



An Examination of Career Education and Guidance in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

This article examines national policy and guidelines regarding career education and guidance in Swedish compulsory education. We present and examine research in Swedish contexts related to career education and guidance in compulsory education, particularly research conducted after implementation of a major school reform in 2011. We also discuss policy and guidelines in relation to current research and implications for social justice. We draw several conclusions. First, career education and guidance is supposed to be the whole school's responsibility, involving all the principals and teachers, as well as specifically trained and recruited career guidance counsellors. However, national guidelines provide very general recommendations, with few instructions and little information regarding what career education should include and how it should be implemented. Moreover, it is largely provided by career guidance counsellors on an individual basis. Thus, their strong autonomy could reduce social justice by exacerbating inequalities between regions or schools, or enhance it by compensating for local inequalities (for example, in the diversity of educational institutions and workplaces cooperating in career education activities). Possible strategies to at least partially address identified deficiencies are discussed.

ABSTRAKT

Den här artikeln granskar nationell politik och riktlinjer gällande karriärlärande och vägledning i svensk grundskola. Vi presenterar och granskar forskning utförd i Sverige som rör karriärlärande och vägledning i grundskolan, särskilt forskning som genomförts efter genomförandet av en omfattande skolreform år 2011. Vi diskuterar också politik och riktlinjer i relation till aktuell forskning och dess implikationer för social rättvisa. Vi drar flera slutsatser. För det första förväntas karriärlärande och vägledning vara hela skolans ansvar, vilket ska involvera rektorer och lärare, samt högskoleutbildade studie- och yrkesvägledare. Dock ger nationella riktlinjer mycket generella rekommendationer med få riktlinjer och lite information om vad karriärutbildning bör innehålla och hur den ska genomföras. Dessutom tillhandahålls den till stor del av studie- och yrkesvägledare genom individuella samtal. Svag styrning ger stor självständighet vilket kan påverka social rättvisa genom ojämlikheter mellan regioner eller skolor, men också möjligheter att kompensera för lokala ojämlikheter (till exempel när det gäller mångfalden av utbildningsinstitutioner och arbetsplatser som samarbetar i karriärutbildningsaktiviteter). Möjliga strategier för att åtminstone delvis åtgärda identifierade brister diskuteras.

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In international communities the Nordic countries are often regarded as sharing common socio-economic understandings and traditions rooted in a social democratic welfare system (Esping-Andersen, 1990), sometimes called the Nordic model (Antikainen, 2006). The model has featured in many debates regarding issues such as social equality, gender policy, and social investment including fair and equal educational systems in the EU and beyond (Holm, 2018). In relation to career education and guidance in compulsory education, this view of the model has some validity for two reasons. First, career education and guidance in compulsory school is usually provided by public or state-financed actors in the Nordic countries. Second, a general aim of national Nordic laws or regulations is to ensure that it is carried out by practitioners with appropriate academic education [1]. However, it has been argued that the concept of the Nordic model should be understood as an ideal type and its ambitions were never successfully implemented in practice (Antikainen, 2006). According to this view, the ideals of the model have been contested since the economic crises of the 1970s and educational policies (including those pertaining to career education) developed quite differently in the Nordic countries. This trend was accelerated by the wave of new public management ideologies in the 1990s (Helms Jørgensen et al., 2019), which triggered a gradual shift from strong government management of public services to a private sector-like management model. Moreover, career education and guidance in the Nordic countries had, and continues to have, some commonalities but there have always been substantial differences. During this period Finland has been least affected by new public management ideologies, while Sweden has gone furthest in terms of decentralisation of governance, ranges of alternative and private schools, and allowance of profit-making in education (Dovemark et al., 2018).

However, apart from studies by Cedefop (2020b) and Haug et al. (2019) there have been very few attempts to describe the career education in the Nordic countries in a manner that provides foundations for robust comparison. This article focuses on provisions in Sweden and is one of a collection of articles of services in other single countries that will hopefully provide foundations for future comparative research on the development of career education in the Nordic countries. To contribute to such foundations, we first examine current Swedish policy and guidelines regarding career education in compulsory education. Next, we critically summarize relevant research and official statistics concerning career education in Swedish compulsory education, particularly after 2011. This starting point was chosen because a major school reform was implemented in 2011, which was part of a wider raft of reforms as a long era of minority coalitions in parliament led by the Social Democrats was ended by a liberal conservative coalition. As described by the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE), changes associated with the 2011 school reform (Lgr11) included, among others, a new school law, new grading system, change from a goal-oriented to a requirements-oriented syllabus, more national tests, and increases in authority for the Swedish School Inspectorate (SNAE, 2015). Our aim is to analyse Swedish policy and guidelines in relation to current research and their implications for social justice.

THEORY

In order to analyse social justice in what the curriculum and research describes as career education we use a theoretical framework based on the Bernsteinian notion of pedagogical rights (Bernstein, 2000), as illustrated in Table 1.

The pedagogic rights shown in Table 1 are integrated and divided into three levels mainly to facilitate their separate analysis and consideration in different contexts. The most important

RIGHT	DEFINITION	CAPABILITY
Individual enhancement	"The right to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities" (Bernstein 2000, xx)	Confidence
Social inclusion	"The right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally [including] the right [to be] autonomous" (Bernstein 2000, xx)	Belonging (in groups)
Political participation	"The right to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order" (Bernstein 2000, xxi)	Civic discussion and action

Table 1 Pedagogic rights.

elements of the first right, to individual enhancement, are opportunities for critical thinking that enables students to see new opportunities, particularly here career opportunities. Moreover, critical thinking opens up different ways of understanding phenomena in different contexts and from different perspectives. For example, diverse aspects of a career may be relevant, such as where a profession can be practiced or possibilities for combining it with various kinds of social life.

In order to exchange individual knowledge and experiences, the second pedagogical right, some form of social dialogue is needed since belonging in a profession cannot really be exercised through school activities. However, in relation to career education some knowledge and experience can be acquired through discussions with class peers and work experience placements. Finally, the third pedagogical right (political participation) in our adaptation refers to an individual's or group's preparation or abilities in relation to opportunities to engage in influencing their career, their profession, and civic issues. In professional contexts this may involve the knowledge required to join and exert influence through organisations such as trade unions, and knowledge of arguments that are recognized and valued in different contexts.

When considering pedagogic rights in any educational contexts at least two questions must be addressed: *What* should be taught and *how* should it be taught? Here, the Bernsteinian (2000) concepts of classification and framing are useful, which refer to organizational elements of learning processes. Briefly, there is strong classification if there are clear, explicit boundaries between 'categories' (e.g. of agents, subjects and other discourses), and weak classification if the boundaries are blurred. In addition, there is strong framing when there are clear, explicit rules and principles governing classroom practices (and hence educational communication and learning processes), and weak framing when those rules and principles are vague (theoretical framework adapted from Rosvall & Nylund, 2022).

METHOD

As part of a project called NordicCareerEd funded by Nordforsk, we (the authors) collected and examined Swedish policy documents and research related to career education [2]. Career education was defined in the project as any systematic attempt to support students' career development through various educational strategies, including incorporation of career-related concepts in the academic curriculum, and provision of career planning advice with information about next level or further education, various occupations and work-site based experiences and offering career planning courses (Niles & Harris-Bowlsby, 2013). However, as shown in the following presentation of results, Swedish policy, practice and research seldom refer to career education. Instead, the concept of career guidance is generally used, which is narrower than Niles and Harris-Bowlsby's (2013) definition, but one of the career education activities included in their definition. Thus, to reduce ambiguity and highlight the difference in relation to the practice in other Nordic countries (e.g., in Finland the term career education is used in the curriculum and school schedules), we use the concept of career education and guidance to refer to more general activities and career guidance solely to refer to one-to-one guidance provided to a student by a counsellor.

This article is based on work in the NordicCareerEd project, extended with a theoretically informed discussion on social justice (pedagogic rights). Thus, it starts with a description of Swedish policy and guidelines as expressed in laws, the national curriculum for compulsory school, reports of the SNAE and official governmental reports (Statens offentliga utredningar, SOU, in Swedish), followed by a critical review of research conducted in Swedish compulsory school contexts related to career education and guidance. The curriculum initially addressed in the policy examination was the previous curriculum for compulsory school, Lgr11. During our work the Lgr22 curriculum was implemented and the texts were updated, but we only identified a few minor changes related to career education and guidance between these curricula. Since there has been little research on career education and guidance in Sweden, the research review focused on literature reviews (Haug et al., 2019; Hooley, 2014; Hughes et al., 2016) and personal webpages of researchers at the three universities (Stockholm, Malmö and Umeå Universities) that provide career guidance counselling programmes and host most of the relevant research. To find additional pertinent peer-reviewed articles and PhD theses, a snowball approach was used, asking colleagues at departments of Swedish universities known

to engage in relevant research. The final part of the article discusses the findings, particularly focusing on social justice (cf. [Sultana, 2022](#)), to contribute to a growing international body of research addressing career education in relation to this issue ([Alexander, 2018](#); [Hooley et al., 2018](#)). The objective of analysing career education and guidance in relation to social justice is to acquire knowledge on optimal approaches to support students' (and/or other citizens') reflection and development of self-knowledge, provide information about potential career and life options, facilitate decision-making and initiation of action, and empower management of their own life paths through appropriate guidance and counselling. The point of departure is that career education and guidance is often based on individual-centred approaches that do not sufficiently acknowledge structural, contextual and institutional inequalities, "thereby also leaving the impact and significance of broader discourses and structural conditions, for instance leaving neoliberal governance, patriarchy, white supremacy, colonial history and heteronormativity unquestioned" ([Thomsen et al., 2022, p. 483](#)). In our search for research three themes emerged and directed our analysis, designated Professionalisation, Organisation of (individual) career education and Place.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF SWEDISH CAREER EDUCATION: TOWARDS A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

To understand career education guidelines and policy, some historical contextualisation and description of the general status of the current educational curriculum is essential. The concept of career or vocational guidance and the organisation of related activities was first outlined in Swedish policy documents in the latter part of the 1920s ([Vestin, 1991](#)). However, the first broad definition incorporating anything that could be regarded as a whole school approach appeared in the curriculum introduced as part of a reform of compulsory school implemented in 1980 ([Lgr80](#)). This stated that teaching should include "elements in the teaching that specifically aim to provide students with preparation for future career choices and knowledge of working life" [p. 36 our translation]. However, an orientation towards a whole school approach in career education and guidance became stronger in parallel with the deregulation of schools in 1991, when responsibility for compulsory education was transferred from the state to municipality level. The deregulation included transfer of responsibilities for budgeting, organisation, distribution of work and service, the formulation of local goals and their realization to the municipalities. The new governance system brought new tasks for municipal politicians, school managers, principals, teachers, and career guidance counsellors, which challenged previous professional boundaries in various ways. Thus, current curricula place greater demands on collaboration between the various professionals within the education system to optimise individuals' choices of educational and professional paths ([SOU, 2001](#); [SNAE, 2008](#)). In 1993 the first Higher Education Programme providing a university level qualification as a career guidance counsellor was launched 6.

CURRICULUM AND NATIONAL GUIDELINES

In this section we provide a brief description of national guidelines in policies and legislation that regulate or have substantially affected career education in compulsory school in Sweden. The requirements for working with career education and guidance in the schools are mainly regulated by the Education Act and curricula. The SNAE has issued general advice, with comments to support the planning and implementation of equivalent, high-quality career education and career guidance ([SNAE, 2017, 2018, 2020, 2022](#)).

The Education Act ([SFS, 2010: 800](#)) stipulates that students in all school forms, except pre-school and pre-school classes, must have access to career guidance and those employed as career counsellors must have relevant education for the work (Chapter 2, para 29). However, it provides no further stipulations regarding the implementation of career education and guidance. The introductory chapters of the curricula for compulsory school ([Lgr22](#)) describe aims of the career education and guidance as strengthening students' preparation for both working life and other civic roles. [Lgr22](#) provides general guidelines for specific professional groups in the schools to engage in career education and guidance. Career education and guidance is described here as a process that is intended to gradually increase students' self-

knowledge and awareness of the world around them, especially about education, professions, and the labour market. According to Lgr22, career education and guidance should form a continuous thread throughout each student's entire schooling and give tutors opportunities to connect the knowledge and experiences their students have developed with their individual career education. The overall aim of the process is to increase each student's career choice competence (Lgr22). It is emphasized that students must develop their self-knowledge regarding alternative educational paths and opportunities in the labour market.

Through acquisition of stronger insights into their proficiencies and interests, students are supposed to develop their analytical skills in connection with various career choices. They are also supposed to obtain as complete pictures as possible of the prospects and constraints associated with potential career choices, opportunities for further education, and occupational options. An important stipulation in the curricula is that the career education and guidance in school "shall counteract such restrictions in the choices that are based on notions of gender and social or cultural background" (Lgr22 p. 6). The guidance should therefore be norm-critical and have a compensatory focus (Chapters 1 & 2, Lgr22).

In addition to its formulations of students' rights of access to a career guidance counsellor, the Education Act also stipulates that they must be provided at least 10 days of mandatory work experience placement (WEP: Praktisk arbetslivsorientering or PRAO in Swedish) during grade 8 and/or 9. However, it does not stipulate how the WEP is supposed to be carried out. Thus, the WEP framing and classification vary locally in terms (*inter alia*) of who organises it, how it is introduced and followed up, and how the WEP periods are associated with other activities of the students' career education and guidance.

The SNAE's general advice for career education and guidance includes more detailed descriptions and examples of how it can be practiced. In accordance with the broad definition stated above, a key element of Swedish career education policy is expressed as follows by the SNAE (2008), "quality in career guidance – the responsibility of the whole school" [our translation of the original Swedish: "kvalitet i studie- och yrkesvägledning – hela skolans ansvar"]. This succinctly expresses the current political goal of career education and guidance. The understanding of career education and career guidance as the responsibility of the whole school is repeated in various forms in the curriculum for all forms of state-regulated education and care (educare) provision for students of compulsory school age, ranging from preschool classes to secondary education and activities in recreational centers (Lgr22).

Recommendations by the SNAE (2013, 2022) state that career education and guidance efforts in compulsory education should involve collaboration between participants engaged in various forms of education, educational institutions and working life. A pattern that emerged from our examination of the curriculum and other documents is that they provide general recommendations, with few instructions and little information regarding what career education and guidance should include and how it could be implemented. The general formulations emphasise that career education and guidance is crucially important, without providing any specific guidance for delivering it (SNAE, 2022).

Despite lacking the force of a law or regulation, the SNAE's general advice regarding career education and guidance provides important steerage for the associated work of principals, teachers and career guidance counsellors. It is based on the laws and curriculum described above, but also states that the career guidance counsellors' work must be impartial. The students must be able to trust that the information is not biased in favour of any special interests, due (for example) to commercial links between organizations providing promoted education or work and the schools they attend (SNAE, 2013, p. 33).

According to the general guidelines, everyone employed in a school should strive to develop contacts with representatives from the labour market that can enrich the school as a learning environment and contribute to the students' study and career choices, without restrictions linked to gender or socio-cultural background. They also emphasize that career guidance counsellors are responsible for informing and guiding students as they choose and prepare for educational and vocational transitions, paying particular attention to the opportunities for students with disabilities and supporting other staff's career-oriented efforts (SNAE, 2013, p. 26). Schulstok and Wikstrand (2020) note a shift in terminology in SNAE's publications in 2011, before which the term gender neutral was commonly used, and after 2011 when the concept

of norm criticism was used. They (Schulstok & Wikstrand, 2020) also highlight a conclusion in a report from the Swedish School Inspectorate in 2013, that Swedish career guidance and counsellors did not feel that they had tools to address gender issues. This prompted an SNAE initiative to offer a course in norm criticism and support for publication of a book on methods to engage with working life-related issues and norm criticism (Wikstrand & Lindberg, 2015).

In sum, legislation and policy documents state that provision of career guidance and education is the responsibility of the whole school. However, they provide little more direction, other than stipulating that it should counteract restrictions of choices based on gender, social or cultural background, and students should have access to an educated career guidance counsellor as well as 10 days of WEP. In terms of content and organization, the career guidance and education can be described as weakly classified and framed (cf. Bernstein, 2000) since the implementation and praxis are left to the municipalities and schools to carry out as they see fit. At least according to Swedish Government Official Reports (see for example SOU, 2019, 2020, 2022) there seems to be consensus that clarifications is needed in this regard. However, there seems to be a lack of corresponding political will, since there has been little attempt to strengthen the classification and framing of career guidance and career education, i.e. what it should include and how it should be provided (cf. Bernstein, 2000).

REPORTS ON CAREER EDUCATION IN COMPULSORY SCHOOL

Despite the long history of the Swedish “whole school approach” to career education and guidance, it is not covered in the mandatory content of teacher education or university level programmes for principals. The level of knowledge in terms of the content and organising of career education varies according to individual school staff members’ interest and/or knowledge of career education that teachers and principals might have gained through educational programmes that local organisers of their education chose to provide (SOU, 2019). Thus, due to the lack of formal or practical requirements in the recommendations there are missing links between the intentions of the whole school approach (as expressed in the law and curricular steering of compulsory education) and the education for both teachers and principals.

The Swedish Government Official Report *Choices for the future – career guidance for the individual and society* (SOU, 2019) concludes that there are needs for:

1. clarification of what guidance is, that it can be both individual and general, and should be called ‘career guidance’ (karriärvägledning);
2. clarification of pupils’ access to individual career guidance;
3. clear requirements for individual career guidance to be offered on certain occasions;
4. strengthening of the general career guidance perspective in various subjects in compulsory school;
5. a new compulsory element with allocated time, referred to as *Future choice*, should be introduced in compulsory school, primary school and special school (Cedefop, 2020a).

It clearly seems that “the whole school” approach to career guidance called for in the governing documents has not been implemented as intended, and that both principals and teachers generally have little knowledge of the national goals for career guidance (SOU 2019: 4). Moreover, there is seldom any planning of career guidance at the local principal or political levels, and hence no follow-up goals for career guidance practice and outcomes, e.g., in systematic quality work. Thus, politicians, unions, teachers, principals and practicing career guidance counsellors are also calling for clearer regulation. Notably, the term “career guidance” [vägledning, karriärvägledning or studie- och yrkesvägledning in Swedish] rather than “career education” is used in the curriculum and recommendations. The use of guidance as a concept could be interpreted as part of a lingering legacy of treating career guidance as a highly individual and sporadic practice that hinders the transition towards more systematic “career education” that includes more diverse activities, with clearer and more universal goals.

A survey-based report on counsellors’ work in compulsory and upper secondary education prepared for the Swedish government (Hammargren, 2018) describes how counsellors divide their working hours between various tasks, collaborative efforts, prioritised groups, systematic work and other activities. It concludes that the shortcomings in some principals’ work and

some schools regarding career education and guidance, and counselling, can be explained (at least to some extent) by weak and unclear governance. Both previous investigations and Hammargren (2018) also indicate that important contributors to differences between schools and/or municipalities are variations in the local officials' and principals' knowledge and commitment to addressing related issues that affect the local provision of career education, counselling and guidance.

According to a report by the Swedish teachers' union (Lärarnas riksförbund, 2017) over 40 percent of 626 surveyed career guidance counsellors stated that there are no clear national or local goals and plans for career education and guidance at their respective schools, and their assignments are often correspondingly vague. This indicates that the curriculum objectives and general guidelines for career guidance are not sufficiently implemented in the schools' activities, as also noted by Hammargren (2018). More than 60 percent of the surveyed counsellors also expressed beliefs that principals of their schools did not actively take responsibility and strive to ensure that a whole school approach to career guidance and education was adopted. According to the report, teachers are often unaware of their role or given insufficient time to participate as intended. These deficiencies indicate a paucity of knowledge and insight among school leaders and principals about what career guidance and education involves. Similarly, the survey indicates that career guidance and education is insufficiently covered in systematic quality work. Almost 40 percent of the surveyed counsellors stated that their work is not usually covered in systematic quality work, so results are not followed up and evaluated. Moreover, large recent increases in numbers of immigrants have not been accommodated by corresponding increases in resources (Lärarnas riksförbund, 2017).

In 2018 the Swedish Parliamentary Education committee surveyed practices in 5599 school units (Hammargren, 2018), and from the responses concluded that school principals who participated in competence development initiatives in career education were better prepared and worked more systematically with career education and guidance. Like the previously mentioned survey, it also indicated that the lack of specific guidelines and formulations, as well as restrictions in allocated time, hinder career education work. In a decentralized steering system it is presumed that local goals should be formulated to guide the practice. However, a third of the surveyed principals admitted lacking such a plan. The survey also identified local differences between rural areas and large cities in terms of difficulties in recruiting appropriately educated career guidance counsellors, which were more severe in rural areas. The schools' principals estimated that the counsellors' time was mainly used for career guidance counselling with individual students, administration of WEP and information meetings with parents. Less than 15 percent of the surveyed principals of compulsory schools thought that the counsellors at their schools were involved in teaching activities, for example having classes focused on career education. The authors also compared the general practices in Sweden to those in other Nordic countries and concluded that many principals and schools work less systematically on career guidance in Sweden than in the other countries, especially Finland. One reason for this may be that the regulation of career education and guidance is perceived as less clear in Sweden than in Finland, indicating that the activity is not prioritized. In Finland, there is also a requirement to include time for career education in schools' schedules (Hammargren, 2018).

A report based on 20 interviews with compulsory education students regarding attitudes towards choices of upper secondary education programmes, i.e., higher education preparatory or vocational programmes (Panican, 2015), concludes that the interviewees believed that they made their own educational choices. However, empirical data show that the choice of educational orientation (higher preparatory or vocational programme) is strongly steered by students' social background (SOU 2020:33; 2022:34). The report (Panican, 2015) also indicates that students' choices of upper secondary school programmes and schools are often based on what they consider to be enjoyable forms of education, rather than beneficial for a future career. This may be desirable in terms of ideologies that favour freedom of choice, but potentially problematic for labour market establishment (Panican, 2015).

RESEARCH (PHD THESIS AND PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES)

There has been very little recent research on career guidance and education in Swedish compulsory schools. Research in Sweden on career education, including transitions, has mainly

focused on upper secondary provisions, with some examples from further and higher education (see Haug et al., 2019). One of the few examples of research on the guidance and education at compulsory school level is a mixed methods study led by Lisbeth Lundahl, called Learning for Career Management Skills [Framtiden i sikte], which is mainly reported in a book (not peer-reviewed) of the same name (Lundahl, Lovén, et al., 2020). Part of this study confirmed the finding by Panican (2015) that students' educational choices are most strongly influenced by factors related to interest, ability, wellbeing and enjoyment. Participating students regarded views and choices of friends and adults outside the family as less important. However, it also found that their choices were influenced by plans for occupations after upper secondary school, their perceptions of a secure and comfortable life, and associated requirements. Drawing on their results, the authors argue that career learning needs to be flexible and adapted to students' specific situations and needs (Rolfman, 2020).

Part of a recent study, *Moving on* (Lundahl et al., 2023), focuses on organizational arrangements (Lundahl, Linde, et al., 2020; Rosvall, 2022) and career support (Linde et al., 2021; Sundelin & Lundahl, 2023) for students who are likely to leave Swedish compulsory education without the grades required to enter upper secondary education. From a comparison of municipalities with different profiles it is concluded that systematic handover between compulsory schools and upper secondary schools is less common in commuter municipalities than in municipalities categorised as rural or as small towns (Lundahl, Linde, et al., 2020). The cited authors also identified what they call "indirect support" by career guidance counsellors, in the form of advocacy, relational, and emotional work, which is not always recognized by the students or officially recognized by superiors but appears to be important complementary support. Furthermore, it seems that the transitions in compulsory school, and between compulsory and upper secondary school levels, may become too fragile without support involving sustained collaboration between school actors at each of the involved levels (Sundelin & Lundahl, 2023). Overall, important factors for successful transitions for students who are likely to leave Swedish compulsory education without adequate grades (and probably other groups of students that were not included in the study) may include: short distances between school institutions (facilitating information flows); collaboration between teachers, other professionals and students; and clear options for students (Rosvall, 2022).

A common implicitly or explicitly expressed theme in several articles is place. One, based on interviews with career counsellors in compulsory schools, focuses on local factors affecting career education (Rosvall, 2020). It concludes that the local organisation of career education and guidance is influenced by geographical factors, municipalities' management of career guidance counsellors, and student uptake. Career guidance counsellors in urban areas worked in a central unit and were contracted by schools mainly for counselling students individually. The plethora of opportunities contributed to a more general approach to guidance. Career guidance counsellors in rural areas focused more on the local areas' educational and vocational options, because for most rural students the only realistic options are programmes offered in the closest upper secondary school. It would take too long to commute and/or be too expensive for most of them to get somewhere to live during studies elsewhere. However, counsellors in both rural and urban areas noted that the principal played an important role in terms of implementing structured work or supporting counsellors to use lessons for career education activities (Rosvall, 2020).

An important activity in the students' career education is their WEP. However, a forthcoming study (Eshaghbeigi-Hosseini) concludes that official Swedish documents concerning WEP do not mention associated responsibilities or expectations of the labour market, or employers' contributions to the young people's experience of the world of work. This clearly undermines the activity, or at best seems to avoid maximising its potential benefits.

Nilsson and Hertzberg (2022) have examined professionalism and professionalisation of career guidance and counselling in Sweden. They argue that the abovementioned general guidelines published by the SNAE (2013) are not only important for the work of school staff in compulsory education. They are also important for guidance of content and organisation of career guidance counselling programmes at universities and the formulation of professional ethical guidelines by the Swedish Association of Guidance Counsellors. Despite strong ethical leanings to be impartial and focus on the students, they argue that the professional practice involves delicate balancing of individuals' preferences or needs and societal expectations.

The definition of career education applied in the project including the work this article restricts it to “systematic attempts”. However, career education could also include more spontaneous types of education. For example, there are indications that students in grade nine (the last year of compulsory education in Sweden) in rural areas of Sweden learn about career options in classroom practice from teachers’ talk about the local area (Rosvall et al., 2018; Rosvall & Rönnlund, 2019). Such career learning was usually implicit or raised spontaneously by students or the teacher, rather than being rooted in intentions expressed in the curriculum, for example (urban) norm-criticism. In the same project students in rural areas were interviewed about their career plans, and one study especially focused on immigrant youths’ career plans (Rosvall, 2017), but the interviews did not include questions about their career education (Rosvall & Rönnlund, 2019; Rönnlund, 2020; Rönnlund et al., 2017).

Several studies also show that career education is important as school choices have long-term effects on social mobility (see Bygren & Rosenqvist, 2020; Trumberg & Urban, 2021) and that peer relations affect upper secondary school choices (Rosenqvist, 2018; Sixtensson, 2018). Other highly relevant work in Sweden that has not directly focused on career education in compulsory school includes studies that have addressed education as a market (Fjellman, 2017; Lundahl & Olofsson, 2014), particularly effects of the strong decentralisation of upper secondary education in Sweden. In conclusion, however, few studies have focused on career education in Swedish compulsory schooling. It should also be noted that the systematic search of articles by searching at researchers working at departments offering the Career guidance and counselling programme websites may leave out research falling outside “systematic attempts”, for example research focusing peer relations affects on career choices.

DISCUSSION

National guidelines and social justice: There seems to be a consensus that national guidelines for career education and guidance have weak classification and framing, and that principals, teachers and career guidance counsellors want clearer descriptions of what it should entail and how it should be carried out (Lärarnas riksförbund, 2017; Hammargren, 2018). In this section we discuss our evaluations of the curriculum, associated official documents and presented research on career education, focusing particularly on the implications for social justice.

Sultana (2022) recognises a “need to work at a range of levels, that is, not just the interpersonal, pedagogic, palliative, or psychic levels—important though these might be—but also at the institutional and societal levels” p.73. This is an interesting observation in relation to the Swedish regulations concerning career education and guidance. Although the few pertinent Swedish laws and regulations express in some manner that all staff should strive to counteract the stereotypical nature of many career paths, career education has generally been solely practiced by career guidance counsellors. With a decentralised system with few laws and national guidelines, the Swedish government provides few tools at institutional and societal levels that could be used to enhance social justice, i.e. practices weak framing. School staff (e.g., principals, teachers, and career guidance counsellors) can address, to some degree, social injustice at interpersonal, pedagogic, palliative, or psychic levels, but can do little more than highlight examples of injustices at societal level, that is, in Bernstein’s terminology do little to address the third pedagogic right.

Professionalisation: Nilsson and Hertzberg (2022) conclude that the professionalisation of career guidance and counselling in Sweden is to a large degree driven by policymakers. This might not be surprising since it is a common feature of young professions with an interdisciplinary and semi-professional character (cf. Bernstein, 2000). However, the highly decentralised education system also provides some autonomy for career guidance counsellors to shape their own professionalism (Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022). For social justice, this could have sharply contrasting effects. Strong autonomy (weak framing) in the practice of career guidance and counselling could exacerbate inequality between regions or schools. However, it could also potentially compensate for local inequalities (for example, in the variation of educational institutions or workplaces available for cooperation in career education activities). Moreover, highly decentralised professionalism might also inhibit establishment of a distinct voice in shaping a professional ethos in relation to policy reforms. In a highly decentralised system it

might be difficult, for example, to reach a consensus regarding the forms of social justice that career education could promote, and how it could promote them.

Organisation of (individualised) career education: Career education includes diverse activities, as mentioned above, e.g., fairs, WEPs, school visits, and both group and individual counselling (Sundelin & Lundahl). However, both research articles and reports (Hammargren, 2018; Lärarnas riksförbund, 2017; Rosvall, 2020) indicate that career guidance counsellors' work mainly consists of individual counselling. We argue that this may hinder efforts to meet goals stated in national guidelines, curricula, and policy documents, that career education "shall counteract such restrictions in the choices that are based on notions of gender and on a social or cultural background". This is partly because individual students might feel uncomfortable if issues concerning (for example) gender-stereotypical career choices are raised in relation to their own choices, and partly because it is impossible to address such societal-level issues systematically through one-to-one interactions (at least without enormous expenditure of time). Thus, with this practice it is difficult to reach standards associated with Bernstein's definition of pedagogic rights.

Place: As discussed by Rosvall (2020), based on a theoretical framework presented by Massey (1994), career guidance counsellors are positioned and position their counselling in relation to place. For various reasons, different places offer different career options and diversity of educational opportunities and vocations. Students have varying access to resources to overcome potential barriers created by differentiation in access to educational programmes or work of their choices (Alexander, 2018; Rosvall et al., 2018; Thomsen, 2012). In addition, rural areas and suburbs are often described as lacking a variety of educational and vocational choices, while for sociospatial reasons substantial shares of young people in them value their places, despite describing them as having deficits, and express desires to develop a 'local' career (Bunar et al., 2021; Rosvall & Rönnlund, 2019). This raises clear questions about strategies to address imbalances in access (power geometry) and the individuals' career planning. In this respect, efforts to counter the particularly acute poverty of access to education for students with low resources, and poverty of opportunities, may be particularly pertinent in rural areas. However, connecting local communities to the wider, global society is also an issue for counsellors in the cities. Overall, in terms of place, career education and social justice, we suggest that careful attention to resources that restrict students' horizons of action may be crucial for fruitfully easing transitions not only in rural areas in Sweden, but also more widely. According to several researchers, there is a strong normative discourse that can be explained as a neoliberal promotion of boundlessness, free markets and individualism (Nilsson & Hertzberg, 2022) that incorporates an 'unacknowledged metrocentricity', as it provides substantially more opportunities for people in cities than for peers in rural areas (Farrugia, 2014; Gulczyńska, 2019). The combination of a career education system primarily based on individual counselling and prevalent notions that giving advice is unethical so counsellors should only support the students' free choices based on their interests raises important questions. Among others, it is not clear how rural adolescents can be provided with countercultural ideas, the third pedagogic right, including alternatives to more urban youth culture and careers, thereby in terms of social justice and norm criticism raising possibilities to problematise urban hegemony (cf. Buland, 2023; Rosvall, 2020).

Concluding words: This article is included in a special issue with several aims, one of which is to provide a specific analysis of career education in each of the Nordic countries (Kettunen, forthcoming; Røise & Mathiesen, forthcoming; Tybjerg et al., forthcoming) and thus a platform for future comparisons. One observation that can be made from the collection of articles is that it can be difficult to compare career education. For instance, in Sweden there is no specific subject called career education as in some other Nordic countries. Activities and approaches that can be understood as career education in Swedish settings are supposed to be whole schools' responsibilities, but the 'what' and 'how' involved are not clear for either school staff (Lärarnas riksförbund, 2017; SOU, 2019) or researchers. An interesting observation from our analysis of the Swedish context is that although career education is described as the whole school's responsibility, the term career guidance is most commonly used. However, official Swedish documents most commonly refer to "study and vocational guidance" [studie- och yrkesvägledning]. In a recent Governmental official report (SOU, 2019) the term career guidance [kärriärvägledning in Swedish] is suggested to signal a more holistic *guidance*. However, the use of career guidance instead of career education might run a potential risk of being understood

as foremost individual guidance. Especially considering history and tradition of career guidance in Sweden where career guidance foremost has been implemented as one-to-one guidance provided to a student by a counsellor rather than career education courses. The use of career guidance instead of career education might then hinder understandings of the whole school approach. And thus also runs the risk to thereby also leaving the impact and significance of broader discourses and structural conditions, for instance leaving neoliberal governance, patriarchy, white supremacy, colonial history and heteronormativity unquestioned (Thomsen et al., 2022) regardless of SNAE's efforts to introduce norm criticism courses (Schulstok & Wikstrand, 2020). To express this explicitly in terms of Bernstein's pedagogic rights, the current classification and framing of career education in Sweden strongly hinders realization of the rights to acquire critical understanding (first right), to be socially included (second right), and participate in the transformation of social order (third right). Especially in relation to the third right, the use of career guidance instead of career education might obstruct more holistic approaches that could include transformation of the social order (norm-criticism).

International literature reviews (e.g. Hooley, 2014; Hughes et al., 2016) indicate that structured, coordinated and continuous career education and guidance activities, such as teaching, individual guidance, work place visits, learning and contacts, and mentorships help to minimise drop out and strengthen students' motivation and possibilities to make career choices. In addition, Swedish research indicates the importance of individual school principals initiating, supporting, structuring and organising such work (Lundahl, Linde, et al., 2020; Rosvall, 2020). The literature reviews especially highlight the importance of structured career education for groups of students considered to have vulnerable positions, for example newly arrived immigrants and students with reduced physical or mental working capacities. In that sense the Swedish national policy and guidelines have room for improvement in terms of classification and framing, i.e., how such career education should be structured and coordinated, and what it should include. More research in the Swedish context may be needed to write well-informed and evidence-based policy and guidelines. However, it clearly seems that they should seek to increase the coordination of activities, systematic application of best practices, and participation of principals and teachers.

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