ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Pupils with special educational needs: Experiencing recognition in individual subject curriculum meetings

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1 | INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) gives children the right to participate in decisions that affect them, most notably through Article 12, which establishes that children have rights equal to those of adults to make their voices heard and have their views respected and taken into account. In relation to schooling, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 2009 notes that teaching and learning must take into account a child's life conditions and prospects, and that schools accordingly have to include children's views in their planning.

In Norway, pupils who have not achieved or cannot achieve satisfactory learning outcomes from ordinary teaching have the right to special education and an individual subject curriculum (ISC) (Education Act, 1998, Section 5.1 and 5.5), where the goals and content of the education are outlined. The pupils' ISCs are discussed in ISC meetings between the professionals, pupils and parents. The term professionals applies to employees at the school with education or special education qualifications who participate in ISC meetings (e.g., teachers and special educators). Professionals who participate in ISC meetings at school have a duty to recognize the rights of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) when planning their education.

Previous research indicates that while pupils are physically present in the process that leads to IEP meetings (the US equivalent of Norwegian ISC meetings), they were not actively involved (Thoma, Rogan, & Baker, 2001). They were routinely not involved in the development and implementation of the IEP (Riddell et al., 2002) and their voice was often absent or marginalized in the final version of the IEP (Kaczkowski, 2012). Research also shows that we lack data that can shed light on the pupils' perspectives on their role in the IEP process (Davies & Ryan, 2005). However, an analysis of 20 interviews with pupils and their parents, in which they described the process leading up to the final IEP, shows that IEP meetings were perceived as frustrating and stressful because they felt their views were rejected (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). Research also shows that pupils and parents wanted to influence the pupil's education but that they did

not always find that the teachers recognized what they had to say (Lewis et al., 2007). Little attention has been paid to pupils with SEN in terms of their experiences of being recognized in ISC/IEP meetings. This is surprising, considering educators have a mandate to ensure that children (in this case pupils with SEN) have experiences of recognition that challenge, shape and educate them (Åmot & Skoglund, 2019).

An ISC meeting at school can act as an arena where professionals, alongside the pupil's parents, can give pupils the experience of being recognized. Recognition is an integral aspect of communication about people's everyday lives (Honneth, 2000). For pupils in compulsory primary and secondary school, a school year typically consists of 190 teaching days (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2014). Thus, the school plays a key part in the everyday lives of pupils with (and without) SEN. Accordingly, it is important to shed light on the recognition manifested through communication about education and learning that affects their school life. The importance of examining the experiences of pupils with SEN is based on the growing understanding that children's voices have not been listened to, especially in the field of disability studies (Whyte, 2006). Honneth's theory of recognition (1995) forms the basis of my discussions of the findings. His theory has previously been applied to the field of education and learning (e.g., Hanhela, 2014; Huttunen, 2009; Jakobsen, 2013; Sandberg & Kubiak, 2013; Shakespeare, 2000). The aim of the present study was to explore the extent to which pupils with SEN experienced recognition by professionals and their parents in ISC meetings in school.

2 | HONNETH'S THEORY OF RECOGNITION

Honneth (1995) distinguishes between recognition as, respectively, "love-based recognition," "rights-based recognition" and "social esteem-based recognition." The first, love-based recognition, occurs in primary relationships (e.g., between family members, friends or partners) and is characterized by strong emotional attachments between a small number of people (Honneth, 1995). Love-based recognition may initially appear to be limited to people in primary relationships, and thus of no relevance to recognition between, for example, pupils with SEN and professionals. However, one could also argue that recognition in the form of emotional empathy and support is a key ingredient in successful relationships between teachers and pupils (Jakobsen, 2013). The statement is interpreted along the lines that love-based recognition can also arise in relationships between individuals who are not in primary relationships with each other, such as pupils and teachers. It is worth mentioning that Jakobsen's (2013) statement is not rooted in empiricism, but what must be presumed to be his personal conviction.

The second type of recognition, rights-based recognition, relates in this context to individual demands for rights that people aspire to obtain because they are "a full-fledged member of a community" (Honneth, 1995, p. 133). Furthermore, Honneth (1995) links this type of recognition to the universal human rights that apply to all human beings. One example of such a right is Article 28 of the UNCRC (1989), which states that all children and young people have the right to education. Kermit (2019) uses acts and rules that govern practice in schools and the relationship between pupils and professionals as an argument that rights-based recognition is relevant in schools.

The third type of recognition, social esteem-based recognition (Honneth, 2008, p. 130), develops in relationships within a group, community or a society where people's "social 'worth' is measured by the degree to which they appear to be in a position to contribute to the realisation of societal goals" (Honneth, 1995, p. 122). What is decisive in this context is whether the community validates individual contributions. The current study posits that the community consists of everyone present at the ISC meetings, while contributions refer to input for the content in the pupils' ISCs. Accordingly, in relation to the recognition of pupils with SEN, it can be crucial whether the participants believed their contributions were validated during the meeting. Pointing out that the role of teachers also entails recognizing—or not recognizing—pupils' performances and abilities, Jakobsen (2013) claims that social esteem-based recognition is relevant in schools.

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Participants and recruitment

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select information-rich cases that could illuminate the phenomenon in focus here: pupils' experiences of recognition in ISC meetings. The sampling criteria for enrolling each pupil were as follows: (a) that they were 15 years of age and enrolled in the 10th grade (b) they identified with having a specific learning difficulty, (c) they had received special education in primary school (not a special school), and (d) they had attended ISC meetings. The participants in the study are residents in three medium-sized municipalities in Norway and had varied experience of participating in ISC meetings. While some were present for one or two meetings, others were present for parts of a meeting. Pupils who participated in the study have SEN due to reading and writing difficulties (dyslexia) or maths-related learning difficulties. The study sample consisted of 12 pupils with SEN; five girls and seven boys. The interviews were individually conducted with each of these pupils.

The process of recruiting pupils started by the researcher contacting department heads of the Educational (EPS) and Psychological (PPT) Counselling Service in five Norwegian municipalities. The EPS is a public service agency that provides advice and guidance to municipalities on the establishment of measures and initiatives for children with SEN (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). Each department head received an information and consent letter to be given to the parents of children with SEN, which among other things provided details about the aim of the study, the data collection methods to be used and the processing of personal data. In addition, they received an age-appropriate letter for pupils with SEN that also contained information about the study. The department heads were asked whether they were willing to pass on *both* letters to parents of children who met the eligibility requirements mentioned above. The letter to the parents were them encouraged to review the age-appropriate letter together with their child so they could assess whether they wished to take part in the study. Considering that the children were 15 years old, it was necessary to obtain consent from both the parents and children. Over a period of 4 months, the researcher received 12 signed consent forms from families in three municipalities whose children were willing to be interviewed. The interviews were scheduled on an ongoing basis. The study was reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data in 2017 and was carried out in accordance with the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities' (2016) guidelines for handling personal data.

3.2 | Data collection

Individual interviews were the method chosen for collecting data to examine the pupils' experiences of receiving recognition in ISC meetings. Each pupil was interviewed once. The decision to interview pupils was based on the fact that this method gives children the opportunity to share their own experiences with the adults (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999; Soffer & Ben-Arieh, 2014). The researcher designed a semi-structured interview guide that was used for all the interviews. The pupils were asked open-ended questions about their thoughts on their own participation in ISC meetings. An example of such a question is "Can you tell me what it was like for you to talk during the meeting?" It was agreed with the school principals in the three municipalities that the interviews would be conducted in the pupils' classrooms or in small group rooms after normal school hours. All the pupils were given the opportunity to have their parents present during the interview, but chose to be interviewed without them. Each interview lasted 30–35 minutes on average and was recorded on a tape recorder. The audio recordings were transcribed the following day.

4 | ANALYSIS

The starting point for the data on which the analysis is based is the pupils' responses to open-ended questions about their participation in ISC meetings. The analytical approach consists of four steps. The first entailed a review of the

interview data from each of the 12 pupil interviews, where codes categorizing the meaning of statements were established by the researcher. A total of 44 codes were created. To show an example, two of these codes are "belonging" and "respect." The second step entailed creating thematic categories under which codes touching on the same theme could be sorted. In total, five categories were created.

"Recognition" is the largest category, comprising 12 codes. Examples of codes that fall under the recognition category are: "emotional attachments," "personal qualities," and "knowledge." The main reason the category of recognition was preferred is because research shows that there is minimal research on recognition of pupils with SEN in schools. The third step consisted of creating recognition subcategories that capture the content of the 12 tags. The following categories were created: quality of relationships, legal recognition of the pupils, and pupils as part of the team. In the fourth and final step, the data material was reviewed to identify all statements that were coded and sorted under each of the three categories. Each statement was then allocated to the main category to which it belonged. For example, statements about pupils rights were allocated to the main theoretical category "rights."

Honneth's (1995) theory of recognition provided the starting point for a discussion of the findings that are described below. This is because his division of love-based recognition, rights-based recognition, and social esteem-based recognition highlights the three areas that were derived from the third step of the analysis.

5 | FINDINGS

The aim of the present study was to explore the extent to which pupils with SEN experienced being recognized by the professionals and their parents in ISC meetings at school.

5.1 | Love-based recognition: The importance of the quality of relationships

The pupils' accounts of their own presence in ISC meetings touched on different aspects of love-based recognition. The importance of relationships between the pupil and professionals (teachers and special educators) was a particularly common theme. The pupils described the challenges associated with their own learning in meetings where the professionals with whom they had a good relationship were present. Camilla, a pupil with reading and writing difficulties, described it as follows:

> I have never liked talking about the things I'm not so good at. The only reason why I still do this in the meeting when they [the professionals] asked me to was because two of my favourite teachers were there. If only teachers I didn't know particularly well had been sitting there, I wouldn't have told them how much I struggled to read and write well enough at school and at home.

Here the pupil shows that the strength of the relationship between her and the professionals was crucial in her decision to open up in the ISC meeting and share with them her struggle with reading and writing. She notes that if only the teachers that she "didn't know particularly well" had been present she would not have revealed her reading and writing challenges.

The findings indicate that the pupils were concerned about the emotional aspect of their interaction with the professionals when they shared something they felt was difficult to reveal about their own learning difficulties. Pupils who were satisfied with the atmosphere of the meeting based their sentiments on the fact that they were given enough time to express themselves and that the listeners respected what they had to say. On the other hand, pupils who were not satisfied based their sentiments on the fact that the professionals' non-verbal communication [body language], according to them, signalled that they did not agree with their descriptions. Olav, a pupil with reading, writing and maths difficulties, expressed it as follows:

> *I felt naked as I sat there and talked about the things I struggled with at school. In the meeting, there were teachers who I'd seen in the hallways at school but who I'd barely ever spoken with. One of them shook their head as I talked about numbers and letters hopping around the workbooks. She probably thought I was just sitting there fooling around. I wasn't.*

We can see here that when the pupil noticed the professional doing something he perceived to be shaking her head, he interpreted this as indicating his problems not being taken seriously.

The findings also indicate that the pupils found that their parents played a supportive role in the ISC meetings. Jon, a pupil with reading and writing difficulties, described the significance of his parents in his experience of the meeting thus:

> *I don't know what I would have done without my mother and father. The fact that they were there with me made it less scary to talk to all the teachers. They always make me more comfortable and confident, which in turn makes me relax. Just the fact that they sat next to me helped.*

Furthermore, the findings show that the pupils' need to have information they were given by the professionals explained to them was satisfied by their parents. Christer, a pupil with reading and writing difficulties, noted:

> *The fact that I have parents who know me really well and always know what I need was really helpful. Without prompting, they started explaining what the teachers meant by what they said. I didn't have to ask for help. It was almost like they had telepathic abilities [mind reading] that allowed them to peek into my head and know what parts of what the teachers said I hadn't understood. The fact that they explained things to me rubbed off on the teachers, who began doing the same.*

We can see here that the pupil's experience of parents who understood his need for further explanation improved his comprehension of what the professionals said during the meeting.

Finally, the findings indicate that the pupils occasionally felt there was a mismatch between the promises of support for the ISC meetings that they had been given by their parents (e.g., with proposals and requests) and the actual support they got during the meeting. Emma, a pupil with reading, writing and maths difficulties, said:

> *When we were home talking about the meeting we were going to attend, they promised me that they would make an effort to get the teachers to listen to me and what I wanted. But as the meeting started and the teachers entered the room, they changed. They remained silent and allowed the teachers to run the whole show. I was wondering what had happened to the support they'd promised me.*

5.2 | Rights-based recognition: Legal recognition of the pupils

The pupils' accounts of being present in ISC meetings touched on different aspects of rights-based recognition. The findings indicate that the pupils were well aware of their right to have an effect on and make decisions in ISC meetings. Hanne, a pupil with reading, writing and maths difficulties, had the following to say on this point:

> *We learned quite a lot about the Children's Convention [UNCRC] at school. What I remember most clearly is that it says that adults must do what they can to allow us to have our say on what goes on in school, and that they must take what we choose to say seriously. In the meeting, I obviously expected that the teachers— but also my mother and father—would let me say what I wanted to, listen to what I had to say and allow me to make decisions together with them.*

Furthermore, the findings show that the pupils compared their own opportunities to have an impact on the teachers' decisions with their parents' opportunities to do so. Vidar, a pupil with reading and writing difficulties, noted:

> In the meeting, things went a little more my way when my mother and father agreed with me and said so to the teachers. You know what? I think it was more difficult for them [the professionals] to say no when my mother and father said they agreed with me on something I wanted to do.

This shows that the pupil felt the professionals exhibited a greater willingness to accommodate his wishes after his parents expressed their support for him.

Finally, the findings show that the parents knew the regulations that affected the pupils' right to participate, which they shared with the professionals, as William, a pupil with reading, writing and maths difficulties, remarks:

> I was fortunate to have a mother who works in the EPS and who knows a lot. I was completely calm at the meeting because I knew she was in full control. I remember that she said to the others [the professionals] that I as a pupil have the right to state my opinion and that they actually have to listen to me. After she told them that, they probably felt that they had to speak more to me rather than about me.

5.3 | Social esteem-based recognition: Pupils as part of the team

The pupils' accounts of their own presence in ISC meetings touched on different aspects of social esteem-based recognition. The findings show that the pupils wished to be part of the group that discussed their ISC but that several of them found this challenging. One of these pupils is Pelle, who has reading, writing and maths difficulties and who described his own experience as follows:

> It wasn't so easy being part of the group. I worked hard at it. What made it difficult was that there were a lot of teachers that I didn't know particularly well in the room.

Other pupils also found it challenging to be part of the group because they found the number of professionals in the meeting overwhelming, especially where there was an unspoken expectation that they had to speak about their experiences of learning difficulties, which was not easy for many of them.

On the other hand, pupils who felt that they were part of the group based this perception on the fact that their parents and the professionals were interested in their opinion, as Christer noted:

> I felt like I was part of a team where everyone was working to achieve a particular goal. I felt sure that my mother, father, and the teachers thought that what I had to say was as important as what they had to say. Take, for example, when they asked about what I thought might help me at school. I told them that I wanted an assistant who could get me going again whenever I was completely stuck due to not being able to read the instructions for an assignment. And I got one!

The pupil here highlights two factors that may explain why he felt that he was part of the group, or "team." The first factor was the conviction that his input was just as important as the others' input, and the second was that the professionals took into account his wish for an assistant. Others who noted that they were part of the group based this perception on the professionals' non-verbal communication (e.g., eye contact, smiling, and nodding) regardless of who, whether the parents, other professionals or the pupil, were speaking at any given time.

Finally, the findings indicate that the pupils appreciated the suggestions of their parents—and especially the professionals'—for the content that needed to be potentially included in their ISC. Jon, a pupil with reading and writing difficulties, noted the following:

As I was listening to the teachers' proposals, I just thought WOW! It was cool to see that they were so knowledgeable! I mean, they must have spent a lot of years at school to learn all that. I remember thinking how lucky I was to have people around me who were so insanely knowledgeable about how to get pupils like me to crack the reading code [learn to read].

6 | DISCUSSION

The general findings are that one aspect of love-based recognition that was actualized by the relationships among pupils, parents and professionals. For example, the pupils weer able to describe their learning difficulties in ISC meetings in which the professionals they had a good relationship with were present. Rights-based recognition is actualized when the pupils and their parents are aware of the pupils' right to participate and expect and attempt to get the professionals to respect this right. Social esteem recognition is actualized when pupils' felt they were part of the group with the parents and professionals, as well as when they felt that their views were deemed important by the other participants. The findings show that the pupils valued the proposals of the professionals, but also their parents.

The social valuation of people in a modern society presupposes that relationships are characterized by "symmetrical esteem" (Honneth, 1995). However, the relationship between professionals and pupils with SEN is instead characterized by asymmetry. This is because professionals possess knowledge in areas such as learning difficulties and special education measures that pupils lack. The question is whether such asymmetry makes social esteem-based recognition between pupils and professionals impossible. This concern may be unwarranted, however, as Honneth (1995) points out that symmetrical means that individuals are free from being collectively denigrated and that everyone is given the chance to feel that their achievements and abilities are recognized. Bearing in mind that Honneth stresses it is crucial that individuals (such as pupils with SEN) are given the chance to believe that their contributions are valued by others, it could be argued that the asymmetry between professionals and pupils is unimportant as long as both parties, in theory, can experience recognition. This interpretation is supported by findings from the present study which show that certain pupils, in spite of the asymmetry, believed that they were part of a group and were on equal footing with the professionals and their parents.

It is clear from the study that some of pupils with SEN had difficulties understanding the professionals, a finding that is not unique to this study. Earlier research has shown that instead of using "accurate terminology and 'straight talk'" when speaking to pupils about their learning difficulties, professionals use euphemisms and jargon (Abernathy & Taylor, 2009, p. 132), which makes it hard for pupils to understand them. One reason why some of the pupils found that their parents were able to accommodate their immediate and unspoken need for explanation of terms and expressions in the meeting could be because of the parent–child relationship. In relation to Honneth's (1995) love-based recognition, Willig (2003) argues that the love relationship between parents and children is a symmetrical one where those who feel that their abilities are acknowledged and recognized by others develop a relationship of familiarity with their abilities. In such families children may grow up in a home with parents who accept his reading and writing skills, regardless of their level, thereby developing a conscious relationship with these skills.

According to Willig (2003), one essentially develops a high awareness of one's *own* capabilities rather than those of others. However, those who enter into such relationships may also become familiar with the abilities of others, as in homes where there is a culture in which children and parents share their perceptions of abilities (e.g., reading skills) with each other. It is reasonable to assume that a child [a pupil] who tells his parents that he is struggling to understand the expressions teachers use also helps his parents become familiar with his abilities. This may therefore explain the parents' ability to accommodate the pupils' immediate need for help in the ISC meetings. This demonstrates the importance for professionals, when conversing with pupils, to encourage them to share their thoughts on their own academic or social skills with their parents or others with whom they have a good relationship.

In some cases in this study pupils experienced a mismatch between their parents' promise to support their views during the ISC meetings and the actual support they felt they received. A potential reason for this may be "model

power" (Bråten, 2004, p. 114), which arises when a topic is delimited in a way that gives one party the relevant knowledge (e.g., the concepts and ideas) that can be applied to it while the other party has little knowledge to contribute. Bråten refers to those with relevant model knowledge as "model-strong" and those with little model knowledge as "model-weak." In the context of ISC meetings, examples of "relevant model knowledge" include knowledge about learning resources and planning the education of pupils with SEN. Pointing out a person's level of knowledge is relevant because research shows that parents who have participated in IEP meetings have also found that their input was not valued (e.g., Fish, 2006; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). Thus, one reason why certain pupils may have felt that they received less support could be that their parents regarded themselves, and possibly also the pupil, as being "model-weak" due to a lack of "relevant model knowledge" that the "model-strong," i.e., the professionals, probably possessed. When viewed in the context of the emotional bonds that Honneth (1995) claims exist between parents and children, the parents' negative assessment of their knowledge may have resulted in a temporary weakening of their emotional bonds with their own child. For the pupils, this weakening may have manifested itself in feeling as though their parents were less supportive than they had anticipated. This shows that, when meeting pupils and parents in ISC meetings, professionals should emphasize the knowledge the pupils and parents possess and the contribution they can may to discussions in the meetings.

In one area, the findings indicate that some of the pupils and their parents were "model-strong" while the professionals were "model-weak." This is because in some cases pupils and parents might have had more knowledge about the right of the child to participate (e.g., the right to be heard, as stated in Article 12 of the UNCRC, 1989). As the law in Norway insists on the participation of children in what concerns them (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006), one would expect that professionals who work with children are familiar with this practice. However, the present study indicates that the professionals appear to have only limited knowledge of this law. Yet the most important prerequisite for safeguarding pupils' rights is for professionals to know about the applicable regulations and strive to comply with them in their own work (Collin-Hansen, 2010; Herlofsen, 2014). On the other hand, these findings indicate that pupils did know about their right to participate, contrary to Welstad & Warp's (2010) assumption that children generally lack such knowledge.

The CRC (2009) lays out basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard, as stated in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989). In processes where one or several children participate and should be heard, adults are required to be well prepared in terms of having the skills and aids that will enable them to facilitate the children's participation (CRC, 2009). Yet the current study indicates that some professionals lack the skills to simplify the situation pupils to participate, for example, to communicate in a way that pupils with SEN will understand. This could signify that educational institutions that train professionals for work in the school system have not done enough to ensure that their graduates have the skills to safeguard the rights outlined in the UNCRC (1989).

In terms of rights-based recognition, before a person can recognize another in the legal sense, "two operations of consciousness flow" (Honneth, 1995, p. 112) must occur. Honneth maintains that one of these operations is the knowledge of the legal obligations we have in relation to autonomous [independent] persons, while the other is a situational interpretation where we assess whether other people have the characteristics that trigger these obligations. Each operation of consciousness flow is interpreted as being a condition for legal recognition that must be present before professionals can recognize pupils with SEN. Bearing in mind that the study found that pupils and parents were knowledgeable about the pupils' right to participate, it is clear that Honneth's (1995) first condition was met.

Similarly, the findings that the parents chose to share their knowledge about these rights with the professionals indicate that the other condition was also met, because they probably helped to increase the professionals' knowledge in this issue, making them more aware that pupils with SEN possessed the characteristics that triggered in them an obligation to respect their rights. Even though the data do not show that parents had detailed knowledge about children's rights, it is worth noting that past studies have shown that parents claim their lack of knowledge about special education legislation is one of their greatest weaknesses in the IEP process (e.g., Fish, 2006; Thatcher, 2012).

However, other findings indicate that professionals were more willing to accommodate requests by pupils who had their parents' support. Based on Honneth's (1995) other condition for rights-based recognition, one reason for this may be that the professionals potentially did not regard some pupils as possessing the characteristics that triggered rights

they were obliged to respect. On the other hand, this could indicate that an overall assessment of the characteristics of the pupils and parents resulted in them collectively possessing characteristics that triggered an obligation to respect their rights.

The right of children (in this case, pupils with SEN) to be heard according to Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) does not give them the right to self-determination (Sandberg, 2016). For the pupils, this means that they cannot actually force professionals to agree to their requests in the ISC meetings. In other words, they were wrong to make this assumption. The key to safeguarding the right of children to be heard is that the processes in which they participate should be based on treating their perspectives with respect (CRC, 2009). The fact that the findings show that some pupils interpreted the professionals' non-verbal signals as indicating that what they said was not being taken seriously would suggest that they were not treated with respect. However, it should be noted that the data do not provide grounds for asserting that this was the professionals' intention, although it does show that professionals should be aware of and consciously consider that their non-verbal signals can be misinterpreted.

The pupils' decision to share their own challenges in meetings where professionals they knew were present indicates that strong emotional bonds (Honneth, 1995) also existed between them and some professionals. The question is then why pupils elected to share their thoughts only when specific professionals were present. A natural response may be that they had previously found that the professionals in question were receptive to what they had to say. Thus, the pupils' positive experiences with specific professionals may have established strong emotional bonds between them, which would explain their decision to share their views. The importance of such positive experiences is supported by Lysaker (2011), who, in reference to Honneth's (1995) love-based recognition, notes that love is crucial if individuals are to develop optimism towards others. This shows that it is important for professionals who have a good relationship with the pupil are be present at the meetings.

In ISC meetings, non-professionals (i.e., pupils and parents) and professionals enter into professional relationships. Thus, it is necessary to consider the use of the concept of love, which is debatable in relation to such relationships (e.g., Brunkhorst, 2008; Jakobsen, 2013; Thrana, 2015). For example, Brunkhorst (2008) notes that the teacher role, unlike that of the parent, is oriented towards specific teaching responsibilities that can be separated from specific persons. Within this possibly lies an implicit assumption that the practical role of teachers is also detached from feelings for specific persons: the pupils.

However, the Norwegian school system is based on the premise that teaching should build on the Christian virtue of charity, or caritas (*nestekjærlighet* in Norwegian), i.e., 'love thy neighbor' (Education Act, 1998, Section 1-1). The fact that professionals are obligated to include this virtue of love in their teaching is a strong signal that their role cannot be detached from feelings for the pupils. In his conceptualization of love, Honneth (2008) points out that we should think of love as something that exceeds the more restrictive meaning the term has taken on; namely, the romantic character of sexual and intimate relationships. If we follow Honneth's broad interpretation of the term, this means that love can arise between people who are not in a sexual or intimate relationship with each other, such as pupils and professionals. When applied the findings showing that the pupils' relationships with professionals influenced their willingness to share their thoughts in ISC meetings, it is clear that emotional bonds also exist between the pupils and teachers.

In reference to Honneth's (1995) love-based recognition, Willig (2003) notes that love is an emotional form of recognition. Thus, it is relevant to include factors that may affect the pupils' emotions in ISC meetings. In extending this idea, the current study found that the parents' presence contributed to the pupils feeling safe and comfortable in ISC meetings. However, it is not always the case that pupils (with and without SEN) grow up in homes where they develop emotional bonds with their parents and that are characterized by security and optimism. Pupils who are subjected to serious neglect, violence or sexual abuse are also likely to have strong emotional bonds with their parents, but these bonds will be based on negative experiences. In such contexts it is even more important for professionals to be prepared to compensate for the pupils' need for the love that their parents may not be providing. This is supported by Thrana (2015), who in relation to the work of professionals working in the child services notes that their duties occasionally entail compensating for the child's needs for love.

In connection with Honneth's (1995) social esteem-based recognition, the findings show that it was important for the pupils to feel that they belonged at the ISC meeting. Even though many pupils felt that they belonged there, several noted that they had to struggle to be included, and these struggles constitute a major part of recognition (e.g., Honneth, 1995; Lysaker, 2011, 2013). Huttunen (2009, p. 93) notes: "Individuals do not receive recognition for free; on the contrary, [they] must struggle for it in one way or another."

One factor that contributed to the reason why pupils struggled to be included was the number of professionals taking part in the meeting, which was perceived as overwhelming. According to the CRC (2009), in connection with the implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), professionals must ensure that the environments in which children can participate are child-friendly. The fact that some pupils felt that too many professionals were present suggests that the environment was anything but child-friendly. The pupils' experiences of the ISC meetings as challenging is not unique to this study. Previous research shows that pupils not only felt ignored but also felt that their views were not respected (Powers, Turner, Matuszewski, Wilson, & Loesch, 1999). These mixed perceptions of being included could be because the professionals tried to include the pupils in different degrees. This may be due to the fact that Norway lacks national guidelines for the way that professionals should include pupils in ISC meetings and ensure that their right to be heard is respected. If such guidelines are established, a natural consequence would be that the experiences of pupils from schools in different municipalities, or even within the same school, would likely be more similar.

Finally, it should be noted that pupils found that their contributions to shared practice in ISC meetings were appreciated in that the parents supported their requests and the professionals chose to agree to some of them. "Shared practice" in this context means proposals and discussions about the potential contents of the pupils' ISCs. Honneth (1995, 2008) notes that feeling that others regard you as having skills that have implications for practice is a crucial component of social esteem-based recognition. In this study, this would indicate that these pupils were regarded as possessing skills that the parents and professionals believed were of significance to practice, i.e., the process of putting together the ISC. Moreover, the findings show that the pupils appreciated the parents' and professionals' contributions, in the form of the proposed content of the ISC. This also shows that they considered the other participants in the ISC meeting as individuals who possessed skills that were significant for the common practice.

6.1 | Final comments

The aim of the present study was to explore the extent to which pupils with SEN believed they were recognized by professionals and their parents in ISC meetings in school. The study shows that factors that had an impact on whether pupils experienced love-based recognition were the relationships they had to their parents and the professionals. A factor that had an impact on whether they experienced rights-based recognition was their parents' and the professionals' knowledge of and respect of their rights. Lastly, the parents' and professionals' valuation of the pupils' contributions in the ISC meeting, as well as their focus on including pupils in the group, were crucial in their experience of social esteem-based recognition.

6.2 | Limitations and implications for practice

The present study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. In terms of its theoretical perspective, I note that Honneth's theory of recognition (1995) was designed for the modern workplace (Jakobsen, 2013) and not for practice in a school context. Nevertheless, there is a growing interest in applying this theory to the field of education and learning in Nordic countries (e.g., Hanhela, 2014; Huttunen, 2009; Jakobsen, 2013; Skoglund & Åmot, 2019). In the present study, the theory has been used to show that the recognition the pupils experienced in ISC meetings is complex and touches on the areas of love, rights, and social esteem. In terms of data collection methods, a weakness in this study is that the researcher was not present during the ISC meetings described by the pupils. Consequently, she was unable to verify the pupils' descriptions of events and discussions in these meetings and therefore had to base the

data on their accounts. However, the study has shed light on the experiences of pupils with SEN, a group that has often been neglected as research has traditionally focused on the experiences of the parents, professionals and other adults (Watson, Shakespeare, Cunningham-Burley, & Barnes, 2005).

Notwithstanding the limitations mentioned above, this study has implications for future practice. First, the number of professionals taking part in ISC meetings should be kept to a minimum and consist mainly of those with whom the pupil has an attachment. This is because the pupils' willingness to share difficult experiences about their own learning difficulties may depend on this. Second, and regardless of whether the professionals know the pupils or vice versa, it is important for professionals to learn how to appear that they are giving pupils recognition in ISC meetings. In practical terms, this would entail training them in how non-verbal communication can be interpreted positively and negatively by pupils and parents. However, one could also argue that recognition of pupils with SEN, in addition to behavior, also depends on a genuine desire to recognize. Third, professionals require knowledge about how they can include pupils so that they experience being part of a group together with the parents and professionals.

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