The Individual Development Plan as Tool and Practice

in Swedish compulsory school

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ABSTRACT
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Since 2006 Swedish compulsory school teachers are required to use individual development plans (IDPs) as part of their assessment practices. The IDP has developed through two major reforms and is currently about to undergo a third in which requirements for documentation are to be reduced. The original purpose of IDP was formative: a document containing targets and strategies for the student’s future learning was to be drawn up at the parent-pupil-teacher meeting each semester. The 2008 reform added requirements for written summative assessments/grade-like symbols to be used in the plan.

This thesis aims to generate knowledge of the IDP as a tool in terms of what characterizes IDP documents as well as teachers’ descriptions of continuous IDP work. It contains four articles. The first two are based on 379 collected IDP documents from all stages of compulsory school, and the last two build on interviews with 15 teachers. Throughout, qualitative content analysis has been used for processing data. The analytical framework comprises Latour’s conceptual pair inscription – translation, Wartofsky’s notions of primary/secondary/tertiary artifacts, and Wertsch’s distinction between mastery and appropriation, which together provide an overall framework for understanding how the IDP becomes a contextually shaped tool that mediates teachers’ actions in practice. Moreover, the activity theoretical concept of contradiction is used to understand and discuss dilemmas teachers experience in relation to IDP.

In article 1, targets and strategies for future learning given to students are investigated and discussed in relation to definitions of formative assessment. Concepts were derived from the data and used for creating a typology of target and strategy types related either to being aspects (students’ behavior/attitudes/personalities) or to subject matter learning. In article 2, the distribution of being and learning targets to boys and girls, respectively, is investigated. The results point to a significant gendered difference in the distribution of being targets. Possible reasons for the gendered distribution are discussed from a doing-gender perspective, and the proportion of being targets in IDPs is discussed from an assessment validity point of view.

In article 3, teachers’ continuous work with IDPs is explored, and it is suggested that IDP work develops in relation to perceived purposes and the contextual conditions framing teachers’ work. Three qualitatively different ways of perceiving and working with IDP are described in a typology. Article 4 elaborates on dilemmas that teachers experience in relation to IDP, concerning time, communication, and assessment. A tentative categorization of dilemma management strategies is also presented.

Results are synthesized in the final part of the thesis, where the ways in which documents are written and IDP work is carried out are discussed as being shaped in the intersection between rules and guidelines at national, municipal and local school level, and companies creating solutions for IDP documentation. Various purposes are to be achieved with the help of the IDP, which makes it a potential field of tension that is not always easy for teachers to navigate. Several IDP-related difficulties, but also opportunities and affordances, are visualized in the studies of this thesis.
INCLUDED ARTICLES

The thesis is based on the following included articles:

ARTICLE 1

ARTICLE 2

ARTICLE 3

ARTICLE 4
Hirsh, Å. The Individual Development Plan: Supportive tool or mission impossible? Swedish teachers’ experiences of dilemmas in IDP practice. Accepted for publication in Educational Inquiry.
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FÖRORD

Det är svårt att tro att det är sant. Nästan fem år har gått och det är dags att sätta punkt och avsluta en resa som varit omvälvande och fantastisk på många sätt. Vandringen längs doktorandvägen har ofta känts allt annat än rak och arbetet har varit hårt och inte sällan mödosamt. När jag ser tillbaka och summerar tänker jag dock i första hand på hur fantastiskt roligt det har varit, jag känner mig priviligierad som har fått göra den här vandringen och jag är stolt över vad jag har åstadkommit. Många har – mer eller mindre direkt – bidragit till att det blev en avhandling som jag kan vara stolt över, och många har – på olika sätt – förnyttat min tillvaro utmed vägen. Detta förord tillägnas er som har funnits där. Att jag har genomgått en forskarutbildning och skrivit en avhandling är fantastiskt, men minst lika fantastiskt är att det finns så många människor att tacka!


Som doktorand inom Akademin för skolnära forskning har jag finansierats av 13 kommuner i Jönköpings län i samverkan med Högskolan för lärande


Med detta sätter jag punkt för avhandlingen och en epok av mitt liv. Mot nya äventyr!

Habo i oktober, 2013

Åsa Hirsh
INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with individual development plans (IDPs) in Swedish compulsory schools. An IDP is an assessment document answering to summative as well as formative assessment purposes. The IDP has an informative function, apprising students and parents of the results and progress of the student in school, as well as a forward-aiming educational planning function. In contrast to the action plan, a similar type of document that is used for pupils in need of special support (SEN), IDPs are given to all students in compulsory school once every semester during parent-pupil-teacher meetings.

I myself have been a teacher at secondary school level for many years, and I remember when we were told, in 2006, that we were to draw up specific documents during the parent-pupil-teacher meetings. Along with students and parents, we would summarize in writing the students’ strengths and weaknesses, and, on the basis of this, specify what was most crucial for each student to aim for ahead. The students’ and parents’ right to influence had been emphasized as central, and the writing of the document tended to be based on teachers asking the students questions such as ‘What do you think you are good at?’, ‘What do you think is difficult?’, ‘What would you like to work on a little extra?’, and ‘What do you want the school to help you with?’. On one occasion, we had a visit from School Inspection, who collected and evaluated a sample of our IDP documents. We were

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1 Teachers' administrative workload is currently under investigation, and in a department memorandum (Ds 2013:23) it is suggested that IDPs should be drawn up once instead of twice a year in grades 1-5, and that IDPs should no longer be required in grades 6-9 of compulsory school.
judged to be inadequate in our IDP-writing and asked to consider how we could improve.

We had no more than begun the process of considering how we could develop our current IDPs, however, when a new IDP reform was introduced. According to the new reform, in addition to the forward-aiming summary drawn up at the parent-pupil-teacher meeting, students were to receive written summative assessments in all school subjects in their IDPs. The municipality created a template for the new type of IDP documentation, where students’ knowledge in each subject was to be graded in terms of ‘On the way to reaching the goal’, ‘Reaches the goal’, or ‘Reaches the goal by a margin’. In addition to this, we were to add explanatory and forward-aiming comments in each subject.

A web-based system was introduced, where all subject teachers wrote their assessments of students. When sitting as mentors with students and parents in the parent-pupil-teacher meetings, many of us noted how different the assessments written by various teachers could be. Some teachers only checked the boxes with ‘grade levels’ and wrote no further comments, whereas others wrote long and extensive texts about each student. Some wrote in a very general manner, more or less the same comments for all students in a class, while others wrote very specific information on each individual student. This led to discussions among the school staff and at the municipal level, concerning students’ and parents’ right to expect the same from all teachers.

In 2009, when the second IDP reform was still in its initial stage, I stopped working as a teacher and began working on my dissertation.

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2 At secondary school level the students in a class have different subject teachers in each school subject. One of these teachers functions as a mentor/class teacher with extra responsibility for the students in the class. The mentor leads the parent-pupil-teacher meetings, compiles the written assessments, and draws up the forward-aiming planning in collaboration with the students and parents.
Since then, I have followed the development of IDP from my position and point of view as a researcher.

Assessment issues have always interested me, issues concerning formative assessment in particular. The focus of my research on assessment issues in school was predetermined from the start of my dissertation process by a number of municipalities that have contributed to financing my studies. My choice to study teachers’ assessment through IDP largely had to do with the fact that assessments in IDPs are to contain explicitly formative assessments. Moreover, the IDP phenomenon was new and relatively unexplored, and I thought there was good reason to study IDP documents as well as teachers’ attitudes toward and perceptions of IDP.

Lately, the general debate has concerned, to a large extent, the fact that teachers spend so much time on administration and documentation that they no longer find time for planning and evaluating their lessons. The documentation, which up until now has been regarded as quality assurance, is increasingly perceived as a threat to the quality of the school. As a new election approaches, politicians speak of removing some of the requirements for documentation in order to provide better conditions for teachers to focus on what is described as their core mission – teaching.

I consider it important, at this point, that the discussion not simply stop at issues dealing with removing or retaining the IDP. Rather, it ought to concern what is perceived as beneficial and sustainable and what is perceived as unsustainable in relation to IDPs. We ought to discuss that which teachers, students, and parents perceive the IDP can or cannot contribute with. For eight years now, teachers have dealt in various ways with difficulties and opportunities surrounding the IDP, and many feel that through this process they have developed a fruitful and functioning practice. The articles and overall chapters of this thesis show that the IDP is multifaceted in many respects, and that there are opportunities as well as concerns that are worth considering.
SORTING OUT THE TERMINOLOGY

When I began writing the first article of my thesis, I hesitated as to which English terminology I would use for the Swedish concept of ‘Individuella utvecklingsplaner’. In one English text from the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE) (2009), the term *individual development plan* is used. Since international comparisons were to be made, I found it relevant to try to discover what that concept would relate to internationally. A Google Scholar search of the term ‘individual development plan’ generated approximately 1500 hits, most of which related to adult learning and development, workplaces, and career supportive activities. The kind of educational planning document for schools that the Swedish term ‘individuell utvecklingsplan’ refers to is more in line with that which is internationally referred to as an *individual education plan*. This term is generally used for documents prepared for students with special needs in relation to learning and/or functioning in the compulsory school context. In content, these documents often resemble the Swedish ‘utvecklingsplan’ - in that they contain targets and strategies for future learning, follow-up of results, clarification of responsibilities and agreements, etc. For this reason, I chose to use the term individual education plan when writing my first two articles, with a thorough clarification of the differences between the documents I referred to when talking about individual education plans, and the documents given to students with special educational needs internationally. An important difference is that the latter documents primarily address special needs and are often prepared by specially trained personnel. I do not make any com-

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3 The Swedish National Agency for Education is an authority working for the Department of Education, providing support to school staff and municipalities. Throughout the thesis I will use the abbreviation SNAE when referring to the Swedish National Agency for Education

4 The Swedish counterpart to the internationally termed *individual education plan* is termed *action plan* by the SNAE (2009).
parisons concerning the actual content of the documents in that sense, rather, I highlight differences and similarities concerning documentation as a phenomenon, how the documentation is used in practice, and the tools and forms for such educational planning documents.

For the third article, I changed the terminology, following referee comments in which I was advised to use the term individual development plan in accordance with an SNAE translation. Thus, in articles 1 and 2, the term individual education plan is used, whereas in articles 3 and 4, as well as the general parts of the thesis, the term individual development plan is used.

**AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This thesis aims to generate and deepen knowledge of individual development plans as documents given to students and as tools for teachers for acting in practice. All knowledge is perspective bound, and I have used a socioculturally/activity-theoretically inspired point of view in my studies. I understand the IDP as a tool that mediates teachers’ actions in practice, i.e., teachers understand and handle (part of) their work through the IDP document. A point of departure is that the IDP is not a tool that can simply ‘be put into operation’ in a certain given way. Individual (teachers in collaboration with students and parents), tool (IDP) and context (rules and conditions) mutually shape each other; thus, the ways in which the IDP is put into practice may vary. The included empirical studies concern the IDP tool and teachers’ use of the tool, but in relation to background, previous research, and theoretical concepts it is also possible to discuss the relation between the IDP as ideal construction and how it is realized by teachers in local contexts.

The use of IDPs in Swedish schools is investigated in four empirical studies. The first two examine documents and the latter two examine teachers’ work with the documents.
The overarching questions are:

(i) What characterizes IDP documents, both in terms of design and in terms of the kind of assessment displayed in the documents?

(ii) What characterizes teachers’ descriptions of their work with IDPs in relation to perceived purposes and in terms of difficulties as well as opportunities connected to IDP work?

Each of the four articles have their own specific aims and research questions:

ARTICLE 1

Article 1 aims to develop further knowledge about the use of formative assessment in terms of targets and strategies given to pupils in their IDP documentation, by answering the following questions: (i) How are targets and strategies expressed in Swedish IDPs? (ii) In what way(s) do targets and strategies interact with each other? (iii) What differences (if any) are there between IDPs for pupils in differing stages of school?

ARTICLE 2

Article 2 aims to gain knowledge of gendered differences and similarities in targets given to pupils in IDPs, by answering the following questions: (i) How are different target types (being as well as learning aspects) distributed in IDPs given to boys and girls of different grade levels in the Swedish compulsory school? (ii) What are the possible reasons for a gendered distribution? An additional interest is aimed at discussing issues of assessment and assessment validity in relation to the gendered distribution of targets.
ARTICLE 3

Article 3 aims to generate knowledge of teachers’ practices with regard to IDP as a tool, by answering the following questions: (i) What do teachers perceive as the purpose(s) of IDP? (ii) What IDP practices can be discerned in teachers’ descriptions? (iii) What contextual aspects may affect perceptions of the purpose of the IDP and the implementation of the plan in practice? An additional interest is aimed at the (possible) relation between IDP and formative assessment.

ARTICLE 4

Article 4 aims to explore the dilemmas and coping strategies for handling dilemmas that can be discerned in teachers’ descriptions of IDP practices.
BACKGROUND

The three chapters that follow are intended to provide a context for the four articles included in the thesis as well as the discussion in which the results are synthesized. The emergence of the IDP tool can be understood as a response to perceived societal needs. As will be apparent in the background, previous research, and theory chapters, the IDP can be understood as answering to different needs and it is possible to view it as a tool for achieving various, potentially contradictory, purposes. The needs motivate concrete actions - in this case, IDP related actions. The IDP is used by teachers in practice and is also, in a sense, shaped by them. There are, however, other actors and other dimensions that contribute to shaping the IDP into a tool for documentation and teachers’ actions in practice.

In this chapter I begin by briefly describing how such dimensions can be understood. Since this can be regarded as a theoretical framework against which the results of the included studies can be discussed, I will return to the issue in the chapter on theoretical perspectives. I consider it important, however, to provide the reader with an initial clarification of how I understand different dimensions of IDP, which dimension my empirical data concerns, and which dimensions are to be understood as a background against which data are interpreted. I then move on to give an account of the assessment purposes of the IDP before I turn to describing and problematizing the short history of the IDP itself and how it has developed from the time of its initial proposal to the present. In addition, because the IDP tool is an important part of the contact between school and home, I give an ac-
count of how this contact has evolved in relation to societal needs and purposes as well as changing views of learning. I conclude the background chapter by problematizing tensions between different IDP related purposes.

DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF IDP

The fact that IDP is shaped at different levels can be compared to Goodson’s (1995) understanding of five different dimensions of curriculum. First there is the ideological dimension, the ideal which forms the basis for the way of thinking when the curriculum is formulated. Due to political and pragmatic factors, it is impossible to fully implement the ideological dimension. The formal dimension is the actual curriculum that activities in school follow, which is interpreted differently in different schools. The understood dimension concerns how actors in various schools understand the formal curriculum. A number of factors can lead to differential interpretations by, for instance, teachers and school leaders. The implemented dimension is what actually takes place in the classrooms. Teachers can understand the curriculum differently, but even if they do have similar understandings, their actual classroom practices may vary due to other contextual factors. Finally, the experienced dimension concerns that which the students experience in the classroom.

In this thesis I interpret the IDP in the same way. There is an ideological dimension on which the idea of IDP is based in the sense that it is based on a certain epistemology and democratic ideals concerning how students are to be viewed. The ideological dimension is behind and affects the content and wording of the formal dimension of IDP as it is written in policy documents and, particularly, SNAE guidelines that teachers and school leaders are to follow. The understood dimension in the IDP case differs from Goodson’s understanding of curriculum in that an ‘outside’ commercial actor has entered, thus situating this dimension in the intersection between the central munic-
ipal level (politicians and school administration), companies developing solutions for documentation, and principals’ and teachers’ understanding of the formal documents. The empirical studies in this thesis do concern teachers’ understood dimension, but foremost they concern the implemented dimension of IDP and how this is manifested in documents and teachers’ descriptions of their practices with regard to IDP. The ideological and formal dimensions, as well as the understood dimension at municipal and company-solution level provide a background for the empirical studies.

ASSESSMENT PURPOSES OF THE IDP: SUMMATIVE AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Teachers’ assessment practices are many and diverse, some formal and some more informal. The IDP is a central part of teachers’ assessment practices, and can be regarded as formal in the sense that all pupils are to have an IDP document containing written summative assessments as well as forward-aiming targets and strategies related to assessment criteria in the syllabuses in all school subjects. In another sense, the IDP can be regarded as more of an informal ‘working document’ that is used formatively, on an ongoing basis, in the classroom.

Up until 6th grade, the IDP represents the only formal, written assessment Swedish pupils receive. The assessment purposes of the current IDP are summative as well as formative: the written assessments in the IDP are to summarize students’ knowledge and contain forward-aiming elements, and function as a tool for acting in practice. In this way, the IDP is representative of what is sometimes referred to as ‘the new assessment paradigm’ (Havnes & McDowell, 2008), where there is a drive to use assessment not only as a way of control-

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5 Up until 2011, Swedish pupils received formal grades twice a year in grades 8-9. From 2011, students receive grades twice a year in grades 6-9.
ling and summarizing student achievement, but also as a tool for learning. Summative assessments have the purpose of determining academic development after a unit of material, and formative assessments have the purpose of monitoring and supporting student progress during the learning period (Dunn & Mulvenon, 2009). In an article from 2006, Popham gives a definition of formative assessment that he claims was agreed upon by a number of researchers:

An assessment is formative to the extent that information from the assessment is used during the instructional segment in which it occurred, to adjust instruction with the intent of better meeting the needs of the students assessed. (p. 3).

In my first article, I claim that the formative function of the IDP can be seen much in the same way, although in a longer time perspective. The quote above (Popham, 2006) can be seen as referring to short cycle formative assessment taking place in the classroom in that it says that assessment information shall be used to adjust instruction during the instructional segment in which it occurred. Even though assessment in IDPs generally concern longer cycles, the teacher’s role in clarifying learning intention, sharing criteria for success and providing feedback that moves the learner forward (Wiliam, 2009; Jönsson 2010) is the same as in short cycle classroom assessment. The instructional segment must be seen in another time perspective however.

Bennett (2011) argues that two types of arguments must be involved in a theory of action of formative assessment practices: a validity argument to support the quality of inferences and instructional adjustment, and an efficacy argument to support the impact on learning and instruction. It is not enough to talk about one of them. If this statement were to hold for IDP practice, this would mean that IDP practice ought to involve teachers’ making the ‘right’ inferences about pupils’ present levels and their being able to use these inferences to give targets that are valid not only in relation to curricular goals but also in
relation to pupils’ present levels. In addition, teachers should be able to provide relevant strategies, suitable for each pupil, and make sure that everything written and agreed upon actually has an impact on classroom instruction. From my point of view, that an IDP practice lives up to both the validity argument and the efficacy argument demands a lot. First of all, teachers must have a thorough knowledge of assessment purposes; secondly, there is the system issue (Bennett, 2011). Formative assessment exists within a larger educational context, which in order to function effectively must be coherent with respect to its components. The effectiveness of formative assessment, such as IDP assessment, is limited by or benefits from the larger system in which it is embedded.

It is worth noting that, at the primary and intermediate stages of school, the class teacher who teaches most subjects also writes most of the IDP content - the summative assessments in different subjects as well as the forward-aiming part with central targets and strategies for the future. In secondary school, on the other hand, pupils have different teachers in different subjects, wherefore the summative assessments in their IDPs are written by a number of different teachers. For these pupils, one teacher functions as a mentor with extra responsibility for a number of pupils in a class, and this mentor is responsible for summarizing the forward-aiming part with targets and strategies. Thus, information given by several teachers is interpreted (and possibly transformed) by the mentor before it reaches the student and parents. It is also important to consider the domain dependency issue. To be effective, formative assessment requires not only knowledge of general principles and techniques, but also a certain measure of subject-specific knowledge (Bennett, 2011). For teachers who do not teach more than one or two subjects, it is difficult to make inferences and know what to ask from pupils in subjects other than their own.

If we consider the fact that all educational assessment is inferential – that we can merely make conjectures based on observations of pupils’ work, participation, test results, etc. – it seems the validity argument would be stronger the better the teacher knows his/her pupils:
Each teacher-student interaction becomes an opportunity for posing and refining our conjectures, or hypotheses, about what a student knows and can do, where he or she needs to improve, and what might be done to achieve that change (Bennett, 2011, p. 17).

It is reasonable to assume that a class teacher in primary and intermediate school who works together with his/her pupils’ several hours every day would be better prepared to make valid inferences than a mentor who only meets the pupils one or two hours a week. Thus, there are different traditions and rules at secondary school level than at primary and intermediate, and presumably such contextual conditions contribute to shaping teachers’ IDP related actions in different ways.

**THE EMERGENCE OF IDP**

The following section deals with the emergence of the IDP in relation to policy. It is about how traditions and changing conditions of teacher action and autonomy can be understood in relation to the IDP as assessment practice and as part of the contact between school and home.

**HISTORY OF HOME-SCHOOL CONTACT**

While the IDP is part of an assessment practice and mainly viewed as such in this thesis it is currently also a significant part of the contact between home and school. Just as assessment practices have changed and developed over the years, the development of the contact between home and school can be tied to societal needs and demands and the way in which views of learning have changed. The recurring meetings that we have today in Swedish schools between teachers, stu-
dents and parents – and of which the IDP is part – have their roots in post-war changes in theories of child development and learning, as well as in an increased emphasis on democratic ideals such as independence and critical thinking (Granath, 2008). The need for a form of contact between home and school was born when discussions about learning no longer revolved around children’s predispositions: if children are malleable, then it must also be possible to influence children’s future fate. Increasingly, the discussion also concerned the fact that a child is shaped by his or her environment, not least the home environment. Therefore, it was in the interest of the school to get a picture of the child’s social life and home conditions. The idea of developmental meetings between home and school were not realized, however, until the early 1970s, in the form of regularly recurring ‘individual talks’ (Hofvendahl, 2006, my translation).

The era of the ‘individual talk’ lasted until the mid-1990s, when it was replaced by what is called a developmental parent-pupil-teacher meeting. The ‘individual talk’ had proved to be mostly debriefing and reporting of results, rather than a forum for discussion and planning of necessary actions. With the introduction of a new term for the meeting, there were new guidelines emphasizing a future-oriented, equitable and dialogic conversation between three parts (SNAE, 1998, 2001).

Hofvendahl (2006) points out that there are a couple of important differences between the ‘individual talk’ and the ‘developmental parent-pupil-teacher meeting’, at least in terms of how they are described in policy documents and similar texts. Whereas student participation in the ‘individual talk’ was desirable but not mandatory, it is considered a prerequisite for the ‘developmental parent-pupil-teacher meeting’. The SNAE (1998), furthermore, argues that the ‘individual talk’ meant that parents came to school for a 15 minute meeting every semester to receive information about their child’s current knowledge status and results. In contrast to this, they describe the ‘developmental parent-pupil-teacher meeting’ as a new way of meeting together with the student, where all parts actively discuss and plan for the future.
When something old is replaced by something new, it is often a policy discourse to describe the new in more positive terms than the old, in this case old meetings are described as ‘debriefings’ of the current situation, and the new as ‘aiming for the future’ (Hofvendahl, 2006). Differences that can be traced are that the new meeting is more set to look ahead, and, in line with the 1994 curriculum, it is characterized by goal orientation. It is also possible to discern a shift to a more individualized approach. A government letter on quality work in preschools and schools mentions that “the developmental parent-pupil-teacher meeting should routinely lead to a forward-aiming individual development plan” (Skr 2001/02: 188, s 18, my translation). Thus, thoughts of individual development plans start to appear in policy texts from the early 2000s.

Eriksson (2004) claims that for at least half a century there have been expressed political expectations on parents to support and get involved in their own children’s schooling. In recent decades, however, there has been a change, both internationally and from a Swedish perspective. An increasing mandate has been placed in the hands of parents when it comes to making decisions and being actively involved in their children’s education. Education has increasingly come to be defined as a matter for the individual and as a family affair. In parallel, it also appears that the school has become more accountable to parents (Eriksson, 2004). Brown (1990) argues that the education policy landscape from the 1970s and onwards has entered a stage that he describes as parentocracy. This has not grown out of public or parental needs but has, rather, evolved as a consequence of the state’s having bestowed increased responsibility on parents, as formulated in slogans such as “educational choice” and “free market” (Brown, 1990, p. 67). Through this development, Brown argues, we are now in a situation in which children’s education is increasingly dependent upon the wealth, awareness and wishes of parents. Eriksson (2004) mentions Whitty’s (1997) arguments that, whereas discussions used to concern how parents were fulfilling their responsibilities to help their children with school work, the discourse now tends to be more about the obligation of schools to fulfill their responsibility toward
parents. Parents have the right to receive information and reports from the school and they also have the right to lodge complaints at the schools. They shall have the possibility to judge their children’s progress and achievements and thereby evaluate the efficiency of their own school compared to other schools. Schools may also benefit from parental participation. Whitty (1997) describes an increased interest from schools in ‘tying up’ the parents and ensuring their support through the establishment of different types of documents and contracts.

**CHANGES IN STEERING AND CONTROL OF SWEDISH SCHOOLS**

During the past two decades, the system for control of the Swedish school has undergone major changes. Since the early 1990s, the system has been one of management by objectives and results, on the one hand creating more flexibility and allowing for local, situation-specific solutions and, on the other hand, controlling the results. Responsibility for the school was decentralized to the municipal level in the 1990s, while the central level concentrated its responsibilities to include quality control, national equality and legal security. Moving responsibility and decisions to the municipal level was described as important from the points of view of both democracy and efficiency (Krantz, 2009). In recent years, the Swedish school has been portrayed as lacking in quality, as permissive, and as generating poor results in terms of goal attainment among students and in terms of rankings in comparative international measurements (e.g., Avdic, 2010). In answer there has been a growing emphasis on central monitoring, evaluation and inspection. Increasingly extensive documentation has come to be viewed as quality assurance and as a means of holding schools accountable for their results (Forsberg & Lindberg, 2010). The IDP is part of this picture. It has developed through two major reforms: The first, in 2006, introduced the IDP as a forward-aiming tool for a more individually targeted educational planning and
greater involvement of students and parents. The second, in 2008, expanded the purpose of the IDP to include written summative assessments of students’ knowledge in each school subject.

The following section will describe the two IDP reforms in terms of the needs and objectives of each, how each has been described in guidance from the SNAE, and how each has been evaluated.

THE 2006 IDP REFORM

Preparatory work, proposals, and decisions concerning the first IDP reform came during a period when Sweden had a left-wing government. Wennbo (2005) argues that a variety of motives as to why the first IDP reform was introduced can be traced in policy proposals. The reason most emphasized is — perhaps unsurprisingly — that the reform was expected to be beneficial in different ways for student learning and school performance. In 2001 (Ds 2001:19) a governmental expert committee suggested that the purpose behind the action plan — “optimally planning the individual’s conditions for learning” (p. 30, my translation) — should be valid for all students and that each individual should have the right to an educational planning document containing guidance toward optimal learning performance. A document such as the IDP — that visualizes progress — was also expected to develop students’ meta-cognitive reflections and thus contribute to increased learning, involvement and motivation. Policy justifications indicate that transparency and documentation were expected to contribute to more effective learning among students, as these were expected to enable and motivate students to a greater extent (Wennbo, 2005; Krantz, 2009). There were also other factors involved. The political debate in the 1990s and early 2000s dealt to a large extent with quality management and quality assurance. Monitoring results and information about assessment and grading became key components in this discussion and the school’s obligation to provide information to the home was increasingly emphasized. Wennbo (2005) points to the
fact that the former (social democratic) minister of education clearly described the IDP as not only an educational planning document beneficial for students but also a way of controlling schools’ quality. She argues that it is possible to ask Which was the strongest motive behind the reform: the individual’s need for a tool for learning or the need for increased control of schools’ (declining) results?

Documenting and informing about students’ learning and development fulfills the argumentative function of making the school more transparent. Transparency was expected to create understanding and legitimacy of the assessment and its grounds for all parties involved. Krantz (2009) argues that when positive values such as transparency, increased understanding, and motivation are linked to documentation and assessment, it is difficult for schools and teachers to take a critical stance on these issues.

The teachers’ synthesized observations and assessments of each student were to provide the basis for the parent-pupil-teacher meetings. Thus, the summative evaluation of the student was to be dealt with orally, while the written IDP was meant to be exclusively prospective: A document describing targets and strategies for the near future was to be prepared as a trilateral agreement between the parties involved (SNAE, 2005). Teachers were to ensure that the school, students and parents had a common understanding of what their respective actions would achieve (Krantz, 2009). The government (Ministry of Education, U2002/3932/S) stressed that the introduction of IDP did not mean that teaching should focus on more individual work. It was emphasized that learning occurs in a social context, which makes a claim on the teacher to consider contextual conditions for learning. Thus, the IDP was positioned within a potentially conflictual tension between an individual success orientation and an activity critical contextualization (Krantz, 2009).

Teachers’ collective preparatory work before parent-pupil-teacher meetings and IDP writing was expected to give fruitful discussions on assessment related issues and, by extension, lead to a better learning
situation for pupils. The written plan was to be forward-aiming and formative only, and it was strongly emphasized that the IDP should not be perceived as a way of grading students (Ds 2001:19).

THE 2008 IDP REFORM

After 2006, the education policy debate shifted towards greater focus on the importance of grades, knowledge measurement, and clarity concerning curricular goals and assessment criteria. Grades in earlier school years, a more differentiated grading scale, and more extensive standard testing have been profile issues for the right-wing government appointed after 2006. Under this government, the IDP has also been developed towards becoming a more knowledge-oriented plan. A 2008 Ministry of Education memorandum stated that information given by teachers at the parent-pupil-teacher meeting often lacked clarity, wherefore teachers ought to be given the opportunity to express themselves in “grade-like forms” (Ministry of Education 2008, p. 4) in the IDP. The writings of the Educational Act were changed, and from 2008, it prescribes an IDP containing written, summative assessments in all subjects, while it also maintains the original purpose of IDP as a forward-aiming formative tool. The change was motivated by the fact that official grades together with information given at the parent-pupil-teacher meeting and in the forward-aiming IDP were deemed inadequate in their function of providing information about students’ knowledge. Claims on teachers’ duty to inform were reinforced; goals and assessment criteria needed to be clarified and concretized. School problems were defined in terms of lack of effectiveness in goal attainment. Giving teachers the opportunity to express themselves in grade-like forms was seen as a solution. In this way, the IDP was expected to contribute to countering the vagueness and increasingly widespread permissiveness of school.

Krantz (2009) argues that a number of discursive contrasts are placed against each other in various policy documents concerning IDP: fuzz-
ininess, tardiness and discontinuity are contrasted with clarity, earlier
detection of problems and regularity. Undesirable variation in as-
se ssment is to be met with extended external control. Just as with the
former reform, it is difficult for teachers and principals to adopt a crit-
ical stance to a reform described in such a way.

With the introduction of written assessments and grade-like symbols
in the IDP, the tension between summative and formative assessment
was accentuated. One of the unions for teachers in Sweden (consist-
ing primarily of teachers in the earlier school years) expressed con-
cern that grade-like assessment information would degrade the info-
mation students received in their plans, and argued that teachers
should engage in formative assessment and mainly express what is
needed in order for goals to be achieved when formulating the IDP.
The other teacher union (consisting primarily of teachers on the sec-
ondary school level) was more positive toward what was described as
clearer and earlier evaluation of students’ knowledge, but simultane-
ously critical to the fact that the design of the IDP was to be shaped
locally (Krantz, 2009).

EVALUATIONS OF THE REFORMS

The SNAE has carried through two major evaluations of the IDP, one
in 2007 and one in 2010. The evaluations are largely positive. It is
important to bear in mind, however, that there is a dependency be-
tween the SNAE and the authority that assigned them the mission to
evaluate. Moreover, as mentioned, it might be difficult initially for
teachers and principals to take a critical stance to a reform that is de-
scribed as countering school problems and declining results.

In both evaluations, teachers, principals, students and parents in se-
veral municipalities answered questionnaires and were interviewed,
and documents were analyzed. As mentioned, the results are predom-
inantly positive, although shortcomings are highlighted and discussed
to some extent. Primarily, the IDP is depicted as having had an obvi-
ous effect on the ways in which teachers speak of students’ knowledge development in relation to curricular goals. It is argued that the IDP has contributed to developing students’ meta-cognitive skills, and that teachers have come to realize “the importance of systematic evaluation and planning of school activity” (SNAE, 2007, p. 25, my translation). In the 2010 evaluation, the written assessments are described as having had a favorable impact on the implementation of the curriculum and syllabi. Thus, in both evaluations, the IDP is depicted as being a tool for bringing about professionalization.

Noted on the negative side is that the IDP is generally seen in a distinctly individual context. The expert committee that investigated the matter before the introduction of the reform emphasized that the work with IDP must be viewed relationally, i.e., in relation to the context of which the pupil is a part. The SNAE (2007) argues that the IDP documents in the evaluation do not live up to such expectations. Many teachers claim that the difference between the action plan and the IDP is diffuse, and, moreover, that there is great confusion concerning what should be included in the IDP. The SNAE concludes that, due to this variance in interpretations, the scope of the documents collected for the evaluations varies significantly. In the latter evaluation, 40% of the teachers claim that time to write all the assessments is insufficient. Other problems mentioned are, for instance, the fact that the assessments tend to be more summative than formative, that there emerges a clear normative image of the ideal and desirable student in assessments about students’ social development, and the fact that there is often no clear link between the written assessments and the forward-aiming planning. In the 2010 evaluation, teachers in the earliest school forms tend to be doubtful concerning the summative, grade-like evaluation of young children. Furthermore, the IDP is frequently perceived as insufficient as a tool for continuous individual planning and monitoring; logbooks, diaries and portfolios are often used alongside.

In both evaluations, the SNAE touches upon the issue of standardized templates for documentation. In their discussion of the ‘professionali-
zation effect’ that the IDP has entailed, they argue as follows: “Paradoxically, the IDP – if it becomes too mechanical and if the templates are allowed to replace teachers’ experienced-based ‘tacit’ knowledge – may lead to de-professionalization” (SNAE, 2007, p. 25-26, my translation). In the 2010 evaluation, they claim to detect a development towards greater standardization in matrices, templates, and forms for documentation used within municipalities. They note that this is problematic in the sense that it may lead to a uniformity which is not necessarily positive. Schools that have developed models for documentation and documentation practice may feel that they have to set these aside in favor of common municipal templates. At the same time, pupils and parents are considered to be entitled to some form of equivalence in terms of quality within a municipality.

TENSIONS BETWEEN ASSESSMENT PRACTICES INHERENT IN IDP

Before the grading system in the Swedish school became goal-oriented in the mid-90s, there was an epistemological discussion in which an instrumental view of knowledge was placed in contrast to qualitative knowledge as Bildung. This discussion subsequently led to a ‘two-stage’ target structure in the 1994 curriculum: goals were formulated both in terms of what students were to achieve as a minimum and in terms of what schools, teachers and students ought to continue to strive towards. A part of teachers’ professional autonomy was to interpret and specify the direction of the ‘goals to strive for’ from a Bildung-perspective. Krantz (2009) argues that this created a tension between goal rationality/instrumentality on the one hand and deeper and more sophisticated learning on the other.

6 The current curriculum, introduced in 2011, is not formulated with goals in two stages. Instead, it establishes proficiency levels for grade levels A, C and E (grade levels D and B are considered to be intermediate levels that are to be used if students’ knowledge does not qualify for the grade immediately
When problems concerning students’ goal attainment and equivalence in assessment and grading are discussed, it appears as though the system of management by objectives and results poses professional problems for teachers. Systematic monitoring and documentation is seen as one solution to the problem. At the same time, Krantz (2009) claims, the IDP-reform reinforces the tension and discursive struggle between instrumental goal-orientation and Bildung-orientation. Goal-oriented assessment on the level of the individual demands that the goals and the progression towards goals can be formulated in writing. At the same time, demands for transparency, information and uniform procedures are increasing. The discursive struggle between instrumental goal-orientation and Bildung-orientation concerns which results are to be achieved and what kind of teaching profession is to be developed. The different discourses concern to great extent teachers’ professional autonomy. In an analysis of policy documents, Krantz (2009) claims to distinguish four different discourses bearing on assessment practices and IDP: a Bildung-oriented communicative discourse, a goal-oriented political-administrative discourse, a market discourse, and a professionalization discourse. In my reading, the discourses can be understood as descriptions of shifting purposes that can be achieved with help of the IDP.

In the Bildung-oriented communicative discourse, teachers are autonomous and self-managing within the frames of the requirements of the steering documents. Professional interaction and student participation are key components. Students' knowledge is evaluated com-

above in its entirety). Assessment criteria in each subject are formulated as abilities (which can be summarized as analytical, communicative, metacognitive, information processing and conceptual abilities) at qualitatively different levels. Thus, teachers are still expected to make their own interpretations.
prehensively, taking into account their differences and the relation to the context of which they are part. Meaning is created jointly rather than individually. Teacher autonomy is seen in the light of the fact that goals are not always easily formulated and concretized in advance. Uncertainties must be handled professionally.

In a goal-oriented political administrative discourse, the task of concretizing goals and assessment criteria are shifted toward being a political responsibility rather than a professional one. The focus of pedagogical practice primarily concerns assessment in terms of measurability and objectivity. The professional interpretation space decreases and the external control is strengthened by inspection, standardized tests and grades. Grade-like assessments are assumed to increase students' motivation and thus, by extension, lead to better results in terms of goal attainment. Local misinterpretations and permissiveness are depicted as factors behind failing results, wherefore more central monitoring and control and extended documentation is necessary. Teachers' professional autonomy is seen as a problem rather than an asset. In this discourse, the teacher is constituted as a results-responsible executor.

Choice and competition are keystones in the market discourse. The customer makes choices on the basis of comparisons, and grounds for comparison are created through documentation, grades, and knowledge measurements. A market discourse constitutes schools and teachers as implementers of what the customer has ordered.

In the professionalization discourse, assessment practice has a legitimacy based on the claim that only qualified teachers are able to objectively see the student's knowledge in a holistic perspective. The importance of teachers developing a common professional language and common forms and procedures for assessment is also stressed. Professional rather than pedagogical implications are discussed when the IDP is formulated as a professionalization project.
Traces of all four discourses are present in the IDP practices and perceived dilemmas that are described in studies 3 and 4 of this thesis. I will therefore return to the discourses in the discussion.
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

So far, aspects that are considered relevant as background for understanding teachers’ work with the IDP as a tool have been described and problematized. Such aspects concern assessment purposes, home-school contact, changes in the control and steering of the school system, and the emergence and evaluation of IDP in relation to policy. The current chapter aims to present a picture of research that ties in closer to documentation plans and documentation practices as such, research in which the empirical basis in most cases has been various educational planning documents and teachers’ work with such documents. The chapter concerns IDPs and comparable forms of documentation tools, with a certain focus on the purposes for which such tools are used, and possible problems as well as opportunities connected to document content and use of such tools in practice.

Swedish research into IDPs is not very extensive. The relatively short time that the IDP has existed is presumably one reason for this. My intention has been to cover the Swedish research available, although some studies are more thoroughly described than others. Work with IDPs or resembling documentation and assessment practices can be described as a transnational trend, with similar standardized systems for documentation, contracts and instruments for regulation at the individual level. There are differences between countries, but also commonalities. In English-speaking countries there is the term IEP for individual education plans/programs, and in other countries other corresponding terms are used. These documents are equivalents to the
Swedish action plan and are given to pupils in need of special support (SEN). The Swedish IDP and action plan often resemble each other greatly and are, in many cases, identical documents (Asp Onsjö, 2006). The fact that IDP documentation is provided to all students characterizes the Swedish case (Vallberg Roth & Månsson, 2008). Given the similarities between the documentation forms and issues that can be discussed in relation to various forms of educational planning documents, there is reason to make comparisons between them. Besides research into IDPs, therefore, Swedish as well as international studies of action plans/IEPs will also be referred to. In the Swedish case, I have mainly focused on research from the last decade (which is when the ideas of IDP emerged and were implemented in practice). For the international case, I have primarily used a meta-study of Mitchell, Morton and Hornby (2010) in which the authors present an overview of 319 studies bearing on IEP. In some cases, studies which do not concern such documentation but otherwise deal with issues of relevance for the problem area will also be referred to.

While reading Swedish research into IDPs and action plans, I found two more or less distinct branches, where the first is research essentially focused on problematizing underlying agendas of documentation practices. This research branch will be presented first. I will then turn to the other branch, which mainly focuses on practical implications of IDP in relation to official or expressed purposes.

The terms IDP, action plan, and IEP will be used alternately in the following text, where IDP and action plan concern the Swedish context, and IEP the international.

**FOSTERING, NORMALIZATION AND POWER STRUCTURES**

Swedish researchers into documentation in the form of IDPs as well as action plans have taken great interest in studying the fostering and
normalizing aspects of documentation. The research reveals hidden power structures in the ways students are depicted in such school documentation. Elvstrand (2009) argues that schools’ democratic processes in general foster students to learn and think ‘right’ rather than develop critical thinking. Similarly, Bartholdsson (2008) argues that various actions in school, of which parent-pupil-teacher meetings and IDPs are a part, are about ‘benevolent government’. She views ‘pupilness’ as a form of normality that involves pupils conforming to a power structure, consenting to be governed, wanting to learn and work hard and adapting to the system. In the school situation as a whole, much time and effort is devoted to moulding children into ‘ideal pupilness’ (cf. Adelswärd & Nilholm, 1998). Bartholdsson questions the narrow view of normality that ‘ideal pupilness’ represents. Nilholm (2012) argues that there is a need to distinguish between a legitimate striving for normalization and an illegitimate striving. The legitimate striving lies in schools’ mandate to actively and consciously foster students into becoming democratic citizens and embracing the norms and values of society. If teachers were to not bother with fostering students into being respectful towards others and following certain rules, for instance, many would probably regard that as somewhat odd. Therefore, Nilholm (2012) claims, there is a need to consider not only that but also how such normalization and power is exercised.

Vallberg Roth and Månsson (2008) position the IDP as typical of the audit society, where everything is to be measured and reported, and argue that, as such, it is an expression of regulated childhood and institutional practice that aims to normalize. They question whether the child is actually visualized in a good way in the type of documentation that the IDP constitutes or whether there is a risk that the child instead becomes objectified and that the relation between teacher-student and school-home becomes instrumental. Elfström (2005) claims that there is a risk for IDPs to become instruments for evaluation of the individual as person, and in a study from 2009, Andreasson and Asplund Carlsson argue that social competence, motivation,
independence, and sense of responsibility are depicted in documents as being a prerequisite for knowledge-related learning. Comparisons can be made with a study by Berthén (2007) in which classroom activities in special schools for intellectually disabled students were explored. Obviously, the students who go to special schools for the intellectually disabled cannot be compared to ‘regular’ compulsory school students, but the point she makes in her study is interesting. The teachers in the special school classrooms engaged in instructional activities with the aim of teaching the pupils ‘pupilness’ and preparing them for subject teaching. Students were trained to sit still, not to disturb others, not to speak without permission and to behave according to accepted norms. These preparations, Berthén argues, did not seem to have an end, but rather to continue year after year. School knowledge in the form of reading, writing, and arithmetic played a secondary role. On the basis of these findings, Berthén discusses that the teachers’ motive behind the lessons were related to upbringing rather than knowledge in school subjects, even though research has shown that teaching school knowledge in such groups of pupils can be pursued with good results if the pupils are given the opportunity to participate in classroom activities that are aimed at learning in school subjects.

Andreasson (2007) has also studied how boys and girls are constituted in action plans. Here she concludes that the social fostering goals in the plans seem to function as a prerequisite for knowledge-related learning. Furthermore, she argues, boys and girls risk being assessed according to different norms, although they are described as having the same type of knowledge related difficulties. There is a gendered difference, she claims, in the way boys and girls are described: the description of boys often refers to their ability or skills, whereas the description of girls is based to a greater extent on their personal qualities (such as being nice or ambitious). There is a risk, Andreasson argues, that this influences the type of measures decided upon.
In a study of written IDP assessments in one Swedish municipality, Andersson (2010) notes that many IDP assessments are about that which the pupils need to change in order to ‘fit in’ to the school system. Most pupils are assessed in social development, and such assessments often contain judgments and opinions about pupils’ personal characteristics. Moreover, he claims that the responsibility for change is placed on the pupils, and only very rarely is schools’ or teachers’ responsibility for pupils’ development expressed (cf. Isaksson et al. 2007). There is a risk, Andersson (2010) argues, that if schools/teachers do not have the resources or the knowledge to express how they will act upon pupils’ perceived shortcomings, the only remaining effect of the written assessments will be stigmatizing.

Also the formative assessment purposes of the plan can be interpreted as a hidden agenda which aims to foster and normalize. Formative assessment involves students in evaluating themselves and setting suitable goals. This can be regarded as metacognitive training. Research into formative assessment (e.g. Hattie, 2008) often argues that the fact that students can take a meta-perspective on their own learning is a very important factor for improving their school performance. This may also be interpreted, however, from a normalization and power point of view. In a thesis from 2012, Mårell-Olsson claims that students experience constant demands for being ‘ideal pupils’, in terms of behaving well, accomplishing good results, and getting good grades. Such demands relate to students’ overall school situations, but seem to have become more visible through the work with digital tools for IDP documentation. Through these it becomes evident, Mårell-Olsson argues, that the students are constantly measured, evaluated and compared against a notion of a student who takes great responsibility, always performs her utmost, and achieves the goals of the highest grading criteria in all school subjects. Assessment in the kind of digital IDP tools that are used in Mårell-Olsson’s study, involves students in evaluating themselves both in terms of behavior and school performance. Seen from a power perspective, such assessment can be understood as a way of teaching students to become self-
regulating and self-disciplining, and it is possible to talk about a shift from schools and teachers being the ones fostering and normalizing students, towards students fostering and normalizing themselves.

In summary, according to research, fostering and normalizing students can be understood as a purpose of the IDP tool which plays rather a prominent role. This purpose is not explicitly written, rather it can be regarded as arising when teachers make use of the IDP.

**ASSESSMENT, PARTICIPATION, INFLUENCE AND COMMUNICATION**

Assessment can also be discussed in relation to the other research branch, i.e., that which deals with more pragmatic issues of the use of IDP. Swedish research concerning IDPs in pre-school, pre-school class and compulsory school has shown that the plans primarily contain summative evaluations and descriptions of the children/students (e.g., Elfström, 2005; Vallberg Roth & Månsson, 2008). Even though assessment purposes are supposed to co-exist in IDPs, there has been a clear tendency in favor of summative assessments (cf. SNAE, 2007; 2010), despite the fact that the IDP reform was introduced based on arguments that can be seen as rooted in the formative function.

In his thesis, Krantz (2009) discusses the grounds for introducing the IDP. IDP practice, he argues, is conflictual in many ways. There is an argumentative tension and a discursive struggle, primarily between schools’ goal- and result-oriented mission and its communicative understanding-oriented mission. In this, he positions teachers’ formative mission, assessment for learning, as a vague and complex task. The

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7 Already before it became a legal requirement in 2006 there were schools and pre-schools that used individual development plans for describing/assessing/planning students’/children’s development.
goal- and result-oriented discourse, on the other hand, is a political and administrative discourse, where efficiency, predictability and distinctness are in focus. Along with the latter discourse, he characterizes teachers’ summative mission, assessment of learning, as a means for control. In their assessment practices, of which the IDP is a part, teachers’ have to simultaneously meet claims for objectivity and clarity and claims for in-depth meaning making. This is not easy, Andersson (2010) argues: In his study of written assessments in IDPs in one Swedish municipality, he states that teachers find it difficult to interpret the ambiguity of the guidelines given by the SNAE concerning the purposes and writing of IDPs. They do not know whether to emphasize the summative or formative purpose, nor are they sure how to express the assessments. On the one hand, policy texts stress that the written assessments about pupils’ present level are not to be seen as grades; on the other hand, it is written that the assessments may be expressed in grade-like symbols. One effect of schools’ and teachers’ not knowing how to interpret the guidelines is that there exist numerous ways of designing documents and expressing assessments within the municipality. Andersson (2010) argues for the need for some kind of common guidelines as to what shall be expressed and how. He claims, furthermore, that it is difficult for many teachers to find an appropriate level of language in the documents, one that is neither too formal nor too informal. Pupils and parents must be able to understand what is written while the language must also be in some sense professional. He does claim, however, to see some examples of teachers finding the ‘right’ level.

In policy documents, an explicit purpose of the IDP is to inform parents and students about the individual student’s situation in school, and also increase students’ and parents’ participation and ability to influence. Thus, the IDP can be viewed as a communicative link between school and home. Andreasson and Asplund Carlsson (2009) argue that formal and institutionalized forms of communication exist alongside more informal kinds. IDPs and action plans are regarded as institutionalized, while logbooks and weekly letters, for instance, are more informal. Informal cooperation between school and home is
great important for teachers as well as parents (Nilsson, 2007), and appears to be a natural ingredient in preschool and primary school, where parents also meet school personnel when leaving and picking up their children. The older the children are, the more difficult it seems to establish an informal dialogue. The IDP may be regarded as an essential tool in the contact between school and home. Therefore, it is important to consider the ways in which it functions as a tool for information, involvement and communication.

In a review of 319 studies bearing on IEPs internationally, Mitchell, Morton and Hornby (2010) report that studies show a widespread agreement that parental involvement in children’s schooling and in the IEP process, in particular, is critical when it comes to improving children’s academic outcomes (cf. Hattie, 2008). Extensive research literature on parental participation in IEP processes indicates, however, that such participation is problematic for various reasons. There seems to be a gap between rhetoric, in terms of what is written in policy documents about the importance of parental involvement, and reality. The barriers to parent involvement may relate to family factors such as class, ethnicity and gender, to child factors, such as age, learning difficulties and behavioral problems, or to parent-teacher factors, such as differing agendas, attitudes and language used by parents and teachers. There are often social, cultural, and linguistic barriers to parents’ participation in IEP meetings and in the IEP documentation process. Parents may feel intimidated and inferior during meetings, often due to cultural differences, language and jargon (Mitchell, Morton & Hornby, 2010).

In discussing communication and collaboration between school and home it is important to consider issues of equity. In a study of parents’ experiences of their meetings with schools, Andersson (2003) found that the difference in the degree to which parents’ felt that they were respectfully received and treated at school depended on whether their child was considered to be a good student who was well adapted to school or to be less well adapted or have difficulties in school. Andersson (2003) claims that parents with high socio-economic status
generally have a linguistic capital that contributes to their being heard to a greater extent than parents who lack the same capital. It is reasonable to believe that such issues of equity may be accentuated as the contact between school and home and the parents’ and students’ possibilities to influence the school situation are increasingly taking place through formal communication via documents that cannot be understood equally well by all.

The importance of student involvement in the IEP process is also stressed in policy as essential. Here also, much research paints a negative picture. Pawley and Tennant (2008) have studied the extent to which students themselves contribute to and understand their IEP targets. They conclude that students often have very little sense as to what their IEPs contain. The authors argue that a considerable amount of time and effort is needed in order to ensure that IEPs are meaningful documents for students. Therefore, they suggest, IEPs can be reasonably used with only a small number of students in a school. Mitchell, Morton and Hornby (2010) refer to several studies of student involvement in the IEP process and argue that students need to be taught participation skills and to be given continuous training in goal setting, monitoring and adjusting the content of their IEP plans.

On the basis of a study in which all teachers in a municipality responded to a questionnaire about their work with action plans and in which six students were subsequently followed in a case study, Asp Onsjö (2006) concludes that the ways in which schools and teachers work with the shaping of action plans vary, as do the ways in which the plans are presented to parents and pupils. Some teacher teams produce very extensive documentation, whereas others write much simpler action plans. The results indicate that less extensive and more simply written plans often work best. It is also pointed out in the study that school personnel often agree on key decisions before parents and students are given the opportunity to influence. When parents and students are instead invited to an open dialogue, the likelihood of finding ways to work agreeable to all parties increases. Sim-
plicity and involvement thus appear to be important factors for the quality of the work carried out on the basis of action plans.

Issues of participation, influence and communication are also central in Mårell-Olsson’s thesis from 2012. She examines the IDP process from students’, parents’ and teachers’ points of view, with special interest aimed at the role of digital documents in this process. Seven teachers, all described as pioneers and enthusiasts when it comes to using digital tools for IDP documentation, were interviewed. In addition, 15 parents were interviewed, whom were of Swedish origin and had high levels of education and professions as corporate executives, teachers, midwives, economists, system developers, engineers or social workers. Also interviewed were seven students of various ages – five girls aged 5, 10, 11, 14 and 16, and two boys aged 8 and 16 –, all of Swedish origin and described as not having problems in school.

The study suggests that the IDP only seems to be a new element in the parent-pupil-teacher meeting, which otherwise conforms to already established patterns. The IDP does not appear to greatly affect teaching or thinking about teaching. Mårell-Olsson points out that the study shows that principals do not seem to problematize IDP work in relation to continuous instructional practice, and therefore there are no practical strategies or models that involve relating document content to instructional practice. Parents in the study state that they receive better information and thereby gain more control over their children’s knowledge development, but according to Mårell-Olsson, it is hard for parents and students to participate in formulating IDP targets, because their knowledge of curriculum and syllabuses is limited. This, she argues, may be a reason that the targets in students’ IDPs are often short term and subject specific, rather than aimed at long term, overall development.

The parents participating in this study were socio-economically advantaged parents with professional experience of negotiations, so they could be relatively influential in the negotiation of their children's goals and in their claims for individually adapted teaching strategies
for their children. To a certain extent, they also ensured actual follow-up to the agreements made at the parent-pupil-teacher meetings. Again, it is relevant to raise the question of equity here. What might the outcome have been if parents with different cultural and social assets had been studied? Similarly, although the students who participated in this study understood that the IDP information could help them achieve good results, different samples of students might have yielded different results.

TOOLS FOR DOCUMENTATION

Digital solutions for documentation have been developed to facilitate communication and collaboration between school and home, but also to facilitate teachers’ work with IDPs, thereby reducing teachers’ workload. Potential problems that may arise from the use of such digital tools and ready-made templates have already been touched upon in the background chapter of this thesis. In their meta-study, Mitchell, Morton and Hornby (2010) also mention computer managed IEP record systems as a solution to the problem of insufficient time and excessive paperwork for teachers. They state that the use of ready-made solutions appears to be common but they do not further problematize the issue. Already in 2000, however, Gross wrote that more and more schools were accessing computerized systems with banks of ready-made phrases, allowing for IEPs to be produced “at the click of a mouse” (p. 126). In points from a SEN-Co forum (2001), the issue of computerized systems is discussed. The SEN-Cos using such programs generally felt that it speeded up their production of IEPs, but some of them expressed concerns that it sometimes felt as though pupils were being matched to the program-generated targets rather than the other way around.

Mårell-Olsson (2012) discusses the problem from several points of view in her study, mainly by raising a number of problematic questions. The companies that provide web solutions for IDP processes, in
determining the design of an IDP process, have defined the schools’ problems and have then created solutions based upon that. Solutions often contain lists with fully formulated phrases, matrices, and suggestions on how written assessments may be formulated. Mårell-Olsson raises questions concerning the possible consequences of teachers assessing students’ knowledge by using pre-made templates and matrices and of actors other than the schools/teachers themselves controlling the design of such processes.

In a study from 2008, Paulsson problematizes the fact that schools generally seem to have a complicated relationship to the use of ICT solutions. Whereas companies see a problem and develop solutions in response to this, solutions are often imposed upon schools/teachers and tend to cause problems. Paulsson argues that teachers do not get access to tools that they need for pedagogical purposes, wherefore there is a discrepancy between pedagogical expectations/demands and technical solutions used. In the case of IDP, Mårell-Olsson (2012) argues, it seems to be the use of the digital tools with their built-in IDP solutions that control the IDP process rather than vice versa.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Documentation and assessment practices such as IDPs and action plans/IEPs appear to be problematic in many ways. Apart from what has been presented above, Mitchell, Morton & Hornby (2010) argue that a recurring issue in studies of IEPs worldwide concerns documentation as a vastly time-consuming and bureaucratic nightmare for teachers. In Sweden, this is also the main reason behind recent political suggestions concerning the removal of certain documentation requirements for both IDPs and action plans (Ds 2013:23). Mitchell, Morton & Hornby (2010) conclude, additionally, that IEPs suffer from having multiple purposes ascribed to them: the same document is frequently expected to serve educational, legal, accountability, placement, and resource allocation purposes. Therefore, they argue, it
is a challenge for educational policy makers to ensure that all purposes can be served without the IEP losing its primary purpose as educational planning document.

A relevant question is whether documentation in terms of IDPs and action plans/IEPs is beneficial at all. In a study conducted on behalf of the SNAE (2002), one central issue concerned the fact that the actual creation of action plans, and the kind of problem solving that such preparation requires, may be more important for a positive outcome for the student than the action plan itself. Granlund and Steen-son (1999) have been able to see such results in a study of work with action plans for children and adults with severe disabilities. Their study shows that the collaborative problem solving that takes place when action plans are drawn up has an effect on the ways in which the plans are acted upon. Structured intervention work is carried out to a greater extent when there is a written plan. If, moreover, the documents are used as basis for discussing goals and reasons for setting certain goals, this may affect the quality of the work carried out on the basis of the plans. In an overview of (mainly British) studies bearing on IEPs, Tennant (2007) brings to the fore positive effects of IEP work. If the number of targets are kept down, if all parties concerned – teachers, support teachers, other professionals, parents and pupils – are involved in the process, and if there is a belief among staff that IEPs can actually make a difference, then IEP work can be seen as good practice. Moreover, it seems as though the IEP process is important and can be regarded as professional development for teachers.

Given the fact that documentation plays a prominent role in teachers’ everyday work, there is relatively little research into the area of IDPs, and what constitutes the main focus of my research has not been studied in this way before. In existing research, findings have largely concerned the content of documents interpreted from a power perspective. In a sense, articles 1 and 2 of this thesis confirm such previous findings, but apart from this, my intention has been to contribute with an understanding of IDP as a tool, especially in relation to formative assessment and assessment validity. The practical implications of IDP
are even less explored, and need to be further elaborated upon from the point of view of different actors. I have chosen to study teachers’ point of view in this thesis. By using the tool concept, it is possible to gain knowledge about how IDP is used as a tool to achieve different purposes. The chosen theoretical frames contribute to a picture of IDP work as shaped contextually, in the tension field between national, municipal and local requirements, which explains to a certain extent why teachers’ work with IDP takes shape the way it does.
THEORETICAL FRAMES

Theory is related to the empirical investigations in slightly different ways in the four articles of this thesis. Thus, before presenting theoretical perspectives and concepts used, I will say a few words concerning the role played by theory at an overall level.

As is well known, there are different ways in which theory can be related to empirical data. On the one extreme, it is derived out of empirical observation, whilst on the other extreme it is formulated in advance and hypotheses can be derived and tested against empirical data. The document studies of this thesis lie closer to the first alternative, and the interview studies closer to the latter. In the first article, the IDP content is in focus, and in order to conceptualize and analyze this content I developed some basic distinctions which could be considered as building stones in a data-close theory. The developed concepts were then used for describing how gender is (re)constructed in article 2, in combination with a more general theoretical point of departure (a doing-gender perspective) for discussing possible reasons for a gendered difference.

In articles 3 and 4 the points of departure are to a larger extent taken in theory. Article 3 deals with issues of how teachers work with IDPs, i.e., their actions are in focus. In order to understand such actions, a conceptual model was used in which actions are seen as structured by purposes perceived by teachers, and by contextual factors. In a similar vein, the concept of contradictions played an important role in article 4, where teachers’ experienced dilemmas were in focus. These concepts were derived from activity theory, but modified to fit in with
the purposes of the present study. Other concepts (mainly used in articles 3 and 4 but also in the general discussion), such as the distinctions between inscription/translation (e.g. Akrish & Latour, 1992) and mastery/appropriation (Wertsch, 1998), as well as Wartofsky’s (1979) notions of primary, secondary and tertiary artifacts, were used as framework for interpreting the IDP tool and how teachers’ IDP related work is shaped.

**POSITIONING THE STUDY**

As previously mentioned, I use key concepts from socio-cultural and activity theoretical perspectives. Both assume that the relations between individuals and the world are considered to be tool mediated (Wertch, 1998), and that individual, historically shaped context, and mediating tools are understood as aspects that mutually interact with and affect each other in activities. Each is involved in the others’ definition, and none exists separately. Rogoff (2008) argues, however, that the parts making up a whole activity can be considered separately as foreground without losing track of their inherent interdependence. In the empirical studies of this thesis, I foreground the use of a specific tool, the IDP, and how this tool mediates teachers’ assessment actions (as such actions are manifested in document content and interviews), while the historically shaped context forms a background that contributes to explaining teachers’ actions. My understanding of context is linked to Engeström’s (2001) concepts *rules, community*, and *division of labor*, which I will return to later in the chapter.

The IDP as a tool, as a document with a certain content as well as a mediating tool for thinking and acting in practice, is central in all articles. In articles 3 and 4, concepts from activity theory are used, but I do not claim to do a full activity theoretical analysis in the sense that I regard the whole activity as the unit of analysis. Empirically, the document content and the material based interviews with teachers concerning use of the IDP tool in practice form the unit of analysis.
There is, however, a striving to understand why the teachers’ IDP related actions take shape the way they do, by clarifying and problematizing the context in which the actions have been and are being shaped.

In the following text, I will elaborate on the theoretical concepts I have used for interpreting and discussing empirical data.

**DIMENSIONS AND LEVELS IN IDP SHAPING**

I understand the shaping and implementation of the IDP in practice as situated in a larger sociocultural and political context. The empirical data of the studies included in this thesis foremost concern the implemented dimension of IDP (cf. Goodson, 1995). In Goodson’s theory on curriculum, this dimension is influenced by other dimensions, that he terms the ideological, formal and understood dimensions of curriculum. I use his dimensions of curriculum as an analogue to IDP work in order clarify how I view such relations. In Goodson’s model, curriculum (and thus also the IDP) is formulated and interpreted at different levels by different actors, thus opening up a space for reframing.

In a similar vein, Lindensjö and Lundgren (2000) discuss school governance by using the concepts of formulation and realization arena. The formulation arena is the level where education policy is formulated, which in turn can be divided into two parts: political decisions and initial steering on the one hand, and the central school administration which has the mandate to interpret the political intentions into guideline writing on the other. The realization of policy is the process in which political intentions are put into practice. Lindensjö and Lundgren (2000) use the concept of field implementation when describing activities on the school level. Ideally, politicians make decisions which the central administration transforms into clear and specific guidelines that teachers easily can implement in schools.
Rarely, however, decisions and guidelines are so clear that they can only be perceived in one way. Since governance of the Swedish school, moreover, is highly decentralized, there must also be space for the local municipal level to concretize national targets. Reform motives are interpreted and translated by local politicians and local school administrations, and then interpreted and translated again on school level, by school principals and teachers. As mentioned in relation to Goodson’s dimensions, an additional actor must be taken into consideration in the case of IDP. The market, i.e., the companies designing and selling formats for documentation, is involved in interpreting decisions and guidelines, and therefore understood as part of the formulation arena.

In articles 3 and 4, I utilize the concepts of inscription and translation from Actor Network Theory (ANT) (e.g. Akrish & Latour, 1992) and use these as a way of understanding the IDP as tool for actions in practice. **Inscription** refers to the way patterns of use are encoded and incorporated in objects. Objects are designed and created on basis of imagined users and scenarios of use, thus they are inscribed with a certain program of action (cf. Habib & Wittek, 2007). In ANT, the object is then regarded as an actor that imposes its program of action on its users. Actual use may, however, deviate from the inscribed program of action. Users may – either intentionally or unintentionally – use the object in other ways than the designers of the object intended in their imagined scenarios of use. The process when users interpret, renegotiate, modify, or reconstruct the object is referred to as **translation** in ANT. Similarly, I understand the IDP as inscribed with a certain program of action already when it reaches the field implementation level. The inscription is done on the formulation arena, in policy documents, advices from the SNAE, and by companies designing solutions for IDP. The translation process concerns the ways in which the field implementors adapt the inscribed object to their local conditions and circumstances.
MEDIATED ACTION

Central to my studies is the specific notion of mediated action, originating from Vygotskij’s work. The concept of mediation suggests that people are not in direct, immediate, uninterpreted contact with the surrounding world but rather understand and handle it with the help of various physical and intellectual tools that are integral parts of their social practices (Vygotskij, 1978; Säljö, 2000). Thus, if one wants to say something about the ways people think and act, one needs to include mediating artifacts in the analysis. Wertsch (1998), whose discussion of mediated action I found useful for the present study, argues that a focus on agents-acting-with mediational-means forces us to go beyond individual agents when trying to understand their actions, since mediational means – or cultural tools – are inherently situated in a sociocultural historical context. Even if focus is primarily on individual agents’ roles in mediated action, the embeddedness of the action is always built in to the analysis. One element may be isolated for the purpose of analysis, but in and of themselves, cultural tools are powerless to do anything, they become something in the hands of their users and both users and tools are always part of a context (Wertsch, 1998).

Mediation is often discussed in terms of how it enables or empowers action, and certainly, in many respects, cultural tools enable actions that would not otherwise be possible. This focus, Wertsch (1998) argues, is not the only focus needed, however; it is crucial that we also discuss how cultural tools may constrain or limit the forms of actions agents undertake. When new tools are developed and/or introduced, it is generally because there is a perceived problem that needs to be overcome. However, even if a new tool frees its users from some problem, it may well introduce new problems of its own. This holds for the IDP tool. The aim of the first IDP reform was to provide all students with an educational planning document that would guide toward optimal learning performance by directing focus at future learning at the parent-pupil-teacher meeting, rather than just describing results retrospectively. However, this solution generated new
problems related to unfamiliarity with describing targets and strategies for future learning in written form in a more formal – and public – document. The second IDP reform, which added written summative assessments and the option to use grade-like symbols to the already existing forward-aiming purpose, was an answer to another problem, namely, that parent-pupil-teacher meetings often failed to provide adequate information about the status of pupils’ knowledge. The tool’s new purpose transformed mediated action and created new problems. Teachers’ perceptions of the IDP tool as enabling or empowering in some ways and constraining or limiting in others are central issues of studies 3 and 4 in this thesis.

**MASTERY AND APPROPRIATION**

An important issue is how the use of particular tools, such as the IDP, leads to the development of particular skills or ways of thinking and reasoning. In relation to the ways people make use of cultural tools, Wertsch (1998) discusses the concepts of *mastery* and *appropriation*, where mastery is seen as *knowing how to use a mediational means*. It does not imply that the mediational means has any effect on a person’s thinking or constructs of knowing. Appropriation, on the other hand, involves *making the process one’s own*, in the sense that it does involve effects on thinking and constructs of knowing (Habib & Wittenk, 2007; Wertsch, 1998).

Mastery and appropriation ought to be understood as two distinct modes of internalization\(^8\), which can be correlated on high or low lev-

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\(^8\) I use the term internalization in the same sense that Wertsch uses it in *Mind and Action* (1998), realizing that it may be perceived as problematic in its indication of an opposition between external and internal processes. Wertsch argues that the definition of the term must be tied to the context in which it is used. In this case the term is embedded in an analysis of mediated action and the ways in which teachers understand and make use of the IDP tool.
els. Higher levels of mastery are often positively correlated with appropriation. It is also possible, however, for the use of a tool to be characterized by a high level of mastery and a low level of appropriation. Appropriation without mastery, on the other hand, means that one values a practice but has not yet come to terms with how to carry it out (Laffey, 2004). The two terms provide a useful way of thinking about different levels of internalization of IDP practice. An agent who uses a cultural tool without appropriating it often does so with a feeling of resistance or conflict. Laffey (2004) argues that the path to appropriation of new tools is seldom easy or linear; there are likely to be tensions, often resulting in resistance. Teachers can certainly master the IDP in the sense that they can use it in some way because they have to. However, this does not necessarily mean that they appropriate the writing of or work with the IDPs such that they can see the advantages of it. If they do not, it is unlikely that ‘IDP thinking’ will become part of their working culture. The agent views the cultural tool as imposed, i.e., as not belonging to him/her. Since the use of the IDP is required, it is used, but the work, for some teachers, might be characterized by resistance or dissimulation (Wertsch, 1998).

Whether a person appropriates a tool or not also has to do with perceived need. It is common for cultural tools to be seen as emerging in response to the needs of an agent, but this is not always the case. In fact, Wertsch (1998) argues, many of the cultural tools we use were not originally designed for the purposes to which they are being put. They instead emerge in response to forces having little or nothing to do with the ideal design of a mediational means.

**PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND TERTIARY ARTIFACTS**

Emerging tools change the way we use our intellect and interact with others. They change our ways of experiencing and learning and help
to *perspectivize* the world. By using mediating tools we can act in complex situations, reflect on them, and communicate with others (Säljö, 2005).

Säljö (2005) argues that the distinction between physical and intellectual artifacts is not very fruitful; he suggests viewing them instead as cultural tools which have physical as well as intellectual sides to them. Such cultural tools surround us, a fact that is rather unproblematic. It is not always clear, however, what it means to say that people use certain cultural tools in their thinking or how tools are to be understood and considered in relation to learning and development.

Instead of differentiating between intellectual and physical artifacts, Säljö (2005) argues that it is more relevant to differentiate between the functions of tools. Wartofsky (1979) makes a distinction between *primary*, *secondary* and *tertiary* artifacts that I have found relevant for understanding and analyzing the IDP as a tool. The term IDP can be understood and used in various ways. It is often used with reference to the actual document as such, but also often with reference to working patterns or processes that the document entails. Moreover, the use of the IDP – writing the document as well as putting it to practice – might also lead its users to new modes of thinking and/or acting as a result of the IDP experience. It is in understanding and discussing the IDP on different levels that Wartofsky’s notions of primary, secondary and tertiary artifacts become fruitful. The three modes of representation are not discrete; all three could be included in any one unit of activity and there is no hierarchy between them (Habib & Wittek, 2007). Primary artifacts are directly used in production and activities that people engage in. They can be physical tools, such as axes, bowls or cars, and can be seen as an extension of the human body. They facilitate our work and make it more effective. These tools have affordances in the sense that they lead the user to act in a certain way (Säljö, 2005; Wartofsky, 1979). In the case of IDP, the physical document could be regarded as a primary artifact when its main function is to serve as information or working instructions
for students and parents, to provide the basis for teachers’ evaluation and planning, or to provide the basis for reporting results.

Secondary artifacts are tools which recreate human concepts and insights and give us models for how to think and act. Thus, secondary artifacts can be modes of using primary artifacts, but also routines, norms, or rules about them (Habib & Wittek, 2007). Secondary artifacts are intentionally created to preserve or describe knowledge and skills and they guide us in the way we act and understand. In this study, everything that the IDP is inscribed with (Akrich, 1992; Akrich & Latour, 1992; Säljö, 2005) before it reaches the level of the local school – guidelines related to steering documents as well as those from local school authorities and companies designing documentation formats – is regarded as a first set of secondary artifact. A second set would concern how the field implementation level – principals and teachers at local schools – put the IDP into practice within their local context, i.e., how they translate it (Habib & Wittek, 2007; Latour, 1987). Thus, secondary artifacts may be seen as participating either in the process of inscription or in the process of translation of primary artifacts. The conceptual pair inscription-translation is important as a basis for understanding and discussing how teachers are able to make use of the IDP as a tool in continuous practice. The use of a mediating tool such as the IDP is based on a subtle interplay between inscription and a situated translation. According to Säljö (2005), inscriptions are open to different interpretations but require an active subject who reconstructs and translates what the meaning might be.

Tertiary artifacts are of another kind, and can be described as an extension of secondary artifacts and their practices. Miettinen and Virkkunen (2005) picture them as a domain in which an imaginative construction of alternative rules and operations is possible. This feeds back to the actual praxis and serves as a tool for imagining and proposing alternatives. Thus, tertiary artifacts might be means for finding solutions to problems within present practice. Habib and Wittek (2007) also describe tertiary artifacts as imaginative: they color the way we see the world and provide tools for changing current practice.
Säljö (2005) depicts them as being about how the world is described, understood and analyzed. Scientific reasoning or the sketching of an architect are examples of tertiary artifacts in which understanding is a product of the activity. Habib and Wittek (2007) suggest that new modes of thinking and acting acquired as a result of portfolio experience are one example of a tertiary artifact. In this sense, they argue, the portfolio can be considered to be truly appropriated when its users have integrated it to such an extent that the primary artifact is no longer necessary. It is possible to understand the IDP in the same way.

THE USE OF CONCEPTS FROM ACTIVITY THEORY

In studies 3 and 4 of the thesis, additional concepts from activity theory are used as analytical framework. The following text aims to clarify which concepts I have used and how I understand and use them.

ACTIONS AS PART OF AN ACTIVITY SYSTEM

Leontiev (1978) describes in general terms how an activity as unit of analysis forms a system of different entities related to each other by dialectical and interdependent processes. These processes occur simultaneously on three levels: level of activity, level of actions, and level of operations. According to Leontiev, an activity cannot be understood as visible in a tangible form, but can only be visualized through analysis of system units – in particular the various actions – and the relationship between them.

I understand teachers’ writing of and continuous work with the IDP as goal-related actions taking place within the activity system of instruction (cf. Rogoff, 2008). Furthermore, I assume that it is reasonable to perceive the object of instruction – that which instruction is
aimed at – as learning in a broad sense, and that teachers’ IDP related actions can be understood as contributing by directing students’ attention to the object. Learning, in turn, is always related to a content, and what that content actually is may be discussed in relation to the results of articles 1 and 2. I will, therefore, return to the issue in the discussion chapter.

CONTEXT: RULES, COMMUNITY AND DIVISION OF LABOR

As mentioned, individual, context, and mediating tools are understood as aspects that mutually interact with and affect each other in activities. In the analyses, the meaning of the term context is comparable to the activity theoretical concepts of rules, community and division of labor (cf. Engeström, 2001). In the system, there are various rules and norms, regulating how, when and where actions take place, how time is used, how work is planned and carried out, how outcomes are assessed and measured, and so forth. The rules in the teachers’ system include, for instance, curriculum requirements, advices from the SNAE, guidelines from the local school administration, and specific agreements made on each school. They also include companies who develop and sell solutions for IDP documentation. There are also ‘unwritten’ or local rules, such as different traditions, norms and values. Some of these might be deliberate whereas some probably exist on a more unconscious level or as routines that are taken for granted. Thus, rules can include expectations about pupil behavior as well as gender stereotypes resulting in different expectations of boys and girls (as described in study 2). Teacher teams and/or individual teachers may also have developed their own opinion about the writing and implementation of IDP.

The community at the field implementation level consists of the various actors who are the staff of the school and the pupils. The division of labor determines the work tasks and powers of the members of the community. The division of labor within IDP practice may concern
the allocation of responsibility between different actors, and how each actor views his/her responsibility. It is assumed that the general object of instruction and IDP actions is – in theory – shared between the different actors. Different actors, however, have different histories and positions in the division of labor, hence they may very well construe the object in different ways (Engeström, 2001).

**CONTRADICTIONS**

Another concept from activity theory that is central in article 4 and the discussion of the synthesized results is the concept of contradictions. According to Engeström (2001) contradictions can be defined as “historically accumulating and structural tensions within and between activity systems” (p. 137). They are always present and function as sources for change and development. Engeström and Sannino (2011) describe contradiction as a philosophical concept that should not be equated with, for instance, paradox, conflict, or dilemma. They argue that such terms are often used interchangeably with contradiction, whereas they ought to be understood as discursive manifestations of contradictions. Thus, contradictions can be identified through the study of dilemmas experienced by members of the community, which is the case in the fourth article of this thesis. In that article, I define the term dilemma as a situation in which two partly contradictory goals are to be achieved. Neither can be deselected, wherefore ways of balancing the dilemma must be sought. Dilemmas are thus about positioning rather than problem solving. When a new element, such as the IDP, enters an activity system from the outside, this may lead to aggravated inner contradictions within the system (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). The IDP as assessment tool was imposed on teachers ‘on top of’ everything else they need to do. Inner contradictions were aggravated, partly because the rules that constrain the actions within the activity system were changed in terms of new tasks being added, at the same time as other rules – concerning, for instance, teachers’ working hours and the number of lessons taught
each week – remained the same. The issue of time, as one example, therefore, came to generate disturbances within the system, in turn causing a dilemma for teachers.

When contradictions within the system are aggravated, individual participants may begin to question and deviate from established norms as they experience current forms of work as increasingly problematic. This may escalate into a deliberate, collective change effort (Engeström, 2001). Similarly, it is possible to discuss teachers’ balancing of dilemmas as being more or less deliberate and collective ways of finding feasible and/or fruitful ways of managing their IDP work.
METHOD

The empirical data for the studies included in this thesis were collected in two stages and consist of 379 IDP documents and 15 interviews with teachers. Empirically, the studies deal with IDP on the field implementation level, i.e., that which is written by teachers in the documents and how teachers describe the various ways in which the document is put into practice. This chapter begins with a clarification of the relationship between theory and selected methods for data collection and analysis. The sample/participants and data collections are then described, followed by a section on analysis procedures. The method chapter concludes with section on trustworthiness and generalizability.

METHOD - THEORY

The purpose and research questions of the thesis as a whole, as well as each article included, concern characteristics of the targets and strategies in IDP documents given to students of various stages of compulsory school and how teachers’ IDP practices are shaped in different contexts. Moreover, one aim has been to explore dilemmas that may arise in the work of teachers in relation to IDP, and how teachers deal with these dilemmas. These purposes required a collection of documents and also some form of access to the ways various teachers’ perceive and work with the IDP as a tool.
I understand the IDP plans as assessment documents that, in various ways, have an impact on teachers’ actions in practice. It was reasonable, therefore, to depart from textual analysis of documents. Part of the aim of the first two studies was to explore whether there were differences between various school stages and between girls and boys, wherefore the collected sample needed to allow for this kind of comparative analysis. In order to be able to say something about teachers’ different IDP practices – based on a theoretical assumption that such practices are shaped contextually – there was an attempt in the last two studies to involve a variety of participants from differing contexts in terms of school stages, geographically in terms of different municipalities and schools, and in terms of different facilitators.

The decision was made to supplement the textual analysis of documents with teacher interviews. By choosing interviews, I was able to include 15 teachers representing different school stages, municipalities, schools, and facilitators, and thus get the variation I was striving for.

I use concepts in my studies taken from sociocultural and activity theories. These concepts should be understood as a framework for understanding, analyzing and describing data, rather than a claim to do a complete socio-cultural or activity theoretical analysis. Often, sociocultural or activity theoretical research employs a variety of methodological approaches, where ethnographic observations are often used in combination with, for instance, document studies and in-depth interviews. I made a conscious decision to limit my empirical analysis to be based on documents and interviews with teachers. Observational studies are time consuming, and available time frames would have forced me to choose one or two cases to observe more closely. While this may also have been of interest, my intention has been to strive for variety in order to compare and create typologies, rather than to carry out in-depth studies of one or two cases. The activity-theoretical understanding of actions as part of a system (where the subjects’ actions in relation to the purposes they perceive that they need to achieve are mediated and take place in a context that contrib-
utes to shaping the actions) was, so to speak, built into the study design and interview guide. Here I was inspired by concepts such as tool mediation, goal-directed actions, contextual conditions, and contradictions as a driving force for change. The relation between theory and method, and in particular the choice of interviews for data collection, will be further elaborated and problematized in the discussion chapter.

In the text that follows, I briefly describe the sample and data collection and clarify my use of qualitative content analysis and the included concepts. For a more detailed description of analysis procedures, I refer the reader to the respective articles.

FIRST DATA COLLECTION

As mentioned, two data collections were carried out. The 379 IDP documents which constitute the empirical basis for articles 1 and 2 were collected in the spring of 2009, and consisted of five to seven IDPs from each of 63 school classes (grades 3, 5 and 8) in three different Swedish municipalities (see table 1). A random approach to sampling allows for multiple voices, variety, similarities and dissimilarities to be sought in order to gain knowledge of a wider group than that contributing to the data collection. As for the documents I collected, I strove for variety in the sense that I wanted the documents to be collected from more than one municipality, from different school stages, and from different schools and teachers. From two smaller municipalities, documents were collected from all schools, and from a larger municipality, one district was chosen (where the size of the district was about the same size as the smaller municipalities regarding the number of schools and classes). For the collection of documents to be as random as possible, I asked for documents belonging to every fourth student on the class list.
Table 1

*Number of classes and IDPs involved in the study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of classes 8th grade</th>
<th>Number of IDPs 8th grade</th>
<th>Number of classes 5th grade</th>
<th>Number of IDPs 5th grade</th>
<th>Number of classes 3rd grade</th>
<th>Number of IDPs 3rd grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mun. A</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mun. B</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mun. C</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Swedish IDPs are official documents, I asked for the plans to be sent to me anonymized, with only an indication of whether the plan belonged to a girl or a boy. Table 2 shows the distribution of IDPs by grade level and sex.

Table 2

*Distribution of IDPs by sex and grade level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total number of IDPs: 379</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of IDPs given to boys: 184</td>
<td>Number of IDPs given to girls: 195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd grade:</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since the research interest was aimed at targets and strategies for future learning in article 1 and targets only in article 2, the forward aiming part of the documents was of more direct interest. The initial part of the analysis process focused on identifying and listing a total of 829 targets and 557 strategies, which became the meaning units in article 1. In article 2, the meaning units were the 829 targets. Table 3 shows the distribution of IDP targets by grade level and sex.

Table 3

_Distribution of IDP targets by sex and grade level_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of IDP targets: 829</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of targets given to boys: 467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd grade: 154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SECOND DATA COLLECTION**

The second data collection, constituting the empirical basis for articles 3 and 4, was carried out in the fall of 2011. It consists of 15 interviews with teachers representing primary, intermediate and secondary levels of compulsory school. Because there are no national standards for IDP documentation or IDP work, local schools may use different formats for documentation and have different guidelines concerning IDP work. Thus, to obtain variation, teachers from different municipalities as well as independent schools were included (see Table 4).
Table 4

Information on the informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher and (municipality)</th>
<th>School stage and (grade level)</th>
<th>Age and (Sex)</th>
<th>Number of years in the profession</th>
<th>Public/independent school</th>
<th>School size and (number of students for whom teacher was responsible)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1 (A)</td>
<td>Secondary (8)</td>
<td>41-50 (F)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>450 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 (A)</td>
<td>Secondary (8)</td>
<td>31-40 (F)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>380 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 (B)</td>
<td>Primary (3)</td>
<td>41-50 (F)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>200 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4 (B)</td>
<td>Intermediate (4)</td>
<td>51-60 (F)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>110 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5 (C)</td>
<td>Primary (2)</td>
<td>31-40 (M)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>350 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6 (A)</td>
<td>Primary (2)</td>
<td>31-40 (M)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>200 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T7 (B)</td>
<td>Secondary (9)</td>
<td>31-40 (F)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>92 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8 (B)</td>
<td>Primary (3)</td>
<td>51-60 (F)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>200 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T9 (B)</td>
<td>Intermediate (6)</td>
<td>51-60 (F)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>250 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T10 (D)</td>
<td>Intermediate (4)</td>
<td>51-50 (F)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>225 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T11 (D)</td>
<td>Intermediate (6)</td>
<td>41-50 (F)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>225 (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To avoid my involvement in the selection of informants, I decided to ask the central district office in the 13 municipalities financing my studies if they were willing to provide me contacts with a number of principals. Five municipalities heeded my request and gave me names of principals, who in turn received a letter in which I briefly described the purpose of the study and what would be required by the teachers who would participate. Two principals from independent schools were contacted by me directly. The criteria for eligibility of teachers to take part in the study were established as follows: Each teacher must

- have a teaching degree and at least two years of teaching experience;
- be a current teacher of a class; and
- be able to bring copies of two IDP documents that he/she had participated in writing some time during 2011.

* description of a former IDP practice at another school (for further explanation, see article 3)
From the names that were sent to me by the principals, five teachers from each school stage were contacted and gave their consent to participate in the study. They each received a letter of informed consent, stating that interviews were to be recorded, that anonymity was guaranteed, and that they could withdraw their participation at any time. The teachers brought to the interviews examples of the IDP documentation they had used. Thus, the interviews were material based. Having the documents during the interviews facilitated my understanding; the teachers’ could exemplify by pointing directly to different parts and content, and my questions could tie more directly to the respective documents. The link to each specific context, and thereby the empirical anchoring, thus became stronger.

ANAlysis PROCEDURES

The document analyses are based on a fairly large amount of data, which, to some extent, is accounted for quantitatively. In Article 1, a large number of targets and strategies that were written by teachers in a total of 63 different classes in three different municipalities was handled. From a trustworthiness point of view, the large number and spread is a strength, even though the results are presented with focus on types of goals/strategies rather than quantity. In Article 2, however, it is clear that the number of goals given to girls and boys plays a prominent role.

Throughout, qualitative content analysis has been my choice when the data have been sorted and processed for analysis. There are diversities in and different opinions regarding the meaning and use of concepts and procedures in qualitative content analysis. To a large degree I have been inspired by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) and the way in which they suggest using concepts. I have experienced this way of working with content analysis as thorough and rigorous, as allowing
freedom to relate to both the manifest and latent content in the analysis of the empirical material.

As mentioned, my empirical analyses concern teachers’ actions as they are manifested in document content and interviews with teachers. Thus, the IDP documents and interview transcripts constitute the units of analysis. These were read in their entirety several times before the work with the meaning units was begun and are, as a whole, seen as context for the meaning units in the four articles.

Meaning units are described by Graneheim and Lundman (2003) as words, sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to each other through their content and context. Table 5 below shows the meaning units used in each empirical analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning units</td>
<td>829 targets</td>
<td>557 strategies</td>
<td>Paragraphs concerning Purpose(s) of IDP</td>
<td>178 paragraphs concerning what is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>829 targets</td>
<td></td>
<td>Use of IDP</td>
<td>Difficult/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paragraphs concerning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Contextual conditions</td>
<td>Problematic/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purpose(s) of IDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If meaning units are paragraphs of text, there is a need for condensation, which refers to a process of shortening while still preserving the core meaning of the content of the paragraph. Condensation is thus different from abstraction, which takes place on a higher logical level. In the analysis process in articles 1 and 2, there was no need for con-
densation, since the meaning units were already short. In articles 3 and 4, however, condensation was necessary in order to reduce the amount of text and make the material easier to review.

The label of a meaning unit is referred to as a code and is described as a heuristic device that allows data to be thought of in a new way (Coffey & Atkinsson, 1996). This is exemplified in Article 1, Figure 1, p. 20.

In qualitative content analysis, the creation of categories and possible sub-categories is a core feature. The categories mainly refer to the manifest content of the text, but there is always an element of interpretation and abstraction involved in creating categories. All content in a category share a commonality. No data related to the purpose should be excluded due to lack of a suitable category, and ideally no data should fall between two categories or fit into more than one category. The creation of mutually exclusive categories can be difficult. In working with targets and strategies in article 1, for instance, it was sometimes difficult to decide whether the content should be understood primarily as being or doing.

Article 3 can be said to be more deductive than the others, in the sense that I was already in the construction of the interview guide colored by my theoretical understanding. The analysis followed predetermined research questions rather closely, and was focused on identifying how teachers perceive the purpose(s) of IDP, how they work with IDP in an ongoing manner, and the contextual conditions that appear to affect IDP work. These three can be seen as main categories, where the perceived purpose(s) could be understood as crucial for how IDP work was shaped in practice. The typology of practices presented in article 3 groups together the different categories into types of IDP practices. This step was taken due to the coherence between perceived purpose(s) and the other investigated aspects and is not a given step in content analysis.
TRUSTWORTHINESS

Certain aspects of trustworthiness have already been accounted for in the previous parts of this chapter. These have concerned the number of documents collected, the way documents were collected and participants chosen, and the fact that material based interviews are considered to strengthen the empirical anchoring. The following section aims to discuss other aspects of trustworthiness of the studies presented in the four articles and points to things that could have been done differently.

One aspect of trustworthiness concerns questions of empirical anchoring (Larsson, 2005), or the congruence of findings with ‘reality’. Familiarity with the culture of the study’s participants is often considered a strength (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethnographic traditions place great emphasis on the presence of the context which is being studied. Being in the context of that which is studied becomes the basis for claiming validity. As mentioned, I found interviews to be better suited for the purposes and research questions of my studies. Given my own background as a teacher, however, I regard myself as well acquainted with the complex reality in which my informants work and, thus, as having a thorough pre-understanding of the situations they may face in relation to IDP. This has been a strength when it comes to formulating interview questions and going deep into certain areas of concern. At the same time, if one feels that one understands what informants mean without further explanation, there is always the risk of neglecting to ask them (adequately) to explain and expand on their perspectives. I therefore deliberately used follow-up questions such as ‘What do you mean’ and ‘Can you give examples of ...’ to a great extent. During the interviews I also used a lot of iterative questions in which I returned to matters previously raised and rephrased questions. Frequently, I also summarized what I perceived to be the essence of the informants’ statements and asked if I understood
them correctly. This can be regarded as an ‘on-spot member check’ (Shenton, 2004).

Additionally, and as touched upon earlier, I regard the documents that the teachers brought with them to the interviews as supporting data in the sense that they helped explain what the informants were describing and could verify particular aspects that were mentioned.

When analyzing data of the document studies, I used a reference group of compulsory school teachers who read the meaning units and suggested how to label the codes that subsequently led to the creation of categories. This kind of peer input strengthens the credibility of the study. I alone analyzed the interview transcrips. If time and resources had enabled at least one more person's analysis of the same data, this would have been a strength. When multiple interpreters of the same material is not an option, it is even more important to explain one’s approach and the various steps in the analysis process as transparently as possible. This has been my intention. Moreover, the inclusion of interview excerpts in the results sections of articles 3 and 4 illustrate the categorization and the typologies and enables, to some extent, the reader to assess the credibility of the categorization.

**GENERALIZABILITY**

Although it has not been my intent to generalize the results of the studies in any statistical sense, but rather to describe patterns that occur in document content and teachers’ descriptions of their IDP practices, it is still possible to talk about generalization in other terms. Certainly, in most studies there is a will to be able to draw conclusions that have meaning beyond the specific context of which the studies were carried out.

Larsson (2010) discusses the issue of generalizability in terms of using a sample that maximizes the variation by attempting to cover the
variations that exist. In my case, one sample concerns the collection of IDP documents and one concerns choosing teachers for the interviews. For the document study it was possible to use a large sample, whereas the number of informants for in-depth interviews was limited to 15 due to time constraints.

Before the sample was chosen, I identified a number of factors likely to affect informants’ perceptions of IDP phenomenon and their ways of working with the IDP. I assumed that school stage was important because teaching contexts differ between primary, intermediate, and secondary levels of compulsory school. It was also essential that documents and informants come from different municipalities as templates and guidelines for IDP often depend upon decisions made on the central municipal level. Because the facilitator is not always the municipality, I also decided to include teachers from independent schools when doing interviews. In addition to this, I wanted documents as well as teachers to come from different schools. The attempt at variety has been important to me, even though I realize that there is always a possibility that further variation exists. The document studies involved a rather large amount of data but may be regarded as limited, given that the documents were collected from only three different municipalities. However, there are obvious similarities between these three municipalities, and previous research has pointed to similar and comparable results. Interview data were categorized into three different IDP practices in article 3, and three dilemmas emerged as central in article 4. The fact that the empirical data could be fit into so few categories suggests that teachers’ perceptions and experiences are quite similar. Other aspects of generalizability, concerning contextual similarity and heuristic quality, will be returned to in the discussion chapter.
THE FOUR ARTICLES: A SUMMARY

In the following chapter, I summarize the purposes, questions, and main results of the four articles included in the thesis.

ARTICLE 1: A TOOL FOR LEARNING: AN ANALYSIS OF TARGETS AND STRATEGIES IN SWEDISH INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

The study aims to develop further knowledge about the use of formative assessment in terms of targets and strategies given to pupils in their IDP documentation. It addresses the following questions: (i) How are targets and strategies expressed in Swedish IDPs? (ii) In what way(s) do targets and strategies interact with each other? (iii) What differences (if any) are there between IDPs for pupils in differing stages of school?

The relation between IDP and formative assessment is central in the study. An essential question is in what respects the IDP can be seen as formative and as a tool for learning. The SNAE (2008) defines formative assessment as assessment which supports the learning process and describes what the pupils need to develop and how. This definition is simplified, but nonetheless useful in relation to targets and strategies given to students in the collected IDPs.

In the study, a total of 829 targets and 557 strategies (coming from 379 IDPs given to students in grades 3, 5 and 8 in 64 different school classes) were analyzed separately as well as in relation to each other.
Based on the content they expressed, targets were sorted into three categories termed *being, doing* and *learning*. Being targets concern changes in pupils’ personality, behavior and attitude towards school work. Doing targets express that a pupil needs to do something and are actually strategies written as targets. Learning targets are connected, in various ways, to knowledge of subject matter. The strategies for reaching targets were sorted into two categories: *being* and *doing*. Pupils were directed to reach their targets either through *being* (a change in personality, behavior or attitude to school work) or through some action-oriented *doing*. By looking at targets and strategies in relation to each other, different combinations were possible (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Possible target-strategy combinations.](image)

Moreover, a four field figure was developed describing the degree of generality or individuality of targets in relation to the vague or concrete nature of strategies (Figure 2).
**Individual:** specific for the pupil who is the object of the IEP

**Vague:** does not suggest tools, interaction, situation

**General:** applies to all/most pupils in school

**Concrete:** suggests action, giving tools, interaction, situation

*Figure 2.* Relation between general-individual targets and vague-concrete strategies with illustrating examples.

While no considerable difference could be seen between the ways in which target and strategy types were given to pupils in grades 3, 5 and 8, there was a difference between the ages concerning the location of their targets/strategies in Figure 2. Targets tended to be more individual and strategies more concrete the younger the children were, and vice versa.
ARTICLE 2: THE INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN: A GENDERED ASSESSMENT PRACTICE?

The study aims to gain knowledge of gendered differences and similarities in targets given to pupils in IDPs. The following questions are addressed: (i) How are different target types (being as well as learning aspects) given to boys and girls of different grade levels in Swedish compulsory school? (ii) What possible reasons could there be for a gendered distribution? In addition, interest is aimed at discussing issues of assessment and assessment validity in relation to the gendered distribution of targets.

This study is based on the same empirical material as the first study, but only the 829 targets were used as the meaning units. These were analyzed according to their distribution among boys versus girls. The doing targets were sorted into the categories of being or learning targets, depending on their content. Thus, this study operates with learning targets and being targets as overall concepts. A further sub-categorization was made, however, in which both target types were sorted into a number of sub-categories based on expressed content. Learning targets were labeled as understanding, basic skills/drilling, or grades/results. The distribution of learning targets to boys and girls, respectively, proved to be fairly even, whereas there was an obvious difference between the sexes concerning being targets (Figure 3).
Since the main difference occurred in being targets, and these were themselves of various kinds, a sub-categorization resulting in six categories was carried out (Figure 4).

**Figure 3.** Distribution of all targets to boys and girls (829 items).

**Figure 4.** Distribution of sub categories of Being targets to boys and girls (324 items).
In sub-categories 1, 2, 3 and 5, boys received the greatest proportion of targets, whereas in sub-category 4, targets were predominantly given to girls. The distribution in the two figures above apply to the overall picture of the material as a whole. There are variations in the picture when the results are presented according to grade level (see article 2 for details).

The study takes a doing-gender-perspective, in which gender is seen as discursively produced rather than tied to the sexed body. Gender issues are discussed in relation to the differences in the distribution of being targets at all grade levels. Possible explanations for the gendered distribution of being targets can be thought of in at least two ways: Boys and girls generally do behave differently and the outward-directed behavior of boys may be interpreted as behavior designed to maintain the gender order. If behaving as the ‘ideal pupil’ is seen as girlish, the boys might behave in an opposite manner to avoid being viewed as feminine. The results can also be seen, however, as a reflection of teachers’ different expectations of boys and girls. Pre-conceived ideas of boys and girls might influence teachers’ patterns of expectations in school.

The results of the study bring to the fore issues that can be considered problematic even if the gender aspect is not taken into account. One such issue has to do with assessment validity in terms of what is actually being assessed in the IDP. The IDP appears to be used, to a large extent, for fostering pupils’ behavior and attitudes. Not seldom pupils – in particular boys – are given being targets exclusively. For them, instead of being an educational planning document, the IDP may be seen as a document that provides guidance on how to navigate within the borders of permitted behavior.

ARTICLE 3: IDPS AT WORK

This study aims to generate knowledge of teachers’ practices with regard to IDP as a tool by answering these questions: (i) What do
teachers perceive as the purpose(s) of IDP? (ii) What IDP practices can be discerned in teachers’ descriptions? (iii) What contextual aspects may affect perceptions of the purpose of the IDP and the implementation of the plan in practice? Additional interest is aimed at the (possible) relation between IDP and formative assessment.

In this study, the focus has shifted from document content to what I call IDP practice, which concerns teachers' understandings of the purpose(s) of the IDP and their use of IDP in continuous work. The empirical material consists of 15 interviews with teachers representing primary, intermediate, and secondary levels of compulsory school. Data was initially sorted on the basis of three areas related to the research questions: perceived purpose(s) of IDP, use of IDP in continuous work, and contextual conditions affecting IDP work. The analysis indicated that teachers’ perceptions of the purpose(s) of IDP can be understood as having major impact on how and when the IDP is used in continuous work. Thus, it was decided to make the perception of purpose(s) the defining factor in the description of three qualitatively different IDP practices in a typology. Certain aspects of contextual conditions also seemed to align closely with perceived purpose(s) and the use of IDP in continuous work. Accordingly, it was possible to discern coherent wholes forming three different practices.

The three practices can be summarized as follows:

**Practice 1:** The IDP is primarily seen as a document for providing information to pupils and parents at the parent-pupil-teacher meeting once every semester. Teachers describe that they do not use or look back in the documents between the meetings. The IDP can be seen as a formative tool only if pupils and parents are able to take in the information provided and act upon it themselves. For documentation, teachers fill in a template and follow it rather strictly. The level of inscription is thus rather high and the translation is limited. A certain resistance is present in the teachers’ descriptions; they do not feel that IDP documentation makes a difference but, rather, that it takes a disproportionate amount of time. Characteristic of practice 1 is also that
there is no forum for discussion or joint work around IDP, and that the teachers describe a low level of involvement on behalf of the principals.

**Practice 2**: The IDP is primarily seen as a document for providing information but also as a tool for involving pupils and parents in setting and evaluating goals at the parent-pupil-teacher meetings. The IDP is ‘indirectly’ visible in continuous work: teachers describe that the IDP makes them see each individual’s needs more clearly and that they therefore implicitly adapt to those needs. Students are continuously reminded of their goals in different ways, but the document is static between meetings. The teachers feel that they put a disproportionate amount of time into writing IDPs, but they also claim to see clear benefits in terms of pupils becoming more aware and reflective. As in practice 1, teachers in practice 2 follow templates rather strictly and the level of inscription is high. Here, however, there is a clear will to translation, but the teachers feel that they are held back by local guidelines and requirements. In practice 2, there is a higher involvement on part of principals, primarily concerning the formulation of documents and organization of time.

**Practice 3**: IDP is foremost viewed as a formative tool, affecting the way the teachers think of, organize and execute instruction. The IDP is formative in that it is used continuously as a basis for pupils’ involvement and understanding of their own learning and that it serves as a basis for teachers’ evaluation of instruction. The IDP is worked with continuously and updated on a regular basis, and there is ‘IDP-time’ on the schedule, during which pupils work with their individual targets. The level of appropriation of the IDP as a conceptual tool appears high in practice 3. It is described as a tool for new thinking and acting in practice, and can therefore be seen as a tertiary artifact. Principals are described as actively involved in the IDP discussion and as working together with the teachers in translating the IDP to become a locally shaped tool. The level of inscription appears to be considerably lower than in the other two practices.
ARTICLE 4: THE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: SUPPORTIVE TOOL OR MISSION IMPOSSIBLE? SWEDISH TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES OF DILEMMAS IN IDP PRACTICE

This study aims to explore which dilemmas and coping strategies for handling dilemmas can be discerned in teachers’ descriptions of IDP practices. Dilemmas are defined as situations in which two partly contradictory goals/purposes both need to be fulfilled. Because neither can be deselected, ways of balancing dilemmas must be sought. Handling dilemmas is thus more about positioning than problem solving. From an activity theory point of view, dilemmas are seen as manifestations of contradictions that exist within the activity system of instruction. Contradictions resulting in dilemmas may be problematic, but they can also be a driving force for change and innovation as they are balanced. The IDP dilemmas are interpreted as emerging from a central contradiction between trust in teachers’ professionalism and external steering and control. The fact that multiple purposes are assigned to the IDP and that many different actors driven by different motives are involved in one way or another in IDP also contribute to making IDP practice potentially contradictory/dilemmatic.

The study draws on the same 15 interviews with teachers that were used in article 3, and through analysis it was possible to distinguish three dilemmas that can briefly be summarized as follows:

*Documentation vs. instruction:* The incredibly extensive documentation is described as taking so much time that teachers feel they no longer have time to plan or reflect on their teaching. The IDP reform has meant a considerably increased workload for the teachers, without any changes in the organization of teachers’ working hours or their other duties.

*Officially correct vs. pupil friendly* is closely connected to the first dilemma and concerns the scope and complexity of formulations within the documents. Teachers feel the demand to express them-
selves in a curriculum-similar and overly bureaucratic language. This, they feel, is often incomprehensible for many students and parents. Consequently, the teachers feel that they put a lot of work into something that many of the recipients are unable to understand and make use of.

**Summative vs. formative**: This dilemma concerns the fact that IDP serves summative and formative purposes in the same document. Teachers describe that students are often assessed in an unnecessarily instrumental way in the ‘grade-like’ parts of the document. They feel that students’ and parents’ attention is automatically drawn to the ‘grades’ and that this prevents them from seeing the formative and forward-looking elements. The instrumental way in which children – especially younger children – are assessed and ‘graded’ is described, moreover, as de-motivating to children rather than as inspiring or impelling them to want to learn more.

A tentative categorization of the teachers’ ways of handling dilemmas – conscious or unconscious – was also made:

**Procedural display**: Teachers display to pupils/parents and principals procedures that count as accomplishments of IDP, but do not necessarily pay much attention to what an IDP is or ought to be. The IDP is reduced to the writing of a document, a ‘ritualized’ performance carried out twice a year.

**According to all the recognized rules**: Everything must be done and all purposes met in accordance with national and local guidelines and templates. There is no real strategy to deal with the dilemmas, which makes them very evident and leads to much frustration among the teachers.

**Towards a new thirdness**: These teachers had been in According to all the recognized rules but experienced it as impracticable. The dilemmas led to a collective and profound change effort and a changed
IDP practice, with easier language in documents and greater emphasis on the instructional consequences of the content of the document.

Hypothetically, it is possible to argue that being in *According to all the recognized rules* is a mission impossible within the scope of teachers’ regular working hours, and that teachers will therefore eventually end up in either *Procedural display* or *Towards a new thirdness*.

In the discussion, two models of emerging IDP practices are elaborated. Teachers experiencing dilemmas to a lesser extent appear to have more autonomy in shaping their IDP practices than teachers who experience dilemmas to a greater extent. The practice of the latter appears strongly affected by the ways in which other (external) actors shape templates and/or guidelines.
DISCUSSION

Two separate data collections generated two types of results in this thesis: textual/content aspects of the IDP and aspects related to the ways the IDP is shaped in teachers’ continuous work. The document content generates certain issues for discussion, while viewing IDP work from a teacher perspective generates others.

In this chapter, I aim to synthesize and discuss the results of the four articles. Initially, articles 1 and 2 are dealt with from the point of view of what characterizes the IDP documents. This is followed by a discussion of articles 3 and 4 concerning that which characterizes teachers’ descriptions of their work with IDP. Theoretical points of departure and concepts will be further elaborated in relation to the results of the articles.

I conclude the chapter by reflecting on the choice and usage of theory and method in the articles included in the thesis.

ARTICLES 1 AND 2: WHAT CHARACTERIZES THE IDP DOCUMENTS?

In the first two articles, which focus on the content of the IDP document, a general question is whether the IDP – judging from what can be discerned in written documents – appears to be a tool for learning in terms of forward-aiming targets and strategies given to pupils at all
stages of compulsory school. This would relate to the formative function of the IDP. Targets and strategies in the documents of my studies are frequently formulated in a general and diffuse manner, and goal-setting often lacks a specific individual focus. A desire to foster and 'normalize' students’ characters can be discerned in the documents, in that many of the targets and strategies related to such aspects. Article 2 reveals a difference in how these aspects are written into the IDPs for girls versus boys. Some of these findings confirm patterns found in previous research (e.g., Andreasson, 2007), and can be regarded as problematic in many senses. Questions of what is actually assessed and whether it is possible to assume that IDP is an equally beneficial tool for learning for all students, or indeed beneficial as a tool for learning at all, become central.

The question of what is actually assessed relates to the fact that targets and strategies so frequently concern students’ behavior, attitudes, and even their personalities. Obviously, it may be hard to see the IDP as a tool for subject learning if the content merely revolves around such aspects, and it is even possible to believe, as Andersson (2010) suggests, that IDP assessment may have a stigmatizing effect on students. The question of whether or not the IDP ought to contain ‘being aspects’ is not easily answered. There are two things we know for certain: schools are assigned to actively and consciously work with curricular goals of norms and values (e.g. SNAE, 2011), and the IDP may be used for this purpose if local schools decide to do so. It is also clearly expressed, however, that descriptions of students in IDPs may never concern their personalities (SNAE, 2008, 2012). This relates to the discussion of the difference between legitimate and illegitimate efforts toward normalization (cf. Nilholm, 2012). In my view, it is rather unproblematic that there are certain rules that need to be followed and that students must be encouraged to be responsible and considerate towards other people as well as school materials and environment. There are plenty of examples in my material, however, where targets and strategies revolve around students’ personalities in a way that cannot be related to curricular goals of norms and values. When such aspects are brought up in a dialogue at the parent-pupil-
teacher meeting, it might be easier for teachers to explain what they mean, but in a written document there is not always space for such explanation. Furthermore, written documents such as IDPs are permanent and can be interpreted as statements of a given 'truth'. Ahumemulic et al. (2010) discuss the fact that documents can be used to describe people but that, in doing so, they purport to be a description of reality, so that other - possibly truer - descriptions become obscured. In this way, the documents are examples of an exercise of power that operates through the production of truths (Steyerls, 2010). This is one of the reasons, I suggest in my articles 1 and 2, that IDP documents should focus primarily on students' knowledge in school subjects. The other reason concerns the critical contextualization aspect of IDP activity, i.e., that contextual conditions for learning ought to be considered when strategies for reaching targets are formulated (e.g., Ministry of Education, U2002/3932/S). It appears as if students’ behavior is often seen as the cause of their lack of knowledge; correction of the behavior is the seen as the solution. The fact that behavior could rather be a symptom of some other reason for the lack of knowledge, such as students having difficulties with some aspects of a subject, perhaps necessitating attention to instructional or other contextual factors, is seldom seen in the documents (cf. Isaksson et al. 2010). I believe, therefore, that there is reason to distinguish between being and learning aspects in the written document, and to let the IDP serve primarily as a tool for learning in school subjects.

It is not a stated purpose of IDP to be a tool for fostering students, but it appears as though it has partly come to be used in that way. Andreasson (2007) argues that in her study of action plans for pupils in need of special support, it appears that a certain way of being a pupil is seen as a prerequisite for subject related learning. The content of the documents used in my studies could be interpreted in the same way. There are several documents (predominately given to boys) that contain being targets only, and where there is a combination of being and learning targets, being targets are generally listed first. Comparisons can also be made with Berthén’s (2007) study, in which classroom activities in special schools for students with an intellectual dis-
ability were explored. Berthén argues that teachers appeared to operate from a motive that related to upbringing rather than knowledge in school subjects. Classroom activity was largely aimed at being aspects and normalization in terms of behavior. Subject learning played a secondary role in the classrooms studied, although research has shown that teaching school subject matter to such groups of pupils can be pursued with good results if the pupils are given the opportunity to participate in classroom activities that are aimed at learning in school subjects. In my studies, a rather large proportion of targets and strategies deal with being aspects. As in Berthé n’s study, this can be interpreted as an indication that teachers perceive fostering and normalizing as the purpose of their IDP actions. It is certainly possible to understand IDP actions in that way, but in the case of instruction (of which IDP-related actions are part), I would maintain that the object and intended outcome is learning and that learning can be defined as learning in accordance with the syllabuses in different subjects as well as in accordance with curricular goals of norms and values. If all of these goals are worked on continuously and in parallel, this is fairly unproblematic. What is problematic is when normalization is seen as a prerequisite, therefore delaying or overshadowing subject learning, or when normalization becomes illegitimate.

Another aspect that could prevent the IDP from becoming a tool for learning for students is if the content of the document is difficult to understand. In article 1 I argue that the content of many documents is likely to be difficult to understand for the reason that it is vague, limited, or incomplete. In other cases, as described by teachers in the interviews, one can assume that documents can be hard to understand because they are too voluminous or formulated in a language that is too complicated. A key element for formative assessment to function successfully is that students understand the content of the feedback provided (e.g., Popham, 2006; Sadler, 1989; Wiliam 2010). In relation to this aspect of formative assessment, the documents in my studies often appear deficient.
There are several possible explanations for this deficiency. Neither of the two IDP-reforms were preceded by additional training for teachers. Thus, an insufficient conceptual understanding of formative assessment and/or unfamiliarity with expressing goals and strategies in writing may be reasons for some of the shortcomings in the documents. In a Dutch study, Poppes et al. (2002) pointed out that goals listed in IEPs for children with disabilities were often vague and inconsistent. They studied the effects of an intervention in which teachers received training in setting goals and concluded that the quality of goals increased dramatically after the training. However, one must also take into account the fact that the documents I have studied – summarized products of agreements made at parent-pupil-teacher meetings – are taken out of their context in a sense. It is reasonable to assume that such meetings contain much more than what can be formulated in writing.

Moreover, the formulation of targets and strategies in a document can be seen as part of the discourse that Krantz (2009) terms the goal-oriented political-administrative discourse, which is in sharp contrast to the Bildung-oriented communicative discourse in which complex knowledge and paths to gain such knowledge do not easily allow themselves to be formulated and summarized in a document template. If document content appears deficient in various ways, one explanation might be that teachers do not know better. This may be true in some cases, but I believe that the results of my studies contribute to a more nuanced picture in the sense that they show that the IDP is not shaped merely on the field-implementation level by teachers.

The balancing that teachers need to deal with when formulating documents is described as dilemmatic in my interviews. On the one hand, document content needs to be understood by students, on the other hand, guidelines and templates from the formulation arena contribute to shaping the content and scope of documents. At the same time, there is an ideological dimension (cf. Goodson, 1995) behind policy formulations, emphasizing what Krantz (2009) refers to as the Bildung-perspective. I believe it is possible to assume that the IDP as
primary artifact (when its function is, for instance, information to students and parents, working instructions in continuous practice, or grounds for reporting results to the municipality) can be understood as part of the instrumental goal-oriented discourse. This does not preclude, however, the existence of an underlying Bildung-perspective, both in teachers’ understanding of their work and in how their continuous work is manifested in the classroom, even if such a perspective does not show in the document.

In my material, I believe that there are plenty of examples of IDPs containing concrete and specific targets and strategies, which could potentially serve as clear and tangible information to homes concerning what the child needs to develop, and, simultaneously, as ‘working material’ in regular schoolwork. Moreover, the results of articles 3 and 4 show that there are teachers who have come to organize and value IDP work as a continuously ongoing part of schoolwork, where the IDP is updated with new targets as students progress. Some teachers interviewed in this study describe how they experience such short-term and subject specific working targets as motivating for students when students can ‘check off’ targets and set new ones. This can be interpreted as an instrumental view of knowledge, but, again, it does not preclude there being an underlying Bildung-perspective which might simply be unapparent in the students’ documents.

CONTRIBUTION

Articles 1 and 2 form an empirical survey of the contents of the forward-looking part of IDP documents. The results confirm, in many respects, patterns found in previous research and evaluations of IDPs/action plans (cf. Andersson, 2010; Andreasson, 2007; Isaksson et al., 2010; Vallberg-Roth & Månsson, 2008). They also extend the context in which such patterns can be found. Since the data collection compared all stages of elementary school, the studies contribute by pointing to the fact that being aspects and gender patterns appear to
be similar regardless of the age of the students. The contribution also lies in further in-depth knowledge of how the content of the documents is formulated, and of the ways in which this relates to issues of assessment validity and equity. Furthermore, the way the categorization is carried out in terms of sorting targets and strategies into being, doing and learning may contribute by being a tool that can alert teachers to the content of targets and strategies when formulating their own IDP assessments. The four-field figure in article 1, which shows the sliding scale from individually to generally formulated targets in relation to an equally sliding scale of vague and concrete strategies, may also help to raise awareness of the need to be specific with respect to the individual as well as the subject matter in formulating an IDP (cf. Lundahl, 2011). Looking for and describing patterns in specific phenomena, portraying various features of a specific activity by introducing new concepts and/or formulating typologies, etc., can also be regarded as theoretical contributions based on empirical data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Larsson, 2005) in the sense that the concepts can be used and developed in future studies.

ARTICLES 3 AND 4: WHAT CHARACTERIZES TEACHERS’ WORK WITH IDPS?

Articles 3 and 4 further broaden and deepen the understanding of the IDP tool by turning the focus towards teachers’ descriptions of how the documents are used in continuous work and which possible affordances and difficulties the tool entails in this respect. These articles also illustrate how IDP work takes shape differently depending on teachers’ perceptions of the purposes of IDP and on different contextual conditions.
PURPOSE AS A CENTRAL CONCEPT

The purposes of IDP are central to the study as a whole — not only the official purposes but also additional/unofficial purposes for which the IDP is used, as well as that which teachers perceive they need to achieve with the IDP. The fact that there are a number of different purposes involved makes the IDP a potential field of tension. The fact that the IDP is summative (grade-like) as well as formative already reinforces a tension between instrumental goal-orientation and Bildung-orientation (Krantz, 2009). Apart from this, the IDP is also supposed to inform students and parents and to serve the simultaneous purpose of involving them. Seen as part of the ‘parentocracy’-era (Brown, 1990), the IDP may be a means for parents to make demands on the school and to make comparisons with other schools, as well as a way for the school to require parental involvement and shared responsibility for children’s results. I position this purpose of IDP within Krantz’s (2009) market discourse, where schools and teachers are constituted as implementers of what the customer has ordered and where documentation can be a ground for comparison when parents make educational choices for their children. Moreover, the professionalization discourse shines through in the interviews in this study when the teachers speak of requirements to use professional language in the documents. Largely, it seems to be the formulation arena, in the form of municipal guidelines and company solutions, that defines what is professional language. Documents are often inscribed with formulations taken directly from the syllabuses in unchanged form, and companies sell solutions with fully formulated phrases that can be cut and pasted into the documents.

The collection of grade-like assessments for the purpose of municipal control and comparison is an example of an additional/unofficial purpose for which IDPs can be used. Thus, considering the different purposes to which IDP is put, it can be understood as a tool for informing parents, enabling parental influence, enabling schools to involve parents, central monitoring and control, marketing, summative evaluation, teachers’ professionalization, and formative purposes. The
formative purposes include the learning process, giving feedback, involving students and developing their metacognitive skills, as well as evaluating the school situation.

The relatively strong societal and political focus on measurable results and accountability of recent years has meant an increased focus on measurability in terms of presenting knowledge in grades and grade-like forms. In the general debate, the summative purposes of the IDP have been the focus of attention, and have sometimes even been mentioned as the *actual* purposes of IDP (e.g., Helte, 2012). The less measurable and evaluable aspects, i.e., the formative purposes, have been relegated to the background. The multiple and often contradictory purposes are assumed to affect and shape teachers’ perceptions of what they need to achieve with IDP. Teachers’ perceptions of the purpose(s) of IDP direct their actions and give these meaning, in the sense that teachers act in accordance with that which they primarily perceive they need to achieve.

All four discourses that Krantz (2009) describes can be understood as active when teachers’ different IDP practices are shaped. The contradictions inherent in the various discourses are, moreover, ground for the dilemmas teachers experience to different degrees. In my view, the contradiction that concerns the degree of teacher autonomy versus the degree of external steering and control is central. The idea behind goal-steering and decentralization was that the power to define paths to the goals would largely be close to the local context, so that the school system could be designed according to local needs. Results in terms of goal attainment would then be accounted for. In recent years, steering has increasingly been taken back to the central level, in line with talk of failing results and permissiveness. The steering – and thereby the shaping of local school practices – takes place on three levels; the national, the municipal, and the local. Additionally, in the case of IDP, the market has entered the scene. In this, it seems difficult for teachers to navigate and make the 'right' decisions in their work. On the one hand they are expected to be professional, to interpret and make autonomous decisions, on the other hand local misin-
interpretations and permissiveness are depicted as causes of students’ declining results.

THE SHAPING OF IDP PRACTICES

When teachers’ IDP practices are shaped, the balance between inscription and translation appear to be central. This, in turn, can be related to other concepts that I use in order to understand teachers’ continuous work with IDP. For teachers who are given a greater degree of autonomy, the translation (in which they translate laws, guidelines and document design in terms of adaptation to their own, local circumstances) becomes more and more of an ongoing and constantly evolving process. The possibility of appropriating the IDP as a conceptual tool increases, which, in turn, lies close to my understanding of the IDP as tertiary artifact. Tertiary artifacts are partly abstracted from the ‘direct production’ and color the way we see and understand phenomena in the world. In a way, they are decoupled from the original artifact, but the connection is still there. Thus, tertiary artifacts are important as mediating tools for changing established praxis or routines and ways of speaking and acting that develop in relation to tertiary artifacts can be transferred between contexts (Wartofsky, 1979; Wittek, 2007). A conceptual understanding of IDP as a formative tool involving continuous work towards learning goals, evaluation and assessment, reflection, and involvement of students, may affect other parts of instruction and vice versa, leading to a more coherent whole.

When inscription – i.e., that with which the IDP is already inscribed in terms of regulations, guidelines, and templates before it reaches the level of the local school – is significant and the translation process is limited or almost non-existent, the IDP may be regarded as a ready-made solution. Interpretations of the law and the SNAE guidelines have already been made on the level of the municipality and companies designing formats for IDP documentation, and schools are expected to adapt to a more or less given solution in the name of in-
creased efficiency and equity. If teachers are not required to think in terms of translation, it is possible to assume that they will not develop the professional ability to shape, evaluate, adapt, and refine their practice. The ability to balance and find solutions in complex situations develops in autonomous action (Agevall & Jenner, 2008). With a limited degree of autonomy, the possibilities for teachers to appropriate the IDP as a conceptual tool will be reduced. The risk, then, is that teachers merely 'manage' the IDP, which can be linked to what Wertsch (1998) describes as mastery without appropriation. This, in turn, often leads to a degree of resistance, which makes it more likely that the IDP is considered as existing alongside regular practice rather than being an embedded part of it.

THE ROLE OF DILEMMAS

The design of IDP documents and IDP practice are not standardized. The law and the SNAE guidelines prescribe a plan that is to contain summative (grade-like) written assessments in all school subjects and simultaneously function as a formative tool. The SNAE guidelines state that the content of the IDP is to be clearly linked to curricular goals and assessment criteria, but also that it is to be formulated in a way that is understandable to the student. This is the actual inscription. However, there is often additional inscription in terms of municipal guidelines and company templates. These can be, or can be perceived as, compelling in a way that significantly affects IDP work and limits the translation process of principals and teachers at local schools. Article 4 indicates that the dilemmas are experienced more tangibly in cases of heavy inscription – in the form of literal interpretation of SNAE and municipal guidelines as well as templates from companies than in cases where there is a more pervasive translation process. The dilemmas described, where teachers report difficulty finding a balance, concern time, in terms of working hours spent on writing and administering IDPs, communication, in terms of language
and formulations in the documents, as well as the fact that IDPs are supposed to contain summative and formative assessment.

A tentative categorization of how teachers handle the dilemmas points to three qualitatively different ways, where one way is to try to do everything according to all the recognized rules in terms of following guidelines and templates to the letter. This means spending an unreasonable number of working hours writing documents. Teachers describe that there is no way that this can be done within the limits of regular working hours. A hypothetical assumption is therefore that it is impossible to work with IDP in such a way in the long run. The other two ways may be seen as two qualitatively different ways of handling an unsustainable situation, but they may also be considered as (conscious or unconscious) choices based on what is possible in the context. The translation process has taken two different directions, which I term procedural display and towards a new thirdness. Procedural display means that IDP is reduced to what is visible and possible to inspect, i.e., the document. The IDP is described as existing twice a year at the parent-pupil-teacher meeting, where a document ‘counting as’ IDP is written and handed over as information to pupils and parents about the status of pupils’ current knowledge in the subjects and the forward-aiming targets. In towards a new thirdness a collective change effort has taken place: teachers have jointly decided to view the IDP as a continuous and pupil-oriented tool for targeted work and formative assessment. This means less focus on long summative and grade-like assessments, and more focus on pupils’ understanding and on their receiving time in the schedule to work with their IDP targets.

I see a strong correlation between the qualitatively different IDP practices in article 3 and the different ways in which dilemmas are handled in article 4. The correlations are strong between practice 1 – procedural display, practice 2 – according to all the recognized rules, and practice 3 – towards a new thirdness. In article 3, the three practices are described from the point of view of perceived purposes, and in article 4 the categorization is based on dilemma-management
strategies. Thus, article 3 is about describing qualitatively different IDP practices, whereas article 4 can be seen as giving reasons as to how the different practices have evolved. Hypothetically, it is possible to argue that when the situation is perceived as unsustainable in terms of handling all purposes and demands, teachers are ‘forced’ to decide (consciously or unconsciously) which purpose(s) are central. Their decisions and attitudes are influenced and shaped by the context in which they find themselves, in terms of how strong the inscription appears, the kind of support and organization provided by the local principal, which school stage they work at, and so forth.

CONTRIBUTION

If we only look at the results of articles 1 and 2, the IDP as a document appears problematic in many respects. Previous research into documentation can be understood to some extent as a criticism of teachers, in the sense of suggesting that they have not quite mastered the task of formulating documents such as IDPs and action plans or that they might have hidden agendas. This thesis takes another approach in trying to understand why IDP work and documents take shape the way they do. Empirically, articles 3 and 4 have contributed, in a way that has not been done before, with knowledge of the ways in which teachers work with IDP and the dilemmas they experience in this work. Theoretically, the contribution lies in the application of concepts taken from socio-cultural and activity theory to a new area. The typologies that have been developed can be seen as a theoretical contribution that can be tested against new empirical data.

The conceptual understanding of the teachers’ IDP work as assessment actions within an activity system, and the assumption that teachers’ work is not simply and straightforwardly controlled by the writings in the law and the SNAE guidelines on IDP have deepened the understanding of teachers’ IDP work and writing of IDP documents. Teachers’ (contextually shaped) perceptions of what they need
to achieve, as well as locally developed conditions and traditions are important for the realization of IDP. Thus, the IDP is shaped on different levels - central, municipal and local - all of which contribute to what IDP becomes in practice. The fact that the market has become an influential actor in this, moreover, adds another dimension. Teachers’ actions are shaped by inscriptions made in the formulation arena and by what they perceive the surrounding context to require, allow, or permit.

REFLECTIONS ON THEORY

As mentioned, theory is related to the empirical investigations in slightly different ways in the four articles. I went into the document studies with a focus on the documents’ forward-aiming parts and an underlying interest in how the plans could function as the ‘tools for learning’ they were described as in policy.

As I sat with the long lists of targets and strategies in front of me, I could have made the choice to critically examine their content in relation to the content of the curriculum and syllabuses, and from that point of view discussed the validity of targets and strategies given to students in IDPs. I could also have chosen to include a power perspective, since the collected documents provide undeniable access to a variety of descriptions of students’ knowledge as well as behavior. The targets and strategies that are considered central to each individual reveal an image of what might be considered the ‘ideal pupil’. At this point, I could have engaged more deeply in matters relating to how normality is constructed in documentation such as the IDP. I could have questioned the teachers’ right to define normality and their ways of using assessment and documentation as a means of exercising power. To some extent, I deal with such issues in both articles 1 and 2, but the research questions and main focus in article 1 concerned the formative tool function of the plan, wherefore my analysis came to concern types of targets and strategies and how these
could be combined. On basis of the created concepts being, doing and learning, as well as the four-field figure with generally/individually formulated targets and vaguely/concretely formulated strategies, it was possible to discuss the data in relation to how the IDP is intended to act as a concrete tool for learning for each individual. Thus, the empirical data generated a collection of concepts, which can be seen as a data-close theory that concerns the entities that IDPs are built from. As such, it may be used in different contexts and tested against new empirical data.

The concepts that were developed in article 1 were used and further elaborated in article 2. I would claim that the role of the IDP as tool for learning is central in article 2 as well, but from a different point of view. On basis of the way in which targets are distributed in IDPs for boys and girls it is possible to discuss whether the IDP is an equally beneficial tool for learning for all students. I chose to include in the article a discussion of possible reasons for the incidence and gendered distribution of – above all – being targets. In the study, gender is understood as continuously created and recreated through social interaction, in schools as well as in society at large, and the abilities of boys and girls are understood as developing in a sociocultural context where certain cultural beliefs have become part of our thinking and inscribed in our routines and behaviours (Murphy, 2008). The doing-gender perspective is used as framework for understanding possible reasons for distribution in this particular article, and therefore not further elaborated in the theoretical chapter of the thesis as a whole.

In articles 3 and 4, the point of departure is to a larger extent taken in theory, particularly in the activity theoretical concepts of goal-directed actions, rules/community/division of labor, and contradictions manifested as dilemmas. The interview guide was designed to induce descriptions of perceived purposes of IDP work, contextual frames and conditions, and affordances as well as difficulties connected to IDP work. In analyzing and interpreting data, additional concepts were used. Wartofsky’s (1979) notions of primary, secondary and tertiary artifacts provide – in my opinion – a fruitful way of
understanding the IDP not only as a physical document, but also as a process shaped on different levels (inscription/formulation arena and translation/field implementation) and as tool for reflecting on and perhaps changing current practice. In the same way, the distinction between mastery and appropriation of a cultural tool has been important for discussing the ways in which teachers make use of the IDP tool.

Understanding the mediating qualities of the IDP not only as enabling and empowering, but also as steering, constraining and limiting (cf. Wertsch, 1998) also contributed to a deeper understanding. When new tools are developed and/or introduced it is generally because there is a perceived problem that needs to be overcome. In the case of IDP, there was no expressed need from a teacher point of view for a tool such as the IDP, wherefore it can be regarded as imposed on the teachers. Moreover, the understanding of contradictions (manifested as dilemmas) as a driving force for change and innovation (Engeström, 2001) has been important. Even though the IDP in many senses appear as problematic for the teachers, some of them describe how they have managed to balance dilemmas and develop a new practice that they value.

On the whole, I believe my choice of theoretical approach and concepts has helped me achieve a study of IDP that contributes with an additional dimension to those of previous research in the field. I have been able to bring to the fore issues related to how teachers perceive of the IDP as a tool, and why they think and act the way they do on basis of the tool. Teachers are often criticized for not understanding what to do and how to write, but they do not act in isolation from a context in which a wide range of interests and governing mechanisms at the national, municipal and local levels (and even the market in the case of IDP) contribute to shaping the work that they perform in school.
REFLECTIONS ON METHOD

The document studies, i.e., articles 1 and 2, have given a picture of IDP that can be regarded as limited in some senses. The collected documents were once part of a context; they were drawn up at parent-pupil-teacher meetings. The analysis of document content would have been more nuanced had I also observed the parent-pupil-teacher meetings and made the conversations and interactions that led to the written agreements part of the analysis. In the methods chapter, I described the considerations that led to my choice of interviews rather than observations as data collection method. My research interest has largely been about studying a possible variety in relation to, for instance, school stages and facilitators. I wanted to describe patterns and create typologies, and document studies and interviews were found better suited to that purpose than ethnographically-inspired studies in which I would have had to limit myself to fewer cases and thus would not have been able to make the desired comparisons. Certainly, actual observations of IDP-related classroom action would have been another way of collecting data, but it would have been very difficult to define the relation between IDP and classroom action if the relation was not outspoken. Moreover, by doing 15 interviews, I was able to spread them between school stages, municipalities, and municipal/independent schools in a way that, had I observed, would not have been possible due to time constraints. I realize that choosing the interview as the data collection method without combining it with observational studies can be considered problematic in relation to the theoretical frames that have inspired my approach in analyzing the data. Socio-cultural and activity theories place heavy emphasis on the importance of context, and I have not observed the informants in their context.

The qualitative research interview aims to understand the world from the informants’ point of view and to develop the meaning of the experiences they express. The interview may be seen as individualistic in the sense that it focuses on the individual and ignores that he or she is embedded in social interaction, or as idealistic and ignoring the fact
that human experience and behavior are localized to a social and material world (Kvale, 1997). Säljö (2000), moreover, argues that interviews do not give access to what people think, but rather, to what they consider reasonable to say in a given situation, which is also embedded in a context. I realize that an ethnographically-inspired method, in which I had followed and observed the work of teachers in the social and material world in which their actions are actually shaped and operationalized, might have given me another understanding. In these studies, however, the interviewees’ descriptions constitute the empirical data, and I regard them as informants who have shared their points of view and experiences of IDP work. Naturally, additional observations of practice would have enabled me to scrutinize the relation between what was said and what was done, but available time frames did not allow for this. Such studies of the relation between said and done could be a matter for future research. In the light of, for instance, my own background as a teacher and the fact that the interviews were based on examples from documents brought to the interviews, I regard the informants’ descriptions as reasonable and credible. I am aware, however, that my understanding can be regarded as an understanding of teachers’ stories rather than of the ‘direct reality’.

I do not claim to be able to generalize the types of IDP practices or the teachers’ experiences of dilemmas in any statistical sense. As mentioned in the method chapter, it is possible to talk about generalization in terms other than statistical. Using a sample that maximizes the variation by means of attempting to cover the variation that exists is one way of discussing generalizability that I have already addressed. It is also possible to discuss generalization through context similarity, sometimes also referred to as transferability (Larsson, 2010). The basic idea is that interpretation made in a study may be generalized to other cases with similar contexts. The contextual similarity refers not only to external similarities but also to actors’ ways of giving meaning to the phenomena. Based on my own pre-understanding and the results of previous research I would expect a certain degree of transferability, but the extent to which this is so is left to the judgement of those who take part of the research results. A
third way of looking at generalization has to do with readers recognizing the ways in which the results are portrayed. Through the researcher’s interpretations and ways of presenting those interpretations, it is possible for the reader to understand a process or phenomenon in a new or different way. Larsson (2010) refers to this as the heuristic quality of interpretive research. My hope is that the categorizations, concepts, and typologies used to present the results in the different studies in this thesis will contribute to another or deeper understanding of the IDP phenomenon.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

In concluding this thesis, I want to point to some possible areas of future research into the field of IDPs and similar documentation practices. As mentioned, the categories and typologies included in this thesis can be tested against new empirical data, and the results of the studies may be further deepened and problematized by observational studies in which the relation between said and done is scrutinized. Apart from this, I would like to point to two areas that I find particularly interesting to study further in relation to the findings of the present study.

Empirically, this thesis has taken a teacher perspective in trying to understand the IDP as tool for documentation and actions in practice. The studies have concerned the understood and implemented dimensions of IDP from their point of view. Of Goodson’s (1995) five dimensions of curriculum, the fifth concerns the experienced dimension, i.e., that which the students experience in the classroom. A study of students’ experienced dimension of IDP would indeed be interesting in relation to the teacher perspective, and a very important contribution to the discussion of the future of IDPs and similar documentation practices in school. What are the affordances and difficulties from a student perspective? In what ways do students of various stages of school perceive of the IDP as a tool? Additionally, it would
certainly be of interest also to gain knowledge of a third party, and study the parental experiences of IDP in the same way.

At the time of completing this thesis the IDP is about to enter a new phase, where the requirement of IDP documentation is to be reduced by half for school years 1-5 (IDPs are to be drawn up once instead of twice a year) and removed completely for the grading school years 6-9 (Ds 2013:23). On basis of the results and theoretical argumentation of this thesis, it would be highly interesting to follow the development both where requirements are halved and where they are removed. I have argued that new modes of thinking and acting as a result of the IDP experience can be regarded as a tertiary artifact. Habib and Wittek (2007) argue that the portfolio can be considered truly appropriated when its users have integrated it to such an extent that the primary artifact is no longer necessary, and the IDP can be understood in the same way. Therefore, it is interesting to follow the development when requirements are removed or reduced. Has teachers’ work with writing and implementing IDPs during the past eight years led to something that will persist despite the fact that requirements to use the primary artifact is removed/reduced? Has teachers’ balancing of dilemmas led to practices that they value in such a way that they are maintained? And if teachers have not seen the benefits of IDPs and draw a sigh of relief that the requirements are gone: what alternatives do they see ahead concerning documentation of students’ knowledge, the formative function that the IDP documents had to fill, or information to students and parents?

Indeed, I myself will follow this development with great interest.
SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

I sammanfattningen som följer presenteras avhandlingens innehåll kortfattat under rubrikerna bakgrund, syfte och frågeställningar, teoretiska ramar, metod, resultat (de fyra artiklarna) samt avslutande kommentarer.

BAKGRUND

Denna avhandling handlar om individuella utvecklingsplaner (IUP) i svensk grundskola, ett lagstadgat fenomen sedan 2006. Under de sju år IUP har funnits har syftena med såväl som innehållet i planen förändrats. 2006 års reform introducerade IUP som ett sammanfattande och framåtsyftande planeringsdokument som skulle upprättas i samförstånd mellan tre parter (lärare, elev, förälder) vid utvecklingssamtalet en gång varje termin. Syftet var att optimera varje individens studisituation samtidigt som elev och vårdnadshavare gjordes delaktiga och fick möjlighet att påverka. I och med en ny reform 2008 tillskrevs IUP även summativa syften, och planen skulle, utöver de framåtsyftande delarna, även innehålla skriftliga/betygsliknande omdömen i alla ämnen som elev hade undervisning i. Förbudet mot betygslikhet togs bort, och elevens kunskaper i ämnena fick, om man så önskade, uttryckas i form av en symbol (Skolverket, 2008).

Den formativa funktionen beskrivs fortfarande som central, varför varje omdöme inte bara skulle beskriva elevens kunskaper retroaktivt, utan även blicka framåt. Beroende på hur huvudmän (kommuner eller fristående aktörer) och enskilda skolor tolkar och omsätter lagen och de allmänna råden har dokumentationen kunnat variera i omfattning. IUP-dokument insamlade för denna avhandling varierat i omfång mellan 3-45 sidor per elev.

Även om IUP i utvärderingar (SNAE, 2007; 2010) beskrivs ha medfört en rad positiva effekter, främst i form av en professionalisering av lärarens arbete, så har man också kunnat konstatera att dokumentationen under senare år tagit alltmer av lärarens arbetstid, och att lärare många gånger upplever att de inte längre har tid att planera och följa upp sin undervisning på ett rimligt sätt (Ds 2013:23). I skrivande stund introduceras en ny reform som innebär reducerade krav på dokumentation i syfte att minska lärares administrativa arbete. Från politiskt håll har uttalats att IUPs funktion har ersatts av tidigarelagda betyg, varför planen inte längre är nödvändig i de betygsattande årskurserna 6-9 (Helte, 2012). Detta synliggör en av många spänningar som finns i relation till IUP, nämligen att vissa aktörer ser planens summativa och betygsliknande funktioner som centrala, medan många lärare (jfr artikel 3 och 4 i föreliggande avhandling) betraktar planens formativa funktioner som primära.

379 insamlade IUP-dokument och 15 djupintervjuer med lärare på grundskolans tre stadijer utgör den empiriska basen för de studier som presenteras i fyra artiklar i föreliggande avhandling. Ett grundantagande är att lärare uppfattningar av och arbete med IUP (som dokument och verktyg för kontinuerligt arbete) tar form i skärningspunkten mellan olika aktörer på olika nivåer. Den *formella dimensionen* (jfr Goodson, 1995) av IUP, i form av lagar och allmänna råd kring hur IUP ska användas och fungera, formuleras nationellt av politiker och myndighetstjänstemän. I och med ett decentraliserat styre av den svenska skolan måste utrymme också lämnas för tolkning på lokal kommunal nivå, där ytterligare riktlinjer ofta utformas av kommunala politiker och tjänstemän. Eftersom IUP-bedömningens summativa
och formativa syften är komplicerade att hantera och dokumentera i skrift har kommuner i hög utsträckning tagit hjälp av företag som specialiserar sig på att skapa och sälja lösningar för IUP-dokumentation. Både den centrala kommunnivån och företagen kan sägas skapa en förstådd dimension av IUP. IUP förstås naturligtvis också av de lärare och skolledare som ska implementera planen på den lokala skolan. Den implementerade dimensionen, d.v.s. hur IUP formuleras och tas i bruk i lärares kontinuerliga arbete, är vad studierna i denna avhandling i empiriskt handlar om. Kopplingen till övriga nivåer och dimensioner i systemet finns dock hela tiden med som en bakgrund mot vilken jag anser det är nödvändigt att förstå lärares IUP-relaterade handlingar.

**SYFTE OCH FRÅGESTÄLLNINGAR**

Avhandlingen syftar till att fördjupa kunskapen kring individuella utvecklingsplaner som dokument och verktyg för lärares kontinuerliga arbete, utifrån följande två övergripande frågeställningar:

(i) Vad karakteriserar IUP-dokument i termer av den bedömning som framkommer i dem?

(ii) Vad karakteriserar lärares beskrivningar av IUP-arbete i relation till uppfattade syften, och i termer av svårigheter såväl som möjligheter?

Var och en av de fyra artiklarna har sina egna specifika syften och frågeställningar som relaterar till de övergripande.
TEORETISKA RAMAR

I avhandlingen används ett antal nyckelbegrepp hämtade från socioikulturella teorier och verksamhetsteori för att tolka och förstå hur IUP blir ett kontextuellt format verktyg som medierar lärares handlingar i praktiken.


Termen IUP kan förstås och användas på olika sätt. Ofta syftar man på det fysiska dokumentet, men termen IUP kan också referera till användningsmönster och arbetsprocesser som dokumentet medför. Dessutom kan man anta att arbetet med IUP kan leda till att användarna börjar tänka i nya banor som följd av IUP-arbetet. Wartofskys (1979) begrepp **primära**, **sekundära** och **tertiära artefakter** har hjälpt mig att förstå och analysera IUP som ett verktyg som fungerar på olika nivåer. IUP som primär artefakt handlar om det fysiska dokumentet, som kan användas för att ge information till elever och föräldrar, vara arbetsinstruktioner i kontinuerligt klassrumsarbete eller utgöra grund för att rapportera resultat. IUP som sekundär artefakt ger tolkningar och modeller för hur IUP-arbetet kan te sig i praktiken. Tolkningarna och modellerna för hur IUP ska användas kan komma från Skolverkets allmänna råd, beslut på central kommunnivå eller


Ett annat verksamhetsteoretiskt begrepp som används i avhandlingen är *motsättningar*. Dessa antas vara ständigt närvarande i verksamhetssystem och utgöra en drivkraft för förändring. Motsättningar beskrivs som historiskt framvuxna strukturella spänningar inom och mellan verksamhetssystem. Diskursiva manifestationer av sådana motsättningar kan vara *dilemman* som artikuleras av dem som finns i systemet. I lärarintervjuerna framkom såväl upplevda möjligheter som svårigheter relaterade till IUP, där vissa av de senare kunde tolkas som dilemman. I min studie definierar jag dilemman som situationer i vilka två delvis motsägelsefulla syften måste uppfyllas. Inget syfte
kan väljas bort, vilket gör att att dilemma måste balanseras på något sätt.

**METOD**

Empiriska data har samlats in i två omgångar och består av 379 IUP-dokument från skolår 3, 5 och 8, samt 15 djupintervjuer med lärare på grundskolan (fem från vardera låg-, mellan- och högstadiet). Insamlade dokument låg till grund för de två de studier som presenteras i artikel 1 och 2, medan lärarintervjuerna låg till grund för artikel 3 och 4.

Utav de insamlade IUPerna från 63 skolklasser i tre kommuner tillhörde 184 dokument pojkar och 195 dokument flickor. Forskningsfrågorna rörde den framåtsyftande delen av dokumentet, där elevernas mål och strategier för fortsatt lärande var nedskrivna. Totalt fanns 829 mål och 557 strategier i dokumenten, och dessa listades och kategoriserades utifrån *typer* av mål och strategier. I artikel 2, som handlar om skillnader i hur olika måltyper ges till pojkar respektive flickor, är det endast målen som varit i fokus för analys. Av de 829 målen var 467 givna till pojkar och 362 givna till flickor.

Genomgående har kvalitativ innehållsanalys använts för att sortera och bearbeta data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Dokumenten och intervjuutskrifterna i sin helhet har betraktats som de analysenheter som har ramat in och kontextualiserat meningsenheter som varit föremål för mer ingående analys och kategorisering. Meningsenheter i dokumentstudierna utgjordes av de 829 målen och 557 strategierna, medan meningsenheter i intervju materialet utgjordes av de delar som svarade mot forskningsfrågorna i artikel 3 och 4. Meningsenheter har vid behov kondenserats till kortare texter med bibehållt kärninnehåll, och dessa kondenserade meningsenheter har sedan kodats och kategoriserats utifrån innehåll.

RESULTAT
De fyra artikelarnas syften, forskningsfrågor och resultat sammanfattas kortfattat nedan:

ARTIKEL 1: A TOOL FOR LEARNING? AN ANALYSIS OF TARGETS AND STRATEGIES IN SWEDISH INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS
Studien syftar till att utveckla kunskap om användandet av formativ bedömning i termer av mål och strategier för fortsatt lärande som ges till elever i IUP-dokument, genom att söka svar på följande frågor:

(i) Hur uttrycks mål och strategier i IUP?
(ii) På vilka sätt samverkar mål och strategier med varandra?
(iii) Vilka skillnader (om några) finns mellan innehållet i IUP-dokumenten för elever på grundskolans olika stador?

Relationen mellan IUP och formativ bedömning, samt frågan om i vilka avseenden IUP kan biteraktas som ett verktyg för lärande är centrala i denna artikel. Från den framåtsyftande delen av elevers IUP-dokument hämtades 829 mål och 557 strategier (vägar till målen).
Målen kategoriserades i olika typer – being, doing och learning -baserade på det innehåll de uttryckte. Being-målen handlade om aspekter av elevernas uppförande, attityder och personlighet, medan learning-målen på olika sätt relaterade till lärande i skolans ämnen. Doing-målen var speciella till sin karaktär, de uttryckte ett görande och var i själva verket strategier som var skrivna som mål. I analysen av strategier urskildes två olika typer; being och doing. Antingen skulle eleverna ta sig till målen genom att ändra aspekter av uppförande, attityd eller personlighet, eller genom ett mer handlingsinriktat och konkret görande. Då målen och strategierna analyserades i relation till varandra framgick att fem olika kombinationer var möjliga:

- **being by being** (t ex. “Bli mer uppmärksam på lektioner genom att vara mer koncentrerad”)
- **being by doing** (t ex. “Bli mindre impulsiv genom att tyst räkna till tio innan jag sager något”)
- **doing by doing** (t ex. “Räcka upp handen en gång per lektion genom att tänka på att räcka upp handen”)
- **learning by being** (t ex. “Sikta på bättre resultat i engelska genom att tro på dig själv”)
- **learning by doing** (t ex. “Utveckla din huvudräkning i allmänhet och multiplikationstabellen i synnerhet genom att använda datorprogram X varje dag i skolan och hemma”)

Analysen visar också att elevernas mål kunde vara generellt formulerade (mål som i själva verket gäller för alla elever i grundskolan) eller individuellt riktade (mål som gäller ett specifikt utvecklingsområde för en enskild elev). På samma sätt kunde strategierna ses på en glidande skala mellan vaga formuleringar och mer konkreta. Relationerna mellan generellt/individuellt formulerade mål och vagt/konkret formulerade strategier tydliggjordes med hjälp av en fyrfältsfigur. Mål tenderade att vara mer individuellt riktade och strategier mer konkret formulerade ju yngre eleverna var. För högstadiielever var det vanligare med generellt formulerade mål i kombination med vaga strategier.
ARTIKEL 2: THE INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN: A GENDERED ASSESSMENT PRACTICE?

Studien syftar till att skapa kunskap om genusrelaterade skillnader och likheter i mål som ges till elever i IUP, genom att söka svar på följande frågor:

(i) Hur ges olika måltyper (med avseende på både being- och learningaspekter) till pojkar respektive flickor på grundskolans olika stadier?

(ii) Vilka möjliga orsaker kan finnas till en genusrelaterad distribution av mål?

Ett särskilt intresse ägnas också åt att diskutera frågor kring bedömningsvaliditet i relation till en genusrelaterad distribution av mål.

I denna studie utgör de 829 målen analysenheten och det som undersöks är hur dessa fördelas mellan pojkar och flickor. Doing-målen sorterades in under antingen being- eller learning-mål, beroende på vilket innehåll de uttryckte, och en underkategorisering av såväl being- som learning-mål genomfördes. Learning-målen rubricerades antingen som förståelse, grundläggande färdigheter eller betyg/resultat. Fördelningen av de olika sorternas learning-mål visade sig vara förhållandevis jämn, medan det fanns en uppenbar skillnad i fördelningen av being-mål, där pojkarna fick betydligt fler. Beingmålen uttryckte en rad olika aspekter, och sorterades därför in i sex underkategorier: attityd, störande beteende, slarv/oordning, osäkerhet/tysthet, ineffektivitet och ’bibehåll det goda uppförandet’. I kategorierna attityd, störande beteende, slarv/oordning och ineffektivitet var det pojkarna som fick en mycket stor del av målen, medan flickorna var starkt överrepresenterade i kategorin osäkerhet/tysthet.

Möjliga anledningar till den genusrelaterade fördelningen av mål diskuteras utifrån ett doing-gender-perspektiv, där genus förstås som skapat/återskapat i social interaktion i skolan såväl som i samhället i
Svensk sammanfattning


ARTIKEL 3: IDPS AT WORK

Studien syftar till att skapa kunskap om lärares kontinuerliga arbete med utgångspunkt i verktyget IUP, genom att söka svar på följande frågor:

(i) Vad upp fattar lärare som syftet/syftena med IUP?
(ii) Vilka IUP-praktiker kan urskiljas i lärares beskrivningar?
(iii) Vilka kontextuella faktorer kan påverka uppfattningar av syftet med IUP och omsättande av planen i praktiken?

Ett särskilt intresse riktas mot relationen mellan IUP och formativ bedömning.
Artikel 3 hämtar sin empiri från 15 intervjuer med lärare från grundskolans alla stadium, och data sorterades utifrån tre områden som tog sin utgångspunkt i forskningsfrågorna: uppfattade syften med IUP, kontinuerligt användande av IUP och kontextuella villkor som påverkar IUP-arbetet. Analysen indikerade att lärarnas uppfattning av syften med IUP kunde förstås som avgörande för hur de arbetar med IUP kontinuerligt. Den visade dessutom att vissa aspekter av kontextuella villkor sammanföll med uppfattade syften, varför uppfattade syften fick utgöra den definierande faktorn i en typologi innehållandes tre kvalitativt olika IUP-praktiker.

De tre IUP-praktikerna kan sammanfattas enligt följande:

**Praktik 1:** IUP uppfattas i första hand som ett dokument som ger information till elever och föräldrar vid utvecklingssamtalen en gång per termin. Lärarna beskriver att de inte använder eller ser tillbaka på dokumenten mellan utvecklingssamtalen. IUP kan ses som ett formativt verktyg bara om elever och föräldrar förstår informationen som ges i dokumentet och själva har förmåga att agera utifrån den. Lärarna skriver i en IUP-mall som de tilldelats och som de följer tämligen strikt. Inskriptionen förefaller stark, medan översättningen förefaller vara begränsad. Ett visst mått av motstånd är närvarande i lärarnas beskrivningar: de känner att IUP tar oproportionellt mycket tid samtligt som de upplever att den gör liten skillnad. Karaktäristiskt för praktik 1 är också lärarnas beskrivning av att det finns få forum för samarbete kring IUP, och att skolledarnas inblandning i hur IUP (dokument och praktik) ska formas inte är särskilt påtaglig.

**Praktik 2:** IUP uppfattas i första hand som ett dokument som ger information, men beskrivs också som ett verktyg för att involvera elever och föräldrar i att sätta upp och utvärdera mål vid utvecklingssamtalen. IUP är ’indirekt’ synlig i praktiken mellan utvecklingssamtalen, eftersom lärarna beskriver att arbetet med att ta fram IUP leder till att de ser varje individuellt elevs behov tydligare och att de därmed
har dessa i bakhuvudet. Eleverna påminns kontinuerligt om sina mål på olika sätt, men dokumentet är statiskt mellan utvecklingssamtalen. Även dessa lärare känner att de lägger oproportionerligt mycket arbete på skivandet av IUPer, men de beskriver också att arbetet gör dem mer medvetna och reflekterande. Också dessa lärare berättar att de följer en IUP-mall tämligen strikt och inskriptionen förefaller väga tungt. Det finns dock en klar vilja till översättning, men lärarna känner att de hålls tillbaka av kommunala riktlinjer och mallar som måste användas på givna sätt. I praktik 2 beskrivs skolledarna vara involverade i högre grad än i praktik 1, framför allt i termer av hur IUP ska formuleras och hur tiden för lärarnas skrivarbete ska organiseras.

Praktik 3: IUP beskrivs främst som ett formativt verktyg som påverkar lärarnas sätt att tänka kring, organisera och genomföra undervisning. IUP är formativ i termer av att den fortlöpande används som grund för att involvera elever i att förstå sitt eget lärande och sin egen utveckling, samtidigt som den också beskrivs ge lärarna grund för att samtala om och utvärdera sin egen undervisning. IUP arbetas med och uppdateras kontinuerligt genom att det finns särskilt avsatt tid för IUP-arbete i elevernas schema. Lärarna förefaller ha approprierat IUP som ett konceptuellt verktyg; eftersom den beskrivs ha bidragit till att de tänker och arbetar annorlunda än tidigare kan man tala om att den fungerar som en tertiär artefakt. Skolledare beskrivs som aktivt inblandade i diskussionen om IUP, och som arbetandes tillsammans med lärarna för att översätta IUP till ett lokalt format verktyg. Inscriptionen förefaller vara mindre påtaglig här än i praktik 1 och 2.

ARTIKEL 4: THE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: SUPPORTIVE TOOL OR MISSION IMPOSSIBLE? SWEDISH TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF DILEMMAS IN IDP PRACTICE.

Studien syftar till att utforska vilka dilemma och strategier för att hantera dilemma som kan urskiljas i lärares beskrivningar av sin IUP-praktik. Dilemmen definieras som situationer i vilka två (delvis) mot-

Empirin i artikel 4 hämtas från samma 15 intervjuer med lärare som i artikel 3. Genom analys urskildes följande tre dilemma:

Dokumentation vs undervisning: Den mycket omfattande dokumentationen beskrivs som så tidskrävande att lärarna känner att de inte längre har tid att planera eller reflektera över sin undervisning i samma grad som tidigare. IUP-reformen från 2008 medförde en avsevärt högre arbetsbörda för lärarna, utan att några förändringar i organisationen av arbetstid och arbetsinnehåll gjordes.

Officiellt korrekt vs elevvänligt språk: Kan i viss mån kopplas till första dilemma och handlar om omfånget och komplexiteten i det innehåll som formuleras i dokumenten. Lärarna känner ett krav på att uttrycka sig byråkratiskt och kursplanelikt, samtidigt som de känner att det de skriver ofta blir mycket svårt att förstå för många elever och föräldrar. Konsekvensen blir att de känner att de lägger mycket tid på något som få av mottagarna kan förstå och använda sig av.

Summativ vs formativ bedömning: Lärarna beskriver att eleverna ofta bedöms på ett, enligt dem, onödigt instrumentellt sätt i den ’betygslïknande’ delen av dokumentet. Lärarna menar att elevers och föräld-
rars uppmärksamhet automatiskt riktas mot ’betygen’ och att detta hindrar dem från att se de framåtsyftande delarna. Flera av lärarna beskriver också en oro för att de sätt på vilka elevernas kunskaper summeras och redovisas i IUP ska leda till att eleverna tappar motivation och lust att lära.

En preliminär kategorisering av lärares olika sätt att hantera/balansera dilemman kan summeras enligt följande:

*Procedural display:* Lärarna uppvisar för elever/föräldrar och skollädere procedurer som kan räknas som IUP, en slags ’yta’ som inte nödvändigvis innebär att man ägnar så mycket uppmärksamhet åt vad en IUP egentligen är/borde vara. IUP reduceras till dokumentskrivande, ett ’rituellt utförande’ som görs två gånger om året.

*Enligt konstens alla regler:* Allt måste göras och alla syften måste fyllas i enlighet med nationella såväl som kommunala/lokala riktlinjer och mallar. Det finns ingen egentlig strategi för att hantera de dilemman som uppstår, vilket gör att de upplevs som påtagliga och leder till frustration.

*Mot en ny ’thirdness’:* Dessa lärare har varit i *Enligt konstens alla regler* men upplevt det som ohållbart. Upplevda dilemman har lett till en kollektiv förändringsprocess och en ny IUP-praktik som innebär ett elevvänligare språk i dokumenten och större betoning på hur dokumentinnehållet kontinuerligt ska arbetas med i praktiken.

Hypotetiskt är det möjligt att anta att det i längden är omöjligt att befinna sig i *Enligt konstens alla regler* inom ramen för reglerad arbets- tid, och att lärare av den anledningen i förlängningen hamnar i antingen *Procedural display* eller i *Towards a new thirdness*. 
AVSLUTANDE KOMMENTARER

I avhandlingens fjärde delstudie skisseras två preliminära modeller som visar hur framväxten av IUP-praktiker kan förstås utifrån lärares olika utsagor. Lärare som i lägre grad upplever dilemman beskriver en högre grad av autonomi i processen där IUP tar form lokalt, medan lärare som i högre grad upplever dilemman är mer påverkade och styrd av hur andra aktörer har format riktlinjer och mallar. Jag betraktar IUP som formad på en formuleringss- såväl som en realiseringsarena. Formuleringsarenan består i min tolkning av politiska beslut och skolverkets allmänna råd på nationell nivå, men även av riktlinjer skapade på central kommunal nivå, där de senare ofta inbegriper mer eller mindre omfattande dokumentationslösningar inköpta från företag. Verktyget IUP kan därmed betraktas som inskriberat med en uppsättning egenskaper och ett visst förhållningssätt redan innan det når den lokala skolan. Om inskriptionen upplevs som tung, tvingande och inte förhandlingsbar kan detta leda till känslor av motstånd och/eller svårigheter att balansera upplevda dilemman.

IUP förefaller också svara mot en rad olika syften, där de syften som skrivas fram i styrdokument primärt handlar om som att IUP ska informera och involvera elever och föräldrar, fungera som verktyg för elevens fortsatta lärande och som verktyg för såväl elevers som lärares meta-reflektioner över lärande och undervisningssituation. Det förefaller också vara så att IUP i vissa avseenden betraktas som en utvärdering eller ett betyg, och som sådan kan den användas i syfte att kontrollera eller jämföra skolor. Utifrån resultaten i dokumentstudierna skulle man också kunna hävda att det framstår som att IUP kommit att användas även i syfte att fostra elever.

Ett spänningsfält av olika faktorer framstår således som bidragande till hur IUP formas som verktyg och praktik. En rad svårigheter, men också möjligheter, blir tydliga genom studierna i denna avhandling. När dessa rader skrivs befinner vi oss i en ny brytningspunkt, där kraven på IUP reduceras för årskurs 1-5 och tas bort helt i de betygssättande årskurserna 6-9. Att följa utvecklingen framöver i relation till
resultaten i denna avhandling blir därför mycket intressant. Har de senaste åtta årens arbete med IUP lett till appropriering i form av nya arbetssätt och tankemönster som bibehålls även om de lagstadgade kraven reduceras eller försvinner? Eller har man upplevt IUP enbart som en pålaga som det är skönt att bli av med? Att studera lärares/skolors fortsatta agerande, liksom elevers och föräldrar upplevelser av den nya situationen känns mycket angeläget.


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References


Appendix 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE: STRUCTURE FOR QUESTION AREAS

(Two documents are brought to the interview)

Warming up questions on teacher education, how long one has worked as a teacher, what kind of teaching job one currently has, how many schools one has worked at, which subjects one teaches, etc. Form to be filled.

- **INITIAL QUESTIONS**
  - Has the introduction of IDP made a difference to the way you work? How?
  - Which (practical or other) role do the documents that you have brought examples of play: For you? For your teaching? For the students who are given the documents? Give examples!
  - What are your thoughts about the IDP: what do you think is the purpose of IDP? Is the IDP good or not? In what ways is the IDP good/Why is the IDP not good? What ought/ought not to be included in an IDP? Why?

- **THE IDP DOCUMENT**
  - The document is designed in a certain way, with different parts and different headings. What is your opinion on that? Describe and tell me about the document on basis of the different parts/headings!
  - How free or controlled do you feel in relation to the different parts/headings of the document? How free or controlled do you want to be? (which could be the advantages/disadvantages with being free/controlled?)
  - Do you have certain routines concerning IDP writing at your school/among the staff that you feel control/facilitate/inhibit your work with IDP?
  - Do you feel comfortable with the document template that you use? Why/why not? (Give examples from the document).
  - What is easy/difficult when you write the document? (Give examples from the document).
- Which part(s) do you think is/are most important in the document? (show me!). Why?
- Do you have experiences from other ways of documenting or other document solutions? What are the strengths and weaknesses compared to this?
- Have you had discussions among staff/with the principal/with the municipality concerning the design of the template? Have you in any way contributed to creating the template that you use/has it been possible for you to give any feedback? Explain!
- If one were to see IDP writing on a scale like this, where would you position yourself on the scale? Explain and give examples!

| 1 | It is expected that I write this document, I have to do it, but I see no use doing it |
| 10 | I see a great value in writing this document, it makes a difference/is beneficial for me/the students/others |

- Do you think that other teachers would describe it in pretty much the same way?

• THE IDP AS DOCUMENT AND PRACTICE
- Has the IDP lead to any changes in your way of thinking and/or working in relation to instruction/assessment compared to when there were no requirements for using IDP? Has the IDP contributed to you learning something new or viewing things
differently? What (if so) has been positive/negative? (Give examples).
- Do you think the IDP can be ‘a tool for learning’? If so, how and for whom? Alternatively: why not?
- Are there any barriers to the content of the document being put into ongoing practice in a relevant way/ a way that makes a positive difference for those affected by the document? If so, which barriers, why, and how? What do you think would be required for the document content to be put into practice in a relevant way?
- How would you want the relation between document and practice to be? Which is your ‘dream scenario’? What are the barriers to you realizing this? If you had the possibility to design documentation/evaluation and documentation process (taking away documentation is also an option) exactly the way you wanted it to be, what would it be like?
- How would you describe the conditions under which you write/work with the IDP? Among colleagues/support or demands from the school management/support or demands from the facilitator/municipality?

- It is time to round off this interview. Is there something you would like to add? Something you think I missed out on asking?
Bilaga 1
INTERVJUGUIDE: STRUKTUR FÖR FRÅGEOMRÅDEN
(två dokument medtages till intervjun)

Uppmjuande frågor som handlar om utbildning, hur länge man varit lärare, vad man har för typ av tjänst just nu, hur många olika skolor man har arbetat på, vilka ämnen man undervisar i (formulär ifylles)

- **ÖVERGRIPANDE/INLEDANDE**
  - Har IUP inneburit någon skillnad i ditt sätt att arbeta? Hur?

  - Berätta hur *du själv* tänker kring IUP: vad som är syftet, om IUP är bra eller ej, hur och för vem det i så fall är bra alt. Varför det inte är bra, vad IUP behöver/bör eller inte behöver/bör innehålla och varför.

- **IUP-DOKUMENTET**
  - Dokumentet är uppbyggt på ett visst sätt, med olika delar, olika rubriker etc. Hur ser du på det? Berätta utifrån de olika rubrikerna i det medhavda dokumentet!
  - Hur styrd/fri känner du dig med tanke på de olika delarna/rubrikerna? Hur styrd *vill* du vara (vilka för-/nackdelar kan finnas)?
  - Har ni särskilda rutiner kring IUP-skrivande på skolan/i kolleget som du upplever styr/underlåtbar/hämmar?
  - Känner du dig bekväm med det dokument du använder? Varför/varför inte?
  - Vad är lätt och vad är svårt när du skriver dokumentet? Ge exempel i dokumentet!
  - Vad/vilka delar tycker du är viktigast i det här dokumentet (visa)? Varför?
  - Har du erfarenhet av andra dokument/andra sätt att dokumentera? Styrkor och svagheter i relation till det?
  - Har ni fört diskussioner i kollegiet/med skolledning/med förvaltning kring hur dokumentet är utformat? Har du på något
sätt varit med och utvecklat IUP som det ser ut hos er? Haft möjlighet att ha synpunkter?

- Om man lite tillspetsat ser IUP-skrivande som en skala, var skulle du säga att du befinner dig? Förklara och ge exempel!

- Upplever du att andra tycker ungefär som du vad gäller IUP?

- **IUP SOM DOKUMENT OCH PRAKTIK**
  (för att utveckla om det inte redan kommit in under de inledande övergripande frågorna)
  - Har IUP på något sätt fått dig att tänka annorlunda (arbeta annorlunda) kring lärande/undervisning/bedömning jämfört med tidigare? Har IUP bidragit till att du lärt nytt/lärt om? Vad har i så fall varit positivt/negativt med det? Ge exempel!
  - Tror du att IUP kan vara ett verktyg för lärande? I så fall hur och för vem? Alternativt: varför inte?
  - Finns det några hinder - och i så fall vilka hinder kan finnas - för att IUP-dokumentets innehåll ska ta plats i praktiken på ett bra sätt, d v s på ett sätt som gör att dokumentet gör en positiv skillnad i praktiken (för dig själv/dina elever/föräldrar)
  - (Vad tror du skulle krävas för att IUP-dokumentets innehåll ska ta plats i praktiken på ett bra sätt, d v s på ett sätt som gör att dokumentet gör en positiv skillnad i praktiken (för dig själv/dina elever/föräldrar))
helt själv, hur skulle du vilja utvärdera eleverna och dokumentera elever (eller inte göra det)?
- Vilka förutsättningar tycker du att du har fått/får för att göra ditt arbete (kring IUP)? Kollegialt, stöd/krav från skolledning, stöd/krav från förvaltningshåll?

- Det är dags att börja avrunda samtalet. Har du något du känner att du vill tillägga, som jag inte har frågat om?
DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

School of Education and Communication, Jönköping University


17. Falkmer, Marita (2013). From Eye to Us: Prerequisites for and levels of participation in mainstream school of persons with Autism Spectrum Conditions.


Since 2006, Swedish compulsory school teachers have been required to use individual development plans (IDPs) as part of their assessment practice. The IDP is to serve summative as well as formative purposes.

In this thesis, IDP documents and teachers’ ongoing work with IDPs are explored in four different articles. The first two are based on 379 collected documents from students in grades 3, 5 and 8; the other two are based on 15 interviews with teachers from all stages of compulsory school. Throughout, qualitative content analysis has been used as method for processing data. Theoretical concepts for interpreting data and discussing results are mainly derived from socio-cultural and activity theoretical perspectives.

In articles 1 and 2, targets and strategies for future learning given to students in IDP documents are investigated and discussed in relation to definitions of formative assessment. Moreover, the distribution of target types to boys and girls, respectively, is examined. In article 3, teachers’ continuous work with IDP is explored, and article 4 elaborates on dilemmas that teachers experience in relation to IDP – concerning time use, language in documents, and summative/formative assessment purposes.

The ways in which IDP documents are designed and formulated, as well as the ways in which teachers’ ongoing IDP work is carried out, are shaped in the intersection between rules and guidelines at national, municipal, and local school level. Moreover, companies creating solutions for IDP documentation have become influential actors in the process. Various purposes are to be achieved through the use of IDP, which makes it a potential field of tension that is not always easy for teachers to navigate. Several IDP related difficulties and dilemmas, as well as opportunities and advantages, are visualized in the studies of this thesis.