Social Justice in Swedish post-16 education? New preparatory programmes

• research project funded by the Swedish Research Council (2012-2015): Inclusive and competitive? Changing understandings and practices of social inclusion in upper secondary school.

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Background...

• by 2011, over 85% of Swedish 25-year-olds had graduated from upper secondary education (OECD 2013).
• Gy 11 - brings higher entrance demands for all post-16 education
• new differentiation between academic and vocational programmes,
• five new preparatory study paths entitled introductory programmes.
Aim, method and theoretical framework

• The aim is to map the early onset and outcomes of the IPs nationally and locally
• interviews across six municipalities, official documents and statistics, including reports, guidelines and press releases of the national education authorities.
• a critical approach to understand the policy context for the IPs.
• We refer to wider discussions about inclusion and exclusion (Silver 1994, Alexiadou 2002, Béland 2007, Jones et al. 2008)
• Bernstein’s (2000) concepts of ‘pedagogic rights’.
Swedish upper secondary education (1960s – 2011)

• At post-16 level, a variety of academic and vocational programmes were gathered in the mid-1960s under the umbrella of a national curriculum (Gymnasieskolan).

• fully financed by the state and the overall responsibilities for its delivery were given to the municipalities

• detailed central regulations

• a curriculum reform entailing the prolongation of vocational programmes from two to three years, and broadened access to higher education
new policies for a de-centred role for the state
• introduced market-type principles into education
• included policies for student choice, school vouchers and public funding of new, free-schools along with new systems for assessment and control
• the provision and outcomes of education varied greatly between regions, municipalities and schools
• Increasing numbers of post-16 students were “drop outs”
New preparatory study paths – the introductory programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introductory programmes</th>
<th>Aim of the studies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IP1 Individual alternative</td>
<td>Transition to a vocational programme, other further education or employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP2 Language programme</td>
<td>Transition to a national programme or vocational training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP3 Preparatory programme</td>
<td>Transition to a specific national programme within a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP4 Programme-oriented individual choice</td>
<td>Transition to a specific vocational programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP5 Vocational introduction</td>
<td>Transition to the labour market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the policy context of the IPs ...

- equivalence
- equal education opportunities
- equity in the distribution of education
- ‘inclusive education’
- ‘education for all’
### Bernstein’s division of pedagogical rights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Capability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Enhancement</td>
<td>‘The right to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities’ (Bernstein 2000 xx)</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Inclusion</td>
<td>‘The right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally [including] the right [to be] autonomous’ (Bernstein 2000 xx)</td>
<td>Belonging in group(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Participation</td>
<td>‘The right to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order’ (Bernstein 2000 xxi)</td>
<td>Civic discussion and action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study...

- documents, including national policy documents and official statistics, national media and teacher union references
- interviews with staff (n=34) in the upper secondary sector across six municipalities.
- Official documents, including statistics from official websites.
- Quantitative and qualitative data on education at national, regional and local levels, including the school-unit level, are provided in databases, memos and reports of the National Agency for Education and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate; governmental bills, reports and press releases
National overview of the new preparatory programmes (2011-2014)

- IPs had almost one-fifth of the cohort aged 16 years (18.9% by 2014)
- dominated by boys (6:4)
- the IP students had a considerably lower education family background
- considerable inequities in the provision of the IPs
- statistics showed overall high drop-out rates among IP students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>No. of schools*</th>
<th>No. of public schools among total providing IPs</th>
<th>No. of free-schools among total providing IPs</th>
<th>No. of students within IPs</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of student cohort within IPs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bay City</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13/11</td>
<td>29/2</td>
<td>1 500</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Hill</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4/3</td>
<td>8/1</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Village</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Town</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4/1</td>
<td>3/1</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River Town</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5/1</td>
<td>6/1</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Village</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different distribution - integration/segregation

• We try to do our best to avoid schools that are too homogenous, for example we provide introductory programmes at all our [public] schools. (Administrative leader of upper secondary education, Bay City)

• The way we have organized all introductory programmes in one school [with no national programmes] /..../that’s an old tradition here in River Town. (Principal, Larch Public, River Town)
Challenges

- **Costs:** “The introductory programmes are taking more resources than we had expected/…/ We have more pupils than previously who don’t reach the competence level for access to upper secondary education. /…/ As it will take four years for many to complete their studies, the municipalities’ spending on upper secondary education will also increase”. (Politician, Forest Town)

- **Questioning the national guidelines for the programmes:** “Staff from the National Agency for Education were here and informed before the introductory programmes were launched. But they do not know anything about the introductory programmes./ … / Then we went to X-town to get more info from the National Agency for Education, but the information they gave there was also under all criticism, I think. We know more, it’s we who are the experts”. (Principal, Forest Town)
disparate policy aim…

• “This policy idea of one-year studies in the Preparatory introductory programme, and no more, has turned out as indeed quite impossible!” (Development leader, municipal level, Forest Town)

• “The introductory students have completely failed to obtain grades in compulsory school /…/ So, we have not got many students in the one-year Preparatory introductory programme. We all know that it is extremely rare [to enter a regular national programme within a year] /…/ It is not just about turning around like that [snaps his fingers]”. (Principal, Forest Town)
The transition to work places...

• It is hard for us to find work placements when companies and employers prefer trainees for whom they will get economic compensation. Also, they want persons who are older and who can perform tasks without extensive supervision and support. (Study and guidance officer, Forest Town)
many hindrances …

• employers generally preferred individuals above 18 years of age and who were registered at the Employment Agency and for whom they would receive state subsidies,

• the policies posed a new, heavy economic challenge arising from the planning and onset of the new organization, including increased workloads for staff at different levels.

• contrary to policy suggestions, the new stricter entrance demands meant that few IP students managed to achieve the necessary grades for transition to a national programme within a year

• Staff was critical of the policy rhetoric and stated that they now had little trust in the national school authority.
conclusions

• about one-fifth of the “new” cohort of 16-year-olds is recruited each year to new preparatory, so-called introductory programmes.

• the new IPs are far from living up to the wider “inclusive” policy ideas.

• Swedish post-16 education is continuously based on a highly marketised system, including the effects of the unequal quality and distribution of education broadly along social lines.
many discrepancies between national policies and the practical local opportunities

• high rates of student drop out, frequent changes in study paths among students

• only a few introductory students manage to successfully complete a national programme.

• require a longer study time for completion of a national programme; extra costs for the individual students and their families, as well as the municipalities.

• “real life” often includes physical segregation, including social and intellectual segregation, between preparatory students and students in national programmes

• nationally outlined structures lack any follow up on students who “drop out”, nor are there official statistical data on student transitions to the job market.
• the new IPs as “outside” regular upper secondary education work to exclude many young people from formal post-16 education.

• students who are denied their pedagogical rights are at risk of intellectual, social and cultural segregation.

• Risks of wider social exclusion, as identified for the young (16-to 24-year-olds) who are ‘neither in work nor in studies’ include long-term unemployment, physical and mental health problems.
• the policies for the new IPs stand out as both contradictory and odd.
• Swedish policies for the preparatory programmes tend to be not only socially segregating but also socially aggressive.
• the introductory programmes might instead be exacerbating social and economic exclusion, with implications for many of the young concerned, their families and society at large – precarious future?