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From Inclusion to Organisational Differentiation? A Fraserian Critique of Special Teaching Groups in Swedish Special Education Discourse

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Introduction

How schools are organised shapes pupils' opportunities to participate in education. The environments that schools constitute, together with the norms that structure them, tend to accommodate some pupils more readily than others. Questions of school organisation are therefore not only pedagogical in nature; they are also fundamentally questions of justice.

From this perspective, the debate on inclusion and exclusion in education becomes particularly significant. It not only reveals prevailing normative orders, but also how school organisation produces advantaged and disadvantaged groups of pupils. Special teaching groups (In Swedish särskilda undervisningsgrupper, i.e. small, separate instructional groups for pupils assessed as in need of special support) offer a particularly revealing site for examining the relationship between school organisation, inclusion, and justice, as they bring these tensions to the fore in policy and media debates. This is especially relevant in the current Swedish context, where significant changes are underway, making a justice-oriented perspective on organisational differentiation in education timely.

Recent policy proposals, expressed in government inquiries and political agreements, indicate a shift toward expanding the use of

special teaching groups (Tidö Agreement, 2022; SOU 2025:44). Although these proposals have not been implemented, the ambitions articulated in contemporary debates increasingly legitimise a school system based on organisational differentiation. This development is notable given Sweden's long-standing policy ambition to establish an inclusive school system, in which pupils' diverse needs are, as far as possible, addressed within mainstream classroom settings.

In this article, I draw on Nancy Fraser's redistribution–recognition dilemma to analyse this development. There are several reasons why Fraser's framework is particularly useful in this context. First, it makes it possible to examine how different forms of support may function as either affirmative (compensatory) or more transformative responses to educational disadvantage. Second, it enables an analysis of how responses that appear egalitarian can nonetheless reproduce the hierarchies they seek to remedy. Third, it brings together questions of resource distribution and cultural values. Finally, it provides a basis for shifting the focus from specific interventions to the broader logics through which educational injustice is produced and managed. Building on this, I argue that changes in the understandings of special teaching groups in Sweden from the 1960s to the present can be interpreted as a shift between different affirmative strategies, initially grounded in recognition and later in redistribution. This, in turn, suggests that a fragmented focus on different dimensions of disadvantage may contribute to an ongoing shift between positions 'for' and 'against' special teaching groups. On this basis, I go on to consider what a more transformative approach to educational justice might entail.

While the analysis centres on special teaching groups, organisational differentiation in the Swedish school system extends beyond this arrangement. Contemporary debates on special education in Sweden encompass a wider range of organisational forms, including special schools for pupils with intellectual disabilities, special needs schools, and other forms of segregated provision such as 'acute schools'. These parallel school forms represent more far-reaching institutionalised forms of

differentiation, in some cases including separate curricula (e.g. Lgrsär 22). Although they are not examined as primary cases in this article, references to research on public debates concerning such school forms are included where relevant, as they point to justificatory logics similar to those discussed here in relation to special teaching groups.

It is also important to emphasise that pupils in special teaching groups do not constitute a homogeneous or fixed group. Rather, they represent a heterogeneous category whose boundaries are shaped and reshaped across contexts in relation to changing societal norms and expectations of pupils. Yet, this category becomes socially visible in everyday school practice when pupils are grouped together and distinguished from others. Rather than treating pupils in special teaching groups as a pre-given collective, I approach this category as something that is constituted and made meaningful in relation to debates on special education. Accordingly, the analysis should be understood as a theory-driven examination of how justice, support, and differentiation can be understood, through Fraser's framework, in relation to policy and public debates on special teaching groups within the Swedish school system.

Disability, difference, and justice in special education

Within special education research, a common distinction is made between categorical and relational perspectives (e.g. Persson, 2019). A categorical perspective locates educational difficulties within individual pupils, whereas a relational perspective understands such difficulties as emerging in the interaction between the pupil and the educational environment, and as shaped by the organisation and normative expectations of schooling. Closely related arguments are found in the work of Thomas Skrtic (1991, 1995), who shows that the organisation of schooling itself plays a central role in producing the problems that special education is then tasked with addressing. From this perspective, schools as bureaucratic institutions generate ideas of normality and deviance that both structure and justify the differentiation of

pupils. Traditional special education can thus be understood not merely as a response to pre-existing needs, but as part of an organisational logic that stabilises the categories it seeks to support.

This emphasis on categorisation also relates to a central concern within disability studies. Disability categories are typically constructed in relation to dominant norms of ability (e.g. Goodley, 2014). This gives rise to a well-known dilemma: while such categories are mobilised to articulate claims to rights, resources, and social justice, they may simultaneously reproduce the very hierarchies between ability and disability on which they are based. At the same time, they remain indispensable for making such claims legible within existing institutional frameworks. As Vehmas and Watson (2014) argue, addressing injustice in this context requires both a critique of normative frameworks and a recognition of material disadvantage. Efforts to dismantle exclusionary norms must therefore be accompanied by concrete political measures, including the allocation of resources and the recognition of difference.

This tension becomes particularly salient when viewed through Nancy Fraser's theorisation of redistribution and recognition, which provides a framework for analysing how attempts to address injustice may operate in conflicting ways. Building on this, I examine how these tensions are articulated in Swedish policy and media debates on special teaching groups, and argue that they take the form of predominantly affirmative strategies.

The redistribution-recognition dilemma

To analyse different forms of injustice, Nancy Fraser (2003) introduces what she calls the redistribution–recognition dilemma, a framework she further develops in later work[1]. This distinction

[1] Fraser (2009) later extends this model into a three-dimensional theory of justice by adding the category of representation. As the present analysis addresses institutional and normative differentiation internal to the school system, rather than questions of political membership or decision-making procedures, it draws on the two-dimensional version.

makes it possible to understand injustice as rooted either in political–economic or cultural–value-based differentiation. In the former case, an ideal-typical collective is oppressed primarily because of economic inequalities; Fraser's example here is class. It is the unequal distribution of economic resources that generates the injustice, and it is this injustice that gives rise to the collective itself. In this sense, the injustice and the differentiation are one and the same. Injustices grounded in political–economic differentiation are therefore addressed through redistribution. The purpose of redistribution is not to improve the circumstances of the working class as such, but rather, as Fraser puts it, "to abolish itself as a class" (Fraser, 2003, p. 186). The second form of injustice arises through cultural–value-based differentiation. Here, the collective does not occupy a distinct position in the division of labour, which means that structural change cannot be achieved through economic redistribution. Instead, what the group requires to overcome the injustices imposed by dominant collectives is recognition, understood as the revaluation of social status and cultural meanings. Fraser (2003) illustrates this with the example of homosexuality. In this case, it is cultural devaluation that constitutes the injustice, and the remedy is therefore a transformation of cultural value patterns (p. 188). Thus, injustices rooted in economic conditions call for redistribution, whereas those rooted in cultural values call for recognition.

However, Fraser (2003) also emphasises that some collectives are bivalent in the sense that they require both redistribution and recognition; her central example is the subordination of women (p. 191). The difficulty arises because the logic of redistribution aims at dissolving the collective, whereas the logic of recognition seeks to revalue it. Redistribution, in this view, would work to make gender an inconsequential social category, while recognition would seek to assign women a higher social standing (Fraser, 2003, p. 191). This tension makes it challenging to pursue redistribution and recognition simultaneously, since each presupposes a different stance toward the continued existence of the collective. To address this problem, Fraser distinguishes between affirmative and transformative forms of redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 2003, p. 195; see also Fraser, 2007).

Affirmation is grounded in a universalist commitment to the equal worth of all persons, yet it addresses injustice only at a superficial level. In the domain of redistribution, it comprises measures such as income transfers, social insurance, and other welfare-state programmes that reduce economic disparities without transforming the underlying class relations and structures of production that generate those disparities in the first place (Fraser, 2003, p. 199). Such measures can, however, produce stigma for the very groups they are intended to support. Fraser characterises this tension as a mismatch between the aims of affirmative redistribution and its practical effects when redistributive interventions must be enacted repeatedly. Over time, these repeated interventions may foster distrust between groups, as redistribution can come to be perceived as unfair. Those who receive redistributed resources may therefore become vulnerable to new forms of recognition-related injustices (Fraser, 2003, p. 200).

In the realm of recognition, a similar distinction between affirmative and transformative approaches applies., Affirmative strategies aim to raise the social standing of a previously devalued group, yet they do so without altering the content of the group's identity or the underlying patterns of differentiation that sustain social hierarchies. Transformative recognition, by contrast, seeks to reshape the cultural–value order within which the injustice is embedded (Fraser, 2003, p. 196). Accordingly, affirmative recognition is directed at revaluing a particular group identity, whereas transformative recognition aims to revise the identity structures of all participants. Hence, transformative recognition and transformative redistribution work in an analogous way: the goal is to fundamentally reorganise society so that injustices no longer arise.

	Affirmation	**Transformation**
Redistribution	*The liberal welfare state* Surface reallocation of existing goods to existing groups; supports group differentiation; can generate misrecognition	*Socialism* Deep restructuring of relations of production, blurs group differentiation; can help remedy some forms of misrecognition
Recognition	*Mainstream* multiculturalism Surface reallocation of respect to existing identities of existing groups; supports group differentiation	*Deconstruction* Deep restructuring of relations of recognition; blurs group differentiation

Model 1: Fraser's (1995) distinction between affirmative and transformative strategies of redistribution and recognition.

Fraser elaborates this argument further through the distinction between the identity model and the status model (Fraser, 2000). The identity model, which Fraser is strongly critical of, understands injustice as rooted in the devaluation of identities. Oppression is therefore conceived as arising from the stigma attached to certain group identities by dominant groups. The corresponding remedy is to "repair" this damaged identity by creating new self-representations that can receive societal recognition. Fraser critiques this model for placing a moral burden on individuals to orient themselves toward a prescribed group identity and for overlooking redistribution as a crucial means of achieving social justice. As a more promising alternative, she proposes the status model, which treats recognition as a question of social status, and formulates the point as follows:

> To be misrecognized, on this view, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others' conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather denied the status of a full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life as a consequence of *institutionalized* patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. This approach avoids difficulties that arise when misrecognition is understood psychologically. When misrecognition is identified with internal distortions in the structure of self-consciousness of the oppressed, it is but a short step to blaming the victim. Conversely, when misrecognition is equated with prejudice in the minds of the oppressors, overcoming it seems to require policing their beliefs, an approach that is authoritarian. On the justice view, in contrast, misrecognition is a matter of externally manifest and publicly verifiable impediments to some people's standing as full members of society. And such arrangements are morally indefensible whether or not they distort the subjectivity of the oppressed (Fraser, 1999, p. 35).

From the perspective of the status model, the central task is therefore to examine how redistribution and recognition can enable members of disadvantaged collectives to participate in social life on equal terms. For the purposes of this discussion, pupils placed in special teaching groups are analysed as a socially differentiated collective produced through school organisation. Yet conceptualising 'them' as a group is analytically challenging: much like the category of class, the collective's existence is inseparable from the disadvantages that produce it. The pupils become a group only because the organisation of schooling fails to accommodate them within mainstream instruction. Their collective identity is thus generated through separation and legitimised by dominant norms of expected pupil performance. In this context, identity-based recognition is difficult to

operationalise, since no positive or stable shared identity exists beyond the common experience of being excluded. Fraser's distinction between identity- and status-based recognition is therefore particularly salient for the analysis that follows.

Overall, Fraser's framework connects cultural–value structures with resource allocation. This makes it possible to analyse the changing discourse on inclusion in Sweden, as it reveals how well-intentioned reforms may reinforce differentiation when they operate within an affirmative logic. In this sense, special teaching groups can be analysed not merely as pedagogical arrangements but as institutional responses to injustice. Before addressing the contemporary inclusion debate, a brief clarification is needed of the legal and organisational arrangements that govern assistance for pupils in need of special support in Sweden.

Extra adaptations and special teaching groups

In the Swedish school system, support is typically organised through two main forms of intervention: extra adaptations and special support. Extra adaptations are intended to be minor pedagogical adjustments implemented within the regular classroom, while special support is more extensive and may, under specific conditions, take the form of individual instruction or placement in a special teaching group, that is, a smaller, separate instructional setting outside the mainstream classroom (SFS 2010:800). Although the principle of inclusion has long dictated that support should primarily be provided within mainstream instruction, these exceptions have enabled a continued use of organisational differentiation.

The distinction between extra adaptations and special support was clarified in a 2014 revision of the Education Act, which emphasised that extra adaptations should fall within teachers' professional competence and be manageable in ordinary classroom settings (Prop. 2013/14:160). Yet the practical application of this distinction has been contentious. Schools have struggled to determine when adaptations are sufficient and when special

support is required, and debates have emerged about whether the current model places unreasonable demands on teachers or fails to adequately meet pupils' needs.

Recent government inquiries propose removing the requirement that special support be justified by 'specific reasons' and simplifying the procedures for placing pupils in special teaching groups (SOU 2025:44). These proposals indicate a shift away from the earlier ambition to reduce organisational differentiation and instead point toward an expansion and legitimisation of segregated arrangements within compulsory schooling.

A changing Swedish inclusion discourse

Since the 1960s, there has been a political consensus in Sweden aimed at establishing 'a school for all' (Persson, 2019). This ideal envisions an educational system designed to ensure that the vast majority of pupils can access their education within the mainstream classroom environment. Nonetheless, this ambition has not been without exceptions, as it was common during this period to organise so-called 'OBS-classes' (observation classes) intended for pupils in need of support (Lgr 62, p. 77). The differentiation of pupils in need of special support therefore became a basis for organising schools, resulting in increased segregation within the educational system.

This organisational differentiation was, however, met with sharp criticism in Sweden. It was contested not only due to its ineffectiveness in promoting pupils' academic achievements, but also because it tended to socially stigmatise pupils placed in these separate classes (Ahlström, Emanuelsson, & Wallin, 1986; Österling, 1967). As a result, the strong critique catalysed a paradigm shift from organisational differentiation to pedagogical differentiation. This meant that rather than placing pupils in need of special support into separate classes, special educational interventions were to be integrated within regular classroom settings to a much greater extent (SFS 2010:800; SOU 1974:53). The transition from organisational to pedagogical differentiation

was largely driven by an increased emphasis on individualised education and reflected a broader political and societal commitment to ensure that every pupil's right to an equal education is fulfilled. This shift was further consolidated through a series of curriculum reforms (e.g., Lgr 62; Lgr 69; Lgr 80), which reinforced the principle of adapting teaching practices to meet the unique needs of each pupil. The state inquiry 'The inner work of the school' (SOU 1974:53) was especially influential in transforming the Swedish perspective on special education, and the following government bill underscored the importance of adapting teaching to meet the individual needs of each pupil, marking a shift toward pedagogical differentiation (Prop. 1975/76:39, p. 1).

It is within this context that inclusion became a cornerstone of Swedish educational policy, further emphasized in the Salamanca Declaration (Swedish National Commission for UNESCO, 2006). Sweden has also been internationally regarded as having an inclusive school system (EADSNE, 2003, p. 113), although critical reviews have demonstrated shortcomings in this assessment (Göransson, Nilholm, & Karlsson, 2011). The flexibility built into the legislation has led some scholars to characterise the Swedish system as one of 'weak inclusion,' where inclusion functions as an aspirational principle but exemptions are routinely made for particular cases (Carlsson & Nilholm, 2004). While this inclusive ideal has long served as a guiding principle in Swedish education, it is now increasingly being questioned. A key indicator of this shift is the growing number of media debates in which inclusion is framed as a problem rather than a goal.

Research on these debates shows that arguments for segregation are often presented as protecting vulnerable pupils, improving learning conditions and offering especially competent teachers, thereby aligning with what has been conceptualised as segrequality—the idea that equality for some pupils is best achieved when their needs are met in separate, tailored settings (Göransson & Bengtsson 2023, p. 300). These arguments also tend to position individual and collective interests against each other, for example by asserting that pupils have a right to a calm and safe learning environment that can only be ensured through

sorting out those deemed disruptive (Bunar, 2024; Bagger & Lillvist, 2021, p. 66). Other analyses demonstrate how the claim that 'inclusion has gone too far' has become politically institutionalised, influencing policy reforms and legitimising segregated environments as efficient and equitable alternatives (Magnússon & Paulsrud, 2025). Taken together, these studies indicate a discursive reorientation in which organisational differentiation is increasingly framed not as a departure from inclusion, but as a pragmatic and, at times, even just response to contemporary challenges in education.

Another factor that likely contributes to the shifting discourse on inclusion in both research and public debate is the criticism directed at extra adaptations in recent years. Educational researchers (Jönsson, 2018; Klapp & Jönsson, 2021; Sandström, Lindqvist, & Klang, 2017), teachers' unions (Sweden's Teachers, 2024), and public commentators (Karlsson, 2024; Mikko, 2023) have highlighted that extra adaptations have not produced the expected outcomes and have, instead, led to a heightened workload for teachers in compulsory school. These concerns are also reflected in the government's committee directive and subsequent interim reports, which propose abolishing extra adaptations and simplifying the procedures for placing pupils in special teaching groups or individual education (Dir. 2024:30; SOU 2025:44). Hence, the earlier shift from organisational differentiation to pedagogical differentiation may now be reversing.

To understand this development, it is helpful to recall the rationale that previously motivated moves away from organisational differentiation. At that time, a commonly raised concern was that pupils in special teaching groups risked being stigmatised. From a Fraserian perspective, this earlier line of argument can be understood as operating within a logic of recognition: by reintegrating pupils into regular classes, the aim was to remove the stigma associated with segregation. In the current debate, by contrast, a typical argument is that pupils placed in special teaching groups can receive more appropriate and effective support. Such claims rest on a logic of redistribution, in which

additional resources are directed toward those identified as needing special support. Hence, contemporary debates on the organisation of special educational support may be read as shifting from a logic of recognition toward a logic of redistribution. While these patterns are not exhaustive, they illustrate two contrasting logics that have shaped the debate at different moments, a tension central to the redistribution–recognition dilemma.

Analysing the discourse from a Fraserian perspective

In the following analysis, I examine how justifications for placing pupils in special teaching groups can be interpreted through Fraser's redistribution–recognition dilemma. I first show how these claims rely on logics characteristic of affirmative redistribution and recognition. I then offer a tentative exploration of what a transformative approach might require, and how adopting such a perspective would reframe the current debate on support for pupils in need of special support.

Affirmative redistribution/recognition

Affirmative redistribution involves reallocating resources to reduce political-economic disadvantages facing marginalised groups, but without changing the underlying conditions that produce these disadvantages. In relation to class, for example, redistribution might take the form of income transfers. When redistribution is enacted through special teaching groups, it becomes affirmative if it reinforces rather than challenges the differentiation between groups. Within this logic, such groups are presented as necessary in order to provide pupils in need of special support with more extensive provision than other pupils in the school. The educational goods being redistributed may include a higher staff–pupil ratio, teachers with specialised qualifications such as special educators, access to better facilities, and support functions such as counsellors or school psychologists, along with other resources that can be shifted within the school organisation. The key point is that, within this logic, special teaching groups are

justified through the redistribution of resources. However, these changes do not alter the school system as a whole, instead, they are based on segregating those pupils in need of special support, therefore reinforcing differentiation.

There are two problems with this logic when applied to the Swedish context, one empirical and one theoretical. Existing research does not provide clear evidence that special teaching groups improve pupils' educational outcomes (Giota, Lace, & Emanuelsson, 2023; Jönsson, 2018, p. 3), therefore further evaluative studies are needed. In addition, a recent review by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2024) concluded that most of the examined schools needed to improve the quality of their provision in special teaching groups. Identified shortcomings concerned the scope and variation of instruction, the extent to which teaching was adapted, and the deprioritisation of pupils' knowledge development (Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2024). On this basis, there is currently no strong empirical support for the assumption that special teaching groups will ensure that educational resources are used in ways that reduce disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils.

However, even if we imagine a scenario in which the development of special teaching groups led to better outcomes for the disadvantaged group of pupils, a theoretical problem will remain in light of Fraser's account of the redistribution–recognition dilemma. The allocation of resources to such groups presupposes that pupils accept membership in the collective created by this differentiation. In other words, the solution depends on and reinforces group differentiation. This leads to other concerns. First, pupils placed in special teaching groups risk being stigmatised and internalise a negative self-understanding. Second, even if special teaching groups were to deliver strong educational outcomes, a Fraserian analysis suggests that affirmative redistribution may still generate misrecognition. Because support must be targeted at a delimited collective, the intervention risks producing resentment among those outside the group, while simultaneously stabilising the disadvantaged group as a distinct

social category. In this sense, the remedy may reproduce the very status hierarchy it seeks to mitigate.

Turning from affirmative redistribution to affirmative recognition reveals a parallel set of difficulties, this time concerning the cultural–value dimension of differentiation. Within this logic, placing pupils who are constructed as deviating from dominant school norms in special teaching groups is framed as a way of providing them with a safer and more supportive school environment. Such reasoning relies on an identity-based conception of recognition, insofar as it treats the perceived divergence of these pupils as a defining group characteristic that warrants separate treatment. Media debates offer examples of this reasoning, where it is argued that certain pupils differ so markedly from others that they benefit more from differentiated provision, and that they risk marginalisation if they remain in mainstream classes (Göransson & Bengtsson, 2023, pp. 296–297). Differentiation is thus presented as a means of promoting equality, yet it reflects an affirmative form of recognition: it aims to protect pupils from the immediate pressures of mainstream schooling without challenging the structural and normative conditions that generate marginalisation in the first place.

Affirmative recognition may also take the form of efforts to construct a shared group identity within special teaching groups. Yet it is difficult to see how pupils placed in such groups could inhabit a meaningful collective identity, since 'school difficulties' offer little ground for an empowering self-understanding. Diagnostic labels might seem to provide a more positively framed identity that could be revalued, but this approach reintroduces the difficulty Fraser associates with the identity model by making recognition contingent upon adopting a predefined group identity.

If the aim is to address inequalities within the school system, affirmative redistribution through special teaching groups raises difficulties, as it may reinforce group differentiation and give rise to misrecognition. Affirmative recognition grounded in group identity presents similar challenges, insofar as it can reproduce

cultural–value hierarchies or generate identity collectives that do not necessarily align with the experiences of individual pupils.

Transformative redistribution/recognition

To consider what a more transformative approach might involve, Fraser's framework offers two guiding principles. First, a transformative approach must work to reduce differentiation by restructuring arrangements that affect all pupils. Second, recognition must be understood in terms of status, enabling disadvantaged groups to participate on equal terms with others.

Hence, a transformative redistribution of educational goods would need to encompass all pupils. Its aim would not be to compensate for disadvantage within existing structures, but to alter those structures so fundamentally that the conditions producing disadvantage no longer arise. This is a far-reaching and radical ambition. Such a perspective prompts questions about when and why the need for special support emerges. Measures such as substantially reducing class sizes or introducing co-teaching models may be seen as examples of systemic reforms that could, in principle, reshape schooling in ways that lessen the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils. From a Fraserian standpoint, the central question for any distribution of educational goods is therefore whether, and in what ways, it contributes to permanently reducing differentiation. In a similar way, recognition would, if it is to function transformatively, need to reshape the cultural–value structures of schooling. This might involve rethinking the assumptions that define what counts as valuable knowledge, how learning is measured, and which forms of performance are recognised. Such a shift would also unsettle deficit-oriented narratives that portray individual pupils as the source of educational failure. Accordingly, transformative recognition is concerned with altering the status hierarchies embedded in the school's normative order.

Such a transformation of the school's value patterns would be easier to pursue if the organisation of schooling were restructured

in ways that enabled more pupils to participate in mainstream instruction. At the same time, shifts in underlying value orientations may themselves support and legitimise the organisational changes required, potentially generating the political momentum for a more far-reaching restructuring of the Swedish school system. From this perspective, transformative redistribution and recognition can be understood as mutually reinforcing, since both seek to unsettle the conditions that produce differentiation and injustice. By contrast, efforts to extend recognition to all pupils without addressing the conditions that generate school difficulties may, despite good intentions, reproduce misrecognition.

These dynamics become particularly visible when the historical shifts in Swedish special education are viewed through Fraser's framework. The abolition of OBS-classes may be taken to represent an affirmative move centred on reducing stigma, yet it did not entail a broader transformation of the organisational conditions that produced school difficulties. The subsequent introduction of extra adaptations likewise constituted an affirmative form of redistribution, directing support to individual pupils without altering the structures that made such support necessary. The growing criticism of extra adaptations—often framed as a conflict between pupils' rights to support and teachers' limited capacity to provide it—illustrates how affirmative redistribution can generate new forms of misrecognition, as Fraser predicts. In the current debate, this dynamic appears to be contributing to a renewed turn toward affirmative redistribution, this time through the expansion of special teaching groups. Together, these shifts reveal a recurring oscillation between different affirmative strategies in Swedish special education, none of which fundamentally restructures the conditions under which educational disadvantage arises. The contrast between these affirmative and transformative logics can be summarised as follows:

	Affirmation	Transformation
Redistribution	*Special teaching groups* Surface reallocation of existing goods to special teaching groups; supports group differentiation; can generate misrecognition	*Reorganisation of school system* Deep restructuring of school organisation so it affects all pupils for example, by increasing teacher-pupil ratio, blurs group differentiation; can help remedy some forms of misrecognition
Recognition	*Identity based grouping* Using grouping that allows for identity-based recognition such as autism classes. Surface reallocation of respect to these identities; supports group differentiation	*Deconstruction of school norms* Deep restructuring of school norms for status-based recognition; blurs group differentiation

Model 2: The redistribution-recognition dilemma framed as organisational differentiation in schools.[2]

The model thus represents an application of Fraser's analytical framework to the organisation of special educational support, illustrating how different approaches to redistribution and recognition may be understood in this context. In doing so, I position special teaching groups as an example of an affirmative remedy, while distinguishing this from more transformative alternatives. The model thereby provides an analytical lens for examining how responses to educational injustice are framed in relation to the structural and normative conditions of schooling.

Conclusion

Drawing on Fraser's framework of redistribution and recognition as an interpretive lens, I argued that recent developments concerning organisational differentiation can be understood as a movement from affirmative recognition toward affirmative redistribution. From this perspective, both historical and contemporary responses to educational disadvantage are best understood as operating within an affirmative logic, albeit in different ways, addressing inequalities without transforming the structural conditions that produce them. While the debate is often framed as a movement between opposing approaches to inclusion and differentiation, I suggest that the contrast may be overstated. From a Fraserian perspective, these developments can instead be seen as variations of the same affirmative logic. Hence, the overall ambition has been to show how current debates on inclusion and segregation can be interpreted through a socialist theory of justice, and thereby to clarify what is at stake when support is

[2] This model adapts Fraser's distinction between affirmative and transformative strategies of redistribution and recognition to the context of Swedish special education. 'Affirmation' refers to interventions that reallocate resources or revalue social status without altering the structures that produce differentiation. 'Transformation' refers to approaches that seek to restructure institutional arrangements and normative frameworks so that disadvantage no longer arises. The examples in the table illustrate how organisational differentiation in schooling can embody these contrasting logics and should be read as tentative illustrations.

conceptualised as an individual rather than structural matter. Fraser's framework is particularly illuminating in this context because it exposes how educational interventions that appear egalitarian can nevertheless reproduce structural disadvantage when they operate within an affirmative logic. By reframing the discussion in this way, I aim to open space for reconsidering the organisational and normative foundations of educational equality in Sweden.

Disclosure statement

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