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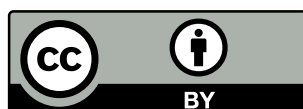
Principals in institutional congestion: Navigating between governance requirements and inclusion ideals of a school for all

Johanna Lüddeckens

Abstract

This article examines how Swedish principals manage tensions between ideals of inclusion and demands for pedagogical and organizational differentiation, with a particular focus on students with autism. Autism often highlights dilemmas involving both pedagogical and organizational solutions and is therefore relevant for illustrating principals' room for manoeuvring. Using institutional logics and sensemaking as theoretical lenses, the study focuses on principals' interpretations, while perspectives from school superintendents provide contextual references. Based on digital interviews with eight principals and seven superintendents, the analysis identifies several coexisting and sometimes conflicting logics; inclusion, differentiation, efficiency, sustainability, relational trust, and policy, shaping how principals justify and implement decisions. Sensemaking emerges as a key process for integrating expectations into locally grounded strategies. The results show that principals engage in pragmatic balancing acts shaped by norms, conditions, and available support. The study is limited to a small sample and does not include students' or parents' perspectives, which affects generalizability. Future research should include these voices and trace how inclusion strategies develop over time and across organizational contexts.

Keywords: School governance, institutional logics, inclusive education, resource allocation.



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