



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

"It's not really about the food, it's about everything else":

Pupil, teacher and head teacher experiences
of school lunch in Sweden

Linda Berggren

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Author

Linda Berggren

Title

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Abstract

The school lunch is often associated with food, nutrition and health while the social, physical, pedagogical and cultural dimensions of the school lunch situation have not been given as much attention. Sweden is one of few countries in the world where tax-funded school meals are served to all pupils in compulsory school. This thesis highlights the school lunch situation from the perspectives of pupils, teachers and head teachers in Sweden. The overall aim is to contribute a deeper understanding of how these school actors perceive and experience the school lunch situation.

The thesis is compiled from four papers. Paper 1 examine Nordic pupil's perspectives on the healthiness of the meals in the context of school lunches. The remaining papers have been carried out in a Swedish context. Paper 2 examines pupil's lived experiences of school lunch and how they relate to the social and physical dimensions of school lunch. Paper 3 examines teachers' perceptions of the school lunch in terms of intentions and daily practice. Paper 4 examines head teachers' (also called principals and school leaders) perceptions and experiences of school lunch. The main theoretical base is based on Henri Lefebvre's theoretical framework of social production of space, applied mostly in Papers 2-4, together with an overarching conceptual framework of social constructivism, applied mostly in Paper 1. The thesis is based on a qualitative descriptive research design where the empirical part of the study is based on focus group discussions, empathy-based stories, a qualitative analysis of open comments from a questionnaire and in the fourth paper, individual interviews.

Through the four papers performed within this thesis it is clear that the normative, social, emotional, physical and organizational dimensions are central to the way that school lunch is experienced and perceived. The results show that pupils, teachers and head teachers share the perception of school lunch as a space for socializing and eating. The results further show that the perceptions and experiences of school lunch are negatively affected by the way the school lunch is framed and organized at both school and municipality level, and that favorable conditions for the school lunch situation do not always exist. The main concerns are centered on the meal environment, time-restrictions, the logistics and the different structures that pupils, teachers and head teachers have to adapt to. These challenges may affect the possibility of influencing practices and adherence to policies. The physical and organizational dimensions of school lunch need to be acknowledged: specifically, time management and the extent to which school restaurants are purposely designed and built. This is something that should be also taken in consideration when designing and building new school restaurants.

Keywords

School lunch; Sweden; Pupils; Teachers; Head teachers; Social production of space.

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