Academic work on a back-burner: Habituating students in the upper-secondary school towards marginality and a life in the precariat

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Abstract
This article takes its point of departure in ethnographic data from what in Sweden is called the Individual Programme (IP). This programme was for upper-secondary school pupils who were not eligible for one of the country’s academic or vocational programme. Its main formally expressed goal was to enable students to become eligible for these programmes. Our data show that this aim risks going unfulfilled as attending the kind of programme represented by the IP increases the likelihood of marginalisation and a precarious existence. The policy of freedom of choice was a problem. This policy allowed the students to opt out of academic work and staff to encourage students to opt for easy study options and activities that took them away from academic routes.

Introduction
According to the introductory paragraphs of the Swedish Education Act, education at both primary and secondary levels should aim to promote the maximum development of all children, compensate for the variations in their learning possibilities, and provide equal access to education regardless of geographical and socioeconomic background (SFS 2010:800). At the same time we know that an individual’s social background still determines to a large extent the educational path that they take (refs: Berggren 2013; Svensson 2006). The middle and upper class are given opportunities for academically oriented training that prepares them for advanced social positions, while lower middle class and working class pupils are offered a vocationally oriented education that prepares them for subordinate social positions within the social division of labour (Berggren 2013). Teachers put different demands on students in relation to this and also have different expectations and understandings of their capabilities and education needs (Beach 2001; Beach and Dovemark 2011; Dovemark 2004, 2012; Hjelmér 2012; Norlund 2009; Rosvall 2012). This is reflected in the content they select, the way content is communicated and how students seem to be almost habitually constructed and labelled as ‘theoretical’ or ‘practical’ on the one hand and gifted or ungifted on the other (Berggren 2013; Dovemark 2011).

The present article takes its point of departure in ethnographic data from a Swedish upper secondary school. It concerns selection and differentiation processes there and at the interface of this school with the comprehensive sector. It looks in particular what was previously called the Individual Programme (IP).

Background
Sweden’s education system has been internationally recognised as comprehensive since at least as early as the nineteen-sixties, due to its formally non-selective 9 year-long common system of compulsory education for pupils aged from 6/7 to 15/16 years. This education has existed since
1962. It is preceded by pre-school studies that are freely available to all children, and it is followed by a three year elective upper-secondary school education, where students are separated into different programmes of study. Some of these are university preparation programmes (called theoretical or academic programmes) and some of them are vocational programmes (often called practical programmes). There are sixteen such programmes plus what is today called the introductory programmes (former Individual Programme) for students who for one reason or another are not eligible for other programmes. Although elective, attendance levels in the upper-secondary school are high: 98% of pupils leaving comprehensive school begin upper secondary school. The focus of the present article is on data from an individual programme.

The separation of pupils into the two programme types follows old principles of educational differentiation that are well recognised internationally and historically. Parker (2007) describes how these processes work as part of a normalising of ideology through the production of ‘images’ of human beings that serve to keep people in place (Parker 2007, 45). In the present article we look at this issue of the separation of young people from mainstream education via alternative programmes and the effects of this on them. We also examine the identities of youth who are not yet eligible for upper-secondary national programme studies of either the academic or the vocational type.

The main goals of IP were to meet the individual needs of students and help them to become eligible for a national programme (Swedish National Board of Education, 2006) (IV 2000:21, 9). IP was, as the name indicates, strongly focused on the individual student and had a strong emphasis on ‘freedom of choice’. According to the school law (fifth chapter, 4b §) every student had the right to his or her own ‘study plan’.

Unlike the national academic and vocational programmes the IP did not have a compulsory curriculum. Instead the Swedish National Agency of Education gave the municipal authorities freedom to explore many different flexible solutions (IV 2001:21, 5), the organisation and content of which has varied in different schools because of this. Sometimes IP has been integrated within the national programmes and sometimes it has been run separately, even in separate premises. IP had the third largest annual intake amongst programmes in Swedish upper secondary schools when we conducted our research.

In 2011 the Individual Programme was reorganized and renamed as the Introductory Programme. The reasons given for this were high dropout rates and low rates of transition into national programmes, which was heavily criticized by the Minister of Education. The introductory programme, like the old IP, lacks a compulsory national curriculum. Instead detailed individual study plans are drawn up for the subjects and courses which need to be completed by students if they are to gain access to a regular programme, and there are also complementary studies that can be carried out within educational ‘job training schemes’.

The intention with the new introductory programme is thus, like the former IP, to on the one hand bridge compulsory and upper secondary education. However, unlike the former programme it also includes formal sanctification of direct relations to the local labour market (Ministry of Education 2009, http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/11908). There is thus a double orientation toward further studies on the one hand and the labour market on the other (see Dovemark 2011, 2012).

In terms of official policy texts, the IP was strongly focused on preparing students for further studies in the upper-secondary school and included theoretical studies as a foundation for higher
education and life-long-learning. This was very clear in policy texts such as SOU ¹ 1997:107 and SOU 2002:120. However, in practice this official policy was often re-contextualised according to different parameters (Hultqvist 2001). Ethnographic studies (see e.g. Dovemark 2011; Johansson 2009) have identified two important dimensions: (i) a deficit view of the pupils attending the programme on the part of teacher teams and local educational leadership and (ii) a concomitant downscaling of the education they were offered to vocational rather than academic studies. Thus, despite the main goal of preparing for further upper-secondary studies and life-long learning, the IP has had a strong focus on preparing students for future manual or vocational work and a restricted social role or citizenship.

An example of this from Dovemark (2011) was that when studying 40 web sites, where different municipalities and schools presented their individual programmes, 37 of them showed pictures of students doing carpentry, mechanics or cooking and there were no pictures of students actually engaged in study activities that involved books, calculators, computers or other artefacts that are commonly associated with the theoretical subjects and academic study. The texts were quite similar to South City’s presentation, where our study was carried out. On that school’s website it is stated:

The individual programme is meant to prepare for continued studies and skilled work. You get vocational guidance and social and professional training. It is also good for students who need to work with their motivation and identity.

Not one single web page showed or talked about advanced intellectual skills for these students. Regarding such skill, as one teacher put it, ‘we are happy if they can just manage to read a whole book’. They ‘need to develop basic skills of literacy and numeracy… which they will do at best…. They have no need of reading literary canons and would not benefit from that kind of work in my opinion anyway’ (Joan: English). Berggren (2013) has recently shown that these deficit images are not restricted to the Individual Programme students or their new equivalent from the introductory programme from 2011. As described in Beach (2001) they cut across understandings of pupils from all non-academic study programmes and represent a deep democracy problem at the very heart of our ‘one-school-for all’ ideal with deep consequences for all students, not only those who really do want to do academic work (Jonsson & Beach 2013).

The problem of IP as a programme that is socially constructed in this way as a programme for students with learning (or motivational) difficulties became clear in the ethnography after just a few weeks of fieldwork. Students were at IP for a number of reasons. As the students identified in Beach and Dovemark (2011), several of the students testified that they had poor relationships to teachers during compulsory school, had problems at home, had been ill, or had been unable to decode the school and its activities. As working class students in general then, their academic failure was more about social than cognitive issues (Bernstein 2000). The special education teacher at Chisel verified this when we asked him how many of the 22 enrolled students he considered having learning difficulties. After a while he said ‘possibly two’ and that the problem they had was not related to cognitive ability.

¹ SOU (Statens Offentliga Utredningar [Government Official Reports])
Research method
We have previously engaged quite extensively in introducing, theorising, developing and conducting ethnographic research in education (see e.g. Beach 2010; Beach and Dovemark 2007, 2011; Dovemark 2004, 2011, 2012). The present article is based on developments from that research and data from recent ethnographic investigations. These show ethnography to be a multifarious research approach enabling culturally rich theoretical and practical descriptions of human life over a relatively long period of time (Jeffrey & Troman 2004) with different forms of observation and description. Ethnography involves direct and constant social encounters and meetings with human subjects in their daily lives, and tries as fully and as respectfully as possible to represent the human experiences involved (Beach 2010).

Field-notes were the most important data form in our research. In line with Sanjek (1990, 95) we have identified different levels of field notes, which are provided alongside analysis and interpretations, to allow for continuous reflections concerning the complexity of human contexts and reflexivity as a way of understanding the processes and influences when producing data (Beach 2010). One of the main features of the fieldwork has been flexibility with regard to time and visits in the field (Jeffery & Troman 2004). We had access to the field whenever we wanted during school-time. We could ‘pop in whenever we liked’, as one teacher expressed it.

The research site
The study was carried out at a school that we named Currant Upper. It is situated in Lake City in the south of Sweden. Lake City has approximately 60,000 inhabitants. The school had roughly 2,000 students, which is regarded as a big school in Sweden. The individual programme was divided into two different parts. These were Booklet, which was situated close to the main school building, and the strongly vocationally oriented Chisel, located quite some distance away in an industrial area on the outskirts of the town. There were 120 students enrolled on the IP when the fieldwork began. This represented 16% of the student body at Currant Upper.

At the time of the research approximately 8% of Swedish upper secondary students attended an IP. Of these most came directly from secondary school because they lacked grades in the core subjects, while others were newly arrived migrants who needed to learn Swedish before they could join a national programme (the Swedish National Agency of Education 2007, 5). The students were thus not a homogenous group. However, there was one common hallmark among the students who enrolled from the comprehensive school. They came predominantly from homes without established academic traditions (Dovemark 2011; Hultqvist 2001; SOU 2000:39).

Another typical characteristic of the Individual programme, aside from its obvious class bias (as a programme devised by the upper classes and monitored by agents of the middle class for children from lower down the class system), is its gender imbalance. Nationally less than 30% of the IP pupils were female. This applies also in the present investigation. At Chisel, which we focus in this text, there were seventeen male and five female students enrolled during the year of study. They were taught and supervised by three teachers (one female and two male). There was also two male and two female instructors without any teacher education. This is an extremely high ratio of unqualified to qualified staff according to national averages.

When asking 24 students in our investigation about their parents’ occupations 19 of them named typical working-class jobs like lorry driver, care assistant, industrial labourer, plumber or painter and others had parents who were currently either unemployed, on sick leave or on social security pensions. None of the pupils in the cohort had parents with an academic higher education who could be classed as typical professionals (doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses etc.). National statistics are in line with these observations (Svensson 2006).
The programme had low status and teachers comprehended their practice as mistreated with regard to economical resources compared to other programmes at the school (see also Hultqvist 2001; Johansson 2009). They collectively complained to the principal several times and their continual struggle for better conditions stretched across the whole year of fieldwork.

**The present study**

The data upon which present paper focusses have primarily been produced from transcribed (field-) interviews and observations in one particular research project, but also links to other previous investigations. All interview and observation transcriptions have been read and coded. In addition to participant observation and interviewing at the sites we have also analysed web sites and folders about the IP there.

The participant observation was intense in some periods and in others less so. On average two to three full or half days a week were spent in the field, mainly at Chisel. The main focus was on students and staff during lessons, but also included excursions. We also had the opportunity to ‘hang around’ during breaks and free time. We spent time at cafeterias/assembly rooms and in the corridors. We decided not to interfere in some areas, for example the changing rooms and smoking areas as we regarded these as students’ ‘private zones’.

The data focused on in the present paper have been produced around interviews and transcription field notes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. All names in the text are fictive. The analyses are based on participant observations, formal interviews, field interviews and different kinds of artefacts found in the field (Beach 2010).

**Students, organisation and main activities at Chisel**

The official aim of the individual programme at Chisel was, in line with national policy documents, primarily to help students qualify for a national programme (Swedish National Board of Education 2006). However, both nationally and locally this aim has historically been quite difficult to accomplish and anticipation for the research was that our observations may be able to help identify if and how internal practices created, or helped to create, hinders for this policy. The policy of freedom of choice was felt to be a possible problem. This policy has been shown to allow students to opt out of academic work and has also been used in schools by staff to encourage them to opt for easy study options that took them away from academic routes (see also Berggren 2013; Hjelmér 2012; Johansson 2009 and Rosvall 2012). In line with research by Jonsson and Beach (2012, 2013), some pupils are simply seen as ungifted and unsuited to academic work and incapable of benefitting from it and are as a result encouraged away from pursuing these kinds of studies.

The early observations at Chisel confirmed that there was a possible risk of this kind. The curriculum that was developed to serve the pupil group could be described as formed according to a typically horizontal knowledge discourse in the sense of Bernstein (2000). The discourse was termed horizontal in the sense that it was based on everyday language and concepts and expressed common sense knowledge related to practical goals. It was constructed often in conjunction with entrepreneurial activities at the site. These activities were seen as being very important. ‘Services, manufacture/production and selling’ proved to be one of the main activities and were even important for co-financing certain extra-curriculum activities such as excursions. One day a week was intended for excursions which had to be financed:
Everyone has to contribute... nothing is for free ... every extra activity costs money and we want to do excursions and study visits... All students have to contribute with their own work (Leif, instructor).

The kinds of jobs that were done by students from Chisel included refuse collection, tidying local lay-bys and preschool playgrounds, table manufacturing, and servicing conferences. Chisel was almost as much a business as it was a school and it was a business where the students contributed their labour to allow the organization to function. But as a consequence, the students were offered a pedagogical organisation and content basically built upon manual work and principles that are not normally rewarded in the formal school and that do not prepare well for future political citizenship and activities. They reduced students’ possibilities to engage in academic work and analyse and discuss current problems in society. They rarely engaged in an education in line with the academically oriented discourse of the kind that is offered to students on academic programmes and that they would need in order to be fully integrated into a national programme, including vocational ones, at least in relation to their academic components programmes (Beach 2001; Berggren 2013; Hjelmér 2012, Rosvall 2012).

The entrepreneurial activities consisted of three dimensions in the main. These were a) manufacturing tables and benches, b) labour rental for the installation of exhibitions and displays and c) public cleaning duties such as the cleaning of lay-bys along the major roads in the city district. In addition to these three specializations work in the kitchen was important and obligatory due to the fact that the pupils' own labour was a prerequisite for them to get breakfast, lunch and coffee breaks. This is different from the standard operating in most other schools nationally and locally. Generally these have employees for catering and cleaning activities. The principle of the importance of manual work was based on the assumption that students at Chisel were taken for granted as ‘low ability learners’ (Bernstein 2000).

The mechanical workshop at the site was the most important hub of the entrepreneurial activities. This workshop looked like any other mechanical workshop. It was at the end of a long corridor with an arrow-formed wooden sign hanging from the ceiling saying ‘mechanical work shop’. We noted:

To get to the mechanical workshop you had to go down stairs and turn right into a long narrow corridor /.../ When you opened the door you got into another corridor with a strong smell of gasoline and oil. This got stronger as you walked down the corridor. Half way down there was another sign, which pointed to another door. Behind that door you found the workshop, which was constituted of two big engineering plants. Big machines – like a lathe, saws of different sizes and drills - filled the rooms. Different tools were hanging from the ceiling. In one corner there was room for the exhibition displays that Chisel installed and in another there were a pair of on-going works, ‘the main product’ benches and tables for lay-bys and schoolyards. Next to the door there was a small room with a little desk, a telephone, a radio and some coffee mugs. Whenever you entered the workshop, you could hear music from the radio through various speakers spread around the location. Wood and timber was kept in one room and there was also a pair of carpenter’s benches. On one wall there was a huge picture of a young woman wearing a bikini. (Fieldnotes Chisel, August 2008)

It was taken for granted that all students liked ‘manual work’ and the starting point was that all students at Chisel had to do ‘at least one day a week in the mechanical workshop and one in the kitchen’ (Inez, teacher). Above that they were supposed to do academic work for at least one day a week and one day a week was reserved for study visits and excursions. However, as the students
had individual schedules they could decide themselves how many days a week they wanted to do manual or academic work. Some of them did manual work up to three or four days a week. Others got away with the mandatory two days, one in the mechanical workshop and one in the kitchen. Together with the excursions and study visits this left very little time for many of them for academic studies: at the most two days a week. Thus, although the main point of the programme was to help students obtain academic grades in core subjects so they could join a national programme, the importance of manual not academic work was constantly stressed and motivated by teachers and the surroundings:

There was a firm conviction ‘that all youngsters are fed up with school and manual work should be good for all these practical oriented students’ (Inez, teacher) and the importance of doing manual work was stressed constantly. Writing and reading were clearly not expected from the students. It was the identity of being a ‘manual person’ that was encouraged by the staff. There was an emphasis on the ‘goodness of manual work’ as teachers argued when persuading students to come to the mechanical workshop. (Fieldwork Diary)

Not all the students coveted manual activities and several said they actually preferred reading, writing and other academic activities. However, these activities were not ‘prescribed for them’ by the way the national curriculum intentions for the IP had been locally re-contextualised and enacted. Manual tasks and a notion of ‘being busy and useful’ in or through physical work was observed:

In the mechanical workshop Mirjam, Leo, Petra and Oliver are as usual sitting at the bench talking. Jim and André are working with the tables and benches. They measure, drill and nail. They really work hard wearing their blue oily and dirty overalls while the students at the bench don’t show any interest. Wouldn’t it be better if Mirjam and co got less time here in the mechanical workshop? They seem to do nothing when they are here. The assumption that guided local agents, that all students who attended IP were actually ‘fed up with school’ and wanted to do practical work, seems to break down as many of them resisted this work and tried to elect for other kinds of interactive options, including studying together. (Fieldnotes, Chisel February 2009)

Extracts like the above led us to question the assumption about students ‘wanting to do practical work with their hands’ as one instructor expressed it, and during the field-work we met quite a few students who were, at least at the beginning of the school year, full of energy and ready to tackle their studies as quickly as possible to pass what was required for them to attend a national programme. They wanted to ‘go for it’ (Jenny) as several put it, and ‘study like mad to get passes as quickly as possible’ (Viggo). However, as time went on even these students eventually ‘fell gradually into a slower study pace as expectations were so low’ (Viggo: see also Hjelmér et.al. 2013; Rosvall 2012).

The importance of manual work was also materialized over time by changes in students’ personal schedules. Most changes were made from academic work to manual work in relation to cooking assignments and manufacturing work in the workshop, which were emphasised as a first priority at Chisel by the majority of staff. As they put it ordered benches and screens had to be made and delivered on time and students and staff had to have lunch. Thus, not only were students allowed to slip away from academic work, it was actually quite obviously not an important issue within the organisation of the Individual programme as a whole.
There are many examples of this in the fieldwork data. One of them refers to a student called Jonathan. Jonathan had passed all subjects but English at the comprehensive school. He had ‘chosen’ to study once a week, and the other days he was in the mechanical workshop and the kitchen. When doing observations in the workshop we fairly soon found out that he was one of those students who reluctantly worked while he was there. We saw him often with friends sitting on a sofa chatting and listening to music. Grudgingly he screwed in some screws in a bench when he was directly told to do so by one of the instructors. Like many others he let one school day after the other just pass without really doing anything, even during his day of academic studies. He had one day a week to try to pass in English but we rarely saw him with his English books and we never overheard anyone chastising him for not studying harder. It just did not seem, in retrospect, to be considered sufficiently important by anyone. When we raised the subject we were simply reminded that ‘these kinds of student are tired of school work’ and ‘lack motivation’.

Jonathan himself made jokes about his reluctance and the teachers let him go time after time: ‘We can’t force him’ they said. ‘Maybe he will mature next year and then study harder’ (Inez). What makes it possible to refuse year after year? It seemed to be more important to keep Jonathan in a good mood than persuade and force him to study English and by that qualify for a national programme, which was the main expressed goal of the programme. The day-to-day activities were very contradictory toward this aim.

The situation described here seems to be quite absurd. However, when students explicitly wanted to do academic work but were encouraged not to it really is absurd. Lisa was one example of this. One day when one of the two students who had their mandatory day with cooking was sick, a question seeking a replacement for this student was posed to all students who had chosen and planned for academic work that day. None of them volunteered. All students were asked again. Then Lisa, who had already started on writing a review of a book, was persuaded to work in the kitchen. Lisa had to end her studies and go to the kitchen. The motivation was that ‘we all need to have lunch today. Someone has to cook the food so that students and staff will get their lunch’. Somewhat ironically given the context, academic work had to be put on a back-burner in the meantime. Preparation for dual citizenship in the so-called one school for all through different forms of treatment has been shown consistently in research in Sweden over the past twenty years and more (Beach 2001; Beach and Dovemark 2007, 2011; Berggren 2013; Dovemark 2011, 2012; Hjelmér et.al. 2013; Johansson 2009; Rosvall 2012). But no-where in this research has it taken so obvious forms as in the IP at Chisel.

**Discussion**

The political aspirations in Sweden are that all young people should continue their education after the completion of compulsory education and nearly all Swedish young people do so in one way or another (98%). This is usually in one or other of the 16 national academic and vocational study programmes. However, some youngsters are not eligible for these programmes. In such cases they are offered an individual alternative (previously the Individual- and now the Introductory Programme) that is supposed to satisfy their different educational needs and provide clear educational routes into the national programme system. The data in this paper are generated from a school department offering one of these alternatives.

The data focus on the pedagogical organisation and content the students were offered. They reveal an increasing erosion of trust to the idea and practice of inclusion as a fundamental goal of the education system, and a narrowing of spaces where the older narratives of equality can be asserted. Teachers placed low demands on and had low expectations of the students at Chisel and
they generally quite vigorously advised them away from academically demanding choices and toward manual work. Due to the individual schedules and the strong emphasis on freedom of choice students could also get away with following academic studies for just one day a week, as was the case with Jonathan. This effectively prevented them from gaining access to the academically oriented discourses they need in order to qualify for a national programme. Manual work took precedence and was actually rewarded through the way these activities were valued as a daily activity compared to academic work. This is illustrated through the excerpt involving Lisa.

The obvious starting point to get students to thrive at IP through manual work was not challenged by the staff and the designation of the students at IP as young people ‘at risk’ and ‘low ability learners’ was obvious. This expressed belief helped keep academic teaching very low key. The staff’s assumption was rather that the students thought that academic work was boring’ and they did not really expect hard work from them because of this and because they did not really have the skills or interests needed to benefit from it.

Our data challenged these assumptions in at least two ways: a) far from all students at Chisel (actually only a handful) liked manual work in the kitchen and the mechanical workshop and b) far from all students were tired of school: indeed almost half of them, at least at the beginning of the school year, were prepared to ‘go for it’ and ‘study like mad’ to get onto a national programme. They were, however, denied this and more so, they were also denied access to vertically organised content and discussions and possibilities to develop tools with which to analyse social issues in an academic manner. The focus on manual labour at the cost of academically oriented studies thus not only prevented them from passing courses to get onto a national programme it contributed to further their academic isolation and social categorisation as intellectually limited, uninterested, lazy and inept. This is the most serious result from the investigation.

There is a risk that these youngsters may get used to a situation of low expectations and demands and accept an uncertain future without jobs or at the best short-term ones. But what will this mean for them and the societies they are part of? Standing (2011) created the term ‘precariat’ for the global multitude of insecure people, living bits-and-pieces lives, in and out of short-term jobs, who are affected by insecurity and the fragility of their social position. If we are serious about creating a meaningful and encompassing democracy we have to be worried about this. If collective political and economic power is needed we have to be aware of the differentiation created within the Swedish school system and the risk there for habituating students towards marginality and a life in the precariat.

Standing (2011) states that below the salariat and proficians in terms of income is the old manual working class, the proletariat, which has been dissolving for decades. The democracy built in the twentieth century was designed to suit this class, as was the welfare state. Trades unions forged a labourist agenda and social democratic parties implemented it. That agenda has little legitimacy in the twenty-first century. Below the proletariat is the rapidly growing ‘precariat’, a class-in-the-making. It is internally divided, just as the proletariat was. Its division is what makes it a dangerous class and is why an understanding of it is so crucial to debates about democracy. Without a narrative of occupational development and the tools from education and experience to develop this, millions of frustrated youth, millions of women abused in oppressive labour, growing numbers of criminalised people, ‘disabled’ people and migrants with a restricted range of social, cultural, political and economic rights than other citizens around them will grow across the globe, including in Sweden. The individual programme (and now its replacement by the introductory programmes) was possibly intended to be a means to help prevent this and to keep the doors of citizenship open. It seems that things, for all kinds of reasons, have not developed in this way.
Conclusion

The generally reported fact of school-tiredness among practical-vocational tracked and IP pupils is often used to motivate ‘giving them an easier time’ in school (Berggren 2013; Johansson, 2009; Dovemark 2011). It is seen as a favour to them and this ‘kindness’ or tolerance is used extensively to motivate the treatment they are given. But this is a kindness that is continually challenged by local data (i.e. it only ever applies to a few young people in any year group anywhere, and, often equally to academic as non-academic students). Going easy on pupils who ‘have had a hard time’ remains however intact through the media and actively enforced by right-wing educational policies such as those of the present Swedish government.

This is a sense the main core of our ethno-narrative. We could frame it in the way Willis did in learning to labour in 1977, but in relation not to an anticipated future of secure full-time manual labour, but rather in relation to a life of continual impermanence on the margins of paid labour time doing other kinds of work (non-commodified labour and criminal activities are included in this), or no work at all, with little benefit to anyone and no economic security. This is learning for marginality as described in for instance Beach and Sernhede (2011). Even the staff plays into this by encouraging it. At least Willis’ Lads’ teachers tried to help their pupils by being hard on them. ‘But at places like Chisel’, as one informant put it, ‘it seems as if it’s ok to choose to fuck up your life and no-one cares enough to even find out or discuss what the consequences are’. The impact of these forms of exclusion, often experienced by highly marginalised young people, can have a damaging effect on their life opportunities and may well work to reinforce already existing injustices.

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