

# A Mechanism Approach to the Sociology of Teachers' and Students' Actions:

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Teaching Practice, Student Disengagement and Instructional Materials

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## Abstract

The overall purpose of this dissertation is to describe and explain teachers' and students' actions related to instruction in compulsory education classrooms in Sweden.

In order to approach these issues, I will focus on social mechanisms (processes) that can explain teachers' and students' actions in the classroom. I argue that such mechanisms and actions in schools have been sparsely studied in previous research.

**Study I** deals with the research question, Why does the teaching practice of individual work and class teaching occur in Swedish classrooms? **Study II** deals with the research question, Why does usage of instructional materials (whiteboards, laptops, paper-based materials, textbooks) vary across Swedish classrooms? **Study III** deals with the research question, Why does student behavioral disengagement occur and reoccur in Swedish classrooms? **Study IV** deals with the research question, Why and how do students' expectations about school, teacher–student relations, students' commitment to school, and truancy mediate the effects of student social background on mathematics achievement across Swedish schools?

For the first three studies, I used video data that I analyzed using multiple methods such as descriptive statistics, cox regression, field notes, transcripts, and pictures. In **Study IV**, I used secondary data from Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development analyzed with structural equation modelling (SEM). In **Studies I** and **II**, the school class was the unit of analysis. In **Studies III** and **IV**, the individual student was the unit of analysis.

**Study I** indicates the increasing individualization of teaching. Furthermore, **Study I** indicates that subject area predicts teaching practice. **Study II** indicates that teachers use text-based materials more than textbooks or laptops. The study also suggests that class size affects students' usage of instructional materials in teaching practice, as do school subjects. **Study III** indicates that peer encouragement and school subject can predict student behavioral disengagement. **Study IV** indicates that the relationship between student background and mathematics achievement is mediated by school expectations, truancy, and commitment. Moreover, I also identify an independent indirect effect of the teacher–student relationship on the average predicted mathematics achievement.

**Keywords:** social mechanisms, action, sociology of education, teaching, disengagement, instructional materials, attitudes