

Malin Wevang

# Reimagining inclusion: At the intersection of relational bonds and cultural resilience

A qualitative case study of the significance of school-based social bonds in a practice of social inclusion

Master's thesis in Sociology  
Supervisor: Håkon Leiulfsrud  
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Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences  
Department of Sociology and Political Science



## **Preface**

Even though the last few years of my student life have been affected by a global pandemic, my sociological interest has never left my side, it has rather become accelerated. It has been a long and demanding process navigating through the endings of a worldwide societal change, but here I am having the pleasure of calling myself a sociologist.

I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to get insight into the Unequal Childhood project, access to the data material, and all parties involved in this project. Also, thanks to my fellow students in the research group for all the great discussions we've had along the way, and to all the meetings at NTNU Social Research. It has without a doubt made a difference in my master's experience, and I'm grateful to you all. I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Håkon Leiulfstrud, who has guided me through this project and challenged me to see opportunities where I did not. There have been meaningful, critical, and enriched discussions throughout this process that I wouldn't want to be without.

After finishing this thesis, I have found a new sociological curiosity about schools, their organisation, children's everyday school life, and the interplay between relations and inclusion. It has been incredibly educational, and I am extremely grateful for all the knowledge I have acquired. I have always believed that seemingly elementary everyday phenomena are extremely rich in content and consist of complexity beyond our imaginations. As a sociologist, I will always look for the extraordinary in everything ordinary.

Trondheim, July 2022

*Malin Wevang*



## **Abstract**

The theme for this thesis is social inclusion, social bonds, and relations in Norwegian primary schools. The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how schools with low socioeconomic status understand and translate the concept of social inclusion in their everyday school practice and how social relations play out in this practice of inclusion. The aim is to find out whether there is a connection between inclusion and exclusion processes in the development of social bonds among the school actors. The thesis is a case study based on ten in-depth interviews with teachers, employees and school leaders that were conducted in 2019/2020 through the Unequal Childhood project.

To examine how school actors understand social inclusion and what priorities they make in the work with social bonds, a meso-level approach is applied. With an analysis based on an intermediate level, theories of inclusion and exclusion, group formation, interpersonal ties and social bonds are used to shed light on how actors interact at an organisational level. This, together with a phenomenological approach, opened the possibility for a study of the relational in an organisational context. Through the analysis, it is revealed that parallels are drawn between social inclusion and the embrace of diversity and differences. The development and establishment of social bonds between school actors turn out to have a wide variety, where some bonds are stronger, and others are weaker. Yet, it is a matter of finding a balance between the bonds. In addition, a prominent commitment is shown among the actors to legitimise their district as a competent arena for their younger citizens.

Political practice and pedagogical practice often have conflicting perspectives that cause the school to strain between two worlds in an inclusion perspective. In addition, the concept of social inclusion is interpreted and translated differently among different groups of people. It is often a representation that it is strong bonds and a closer community that creates fertile ground for inclusion in society. This thesis illustrates how this not necessarily is the case in a low SES school context, and that a certain necessary distance is needed to support professionalism and inclusive relationships. This creates contrasts with conventional views of schools found in low SES areas. The school in this case refers to an investment in social capital, community building, and opportunity-creating structures in the existing diversity. Lastly, it is discovered the immense complexity that the schools consist of with several different tasks, functions, and domains, which nevertheless are on a par with each other.





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## 1. Introduction

Everyone needs to grow up, and live, in inclusive local communities with adequate living conditions and prerequisites for integration. Everyone should be able to live good lives, but children's life chances can be constrained or enhanced depending on where they grow up and which SES (socioeconomic) area they live in. In line with international and Norwegian official norms, all children should have the same opportunities to live good lives, especially children in vulnerable urban areas, to be able to be on an equal footing with other children (NOU 2020: 16, pp. 13).

For most children in Norway, their parents and family are the most important actors in ensuring a good upbringing. Children who come from families with limited socioeconomic resources may demand more public support to ensure coverage of needs. In these cases, it is especially important that kindergartens and schools can be effective (NOU 2020: 16, pp. 13; see also Caspersen, Buland, Hermstad & Røe, 2020). Thus, a common goal in early childhood and education is that all children, despite family backgrounds, disabilities, and resources should have the same chances to develop their various skills as human beings. Kindergartens, schools, and other public welfare agencies in all the Nordic countries are expected to play a significant role wherever parents do not have enough resources and cannot provide sufficient support.

From the very end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up till today, there has been an enormous growth of interest in how social relationships and the school climate affect students (Juvonen, 2006). Whereas the concept of "integration" used to be the dominant school practice, the Salamanca Statement of 1994 (*The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*, see UNESCO, 1994) represents a shift toward the more actor-oriented concept of "social inclusion" (Caspersen, Buland, Valenta & Tøssebo, 2019). The importance of inclusion for the Norwegian government is stated in Report no. 6 (2019-2020) to the Parliament:

Early intervention and inclusive practices are key to ensuring that all children and young people can realise their dreams and ambitions. It is the government's goal for all children and young people to be given equal opportunities for all-around development and learning, irrespective of background and individual circumstances. We want an education system that allows everyone to feel a sense of achievement and experience the value of knowledge and community (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020:7).

In other words, inclusive educational practice is expected to be beneficial as more children can use their abilities, get an education, and create good health. Inclusive educational practice is built on several interpersonal relationships and social bonds. Thus, inclusion may both refer to the school as a social system or an organisation, or to the social relations, bonding and actions taking place in a school context.

### 1.1 Focal point and research questions

This thesis will focus on the social inclusion work taking place within Norwegian primary schools. More specifically the emphasis will be on a) how the schools perceive their inclusion mission, b) how the concept of inclusion is translated into school practice, and c) how the relationships and social bonds influence practices of social inclusion and social exclusion. From a sociological perspective, it is expected that we may find discrepancies between visions and goals, and the actual execution of these within the schools. The official plans on inclusion practice may be well developed and filled with good intentions, but it is far from evident that these scripts are followed up in practice in Norwegian schools (see e.g., Nordahl et al., 2018). This may also have to do with public rhetoric and interpretive framework with various understandings of inclusion and different conceptual understandings of social inclusion. Consequently, translations of inclusion may create differences in the practice of inclusion for the children as each school tends to have diverse histories with unique student bodies, and backgrounds. To research this topic, two broad questions are posed:

*How is the goal of inclusion translated in Norwegian low SES schools, and how do the social relations and social bonds play out in a practice of social inclusion?*

Surprisingly, little research has been done to explore how social relations and bonds are played out in school practice and the classrooms (see also Martinsen, 2021). A better understanding of what happens among students and between students and teachers is needed if we want to understand social inclusion in “lived life” and ongoing interpersonal relations as opposed to a more systemic approach. As this thesis is about the practice of inclusion, I want to study how the actors perceive and understand social bonds, as tools of inclusion and potential cleavages and source of exclusion. My two research questions are as follows:

- i) How do schools in low SES areas understand social inclusion?
- ii) Which priorities are made by schools in low SES areas in the work with social bonds?

## 1.2 Why is social inclusion an important research topic?

Currently, Norway has a dysfunctional and exclusive special education system for children and youths (Wendelborg, 2010; Haug, 2017; Nes, 2017; Nordahl et al., 2018). The general claim made by Nordahl et al. (2018) is that a large share of children in need of extra help and facilitation are met by employees in kindergartens and schools without sufficient pedagogical competence. It takes too long from the time the child's needs are discovered until measures are implemented. At the same time, the experts in PPT (Norwegian Pedagogical and Psychological Services), use their professional competence in reporting and assessments, while the children are met by assistants without sufficient knowledge. There are also extensive processes for evaluating and implementing special education measures, and only a small share of Norwegian children is included in the special education system (see Gøranson, Ochoa & Zoeller, 2021).

There is considerable knowledge about the importance of parents' level of education for their children's school performance, but less is known about how these educational resources play out in different schools (Bakken, 2009; Bråten, 2014). Parents with a higher socioeconomic background tend to have more knowledge of hegemonic cultural (school) codes than the working class (Rapp, 2018). This is a phenomenon that has persisted in Norway and elsewhere despite several school reforms (Bakken, 2009).

Repeatedly, class and mobility research has shown that the school system tends to reinforce social inequalities and contributes to the social reproduction of inequality (Bakken & Danielsen, 2011; Bakken & Elstad, 2012; Hjellbrekke & Korsnes, 2012). The reproduction of social inequality is closely intertwined with the processes of social inclusion and exclusion in a school context, for example in how to serve all students with proper resources or how to balance a concern of social inclusion with individual academic excellence. Inclusion and exclusion are connected to systems of communication as communication is a constant ongoing occurrence and process that happens in everyday interaction (see e.g., Habermas, 1984). The creation of communication, at different organisational and institutional levels, is not just inclusive but also exclusive. The actors in the school systems work on the principles of inclusion and exclusion, which problematise a one-dimensional pedagogical notion of inclusion (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

### 1.3 The school as a research object

A classical division in social science is represented in a departure from individuals and actors and the social structures that impact social life and all social action. This division can be categorised as actor or interaction oriented – where the social level is reduced to a micro level and the main objects for research are persons or families, vs. system and structural frameworks on a macro level. Methodological individualism claims that social phenomena are to be explained as the result of individual actions and choices. System and structural approaches go more in-depth to explain social processes as out of the control of the individuals and independently of individual action (Risjord, 2014).

While agents are usually micro-level actors, collectives can also be agents. Likewise, although structures are usually at the macro-level, there are structures at the micro-level (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). Hence, it is not given that the two approaches are fixed in practice (see Scott, 2021). In this study I am neither going for a macro study nor a micro study, but what is commonly referred to as a sociology of the middle range (Merton, 1968). The middle range is an intermediate approach to theories of social systems. This method explores the relationship between micro- and macrostructures in day-to-day research to develop an integrated theory that may explain observable phenomena of social change, social behaviour, and social organisation. It may be used as a guide to empirical inquiry (ibid.).

This thesis is concerned with Norwegian schools as organisations. Organisations in modern society are a typical research object for sociologists. Despite this, both sociologists and school researchers tend to focus on individuals and less on organisations and the impact of organisational structures (Hasse, 2021). From a sociological perspective, organisations are not just organisational processes and structures, but a field of practices with an agency. Organisations such as the school are in this perspective not fixed entities but both a mirror of the society they operate within and filled with people that uphold several norms and organisational practices. These are norms and practices that for example are shown in the school culture, the pedagogy, and daily prioritisations in these. Having a focus on the school as an organisation is also a way to avoid the micro-macro divide and rather focus on an analysis of the meso-level, and sociology of the middle range.



Jürgen Habermas (1987) is of relevance and interest in this study as he focuses on middle-range processes at the junction between the life world (where people interact and communicate) and the system world (i.e., the structures that surround us and impact us, such as the economy, politics, the legal system, and the media system). The system world derives from the life world, but the system is also having systemic properties of its own that are not easily found in the life world (see also Luhmann 1995). A key idea in Habermas's analysis is that the system world tends to invade the life world. The system has come to exert control over the life world and colonise it in modern times. This is what Habermas calls "the colonization of the life world" (Habermas, 1987). The schools (organisations and actors) are good examples of increased pressure from the system world in terms of expectations that they fulfil their organisational goals and social missions. Likewise, schools and their educational support systems, such as social services and healthcare do not work at a school level but are organised by the municipalities in the Norwegian system, and all systems are under a lot of external pressure (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

In other words, schools may both be looked upon as institutions filled with norms and expectations and as organisations of a group of people cohabiting in their life-world. To what extent, and how, the demands of the system world are interpreted or manifested in the daily running of schools, is a more open question. Another question is whether the junction between the "two worlds" creates an impact on the students and their ability to create and keep social bonds between themselves and their teachers. As stated by Bachmann and Haug (2006), it is not only the construction of relationships and inclusive practice that the school must ensure. Ideally, there should be room for similarity and differences, variations, and diversity (Nielsen, 2014), i.e., goals that are not necessarily compatible with each other.

Another point that Bachmann and Haug (2006) show is that the school is not a fixed entity. Normally, there is a perception of the school as monolithic, but the school is a complex organisation where different and opposing perspectives compete against each other. A challenge associated with this complexity is the relationship between the diverse levels in the school system. The systemic features cannot guarantee which priorities are made in each school. Political practice and pedagogical practice are often in dispute. This is because school practice and politics have contrasting functions and tasks that refer to different expectations and traditions.

#### 1.4 Thesis outline

The thesis is structured into six chapters. In Chapter 2, key concepts and the theoretical framework are presented. All the theories are concerned with what happens when groups of people come together. At the end of the chapter, a theoretical model summarises the concepts and theories and unveils how they are interconnected. Chapter 3 consists of methodological choices and strategies and an insight into the data material. How the analysis is conducted, the thesis' research design and the quality of the study are also included here. In Chapter 4 the empirical material will be analysed following the research questions. Through the analysis, it was discovered four main findings regarding the school merger, views on social inclusion, how the social relations unfold and a widespread passion and drive for the school and its local community. Chapter 5 discusses and examines the questions posed in this thesis. The discussion is based on an understanding of the schools as incorporated into an educational system and a system world that to varying degrees enable, or disable, the actors in the governance of the school as an organisation. It is also based on a synthesis that the translation and understanding of social inclusion supply guidelines for how the social relations and bonds unfold in a practice of inclusion. In the concluding chapter, a summary is given, as well as a conclusion on the thesis' questions and its academic relevance.

## 2. Theoretical framework

I begin this chapter by presenting the current concepts of inclusion and exclusion and placing the concepts into a school context before the theoretical approaches are reviewed. My interest in what goes on inside the school entails an interest in the organisation's social actors, which is the students and the people working there. For that reason, all the theoretical programs are concerned with what happens when people come together in social relations and what is created as a result, whether it is a form of commitment through plural subjects, common goals through joint commitment, or ties and bonds in interpersonal and organisational relations.

### 2.1 Inclusion and exclusion

The concept of inclusion may be linked to democracy and social justice where participation and affiliation are seen as fundamental human needs to be able to function together in a society (Jortveit, 2018). Inclusion may also be linked to diversity, equality, citizenship, and the universal right to adequate and adapted education (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). The idea behind inclusion is that everyone, including marginalised groups, should be on equal terms and accepted in all social arenas and take part in collective decisions and the implementation of these. Understandings of inclusion are often linked to different attitudes and values related to social diversity, and as a result, become decisive for how practices of inclusion are performed. Thus, inclusion in this sense is not a condition, but a process (Jortveit, 2018).

Inclusion is further developed from the concept of integration. Integration in a school context is understood as students in need of adapted or special education should receive this within the same school as other students. The concept of integration is problematic because it implies that there are some on the outside and not part of the community. The concept of inclusion was introduced as a replacement for the concept of integration due to this problematic discourse. This change of language stands for a change of perspective where the emphasis is placed on the process of schools accepting all children regardless of background conditions and prerequisites (Wendelborg, 2017). On the other hand, social inclusion as a topic in educational research has traditionally been researched in the context of students with special educational needs (Bachmann & Haug, 2006; Jortveit, 2018; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). This is to be understood as a narrower definition of inclusion where it is a matter of groups that previously have been marginalised, such as students with disabilities, gaining access to ordinary schools (Nes, 2017).

A broader definition of inclusion in schools involves the inclusion of the entire student diversity. The student diversity consists of students who are doing well, students who have learning challenges, mental or physical developmental disabilities, language difficulties and various diagnoses, students who are on a high intellectual level, students with emotional or social challenges, and students with a different ethnic background who do not have the official language in the country as their first language (i.e., Norwegian in Norway). Thus, the student diversity is large and much greater than in these examples (Uthus, 2017). Therefore, inclusion concerns the whole school and is about real and active participation for all students. Certain inclusive practices that work for one student may not work for another. Thus, the discourse around teaching within or outside the ordinary framework has resurfaced (ibid.).

Inclusion in a school context also means actively counteracting exclusion, academically, socially, and culturally. This means creating conditions for equal learning opportunities for all in a framework of the community people's lives. If a principle within inclusive education is to empower students to improve student learning and participation (Jortveit, 2018), then exclusion must involve that students are actively or passively excluded from equal opportunities for learning and participation in the community, be it academically or socially (Nes, 2017). Inclusion and exclusion in school may therefore be considered at various levels: a) from the learning outcome the students receive and how they experience the situation themselves, b) from what happens inside the classroom, at school and in the municipality, and c) what happens at the regional and national level (ibid.). Hence, inclusion is not only about the individuals' prerequisites and their need for facilitation, but it also involves a systemic understanding that embraces the entire school (Jortveit, 2018).

The political drive for inclusion in Norway probably comes from the endorsement of the Salamanca Declaration in 1994 (Bachmann & Haug, 2006; Jortveit, 2018; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). Although the declaration appears as a guideline with greater relevance for special education, an important requirement for inclusion is that the school is not looked upon as a static institution, but as a mirror of more general social divisions and inequalities in society. The Salamanca Declaration embraces much broader than special education and holds measures that could benefit all students in school, including the great variation that exists among students (Bachmann & Haug, 2006). One of the main goals is to avoid discrimination and exclusion that comes from diversity (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

Through the Salamanca Declaration, there was broad international and national affiliation to the visions and goals of inclusive education. However, to this day there are disagreements in the understanding and the practice of inclusion. In certain contexts, the concept of inclusion is described as merely the absence of exclusion (Nes, 2017). Moreover, the definition of inclusive education differs between different theoretical approaches. How the concept is understood also varies between researchers and between countries. Some understandings of the term involve incorporation of all forms of student diversity, while other understandings are based on learning or educational leadership. Finally, it stems from the fact that there are differences in the implementation of inclusive education and variances in how it should be organised (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). As a result, the challenge lies in transferring the idea into actual practice (Bachmann & Haug, 2006).

### *2.1.1 Translations of programs and scripts*

One of the most promising sociological perspectives dealing with the translations of organisational programs and scripts is neo-institutional theory. This is a strand of research that asks why organisations do not act in line with the goals they have set themselves (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Next to this theorising is also manifest and latent functions, where manifest functions entail intended actions, and latent functions are unintended actions (Merton 1949/1968). It is, however, challenging to address the question of organisational interpretations of programs and scripts without bringing in an actor perspective and the groups that makeup organisations in practice. Actors are not just individuals or groups with uniform voices but may also be seen as “plural subjects” (Gilbert, 1992).

## 2.2 Plural subjects and joint commitment

Gilbert (1992) describes plural subjects as an act of the collective, a collective that can have thoughts, attitudes, and values of their own. A plural subject concerns a collective belief and a social convention in everyday life: “Social groups are plural subjects, collective beliefs are the beliefs of plural subjects, and social conventions are the fiats of plural subjects” (1992:408). According to Gilbert, it is essential that they feel and experience a willingness to be members of a group. Normally, most individuals consider themselves as part of a social group or collective agent, and they continuously act according to this perception.

Furthermore, a plural subject, such as teachers in a school, will profoundly affect the members' responsibilities to the group. Gilbert (1992) describes these responsibilities as *sui generis* (Latin: something unique and of its own kind. There is nothing else like it). The group members' responsibilities and their willingness to be group members are according to Gilbert based on voluntarism, which creates a "joint commitment" and loyalty to the cause. From plural subjects Gilbert (1992; 2014) further developed this theoretical perception of the concept of a "joint commitment": "Anyone wishing to understand the human condition needs to understand not only what it is to act on one's own, but what it is to do something together with another person" (2014:10).

Normally, people understand themselves as part of a joint commitment throughout their lives. For the group to exist, a necessary precondition is that all parties have an understanding that each member must do their part to promote a joint activity, whether it is about joint approval of a proposition or a joint approval of an action. Either way, the individual members in the plural subject now have a common goal. This means that there are incentives for joint action for all members (Gilbert, 1992). What one person must do to form a joint commitment often depends on what the others do. This arrangement persists if the members of the group want to continue the joint commitment. If they want to cease the joint commitment, this is also something that must happen through agreement in the collective (Gilbert, 2014).

Being jointly committed does not automatically mean that the participants feel a moral liability, even though they may feel this way. Furthermore, it is not a requirement for the existence of a joint commitment, according to Gilbert. Rather, it is a matter of having obligations to one another, where there are expressions for desired actions, and reprimand for the lack of actions. This entails having a common goal within the group, and the execution of it (Gilbert, 2014). Sanctions for inaction are reminiscent of the function of norms, which are closely related to culture. The obligations and achievements of common goals may be influenced by how the relationship unfolds in diverse groups of people. Whether the relations are "strong" or "weak" (Granovetter, 1973) may have an impact on the group's feasibility to act together.

### 2.3 Interpersonal ties

Mark Granovetter (1973) is also particularly concerned with how small-scale social interactions in groups and networks impact organisations and organisational behaviour. Rather than just focusing on group behaviour and group cohesion he focused on distinct types of social ties

binding people together. Granovetter makes a distinction between strong and weak ties, as well as absent ones. Family and friends are in his view typical examples of strong ties, while acquaintances typically illustrate weak ties. The strength of a tie is described as follows:

Most intuitive notions of the “strength” of an interpersonal tie should be satisfied by the following definition: the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. Each of these is somewhat independent of the other, though the set is obviously intracorrelated (1973:1361).

The description of strong ties is reminiscent of the description of close friends or family members. Within network analysis, there is a tendency among sociologists to focus on these strong ties and pay less attention to the study of social groups in themselves. Consequently, the strengthened emphasis on strong ties has resulted in the negligence of weak ties. However, a key point of network theory is that the actors that have these ties may be found on the entire micro-macro spectrum. The actors can be people, but they can also be groups, organisations, or societies (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). In other words, both strong and weak ties can transpire at any level, including the meso-level.

In Granovetter’s (1973) analysis, strong and weak ties are not just described but linked to the concepts of bridges and bridging. A bridge is a line in a network that creates the only path between two points. Therefore, no strong ties are bridges, but all weak ties are bridges. Thus, bridges play a significant role in social interaction. Bridges can also be local, meaning that local bridges create a shorter distance between two points. The argument is that if a weak tie is removed it will do more damage than the removal of a strong tie. This is because the probability of transmission will be weakened. In other words, whatever is to be transferred can reach a greater number of people over greater social distances, if it goes through weak ties rather than strong ones. Therefore, individuals with many weak ties are in the best position to transmit since some of the ties will be local bridges.

Moreover, strong ties form dense networks and weak ties create less dense networks. Thus, for an individual, weak ties will be an opportunity to achieve mobility, according to Granovetter (1973). Weak ties have a stronger ability to connect members of different small groups to a greater degree than strong ties. And from a macro perspective, weak ties will have an impact

on social unity. When it comes to why some groups of people can organise themselves towards common goals more effectively than others, it is often about variations in culture and personality traits. However, by looking at the tie network of a community, it can be studied whether there are any aspects of its structure that enable or limit its organisation (ibid.).

Another principal factor is trust, according to Granovetter (1973). Whether a person trusts their leader depends on whether the person has interpersonal contacts that can ensure that this leader is trustworthy:

Trust in leaders is integrally related to the *capacity to predict and affect their behaviour*. Leaders, for their part, have little motivation to be responsive or even trustworthy towards those to whom they have no direct or indirect connection. Thus, network fragmentation, by reducing drastically the number of paths from any leader to his potential followers, would inhibit trust in such leaders (1973:1374).

If a community is to form many weak ties that are bridges, there must be several different ways for individuals to create them. The more local bridges per person in a collective and the greater the distance between them, the more organised the community and their ability to act together. Hence, studying the source and character of such bridging ties will supply good insight into the social dynamics of the collective (Granovetter, 1973). Thus, the key to enabling acting together is all about having the opportunity to create as many bridges as possible. Several weak ties give rise to the opportunity of getting insight from different worlds. Strong ties become weak when it comes to maintaining the organisation.

### 2.3.1 Social integration

Strong and weak ties are concepts that make descriptions of social integration through different strengths of the cohesion between people. This is a dichotomous synthesis that has been the subject of theorising in the sociological field since its inception. In particular, Ferdinand Tönnies' (1887/2001) pair of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* may be highlighted, as well as Émile Durkheim's (1893/1964) organic and mechanical solidarity.

*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* may be translated to community and society and represent the difference between unity and diversity. The essence of *Gemeinschaft* (community) involves an organic cohabitation that is both inclusive in the sense of building relationships between people



who are close to each other, and exclusive since closeness creates the element of an outside. *Gesellschaft* (society) involves a mechanical construction where life is in the public space and individuals live together, but independently of each other. Community is the social unit most people are born into, with genuine relationships, but society is the superficial outside world (Tönnies, 1887/2001). The same words, organic and mechanical, are seen in Durkheim's (1893/1964) works.

Both Tönnies (1887/2001) and Durkheim (1893/1964) lived during the same era. Where Durkheim described a unified society as consisting of mechanical solidarity, Tönnies described the distant society as mechanical. The organic in Tönnies's work stands for the dense and close organisation, while organic solidarity in Durkheim's describes the differences between people in a society. Thus, differences in vocabulary around the discourse of social integration are revealed. The fact that Granovetter's (1973) analysis presents that the weak ties are the key to achieving collective action, testifies to another element of this discourse. There are different descriptions of social unity and cohesion, and in contemporary sociological research, the social integration between people is a continuous subject of research. From dichotomies and interpersonal ties to social bonds (Ahrne, 2021), there is a shift from the classification of connections between people to a more in-depth description of the relationship characters and how people get involved with and invest in relationships in organisations.

## 2.4 Social bonds

Göran Ahrne (2021) takes on the project of defining social bonds and how they can make up a research object. In doing so, he shows how social bonds can be integrated into the analysis. Ahrne points out that an emphasis on social bonds does not mean an introduction of a new level of analysis. Quite the opposite, such an emphasis proposes a more comprehensive way of understanding the connection between social structures and individuals, and how these individuals establish and uphold the structures. This is because people who engage in several social bonds are still individuals. Social bonds, therefore, do not take away individuality, they make individuals into social creatures; "To investigate social bonds between individuals is to transcend an individualistic perspective without losing sight of the individuals themselves. It is not individuals that are the constituent elements of society but the bonds between them ... "(Ahrne, 2021:86). Therefore, it is near impossible to imagine individuals without any form of social bonds since they uphold society.

#### 2.4.1 *The banner of bonds*

Ahrne (2021) begins his article by referring to Charles Tilly's (1998) book *Durable Inequality*, where the intersection between a micro and a macro approach is problematised as well. Tilly supposes relational analysis to be a minority in the social sciences and therefore emphasises a priority of analysing bonds that he defines as: "Relational models of social life beginning with interpersonal transactions or ties" (1998: 18). A relational analysis emphasises the significance of culture in an understanding that culture is a social world where actors act in a joint reality based on shared understandings that are influenced by earlier interactions. This causes culture and social relations to coincide incessantly (ibid.).

Tilly's (1998) analysis also applies an expanded understanding of the concept of an organisation and incorporates all forms of assemblies of social relations in that understanding. What is relational and what is organisational are however somewhat used interchangeably. It is the relational between people that enables or hinders individual action, and thus influences social behaviour, according to Tilly. All individuals also have multiple identities that match the number of social relationships they have. Tilly argues that we have one identity per relationship. In other words, who individuals associate with within social relationships will have a say in the outcome of social behaviour. Ahrne (2021) draws inspiration from Tilly's conceptualisations of a relational model of the social world with associated bonds and further develops it into the concept of social bonds.

In line with Tilly (1998), Ahrne (2021) argues that knowledge of how social bonds create groups gives indications of how the collective acts, its strengths, and its weaknesses. However, in most social sciences, collectives are seen as either a structure composed of individuals or as being made from a gathering of individuals. Nevertheless, a collective is not composed only of individuals but also the social bonds that bring them together, according to Ahrne (2021). To understand the unity of any collective, the characteristics of the bonds that keep them together must be considered. An analysis of what social bonds consist of would not only give details of how these groups are created but would also arrange for a deeper understanding of the individual actors themselves. When knowledge is produced of how each social bond is being attached to everyone, an understanding can be achieved of their relation to parts of their surroundings (ibid.).

#### 2.4.2 *What exactly is a social bond?*

Tilly (1998) describes the acquisition of bonds as categorically differentiated. This means that different individuals and groups can acquire different types of bonds, but it also depends on previous categorical experiences and the dispositions and means they already occupy. “A category consists of a set of actors who share a boundary distinguishing all of them from and relating all of them to at least one set of actors visibly excluded by that boundary” (1998:62). In other words, a social configuration that creates both an inside and an outside that also are related to each other. In a school context, categorically differentiated families will affect students’ school performances and the way teachers evaluate students’ performances, Tilly states. Teachers categorically differentiate their responses to performance and contribute to lasting organisational categorical differences. To put it another way, this is a kind of reproduction of organisational processes created subconsciously by individuals following their already existing dispositions.

To interact with the same individuals on multiple occasions, relationships must be created. However, motives are not enough to create these relationships, they need something more to keep them together and that is social bonds. How social bonds appear, according to Ahrne (2021), can be divided into three parts: a) the social bond is a given bond that has already been established, usually through family ties. These bonds are the strongest and last the longest; b) the social bond develops gradually, from acquaintances to friends as they meet and spend increased time together. This is how networks are often portrayed, and c) the social bond comes from people deciding that they belong to each other, often through collegial gatherings, the joining of a sports team or marriage. These bonds are decided to exist after the parties have communicated as such with each other (ibid.). To put it another way, social bonds can be formed either through acquisition, development over time, or mutual agreement. Thus, where Tilly (1998) describes individuals as acquiring different types of bonds based on different dispositions, Ahrne (2021) categorises these dispositions into three types.

As social creatures, individuals have several social bonds, according to Ahrne (2021). Also, most social bonds consist of more than two individuals. Each social bond unites certain individuals for certain purposes. In other words, different types of relations require different types of bonds. This means that one bond is hardly absolute in that each bond holds different aspects of their lives. This is in line with Tilly’s (1998) statement that everyone has one identity per relationship, meaning that one individual can have several identities depending on the

number of social relationships. In late modern times, most are bound by various bonds, but several of them are rather constricted though more flexible, Ahrne (2021) states. For the relationship to endure a longer period, the social bonds must be kept intact and those involved in the bond need to know that the others in the bond will still be there, ready to recommence the relationship, regardless (ibid.). Thus, there is juggling between several different social bonds, often flexible bonds, but everyone must exert themselves for the persistence of them.

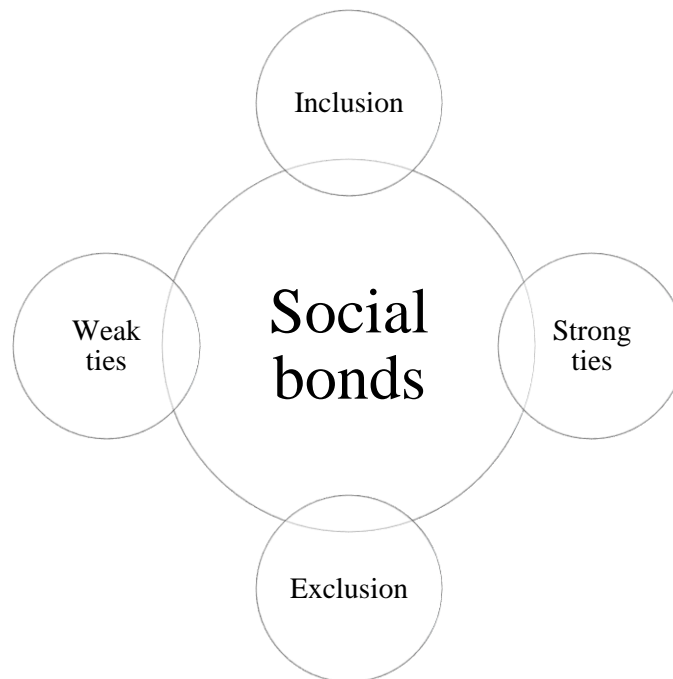
Those together in a bond must know who the others are, who is inside, and who is outside. There is no bond without this recognition, according to Ahrne (2021). This draws parallels to Tilly's (1998) description of a category in which a boundary is created between those on the inside and those on the outside. Therefore, according to Ahrne, the bonds give indications of the position to everyone, ought to be adjusted for everyone, and allow some to do certain things, where others cannot. For that reason, social bonds require communicating and expressing certain forms of expectations for what they are meant to be, and what the involved parties can achieve together. Social bonds can contribute to the achievement of common goals beyond what each person could have achieved on their own. This is something that only social bonds can accomplish. At the same time, where social bonds hold people together, they also create division. They create an inside and an outside. Where social bonds connect people, they also exclude people (Ahrne, 2021). Social bonds may do immensely things together, but this unity is also involved in creating exclusion.

## 2.5 How social bonds are impacted by interpersonal ties and inclusion and exclusion

What all the theoretical perspectives have in common is a foundation based on the importance of knowing how social groups are created to find out how they function as a collective. Also, what is created between the actors as they come together. Research on social ties and bonds allows us to study individual behaviour in an organisational context and find out how the actors establish and maintain the organisational structures, as well as plural subjects and groups, such as teachers, and joint commitments in school practice.

Joint commitment and social bonds are both different concepts of achieving something together. Ahrne (2021) and Gilbert (1992; 2014) both argue that organisations are more than systems and structures. Where Gilbert describes what happens when a group of individuals come together and form a social group, Ahrne is more concerned about the social glue that binds people together and draws parallels to Tilly's (1998) analysis of relational models in social life, where

an organisation of social relations represents the organisation's culture. Furthermore, Granovetter (1973) divides these bonds and categorises them into different ties, mirroring different forms of social integration.



*Figure 1. Theoretical model of how social bonds are impacted by interpersonal ties, and inclusion and exclusion*

In Figure 1 above, I have illustrated how the theories are interconnected and especially valuable in a study of social inclusion and social bonds. Social bonds are impacted by inclusion as well as exclusion depending on the context and roles played out in a school. Social bonds can create inclusion processes, but they can also create exclusion, as in shifting friendship relations in flux. The same holds for social ties that may appear as strong or weak, yet open when it comes to the outcomes of inclusion and exclusion practices. Rather than ending up with strong expectations on what to find in the empirical material, the idea is here to use these dimensions as explorative tools in my study of narratives of social inclusion in a Norwegian low SES school.

### 3. Methods and data

This master's thesis is part of a larger research project "Childhood, School and Inequality in the Nordic Countries" (Unequal Childhood). The project is a continuation of "Childhood and welfare in the Nordic countries" which started in 2002, with a follow-up study in 2009. A third wave and extended version of the project were conducted in 2019/20. The project currently includes data from three Nordic cities – Trondheim, Tampere and Norrköping, as well as Berkeley in California. The project may be described as a set of extended case studies (see Burawoy, 2009) based on school studies found in high SES and low SES school areas, survey data, document analysis and register data. My thesis is best described as a case study and is based on the Norwegian part of the project and the qualitative interview data from 2019/20. This is data from a school located in a low SES area.

#### 3.1 Research design

A case study is based on an already existing boundary of what and who the study includes and excludes (Tjora, 2017). As low SES schools tend to give high priority to social inclusion and report as high levels of social thriving as high SES schools in Trondheim, I find it particularly interesting to study social bonds and social inclusion in a low SES school. I am here especially interested in exploring meanings attached to social bonds and social inclusion among the teachers and school leaders in the low SES school.

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and theory of knowledge. It has to do with how we acquire knowledge, what knowledge is, and how we can legitimise it. This includes various conditions and prerequisites that the researcher must review to prove that the knowledge is in logical correspondence with reality. Thus, it is a matter of finding out what is the most secure and indisputable knowledge. Phenomenology is the epistemological direction where knowledge is acquired through perceptions and experiences (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2014). The approach I will use in this thesis is based on phenomenological traditions. In this approach, the taken-for-granted structure of everyday life, or the life world, is described as constituted in and through conscious actions (Benzecry & Winchester, 2017). Phenomenology is meant to reveal universal and immutable structures in people's life world (Kusenbach, 2003). In other words, this refers to studying the everyday lives of people. In this context, I am interested in investigating how the school actors' life worlds unfold into a larger, organisational context.

### 3.2 Methodological strategies

In most organisational contexts, there will be a group of people who maintain and comprise the organisation. These actors make up the lived experiences which in phenomenology represent the empirical circumstances. To obtain the structures of their life worlds, phenomenological methods preferably use interviews to get past what is visible and observable, and into perceptions and experiences (Kusenbach, 2003). Therefore, interview data has been used in this case study to interpret the school actors' life worlds into an organisational context. To do this, my interpretations have been based on finding an overall representation of the organisation through the narratives of the informants.

This phenomenological approach is in congruence with a social constructivist paradigm (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2014), where my focus in reading the data is based on interpretation and understanding. According to Risjord (2014), one of the most difficult challenges within the social sciences is the ability to understand practices and principles that are very much different from one's own. Different types of events and behaviours may be perceived as abnormal only because they have been interpreted in a specific way. While a different type of interpretation may make the event or behaviour seem understandable. The question is not necessarily about what is true or false, but which interpretation is the most fitting based on the research questions addressed.

Interpretive research emphasises that to understand a group, it is important to understand its norms, values, and rules. A culture conveys to its members how they should act and behave, and if they do not follow these norms, it is seen as deviant. Therefore, what is real and rational may vary between cultures. "Interpretivism thus relies on an unbounded model of rationality" (Risjord, 2014:71). The unbounded model of rationality, in this case, consists of a "school code" that is official norms and "hidden curriculum" developed by the school as an organisation and the organisational actors.

With a phenomenological and interpretive research design, I have chosen to take inspiration from the abductive methods. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) describe abductive methods as going back and forth between theory and data where creativity is emphasised and the ability to discover findings in already existing theories to gain new theoretical insight. This method has allowed me to be exploratory by alternating between the material and the theory and earlier research. This has also given me useful tools in the analysis, as the interpretation needs to be

performed in a school context. In this context, it was essential for me to have a pre-understanding of the field to be able to interpret it accordingly. This field holds all the school actors who make up my informants.

### 3.3 Data: Unequal Childhood

I have chosen to analyse the interviews conducted with the principal, two associate principals, two special educators, one environmental therapist and four teachers to get a more comprehensive picture of the school culture, norms and main narratives associated with social bonds and social inclusion. I have not personally been conducting any of these interviews. This is a limitation, especially as my method is heavily reliant on interpretation in context. As my supervisor took part in most of the interviews, this represents less of an issue, as he has first-hand experience and has guided me in the interpretation of the data reported in this thesis.

#### *3.3.1 Mercury school*

There are ten informants in total. The teachers are from 4th to 7th grade and are all contact teachers at the school. The teachers are referred to as Teacher 1-4. The principal and two deputy heads are referred to as School Leader 1-3. The environmental therapist and the two special educators are referred to as social workers 1-3.

When the interviews were conducted in 2019/20, the school, given the pseudonym “the Mercury school”, had just finalised the first phase of a merger of several schools into a larger organisational configuration. Although all the previous schools were from the same area, this offered a change in some of the school’s characteristics and composition of the staff and student body. Nevertheless, the school consists of a wide diversity of students from different backgrounds, culturally and socioeconomically. This is a school located in a school district with lower scores on most official sociodemographic factors, including a high share of students coming from immigrant families. Several of the informants are living in the area with good knowledge of the ecosystem the school is operating in.

#### *3.3.2 Ethical considerations*

As the interviews have been conducted and transcribed in Norwegian, direct quotations were translated into English. Expressions that made sense in Norwegian may have no meaning in English and vice versa. Here, the task was to adjust the translations in context, without losing the content and meaning. This was something I spent a lot of time working out.



Because I have not been a participant in the data collection, it has been important to treat the data material in an ethically sound manner to keep the trust in the project and the trust that the school has in this university-school collaboration. Through the project members responsible for conducting the interviews, information leaflets and consent forms have been distributed to all participants, meaning that everyone has agreed to take part in the study (The consent form and interview guides are presented in the appendix).

Exemplifications through descriptions of individual students from the informants and specific incidents are not included to ensure the privacy of the children and the school. The school has therefore been given a pseudonym, and all the informants have been anonymised through simplified job descriptions. The informants were also approached as informants talking on behalf of the school, rather than looking for their personal opinions, even if this distinction may be blurred in practice. With interpretation in context, the purpose has always been to use the interviews to conceptualise them into a larger organisational context, and not to single out the school and their practices.

### 3.4 Research quality of this study

Research in the social sciences concerns itself with reliable results based on well-founded research designs, methods, and interpretations (Tjora, 2017). Reliable results come, among other things, from remaining neutral (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) and being reflexive and transparent throughout the research project (Risjord, 2014). An important goal for this thesis is to give the reader good insight into the work and process with the handling of the data material, as well as reflective considerations.

#### *3.4.1 The researcher's role and position*

The researcher's role in projects based on qualitative methods involves, among other things, being an interpreter of a person's experience or an event in society. Being an interpreter thus has a certain form of authority. It is important to recognise the interpreter's influence on the text production, as what is produced is also something that has been interpreted. Interviews and focus groups, for instance, do not necessarily give us the true representation of reality. These are only interpretations made by the researcher. Thus, the interpreter is partly responsible for its meaning and content (Risjord, 2014). In this context, it is about being an interpreter and representative for all the informants. The goal is to address findings and narratives based on the content of what the informants say, rather than adding meaning to who said what.

Yet, all researchers bring with them a set of pre-knowledges into the field they are researching. Also, within most types of social research, the researcher will bring with them a theoretical understanding, and as in my case a set of research questions that decide what is relevant to report. I already had some understanding of the school case, as I come from the same area where the school is located. My history as a former student in the school district was a coincidence, but I have tried to remain neutral and not let my pre-knowledge colour my analysis. Nevertheless, it is challenging to maintain complete neutrality within the social sciences, and particularly within qualitative methods. On the other hand, this coincidence allowed me to study an area of familiarity, which has motivated my sociological interest in the case.

#### *3.4.2 The road to epistemological legitimacy*

After I gained access to the data material, the work started with reading the interviews and getting familiarised with the material. To begin with, I had a fairly good idea of the topic I wanted to research, and it was important to spend a long time familiarising myself with the interviews. The questions that were formed at the very beginning of this master project are not the questions I ended up with. I spent a lot of time going back and forth between the empirical data and the questions to ensure that the questions asked were possible to answer based on the empirical data. This is an important feature in strengthening the validity of the thesis (see Tjora, 2017). I also spent considerable time investigating whether the answers found in the data were answers to the questions asked. This can be relatively challenging within an interpretive methodology.

Grounding the thesis on only one case may weaken the chances of transferability and credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Case studies concerned with an exceedingly small number of cases may find it challenging to create a pattern and further make any claim for generalisations (Risjord, 2014). Several researchers are also critical of the use of just interview data (Atkinson, 2015; Hammersley, 2017; Silverman, 2017). The main task for my study is to legitimise the choices I have made along the way and point towards academic relevance, supported by previous research and selected theories. By shedding light on one case of a low SES school, this research can be relevant for other schools of a similar kind and similar socio-demographic environment. The open-ended approach presented at the end of Chapter 2 (see Figure 1) is also an opportunity to work with analytical generalisation and explore earlier claims made on the nature of social bonds in a context of inclusion and exclusion.

### 3.5 The process of analysis

I took inspiration from categorical analysis. A categorical analysis is useful because many category systems are rooted in organisations, such as the education system. Categories are anchored in systems that may have several levels and be characterised by formalisation and anchored in organisations (Johannessen, Rafoss, & Rasmussen, 2018). The school is an organisation that is on several different levels simultaneously.

The analysis is structured as a narrative based on the informants' experiences and perceptions to shed light on the questions asked in the thesis. All the content and information stems from the interviews and has been retold through paraphrases and direct quotations. The interviews are influenced by the merger, which may have had an impact on some of the informants' answers to the questions asked. It is conceivable that different answers could have been given if they had not gone through a merger. The work with the analysis has taken place over several stages.

#### *3.5.1 Stages of analysis*

The first stage involved reading over the interviews and getting to know the content of the material. During the reading of the material, I wrote down thoughts and reflections to get a better overview, as well as to remember the interviews better. A draft of the research questions was made in this sense. In addition, I reflected on my theoretical pre-knowledge of this field of research, and I started to think of some theoretical approaches. The material was also discussed with other members of the research group. It was also through this process of discussions that the research questions were altered.

In the second stage, codes were created (see Table 1) based on the theme and the research questions. After selecting a set of codes, the work was set out to re-read the interviews whilst performing coding of the material. Reading the material several times made it easier to know what to look for and how to sort the material into categories of codes. The coding was conducted with the coding of several words or whole sentences or even paragraphs. The reasoning for this was to get the essence and content of the informants' narratives by conducting a "close empirical coding" (Tjora, 2018). It was especially important to ensure that significant statements did not get lost. At the same time, since this thesis has an interpretative framework, it was important to code longer statements to interpret them in the right context. Here I used the abductive methods (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) and went back and forth between an

inductive and deductive approach, and between the data and theories. I found it useful to compare the material with existing theories and to look at the empirical content and the theoretical continuously.

*Table 1. Coding system*

<b>Colour</b>	<b>Code Group</b>	<b>Description</b>
Blue	Social inclusion and social bonds	How the school thinks about and practices social inclusion and social bonds. This includes direct and indirect descriptions of how they practise and think about inclusion, relationships and relationships building. These elements slightly overlap in the interviews and have therefore been given the same code. This code was used the most.
Yellow	Mercury school as an organisation	How the school is organised and works from day to day i.e., how the classroom and teaching are organised, how the collaboration is between the different school sectors like SFO (Norwegian Before- and After-School Programs) and the teachers, and practices in general. This code reflects the actual academic practice taking place.
Green	External actors	Actors outside the school, such as municipal agencies and support agencies, and the university collaboration. This includes PPT (Norwegian Pedagogical and Psychological Services) and BFT (Norwegian Child and Family Services) and planned measures from the municipality. This code was not used as much.
Pink	Information about the informants or the school	Personal information or subjective interpretations of the informants, and information about the school i.e., how long the informants have worked at the school, earlier work experience if they are from the school district, and different dates and years relevant to this context, like the year of the merger. This code was used the least in the analysis due to anonymisation and privacy and was intended to provide me with information to better understand the context.

The category system I created (see Table 1) was given different colour codes. Initially, four categories were created. Eventually, it became clear that the codes blue and yellow had the most relevance, while the codes pink and green were used the least. The green code was useful for understanding the collaboration between the school and external actors and was used somewhat in the thesis, but not to a great extent.

The third stage consisted of a code grouping. Here, all the coding was initially gathered under the associated code group to get an overall impression. It turned out to be a challenge as several of the coding could have ended up within different code groups. These code groups are categories that to some extent merge into each other. Therefore, I was attentive to demarcation to ensure that the categories became less permeable (Johannessen et al., 2018). For example, the yellow code addresses how the school is organised and how they work. This school organisation requires cooperation between different actors, and this cooperation can be reflected in social bonds and relationships. Here it became important to make a distinction between organisational practice and what happens relationally between the actors which is the case in the blue code. This code (blue) could with its advantage have been divided into two different colours because it bypasses two different categories, but it was often difficult to differentiate between them in the interviews. Most of the time, social inclusion and social bonds were talked about in the same contexts. The solution was to interpret and make a distinction between what was social inclusion and what were social bonds in the code grouping.

Besides the fact that the blue code should have been assigned two different colours, colour coding has been useful to me. It is a way of creating a coding system that gives a larger overall picture when all the coding is gathered under the same coding group. At the same time, it is easy to return to the code groups if more information is needed. It is also a good manual alternative.

## 4. Analysis

The analysis is centred around the two research questions in Chapter 1 and is therefore divided into two main parts (4.2 and 4.3). Although the analysis is primarily based on these research questions, other relevant findings are also presented and analysed, such as the organisational changes that took place during the interviews, and a distinctive feature of the school district in the form of a real drive and sense of privilege to be part of a school like Mercury. The analysis reveals that the merger has a significant impact on the school's structures and social relations. Social inclusion at the school takes on a holistic form and it is disclosed some variations in the ties and social bonds among the school actors.

### 4.1 Organisational changes

Schools may be seen at the juncture between the system world (read organisations) and the life-world (lived living). Not only do they struggle between these two worlds, but they must also live up to conflicting expectations (Bachmann & Haug, 2006; Habermas, 1987). On top of this, in our school case, the Mercury school went through a larger organisational merger which led to the need to define a new common culture and organisational vision. The school leaders at the Mercury school speak of demanding times where they have gone from being “two small ships” to becoming “a very huge tanker that takes much longer to turn” (School Leader 2).

“Then we were merged in 2018... then we became [Mercury school] and increased the number of students by 100 per cent and increased the number of employees from 35 to 140. So *that* transition has been huge. It has been very huge. And it has been a little demanding at times because then we had [two different cultures] that were to become one culture in a way. But basically, they are not so different, the two cultures, they are quite similar really, because they have quite the same field of application, that is the same student body” (School Leader 1).

This is a kind of organisational project that not only changes and increases the composition of people but also challenges structural and organisational principles. Being able to keep sustainable social relations and bonds is critical for specific groups of students and critical at certain times, especially when students are adapting to a new school setting (cf. Juvonen, 2006). However, the teachers do express difficulties in going from small units to a single large unit. They describe it as more challenging to accommodate all the students in the new organisation and to have a full overview of the students in the transition process, due to the physical distance between the different sites of the school in 2019/20. The physical distance derived from being

placed in different buildings has also created a new and different culture in the organisation. However, this is a temporary culture that eventually will change and become a unified culture when the merger is complete.

In addition, the school leaders report little understanding from the administrative body of the municipality of the challenges involved in merging schools and building a new school. This is a criticism that the municipality lacks organisational understanding and what it means to organise a large organisation like this school. The teachers also elaborate that there has been little participation in easing the organisational merger and that this new situation is something they must arrange and figure out on their own. Even though they do not feel that they are fully understood by the municipality, they place confidence in the building of a better school, especially after becoming a part of a university school collaboration. This collaboration includes several research projects adapted and specially made for the area. The leaders hope that this collaboration will be a boost for the school as an organisation and facilitate the integration process. Although the collaboration has several missions, the main goal is to create a good organisation in the area.

It is nevertheless a collective perception of almost all the employees at the Mercury school that they miss being part of a smaller staff group because it creates less distance and more cohesion. This is particularly clear in the context of discussions concerning the development of the new organisation. Disagreements in the discussions have created space for a necessary culture of openness among the employees in doing something new to create a new school. The distance between the staff has created some divisions, which is expected, but the collaboration has also gone better than they expected.

“But then you have, as many people have said, that it has gone better than expected. We have managed to align in a better way than we thought. And we do have common goals, and that makes the job a little easier when you are working for the same thing” (Social Worker 3).

Despite the difficulties associated with the merger, the collaboration is working well so far, and common goals and visions are some of the driving forces behind it. The school leaders emphasise continuing the work with what is most important, the students and their teachers.

“Of course, with a smaller organisation you experience that you are closer to the teacher organisation, and I want to be closer, but I don’t feel I have achieved it in the same way now. So, it’s a transformation for all of us and figuring out ways to do it. So that we have more focus on the primary task which is the kids ‘learning processes and the teachers and employees’ learning processes” (School Leader 3).

This shows how a massive increase in the student body and a quadrupling of the staff members have effects on, among other things, collegial cohesion. It is reported to create a greater distance between the employees, and perhaps between the teachers and the students. Also, a large amount of people scattered across different places creates obstacles in that the staff are not able to get to know all the students. Consequently, it may have an impact on how the staff understand and work with social bonds and social inclusion in the new organisation.

#### 4.2 Understandings of inclusion

The understanding of social inclusion at the Mercury school is more comprehensive than found in much special pedagogy and narratives of inclusive education. Both the leaders and the staff share a view that inclusion must be based on more comprehensive equality, justice, and equivalence.

Several of the staff define inclusion in terms of being fair teachers and seeing the students on an equal footing as the adults. One teacher expresses a more conventional welfare view of inclusion as using all available resources for each child to strengthen the child’s overall well-being. In line with this, another staff member believes that what is most important is to acquire knowledge to understand the difficulties the students may have and show that they see the students so that the students feel they are seen. In this school, inclusion is also associated with cultural diversity, where diversity is seen as a resource rather than a problem.

“It will be, we are very much characterised by many religions, many differences so that we get a slightly higher umbrella. It has to be, a little like a rainbow, a little like that, and that’s positive. And that there is a positive development on that part, yes, this is something that adds to us that is good” (Teacher 3).



Rather than a narrow idea of inclusion in the classroom, several of the staff members at the Mercury school refer to the importance of bringing in the entire neighbourhood, the local sports team, the library, as well as the parents into a narrative of social inclusion. This is also an approach that blends in well with the official school strategy to be an active player and resource in the community. This strategy is about creating stronger children's communities and moves away from conventional practices where only the school and the families are responsible for the children's upbringing. It is everyone's responsibility to be good role models for the children, and it requires communication across units, organisations, and agencies.

“So having that shared responsibility then, and thinking that it's our children, and not mine and yours. I think that's very nice, and I think it's time to think that way, sort of” (Social Worker 3).

There is great adherence and support for this strategy among the employees. Part of the reason comes from their understanding that inclusion is particularly important for this school. They have a common awareness of the area they are in and what is needed to achieve their inclusion mission. Within this understanding lies a significant feature, the students' parents.

#### *4.2.1 Parents roles*

The staff's broader and extensive understanding of inclusion above is heavily relying on how to mobilise and empower the children's parents. A recurring theme among the employees is a collective understanding that it is needed more cooperation with the parents at Mercury school compared to other schools.

“I think it's important to get everyone involved, but of course, we don't succeed all the time. It is a continuous work, but it is about getting hold of things when difficult things arise. The fact that you dare to take up a matter and talk to the parents, and yeah, bring up things at parent meetings that are a little difficult, et cetera. And maybe map out what the needs are in the parent group, so they can support their students the best way possible, both emotionally and academically” (School Leader 3).

In this quotation, one of the school leaders stresses the importance of being open about difficult matters and creating a joint plan for what can be done. In line with this, we find a strategy that pays much attention to knowing what goes on in the students' homes. The staff at the Mercury school cannot do or change much about the home situations of the students, but they can create

a safe arena and stable structure for the students when they are at the school. If it is chaotic at home, it is particularly important to help secure the daily life of the students or at least make sure that it is not chaotic when they come to school.

“It’s important that I know that the kids are doing well when they are at school. If there are things they struggle with at home, and it is for several of them, that they get that freedom when they are at school” (Teacher 4).

It is also reported that students seek out contact with the staff, slightly more than before. There is a perceived need among the students which may be due to a lack of access to adult relations elsewhere. These are some examples of the many roles and tasks teachers in a low SES school may have to secure children’s sense of belonging to the school (cf. Juvonen, 2006). These measures are seen as especially important for students who come from socially vulnerable homes where the parents may struggle socially, psychologically, or financially. There are also family circumstances that increase the need for social support and teacher involvement beyond the classroom to meet the needs of the students beyond traditional academic teaching.

“But it’s this with... seeing the student in a completely different way, that with perhaps not highlighting the academic, not focusing on the academic strengths, but more on the socio-cultural, that is, this integration image, and create unity or create a community... So, the academic part was perhaps not so important then. It is important, but not the most important. I think that was something I learned at [Mercury] school” (School Leader 1).

The emphasis at the Mercury school is in many cases placed on socio-cultural rather than academic achievements. In line with the quote above, it is more important to prioritise the creation of group cohesion and a community before the more traditional educational part can take place. It is a matter of setting up self-confidence in the students which eventually may develop into inner motivation.

“We must know some about the needs and the data, but we must find talent in the children as well. So, it’s not just about how well they do in maths or reading or... “(School Leader 3).

“You see the students from completely different points of view, and you experience them completely differently, and that is very positive. So, subjects are important, yes, but different types of subjects, then” (Teacher 4).

Although school subjects and basic school knowledge are essential, it is of more importance that they accept each other the way they are and can create something together. It is equally important that the students work together on a performance over an extended period where a fellowship is created in another arena because they get the chance to express something different about themselves. Education is important, but if you do not manage to get along with other people in a community, then the education does not get you very far, it is reported. The socio-cultural part becomes predominant when it comes to existing in a multicultural school context.

“And I feel like we often talk about that, how to understand people, and how to respect the culture they carry with them, and the luggage, or the backpack some children here can carry with them - and I don’t think only about foreign children, inclusion is so much more than just that of minority language speakers. This one I react very strongly to, [the one] where people associate inclusion with [only] minority language speakers because that’s not what inclusion is, I think” (Social Worker 3).

Even in a school context where there is a considerable amount of attention towards minority language speakers and a multicultural environment, it is emphasised that it is not enough to just integrate everyone into the community and that something more is needed. An expanded understanding of inclusion is needed, and the extended version of inclusion at the Mercury school is understood in a framework of getting the parents involved, creating a safe space for the students at the school, and focusing on social cohesion. Both the teachers and the leadership at the Mercury school also interpret their inclusion mission as building social skills among students in need of extra support due to the lack of family resources or family support.

#### *4.2.2 Social inclusion in school practice*

The school leadership shares a view of social inclusion in school practice based on active participation and integration in the class. Students are staying with their class and their classmates and are not taken out of class: “We have to think through groups, and that we do not take out one and one student at a time,” explains one of the leaders. A key in this inclusion practice is that the students should feel that they are part of a community. By doing it this way, they have organised the everyday school life of the children differently and they believe that this is the right way to do it.

“I’m scared... that’s why I’m concerned that most things should happen in the community. This is also what more children have confidence in. It varies, after all, who they need to talk to. For some, it’s natural to talk to someone else in cases, but I think a lot is resolved in the classroom. I’m a little sceptical of such alternative teaching outside the classroom. The teaching should be so good that it embraces everyone, it should be that good. But of course, there are exceptions” (School Leader 3).

This also resonates with what is conveyed by the social workers. Instead of focusing on smaller groups and a parallel teaching process in parts of the teaching for the students, they want to implement special education into the nary teaching as much as possible. Several of the teachers also want to keep the teaching assembled in the classroom and have the intention of learning in a community and facilitate adapted teaching within this community whenever they can. They want, as far as possible, the adapted education takes place in the classroom. Flexibility is a key word here.

“I try to adapt in the community, [and] create arrangements and tasks that embrace a wide range, where everyone can meet challenges that are adapted to themselves and work out from their own level. It’s an intention I have... even though we try to differentiate in the community, we also have the opportunity to divide a little and yeah, [divide] is where we see it as most fitting” (Teacher 2).

Both adapted education and special education are attempted to be organised jointly in the classroom. “The line between special education and adapted education is not so clear. Adapted education must be provided by everyone” (Social Worker 1). Adapting within a community is most likely done everywhere. That the lines are unclear between special education and adapted education may mean that there are small structural framework differences between them. Adapted education is reported to be associated with flexibility among the staff members and the ability to reach more students and include them in ordinary teaching.

This idea of inclusion in the classroom may nonetheless be challenging due to a gap in school skills among the students: “When you have few in the middle, and many at both ends then ... it’s a challenge” (Teacher 2). This gap illustrates a need for a flexible school arrangement. One arrangement is not guaranteed to be suitable for all students, whether it is planned by the teaching staff at the Mercury school or by the municipal authorities. There seems to be an understanding of these matters among the school leaders and staff.

Despite this, we still find a culture of openness and willingness to try out alternative teaching methods so that the needs of the individual students are met. We also find a culture of inclusion based on group inclusion and social cohesion in the classroom strengthening the social bonds between teachers and their students.

The school vision is to create a strong community in the classroom with room for both differences and diversity. The learning environment, however, is demanding for both teachers and students. In an ideal world, every student should be grouped by their level of competence, but this is rarely possible given the enormous resources required to achieve it. Still, there is broad agreement on the principles of conducting as much of the teaching as possible during ordinary teaching hours.

#### 4.3 Social bonds in a school context

Social bonds are fundamental when it comes to building relationships between people (Ahrne, 2021). The bonds at the Mercury school are not limited to those between teachers and students or students, but it is also between the Mercury school as an organisation and its environment. While all these types of social bonds are important, it is the organisational ties and bonds that are of special interest in this study, including how they are kept based on social trust.

##### *4.3.1 The importance of social trust*

All members of the leadership team at the Mercury school talk about the importance of trust. This entails creating trust in their ability to run the school, but also trust in the teachers. Additionally, trust needs to be established in the students, but also among the parents and in the district. Creating and keeping trust is a continuous work that must take place for the parents to trust the school and for the trust to be kept in the district. The general idea of the leadership is that building high levels of trust in the school, makes it easier for the school and staff to work as a key-actor in the local environment. This is also looked upon as a key to how to include children in the school context.

“Yes, but my loyalty goes to the principal and the kids. I’m completely loyal to the principal, but that’s about my insane trust and that I know [them] so well. While the ones we should have the greatest loyalty to are the kids. We should have loyalty to the Trondheim municipality, but sometimes it’s the kids who take the lead if I experience that it does not coincide” (School Leader 2).

This clearly shows how important it is for the Mercury school and its leadership to give priority to the student's well-being and do what they believe is best for them. It has also been reported that it is often the teachers and staff that the students trust and rely on since there may be shortcomings in adult relationships elsewhere. As a result, the trust, and social bonds between the leaders to the students, are strong. This is also a relationship believed to create security for the students and give them increased self-confidence.

“No, I think that we have the opportunity to give them a kind of security, that is, that you create a good relationship and give them the belief that they can succeed. I think that's important. And then I think maybe I am a person who also manages to have good relationships with those who may need the extra and give them the belief that they can succeed” (School Leader 1).

Social support and security among students and teachers are considered essential for functioning in the Mercury school, especially for the younger students. If students feel unsupported or disconnected, their achievements and motivations are expected to drop significantly. Based on this assumption, we may expect that students who perceive their school as supportive and feel connected, are more likely to do it well in school (cf. Juvonen, 2006). A sense of belonging and social support is closely related to the development of relationships and social bonds between the students and the teachers.

#### *4.3.2 Teacher-student social bonds*

Some students find it easy to interact with their fellow students and teachers, while others struggle to fit in and find their place and connections. The teacher-student relationship at the Mercury school is seen as important for the younger students, especially for students who are displaying early behaviour problems, come from disadvantaged family backgrounds, or have low grades.

In all the interviews with the teachers, we find a desire to have a relationship with the students. All of them are contact teachers so they have a closer relationship with the students. A desire is expressed for warm and close relationships with the students, and they believe that it is mutual on the part of the students. One of the teachers expresses that they are good at backing each other up in difficult situations. Not only is it the teachers who back up the students, but the students also back up the teachers.

“They are [x]th graders now. And it works just fine. ‘Yes, shall we help you? Yes, can we help you with something? Can I go out with the trash? Can I...’ So, they take responsibility together with us, and I think that helps to build them up” (Teacher 4).

Here, a form of mutual team play is expressed between the students and the teachers. This teacher also describes a relationship with the students reminding us of Gilbert’s (1992, 2014) description of plural subjects and joint commitment. Part of the reason, explained by the teacher, is that several of the students have difficult home settings and parents who struggle in their ways, but also a culture of openness to air difficulties in life. This is also an example of a culture of inclusion that creates space for meaningful conversations that help strengthen the bonds between the participants. A culture of openness and meaningful conversations is also illustrated through the fact that the employees prioritise setting aside time for the students if they want or need to talk to them. It is also expressed that it does not only have to be the teachers that the students talk to, but it can also be the social workers or the school leaders.

“They’re pulling towards us because if they come to us, we always set aside time for them ... We also have measures where children have talked to a department head because the child has been attached to that department head, and then they talk together twice a week. So, you hear that we don’t have a specific system for that, but it’s a bit about who kids choose too” (Social Worker 1).

Through this quotation, a prioritisation of the work with social bonds is expressed through the students being able to choose which adults to talk to. It is a matter of who the students develop social bonds with, and which of the employees the students feel they can trust. Yet, despite all the active inclusion work taking place at the Mercury school the teachers also report a more demanding student group than in the past, including quarrels and disputes. This is also evident through an increasing need for referrals to external bodies. Some of the disputes are related to students challenging the teacher’s authority, but a lot of this is simply seen as, over the years, more empowered children able to raise their voices.

“But there is a reason why they do it, it’s kids who have needs, I think, but that type of needs only becomes more and more, that’s my impression. More and more diagnoses... more and more expert assessments” (Teacher 1).

As a result, the teachers refer to frustration over the situation they are in, but they still understand that the students' actions are their way of showing who they are as individuals and a reflection of their life situation. This is reported to be challenging by the teachers as it requires adaptation and facilitation and is also shown in an increased need for expert assessments. Even if the statistics of students in need of special assessment and extra support is on the rise, it is not necessarily seen as a higher share of students struggling among the teachers. One explanation mentioned by one of the social workers is that they may have become more adept at referring to and seeing the students due to more acquired knowledge and understanding of the composition that exists in the school district.

Another alternative explanation mentioned by the teachers why more students are acting out refers to a demanding school merger, where teachers end up in a situation where it may be difficult to pay as much attention to children's individual needs. It has also been difficult for some of the students to adapt to the increase in the number of fellow students, especially at SFO (Norwegian Before- and After-School Programs) where the number of students doubled. In this setting, it will be a new and different group of new peers to relate to, which will form a new everyday school life, both for the students and the teachers. Consequently, some children may feel that the ties and social bonds are not what they used to be and voice their discontent and protest more openly.

This blend of students is relatively characteristic during this merger process, and it may create some noise in the following years. When first graders start school, they will be a mix of all the old schools from the start, and this will recreate the "norm" situation for the Mercury school. In the meantime, the staff try to work for the students to get to know each other across groups and classes and make it as natural as possible.

"So, it's very difficult to say how to do it, like determined, but you just have to look at it ... you have to consider so many things to make it happen, you can't just put them in a gymnasium; 'Here you go, here's a ball for you, now play together' sort of. You have to think about how to organise it so that most [of them] get the best possible benefit [from it]" (Social Worker 3).

Finding out which students are most compatible with each other in different school settings requires that the staff become familiar with the new student groups and their characteristics as a group. This requires a lot of work and may take time with trial and error in the beginning.



Therefore, the importance of safe adults around the students during this transition phase is also reported. Safe adults around the students and the opportunity to create social bonds come, among other things, from sufficient collaboration among the employees.

#### *4.3.3 Collaboration between the teaching staff*

An essential part of the collaboration between the employees at the Mercury school is the ability to communicate. Consistent communication flow and role clarifications are reported by all the staff members. Using each other in the best way possible among the staff is not just about who is the best teacher in, for example, mathematics, it is also about the students receiving the best out of the teachers, as well as all the other staff members. One of the school leaders refers to the management's role as traffic controllers:

“What’s my role? My role is that I’m the air traffic controller at an airport and the teachers are the pilots who will do the most important job. As an air traffic controller, my job is to make it possible for the pilots to concentrate on their job, which is ‘connection’ with the kids – it’s about ensuring learning and that the kids are doing well” (School Leader 2).

There are clear boundaries and clarification between the various roles that the employees hold at the school. The role clarification helps to place the resources where they are most important, which is with the students. In addition, the management thinks it is important to give the teachers constructive and positive feedback on the work they do.

“We have teachers who come and cry, you know because they feel they’re not enough because there’s so many social challenges here in the classes. So, I think what I would’ve said is that they do a wonderful job even if it doesn’t always feel that way, sometimes it feels like you have failed. But it’s important to give them support in that the job [they’re doing] is good. Because there are many social challenges, it is” (School Leader 1).

Support and approval are keywords in the language of cooperation among employees. One school leader also mentions the difficulties of meeting the challenges that arise and says that it is important that teachers do not stand alone in these cases. This is a belief that is widely circulated among the employees at the Mercury school. There is room to talk to some of the others in the staff group if needed. Additionally, if some of the employees have suggestions or ideas regarding various matters, they feel like the others hear them out and they can implement

their ideas if possible. This indicates that inclusion also has a strong anchor within the college, both when it comes to relying on each other, and when it comes to speaking their mind about various matters.

The main narrative is that open communication between the teachers, social workers and the management enables the teachers to find solutions among themselves rather than being instructed from above. There is a low threshold for discussing issues locally at the unit before matters are taken further to, for example, PPT or BFT. It is also a narrative where the teachers as a team are in full control of the students' learning and general well-being. This is also a view shared among the staff describing the social ties among the staff as closer than in most other schools.

“The teachers discuss it with us because that’s how we do it: if the teachers are worried about a student, they discuss it in teams first so that the others keep an eye on the student, then it is discussed again before they talk to us” (Social Worker 1).

“If I’m wondering about someone, I’ll talk to my 5-6 colleagues about it, and they do the same, then we put a plan together concerning that we have to keep an extra eye on the situation moving forward. We experience that this and that child, “I wonder if it’s like that”, “no, I have never thought of that”, says a teacher who is in [school] for as many hours as I am. And it gives room then, to talk together, come up with a plan, look at the children with several eyes over time” (Teacher 1).

This refers to an emphasis on the fact that it is a matter of “our children” at the Mercury school. This is also a narrative echoed in several interviews. Even if the Mercury school at the time of the study were in different spaces it still runs with a strong team of teachers; “I think we are able to work closely, with the circumstances taken into account” (Social Worker 1). Another narrative is a culture of openness and room for discussion. This is seen as a buffer to solve problems and come up with collective, rather than individual measures. The interviews also reveal a culture among the teachers of good communication, and mutual support, including stepping in for each other when needed. The culture also involves close relationships with the possibility of phone calls to colleagues where the distance is seen as short. Despite a strong sense of support among peers, the teachers also wish they have better competence to meet the challenges of each of their students:

“Challenges are perhaps when you feel that you don’t have enough expertise on kids that you actually really want to help. This is where I might feel that I have... yeah. Academically, I now think that I have managed to keep up, and I think I have managed to cope with the students, but it is this thing to really be able to help” (Teacher 4).

The lack of competence among the teachers is especially pronounced when it comes to how to manage students with extra needs, including how to proceed in difficult cases where external specialist service is needed. A good starting point is therefore to have the parents on their team.

#### *4.3.4 The parents*

As already shown above, the importance of getting the parents involved in school matters has a high priority at the Mercury school. With a diverse parent group, there are several situations to consider for the employees, but communication and keeping the relationships are reported as most important.

“I think we are pretty much in agreement ... that we have to know something about the parents if we are to do a good enough job for their children. This is also something we try to convey to the parents, that we as teachers have no chance if we don’t get the parents on as team partners” (Teacher 1).

The teacher above experiences that most parents are great at communicating school-relevant matters, but also that some do not tell anything, which results in the teacher not knowing anything about them either. Consequently, the teachers use a lot of time and energy to create trust and collaboration with the parents that tend to keep a distance from the school and seldom attend parental meetings.

“First of all, you have to make arrangements for it to be okay to come to the parent meeting. And then you have to work a little with it, think a little and you have to ask yourself then: ‘Why did she not come, what could be the reason for that?’ And then some answer that they think it’s difficult and thinks it’s uncomfortable, and then you have to try to assure them that it’s okay, and you succeed with that sometimes, and sometimes not” (Teacher 2).

The students’ parents are not a homogeneous group, but highly diverse, with active parents heavily involved in their children’s schooling and school affairs, as well as parents with low trust in official institutions based on negative experiences in the past. As building trust is a long-

term project demanding much patience and hard work, this is also an investment in establishing social ties and eventually also social bonds between the school and the parents of the students. The work may best be described as a mix of soft pressure (as in the cases with teachers contacting the parents) and a formal request made by the principal, in cases where it may be more difficult to involve the parents to be in active communication with the school. The problem with disinterested parents is less than in the past according to our informants. The teachers are also reporting that the parents have become better collaborators and more secure in their roles as parents.

A substantial part of the parents is reported to be illiterate or not able to master Norwegian. Language challenges are a recurring topic in the interviews. Several conflicts may arise because of language barriers such as interpreters being seen as a barrier to free communication among some parents. Yet, it has also been reported that some parents come to the parent meetings even though they do not know the Norwegian language very well. There are some variations. The language challenges are also reflected in the students who mostly speak their first language at home because their parents do not speak Norwegian. This may contribute to the Norwegian language not being as well integrated with the students.

Differences in cultures, especially when it comes to how to best raise a child, combined with negative attitudes towards the school system in their home countries, are also reported to be a potential barrier to school-parent collaboration.

#### *4.3.5 Ties outside the school and SFO*

Another important feature of the Mercury school is the social ties and bonds that the school has set up with other local actors in the district. These are external social ties and bonds that are considered essential for the inclusion of the students by the school leadership. This includes a good collaboration with the library, the local sports team, and a local youth club with which they have monthly contact.

“So, the important thing is that we as a school also have that contact with other organisations that are in the immediate area, because alone as a school, I think it’s difficult. Because the school day is from 09:00 to 14:30, even then it’s a long time left of the day [laughs briefly]” (School Leader 1).

“We in [Mercury school] have been very unique, the cooperation we have with the sports teams, not many people have that” (Social Worker 3).

Several of the school partners contact the school regularly to report on their work, but also to ask for advice on how they can organise their work better, including how to group students that may benefit from being together. Several projects have also been conducted by the library, based on the view that creating a cultural space for the students after school is necessary. As this is based on active collaboration between the school, it may also be seen as an extension of organisational ties for all parties.

Beyond the important collaborations externally, the collaboration internally with SFO is also important for the students and staff at the Mercury School. SFO is an organisation that allows students to be in an arena at school before the teaching starts, and a few hours after the school day is over. This part of the school has also been affected by the merger and is experiencing organisational challenges both with the spread of people and allocation of premises, as well as a new and altered student body. The general impression from the employees at the Mercury school is that there is a varying perception of how well the collaboration works between SFO and the school, considering the merger. What there is less doubt about is how important SFO is for the students and the opportunity-creating structures that form the basis of this arena.

“SFO is also a great opportunity where kids can use new parts of themselves in a different way. Maybe lower your shoulders a little and have other people saying what they should do and who are passionate about other interests” (School Leader 3).

SFO creates an arena for students to unfold in different ways compared to everyday life in the classroom. It opens a room for freedom and more playful activities. It is reported that some students function better in a context where they can act with freer rein where the social is in focus rather than the academic at school, especially for those students who struggle to concentrate in the classroom. This is also shown by the fact that they need less follow-up of the staff at SFO than they do in class. They need fewer adult resources and can function as independent actors. This means that SFO gets a more important role for the students at the Mercury school.

“There may be some who don’t see the importance of SFO. Not that I have experienced something like this directly with some people here at the school or some teachers or something like that, but in general I think people are unaware of how important SFO is for the kids and what it does with kids” (Social Worker 3).

The concept of SFO has been reflected in a common perception at the Mercury school that it is important to follow up and see the student throughout the day. The staff also experience that some students benefit from a change in which adults are with them throughout the day. When they arrive at SFO, they meet other adults with who they have not been in the classroom all day. While for other students, SFO may be experienced as more chaotic due to this change of surroundings and change of people they must relate to. In addition, there is less structure and fixed routines at SFO. It is a leisure arena where it is up to the students to decide what they want to do, and it can be experienced as chaotic for some children, especially during the period of the merger, it is reported. This also runs in parallel with the goal of joint use between SFO and the school.

“I am against joint use, SFO-school, and that’s mostly about that the arena the students have in a classroom, where I’m the boss, where it’s this and those rules that apply. And the kids are fully aware of that when I’m there. And then SFO comes and uses the same room, and SFO is meant to be a little freer, with more freedom of choice and all that, but then the kids are in exactly the same room, but with two sets of wildly different rules” (Teacher 1).

That the same premises and rooms are being used for teaching and SFO has created an ambivalence among the employees at the Mercury school. Some do not think it is as wise because it may arise confusion among the students with role clarification between the staff and what rules apply where, in addition to making this transition in general. However, others believe that this solution will be effective for the organisation, but that it requires more planning and innovation. In addition to changing premises and temporary rooms to manage, both the staff and the students must become familiar with a new student body.

“SFO has been extra demanding and that’s because the kids in that arena meet each other crosswise to a greater extent. There is a little more structure and control through the school day, so the SFO becomes a little freer - but for that freedom to work, there must be structures there as well” (School Leader 3).

It is told that SFO has several transitions internally with several rooms and different activities that the students can conduct. This may lead to students not always knowing what to do, which may create some unrest. Therefore, the employees at SFO have organised the arena for there to be fixed activities on set days to create more structure. In addition, the difference between the school and SFO during this merger was that they chose to keep the class composition from the old schools in the classroom teaching, while at SFO the students were mixed because this is an open and common arena for all students. Additionally, the Mercury school has “free core time” at SFO, which opens an offer and the opportunity for more students to be included in the scheme. This leads to equalisation with equal offers for families regardless of income, as well as an arena that is accessible to all students, which further helps to strengthen the children’s communities. On the other hand, this sets a direction for more pressure on the staff at SFO, as it explicitly means a larger scope of students to organise the arena for, especially after the merger. It is explained that almost 90 per cent of the students between 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade make use of the SFO arrangements.

“It’s a huge SFO... and there have also been disagreements within the college, about whether the free core time is a good thing or not a good thing. And that’s about the fact that SFO is a huge resource, and that with getting... that all the kids should have an offer and have an opportunity to go to SFO” (Teacher 2).

Thus, the challenge is to be able to offer all students the place at SFO they have been given, and it is about enough resources and employees in positions that allow them to get to know the student body properly. Furthermore, it is reported that different practices between the school and SFO lead to different views on the organisation of the school life of the students. “Clearly the school sees something and SFO sees something else” (Teacher 2). Two different arenas may practice inclusion and bond building in different ways. It creates differences between academic learning and socialisation, even though the social is also heavily emphasised at the Mercury school, the academic part has a lesser degree at SFO.

#### 4.4 A burning heart for the neighbourhood

To be a teacher or run a school like the Mercury school is not just a job but it is also a call to influence as an adult in society. This is a school district where different types of challenges and a diversity that varies widely, are the driving force of many.

“But, no, so that was perhaps the biggest experience of coming to [Mercury school], there were big social differences, that is, among the students. Which also perhaps made me think that it was more interesting even, that I felt I made a difference” (School Leader 2).

“... Sometimes you become a bit like the only one. Their only support in a way. That rock, a little, for some kids. It’s meaningful. For me, the job must be meaningful. But then there is, I’m here because I want ... to make a difference ... and give something” (Teacher 3).

To work at a low SES school requires being open to the acquisition of new knowledge and thinking broadly while encountering differences. It is not just based on ideals but requires a real personal drive and a willingness and interest to be involved in a highly diverse student body:

“You have kids who represent the whole world ... yes, I think it’s really cool to work at [Mercury school] because you have that diversity that you may not have anywhere else, or to the same extent ...” (Social Worker 3).

Several of the teachers, social workers, and leaders at the Mercury school claim that their work is not only important in terms of what they do but also describe it as a privilege to work with students in an area in constant flux. Rather than viewing social and cultural diversity as a problem, it is in the words of one of the teachers a positive and rewarding job that: “(I) would not be without it, for better or worse”. They associate their work with a greater environment for opportunities to acquire more knowledge and experience with different types of social and educational difficulties. This is not a job without a cost but is described as educational for both staff and the students in the classroom.

“I’m a bit passionate about jobs that have the kind of challenges that are here. I am passionate about that district here, and I like working with great diversity both among employees and children. I also like the groups where it’s most difficult to reach. It’s something that I think is an exciting challenge, even though it’s not easy, it has become my ‘heart child’ has it” (School Leader 3).

Despite some challenges associated with diversity, the school also experiences benefits from the variety that exists. In an organisation with a wide range of characteristics, it opens to a culture with greater acceptance and understanding of each other, and even greater chances for



finding resemblance. This organisation of people eventually becomes part of their normal practice and everyone belonging to the organisation acclimatised to it.

“If you come with a family consultation that’s not quite [the norm], then there’s probably someone who has something similar at home. If anyone has a diagnosis, we have a broad diagnosis picture, so you’re not alone. If you have an ‘individual decision’ with special education, you are not exactly alone there either” (Social Worker 1).

In this school, they find a community by bonding over similarities within the family and school relationships. This creates more openness and a lower threshold for talking about topics that may be constricted elsewhere. In line with this, several of the staff make comparisons with other schools and a unique opportunity to be able to support students with various needs. One teacher describes it as having a completely different role as a teacher with a special focus on the social dimension of teaching. Another teacher elaborates that many of their students probably would be worse off socially if they were to go to another school with less room for differences and cultural diversity. Being surrounded by student peers either born outside of Norway or raised by parents with an immigrant background and 30-40 languages, allow for an open school culture based on diversity and tolerance for differences.

“But I saw the value of living in a district like this. This is something my kids say today that has done something to them. This is to live in an environment where there is a bit more diversity and to have friends in different layers. This is something I think is important for everyone in the future” (School Leader 3).

This is described in the interviews as a broader societal mandate and a commitment to play an active role in building the community inside and outside of the school. As a school found in a low SES area, there is also a lot of prejudice, according to the teachers and the school leadership. Rather than confirming negative views of the school and the area the teachers tend to emphasise the bright side of working in this area, and of working in one of the best schools in the city. Therefore, there is broad support for getting research into the district.

“I think getting research into this district is incredibly important. I talked a bit about rumours earlier, and it quickly becomes myths from the outside about a district like this. Gaining a kind of credibility by working closely with the research community and legitimacy concerning the work we do” (School Leader 3).

Collaboration with researchers and research-based practice is both seen as a means to get an even better school and to be recognised as a school and institution. This is reported to be important for everyone involved in the school, but also for the district. Research collaboration is looked upon as an opportunity to bring in competence that they do not necessarily have themselves and to discuss things that are important to them in everyday life.

Regardless of the opportunities to acquire broader competence, it is revealed that the Mercury school is already in line with the strategy of the municipality. The newer municipal strategy for stronger children's communities are principles that have been practised in their school priority: "[When] you read about the strategy, you think 'oh, but we have worked with this before'" (Social Worker 3). For the school as an organisation, it is relatively advantageous that its practices correspond with the initiatives of the municipality.

"So, we are very good with it then, I feel, on that with inclusion and community and meeting the parents without having judged them in a way, meeting them with an open mind, on that, I think we've been very good as a school. But it comes from having a long experience with this. We've had diversity and different needs and different perspectives and different ethnic groups for over 20 years, and that means that we are one step ahead of several" (Social Worker 3).

Here, the strengths of a multicultural and low SES school are brought to light. In an extended understanding of the practice of community and social inclusion, the conditions are already in place for this school. This refers to an accumulated resilience over time.

#### 4.5 Main findings

Four findings are particularly noticeable; a) the merger has a significant impact on the structural principles as well as the relational ones, b) social inclusion is primarily understood through a holistic approach where the students' socioeconomic backgrounds are understood in a broader framework, c) there are some variations in the strength of the ties and social bonds where some are strong while others are weaker, and d) a widespread passion and drive for building the school and the local community.

The cultural feature that is recurring throughout the analysis is the feature of openness. The culture of openness manifests itself in almost all aspects of the various school settings but through different formats. There are signs of openness in the context of the merger, where

employees and students must adapt to a new everyday school life and be open to change. In the context of social inclusion, openness is about alternative teaching methods in the face of differences and diversity. When it comes to relations and social bond building, openness is about the created space where they can have discussions and talk about difficulties. Lastly, is about openness through tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences that have led to an accumulation of cultural resilience.

The merger has a greater significance for the organisational, structural, and relational principles. This is rooted in changes and transfers that create both physical and emotional distance. Physical distance leads to emotional distance through the distribution of students and staff in different places, resulting in difficulties to keep close relationships. At the same time, there are a greater number of new people to relate to in an altered group structure where it may become difficult for the school actors to establish ties and bonds when it takes longer for them to get to know each other. Due to this condition, a temporary culture is also created through this time-consuming process. This culture stands for some despair, but it also represents incentives for the continuation of the work of inclusion.

The Mercury school is a school that has a more holistic understanding of inclusion. This is a school where the school culture and pedagogy are based on a narrative of systemic inclusion rather than an individual-based perspective of inclusion. The Mercury school is also a school with a strong emphasis on both building community and empowering the students. Their approach combines unity and cohesion, co-creation and socio-cultural, with a vision to unite differences and diversity together in the classroom by placing adapted education and special education within ordinary teaching. This is a culture that also reflects willingness in openness around group inclusion. This also manifests itself in the culture of SFO where students have a different arena to unfold in, as well as form social relationships across grade levels. At the Mercury school, social cohesion across units is highly emphasised and is also evident in the routines around the relational bond building.

The relations extend beyond what are the human actors, where ties and close bonds in the local community are a priority. The social bonds are built on trust, which further helps to set up a strong basis for the development of relational bonds, whether they are through ties or bonds. Nevertheless, there are variations in the strength of the bonds, which aim at a contradiction of goals and visions of closeness and inclusion. It seems that there are both strong and weak bonds

between the staff and the students. Teachers and staff have a broad role to play in securing the social bonds between themselves, students, and their parents. There are prospects for this through the foundation of a collaborative language among the staff members that hold strategies such as support and recognition, role clarifications and collaboration, and room for divided opinions. It turns out that despite physical and emotional distance among the staff, they have been able to maintain social cohesion and the strength of the social bonds among themselves.

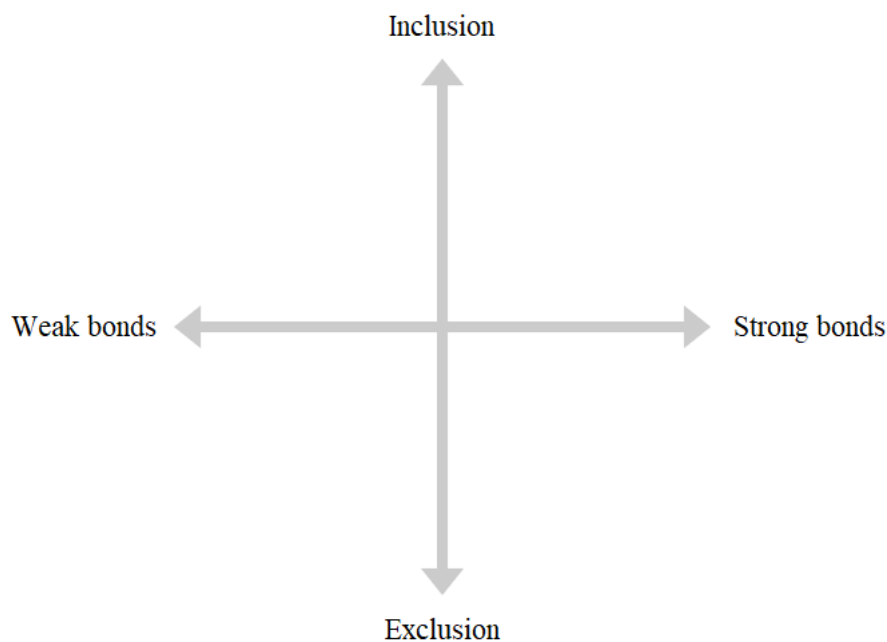
Most of the staff at the Mercury school are reported to have a burning heart for the neighbourhood. This includes a lot of time and dedication spent on building trust and social ties between the school and the people living in the area. This is an area where the people are described by the school leadership as aware of the position that they are in, work from it and aspire to improve the lives of all. It is a mutual desire to be able to make a difference for the local community and at the same time continuation of their community mandate. Their societal mandate takes on a broader role and is reflected in their cultural tolerance and acceptance of differences and similarities. This has ultimately resulted in an accumulation of cultural resilience over time and puts the Mercury school in a characteristic position.

## 5. Discussion

In this chapter, findings from the analysis will be discussed against the questions asked in Chapter 1. Firstly, a presentation of the matrix that represents the theoretical framework of this thesis will take place. This matrix may be used to analyse social bonds and social inclusion and exclusion in a school context.

### 5.1 Social bonds and social inclusion/exclusion

Figure 2 below summarises the main dimensions of my theoretical framework. The matrix is based on an understanding that social bonds (weak and strong) are a key to a sociologically informed understanding of the inclusion and exclusion processes. Social bonds are of special interest as it is not self-evident how it plays out in different situations in a school context. Strong social bonds may increase opportunities for joint commitments but also lead to social exclusion that weakens initially strong social bonds. Weak social bonds may stand for a problem in terms of social cohesion of groups – among students as well as staff and are typically seen as a problem in a school context but may also be an opportunity for individual thriving and organisational innovation.



*Figure 2. Theoretical matrix axis for an analysis of inclusion/exclusion and school-based social bonds*

Both dimensions in Figure 2, – strong and weak social bonds and social inclusion and exclusion – are played out in school practice. A more substantial version of the theoretical model is presented in Table 2 below.

*Table 2. Theoretical summary of the interplay between inclusion/exclusion and social bonds*

	<b>Strong social bonds</b>	<b>Weak social bonds</b>
<b>Inclusion</b>	This combination is characterised by strong social bonds and strong social inclusion internally but combined with closure for persons outside the group. This group is often of a smaller size and with more density among the members. This creates good opportunities for the formation of joint commitment and hence joint action.	With weaker social bonds but strong social inclusion, this group is best described as a larger group with more distance between the members and less close. Despite this, this creates moderate to good opportunities for the establishment of joint action through joint commitment.
<b>Exclusion</b>	In this group, there are strong social bonds in combination with strong social exclusion. Here the group is of a smaller size and has more density which may create weaker incentives for joint action due to the exclusion processes.	This category implies weaker social bonds in combination with strong social exclusion. This group is usually larger with larger distances between the members. This creates weak opportunities for joint action, as there are both weak bonds and exclusion among the group members.

This is a theoretical model inspired by Granovetter’s (1973) differentiation between strong and weak ties combined with Ahrne’s (2021) theoretical work on social bonds translated into a school context. My addition to their contributions is to link this to a discussion of social inclusion and social exclusion. However, it is in most cases difficult to legitimise the existence of groups that have strong bonds but are characterised by strong exclusion in a school setting. For this thesis, social inclusion in combination with both strong and weak social bonds is of most relevance. The use of bonds rather than ties in Table 2 and Figure 1 is based on an interpretation made of the theoretical material, where social bonds appear as something different and more than ties. Where ties may be seen as a pure description of the relational connections between different points, social bonds are a deeper manifestation and explanation of the relational characters of the parties involved in the bonds (Ahrne, 2021).

Furthermore, Granovetter's (1973) ties are based on a description of the interpersonal between different human actors. Ahrne's (2021) social bonds conceptualise what it means and entail when an organisation has different bonds. Although these social bonds also consist of human actors, it is rather an establishment of affiliation with the organisation, which in this case is the Mercury school. Ties can be various and diverse, and most people have infinitely relationships across various spheres of lived life, but the social bonds are rooted and incorporated in an organisational system where all actors are part of and committed to a community. This also means the creation of an inside and an outside of the organisation. When it is a discussion of opportunities for elevation from ties to bonds, it is a matter of getting on the inside of the organisation, taking part in the social bonding, and becoming part of the community. Once inside, the social bonds can have varying degrees of strength and manifest themselves as both strong and weak bonds. Yet, on the inside, there are also systems of inclusion and exclusion.

Most sociological research, and especially network analysis tend to link social inclusion and strong social bonds (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). Smaller and tightly integrated groups are often used as the prototype of inclusion (Granovetter, 1973). In theory, there should be good opportunities for joint action within such a group, as the bonds are strong and the group members experience obligations to each other (Gilbert, 2014). What is often the unintended consequence of strong bonds is the process of social exclusion that comes along with it. Where there is strong inclusion, there is also strong exclusion.

Conversely, in cases of social inclusion and weak social bonds, less dense bonds tend to have a higher degree of distance between the group members. These are also typically groups of a larger size. Here there will also be opportunities for joint action, as the inclusion is strong. It will also be opportunities for bridging formations. Bridging, according to Granovetter (1973) increases the likelihood of breakthrough and transmission because it can potentially reach a larger number of people over greater social distances. If bridging is transferred from an interpersonal to an organisational perspective, it is a matter of greater distance between the members within the organisation. This is one of the major differences between strong and weak bonds from an inclusion perspective.

The interviews made with the Mercury school suggest an inclusion philosophy based on strong bonds among the students sharing the same classroom, and between teachers and students. It is also a philosophy that is looked upon as an ideal of social cohesion at all levels of staff

employed at the Mercury school and in the communication between the school and parents. This may create opportunities, but it can also be an obstacle, as no strong bonds are bridges (Granovetter, 1973). In situations where there is strong inclusion, but weak bonds, the social bonds may be more flexible, and open opportunities for more elastic relationships. It may also allow for a necessary distance between the students and teachers, supporting individuals who want to voice their protest or find alternative ways to approach the school than the main norm. Too strong bonds between students and teachers, or teachers and parents, may also in some cases be an obstacle to professionalism and students' autonomy.

## 5.2 School-based social bonds

Individuals can be dependent on their social bonds during different phases of life (Ahrne, 2021). One life phase where this is particularly important is the primary school period. Schools and classrooms are not only environments for teaching and learning but are also important social arenas filled with possibilities for affiliation and social interaction (Juvonen, 2006). Social bonds are needed where relationships are to be established. It is difficult to imagine a society without social bonds, as it is these that uphold society (Ahrne, 2021). Thus, a social bond is an object that is created in relationships, it is the glue that holds people together. According to Granovetter (1973), the study of these bonds can supply insight into how social dynamics are organised in a collective. What is interesting about social bonds is that they can unfold in many different contexts. Since the thesis is concerned with social bonds in a school setting, several things are up for discussion.

Firstly, there is a lack of research in the social sciences on social bonds and relations in an organisational context. There is especially little research based on relational approaches in the sociological field. Sociologists and school researchers tend to research the individuals who make up the organisations, or the large structures that influence human action (Hasse, 2021). Within pedagogical research and school research, we find more research on the relationships between, for example, teachers and students (see e.g., Drugli, 2012; Federici & Skaalvik 2017), which is a much-neglected aspect of human action and interaction in sociologically oriented school research. Secondly, at the Mercury school, it is attested that there are strong social bonds between the actors in the organisation, but there are also some disparities and elements of weaker social bonds.



### *5.2.1 Strain in the social relations*

Our results suggest strong social bonds between the teachers, the management, and the staff in general at the Mercury school. These bonds are what keep the organisation going. The school have proved strong professional and personal relationships with the local research community, and the Mercury school has formed strong relationships between the school and the local community to broaden the leisure activities for their students. In addition, the Mercury school has chosen to prioritise work on social inclusion in the classroom and with the students' peers rather than taking children with extra needs out of the classroom. After all, it is the relational bonds to the students that are most important at the Mercury school.

However, the relationships and bonds appear uneven, with some parents highly involved in school matters while others are less interested and involved. It requires a lot of hard work for the school to reach out to the parents less interested and involved in establishing social ties and developing social bonds. This testifies to the expanded social inclusion mission of both teachers and staff at the Mercury school. At a low SES school such as the Mercury school, employees must take on a broader role in school practice, both relationally and academically, to achieve the goal of social inclusion. A prerequisite for being a leading player in the local community is also a school organisation and organisational culture resistant to both challenges in the attempt to strengthen the interpersonal relations in a culturally diverse community, to build a new school culture based on a newly merged school organisation and respond to external pressures.

Constraints in the relationship between the teachers and students, and some parents may have several causes and reasons. One possible cause mentioned by the staff is the organisational merger from several small schools to one large school unit. A second reason may be due to societal changes and a school structure that better correspond to the student's life situation and needs. A third cause may be that the students' social bonds are more uneven and floating than described in the interviews. Social bonds, including student-teacher relations, develop over time and are to a high extent based on mutual agreements (Ahrne, 2021). Because several parents display a weaker connection to the school, there is a possibility that the students follow their parents. If a choice must be made between social groups, the groups with the strongest social bonds will usually be chosen.

All these explanations reflect different elements of the school culture, whether it is the current culture that has arisen during the merger, or through changes in the local community and school structure that leads to a change in the culture, which in turn has affected the social relations and bonds between the students and teachers. The general school culture is imperative for whether awareness of the school's values is being worked on, and whether the employees work continuously with these values. The school culture is about the process of everyone involved internalising and sharing the same norms and values with the means to set up a set of common rules of action (Drugli, 2012). The merger that has taken place at the Mercury school creates an interim culture and tension for the parties involved, yet this does not necessarily have to be the primary reason the situation has been described as demanding by the staff at the Mercury school. Still, it may have its side effects on the school's culture and structure. The school culture also manifests itself through the daily prioritisations that are made at the school in the form of emotional and social practice and educational practice.

Drugli (2012) illustrates how some teachers claim that focusing on students' emotional and social needs is not part of their work tasks. While other teachers believe that they must relate to all aspects of the student for the professional learning activity to thrive. However, these dimensions are closely related; for the students to achieve performance academically, it is necessary that not all their energy is directed towards difficulties on the emotional or social level. Federici and Skaalvik (2017) conceptualise this as a balancing act between emotional and instrumental support from the teachers. Emotional support involves being valued and respected and feel safe in the relationship with the teacher. Instrumental support includes students' perception of specific advice and guidance in schoolwork. Thus, this divide may stand for the difference between social and educational support. However, a combination of both types of support is needed.

At the Mercury School, a concise agreement is revealed about the link between the social, the emotional and the academic. This understanding has been internalised by the staff. It is an understanding based on that the students must be seen and followed up throughout the day, also in the transition between the end of the school day and the start of SFO. Educational support is important, but a combination of both educational and social and emotional support is needed for the achievement of academic performances. This means that these two dimensions are intercorrelated. These dimensions are also reflected in the contrasts between political and pedagogical practice in school.

The system world and the life world derived from Habermas' (1987) works may be reflected through the political and pedagogical practices in schools. Increased pressure from the system world with political and municipal directives on academic disciplines, as well as an increasing need for emotional and social support in the daily regulation of the school, impact staff as well as students at the Mercury school. The balance between external pressure and internal pressure may contribute to creating irregularities in the social bonds between the students and teachers. In addition, the Mercury school is in a low SES area where the relationship between the home and the school to a high extent is stratified with both highly involved families and families not as much involved in the children's school world. Both the home and the school, depend on well-functioning relations to promote positive relationships between students and teachers (Drugli, 2012). From the interviews with the Mercury school, we get an insight into how the relationship between the parents and the schools has improved over time, but also of a change with a more diverse and demanding group of parents.

Considering that there can be several different reasons for strain in the relationships and social bonds, testifies to the importance of examining how the relationships play out in the school arena. Knowing how relationships and bonds are formed and kept is fundamental in understanding disturbances in relationships. Since relationship building and bond building are context-dependent, it becomes important to look at the characteristics of the surrounding environment and climate (See Figure 3 below). For the Mercury school, important elements in the nexus between the parents and the families of the students are socioeconomic status, the students' multicultural background and the widespread need for adapted education. In short, this is not just due to traditional socioeconomic factors growing up in a low SES area, but a more diverse and complex set of inclusion issues that the school must cope with daily.

### *5.2.2 The strength of weak bonds*

The concept of plural subjects (Gilbert, 1992) refers to groups rather than individuals with their own set of thoughts, attitudes, and values. A plural subject, as it is described by Gilbert, may refer to different groups or organisations. A crucial aspect in the formation of plural subjects is the group members' willingness to be part of such an organisation, as well as the responsibility that comes with it. The school culture at the Mercury school consists of openness and willingness to work with the situation that they are in with the means that they have. The most important means are the efforts for communication, group inclusion, unity, and acceptance of the cultural diversity at the school. Attempts are made to keep these aspects of the school culture

through the prioritisation of building trust in the students, the parents, and the local community. Drugli (2012) describes trust between the students and teachers as a condition that will gradually appear through positive interactions between them, where there is room for both closeness and distance. This relationship of trust allows for differences and for adjustments to the interaction for it to be appropriate for all parties. As trust is a continuous work, fragments of ruptures in the social bonds may occur on the way to a fulfilling trust in the Mercury school.

Ahrne (2021) conveys that those bounded together in a social bond must know who is on the inside and the outside. The bonds function as indicators of the members' positions, and they may thus be adapted to all parties and allow someone to do certain things where others cannot. This opens a space for there to be asymmetry in the bonds between teachers and students, and the school and the parents at the Mercury school. Ahrne does not discuss the balance of strength on the bonds and what significance they may have in a school context, however, he describes the social bonds in modern times as more limited and bound by flexibility. Despite this, the bonds require maintenance if they are to last over time, according to Ahrne. That the social bonds are more limited and flexible for some of the actors in the school organisation is consistent with the situation at the Mercury school. The question is whether this is sustainable at a low SES school as the Mercury school.

That the bonds between the school and the parents, and the students and teachers are uneven, do not necessarily have to be a disadvantage in a school setting. Nonetheless, it is the weak bonds that are reported to be critical at the Mercury school, especially the parents' position that holds these weak bonds. The teachers cannot practice what is best for the children if the parents are left out. However, weak bonds are potential bridges (Granovetter, 1973), and parents represent a potential bridge and as actors able to understand the student and their life inside and outside the school. Both the teachers and the management at the Mercury school are working hard to keep the bonds with the parents intact. The big question is what kind of ties and bonds are the most productive to keep in a low SES school. Is it a priori strong social bonds that are the solution, and weak social bonds that are the problem? This may at first sound like an odd question, but it is also a matter of what a school like Mercury want to achieve in their inclusion attempts.

An image is often presented that inclusion comes from large, close communities, as this is what will create a sense of belonging and reliable relationships. The question is whether it is these large communities that are the path to inclusion. Weak bonds are essentially critical and necessary when it comes to creating a school that will have room for great diversity with its unique differences. Although there is a compelling philosophy of strong bonds present at the Mercury school, these bonds are not intensified to the extent that they go at the expense of the inclusion processes and further create exclusion. It is a matter of finding a balance between unity and diversity, which is between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (Tönnies, 1887/2001). Too much *Gemeinschaft* may be an obstacle to the unfolding of differences, while too much *Gesellschaft* may contribute to an enlarged distance that hinders social cohesion and inclusion processes.

When it comes to the school's alternation between the role of caregiver and disseminator of knowledge, some distance is necessary for the teachers to perform their educational teaching professionally. Thus, weak bonds are also necessary if professional work and organisational bonds are to last over time. Part of the reason is that strong social bonds that have strong inclusion will also have strong exclusion. The community may potentially be too close, with limited opportunities to create relationships across other groups and boundaries (see also Granovetter, 1973). On the other hand, students' social and emotional needs require a different type of approach with less distance and stronger social bonds, especially after all the new alterations appearing with the merger.

The school merger taking place at the new Mercury school potentially creates a larger, richer, and more diverse school culture based on a joint project and a new configuration of "plural subjects" (Gilbert, 1992). The strength of Mercury school is the awareness and investment in building a community based on strong social bonds – i.e., a culture of inclusive practices based on collective processes where all students should feel included in the community, master school-related tasks, and be recognised as individuals. The challenge for the Mercury school is to carve out enough space to recognise individuality, cultural diversity, and deviance from what is eventually defined as their official program of inclusion in a sustainable way. In a modern society with greater diversity, heterogeneity and local bridges are what may make society move towards inclusive practices. The impact of merging several small schools into one single school unit is not unique to the Mercury school but may also be the reality in many larger cities, precisely because of the urbanisation and centralisation policy taking place.

### 5.3 The translation of social inclusion

Through the analysis of the interviews, the concept of social inclusion is understood as an acceptance of diversity, as well as a strategy of distributing additional inclusion resources in the classroom and SFO, and to students in need of extra support in a classroom setting. What is of more interest than the official goals and scripts, however, is how this is translated into practice. This translation is what ultimately reveals the school culture, and consequently the actual work with relations and social bonds.

#### *5.3.1 From understanding to practice*

Given that the Mercury school is in a low SES school district, inclusion in the interviews is constantly referred to as the assessment of socioeconomic-related challenges first before other circumstances can be prioritised, such as academic learning. A practice of the social, cultural, and emotional over the academic echoes both in a relational perspective and in an inclusion perspective. This is one of the keys to the school's accumulated sustainability. This approach expresses itself both in the practice of social bonds between the staff and the students, but also in the practice of social inclusion as an overarching topic. Not only does this display an acceleration of social capital, but also a deposit of cultural capital (see Bourdieu, 2006). The Mercury school uses cultural diversity to its advantage and as a resource rather than looking at it as disadvantageous. This in turn contributes to incentives for inclusion through the building of a community with room for differences.

The concept of inclusion at the Mercury school is not just restricted to the students but also includes their parents. In the introduction, I outlined the importance of adequate home conditions and parents who can contribute to the students' social, emotional, and educational support. Earlier research shows that there is a strong correlation between the parents' socioeconomic background and the student's performance in school (Bakken, 2009; Bråten, 2014). Students with middle-class parents tend to have an advantage in the school context because the school culture is more adapted to their class than it is to the working class (Rapp, 2018; Aarseth, 2014). Regardless of socioeconomic status, the role of the parents is crucial. The staff at the Mercury school understand that they are almost chanceless without the parents' contribution and active involvement. Although these relationships in many cases are described as weak, they have a critical function. Even if the group of parents at the Mercury school are highly diversified by social class, cultural background, and resources, it is the challenges of parents with a low SES status that are stressed in the interviews. This is especially the case

visible in the staffs' narratives of low SES families being unable to invest in their children's lives, mentally, emotionally, and practically, i.e., a lack of learning internalisation of motivation (Aarseth, 2014). This is an understanding that the teachers have embodied, and therefore work continuously with, both with the parents, but also with several compensatory measures for the students. One of those measures includes not taking students out of the classroom for adapted teaching.

There is a high threshold for taking individual students out of the classroom for alternative and adapted teaching at the Mercury school. This form of teaching and pedagogy conforms to the principles of inclusive education, and the school actors prove the ability for a systemic and organisational understanding. It is also a pedagogy intended to leave no child behind, alone and at risk of losing their sense of belonging and being part of a community (see Godø, 2014). In a study by Wendelborg (2017), he also finds that there is a negative correlation between special education separated from the classroom and belonging and friendship with student peers. In line with Godø, Wendelborg's interpretation is based on an understanding that if students with special education are not with their classmates in the classroom, it is more difficult to keep relationships with classmates, both in the classroom and outside of school. To develop and keep a relationship, requires that the parties are present in the same arena. This is also a view that resonates well with the staff at the Mercury school through their continuous emphasis on inclusion and social relationships.

Another important feature of the Mercury school's practice of inclusion entails the implementation of free core time at SFO. This is a part of the organisation that both contribute to an equalisation of social divides between students and their family's socioeconomic backgrounds and an arena where students can build social relationships and bonds with their peers. As a result, this school offer is twofold in that it strengthens both inclusive processes and relationship-promoting processes. In addition, SFO is an arena that offers different forms of inclusion where socialisation and social learning is almost exclusively emphasised. This may be especially uplifting for students who are struggling academically or who function better in social settings. If they experience schooling as difficult, either on an academic or emotional and social level, it may be reassuring for them to know that they have another arena where they can unfold and develop in a community. Thus, SFO has a different integration and organisational logic than the school itself, where inclusion takes on a different focus and is described as a more liberating life for the students.

SFO is a separate integral part of the overall constellation, which makes the school internally differentiated. The school thus turns out to be more than a unified organisation. It is a configuration of several units beyond the classroom, with different arenas that have different functions, but where everyone aims for the same direction. They have a unified understanding of inclusion and the organisation facilitates this. These parts integrate to realise an inclusive practice for the students. A strong inclusion practice also helps to strengthen the social bonds, which in turn strengthen the inclusion processes and create a harmonious circle. In the question of what significance an inclusion practice has for social bonds and what significance social bonds have for an inclusion practice, the answer is that these events are mutually reconcilable in that they strengthen and substantiate each other.

The goal of inclusion at the Mercury school is translated into joint classroom teaching which further helps to strengthen opportunities for bond building and the establishment of relationships. This is done out of a conviction that it will counteract stigma and exclusion. It is also a pedagogy that allows for seeing opportunities within the framework of the community and thinking in systemic terms (Jortveit, 2018). In addition, they operate with free core time in SFO, which further contributes to holistic inclusion and better opportunities for relationship building among the students. This is a practice of inclusion that is future-oriented, especially in the context of a growing diversity that is present everywhere. The recognition of diversity creates counterproductive processes of exclusion and opens opportunities for stronger inclusion.

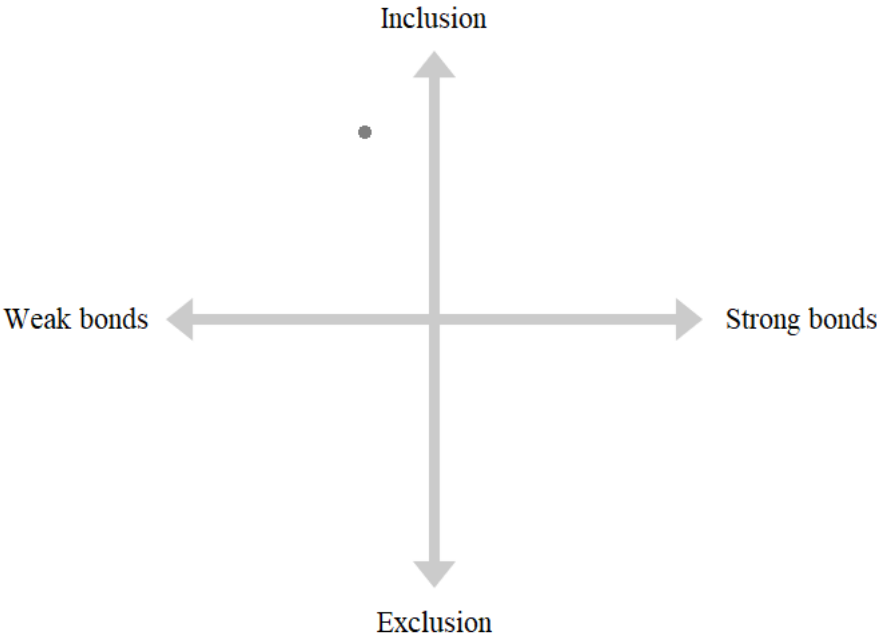
#### 5.4 From translations to reality

The translation and understanding of inclusion provide guidelines for how the social relations and bonds unfold in a practice of social inclusion. It is about a) the understanding of social inclusion, b) the translation from understanding to the practice of social inclusion, and c) the development of social relations and social bonds. Translations matters if we want to go from words to practice and get a better understanding of obstacles associated with realisations of inclusion in a school context.

How actors understand social inclusion varies widely. It is difficult to find a clear and common definition of the term social inclusion in pedagogy and educational research (Bachmann & Haug, 2006). Nevertheless, a common understanding requires communication and an agreement on how social inclusion should be practised at each school and for their students.



Since there will always be different interpretations of social inclusion, it is to be assumed that the practice will be different in different contexts, such as in school contexts with low and high socioeconomic status.



*Figure 3. The interplay between inclusion/exclusion and social bonds at the Mercury school*

In Figure 3 above, a point is marked along both axes to show where the Mercury school end up in a framework of inclusion/exclusion and bonds. This is also a matrix that can be used in the study of other schools, including schools with different socio-demographic profiles, to figure out the relational status of the school organisation.

Based on the findings in this thesis, the Mercury school is found high up on the vertical line and to the left on the horizontal, as the school is characterised by high levels of inclusion with a combination of strong and some weaker social bonds. Although there are several strong bonds present at the Mercury school, such as those between the teaching staff and the management and the external bonds, the weaker bonds have a more critical function from an inclusion perspective and cause the school to be placed to the left of the vertical line.

Weaker bonds between the school actors may both create a necessary distance between the school and the parents, and the students and teachers, and facilitates a space for the maintenance of professionalism and academic inclusion, as well as individual autonomy for the students. In addition, weak bonds have the effect of uniting groups across units and therefore sets up a bridging function (Granovetter, 1973) within the organisation. Bridging in an organisational school context consists of connections between local weak bonds. Although this concept is taken from a network perspective, the school also consists of a distinct network. The local bonds function as bridges across several small groups, merging the diversity. And since the Mercury school holds this rich diversity, the smaller groups within the community may have stronger bonds between themselves, such as those in the college, groups of students, and perhaps also between groups of parents. These are also processes that prevent exclusion because everyone has their small groups within the community. So, while the image of a large and cohesive organisation is usually portrayed as the recipe for a functioning community, this does not necessarily need to be the case.

If there is too much of the community and it becomes too dense, this may have reversal effects and create room for exclusion. In a school like Mercury, there is a need for a broader umbrella that has room for both distance and proximity to create space for cultural diversity, and further room for the performance of academic learning. Although the current Norwegian school system seems to reward academically proficient students, the community rewards social capital. Nevertheless, it is a matter of finding a balance between the social bonds, and it requires that some are strong where others are weak to maintain the organisation and complete the inclusion mission, particularly at a low SES school.

When a school is in a low SES area, it may create incentives for resource generation of, among other things, external partners and ties and bonds in the organisation. External partners, such as the research community, the local sports team, the library, and the local youth club, are all crucial for supporting an inclusive school environment, which is not restricted to the school but includes the larger community. This is also an example of a dual strategy where external partnerships may counteract and open for a broader range of inclusion than what is taking place at the school and in the classroom. A school in a high SES area may not have as much focus or perceived need for this type of resource generation since they are seen as better able to meet the students' needs.

Research portrays an image that families' low SES has a negative impact on students' relationships with the school and the teachers (Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999), that multicultural students receive less help with homework at home and are hampered by their parents' language barriers (Brok, Tartwijk, Wubbels & Veldman, 2010), and that students with a need for adapted education have poorer relationships with their teachers (Drugli, 2012). Nevertheless, the results from the empirical material prove a contradiction that does not coincide with previous research. It is rather revealed a school culture that draws on these conditions and uses them to build a community that creates and reinforces of the school. Instead of seeing potential negative impacts, they see possibilities in the diversity. And what is paradoxical is that low SES schools are proving to come better out of it than high SES schools, precisely because these mechanisms create a mobilisation of community-building and a sense of belonging.

Although Tilly (1998) states that established dispositions in both teachers and students lead to a reproduction of organisational structures, the Mercury school illustrates a breach in these dispositions where, among other things, there has been an improvement in the relationship between the parents and the school. What admittedly resonates with the Mercury school is that earlier categorical experiences have over the years led them in a direction of promoting community building and the sociocultural. This is a strategy that the school has practised for over 20 years, which has led the school to gain an accumulated and intensified knowledge of how they can structure their constellation to better adapt to the area and the needs of the students. This strategy is also in line with newly established municipal goals and measures to build stronger children's communities, which reveals the school's position as future-oriented and in a sense ahead of its time, or rather ahead of everyone else's time. Thus, the Mercury school's accumulation of categorical experience has resulted in a school-based cultural resilience, but perhaps also resilience for the local community.

## 6. Conclusion

Since the Salamanca Statement in 1994, there has been a change in the official inclusion discourse from the prioritisation of special education for individual students with needs over to a larger and broader spotlight on the inclusion of all students. This has led to the school's role being further expanded, and organisational pressure has been placed on the running of the schools (Bachmann & Haug, 2006), mirroring the school's existence as one foot in two different worlds with different expectations and practices (Habermas, 1987).

Despite a greater emphasis on social inclusion in the official political discourse and the school curriculum, we observe that social inclusion is not restricted to special education or students' needs, but to how schools practice their inclusion in everyday school practice and the perception of the school in their local environment. This is also the reason some low SES schools, due to the environment with they must adjust to, may end up with better overall scores on children's well-being than their counterparts in socio-demographic more privileged areas with less pressure to highlight social inclusion as a top priority.

With external pressure from the municipality and internal pressure on the preservation of students' emotional, social, and academic needs, the goal of inclusion is typically understood and translated into the teaching being assembled within the four walls of the classroom. The understanding is that if the academic goals are to be achieved, the social and emotional aspects must be optimised. The question of inclusion is also part of a broader public discourse of diversity where opportunities rather than barriers are stressed in recent years. The increased interest and recognition of the importance of social and emotional aspects of importance for academic achievement is also stressed by OECD (2018) (see one of the latest PISA reports). This way of understanding inclusion has also resulted in an increased interest in social resilience (see PISA report). This may potentially open our understanding of inclusion, but when combined with a broader understanding of social inequality in society.

It is still the case that children's everyday school life can be compromised, and their life chances limited if they come from a home that constantly faces socioeconomic challenges. When this is the case, it puts more pressure on the schools to contribute with compensatory measures and resources to even out inequality in childhood. This often proves to be a challenging task for schools in low SES areas. Navigating between two, often conflicting worlds of being part of a

school system (system world) and lived life (social world) (Habermas, 1987) based on conflicting goals and principles. Nevertheless, for schools in low SES districts, this may contribute to the build-up of school resilience accumulated over time, yet this is not to be guaranteed.

The research on inclusion in a low SES school is important as it shows that a school is not just about academic performance and achievement, but a combination of both academic learning and building a relational ability that enables the students to master life inside and outside of the school. This is a mission that is crucial for society but not necessarily fully recognised in a system primarily rewarding teachers with academic excellence over teachers with social and relational inclusion skills. Even if both skills are not mutually exclusive it is clearly that sociologists are wise to pay more attention to the important, yet, difficult, work teachers are conducting in low SES schools.

A school culture characterised by openness and a willingness to communicate and interact is obviously better positioned to build a new and inclusive school culture compared to a school culture that is more stable or fixed. The Mercury school is due to their investment and priority of inclusive childhood in a good position to conduct their effort of building social relations from below to strengthen the students' sense of place and belonging. Nevertheless, it is not to forget the demanding position of a low SES school, both when it comes to having a broader societal mandate in the face of student diversity, and a more intensified work to be able to establish and maintain social bonds with the parent group, and trust in the local community.

As a continuation of this study, it would have been particularly useful to include the students' voices and perspectives. In a study of school actors, all parties involved should be taking part in the research. If a group of people is to be researched, it requires that these people are included, talked to, and heard. The adults, which are the staff at the Mercury school in this case, can only to a certain extent be able to understand and describe how everyday school life is experienced by the children. An insight into their everyday lives had without a doubt opened other forms of explanation for various events, such as the teachers' experience of the students as increasingly outspoken. If the thesis had come down to their level, there are possibilities that this specific situation could have been explained in more detail. Additionally, doing research on this school from both a micro and macro perspective would be beneficial in collecting different points of analytical view and creating nuances in the school picture. From a macro perspective, the

contribution would have consisted of more insight into political processes both locally and nationally. And the opposite, from a smaller scaled level to see how the life world among, not only the students but the rest of the school actors unfolds in the school context.

In general, this is a topic that consists of several research gaps in the social sciences, but particularly within the sociological field. Although micro and macro levels are much needed, the intermediate level is neglected and forgotten, along with a relational perspective in an organisational viewpoint. This assignment contributes to the actualisation of the importance of the coherence between social relations and bonds in inclusive school practice and the use of meso-level analysis. More research into how groups of people who make up the school's organisation and create intermediate structures can further reveal more of the complexity behind these constellations, both within the research community, but also the population at large.

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## **Appendix**

Attachment #1: Information letter and consent form

# **Vil ditt du delta i forskningsprosjektet ”Barndom og velferd i Norden”?**

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å forske på hvordan skoler og utdanningssystem møter ulike elevers ressursbehov. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

### **Formål**

Målsetningen med prosjektet er å framskaffe ny kunnskap og å styrke forskningen om hvordan skole- og utdanningssystemet møter ulike elevers ressursbehov. Vi retter fokus på skolers organisering og håndtering av elevens faglige og sosiale betingelser i skolen, med utgangspunkt i sosioøkonomisk bakgrunn. Forskning viser i høy grad at sosioøkonomisk ulikhet reproduseres gjennom utdanningssystemet. Dette prosjektet vil bidra til ny kunnskap om hvordan skolen kan motvirke eller forsterke sosial ulikhet grunnet i barns familiebakgrunn. Prosjektet er en videreføring av to tidligere studier, “Barndom og velferd i Norden” (BIN) som ble gjennomført i 2002 og i 2009-10 i henholdsvis tre kommuner i Norge, Sverige og Finland.

### **Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?**

Førsteamanuensis Anna Rapp, ved NTNU, Institutt for lærerutdanning og professor Håkon Leiulfsrud ved NTNU, Institutt for sosiologi og statsvitenskap, er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

### **Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?**

Tre kommuner og skoler i Norge, i Finland og i Sverige vil være med i vår studie. Kommunene er valgt på grunn av at de ligner hverandre i størrelse og innhold. Skolene er valgt ut på grunnlag av sin sosiodemografiske beliggenhet. Studien er et ledd i oppfølgingen av et nordisk forskningsprosjekt i 2002 og 2009, Barndom i Norden, der din kommune inngikk. Vi snakker med rundt 20 personer i hver kommune og du er valgt ut på grunn av din rolle i kommunen. Vi ønsker svært gjerne å følge opp og sammenligne resultatene fra tidligere prosjekt. Gjennomføringen av datainnsamlingen ledes av forskere som har arbeidet med denne og lignende studier år.

### **Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?**

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer du få delta i en intervju. Intervjuet vil ta inntil 90 minutter og foregå et adskilt sted på din arbeidsplass. Intervjuet vil, ved ditt samtykke, tas opp på lydbånd. Intervjuet vil bli transkribert og anonymisert.

### **Det er frivillig å delta**

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

## **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er kun prosjektmedarbeidere som vil få adgang til data.
- Vi registrerer ikke navn i denne undersøkelsen
- Datamaterialet lagres på forskningsserver og er innelåst.
- Lydfilene vil bli slettet ved prosjektets slutt.

Deltakerne vil ikke kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjoner. Både individer og skoler vil anonymiseres.

## **Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?**

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 31.12.2024. Etter prosjektets slutt vil data oppbevares innlåst og anonymisert med formål å kunne brukes ved en oppfølgingsstudie, slik dette er en oppfølgingsstudie fra 2002 og 2009.

## **Dine rettigheter**

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

**Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?** Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra NTNU, Institutt for lærerutdanning har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

## **Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?**

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Institutt for lærerutdanning ved førsteamanuensis Anna Rapp [anna.cecilia.rapp@ntnu.no](mailto:anna.cecilia.rapp@ntnu.no) telefon +47 41363994 eller Institutt for sosiologi og statsvitenskap ved professor Håkon Leiulfsrud [hakon.leiulfsrud@ntnu.no](mailto:hakon.leiulfsrud@ntnu.no) telefon +47 95404299.
- Vårt personvernombud: Thomas Helgesen [thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no](mailto:thomas.helgesen@ntnu.no) telefon +47 93079038
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Anna Rapp  
(Førsteamanuensis)

Håkon Leiulfsrud  
(Professor)

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**Samtykkeerklæring**

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet Barndom og velferd i Norden og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

Å delta i undersøkelsen gjennom intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca 2024 -----

---

(Signert av foresatt til prosjektdeltaker, dato)

## Intervjuguide for lærere/ansatte

### Oppvarming

- Kort presentasjon av prosjektets fokusfelt, rolleavklaring, konfidensialitet, intervjuets gang.
- Evt. inntrykk relatert til prosjektets kvantitative del?
- **Intervjupersonens stilling, arbeidsforholdets varighet, typiske arbeidsoppgaver**
- Ved alle relevante spørsmål, bring opp spørsmål om endring over tid. ”Har det skjedd endringer de siste årene/ etter innføringen av Kunnskapsløftet?”

### Kan du beskrive lærerrollen din?

- Hva er **viktig** for deg som lærer?
- Når synes du at du **lykkes** med en skoledag som lærer?
- Hva er det mest **utfordrende** i lærerhverdagen her på S2?
- **Elevrelasjon** (relasjonell støttespiller, rollemodell, verdiformidler, klasseleder, kunnskapsformidler, veileder, inspirator, organisator, kontrollør, omsorgsperson og problemløser) (ikke relatert til enkeltelever).
- **Systemrelatert** (utvikle læringsmiljø og skoleorganisasjon, delaktighet i skoleutvikling, tydeliggjøre skolens verdier, synliggjøre visjoner og samarbeide for å nå dem).
- *Hovedutfordringer* i din rolle på denne skolen?

### Kunne du beskrevet denne skolen, som en organisasjon?

- Har dere noen spesielle **målsetninger/visjoner/verdier** dere jobber ut fra?
- **Læringsmiljø**, stabens og **ledelsens engasjement** i utviklingsarbeid.
- Før og etter Kunnskapsløftet?
- Hva er **positivt med akkurat denne skolen**? Hva er utfordrende?
- Kan man si at noe er særegent ved skolen, staben, ledelsen, elevene eller de foresatte?
- *Hvordan er det å jobbe her? Hva er de viktige samtaleemnene i staben? Noe som kjennetegner staben (utskifting)?*

### Kunne du beskrevet skolekretsen her, og hva som er særlig positive eller utfordrende ved den?

- *Eksempelvis i forhold til boligstandard, sosialt miljø, aldersspredning, botid og flytting, institusjoner, kriminalitet, rusmiljø, immigranter, arbeidssøkere, sosialhjelp, ungdomsmiljø, organiserte tilbud?*
- Hva er særlig positive og særlig utfordrende innslag i skolekretsen?

### Hvordan har skolekretsen innvirkning på hvordan skoler er organisert tror du?

### Beskriv samarbeid med hjemmet (ikke relatert til enkeltelever) (PRIORITET)

- *Eks; oppfølging av hjemmearbeid/ utstyr/ oppmøte, behovsdekning, samarbeidsklima*
- Beskriv typisk bra og typisk utfordrende samarbeidsforhold. Noe **karakteristisk**?

- Hvordan oppleves samarbeidet med hjemmet i forhold til din og foresattes virkelighetsoppfattelse/problemforståelse? Hvilken innvirkning har det på din arbeidspraksis?
- Hvordan arbeider du i tilfeller der elevens hjemmeforhold er vanskelig? (med elev, foresatte, nettverk, eksterne instanser osv. Grad av og type intervensjon, be om eksemplifisering).
- *Forståelse av samarbeid; tema, formaliseringsgrad, mål, forpliktelser, beslutninger og Autonomi.*
- Representativt, direkte eller kontaktløst samarbeid? (informasjon, dialog og drøfting, medvirkning og medbestemmelse, ressursorientering, myndiggjøring).

### **Beskriv samarbeid med eksterne instanser og nærmiljøtiltak**

- Beskriv et typisk samarbeidsopplegg med PPT (faglig, sosialt, foreldreinvolvering?)
- Beskriv forebyggende og intervensjonerende tiltak<sup>1</sup> (jf. "Forebyggende innsatser i skolen":s.141): *organisatoriske forutsetninger, endringsvillighet, behov, systematikk, lokale tilpasninger, planlagte forebyggende tiltak, helsestasjon, skolehelsetjeneste, samarbeid med lokalmiljø/ frivillig sektor/ Barne- og familietjenesten<sup>2</sup>/ Skoleteamet<sup>3</sup>/ BUP/ faggruppen Oppvekst- og utdanning i Trondheim kommune (Jf. Plan for helsefremmende og forebyggende arbeid for barn og unge i Trondheim kommune).*

### **Hva forstår du med tilpasset opplæring på din skole? (PRIORITET)**

- Beskriv typisk tilpasset undervisning i klassen/ ved skolen, på individ-, gruppe- og skolenivå. (Tilpasning til individuell faglig-teoretisk læring, samt (sosial) tilpasning til fellesskapet.)
- Hva er den største utfordringen når det gjelder tilpasset opplæring ved skolen din? Hva lykkes dere med?
- Hvem inkluderes? Hvem ekskluderes? Hvilken type problematikk håndteres og ikke?
- Beskriv typisk bakgrunn for spesialundervisning etter vedtak i klassen/ ved skolen? (også på bakgrunn av sosiale problemer, maskeres som faglige behov?)
- Hvordan oppfatter du forholdet mellom elevenes behov og de tilgjengelige ressursene? (Faglig og sosialt, hjemme og på skolen)
- Hvordan brukes skolehelsetjenesten i sosiale øyemed? Utviklingsbehov/- potensiale?
- Oppfatter du skolen som en del av velferdsstaten?

### **Hvis du hadde en tryllestav... (Løsningsorientering, organisatoriske tiltak)**

- "Jeg skulle ønske at" ...
- Hvilke utviklingsbehov mener du bydelen/ skolekretsen/ nærmiljøet har?
- Hva trenger skolen din for å i enda større grad oppnå sine faglige og sosiale mål for elevene? Og hva trenger grunnskolen generelt?

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<sup>1</sup> *Tiltakskjede*; lavrisiko og skoleomfattende/ klasesentrerte tiltak (universelle tiltak/ primærforebygging), moderat risiko og elevsentrerte tiltak (selektive eller sekundærforebygging; ), høy risiko og multisystemiske tiltak (indikative tiltak eller tertiærforebygging).

<sup>2</sup> Barne- og familietjenesten tilbyr [barneverntjenester](#), pedagogisk-psykologiske tjenester, kommunehelsetjenester og sosiale tjenester for barn og unge og deres familier.

<sup>3</sup> Skoleteamet er et byomfattende tiltak i [Barne- og familietjenesten](#). Skoleteamet skal gi bistand til skoler som over tid har store utfordringer med å få til endring i atferd, samspill og skolefungering - primært med utgangspunkt i henvisning på en elev.

## Intervjuguide for rektorintervju

### Bakgrunnsspørsmål

Utdannelse? Arbeidserfaring? Hvor lenge på denne skolen?

Hvorfor ble du rektor? Hvorfor på denne skolen?

### Rektorrollen

Hva kreves for å være en god rektor på denne skolen?

– og i Trondheim?

Hvis tidligere lærer: Hvordan er det å gå fra jobben som lærer til rektor?

(Endringer i syn på skolen, prioriteringer, relasjon til lærerne, til elevene?)

Hva er de viktigste arbeidsoppgavene en rektor har? – bør ha?

Hva er de mest positive aspektene ved å jobbe som rektor på denne skolen?

- de mest utfordrende aspektene ved rektorrollen?

### - Press, forventninger og lojalitet

Som rektor, hva slags press opplever du fra andre aktører – hva innebærer dette?

(Endring over tid?) - Lærere

- Foreldre
- Kommunen

Hvilke grupper opplever du sterkest lojalitet med?

(elever, foreldre, kommune, lærere... andre? )

Bli man tatt på alvor av kommunen som rektor og skoleleder?

### Skolen som organisasjon – visjoner og målsetninger

Hvordan vil du beskrive denne skolen som en organisasjon?

(Visjoner, verdier, samarbeid, arbeidsmiljø, felles visjon)

Hva er dine visjoner for skolen, som ny rektor?

Som vi har forstått har det vært en noe ustabil ledelse på skolen – er dette tilfeldig?

Hvilke endringer vil skje på skolen med deg i lederrollen?

Hvilken rolle ønsker du å ha som rektor?

Hva mener du er din viktigste rolle overfor lærerne?

Hva er dine visjoner for foreldresamarbeidet?

### Skole – omgivelser - overlevelse

Nå har vi nedleggingsaken i bakhodet: Når du tenker på skolens beliggenhet/skoledistrikt og de spesielle utfordringer dette gir ifht barnas behov: Hvordan ser du for deg fremtiden til skolen, på kort sikt? - på litt lengre sikt? Hvordan vil skolen overleve?

### Skolens sosiale målsetninger



Et sentralt tema i vårt prosjekt er barns levestandard og velvære, sett fra et perspektiv om sosial ulikhet. I hvilken grad vil du si at skolens og ansatte praktiserer læring og pedagogikk med et fokus på individuelle behov? Fokus på sosial kompetanse? Hvis ja: hvorfor? / Hvis nei: hvorfor ikke?

Hvis man ser faglig og sosial kompetanse som en dimensjon – hvordan ser du relasjonen mellom disse temaene, sett på bakgrunn av de endringene som har vært de siste årene, mot testing og fokus på grunnleggende ferdigheter?

Har det vært endringer i prioriteringer og forventinger nå ifht tidligere?

Hvordan opplever du ressursene som er tilgjengelige for spesialpedagogikk/spesielle behov? Hvordan er situasjonen i dag, i forhold til tidligere? Hva er din spådom for de nærmeste årene?

### **Styring**

#### Kommunen

Hvordan fungerer kommunikasjonen mellom deg og kommunen?

Hvor stor autonomi har du til å forme skolen etter dine visjoner?

Hva opplever du er hovedfokus i Trondheim for skolen?

Hvordan fungerer lederavtalen?

Hvor viktig er lederavtalen for deg? - for skolen?

Hvordan blir den utviklet?

Hvilke føringer får den for virksomheten på skolen?

Stemmer målsetningene i lederavtalen overens med dine visjoner for skolen?

Kjenner lærerne til lederavtalen og forholder de seg til den? Hvor viktig er det for deg at lærerne involveres i å oppnå målene i lederavtalen?

Hva holdes du ansvarlig for, fra kommunen?

Er du enig i kommunens krav/forventninger?

Hvordan fungerer evalueringer i Trondheim kommune?

Er resultater av evalueringer/tester nyttige for deg/for skolen? (elevundersøkelsen, nasjonale prøver).

Hva skjer med resultatene – brukes de?

Hva forventer du fra lærerne av rapportering/skriftliggjøring?

Har du noen påvirkning på hva som skal rapporteres?

Har dette konsekvenser for lærernes arbeid?

### **Avslutning**

Opplever du skolen som en del av velferdsstaten?

Tryllestav: Hva mener du ville kunne gjøre denne skolen ennå bedre?

