive changes to existing teaching traditions because its formations required students to gain specific areas of knowledge, which the previous curriculum (Skolverket, 2002) had not demanded. The learning content in focus for the analysis was pupils' agency and democratic values (GySär13, 2013), linked to the commitment to taking the "voice" of children/youth. Within this context, the concept of "voice" represents the ratification of the child's

participatory rights to express an opinion, remain silent, access information, and be included in decision-making on matters affecting them (United Nations, 2009). The perspectives of the learners' civil rights and learning were comparatively vague in the previous curriculum (Skolverket, 2002), where aspects of care and understanding emerged.

As an introduction to this chapter, a story with its roots in the building where I started my teaching career will be presented to provide a threshold of knowledge and argue why retrospective analysis in the context of SEND teaching must proceed.

Once upon a time, to be exact, in December 1909, Långbro Hospital was considered to be one of Europe's most modern mental hospitals; it was regarded as modern and humane (Figure 1). Today, we would presumably consider the treatment of long baths, inmates locked in their rooms only allowed to eat meals out of deep bowls without a spoon, in a different way (Långbro Sjukhusmuseum, 2023).

Figure 1. Långbro Hospital
Note: The doorway in the picture leads to the building that housed the school where I started my teaching career. In front of the building is a vast park, well preserved from recent times when it was used as a recreation area for staff and relatives of the inmates.

When I started working in the area of Långbro Hospital, the mental hospital had recently closed. However, Elisabeth, considered the most dangerous woman in Sweden, was still treated there. Elisabeth was deemed unpredictable, aggressive, and psychotic. A report from the late 1970s showed pictures of her chained to a bed. I never saw Elisabeth, but colleagues obliged to open the school in the early morning witnessed her waking in the garden area in the early mornings, wearing a leash guarded by double staffing.

It later turned out that Elisabeth had autism. Like many people with autism at the time, Elisabeth was treated through various therapy methods to uncover the intended traumas considered to lie behind her behavior. As a child, Elisabeth had been punished when she refused to play with other children. This punishment led to her becoming violent and throwing things around, leading to further punishments and coercive measures. In addition, Elisabeth had been subjected to physical correction measures and heavy

medication during her upbringing. What made a difference for Elisabeth was when she finally met an educator, Eve Mandre, who became involved in her case. Mandre provided Elisabeth with functional communication that had a crucial benefit in her life. In a thesis written about psychiatric patients in similar situations as Elisabeth, Mandre aimed to contribute knowledge about the urgent need for in-service training regarding the difficulties with contact, communication, and thinking that individuals with an autism diagnosis can experience (Mandre, 2002). Through case descriptions, Mandre showed the staff how they could relate to their patients and adapt communication and environment based on their thinking, making it possible for the patients to predict what would happen next. In her summary, Mandre (2002) wrote that the staff's changed attitudes led to significant patient changes. As a result, several patients received new investigations and diagnoses; some of them were discharged from inpatient psychiatric care to municipal housing—one of them after 25 years of psychiatric care.

The story about Elisabeth is included here for several reasons. First, there is a hope that the story opens the reader's mind, serving as an ongoing request to constantly question actions and decisions made concerning individuals in vulnerable situations. Consider that the operations (including the long baths and belting) at Långbro Hospital once were regarded as innovative. Elisabeth was considered the most dangerous woman in Sweden, and she was allowed to go out only before others had woken up, wearing a harness controlled by double staffing. Still, after encountering a committed educator, she could develop functional communication, thus enabling her to express her wants and needs and have a personal existence.

When I started work at the school hosted in the former hospital, I was employed as a teacher assistant for a group of learners with a combination of intellectual disability and autism. I loved the job; the location was peaceful, and the area was spacious. The pupils could be demanding, but fascinating, and I loved the experience of solving the riddle within each situation or encounter. In about 20 years, I tried different roles, such as teacher assistant, preschool teacher, SEND teacher, and principal. And later on, I conducted doctoral studies on teaching pupils with a combination of intellectual disability and autism. So, you could say I have not gone far from the garden area of Långro Hospital. A SEND teacher's assignment requires perseverance, dedication, and curiosity because teaching pupils in extensive supportive needs is like being a detective.

With the limitations of the existing research in the educational milieu for pupils with an extensive need for support and adaption, I wrote this chapter using an approach similar to Eva Mandre's. Still, instead of critically reviewing the actions of others, the intention here was to review actions and decisions that I made. The intention is to step up and lead, hoping the readers will follow by critically examining their own perspectives in teaching.

In this chapter, through a retrospective analysis of previous teaching experiences in schooling for pupils with intellectual disabilities, I aim to contribute knowledge about how SEND teachers can develop their teaching through reflective practice.

BACKGROUND

Students' Opportunities for Learning and Advocacy in the Swedish School System

Since 1968 all children have had the same rights and obligations to education within the Swedish school system (Grünewald, 2009). But the Swedish educational system is divided between regular and special

schools. Schooling of pupils with ID is primarily regulated in the Education Act (Public Law 800 2010). All children in Sweden, regardless of the occurrence of disabilities, must receive schooling (about 1% of the pupils receive their education in special schools). The Swedish educational system has been recognized for valuing all pupils equally. In addition, it has been encouraged to compensate if and when academic difficulties appear (Goei et al., 2021). Still, challenges arise.

In Sweden teachers enrolled in SEND teaching have to be examined and approved based on the requirements of the examination order (SFS 2017: 1111). In short, SFS 2017:1111 ensures that the teachers have the necessary qualifications to teach different subjects and levels, including students with special needs. The point of departure in the present chapter is that even though Swedish SEND teachers have been examined and approved based on the requirements of the examination order (SFS 2017: 1111), a recently published audit report reveals that requiring specific qualifications for teachers is not sufficient to create preconditions for participation and learning for all students (City of Gothenburg, 2022). The report shows that the personnel working with the students with intellectual disabilities are uncertain about how to talk about students' goal achievement and how to describe or document the students' progression. These results (City of Gothenburg, 2022) are consistent with international research, indicating that teachers educating students demanding comprehensive support often experience uncertainty in how to meet students' learning needs (O'Brien et al., 2019).

Last semester, in the autumn of 2022, the Swedish special-needs compulsory school received a new curriculum (Lgrsär22, 2022). In short, the changes concerning the previous curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) give the learning content a more precise focus. At the same time, the syllabi have been cleaned up at a detailed level around the content that the education should address. *Curriculum transformation* can be understood as initiatives aimed at enhancing the educational program to improve student achievements (Bahrum et al., 2017). According to the Swedish National Agency for Education (2022), the purpose of the adjusted curricula is to make it easier for teachers in special-needs compulsory schools to design a high-quality education for all pupils, regardless of school form or placement. Previous research provides lessons regarding the risks and opportunities when implementing adjusted curricula in education for pupils with intellectual disabilities. As an example, from a similar context, Benson-Golberg (2021) aimed to examine opportunities for developing reading and writing for pupils with a combination of intellectual disabilities and language disorders. This research found that changes in policy documents enhanced teachers' awareness of the importance of practicing literacy; however, the findings emphasized that this enhanced teacher awareness did not improve the pupils' learning opportunities in the classroom (Benson-Golberg, 2021). Benson-Golberg (2021) revealed that the teachers tended to focus on form rather than the function of the lesson activities. Benson-Golberg (2021) also stressed the importance of analyzing if and how adjusted teaching strategies, followed by implementing new policy documents, generate real learning opportunities for the pupils.

Teachers' Uncertainty

Children and adolescents in extensive need of support challenge even the most proficient teachers (Carpenter et al., 2015). Researchers such as Hattie (2012) and Bandura (2006) concluded that teachers' experiences of professional certainty are essential for the pupil's abilities to fulfill their learning goals in education. In contrast, Munthe (2003) pointed out that professional certainty can hinder the teacher's professional development if the teacher walks the path of practice without reflecting on how the planned lesson develops pupil learning.

Based on a similar approach to Munthe (2003), Mintz (2014) explored how teachers can develop their practice by strategically working to make room for the uncertainty that may arise in the didactic encounter. Mintz investigated the educational situation for students with autism, focusing on how teachers, by challenging their own experience of professional uncertainty, can provide the students with expanded development and learning. This research revealed that uncertainty does not have to be similar to a lack of competence; it can be seen as an indication that teachers need to stop and seek suitable strategies for the individual student. This research concluded that teachers' didactic efforts in uncertainty are critical in meeting students with autism (Mintz, 2014).

In this chapter I addressed the issue of professional uncertainty in special educational needs and disability (SEND) teaching. I defined professional uncertainty as the state of mind that occurs in the teacher's heart and mind when facing didactical dilemmas or situations without answers. I explored the context of special-needs schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities, focusing on the role of reflective practice in supporting SEND teacher professional development and ultimately improving the education and outcomes of their students. Furthermore, I addressed the issue of professional uncertainty, linked to concrete experiences of teaching, during implementation of an adjusted curricula. I addressed the research questions through a methodology in which I used my own professional experience as a starting point.

Research Questions

RQ1: How did the implementation of the curriculum (GySär13, 2013) and the subsequent learning activities promote both the content knowledge and advocacy skills of students with intellectual disabilities in special-needs schools, as perceived by a former SEND teacher?

RQ2: What can retrospective analysis of former teaching experiences add to the SEND teachers' teaching repertoire? If the retrospective analysis is the first step, what will be the next?

METHODOLOGY

Critical Self-Reflection

The concept of critical self-reflection was used to answer the research questions. The idea of using an approach of critical reflection can be understood through Fook and Askeland's (2007) description of critical reflection as a process that can provide a deeper understanding, especially the relationship between the social world and the person. Critical understanding can also be linked to the core of teaching because the teacher acts as researcher and educator, contributing research and practice (Dewey, 1929). In this chapter, I proceeded with this process.

In the current year, 2023, it is not yet possible to examine how the recently implemented curricula for pupils with intellectual disabilities (Lgrsär22, 2022) generate learning opportunities for the pupils in the classroom. Therefore, I focused my analysis on the second most recently implemented curriculum in the Swedish school, a curriculum for pupils with intellectual disability in upper secondary school (GySär13, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

I evaluated concrete examples from my teaching practice to enable mirror situations where reflective practice may have vital importance. The excerpts presented were selected based on the ALLEA (2018) code (including respect, honesty, reliability, and responsibility). Information about places, people, or details that risk identifying the participants were excluded. Here is a list of the elements of the ALLEA (2018) code as they pertain to this chapter:

- **Respect:** As a former SEND teacher, I recognize the importance of respecting the unique backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of my students and fellow educators. I strive to create a learning environment that is inclusive, supportive, and respectful of diversity—one that allows all individuals to thrive and reach their full potential.
- **Honesty:** As an author, I am responsible for molding and presenting the content in this chapter in an honest way.
- **Reliability:** The content in the teaching examples delivered are lesson notes and evaluations on pupils' learning; these are methods that use available resources fairly and reliably.
- **Responsibility:** Being examined based on professional skills or conditions for learning can be bothersome or even unpleasant; my critical self-reflections focused mainly on the consequences of my previous actions and decisions in my former teaching experiences.

Procedure

To enable my retrospective analysis of steps taken when developing altered learning content (2014-2017) after implementing the new curricula (GySär13, 2013), I returned to teaching notes taken from 2014 to 2017. Consequently, the lesson notes and the pictures of the learning material originated from my documentation. Exceptions are photos in which individuals are partially visible; these pictures are newly taken based on the original images. The reason is to minimize the risk of identification.

The reflective proceeding was inspired by Dewey (1929), who advocated the importance of organizing teaching so that it urges the individual to confront situations that encourage reflection. Creating and examining individualized lesson activities allow the teacher to explore the pupil's actions regarding the learning content. Dewey described enabling pupils' engagement and participation in teaching as a communicated experience, one that can be said to be the link between education and active learning (Dewey, 1929). Thus, in this chapter, I used assumptions from pragmatism to understand and interpret the process in which the knowledge of a teacher's thoughts is developed through reflections of actions that simultaneously lead to developed teaching strategies.

Context

I analyzed moments from my teaching experience, and the retrospective analysis covered the years between 2014 and 2017. I chose the lesson plans as a *purposive sample* (Bryman, 2011) because they related to democratic values and learning activities that required major adjustments after implementing GySär13 (2013). In addition, I planned learning activities in the educational context of pupils with intellectual disability and autism enrolled in the Swedish special-needs upper secondary school. I excluded personal data and precise dates of the teaching situations from the presentation to avoid the risk of identification.

RESULTS, CONSEQUENCES IN PRACTICE, AND MY RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF PUPILS' LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

In this section I discuss the results that originated from my teaching experiences.

The Year 2014

When this story began, I had recently moved from Sweden's capital to a small village in the southern part of the country. Even though I had a combined teacher education at both basic and advanced levels and almost 20 years of teaching experience with pupils with autism and intellectual disabilities, I felt unconfident with my new teaching assignment. I had no experience in teaching at the adjusted upper-secondary school level. Additionally, there had recently been decisive adjustments for teachers educating pupils with intellectual disabilities to consider in adjusted *upper secondary school,* as there had been a shift in the teaching guidelines (GySär13, 2013). The earlier directives given (Skolverket, 2002) had advocated the teachers to focus on aspects of care as an attempt to make the pupils feel comfortable and appreciated. In the earlier curriculum, the teachers were free to choose subjects to focus on and which to offer to a minimum extent. In the adjusted curriculum (GySär13, 2013), the guidelines for teachers educating pupils with intellectual disabilities were more comprehensive, with more concisely formulated learning goals. One of the subject areas that I found essential, but challenging to address in the adjusted curriculum was democratic values and pupil agency. At the overall level, the curriculum highlighted that the school could provide all pupils, based on their requirements, capabilities to participate in democratic decision-making processes in society and working life. The target area of this analysis is the content area of "individ och samhälle" (individual and society), which declared that all pupils should gain knowledge about the Swedish political system of parties and elections (GySär13, 2013).

In the group of learners—where I was the head teacher—six pupils aged 15-18 were enrolled. All the pupils had comprehensive support needs owing to intellectual disabilities and autism. Only one of the pupils used spoken language; the others communicated with the support of images, signs, body language, or a combination of these. The school also offered leisure activities in the afternoons and on holidays. Besides me, as the head teacher, there was one more teacher in the group—responsible for the leisure time activities—and four assistants, providing support in teaching, leisure activities, and caregiving. When I started my teaching assignment in the group, all personnel had worked together for a long time and were familiar with each other. I told the headmaster that I regarded the adjusted curricula (GySär13, 2013) as a challenge I wanted to fulfill.

But the headmaster and most of my colleagues urged me to hold off on learning and let the pupils continue with the familiarized activities to avoid interrupting the routines. I felt uncertain because I wanted to offer my pupils the learning content defined in the newly implemented curriculum (GySär13, 2013). However, I knew there were risks, stress reactions from the pupils in the group, and skepticism from the teacher assistants. They might think, That teacher from the town in the north, who does she think she is? We have done this for decades; we know what is best for our pupils.

In Sweden, all adult citizens vote once every four years. The right to vote is seen as a privilege, but also as a responsibility. All adults who have reached the age of 18 years have the right to vote, including persons with developmental disabilities. But in Sweden, only 4 out of 10 eligible people vote (FUB, 2022). I planned and prepared some new lesson activities to combine the learning content requested

in the curricula (GySär13, 2013) and simultaneously enable the pupils' conditions to participate in the voting procedure.

But my knowledge of the pupil group made me uncertain. I knew that the group of pupils was vulnerable and could get anxious quickly; I did not want to increase their burden.

What Happened in the Classroom?

In this section I explain how I succeeded in developing lesson content about democracy and the political parties but failed in building up pupils' conditions for self-determination.

Attempt 1 (Autumn 2014): The Voting Procedure

In my first attempt to teach my pupils about democracy, I used the "flanosaga (SWE)" method. Flanosaga describes a technique initially used for preschool children. Flanosaga is a way of teaching by reading a story and simultaneously setting up pictures with a sandpaper-like material on a flannel board, a board covered with felt fabric where the images stick. The images enable children with limited knowledge of verbal language to grasp the story and allow the pedagogue's overview of the group of children (which is hardly possible when reading from a book with the children around). Granberg (1996) described the flanosaga method as one that allows the teacher to tell the story and at the same time have eye contact with the children, thus allowing direct adaptions or opportunities to explain events based on the children's interests and age.

Even if the pupils in the group were adolescents, they seemed to enjoy the flanosaga activity. Therefore, to enable the pupil's knowledge about the voting procedure, I made a flanosaga about the voting process. Each patch on the flannel wall corresponded to an event in the democratic proceeding of voting: identify oneself, select a ballot, stand behind confidential screens, and put the votes in an envelope (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The Flanosaga
Note: The photo visualizes the wall with all the pictures used during the proceeding of the flanosaga.

I am the first to admit that the outcome was not so positive as expected. The shift in pupils' attitudes, from manifestations of positive expectations to uncertainty and disappointment, was evident. Because the pupils were used to listening to flanosaga, they expected to experience sensations of recognizable rhyme and images. When I think about what happened during that moment when I presented the flanosaga about the election system, some insights hit me. I remember my tone differed from the one I usually used during the flanosaga activity because my intention wasn't to give my pupils an experience primarily. I wanted to share a message and provide the pupils with opportunities to understand and recognize an important societal event. But I failed; the activity was too abstract, and the pupils seemed bored. It was not a great idea to serve knowledge about democracy as a fairy tale.

Furthermore, I had failed to adapt my teaching to the primary concern for persons with autism (APA, 2013)—the barriers to social communication and interaction and the occurrence of restricted and repetitive behaviors or interests. As a result, I did not receive confirmation that the activity had changed or developed the pupils' awareness of participation. Rather, the opposite held true: Some pupils had shown reluctance to the lesson activity but were still convinced to participate. And I had forgotten to give them an alternative; I had not even allowed them to express their reluctance.

Attempt 2 (Autumn 2015): Pupils' Agency and Democracy

The Swedish curriculum for pupils with severe intellectual disabilities in special-needs upper secondary school (GySär13, 2013) gives the teachers four years to address the areas of knowledge described in the syllabus. Teachers enrolled in special-needs upper secondary schools are consequently allowed to repeat and adjust their efforts in teaching over time. The object of learning presented here is within the subject area of "*individual and society,*" targeting pupils' agency and democracy. In the next school year, instead of the voting procedure, the lesson activities focused on enabling pupils to express their opinions and be heard.

In the autumn of 2015, the didactical strategies focused on concrete events. One example was when I, as a teacher, or the teacher-assistants, informed one of the pupils about the next activity in the visual activity schedule (VAS). I asked the teacher assistants to use this moment as a moment for learning and do their best to react to the pupils' responses.

Consequently, if the pupil closed the hatch after being informed of the next activity, the teacher assistants were asked to confirm the pupil's intention. Even if the pupil was nonverbal, it was clear that she said, "I don't want to do that activity (e.g., do sports); I want to have a break." (Figure 3). Because pupils' agency and democratic values were target learning goals, the teacher assistants were told to speak out about what was happening and to confirm the pupil's wishes whenever possible. This activity was linked to the learning content, communicating life issues, and pupil-related issues (GySär13, 2013).

Attempt 3 (Autumn 2016): Consequences for the Personnel to Consider

After the teacher assistants and the pupil had used the adapted proceeding with the visual schedule for one year, anxiety arose among the paraprofessionals. The pupil declined to participate. The pupil now knew how to express her opinion (Figure 4). The pupil showed her intentions through body language and a few visual signs, and she also used the "close the hatches" procedure in the visual schedule. Now the question was how to respond to the pupil's new behavior.

Figure 3. Visual schedule with hatches
Note: This picture illustrates a personalized visual schedule used by a nonverbal female pupil with intellectual and autism. The pupil had images visualizing critical events during the day, and after each event, the pupil was encouraged to close the hatch.

Once a week, the team discussed educational issues. As a teacher, I had to remind my teammates that our mission was not to foster compliance, but to teach pupils independence and confidence in their abilities. Because even if it was easier for us as educators to bring the pupil with us in all teaching activities, an individual, as the young woman in the example, risks being exposed to situations where motives other than pure beneficence can dominate. The ability to express resistance or say no to situations that feel wrong can be decisive.

Attempt 4 (Spring 2017): Altered Thinking About the Learning Objective in the Lesson Activities

In the spring of 2017, the learning routines in the pupil group had altered. Some new learning activities had been implemented, and others had come back because the gap between new and old habits had been too broad. So, instead of promoting additional activities, I, as a teacher, analyzed if and how the present learning activities promoted the pupils' learning. Here is one conclusion: What in the eye of the beholder looks like teaching may not always be the most effective way to encourage learning.

Figure 4. The pupil expresses her opinion
Note: One frequently used sign was the stop sign, which was given in a distinct manner.
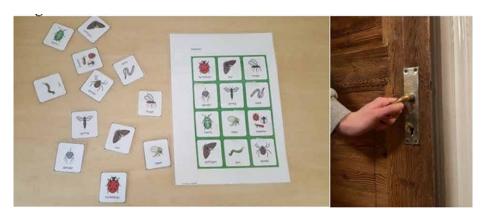

To highlight this point, I present the last teaching examples in this chapter. A core activity among the lesson activities was that the pupils carried out several matching card exercises. Sometimes it could be an inquiry of categorizing pictures that somehow belonged together—for example, combining photographs of dogs, cats, and cows into the animal category. But there were also pure matching exercises where identical prints were matched and placed on top of each other. When I analyzed this lesson activity, I suddenly felt overwhelmed with uncertainty. Could I say that this matching exercise with identical cards promoted learning? Yes, it looked like a lesson because the pupils were quiet and sat on their benches doing activities that, at a distance, looked like academic issues. But what did I expect them to learn? To sit still? To develop fine motor skills? If that were the purpose, that activity would be all right. But I realized I also had other ambitions with the matching cards activity, such as enabling the pupils to learn to categorize bugs. Honestly, I hadn't planned for the exercise correctly.

On the contrary, other activities I had not even thought about as lessons probably provided more significant learning opportunities (Figure 5). For example, the nonverbal pupil that underwent the close-the-hatch exercise (attempt 2) had recently developed a new interest in visual cues. A patient teacher assistant had noticed this circumstance, and after applying more time between the activities, the pupil moved from one activity to another independently.

Figure 5. Learning activities
Note: Everyday activities like interpreting images to predict and thus enable independent movement from one activity to another appeared to yield greater learning than the matching bugs activity, despite the latter appearing more traditional.

OUTCOME

How the Learning Activities Applied After Implementing the Curriculum (GySär13, 2013) Promoted the Pupil's Content Knowledge Versus Advocacy

Benson-Golberg's (2021) research included evidence that teachers tended to focus on the form of teaching instead of focusing on the content of the learning activities. The situation was similar in attempt 1, where I presented a flanosaga about the voting proceeding. After carefully reading through the syllabi (Gysär13, 2013), I noted that as a teacher, I was responsible for ensuring that the lesson activities should provide the pupils with the main content about Sweden's political system with parties and elections. By bringing the pupils together and presenting the main features of the election procedure with image support, I had the preliminary idea to offer the pupils the learning content to which they were entitled.

Benson-Golberg (2021) emphasized the importance of analyzing if and how adjusted teaching strategies, followed by implementing new policy documents, generate real learning opportunities for the pupils. In this chapter, I discussed using critical self-reflection (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Dewey, 1929) to conduct a retrospective analysis of the outcome of lesson plans applied after implementing the new curricula for pupils with intellectual disabilities (GySär13, 2013). When I analyzed the situation, I got a guilty conscience because I became aware that I did not know if the activities benefited the pupils' understanding or learning. Moreover, the analysis was subjective, and another teacher had probably put the lens over other situations or objects of knowledge.

But through the proceeding (attempts 1-4), the learning content within the lessons transformed. There was a change in teaching awareness; it moved from activities that could look like lessons, such as the flanosaga activity, about the voting procedure, or the bug-match exercise. Instead, the focus relied on activities in which the pupils could use their democratic rights or self-determination by refusing to be part of the activity (attempt 3) or transferring independently (attempt 4).

To this day, I am not sure the choices made in my teaching practice best served this pupil group's knowledge development or advocacy. However, I know that the reflective proceeding functions as a

shelter, allowing the teacher to rethink and enabling new opportunities for the pupils to be heard. What is missed in the first round must be questioned in the second.

Altered Learning Objectives in the Classroom

In 2014 when I assigned a new teaching appointment simultaneously with the implementation of a new curriculum (GySär13, 2013), I was overwhelmed with uncertainty. I wanted to fulfill my teaching assignment, but I experienced skepticism from the group of colleagues that had used the same lesson activities for years. This experience of uncertainty is in line with evidence reported in a recent report in the City of Gothenburg that declared that teachers and teacher assistants in Swedish special-needs schools are not used to reason about the pupils' goal achievement (Göteborg Stad, 2022).

In line with Munthe's (2003) and Mintz's (2014) viewpoints, if teachers enable room for critical self-reflection about steps taken and identify strengths and benefits in the teaching procedure, the experience of uncertainty can grow to a level of professional uncertainty. In this chapter, I identified several shortcomings that were considered in the next step of my planning.

This feeling of hesitation experienced in didactical encounters with unfamiliar learning contexts can be linked to the core of teaching, cycles of lesson development. According to Dewey, "… education is by its nature an endless circle or spiral. It is an activity which includes science within itself (Dewey, 1929, p. 40)."

Aspects to Consider Enabling Pupil's Agency

To visualize the outcome of the lesson learned through retrospective analysis of attempts 1–4, I present aspects to consider enabling SEND pupils' agency as bullet points, together with elements from the retrospective analysis.

- **Let the Pupils Be Involved in Planning Their Teaching/Activities:** Instead of eliminating the activities, as the flanosaga with the voting proceeding (attempt 1), present it, but let the pupil interact during the proceeding—take a break or be attentive if the pupil takes the initiative to ask for alternatives.
- **Make Sure That the Pupils Have Access to Communication/Communication Aids:** A visual schedule with hatches (attempt 2) is concrete and easy to handle, but it can be heavy to bring in a pocket. Thus, before introducing a communication aid, consider how it could be personalized and modified.
- **Ensure That the Pupils in Your Learning Group Experience That the Personnel Around Them Are Listening/Paying Attention to Them:** If you work with pupils with SEND, you are probably part of a team. Therefore, ensure that there is time for reflective practice at the group level.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discussed the use of an approach of self-reflection (Fook & Askeland, 2007). Self-reflection is decisive for enabling meaningful teaching, but adding this to teachers' repertoire is not

enough. To promote sustainable development in SEND teaching, critical self-reflections in collaboration with others are decisive. Critical self-reflections are the most robust protection against abandonment or misunderstanding built on ignorance or fear. Remember Elisabeth. Elisabeth was considered the most dangerous woman in Sweden; she was allowed to go out only before others had woken up, wearing a harness controlled by double staffing. Elisabeth's situation altered when she met a reflective practitioner (Mandre, 2002). Let us all rise to that level, enabling us to be committed educators enabling functional communication and responsiveness to the pupils we encounter.

I wrote this chapter a year after the finalization of my dissertation project (Klefbeck, 2022). The thesis was proceeded through teacher-researcher collaboration, and the collaborative process was proceeded through the lesson-study model. The lowest common denominator in a lesson study is that the practice-developing effort includes elements of *joint planning,* evaluation of the *design with the support of observers*, and *reflection* of the result (Ono et al. 2013).

The outcome of the critical reflections taken through my retrospective analysis (attempts 1-4) presented in this chapter have similarities with the factors of importance to developing teaching practices in the Swedish special school for pupils with learning disabilities, thereby promoting contextualized inclusion for pupils with ID and autism discerned within my thesis (Klefbeck, 2022). To highlight how these findings can be related, I have included them in a summary of the results in this chapter versus my thesis in Table 1.

Table 1. Outcome of critical self-reflection versus teacher-researcher collaborations

	Critical Self-Reflection (Attempts 1-4)	**Teacher-Researcher Collaborations (Klefbeck, 2022, p. 94)**
A	● The importance of authenticity in the analysis	● The importance of collaborative work
B	● Focus on case-pupils' participation in learning situations	● Focus on the pupils' participation in learning situations
C	● Distance to own teaching by retrospective analysis of lesson notes	● Distance to own teaching by video-based reflections
D	● Structured analyses of how the design of lessons affects pupils' advocacy	● Structured observations and analyses of how the design of lessons affects pupils' learning
E	● Changed focus from pros and cons of my own teaching to evaluation of the overall proceeding	● Changed focus from pupils' behavior to teaching and learning
F	● Continuity regarding self-reflection over time	● Continuity regarding professional development over time

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There is an urgent need for projects where teachers, researchers, and school principals collaborate, focusing on developing all students' opportunities for active participation and engagement in learning. The results shared in this chapter call for participatory projects involving the children, youths, and their guardians. I see teachers' and researchers' collaboration and retrospective analysis as the first step. In the next step, the individuals affected from a first-person perspective must be invited.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the results of my retrospective analysis emerge (attempts 1-4), resulting in more precise and developed teaching strategies supporting the pupils' agency. This self-reflective approach was inspired by Mandre's (2002) conclusions that showed how reflective thinking could enable personnel around individuals in extensive need of support to adapt their communication repertoire; this approach made it possible for the patients to predict what would happen, which in turn, reduced the patients' challenging behaviors. Fook and Askeland (2007) declared that self-criticism can promote teachers' responsive behavior, and similarly, Mintz (2014) declared that teachers' encounters with the inner space of professional uncertainty can enhance their proficiencies in an encounter with students with challenging behaviors. I believe that the possibility of self-reflection can increase teachers' preparedness in SEND teaching. However, because teachers in SEND often experience uncertainty, stress, and burnout (Carter, 2018), a mental space for reflexive thinking must not be added as an additional requirement. Guided teacher-researcher collaborations are one solution to strengthen teachers' confidence, and systems of plan-do-evaluate-reflect—and adjusting proceedings (Ono et al. 2013)—are another.

To fulfil the aim, the overall research question about how SEND teachers can develop their teaching through reflective practice needs to be discussed. In a stream of consciousness-like manner, the methodological approach in this chapter has been self-reflection, where I, as an author and researcher, have processed past experiences, using previous research and dissertation work as a sounding board in the proceeding. This process has allowed me to critically evaluate my previous work and consider alternative perspectives or approaches that I may have overlooked before.

In a similar way self-reflection can be used in SEND teachers' teaching practices. Reflective practice can contribute to understanding of urgent issues within Swedish special-needs schools, where the SEND teachers have been stuck focusing on either care of the pupils or enabling them to gain specific areas of knowledge (GySär13, 2013; LgrSär22, 2022). The conclusions from the retrospective analysis presented in this chapter indicate that the teacher has no benefit in choosing. The curriculum (LgrSär22, 2022) points out what is to be learned; the SEND teacher's obligation is to continue to contribute as much responsiveness to their pupils as they can offer. Care is to listen, and teachers' self-reflection enables the child's voice (United Nations, 2009) and preconditions for active learning.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Advocacy: The act of supporting, defending, or promoting a particular cause, issue, or group of people. In the present context it refers to teachers' efforts to support pupils to have their voices heard.

Didactic Tools: Instruments or techniques that teachers use to facilitate learning and teaching. They can be physical tools, such as whiteboards, textbooks, and computers, or they can be instructional techniques, such as lecturing, group work, and problem-solving.

Flanosaga: A technique initially used for preschool children. Flanosaga is a way of telling where you read a story and simultaneously set up the pictures on a flannel board. The images enable children with limited knowledge of verbal language to grasp the story and allow the pedagogue's overview of the group of children.

Matching Card Exercise: An exercise in which the student places one picture on top of the other. The images that "match" can be identical, but the images may also resemble each other or be linked by a common theme.

Mental Space: Teachers can benefit from understanding the concept of mental space by considering factors such as the physical classroom environment, the emotional climate of the classroom, and the teaching strategies used to engage students. By being aware of the impact of these factors, teachers can create a more effective and enjoyable learning experience. Additionally, teachers can also work on developing their own mental space, thus enabling them to reduce stress and increase job satisfaction. One way of achieving mental space is through strategies such as mindfulness, self-reflection, and self-care.

Professional Uncertainty: A mental state that occurs in the teacher's heart and mind when facing didactical dilemmas or situations without answers; the teacher copes with and accommodates the uncertainty that comes to the surface when facing the unpredictable.

Retrospective Analysis: In the retrospective analysis, measurement data are collected in forehand, through the teacher's lesson notes, or in a database. It's just a matter of exploring them.

Self-Reflection: In this chapter's context, self-reflection should be understood as an activity that engages cognitive and emotional experiences; this does not mean that self-reflection needs to be unconscious or come by itself because even conscious efforts of self-reflection can lead to an increased ability for reflective thinking.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: (**SEND):** The learning group of pupils who find learning harder owing to additional learning needs or disabilities.

Swedish Special-Needs Compulsory School: The Swedish educational system is divided into regular and special schools. Pupils with intellectual disability or significant and long-term cognitive disability owing to brain damage can be accepted in schools for pupils with special needs. Schooling of pupils with ID is primarily regulated in the Education Act (Public Law 800 2010).

Visual Activity Schedule (VAS): A VAS uses visual clues, such as images or photographs, to visualize and prepare for the next step or activity during the school day.