



## Brief

# The role of the special needs educator in preschool – preschool teachers' descriptions of division of labor, claims and negotiations

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According to the Swedish curriculum, all children should receive an education that is designed and adapted so that they develop as far as possible. Since preschool should stimulate every child's development, preschool should work inclusively. Therefore, special requirements are imposed on preschool staff members to facilitate the needs of all children in order for them to develop and learn in preschool. In the Swedish preschool context, the role of the special needs educator (SNEs) is important since SNEs are expected to work together with preschool staff in order to assure a) the development of children in need of special support and b) the approach taken by regular staff who meet these children on a daily basis is satisfactory. However, it is unclear exactly what SNEs should be equipped with to handle this work.

This paper focuses on the role of SNE from the perspective of preschool teachers. This can contribute new knowledge and elucidation regarding the role of SNEs. The study can also be seen as a contribution to research on special education in preschool, which is expressed as lacking in previous research studies (Palla, 2020). The purpose of this study is thus to increase knowledge about the SNE's role in preschool from the perspective of preschool teachers.

The data consists of interviews with 15 preschool teachers who have had contact with SNEs at work. The data material was processed through a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The following three themes emerged based on the preschool teachers' descriptions, the SNE as: (1) supervisor, (2) observer and (3) advisor. The results show that the preschool

teachers describe the SNE's supervisory role based on the SNE being able to add an outside perspective and that the SNE can contribute with confirmation of the preschool teachers' work. The preschool teachers describe the SNE's role as an observer of individual children and of activities. Finally, the SNE's role as an advisor is described, both in terms of advice to the work team and to guardians. In the discussion of the result, Abbott's (1988) reasoning on the claim to jurisdiction and the negotiation that takes place with regard to professional work is used and the outcome is also discussed in relation to Skrtic's (1991) reasoning about collaboration.

**Keywords:** *children in need of special support; jurisdiction; preschool teacher; special needs educator*