

Chapter 13 “Framing Work Injury/Sickness in a Changing Welfare State – Naming and Blaming”

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“My views were completely disregarded and I was forced, despite my protests, to accept my work situation.” (F 64 year old, teacher, 0480)

“I was ordered to work with this student and I told the principal that I could not do it. I told him many times that I did not feel well. He said there was nothing to do. He told me that if I could not do the job, I should quit. They needed two people to help this student but one after the other took sick leave or quit. So I had to take care of him by myself.” (F 24 year-old, teacher assistant 0495)

This chapter looks at how 569 primary school employees in Sweden, women and men between 2012 and 2015, framed their illness as caused by work in their accounts reported to the Swedish Work Environment Authorities (SWEA)¹. The analysis of the accounts throws a new light on work in the public sector.

The promise of new public management (NPM) to modernize and make the public sector more efficient (Hood 1991) was the accepted recipe for running Swedish schools during the 1990’s, but failed to deliver. Analysis of the accounts of illness by school employees as caused by work environment reveals a dark side to new public management. The accounts suggest that the very tools designed to obtain standardization and control while decentralizing schools to local municipalities led to workers fleeing their workplaces because of illness and/or exiting when they lost the sense of a professional identity.

To understand the context of the framing of accounts presented in work sickness cases, I present a brief introduction into the current organization of Swedish primary schools. After specifying the context of school as a workplace, I turn to an analysis of the accounts. The subjective interpretations given in the accounts depict both naming who or what at the workplace is seen as responsible for the experienced illness and blaming processes at work in the school environment. A particular focus of importance in the analysis is uncovering a process of de-professionalizing the identity of a school employee as a grade school teacher.

I argue that the effect of organizing the administration of one of the major responsibilities of the nation state, public compulsory education, when done according to principles closely aligned with NPM show how NPM can increase control over school employees and how this in turn can result in employees use of NPM instruments to control the behavior of each other. Accepting a definition of professionalism, as the ability to control ones own work, (Friedson, 1981), the chapter looks at the accounts as living descriptions of the lack and loss of professional autonomy. The chapter summaries the analysis of different accounts with a discussion of processes at the core of NPM and how they change the organization of work in a way that affects de-professionalization of teachers as employees. I suggest that managerial tools designed to increase efficiency and transparency can be used to weed out undesirable workers and to create uncertainty within a previously assumed, as taken-for-granted, moral

¹ This chapter is based on 569 cases. They are (100%) of the cases reported by law, of a work-related illness to the SWEA between 2012 and 2015. The 569 cases are a part of a larger population of 1808 cases gathered during the same time period but , which also included cases where injury caused at primary schools, was seen as an accident and usually caused by a student. Support for this research was provided by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and SocialScience (P13-1197:1).

authority of professional public sector educational workers. The conclusion ties together how mechanisms of self-control are used to socialize employees to demands of the workplace while creating a basis for how employees learn to control colleagues.

1. Background. Schools in Sweden.

Schools, as a special area of the public sector in Sweden, have gone through extensive organizational changes during a short period of time. De-centralization of schools from the national state to municipalities in 1989 changed employment status for schoolteachers. They were no longer employees of the state but employees of the municipality. The municipality also was given the legal responsibility for running public schools.

In 1991 private independent schools were accepted and encouraged in Sweden as an equal valued school form guided by the same national laws as public schools and accorded the same amount of public financing per student as that allotted public schools. Arguments for introducing independent private schools on an equal basis with public schools was grounded in the idea that competition between schools would increase when private schools were free and parents could choose which school, public or private, best for their children. As schools competed in attracting and maintaining students. Competition was thought of as a win-win situation. Proliferation of different types of schools would spread innovation throughout the educational system. Parents would be free to choose a school for their children without worry about costs. These two structural school changes - both the employment relations of teachers together with the transfer of school administration from a central to a local municipality and the inclusion of independent private schools as an equal value school form with free choice for parents to select a school - resulted in mass exits of qualified teaching personal from municipal schools, protests and an intense national school debate.² Both these school reforms were influenced by the current popularity of NPM principles.

De-centralization of administration within the public sector was strongly touted as a technique that would allow management by expertise with preference given to local knowledge on how best to run local schools. In Sweden, the ruling Social Democratic party had throughout the 1980s prepared analysis on the importance of governing through open frame laws which argued for flexibility and for leaving details to local experts. In 1991 with a change in government to a center-right alliance, other NPM principles were also included in governing of compulsory education. This included introducing competition within the public sector by the public financing of private schools within the de-centralized school system. When the Social Democratic party returned to power in 1994, they kept the independent school system financed through the public sector. Twelve years later, in 2006, a central-right alliance government regained majority power in parliament in part as a result of a campaign on the negative effects of de-centralization of schools and the loss of national control over an equal school system.

De-centralization of schools was equated with a de-regulation of schools.

² Throughout the 1990s, 6% of male teachers and 5.5% of women teachers left the teaching profession. Younger. Younger teachers leave the profession at higher rates with teachers under the age of 29 leaving at rates of above 10% throughout the period between 1990 and 1999. Today, one in every six persons who has been educated as a teacher does not work as a teacher. http://www.scb.se/statistik/publikationer/UF0521_2001A01_BR_A40BR0103.pdf teachers leave the profession at higher rates with teachers under the age of 29 leaving at rates of above 10% throughout the period between 1990 and 1999. Today, one in every six persons who has been educated as a teacher does not work as a teacher. http://www.scb.se/statistik/publikationer/UF0521_2001A01_BR_A40BR0103.pdf

The new government moved swiftly in 2006 to institute a national School Inspectorate as a powerful new government agency independent of the Swedish National Agency for Education, a new Education Act effective 2011, a program to strength career paths for teachers, and a new national curriculum for the compulsory school, as well as imposing more rigorous and earlier grading of students nationally.

Stricter enforcement of a the new national 2010 Education Act by the School Inspectorate included demands on local schools for more documentation of processes within school. The demand on outputs produced by the schools was now both in total alignment with NPM principles and simultaneously increased the national control over Swedish schools. Schools, according to law, were obligated to give each student the support that they individually needed to obtain an equal education. Guaranteeing students rights involved comprehensive documentation not only of what was being done by teachers and school administrators ensuring students rights to an equal and safe education but also action-plans for each individual student. Documentation for dealing with degrading behavior at school was required at each individual school with obligations to review the plans and change them when and if necessary on a continual basis. Complaints against schools were publicly available as were yearly school results in terms of grades.

The de-centralization of schools to municipalities, the introduction of private schools publicly financed, and stricter demands for more and better documentation of school output, were a severe blow to the public education system in Sweden. Yet, these changes showed that despite different national political majority governments from 1991 to today, there was political unity of use of political arguments for improving schools were grounded on basic NPM management principles. Cries to re-nationalize schools, proposed by one center-right political party, were not taken seriously by other political parties as members of the center-right coalition. Lately, however, in 2016 and 2017 the center left parties currently in power and led by the Social Democrat party are campaigning for law changes capping the amount of profit that owners of private for profit schools can realize.

The idea of something being wrong with Swedish schools undoubtedly has remained a strong election issue since the 1990s. However, the political debate shifted focus from issues of school bullying in the 1990s, to lack of national regulation in the early years of 2000 and after 2010 to problems of integration, segregation and provision of an equal educational outcome for all students. But in 2013 when the OECD PISA reported a rapid decline in Sweden's school results when compared to results in 2003 and to the rankings of other countries, a somewhat earlier worried Swedish population became aware that there was "trouble at school."

As a national policy discussion ensued in Sweden about what to do to regain some sort of steady improvement in students' results, a micro level of everyday life at school started to emerge, portraying a school system in disarray. Parents were reporting disturbing events at school to the School Inspectorate. Teachers were leaving schools for other jobs. Recruiting new teachers was problematic. Teachers were increasingly reporting illnesses as caused by the social-psychological organization of work.

It was obvious to me, while transcribing accounts of both injuries and illness among school employees that the accounts uncovered what I term micro mechanisms accompanying changes in school policy. The micro mechanisms mirrored what happens when gradual structural organizational changes - de-centralization of a national school system, introducing

private but publicly funded schools, increasing regulation and national control over a school system - became unbearable for school employees.

The development of law, politics and regulation produced on the one hand, a cognitive culture affecting imagery for families and on the other hand, an assumed script provided to school personal. Families encouraged by the an image of a child as “owner” of a sack having a “bag” of school money to be given upon his/her admittance to the school of choice increased both expectations of students and families and demands on schools for delivering better support and better learning outcomes. The cognitive culture portrayed to teachers was a type of “script” outlining both the possible risk of fewer resources if students started leaving their schools, and increased administration and increased teacher responsibility while losing professional authority. The break in cognitive culture between parents, students and teachers was dysfunctional (Hetzler 2012). The hypotheses below are derived from the analysis of the forms of dysfunction as they affect the everyday life of teachers.

My hypotheses are:

The use of national regulation to regain control of a de-centralized school system by increasing required documentation of output of work exerts more control over school employees that leads to inward disturbances of the work place.

As control measures coupled with increased competition between schools and within schools become endogenous as a part of school culture, employees use of control mechanisms are directed against each other as a sorting mechanisms resulting in weakening the professional identity of a co-employee and increasing exit alternatives for employees

2. Method.

Swedish law requires employers to report all work injuries or work illnesses to the Swedish Work Environment Authority (SWEA) and to the Swedish National Social Insurance Agency. All the employee needs to do is inform his employer about what has happened. Examples of work sicknesses can be a feeling of psychological distress because of a work conflict or stress at work.³

Methodologically, I work with a phenomenological understanding of the written documents as an intentional act (Paul.Ricoeur 1976, 1978). Those writing about what happened assume a receiver of their account. They are answering a specific question. In the case of work-induced illness, the writer is asked, “What caused your illness/impaired your health.” The question asks for an explanation of what caused illness. I was looking for examples of explanations that included stating a consequence of what happened because of the cause specified.

The accounts are treated as embodied experiences. By reading the documents, I hoped to capture meaning and common features of an experience or event. The accounts also can be seen as relating processes in an event. The methodology I used is that through reading all case accounts, I capture repeated patterns of what is revealed as links in what happened by the person experiencing the event. As such I treat the gathered accounts as an instance of “causal

³ A Swedish employer must even report an event that could bring about an injury or illness, that is, incidents that could lead to an injury or illness even if they did not in the particular reported case result in an injury or illness.

reconstruction” of what underlies changing patterns of employment occurring at a macro level.

Renate Mayntz (2004) writes about “causal reconstruction” as a way to overcome an explanatory deficit when accounting for macro level changes. Thus recognizing causal mechanisms in micro processes she aims at finding generalizations involving processes as a necessary tie-in between micro and macro phenomenon.

Finding the bridge between micro and macro processes is also a concern of new institutionalism. In this work the emphasis is on the fact that studies of meaningful aspects of institutionalization draw attention towards peculiarities of institutionalization. As Tammar Zilber (2008) points out, “the specific contents of institutional structure and practices affect institutionalization and are embedded within larger meaning systems (p. 154).”

The accounts I studied revealed a group of employees that were pre-dominantly, but not only, high-skilled teachers, subjected to psychosocial and organizational pressures of work. In many of the accounts, employees defined a situation that I termed “strategic violence.” I define strategic violence as affecting the professional identity of the employee, taking place over a longer period of time and resulting in longer sick leaves or exiting the profession. Strategic violence was usually performed by colleagues at work and involved using aspects of the organization of work.⁴

Violence at the workplace is often described in literature concerned with safety at the work place (DOL 2015) as a result of encounters with external perpetrators, e.g. clients, students, customers or patients, who might threaten or attack the employee in everyday working situations. Violence *between* employees has not been recognized to the same extent and is usually defined as *relational violence*, e.g. bullying or sexual harassment, or *structural violence* that originates in the culture at the workplace, e.g. through demeaning language or performed tasks that put the employee at risk. I introduce the term *strategic violence* in this analysis to capture the dynamics involved in threat and violence by connecting the element of intention in behavior and the dynamics involved in movement between relations and organizational structure. Non-physical violence at the workplace is done by knowledge of how organizational structure can be used as a part of non-physical violence directed towards injuring an individuals sense of self and their work identity. There is a dynamic variation captured by the concept “strategic.”

An analysis of a non-physical violent behavior makes it possible to depict how covert violent behavior evolves between different structural aspects of the organization of the work place.

I suggest that the written accounts describing the action producing an illness provide an empirical base over a sufficient number of cases and in a variety of situations and locations in a similar work organization, primary schools, to show processes that display mechanisms of work place aggression.

Cases were transcribed by myself at the offices of the SWEA and later coded for 7 variables. These were year reported, time between the injury/illness and reporting, gender, age, length of

⁴ Although bullying and harassment at work has been researched, the research looks at the events at an individual and descriptive level and follows the patterns of understanding adult bullying as extension of a phenomenon of bullying developed to explain the behavior of children. See the discussion in the conclusion of the chapter.

sick leave (1-3days; 4-14 days; over 14 days), years in the profession at the time of the reported injury/illness, employment category (teachers; before and/or after school pedagogues; child care taker; Teacher assistant; other).

Cases of reported illness caused by work increased each year during the four-year period from 118 in 2012 to 176 in 2015. By comparing 2012 and 2015, we see that the tendency in the age of the group reporting work caused illness has moved from older workers (55>) to a younger employees. Table One shows some characteristics of the population and how they have changed over the four-year period.

(Table One Here)

3. Analysis

3.1 Framing

Reviewing the accounts presented show that illness caused by work are framed as the starting of an event. The form that has to be filled-out structures the written accounts. The form asks for a description of what has happened. It should be mentioned that the account “giver” seldom lets the size of the space for recounting what has happened limit the report of the experienced account. Various techniques such as writing in a minimal hand style, or using attachments were evident in more than 40% of the submitted cases.

The accounts often started with either framing an event as unexpected or as something that broke a pattern. I categorized events as framed as an “*unexpected change*,” an “*increased work burden*,” or “*the organization of work*.” Examples of the three categories are given below:⁵

“It was the second day after the start of the school year and a colleague said she wanted a word with me privately. She accused me of treating her with disdain.”(Unexpected change experienced by F 33, 1283).

“I have had an excessive work load for a long time. More and more new work tasks were piled on me without any taken away.” (Increased work burden, F 38 1406)

“Extensive cuts in our budget necessitated a reorganization with larger classes, fewer special pedagogues and other support personal.” (Organization of work, experienced by F 42, 1439).

There is not a clear boundary between the categories framing an event. An event can start out as something unexpected that changes into more work or that develops into a broader organizational pattern. What does become obvious is that the writer of the account takes the reader from what can be perceived within a context of a private identity to what is going on in the work place and then to an understanding outside of a private identity to what was happening to her/his professional identity, an identity related to her profession as a teacher, and a reaction to what has been experienced.

⁵ Each account presented is followed by the gender and age of the writer of the account and a number that has been assigned the account in the study. When I return to an account in the text the number of the case is presented again in parentheses.

This pattern – private identity, professional identity, and reaction - can be illustrated by following the development of the written first account presented above. In the unexpected change in everyday working life by being accused of treating a colleague with disdain, the writer continues:

“She thinks that I do not treat people equally and that I am always trying to be best and that I think I am far better than her. She said that I align myself with certain people and that I create groups at work.” (1283)

In this account, the allegations are extended to a criticism that the writer’s personal characteristics affect the work place. The writer, in turn, points out that the same person has also accused other people in their workgroup and they feel bad because of the accusations. She also mentions that management has told them that “this colleague has recorded conversations and there is a risk about how she might use the recordings.” Responsibility is laid by the writer of the account on the accusing colleague for the following results:

“Because of this, I do not dare express my thoughts or my opinion for fear of being recorded. This colleague has called us in the work-team for racists and she has spread this to a new employee. I experience stomach pains when I am on my way to work and at work. I am irritable and have problems sleeping. I have also become afraid of conflicts and have become unsure in situations where I would otherwise be convinced of my viewpoint. That is I pull away instead of standing-up for myself.”

The teacher that experienced a continual increase in her work load in the second account introduced above (1406) develops her account by focusing on what it means in her professional life as a teacher. In her case she starts off directly with her professional identity and a reaction.

“I have been assigned extra hours of teaching in the classroom without giving me any more time for planning and preparing my lessons or time for work after the lessons, for example in correcting work handed-in or grading extra exams. I have been given a work schedule without 100% possibilities to take my legal right to pauses in work or for lunch. I have long work passes with out possibility to go to a lavatory. And there is no possibility for access to necessary continual education so that I can perform all of my work duties.” (1406)

The reaction experienced by the writer was a 14-day sick leave and a medical diagnose of exhaustion syndrome F43.8.

The third case given above (1439) which frames the event as a necessary re-organization of the work place goes directly into how the re-organization due to budget cuts affects her professional identity.

“A burden has been laid on me as a subject teacher⁶ to take responsibility for producing individual course schedules for those students taking my courses and

⁶ I use the expression “subject” teacher to describe it as being either in languages, social or natural sciences. The writer was not explicit which area was actual in her case.

to also plan the individual progress plans for each student and gather necessary study material for each of them to achieve their individual goals. If I do not do this in a satisfactory manner, I meet complaints from worried parents that their child is not getting the necessary help he/she needs to pass the course. Demands are made on teachers with reduced resources to fill higher demands, which is frustrating. The new school law has increased our legal obligations. We have also more students without Swedish as their native language and some of them are illiterate. In addition to all this, I also have my own class of 28 students and that is a safety risk. With all these things to do, I have not any help at all in how to prioritize my work tasks. I am under extreme pressure and I, and my colleagues, have written to our union representatives as well to our school security ombudsman. “ (1439)

The above reaction to the above teacher’s situation was a longer sick leave.

3.2. Naming

If a frame sets the boundaries, although vague, for what has happened and describes the event within a given context, *naming* those involved sets us into understanding who the writer believes is responsible or at least involved in the event. In the examples given above, the first case (1283) names a particular colleague as initiating the event. But in this account the writer also mentions other colleagues who were also victimized by the same person. The second case, names no one but gives a process of additional work that transgresses boundaries of what should be, according to law, a reasonable job. The third event names no one but describes the event as affecting more than ones own professional identity. The third case actually invokes what might be called a collective professional identity that names appeals to a union and a safety inspector.

Thus naming someone in the accounts I read can differ from one person spreading ill will among many, to a process seen as unreasonable and against laws designed to protect workers, to a general breakdown in a system where work demands far exceed capacities. To understand what kind of “naming” is most prevalent in the read accounts, I looked at all accounts to come closer to who or what was being named. In a school context it is apparent that besides the school employee there are students, parents, colleagues and management. In some cases there are combinations. In this analysis, I examined who or what is named in the written account as involved in the work illness. When many are involved but no one is dominant, I excluded the case. If both colleagues and management (principals) are named together, I used a category of “both.”

Dividing students and parents as one category and colleagues, management and “both” as another category captures the differences in the account moving from the personal exterior to an interior environment. I use the concepts “*exterior*” and “*interior*” in relationship to their legal connection to the school environment. Students and parents are considered as part of the “*exterior*” environment. They are connected to the school because of the legal service, compulsory education, provided by the school. The other category, “*interior*”, refers to those employed at the school, service providers. The category “both” is in the majority of cases used in the submitted accounts to mean a lack of support by both colleagues and management.⁷ Table 3 shows us that there is a difference between accounts written in 2012

⁷ In some cases “both” can also include reference to parents, but this is in few cases.

and those submitted in 2015. More accounts named students and parents in 2012. But accounts gradually shifted in the following years. By 2015 we could see that accounts involving students and family members are about the same. But accounts naming colleagues and administrators have increased for recognizing that both are involved in the incident. Thus there is a bit of a shift from naming exogenous factors to endogenous factors within schools. Most interesting, however, is the account writer in 2015 more often grouped behavior from both colleagues and administration as acting together.

(Table Two Here)

Naming is important. Disorderly students or complaining parents can contribute to a dysfunctional work environment. But as “outsiders” to those employed within the school, students and parents can be met by a united “insider” reaction. The “insider” reaction can be that both the students and/or the parents are seen as “not reasonable” and their complaints disregarded. A collective action by a school towards both students and parents can also be a collective and progressive action that finds solutions to conflict beyond what an individual can accomplish.

For the individual teacher it is important when naming students or parents in their written account, how colleagues and the school react. Although my material only incorporates four years of written accounts, it is obvious that what is usually considered as irritable to schools organization, naming disorderly students and/or complaining parents, has gradually shifted towards naming colleagues and management as being involved in work illnesses. Thus what might have been seen as a standard account or story in schools – uncontrollable students and unreasonable parents, has shifted to stories of interior causes generated within the structure of schools.

3.3. Blaming

3.3.1. Blaming students and parents

An illness or event caused by a student is usually reported as an “accident” because a child fifteen or under is not considered legally responsible under Swedish law for his/her actions. Occasionally a student is indirectly blamed in a written account of illness. The written account that names the student finds “blame” somewhere else, usually, within the organization of the school.

“One does not get any explicit support in front of students and their parents, which undermines a teachers authority to do her/his job. This leaves it open for students to do more or less what they want. One day this culminated in pure harassment against me and ended in a deep depression with anxiety.” (F 48, 0049)

Or, as in the case below, claiming that the boy does not belong in a classroom.

“A 12 year-old boy has threaten to kill me and has harassed me and others as well as his classmates. My job has been to stop him before he injures someone. The difficulties with stopping his impulsive dangerous behavior, the vast amount of aggression he continually displays and his acting-out behavior can

with difficulty be handled within a classroom, even if we offer all of our competency, which we have done. There are many that are suffering and just now it is me. "(Special pedagogue, F 44, 0122).

Although it is easier in the accounts to lay blame when parents are involved in an unexpected incident, even here management or lack of management from school is blamed.

"A very angry parent comes to school and is threatening and aggressive against me and a colleague. Being understaffed, and not knowing what procedures to follow when a colleague is on sick leave and with no good plan on what to do in threatening and violent situations, has led to a frustrated parent coming to school behaving aggressively and threatening." (F 40 0045).

The parent in case 0045 is not responsible. In fact, responsibility is entirely given to management for not having the right procedures in place.

However, it does happen that a teacher can put blame on the parents as we see in the following account where a male teacher blames a group of parents for an acute crisis reaction. He does this without blaming school management.

"There was a conflict situation with a group of parents. The parents were extremely critical of me. They used comments against my person, many exaggerated descriptions of my behavior and even threats against me. I suffered an acute crisis reaction with depression, anxiety, loss of weight, problems sleeping and headaches and was on sick leave for an extended period of time. (M 33, 0010).

In the 0010 the teacher is not treated at all within his professional identity instead the parents "used comment against my person," or a private identity which causes an "acute reaction."

3.3.2. Blaming colleagues and principals

If naming involves those within the school organization, criticism becomes more than something related to an individual identity it becomes something that points blame to the organization of work and is directed towards the employees professional identity. It is at this level of reading of the accounts of work illness that it is possible to see a clear connection to the organization of work according to principles of NPM. The written accounts are not *blaming* a person but are pointing to a process as responsible. The written account of work injury is being depicted as a consequent of changes in and/or demands made by management of work at schools either by invoking action or by neglecting to take action.

As I have mentioned above, I am working with hypotheses that management and the workplace are changed by changes in macro policy decisions. Changes affect the entire organization and influence behavior between colleagues by being able to be used as part of an *exclusion* behavior between colleagues and/or by a behavior of *sorting* out employees by management. Thus colleagues are involved in a process and the reaction affects the professional identity of an individual. This process is an endogenous process within the work organization and involves strategic violence.

A typical case of being *excluded* by colleagues was reported in a long appendix attached to a reported illness in case 0389 below from a teacher that had been at a school for a number of years and noticed a gradual change over a few years after the appointment of a new principal. She describes it as if the school “culture” had changed:

“The school is run by a few very strong informal leaders and I found myself after a couple of years “out in the cold.” I was treated as if I was “air.” In our personal room, no one would talk to me and I began to be more and more isolated. If I tried to start a conversation, they would just turn away from me. And if I said something, they pretended that they did not hear me. Decisions at school were taken in the corridors and not at meetings. The possibility to participate did not exist. It became an untenable situation where I was excluded from coordinating my work with other class teachers. I found myself excluded from newly started projects that were originally my idea.” (F 45 0389)

She summarizes her account by stating, “I was ignored. I did not exist. I was invisible. Nobody said “hello” or talked to me, I did not exist. I did not get any work related information and did not get information about students nor was I involved in projects involving students. Now, I am only working 50% and after a day at school I drive home and sleep an hour or two so that I can do something else. I have difficulty finding any joy in life.”

A typical case of *sorting-out* is reported in a 17-page appendix in the submitted account of work caused illness. A teacher submits the case 0014. The teacher has competency as a special pedagogue. There are many difficulties at the school and continual changes as old colleagues leave the workplace and many temporary employees come and go. Many of the new and temporary employees are working together with her, taking care of students with special needs. A new principal is appointed, parents of the children with special needs are upset and the teacher tries to convey difficulties at the school to the new principal. Some of the main points addressed in the written account are the following:

“I was being attacked with lies, gossip and rumors. B (the new principal) called many meetings because I was being accused of a criminal action against a student. I knew nothing about this. B said I had to go to a psychologist. My judgment was questioned. I was subjected to supervision of my work. I was given unreasonable work directives and my earlier work duties were taken from me. I was not able to work in a classroom because the principal did not trust that I had the capacity. My job was reduced from 80% to 60%. I was not given any work related information and when I thereby missed a meeting, the principal told me that it could be considered “refusal to work.” I was assigned a minimal work space of 2x3 meters and told that ‘if I was not satisfied, I should quit.’ B had told other teachers that they are not to work with me and has also sent a letter to parents telling them he has no confidence in me. When the parents turned to the media, I was called into B’s office where he said that if I were behind the parents’ use of the media, I would be fired. After all of this, I was placed at home with pay for a few months.” (F 35, special pedagogue 0014).

The *sorting-out* process used by the new principal against the teacher can be considered an extreme case. In fact written accounts where an employee can be considered an “insider” as well as a competent pedagogue, as was the case in the 0014 account above, is not easily

resolved by a principal wishing to be rid of a teacher. In the above account, the teacher was unable to get any information about what criminal action she was accused of or how she was to defend herself. By invoking a cause for mistrust of the teacher resulting from something serious outside of the workplace, the principal could justify separating the teacher from her work. Insisting that the teacher see a psychologist and ordering that her work be supervised are examples that the principal used to get colleagues at the workplace to question the professionalism of the teacher. It is also a strong signal to the teacher that she should also doubt her competency. However, it is when the principal goes outside of the internal environment and tries to engage the parents to the children with special needs that the principal loses control of the situation. The parents ignore the principal, side with the teacher, and go to the media instead. The teacher is accused by the principal of manipulating the parents and banished from the school.

What is unusual about case 0014 is that the teacher had strong resources, never doubted her professionalism and knew that she had support of both colleagues and parents. A situation, which was frequent, however, is the situation of the teacher in case 0389. The teacher felt herself as “invisible” and finally the situation as “untenable.” Both cases are directed towards injuring the professional identity of a teacher, damaging the professional self-esteem of an individual resulting in isolation or voluntary leaving the work place.

4. Discussion

The accounts shown above, end in one way or another, in blaming bad management at schools as responsible for producing illness. But actually, it took almost twenty years for Sweden to understand that although they de-centralized its national school system and introduced competition with private schools, its central management tool, the independent Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE) did not function to guarantee the goals of the Education Act. In fact the SNAE charged with seeing that there was universal implementation of the Educational Act, waved a “white flag” in their relationship with municipalities and private schools. Supervision of schools was haphazard and the SNAE, without any legal weapons to use against schools, municipalities/private school owners governed schools as they saw fit. Creating a separate School Inspectorate in 2006 with possibilities to take legal action against municipalities and private schools that were lax in following national education rules and procedures made documentation mandatory.

In addition, the NPM influences in introduction of competition and school choice was minimal for a number of years. Number of students choosing private schools got off to a slow start but a rapid increase started in Sweden at about 2007 and has continued with a concentration and expansion of large for profit school concerns.⁸ Today about 14% of students in compulsory 9-year education in Sweden are in independent schools. Between 2008 and 2016 municipal schools in Sweden decreased by 13%.

It is possible to say that both increased requirements for documentation of output results and budget cuts for schools losing students because of competition from both private schools and better functioning municipal schools are exogenous pressures. These pressures increased local management problems and lead to further reliance on gaining efficiency by promoting even more documentation of outcomes.

⁸ There are presently 6 large active school conglomerates in Sweden.

Thus we see clearly in the accounts of work-produced illness that increased demands for documentation led to greater possibility to increase control over school employees. Teachers are not only required to produce documentation, they are also seen as responsible for failed learning processes. Parents tend to pull their children out of a school they see as “failing” or if their child is not getting better grades, which in turn leads to decreased revenue for schools.

Another method used in schools that can be misused and increase excluding or sorting-out school employees is the fragmentation of teachers’ autonomy by breaking-up the process of teaching into more distinct and smaller units. By introducing fragmentation into more distinct and smaller units it makes it easier to point out what might be seen as weaknesses in the outcome procedures. Focus is turned inwards in a situation of uncertainty. In such a situation, employees use control mechanisms against each other. It becomes easier to use endogenous processes of sorting out and exclusion in a collective identification as what is seen as “the weak link in the chain.”

The number of cases within the written accounts that describe exclusion or “sorting out” resulting in an individual loss of self-esteem about his/her professional competency give witness to the fact that exclusion is not an isolated account.

When a principal is sorting-out an individual worker it is seldom that the person to be sorted-out is supported by the workgroup. It is interesting to note that between 2012 and 2015, the cases increasing the most were those where both colleagues and the principal were involved (See Table 3 above). Both *excluding* and *sorting-out* use the very tools available within the workplace to perform a non-physical act of violence attacking the professional identity of a teacher. Is what I term “strategic violence” intentional? One might argue that a process is not intentional, only the individual acts that further the process can be intentional. But the end process is known and if one cannot say an individual act within the process was intentional, an acceptance of the process by withdrawing support can be seen as participation – even if unwittingly – in the process of exclusion.

4. Conclusion

There are two processes existing simultaneously within Swedish schools. One is the process of changing the type of management at schools. The other is the reaction to a changing type of management by employees providing services in schools. Employees, when experiencing an illness as caused by their work, are providing written accounts of what is happening because of, or reactions to, macro level changes in how they should provide public services. This chapter looked at the work process of providing public service of obligatory compulsory education to those with rights to these services and to those demanding good services.

In the material used, the accounts recount how employees wound up sick and in many cases lost confidence in their professional identity. I use this result of losing confidence in their professional identity as representing the result of an act of strategic violence. Strategic violence is a process that exists at work. It is the link between the process of changing the social organization and management culture of schools and the illness experienced as caused by work. The accounts describe processes of exclusion and of being “sorted out” and how it affects a sense of professionalism.

I have attempted to use these accounts as eye views of everyday life from school employees in Sweden, an advanced welfare state. The accounts of employees are not simple diary

notations of life at school. They are documents recorded as written accounts accusing the schoolwork environment of inflicting illness upon employees while they are doing their job.

Thus I have not presented normal accounts of daily life at school. Instead, I have used the accounts that might well be a tip of an iceberg. The accounts I have presented come about as exceptions to everyday life. They have come from those that have accepted that their illness is work produced.

Fevre et al (2012) mean that the reason illness caused by work has not become a public issue is because such concepts as “bullying” traditionally used in the literature to describe psychosocial organizationally caused illness did not lead to any attempt by researchers to generalize from the individual experience (p. 23). Concepts to describe incidents were such concepts that personalized the incident and thereby could only be helped by finding individual solutions. Incidents, according to Feyre et al were thought of as private troubles and stayed private instead of treated as public issues.

The concept I used to describe the behavior is “strategic violence.” It was necessary to discover a new concept that was embedded in the processes of organizational change in the public sector and clearly described in written accounts of work injuries by school employees. The accounts tell a public story. The concept enables us to look at accounts that make visible a process that is endogenous to the work place and clearly puts blame as lying within this process.

The stories take us into the professional identity as teacher, which is far more than a role that is played during working hours but is a part of a professional identity existing along side a private identity, defining everyday life when work and private life are intertwined. The stories tell of how experiences of being excluded or an object to a “sorting out” process is experienced first as harm to a private identity. But as the story unravels, as we read the account, we see the individual in many cases talking about harm to a professional identity and a sense of loss.

What is important in the accounts in this chapter are that the written accounts are producing a new type of story. They are not stories of aggressive parents or unruly students even though those stories exist and are well known. Those stories made up the myth about schools. The accounts I read include some of these old stories but also stories that are new and are stories that are becoming a public issue. These stories have become a part of a larger picture of school culture and the consequence can be seen when people shy away from entering a profession that is no longer appealing.

In my examination of how new public management principles fragments the autonomy of school employees and creates a de-professionalism of their identity through the use of an endogenous process that I call strategic violence, I also became aware of the power of the written accounts.

As Paul Ricoeur argues, the written account is an intentional act. I as a reader am an interpreter and a translator. Every interpretation relocates what is read within knowledge of what is an available horizon of understanding. Thus I am, by using concepts such as “interior” and “exterior” environments and by “excluding” or “sorting-out” behavior, changing what I read in the accounts to a conceptual rationalizing interpretation of my interaction with the

accounts (1978:303). The accounts create the possibility to show how another story develops about what is happening to work in the public sector.

These stories, outside of an interpretation of how new public management has influenced daily behavior at work, have become part of the culture of the Swedish public service workplace. And whether they are heard or read, these stories are passed on to others working within similar work places. The stories are strong stories and convey a solid picture of changing professionalism and changing work places. A collective and silent response is apparent as fewer chose to enter public sector professions and more workers in public sector professions withdraw through illness or exit.

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Table 1: Population Percentages 2012-2015: Age, Sick Leave and Gender.

Population N_569	2012% N=118	2013% N=122	2014% N=153	2015% N=176
Age				
< 34	11,0	11,5	17,6	16,3
35-44	23,7	22,1	20,9	31,0
45-54	29,7	32,8	37,9	28,7
55>	35,6	33,6	23,5	24,0
Sick leave				
0 days	33,9	32,0	24,8	26,7
1-3 days	1,7	6,6	7,2	2,3
4-14 days	30,5	22,1	47,1	27,8
14 days>	33,9	39,3	20,9	43,2
Gender				
Women	77,1	85,2	87,6	84,5
Men	22,9	14,8	12,4	15,5

Table 2: Naming others as involved in the process.
Percentages for the year 2012 and 2015

Named as InvolvedN=271	2012 % N= 109	2015%N=162
Students	16,5	24,7
Parents	14,7	10,5
Colleague	31,2	26,5
Principal	27,5	20,4
Both Colleague and Principal	10,1	17,9