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Keeping possibilities open for the students: autism from the point of view of students and education professionals in two special educational contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to contribute with knowledge of how the autism spectrum diagnosis is used by education professionals and students in special educational environments in Sweden. Despite having been seen as focusing on inclusion, the Swedish school system offers various special and separate school contexts for students with autism. It is important to deepen our knowledge on how an autism diagnosis informs the reasoning of both students and education professionals, both as a matter of self-knowledge and as a tool to plan the students' education. The study reports data gathered through interviews ($n = 23$, with students) and open-ended questionnaires ($n = 18$, with education staff) and analyses the results using the MADIT methodology of discourse analysis. The results show that the students are configured as individuals and that the diagnosis does not play a key role, despite the schools being special educational schools with a profile towards autism. At the same time, the schools use interactive processes in which the diagnosis becomes a central element, especially to make 'justifications'. The results are discussed in relation to promoting the students' development and keeping possibilities open for them.

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Autism diagnosis; special education; autistic; text analysis; development; potential

Introduction

This study aims to contribute knowledge on how an autism spectrum diagnosis is understood by students and education professionals in two Swedish special educational environments. The Swedish education system has previously been seen as a model of inclusive education (e.g. OECD 2011), a view that has been contested because of increased segregation within the system (e.g. SOU 2020:28; OECD 2015) and because the concept of inclusion is relatively absent in education policy (Göransson, Nilholm, and Karlsson 2010; Isaksson and Lindqvist 2015). However, it could be argued that Swedish education policies have historically aimed to reduce differentiation and to further social cohesion (Magnússon and Pettersson 2021). For instance, there is a clear policy emphasis on a compensatory approach to reduce the

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impact of students' background on learning and a focus on learning achievement (rather than diagnosis or disability) as a reason for special support.

However, the political formulation 'inclusion has gone too far' has gained momentum in recent years, and is an explicit driver of policies that encourage and fund the increased use of segregated schooling (Bagger and Lillvist 2021; Magnússon 2022). In particular, students diagnosed with neuropsychiatric diagnoses, such as autism spectrum diagnosis (ASD), have been the focus of the debate on whether segregated or mainstream environments are the most appropriate environments for them (Bagger and Lillvist 2021; Malmqvist 2018; Olsson and Nilholm 2022). The use of psychiatric diagnoses in education has been debated for decades, especially in relation to inclusion, and some scholars have argued that they are inherently antithetical to inclusive education (Haug 1998; Malmqvist 2018; Nilholm 2006). On the other hand, separate educational contexts based on diagnosis have been argued to be inclusive in the sense that they provide an environment adapted to the needs of the specific student (e.g. Holmqvist 2024). However, such segregated contexts are often seen as definitionally incompatible with inclusion (cf. Malmqvist 2021; Malmqvist and Nilholm 2016).

Previous studies have discussed how the use of categories such as psychiatric diagnoses in school might lead to a focus on the shortcomings of the individual (Haug 1998; Slee 2011). For example, the category 'learning disability' has been found to correlate with negative expectations from teachers (Minner and Prater 1984; Shifrer 2016). Because psychiatric diagnoses provide information about a student, previous research has also suggested that such categories tend to lead education professionals to interpret behaviours as signs of the diagnosis, which in turn leads to interactions with students that reinforce or confirm these categorisations (Dudley-Marling 2004; Hjörne and Säljö 2019). Research focusing on ADHD has suggested that the diagnostic label correlate with more negative evaluations of the students; academic as well as behavioural and of the students' personality (Franz et al. 2023). Previous ethnographical work has illustrated how an ADHD diagnosis can become the primary defining feature of a person through which their behaviour is interpreted (Hjörne and Evaldsson 2016). However, studies examining how an ADHD diagnosis influences education professionals' evaluations have produced mixed results, with some findings indicating no negative effects (Evaldsson and Svahn 2019; Franz et al. 2023). Moreover, a diagnosis can also be seen as useful when organising an effective and functional education for the students (Bejnö et al. 2019; Holmqvist 2009). From such a perspective, the knowledge of education professionals about autism is important in order to guarantee that students receive the right type of support (Anderson 2020; Wood 2023).

To make education as effective as possible for students with autism, it is not only important to focus on clinical features of autism, such as specific difficulties often associated with the diagnosis; it is also important to focus on how the students themselves make sense of the diagnosis to understand themselves, create expectations and beliefs which, in turn, have implications for their actions and choices. It is also important to gain awareness of how education professionals understand their students since this will impact how they interact with the students and plan educational activities. This study aims to contribute with knowledge on how an autism spectrum diagnosis is understood by education professionals and students in two Swedish special educational environments and to discuss the implications that are likely to follow. We will specifically focus on the students' possibilities for development and how education professionals can keep doors open for them. The results presented in this paper are from interviews with 23 students and questionnaires completed by 18 education professionals. The article is structured as follows: a description of the special educational school system in Sweden; methodology and materials; the results, followed by a concluding discussion.

Special educational contexts for students with autism

According to the new Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800), a diagnosis is not necessary for students to receive special educational support. Rather, the provision of support is primarily connected to educational attainment, meaning that students who are at risk of not reaching the knowledge goals may be entitled to support. The head teacher of the individual school is legally responsible for investigating the individual student's need for support, as well as provision of the support in cooperation with a student health team. Following the Education Act of 2010, a legislative amendment led to the closure of special units for students with ASD who did not have intellectual disabilities (SFS 2010:800). This meant that students with ASD who had previously been placed in special educational units were moved to regular compulsory school. However, the Swedish Education Act of 2010 also introduced provisions that gave independent primary schools (a school run by a principal organiser other than a municipality, region or state) the right to limit their education to students in need of special support. Later, a corresponding right was added for independent upper secondary schools (Swedish National Agency for Education 2014).

In recent years, the use of special educational units focused on specific diagnoses has increased again, often motivated by failing support in regular schools (Malmqvist 2021; Giota, Lace, and Emanuelsson 2022). Additionally, lower and upper secondary schools can restrict their admission to students in need of special support, often with a focus on students with neuropsychiatric diagnoses (Swedish National Agency for Education 2014). Hence, a diagnosis such as autism is decisive to a certain extent when it comes to the organisation of educational provision for particular students.

The Education Act (SFS 2010:800) also stipulates that special support should primarily be given within the regular classroom. However, as mentioned, there are several exceptions to this, and the notion of educational provision as a right of the child is often subject to the discretion of the individual head teacher (Göransson, Nilholm, and Karlsson 2010; Hjörne and Säljö 2019; Magnússon 2022). Thus, despite the ideal of inclusion, the tendency to use special education outside the regular classroom has long existed in the Swedish education system (Malmqvist and Nilholm 2016; Giota, Lace, and Emanuelsson 2022). For instance, students can be placed in smaller groups, the pace of teaching can be adapted, they can receive one-on-one teaching, or enrol in special school forms (Hjörne and Evaldsson 2016). To some extent, this can be understood as the result of incompatible policy requirements: both the Education Act and the curricula for compulsory education stipulate that education shall take different needs into account so that students can 'develop to their full potential' and that schooling shall have a compensatory approach to reduce differences between children (e.g. SFS 2010:800; United Nations 2007). However, what is meant by 'full potential' is rather vaguely described in the policy documents. While inclusion in the regular classroom is preferred, special units have been understood as a way of taking specific needs into consideration (cf. Malmqvist 2021).

Parents, students and teachers have diverse opinions about the suitability of mainstream education (e.g de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert 2011; Allan 2012; Anderson 2020). For example, Lynch and Irvine (2009) highlight how parents with children with autism are often less satisfied with mainstream placement as their children grow older and believe that the needs of children and youth with autism are not properly met in regular school settings. Similarly, Lindsay et al. (2013) argue for the need of more strategic teaching methodologies in inclusive classrooms, including teamwork, parental guidance, an inclusive atmosphere and resources and training for teachers (cf. Cook, Ogden, and Winstone 2020). As also demonstrated in a recent research review on autism, student voices are often missing and should be listened to more thoroughly in research on inclusion (Olsson and Nilholm 2022).

Materials and methods

The Methodology for the Analysis of Computerised Text Data (MADIT) was used to analyse the data (Turchi et al. 2021, 2022; Iudici et al. 2022; Bassi et al. 2024). The methodology has roots in the philosophy of the language of Wittgenstein (1953) and understands natural language as the fundamental tool that people use, in interaction, to construct meaning. In particular, the assumption is that in natural, everyday language, meaning is produced by how the words are used (Turchi et al. 2021; Wittgenstein 1953). In MADIT, this 'use' is understood through the concept of 'discursive repertories' (DRs). DRs are defined as '*a precise and distinct way of using ordinary language'* (Turchi et al. 2014b). In other words, DRs are rules to which ordinary language adheres as it is being used to configure reality.

MADIT comprises 24 DRs that are divided into three classes depending on whether they tend to keep the process of configuration of sense stable or unstable (Turchi et al. 2021; see also Tassinari Rogalin, Turchi, and Orrù 2024). The Stabilisation DRs enhance stability in the discursive process, keeping the process equal to itself. Stabilisation DRs restrict the possibilities to generate alternative discursive scenarios. This means that what can be said, imagined and done in the interaction between people is restricted. Generative DRs stimulate instability in the discursive process. These DRs open up possibilities for other ways of configuring sense insofar as they 'invite' new things to be said, done and imagined. The Hybrid DRs can contribute to both stability and instability in the process of sense-making, depending on the DR (Generative or Stabilisation) with which they connect (a full list of definitions of DRs can be found in the supplementary material to Turchi et al. 2021). The particular combination of different DRs constitute the *discursive configuration* (Bassi et al. 2024; Turchi et al. 2014a).

In this study, a discursive configuration primarily comprising Stabilisation DRs could indicate that the diagnosis may restrict what possibilities for development that can be imagined, expected and proposed for the students. In this sense, some doors might be closed for the students. Thus, in regard to educational policies (e.g. SFS 2010:800; United

Nations 2007), the development of the students' full potential might be restricted (such as the acquisition of new skills, the possibility to take on new challenges). Identifying Generative DRs, especially a variation of Generative DRs, in the discursive configuration would indicate that many options are available for the students. This is because Generative DRs favour change that is essential for development. In the analysis, it is also important to consider the content found in the responses, focusing on *what* the students and education professionals talked about. The themes are always linked to the DR that gives the theme is specific use in language (Turchi and Orrù 2014; Bassi et al. 2024). The discursive configuration is generated, maintained and changed in and by the interactions between people (Turchi and Orrù 2014; Turchi et al. 2021). Thus, the analysis examines where DRs overlap between the students and education professionals (thereby reinforcing each other) and where they differ (thereby challenging and possibly destabilising the configuration).

Participants and data

The results presented in this paper draw on interviews with 23 students diagnosed with ASD and open-ended questionnaires with 18 members of school staff (teachers, resource educators (*resurspedagoger*), as well as 'student health team' members, including head teachers). The interviews were fully transcribed and all data treated as textual data. Two schools were involved in the study: a) an independent upper secondary school for students diagnosed with ASD and other neuropsychiatric diagnoses. This school offered three orientations: social sciences, science, and the arts. This school also offered a preparation programme for students with insufficient grades from compulsory school; b) two lower secondary school special teaching classes, 7th and 8th year. The classes are located in a separate building next to a larger compulsory school and welcome students from a larger catchment area. The students in these classes are offered a place through a process initiated by the head teacher of the student's regular school and involves a decision-making process on municipal level. A diagnosis is not a requirement to be placed in these classes but at the time of the research, most of the students had an ASD diagnosis and the education team worked with a focus on autism and other neuropsychiatric diagnoses. Table 1 presents the participants.

Table 1. Participants.

		Education professionals			Total
	Students	Teachers	Resource educators	Student Health Team	
Upper secondary school (ages 16–19)	19	7		2	**28**
Lower secondary school (ages 12–15)	4	3	3	3	**13**
Total	**23**	**10**	**3**	**5**	**41**

In MADIT, an important part of the collection of data is to ask the participants to describe each other's point of view. It is assumed that a person's point of view comprises two perspectives: the first person perspective (called 'personalis' in MADIT) and others point of view (called 'alter'). For this reason, the participants were asked to describe their own point of view from a first-person perspective, as well as to describe the others' point of view (Turchi and Orrù

2014). In this study, 'alter' meant asking the students how, according to them, a teacher would describe a student with an autism spectrum diagnosis, whereas the education professionals were asked how, according to them, the students would describe themselves. Table 2 illustrates the questions formulated in personalis and alter. Data generated in the form of the first-person perspective (personalis) have been presented in a previous article (Tassinari Rogalin, Turchi, and Orrù 2024). In this paper, we will present data generated from the questions regarding the others' point of view (alter).

Table 2. Questions to participants.

Personalis/first person perspective	Students	How would you describe a student with an autism spectrum diagnosis?	
	Education professionals	As a teachers/pedagogical resource/member of the student health team, how would you describe a student with the diagnosis autism spectrum disorder?	
Alter/others point of view	Students	According to you, how would a teacher describe a student with the diagnosis autism spectrum disorder?	Questions treated in the present paper
	Education professionals	According to you, how would a student with the diagnosis autism spectrum disorder describe themselves?	

Ethical approval was granted by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (approval no. 2021–03775). All participants received oral and written information about the research and their rights. The interviews with the students were carried out in a separate room in both school settings, and took place during, before and after school hours. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes, depending on how much the students spoke when giving their answers.

Results

Following the MADIT methodology, each response from the students and education staff was analysed with reference to the 24 Discursive Repertories. One response can be formed through one or more DR. Through this analytical procedure we ended up with a set of DRs that the participants in the two groups (students versus educational professionals) used to answer. This is what we call the *discursive configuration* (see 'Methods').

The results can be seen in terms of the extent (percentage) to which each DR comprises the whole configuration. Consequently, the percentages indicate how central a DR is in the discursive configuration. We will illustrate percentages of type of DR (Stabilisation, Generative and Hybrid), as well as for the most common DRs. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the percentages of Stabilisation, Generative and

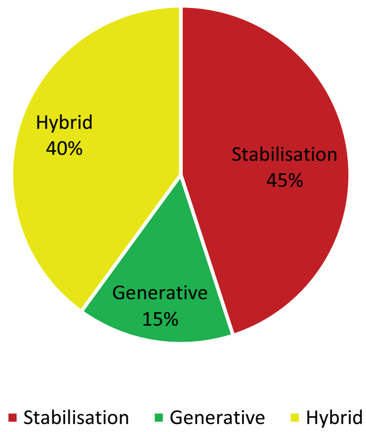

Figure 1. Stabilisation, Generative and Hybrid DRs in the answers given by the students.

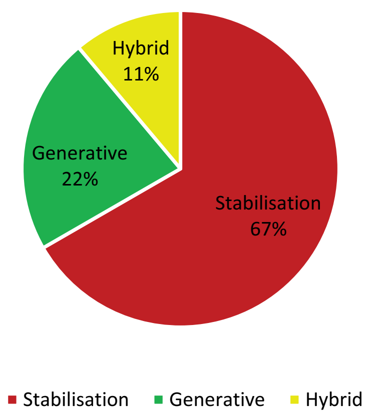

Figure 2. Stabilisation, Generative and Hybrid DRs in the answers given by the education professionals.

Hybrid DRs in the students' answers and in the education staffs' answers, respectively.

The Stabilisation DRs (in red) are more frequent in the answers compared to the Generative DRs (in green) in both groups. This means that the configuration is quite stable and will therefore tend to remain the same. The above figures also show that in the responses given by the students in particular, a high percentage of Hybrid DRs were identified. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate all DRs that cover a percentage higher than 4% of the total configuration relating to students and education professionals, respectively. The circle indicates the two overlapping and most common Stabilisation and Generative DRs: the Justification and the Description DRs.

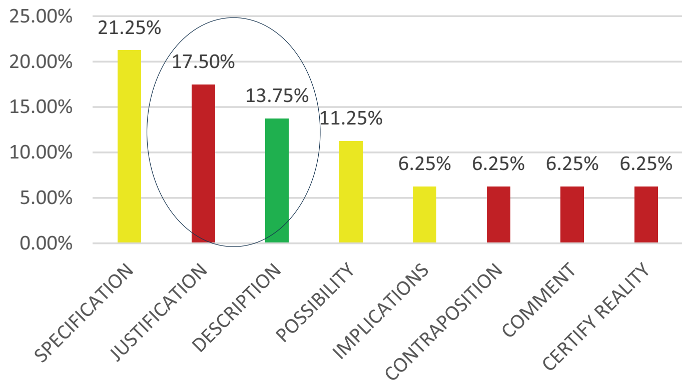

Figure 3. Percentages of specific DRs 4% > in the answers given by the students.

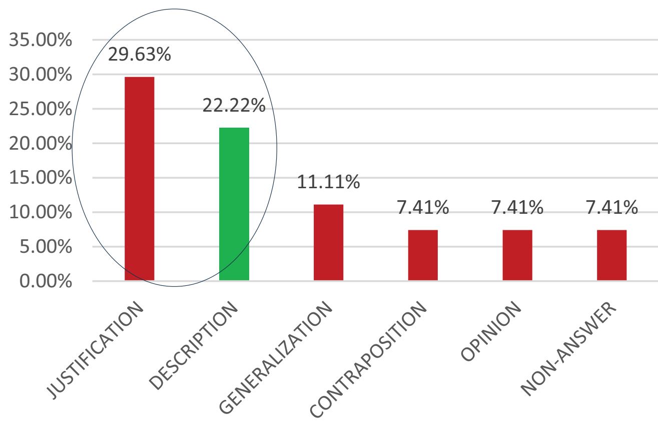

Figure 4. Percentages of specific DRs 4% > in the answers given by the education professionals.

In the students' answers, the Hybrid Specification is the most common DR. Specifications support other DRs by adding further details to what has already been said (Turchi et al. 2021 supplementary material). In our case, the Specification DR is associated with both Stabilisation and Generative DRs, occurring slightly more often with Stabilisation DRs (4 times with Generative DRs, 7 times with Stabilisation DRs, and 6 times with other Hybrid DRs).

The most common Stabilisation and Generative DRs in both groups are Justification and Description DRs. The fact that they are found in both group means that students and education professionals reciprocally enhance these two modalities. Thus, in the following sections, we will focus on these two DRs and discuss their implications.

The Description Discursive Repertory

The Description DR forms a discursive reality starting from a neutral position and is characterised by constructing a current or past reality, as if the narrator were responding to a question starting with 'how'. It also leaves the discourse open so that further elements can easily be added to the discursive configuration (Turchi et al. 2021 supplementary material; Turchi and Orrù 2014, 109). Following these definitions, in the material analysed for this paper, the Description DRs reach two main criteria a) the text enters into the merits of what the question is asking and b) the answer is formulated in a way that does not restrict what could be further said.

Education professionals: feeling different and not fitting in

In the answers given by the education professionals, the most common category found in the Description DRs is 'Being diverse/different'. This revolves around students or persons with autism as 'being special', 'different' and 'diverse'. The examples below illustrates the Description DR together with the content 'Being diverse/different'.

Excerpt 1 many students feel different, that they don't fit into society. Feeling not understood.

(Health team member, lower secondary school).

Excerpt 2 The perception that you are different from others and that they believe they are perceived as odd and unsocial. That you're not understood and don't fit in.

(Teacher, upper secondary school).

Of particular interest is that the education staff, through the use of the Description modality, configure the student as being diverse or different without turning the categorisation into something that essentially differentiates those students with autism from other students.

Students: Special educational support and special interests

In the Description DRs identified in the students' responses, various types of content were found in almost equal amounts. The category 'special/individual education' was slightly more common and we will therefore explore this category. We will also show an example of the category 'special interests/knowledgeable in certain areas' to further illustrate the students' competences in using an autism diagnosis as a resource.

The content 'special/individual education' contains answers that revolve around students needing special support or individual education. As the students imagine what the teachers would say, the need for support is recognised, while not restricting what could be further added to the description. Excerpt 3 and 4 exemplify:

Excerpt 3 Mmm, I would say that students need more support work more with clarification pedagogy

(Student, upper secondary school).

Excerpt 4 but a student who needs extra support who maybe is a little hard to handle sometimes

(Student, upper secondary school).

The category 'special interests/knowledgeable in certain areas' contains text that revolves around students/persons with autism having special interests or being knowledgeable in certain areas of interest. Excerpt 5 provides an example:

Excerpt 5 erm funny to have I think knowledgeable in certain areas erm don't care so much what others think

(Student, upper secondary school).

Implications of the Description DR

In comparison to Stabilisation DRs, the Description DR is a way of just adding information without involving causes, justifications, comparisons or explanations that 'fixate' the configuration (cf. Bassi et al. 2024; Turchi et al. 2021; Turchi and Orrù 2014, 101–21). The autism diagnosis is not constructed as something that restricts what can be further said and imagined in regard to the students. In other words: the Description DR keep options available for the students. As the Description simply adds elements to the identity of a student with autism, it does not configure a stable and coherent identity that creates limits to what could be added, thus allowing for potential skills to be developed.

Regarding the category 'being diverse/different' used by the education staff, it is interesting to note that the participants do not turn the diversity/difference into a comparison to students/people without autism, as would be the case with a Contraposition DR (Tassinari Rogalin, Turchi, and Orrù 2024). In this sense, the autism diagnosis is not turned into a category that differentiates students with autism from other students/persons. In a special educational environment in which the diagnosis is a central element, these results are interesting because they suggest that the diagnosis is understood as one of many elements that the students comprise, rather than the main element. Because the Description keeps the discursive configuration open, it is helpful in focusing on the students' potentials and capabilities rather than limitations. In this sense, it would favour development and change – thereby keeping possibilities and doors open for the students. Our findings are important in respect to the intent in the policies regarding the students' rights to develop towards their full potential (SFS 2010:800; United Nations 2007).

A note should be added regarding a difference between the two schools: it was mainly the students in upper secondary school who used Description DRs. On the other hand, among the education staff, the ones from the lower secondary school used more Descriptions compared to the ones in the upper secondary school.

The Justification discursive repertory

The Justification DR was the most common Stabilisation DR among both the students' and the education professionals' answers. According to MADIT, a Justification DR legitimises the state of things by creating a connection between two discursive elements where one legitimises the other. In doing so, the DR in question complicates the development of alternative discursive scenarios (Turchi and Orrù 2014, 118; Turchi et al. 2021). In data analysed for this paper, the Justification DRs are characterised by a) not entering into the merits of what the question is asking, turning the focus to something else, and b) offering a reason that justifies why it is not possible to enter into the merits. In the subsequent paragraphs, we will give examples of the Justification DR in the answers from the education professionals and students, respectively, together with the most common categories.

Education professionals: 'varying, specific to each and every one'

In the responses given by the education professionals, the most common content was 'Varying, specific to each and every one'. This category contains answers that centre on autism being specific to each person, varying; it depends on what it means. Excerpts 6–8 offer examples:

Excerpt 6 I think it varies completely from student to student

(Teacher, upper secondary school).

Excerpt 7 Also here, it varies a lot between one student and the next

(Resource educator, lower secondary school).

Excerpt 8 Not possible to generalise. Will get different answers depending on the student.

(Teacher, upper secondary school)

The texts in the examples configure the sense that, because the autism diagnosis varies a lot between different students, it is hard to enter into the merits of what the question is asking (how the students would describe themselves). At the same time, however, the configurations indicate that the diagnosis says something about the students in question.

Students: Knowledge

In the students' responses, the content most commonly formed as Justification DR is 'Knowledge'. This category includes answers that revolve around knowledge of and/or experience of autism in various ways. In the selected data, knowledge of autism is configured as a way of distinguishing between ordinary teachers and special educational teachers, or teachers with experience of autism. Knowledge is also used to explain why it is hard to answer the question. Excerpts 9 and 10 exemplify:

Excerpt 9 I don't know, I'm not a teacher (laughs)

(Student, upper secondary school).

Excerpt 10 And their job is to work with such people so they, eh so I can't use any of them

(Student, secondary school).

According to MADIT, the important point in the above answers is that it is taken for granted that 'autism' says something about the student while it is, in the first excerpt, lack of knowledge (*'I don't know'*) that makes it impossible to express what a teacher would say. In the excerpt 10, 'their' refers to teachers and 'such people' refers to students or people who have an autism diagnosis. In this answer it is also taken for granted that there is some kind of knowledge that teachers could have on students with autism and that there is a difference between teachers who work with those students and teachers who do not work with students with autism. While the content ('knowledge') differs from the content used by the education professionals ('varying, specific to each and every one'), the way of making sense (the DR) is the same.

Implications of the Justification DR

When discussing the implications of these results, it is important to consider how common the Justification DR is in the discursive configuration. The idea in MADIT is that DRs that are used in language to make sense of a student with an autism diagnosis are also indications of what happens in the interactions between students and education staff (Bassi et al. 2024). Identifying multiple Justification DRs indicates that this way of approaching the students also takes place as the education staff interact with the students in their daily work. The presence of the Justification DRs are plausibly an outcome of a desire to not generalise who the students are based on diagnosis. What could be critical with the findings are the many Justifications that have been found in both groups. A 'dominance' of the Justification DR in a discursive configuration indicates a tendency to legitimise situations; possibly difficulties or struggles that in reality could be challenged, allowing the students to develop beyond those struggles. Based on MADIT, in order to enhance the chances of development and give the students access to their potential, more and stronger Generative DRs in the configuration would 'balance' the strong justification tendency.

Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this paper was to contribute with knowledge on how students and education staff make sense of the autism diagnosis and the implications that are likely to follow from these understandings. We achieved this by using the MADIT methodology and describing the discursive configuration that stems from the perspective of the students and the education professionals. It illustrated and discussed two particular DRs: the Generative DR Description and the Stabilisation DR Justification.

The Description DR indicates a way of using the autism diagnosis to add information on the students while not restricting the opportunity to add further information. In this sense, the diagnosis is taken into consideration but does not become the main 'aspect' of the student. This result is interesting because it shows the autism diagnosis being used in a way that is not exposed to the risks discussed in other research in terms of psychiatric diagnoses becoming elements that confirm 'inabilities' (Dudley-Marling 2004; Hjörne and Evaldsson 2015; Hjörne and Säljö 2019), and generate negative expectations on the students (Tassinari Rogalin and Nencini 2015; Franz et al. 2023; Minner and Prater 1984; Rogalin et al. 2015; Shifrer 2016). In the Description DR, while being in a special and separate educational environment, the students are still 'approached' as belonging to the broader group of students rather than a separate group of students (Tassinari Rogalin, Turchi, and Orrù 2024).

A challenge with using psychiatric diagnoses in school is that certain categories may lead to certain assumptions about the students that are not true for all of them (Hjörne and Säljö 2019), where a diagnosis becomes the primary-defining feature of a person (Hjörne and Evaldsson 2016) through which the students' behaviour is interpreted (Malmqvist and Nilholm 2016) – Description DRs are an indication of this *not* happening. Moreover, the Description modality is generative and therefore keeps the discursive configuration unstable; instability enables change, which is necessary for development. Thus, the Description DR in the discursive configuration suggest a presence of elements that could benefit the students' development (SFS 2010:800; United Nations 2007). This study was carried out in Sweden, where the school system is characterised by an emphasis on inclusive education and in which psychiatric diagnoses should not be a necessary element to receive support. The present study was carried out in two special educational contexts separated from mainstream school, but it is possible to imagine that the findings of the Description DRs has to do with the emphasis on inclusive education and avoidance of differentiation in the Swedish school system. It is likely that the results would have been different would they have been generated in a more segregated system (Iudici, Tassinari Rogalin, and Turchi 2019). It would therefore be valuable to compare the findings of the present study to results generated within mainstream schools in Sweden and to countries with a more segregated school system.

The high amount of Stabilisation DRs, in particular, Justification DRs, suggest that in the daily interactions between students and education professionals, there are situations that are maintained to a broader extent than necessary. It is difficult to know exactly what types of situations are justified, but it is possible to anticipate that sometimes the students are not given the opportunities to challenge and overcome obstacles or develop new competences, because the 'current situation' is justified. The issue is not that there are Justifications but that they are quite common in relation to Generative DRs. Believing that education professionals work towards promoting student development, it could be helpful to carry out an intervention with the aim of adding more Generative DRs to the configuration. As the configuration changes, so do expectations and the daily interactions between students and education professionals. According to MADIT, there are several DRs that have a stronger generativity than the Descriptions: 'Proposal' and 'Targeting an aim' could be helpful to strengthen the movement towards development.

Limitations and future research

The results of this study were generated from a small sample and are initial findings. Ideally, the results could be further explored and verified through observations. As mentioned above, the results should also be understood to have arisen within the Swedish education system, which has a historical emphasis on inclusion and avoidance of differentiation. Hence, the results may partly be due to the system and could have been different in other, more segregated and differentiated education systems. It is of interest to compare the results to findings in mainstream schools to observe if there are more Generative DRs in such contexts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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