TRANSITIONS FROM EDUCATION TO WORK
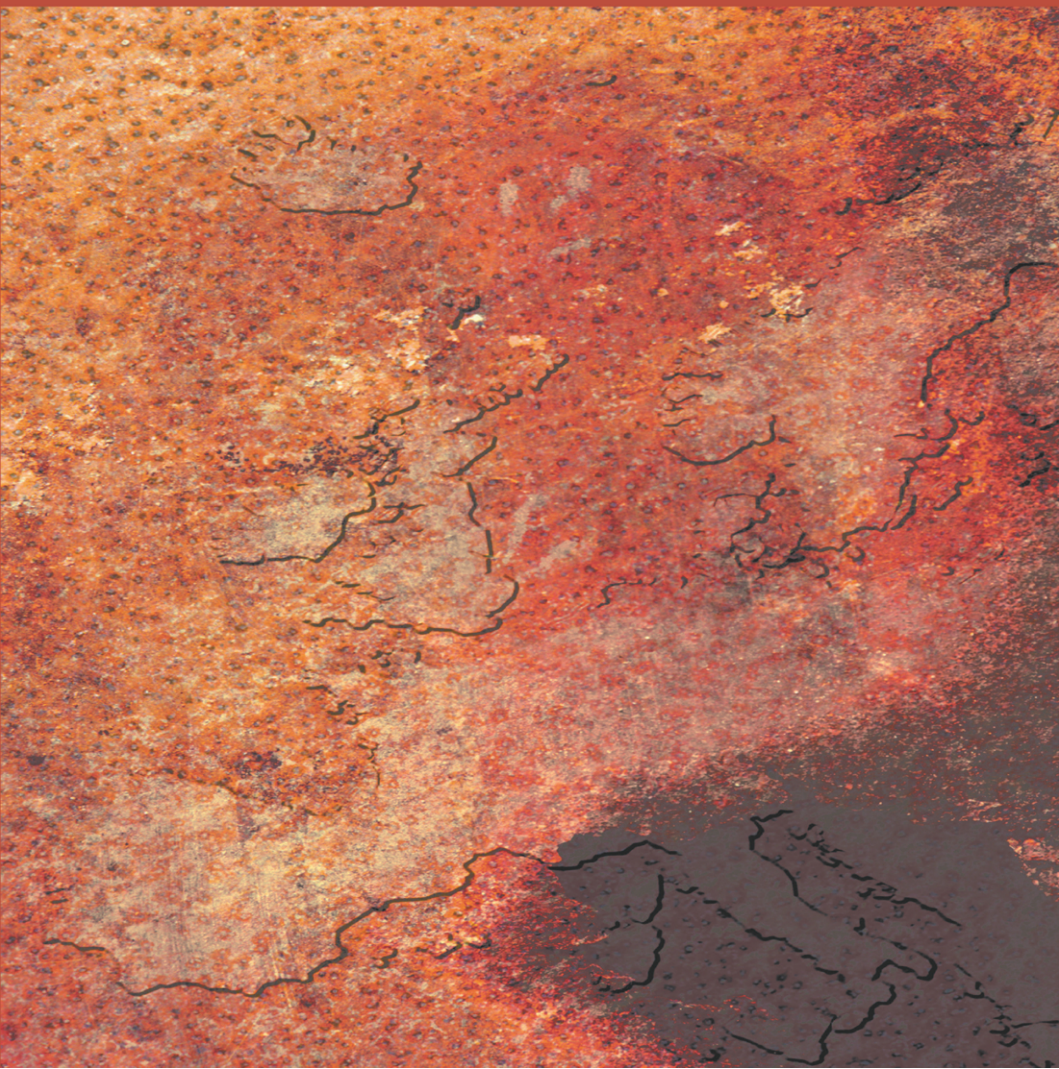
New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond

Edited by Rachel Brooks

Transitions from Education to Work

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Edited by

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For Hannah, Martha and Daniel

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1
Transitions from Education to Work: An Introduction

Rachel Brooks

Changing patterns of transition?

The concept of a 'transition' from full-time education to full-time work is one with a long history in youth studies, sociology, psychology and education. However, along with other transitions typically associated with the period of 'youth' (i.e. from the parental home into independent housing and from the 'family of destination' to the 'family of origin'), it has been subjected to considerable critical scrutiny over recent years. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, some researchers have argued that it now offers little theoretical purchase on the experiences of young people in the twenty-first century and the increasing complexity of the choices they are required to make as they move towards adulthood. While acknowledging the changes to the social, political and economic context within which young people now live, other scholars have suggested that it is more helpful to discuss changes to the nature of transitions, rather than assume that the concept is now obsolete. Indeed, in mapping some of these changes over recent decades, youth researchers have highlighted three significant trends in young people's transition from education to work, which have been identified in many parts of the world. First, it is clear that young people are remaining in full-time education for longer periods of time and, as a consequence, entering the labour market (as full-time employees) at a correspondingly older age. This is evident not only in Western Europe, the United States and Australia, but also in Asian and post-communist countries (France, 2007). In the United Kingdom, 82 per cent of 16-year-olds and 69 per cent of 17-year-olds were in full-time post-compulsory education or government-supported training in 2005/2006 (DCSF, 2007), compared with around a third of this

cohort in the early 1970s. Across all OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, the average educational enrolments amongst 15- to 19-year-olds reached a similar level (of 82 per cent) in 2005, with some countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece and Poland having reached 90 per cent or more (OECD, 2007).

Second, the youth labour market remains stagnant. For many countries in Europe, this stagnation has its roots in the early 1980s when youth employment collapsed as a reaction to a more general economic downturn. As Furlong and Cartmel (2007) note, youth unemployment is typically more sensitive to economic pressures than adult employment, and thus suffers disproportionately during periods of recession. Although a large number of countries experienced a collapse in the youth labour market in the last three decades of the twentieth century, there has been considerable variation in both the time at which this occurred and the magnitude of the decline. For example, whereas youth unemployment in European countries typically peaked in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, it was not experienced in Japan until the mid-1990s. Even within Europe disparities were seen, with higher levels of unemployment and sharper rises in the rate of unemployment occurring in southern European countries than in their northern counterparts (ibid.). This clearly had an impact on extending the period of education, discussed above: with fewer jobs available for school leavers, educational opportunities came to be perceived as increasingly attractive. Although some of the more pessimistic predictions about the future of youth employment did not come to fruition (namely that levels of youth unemployment would remain very high permanently), structural changes to the labour market over the last part of the twentieth century have had a significant impact on the type of work that is available to school leavers and other young people in search of employment. Young workers are now typically employed in small-sized firms in the service sector and, like many older adults, are increasingly employed on temporary contracts and on a part-time basis (du Bois Reymond and Chisholm, 2006). It is also the case that we are witnessing more variation in patterns of transition, as young people increasingly 'blend' periods of education and work, moving backwards and forwards between the two and engaging in significant elements of paid work whilst being a full- or part-time student. Indeed, reflecting on changes witnessed in the last few decades of the twentieth century, Chisholm (2006) notes:

> Transitions to the labour market were taking place not only later but also in more differentiated and gradual ways as young people

mixed study and work in a combination between practical economic
necessity, tactical career planning, and personal choices.

(p. 15)

Third, alongside the extension of full-time education, we have witnessed
the emergence of what some researchers have called the 'training state'
as a major pathway for school leavers since the 1980s (Mizen, 2004).
Indeed, offering more extensive training packages to young people as
they leave school has been one way in which national governments
have tried to manage unemployment and skills shortages. This has
been replicated at a regional level: for example, the European Union
(EU) Summit on Employment held in Luxembourg in 1997 established
a common set of principles to underpin provisions for young people
who had been unemployed for a period of six months or more – which
included a guarantee of education, training or employment (Chisholm,
2006; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007).

  Though the nature of young people's transition from education to
work has changed in the ways outlined above, there are also important
elements of continuity, which should not be overlooked. For example,
in their comparison of the transitions of British young people in the
1970s and the 1990s, Schoon et al. (2001) argue that, although the
latter cohort demonstrates more fluidity in its transition patterns, gen-
der continues to play a central role in shaping the pathways taken by
young people, with more young women than young men outside the
labour force – involved either in education or in family care. Similar
gender differences are apparent in other parts of the world. On the basis
of their analysis of data from the European Labour Force Survey, Ian-
nelli and Smyth (2008) suggest that gender has a significant impact on
transitions in most European countries, as a result of the different path-
ways taken by young men and young women through education and
training (and, in particular, the different fields of study they choose)
rather than because of differentials in the level of qualification attained.
Schoon et al. also demonstrate persistent inequalities across time in the
fortunes of those with the lowest level of qualification. Indeed, they
contend that as a result of the more general trend towards staying on
longer in education those who leave 'early' with few or no qualifications
are increasingly adversely affected by the disappearance of traditional
entry-level jobs and the polarisation of the labour market (p. 19). Similar
arguments are advanced by Dwyer and Wyn (2001) in their analysis of
young people's transitions to employment within the Australian labour
market. Such differences also continue to be quite strongly associated

with social class, with young people from working-class backgrounds over-represented amongst early labour market entrants, while the nature and type of work-based training taken up by young people also continue to be highly stratified by socio-economic status (as well as gender and 'race'/ethnicity) (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p. 29).

These trends in young people's transitions from education to work are inextricably related to wider economic changes in Europe and other parts of the world over recent decades. The changing structure of the labour market, periods of recession and the increasing dominance of the so-called 'knowledge economy' have all had considerable impact on the experiences of young people as they come towards the end of their full-time education. However, within Europe in particular, youth researchers have argued that young people's transitions from education to work have been altered, not only by the changing economic structures around them, but also by the considerable shifts in the political environment that occurred in the last couple of decades of the twentieth century – namely the demise of communist regimes in central and eastern Europe and the drive towards further European integration across the continent. Indeed, Chisholm (2006) goes as far as to suggest that, as a result of these changes, 'Young Europeans could now think of their lifestyles and futures in different ways; new options for realization became practically available' (p. 15). She goes on to suggest that the combination of these political and economic changes had the effect of rendering the normative reference points of youth studies irrelevant and opened up space for the development of new theoretical frameworks.

The impact of policy

Over recent years, many scholars have argued that state autonomy in relation to education policy-making has become increasingly limited by trends and initiatives at the European and international level. For example, Stephen Ball has contended that 'the nation state is no longer adequate on its own as a space within which to think about policy' (2008, p. 25), maintaining that policies are now made largely in response to globalisation and tend to be driven by supranational agencies, practical policy 'fads' and the flow of policies between countries. In relation to Europe, in particular, Martin Lawn has suggested that, as a result of both the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy, a new 'European learning space' has opened up, which 'stands in sharp contrast to the older, central roles played by organisations, rigid borders and national sites' (2006, p. 272). The Lisbon Strategy (European Parliament, 2000) aims to make

the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society in the world by 2010, through measures such as encouraging the mobility (for both learning and working) of European citizens; creating an 'information society' for all; promoting employability through investment in citizens' knowledge and competences; and the adaptation of education and training to enable individuals to be offered tailored learning opportunities at all stages of life. The Bologna Process (Commission of the European Communities, 1999) is an inter-governmental initiative which aims to create a European 'higher education area' by 2010, and to promote the European system of higher education worldwide.

Initiatives such as these, it is argued, have had considerable impact on young people's transitions from education to work. Indeed, Walther and Plug (2006) outline a number of concepts which, they suggest, have gained widespread currency across Europe through processes of European integration and European policy-making. These include 'employability', which, they argue, is based on an individualised understanding of disadvantage – in which unemployed young people (and older adults) are viewed as insufficiently adapted to the demands of potential employers; 'lifelong learning', which 'reflects the fact that education and employment are no longer linked directly within post-Fordist labour markets' (p. 85); and 'activation' employment policies – which rely on motivating individuals to look for a job. More specifically, mechanisms have been put in place to drive forward the 'Europeification' of education and training policies: the definition by the EU of a matrix of policies to be developed by member states in the field of education and training; the establishment of inter-governmental platforms to take decisions about measures to be implemented in individual countries; and the development of an EU community agenda and policy for education and training (Antunes, 2006). These have underpinned the Open Method of Co-ordination,[1] which has attempted to promote convergence in vocational education and training across Europe.

Despite these trends, however, the nation state retains considerable autonomy in relation to education. It is notable that the Open Method of Co-ordination aims for convergence (i.e. moving closer together) rather than harmonisation in this area, and even this aim has been subject to criticism from European politicians, on the grounds that it may well compromise national diversity (Fredriksson, 2003). Moreover, various empirical studies have demonstrated the enduring differences in education policies, educational systems and education-to-work transitions across Europe. While acknowledging the various pressures from the EU to further the co-operation between universities and the world

of work, Dahlgren et al. (2007), for example, point to considerable variation in the extent to which this was implemented in the four European countries in which they conducted research. Similarly, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) outline significant national differences in responses to the widespread unemployment of young people across Europe in the 1990s (and despite the establishment of a common set of principles for tackling youth unemployment, outlined during the EU summit on employment held in Luxembourg in 1997).

Recent scholarship has also emphasised the influence of the nature of national welfare regimes in determining education-to-work policies and, as a result, young people's experiences as they reach the end of their full-time education (Iannelli and Smyth, 2008). Drawing on Esping-Anderson's work (1990), Pohl and Walther (2007) identify five types of 'transition regime' operating in Europe. These are broadly related to the more general welfare regimes operating in the individual countries (or clusters of countries), but are also underpinned by the differences in policies that impact young people's transitions from education to work and, perhaps most fundamentally, different ways in which 'youth' is conceptualised. The 'universalistic' transition regime of the Nordic countries is, Pohl and Walther argue, based on assumptions about the importance of collective welfare – and the citizenship rights of all young people, irrespective of their social background. Here, labour market activation measures focus on opening up access and developing individuals' orientations towards mainstream jobs, rather than damping down aspirations and encouraging take-up of low-status careers. In contrast, the 'liberal' transition regime typical of the United Kingdom and Ireland is characterised by Pohl and Walther as valuing individual rights and responsibilities above collective provisions, and understanding youth as a transition phase that should be replaced as quickly as possible by economic independence. Policy responses place more responsibility on the individual for maximising his/her own 'employability'. The 'employment-centred' transition regime is evident in continental countries such as Austria and Germany. Here, youth is understood as a process of socialisation into allocated social positions – through a selective schooling system and a limited range of labour market options for young people experiencing unemployment. The 'sub-protective' transition regime is found, according to Pohl and Walther, in southern European countries including Spain, Greece and Italy. Young people in these countries have no distinct status, and youth transitions are characterised by a long 'waiting phase' during which young people are dependent on their families. Labour market segmentation and a

lack of training opportunities are argued to contribute to high levels of youth unemployment. Finally, countries included within the 'post-communist' regime of eastern Europe have mixed understandings of 'youth'. Transition policies vary accordingly, with some sharing significant elements with the liberal regime, whereas others have more in common with the employment-centred, universalistic or sub-protective regimes. These differences highlight the important variations between the experiences of young people across Europe and the close interaction between the way in which youth is understood in a particular society and its youth-related policies.

Learning biographies

While acknowledging some of these important differences in the experiences of young people across Europe and elsewhere, many youth researchers have attempted to develop new theoretical frameworks, which are sensitive to some of the trends discussed above, and also to the new social and political contexts, which now often impinge upon young people's movement into adulthood. Amongst European researchers, one response to the shifts in the way in which young people move from full-time education into employment and the changing role of 'learning' in their lives more generally has been to develop the concept of the 'learning biography'. Two of the key proponents of the 'new youth biography', du Bois Reymond and Chisholm (2006), explain that it refers to the deconstruction of the 'standard biography', which was based on a three-phase life course: socially differentiated education and training; gender-differentiated work lives; and age-defined retirement for men and continued familial responsibilities for women. Instead, du Bois Reymond (2004) suggests that the late twentieth century witnessed the emergence of two ideal types of learners: the 'disengaged' and the 'productive' (or 'trendsetter'). The former group becomes alienated from learning, she argues, as a result of the indifference of educational institutions towards the individuality of their students, and the perceived irrelevance of the curriculum the students are offered by such institutions. In contrast, she suggests that 'productive' learners combine old and new learning sites and resources in innovative ways, and design working careers that serve their own (learning, personal and professional) needs better than jobs in highly formalised and hierarchical organisations. They also engage in much more collaborative learning than many of their predecessors in previous generations.

> Learning and working for biographical trendsetters is not an activity based on predefined individual competences but is much more an enterprise that is undertaken by people who feel the same way and are ready to combine their specific know-how to make the project in question work.
>
> (Mørch and du Bois Reymond, 2006, p. 32)

As such, du Bois Reymond and colleagues ask whether this group of young people offers late modern societies a new cultural script in their insistence that knowledge production can be achieved only through co-operation and non-hierarchical differentiation (ibid.). Although the different social positioning of these groups is not always made clear within discussions about 'learning biographies' (Brooks and Everett, 2008a), the wider work of this group of researchers (which has been extremely influential in youth studies over recent years) has engaged more explicitly with the ways in which different familial resources can affect the extent to which young people are able to make 'choices' and engage in innovative new forms of learning. Indeed, they suggest that although the 'standard' biography may have been replaced by a 'choice biography' for those from more privileged backgrounds who are able to 'redefine the constraints created by flexibilization and rationalization of labour and the requirements of lifelong learning' (du Bois Reymond, 2004: p. 67), disadvantaged young people may be less able to take advantage of the benefits of modernisation and, as a consequence, have much greater difficulty in combining leisure, learning and work in creative and personally satisfying ways.

These differences by social position (in du Bois Reymond's case articulated in terms of the contrast between disengaged and productive learners) have been noted by others. Devadason (2007), for example, has argued that, in the face of job insecurity, young people rarely develop insecurities and an inability to develop coherent life narratives in the way that some social commentators have suggested (Sennett, 1999). Instead, he draws on interviews with young Europeans to suggest that they are quite able to piece together episodes of education, training, employment and unemployment to construct coherence, as part of a broader reflexive project of the self. Indeed, he takes this further, contending that for many young people, 'The notion of a working life that is linear and cumulative is downplayed in favour of a life characterised by new experiences, challenges and continual personal development' (p. 218). Nevertheless, he recognises that not all young people have the resources to embrace a 'project of the self' in the same way, and

that high-income professionals are likely to have significantly more economic, cultural and social capital to take the maximum advantage of more flexible career paths. Moreover, Walther and Plug (2006) have argued that a young person's scope for biographical construction is also dependent on the 'transition regime' in which he/she lives, with those living in the 'universalist' regime – where social rights are linked to citizenship status – having the greatest capacity to engage in reflexive 'projects of the self'.

Challenges to the notion of transition

Though the concept of 'transition' underpins the rationale for this book, and the individual chapters of which it is comprised, the authors are cognisant of the recent challenges to this term. Indeed, they are discussed explicitly in a number of the chapters that follow. These challenges are predicated on the assumption that the concept of a 'transition' is no longer a useful tool when attempting to understand young people's experiences in the contemporary world. Researchers have hinted that the term suggests a linear progression, when, in fact, young people's movements (from education to work, but also in relation to housing, family and lifestyle more generally) have become more complex and often include 'reversible transitions' – with periods in and out of education and of work, and movement out of and back to the parental home, for example (Stokes and Wyn, 2007). Furthermore, there is a growing body of work from many countries of the world that demonstrates the prevalence of young people engaging in paid work whilst in full-time education (Brooks, 2006; Hodgson and Spours, 2001). In many respects, this has been driven by the wider policy context: specifically the increasing expectation that young people (and/or their parents) will fund or at least subsidise their post-compulsory education, and the increasingly congested graduate labour market in which work experience can be used to differentiate oneself from others (Brooks and Everett, 2008b). However, studies have demonstrated that, for some young people (such as the 'trendsetters' discussed above), paid work can offer more intrinsic rewards. Cockburn (2001), for example, argues that within his research, an overwhelming response of the school-aged young people he interviewed as to the rewards from the paid work they were engaged in was 'the positive benefits to their independence and confidence' (p. 25). He goes on to claim, further, that they gained both as consumers, and also in terms of the increased degree of independence over their parents

and the autonomy they had with respect to spending. Similarly, evidence of non-linearity is observable in later life, as a consequence of the expectation that all adults will engage in further education and training to ensure that their 'employability' is maintained within a competitive global economy (Coffield, 1999).

A further challenge to traditional conceptions of education-to-work transitions has come from proponents of the 'individualisation' thesis. This holds that under conditions of late modernity, traditions and structures have become increasingly disembedded and, thus, when making their decisions about the future, young people lack the clear frames of reference of previous cohorts (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Stauber, 2006). As Furlong and Cartmel (2007) note,

> Despite the maintenance of traditional lines of inequality, subjectively young people are forced to reflexively negotiate a complex set of routes into the labour market and, in doing so, develop a sense that they alone are responsible for their labour market outcomes.
>
> (p. 52)

Moreover, these changes are often exacerbated by social policy, which puts increasing emphasis on an individual's responsibility (for engaging in lifelong learning, keeping one's skills up to date and remaining healthy, for example) and often assumes that particular social problems experienced by the young are a result of their individual failings (Edwards, 2002; France, 2007). These trends underpin the concept of the 'new youth biography' discussed above: namely that under such conditions, young people are forced to take on considerable individual responsibility for their own careers and lifestyles and, in doing so, go about constructing a 'biographical project'. In this way, the concept of 'transition' may seem redundant in its failure to account for the multiple possible pathways open to young people and the individualised and diverse biographical projects they construct.

In responding to these various critiques, youth researchers have proffered a wide array of alternatives to better conceptualise the experiences of young people in late modernity. These have included 'pathways', 'journeys' and 'navigations'. More recently, Wyn and Woodman (2006) have suggested that 'generation' is a more useful concept in that it gives greater emphasis to the way in which the experience of age is shaped by social conditions and locates young people within particular political, economic, social and cultural contexts. More specifically, they argue that the 'post-1970' generation in many countries of the world

has experienced not merely an extended transition to adulthood – that is suggested by some of these alternative concepts – but significantly different life patterns (in terms of education, employment, household formation and relationships). Nevertheless, other youth researchers have argued vigorously that the concept of transition remains relevant in today's world, despite the changes to the lives of young people that have been documented in this chapter. Roberts (2006), for example, contends that transition does not assume linearity and has been used by scholars to help understand 'considerable back-tracking' on the part of young people. Perhaps more importantly, he argues that we should not exaggerate the disorderliness of contemporary youth transitions – pointing to the fact that most young people do still 'reach destination' (i.e. marry, have children and achieve employment). Similarly, Shildrik and MacDonald (2007), while confirming many of the criticisms of the idea of transition through their emphasis on the unpredictable and insecure lives of their research participants, maintain that the concept remains highly relevant – indeed, they claim that 'the appeal of a broad, holistic, long view of youth transitions is that it offers a privileged vantage point from which to glimpse processes of social structural formation and transformation' (p. 601).

In this book, there is no overarching argument about the way in which 'transition' should be understood in contemporary youth research – or indeed whether it should be disregarded in its entirety. Instead, the contributors provide a variety of different standpoints to explore the various ways in which the term can be operationalised when considering young people's experiences of education and work, and to offer new perspectives on the ways in which this conceptual tool can be deployed.

Structure of the book

Transitions from Education to Work: New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond brings together the work of scholars from six different countries, and helps the readers to understand the changing nature of young people's transitions. The book is structured around four main themes, each of which encourages the readers to rethink some of the assumptions about pathways from education into employment in contemporary society.

The first part, '**Changing Transitions**?' is concerned with exploring the extent to which young people's education-to-work transitions have changed over recent decades and, in particular, whether claims of a shift

towards more complex, non-linear pathways are borne out by empirical evidence. The chapter by Gayle and colleagues draws on quantitative data from the Youth Cohort Study to model pathways from school to work in the late twentieth century and thus provides a strong basis for assessing these claims. Harris and Rainey take a contrasting approach, based on in-depth interviews with Australian students, to argue that though learners may be increasingly open to making complex transitions between different educational programmes and providers, they are not always well-supported in making these choices.

The second part of the book, '**Making Transitions**', focuses more specifically on how young people themselves go about making their transitions from different types of education into the labour market. All three chapters in this section (from Austria, the United Kingdom and Finland) suggest that, to date, in theorising these processes, insufficient recognition has been given to young people's agency. Waechter and colleagues draw on a study of migrant young people in Vienna to argue that although many of their respondents lacked the 'bridging' forms of social capital, which would have provided them with easier access to the jobs they desired, they did, nevertheless, make effective use of their 'bonding' social capital (i.e. homogenous social networks) to maximise the labour market opportunities that were open to them. Developing a similar argument, Cieslik and Simpson point to considerable variation in the relationship between 'basic skills' competencies and transition experiences in the United Kingdom. Indeed, they contend that this is explained by the creative ways in which young people manage their skill competencies and access both family resources and labour market opportunities. Finally, Jahnukainen explores the transitions of high-risk youth in Finland from state-owned residential facilities into the wider community. He argues that, although there is much diversity in the pathways taken by these young people, positive routes into employment have been overlooked in most of the previous research. As a counterpoint to this, he focuses on a number of 'resilient cases', analysing young people's 'stories of survival'.

'**Emerging Sites of Transition**', the third part of the book, explores some recent changes to the places and spaces in which transition occurs. All three chapters focus, to varying degrees, on university as an increasingly important site of transition, associated with the mass expansion of higher education in many parts of the world. The chapter by Tagoe considers the impact of an increasingly congested graduate labour market on the experiences of young people in Ghana. It explores various

tensions between Ghanaian universities and the world of work, brought
into sharp relief by a competitive global economy. Alongside the expan-
sion of higher education, recent years have also witnessed considerable
growth in 'gap year' travel, either immediately before or after university.
The chapter by Johan draws on a range of research from a number of
different disciplines to explore the impact of gap year travel on young
people's learning, identity construction and transitions more generally.
The third chapter in this section, by Matthews and colleagues, focuses
on the increasing importance of unpaid work in transitions from higher
education into work (partially prompted by the increasingly competitive
graduate labour market, but perhaps also by the recent emphasis placed
on voluntary work by the UK government as a means of developing
'active citizenship'). They conclude by arguing that volunteering sug-
gests yet another way in which the notion of a clear 'transition' from a
life phase centred upon study and a later period dominated by paid work
may be an oversimplification of the relationship between education and
work in the lives of young adults.

The fourth and final part of the book, '**Rethinking Transitions**',
brings together three chapters each of which raises interesting questions
about how we conceptualise transitions from education to work in late
modern society. Young suggests that, as a result of the increasing preva-
lence of young people engaging in paid work whilst in full-time educa-
tion, and the pressures on full-time workers to pursue further learning
in order to remain flexible within a globalised economy, the concept of
transition is largely redundant. He develops his position by exploring
the potential of one particular new technology (e-portfolios) to support
learning throughout the life course. Young's conclusions are, however,
disputed by the other two contributors to this section. Bye draws on
her research with young people in Australia to explore the identities of
youth in transition. She argues that the way in which post-compulsory
learning environments are currently structured produces a new kind
of institutional space, which encourages young people to problematise
their own conduct in relation to study, employment and citizenship
which, in turn, affects their own understanding of the notion of 'transi-
tion'. King also argues that the concept of 'transition' is not redundant,
but in need of reorientation. Indeed, he contends that transitions to
adulthood should be understood as an ongoing achievement, produced
by young people through the use of categories and attributes in talk
about, amongst other things, their experiences of short-term employ-
ment. In this analysis, employment comes to be seen as part of the

process of becoming 'aged', rather than age being conceptualised as merely another sociological variable affecting employment.

Note

1. The Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) encourages member states to jointly identify and define objectives within a specific policy area. Commonly defined measurement tools are then developed, which enable member states to assess where they stand in relation to the policies that have been set. Tools are also developed to promote comparisons and co-operation between states. See Fredriksson (2003) for a discussion of the OMC in relation to education, specifically.

Part I
Changing Transitions?

2
School-to-Work in the 1990s: Modelling Transitions with Large-Scale Datasets

Vernon Gayle, Paul Lambert and Susan Murray

Introduction

In this chapter we explore school-to-work transitions by documenting the activities of young people who reached the minimum school-leaving age in the 1990s. Our starting position is that changes in the economy, education and training lead us to suspect that the landscape of social and economic conditions under which young people grew up during the 1990s were sufficiently different from those a decade before to justify exploration. Through the analysis of data from cohorts of young people who reached minimum school-leaving age in the 1990s we evaluate the 'detraditionalisation' thesis.

'Youth transitions' is a key theme that runs through the sociology of youth literature, and has been the subject of numerous post-war studies (see Clarke, 1978). Much contemporary research has been bound up with what is colloquially termed as 'the school-to-work transition' (see Ashton and Field, 1976; Wallace, 1987; Hollands, 1990; Wallace and Cross, 1990; MacDonald et al., 1993; Irwin, 1995; Gayle, 1998; Muller and Gangl, 2003). In the decades following the war the vast majority of young people in the United Kingdom left education at the first opportunity. In more recent decades this situation has reversed, and official data illustrate that an increasing proportion of young people have remained in education (Department of Employment, 1993; Further Education Funding Council, 2000; Social Trends, 2006). This shift has been commented upon by a number of authors (especially Paterson and Raffe, 1995; Biggart and Furlong, 1996; Cregan, 2001). Banks et al. (1992) note that there had always been a minority of young people who remained in education for long periods

before entering the labour market, but by the late 1980s, only a minority made an early transition straight from school to work.

Youth Sociologists are generally in agreement that the background in which young people grew up was transformed in the closing decades of the twentieth century and was now radically different from that of earlier decades. We label this the 'changing-times consensus'. It is now widely agreed that the 'normal' school-to-work transition that characterised the 'traditional' rite of passage from youth to adult status has been disrupted (Irwin, 1995). Sociologists have deployed a series of adjectives such as 'long', 'broken', 'fractured' and 'uneasy' to describe the changing pattern of youth transitions (Craine, 1997). Within the 'changing times consensus', authors agree that the transformation was driven by a series of interrelated social and economic changes.

The most dramatic of the economic changes was the virtual collapse of the youth labour market in the early 1980s. This key transformation received a great deal of sociological attention (see Ashton et al., 1982; Atkinson and Rees, 1982; Raffe, 1984, 1988; Roberts, 1984, 1997; Brown and Ashton, 1987; Furlong, 1987; Bynner, 1996; Maguire and Maguire, 1997). The growing levels of youth unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s are well-documented (Casson, 1979; Jackson, 1985; Gallie and Marsh, 1994). Concurrently, there was a sharp decline in the number of apprenticeships during this period (Maguire and Maguire, 1997). The overall economic environment was one in which there was a reduction in the number of jobs that were suitable for young people, especially minimum-aged school leavers.

This pattern of economic restructuring led to a number of policy responses, most notably the widespread introduction of 'youth training' provisions (Raffe, 1982, 1983; Roberts, 1984; Chapman and Tooze, 1987; Stoney and Lines, 1987; Deakin, 1996). The introduction of youth training was coupled with a number of reforms to the welfare system that changed young people's entitlement to state benefits (Maclagan, 1992; Irwin, 1995; Dean, 1997). The provision of further education expanded in the 1980s (Smithers and Robinson, 2000; Hyland and Merrill, 2003). This was followed shortly afterwards by an expansion in provision of higher education (Daniel, 1993; Dearing, 1997; Archer et al., 2003).

Growing up in the 1990s

We argue that the transformations in the structural social and economic conditions that are identified above as key changes in the climate in which young people grew up largely took place in the 1980s. By contrast, the 1990s was a decade of employment growth in the United

Kingdom (DfEE, 2000). It is plausible that in the 1990s young people may have benefited from a more buoyant economy. We conjecture that changes in the economy, as well as in education and training, demark the 1990s. Therefore the opportunities available to young people and the choices that they made may have differed from those available to or made by their counterparts a decade before.

The *Education Reform Act 1988* is sometimes regarded as the most important single piece of post-war education legislation. The result was that the early 1990s saw rapid changes in the curriculum, organisation, management and financing of schools (Spence, 1993). A major change for pupils was the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Department of Education, 1985; Mobley et al., 1986; North, 1987). GCSEs differed from the established Ordinary-Level General Certificate of Education (GCE O'Level), Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) and 16+ examinations which they replaced. A new grading scheme was established and all pupils were to be entered for a common set of examinations. There were also changes in the nature and format of examinations, and assessment by coursework was introduced (Ashford et al., 1993). It is conceivable that, coupled with the reorganisation of schools, changes in the system of examinations and qualifications could have had an impact on the choices that pupils made when they reached the end of compulsory schooling.

In addition to the changes in academic education, a new apprenticeship initiative called 'Modern Apprenticeships' was established to enhance the technical and vocational skills of young workers (Saunders et al., 1997; Ainley and Rainbird, 1999). Young people were now eligible for new, nationally recognised, vocational qualifications (Smithers, 1999). These opportunities had the potential to influence the decisions that young people made as they approached the end of compulsory education, although they were not exclusively targeted at minimum-age school leavers.

In 1997 New Labour came to power with a distinctive education policy agenda under the more general umbrella of tackling social exclusion. Williamson (2005) comments that it is virtually impossible to present a full catalogue of the measures that have now been established to address the challenge of social exclusion. Because New Labour came to power in the late 1990s we suspect that these policy changes were only likely to have affected the choices made by those young people who reached the end of compulsory education towards the end of the 1990s.

Hodgson and Spours (1999) argue that New Labour's education and training policies were largely dominated by responses to the Conservative legacy. Smithers (2001) notes that what is remarkable about all the

apparent changes brought in by New Labour is how little they differed at root from the educational policies of the preceding Conservative administration. Hodgson and Spours (1999) highlight a difference of approach towards compulsory and post-compulsory education. They argue that changes in compulsory education were prioritised and changes in post-compulsory education were positioned lower in the policy hierarchy. This was because of the more complex interrelationship between post-compulsory education, training and the labour market.

Under the New Labour administration minimum-age school leavers continued to be excluded from the unemployment benefits available to older workers (CPAG, 1998; Mizen, 2004). However, a notable example of an early New Labour policy initiative in the area of training was the New Deal for Young People (NDYP). This initiative resonated within the wider 'welfare to work' agenda (Riley and Young, 2001; Brewer et al., 2002; Fraser, 2004). Introduced in 1998 NDYP was aimed at older young people. The scheme aimed to provide opportunities to work, gain new skills, and get work experience for 18–24 year olds (Wilkinson, 2003). Participation was mandatory for young people claiming unemployment benefits (i.e. Jobseeker's Allowance) continuously for six months (IER, 1999). We contend that the introduction of the NDYP would not have directly affected minimum-age school leavers. However, it clearly signalled how the government aimed to treat unemployed young people, and this may, albeit indirectly, have affected pupils' choices.

In the same period New Labour also introduced the minimum wage. The Low-Pay Commission was established as a result of the national minimum-wage legislation in 1998. In turn, from 1 April 1999 workers aged 18–21 were entitled to a minimum wage at the development rate (i.e. a lower level than the adult rate). This legislation was introduced explicitly to target poverty and social exclusion and, more recently, has been extended to include workers aged 16 and 17. Although the timing of the introduction of the national wage policy and its focus on older young people were unlikely to have directly influenced the choices and activities of pupils as they reached the end of compulsory education, it is at least plausible that they may have affected the pay and conditions of more recent groups of minimum-age school leavers.

Detraditionalised transitions?

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s numerous writers have described how young people differentiated by social class, gender and ethnicity follow different paths during the teenage years after they leave school

(MacDonald, 1999). Empirical projects, for example Banks et al. (1992) and Bynner and Roberts (1991), provided useful statistical evidence and contributed to conceptual frameworks that centred on notions of 'career trajectories'. These trajectories were based on broadly similar routes to employment, had their origins in education and family background, and led towards the predictability of ultimate destinations in the labour market (Bynner and Roberts, 1991). Adjectives such as 'pathways', 'trajectories', 'navigations' and 'niches' have been deployed as metaphors to describe youth transitions (Evans and Furlong, 1996). Within these conceptual frameworks the emphasis was on the importance of social class, gender and ethnicity and the influence of economic realities such as labour markets and unemployment rates (Evans and Rudd, 1998).

More recently, youth researchers have been keen to argue that we have moved, or at least are moving towards, a post-modern era (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). The sociological ideas of mainstream theorists, notably Giddens (1990, 1991) and Beck (1992), have been influential within youth sociology, the central argument being that social life has undergone a profound change, although without undergoing a complete epochal break with the modern period. In essence, contemporary (often termed as 'risk') societies are typified by greater opportunities for individual action and decision-making; however, this involves increasing risks. We are aware that the individualisation thesis is more subtly nuanced. Some theorists are often cautious and, for example, suggest a 'movement towards' rather than a total shift in societal conditions. Indeed Bauman (2000) highlights the 'fluid' nature of this development.

Central to the individualisation thesis is the concept of 'detraditionalisation': in essence, the idea that structural factors such as social class, gender and ethnicity cease to be determinants for the individual who is pursuing the imperative of living a life of his/her own (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). A consequence of detraditionalisation is life as a 'planning project' (ibid.). The individual biographies carved out in late modern society are considered as being 'self-reflexive' and 'self-determined' (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992). Therefore 'biographies of choice' replace 'standard biographies', and the individual's life becomes less predictable because previous standard life-course sequences cannot be taken for granted. Inevitably a life of one's own, under conditions of late modernity, is a reflexive life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

As youth researchers Brannen and Nilsen (2002) declare, 'intrinsic to the theory is the thesis that the process sweeps away structural divisions of gender, social class, and age. Individual choices become all the more important, and the choice biography takes over from the standard

biography' (p. 515). Similarly, Arnot et al. (1999) suggest that the process of individualisation is considered to transform individuals' relationships with their class and ethnic status, family connections and traditional loyalties. Following from this position is the view that young people are now required to adopt calculative, strategic and reflexive personalised strategies towards the new risks and opportunities of the post-school world, rather than following the traditional (and now often obsolete) pathways associated with their collective social class, gender and ethnic identities (MacDonald and Marsh, 2005).

The theorised experience of youth transitions under detraditionalised conditions is neatly summarised:

> In the place of these collective guides and traditional institutions are much more individualized identities and biographies where individuals have a greater scope beyond traditional markers of class, race and gender to create complex subjective lifestyles.
>
> (Cieslik and Pollock, 2002, p. 3).

The idea that the conditions in which young people grew up underwent a process of change in the closing decades of the twentieth century is not in contention. In this chapter our overall analytical aim is to investigate whether, or not, evidence of detraditionalisation can be detected through the analysis of cohorts of nationally representative survey data. If a process of detraditionalisation is taking place we would expect that the influence that individual-level factors (e.g. social class, ethnicity and gender) have on young people's transitions (i.e. participation in education, employment and training) would be in decline.

Survey data

Researchers in the United Kingdom have enjoyed access to youth data through the birth cohort studies. No new birth cohort data was collected between The British Cohort Study in 1970 and the Millennium Cohort Study. A gap in data provision exists with no birth cohort data available for young people growing up in the 1990s. In this analysis we concentrate on data from the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales (YCS), which partially fills this gap (see Gayle, 2005).

The YCS is a major longitudinal study which began in the mid-1980s. The study is designed to monitor the behaviour of young people as they

reach the minimum school-leaving age and either stay on in education, enter the labour market or undertake training. The sample is representative of all Year-11 pupils in England and Wales (that is all pupils reaching the minimum school-leaving age). The data are therefore nationally representative and have mainly been collected by postal questionnaires. The survey mostly collects individual-level information. A small amount of information is collected from the young people on their parents and family life. In particular, detailed information on experiences in education (especially qualifications), training and employment is collected. The cohorts are tracked for three (sometimes four) waves (sweeps) of data collection. The first sweep of data collection takes place in the spring (this is usually near the Easter vacation) after the pupils complete Year 11 (i.e. pupils remaining at school will be in Year 12; historically this was known as the lower sixth form).

In the present analyses we focus on five YCS cohorts which span the 1990s. The cohorts comprise young people who reached the minimum school leaving age in 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999, respectively. The design of the questionnaire and question content have changed over the life of the YCS, partially owing to changes in substantive interests and alternative policy concerns. In the present analyses we have harmonised a number of measures to compare across cohorts.

Results

The proportion of young people remaining in education after the minimum school-leaving age increased in the 1980s and 1990s, and in the later cohorts nearly three quarters of young people remained in education (see Table 2.1). Eight per cent of the young people in the 1984 cohort were unemployed in the October following their completion of compulsory education. We envisage that youth unemployment was at its zenith in the early 1980s and unemployment was halved in the 1990s cohorts.

Overall, the increased participation in education is a result of lower participation in employment and training. Around a quarter of the age cohort participated in training in the 1980s cohorts, but this fell to less than 10 per cent for the later 1990s cohorts. Around 45 per cent of young people left education and entered employment or training in the 1980s and the 1990 cohorts. This proportion fell sharply in the 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999 cohorts, with 20 per cent or less leaving education and entering employment or training. The data show

Table 2.1   Main Activity in the October Following Year 11 by YCS Cohort (%)

	1984	1986	1988	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999
Education	42	43	51	61	75	74	73	74
Unemployment	8	7	2	4	4	3	4	3
Training	28	28	24	14	9	9	9	9
Employment	17	19	22	18	7	9	11	10
Other Activity	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2
Missing	3	1	1	2	3	3	1	2
N	*8064*	*16,208*	*14,116*	*14,511*	*18,021*	*15,899*	*14,662*	*13,698*

Note: Weighted percentages.

a decline in the numbers of those young people not in education, training or employment (NEET), which concurs with official statistics (see DfES, 2005).

In general, the picture for the 1980s was one of increasing partici- pation in post-compulsory education. This trend has stabilised in the more recent cohorts however. The majority of young people growing up in the 1990s remained in education after the minimum school-leaving age. Theorists have made the claim that an increasing number of path- ways have become available to young people in contemporary society. This may be the case, but in reality increasing proportions are choosing the path of continuing in education.

In the 1990s cohorts, young people were thinly distributed across the pathways outside of education. This poses the empirical question: which factors are associated with early school-to-work transitions? In the remainder of this chapter we attempt to identify how gender, ethnic- ity and social class relate to post-compulsory educational participation. From the outset we conjecture that we may no longer identify the key structural effects of gender, ethnicity and social class under conditions of increasing detraditionalisation.

Qualifications

Qualifications remain a powerful dynamo, and in general, young people with high levels of educational attainment tend to remain in education. Across the 1990s YCS cohorts there was a steady improvement in Year 11 GCSE attainment, measured by the familiar official measure of 5+ passes at grades A*–C (see Table 2.2). Year 11 GCSE attainment is a strong

Table 2.2   Year 11 GCSE Attainment by YCS Cohort (%)

	1990	**1993**	**1995**	**1997**	**1999**
Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	65	57	55	54	49
5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	35	43	45	46	51
N	*14,022*	*17,564*	*15,592*	*14,478*	*12,832*
Official Figures[1]	35	41	44	45	48

Note: Weighted percentages.
[1] See http://www.bstubbs.co.uk/5a-c.htm#table1 (accessed 20 February 2008).

predictor of participation in post-compulsory education. We note that only a small minority of the young people with 5+ passes at grades A*–C did not remain in education (see Table 2.3). More interestingly, over half of the young people who failed to obtain 5+ passes in 1990 left education, but in subsequent cohorts there was a small increase in the portion of this group who remained in education after they reached the minimum school-leaving age.

Table 2.4 reports the results of a logistic regression model which presents the interaction between cohort and Year 11 GCSE attainment. Figure 2.1 depicts that whilst the effects of having less than five passes is significantly different for the cohorts after 1990 there is no clear trend, and overall these cohorts are not significantly different from each other.[1] Similarly, passing at least five GCSEs in Year 11 has a different effect for

Table 2.3   In Education in the October Following Year 11 GCSE Attainment by YCS Cohort (%)

	1990	**1993**	**1995**	**1997**	**1999**
In education with less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	46	64	63	57	61
N	*3647*	*5350*	*3890*	*3514*	*2593*
Staying in education with 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	93	95	95	93	92
N	*5914*	*8705*	*8713*	*7782*	*8000*

Note: Weighted percentages.

Table 2.4 Logistic Regression Model: In Education in the October Following Year 11 – Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Effects

	Estimate	Linearised Standard Error	T value	Probability	Quasi-Variance
1990 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.00	–	–	–	0.0006
1993 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.74	0.04	20.46	<.001	0.0007
1995 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.66	0.04	17.77	<.001	0.0008
1997 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.42	0.04	11.47	<.001	0.0008
1999 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.59	0.04	13.95	<.001	0.0012
1990 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.68	0.06	48.34	<.001	0.0025
1993 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	3.18	0.06	53.82	<.001	0.0029
1995 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	3.00	0.05	56.68	<.001	0.0022
1997 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.79	0.05	55.33	<.001	0.0020
1999 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.63	0.05	54.73	<.001	0.0017
Constant	−0.15	0.02	−6.05	<.001	–

Notes:
1. Weighted survey data, survey regression estimated using pseudo maximum likelihood.
2. Goodness of fit measures based on standard regression (i.e. non-weighted data); Pseudo $R^2 = .18$; Deviance null model 77,439; Deviance current model 61,389; Change in deviance 16,050 @ 9 d.f.

Figure 2.1 Estimates of being in Education in the October Following Year 11 (Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment – Interaction Effects)
Source: (YCS, Cohorts 1990–1999; Model: Logistic regression predicting young person is in education in the October after Year 11.)

some cohorts but there is no clear trend. There is a changing distribution of participation in post-compulsory education and a changing distribution of Year 11 GCSE attainment. We believe that explicitly modelling this interaction is useful and will provide increased statistical control when modelling this data, which pools five cohorts of survey data in order to better explore trends over time.

Gender

During the 1970s and 1980s the primary focus of research on gender in the field of education was on girls (Warrington and Younger, 2000). The overall message was that expectations, aspirations and choices were structured along traditional gender lines to the disadvantage of young women (see, e.g. Sharpe, 1976; Deem, 1980; Griffin, 1985). In recent years the situation is reversed as there is now growing concern about the lack of participation, and the under-achievement of boys (Younger and Warrington, 2005). In the present analysis there is a persistent gender effect with a higher proportion of girls remaining in education in each of the five cohorts (see Table 2.5).

Ethnicity

It is well observed that there are differing levels of participation in post-compulsory education across ethnic groups (see Drew et al., 1992; Drew, 1995; Bhattacharya et al., 2003). We observe higher participation from non-white young people even after Year 11 GCSE attainment, cohort

Table 2.5 In Education in the October Following Year 11 by Gender and YCS Cohort (%)

	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999
Staying in education males	57	74	73	70	71
N	*4375*	*6185*	*5575*	*5071*	*4641*
Staying in education females	68	81	81	78	80
N	*5237*	*7921*	*7061*	*6225*	*6126*

Note: Weighted percentages.

and gender have been accounted for (see Table 2.6). Biggart and Furlong (1996) suggest that one explanation as to why pupils from ethnic-minority families remain in education for longer periods is that they might be sheltering from (either actual or perceived) discrimination in the labour market. Whilst all of the ethnic-minority groups in the five cohorts have higher participation than their white counterparts no single group has a significantly higher level of participation overall (see Figure 2.2). At the current time there is emerging concern regarding the educational participation of white boys from poorer families (see Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). This is a point that we will return to in the next section.

Family social class

In this section we explore the effects of family social class through measures of parental occupation. We use what is commonly termed as a 'dominance approach', namely the social class of the family is measured by the occupational position of the higher of the two parents (or step parents) (see Erikson, 1984). We consider that a dominance approach logically resonates with the idea of an overall 'family' social class and is a more empirically suitable measure for the present analysis. Given the rising levels of divorce, separation and lone parenting, this is much more appealing than adopting father's social class as a measure.

We have calculated four recognizable measures of social class. Registrar General's Social Class (see Leete and Fox, 1977), NS-SEC (see Rose and Pevalin, 2003), CASMIN (see Goldthorpe, 1987) and CAMSIS (see Stewart et al., 1980). We are aware that established conceptions of social

Table 2.6 Logistic Regression Model: In Education in the October Following Year 11 – Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment, Gender and Ethnicity Effects

	Estimate	Linearised Standard Error	T value	Probability	Quasi-Variance
1990 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.00	–	–	–	0.0006
1993 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.73	0.04	20.03	<.001	0.0007
1995 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.65	0.04	17.36	<.001	0.0008
1997 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.40	0.04	10.62	<.001	0.0008
1999 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.57	0.04	13.22	<.001	0.0012
1990 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.72	0.06	48.73	<.001	0.0025
1993 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	3.20	0.06	53.83	<.001	0.0029
1995 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	3.01	0.05	56.71	<.001	0.0022
1997 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.79	0.05	54.95	<.001	0.0020
1999 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.62	0.05	54.13	<.001	0.0017
Males	0.00	–	–	–	–
Females	0.33	0.02	15.08	<.001	–
White	0.00	–	–	–	0.0001
Black	1.22	0.10	11.96	<.001	0.0103
Indian	1.49	0.11	14.21	<.001	0.0109
Pakistani	1.00	0.09	11.06	<.001	0.0079
Bangladeshi	1.06	0.14	7.44	<.001	0.0202
Asian (other)	1.69	0.18	9.20	<.001	0.0335
Other	0.99	0.14	7.07	<.001	0.0193
Constant	–0.39	0.03	–14.45	<.001	–

Notes:

1. Weighted survey data, survey regression estimated using pseudo maximum likelihood.
2. Goodness of fit measures based on standard regression (i.e. non-weighted data); Pseudo R^2 =.20; Deviance null model 77,439; Deviance current model 60,259; Change in deviance 17,180 @ 16 d.f.

In Education
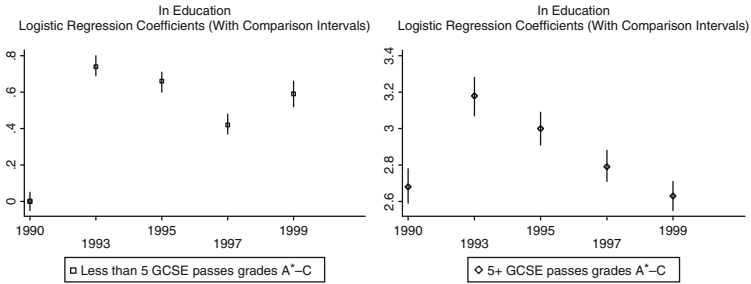Logistic Regression Coefficients (With Comparison Intervals)
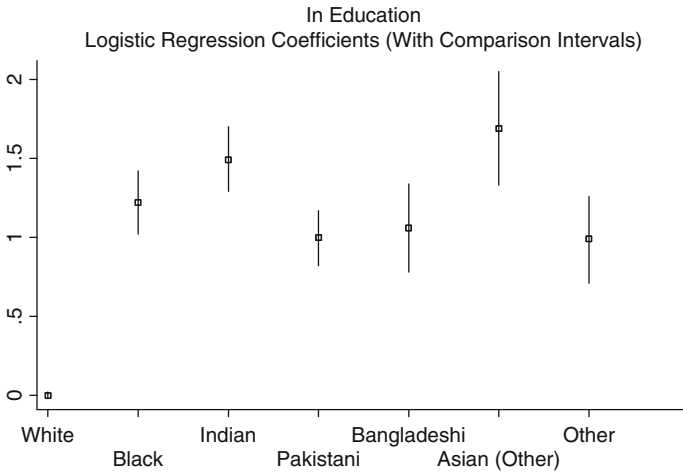
Figure 2.2 Estimates of being in Education in the October Following Year 11 (Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment and Gender Effects)
Source: (YCS, Cohorts 1990–1999; Model: Logistic regression predicting young person is in education in the October after Year 11. Other controls for cohort, education and gender.)

stratification and social-class analysis have recently drawn sharp criticism in mainstream sociology (Bergman et al., 2002). Our motivation in choosing a number of different measures of social classification is that they measure social stratification through alternative dimensions (Rose and Pevalin, 2003).

There is an ordinal relationship between the family's Registrar General's social class and the young person's participation in post-compulsory education (see Table 2.7). The picture is very similar when social class is measured by NS-SEC and CASMIN (see Tables 2.8 and 2.9, respectively). Young people from families with parents in less-advantaged occupations have lower levels of participation in post-compulsory education. Similarly, Table 2.10 reports that young people who do not remain in education have parents with lower mean (male) CAMSIS scores.

The message is unambiguous. Once Year 11 GCSE attainment, cohort, gender and ethnicity have been controlled for there is a clear negative relationship between family social class measured by the Registrar General's classification and participation in post-compulsory education (see Table 2.11). Young people from families with parents in less-advantaged occupations have greater chances of making an early school-to-work

Table 2.7   In Education in the October Following Year 11 by Family Social Class (Registrar General) and YCS Cohort (%)

	1990	**1993**	**1995**	**1997**	**1999**
Professional (I)	88	94	95	94	87
Intermediate (II)	76	86	86	84	84
Skilled non-manual (IIIn)	63	78	76	73	75
Skilled manual (IIIm)	47	66	65	62	67
Partly skilled (IV)	43	65	64	59	65
Unskilled (V)	41	60	63	53	53
N	*8,739*	*12,680*	*11,501*	*10,329*	*10,043*

Note: Weighted percentages.

Table 2.8   In Education in the October Following Year 11 by Family Social Class (NS-SEC Three Classes) and YCS Cohort (%)

	1990	**1993**	**1995**	**1997**	**1999**
Managerial and professional occupations	85	91	92	91	87
Intermediate occupations	68	82	80	77	81
Routine and manual occupations	47	66	65	61	65
N	*8759*	*12,699*	*11,516*	*10,331*	*10,046*

Note: Weighted percentages.

transition. Figure 2.3 illustrates that there are significant differences in the levels of participation in post-compulsory education for young people from professional, intermediate and skilled non-manual backgrounds. Whilst those young people from skilled manual, partly skilled and unskilled families are less likely than their counterparts from the three more-advantaged social classes to remain in education, they are not significantly different from each other. This is an important finding and signals that there is a genuine cleft between young people from non-manual and manual backgrounds.

   The picture is very similar when family social class is measured by NS-SEC (see Table 2.12). Young people from families with parents in less-advantaged occupations have greater chances of making an early

Table 2.9   In Education in the October Following Year 11 by Family Social Class (CASMIN Three Categories) and YCS Cohort (%)

	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999
Service classes	82	90	90	88	86
Intermediate classes	62	78	76	72	75
Working classes	47	65	65	62	64
N	*9612*	*14,106*	*12,636*	*11,296*	*10,767*

Table 2.10   In Education in the October Following Year 11 by Family Social Class (Male CAMSIS Score) and YCS Cohort (%)

	1990	1993	1995	1997	1999
(Upper estimate)	58	57	58	57	58
In education	57	57	57	57	57
(Lower estimate)	57	57	57	57	57
(Upper estimate)	48	49	50	49	51
Not in education	48	48	49	48	51
(Lower estimate)	48	48	49	48	50
N	*12,558*	*15,448*	*13,812*	*12,990*	*12,229*

school-to-work transition. The modelling results for NS-SEC and CAS-MIN are almost identical, therefore we have only reported one full set of model results. Figure 2.4, however, depicts the high similarity of these two alternative measures of family social class. We are also keen to note that the effect of the family's Registrar General's social class on participation in post-compulsory education varies little across each of the five cohorts. This pattern is identical when family social class is measured by either NS-SEC or CASMIN, and overall modelling results bear remarkable similarities using any of these social-class measures.

The overall substantive conclusions are comparable when family social class is measured by the (male) CAMSIS score (Table 2.13). Young people from families with parents in less-advantaged occupations have greater chances of making an early school-to-work transition. We note that CAMSIS has additional appeal in this type of analysis as it leads to a better-fitting statistical model that is more parsimonious because it estimates fewer parameters.

Table 2.11 Logistic Regression Model: In Education in the October Following Year 11 – Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment, Gender, Ethnicity and Parental Social Class (Registrar General) Effects

	Estimate	Linearised Standard Error	T value	Probability	Quasi-Variance
1990 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.00	–	–	–	0.001
1993 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.75	0.04	18.56	<.001	0.001
1995 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.67	0.04	16.15	<.001	0.001
1997 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.40	0.04	9.79	<.001	0.001
1999 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.53	0.05	11.31	<.001	0.002
1990 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.50	0.06	42.34	<.001	0.003
1993 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.98	0.06	47.65	<.001	0.003
1995 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.81	0.06	50.18	<.001	0.002
1997 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.57	0.05	48.44	<.001	0.002
1999 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.41	0.05	47.29	<.001	0.002
Males	0.00	–	–	–	–
Females	0.40	0.02	16.48	<.001	0.014
White	0.00	–	–	–	–
Black	1.18	0.13	9.20	<.001	0.127
Indian	1.67	0.13	13.29	<.001	0.125
Pakistani	1.40	0.13	10.59	<.001	0.131
Bangladeshi	1.43	0.23	6.12	<.001	0.234
Asian (other)	1.68	0.22	7.72	<.001	0.217
Other	1.04	0.18	5.90	<.001	0.176
Professional (I)	0.00	–	–	–	0.003
Intermediate (II)	–0.44	0.06	–7.33	<.001	0.001
Skilled Non-Manual (IIIn)	–0.81	0.06	–13.24	<.001	0.001
Skilled Manual (IIIm)	–1.17	0.06	–18.76	<.001	0.001
Partly Skilled (IV)	–1.22	0.07	–18.34	<.001	0.001
Unskilled (V)	–1.34	0.09	–15.59	<.001	0.004
Constant	0.45	0.06	7.20	<.001	–

Notes:
1. Weighted survey data, survey regression estimated using pseudo maximum likelihood.
2. Goodness of fit measures based on standard regression (i.e. non-weighted data); Pseudo $R^2 = .22$; Deviance null model 77,439; Deviance current model 51,652; Change in deviance 25,787 @ 21 d.f.

Figure 2.3 Estimates of being in Education in the October Following Year 11 (Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment, Gender and Ethnicity Effects)
Source: (YCS, Cohorts 1990–1999; Model: Logistic regression predicting young person is in education in the October after Year 11. Other controls for cohort, GCSE attainment, gender and ethnicity.)

As Drew et al. (1992) suggested over a decade ago, modelling approaches are attractive in understanding the multivariate nature of post-compulsory educational participation. Returning to Table 2.11, we estimate that in the 1990 cohort a young white male with professional parents (Registrar General's Social Class I), and with fewer than five Year-11 GCSE passes (at grades A*–C) has a probability of remaining in education of 61 per cent. By contrast, if he had attained 5+ GCSE passes (at grades A*–C) in Year 11, his probability of staying on in education would be 77 per cent. This demonstrates the incredibly strong effect of Year 11 GCSE attainment.

We estimate that in the 1999 cohort a similar young white male with professional parents (Registrar General's Social Class I) and with fewer than five GCSE passes (at grades A*–C) in Year 11 would have a probability of staying on in education of 73 per cent (compared with the 61 per cent probability for his counterpart in the 1990 cohort). This illustrates the slight increase in participation by those with lower GCSE attainment in the later 1990s cohorts.

We estimate that a young white male with professional parents (Registrar General's Social Class I) and with 5+ GCSE passes (at grades A*–C) in Year 11 would have at least a 95 per cent chance of remaining in

Table 2.12 Logistic Regression Model: In Education in the October Following Year 11 – Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment, Gender, Ethnicity and Parental Social Class (NS-SEC) Effects

	Estimate	Linearised Standard Error	T value	Probability	Quasi-Variance
1990 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.00	–	–	–	0.0007
1993 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.75	0.04	18.53	0.00	0.0009
1995 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.67	0.04	16.13	0.00	0.0010
1997 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.39	0.04	9.62	0.00	0.0010
1999 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.56	0.05	11.96	0.00	0.0015
1990 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.47	0.06	41.89	0.00	0.0028
1993 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.96	0.06	47.23	0.00	0.0032
1995 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.78	0.06	49.58	0.00	0.0024
1997 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.54	0.05	47.78	0.00	0.0021
1999 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.42	0.05	47.52	0.00	0.0019
Males	0.00	–	–	–	–
Females	0.40	0.02	16.73	0.00	0.0002
White	0.00	–	–	–	–
Black	1.15	0.13	9.03	0.00	0.0162
Indian	1.69	0.13	13.47	0.00	0.0155
Pakistani	1.38	0.13	10.54	0.00	0.0170
Bangladeshi	1.40	0.23	6.03	0.00	0.0538
Asian (other)	1.68	0.22	7.78	0.00	0.0465
Other	1.04	0.18	5.91	0.00	0.0308
Managerial and Professional	0.00	–	–	–	0.0010
Intermediate	−0.53	0.04	−14.15	0.00	0.0004
Routine	−1.05	0.04	−28.22	0.00	0.0003
Constant	0.32	0.04	7.68	0.00	–

Notes:
1. Weighted survey data, survey regression estimated using pseudo maximum likelihood.
2. Goodness of fit measures based on standard regression (i.e. non-weighted data); Pseudo $R^2 = .22$; Deviance null model 77439; Deviance current model 51624; Change in deviance 25815 @ 18 d.f.
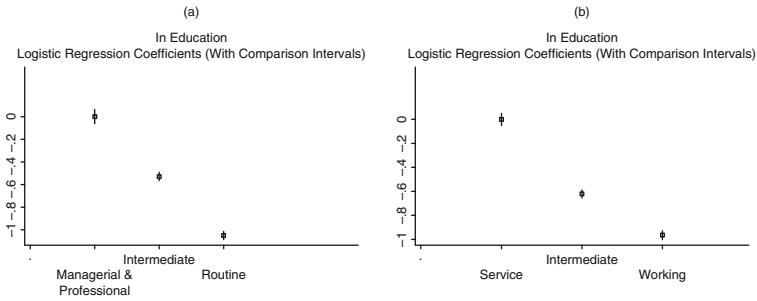
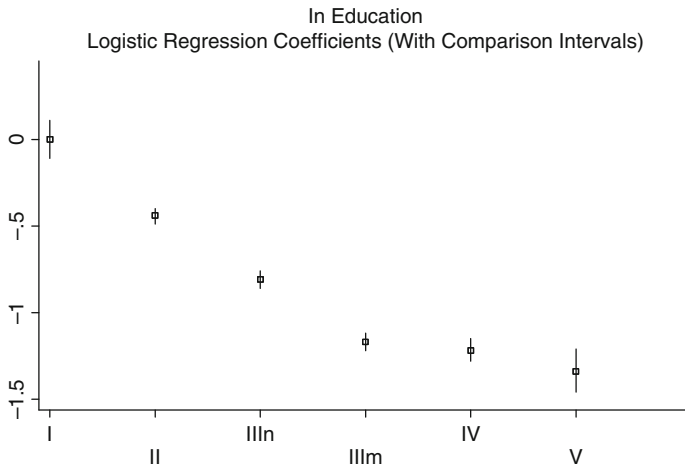*Figure 2.4* Estimates of being in Education in the October Following Year 11 (Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment, Gender and Ethnicity Effects). (a) NS-SEC; (b) CASMIN.

Source: (YCS, Cohorts 1990–1999. Model: Logistic regression predicting young person is in education in the October after Year 11. Other controls for cohort, GCSE attainment, gender and ethnicity.)

education in the 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999 cohorts. We suggest that this illustrates a potential plateau, or ceiling effect. Participation in education immediately after Year 11 may have reached an upper limit for those with good levels of Year 11 GCSE attainment.

The effects of family social class can similarly be illustrated within the multivariate explanation of post-compulsory participation. We have estimated that in the 1990 cohort a young white male with professional parents (Registrar General's Social Class I) and with fewer than five GCSE passes (at grades A*–C) in Year 11 has a probability of staying on in education of 61 per cent. In contrast if he had unskilled parents (Registrar General's Social Class V) his probability of participating in post-compulsory education would be reduced to 29 per cent. Even when a young person from the less-advantaged social-class background has obtained 5+ GCSE passes (at grades A*–C) in Year 11, on average, they have about a 12 per cent lower chance of remaining in education. Taken together, the negative effects of being from a lower social-class background, being male and being white lend some support to the emerging concerns regarding boys from poor white families.

Conclusion

The 'pathways' or traditional routes that young people followed in the immediate post-war decades have altered. The structural changes in the climate in which young people grew up in the 1980s are not in

Table 2.13 Logistic Regression Model: In Education in the October Following Year 11 – Cohort and Year 11 GCSE Attainment, Gender, Ethnicity and Parental Social Class (Male CAMSIS) Effects

	Estimate	Linearised Standard Error	T value	Probability	Quasi-Variance
1990 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.00	–	–	–	0.0007
1993 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.75	0.04	18.48	0.00	0.0009
1995 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.65	0.04	15.75	0.00	0.0010
1997 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.40	0.04	9.70	0.00	0.0010
1999 Less than 5 GCSE passes at grades A*–C	0.52	0.05	11.03	0.00	0.0015
1990 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.44	0.06	41.35	0.00	0.0027
1993 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.92	0.06	46.64	0.00	0.0032
1995 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.75	0.06	49.05	0.00	0.0024
1997 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.51	0.05	47.17	0.00	0.0021
1999 5+ GCSE passes at grades A*–C	2.35	0.05	45.97	0.00	0.0019
Males	0.00	–	–	–	–
Females	0.40	0.02	16.57	0.00	–
White	0.00	–	–	–	0.0002
Black	1.17	0.13	9.24	0.00	0.0160
Indian	1.78	0.13	14.12	0.00	0.0157
Pakistani	1.52	0.13	11.30	0.00	0.0179
Bangladeshi	1.49	0.24	6.31	0.00	0.0556
Asian (other)	1.77	0.22	8.16	0.00	0.0466
Other	1.04	0.18	5.93	0.00	0.0305
Family (Male) CAMSIS score	0.03	0.00	32.40	0.00	–
Constant	−2.03	0.06	−34.18	0.00	–

Notes:
1. Weighted survey data, survey regression estimated using pseudo maximum likelihood.
2. Goodness of fit measures based on standard regression (i.e. non-weighted data); Pseudo R^2 =.22; Deviance null model 77,439; Deviance current model 51,439; Change in deviance 26,000 @ 17 d.f.

question. Over the final two decades of the twentieth century increasing proportions of young people remained in education after they reached minimum school-leaving age. The upward trend away from early transitions reached a plateau by the mid 1990s. In the cohorts since then only a minority of young people made the early transition out of education. This is consistent with commentaries within the sociology of youth that have deployed various adjectives to describe the lengthening of contemporary school-to-work transitions.

We reiterate that the cohorts of data which were analysed above are nationally representative. Educational attainment, measured by qualifications gained at the end of compulsory schooling, is very important. The 1990s saw overall improvements in performance at GCSE. Like Ashford et al. (1993) we are reluctant to label this as a 'GCSE effect' however. Compared with the 1990 cohort, in the more recent cohorts an increasing proportion of young people with lower GCSE attainment in Year 11 remained in education after the minimum school-leaving age. We see no reason to expect that attainment will not continue to be a main factor influencing participation in post-compulsory education. Therefore if the government wishes to further increase participation in post-compulsory education, then arguably more pupils with lower levels of Years 11 GCSE attainment must be encouraged to continue in education.[2]

After controlling for qualifications, and changes to the effects of qualifications across the cohorts, differences in participation across gender lines clearly exist. More young women remain in education, and it is their male counterparts who are more likely to make an early transition out of education. This pattern is in sharp contrast to that of earlier decades. Marked differences in educational participation by different ethnic groups remain. White young people are most likely to make a transition out of education directly after compulsory education.

Family social class, measured by parental occupation, has an effect on post-compulsory educational participation. Family social class effects persist even after qualifications, gender and ethnicity have been controlled for, regardless of which social-class scheme is deployed. Young people from more-advantaged social-class backgrounds have very high levels of participation in post-compulsory education. Over the 1990s there has been some improvement in the proportions of young people from less-advantaged social-class backgrounds participating in post-compulsory education. Young people from the least-advantaged families still lag behind their counterparts from more-advantaged social-class positions however.

We envisage that cohorts of young people reaching the minimum school-leaving age after the millennium will similarly continue to exhibit high levels of participation in post-compulsory education. The Labour administration is committed to minimising the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). We do not imagine that the government will make major changes allowing 16 and 17 year olds greater access to welfare benefits; therefore we suspect that levels of unemployment for minimum-age school leavers will remain low. We envisage that the introduction of the minimum wage for younger workers and the introduction of the policy initiatives (e.g. Modern Apprenticeships, which have more recently been repackaged as Apprenticeships) may, albeit indirectly, influence the decisions and choices that young people make as they reach the end of compulsory education. Data from more contemporaneous cohorts of young people is required however to quantify the effects of the raft of policies directed towards combating social exclusion that have been introduced by the New Labour administration.

It is undisputable that transitions to work have lengthened, because fewer young people make an early transition from education. Nevertheless, our overall theoretical conclusion is that there is little empirical evidence supporting 'detraditionalisation'. The 1990s data on early transitions, analysed above, show clear patterns of structure along gender, ethnicity and social class lines. There appears to be little loosening of these social bonds and our evidence refutes the core claims of the 'detraditionalisation' thesis.

The overall pattern of societal change might be a movement towards greater individualisation. We are keen to assert that with temporally comparative data such theoretical claims should be empirically testable however. It may be that individual young people feel that the choice biography is taking over from the standard biography, or that their individual choices are becoming more important. The strong presence of traditional structural influences (e.g. gender, ethnicity and social class) on early transitions does not especially persuade us that processes of individualisation are taking hold and influencing school-to-work transitions. Some youth researchers, for example Furlong and Cartmel (1997), following Roberts et al. (1984), have suggested a more nuanced theoretical conception and have deployed the label 'structured individualisation'. Under these conditions young people believe that their choices and decisions are individualised, but in reality they are still heavily mediated by social structures.

We can conclude that there is no evidence of detraditionalisation and that gender, social class and ethnicity remain apparently strong. From the data analysed above it is not directly possible to determine whether or not young people increasingly believe that their choices and decisions are becoming ever more individualised. At the current time we believe that the view that young people have changed, or are in a process of changing, the way they view (or interpret) their circumstances is empirically unproven. What would be required to convince us is large-scale individual-level data collected over time (e.g. through cohorts) showing clear changes in attitudes, aspirations, expectations and preferences in a way that demonstrates that young people were moving towards understanding their circumstances and choices in more 'individualised' ways.

Finally we caution against uncritically accepting the concept of a process of detraditionalisation. Historical-sociological research has demonstrated the paradox that life-course career stability can coexist with periods of sustained structural and economic change (Savage, 1993). The Annales school of social history argues that social changes occur at an extremely slow pace, far more incrementally than is commonly appreciated by contemporary sociologists (Penn, 2006). Other empirical reviews in British economic sociology have reported long-term patterns of social stability within the experiences of employment and social mobility over the twentieth century (Penn, 2006; Goldthorpe, 2007; Lambert et al., 2007). These points illustrate that at a macro-level social change within certain contexts might seem more evident, but at a micro, or individual, level the experience of social stability can dominate.

Data citation

Youth Cohort Time Series for England, Wales and Scotland, 1984–2002 [computer file]. First Edition, Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], November 2007. SN 5765.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The figure plots the estimates from the regression model using quasi-variance based comparison intervals. For a full elaboration of the merits and the technical computation of this style of presentation see Gayle and Lambert (2007).

2. The Government plans to introduce legislation so that by 2013, all 17 year olds, and by 2015, all 18 year olds, are participating in some form of education or training (see http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Nl1/Newsroom/DG_071319 (accessed 01.04.08) and http://www.commonsleader.gov.uk/output/page2156. asp (accessed 01.04.08). At the current time we will not speculate on the effects of these policy changes and we are cautious because the planned timetable extends beyond the next general election. We are also at pains to point out that the specific nature of the changes in the curriculum and qualifications, the guidance and support offered to pupils, the new financial support mechanisms and the systems of employer engagement that will accompany these policy changes are yet to be outlined in sufficient detail for us to be in a position to comment on the possible effects that these changes might have on future cohorts of pupils. We note however, that Wolf (2007) provides an insightful account of the potential effects of current proposals and concludes that the proposal may be far more negative, both for young people and the economy than anticipated by the government.

3

Interrogating the Notion of Transition: Learner Experiences of Multiple Transitions Between the Vocational- and Higher-Education Sectors

Roger Harris and Linda Rainey

Introduction

Policies and initiatives of governments and institutions often seek to promote multiple and seamless pathways for people transiting from school into tertiary education and work. Over recent years, there have been common themes in policy documents and other literature concerned with young people's transitions (Lopez Blasco et al., 2003; Muller and Gangl, 2003): the need for ease of movement and a range of pathways (OECD, 2000; MCEETYA, 2002; ANTA, 2003) and cross-sectoral collaboration (DEST, 2002; Bridge et al., 2003), as well as for career guidance to assist this process (UNESCO/ILO 2002; Bainbridge et al., 2003). Yet such promotion by governments and institutions may be perceived as both positive and problematic. It can provide considerable choice for learners; however, it can also lead to uncertainty and indecision as they grapple with the challenges of choosing between various learning opportunities.

The linear (or often referred to as the 'direct' or 'traditional') model of a learning pathway is from secondary to tertiary education, either vocational or academic, then on to work. There has been much research in this area, particularly focusing on institutional arrangements for facilitating movement (e.g. Haas, 1999; Bateman and Knight, 2003; Ticknell and Smyrnios, 2004). There has been far less research, however, on learners' experiences of their transitions.

The pathway experience of many learners is not linear. In fact, Anderson (2005) contended that as a consequence of increased rates of skills obsolescence, job turnover, unemployment and underemployment, 'the traditional norms of front-loaded education, linear career paths and jobs-for-life are becoming increasingly redundant' (p. 2). A number of studies have drawn attention to the phenomenon of indirect transfer where movement involves several moves within and between institutions and sectors (Pitt, 2001; Sweet, 2001). American studies have referred to the concept of 'swirling' and 'the community college shuffle' (cited in Moodie, 2004, pp. 42–43). Research by Laanan (2007, p. 1) explored the concept of 'transfer shock' in an attempt 'to better understand and characterise the complex transfer process of community college students'. Karmel and Nguyen (2003) suggested that such movement may also be occurring in Australia, while subsequent Australian research indeed found a high level of both intra- and intersectoral movement, highlighting the complexity in the phenomenon of learner pathways (Harris et al., 2005).

Learner pathways are not therefore always linear, and neither are they always in the 'traditional' direction from vocational education to higher education. Recent research has demonstrated that many transitions of learners proceed the other way (Golding, 1999; Harris et al., 2005). This process has sometimes been labelled 'reverse articulation' (Haas, 1999) or 'reverse transfer' (Moodie, 2004), where the assumptions inherent in the term clearly signify the 'traditional' direction of transition.

While one-way models of learner movement – leading to university – predominate in the literature, Golding and Vallence (2000) have claimed that they are 'simplistic, illusory and inaccurate' (pp. 1–2). Yet as Teese and Watson (2001) state, 'relatively little is known about the educational and employment pathways of students moving between the sectors' (p. 7), despite the importance of such information for policy-makers and institutional administrators in order to understand changes in the demand for education and training and how best to meet learner needs. Golding (1999) suggested a need for the development of two-way models of movement, while Cameron (2005) recently called for an expanded understanding of the different types of transition.

In response to these calls, this chapter interrogates the notion of transition. The question remains: if the pathways post-school to work are not necessarily direct, what do these transitions look like and can any patterns be discerned that might help us to understand more fully the lived experiences in making multiple transitions?

The chapter is based on research in South Australia that explored pathways within and between the higher- and vocational-education sectors. The study initially involved a survey of students commencing study at all eight technical- and further-education institutes and the three universities in the State, to which 556 students had responded as having experienced learning in both sectors. In-depth interviews were then held with 69 of these students, and this chapter focuses on these interviewees. At the time of interview, 47 were commencing study in the higher-education sector and 22 in the vocational-education sector. There were 27 males and 42 females, varying in age from under 19–64 years, two-thirds being between 20 and 34. (Further details on methodology may be found in Harris et al., 2006.)

The notion of 'transition' for the purposes of this chapter refers to learner moves between and within educational sectors. Another term often used is 'transfer' (Moodie, 2003, 2004), though it predominantly refers to learners articulating one-way from vocational institutions into universities (e.g. Abbott-Chapman, 2006; Laanan, 2007). A common use of 'transition' is in moving from school to post-secondary settings (e.g. Hillman, 2005), or to work (Muller and Gangl, 2003) or within vocational education (Anderson, 2005), while another use – more in the two-way sense – is in reference to 'role transitions' between universities and work placements and back again (Auburn, 2007, p. 119). The term 'tertiary education' in this chapter includes both the vocational- and training-education (VET) sector and the higher-education (HE) or university sector.

Analysis of transitions made by the interviewees

The interviewees in this study had moved frequently within tertiary education. They had diverse educational histories which aptly illustrate the phenomenon of inter- and intra-sectoral transition. They had made multiple learning transitions sometimes across a range of seemingly diverse programs, with a mean of 2.7 tertiary transitions, three-quarters of the learners making two or more transitions and some even making six or seven. The total number of transitions undertaken by the 69 interviewees was 255: 120 into higher education and 135 into vocational education. Given that 69 of these transitions were from school, the remaining 186 were transitions between ($N=91$) and within ($N=95$) the tertiary sectors. Of the inter-sectoral transitions, 60 per cent ($N=55$) were from vocational to higher education and 40 per cent ($N=36$) from higher to vocational education. In the case of intra-sectoral transitions,

58 per cent ($N = 55$) were within vocational education and 42 per cent ($N = 40$) within higher education.

Transitions and field of education

'Field of education' is the official classification used in Australia to describe tertiary education courses, specialisations and units of study, in order that all those with the same or similar vocational emphasis are reliably classified into the same field. (There are 12 broad fields of education, examples being 'management and commerce', 'natural and physical sciences', 'engineering and related technologies' and 'health'.)

Forty per cent of all tertiary transitions were to the same, and 60 per cent to a different, field of education (Table 3.1). For those who made only one inter-sectoral transition, most were into a different field of education. Those moving from higher education to vocational education were more inclined to enter a different field of education than those moving the other way. There was little movement from higher education into vocational education in the same field. On the other hand, the intra-sectoral transitions indicate that there was more movement within vocational education, both for the same and for different fields of education, than there was within the higher-education sector.

Despite the apparent shift of interest reflected in transitions to different fields of education, very often the learners were consistent in their interests. From the evidence in this study, the governmental descriptors of fields of education appear to be an artificial construct when it comes to the lived experience of the learners. For example, movement from carpentry to team leadership to natural resource management to environmental engineering involved three changes of field of education, but from the perspective of that individual was a natural progression

Table 3.1 Transitions Within and Between Tertiary Sectors

	Same Field of Education	Different Field of Education
Inter-sectoral transitions (91)	19 VET to HE 9 HE to VET	36 VET to HE 27 HE to VET
Intra-sectoral transitions (95)	22 VET to VET 25 HE to HE	33 VET to VET 15 HE to HE
Total transitions	75	111

Notes: HE = higher-education sector; VET = vocational – education and training sector.

in terms of a developing interest in natural resources and a desire for career development. Similarly, movement between nursing, sign language, counselling, diabetic education, immunisation and workplace training was a natural progression for that person wanting to develop a career in health counselling, even though it involved five changes in field of education.

Some learners made transitions into different fields of education (e.g. undertaking certificates in such areas as hospitality or information technology) in order to support themselves during their other studies or as a 'fallback' for a more-assured income. An extension of this 'fallback' change of direction is where they were planning for a future career change when their current career might not be possible, such as providing for a career in an interest area (e.g. fashion) when anticipating 'burnout' in their current field (e.g. social work). Some learners were required by their employers to complete certificates (e.g. in workplace training, government practice, management or information technology) which did not necessarily have any direct link to their area of expertise but which were necessary for career development. Occasionally they made a foray into a completely different area of interest but returned to their original field of interest, such as from accounting to philosophy to business studies, or accountancy to hospitality to commerce.

There were some who made extreme changes in field of education, often in the first inter-sectoral transition (e.g. from electronics to philosophy and Spanish, or from accountancy to forensic chemistry, or from archaeology to law) which were attributed to a change in their interests. When such extreme changes happened later in their educational careers, usually this was due to either some practical factor which prevented them pursuing their original interest or a genuine desire to pursue a need for personal fulfillment. But even in these cases, there were themes evident in their study which the individuals managed to meld together into a unique career (e.g. from civil aviation to dental surgery to become a dental surgeon in the Royal Australian Air Force).

In summary, it was possible for frequent transitions between the sectors to support a variety of career interests and motivations, culminating in uniquely personal career pathways.

Transitions and age

Not unexpectedly, the mean number of transitions increased with age. Those under 19 experienced an average of one and a half transitions, while those aged 55–64 averaged four transitions (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Transitions and Age (at Time of Interview)

Learners					Tertiary Transitions			
Age	Number	Gender	Total number	Mean	Mean: inter-sectoral	Mean: intra-sectoral	Mean: same field of education	Mean: different field of education
<19	4	F3, M1	6	1.5	1	0.5	0.75	0.75
20–24	11	F5, M6	25	2.27	1.18	1	0.19	1.55
25–29	16	F12, M4	33	2.06	1.25	0.86	0.8	1.31
30–34	18	F12, M6	52	2.88	1.5	1.38	1.27	1.61
35–44	7	F2, M5	22	3.14	1	2.14	0.85	2.28
45–54	7	F4, M3	24	3.42	0.11	2.14	1.86	1.57
55–64	6	F4, M2	24	4	1	2.16	1.66	2.33
Total	69	F42, M27	186	2.69	1.31	1.37	1.08	1.61

Moreover, the mean number of intra-sectoral transitions increased with age, which may reflect fewer opportunities for inter-sectoral transitions for this group of people in their early educational careers. It is likely that more rigid institutional arrangements would have made such transitions across sectors very difficult in those years and that it would have been less socially acceptable to transfer between sectors, particularly from what was then a more selective university system into a more trades-based vocational system. It also may have been a consequence of a more conservative labour market. Interestingly, 19 of the 20 people aged 35+ had at least one gap between transitions of 8–38 years duration at some point in their educational history (a mean of 18 years). This probably reflects the frequency with which these interviewees would have taken leave for family responsibilities or been engaged in self-employment.

Learner perspectives on their transitions

In their interview many respondents clearly recognised that the direction of their learning journey was not always linear. Their reflections resulted in quite different images. As one acknowledged, 'most people would go in a straight line – they don't generally do what I have done, because I have done so many extras'. Typical comments were 'It seems to be too disjointed to be a pathway', 'mine has got a lot of roundabouts in it', 'jagged', 'erratic and spaced out', 'very meandering' and 'very winding'. Other descriptions to explain their journeys included 'a crooked path', 'very bumpy', 'very stop-start', 'a bit of a mish-mash in the beginning', 'a hop, skip and a jump', 'a zig-zag', 'very hilly', 'meandering and scenic', 'messy and disjointed', 'intermittent', 'cobblestoned' and 'initially hit and miss'. Collectively these descriptions reflect circuitous learning journeys for these interviewees (giving voice to the numbers of transitions in their educational histories).

Nevertheless, the learners often interpreted their educational journeys as a series of personal choices, with individual autonomy to twist and turn. Four main reasons could be discerned for their frequent transitioning. One was the lack of guidance they received or used. They were either generally not aware that career services were available or did not use them or did not think they needed them. Their perspective was usually short-term, and the majority believed they knew what their next step was going to be and therefore did not seek career assistance. Arguably this position was the result of ignorance about career guidance, or receiving inadequate career advice or services not being accessible.

Another reason was the lack of 'fit' between the programs attempted. One described the journey as

> strange, because I have done different courses that don't really relate...the failed attempts at finding what I want to do and all of that and just having to start again every time – back to first year and start again. Two steps forward, three steps back.

Inexperience was also hinted as a third reason. Some acknowledged that they did not know what they were doing or where they were going. As one said, '...initially I thought I had that in mind, but didn't know what I was doing', while another referred specifically to their young age when making early decisions about learning options. Yet another reflected on the learning that comes from experience and other people, not just from formal study. A fourth reason was that, for some, they did not possess appropriate academic prerequisites: 'Quite unstructured, I have used three different institutions to get to where I want to be, but I don't think I could have done it any other way due to my high school level'.

As a consequence of these transitions, many recognised their journey as circuitous and inefficient. Some admitted that their learning journey could have been much quicker and easier, and expressed mixed emotions about their transitions. Said one, 'it hasn't been too good – very stop and start', while another recognised 'all those mistakes, and I would change that if I went back'. Another summarised the path as being so far 'only a stepping stone process – it seems to be small, incremental and not very effective at the moment'.

Yet despite their meandering, the interviewees remained in hope that the transitions they had made were leading them to a satisfactory outcome: 'Messy, disjointed, however, hopefully it will coalesce into something that is actually useful...it will all have a point ultimately'. Generally, the interviewees were resigned to, if not content with, their journeys, and identified benefits to come from their transitions, such as 'one learning has led to the next along the way for me' and 'I like to think I have taken something away from every experience and learnt from every experience'. They were able to recognise that each transition had assisted them in realising more clearly what they wanted to gain from their education.

Many of the gains mentioned by interviewees related to completion of qualifications, which 'enabled me to gain employment' or 'got me a trade'. Other gains referred more to the benefits they derived from their

studies, such as the refreshing of skills, 'information...that helped at the time', 'more knowledge in the areas I was interested in' and 'some experience in industry'. An important spin-off was reaffirmation of what they did *not* want to do. Many of the gains were more personal, such as 'better interpersonal skills', 'understanding myself – I have gained more with each transition' and growth in self-belief. Another benefit was the close relationships built with staff and co-learners. The interviewees recognised that each of their learning transitions had value. This was neatly encapsulated in one response:

> I don't think there is any real disadvantage to learning – strings to your bow – [you] encounter different situations and you are able to deal with them a little better than had you not had those previous experiences.

Losses in making transitions were expressed in terms of time, money and career lag. Most often the interviewees admitted that loss of time was largely due to their own circumstances. One described her first degree as 'a lot of money and time I spent on something that didn't really get me to where I might have wanted, although probably I didn't give it a chance either'. Another claimed that there were 'disadvantages with each transition but some of them were related to me personally'. Learners generally expressed loss of time in terms of perceived unnecessary subject matter, repetition and too few contact hours leading to overly prolonged programs. Regarding finance, many acknowledged that there was a loss on 'the old pocket' – both in study costs and income losses. One commented, 'I have a HECS [fees] debt and have to pay back my mum for quitting', though admitted that 'it took [her] six years to finally work out where I wanted to go'. Another rued the financial loss, but was able to take a long-term perspective:

> There is definitely a loss of income any time you take up study. When you have come from full-time work, it feels you always take a backward step...that old saying, take one step backwards to take two steps forward. I can handle that. This will benefit me in a bigger way one day.

The third disadvantage in transitions was perceived career delay compared with friends:

> I suppose there is always the trade-off...do you work or do you study by going back and doing a second degree? A lot of my friends are

moving up in careers and I have gone back and done a second stint at tertiary education, so I suppose there is a career versus study loss. I am three years behind a lot of my friends who are in industry.

Many ascribed their multiple transitions to responding to, adapting to, controlling or benefiting from changes in their lives in order to enhance themselves privately and professionally: 'efficiency-seeking with a positive attitude' and 'I played the game and I was quite happy to play the game'. Certainly, making an educational transition as a response to a life experience was often mentioned by the older respondents. Also, there was a definite tendency in the older respondents to use their transitions to move from a focus on work to a focus on self: 'now is my time', 'I'm running out of time', 'it's time for me' and 'I would like to do something like an arts or humanities subject with absolutely no attachment to any vocation – the most impractical thing you could possibly think of because I think most of my education/training has been around how to do my job better'. Sometimes this involved a broadening out – from self to society. Others were prompted to pursue a 'passion', even at some risk of it not being successful. Some found the transitioning experience itself stimulating: 'I found the transition make me want more . . . the whole process has been of benefit for me personally'. The general reaction was summed up by this learner:

> Any education always contributes – I look at my track record and I see how patchy it is, but I also see there is not a single course I have done that hasn't helped me get work, hasn't helped me at a trivia night, has hindered me in any way. I always take up the chance to learn something new and this is the chance to do that and, if I pick up some more qualifications along the way, that is not a bad thing.

The participants' multiple moves suggest that vocational education is acting as an effective bridge to higher education. Many acknowledged the employment advantages of a vocational qualification but did not necessarily consider that it encouraged them to pursue a broader range of possibilities, whereas higher education stimulated them to do more. However, others spoke of the need not to regard vocational study as having purely income-earning relevance, but contended that it should also be experienced in an educative way as 'an interest and a joy'. Indeed, many interviewees appreciated the opportunity to be educated in both the vocational- and higher-education sectors: 'the combination is important', 'powerful to have both because they are so different yet

they complement each other' and 'our education system has to have both of them, can't have one without the other'.

Patterns of transition

The educational histories of these learners reflect several common patterns of transition. Learners selected programs as a result of diverse motivations, and sector was often an incidental consideration. The fields of education serve for the researcher as a barometer of these transitions. From the analysis of these 69 learners and their movements, we propose here a typology of five patterns of transition based on two key elements: the pathway and the person.

- *Flowing pathway/Developers*
  Some learners showed consistent interest, even though they may have made several sectoral transitions. This most often looked like a domino pattern, where an element of one learning experience led to another transition to develop this further as a career. The pattern was more linear than other patterns, involving a 'flow' rather than a 'jump' into another program. This pattern was dominant for 28 interviewees (41 per cent).
- *Erratic pathway/Interest chasers*
  Descriptors for this pattern of transition are multi-directional, 'searching' or 'yo-yo' when bouncing between different fields of interest. This pattern was dominant for 21 interviewees (30 per cent).
- *Tangential pathway/Forced learners*
  Sometimes learners studied what appeared to be a completely different program for professional-development reasons or under direction from others. This change was often due to some practical factor which obliged them to undertake a particular program, such as affordability, location or entry requirements. This might appear like a detour or sidestep. This pattern was dominant for six interviewees (nine per cent).
- *Merging pathway/Combiners*
  Having explored interests in other areas, some learners then drew different experiences together to move into a more focused program. This was different from the 'developer' pattern in that it was far less linear. This pattern was dominant for three interviewees (four per cent).

- *Parallel pathway/Two-trackers*
  There were two forms of this pattern. Some learners were providing for an alternative career for the time when their current one might not be possible, while others were trying to improve their chances of earning an income while studying. This pattern was dominant for six interviewees (nine per cent).

While 'developers' and 'interest chasers' were clearly the dominant patterns in this study, many interviewees could be seen to have had experience of other types of transition along their educational journey. For example, many were 'forced learners' at some stage in their educational history, and the 'combiners' and 'two-trackers' tended to be those who had a higher number of transitions. Occasionally, 'interest chasers' matured into 'developers', but more often maintained an erratic pattern throughout their transitions. Transcript analysis indicated that the movements of five (seven per cent) of the interviewees were so confused that it was not possible to attribute any discernable pattern to their transitions.

Patterns and number of tertiary transitions

Breakdown of these five patterns by number of tertiary transitions is presented in Table 3.3. Of the 15 learners who had experienced one tertiary transition, only four had a flowing pattern in their pathways. Often the primary motivator was career development, and sometimes gaining a qualification was more important than the field of education. Seven of the remaining 11 single-transition learners demonstrated erratic pathways at this stage and chose the new program out of interest, but this

Table 3.3   Patterns and Number of Tertiary Transitions

Transition Patterns	Number of Tertiary Transitions							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Developers	4	10	8	4	1	1		28
Interest chasers	7	9	1	1	1	1	1	21
Forced learners	2	2		1	1			6
Combiners					3			3
Two-trackers		2		1	3			6
Confused learners	2	3						5
Total	15	26	9	7	9	2	1	69

was not always the prime motivator. Some were forced by requirements of employers or did not want to continue the original course of action.

Many learners were undecided when they made their first transition from school, and some were still undecided by their second tertiary transition. This group of 26 appeared somewhat bewildered – either they thought they were interested in something and later found out they were not or selected programs because others directed them. However, in time some could clearly be identified as 'interest chasers', and others, once they found an area of interest, progressed to become 'developers'. There were more 'developers' emerging from those who had made two tertiary transitions, though again these were often motivated by career/employment. Some of those 'developers' could also be said to be 'forced learners' when their focus was on career or work and they were obliged to pursue further study to progress their career or employment. This inclination to be pushed into transitions through the demands of their work sometimes led to mixed educational histories, when they were confused about their work career. The 'two-trackers' first appear in this group: one female from the youngest group studied one different field of interest (horse track work) in order to provide income for study in her chosen profession (criminal justice); another female from the oldest group who pursued a passion (social anthropology) after years in a particular profession (physiology) then changed again (fashion) as a response to private and practical needs in her life.

Those who had made three tertiary transitions were all clear 'developers' by this stage, except for one persisting 'interest chaser'. This group was also older, none being under 25 and one-third between 45 and 54 years. The seven learners who had made four tertiary transitions were mostly 'developers', two of whom had been 'interest chasers' previously with very much a 'leap before you look' attitude towards their educational choices. Another was a basic 'developer' but, at this stage, had to take another program for professional development. The two-tracker in this group had previously been a 'developer' and was the oldest interviewee.

By the time of five tertiary transitions, there is a clear tendency to create new pathways either by combining previous studies or by creating parallel pathways. The 'combiners' included two who had been 'interest chasers' previously and one who had been a 'developer', but all desired to combine their previous learning experiences to create a new career. One of the 'two trackers' had demonstrated a different pattern at each transition and another was a 'developer' previously but took up a different field of education altogether, not out of mere interest but to prepare

for a time when she would be burned out in her current stressful career. Even the sole 'developer' had changed careers but still demonstrated a 'developer' pattern in a new career and was the youngest in the group. 'Interest chasers' were still in evidence at six and seven tertiary transitions, as well as one inveterate 'developer' who had undertaken a sixth transition for work purposes.

Patterns and age

Breakdown of transition patterns by age revealed that there were 'developers' and 'interest chasers' at all ages, but mostly in the late 20s and early 30s (Table 3.4). At all ages 'developers' were often externally motivated, by career and employment, while 'interest chasers' were internally motivated, frequently not fully researching their next transitional choice.

   Although most learners had forced transitions at some time in their career, at the time of interview these were mainly in the 25–29 age cohort, early in their careers. The 'combiners' and 'two-trackers' were all in the 30–34 and 55–64 age groups, perhaps signifying mid-career and pre-retirement phases (except for the one 'two-tracker' aged under 19 who was two-tracking for the purpose of earning to pay for study). Those who were categorised as 'confused' were aged in their 20s, reflecting no doubt their relative immaturity and inexperience about which other researchers have also written (e.g. Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000; Spierings, 2001). As one learner said, 'I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life and I still don't'. Certainly there was a lack of guidance,

Table 3.4   Patterns and Age

Transition Patterns	Age Cohorts (years)							
	<19	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	Total
Developers	2	3	6	7	5	4	1	28
Interest chasers	1	4	5	7	2	2		21
Forced learners		1	3	1		1		6
Combiners				2			1	3
Two-trackers	1			1			4	6
Confused learners		3	2					5
Total	4	11	16	18	7	7	6	69

or misguidance: 'I was really swayed by other people's suggestions and even though I knew it wasn't really me, they said it was, so I thought it was me'. This group of learners, being younger, had fewer moves but two of them exhibited tendencies which indicated that they might become 'interest chasers' with further transitions, or 'developers' if they found a field of interest which had ongoing appeal. It was not apparent whether the patterns became more differentiated with age; in fact, the table reveals that the 30–34 year cohort was the most differentiated.

Patterns and gender

In the overall sample, the ratio of males to females was 1:1.6. This ratio was maintained for 'forced learners', 'combiners' and 'two-trackers', but not for 'developers' and 'interest chasers' (Table 3.5).

There was a far greater proportion of females among the 'interest chasers' (and 'confused learners') and a greater proportion of males among the 'developers'. There is little in the transcripts to account for these tendencies, apart from the stereotypical pattern of more males feeling the pressure to construct their careers progressively and more females desiring to follow interests. There was, however, a clear message from the older women that they had no career choice in their younger days and were obliged to follow certain career paths, as articulated in this way by one interviewee:

> We were, as females, not encouraged to do male occupations, and I had originally wanted to go into sciences. I was discouraged from doing that and I wanted to do art, and they also said you can't make money in art, you have got to go into the services – typical women things of secretarial, nursing, humanities.

Table 3.5   Patterns and Gender

Transition Patterns	Male	Female	Male:Female
Developers	17	11	1 : 0.65
Interest chasers	4	17	1 : 4.25
Forced learners	2	4	1 : 2
Combiners	1	2	1 : 2
Two-trackers	2	4	1 : 2
Confused learners	1	4	1 : 4
Total	27	42	1 : 1.6

Some of these women used transitions to make changes later in life, such as one from nursing to women's studies and visual arts, one from secretarial work to parkland sciences and tour guiding, another from nursing to women's studies, horticulture and environmental studies, and one, as previously cited, from physiology to social anthropology and fashion.

These findings resonate with the literature on gender and adult education. Studies depict often broken and changing educational journeys for women dependent on life stages, where the influence and effects of gender relations in society shape 'women's and men's experiences in different ways, giving them the opportunity to acquire different sorts of knowledge and abilities' (Flannery and Hayes, 2000, p. 4). Within feminist scholarship, there have been notable studies on women's learning (e.g. Knights, 2000; Fenwick, 2002; Jackson, 2004). What these studies reveal is that how women learners think about learning does not always concur with commonly held notions and expectations of the aims of learning (Daniels, 2008). Moreover, in a Spanish study Arrazola and de Hevia (2006) found that returns to education were greater for women than they were for men, and that this gender differential appears to be especially important for vocational and university studies. Other research has argued for a broader and multiple concept of career to help us understand women's educational participation. Kirton (2006), for example, found that women frequently commit to and actively balance more than one significant life activity, each of which may be conceptualised as a career. These careers 'inter-relate and overlap, sometimes complementing each other, sometimes conflicting; thus commitment to, progression in, or setbacks for one mode of career cannot be understood without appreciation of the others' (p. 47).

Discussion and conclusions

This research investigated cross-sectoral learners, a category purposively selected in order to explore their experiences in making transitions within and between sectors. Though not necessarily seamless, sectoral transitions and pathways appear functional and effective, and the current arrangements for allowing such transitions were certainly utilised by these learners. Two aspects stand out from the findings. First, from the experiences of these learners it is evident that the transitioning process could be enhanced by targeted, accessible and accurate information and by provision of more appropriate career advice. Arguably, adequate information, and assistance in sorting and personalising information, would have led to more satisfactory choices. Career assistance would

have been useful for those in this study who had no defined area of vocational interest, and would have been beneficial in broadening the horizons of those who considered few options, if only to confirm the accuracy of their choice.

Second, notwithstanding systemic factors, the wherewithal of the individual is critical as to whether opportunities are grasped. Within a lifelong learning context, it is pivotal for the individual to become 'the builder and architect of his or her own learning and self-development' (ILO, 2002, p. 13), particularly as services provided by the state are reduced and labour markets become increasingly flexible. In fact, a characteristic of the modern career is that people are adopting the individualistic orientations that agencies and governments are advocating as a response to the challenges of globalisation and a constantly changing work environment, in order to achieve expectations of work–life balance (Smith, 2002; Anderson, 2003, McMahon, et al., 2003). The ability to take more responsibility for one's own decisions is particularly important if stresses caused by conflicting priorities are to be minimised (Robotham and Julian, 2006) and satisfactory work–life–study balances maintained (Lowe and Gayle, 2007). Though these learners demonstrated considerable openness to complexity in their learning journeys, this was within a framework of vocational interest and a willingness to adapt or shift focus depending on their experiences and available opportunities. Yet this may have presented problems through not undertaking information gathering, making decisions too readily and not seeking career assistance. There were also personal, practical issues which interfered with the fluidity of the process for the individual.

More theoretically, this chapter has interrogated the notion of transition by drawing on the lived experience of these 69 cross-sectoral learners. Its findings make two main contributions: to our academic understanding of transition and to tertiary-education policy and practice.

This research contributes to our academic understanding (Cameron, 2005) of transition by illuminating its complexity in that it can take at least four different forms – transitions can be

1. *direct* (linear) or *indirect*: this research has examined the nature of indirect transitions, proposing a typology of five main patterns of transition: flowing (developers), erratic (interest chasers), tangential (forced), merging (combiners) and parallel (two-trackers), with developers (41 per cent) and interest-chasers (30 per cent)

being the most common, and females dominating among interest-chasers (81 per cent) and males more in evidence among developers (63 per cent)

2. *one-* or *two-way* in direction: the learners had made between one and seven tertiary transitions

3. *inter-* or *intra-sectoral*: the learners had made 91 inter-sectoral (49 per cent) and 95 intra-sectoral (51 per cent) transitions

4. between the *same* or *different fields of education*: the learners had made 75 (40 per cent) same-field and 111 (60 per cent) different-field transitions.

This research contributes also to the policy and practice of tertiary education through the valuable insights it provides on transitions. An understanding of transition patterns can assist tertiary-education administrators in tailoring initiatives to respond appropriately to changes in life, learning and work of tertiary learners. The findings raise issues concerning the relationship between higher education and vocational education, and can provide policy-makers and institutional planners with information on how best to position relationships between these sectors. The interviewees' multiple transitions indicate that these sectors are playing complementary roles in catering for the needs of tertiary learners at different ages and stages of their lives. And finally, an understanding of transition patterns, and what are the losses and gains, can assist learners themselves in navigating through sometimes very different educational systems.

From a policy and administrative viewpoint, these learners' multiple transitions may be adjudged inefficient. There was considerable indecision and even confusion on the part of the interviewees in their educational journeys. These transitory learners are logically the ones who would most benefit from career services, hence the situation where such services are not utilised (for whatever reason) raises issues of inefficiency from both a systemic as well as an individual perspective. And to a degree, the learners themselves acknowledged these multiple transitions to be costly, time-consuming and contributing to career lag. While these acknowledgements were made, however, interviewees perceived these disadvantages to be outweighed by the benefits in terms of lifelong learning and the capacity to enhance personal and professional lives. In fact, one may well query (as has Anderson, 2005, p. 2) the extent to which linear pathways still exist.

Furthermore, this research has demonstrated how transitions can serve several important functions. For some learners, the transitions

acted as *release valves*, allowing them to escape situations in which they found themselves as a consequence of poor decision-making, ill-informed advice or immaturity, and then to attempt a new direction (particularly the younger learners) or to switch from stereotypical gender-induced careers (particularly the older learners). For others, the transitions acted as *door-openers*, allowing them flexibly to change programs and/or sectors in order to follow shifting interests and yearnings, or to earn income so that they could pay for study in their chosen career (particularly the younger learners). And for yet others, the transitions were *professional-development catalysts*, allowing them at different stages of their working lives to update and further develop and, in doing so, to consolidate their existing employment or move into promotional positions.

Thus, within a framework of lifelong learning, while learner pathways may not always be seamless, transitions play a pivotal role in allowing learners to continue learning at different ages and stages of their private and professional lives. As the study of these learners has shown, transitioning between and within sectors was not an insurmountable issue. While there remain public perceptions about status differentials between the sectors, these may not be as entrenched as they once were, and while there are still institutional and programmatic barriers, developments in recent years in terms of the promotion of articulation, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning have lessened such blockages compared with what once existed. Moreover, the popularising of lifelong-education philosophy has contributed to increasing social acceptability of moving between sectors and programs, and in countries (such as the Anglophone nations) where the relationship between the educational system and the labour market is relatively loose, such movement is indeed vital. Within this context, then, transitions act as essential escalators for the movement of learners from school to work to retirement.

Acknowledgements

Part II
Making Transitions

4

Social Capital Key for Successful School-to-Work Transitions? Analyzing Migrant Youths' Trajectories and Social Networks

Natalia Waechter, Johanna Blum and Paul Scheibelhofer

Introduction

Data show that the offspring of migrant labourers (the so-called 'guest workers') from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey have problems with educational advancement and are over-represented in low-income jobs in Austria. In this chapter, we examine some of the factors that might explain this problematic situation. Building on social-capital theory, we analyse qualitative interviews with second-generation migrants in Vienna. The outcomes show how different social and institutional agents in the lifeworld of migrant youth affect their chances and choices. We argue that even 'bad' choices, such as leaving school early to enter the labour market, can be understood as reasonable strategies, once the context in which they are developed is taken into account. The analysis thus shows that, in order to improve the social situation and mobility of migrants' children, attention should be directed at the pervasive discriminatory contextual factors rather than focusing on the alleged negative characteristics of migrant youth themselves.

The plight of migrant youth in education and work

During the four decades following the agreement for recruiting foreign workers ('Anwerbeabkommen')[1] between Austria and the countries sending workers (Turkey as well as former Yugoslavia), many children and grandchildren of those initial immigrants have been born and raised in their host society. Nevertheless, they still experience social inequality based on their origin and ethnic membership (cf. Fassmann,

2007). The first generation of migrant workers who came to work in Austria in the 1960s and the early 1970s via the foreign workers' recruitment agreement were frequently relegated to a low occupational status. Those 'guest workers', as they were called, had to fill the holes in the Austrian labour force and typically worked in low-wage sectors. Moreover, they had had little or no education and training in their native countries (cf. Fassmann et al., 1999; Münz, 2000). The offspring of the foreign workers grew up in Austria and participated in the school system; however, generally they still remain less successful than their 'Austrian' peers in gaining school or training diplomas and in mastering the challenging transitions from school to work. The social inequality that their parents or grandparents had to experience continues; the prospect of diminished educational and career opportunities persists even for third-generation migrant youth (Waechter et al., 2007a).

The situation of young migrants in education and training is the topic of many controversial public discussions, but we found a dearth of empirical studies – not only those that present macro-analyses of socio-demographic data but also those that go beyond and try to locate processes and dynamics on a micro-level. The qualitative study that provides the basis for this chapter tries to fill this gap (Waechter et al., 2007b). We questioned young migrants about their educational and occupational trajectories in relation to their social environment (parents, siblings, friends, teacher, etc.) and, as a result, gained new insights about the decision processes regarding school and career options. Our theoretical background relates to theories on social capital. We assume that someone's social capital is responsible for getting a job that corresponds with one's qualification. In qualitative interviews we asked second- and third-generation migrant youth about the existence and the functions of informal social networks, about their 'weak' and 'strong' ties (cf. Granovetter, 1973), and about situations that enable them to establish new ties. We tried to find out how they manage to gain ground in the labour market which, especially for our target group, is very difficult to enter. On the basis of this data we were able to answer our leading research question – the social processes and dynamics that occur in educational and occupational decision-making – and present new findings about the role that social capital plays for education and careers of migrant youth in Austria.

Social capital, ethnicity and the labour market

The social sciences have developed diverse approaches to explore social inequality. The approach taken in the study that generated the data

presented here originated from theories of social capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu and taken forward by others. Building on empirical and theoretical research, Bourdieu (1983, 2001) introduced a theoretical framework to study social structures and processes that reproduce them. This framework builds on a differentiated notion of capital, where economic capital (money, etc.) exists besides cultural capital (knowledge, certificates, etc.) and social capital (social relations in different forms; see below). The social structure of a society can thus be understood as the structure of allocation of the different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 183). Bourdieu sees this allocation structured by such different agents as societal institutions (e.g. schools) as well as personal dispositions that were formed through social interactions (i.e. the habitus). The question of 'inheritance' of social positions was of central concern for Bourdieu and was also central to our research project. In the following section relevant aspects of the theory of social capital by Bourdieu and other scholars are explored.

Generally speaking, social capital can be understood as the 'glue' of society and the foundation of solidarity (cf. Putnam, 2000). Social capital, as a theoretical approach to study societal structures, is widely used today and can, on the one hand, be applied on a macro-level to whole societies, as, for example, it is done in research for developmental aid. Here, the question of the relationship between forms of social bonding (in institutions, associations, groups, etc.) and national economic or social development is central (e.g. Inglehart, 1997; Gehmacher, 2004). On the other hand, the concept of social capital can also be applied, as was done in the present study, on a micro-level, starting from personal experiences and leading to mid-range theories about societal structures. For our research interest – to analyse problems of migrants' children in school and in the labour market – several aspects of social capital are illuminative. Bourdieu defines social capital as the resources to which a person has access by means of his/her social bonds and relations (Bourdieu [1981] 2005, p. 263). Social bonds can be more or less institutionalised, such as in clubs or groups, but can also include family, friends or colleagues. The amount of social capital available to a given person is thus the sum of the resources of all people that the person has ties with. Both the size of a person's social network and the quality of the ties (see below) define the social capital he/she has. Social networks are developed and maintained by continuous investments, that is practices that stabilise the relationship. These investments can be of material nature, but they can also be (and often are) non-material like favours one does for others (like putting in a good word for somebody).

But, though social-capital theory is immensely informative, its widespread usage has met with criticism as well. Central to this critique is the notion that a rising 'capitalisation of the social' (see Peripherie 99, 2005) takes place as part of neo-liberal economic transformations. More and more areas of social life are being measured and evaluated in and by economic terms and values. According to the critics, the concept of social capital can promote this dangerous development. Used in certain ways, the concept can divert attention away from social and institutional structures and focus on the individual (or a certain group) as the main cause for success or failure (cf. Mayer and Rankin, 2002). We see this critique not as a reason to abandon the social-capital approach altogether, but it calls for reflection on the usage to which it is put. As far as our specific research interest is concerned, the danger of an individualising approach seems very real. Discourses on the problematic situation of migrants' children more often than not search for the reasons for problems in the supposed characteristics of the young women and men themselves (cf. Radtke, 1988, p. 302). Such problematic conclusions are drawn when the role of institutions and questions of discrimination and exclusion are left out of the analysis.

In numerous studies it has been shown that social capital is important for processes within the labour market (cf. Granovetter, 1973, 1995; Erickson, 2001; Flap and Boxman, 2001; Lin, 2001). The relevance of informal networks for labour market positions has been documented by Flap and Boxman (2001; see also Wallace, 2003). They have shown, for example, that in 1981 one-third of the male employees in the Netherlands secured their jobs through informal networks. By 1991 this was the case for half of the employees (Flap and Boxman, 2001, p. 160). Granovetter (1995, p. 140) found similar patterns among young employees. In Boston in 1989, half of the white and more than 40 per cent of the black youth found their jobs through friends and other personal relations. These studies have also shown that not only the quantity but also the quality of networks is a relevant aspect of social capital. 'Strong ties' are valuable to secure existing resources within networks of close relationships, such as the family. The drawback of these networks is that they mostly exist among individuals who occupy a similar social position, thus the kind of resources (e.g. the type of jobs that can be accessed) is limited. 'Weak ties', on the other hand, are less stable and less deep, but are often a valuable means to create networks with persons who are in a better social situation (cf. Granovetter, 1995). In a similar vein, Putman (2000) differentiates between 'bonding' and 'bridging' aspects of social capital, where the former describes its function to

create solidarity within groups and the latter, its ability to create relations between individuals who occupy distant social positions (cf. also Gehmacher, 2003, p. 17; Spannring, 2004, p. 16).

As noted above, Bourdieu posits that there are three main forms of capital: social, cultural and economic. These forms of capital are related to each other, so that the existence of one facilitates the acquisition of the other. Thus, economic capital is relevant for one's chances within the labour market in diverse ways, for example, it allows for longer educational periods and later entry into working life. A longer educational career awards higher degrees and certificates (cultural capital) which, in turn, heighten one's 'worth' within the labour market and can thus be 'converted' into higher salaries and a reduced chance of unemployment (if the social capital to find appropriate jobs exists). However, to enter and complete higher education, certain dispositions have to be developed within the family which make the person 'fit' the rules and norms of educational institutions. If a family lacks the resources to endow their children with the right dispositions, the chances for educational and, later, labour market success are reduced.

The notion of different forms of capitals thus shows the complexity of the processes that are involved in the reproduction of social structures. The analysis of generational 'inheritance' of social positions has to take a theoretical approach that goes beyond simplistic and mechanistic explanations.

Applying such a theoretical approach has led to relevant insights within migration research. In an early study, Portes (1998) argued that 'negative social capital' can lead to the social isolation of groups, especially migrants. He demonstrated this for groups such as Puerto Rican drug dealers in New York (p. 17), describing how these dealers were eager to keep each other within the network, cutting relations with those outside of the network (and to the resources these relations might entail). More recently, Martinelli (2006) argued in a study of female migrants in Italy, that social capital could lead to 'ethnicised' labour market structures. If migrants from a certain background are dominant in a certain sector, chances are high that this segmentation will perpetuate itself through the social networks that exist among migrants from the same country of origin. She also showed that social capital can have a restricting effect on female migrants, as networks exert social pressure on them, requiring conformity and hindering emancipation (p. 33). Nevertheless, as discussed above, we must not forget to relate these processes to the institutional contexts in which they take place. For example, the development of strong bonds among co-migrants is often an important

strategy to cope with discrimination (Portes and Zhou, 1993). Ethnic segmentation of the labour market is thus not merely the outcome of certain practices on the part of migrants but a structural problem of the labour market itself. Comparable tendencies have also been found within the Austrian labour market: different groups of migrants work in different sectors of employment (cf. Volf, 2001; Herzog-Punzenberger, 2003). Indeed, Haberfellner (2000) studied 'ethnic economies' in Austria and found out that these are typically structured along familial lines as this is the only way to receive the necessary resources to start a business. As these 'strong ties' often render very homogenous resources, important elements such as commercial knowledge, seed capital or knowledge about the wider branch of the relevant trade are often lacking.

In relation to our particular interest in this study, our theoretical approach, as well as earlier studies, led to initial assumptions about relevant processes. Given the migration history of their parents (who were invited to come to Austria as foreign workers to work in low-paid sectors), the young women and men grew up under capital-scarce circumstances. Low-paying jobs in Austria rendered the families with little economic capital and, as a result, one can expect that the migration process devalued their cultural capital, as it did not correspond to the dominant forms in Austria. Furthermore, social capital was also destroyed as a result of the migration process and had to be rebuilt, often among other people who occupied similarly precarious social positions (cf. Juhasz and Mey, 2003, p. 299). This problematic 'starting position' can continue to impact negatively the migrant children's social situations, when we take into account that schools do not bestow each pupil with the same amount of cultural capital. A school career needs school-appropriate dispositions and habitus. Such signs as a foreign name, an accent or a veil have been shown to cause institutional discrimination in Austria (Klaus and Halbwirth, 2004, p. 149). How these expected processes affect the lives of young migrants of the second generation, what strategies they find to deal with them and how these strategies again affect their school and labour market careers, was the focus of our research.

Research design and methodology

For data collection we used qualitative, semi-structured interviews. The sample consisted of 30 migrant youths (male and female) living in Vienna whose families originated from Turkey or the former Yugoslavia. Since we were interested in the offspring of the original foreign workers

who migrated in the 1960s and 1970s, we interviewed young migrants who are not first-generation immigrants. The age range of the migrants interviewed was 17–25, which means that they have already passed the likely age for moving from school to work. In the sample there is an equal distribution of young women and men. Through the method of 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss, 1998, p. 53) we tried to reach respondents of a wide spectrum of education levels and job experiences: some were still in or had re-entered the education system. Some were successfully employed (stable, long-term jobs), while some others were in apprenticeship or vocational training. Several were employed precariously (contract-workers, etc.), or they were over-qualified, and some were unemployed.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, we asked the interviewees to draw their social networks on paper. The papers we gave them were blank except for an encircled 'Me' in the middle of the page. This combination of the interviews and the drawings refers to Scheibelhofer's (2006) 'ego-centred network drawings'. However, in contrast to Scheibelhofer, whose analyses focused on the drawings, we used them only to support the findings that we had gained from the qualitative text analysis. With the help of the drawings we motivated the young people to reflect and elaborate extensively on their social environment. This was important because we were interested not only in their closest friends and family but also in 'weak ties'.

Since we were interested in locating *new* phenomena (processes and dynamics in the decision-making for education and career) rather than testing already established theories, we used the method of Grounded Theory (cf. Strauss and Corbin, 1996; Strauss, 1998; Strübing, 2004) for analysing our data. Central to our analysis was their 'coding paradigm'. We started with open coding and later focused on categories that emerged as important for educational and occupational decisions. After concentrating on single cases in the initial analysis we continued with including more cases and working in a comparative way until the analysis was 'saturated' (i.e. we did not expect any new dimensions to occur).

The social networks of migrant youths and their impact on school-to-work transitions

Young people establish their notion of life with respect to people in their personal environments. Social networks provide young people with role models. Accordingly, adolescents adopt their attitudes and life courses; they transform and modify them. They may also try hard

not to emulate the biographies of people who belong to their social networks. Nevertheless, these processes are important to young people in determining the directions of their lives. One integral element of finding one's way is developing one's own prospects pertaining to one's job and career. In our study we concentrated on young migrant people in Vienna who have fewer chances than their 'Austrian' peers to master their school-to-work transition successfully and who often find themselves in precarious employment situations. We explored how their social networks influenced their decisions regarding education and occupation and also tried to find examples of 'good practice' in relation to the support young people received. In the study we found that parents have a great impact on the educational and occupational decisions of young migrants. Siblings too influence and support the young people when it comes to choosing a career. Apart from family ties, friends and peer groups as well are important to migrant young people. They help each other manage the transition from school to work. However, there are also peers who try to prevent their friends from making ambitious decisions. Within the wider social network, teachers especially can encourage migrant youth to reflect on their skills and preferences. In the following, these social relations of migrant youth are each discussed in more detail.

Family ties

Analysing our data, we found that parents play a particularly important role. The emotional and economic resources parents provide are decisive to the biography of young people. Thus parents influence educational and vocational decisions both directly and indirectly. They provide strong support to their children: a warm and caring home empowers young people to make up their minds and make their own decisions. Yet some families do not have the economic resources to afford further education for their children. Other factors, such as the parents' preferences, influence the school-to-work transition of their offspring in a direct way. Generally, parents hold high expectations regarding the education and profession of their children. It seems that young people are sometimes put into the role of fulfilling their parents' 'migration project'; they are supposed to have a better life in Austria than their parents'. The young migrants' parents often could not achieve a high socio-economic status and recognised that there were only limited possibilities of social advancement. Now they believe that if their children had a higher education than they did, the children may encounter better

opportunities. However, parents often develop preferences about the careers of their sons or daughters without reflecting on their skills and interests.

The analysis of the interviews yielded three different types of parental support that young people with Turkish or (former)Yugoslavian background encounter at home.

Foremost, some migrant youths are *left on their own* by their parents to manage the transition from school to the labour market. Already during early schooling they are not supported as much as others are and therefore have to solve their difficulties on their own. In the data we could identify important reasons that pertain specifically to migrants. The parents of the young immigrants do not engage in the school affairs of their sons and daughters because they often lack German-language skills. Even if problems occur with teachers or schoolmates they do not intervene. Moreover, migrant workers from Turkey and former Yugoslavia who came to Austria often had little formal education and training in their native countries. As a consequence they are not able to help the children with their schoolwork. The parents' working conditions pose another reason why migrant youths are left alone to take important decisions. Typically the parents have physically exhausting jobs with long working hours. These factors can lead to diminished parental support, which, in turn, can exacerbate pre-existing problems their children face in Austrian schools and working environments.

The data show that being left alone can be rather traumatic for some adolescents. If they are supported neither tangibly nor emotionally they are unsettled. Even if these young migrants have a favoured occupation they are not convinced that their abilities are sufficient for the tasks and as a result fear rejection or disappointment. Therefore, they never really try to find such a job or start an education that could lead to their favoured occupation but rather picture themselves in menial jobs that are easy to get. Accordingly, they struggle to choose an education or training that they expect to finish successfully. However, some other young people act independently from an early age *because* of the absence of parental support: sometimes they manage to make decisions on their own; sometimes they are supported by another person close to them, for instance, by a brother or a sister.

Second, some parents *put pressure* on the young migrants to fulfill high expectations regarding educational achievements or jobs. Often parents do not have clear expectations of the occupation their son or daughter should strive to attain but want them to obtain a prestigious job in order to have a better life. The data suggest that parents have a particularly

negative impact on school-to-work transitions of their children when they demand that they stay in school but do not support them in doing so. Though most young migrants wish to live up to the expectations of their parents they are often over-burdened by these exceedingly high expectations.

If young migrants cannot cope with their parents' expectations or if they express their own dissenting career prospects conflicts may occur. To cope with that prospect they strive for distinction with respect to their parents' interests. Sometimes the young people oppose and reject their parents' values and attitudes. Changing schools frequently and leaving schools or apprenticeships early point to this kind of opposition. Some young people finally succeed and start an education or a job they really want. Our results show that young Turkish women are particularly affected by this form of parental influence. Traditional and patriarchal family values make it difficult for young Turkish women to realise their job preferences against the wishes of their fathers (and their mothers). Nevertheless, our interviews have shown that these young women can manage to withstand such wishes, provided they find assistance among family, friends or teachers.

Third, some young migrants we interviewed can be described as *empowered* by the backing of their parents. A supportive family fosters a healthy environment for young people. In such a setting the adolescents are able to reflect on their skills and discover their career preferences. If problems arise they are prepared to handle the difficulties. It is important for migrant young people to receive help with daily challenges they face, for example, in school or when searching for an apartment or a job. According to our analysis it seems to be even more crucial that parents provide emotional backup and that they discuss relevant issues at home. Generally, help in educational or job affairs is given by the father. He accompanies his ward to open days at school or to a job interview. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that the father usually has lived longer in Austria than has the mother and is therefore deemed to be better adapted. In contrast, the mother typically cares for the well-being of the family members at home; the father deals with the outside world.

The chosen career may or may not suit the expectations of the parents. If the children develop divergent interests it is not always easy for them to pursue them. It seems that it is not necessary to oppose parents in a supportive setting because the parents accept their children's decisions. However, it is common that young people adopt their parents' expectations and attitudes towards education and careers.

Apart from parents, older siblings are important to migrant youth. The main reason is that they had experienced the same transition only a few years earlier. If they had managed the transition from school to work well, they often become role models for their younger brothers and sisters. In particular, young migrants who are unsettled in their educational decisions tend to choose careers similar to their older siblings'.

All in all, the importance of siblings to the school-to-work transitions of migrant youth emerges in contrast to the relationship between the parents and their children. For instance, if conflicts arise with parents the siblings often take on the support of brothers or sisters. In the interviews young migrants gave accounts of various forms of support from their siblings. Not only do the older siblings use their social contacts to help their younger brothers and sisters find a job, but they also provide crucial information on educational and vocational opportunities. Older siblings also lend them money if necessary. Typically, provision of information is the most important kind of support because older siblings have their own experiences of the Austrian education system. Thus, their knowledge often exceeds that of the parents and is vital to their younger brothers and sisters. Moreover, the data reveal that young people prefer to discuss topics concerning education and employment with their siblings. This is owing to the fact that relationships with brothers and sisters are generally on a more equal footing than they are with parents. Whereas parents often have strong expectations, siblings do not try to influence the young migrants as much; they are described as more neutral in discussions.

Friends: the good and the bad

Relative equality is also a defining feature of the friendships the young people have and what gives these relationships their important role. In general, this is fundamental to peer groups and their importance in adolescence. In the data we found friends fulfil two main functions. One is having a good time together and the other is mutual support. Characteristically one of the functions is emphasised more than the other, but both are present in most friendships. With some friends having fun is more important: they go to parties, watch movies, play sports, have barbecues together, etc. In contrast, other friendships are built mainly on support; usually this entails talking with friends about problems and concerns and occasionally actively helping each other.

At first glance, having fun with friends seems to have nothing to do with school-to-work transitions. However, it does have a role. In

the interviews, migrant youths describe the time they spend with their friends in contrast to their everyday routines. Spending time with friends stands out positively because in education or work they often do not have encouraging experiences. As this is one occasion where they can forget about their difficulties in other domains of life it is vital for their relaxation and recreation. Yet more important to educational decisions is mutual support. Issues they do not want to discuss with family members are talked over with friends. In this respect the impact of friends is complementary to that of the parents. Mutual support of friends helps migrant youths to gain confidence in their decisions. In peer groups they exchange experiences of job searches and job interviews. They accompany friends to the employment centre and help each other with writing applications. They talk about different educational opportunities, about various occupations and career prospects. Friends who already have a job inform peers about vacancies. However, the data suggest that finding employment as a result of friends' connections is a secondary influence. This is due to the fact that the young people's friends are usually still at the beginning of their careers.

However, the impact of peers on educational decisions may be negative as well. The interviewees talked about friends who had reacted dismissively to their education or job choice. Some even ceased to be friends subsequently. Thus, it appears that some peer groups sanction ambitious migrant young people (e.g. by telling them that they never will find the job they desire because of their migrant background). Typically those friends ridicule their friends' decisions. To cope with such negative reactions from friends is challenging for the adolescents because it may force a choice between the friendship and following their plans. A possible consequence is that young migrants are so discouraged that they drop their career plans. The narratives of some migrant youths indicate that they regret, retrospectively, the decisions they made in favour of their friends' opinion.

Another negative influence of friends on educational opportunities may lie in joint decisions, for instance the choice to attend the same school. Especially when the girls and boys do not have a clear picture of their interests and opportunities, following the paths of their peers becomes a possible strategy. This often entails following a friend in choosing one of the 'typical' tracks for migrants' children in the Austrian school system (i.e. schools that lead to early entrance to the labour market). Thus, joint decisions of friends can strengthen the present ethnic segmentation of the Austrian education system and labour market. To opt for another education would mean adapting to a new social environment instead of staying with current friends.

Teachers: gatekeepers of the education system

The interviewees reported various people in their broader social networks who had an impact on their school-to-work transition. Foremost, they referred to teachers. Apart from teachers, distant relatives, youth workers, colleagues as well as their bosses were mentioned during the interviews. This wide variety illustrates that migrant youth make use of their broader social networks to find a job. Yet the data point to the fact that they do not have many acquaintances (i.e. weak ties) to help them. In comparison to the close ties reported by these young people, their more formal relationships are less influential.

As mentioned before, the Austrian education system tends to strengthen social and ethnic inequalities. Consequently teachers can influence strongly the social and occupational mobility of young people. This is particularly true for young migrants as their parents are often not familiar with the Austrian education system. Recommendations from teachers easily outweigh personal considerations. Therefore, the counselling by teachers can affect the perspectives of migrant youths positively as well as negatively. Some teachers try to encourage them to attend an academic secondary school or to pursue post-compulsory education whereas others discourage young people from schooling and thus discriminate against them. The interviewees gave account of unjust grades, and more difficult and more frequent examinations of migrant pupils. Teachers also convey in a racist manner that immigrants are not capable of attending higher secondary and tertiary education. As a result some young immigrants quit or change schools as early as possible.

Conclusion

Focusing on the role of social capital has proven a valuable analytical tool to understand the diverse processes at play in the school-to-work transitions of migrant youth in Austria. As has become visible, if we want to answer the question of why young migrants 'inherit' the problematic social disposition of their parents – and how they manage to exit this dynamic – we have to include the roles of different actors and institutions within the analysis.

Regarding the role of the parents of the young migrants, we have seen that many share an intense interest in their children's upward mobility. But this alone is obviously not sufficient to make their wishes come true. Other factors intervene, such as the question of whether there exists enough awareness in the family about the actual nature of the education system as well as the willingness to deal with the young people's needs

and interests. Moreover, the necessary resources to offer their children the education they need to attain their goals or the ability to draw these resources from institutions (such as the school or labour market integration projects) has to exist. Thus, as we have seen, a mere interest in the advancement of one's offspring and the lack of resources and information to realise these interests can turn into a problem for the young men and women. Unrealistic aspirations can then become yet another difficulty the migrant youth has to deal with, rather than a form of empowerment.

Also the role of siblings and friends is complex and at times contradictory. Certainly, they can become important role models for the young people, serving not only as a source of inspiration for possible life projects but also, importantly, as a source of knowledge about the ways to attain these goals. On the other hand, they can also function as role models in a problematic way when they are seen as representing the 'normal' pathway for migrant children. Peer pressure – the 'other side' of the emotional stability that youth groups offer – can thus become a force that keeps migrant youth from pursuing alternative interests and choices regarding schooling and work.

It thus becomes obvious that the above-mentioned critique of an individualising approach to social capital is more than justified in our case. Institutional and contextual factors played a crucial role in informing the possibilities and choices of the interviewed. Lack of information about and perceived social distance from Austrian institutions were, for many, the backdrop against which decisions had to be made. Furthermore, both the structure of the Austrian education system, with its early differentiation into tracks that offer radically different future chances, and the dominant narratives among teachers about the limited abilities of migrant children operate to restrict social mobility for these young people. Obviously, not *all* teachers share the idea that the migrant children are not eligible for higher schooling, as we have learned in the interviews. And, furthermore, it would be wrong to expect teachers, working in a system that seems unprepared to deal with the apparent diversity in classes, to be able to cushion all arising problems. So, a way out of this dynamic would certainly have to focus both on raising the awareness of teachers of their central role for the life opportunities of migrant youth and on the allocation of resources to make the system more able to challenge existing social inequalities on a structural level.

The outcomes of our research can be understood as documenting the diverse ways that migrant youths find to navigate through an adverse social environment. In doing so, they develop strategies that, in the eyes

of some social commentators, might be labelled as 'problematic' vis-à-vis more 'promising' ones. Nevertheless, once we take into account the specific context in which these choices are made, we must realise that even the 'problematic' decisions can be the 'right' answer to the specific problems migrant youths encounter. So, to change the situation, it will not suffice to merely *inform* migrant parents and their children about possibilities and consequences of choices (although the apparent lack of information is certainly a cause for many problems of today). The real task is to change the relevant social institutions to make them less discriminatory towards migrant youth and thus to make diverse career paths *realistic and realisable* for them.

Note

1. In seeking to fill the gap of workers within the labour market, Austria closed contracts with Turkey in 1964 and with Yugoslavia in 1966.

5
Living with Poor Basic Skills?
The Role of 'Skills for Life'
in Education-to-Work Transitions

Mark Cieslik and Donald Simpson

Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of a project, funded by the United Kingdom's Economic and Social Research Council, that explored the influence of basic skills (literacy, numeracy and oracy skills) on school-to-work transitions of young people growing up in the North East of England. A sample of 55 adults aged between 20 and 30 was interviewed between April of 2003 and July of 2004. These sample members had undertaken basic-skills learning in a community, college or work setting. This either had been 'embedded' in training such as New Deal[1] or was dedicated basic-skills provision. In total 24 men and 31 women were interviewed, and all live in the North East of England in disadvantaged communities. In-depth, qualitative life-history interviews were used (Bertaux and Thompson, 1997; Hubbard, 2001) to construct biographical 'life grids' (Webster et al., 2004) that charted the transition experiences of each individual, including school-to-work, domestic and housing transitions. A central aim of the research was to investigate how basic skills competencies might be implicated in the conditioning of transitions into adulthood – including transitions between education and work.

The chapter begins with a short discussion of current explanations for transitions from education to work and moves on to outline the basic-skills context in the United Kingdom (UK). We then briefly review the transition experiences of our sample members before introducing some key explanatory concepts that help us make sense of the role basic skills plays in the transitions into adulthood of the sample we interviewed, including the notion of basic-skills events, basic-skills practices and

reflexive individualism. Finally, we outline some important strategies used by individuals we interviewed when making transitions. Discussion of the latter illustrates how our research – though modest – has a wider significance for policy and practice as it demonstrates how individuals with serious skill problems manage in their daily lives. In some cases they were relatively successful in making key transitions to adulthood, yet, paradoxically, they often avoided the sorts of formal learning opportunities that might have assisted them at these key points in their life. Our research therefore provides an insight into the construction of the demand for learning and the problems that any new skills agenda, such as the current Skills-for-Life initiative (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) in the United Kingdom, will face in its task to improve basic skills.

Transitions from school to work

Part I of this book explored changing patterns of transitions from education to work and whether such routes are becoming less linear. There is also a parallel debate centred on whether transitions are shaped largely by structural processes or influenced more by personal agency and choice. The themes raised in this debate are not new and have been evident since early sociological studies of young people's lives that focused on school-to-work transitions (Roberts, 1968; Ashton and Field, 1976) and connected them to wider debates about social class, life chances and social reproduction. Indeed, several authors continue to claim that even changed transitions are intimately related to (and are largely a consequence of) social class and other factors such as gender and ethnicity. Henderson et al. (2007) have recently talked about 'traditional' transitions from higher education into professions continuing to be enjoyed by middle-class young people in contrast to 'working class routes into further and higher education' (ibid., p. 42).

   As noted in other chapters of this book though, increasingly the changing economic, cultural and institutional landscape of contemporary societies has popularised the use of concepts of risk, reflexivity and individualisation (Cieslik and Pollock, 2002) in explaining transitions. For some this means young people may now have more choice and control with regard to transition experiences than they had in the past (Muggleton, 2000). Consequently, some authors claim that previous conceptualisations of education-to-work transitions fail to provide 'a deeper understanding of the relationship between external contexts, individual resources and processes of active life management' (Furlong

et al., 2003, p. 16). This is why explanations privileging structural factors have continued to fall back on the concept of unpredictability when interpreting change in individual (as opposed to group) transitions. Indeed, while analysing our data and attempting to make sense of the flux across individual transitions and to explain the use of personal and communal basic-skills resources by individuals, we found that factors such as class and gender offered only a partial explanation of transition experiences. Increasingly, as we developed the concept of basic-skills practice to help us make sense of the experiences of our interviewees, we recognised the importance of agency and reflexivity as explanatory tools. Though we are sensitive to the conditioning effects of past biographical experiences and social contexts, we also wished to investigate the complex role of individual agency in transitions. The critical realist work of Margaret Archer, for example, was influential in offering a way of integrating the interplay of agency and structure across biographical time (Archer,1988, 2000).

What are basic skills?

Most countries in Western Europe identify poor basic skills as a significant problem facing their economies, institutions, groups and individuals. In the United Kingdom basic skills are identified as literacy, numeracy and ICT (Information and Communications Technology) skills. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), for example, defines basic skills 'as an essential work skill; beyond that, it is a life skill that enables social, cultural and political participation' (OECD, 1997, p. 11). The UK Government launched its *Skills Strategy, Twenty-First Century Skills* in July 2003 (DfES, 2003) in an attempt to address basic-skills problems across the population. This document reflects a wider policy discourse of knowledge development and learning across Western European countries – namely, a discourse of economic development through improvements in the skills base.

Surveys have suggested that there are some two to three million individuals in the United Kingdom with poor basic skills (Moser, 1999; Basic Skills Agency, 2000) and that this negatively impacts the national economy and individuals. Nevertheless, basic skills and their impact across the lifecourse remain 'under-researched' (Hamilton, 2001), and 'neglect' sums up academic interest in this area (Aldridge and Lavender, 2003). Surveys show how basic-skills competency levels on leaving school are correlated with transition routes for groups – that is, the

lower the literacy and numeracy levels of school leavers, the more nega-
tive the transition outcomes, particularly in regard to securing full-time
employment in the labour market (Bynner and Steedman, 1995; Byn-
ner and Parsons, 1997, 1998, 2005). Though illuminating, this existing
research is unable to chart how young people actively manage their skill
strengths and weaknesses and develop coping strategies which, in turn,
may influence transition outcomes. Sociological interest in the area of
basic skills has also been limited (though see Payne, 2006). A small num-
ber of ethnographic studies have suggested a more complex and variable
relationship (Furlong et al., 2003; Williamson, 2004) between skills com-
petencies and transitions. Some of this 'variability' is predicated on
data which suggest that some young people with good skills experi-
ence marginal routes whilst many with poorer skills are more successful
(Furlong and Cartmel, 2004; McDonald and Marsh, 2005). Accordingly,
these researchers are sceptical about the role of 'skills' in transitions to
adulthood. We question this contention. As we go on to show, skills do
influence transitions but they do so as basic-skills practices rather than
as simpler skill competencies.

Marginal and successful transitions to adulthood

Across our sample there were key differences between sample members
who had pursued marginal careers and those who were more suc-
cessful. The data support earlier research that links social background
and the structure of opportunities to different transition routes (Jones,
2002; Furlong et al., 2003; Webster et al., 2004). The quality of edu-
cational provision, employment opportunities and home environment
all influenced routes into adulthood. Marginalisation was associated
with disaffection at school, educational under-achievement, conflictual
parental relationships, early child-bearing for young women and inter-
mittent unemployment for many of the men. The more marginalised
moved into social housing and established relationships with individu-
als from similar disadvantaged social backgrounds. Though not a linear
process, interviewees experienced a series of events in different career
routes that cumulatively contributed to the process of marginalisation
or success in transitions to adulthood (Bynner and Parsons, 2005).

Those with 'more successful' transitions had less negative experiences
of schooling and better records of attendance and attainment. They
also had parents who supported them in their studies. Both males and
females pursued further education or training at 16 years of age and
were more successful in gaining waged employment and work-based

training. The more successful transitions were also associated with less family conflict and parental divorce and family members provided various forms of material and emotional support. Many of the parents of this 'more successful' sample were in waged employment and assisted their children in gaining employment. The relatively successful women were also more often found to be childless at time of interview or gave birth later than the marginal sample. The more successful also tended to have long-term relationships with partners in waged employment and in some cases had been able to move into privately owned accommodation.

Though we can generalise about relationships between social structures and transitions, we concur with recent research, to which we contributed (Webster et al., 2004), suggesting that at an individual level there is much diversity between different transition routes and much change over biographical time. Some sample members experienced short-lived episodes of marginality within their school-to-work transitions whilst enjoying much more success in their housing and domestic transitions. The opposite also occurred, with some young people securing employment whilst simultaneously having restricted domestic experiences and remaining in their home of origin throughout their twenties.

Although there was evidence that those with a wider range of more severe basic-skills problems (i.e. those with poor competency levels across their whole skills set – literacy, numeracy and oracy) experienced more marginal transitions, one cannot always predict the effect of a particular skill competency on transition experiences. We set out to explore our data in great depth to explain why this might be the case. Importantly, it became clear from the analysis of our data that some of this variability of transition experiences – including school-to-work transition experiences – stemmed from the functioning of skills not simply as competencies but rather as basic-skills practices associated with basic-skills events. Below we outline what we mean by these concepts and provide some examples of how basic-skills practices and events function to influence transitions in both indirect and direct ways.

Transitions, basic-skills events and basic-skills practices

Through comparison across the interviews we began to reveal an important point regarding basic-skills competencies – namely, that they are not neutral technologies with a predictably positive or negative impact. Several interviewees had a relatively higher level of reading, writing and

arithmetic skills than others, but their overall transitions from school to work were less successful. For us, the first key to understanding why this might occur was to recognise that functional levels in basic skills are defined within the 'situations' (Barton et al., 2000) in which they are utilised and can be viewed as practices rather than as simple competencies. Differing basic-skills practices – that is, the utilisation of basic skills across transitions – were valorised across the different work situations in which our interviewees pursued their employment career. So certain skills in certain situations had a higher exchange value. Basic-skills practices of our interviewees framed the nature and number of basic-skills events in which they participated – that is, the observable activities that involve literacy, numeracy and oracy.

We noticed that basic-skills practices and events had a place in all the school-to-work transitions of our interviewees regardless of whether they made successful or marginal transitions. While many basic-skills events were routine, some could be described as 'critical' because they had relatively more significant implications for employment transitions. Generally the importance of 'critical events' is documented in broader transitions literature (Thomson et al., 2002; Webster et al., 2004). They are basic-skills events where the ability to perform particular tasks has a key influence on the course of a career. Leslie, for example, spoke about her oral communication skills at job interviews.

> *Interviewer*: What happened at the interview . . . Could you answer the questions?
> **Leslie**: No, I was a bit quiet.
> *Interviewer*: They said that you were a bit quiet?
> **Leslie**: Yeah . . . I didn't know what to say . . . I just knew I could've got it (the job).

Leslie was frustrated with her skills as she had the ability to do a number of jobs but lacked the skills to succeed in the interviews. Gaining full-time work and moving off benefit would have transformed her life but she had been 'held back' by her (lack of) skills. Other interviewees in employment provided similar accounts.

> I'm, sick of this job I wanna change, but find something that I can do. Dave who works here has gone into the police and the girl I live with now is a civilian in the police so . . . But I failed the test . . . They asked if I wanted to go back and see where I went wrong and that . . . Couldn't

> be bothered . . . at the moment don't feel confident enough to go in
> for it again. (Steve)

Joining the police force would have dramatically changed Steve's
life. It would have provided a better-paid, more secure job and one
that was more interesting than the unskilled work he was undertak-
ing when we interviewed him. Thus, these critical literacy events were
instances where the (in)ability to perform key tasks reflected the tech-
nical competency of individuals. Though common across the sample,
such problematic events tended to occur more in the lives of intervie-
wees with multiple skill problems and was associated with the more
marginal transitions. Failing examinations at school and during train-
ing, and failing aptitude tests at work were all linked to problems with
skills. Nevertheless the data suggested that, overall, it was quite rare for
skills on their own to act as 'switchman' and cause a fundamental shift
in the direction of transitions. Instead skills function in more gradual
ways over long periods of time and in conjunction with other processes.

The mediation of basic-skills practice

We recognised that other important social processes within school-to-
work transitions mediate basic-skills practices. As noted, our evidence
supports the claim that basic-skills practices 'are not simply a set of prop-
erties residing in individuals' (Barton and Hamilton, 2000, p. 13). Rather
they are always situated – and consequently to understand basic-skills
practices, events and their role in transitions we viewed them – as part
of a wider set of processes that condition transitions.

Sabrina aged 20 had secured a position as a junior legal secretary
despite having literacy problems and was attending basic-skills classes
each week at a college. She noted how at school she had received a 'lack
of support' largely because 'the classes were too big' and teachers did not
have the time to offer individuals much attention or to explain them-
selves very thoroughly. Sabrina's observations highlight the significance
of inequality of educational opportunities and how these can condition
subsequent literacy practices and transition experiences.

> I left school to join the North-East Chamber of Commerce, to do me
> Legal Secretary's course, but I would've preferred to go to college but
> I didn't go because of my poor grades. (Sabrina)

Sally's account also revealed how once interviewees accessed employment the circumstances in which they worked continued to condition the basic-skills events in which they participated and their basic-skills practices:

> When I went in, they said, me boss said (to another worker) 'Show her the ropes, what to do and that'. Well they never really. I had to keep asking her all the time, 'What do you do and how do you do it?'. And then, (they started saying) 'that I wasn't doing it properly'...Whereas I didn't really know, because I hadn't been told, they didn't really have the right to complain really. (Sally)

Some of these problems, Sally felt, were linked to the fact that she spoke quite slowly and took time processing information. But her practices were situated in an employment context in which she received little training and assistance to help her cope with the work she was required to undertake. After three months she felt disillusioned by these experiences and left the job.

When considering the education-to-work transitions of our sample members as a group, it is interesting to note how closely these correspond to cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and consequently to a gendered division of labour across work institutions. Several of the women in the sample left school to take up employment in care work. Kathy was directed to such work by her careers officer because it was felt she had the required skills profile to be well-suited to such work – 'I got put in a nursery and I realised I didn't like children' so she left to take up a qualification in business administration. It is not surprising given these mediating processes that several women in the sample developed gendered assumptions about their skill development. Indeed, beyond work several were self-critical of how they performed what are sometimes perceived as their traditional roles. Ann spoke about her skills and their impact on her role as a mother caring for her children who themselves had special learning needs.

> I probably think, I could damage them more than helping them...If I could have been more educated would I be more loving? Or would I not? I don't know. (Ann)

We began to see how internal and wider moral discourses about 'suitability' for key roles in life were associated with the basic-skills events and practices and the role the latter played in shaping experiences and

social identities. With the men in the sample similar processes were evident, where skills could enable or constrain, but they took on a different gendered form. For example, Dougie's first job as a carpet fitter required him to use some basic mathematics to calculate the amounts of carpet needed for each client. Even though Dougie had poor literacy skills similar to those seen with Sally above, this did not present the same sorts of problems. After a few years Dougie was promoted to a carpet salesman and spent his time employed in the salesroom. Even here, he managed to cope with his poor literacy skills.

> **Dougie**: I did need skills, I had to read reports, I had to do this and I had to do writing, I had to do, you know. But luckily, the people I worked for were just as bad as me. They couldn't read or write hardly, so I got away with it.
>
> *Interviewer*: So they never made it an issue?
>
> **Dougie**: Not really no. Never made an issue of it. They used to write as – as – as they did and I used to write as I did, I thought, 'It's good enough for them, it's good enough for me'

As long as he was able to draw on some basic mathematics Dougie was able to succeed at work and 'fit in', despite his poor literacy – this was facilitated by a work culture of poor basic skills. By contrast, Sally's workplace valourised good literacy and oracy, and they were also a part of the gendered work culture. Skill expectations seem to be shaped by gendered processes and operate in various domains in life. These work both at a formal level in the workplace and also informally where employee culture or individuals themselves shape expectations. These expectations are also framed by wider discourses about skills, gender and acceptable competency (Payne, 2003).

We suggest therefore, that, though a skill competency such as reading a text will have a use value to an individual, such skills in a different setting can have a very different social worth. Hence a competency (an ability or inability) can be converted into different costs and benefits in different social settings. For Dougie, a basic grasp of mathematics was an important 'literacy capital'[2] and was converted into labour market success, status and income. In Sally's workplace the literacy expectations were at odds with her literacy practices, and so these were experienced as a constraint and a social cost. Though initially she was able to secure the job and the associated income and status, her literacy practices contributed to an erosion of this labour market position. For Ann her skill difficulties also circumscribed her social identity as a mother. With these

examples we can see how literacy practices act as resources that can help or hinder an actor's efforts to accomplish his/her goals. Though they may draw on these resources intentionally, at the same time the effect of these practices on others (and how others react to them), are beyond their control – as we see with the difficulties that Sally experienced in the workplace. Literacy practices here appear to have a socially constructed exchange value; this illustrates how the costs and benefits of a particular skill competency can vary greatly depending on how a skill is mediated by other social processes.

However, in considering the relationship between basic skills and wider contextual processes it became increasingly clear to us that basic-skills events involved strategising and reflective action by interviewees as they considered their own interest and the constraints under which they acted. Several basic-skills events led to a number of interviewees reflecting upon and questioning their logic of practice, and this resulted in attempts to adapt or to even change basic-skills practices completely. In this sense our data began to reveal to us that the individual employing basic-skills practices was also essentially a mediating factor explaining how basic skills operated across school-to-work transitions. We recognised the continuing importance of wider structural and cultural factors, but it was only by acknowledging the importance of the individual and his/her reflective capacities that we began to understand the full role played by basic-skills practice in transitions and the variability in transitions made by interviewees across our sample.

The adaptation of literacy practices and the making of transitions

Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 14) observe that 'literacy practices are patterned' by the 'social institutions and power relationships' that individuals operate within and 'change' with new ones frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense-making. Our data supported this assertion but we found that the relationship between context, individuals and changing basic-skill practices is complex. Barton and Hamilton state that 'learning and sense making' take place in 'social contexts' and involve 'the internalisation of social process' (ibid., p. 14). We did find that the decision-making of our sample members regarding their adaptation of basic-skills practices was always context-related in the sense that the latter could enable or constrain what they did. However, for the aspects of context to be constraining or enabling in this way, the data revealed, basic-skills practices have to be simultaneously

situated in an interviewee's life project. It was only through their mobilisation in such projects that basic-skills practices formed a 'relationship of congruence or incongruence' (Archer, 2003) with contextual factors.

The reasons why there are complex and confusing relationships between skills competencies, practices and transition experiences are that skills are embedded in everyday situations that have varying circumstances. The use of basic skills is also situated in and has a relationship with diverse personally constructed life projects. Many of our interviewees constructed life projects that were predicated on achieving employment transitions, but such goals often required the enhancement of basic-skills practices. If the original basic-skills practices of our interviewees were constraining then they reflectively modified them after consideration of their circumstances and their transition goals. As their knowledge of the situations they operated within was always bounded and incomplete, sometimes their decision-making and actions might not be wholly sensible when viewed from other perspectives and/or even necessarily conducive to positive outcomes. But in considering the options available, interviewees were reflective and adapted their literacy practices accordingly.

Most of the interviewees indicated that they began adapting their literacy practices at an early age because of problems at school and they had continued using these strategies during their school-to-work transitions. Many interviewees spoke of having developed a stigma associated with their poor skills. We saw here a process, famously discussed by Goffman (1963), where a technical problem of self-presentation can come to be experienced as a moral commentary on the whole self. Because of the discomfort experienced by these individuals and the obvious practical difficulties they encountered, all of the interviewees had developed coping strategies.

Substitution strategies

One adaptive strategy is where individuals develop techniques of employing their stronger skills to compensate for their weaker ones. A common practice was for interviewees to use their oracy skills instead of their reading, writing or number skills. Ann, for example, spoke about her 'gift of the gab' when travelling as she has problems reading timetables.

I always sit besides somebody and talk to them . . . you sit besides someone you think you can manipulate the most . . . men are the

easiest. You just sit next to them and chat and go, 'do you know where such and such a stop is?' (Ann)

Other common strategies involved using technology, humour and conversational techniques to manage problems with poor skills.

> *Interviewer*: So with the till I suppose you had to add up?
> **Jean***: Yeah, but I didn't have to, I don't, I used to, I used to always press the 'whatyoucallit' (calculator) and the numbers would come up.

Overall, this process of substitution varied greatly depending on which skills were perceived to be weak and which ones were stronger. If individuals had multiple skill problems they were less able to develop such compensatory strategies. In the short term, unlike avoidance strategies mentioned below, the use of substitution adaptations meant that individuals were able to participate in activities – there was not a narrowing of participation. Hence the more successful transitions were associated with substitution strategies.

Brokerage

This adaptation involved individuals enlisting the help of others to assist them in their tasks. The use of so-called 'literacy brokers' (Bird and Ackerman, 2005, p. 69) was common across the sample and was employed at work, and in other contexts. In adopting this strategy interviewees would carefully consider circumstances, opportunity costs and the risks of revealing their own lack of competence. Trust in a broker was a key issue and a knowledge of the distribution of literacy capital within institutions helped:

> When I used to work in the shop, I used to do like an invoice and people couldn't read it and I couldn't read it myself half the time . . . When I had reports to do sometimes I would get Susan (the secretary) to type them on the computer and I'd speak, you know dictate it to her and she would do it on the computer. (Dougie)

Brokers were involved in many tasks such as reading newspapers, cooking, shopping and form filling. Interviewees were using their ingenuity and wider skills and resources to participate in activities and achieve their goals despite their poor skills. Those with larger and more supportive social networks tended to use these strategies more than others.

In some instances those with a multiplicity of skill problems did have access to professional literacy brokers such as social workers and learning-support officers.

Reticence and avoidance strategies

A third way that individuals 'coped' with poor reading, speaking or writing was by trying to avoid public settings where they would have to use these skills.

> Once upon a time I wouldn't have dreamt of standing up in front of fifteen managers and talk to them . . . We would just sit in a group and have talking sessions, I wouldn't stand up and confront them. (Dougie)

Dougie spoke of how his 'avoidance' had become a habitual part of his everyday working practices. These avoidance strategies imply a reticent disposition towards participation in a range of activities and notably towards work and training opportunities.

> Every time I picked up a paper there's loads of jobs that I couldn't do . . . just used to think that I couldn't get it because I was thick . . . I used to think that I didn't know how to write a letter and be on a computer and things like that. (Tanya)

Returning to formal education

Our data suggest that earlier experiences helped shape these young people's social identities and enduring negative orientations towards formal-learning opportunities. Such learning identities partly explain how, despite the growth in training and employment opportunities, young people in our sample were often uncertain about accessing them. Though all sample members developed this reticence and these avoidance strategies, those with more severe skill difficulties exhibited these features much more than others. But all the sample members we interviewed had returned to some form of basic-skills training. This return was a strategy often based on recognition of the limitations attached to longer-term effectiveness of the above strategies towards meeting goals attached to employment.

Sabrina, whom we mentioned earlier, noted that when joining the North-East Chamber of Commerce they originally found her a place-ment in a plumbing company as there were no vacancies for legal secretaries. But she held on to her long-standing goal and eventually 'I said to them, I still want to do my legal, that's what I want to do'. Having been given a placement as a junior legal secretary, though, Sab-rina had problems when audio typing (typing from tapes etc.), 'purely because of my spelling, grammar and punctuation'. She recalled:

> [using] a terminology sheet, so I was doing audio-typing, I was com-ing across words I didn't know, so I looked at the sheets, there's the spelling, and type it up. But sometimes the words were not on the sheet, so either try and guess how it's spelt by trying to listen and trying to make out how they're saying it or either use a dictionary

But as Sabrina indicated 'that was a right phaff on, all the time looking in the book' (dictionary). She noted how 'it took longer to type things'. After leaving the Chamber of Commerce Sabrina found work with a bar-rister where she felt there was less opportunity to use her established coping techniques. The office in which she continues to work 'have a rate sheet' quantifying workload in regard to the secretarial staff. Con-sidering her longer-term goals attached to employment projects Sabrina decided it was time to adapt her basic-skills practices radically by return-ing to college to complete her training – 'I'm going to aim for legal secretary and then legal executive'. She realised that to attain such goals she would need to 'do paralegal courses and my English might let me down . . . I need to brush up on my skills before I take the next step'. Sab-rina's adaptation of her basic-skills practices as a means of ensuring her successful transition from education to work was more than a reflex – rather it was reflective and calculated to achieve the thing she cared about most.

Conclusion

We have attempted to show the significance of social contexts, oppor-tunity structures and basic skills to education-to-work transitions (see also Cieslik and Simpson, 2006 and Simpson and Cieslik, 2007). There are some basic-skills events such as job interviews and examinations where the 'use value' of a basic skill is readily apparent. Where indi-viduals had multiple skill problems these events were more difficult to

handle and were associated with more marginal career routes. Existing research has tended to focus attention on these simpler relationships between poor skills and transitions. Previous research has indicated that there is no clear link between skill competences and particular transition outcomes (Furlong and Cartmel, 2004, p. 22). However, we have suggested that basic skills work in complicated ways to influence transitions. Drawing on the work of Barton et al. (2000) we suggest that skills function as literacy practices and work in relation to an individual's values, concerns and attitudes. The power relationships and the distribution of resources within a particular setting can constrain and enable actors and will also have a bearing on the functioning of skills (Archer, 2003). But how actors mobilise resources, learn and adapt also shapes the functioning of skills in education-to-work transitions. We used the concept of 'exchange value' to denote how skills work in conjunction with these agential and structural processes may have a different social worth and corresponding influence on transitions into employment. A literacy practice may operate therefore as literacy capital and enable or constrain actors at different points in the life course.

Our research raises a number of wider questions about class, gender and learning and the relationship between transitions and social identities across the life course. There are large numbers of adults and young people in the United Kingdom who have difficulties with basic skills, and their influence on transitions to work is central to how they represent themselves – the making of class and gender in daily life. Their everyday difficulties and their creative responses are one of the ways in which classed and gendered power and resource relationships are played out in people's lives. Our interviewees learnt from an early age about the costs and benefits of different skill competencies. Having poor basic skills meant having to manage a range of early stigmatising experiences. Yet these early events were a driver for creative responses to their problems. This creativity and resourcefulness is a corrective to the popular image of those with poor basic skills as passive or feckless or lazy. But the very fact that many of our interviewees had managed their skill problems by drawing on other resources meant that they were often reticent about accessing formal learning opportunities or embedding such learning in their daily lives. This process presents a real challenge to current adult education policies that view learning predominantly in relation to employability isolated from the complex ways in which people actually live their lives. A more successful skills-for-life programme would be one that situates formal learning in the messy reality of adults' lives

where new skills are often used in unforeseen ways and are often only indirectly linked to further education, training and employability.

Notes

1. New Deal is a government scheme that was established in 1997, under Tony Blair's Labour administration initially to assist young people with training and advice that would enable them to secure waged employment.
2. Following Barton and Hamilton (1998) we use the terms 'literacy practices' to denote numerical, oral and reading and writing practices and hence 'literacy capital' denotes the values associated with this range of practices.

6

Stories of Survival: The Struggle for Resiliency in the Post-Institutional Life Course of Former Residential-Education Students

Markku Jahnukainen

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, numerous studies have been conducted on how young people with special needs proceed to post-secondary education, working life and adulthood. These studies have clearly shown that youth with disabilities generally have worse adult outcomes than do their peers without disabilities. In particular, students with behavioural disorders and criminal histories have high rates of school dropout, low rates of employment, and low rates of post-secondary school attendance (Murray, 2003). For high-risk youth who have been placed in residential facilities, the facility-to-community transition period may be critical in influencing adult outcomes.

This chapter is based on a Finnish longitudinal study which examines the post-institutional adjustment of former students of state-owned residential facilities (reformatory school). Students placed in these facilities have demonstrated severe risk behaviours (e.g. crime, use of drugs, early school dropout). The aim of the study was to capture the life histories and critical life events of such former students from their own perspectives. Interviews of these students were conducted over a four-year span, from 2002 to 2006.

The data suggest that a residential placement can be followed by different life courses. Post-placement outcomes may be reflective of either social integration or exclusion. This finding is in marked contrast to the prevailing view that social exclusion is the inevitable outcome for young people who exhibit severe risk behaviours. This assumption may

underlie the current dearth of research on successful career pathways for such youth.

   Although successful transitions did ultimately occur for some of the former students, all of them reported engaging in risk behaviours shortly after their release from custody. For some, such behaviours continue to persist and threaten to become a permanent way of life. However, for others, post-facility engagement with risk behaviours was short-lived. This chapter focuses on how the latter group was able to resist long-term engagement with risk behaviors, following their release. The personal 'stories of survival' of these resilient young adults are explored in order to identify the factors that promote successful facility-to-community transitions.

Research on transition of high-risk youth

Much of the research on high-risk adolescents has consistently docu-mented problems in their transition to adulthood. In particular, young people with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) are reported to have high rates of school dropout, low rates of employment, and low rates of post-secondary school attendance (Murray, 2003). Few studies have discussed how high-risk youth can make a successful transition to adulthood (e.g. Todis et al., 2001). As Richard Jessor (1998, p. 3) stated almost ten years ago, we know more about the risk factors for an unsuccessful transition than we do about the protective factors for a successful one.

   In quantitative longitudinal studies of high-risk youth, outcome data is typically provided for groups of adolescents only. For example, the mean scores for depression or conduct problems, or the unemployment or criminality rates for different diagnostic groups, are reported. How-ever, there has been little exploration of individual case studies and success stories, in particular, concerning high-risk youth. It is also argued by Ungar and Teram (2005, p. 151) that 'we have been particularly unsuccessful in sustaining a child-focused understanding of their lived experiences.'

   The successful transitions of youth with risk behaviours are often understood within the context of resiliency. Resiliency refers to the sit-uation in which an individual has been able to achieve success even though s/he has been living under considerable stressors and risk fac-tors (Todis et al., 2001, p. 120). Resiliency is associated with protective factors, which enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes and lessen

the likelihood of negative consequences from exposure to risk (Jessor et al., 1998, p. 195).

Critics suggest that resiliency research has focused mostly on the protective characteristics of the individual (e.g. cognitive abilities), while little attention has been paid to protective environmental factors (e.g. mentoring and social support) (Todis et al., 2001, p. 120). In facility-to-community transitions, the mediating role of the social environment and significant others appears to be a key factor in resilient outcomes (e.g. Jahnukainen and Järvinen, 2005, p. 674). Where familial bonds do not exist or may be counterproductive, non-familial social support may be invaluable. In a recent article, Gilligan brings out some interesting examples of the types of social support promoting resilience in more informal contexts, in recreational activities and in work (Gilligan, 2008, pp. 41–46). However, the resiliency literature (Boyden and Mann, 2005) suggests that the presence of at least one supportive adult is critical for a young person to develop resilience.

The aim of this chapter is to present key findings from a study where the post-institutional life courses of former students of residential education (reformatory school) were followed until early adulthood (mean age 24 years; range from 21 to 27). Fifty-two interviews were conducted during the first study phase in 2002. Using a two-dimensional field constructed on the basis of indices of integration into society and accumulation of risk factors, 26 young people were classified as resilient and were identified as being on the 'making it' pathway (Jahnukainen, 2007). The criteria for the variables of the indices were based on the earlier longitudinal analyses (Jahnukainen, 1999; Rönkä, 1999), and they were considered to represent central development tasks in integration into Finnish society and adulthood (e.g. education, work, family life) as well as the risk factors in this development (criminality, problem use of alcohol, use of illegal drugs).

To qualify as resilient, the young people had to have not been abusing drugs or committing crimes for several years. Respondents must also have been studying, working or taking care of children, at the time of his or her first interview.

The 15 resilient young adults in this study completed follow-up interviews between November 2006 and January 2007, approximately four years after their initial interviews, and six to ten years following their release from custody. The main objective in following the resilient pathways of these young adults was to investigate their own perceptions of their resiliency. How did these high-risk young people perceive their

actions to alter their life courses in a positive direction? What motivated their personal changes?

Before the results of the follow-up interviews are discussed, a brief overview of residential education in Finland is warranted, to place the present findings in context.

Residential education in Finland

Social policies and criminal law vary from country to country. In the *Scandinavian model*, high-risk youth are seen as being in need of protection and rehabilitation. Child protection and social-work professionals are responsible for their treatment. In contrast, the so-called *Chicago model* views youth who engage in risk behaviours as requiring punishment under the law. As such, they are dealt with by law-enforcement personnel and the judicial system (Pösö, 1993). Regardless of whether the primary intention is to correct or rehabilitate, both models involve institutional treatment and community segregation of high-risk students, as a result of either custody orders or court convictions. Depending on the orientation of the model being used, segregated treatment may occur in such varied locations as youth-correctional facilities, residential institutions, special supervisory homes or reform schools. However, in countries like Finland and Sweden following the Scandinavian model, closed institutions have been even more out of favour than elsewhere, and they have been used mainly as a placement of last resort (see Levin, 2004; Pösö, 2004). It seems that despite their general unpopularity, these institutions still have a 'job to do' in the continuum of the services for high-risk children and youth.

In Finland, approximately 14,000 children under the age of 18 are placed in state-mandated residential care each year (Stakes, 2003). The majority of these children are placed in foster homes or in municipal children's or juvenile homes. There are also eight special institutions for high-risk children and adolescents whose needs are too severe to be addressed in foster care or group homes. Six of the special institutions are state-owned reform schools, while the remaining two reform schools are maintained by private foundations. Three hundred students are placed in the special institutions, which constitute approximately two per cent of the children who are placed in residential care (Stakes, 2003). Placements are mandated under the Child Welfare Act. Such interventions are therefore considered to be protective rather than correctional in nature. However, for some of the children in reform schools,

placements are intended to prevent them from engaging in further criminal activity.

A review of placement practices (Kitinoja, 2005) indicated that many young people currently placed in reform schools have a history of multiple placements in foster homes or municipal children's homes. Approximately one-third of reform school students were placed directly into reform schools, which are considered to be a last-resort placement along the continuum of child protection services. Placements in reform school occurred between the ages of 12 and 17, with the median age for placement being 15 (ibid.). Placements based on child protection needs are terminated when the young person turns 18. However, until the age of 21, he or she will still be monitored by social services.

Although general statistics on placement durations are unavailable, the durations of placement in the present study ranged from a few months to five years. The average release age was 16½ years. One out of four young people in the present study did not leave their facilities until the age of 18 (Jahnukainen, 2004).

In the following sections of this chapter we will take a closer look at the life courses of these young people and listen to some of their stories of struggle and survival. Based on the obvious importance of a drug-using habit emerging from the interviews, the study sample is comprised of two groups: young adults who had been placed in custody on account of their drug use and young adults who have had histories of neglect and/or abuse (i.e. child protection clients). Seven participants belonged to the former group, while eight participants belonged to the latter. Examples of the life courses in these groups are provided as two case descriptions in Boxes 6.1 and 6.2. The quotations based on the interviews have been coded using the age of the informant and the history of drug use (e.g. a code used first below, **23yrsNonDrug** means that the interviewee was 23 years old and his/her placement was not based on the history of illicit drug use).

Box 6.1: Case Description 1, 27yrsDrug, Placement Owing to Drug Use

At the age of 12, her parents divorced. She said that it was a very confusing time at home. Her mother was unable to handle the situation with four children and tried to commit suicide. The respondent ran away from home a couple of times and during these trips started to take drugs. At school she was first placed in a special

class for emotionally disordered children, but she continued to be absent and she was placed in a more restricted residential unit. She spent almost two years in custody and was released at the age of 17. She managed to finish two years of senior high school but she then dropped out because of her continuing use of drugs. She managed to get a job at a local supermarket and, at the same time, she decided to quit using drugs. She did not attend any drug treatment programs, but she said that the support from her personal youth social worker was invaluable during this phase of life.

After two years of working, she started to study again (at night classes) in order to complete her high school diploma. She achieved it with good marks. After that, she changed occupation and works now in the social field. She plans to continue her studies first on the non-degree extension program of a university and later maybe at the university itself.

She had several common-law relationships over the past few years, but at the time of the last interview she lived alone with no children. She has always had a supporting relationship with her elder brother, and recently her relationship with her mother has recovered. Even though she still has some mood disorders as a result of her extensive use of heavy drugs previously, she said that the life situation is very satisfactory and that she is looking forward very positively to the future.

Box 6.2: Case description 2, 27yrsNonDrug, placement owing to abuse/neglect

The respondent described himself as a highly restless child and said that his family did not have any rules at home. His parents were not married or living together; however, they still had four common children. Both parents were heavy drinkers and the children spent a lot of time outside and stayed overnight with their friends. As the oldest child, he was taken to custody at the age of 12 because of 'increasingly vulnerable circumstances'. Later the other children came under the child protection services, too.

The respondent spent the first few months in the regular ward of the residential school, but was then transferred to the new professional family group home operating in conjunction with

Box 6.2: (Continued)

the residential school. Altogether he spent over four years under these services including the short Individual Living Period (ILP) in independent accommodation in the local community. He has very positive memories and experiences of his time at this institution, as regards both the teachers and the counsellors in the institution and the parents of the family group home. He has been involved in post-care, which for him has meant meetings with his social worker. He has also stayed in contact with the parents in the family group home.

After the placement, he completed his vocational high school studies but he has never worked in that field. Instead, he started a new career in another field where his employer arranged an apprenticeship training for him. He has worked in the same company since then, even though currently they have had some production problems, and there is a threat of unemployment for at least some of the workers.

He is currently married with two children. The relationship with his wife has been very supportive, and he has adopted a highly family-oriented lifestyle, in some ways an opposite to his own childhood home. He has never used drugs or had any criminality. He has maintained the connection with his mother, but they do not see each other often. He said that, at least for him, the placement was effective and he is thankful for all the support he has received from the group home parents and from the after-care.

Stories of survival

Life before placement

Traditionally in Finland the students placed in reformatory schools come from insecure family environments and/or have engaged in criminal activity. They are often described as having been restless and disruptive at school or absent from school. Outside of school, many of them engaged in a wide variety of adult and anti-social behaviours. Many students started smoking and drinking alcohol at a young age, as well as committing petty crimes.

Prior to their placements, however, the biggest problems such youth face often concern their home lives. Histories of abuse and neglect are

common. The following quotation is characteristic of the type of family background that such students experience:

> **23yrsNonDrug** My family . . . so, it was the family situation. My mom was a total drunk . . . she didn't take care of anything, and my schooling was suffering and after they divorced she was drinking all the time. Me and my little sister, we basically tried to take care of our mum, and my schooling was really suffering, and my friends, they were . . . what they were . . . not too good anyway. I can really say, that it's all about the home, not in every case, but for me anyway . . .

New trends in illicit drug use were occurring at the same time that the study sample had been placed in residential care; this time period came to be known as the 'second drug wave' in Finland (Tammi, 2007). During the 1990s, there was a heavy increase in drug use amongst Finnish youth. Recreational drugs, especially ecstasy, were being taken at raves. Owing to the historically lower drug-use rates in Finland relative to other European countries, the school and child welfare personnel were ill-prepared to handle the rise in youth drug addictions (Pösö, 2004).

According to some former students, staff at the residential units often failed to observe the drug use that occurred while youth were in custody. In some cases, even when the young person had been deliberately placed in custody as a way to prevent their drug abuse, they still continued to use drugs and were even introduced to harder drugs. The majority of the youth who had been placed owing to their drug problems believed that their placement failed to have any rehabilitative effect. However, at present, drug use amongst Finnish youth has declined and residential staff are much more aware of the drug problems of their students. Special programming for addicted youth is also now being offered in some of the residential schools. Unfortunately, because the drug-addicted youth in the study sample were not only unable to access any assistance for their chief problem, but were also exposed to harder drugs during their stay, their placement inadvertently became counterproductive.

Post-institutional life

Participants' post-institutional lives appear to reflect two distinct time periods. First, all of the participants demonstrated problem behaviours shortly after their release. These problems persisted for a few months for some, while for others they persisted for years, between the ages of 16 and 19. For some of the participants, their problem behaviours were

related to their drug use. They reported that they were highly intox-
icated at the time of their release and when they first began to live
independently in the community:

> **27yrsDrug** The heavier use of drugs started in custody. There were so
> much of those available. And at the time of my release it was very
> bad . . . I was offered my own flat, but it doesn't work out . . . I was in
> such a weak condition and I went crazy . . . I was so stoned all the
> time that I can hardly remember anything from those years . . .

Second, there seemed to be a stabilisation period, during which partici-
pants were able to return to school, become sober and gain employment,
stable accommodation and/or a boyfriend or girlfriend. This stabilisa-
tion period occurred between the ages of 18 and 23. Table 6.1 shows
participants' educational status following their release.

In 2002, only one of the former students had graduated, while three
were studying. In 2006, six participants had graduated, while four were
studying. Thus a moderate level of improvement in studying and gradu-
ation can be observed (Table 6.2). These statistics suggest that two-thirds
of the participants are likely to graduate from secondary school. This
graduation rate is superior to the graduation rates cited for similar at-risk
youth, living in the community. Typically, the graduation rate for at-risk
youth in the community has been under 40 per cent (e.g. Kitinoja, 1999;
Jahnukainen, 2001).

Two female participants never enrolled in post-secondary education
on account of having had children shortly after their release. However,
both intend to apply to vocational-education programmes once their
children are older. It is financially advantageous to be a stay-at-home

Table 6.1 Participants' Status Regarding
Secondary Education in 2002 and 2006

Status	Year	
	2002	**2006**
Graduated	1	6
Studying	3	4
Dropped out	8	3
Never entered	3	2
Total	15	15

Table 6.2 Participants' Main Occupation in 2002 and 2006

Status	Year	
	2002	**2006**
Working	4	4
Studying	3	4
Unemployed	2	1
Home with children	6	6
Total	15	15

mother in Finland while one's children are young, owing to government maternity benefits that can be received for 12 months following childbirth, and home-care benefits that will continue until the child is three years old. Accessing such benefits is especially advantageous for the former reformatory students, as their limited education would likely prevent them from earning more than what the benefits provide.

> **23yrsNonDrug**: I have now two children and I am still home with them . . . the older is three now and younger one year old . . .
> *Interviewer*: So, you have been four years now at home and getting the maternity and the home care benefit?
> **23yrsNonDrug**: That's right. And now, when it will end . . . I have thought that I will start studies in a college for social work and health services.

Another interesting development was observed in the lives of the five oldest participants, when they were interviewed after the age of 25. After enjoying several years of progress towards their goals, they suddenly appeared to be struggling with new stressors (e.g. death of parents, physical ailments, job instability). Relapses with mental-health problems such as panic disorder or depression were also reported to occur between the ages of 21 and 27.

> **27yrsNonDrug**: . . . there was some problems with my boyfriend, he used drugs and was violent and I got a severe panic disorder and I was hospitalised, and then the doctor said that I needed some therapy, and it has really helped, I am coping so much better now, but there are so much things that I have to go through with my past.

However, despite their setbacks, the oldest five participants demonstrated that they were able to cope with their new problems by accessing appropriate forms of assistance. Three of them are currently receiving psychiatric treatment for chronic mental illness while the other two have received short-term therapy. One of the participants currently takes psychotropic medication.

In conclusion, even though relatively successful transitions to adult community living were observed within the study sample, participants' life courses following custodial release did not reflect straightforward trajectories. Even the most resilient of the pathways experienced by participants appeared fragile or tenuous. It is overly optimistic to assume that young people coming from such vulnerable backgrounds would develop resilience without help from others in their communities. As the following discussion makes clear, extending child welfare services past the legal age of adulthood may well foster successful adult outcomes, especially for those youth who have been long-standing clients of such services.

The significant others

As mentioned previously, some of the biggest stressors that former students described relate to their family life. All but three of them came from single-parent homes. Twelve of the participants lived with their mothers. Nine of them did so because their parents were divorced, while one participant's mother never married in the first place. In the case of the two remaining participants, they did not get the chance to live with both parents as their fathers had died while they were very young.

As can be seen in Table 6.3, most of the former students reported that they had not experienced any adult support during their childhoods. A very common story was that their mothers had been consumed with other problems, while their fathers failed to be present for most of their lives.

> **27yrsDrug**: Our father was not involved for a long time … my mum tried to get through the divorce, I was absent from school and ran away several times … and my mum she just did not have any capacity left to take care of me because it was so tough for her.

Many of these young people failed to receive supervision from their parents and spent most of their time with their friends. They acknowledged that their friends had a negative influence on their behaviour.

Table 6.3   The Most Significant Adult Relationship During the Life Course

Time period	Parent	Mother	Older Sibling	Spouse/ Partner	Support Person	None	Total
Childhood (Before custody)	1	4	1	–	–	9	15
Adolescence (During custody)	2	4	0	–	4	5	15
Early adulthood (After custody)	0	8	0	4	1	2	15

> **23yrsDrug**: I used to hang-around with older guys and they had some foreign friends who had a lot of problems and they brought some drugs from there . . . and even when I had a stepfather, he did not take any care of me . . . , so I really felt alone and totally helpless.

As the data suggest, some of the former students who did not have any positive relationships with adults were able to establish such a relationship during their stay in custody. For one participant, her 'significant other' was her counsellor at the residential unit. For three other participants, significant relationships developed between them and their foster parents.

> **27yrsNonDrug**: . . . then I was placed in the family group home, which was associated with the reformatory . . . and it was a kind of family for me . . . I can say, that it was a real family for me, we are still very close together, it was wonderful . . . I was like their own daughter, and I remember it was such a happy time . . . and those times I lived with my own mother . . . I have swept away a lot of things, I don't really remember many things anymore . . .

Despite these success stories, five participants failed to establish a supportive relationship with any adult during their time in custody. For those students who had a good relationship with their mothers during childhood, this relationship continued to be their most significant relationship with an adult during their placement. For one participant, contact with her parents was re-established during her placement.

Following release, four former students identified their romantic partners as the adults who were most significant to them. This change is understandable given that intimacy is a developmental task for young adults. Though all of the participants had entered into romantic relationships during the few years preceding the interview, such relationships were not always supportive and ended for various reasons. Moreover, despite the shift in focus to romantic relationships, many participants reported that they had re-established contact with their mothers or had begun meaningful contact with their mothers for the first time. According to these former students, they felt better able to tolerate their mothers now that life had become stable both for them and for their mothers.

> **23yrsNonDrug**: . . . in my early adolescence, we were always fighting each other, but now we have a very good relationship and we can talk about almost anything . . . so, my mum has said that in the end, she has now a more intimate relationship with me than with my other siblings . . . Like, I'm probably the most adult person in my family right now although there were times when I was sort of, completely, how could I put it . . . something else.

Although some former students were not involved in any kind of post-placement services to assist with their transition to independent living, all of them believed that such services should be extended to anybody who has ever required protection as a child. Eleven participants reported having received some form of post-placement support, which consisted mostly of financial assistance to facilitate their facility-to-community transitions. Only seven participants had actually taken part in any specific Independent Living Program (ILP) during their placement. The most common ILP services include teaching of skills associated with self-sufficiency and self-determination, like money management, job readiness and retention, housekeeping and nutrition (see Lemon et al., 2005). They also often include actual transitional living arrangements in semi-supervised settings in apartments located in the community. All of the Finnish reformatory schools did provide these services, but because one had to be independent before one could access ILP, some participants would have been ineligible owing to their younger age upon release.

Only four participants were able to access psychological treatment following their placements. However, only one of them had her treatment facilitated through social services. For two of the former students, post-placement counselling was obtained through an employment

agency, and for one individual, treatment was accessed through the criminal-justice system. Regardless of the source of their treatment, all four participants appeared to value the support they received through counselling. Each of them reported that he/she had benefited from counselling sessions and appreciated being treated with respect by the counsellor.

> **23yrsDrug**: It has been a big help for me. He helped me to fill all of those application papers etc . . . and he did not look down on me . . . so treats me like other normal people. We discussed things that have nothing to do with my life situation.

Despite the success of many in forging meaningful relationships with adults, two female participants reported that they still did not have such relationships in their lives. Their relationships with their parents remained unstable as did their romantic relationships. In spite of their identification as resilient in the first phase of the study, the problems of these two young women have overall tended to be more chronic than those experienced by their resilient peers. Neither of the young women had pursued vocational training or acquired any work experience. Both reported that their life situation had not changed much in the previous year and that they felt 'stuck' with respect to making changes for the better.

Conclusion

This chapter documents the post-institutional life courses of former high-risk youth, who had been identified as resilient in the first part of this longitudinal study (see Jahnukainen, 2007). As the interview data suggest, pathways to successful adult living for such youth are not straightforward. All of the participants demonstrated at least a moderate level of risk behaviour, following their release from custody. However, most of them were able to continue to travel a resilient pathway, despite temporary setbacks. The goal of the study was to identify how these young people were successful in making the transition to independent adulthood. What is it that distinguishes them from their non-resilient peers? Although in this kind of qualitative study no causal conclusions can be reached, some plausible hypotheses emerged from the data.

The notion that having a significant relationship with an adult fosters resiliency was somewhat supported. Relationships with adults were historically a source of great difficulty for most of these youth, given their

unstable family lives. However, staff in the residential placements played a supportive role for some, though not all, of these young people. Similarly, post-placement services, especially counsellors, were identified as a significant source of support for some of the participants. It is clear, however, that these services should be organised more individually; there are no one-size-fits-all solutions available.

Although such professional supports were clearly helpful, the data also suggest that the young person's own efforts and intrinsic motivation were required to realise a successful transition to adulthood. For many of the respondents, early parturition and parenting has, somewhat surprisingly (see also Todis et al., 2001, p. 131), had a positive effect on their life situation. Parenthood seems to constitute a strong enough reason for quitting even heavy drug use and 'partying'. Based on this study, this effect seems to continue over time, even though it is clear that the early beginning of a family career is, in fact, a complex phenomenon which interrupts or at least postpones the possibility of a transition to further education and the labour market, choices more typical of the age group.

Further, in line with previous findings by Todis et al. (2001), many of the participants also identified safety concerns and a wish to avoid the negative consequences of their risk behaviours (e.g. incarceration, drug use–related diseases) as main motivators for making such a life change. Others believed that they had grown out of such anti-social ways of living. It is possible that, for the young people in this sample, problem behaviours were short-lived, on account of having been tied to the developmental stage of adolescence (Moffitt, 1993), as opposed to more chronic, life-course-persistent difficulties (e.g. cognitive, mental) that may be observed in less resilient young adults.

> *Interviewer*: Have you ever thought about why you stopped messing around with drugs and everything?
> **27yrsDrug**: I don't know … maybe I thought that, I don't want to be like my mother … that I want to have a REAL life … that I don't want to be like her … poor alcoholic or something.

From a methodological point of view, it is easy to share the view presented by other scholars (Todis et al., 2001; Ungar and Teram, 2005): using more diverse methodological tools we are able to get a more detailed and deeper picture of what is going on in the lives of the at-risk children and youth. Those paths are not always easy to follow. However, listening to the voices of young people with long history of being served

by our welfare system offers us invaluable access to that kind of personal information beyond what is obtained by enquiries of any other kind. As Thomas and Thomas (1928) put it, 'If men [*sic*] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'. It is extremely important to try to connect these definitions and experiences arising from the primary sources to the development of the current professional practices. This 'may assist attempts to promote favorable development in unfavorable circumstances' (Gilligan, 2008, p. 37).

Note

Part III
Emerging Sites of Transition

7

The Relevance of University Education and Fears of Unemployment: Perceptions of University Students Making Transitions to the World of Work in Ghana

Michael Tagoe

Introduction

Entry to the world of work takes many paths, with opportunities and risks at every crossroads. However, preparing for a successful transition from education to a working life is greatly enhanced by human capital development which is the responsibility of universities at the apogee of the educational ladder. Human capital, which is considered as sum of the abilities and knowledge of individuals (Deutsche Bank Research, 2005) or the skills, knowledge and values which individuals acquire in formal schooling (Xiao and Tsang, 1999), has been identified not only as having immediate benefits to the individual but also as being critical to economic growth. In spite of the key role of human capital in economic development, universities in sub-Saharan African countries have, within the last three decades, faced serious challenges such as reduced government funding coupled with an explosion in enrolment which has been attributed to the neo-liberal economic policies of international financial institutions in the 1980s and 1990s. The cumulative effect of dwindling funding and enrolment explosion has led to challenges such as infrastructure unable to cope with high numbers of students, a high student/teacher ratio and the absence of both state-of-the-art laboratories and Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) infrastructure. These have been found to affect the performance of teachers and the quality of university education.

Several studies have attributed the decline in the standard of universities in sub-Saharan African countries to the economic malaise of the 1970s and 1980s and to the structural adjustment period of the 1990s (Sawyerr, 2004). The economic downturn led to reductions in government financial support for university education. Samoff and Carol (2003) have noted that even before structural adjustment, public expenditure per tertiary student fell from $6461 in 1975 to $2365 in 1983. Similarly, Effah (2003) has observed that in Ghana, by the mid 1970s, expenditure on research and development for universities, which was about 0.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), fell to 0.1–0.2 per cent of GDP during the economic crisis of the 1980s thus hampering the capacity of universities and research institutions to engage in productive research. Whilst the introduction of structural adjustment policies in the early 1980s was a great economic relief, it also had far-reaching implications for tertiary education and fuelled graduate unemployment in many countries such as Ghana. Before structural adjustment in Ghana, the Public Services Commission and the Office of the Head of the Civil Service guaranteed employment to graduates from the universities. However, the restructuring and downsizing of the civil service and privatisation of failing state corporations in Africa led to serious unemployment (Hutchful, 1989; Lienert, 1998; Bangura, 1999, 2000; Laking and Norman, 2006). The contraction of employment opportunities and the continuous churning out of graduates from the secondary schools and higher-education institutions worsened the already precarious employment situation of the 1980s and 1990s in the context of slow growth of the economies of sub-Saharan African countries.

In Ghana, the Human Development Report (1997) noted that whilst unemployment was becoming a huge challenge, it was particularly serious among university graduates owing to the slow growth of the economy. Baah-Boateng (2004) has observed that between 1984 and 2000, whilst economic growth averaged 4.8 per cent annually, and annual employment growth was 3.1 per cent, the labour force grew at 5.8 per cent leading to a huge backlog of those who were unemployed. In 2003, the estimated national rate of unemployment had increased from 10.4 per cent in 2002 to 12.2 per cent (Government of Ghana, 2007). Unemployment is largely an urban phenomenon, and it is found among the educated youth. The key issue is the limited capacity of the economy to absorb the excess labour force entering the labour market. Another challenge is the slow growth of the private sector as an alternative employment route for graduates and those from

secondary schools seeking employment. There is no doubt that the current economic growth cannot generate enough jobs for the growing number of graduates from tertiary institutions (Boateng and Sarpong, 2002; Baah-Boateng, 2004).

The challenge of finding work immediately after university education has become a frustrating experience for many graduates. Whilst it is generally accepted that the contraction of employment opportunities has happened as a result of the slow growth of the economy, it is also argued that the universities are not equipping their graduates with the requisite skills and knowledge critical to emerging global trends. Indeed, it is contended that the interface between university education and industry is very weak and therefore universities are producing graduates who are ill-fitted for the needs of the industries. To address some of these concerns, tracer studies have been conducted to determine the length of time university graduates take to find work after school (Batse and Gyekye, cited in Boateng and Sarpong, 2002; Boateng, Boateng and Bekoe, cited in Boateng and Sarpong, 2002). These studies have focused more on how long it took graduates to find jobs. However, none of the studies has focused on how graduates perceive university education, in terms of its relevance to the world of work. The issue of relevance has become the focus of attention because of its perceived contribution to high incidence and duration of unemployment among graduates (UNESCO, 1998). Boateng and Sarpong (2002) further postulate that 'relevance' also has an effect on the potential productivity of graduates, and, hence, the demand for their services and their overall contribution to growth and development of the country. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to examine the views of students with respect to the courses they pursued at university; their chances of securing jobs immediately after education; and their prospects as they make the transition to the world of work. The chapter attempts to answer the following questions:

a) What skills and knowledge do graduates need to ensure a smooth transition to the world of work?
b) Are universities providing their students with the requisite skills and knowledge?
c) What are the perceptions of students about the relevance of university education to the world of work?
d) How easy is it to secure work after university?
e) Do university students have any fears as they make the transition to the world of work?

Higher education in Ghana

Universities in Africa emerged in the post-independence era as elitist institutions with a small population of African academic staff and courses influenced by a colonial outlook (Southall and Kaufert, 1974). African leaders, upon attainment of independence, faced with the economic imperative of building a base for rapid industrialisation while expanding agriculture, and within the context of a shortage of all categories of technical and professional personnel, decided to change the educational structure to meet the developmental needs and aspirations of the newly emergent African countries. In Ghana, the introduction of educational reforms by the Convention People's Party (CPP) under Dr Kwame Nkrumah affected primary, secondary and higher education in the country.

The genesis of higher education in Ghana can be traced to the establishment of the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948, with a special relationship to the University of London (Agbodeka, 1998). However on attainment of independence the institution was granted sovereign university status with powers to award its own degrees. The policy of 'localisation' was also implemented, calling for the replacement of foreigners as rapidly as possible and the renewal of course content to reflect the developmental needs and aspirations of the newly independent African country (Harbison and Myers, 1964; Agbodeka, 1998). The University of Ghana is mandated by the University of Ghana Act of 1961 (Act 79) to offer programmes in liberal arts, sciences, law, medicine and administration (Daniel, 1996). The mission of the university is to develop world-class human resources and capabilities to meet national developmental needs and global challenges through quality teaching, learning, research and knowledge dissemination.

After the establishment of University of Ghana, steps were also taken in 1952 to establish the Kumasi College of Technology in the Ashanti Region to meet the nation's manpower needs in the area of Science and Technology. In 1961, the College was upgraded to university status as the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology through an Act of Parliament and was mandated to concentrate on various aspects of basic and applied sciences, technology and medicine. In 1966, the name of the university was changed to University of Science and Technology. However, in 1998, the name reverted to Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) by an Act of Parliament. In 1962, the University College of Cape Coast was established

'in special relationship' with the University of Ghana. In 1971 an Act of Parliament (the University of Cape Coast Act 1971, (Act 390)) and later the University of Cape Coast Law 1992 (PNDC Law 278) made the University independent and granted it the authority to confer its own degrees, diploma and certificates (Effah, 2003). These laws also reaffirmed the mandate of the University to concentrate on the training and retraining of graduate teachers to service the secondary schools, teacher training colleges, polytechnics and technical institutions (Antwi, 1992; Anamuah-Mensah Committee Report, cited in Adow Obeng, 2008).

To address issues of access and further to meet the growing specialised needs of the country, in the 1990s, three new universities, the University for Development Studies, University of Mines and Technology and University of Education, Winneba were established. The University for Development Studies (UDS) was established by PNDC Law 279 (1992) to be based on 'new thinking in higher education which emphasises the need for universities to play a more active role in addressing problems of the society, particularly in the rural areas' (Effah, cited in Kaburise, 2003). The legislative instrument establishing the University directed it to emphasise agricultural science, medical and health sciences and integrated development studies; embark on research; offer practical training in the subjects it teaches; and rely on material available in the north of Ghana in particular (Effah, 2002; Kabrurise, 2003). The University of Education, Winneba (UEW) was established by PNDC Law 322 (1992) and was mandated to foster the systematic advancement of the science and arts of teacher education; train tutors for the regional colleges of applied arts, sciences and technology; and provide teachers with professional competence for teaching in basic, secondary and non-formal educational institutions. The University of Mines and Technology was mandated to train graduates in mining engineering and technology (Adow Obeng, 2008).

It is important to note that, within the last decade, the country has witnessed the proliferation of private universities to meet the challenge of widening access to university education. Today Ghana has six public universities and about 32 private tertiary institutions accredited by the National Accreditation Board to run various degree and diploma programmes. The emphasis of most of the private universities however has been on religious and theological studies, business administration and information and communication technology (Effah and Senadza, cited in Adow Obeng, 2008). According to Adow Obeng (2008), in spite of the specific mandates and missions of universities in Ghana,

the foci of tertiary education are underpinned by three overarching objectives:

 (i) Developing critical thinking in people. This enhances their access to knowledge and information and makes them relevant and adaptable to change.
 (ii) Developing requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes in people to enable them to be productive, competitive and generally function usefully in the society.
(iii) Generating new knowledge through research for the acceleration of socio-economic development at the community and national levels.

This position is also supported by Kwami (2001) who has argued that universities in Ghana need to focus more on depth of knowledge, quality and relevance. He further argues that education and training in Ghana should achieve the following objectives: first, to create a knowledge-conscious and an enlightened society that appreciates change and the need for modernisation; basic education should provide a solid, high-quality educational base to support the higher levels of education and make the transition from school to work easier and smoother; and second, to produce at the tertiary level an intellectual base to support industrialisation; graduates from tertiary institutions should have innovative, enquiring and analytical mind to enable them to access knowledge, adapt knowledge and generate new knowledge and ideas; they should be exposed to the use of modern tools of analysis and communications and should be able to adapt to the fast-changing knowledge environment; tertiary education should be relevant to the needs of industry (ibid.).

   In spite of the growth in the number of universities in Ghana, the public universities continue to receive more students and therefore suffer disproportionately from the large number of students on their campuses. Whilst government has strongly encouraged an increase in student numbers, it has not provided the funds to manage the enrolment explosion (Daniel, 2008). Therefore, the public universities face problems such as inadequate infrastructure (lecture halls, libraries, science laboratories); slow scale-up of ICTs; difficulty in attracting young lecturers to replace older members of staff; increased workloads of lecturers; and high student/staff ratios. The cumulative effect of these problems on teaching and learning is that they have led to a fall in the quality of university education. In this study, one may define quality of
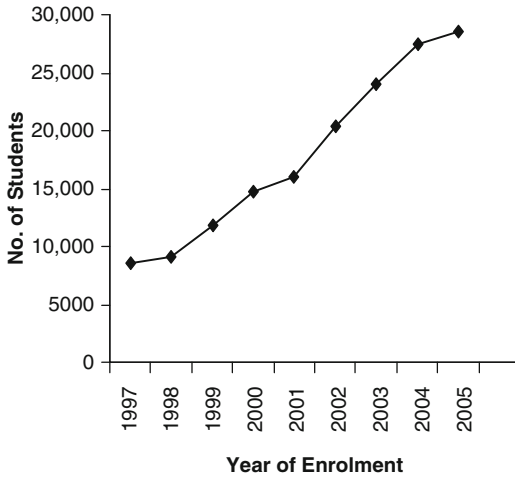
Figure 7.1   Trends in Enrolment Figures (University of Ghana, 1997–2005)

university education as 'the means by which an institution can guarantee with certainty that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced' (Clarke-Okah, 2008, p. 4). In its report, the Visitation Panel invited by the University of Ghana to look at the operations of the university and to offer recommendations for quality university education called for a reduction in the intake of students, reductions in class size and a review of curriculum. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 show the enrolment rates and number of students entering the job market, respectively.

Higher education and youth transition from education to work

Youth transition from school to work has been one of the key issues that have engaged the attention of the world for sometime now. Donahoe and Tienda (1999) have observed that the transition from school to work is a critical part of the wider transition to adulthood. According to them, because full-time employment usually permits financial independence as well as social and emotional independence, both of which are crucial for developing private (i.e. family) and public (i.e. civic) adult roles, it is imperative that there is a commitment to ensure that young people negotiate this transition successfully. Studies have shown that young
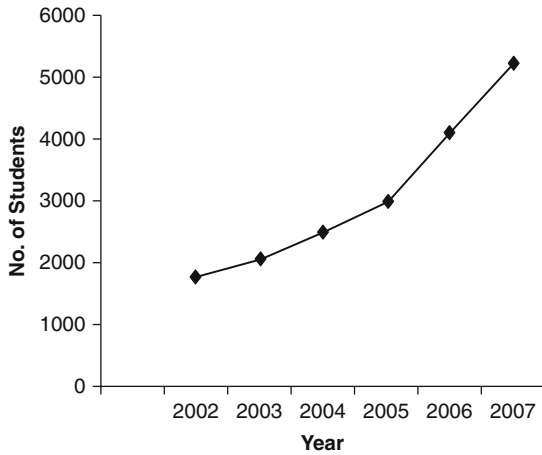
Figure 7.2   Potential Number of Students Entering the World of Work (University of Ghana, 2000–2007)

persons believe that being responsible for oneself, making one's own decisions and having financial independence from one's parents are the three key criteria for adulthood (Arnett, 1994).

Similar views have been expressed in the World Bank's World Development Report (2007) *Development and the Next Generation*. The report contends that as young people make transitions into adulthood they make critical decisions with respect to changing cultural, societal and economic conditions. They make decisions about developing their skills (learning as adolescents and young adults); starting on the road for financial independence (beginning to work); forming families; and engaging with the broader civic community (exercising active citizenship). The extent to which young people are able to make these decisions depends crucially on how well they prepare themselves to compete for and secure well-paying jobs and to participate in social, civic and familial activities (Donahoe and Tienda, 1999). One pathway to securing well-paid jobs is through tertiary education. However, tertiary education is now at a crossroads where its graduates in both developed and developing countries are not finding jobs easily in the job market, although this problem is more acute in sub-Saharan African countries.

Within the last decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been something of a crisis of transition of graduates to the world of work particularly in emerging

economies such as China and other developing countries. In China, the issue of graduate unemployment has been making the headlines in the media and causing concern in the country (Yu, 2001). Several reasons have been given for this situation. These include (a) the reform of higher education which has led to the commodification of Chinese universities and a policy of mass recruitment of new students; and (b) China's transition from a planned to a market economy. In Europe attention has been drawn to the number of graduates that enter the job market, and the challenges of securing jobs in the face of massification (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007). Pozzoli (2005), discussing the difficult transition from university to work of Italian graduates, identified the following challenges: a possible mismatch between labour demand and supply; excessive insiders' protection and new entrants' confinement to temporary jobs or unemployment; shortages of incentive and flexible active labour market policies targeted at youth unemployment; and insufficient economic growth with a limited occupational content.

From the United Kingdom, Harvey (2003) argues that the interface between higher-education and work is at the centre of current debates about employability. In spite of a renewed focus on employability in the last five years, and the significant changes in curricula and support for students and graduates, there is still discontent among some employers. One of the concerns is that existing undergraduate programmes are not producing graduates with appropriate life-long learning skills necessary for their careers. Harvey (p. 5) opines that some employers perceive that 'There is a chasm between what industry wants and what universities provide'. Another concern raised by Harvey is the mismatch between skills and abilities that employers look out for during recruitment and those with which graduates enter the world of work. These include inter-active attributes – communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working – and personal attributes. Personal attributes include intellect, a capacity for problem solving and analytic, critical and reflective abilities. In some instances subject knowledge and understanding are desirable, as are technical skills. However, more often than not relatively little importance is placed on subject knowledge. Furthermore, there is evidence that the number of graduates who failed to find work after leaving university rose in 2005; the proportion of university leavers believed to be unemployed rose from 5.9 per cent in 2004 to 6.0 per cent in 2005 (Press Association, 2006). According to the figures released by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) graduates with degrees in computer science had the highest rate of unemployment, with nearly 11 per cent found to be not working or studying. The HESA figures

further indicated that one in three university leavers was working in non-graduate jobs.

For countries in Africa, various studies conducted have revealed that graduates face many challenges as they enter the world of work. In Uganda, Ssempebwa (2005) found that 50 per cent of the graduates who were employed secured their first job through a personal contact, suggesting that half the available employment opportunities were distributed on the basis of social networks rather than on merit. Those graduates who had no social contacts generally found it difficult to secure employment. The study also noted that many of the humanities graduates had fewer employment openings in their areas of specialisation. Anyanwu (2000) also found similar evidence in Nigeria: she argues that influences of parents or relatives and personal contacts play a critical role in securing employment for new graduates.

Studies by Mugabushaka et al. (2003) in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda, whilst stating that graduate unemployment was not a major issue, conceded that there were still some issues of concern for policy-makers. They found out that graduates of humanities and natural sciences were significantly less likely to be employed than their counterparts who had studied business administration, engineering and education. One important finding of the study was that about 70 per cent of graduates were using the skills and qualifications they had acquired during their studies, whilst only 10 per cent were not applying the knowledge gained through higher education. Those found not to be using their skills were typically from fields of study such as humanities and social sciences.

From South Africa, Maharasoa and Hey (2001) in their study on 'Higher Education and Graduate Employment' quoted a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HRSC) in which it was observed that more than half (59 per cent) of the 1806 respondents who tried to find employment after obtaining a degree did so immediately. However, not all groups were equally successful in their search for jobs the first time. Those who were most successful were those who had studied medical sciences or engineering. Graduates in arts, law and natural sciences were less successful in finding employment immediately after graduation. Similarly, Maharasoa and Hey also suggest that the picture of employability was bleaker for graduates from the humanities faculties.

In Ghana, various tracer studies have been conducted to understand the causes of graduate unemployment. A study conducted in 1996 by the Ministry of Education (cited in Boateng and Sarpong, 2002) to

examine the labour market experience of workers who graduated from the Universities of Ghana, Legon, Cape Coast and the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, between 1985 and 1994 revealed that 71 per cent of graduates found work within five months of completing their national service whilst the remaining 29 per cent took more than a year. However, it was the study by Boateng and Sarpong which noted that

(a) The problem of supply–demand gaps in graduate output was real. There was an over-supply of graduate labour in courses such as arts and humanities, and an under-supply in critical areas such as engineering, accounting, medicine, information technology and management. The existence of supply–demand gaps contributes to the problem of graduate unemployment.
(b) A sharply increasing demand for communication skills, analytical skills and personal skills by employers has made the search for jobs by some graduates more daunting.

The emphasis on skills as critical to employment was also confirmed by Adu-Amoah (2008) who reviewed interviews of human-resource managers of organisations and technical experts/policy-makers of education conducted by Boateng and Agyapong (2003) (cited in Adu-Amoah (2008)) and noted that employers saw managerial and technical skills as most critical to the performance of new graduate entrants, followed by computer and analytical skills, whilst general skills were considered as the least important. The study, according to Adu-Amoah (2008), revealed that employers in the areas of agriculture, engineering and computer science considered managerial and technical skills as most important to new graduate entrants, whilst employers in accounting and social sciences placed a premium on managerial, technical, computer and analytical skills. Regarding the performance of recent graduates, the study showed that, on average, 21 per cent of employers described it as very good, 59 per cent as satisfactory and 20 per cent as poor. However, with respect to managerial and technical skills, which are considered critical to the performance of graduates, 43 per cent of employers rated graduates as poor or inadequate.

Methodology

The research design for the study was descriptive survey research. The population of the study comprised of all the students from the public
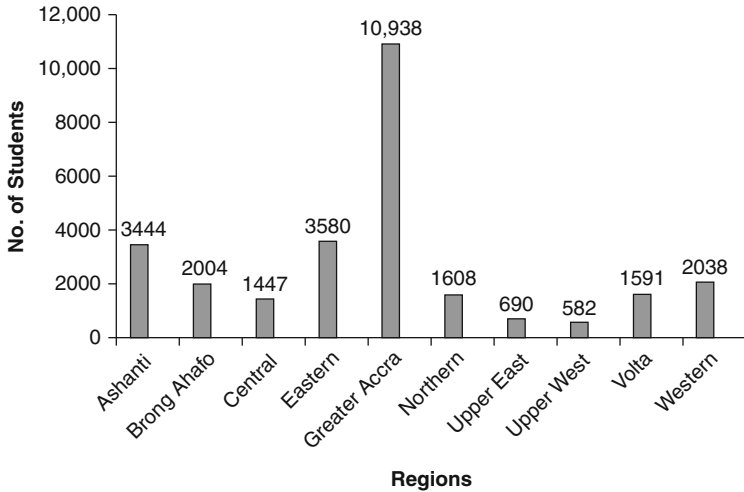
Figure 7.3 Regional Distribution of Students from Tertiary Institutions for National Service

universities in Ghana who are presently in their first year of national service. The Ghana National Service Scheme, which was instituted in 1973, offers a one-year programme to graduates of tertiary institutions to render service in public and private organisations. Although graduates are made to select the region in which they wish to do the service, it is not automatic. The Greater Accra Region has more national service persons compared with other regions (Figure 7.3). The service persons at the end of their service may either decide to stay on, if given appointment, or leave to find work elsewhere.

   The target sample size was 150 national service persons selected purposively from the Greater Accra Region. Though tertiary education in Ghana comprises not only of public univerisities but also of private universities, polytechnics and professional institutions care was taken to identify only university graduates, with respect to the objective of the study. Selection of graduates was done in consultation with the officials of the Greater Accra Regional office of the National Service Secretariat. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. A standardised interview schedule was used to collect data from the service persons on many variables. The main qualitative-data collection method used was focus-group discussions. The method was judged appropriate because it is ideal for exploring people's experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999).

Findings

Age of graduates

In the last two decades, educational reforms in the country not only have reduced the duration of students' stay in school but also have allowed children to enter school earlier and therefore leave tertiary institutions younger compared with older generations. Table 7.1 reveals the youthfulness of students leaving our universities. Ghana's population as a whole is youthful; indeed, the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS, 2003) indicated that about 54 per cent of the population is under 18 years and seven out of every ten persons are less than 30 years of age.

University Attended

Table 7.2 provides the breakdown of the distribution of respondents by public university. Although there are private universities in Ghana, the study focused only on public universities so as to look into the unemployment challenges students face as a consequence of the high enrolment figures and high turn-out rate of students in the public universities every year. Most of the private universities have been established by churches and therefore offer specialised programmes such as theology, business administration and computer science. Social perceptions about

Table 7.1   Age Distribution of Respondents

Age group	Frequency	%
20–24	65	49.6
25–29	54	41.2
30–34	7	5.3
35–39	5	3.8
$N = 131$		

Table 7.2   University Attended

	%
University of Ghana	51.9
Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology	16.0
University of Cape Coast	18.3
University of Education, Winneba	6.1
University for Development Studies	7.6
$N = 131$	

public universities attended by students influence their job expectations and future employment. For example, a graduate teacher from the University of Cape Coast, because of his/her specialisation, has a better chance of securing a job after completion than has a graduate from University of Ghana. Similarly, employers may prefer graduates from the University of Ghana Business School to graduates from other universities who are offering the same specialisation. Although the number of private universities has increased and many are offering specialised courses similar to those of the public universities, the public universities continue to be inundated with applications every year, emphasising the importance of the perceived quality and reputation of universities.

Programmes offered at university

Table 7.3 shows that 77.1 per cent of national service persons had pursued courses in humanities, because every year more students are offered courses in humanities by the three largest universities (i.e. University of Ghana, KNUST and UCC) than that are offered courses in sciences and agriculture. Within the last two decades, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Cape Coast and lately University of Winneba started offering many more courses in the social sciences to attract more diverse students to the universities. Apart from humanities, KNUST, University of Winneba, UCC and the University for Development Studies offer specialised courses in line with their core mandate.

Decision to change programme if given another opportunity at the university

The increase in enrolments and competition for the prestigious courses in the universities has led to strict enforcement of admission standards based on students' grades. For the public universities to be able

Table 7.3   Field of Study of Respondents

	%
Humanities	77.1
Science	14.5
Agriculture	3.1
Engineering	2.3
Architecture	3.1
$N = 131$	

Table 7.4 Decision to Change Programme if Given Another Opportunity at the University

If you have another opportunity to pursue a first degree, would you decide to change programme?	%
Yes	36.6
No	63.4
N = 131	

to exercise some control over the courses students want to pursue at the universities, for making sure that the available infrastructure is able to accommodate intake into the universities, students are not always offered the courses they apply for. In some cases, some departments and schools set higher admission requirements to reduce annual intakes. Thus, many students are offered courses and programmes which they did not choose when completing their admissions. This situation has implications for the students' future prospects and the expectations of society. Table 7.4 shows respondents' answers to the question, if they were given another chance to pursue university education, whether they would choose another programme.

Some of the reasons offered by respondents who would pursue another programme if given the opportunity include

I would decide to do another programme because the programme I did first is not job oriented, that is, it is difficult these days to get a job with that programme. (Male Graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Science Degree)

Accountancy has now become a more marketable course for young and unconnected graduates waiting to enter the job market. (Male Graduate from University of Cape Coast with Bachelor of Management Studies Degree)

I will be pursuing a course/ programme that I want. For now the course I was offered was not what I wanted to do at the university. I think pursuing a course that interests me will help me work well with all my heart and with great joy. (Female Graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts Degree)

I would love to do a business related programme preferably Business Administration which allows for practicality. The job market easily absorbs graduates with BSc. Administration rather than those of us

who have done the humanities. (Female Graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts Degree)

I am not okay with only Theatre Management in the sense that getting a job would not be easy all. Therefore I would prefer to do another programme that will enable me to get a job without any difficulties. (Female Graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree)

Reasons offered by graduates who said they would not change their programmes if given another opportunity include

I would like to continue with my computer science to the Master's level. At the present age and era nothing can be done well without IT. (Male Graduate from KNUST)

I specialised in languages and that is my field of interest. If given a second chance, I will still like to pursue that. Secondly, languages are most essential today. (Female Graduate from University of Ghana)

Expectations of respondents after national service

The transition to the world of work begins when respondents have finished their national service. Table 7.5 shows that a significant number of respondents expected to find permanent employment. Graduates who believed they may not have done a course that could easily secure them decent jobs after national service planned to go back to education. University of Ghana graduates were more likely to go back to university than their counterparts from the other universities as shown in Table 7.6. Of the national service persons who intimated that they

Table 7.5   Expectations of Respondents after National Service

What will you do when you complete your National Service?	%
Find a permanent employment	55.7
Travel abroad	3.1
Go back to university	32.1
Start my own business	5.3
Don't know	3.8
$N = 131$	

Table 7.6   Expectations of Respondent after National Service by University

	Find permanent work	**Travel abroad**	**Go back to university**	**Start my own business**
University of Ghana	51.5	0.0	37.9	10.6
KNUST	70.0	0.0	20.0	10.0
University of Cape Coast	61.9	9.5	19.0	9.5
University for Development Studies	75.0	0.0	25.0	0.0
University of Education, Winneba	66.6	11.1	11.1	11.1
$N = 131$				

wanted to go back to university, 45 per cent said they would pursue Master of Business (MBA) programme. Others mentioned post-graduate programmes in Law, International Relations, Computer Science, Tourism and Communication Studies.

Reasons offered for the choice of post-graduate programmes were (a) to work with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs); (b) to build on the first degree; (c) to start their own business; and (d) to compensate for the lack of professionals in the field. One of the areas that have seen rapid expansion in Ghana lately is the proliferation of NGOs. These NGOs usually offer employment opportunities to graduates. However, many require that candidates looking for employment have at least a Master's degree. Furthermore, students now see the establishment of their own businesses as an opportunity to overcome the challenge of seeking scarce jobs in the public sector and therefore are interested in pursuing business management degrees at post-graduate level to be able to acquire the necessary skills. The study also shows that students of University of Cape Coast, KNUST, University of Winneba and University for Development Studies who pursued specialist courses were more likely to feel confident about finding work within these specialist areas such teaching, computer science, engineering, architecture, agriculture and planning.

Table 7.7 indicates that respondents believed it was difficult for them to find work after university. In an answer to the question about whether

Table 7.7   Perceptions about Finding Permanent Employment

	Perceptions about finding permanent employment	
	Easy	Difficult
University of Ghana	25.0	75.0
KNUST	36.4	63.6
University of Cape Coast	25.0	75.0
University for Development Studies	25.0	75.0
University of Education, Winneba	33.3	66.6
N = 131		

Table 7.8   Decision to Work with Organisation/Institution after National Service

Will you work at the organisation where you are working now, after the completion of national service?	**Yes**	**No**
University of Ghana	54.6	45.3
KNUST	70.6	29.4
University of Cape Coast	65.0	35.0
University for Development Studies	25.0	75.0
University of Education, Winneba	50.0	50.0
N = 131		

they would work with the organisations and institutions where they were currently placed after their national service had ended, a substantial number intimated that they would indeed stay at the organisation (see Table 7.8). The significant finding is that graduates from KNUST are more likely to stay and continue working with the same organisations and institutions after service. This is perhaps explained by the fact that most of the graduates who have pursued specialised courses such as architecture, planning and pharmacy from KNUST are linked to recognised professional bodies which demand on-the-job experience before professional certification; thus, the young graduates are compelled to stay at their places of work to acquire the needed job experience. It is important to note that the service posting is not based on what the students studied at the university, and therefore it cannot be assumed that graduates will be allowed stay on after their service. Reasons offered by respondents who said they would not stay included 'the work here is not challenging enough and it is not my field of interest', 'I don't

like teaching', 'low salary and also that is not my field', 'I will go back to school…I feel the government does not have the welfare of teachers at heart since there is no motivation', and 'the remuneration is not attractive at all…the working conditions are also poor and there are no incentives to motivate workers to do their best'.

University education and preparation of graduates for the job market

The biggest question university administrators have to answer is whether their mandate and mission is to train graduates for the job market. Recently the universities have come under a barrage of criticisms about the quality and relevance of the programmes they offer. Employers have questioned the calibre of graduates they are recruiting and have argued that most of them lack communication skills, analytical skills and requisite personal attributes, and that these skills determine who is recruited at an interview. However, Sawyerr (2006, p. 2) has questioned the direct jobs–university linkage:

> I don't assess a university's success on the basis of economic rates of return. Obviously, people expect to get jobs after graduation. But that cannot be the primary concern of university *per se*. The primary concern is to train the minds of their students, so they can turn their hands to a variety of tasks, and learn on the job. It is up to industry to 'customise' their employees.

As shown in Table 7.9, respondents generally felt that they had been adequately prepared for the job market. However, they had some reservations about the way teaching was organised at the universities.

Table 7.9 University Education and Preparation of Graduates for the Job Market

Do you believe that university prepared you adequately for the jobs market?	Yes	No
University of Ghana	50.0	50.0
KNUST	58.8	41.2
University of Cape Coast	55.0	45.0
University for Development Studies	75.0	25.0
University of Education, Winneba	33.3	66.7
$N = 131$		

All teachings were mostly theory with little attention given to the practical aspect. (Male graduate from KNUST with a BSc Degree in Computer Engineering)

I do not have the practical knowledge and skills. I also do not find myself in an environment that will help me fit in this competitive corporate world. (Female graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts Degree)

The university education has prepared us but not adequately in the sense that we are taught the theoretical aspect without the practical aspect. (Female graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts Degree)

University education in Ghana is not geared towards the job market. It is not practical enough. There is a big gap between what is taught and the job market. (Male graduate from the University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts Degree)

On the fears about transition from education to the world of work, respondents' answers show that graduates from the universities where there is specialisation are less concerned than their peers who graduated from other universities (see Table 7.10). Although a higher percentage of respondents from KNUST said that they had fears, these were concentrated among graduates who had a social-science background.

The fear I had when I was completing school was how I was going to transfer the theory I had learned to the job market. (Female graduate from KNUST with a Bachelor of Arts Degree)

Table 7.10   Fear about Transition to the World of Work

Do you have fears about the transition to the labour market?	Yes	No
University of Ghana	46.9	53.1
KNUST	52.9	47.1
University of Cape Coast	25.0	75.0
University for Development Studies	25.0	75.0
University of Education, Winneba	33.3	66.7
$N = 131$		

Some of the specific concerns expressed by graduates were

> Personally, I had no fears at the time I was leaving school, it all started when you start thinking of applying for jobs and keep wondering what field you can best fit in or where exactly you want to be. (Male graduate from University of Cape Coast with a BSc Degree in Agriculture)

> I wondered what kind of job I would be doing and whether I was adequately prepared to meet the needs of the job market. (Female graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts degree)

> I have to look for work after leaving the university. I know of a friend who just completed her national service and is still in the house searching for a job. (Female graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts degree)

> Other graduates do not have permanent jobs and how easy will it be to get one if I finish? (Female graduate from University of Ghana with a Bachelor of Arts degree)

Conclusion

The study reveals that graduates face many challenges as they make the transition from education to the world of work. There is no doubt that tertiary education in Ghana does not offer the young graduates the stable routes into employment that were associated with the 1960s and 1970s. Today, tertiary education is at the crossroads; the enrolment explosion on the campuses has affected teaching and learning and therefore quality. The dwindling of government funding for tertiary education over the years has led to deterioration of infrastructure and lack of adequate resources. Whilst these challenges faced by the universities affect the quality of graduates that are turned out, they also affect the chances of students as they seek entry to the job market. The willingness of some graduates to pursue a different course if offered another chance indicates that there is a need for greater flexibility in the offer of courses to students when they are entering the university. Due to lack of space and competition among students for the prestigious courses, most students do not get the opportunity to study the courses they are most interested in at university, and this restricts their chances of getting well-paid jobs on graduation.

In relation to students' expectations after they complete their national service, whilst a few indicated they would work at their placement organisation because of the difficulty of finding jobs elsewhere, those who had followed prestigious courses – especially those in computer science and planning from KNUST – indicated they would not stay and would instead pursue career-related courses in other organisations. Those who thought that their present jobs were not exciting intimated that they would go back to university. It is important to note that the decision to go back to university is usually influenced by the hope of higher-status jobs and good incomes. In terms of human-capital theory, this is a rational approach, which holds that the main determinant of the demand for further education at the post-graduate level is the expectation of higher earnings over the individual's lifetime (Boateng and Bekoe (2001) cited in Boateng and Sarpong (2002)). Indeed, a high percentage of those who claimed they would be going back to university for post-graduate programmes mentioned business administration as the programme they intended to pursue.

New pedagogical systems and a review of curricula to make them responsive to global changes and the needs of industry are critical to addressing graduates' complaints that university education is too theoretical and abstract and devoid of practical knowledge and skills. The relevance of university education has been described by Gerth (2008) as encapsulating two broad areas of education: (a) an education that provokes thought processes, instructs an individual broadly about the world and provides him/her with a continuing capacity for critical analysis and reasoning over a lifetime; (b) an education not so much in terms of training, but rather in terms of readiness that students need and must have to participate in the economic and social environments of their world after university – work. Students in universities need to acquire the critical skills and knowledge to be able to make smooth transitions from education to work. Universities in Ghana need to focus more on producing graduates with appropriate life-long learning skills necessary for their careers (Harvey, 2003).

Greater attention needs to be paid to the acquisition of higher-order skills that emphasise critical thinking and effective communication skills, and, above all, universities' programmes need to be relevant to industry to close the gap between what industries want and what universities provide. Skills and abilities that employers look out for during recruitment should be factored into the curricula. This calls for a move from rote learning to one that challenges students to be innovative and inquisitive or the inclusion of what Brock-Utne (2003) has described as

core learning skills. Teaching must be dialogical, moving from teacher-centred to student-centred. Practical knowledge must be emphasised through promotion of internship programmes and a deeper interface between university and industry. Finally, there should be the promotion of interrelationships among different disciplines in terms of selection of subjects. For example, a student studying industrial sociology in the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana could be allowed to select entrepreneurship as an elective in the University of Ghana Business School. Similarly, a student studying archaeology in the Faculty of Social Studies should be allowed to study chemistry in the Faculty of Science. The study further shows that Ghanaian graduates, especially those with humanities degrees, have significant fears about employment and therefore are perhaps more likely than other graduates to find it difficult to secure jobs (see also Boateng and Sarpong (2002) and Maharasoa and Hey (2001)). This can be addressed, for example, if the universities of Ghana could make the selection of courses more flexible; students should be able to crosscut disciplines and select subjects that are more relevant to the job market.

The study has shown that there is a relationship between job market contraction and problems of graduate unemployment. Governments have a critical role to play in ensuring that graduates, who are the future leaders of the nation, find jobs to contribute to the national development. This means that Ghana's economy needs to grow at an annual growth rate of seven per cent or more to be able to create a wider job market. This also calls for prudent economic policies and support for universities to deal with the problems of enrolment explosion and quality. Support also needs to be provided for the private sector to offer alternative job opportunities to graduates. Young graduates must be supported with start-up capital to be able to establish their own companies instead of relying on government for jobs. Universities all over the world are established to provide the human capital critical to national development through the development of young students who have the opportunity to pursue university education. Universities in Ghana can perform their core functions better if they periodically take a critical look at the relevance of what they teach their students to both the jobs market and national developmental needs in order to make their students more confident about their abilities to compete globally in a world that has become knowledge-based.

8
Gap Year Travel: Youth Transition or Youth Transformation?

Novie Johan

Introduction

Many students encounter challenges and difficulties in the transition to university or work owing to geographical, social and other displacements, and these may result in significant numbers who do not complete their studies or who are unable to adjust well to working life (see Kelly et al., 2007; Scanlon et al., 2007; Shanahan, 2000). According to Pearce and Foster (2007, p. 1286), 'the experience and knowledge gained through travel represent a kind of parallel to formal education in school or at university'. This is one of the arguments used to explain the Gap Year Travel (GYT) experiences which many young people choose to engage in between education and employment. By deferring their entry into work, young people allow themselves a space to reorientate and reconfigure their career and life choices. Students in their initial transition to university may experience feelings of loss of continuity as they leave behind familiarity (Scanlon et al., 2007). Travelling is an increasingly important part of 'growing up' for young adults, and GYT may allow space for identity search and personal transformation to happen.

This chapter will discuss the concept of GYT as transition behaviour and explore its relationship with the phenomenon of youth transition and mobility (the latter will be presented as encompassing cultural exchange, identity construction and learning). The chapter will present a more complex view of youth transition than has traditionally been the case in simple linear models of the process. In the chapter it will be argued that through the mobility brought about by GYT the potential is created for young people to achieve more deep-seated and lasting personal transformation that goes beyond mere transition.

Gap Year Travel

Gap Year Travel is a relatively new segment within the travel and tourism industry. Although well-established only since the late 1990s, GYT has now become a major phenomenon. It has received increased publicity and endorsements from both private and public sectors (see Simpson, 2005). Jones (2004, p. 8) defines GYT as 'any period of time between three and 24 months which an individual takes "out" of formal education, training or the workplace, and where the time out sits in the context of a longer career trajectory'. This time out, delaying further education or employment, is used to travel (Mintel, 2005), develop new skills and engage in 'extraordinary' experiences (Simpson, 2005).

Young people represent a large proportion of the GYT market which can be classified further based on career/education stage: for example, after school/higher-education group (pre-university gappers), during employment/training group (career gappers) (see Jones, 2004; Mintel, 2005). Nevertheless, Heath (2007, p. 89) suggests that GYT 'is an increasingly common practice among standard-age British university entrants . . . between the completion of A-levels or equivalent and the commencement of higher education'. The term 'Gap Year' is widely used in the United Kingdom (Noy, 2004) and has been described as a 'peculiarly British phenomenon' (Simpson, 2005. p.10). Nevertheless, the phenomenon is in no way unique to the United Kingdom, since equivalent terms are used in other parts the world; for example, 'The big OE (Overseas Experience)' and 'Working abroad' represent similar concepts in New Zealand and Australia.

The origin of GYT can be traced back to the various historical traditions of long-term travel in the history of tourism since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, the 'Grand Tour', tramping, hitchhiking and hippie trails (Adler, 1985; Mintel, 2005). In the 1970s and 1980s GYT was recognised as a luxurious activity undertaken by only a small minority of people. Yet, by the 1990s the uptake of the GYT had developed and received positive encouragement by universities and potential employers. GYT does represent not only a 'year away' but also a strong association with purposeful activities that have career development potential (Mintel, 2005). Indeed, the literature suggests that GYT, as part of this tradition, is likely to be the latest stage in the evolution of independent long-term youth travel. For example, O'Reilly (2006) suggests that GYT is a more modern version of the long-haul, long-term independent travel that has taken place throughout recent history. The

idea of combining leisure and work/education with adventurous experiences persists and is likely to stay (Pearce, 1988), particularly with the increased feasibility of low-cost international travel through the services of budget airlines.

In addition to the above, a number of authors have highlighted the theme of individual transition and inward changes as a result of travel, for example, enhancement of one's sophistication, worldliness and social awareness (Hibbert, 1969; Swinglehurst, 1974). This transition theme can also be detected even further back in history; for example, the Grand Tour is seen 'as a ritual effecting the separation of young men from home and family' (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995, p. 821). The view of long-term travel as being educational is overt in the work of O'Reilly (2006, p. 1010) who argues that this type of travel fits 'neatly into the break between education and career, building on the former and potentially enhancing prospects for the latter'. Young travellers embarking on long-term travel often acknowledge that, at the beginning of their journey, they were at a life juncture (Graburn, 1983; Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Sorensen, 2003). For example, many explain that they were recently graduated, married or divorced, or between jobs, and hence at a crossroads in life prior to the journey ahead. Travel may be one way of postponing taking on adult responsibilities (Riley, 1988) or a proactive strategy for coping with them. Furthermore, it can mark a major break and change in habitual patterns of daily living (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000; Elsrud, 2001), acting as a space for reflection (Muller and O'Cass, 2001) and avoiding mundane living (Cohen, 1973). Thus, travel may facilitate transition (and perhaps also a transformation) by providing an interval of time to be away from social pressures and from taking on new or different responsibilities and roles (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). Indeed, a more recent study by Shulman et al. (2006) concluded that journeys often served as an experimental search for a more mature self-identity, and as a rite of passage during the transition to adulthood.

The priorities of young people in late modernity have changed with 'personal relationships, wellbeing, lifestyle and leisure [taking] a central focus in their lives' and influencing their study and work choices' (Stokes and Wyn, 2007, p. 501). Indeed, leisure has become a priority for young people, thus making GYT a more acceptable and common option. Furthermore, it has been noted that GYT may play an important role in influencing the outcome of study or career (Inkson and Myers, 2003).

A number of important changes have taken place in education in recent years which have the potential to impact the uptake of GYT (see

Mintel, 2004a, 2004b, 2005). First of all, the expectation of a higher level of education has increased (aligned with the UK government's goal that by 2010, 50 per cent of all young people will go for higher education). Second, young people are likely to stay in school/university for a longer time (e.g. with the expansion of Master's programmes). Third, the number of mature students is likely to increase (with increased opportunities for study). Fourth, there have been increases in disposable income which may be used for travelling (and made easier by the growth in budget travel). Finally, the current restructuring process in the education industry is likely to trigger further changes (e.g. increase in tuition fees – the impact of which on GYT is unclear).

In order to understand the impact of GYT on young people, it is important to consider a variety of demographic and trip-related factors. For example, Inkson and Myers (2003) highlighted the importance of gender, age, education, occupation, motivation, social support, and planning of overseas experiences, as well as trip duration, location, types of trips and personal relationships during the trip. By considering factors such as country of origin, social, economic and cultural contexts, ethnicity, social class/family background, disabilities and funding arrangements, a more comprehensive and holistic portrait of gappers can be created (Mintel, 2005). Individual-level characteristics might also be considered important as these are likely to have relevance to personal learning, transition and transformation, for example personality (such as the 'openness to experience' trait), dispositions and preferences, and previous travel experiences.

Previous research suggests that gappers' motivations are likely to include the following: (a) gain knowledge and experience of other cultures while having 'fun' (Mintel, 2004a); (b) general exploration, pursuit of specific career goals, escape from an undesirable work and personal situations (Barry, 1998); (c) social attraction, exploration, escape, predisposition, need for a break or change, specific overseas opportunity (for work or education), impulse, general career development, and earning money (Inkson and Myers, 2003); and (d) desire for a more balanced lifestyle (work–life balance) and a need for time to reflect, relax and unwind (Mintel, 2006a, 2006b). In reality, gappers rarely have only one motive for heading abroad in the relatively long trips they take (Mintel, 2006a, 2006 b).

The study of Pearce and Lee (2005) suggests that motivations such as stimulation, personal development, relationships, self-actualisation, nostalgia, romance and recognition are of higher priority for the less-experienced travellers (i.e. first-time gappers). Moreover, Niggel and

Benson (2008, p. 151) found that backpackers' motivations included 'to learn more about myself, to find myself and to educate myself about the world'. In their research they also distinguished between 'push' and 'pull' factors. Among the former were several related to self-development, for example to challenge their own abilities, self-testing, confusion about future plans, gaining a feeling of belonging, the completion of study commitments, improving status, postponing current commitments, the completion of work commitments, search for employment and search for the right partner (ibid., pp. 148–149). Both Cohen (2003) and Elsrud (2001) suggest that one of the main motivations is the desire to construct a new identity through travel, in the sense that they hope to become more courageous, relaxed and independent. These literatures conform to Sørensen (2003)'s notion of *rite de passage*.

Youth transition

Young people 'are positioned at the leading edge of many aspects of contemporary social change' (Hall, Williamson and Coffey, 1999, p. 501) making their life transition important both for themselves and for the wider society. However, the transition from childhood to adulthood also makes them vulnerable as this process involves difficult changes (such as adolescence) in which turbulence may abound and a direction for change is sought (see Nielsen, 1996; Newman and Newman, 1997).

Traditionally, transition is seen as consisting of four thresholds that define progress into adulthood in a simple linear fashion: (a) completing education, (b) entry into employment, (c) leaving home and (d) forming a couple (Bagnall, 2005). Yet, this standard model of transition is disappearing because the lives of young people are being restructured profoundly with new agendas, experiences and priorities (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998). Many scholars (e.g. MacDonald et al., 2001; Inui 2003; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2007) compare and contrast the transition process of young people today with those of previous generations. There seems to be a general agreement amongst these researchers that (a) the transition process used to be seen as linear, straightforward, standardised, and was much shorter than the youth transition process today; and (b) youth transition today is regarded as being prolonged, complicated, unpredictable (open-ended and fluid), diverse, individualised, insecure, fragmented, risky and includes many steps. Stokes and Wyn (2007) argue that linearity of transition in the traditional sense is outdated and limiting as it underplays the complexity of young people's lives. It is based on an assumption that waged labour is the ultimate goal

(see Cohen and Ainley, 2000). Linearity suggests that young people need to achieve particular milestones at certain ages (Stokes and Wyn, 2007), which represent a 'successful' youth transition (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Roberts 2007). When simply measured using age criteria and the standards of previous generations the transitions of young people today may easily be deemed 'delayed', 'extended' or 'failed' (Wyn and Woodman, 2007). Indeed, one of the main dangers in uncritically accepting linearity is that it may miss the significance of the construction of identity, which is arguably one of the most important aspects of transition (Vaughan et al., 2006).

Clearly, new patterns of transition have emerged (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001). Wallace and Kovatcheva (1998) argue that school-to-work transitions have become both 'de-standardised' and 'individualised' as young people negotiate a much wider choice of routes into adulthood. Young people have more power to choose, and there is no clear rule of process or outcome. Hence, GYT is part of what is undeniably a complex transition process. Indeed, the concept of transition could usefully be broadened, and should be seen from a more holistic point of view, to include other aspects such as leisure, health and sexuality rather than merely school-to-work, family and housing transitions (Shildrick and McDonald, 2007). Furthermore, transition can also be seen as a process of identity development and construction, and cultural exchange and learning, rather than having a narrow focus on outcomes. In this context, Evans and Heinz (1995, p. 10) suggest that young people need to develop more 'active transition behaviours' that enable them to negotiate their way successfully. GYT is one such active transition behaviour. As young people respond to and negotiate new social realities, they are shaping distinctive new patterns of living – they 'interpret, tackle and hence transform' their worlds (Leccardi and Ruspini, 2006, p. 3).

Mobility

Mobility encompasses 'the large scale movement of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and travel of material things in everyday life' (Ateljevic and Hannam, 2008, p. 253). Hannam et al. (2006) assert that issues of mobility are 'centre-stage'. They are especially so for young people in their transition from the status of child to that of adult to the extent that mobilities are centrally involved in 'transforming the social and educational life of young people' (Ateljevic and Hannam, 2008). Indeed, understanding mobility in

relation to young people and their travel is, with the rise in GYT, of increasing importance in understanding youth transition more generally (Thomson and Taylor, 2005). According to Maoz (2008) and Myers and Hannam (2008) mobility can be a source of status and power because it is closely related to acquisition of cultural and social capitals. As gappers move from one place to another they shape their thoughts and behaviours, and increase their ability to shift from one cultural context to another, and from one society to another (Bennetts, 2003). Travel mobilises youth transition both culturally and socially.

In today's globalised world, adaptation to different national cultures and tolerance of diversity are regarded both as being valuable (Doney et al., 1998) and bringing benefits and as contributing to success in education and employment (Inkson and Myers, 2003). Younger adults are likely to be more receptive to learning from cross-cultural experiences and exchanges (Wilson, 1993); on the other hand, travel may create difficulties on returning home (Useem, 2001) if the need for stability and settling down has been replaced with a desire for mobility (Selmer and Lam, 2004). For young people, complexities and tensions exist between the 'notions of home, tradition and fixedness on one hand and of mobility, escape and transformation on the other' (Thomson and Taylor, 2005, p. 327). While young people access global cultures at the local level (Miller, 1992; Nayak, 2003), it is almost a necessity now for them to 'get out' in order to 'get on' (see Jamieson, 2000; Jones 2000). Geographical mobility is often seen as an investment and 'a means to access to social mobility' (Thomson and Taylor, 2005, p. 333). Travel and mobility are central for some young people, especially in the accounts they give of the development of the self as they make the transition to adulthood; for example, Desforges (2000) suggests that tourism consumption is mobilised for the development of self-identity. In this context, gappers may be seen as negotiating their identities through journeys across different countries and cultures. That said, not all young people have the resources or the capabilities to access such mobilities.

The three mobility-related factors of cross-cultural exchange, identity construction and transformational learning are important contributory factors in youth transition (see Figure 8.1) and will now be considered in more detail.

Cross-cultural issues

Travel can be demanding both physically and mentally; gappers may experience stress, tiredness, and confusion while learning new things and facing unexpected difficulties (Hottola, 2004). Moreover the first
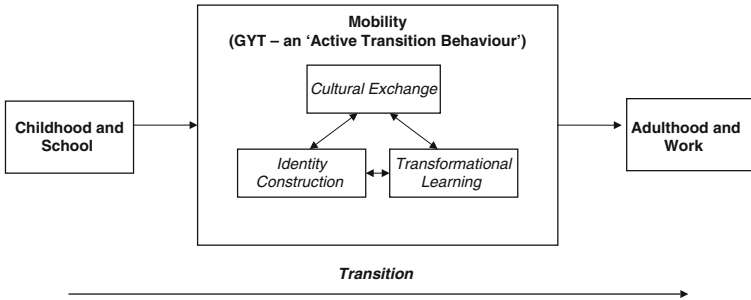
Figure 8.1   GYT, Mobilities and Youth Transitions

experience of national cultural differences sometimes has the most impact (ibid.). Where substantial disparities exist between the home culture and that of the destination, gappers are likely to experience greater difficulties in adjusting (Elsrud, 2001). In fact, Gmelch (1997, p. 486) suggested that learning comes from 'having to cope with surprises and unexpected problems and predicaments'. Similarly, Biggs (1992) in Gmelch (1997) argues that the gappers' exposure to the surprises of cultural disparities and their attempts at the resolution of those are powerful influences in their personal development. Individuals acquire new understandings about life, culture and self when they have to deal with changes in their physical environment and the circumstances in which they live (ibid.). 'Place' is a significant factor in the changes experienced by young people which are brought about through mobility (Hall et al., 1999). Young adults require a 'room of one's own to move' and 'a space that they can enter on their own terms and on their own initiative, unaccompanied and unsupervised by adults' (ibid., p. 506). What usually worked or was acceptable at home may not work, or may have different consequences, in foreign locations (Ralston et al., 1995). Without adequate preparation or guidance it is up to the gappers themselves to negotiate these cross-cultural challenges, often through trial-and-error learning processes. In this sense, GYT meets the needs of young people for time, place and space to negotiate their sense of belongingness and their emerging sense of identity in approaching adulthood. The outcome of self-change is related both to the gappers' travel destinations (Noy, 2004) and to the gappers themselves (Wilson et al., 2008). An important part of the gappers' learning and transition relates to how well they manage issues of time and place in negotiating changes in self-perception and identity construction.

The transitions brought about by travel do not occur in isolation. New social interactions in foreign cultures brought about by mobility are important factors in young adults' development. From a social constructionist perspective (Lave and Wenger, 1991), learning is a 'relational activity, located within a process of social co-participation' (Lawy, 2002, p. 216) both at home and during travel. Indeed, fundamental to the development of an understanding of oneself is the concept of 'the other', and the interactions between the self and others. Gappers' personal development is in part a result of mobility-induced social processes in which they learn about themselves through interactions both with other gappers and with residents of the host country.

Finally, the cultural disparities brought about through mobility may also result in greater participation in risky behaviours (Pizam et al., 1997). Risky behaviours are often seen as something young people have to engage in before they can feel secure (Lawy, 2002). During Gap Year Travel, for example, young people are likely to move from a relatively low-risk life in a familiar culture to one of a higher risk (as a result of the journey itself, living in the host country and engaging in various activities) in a foreign culture with different values and norms.

Identity construction

The transition to adulthood is inextricably bound up with identity construction (Stokes and Wyn, 2007). According to Giddens (1991, p. 53) 'self identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography'. In the same vein, Melucci states that 'identity is the product of our conscious action and the outcomes of self-reflection more than a set of given or inherited characteristics' (Melucci, 1996, p. 31). The effect that tourism has on youth transition has hardly been studied (notable exceptions are Desforges, 2000; Hastings, 1998; Maoz, 2006a, 2006b), yet the links between travel and concepts of 'personhood' (e.g. identity, subjectivity and the self) are well-established in tourism studies (Desforges, 2000). Indeed, tourism has long been known to have an important role in the search for and production of new identity (Urry 1995; Abram et al., 1997), and is considered to offer an ongoing process of identity construction (Desforges, 2000).

In the life of young adults, leisure activity plays a significant role in identity construction as it reinforces previous developmental trends and shapes new ones (Feinstein et al., 2006). Leisure also encourages

and enhances participation in education and training (Gorard et al., 1999). Furthermore, travelling acts as an 'informal qualification', a 'professional certification', a 'record of achievement and experience' which will enhance one's education and employment background (Inkson and Myers, 2003). Thus, the literature suggests that young adults can find and explore issues of identity through leisure activities (see Miles 2000; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Travelling provides the potential to enhance the process of identity construction, allowing individuals to define themselves according to their personal experiences of the world (Maoz, 2007). Furthermore, long-distance travelling as a leisure activity is more suited to younger age groups owing to their openness to new experiences (see Oppermann, 1995). Travel activities free one from the pressures of an old identity, and thus give gappers both control and opportunity to create a new or 'truer' identity (Elsrud, 2001). Perhaps this is due to the fact that 'identity is always specific to situations and to acquire an identity is to be objectively located in the world; that is to be given a specific place in the world' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 152). Gap year travel provides an opportunity to understand oneself more by withdrawing from daily routines and regular places.

The question of 'whether' and 'when' to travel is a crucial issue in the maturation of identity. It is important because the travel decision is often made at a stage in life when 'self-identity is open to question' (Desforges, 2000, p. 933). Turbulence in one's personal situation may become the motivation to travel, and travelling is considered to be a journey in which one can create and maintain a distance from the old identity and have exposure to a new identity (ibid.). In this sense, GYT can be seen as a personal experimentation for young gappers to evaluate their identity and have a chance to construct a new one. Travel is 'broadening' in this sense because it provides a distance which gives differences in perception and may lead to a perspective shift which may, in turn, result in insight (see Kaplan, 2000). The trip helps gappers to be away from the home context, away from the routine, and provides an opportunity to concentrate on trying out a new possible identity. It may be seen as an 'inner journey' (Maoz, 2008) in which gappers can reflect. Nevertheless, any changes in identity that occur during travel are usually a continuation of their former identity and sometimes reflect the archetypal values of their society (Galani-Moutafi, 2001) – in most cases a Western society (Elsrud, 2001, p. 599). There are perhaps two key moments in which travel is particularly important in the maturation of identity: (a) deciding to go overseas on the first long-haul trip into a new context (outbound); (b) the homecoming back to the old context

with a transformed identity (inbound) (Desforges, 2000, p. 927). Furthermore, from an employment perspective (ibid.) travel experiences are appreciated by many business organisations for the value they have in individual development. Travelling is considered to be an asset in the curriculum vitae that may lead to better employment prospects (Inkson and Myers, 2003). For example, one potential outcome of travelling is the development of identities. Stokes and Wyn (2007) argued more generally that the ability to develop identities gives young people

> the capacity to be good decision-makers; have a clear understanding of their own goals and priorities; juggle multiple responsibilities, keep options open and maintain a level of mental and physical well being....
>
> (p. 502)

While this could be an important aim for many gappers, a caution should be offered in that travel may have both positive and negative outcomes. The positive outcome can be 'finding oneself' and 'creating a new identity'; nevertheless it can also easily be an 'escape' – a temporary solution in which one may be avoiding oneself, rather than fixing the roots of the problem.

Identity construction is a process of negotiation. Identities are not simply given, but need to be constructed by the individual (McLeod and Yates, 2006, p. 38). Indeed, identity is a product of ongoing conscious efforts and unconscious processes; hence as well as being consciously managed it also needs to naturally unfold. According to Dwyer et al. (2005, p. 23), young people often see the transition to adulthood as a process of identity construction, and regard adulthood not as a 'given' but as a project, task or journey that demands their ongoing commitment. Some gappers are likely to be aware that identities need to be actively constructed by the processes of experience and reflection. Indeed, the potential for identity search during travel is significant; even short-term mobilities can have significant impact on transforming identities (Urry, 1995). These arguments reinforce the notion of GYT as an active transition behaviour (see Evans and Heinz, 1995).

Learning

Youth transition is inextricably linked to learning, not necessarily in the formal sense of classroom education but in the informal and incidental learning processes that inevitably occur during travel. A number of learning theories are relevant to these discussions.

First, Knowles (1990) offered a theory of adult learning in which a distinction is made between pedagogy ('leading children') and andragogy ('leading men [i.e. people]' or the 'art and science of helping adult learners'). The pedagogical model assigns to the teacher full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned, when it will be learned and whether it has been learned. The andragogical model, on the other hand, is based on the assumption of self-direction, experience as a resource for learning, immediacy of application and internal motivation. Second, in his Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), Kolb (1984) drew upon the work of Lewin, Piaget and Jung. His four-stage experiential learning cycle (Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation) is based on the principle that 'knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Moreover, in the Transformative Learning (TL) theory of Mezirow (1981, 1991), it is argued that an individual can be transformed through a process of critical reflection. A person has frames of reference from which he/she views his/her life experiences. Perspectives become fixed, until the individual becomes willing to and decides to change his/hers. Frames are built on cultural and contextual experiences. Argyris and Schön's (1974) theory of single-loop and double-loop learning (SLL/DLL) is based on premises that each individual has perspectives, scripts or schemas (referred to in SLL/DLL as 'mental models') which guide them on how to act, including how they plan, implement and review their actions. Learning is seen in the theory of SLL/DLL as beginning with the detection and correction of errors.

What these theories have in common is that they (a) focus on transitions in the interpretation of experience, context and one's world view; (b) focus on the individual (internal) rather than on the external (the individual is important); (c) focus on the process of learning, transformation and transition; and (d) are goal-oriented, with a focus on the development of oneself by understanding oneself through one's experience, making one 'a better self'. The theories provide a set of theoretical frameworks that may be used to explain the transitions and transformations brought about by learning during long-term travel. The theory of Knowles describes a process of development from pedagogy to andragogy which also reflects the transition between childhood and adulthood. The theories of Kolb and Mezirow respectively distinguish between learning through reflection on experience and more lasting personal change (transformational learning). Transformational learning 'aims at evoking a new consciousness and self-understanding

and promotes the human experience by thinking, self-expression and actions' (Hudson, 1999, p. 246), and furthermore, transformation has a deep impact on values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. When an individual has undergone a process of transformation, he/she becomes aware of the 'limitedness' of his/her assumptions and how this limiting view affects the way he/she sees the world. Acknowledging and understanding this, the individual may then make new choices and create newer perspectives on life – 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167) or individuation (Kolb, 1984). The extent to which GYT facilitates not only transitions but also transformations is an open question and one which requires further research. Moreover, training gappers in the skills of reflection may be one way to maximise the benefits of GYT.

Conclusion: youth transition, youth transformation and GYT

Transition, as discussed above, can be best described as a process of maturation from childhood to adulthood, and from school to work (see Figure 8.1). Transition is not an option – it happens to everyone, it also happens irrespective of whether a young person decides to embark on GYT or not. Whilst all young adults go through this transition not all of them undergo a transformational process. Mobility promotes engagement in the world, and transformation becomes possible. Time, location and opportunities, when combined with individuals' hopes and dreams, contribute to the possibility for transformation to happen. Whether the change is a slow incremental process or a radical transformation depends on each individual – their readiness and their understanding and interpretation of their experiences.

GYT not only provides an opportunity for transition, but creates the potential for transformation to happen. It does so by providing space, time and place for the young gappers to experience themselves for extended periods of time in cultural settings that they may never have experienced before. While travel provides external stimulus, gappers make sense of this in their own terms through their perceptions and interpretations. Transformation may manifest itself in significant changes of beliefs, attitudes and values and in the evolution of a more mature identity. Transformational learning is not necessarily a single event, but a chain of continuous events, which then become a lifelong learning process. If this is the case the question then arises as to whether GYT is the first stage in an ongoing process of self-transformation.

Travelling, as a form of mobility, has potential to provide cross-cultural experiences and exchanges, and to enhance identity construction, knowledge and skills, and learning how to learn from experience. If personal transformation is a desired goal of GYT there is much to be gained: 'It can help in coping with and instigating change in self and others, transformed relationships, increased educational drive, career improvement, and better quality of life' (Bennetts, 2003, p. 457). The GYT process may have the power to mobilise lifelong learning and support not only youth transition but youth transformation also.

9
The Role of Volunteering in Transitions from Higher Education to Work

Nicole Matthews, Pat Green, David Hall and Irene Hall

Volunteering at the nexus of higher education, employment and citizenship

Why should we be interested in the place of volunteering in transitions from higher education to work? As Ulrich Teichler commented in a report compiled for the International Labour Office, in the 1990s and beyond 'transition from higher education to employment has become more complex and protracted' (1999, p. 5). There is a widespread perception of under-employment, over-qualification yet inadequacy in basic skills required by business, leading to a mismatch between graduates' skills and employment opportunities. Recent research from the European CHEERS[1] study has suggested that in fact such transitions are smoother than they are often perceived to be (Teichler, 2007, p. 21), with rates of graduate unemployment continuing to be lower than those of non-graduates. In fact, this research suggests that many graduates view their career prospects more negatively than a research-informed perspective would suggest. Despite this evidence, anxieties about graduates' transition into work, we will suggest, have become an important driver of volunteering within the curriculum and after graduation. This is not, however, to discount the importance of volunteering or service learning within higher education as a form of experiential education, as a means of developing university–community partnerships for knowledge transfer and social action, or indeed as an enjoyable activity in its own right (Strand et al., 2003; Hall and Hall, 2007).

In an environment in which higher education is engaging in a new way with vocational imperatives, volunteering is increasingly becoming

an important strategy adopted by students, graduates and universities to attempt to smooth this transition (Matthews and Corcoran, 2004; Leach and Marr, 2005; Green and Anderson, 2006; Institute for Volunteering Research, 2007). The report *Volunteering Works*, for example, notes that in 2000, 25,000 university students in England served as volunteers (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2007, p. 31). While few researchers distinguish between types of work experience – paid and unpaid, accredited and unaccredited volunteering – there is evidence to suggest that work experience more broadly plays a key role in transitions between higher education and paid work.

Schomberg, for example, points out that 'the more study-related work experience [during the course of study], the shorter the job search and the time between graduation and first job' (Schomberg, 2007, p. 52). This is reiterated by Purcell and colleagues who confirmed that students undertaking work experience, or other forms of appropriate activity outside of the university but related to study, are likely to gain graduate employment sooner than those who do not (Purcell, et al., 2005). Schomberg also notes that study-related work experience is correlated with recent graduates' ability to use their knowledge and skills in paid employment four years after they graduate (Schomberg, 2007, p. 52). Blasko and colleagues have observed that work experience related to field of study can ameliorate disadvantages faced in the workplace by graduates from marginalised social groups (2002; see also Green and Anderson, 2006).

In the United Kingdom, there has been a significant emphasis within policy on the role of the voluntary sector. Indeed, as Paine points out, 'it could be argued that volunteering is currently experiencing a bit of a high. Never before has volunteering received such direct attention or support from the government' (Paine, cited by Wainwright et al., 2006, p. 120). Government policy has been a response to growing concerns about the extent (or perceived lack) of community involvement, and the declining levels of civic participation, in democratic societies (some claim it to be a 'crisis' (Hustinx et al., 2005, p. 525)).

More specifically, there has been a growing policy emphasis on volunteering as a way of promoting higher education's relationship with the wider community. The 'service learning' model of integrating community service with academic study has a much longer history in the United States and is one that Lisman claims is 're-energising teaching and developing strong partnerships between colleges and communities' (Lisman, 1998, p. 24). Campus Compact – a leader in the service learning movement – lists 'a rapidly growing membership of more than

1,100 colleges and universities, representing more than a quarter of all higher education institutions' (www.compact.org/membership; see also Ostrow et al., 1999).

In the United States, service-learning pedagogy is, as Mohan points out, 'something which stresses acquiring the civic awareness of educated citizens and developing the capacity to reflect and attempt to solve social problems' (Mohan, 1994, p. 338). The rights and responsibilities that are part of civic life thus become part of campus life. What Hustinx et al. (2005) call 'curricular community service' is concerned with two equally important foci: that of community engagement by members of the university, and of community-based learning which brings practical application to academic study. It is this model of community-based learning that has been developing over the last few years in the United Kingdom, particularly since the Higher Education Active Community Fund (HEACF) was established in 2002 (HEFCE, 2001).

While student volunteering in higher education in the United Kingdom has a long history, and successive governments have been keen to encourage it, it was with the New Labour government from 1997 onwards that significant changes occurred. Increasingly, government policy has stressed the role of volunteering and a strong civil society in combating social exclusion. Government and higher-education policies have also placed greater responsibility upon higher-education institutions (HEIs) to establish closer ties with their local communities through engagement with the voluntary and community sector (ibid.), at the same time developing student skills for graduate employment (Dearing, 1997). Community engagement and volunteering has thus become part of the 'third mission' for universities, a task over and above the traditional roles of teaching and research. Here the political commitment is that of connecting 'town' and 'gown', and of dismantling the notion of the ivory tower of higher education in splendid isolation (Cameron and Green, 2006).

Researching volunteering and higher education

Despite this recent upsurge of interest in volunteering within UK universities, there are distinct gaps in the literature on the relationship between volunteering and higher education. The Institute for Volunteering Research's 2007 report *Volunteering Works* notes the lack of research on accreditation of volunteering or indeed on the links between volunteering and employability (2007, p. 30). Recent large-scale research on graduate employment, such as that of Brennan and Blasko (2002), has

frequently failed to unpick the specific role of voluntary work or accredited work experience from broader paid work experience during periods of study. Similarly, early publications from the large-scale CHEERS study have not distinguished between voluntary and paid work experience in their discussion of the role of work experience in graduate career paths (Schomberg, 2007; Teichler, 2007).

This lack of attention to volunteering specifically points towards the underpinning instrumental emphasis in much of government policy, public discourse and indeed some educational research on the way universities can service business (e.g. Robins and Webster, 1999; Symes and McIntyre, 2000; Knight and Yorke, 2004). More broadly, this marginalisation of voluntary activity in accounts of career transitions speaks to the undervaluing of voluntary and unpaid work, historically disproportionately performed by women. Feminist scholars have frequently noted the way voluntary and unpaid work is set aside in conventional accounts of the economy. Attention has shifted towards the voluntary sector in recent times because of government interest in the economic contribution of the third sector as a provider of public services and a source of social enterprise. Nonetheless, students' and graduates' experience of voluntary or unpaid work continues to be difficult to elicit using the kinds of instruments usually used to research graduate career paths.

Brenda Johnston's review of the field of research around graduate employment notes the heavy emphasis on quantitative data, particularly first-destination surveys, and the lack of longitudinal studies (Johnston, 2003). Our small-scale research suggests that standard first-destination surveys elicit information on only a tiny fraction of the unpaid work undertaken by recent graduates. While scoping for one of the two studies reported here, graduate first-destination surveys of four cohorts of graduates across a large HEI identified fewer than ten graduates reporting unpaid work experience. In contrast, over a third of all the respondents in our survey of graduates from just one degree programme over the same period disclosed some form of unpaid or voluntary work after graduation. Follow-up interviews with a small group of respondents uncovered still further graduates with experience of previously undisclosed unpaid work, despite specific solicitation of this experience in our letter and questionnaire (Matthews and Corcoran, 2004). In a context where successful transition is often viewed simply in terms of a speedy move from study to full-time paid work (Schomberg, 2007; Teichler, 2007), it seems engagement in unpaid work is hard for graduates or indeed universities to narrate as part of a successful career story.

In this chapter we will discuss a number of specific questions about the role of volunteering in the transition from higher education to work left largely unaddressed elsewhere (see however, Shah et al., 2004; Yarwood, 2005). We do so by drawing on two studies, each funded through the Learning and Teaching Subject Network, now part of the United Kingdom's Higher Education Academy.[2] The first was a pilot study, funded by the Cultural Studies Learning and Teaching Fund, that explored the role of unpaid work in the early career trajectories of four cohorts of media and cultural studies graduates from Liverpool John Moores University, drawing on short qualitative questionnaires (n = 94) and a small number of semi-structured telephone interviews (n = 13). The second study, funded by the Centre for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (C-SAP), focussed upon the impact of accredited volunteering embedded in the higher-education curriculum. This research used structured open-ended questionnaires and structured interviews to explore students', graduates', host institutions' and academics' experiences of accredited volunteering across five higher-education institutions in England. Across the five institutions, responses were drawn from 72 undergraduates, 36 graduates, 11 representatives of voluntary-sector organizations and seven higher-education staff.

Both studies involve, to some extent, self-selecting samples, with identification of respondents dependent on practical factors, such as involvement of staff as gatekeepers. Although the researched departments represented both pre- and post-1992 universities, and students enrolled in these departments varied significantly in terms of ethnic diversity, social class and region of origin, offering a wide-ranging sample, neither study can claim generalisability across the higher-education sector. The different types of host organizations and career paths of media and cultural studies graduates on the one hand and sociology and social policy students on the other, for example, indicate the importance of context in understanding graduates' diverse experiences of volunteering. Nevertheless, this chapter aims to use qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires to provide a textured account of some graduates' experiences of the role of volunteering in transitions from higher education to work.

Three main issues will structure our discussion. First, we will consider contested definitions of volunteering and the impact of such definitions on the way voluntary activity is reported and understood by graduates. Second, we will consider the profiles emerging in our research of students and graduates who engage in voluntary work. Finally, we sketch the impact of volunteering on the career trajectories of graduates within

our research. In each case we will suggest that the stories of volunteering told by graduates undermine conventional distinctions usually associated with educational transition: distinctions between paid and unpaid work, between volunteering activities during and after periods of study, between career-oriented and citizenship-oriented motives for undertaking voluntary action.

Defining volunteering: 'There's no altruism in voluntary work'

The term 'volunteering' is one which is currently being contested and reshaped. Wardell and her colleagues describe the stereotypical picture of volunteers: 'middle-aged, highly educated women with a secure income, who attend church regularly and are altruistically motivated' (Wardell et al., 2000, p. 229; see also Cusick, 2007). However, this image of the volunteer has been subject to significant challenges over recent times. Not only have older women increasingly come to participate in the paid workforce, thus making them less available as volunteers, but in the United Kingdom government programmes have encouraged people seeking employment to participate in volunteer work, while many young people have come to volunteer as part of their studies and career paths (Wardell et al., 2000; Institute for Volunteering Research, 2007).

Much research has challenged the accuracy of conventional perceptions of volunteering as motivated primarily or exclusively by altruistic motives (e.g. Dickinson, 1999; Wardell et al., 2000; Cusick, 2007). Wardell and her colleagues comment: 'the image of the "do gooder" is outdated' (Wardell et al., 2000, p. 246). Contemporary volunteering often involves a complex mix of instrumental and altruistic motives. Reasons for volunteering might include making new friends, meeting people and having fun, filling spare time, gaining experience that may act as a stepping stone to employment or, more broadly, personal self-development. An indicative comment by one recent graduate from John Moores University points to the way many graduate respondents acknowledge discourses of altruism while situating their own motives as not simply concerned with the wellbeing of others. Thus her acknowledgement of instrumental motives has a guilty tone, despite the convergence of her narratives with HEACF funding objectives.

> it sounds really horrible, but it was to help me get my experience, as well as helping the different voluntary organizations as well ... When I worked it was for Macmillan Cancer Relief, I was actually working

there as an administrator at Newcastle General Hospital up here, and the charity was based on the same site and I found out that they wanted help, so I was helping them with that, administrative duties, but also because I wanted to go into marketing I thought it would be quite good, so like I just helped them write the press releases and helped at events and that sort of thing, but it gave me experience and also I was helping them out at the same time. (Graduate)

A polar opposition between altruistic and instrumental motives for volunteering simply does not accurately describe the way respondents in either study viewed and talked about their unpaid activities in the workplace. The subtitle of this section, from a graduate who has given time as a volunteer within a number of charitable organisations, speaks to the resistance of graduate respondents to a polarised understanding of instrumental and altruistic motives for volunteering. The terms in which students recommended accredited volunteering to others – drawing on both career- and citizenship-related rationales – similarly challenged such polarised understandings of voluntary action.

Nonetheless, discourses which suggest that volunteering *ought* to be altruistic continue to have an impact on research, on the views of some respondents and on the funding of volunteering in higher education. The John Moores University research suggests that stereotypes of the altruistic volunteer may have some impact on graduates' under-reporting of their voluntary activities. In some cases, where unpaid work was defined by graduates as 'work experience' or seen as self-interested in some way – for example, volunteering for a professional association – it was not included in their response to our questions about voluntary work. Initial funding arrangements for the HEACF actively discouraged credit-bearing modules, implying a distinction between philanthropic and self-interested motives for volunteering, with a quest for university credit viewed as self-serving (Hall et al., 2004). While subsequent phases of funding have softened this view, some (although not all) representatives of the voluntary sector continue to view the distinction between instrumental and altruistic motives – and the associated distinction between 'work experience' and 'volunteering' – as very significant.

The terminology used for various forms of student volunteering in higher education adds further complexity to this picture of multidimensional activities being framed by a number of rival terms. The service learning model has primacy in the United States, where the emphasis on either 'service' or 'learning', or an equal measure of both, can impact the student experience (Eyler and Giles, 1999). In the United

Kingdom, the terms community-based learning and volunteering in the curriculum (ViC) have become synonymous with credit-bearing student volunteering in many HEIs (Farrar, 2007; Green and Anderson, 2007). There is a calculated distinction between these terms and work-based learning, unpaid work, or work experience. Work-based learning places the emphasis on the experience with a paid-work setting in which an HEI supports the student to develop undertstanding and critically reflect upon the learning experience (Boud and Solomon, 2001; Little and ESECT, 2004). The latter are opportunities for students to both gain practical experience and develop within the workplace, often in industry or the private sector. ViC offers similar opportunities often through exposure to voluntary and charitable organisations, undertaken as part of undergraduate studies, which allows the integration of academic knowledge and 'learning by doing'.

Who volunteers? 'Converts' versus 'committed' volunteers

In the two undergraduate programmes analysed in most depth in the C-SAP study, there were opportunities for accredited volunteering in each of the three years of the degree. This sequence of units was built upon an introductory first-year course in service learning, through a second-year module exploring voluntary sector organization from the inside, to a final-year project in applied social research with and for a community organization, in place of the dissertation. Our sample of student interviewees included graduates who had experience of one or more of such modules, and second and third year students again with experience of one or more volunteering modules.

As the C-SAP study did not include those without any experience of university volunteering, we are unable to compare it with Hustinx et al. (2005) who, on the basis of a sample survey of 744 third year students (in a five-year degree programme to Master's level) at a Flemish university, concluded that 'a large group of students drop out of volunteering in transition to university, and that volunteering is rarely given priority in students' agenda' (ibid., p. 523). What we can show is that a number of students arrived at university with a history of volunteering, and that they responded to the opportunities within the curriculum to develop a volunteering profile during their degree. This fits with the pattern of 'social contagion' of volunteering found among a small core of students by Hustinx et al., where university volunteering is related to family and friends' connections with volunteering, church membership and study in the field of social sciences.

Volunteering in the curriculum has a strong appeal for students who already have volunteering experiences. Half of the continuing students at Liverpool – that is, those who had taken the voluntary service learning module in their first year, and were, when interviewed, in their second or third year at university – fitted the definition of the 'committed' volunteer. They had prior experience of volunteering before university, had continued volunteering after the first-year module, and were thinking about a career in voluntary sector or social work and the caring professions. This finding accords with the research of Wardell et al., who found that slightly over half of the volunteers they interviewed had previous experience of voluntary work (2000, p. 236).

> I've had lots of past experience with volunteering and I enjoy it. . . . My mum's a special needs teacher and I've been into her school, not necessarily in her class, but helped out at the school, and I've been on residential trips and things like that. (Final year student)

> Well I've always been interested in volunteering and I'd done a lot of volunteering beforehand and I was interested in studying it. (Second year student)

Significantly, however, our interviews also revealed that a number of students found their first experience of volunteering through ViC, going on to take further accredited volunteering modules or to volunteer outside of a university setting. These 'converts' to volunteering would not have begun without the lure of accreditation, but once they had begun to volunteer, they were hooked. How did these students become involved in volunteering in the curriculum? The motivations of 'converted' students in the first place often had nothing to do with work experience or career issues, but were to get a change from essays and exams, where the module was assessed by a portfolio and presentation, and 'to do something different'.

> It was something I'd never tried before and I thought I might just like to try something a bit different . . . It's not just an essay, it's like a portfolio and it was just nice to do something different really. (Final year student)

Once engaged in volunteer action, these 'converts' describe 'eye-opening' experiences that took them as students outside of the university student 'cocoon' or 'bubble' to interact with ordinary citizens, to go

into parts of the city they would not otherwise experience, and to have new experiences and challenges.

> I think when you are in your student life, you are quite isolated and cocooned really because you've got your friends and your house or your halls and that's pretty much your life but I think with volunteering, you're in a different city from where you're used to ... it gives you another perspective on where you're living and how you live your life. (Final year student)

> I think that it's really got me out of the student bubble ... you can come to Liverpool and you could probably never speak to a local apart from in a shop or in a bar ... I actually feel like I've sort of experienced Liverpool a lot more than if I had just come to university and been a student. (Final year student)

These reports of eye-opening experiences of voluntary action were distinctly different from the responses of 'committed' volunteers, or those who volunteered and studied in communities in which they had lived before taking their degree. For the 'converted' volunteer, ViC provided an active introduction to and involvement in the voluntary sector which was largely absent from other university modules. They opened up an appreciation of the work of the voluntary sector, and implanted ideas about possible careers within the sector. 'Converted' as well as 'committed' volunteers indicated in questionnaires and interviews the impact of the 'hidden curriculum' of volunteering. After exposure to the values of voluntary organisations and work with clients, students tended to adopt a strong commitment to their volunteering, so much so that it was prioritised over other social pursuits. At the same time, they spoke not of duty but of the enjoyment that came from volunteering.

Relationships between volunteering and paid work

The research undertaken at John Moores University suggests that those who are not 'converts' to volunteering before graduating often go on to various kinds of unpaid work and voluntary activity after they complete their studies. Interestingly, a number of graduate respondents talked about voluntary work during their studies and after graduation as on a continuum. The term 'work experience' was used by a number of

respondents to describe both types of activity. One student, for example, commented:

> I am very [grateful] for getting off my backside and doing so much work experience whilst I was at University as many are still doing work experience now.

Some higher-education teachers, too, blur this distinction between work experience and volunteering within the curriculum. There can be tactical disadvantages to undiscriminating use of this term: it suggests, for example, that opportunities to gain volunteering experiences emerge primarily outside of the academy, and that creating such opportunities is unnecessary or less valuable than conventional subject-based teaching.

Though research tracing the links between accredited-volunteering and paid-working lives is rare, TimeBank has recently found that three-quarters of the 200 UK businesses they surveyed favour potential employees with voluntary work experience, with over one half preferring candidates to have experience doing voluntary work rather than paid work (TimeBank, 2001, cited in Knight and Yorke, 2004, p. 115). Wardell et al.'s (2000) study found some evidence that the professed views of employers matched their recruiting habits, noting that some volunteers left host organizations because of paid work found through volunteering. A number of graduate respondents in the C-SAP study reported, similarly, of being unable to continue in voluntary positions because of paid work responsibilities in related industries. Only one graduate respondent in this study could see no link between his current paid employment and his volunteering experience as an undergraduate.

Graduate respondents in the John Moores University study repeatedly emphasised the importance of such 'work experience' in transition to careers, especially when asked for advice they would pass on to new students. One graduate, working in a sponsorship and promotions job at a radio station when surveyed, exemplifies this trend:

> My advice to any student wishing to follow a career in the media is get as much work experience as possible whilst at university – in the holiday and on weekends. I know the work experience I had certainly helped

Both studies identified a range of ways that experience of volunteering had served in graduates' career trajectories. Volunteering enabled transitions into a first paid job after graduation, a pattern also noted in *Volunteering Works* (2007). Undertaking voluntary work was also used

by recent graduates as a means to move from low-level 'non-graduate' positions to 'graduate level' jobs or to move on to desirable careers, particularly in the media and cultural industries. This is an extension of a common pattern in the media industries where the expectation is that employees will be willing to take on low-skill, low-pay jobs such as a runner, 'making teas and coffees for a living as a foot in the door', as one graduate respondent, now working as an editor in film and television, commented. Both the C-SAP and John Moores University studies found that graduates frequently used volunteering, either accredited within the higher-education curriculum or undertaken after their degrees, as an opportunity to experience a possible occupational direction before committing to further training. For example, a number of graduates considering teaching as a career undertook voluntary work with young people, with some ultimately choosing to continue to train as teachers while others went on to work in quite different fields.

Learning through volunteering: skills, knowledge, attitudes

Perhaps not surprisingly, amongst first year students in the C-SAP study there was, at first, little direct understanding of the connection between volunteering and disciplinary knowledge. When asked about this connection, first year students commented principally on improved study skills or experience of the workplace:

> Volunteering gave me the opportunity to further my basic skills of planning, organising, motivating others, team work and communication.

> If you put [this kind of voluntary experience]...on your CV then everybody is going to want you because you are working with the toughest children there could possibly be, so it is really going to help with what I want to do

Both the C-SAP research findings and previous work (Green and Anderson, 2006) suggest that with the provision of multiple opportunities throughout the curriculum, the connections between volunteering experiences and academic learning became more deeply established. This suggests that the advantages of ViC accrue over time. When opportunities are spread throughout the higher-education curriculum, students are better able to appreciate the synergies between volunteering activity, academic learning, personal development *and* graduate

employment. In other words, volunteering imparts skills for life, as this student suggests:

> I think these skills are good for life in general really. It's always nice to have these skills that you can deal with people, you can talk to people, you can empathise with people, and I think you'll always use them in every aspect of your life, no matter work or personal.

Both the studies reported on here found that graduates, after some years, often came to re-evaluate the skills they had acquired during their studies, and in particular the relationship between discipline-based academic knowledge and more practical skills and work-based experiences. This finding accords with recent research on employability which has pointed to the importance of self-reflection or metacognition in smoothing transition from higher education to work (e.g. Knight and Yorke, 2004, pp. 65–66). For example, respondents in the John Moores University study commented:

> I found it quite difficult to get a sense of what I could do with my degree . . . however, I'd like to think now I have got over my initial lack of self-esteem. (Graduate)

> The degree was far broader than I realised and while, at the time, I thought much of it was irrelevant, I feel I have been proved wrong. (Graduate)

The C-SAP study showed that it was mature students – graduates or those with prior experience of volunteering – who were able to see connections between ViC and the workplace most readily. Some articulated 'two-way' knowledge connections, identifying the benefits to organisations as well as for themselves:

> I find I am picking up information I didn't know but also from me they're picking up information that they didn't know . . . it's a two-way thing. (Final year student)

Graduates identify a range of specific skills they have developed through volunteering, and in most cases flag these as relevant to their current working lives. Report writing, negotiating, public speaking and dealing with information in an ethical manner were among those skills mentioned by a number of graduates. However, both graduates and host organizations repeatedly highlighted not these narrowly conceived skills

but rather student volunteers' values and attitudes as critical to the success of their placements, and indeed, as being developed through their voluntary work. One graduate, for example, remarked that during a placement 'you can explore other attitudes, you can change as a person'.

Confidence, patience and empathy were attitudes which host organisations sought in their volunteers, and graduates reported developing, to the advantage of their future careers. Several graduates who volunteered in poorer areas or with young people made comments about coming to look beyond appearances and stereotypes after their experiences. For example, one student respondent, answering a question about the skills developed by volunteering, commented: 'you kind of develop a bit more empathy...specially the projects that we worked with which were in really quite run down areas, it kind of allows you to see from their point of view'. This kind of empathy was often seen as having very practical outcomes, especially for those going on to paid work with people facing marginalisation or trauma. One graduate commented, for instance:

> Before you start work, you really need to learn about people...when to listen and when to shut up, when to speak, when to ask. You need to read between the words and you need discretion and you need to know when people want to know something else or they don't want, or they want help or they don't.

Organisational respondents concur that placements helped prompt changes in students' attitudes or values. For example, one representative of a host organisation remarked: 'students come out at the end of their course with a greater sense of the community that surrounds them, and...have more of a moral kind of culture to carry on to whatever career they may have'.

The value attributed by both graduates and host organisations to attributes like empathy and confidence is hard to reconcile with usual accounts of narrowly conceived 'skills' in discussions of higher education and employability. However, the centrality of attitudes or personal characteristics to the findings of both studies does resonate with the work of Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke. These writers employ an acronym – USEM – to move beyond instrumental accounts of skills and point out the range of practices and attributes important in understanding and employability. Knight and Yorke posit not just understanding (U) and skilful practices (S), but also 'efficacy beliefs' (E) – 'beliefs about what sorts of persons we are and what we can do and be' (2004, p. 38) – and 'metacognition' (M) as central to effective transitions from

education to work. Knight and Yorke include confidence, motivation and determination in their discussion of efficacy beliefs the importance of which they have identified through research with graduates and their employers (2004, pp. 62–65). The role of metacognition in their model also fits with our findings on the role of reflection, particularly over the longer term, in enabling students and graduates to extract transferable skills and understandings from their experience of volunteering.

Volunteering: blurring distinctions between work and learning

Our research on volunteering within the curriculum and after graduation reveals another dimension of the 'permeability' of distinctions between higher education and other activities. Just as contemporary university students often engage in paid work while studying, many also engage in voluntary work or 'work experience', both while studying and afterwards. The experiences reported by our respondents throw doubt on understandings of transition from higher education to work as divided into neatly demarcated phases. Interviews with students and graduates blur the boundaries between types of engagements with work often viewed as sharply distinct: 'work experience', volunteering and paid work, for example, or 'altruistic' versus 'instrumental' motives for undertaking unpaid work experience. Our research points towards the importance of continuities and longer timescales rather than abrupt transitions in understanding the role of volunteering in career trajectories. Experiences of voluntary action in higher education can be transformative for some 'converts' to volunteering, providing a way of acquiring not just instrumental skills but significant value changes. However, for many students, volunteering while at university is part of a career in volunteering, with antecedents before their studies.

The full implications of a student's or new graduate's experiences of volunteering are often felt long after his or her first taste of voluntary work. Links between voluntary action and formal academic learning are more readily built by creating multiple opportunities for volunteering throughout the curriculum. Repeated engagements with voluntary action make it more likely that students are able to realise the synergies between volunteering activity, academic learning and the networking useful in the transition from higher education. Our research evidence demonstrates that staff, students and graduates felt strongly that provision developed to enhance student employability should be subject-specific (Anderson et al., 2005; see also Keating et al., 2004).

The C-SAP research demonstrated the value of such embeddedness in the way that some students were able to make 'two-way' knowledge connections between their academic studies and voluntary activities. The advantage of this kind of learning is that students are enabled to place personal experience within a social context and a theoretical framework.

Our experience suggests that volunteering, whilst being a valuable community activity in and of itself, is also a key stepping stone to paid employment for graduates undertaking non-vocational degrees. There is a growing body of evidence to support such conclusions (Blasko et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2004; Leach and Marr, 2005). Blasko et al. (2002) found this kind of provision to be important for all students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, but notes that students from minority ethnic communities in particular 'tend to realise more benefits from work experience than others' (ibid., p. 68). In order to maximise this advantage, providing a diversity of opportunities to volunteers is important. No one model will fit all. It is important that provision is designed to accommodate both discipline and student diversity. A variety of pathways through ViC can build and evidence skills development, and aid the transition to both graduate employment and citizenship.

Attention to the role of volunteering in the lives of graduates thus points towards the limitations of one further set of distinctions frequently encountered in policy around higher education and work: between careers and citizenship. Our research suggests that volunteering can play a key role both in promoting new graduates' careers and in enhancing students' and graduates' contributions to their communities. The changes prompted by individuals' experience of voluntary action – increasing confidence, empathy and motivation – might seem to be those most closely aligned to personal development or community building. Yet these attitudes and attributes converge with the qualities most valued by employers. Given the many roles it can play in the lives of graduates and their communities, volunteering, both within the curriculum and beyond it, needs to be resituated at the centre of our thinking and research on transition.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. The Careers after Higher Education – A European Research Survey (CHEERS), undertaken by researchers in a number of European countries, involved administration of a questionnaire to more than 36,000 graduates in 12 European countries 3–4 years after graduation.
2. The Higher Education Academy, launched in the United Kingdom in 2004 and owned by Universities United Kingdom and GuildHE, seeks to help HE institutions, disciplines and individual staff provide the best possible learning experience experienced by students, including offering a national voice on policy-making and funding 24 discipline-based teaching and learning subject centres (HE Academy, 2008).

Part IV
Rethinking Transitions

10
Education, Transition and e-Portfolios: Smoothing out the Bumps

Derek Young

Introduction

> Beginning teaching is indeed demanding for just about all beginners and is special for each beginner. While it may not approach a crisis for every new teacher, it is more or less transformative for all of them, and that is why the transition has to be recognised as an identity shift rather than as any rational policy-governed progression through the elements of a standard.
>
> (McNally et al., 2008, p. 11)

The term transition is traditionally used to indicate a single point in time facilitating change. By highlighting a number of issues particular to Initial Teacher Education – the lack of a singular point of change, the focus of that change, and the effect of e-portfolios on the process of change – this chapter argues that within the field of Education there is no longer one single transition point. Instead there are a number of 'points of change' which are 'transitional' (fluid in time) rather than 'transition' (fixed in time and place), and as such we should not be focusing on identifying a point of transition but reassessing the nature and the concept of transition – the re-alignment of the process.

This chapter emerges from a devolved e-learning project funded by the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) – a collaborative body, established and funded by the UK funding councils to support education and research through the promotion of innovation in new technologies. The project investigates the transferability of e-portfolios for both student and practitioner within the field of Education, in the process demonstrating how the need and drive for transferability are

heralding the demise of an identifiable 'point of transition'. JISC, which has been actively supporting projects in the area of e-portfolios and education, defines e-portfolios in this way:

> e-Portfolio can be used to refer to a **system** or a collection of tools that support e-portfolio related **processes** (such as collection, reflection, annotation, etc.). The term 'e-portfolio' can also refer to the **products** emerging through these systems or tools, and it is helpful to think about the purposes to which learners might put their e-portfolios (for example presentation for assessment, to support transition, or to support and guide learning). (JISC overview paper)

Transitional development can therefore be seen in part as facilitated through the use of e-portfolios as a reflective tool used in all stages of development. These stages range from Personal Development Planning (PDP), in which a learner undertakes a structured and supported process to reflect upon his/her own learning, performance and achievement, in the process planning his/her personal, educational and career development, through to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as a probationary teacher and then forward through a career as a teacher/practitioner. This concept of an organic process, fluid, flexible, and continuous, can be identified through the use of e-portfolios as a tool for self-reflection and as a self-supporting network.

The question this chapter addresses is whether there remain any identifiable transitions within the field of Initial Teacher Education or whether the ability to develop and support, on a longitudinal basis, acquired learning and teaching skills has removed any identifiable transition period.

Education

In the United Kingdom the demographics of learners undergoing teacher training programmes differ considerably from those of learners studying other disciplines. This is in part due to the subject content, the 'professional' connotation given to the teaching profession, and the vocational nature of the teacher training programmes. Those entering teacher training are still predominantly white, middle class and female. A recent survey of Education students undertaken by the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for Education (ESCalate) covered 40 universities across the United Kingdom, with 56.6 per cent of respondents

undertaking Initial Teacher Training (ITT) or Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes and 43.4 per cent undertaking post-graduate PGCE/PGDE programmes. The base demographics of Education students can be compared with the results from a recent multi-disciplinary research undertaken by Mantz Yorke and Bernard Longden for the Higher Education Academy which focussed on 25 institutions and covered a range of nine subject areas such as Medicine, Engineering and Social Studies (Yorke and Longden, 2007; Young and Saich, 2006, 2007).

There are a number of major identifiable differences between the two groups of learners. Within Education over 63 per cent are mature students (over the age of 21) compared with 25 per cent mature learners in the multi-disciplinary survey; 84.4 per cent are female compared with 60 per cent in the multi-disciplinary group; 93.5 per cent are white compared with 80 per cent; 69 per cent come from a managerial or professional background compared with 40 per cent; almost 50 per cent are the first in their family to enter higher education (HE) compared with 45 per cent; and, as can be expected with such a high proportion of postgraduates, 59 per cent have had previous higher-education experience compared with 32 per cent in the multi-disciplinary group. Interestingly, although Education students are more likely to come from managerial/professional backgrounds, they are also more likely to be the first in their family to enter HE and are more likely to have previous HE experience. The main areas of difference relate to higher percentages of female and mature students studying Education. Those mature learners bring with them a greater awareness of 'self' as a social construct and identity.

Although the four home countries of the United Kingdom each has an autonomous education system, there is a degree of uniformity in the recognition of the need for a structured induction or transition period, a probationary period where the newly qualified teacher can span the professional transition between trainee and practitioner and the social transition between learner and teacher. A statutory induction year for newly qualified teachers was gradually introduced (Northern Ireland 1997, England 1999, Scotland 2002, Wales 2003) with the aim of providing a degree of uniformity in provision for new teachers (Findlay, 2006). This induction period, by recognising that there is a continual and longitudinal process of professional learning and development, is aimed at helping newly qualified teachers bridge the perceived transition between teacher education and their first period of employment (Clarke et al., 2005).

Transition

> In the context of the professional development of teachers, induction
> is the transition from a student teacher to a full-time professional,
> during which a teacher is adapting to her/his chosen profession. It is
> a period of profound importance in the professional development of
> novice teachers.
>
> (Eisenschmidt and Poom-Valickis, 2003, p. 1)

Transition within Education is often identified or portrayed as a stepped
linear movement – progression through a series of structured lifetime
events: compulsory education to higher education, higher education
to employment, learner to employee, trainee to trainer – an inexorable
and logical progression across an identifiable lifecycle. While this con-
cept serves to promote acceptance of, or adaptation to, these moments
of transition, it nevertheless simplifies the process by presenting it as
a singular function, a construct that is measurable. However, the fluid
lifestyle of the twenty-first century dictates that transitional life changes
are no longer one dimensional and are no longer barriers or obstacles
to be overcome, but have become an embedded part of the lifecycle
with the individual receiving training in how to engage with these
transitions as a matter of course. This has promoted a change in the
way society addresses the concept of transition with the focus now on
'smoothing out the bumps' and making the process of transition as pain-
less as possible: anticipating rather than reacting to unforeseen change
and embedding preparatory awareness and skill. Not only society but
the individual must learn to embrace and engage with the concept of
lifelong change (Lynch and Field, 2007).

   While it might be a reasonable expectation that newly qualified teach-
ers would use the induction/probationary period to develop their profes-
sional skills, recent research has shown that new/probationary teachers
engage with initial transition on a personal rather than professional
level, focusing on developing relationships with other practitioners and
pupils (McNally et al., 2008). While clearly recognising that teaching is
not only about self-identity and that new teachers are expected to come
to terms with a wide range of new locations, physical layouts, accommo-
dation, resources and procedures during the initial months of induction,
there are few instances where new teachers make any reference to sub-
ject knowledge or teaching methods. McNally et al. found that any
such reference to cognitive or pedagogical dimensions only emerges
after the first four months of induction – not, as would previously be
thought, at the point of transition. Similarly, it was found that cognitive

skills delivered through the period of training were sufficient, at least in the interim, to allow the new teacher to concentrate on forming these relationships.

> …during their induction in the profession, teachers encounter a huge gap between theory and practice. As a consequence, they pass through a quite distinct attitude shift during their first year of teaching, in general creating an adjustment to current practices in the schools and not to recent scientific insights into learning and teaching.
>
> (Korthagen, 2002, p. 2)

The first few months of induction constitute a 'survival' period in which new teachers rely on the skills, knowledge and experiences gained from their ITE course, including school placements. Any immediate need to learn new skills is superseded by the need to understand and adapt to their new environment at a personal level and the desire to gain acceptance within a new peer circle (Eisenschmidt and Poom-Valickis, 2003). The main aim of the school experience for most trainee teachers concerns the daily practicalities of teaching children rather than those of critical analysis. During the induction period novice teachers are mostly concerned with identity: identifying their own self, relationships with students and colleagues, and coping with feedback on a personal level. In this, which is the very nature of their transition, novice teachers are not yet focusing on their students' development or how to connect with this aspect of their work, and it is only after the novice teacher has identified with and developed their concept of 'self', that they are able to consciously, or unconsciously, focus on learning development.

It is clear that the initial challenge faced by new teachers as individuals is adapting to and becoming accepted within a new relational context and that this in turn promotes change within a novice teacher's professional identity. However, the challenge comes, not in the induction/probationary year as might be expected, but during training when on school placement (during initial training). As we have seen, transition can no longer be viewed as a singular process but as a fluid or continuous action. This particularly applies to teacher trainees who, by virtue of the vocational nature of their training, encounter a number of predetermined transition points: occasions when they undergo a period of developmental transition through school-based placement. Although the initial transition period of induction serves to socialise and initiate new teachers into the ongoing values and practices present within their

new school, they do not enter into this new environment as a blank canvas or an empty vessel. Experiential learning within the university environment, and more importantly while on placement, creates within the new teacher a 'teacher identity' on which to build upon, through ongoing professional practice (Bezzina, 2006; Findlay, 2006).

Debate continues as to whether initial teacher training embeds those skills which serve to be of practical value to the probationer or whether it delivers a reliance on standards-based competences which ill prepare the practitioner for the reality of school-based teaching (Loughran et al., 2001; Grudnoff and Tuck, 2002). Nevertheless, initial teacher education should be recognised as a starting point, serving to embed reflective practice as a normal function of everyday practice and as an initial introduction to the knowledge and skills required to adopt a reflective approach to teaching (Hasu et al., 2006). It is within the school experience that trainee teachers can effectively develop the skills and knowledge pertinent to the classroom (Hall and Weimer, 2004), and this only comes after the initial period when a personal–professional identity has been established.

The use of in-service placement (periods of training within a working school environment) as a tool to develop learning and embed teaching skills does not remove all trauma from the act of transition. Irrespective of the institutional and school-based training new teachers receive, the move from the preparatory period into the practitioner period is still very much a challenging process (Grudnoff and Tuck, 2002; Bezzina, 2006). During the initial transition phase, new teachers encounter a divide between what is taught at university and the realities of teaching practice. Consequently, the initial period of transition becomes a time of adjustment, adapting to those professional practices used collectively 'in house', in the process adopting the assured mindset of a practitioner rather than the inquisitive mindset of a learner (Korthagen, 2002). This applies not only to first employment but also to earlier vocational placements where the learner acquires the skills, not necessarily of teaching, but of adapting and assimilating to become part of the school. These acquired skills allow the trainee/probationer to blend in, to be accepted as one of the group, and to be recognised as a peer by adopting the attributes of the peer group – in this case school-based colleagues.

Transition therefore applies not only to first employment but to earlier initial training placements, where the learner acquires the knowledge that will facilitate personal adjustment and integration within the school. By having a number of different placements the trainee learns to adapt and views transition not solely as the acquisition of teaching

skills but as the process of becoming accepted as a teacher within the school on a personal level rather than on a professional one. For some there is later the added security of accepting a post within the relative safety of the school in which they have served at least one of their placements. This for many becomes the only considered option, the only post they apply for, and is seen as a natural development from their training: they know the school, have already undergone a transition period at the school, have already been accepted by their peers, and acceptance of such a post ensures that there will be no further transition during the statutory induction period (Findlay, 2006).

A number of social aspects, or more precisely aspects of social capital, are also recognised as contributing to successful transition. Trainees who have prior awareness of the requirements of HE, either personally or through previous family participation, or who come from a social or cultural background which promotes participation in HE, will be more likely to successfully complete a transitional phase as their background provides them with a set of 'cultural cues' (Hall and Weimer, 2004). This has a particular relevance for Education. As we have seen, 69 per cent come from a managerial or professional background, 50 per cent have an immediate family member who has been in higher education, and 59 per cent have had previous personal higher education experience.

Research has shown that, in many instances, learners who subsequently withdraw from university claim to have entered with 'inaccurate expectations' and/or that their initial expectations were not met (Aldridge and Rowley, 2001). Complementary research indicates that realistic expectations are related to student's success (Yorke, 1999). Expectations, however, may cover a wide range of areas, including expectations about what university is like, what will happen there, what university is for and how it will impact individuals. It would appear that preparation is a key element in ensuring student persistence. Poor choice of course is another reason often cited by students for leaving a course (Davies and Elias, 2003). Within the field of Education however, 92 per cent of students consider that they made a good choice of subject to study and almost 63 per cent consider that they had received appropriate information prior to enrolment. Prior programme knowledge through personal or family experience is also instrumental in developing an 'awareness' and reducing the tension within transitional periods. Some 80 per cent of Education students claim a good knowledge of their programme on entry, and students with prior knowledge of their programme of study are less likely to subsequently consider withdrawing. Once entered on their programme of study, of those within the

group that indicated a good prior knowledge, only 10 per cent feel that their expectations of the programme have been unrealistic (Young and Lipczynski, 2007a).

Education training is by its nature vocational. In light of the recent initiatives to increase the number of available teachers and the drive to increase the skills of those (other than teachers) working in the field of Education, it is perhaps unsurprising that one-third of those on teacher training programmes have previously worked in Education in one capacity or another, with many previously employed as Class-room or Teaching Assistants (Young, 2008). For this group, transition has assumed a different focus. Through previous employment within Education they are familiar with the environment and the social and cultural requirements. Their focus is on returning to a familiar environment in an unfamiliar role, focusing not on gaining peer acceptance but on developing practice – contrary to the previously identified practice of other new practitioners. Education training in this instance assumes the role of lifelong learning, principally work-related and a supplement to compulsory education. This in turn highlights the current change in learner requirements, with 91 per cent of those on courses defined as lifelong learning undertaking some form of accreditation. Employment is a primary driving force behind participation in lifelong learning in the United Kingdom with almost half of those learners undertaking courses directly relevant to their employment (ibid.).

Part-time student employment has for long been viewed as a major factor in learner retention, exacerbated in recent years by changes to the systems of student funding. However, employment can also become a contributing factor towards learners developing the social tools required to come to terms, and engage with, a period, or periods, of transition. Transferable skills gained through part-time employment can develop added value in time of placement and/or induction. Within Education 50 per cent of students are self-funded, 62 per cent worry about financing their studies, and 51 per cent indicate that they have to undertake paid employment in order to fund their studies (Young and Saich, 2006; Young, 2007).

e-Portfolios

Hitherto we have looked at how transition can be viewed as a fluid process, free of the constraints of time and space. However, in order to utilise this concept there has been a need to develop a practical tool

with which to move this process forward. While recognising that identifiable points of transition can be 'smoothed out', it is also important that a means to facilitate this change is introduced. With their format of reflective learning, and through this an ability to deliver a forum for competency-based assessment, e-portfolios are increasingly being adopted and adapted to provide transition of learning and teaching practice throughout training and onward career. Through the introduction of reflective practice, e-portfolios allow organic progression rather than the reliance on fixed-point transitions.

Within the field of Education there is a requirement currently for learners undertaking Initial Teacher Education and PGCE to compile a portfolio of work which they can then take forward as they move into a professional teaching career and use as the basis for their ongoing Continuing Professional Development. As the use of electronic portfolios has become more widespread, Education, with its reliance on reflective assessment and reflective approaches to teaching and learning, has proved to be an eager recipient of this new technology.

The introduction of portfolios into teacher training is not a new phenomenon. The use of reflective journals, the precursor to portfolios, within teacher education has been routinely adopted as a means to promote learning, enable students to make connections between theory and practice, and critically evaluate their own performance as teachers (Sinclair and Woodard, 1997). The use of reflection in teacher education in this fashion provides a means to demonstrate evidence of professional learning (Clarke, 2004), allowing teachers in the early stages of their career to be independent and autonomous learners, embedded with a commitment to continued professional growth and development (Scribner, 1998). The main benefits of a teaching portfolio can be summarised as (a) allowing the learners/practitioners to reflect on their own learning and teaching and in turn understand how that might influence their approach to the students they will teach; and (b) through teaching Education students how to be reflective about their practice, embedding skills which they can take forward into the workplace (Loughran and Corrigan, 1995).

As previously indicated, it is now a requirement for teachers in Scotland to maintain a portfolio in the form of a CPD profile which includes the teacher's CPD action plan and a record of CPD work undertaken. In a recent study, Clarke et al. found that approximately 11 per cent of Scottish teachers use an electronic medium to record their CPD profile, 58 per cent use a paper-based medium, and 27 per cent use both paper and electronic mediums – giving an overall figure of 38 per cent for

those using an electronic medium (Clarke et al., 2005). The potential of e-portfolios as a lifelong learning tool is apparent but yet to be unleashed, although it is recognised that this capability could inspire a generation of lifelong learners (Greenberg, 2004; Siemens, 2004; Meeus et al., 2006). The transferability inherent in the reflective process allows the learners to maintain their e-portfolio and transfer it with them through their different life stages. In this way the e-portfolio represents a tool capable of supporting lifelong learning through both PDP and CPD and is not restricted to periods of higher education (Mason et al., 2004).

Although there has been little documented evidence on the impact and influence of e-portfolios on teacher training programmes, those institutions that have adopted e-portfolios have claimed that 'they are the biggest educational technology development since the adoption of Course Management Systems' (Lorenzo and Ittleson, 2005a, p. 16). It is therefore easy to understand why the introduction of the e-portfolio is becoming so popular. However, within Education, e-portfolios are being expected to perform an ever widening range of functions:

> a personal portfolio is an autobiographical document written by an individual who needs to speak to a number of audiences. These include prospective employers, university assessors, tutorial leaders, student peers and the authors of the portfolio.
>
> (Woodward and Nanlohy, 2002, p. 6)

There are three clearly identified needs from portfolios: a 'learning portfolio' for student engagement and reflective learning, a 'credential portfolio' to demonstrate proficiency and progress, and a 'showcase portfolio' for job search and employment (Mosely, 2004). As these functions differ, so too does the required content – components designed to encourage reflective learning do not necessarily lend themselves automatically to inclusion within an employment-focused portfolio.

e-Portfolios are now routinely used as part of the job interview process to showcase learners' practical teaching skills and as evidence of their experiential learning. For student teachers, the use of their e-portfolio in this way, within the context of a job interview, provides an opportunity for the employer to gain a clearer perspective and insight into teaching experience gained while in training. e-Portfolios provide the learners with the opportunity to include chosen and relevant artefacts within their 'professional' showcase portfolio while retaining other material for their 'personal' learning portfolio. In this fashion, one of the identified advantages is that e-portfolio removes from trainees some of the

end-of-programme workload as it is constantly updated and represents a body of work from which they can readily access artefacts required to demonstrate their abilities (Woodward and Nanlohy, 2002). However, it is essential to maintain strict control over the structure and content – both in amount and in quality of material made available, with a clear distinction between 'professional' and 'personal' content. The use of e-portfolios presents learners, and practitioners, with a new range of challenges and opportunities. There is no longer a singular choice of presentation or delivery medium – owners are now able to present themselves to an audience through a multiplicity of formats, including audio and/or video, with the flexibility to include interactive aspects such as online demonstrations of teaching practice.

Respondents in the ESCalate study (Young and Lipczynski, 2007a) felt that the use of e-portfolios in Education provided greater variety of the types of evidence students can include than did the traditional portfolio model, at the same time encouraging learners to develop IT skills which can be passed on to their students once in employment. During the time spent on teaching placement by students, developing their e-portfolios allows them to upload video files, podcasts and pictures demonstrating examples of their acquired teaching skills which tutors are able to review remotely. This presents the tutor with the opportunity to provide constant feedback to the students throughout their teaching practice placement. The study identified that this type of evidence promotes reflective learning, in turn creating reflective practitioners, as the e-portfolio encourages learners to weave their teaching practice evidence together and identify relationships existing between them. In addition e-portfolios provide evidence of acquired teaching skills which can be used to demonstrate the experience of the newly qualified teacher to future employers. This aspect is highlighted in the feedback from one respondent:

> Increased awareness of teacher competences and level of progress in personal development as a teacher. Increased use of ICT for storing evidence. Better vocabulary when reflecting on experiences – awareness of what a reflective practitioner is!

It is the use of e-portfolios – and the reflective practices which the creation of a portfolio develops – which ensures that the process of transition becomes fluid rather than being a traditional linear progress through a series of 'step' movements.

Importantly for those undertaking transition through induction, the prior use of e-portfolios to document their reflections while on placement not only provides the opportunity for rapid feedback from staff and peers (Clark et al., 2002), but also creates within the learner the confidence to engage with and utilise technology remotely. The benefits of using e-portfolios to maintain relationships when learners are on placement have been recognised by 48 per cent of Education departments (Young and Lipczynski, 2007a), with one higher education institution identifying that this function can 'enhance the teaching/learning/reflection of the trainees – which makes them better teachers'. However, within the remainder, difficulties identified included ensuring learners had access to appropriate IT facilities and were allocated enough time to allow engagement with the reflective process. The portability and flexibility made possible by embedding the reflective learning, inherent within e-portfolio practice, within teacher training placement establish a focus by which the learners can evaluate and record their teaching experience, a view supported by the comment from one institution:

> Students are more focused on competences and ways to enhance [their] own performance. Students like the environment so [are] willing to post blog entries. Openness and sharing of experiences with tutor and peers. (ibid.)

In this fashion the learner engages with the available technology and is able to draw on the skills and knowledge acquired during induction year through the ability to self-support, secure in the knowledge that there is a community of practice within easy reach and which is able to provide peer support.

Unlike traditional paper-based assignments, e-portfolios are not limited to showcasing best work (Barrett, 2006). With the appropriate design setup e-portfolios can deliver a networked space allowing discussion and reflection by all users and encouraging interconnected feedback by peers, mentors and teachers. In turn networked e-portfolios provide an opportunity for students to engage in collaborative learning with the opportunity to utilise their peers and work together (Mason et al., 2004). The electronic portfolio represents a means to demonstrate the teaching skills and values of the learner and, when used by practitioners, it demonstrates the continuing professional development of the qualified teacher. e-Portfolios present the learners/practitioners with the capacity to act quickly on their reflections by offering the ability to

adapt and restructure and by offering a range of technical tools to be used both in reflective analysis and in the presentation of skills development. The use of e-portfolios promotes a greater impetus for the users to assume a personal responsibility for their own development, in the process taking a greater degree of individual control over their progression towards becoming a teacher (Sunal et al., 2005). The learner/practitioner is therefore provided with the opportunity for 'constant' reflection rather than the 'periodic' reflection offered by more traditional paper-based portfolios. In this fashion there is the opportunity for continual improvement and continual transition (Adcock, 2005).

For some, the e-portfolio represents a digital means of storage, selection and presentation of artefacts for both professional and personal needs (Lorenzo and Ittleson, 2005a). e-Portfolios are routinely described as personal online spaces for students to access services and store their work, a collection of tools, or a collection of artefacts with the emphasis placed on the use of the e-portfolio as a tool, a storage and retrieval archive: a tool that can be used at each stage of the learner's progress to present a record of the learner's competences, both professional and personal (Secretary of State for Education and Skills, 2006). For others, although an e-portfolio involves the collection and presentation of artefacts, the focus would be on the process of creating an e-portfolio and not the end product (Barrett, 2006). This highlights the current divide in the approach to e-portfolios – whether those who create the portfolios are learning about technology as they go through the process of developing a portfolio or whether they are learning through that technology (Woodward and Nanlohy, 2002): whether developmental learning is being supported or driven by the use of technology.

One of the contributions made by an e-portfolio to a learner's PDP development is inherent in the actual processes of developing an e-portfolio, developing those skills required to facilitate reflective learning, developing the practice of lifelong learning, and laying the foundations of authentic CPD development once the learner has progressed into the workplace. In this way the process of developing an e-portfolio in itself teaches skills to further facilitate lifelong learning (Jafari, 2004; Love and Cooper, 2004; Mason et al., 2004; Richardson and Ward, 2005). It is through the process of constructing an e-portfolio that learners and practitioners are forced, continuously, to revisit and reconstruct their beliefs, knowledge and preconceptions surrounding their teaching practice (Foti, 2002). Similarly by going through the process of developing with a cycle of activity, action, and reflection the learner creates a meaningful learning environment in the form of an e-portfolio.

It is through this process of creating the portfolio that learners engage with self-evaluation, peer review and teacher feedback.

A number of perceived potential benefits to learners from the use of e-portfolios have been identified (Young and Lipczynski, 2007b). e-Portfolios allow students to become more self-motivated as learners, in the process developing the ability to value their own capability through improved self-awareness and encouraging independent learning which in turn promotes critical reflection. This is mirrored by an institutional perception of e-portfolios as a positive tool for developing autonomous learning – allowing learners to take a greater role in their own learning and in the process become reflective practitioners.

There are, however, a number of identified downsides to the introduction of e-portfolios. For staff, embedding e-portfolios into the curriculum is seen as yet another initiative to support, while students view engaging with e-portfolios as yet another requirement in order to pass. Both of these points suggest that staff and students may not be fully involved in the process of developing an e-portfolio and therefore may lack a clear understanding of its benefits (Tosh et al., 2005). Staff also feel that e-portfolios are time-consuming to mark and evaluate, as students tend not be as selective as they could in the material which they include. e-Portfolios are viewed as 'time-consuming to compile and use, and stakeholders will need to be able to identify benefits from investment in them' (Young and Lipczynski, 2007a, p. 20). This supports the importance placed on the implementation of e-portfolios as an institutionwide initiative, enabling a consensus to take place between various stakeholders including administrators, technical staff and so on, in order to address issues of technology and technical support (Johnson and DiBiase, 2004; Tosh et al., 2005).

These issues highlight current anxieties regarding the gap between expectations and reality when implementing e-portfolios into the curriculum. These anxieties relate to IT training for learners at the outset of their programme of study; co-ordination between teaching and technical support staff; time commitment of learners in maintaining and updating e-portfolio content; and time commitment by staff in assessing e-portfolio content (Young and Lipczynski, 2007b). Ultimately, successful implementation of e-portfolios within Education is determined by how deeply learners engage in the process. That is, they themselves need to identify the benefits and value of developing an e-portfolio (Siemens, 2004). It is important that time is allocated to the training of both staff and students in the use and understanding of the technology (Hall et al., 2005). While learners are interested in how the portfolio will help them

gain employment, instructors are interested in promoting the learners' professional development.

While the Education sector is at present actively engaging with the introduction of e-portfolios and the concept of transferability of e-portfolios for both students and practitioners, the current initiative to adopt e-portfolios as a reflective learning tool within teacher training courses in universities across the United Kingdom is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, the drive to adopt e-portfolios is growing strong and although still a relatively new initiative, 32 per cent of UK Education departments are currently using e-portfolios as part of their teacher training programme, while overall the sector at large appears to feel very positive with regard to the potential e-portfolios offer within teacher training programmes. A further 52 per cent have indicated that they have plans in hand to implement e-portfolios into their curriculum in the future. Overall, this equates to 84 per cent of Education departments who are either using e-portfolios or intending to do so in the immediate future (Young and Lipczynski, 2007a).

Within UK universities the introduction of e-portfolio practice has been initiated at both institutional and departmental level although it has been recognised that in order to achieve successful integration of e-portfolios into the curriculum the decision to implement e-portfolios has to be institution-wide (Wade et al., 2005). However, although some institutions have been responsible for implementing e-portfolios at a cross-institutional level, the majority of implementations have been initiated by the individual Education departments. This illustrates a natural progression from the inclusion of a paper-based portfolio within the teacher training curriculum to the evolution of an electronic version. Few institutions currently have e-portfolios fully embedded into the curriculum, although well over a third have e-portfolios partially embedded (Young and Lipczynski, 2007a). However, without being fully embedded into the curriculum, e-portfolios are at risk of failing to achieve their full potential (Love and Cooper, 2004).

Conclusion

Within the field of Education it is clear that the 'traditional' concept of transition as a single transformative point in time which facilitates change no longer applies. As we have seen, although there is an identifiable transitional period or more accurately periods of transition, these are not necessarily, as might be expected, at point of first employment

or induction. The vocational element embedded within teacher training programmes introduces within the learner a number of 'points of change' which are 'transitional' (fluid in time), rather than a 'transition' (fixed in time and place). These include school-based placement where the trainee has to learn the skills of social transition and integration as well as practice and develop a baseline of professional teaching skills. The aim is the acceptance of 'self' as a teaching professional and learning the skills for that purpose rather than pedagogical skills: to be accepted within the genre by both practitioners and learners, and only then to work towards expanding professional competences. In this fashion new/probationary teachers initially engage in a personal-level development, focusing on developing peer relationships and approaching the first few months of practice as a 'survival' period.

In parallel with this, the increasing prevalence of trainees engaging in paid employment whilst in full-time education, education workers returning to Education to 'up-skill', and pressures on full-time workers to pursue further learning highlight the conceptual redundancy of the static point of transition. While there might be a transition in terms of skill, social capital and identity, this is now expressed in terms of fluid longitudinal development rather than as a singular point of change.

Traditionally viewed as barriers and obstacles, transitional life changes now are seen as multi-dimensional, are becoming embedded within the lifecycle through increased training, and are dealt with as a matter of routine rather than exception. The approach towards transition is now proactive rather than reactive, anticipating change and in the process 'smoothing out the bumps'.

This concept of transition as an organic, fluid process can be identified through the use of e-portfolios as a tool for reflective practice, allowing organic progression rather than the reliance on fixed-point transitions. However, e-portfolios should not be seen as some form of panacea. While they are, and will remain, a powerful tool for reflective learning, PDP and CPD, they are just that – a tool. Two things are clear. Institutions need to embed e-portfolios within the curriculum at an early stage in the planning cycle, and successful implementation of e-portfolios within Education is determined by how deeply learners engage in the process. Learners themselves need to identify the benefits and value of developing an e-portfolio and in the process take ownership of both the process and the product. It is through the process of creating and engaging with the e-portfolio that fluid transition is achieved.

11
Governing School-to-Work Transitions: Shaping the Future Worker

Jayne Bye

Introduction

The notion that post-compulsory schooling should serve the purpose of preparing young people for the world of work has become a commonplace in education today. In many parts of the world pathways, programmes and a myriad of institutional structures abound to facilitate these ends, with varying degrees of success. In Australia, the last twenty or so years have seen a concerted effort to increase the role of schools in preparing young people for successful transitions through the inclusion of employability skills into the general school curriculum, the availability of vocational courses within secondary schools and the forging of links between schools and Technical- and Further-Education (TAFE) institutions to allow students to move between the two sectors whilst still, effectively, at school. Thus at the structural level much has been done, and interventions continue to evolve to suit particular contexts. The central concern of this chapter, however, is less with the structures we might provide to support transitions and more about the way we conceive of the 'successful' transitioning subject and the processes and practices we engage in to shape and produce this subject. Specifically, how do teaching and learning practices in post-compulsory educational settings seek to shape young people so that they come to exhibit the particular traits and norms of behaviour thought to be commensurate with a successful transition from school to work? What do our practices reveal of our beliefs about what young people need from education and training? What types of agendas drive these beliefs?

These questions came into focus during a research project carried out at a type of senior college in Sydney, Australia, which at the time

of its inception represented a new and reportedly successful (Polesel et al., 2001) approach to education and training in the post-compulsory years. The College's ability to re-engage disaffected learners – 'drop-outs', re-entry students who had previously not completed high school qualifications and disaffected young males (ibid.) – provided a point of interest in terms of what might be happening at such a site. The College's success in attracting and retaining groups traditionally resistant to mainstream offerings, and therefore most likely to experience difficult transitions to work, training or further education, suggested that the strategies and practices of the College were having considerable effect. Indeed, this was borne out in a number of the interviews with young people at the College, with some of the participants giving often quite startling 'before and after' descriptions of themselves in relation to their approaches and attitudes to education, their motives for continuing in education, and their general sense of agency and ability to achieve their goals within and beyond school.

One framework for exploring this question is provided by Foucault's concept of government (1991). Foucault used the term government to refer to the regulation of the population through the shaping of conduct. This shaping of conduct occurs through the mobilisation of a range of resources and authorities, and results in practices designed to elicit particular norms of behaviour (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). Moreover, government not only occurs through our relations with institutions and surrounding communities but also 'the relation between self and the self' (Gordon, 1991, pp. 2–3), that is, we shape our own conduct through practices of self-regulation that are central to the processes and outcomes of government. So in the case of young people at the College, the extent to which they experience themselves as young adults in transition, conducting themselves in an autonomous and responsible way, depends to a large extent on the process of doing work on *themselves* in the context of a vocational and general educational setting. Hunter (1996) explored this 'ethical work' (p. 158) on the self in his genealogy of schooling that positions us as the 'heirs to a whole series of inventions for taking an interest in ourselves as the subjects of our conduct' (p. 158), which he cites as being drawn largely from the traditions of the Greco–Roman and Christian cultures that shaped the foundations of mass schooling. This work on the self consists of 'self-problematising and self-reflective work that results in the comportment of the person that we call "the subject"' (p. 158).

Thus the governmentality framework invites an analysis that allows us not only to look at the government of specific groups, such as

young people in transition, through policy, programmatic statements, and regimes of practices but also to consider the work young people do on themselves to regulate their conduct. In particular, as outlined above, this chapter is concerned with the ways educational practices encourage young people to do ethical work on themselves – to question themselves, to reflect on their motives and goals in engaging with education, to problematise their conduct and ultimately, very often, to modify their behaviour – with the goal of making their conduct more acceptable in relation to what they see as the correct and desirable pathway to a successful transition. In the case of this study, the data suggest that a first and crucial step for many of the participants seems to be modifying their attitudes to education and training and seeing themselves as being able to participate on terms that they find acceptable. Moreover, the data seem to suggest that these young people must begin to participate on terms that are acceptable and intelligible to the governmental ends that the College might be seen to represent. This discussion asks: what type of young adult is desirable in this milieu and through what types of practices is this goal achieved? For this reason, the discussion in this chapter will focus on young people's participation in education as part of the transitional process, preparing them for entry to the workplace.

Australian context – the vocationalisation of secondary schooling

One way to understand the way community expectations have been shaped in relation to the role secondary schooling should play in preparing young people for their transitions to work is through a historical narrative. In Marginson's (1997) historical project mapping the evolution of education and training policy in Australia since 1960, the coalescence of forces and ideas in the international arena as well as in Australia, which resulted in the convergence of vocational and general education, is well illustrated. In the years following the 1978 OECD education conference announcement that a convergence of general education and vocational education was needed, a 'new conception of general-vocational education' (ibid., p. 174) was forged. In Australia, developments in this area eventually led to the formation of the Finn Committee which in 1991 'examined the whole of post-compulsory education and training from "a perspective of employability"' (p. 175). The committee's focus on education as preparation for work resulted in the proposal of 'a system of generic "key areas of competence," essential to employability' (p. 175),

namely, collecting, analysing and organising information, communicating ideas and information, planning and organising activities, working with others and in teams, using mathematical ideas and techniques, and solving problems using technology.

From the introduction of what came to be known as the Mayer Key Competencies, the new vocationalism (ibid.) cemented the relationships between school and work in Australian schools and furthered the broad governmental objective of preparing young people 'for an effective and satisfying life as an individual or as a citizen', and shaping them to meet 'the requirements for a productive and satisfying life at work in today's world' (Australian Education Council Review Committee, p. 55, cited in Bartos, 1993, p. 153). In the post-compulsory education and training context, this governmental manipulation involved creating and smoothing the pathway between school and work and led the way for the range of vocational education and training (VET) interventions we now see in schools. These include the inclusion of 'employability skills' (the Mayer Key Competencies referred to above) into the general school curriculum (Williams and Hawke, 2003) as well as opportunities for specific vocational training through TAFE or VET in schools programmes which are now taken for granted in many educational institutions.

The emergence of the College

Owing to the policy directions outlined above, young people in education in New South Wales (NSW) are offered a range of post-compulsory education and training choices that have begun to blur the boundaries between traditional general education, vocational education and workplace training. High schools offer programmes which include traditional general education qualifications such as the Higher School Certificate with or without the matriculation assessment known as the University Admissions Index, as well as vocational credentials. TAFE colleges offer similar range of programmes (on a more limited scale in most instances) for young people who wish to complete their post-compulsory schooling (Years 11 and 12) in a non-school environment. In addition to these offerings, new institutional spaces, known generically as *senior colleges*, have more recently been created to match new ideas about the needs of young people. Flexible programmes of study which include general and vocational education as well as workplace training, adult-learning environments, close links with industry and a range of general and vocational credentials and outcomes are some of the apparent attractions of such settings. This chapter examines specifically one version of

the model in Sydney which represented, at its inception, a new way of providing general and vocational education with an emphasis on preparation for work, at one institutional site.

The College is situated in a major metropolitan area in NSW, which – even when the College was commissioned almost 15 years ago – was already quite densely populated with a range of secondary schooling options – comprehensive and selective state high schools as well as a large number of private schools. However, despite what might be termed its high level of market competition, the College's viability – there are no arrangements with 'feeder' schools – appears to have been secured by the fact that it was seen to offer a necessary alternative to current educational provisions. Its points of product differentiation, to continue in the ubiquitous marketised language of educational provision, emerge in a number of ways. For example, this site was an experiment by the state government in terms of its organisational structure. It was designed as a hybrid of TAFE and the Department of Education and Training (DET). The novelty of this structure suggests that it represented an attempt to find a solution to a set of perceived problems in post-compulsory education which were not addressable through the range of current styles of educational provision. It was an attempt to attract and entice young people who might not have otherwise wished to engage with the current system.

At the College students are able to undertake a post-compulsory programme of study that allows them to combine general education with vocational qualifications and experience in the workplace. Depending on the programme of study selected, students can complete the NSW High School Certificate (with or without a University Admissions Index), a vocational certificate chosen from a range of areas including retail, IT, media and performance, design and hospitality, and up to approximately 200 hours of industry placement. The College timetable makes this mix of college-based study and work possible by allocating one day per week to work placements; therefore, no classes are scheduled for that day.

The College also markets itself as providing an adult-learning environment and, as the data below show, this seems to be a significant element in the success of the place. In terms of the outward signs of this approach, the College has no bells or uniform, and teachers are referred to by their first names. There are designated smoking areas on the campus, and students are free to enter and leave the College premises as their timetables allow. Classes are run between 8.30 a.m. and 6 p.m., more in line with expectations of the working day rather than the traditional

school day. If students are absent, they are expected to call the College to inform the administration, much in the manner that an employee might inform his/her place of employment of his/her non-attendance.

Many of the students who attend the College have had a range of previous negative educational experiences which had left them reasonably pessimistic about engaging with school and also unsure of their ability to negotiate transitions beyond school. Some had been asked to leave previous schools for indiscretions ranging from the use of hair dye and clashes with staff members through to criminal offences. Others had chosen to leave their previous schools because they found them intolerable in terms of behavioural expectations, rules and the disciplinary regimes enacted to maintain such institutions. A number had returned to education after short and often disappointing periods in the workforce. Regardless of the means of and motivations for their leaving of their previous schools, a common element in their dissatisfaction appeared to be a reported feeling of disjunction between what they saw as the circumscribed identities available in the school setting and their own sense(s) of self. It would seem that engagement with education and training, as a foundation for transition to work or further study, could only occur if the circumstances were somehow fundamentally changed.

The interviews

For the purposes of this project, 14 students at the College were interviewed. All participants had volunteered to be part of the project, either after looking at notices placed in the College paper or being encouraged by friends who had already participated. In recognition of their time commitment (approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour per interview), participants were paid $20 for each interview. Anecdotally it would appear that this token provided a significant motivator for participants recruited through friends and word of mouth. No further selection criteria, apart from a willingness to tell their stories, were placed upon participants. Thus no claims are made as to the representative nature of this group in terms of the College cohort; more generally, however, it can be stated that they do reflect something of the diversity of the wider College in terms of reported socio-economic and educational backgrounds and current living circumstances.

As stated above, the College has no feeder arrangements with surrounding schools and is unique in its approach. Therefore, although the College is located in an affluent section of the metropolitan area,

many students travel from not only outside this locale but also outside the metropolitan area to attend. For example, one participant travelled 2 hours each way by train to attend the campus. Others, though reporting more affluent backgrounds, also cited breakdown in family relationships which resulted in time spent on the streets and in youth refuges. Most participants however lived with family and reported a variety of support and income arrangements ranging from being fully supported by parents to relying on part-time work and government benefits. Participants also came from both the state- and private-school sectors with several participants reporting histories of exclusion from mainstream education and periods in alternative schools for young people with behavioural and psychiatric issues.

The goal of this process was to interview each participant three times over the course of approximately one year. The realities of conducting the research in this context – some students dropped out; some were closer to completing their studies than others and so were not available for the full year; and some did not wish to continue their participation – meant that this was not achieved with all participants. At the conclusion of the data collection, seven participants had completed three interviews, three had completed two interviews and four had completed only one interview. In the reporting of this data below all participants have been given pseudonyms, and any details which may identify them individually have been altered or omitted. Given the scope of the data collected, it needs to be noted that the specific focus of this chapter allows only a small portion of the material to be presented. Having said that, however, the focus presented here reflects a topic common to all of the interviews, which is, every participant spoke at some length about the impact of the teaching and learning environment on them. Of this discussion, the vast majority of comments were overwhelmingly positive and most noted a distinct contrast between the College and their previous experiences of the classroom and, consequently, changed attitudes towards being in the classroom and attempting schoolwork. That this change then led to more optimistic and active planning for beyond-the-school transitions suggested that further exploration might be warranted, hence the focus of this chapter.

As stated above, the College markets itself as providing an adult-learning environment. All of the interview participants talked about this aspect of the College as one of the central elements in their positive appraisal of college life. As a strategy for shaping a particular set of behavioural norms in the classroom and attitudes to schoolwork, the adult-learning approach can be seen to have marked impacts. First, the

perceived lack of coercion in the classroom created an opportunity for a different relationship to schoolwork to emerge.

> With other schools, . . . normal schools, there's like heaps of discipline . . . They don't really treat you like adults. Like . . . here they kind of emphasise that . . . independent learning, where they just . . . , it's up to you if you're going [to] do something. Like if you want to learn, then you do it but if just want to stuff around or whatever, you just do whatever. They don't really care. They leave it up to you really. So that's just what I've come to. (Michael, 18)

Michael's final statement – 'So that's what I've come to' – suggests, perhaps, an act of reflection in line with Hunter's (1996) thesis outlined above on the work we do on ourselves. Paradoxically, it is the lack of coercion in the classroom that has actually *forced* Michael to consider his own position in relation to schoolwork. The fact that what Michael has 'come to' is a point where he wants to study and do well illustrates well the nature of self-government, since although, as Rose (1999) reminds us, '[p]ractices of government are deliberate attempts to shape conduct in certain ways in relation to certain objectives' (p. 4), it does not operate through domination. Government works through choice, and here Michael self-regulates to conform to a different set of behavioural norms than what he had previously demonstrated, because he chooses to.

   It would also seem that the perception of a lack of coercion reflects a different emphasis in teacher–student relationships.

> And you'll have a relationship with them where, like . . . like a normal one . . . just like in public, outside . . .
>
> [*Interviewer*: How do you mean?]
>
> Just like a normal kind of relationship – give and take . . . without all the kind of authority style, like telling you what to do, like do this do that, . . . tuck your shirt in or . . . that stuff like schools. (Michael, 18)

From this different style of relating, a new ability to engage with classroom processes emerges.

> Like at my first English class we went to, we were doing poetry. It's so different from my old school where he's . . . the teacher would ask everyone what they thought of that piece and everyone would have a go which I guess made it a bit easier. Which at my old school

everyone would just go 'I don't know' but I guess being here with
everyone saying their ideas, it was like a class discussion and that
really involved everyone…If no one else was talking I would have
been a bit like shy, but…I remember going home and telling my
Mum, 'Oh I love it so much…'. (Tara, 17)

Interestingly, this increased level of engagement brings with it, for some
participants, a new sense of responsibility and intrinsic motivation.

My old school, I didn't want to go to school. It was boring, they just
teach everyone the same thing and sometimes you have troubles and
you can't really get the hang of something. But here you can get one
on one…and…it's not so bad coming to school. Even though the
lessons are 2 hours, at my old school they were 45 minutes, but I like
it. If I don't come, I feel guilty, I think because you get more respon-
sibility here, you think you should come…. You feel like it's…you
need to go because it's…like I've chosen to come here so I've chosen
these subjects because I want to do them and…so it's kind of like
motivation…If I don't come I'm only disabling myself. (Kim, 18)

It's not because someone yelled at you, it's because they're treating
you like adults, you see that you stuffed up so you try to fix it.
(Mitchell, 17)

In these comments, the ethical work on the self is clear – both Kim and
Mitchell have internalised a new sense of responsibility in relation to
their studies. The adult-learning environment entices them to be self-
governing. Their responsibilised adult personas have emerged, and the
results are clear from their words.

  Despite the overwhelming number of positive responses to the idea
of an adult-learning environment, two participants brought up the fact
that certain practices at the College suggested that there were limits to
their adult treatment and to some extent this undermined the spirit and
perhaps the integrity of the approach. For example, like most educa-
tional contexts, the College maintains rolls and attendance is reported
on. However, as Tara states below, the practice of reporting absences to
parents via text-messages sent within hours of the missed class seemed
inconsistent with the espoused adult-learning approach.

Just the teachers…They're really…the first name basis stuff and
everything…they treat you more like an adult…*sometimes*…They
say like, they say we treat you like adults, but the [text] messaging

your parents thing, like if you're away or miss a class, they message your parents. I think it's new this year, if you miss a class or a couple of periods or an hour, they message your parents to say that you weren't here, which I think that's a real break in . . . like a relationship. They want us to trust them and they want to trust us, I don't think they should do that . . . It just seems that in one way they're treating us like adults but the other they're treating us like kids. (Tara, 17)

The issue of the adult-learning environment also animated Charlotte's discussion of what she reported as a significant negative experience.

I don't reckon it's so much of an adult environment . . . because, I don't know, it's hard to say but, I'm classified as an adult for my age, and I still get treated like I'm a 16 year old. Like if I get in trouble or something . . . it's not really an adult environment because it's like . . . they're not treating you really like an adult, well they're not treating me like an adult, if they're still making me feel like I'm 16.

When asked to elaborate on her ideas with an example, she recounted the following:

I have got in trouble for something and . . . they were like . . . I had to go and see the [head of the College] and she's like 'this is an adult environment learning place' or whatever it was . . . I was in tears, that's how upset I was . . . and I don't get upset a lot, but when someone is talking down to me I do and that's how I felt that she was . . . and another teacher . . . It's not like they would go to another teacher and talk down to them so I don't think they should do it to a student, especially if they enforce it's such an adult environment learning, so to me it's not but that's just one opinion.

When asked about her attitude to the College after this incident Charlotte said:

I was upset and kind of disappointed in a way that you talk so much about this adult environment but yet you don't treat the students as it's an adult environment. I mean, you're not going to walk out into your workplace and talk down to someone in your workplace if it's an office . . . so why would you do it here? (Charlotte, 20)

Discussion

The prospect of being treated as an adult is clearly a major enticement for many young people at the College. The image of adulthood that emerges from their stories is a varied one. The participants whose comments were presented above have not been chosen because they present a neat picture of the ability of the senior college model to carry out its mission of turning out responsibilised young adults with clear visions of their future. Rather, they have been chosen because they appear, at least in some instances, to be saying something about the contingency of such outcomes as well as the contested responses to the 'rationalized practices' (Rose, 1999, p. 4) that might be apparent in such sites. Specifically, in focusing on the governmental shaping of the subject and its capacities, I am interested in the ethical work that young people do on themselves in response to their experiences in an adult-oriented learning environment and the way this might be seen to prepare them for transitions to work and beyond. It is this focus that provides the key to the reading made of the stories told by the young people participating in the study. For example, when Michael, quoted above, is first considering coming to the College his reading of the promise of adult treatment is perhaps not quite what the College administration had intended. Michael's friend encouraged him:

> He was just like, come to [the College], it's the easiest school ever. The teachers don't care, you can wag, whatever. You can even smoke cigarettes. I went, oh yeah, bloody oath you know, that sounds like the thing for me.

That Michael spent a large amount of time in his first term at the College in the pub down the road, and ended up with six per cent attendance, shows the contingent nature of interpretations of what it might mean to enjoy adult freedoms. However, by the time of our first interview, something had definitely changed for Michael; indeed, Michael had changed. Michael had decided that he did have the potential to enjoy study and to get something out of it. His post-College plan involved some form of further study.

One of the striking aspects of Michael's narrative is his recounting of the development of reflective capacities which again reflects Hunter's (1996) argument concerning 'ethical labour through which . . . [individuals] perform a certain "work of the self on the self" ' (p. 158). Michael performs a self-problematisation via the leverage

afforded by his experiences at the College. It allows him to reflect on past behaviours in a new way.

> I wasn't really mature. I'm not saying I'm mature now. Before I didn't have any idea what I was doing. I was really like kind of impulsive, . . . didn't really think about what I was doing, I just did it. I think that was kind of like the reason why I did those things, I didn't realise they had consequences.

Michael's comments make it clear that he has problematised his own behaviour and is seeking to shape it to conform to a subject position of a more responsible young adult.

> Finally till this year, I realised that . . . if you want to do well you need to work. Before [I used to] . . . study on the last day . . . [Being at the College] . . . gave me a bit of time to do a bit of thinking, and like, I was working as well . . . just growing up a bit in that time.

So although it is possible to point to the contingent aspects of students taking up an adult identity through the shaping effects of an adult-learning environment, it is impossible to ignore the more normative effects of these practices. By and large the participants reported feeling more autonomous, responsible, self-directed and entrepreneurial, very much in line with what might be expected of the neo-liberal subject of adult education. The very idea of an adult learner has been associated since its inception with notions of empowerment through particular types of pedagogical/andragogical practices. However,

> A governmentality perspective challenges the liberal notion of 'empowerment' as handing over power to less powerful groups (such as, here, students), or as a removal of previously oppressive power relations. Instead it enables us to understand how power works by producing practices for acting on the self by the self, stressing the dimension of self-subjectification (the ethical practices) in any process of government (Triantafillou and Nielson, 2001, p. 65 cited in Bragg, 2007, p. 345).

Thus, from this perspective, rather than viewing the adult-learning environment in terms of the empowerment of young people, we examine its practices and their effects in shaping conduct and begin to understand

something of its power to shape certain desirable behaviours and perhaps to extinguish others less desirable. For example, Tara's story of the issue of attendance and the reporting to parents via text message in the case of student absence suggests an interesting play of power, which, surprisingly, none of the other students mentioned. Tara, as reported above, provided by far the greatest amount of commentary on the practice, but with this one exception there was no criticism of the practice. On a related topic, however, Mitchell mentioned in his first interview the practice of teachers recording late arrival to class on the roll. That this data is then aggregated and recorded on his student record – a record to which he has online access – was not of concern to him and could in fact be used as a tool for self-surveillance around this issue – 'you see that you stuffed up so you try to fix it'.

The governmentality perspective also asks: To what extent might we be able to see exclusions and limitations in the type of young adult subject position valued at and by the College? For example, in the case of Charlotte the issue of the purported adult-learning environment of the College and her experience of coming up against what she perceived as the disingenuous way in which the policy was put into practice, affronted her sense of how adults might treat each other. The incongruity of her admonishment at the hands of the College head with the phrase 'this is an adult-learning environment' jarred and clashed with her sense of how one might be treated in adulthood. In making a complaint against her teacher, the event that caused her to be brought before the head of the College, Charlotte thought herself to be taking up a position that might be seen as consistent with the role of an adult learner taking charge of her learning, as it were. That this action earned her a rebuke was shocking and unsettling for Charlotte. So paradoxically or perhaps truly ironically, Charlotte works out and takes up her adult position in reaction to, rather than because of, her engagement with the College and its promise of an adult-oriented learning environment. The somewhat unsettling postscript to this story is that Charlotte did not continue at the College and became non-contactable for further interviews. And though the reasons for her discontinuation at the College were likely to be numerous and complex, given her life circumstances, the issue of the clash between her expectations of how adults might be treated and the College's expectations of adult-learner behaviour had significantly coloured her experience of College life.

The enduring appeal of the subject known as 'the adult learner' (despite a long history of critique) and its links to our understandings of the traits and norms of behaviour needed for a successful transition

as exemplified through practices at the College, perhaps also stems from traditional understandings of education more generally.

> The very rationale of the educational process and the role of the educator is founded on the humanist idea of a certain kind of subject who has the inherent potential to become self-motivated and self-directing, a rational subject, capable of exercising individual agency. The task of education has therefore been understood as one of 'bringing out', of helping to release, this potential, so that subjects become fully autonomous and capable of exercising their individual and intentional agency. Thus education is allotted a key role in the forming and shaping of subjectivity and identity, the task of making people into particular kinds of subjects.
>
> (Usher and Edwards, 1994, pp. 24–25)

Rose's (1999) summation of the promise of this subject of education, drawn from a genealogy of schooling, furthers this sense of the possibilities provided by educational interventions:

> They dreamed that one could produce individuals who did not need to be governed by others, who would govern themselves through introspection, foresight, calculation, judgement and according to certain ethical norms. In these ideal individuals the social objective of the good citizen would be fused with the personal aspiration for a civilized life: this would be the state called freedom.
>
> (p. 78)

Adult learning might simply be seen as a strategic refinement of these goals of schooling, applied to adults instead of children. In the case of the senior college, where resistant identities experience what is often called 'second chance' education, it might be argued that adult-learning functions as a more conducive mechanism to assist young people in becoming 'the good citizen' – a second chance for the governmental ends of schooling to be achieved.

Conclusion

The role that education and training has to play in supporting successful school-to-work transitions is of course much discussed. It has become axiomatic in this field that access to and engagement with appropriate education and training is central to young people's chances

of making a successful transition to the complexities of working life in the twenty-first century. And though our understandings of what this transition might look like have changed – non-linear, delayed, fragmented, interrupted – and are changing still, the practices and processes through which young people, especially those considered resistant, are shaped for 'success' are not often interrogated in terms of their underpinning assumptions. The field works hard to find ways to facilitate and smooth transitions – we want young people to have the support and skills to manage the complexities they may be faced with. In the case of the senior college discussed here, shaping young people through the practices of an adult-learning environment which results in a more self-directed, responsibilised young person might seem like a useful addition to the range of educational provisions on offer. However, the emerging ideal of the learner-worker-citizen (Williams and Hawke, 2003) who is increasingly constructed as responsible for his/her own fate, in terms of education, training, employment and longer-term career prospects, never questions the fact that young people are being shaped to 'manage and cope (indeed thrive) in a ratcheted up, intensified, "high performance" workplace where increased competition, responsibility and pressure are the norm' (p. 6). The question of how things might be otherwise is too often not part of this agenda. In listening to the stories the participants tell about themselves, it becomes possible to consider anew questions about 'the *telos* of government' (Dean, 1999, p. 34), the ends and 'utopian goals' (ibid., p. 33) of governmental interventions such as the senior college. What is the aim of these governing practices? What type of better person do they aim to produce, since '[e]very theory or programme of government presupposes an end of this kind – a type of person, community, organization, society or even world which is to be achieved'? (ibid., p. 33) The current conception of the acceptable adult learner is certainly more amenable to certain aspects of institutional life and as such is more able to gain the benefits of education and training. But if this educational opportunity is to achieve more than mere compliance, albeit a self-regulated compliance, what more might be done for and with young people to really prepare them for beyond-school transitions?

This chapter therefore ends with a suggestion that in using post-compulsory schooling to prepare young people for work, we 'should neither tacitly accept the *status quo* nor try merely to "wish away" contemporary developments in society' (Usher et al., 1997, p. 50). The proliferation of ideas on how to facilitate school-to-work transitions might be seen in terms of an opportunity to go beyond the smoothing

of transitions by making young people more amenable to the current situation. The new imperative could be to ask the question, what can we do *within education and training* to help young people critically understand the implications of the new work order and interrogate the model of learner-worker-citizen (Williams and Hawke, 2003) they are being presented with?

12
'Mind the Gap': Reassessing Transitions to Adulthood Using Young People's Accounts of Undertaking Short-Term Employment

Andrew King

Introduction

Young people's transitions to adulthood have been subject to intense critical evaluation in recent years. Various writers have argued that contemporary transitions are complex (Dwyer, et al., 2001; Cieslik and Pollock, 2002; Wyn, 2004) with multiple pathways to adulthood wherein young people may 'yo-yo' between periods of dependence and independence; in short, it appears that transitions are now flexible, mutable and reversible (Pais, 2000; EGRIS, 2001; Walther, et al., 2006). In addition, it has been suggested that previous conceptions of transitions have overlooked the differing experiences of a number of groups of young people. These include those disconnected or excluded from employment (MacDonald and Marsh, 2001), young women (Wyn and White, 1997), those with disabilities (Monteith, 2003; Wells et al., 2003), and those from different geographical locations (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005; Walther, et al., 2006; Henderson et al., 2007).

The notion of adulthood has, similarly, also begun to receive critical attention (Pilcher et al., 2003). The question of whether young people are 'refusing' to become adults has been debated, although this might suggest not a deferral of adulthood but the construction of new adulthoods (Maguire, et al., 2001). Are they delaying the full markers of adulthood until later in their twenties? (Côte, 2000; Côte and Allahar, 1994) Is this a new era of the life course beyond youth, an 'emerging' adulthood? (Arnett, 2004) Pais (2003) has suggested that sociologists

should become 'post-linear' in their research, viewing the connections and disconnections between past, present and future, rather than seeking to define the future or to categorise adulthood. Hence, it is not a case of becoming an *adult* that should be the focus of sociological attention, but the *processes* that enable this identification to be achieved or produced. Certainly, this reflects a broad move within studies of young people's lives to focus on both structure, agency and biography (e.g. see Ball et al., 2000; Maguire et al., 2001; Brannen and Nilsen, 2002; and Henderson et al., 2007).

In this chapter, I focus on processes of *becoming* adult by analysing how a specific group of young UK university students, who have taken a Gap Year between leaving school and beginning undergraduate study, account for their experiences of short-term employment during this period of their lives. I argue that it is in the practice of accounting for these experiences that these young people achieve, or produce, recognisably adult identities. My contention, therefore, is that the practice of giving an account of short-term employment acts as a medium for 'displaying' (Finch, 2007) transitions to a new adult identity. I argue that this is something that is particularly significant for university students whom others consider to be 'emerging' adults because their institutionalised position, between dependence and independence, means that their status as adults is 'contestable' (Arnett, 1994; Horowitz and Bromnick, 2007). Moreover, I argue that adopting a situated, practice-centred, approach to this question means that instead of rejecting the term 'transitions' we should reassess this concept.

I begin with a brief overview of the literature related to short-term employment in young people's lives before considering previous research concerning the relationship between the Gap Year and employment. I then discuss why adopting a situated approach towards young people's accounts of Gap Year employment is valuable and subsequently outline three types of categorisation evident in empirical data that I have collected using this approach: doing work, becoming adult; doing distinctions in and through work environments; and imagining self in future employment. Finally, I discuss the possibilities for reassessing transitions.

University students, the Gap Year and employability

In British society the transition from education into employment has traditionally been viewed as one of the most fundamental markers of becoming an adult and was regarded, until relatively recently, as

unproblematic (Schoon et al., 2001; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Young people, so the orthodox representation goes, left school and acquired jobs with little trouble or anxiety. Since the late 1970s, however, dramatic changes have occurred in the youth labour market in Britain and many other Western societies. In British society, these changes have included a decline in jobs in the manufacturing sector; an associated increase in jobs in the service sector; attempts by successive governments to introduce forms of training to replace the loss of apprenticeships; an increased degree of flexibility and casualisation of employment and an increase in post-compulsory education (Bynner et al., 1997; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). These changes may restrict young people's transitions to adulthood by affecting their economic and domestic independence; certainly, it has been argued that they have altered earlier class distinctions whereby young working-class people attained these transitions at earlier ages compared to their middle-class peers (Wallace, 1987).

Although the orthodoxy of the above representation is widespread, it is problematic for two reasons. First, recent empirical studies have questioned the view that transitions from education to employment were less problematic in the past, especially the so-called 'golden age' of the 1950s and 1960s (Vickerstaff, 2003; Goodwin and O'Connor, 2005). These studies, reviewing qualitative interviews with young apprentices from the period, demonstrate that there were both local and regional variations in labour markets and that fear of unemployment was often considerable. Overall, these studies suggest that the representation of a 'golden age' was a result of applying a macro-level theoretical and methodological perspective, one that occluded individuals' own experiences.

A second problem is that the employment experiences of young people who are currently attending university have, perhaps understandably, received less attention than young people who are currently not in education, employment or training (so-called NEET) (Aggleton, 1987; Hodkinson et al., 1996). Such a dichotomy, between 'NEET' and 'Elite', inevitably means that those who are in both education and employment, either simultaneously or in close temporal proximity, are sometimes under-investigated or marginalised within youth studies. Furlong and Cartmel (2007) contend that the perpetuation of this dichotomy represents a failure to address how young people develop ideas about future employment through working with others from different social and cultural backgrounds during their late adolescent and early adult lives. Furthermore, others have asserted that for many young people

transitions from education to employment are overlapping; a singular transition is rare (Devadason, 2007). Hence, the short-term employment experiences of young people who are about to become university students could be a significant area of sociological enquiry. Certainly, since these young people are also at a 'critical moment' (Thomson et al., 2002) in their lives, a time when they are institutionally and biographically between adolescence and adulthood, an analysis of their experiences appears to be highly significant in terms of reassessing transitions.

There are two significant factors influencing short-term employment amongst this population: previous work experiences and the graduate employment market. Those who attend university are likely to have experienced some form of short-term employment previously, since considerable numbers of teenagers undertake various forms of part-time work whilst at school; studies indicate the figure could be as high as 70–80 per cent of 16–19 year olds (Hobbs and McKechnie, 1997; Mizen et al., 1999; Hodgson and Spours, 2001). Indeed, the UK Government has emphasised, via policy initiatives, the importance of some form of short-term work in encouraging the development of key employment skills.

The reasons why young people undertake short-term employment whilst studying are, however, complex. Contributing to household funds, having greater consumer power and working as part of a leisure experience have all been suggested (Leonard, 1998; Barke et al., 2000; Henderson et al., 2007). In addition, since the introduction of student loans and tuition fees in the English and Welsh higher-education sector, contributing to the cost of these fees may be a significant reason (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006). Here parental resources can be crucial, since avoiding getting into debt appears to be a key concern for students across a range of social-class backgrounds (Christie and Munro, 2003). Moreover, being financially independent is viewed as a fundamental adult competence, suggesting that the reasons for 'earning and learning' are based on factors other than disposable income alone (Christie et al., 2001). What does seem apparent, however, is that young people's attitudes towards paid employment change as they get older, and for those considering university this may include a consideration of the graduate employment market.

Evidence from a range of sources suggests that the graduate employment market is characterised by a number of risks, both in the United Kingdom in particular and in Europe more generally (Harvey et al., 2002; Teichler, 2002). The 'employability' of graduates is relative, dependent on the demands of employers and the number of graduates

available to fill vacancies (Brown et al., 2003). Try (2004) notes that although there has been a concern that graduates are 'over-educated', they frequently undertake temporary employment in more suitable jobs in order to 'boost' their skills for entry into certain professions. This suggests that there is a gap, or delay, between graduates gaining qualifications and their entry into their chosen sector of the labour market. Certainly, a range of policies have been suggested amongst groups of employers and universities, which seek to include the provision of better support services for graduates (Rowley and Purcell, 2001). It also appears that young people are often unaware of the complexities of the graduate employment market, lulled into a sense of security by the availability of flexible, short-term employment whilst studying for their degrees (Oliver, 2004).

The increased competition in the graduate employment market has led others to suggest that young people increasingly need to develop their self in order to gain an advantageous position compared to others in the competition for jobs (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Heath, 2007). Brown and Hesketh (2004) assert, for example, that

> a university degree is not enough to make one employable as credentials do no more than permit entry into the competition for tough-entry jobs rather than entry into the winner's enclosure.
>
> (p. 2)

Entry into these jobs, they argue, depends on developing a form of 'personal capital' whereby certain 'soft skills', such as emotional, charismatic and communitarian characteristics, are displayed and performed. In effect, this means that young people must develop a 'personality package', distinct from those of their peers, both before and during their time at university. Thus, Brown and Hesketh (ibid., p. 36) contend that activities that demonstrate an individual's 'drive, determination and creative thinking' are key resources in this competitive climate and cite a number of activities undertaken as part of a Gap Year as significant in this respect. The implication, therefore, is that the transition from education into employment is unequal and risky and that skills developed during a Gap Year can ameliorate this situation, producing significant benefits in the future.

The number of young people taking a Gap Year between leaving school and beginning university is difficult to quantify; in the United Kingdom, Jones (2004) suggests that the figure could be up to 250,000

young people per annum, whilst Heath (2007) offers the more conservative estimate of 45,000. Whatever the exact number, the Gap Year is a pervasive feature of the cultural life of this group of young people. A whole industry has developed over the past two decades specifically to offer these young people activities as part of a Gap Year experience (ibid.). Such activities invariably involve periods of short-term employment in the United Kingdom and overseas and, for some, significant periods of overseas travel.

Academic studies on the Gap Year have been concerned with exploring the effects of Gap Year travel on both Gap Year students and their host communities (Huxley, 2003; Beames, 2004; Simpson, 2004a, 2004b) but have largely ignored the place of short-term employment[1] (Heath, 2007). This seems surprising, given that Heath, following Brown et al.'s notion of a 'personality package' that I described above, has recently suggested that young people from similar social-class positions use Gap Year experiences, including short-term employment, as a means of establishing distinctions between themselves and others. Thus, these young people could convert the cultural capital they acquire during their Gap Year into future economic advantages in an increasingly competitive graduate employment market. However, whilst such a suggestion indicates one rationale for undertaking short-term employment during a Gap Year, I consider that viewing young people's accounts of their Gap Year employment experiences as being solely about employability is rather one-dimensional. It may obscure the complex identity work taking place when young people give an account of their experiences; at the very least we need to consider how distinctions are achieved.

Situating transitions

Biographical studies of young people's lives (e.g. see Hodkinson et al., 1996; Ball et al., 2000; Thomson et al., 2002, 2004; and Henderson et al., 2007) are concerned with demonstrating that young people's transitions are highly situated and complex. In one series of longitudinal studies conducted by Henderson and colleagues over a period of ten years (Thomson et al., 2002, 2004; Thomson and Holland, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007),[2] young people's understandings and feelings about becoming adults through their biographical position in a range of fields of action, including education and employment, were shown to be related to their interrelationships with others. Or, as the authors suggest, 'thinking of themselves as adult was related to their feelings of *competence*, and

the *recognition* that they received for that competence' (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 29, emphasis in original). However, they noted that recognition and competence in one field of action did not necessarily equate to similar feelings of recognition and competence in another. For instance, although work colleagues might view an individual as an adult, his or her parents may not. Furthermore, this could change in either direction and in different fields across time. In effect, being an adult was a situated identification.

The research identified a number of 'critical moments' when respondents viewed events as having particular significance or consequences, although sometimes only in retrospect. In addition, some researchers have noted that the significance of these events could change over time; something that was consequential at one interview may become less so at a later date (Henderson et al., 2007; Thomson et al., 2002). Thus, the extent of an event's criticality was frequently developed *ex post facto*, in the process of thinking and talking, or being reflexive, about it and its place in one's biography.

There are, I believe, two significant points here. First, the study drew on conceptions of competence very similar to those developed in the new sociology of childhood (Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, 1998). Here competence is also something that is not fixed or attained at a particular age; rather, it is established through social actions at any age. Indeed, from this perspective competence is achieved in specific 'arenas of action' – a concept that, although similar to the notion of field used in 'Inventing Adulthoods', is more situated and context-specific. Arenas are spatial domains in which active displays of competence take place: for example, a school classroom, or an employment interview. In these arenas, specific capacities and capabilities are used to illustrate one's competence to a greater or lesser degree when compared to others'. The second significant point to note is that accounts of a phenomenon are produced in specific arenas too. In effect, it is not only that an individual's biography is situated, but his/her account is situated too. Thus, the identification of 'critical moments' or other biographical details are related to the situation in which they are recounted and therefore these accounts do identity work within that situation.

It is my contention, therefore, that university students' accounts of short-term employment undertaken during a Gap Year enable them to produce recognisably adult identities, in a specific context. My suggestion, at this point, draws upon ethnomethodological conversation- and discourse-analysis studies of the construction of identity (e.g. see Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998 and Speer, 2005). Hence, according to

Laz (1998), age is something that we *do*, rather than something that we are. A number of studies have demonstrated, for instance, how age becomes a key category in talk-in-interaction (Baker, 1984; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995; Edwards, 1998; Nikander, 2000) and that age identities are accomplished for the purposes of the situation in which they are embedded, all the while drawing on wider cultural understandings and moral orders. Young people, like all other members of society, are able to accomplish age and ageing in talk, both in how they describe themselves and others, and in the activities that they make relevant: for example, the category 'stupid boy' has different meanings when applied to a 25-year-old man or an infant; in addition, it could be used as a term of endearment or abuse depending on the context.

My own empirical work has been concerned with examining *how* young people achieve, or produce, recognisably adult identities as they conceptualise them in talks about short-term employment, rather than viewing their age identity as deterministic or fixed. In the section that follows I draw on several accounts produced by young people who have taken a pre-university Gap Year, analysing these accounts using a conversation analysis technique known as Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA) (for clear explanations of this method see Lepper, 2000; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2002; Eglin and Hester, 2003).[3] MCA aims to examine how discourses and norms are reconstructed and reconfigured in social actions (Baker, 2000). I will discuss three types of categorisation that I identified in my respondents' accounts using this methodology: doing work, becoming adult; doing distinctions in and through work environments; and imagining self in future employment.

A number of my respondents clearly attributed undertaking paid work during a Gap Year to be indicative of becoming recognisably adult. This was particularly evident in their use of the two specific, age-related, attributes: 'independence' and 'maturity'. In the following data extract Sarah explicitly associates being at work with being independent. Moreover, she contrasts this to being at school. Note how she classifies being at school as an environment in which she had little autonomy.

749: Sarah: it's just so different to being at school
750:    and it's so refreshing to have a change
751: AK: yeah
752: Sarah: and to be (.) you just feel so much more independent
        as well
753:    not being told when to go to your lesson
754:    and go to lunch

755: and go to the toilet and stuff like that
756: AK: yeah
757: Sarah: just sort of (.) drive yourself to work
758: and you've got your money as well
759: I really like not having to rely on parents' money and things like that

Here Sarah is actively producing a contrast between how she felt about herself prior to taking her Gap Year and during her Gap Year. In effect, Sarah is identifying her employment as a means of giving her independence. Although this is interesting, and affirms previous research that suggests that young people become independent when they enter the workforce, it was clear in other accounts that I heard that the issue was more complicated and related to the type of work that was undertaken.

Matthew explained to me how working in a house for people with learning disabilities during his Gap Year had made him more mature. To this extent, his account is similar to Sarah's. However, he also explained that when he returned home at the end of his Gap Year he had become too mature, because of the nature of the work he had to undertake.

428: Matt: and er (.) I worked in the Summer doing telemarketing
429: which wasn't much fun but a bit of a change
430: AK: hmmn
431: Matt: so that was quite good to help me to get back into English life
432: and put a lot of er
433: 'cos I did notice at first I was very very serious
434: I'd almost lost my sense of humour
435: 'cos I was nineteen
436: but having to do the work of a thirty year old
437: so I'd gone a bit too mature in a way
438: AK: hmmn
439: Matt: so it was good to get back mixing with my friends and going out again.

What is especially significant here is that Matthew equates certain types of work with age. The work he undertook during his Gap Year made him too mature, *for his age*. Undertaking a different type of work and re-establishing his social life resolved this issue. In short, Matthew indicates that maturity is a contextual attribute of personality and that

getting a correct balance is important; there is, according to Matthew, a normative order to maturity.

For others, short-term employment undertaken during a Gap Year not only matured them, but it also gave them insights into potential future employment. In the following extract, Josh characterises the type of work he undertook (retail employment) as 'an aspect of life you wouldn't like to live for the rest of your life'. Hence, he suggests that not only did it mature him, but it had given him a degree of awareness that he did not have before.

> 1589: Josh: er (0.1) I think (0.3) I think my Gap Year's kind of built me much more as a person
> 1590: AK: hmmn
> 1591: Josh: erm (.) I feel much more able to do things on my own
> 1592: and I'm (.) much more mature
> 1593: and (.) and I can think for myself
> 1594: and I think that was mainly travelling
> 1595: erm (0.1) but also working as well
> 1596: it kind of gives you the impression that (0.1) it's just a kind of (0.4) it just gives you an insight into an aspect of life that you wouldn't like to live
> 1597: AK: hmmn
> 1598: Josh: for the rest of your life
> 1599: and it kind of spurs you on to do better in the future
> 1600: especially if you've got a kind of (0.2) a boring job like (.) being a check-out person for six months.

There is an additional feature of this section of Josh's account that is pertinent – relating to its structure – to the significant pauses that he makes at a number of points (lines 1589, 1596 and 1600). At each point Josh is making a claim: his personality has developed because of his Gap Year; his job gave him a valuable insight; certain types of work affect your view of the future. In effect, at this point in his account, Josh is identifying to me that his Gap Year had developed his sense of self. The fact that I do not contradict or question him enables him to construct an identification that incorporates this. In this context, Josh *becomes* more mature.

The accounts that I have discussed above illustrate two forms of work: they are accounts of short-term employment undertaken during a specific period in life and they are actively producing identities in the

context in which they are recounted, an interview. What I believe is significant here is that these young people are doing identity work, related to age, in the here and now: an example, perhaps, of constructing a 'personality package' that others have discussed (Brown et al., 2004; Heath, 2007). By distinguishing a present self from a former self, these young people are able to produce an identification of mobility, or transition, in terms of their life course; effectively, they are able to age themselves, to produce their adulthood. However, this was more apparent in relation to a second type of categorisation I discerned amongst my respondents' accounts: doing distinctions in and through work.

Several of my respondents distinguished themselves from others in relation to their Gap Year employment. This was to distinguish themselves either from their work colleagues or, more often, from fellow students who had not taken a Gap Year.

In the following extract, David makes social class a relevant feature of his colleagues' identities by invoking an employment category: mechanics. He is clearly aware that characterising them as 'the dregs' (line 200), the least desirable remnants of something, has moral implications, since he distances himself from this characterisation by attributing it to his mother and emphasising that 'there's nothing wrong with all that' (line 203).

> 197: David: it was weird 'cos (.) the cleverest (.) the sort of cleverest
>   load of friends I'd got (.) went out went completely away
> 198: AK: hmmn
> 199: David: when they were at uni they were completely separate
> 200: erm (.) and then I was sort of (.) my mum puts it 'I was left with
>   the dregs'
> 201: AK: (laughs)
> 202: David: to go down the pub with all the mechanics
> 203: there's nothing wrong with all that
> 204: AK: yeah
> 205: David: but it's almost as if (.) my profile of friends changed quite
>   a lot that year.

Here, as in the previous extracts I have discussed, David identifies a transition in terms of his life course: at line 205, David explains that his 'profile' of friends changed during his Gap Year. I think this is a significant categorisation, not least because it links transitions in one field, employment, to transitions in another, relationships. It represents a common-sense understanding, recounted to me in the interview, that

change is a normal part of leaving school, taking a Gap Year and going to university. However, frequently my respondents associated distinction not with work colleagues but with their peers at university – an effect, they suggested, of their short-term employment experiences.

Matthew explained that when he became a university student he noticed that there was a difference between himself and his peers; this is evident in the following extract.

> 487: Matt: and there seems to be er (.) I dunno, a sort of difference between personalities of someone like myself who has taken a Gap Year
> 488: and someone who has come straight from school
> 489: AK: what do you think is different?
> 490: Matt: it probably sounds really arrogant to say
> 491: but I think quite often they tend to be more immature
> 492: AK: hmmn
> 493: Matt: in a way they lack life experience
> 494: I mean I haven't got a lot of life experience
> 495: but I've got more than the people who come straight out of school
> 496: AK: hmmn
> 497: Matt: and they still have the same sort of school approach
> 498: they tend to be the ones who stay more in groups
> 499: and are less willing to integrate with others.

Again, he draws a contrast between those who take a Gap Year and those who do not. Matthew, who had already characterised himself as mature because of his Gap Year employment, views this as a significant form of distinction; thus, he claims that he is recognisably different from others within the same group of young people that I could categorise him as a member of – students. He is more mature than his fellow students; he does not have a 'school approach'; he is therefore more adult-like.

Not all of my respondents made such distinctions; indeed two were steadfast in explaining that they were the same as their peers, despite being a year older. However, I think it is significant that accounts of short-term employment can be used in this manner. Not only can they enable one to develop a 'personality package', but they can also enable one to actively produce one's distinct age identity in comparison to others'. I think it is noteworthy that this age identity is achieved by giving an account of short-term employment, rather than an account of leaving school and beginning a permanent job. It is through the prism of

age that this form of distinction is achieved. Indeed, this suggests that although this form of employment may not normatively be viewed as marking the transition to adulthood, it nonetheless can be used in this way. What is more, a number of my respondents continued this rhetorical claim in relation to a third type of categorisation: imagining self in future employment.

In addition to using their experiences of short-term employment undertaken as a means of establishing a claim to adulthood, a number of my respondents indicated that this would be a 'springboard' for obtaining more preferable employment in the future. I have already noted that Josh regarded his Gap Year job as an incentive to get a better job in the future. Others, like Nikki, were particularly vociferous in categorising their work experiences as important in this respect. In the following extended extract from Nikki's account, she is discussing how her experience of working in an accountancy firm would give her 'an edge' in a future job interview.

1622: Nikki: they've seen that I've held down a job
1623: a full-time job for a year
1624: AK: hmmn
1625: Nikki: and I mean fine people at school they get part-time jobs in like y'know a supermarket
1626: it's not quite the same as working full-time
1627: AK: hmmn
1628: Nikki: working full-time is very very different to working part-time
1629: I mean I worked part-time when I was younger in a pub
1630: and I worked like five hours each Sunday
1631: well I mean (.) I never put that on a resume
1632: it's not really useful (.) at all
1633: AK: yeah
1634: Nikki: the fact that I've done a year
1635: I think it was thirteen months I did at an accountants
1636: quarter to nine to five everyday I think shows a level of commitment
1637: AK: hmmn
1638: Nikki: much more than a degree would
...
1668: it does give you an edge I think
1669: because you are different to everybody else
1670: not everybody takes a Gap Year

1671: AK: yeah
1672: Nikki: everybody goes to university
1673: AK: hmmn
1674: Nikki: well the majority of people anyway
1675:   so I think it does give you that slight (.) edge on everybody else.

It is notable that Nikki is again making a distinction in this extract. Her work experiences imbue her, she contends, with a degree of symbolic capital in comparison to others. Having 'an edge' is important because, she declares, 'everybody goes to university' (line 1672). Although she qualifies this, it is apparent, since she repeats this assertion, that Nikki imagines that having 'an edge' in a job interview is important. Though Nikki may not always do this, and though what she says may or may not be accurate, it is the identity that Nikki produces of herself, in the context of the account, which I will consider.

Nikki, like others in my sample, produces an identification of herself as more adult-like than her peers. Her experiences, she suggests, have given her an insight into life *beyond* education. Moreover, she indicates that, biographically, she has gone through a transition. Thus, Nikki's transition is itself reproduced in the account she presents and in the identification that is produced as an effect of this process. I think that this, along with the other examples I have discussed, indicates that we need to reassess the way we approach the concept of transitions.

Reassessing transitions

I began this chapter by discussing problems associated with the term transitions to adulthood: both of these concepts have received critical evaluation, leading some to suggest that alternative means of assessing mobility through the life course are required (Wyn and Woodham, 2006; Stokes and Wyn, 2007). My inclination, given the evidence I have discussed in this chapter, is to suggest that rather than rejecting the concept of transitions entirely, we ought to reorient our understandings. Indeed, I have sought to demonstrate, empirically, why I believe that it is important to examine transitions as situated practices: to enable us to glimpse *how* young people produce recognisably adult identities, in specific contexts. In summary, however, I believe that it is vital to consider what mechanisms and resources are being used in this process.

The examples I have outlined above demonstrate that the 'resources' that young people can use to produce recognisably adult identities

include accounts of undertaking short-term employment whilst on a pre-university Gap Year. I have noted earlier that Henderson and colleagues (2007) assert that competence, and the recognition of this by others, is central to how young people assert their adulthood. It is my opinion that in the practice of accounting for short-term Gap Year employment, the young people whom I have discussed above are engaged in this process.

Conversation analysts have demonstrated that recognition is achieved in linguistic interaction, or talk-in-interaction; that is, understandings and identities are worked up and worked out through turn-taking, pauses and overlaps, together with the categories and attributes that form the content of talk (Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 2007). An interview about their Gap Year experiences provides a space for these young people to produce, *inter alia*, their adulthood: a space, like others, where they can demonstrate their competence in producing this identity and having it recognised. Had I chosen to dispute their accounts, to argue that taking a Gap Year proved they were immature or childlike, such recognition may have been denied; certainly, then, their accounts would likely have been oriented to disputing this representation. However, as my responses to their descriptions indicate, encompassing many 'hmmns', 'yeahs' and other linguistic devices that encourage accounts to be elaborated, recognition was affirmed. What, therefore, are we to conclude from this suggestion?

The majority of studies of transitions from education to employment focus on exclusion, marginalisation or the problems that young people encounter. As I noted, the employment experiences of young people who have taken a pre-university Gap Year have been under-researched. Yet employment has traditionally been viewed as *indicative* of becoming an adult, even if the status of short-term employment has not necessarily been viewed in this manner. Rather than simply viewing the relationship between age and employment so straightforwardly, we could view the recounting of employment experiences as indicative of displaying age identities and, more significantly, situated performances of transitions to adulthood. Young people achieve this by using specific categories and attributes in their talk. However, I am not suggesting that this is something that they will always do. In other contexts, they may produce accounts that emphasise youth. The significant point is that transitions are produced through the accounting process within a specific context – in this instance an interview with a visibly older academic whilst studying for a degree at university. In such a 'formal' institutionalised context, producing a recognisably adult identity could be viewed

as appropriate. Moreover, it is entirely appropriate given the stage of the life course of these young people.

Recently, it has been suggested that young adults' identities are 'contestable' (Horowitz and Bromnick, 2007); this would seem to be especially so for university students who, despite being adults legally, are institutionalised and to an extent are not, or do not view themselves as, fully independent or 'grown-up' (Arnett, 1994). It is therefore highly significant that these young people use an account of their short-term employment experiences to display their adulthood. It is not the concept of transitions that we should be rejecting; rather, I believe that focusing on situated practices can enable us to see how mobile identifications through the life course are enacted in everyday life, amongst different groups of young people.

Notes

1. One exception here is a study conducted amongst young people living and working in a Canadian ski resort, which suggested that they frequently blurred distinctions between work and non-work; Duncan, T., ' "Livin" the Dream: Working and Playing in a Ski Resort', Paper Presented at Tourism and Leisure IGU Pre-Meeting: Tourism, Migration and Mobility Session, Loch Lomond, 13–15 August 2004. Available online http://www.gapyearresearch.org/Tarapaper.pdf. (Accessed 10/04/07.)
2. I shall refer to these studies collectively as 'Inventing Adulthoods'.
3. Those unfamiliar with this technique may notice that transcripts contain a number of symbols which indicate a variety of features related to communication. I have kept these to a minimum here but have kept the timings of pauses. These are indicated in seconds: for example, (0.3) equals a three second pause, while (.) indicates a very short pause, less than one second in length.

13
Conclusion

Rachel Brooks

Continuity and change in transitions from education to work

A key question that underpins this book, as well as one that has exercised many youth researchers over recent years, is the extent to which transitions from education to work have changed under the conditions of 'late modernity'. This has been addressed explicitly by some chapters in the collection, but is an implicit theme in many of the others, too. Some of the empirical evidence presented in Chapter 1 suggested that there are reasonably clear ways in which transitions from education to work in contemporary society differ from patterns observed in earlier decades. These include later entry to the labour market, as young people stay in full-time education for longer periods of time; a contracted youth labour market, with relatively few jobs available for those who choose to end their formal education at the minimum school-leaving age; and the emergence of the 'training state' as a means of managing both unemployment and specific-skills shortages. In addition to these changes, this collection has highlighted a number of other important ways in which transitions in the twenty-first century may be considered qualitatively different from those of previous decades. Some of these are discussed further below, including the new spaces and places of transition which have opened up as a result of some of the trends noted above, and the considerable extension of the age range at which people make transitions from education to work – no longer can these be seen as the preserve of the young.

However, alongside the broad consensus about these specific changes exists a more heated debate about the extent to which, taken as a whole, contemporary transitions represent a break with previous patterns and

a shift towards 'detraditionalisation' and 'individualisation' (Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1992). In this new climate, it is argued, structural constraints such as class, gender and ethnicity have a significantly smaller impact on transitions than they had in the past, as individuals have many more opportunities for making their own decisions and exercising agency. Testing this thesis against available quantitative data is the central focus of Gayle et al.'s chapter (Chapter 2). They argue, on the basis of their analysis of data from the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales, that there is little evidence to support the 'detraditionalisation' thesis and that the impact of class, gender and ethnicity remains strong. Several other chapters in the collection make similar points. For example, although Harris and Rainey (Chapter 3) suggest that the number of transitions between different educational sectors has increased over recent years, they maintain that decision-making about educational pathways (for both older and younger learners) is still significantly conditioned by variables such as gender and age. Similarly, a central contention of Waechter et al.'s analysis of the transitions of migrant youth in Austria (Chapter 4) is that ethnicity continues to play an important role in limiting the options available to those of Turkish and (former)Yugoslavian descent as they come towards the end of their compulsory schooling. Nevertheless, the three chapters that constitute Part II of the collection all suggest that, while there may not be strong empirical evidence to support the 'detraditionalisation' thesis, it is important not to overlook the role of agency. Indeed, the chapters by Cieslik and Simpson (Chapter 5) and Jahnukainen (Chapter 6) both emphasise the ways in which some individuals, who may be considered significantly disadvantaged by their structural location, find ways of overcoming deprivation and expanding their 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson, 1998).

Transitions from Education to Work: New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond also raises questions about the extent to which transitions have been affected by two phenomena that have not been discussed as extensively within the literature: the rise of new technologies and the increasing prevalence of the 'gap year' between periods of education or between completion of full-time education and employment. Young (Chapter 10) suggests that new technologies (such as the 'e-portfolio', which is the focus of his study) have the potential for 'smoothing' transitions from education to work, at least for specific groups of workers, while Johan's analysis of the gap year travel experience (Chapter 8) contends that it can offer young people more deep-seated opportunities for change rather than more traditional 'transition' experiences. However, more research is needed in both these areas to test these claims more

fully. In particular, it is important to explore whether technology does have the capacity to overcome some of the structural factors identified by Gayle et al. (Chapter 2), and whether the 'mobility capital' accrued during a gap year can compensate for a relative lack of other types of capital (social, cultural and economic) or, conversely, whether all four types of capital actually are mutually reinforcing (by gap year travel remaining the preserve of the more privileged).

Age and transitions

The Introduction (Chapter 1) suggested that the concept of 'transition' has a long history within youth studies, sociology, psychology and education. Typically, within all of these disciplines, the focus has been on younger learners as they move from full-time (and often compulsory) schooling at the age of around 16–18 into full-time work. However, this collection testifies to the increasingly wide age range of learners who are making some kind of transition from education to employment. In part, this is related to the extension of post-compulsory education in many areas of the world and mass expansion of higher education; many more young people are now taking the more 'academic' pathway to employment, which is associated with later labour market entry. These 'delayed transitions' were discussed in more depth in Chapter 1 and are the focus of a number of contributions that explore the role of the university in transitions to employment – for example, the chapters by Tagoe (Chapter 7), Matthews et al. (Chapter 9) and King (Chapter 12). However, this collection also draws attention to other ways in which it is useful to broaden our gaze and adopt a more inclusive understanding of 'transition' by ensuring that our analysis also encompasses older adults who are themselves experiencing various kinds of transition.

   Harris and Rainey's chapter (Chapter 3) shows clearly how the concept of 'transition' can be applied, with considerable theoretical purchase, to older learners moving in and out of both education and work, between different types of learning, and from one subject area to another. Although their research was based on a sample drawn initially from eight colleges and three universities in South Australia, the age range of their sample stretched from 19 to 64 years. In their analysis, they show how age can impact experiences of transition, with some of their older respondents making educational transitions as a means of trying to focus more on their selves (and, in a number of cases, wider society) and less on their work. Cieslik and Simpson's research (Chapter 5)

on 'skills for life' also provides a helpful analysis of some of the transitions made by older adults. Although the chapter discusses in some depth the school-to-work transitions of young people with low literacy and numeracy skills, it also explores the way in which some of their respondents made transitions from work back to education, to engage in basic-skills training. In many cases, such decisions were inextricably linked to experiences within the workplace.

Thus, this collection suggests that alongside the other variables commonly considered by researchers exploring transitions from education to work (such as gender, social class and 'race'/ethnicity), it is important not to overlook the salience of age and assume that young people have the monopoly on such experiences. Indeed, it is likely that with the increasing 'reversibility' of transitions and the encouragement for all of us to engage in learning throughout our working lives, 'transitional' studies across the life course will become more prevalent.

Spaces of transition

In addition to highlighting the increasingly wide age span for which concepts of transition are relevant, this book has also emphasised the importance of paying attention to the spaces and places in which transitions occur. Bye's analysis (Chapter 11) of one particular college in Sydney, Australia shows how decisions about the particular ways in which the spaces of the College were organised (e.g. with designated smoking areas, no bells and no prohibitions on entering or leaving the College during the teaching day) had a significant impact on how the institution was understood by actual and prospective students. It also explores effectively some of the tensions which ensue when the messages given by the organisation of physical space are not always in keeping with those emanating from other sources (such as the behaviour of teachers).

The chapters in this collection have also demonstrated how traditional studies of movement from *school* to work may no longer be as relevant when analysing the experiences of young people (and their older counterparts) in the twenty-first century. Instead, they have pointed to the importance of other sites of transition, outside the classroom. Amongst these, the university has taken on new significance, with increasing numbers of young people progressing to higher education in many countries of the word, as a result of the mass expansion of the tertiary sector and the emphasis on developing skills necessary to achieve national competitiveness in an interdependent and competitive

global 'knowledge economy'. Matthews et al.'s work (Chapter 9) on volunteering emphasises the importance, for many students in the United Kingdom, of using their time at university productively, to gain useful experience of paid and/or voluntary work, to ease their access into the graduate labour market. Similarly, Tagoe's analysis of transitions into employment in Ghana (Chapter 7) draws attention to the significance of the university experience in determining the extent to which graduates feel prepared for entry into full-time work. More specifically, he argues that not all universities are perceived as offering the same bridges to employment: an institution's place in a national hierarchy of higher-education establishments can have an important bearing on the extent to which its graduates feel prepared for subsequent employment. King's chapter (Chapter 12) makes a slightly different argument: here universities are understood as the sites in which adult identities are *performed*, and which facilitate important contrasts and comparisons with other students.

In explaining the increasing importance placed on lifelong learning, educational researchers have pointed to the importance of particular workspaces in facilitating (or indeed hindering) access to learning (Fuller et al., 2005). It is perhaps unsurprising, given the increasing imperative to work during one's full-time education – for financial and leisure-related reasons, as well as to gain useful labour market experience (Hodgson and Spours, 2001; Brooks, 2006) – that workspaces have also been highlighted in this collection. Tagoe (Chapter 7) points to the way in which a year's national service, working for a public or private sector organisation, often influences the decisions about education and work made by young Ghanaian graduates, by providing them with time to reflect on their employment prospects and experience of a particular working environment. Similarly, Matthews et al.'s chapter (Chapter 9) demonstrates how the spaces in which voluntary work is conducted, alongside a degree programme, can have considerable impact on students' learning and the decisions they make about the type of employment they want to pursue on completion of their higher education. Cieslik and Simpson's chapter (Chapter 5) presents a different perspective on the importance of workspaces. Here, they suggest that, for adults who have low levels of literacy and/or numeracy, the extent to which the workplace allows them to develop coping mechanisms can have a significant impact on both the extent to which they re-engage with education and their career trajectories.

Leisure spaces are also of increasing importance to young people, as a result of the 'blurring' between learning, work and leisure in

contemporary society, which has been documented by many researchers (e.g. du Bois Reymond, 2004). This is illustrated well in the chapters on gap years by Johan (Chapter 8) and King (Chapter 12), both of whom suggest that a 'year out' between school and university can have a significant impact upon young people's learning and the way in which they understand (and present) their own relationship to traditional markers of 'adulthood'. Furthermore, Jahnukainen's study of former residential-education students in Finland (Chapter 6) and Waechter et al.'s research with migrant youth in Austria (Chapter 4) suggest that informal spaces, where such students can interact with significant others, often have an important bearing on the extent to which they make successful transitions to employment (and further education) in their adult lives.

By emphasising the importance of the places in which transitions from education to work are played out, the contributors to this collection have highlighted not only various 'Emerging Sites of Transition' (the specific focus of Part III), but also the importance of spatial factors, more generally, in understanding young people's (and older adults') transitions. Future research could usefully extend this aspect of the analysis. Although some innovative work has been carried out within the disciplines of both education and geography to explore the impact of spatial factors on the education experiences of young adults (see e.g. Waters, 2006; Gulson and Symes, 2007; and Warrington, 2008), it remains a relatively under-researched area, worthy of further attention.

Comparative nature of the collection

Transitions from Education to Work: New Perspectives from Europe and Beyond has drawn on research from a number of European countries (the United Kingdom, Finland and Austria) as well as from Australia and Ghana. In doing so, it has highlighted various commonalities of experience in different parts of the world. For example, Tagoe's discussion of the problems faced by young Ghanaians as they graduate from higher education (Chapter 7) has many parallels with analyses of the graduate labour market in Western European countries (Brown and Hesketh, 2004; Brooks and Everett, 2009) and Australia (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001), while Waechter et al.'s (Chapter 4) scrutiny of the problems faced by second-generation migrant youth from Yugoslav and Turkish backgrounds in Austria has clear parallels with research on the transitions of young people with similar migratory experiences in other parts of Europe (de Vries and Wolbers, 2004; Malmberg-Heimonen and Julkunen, 2006).

Nevertheless, in keeping with the arguments rehearsed above, it is important to note the impact of the local on the experiences of the young people discussed in this collection and, in doing so, to recognise that there may well be important national (or regional) variations in the way in which some of the broader influences discussed in this book are played out. Chapter 1 outlined a typology of different 'youth transition regimes' developed by Pohl and Walther (2007) which, the authors argue, are related to the broader 'welfare regime' dominant in each country. Although none of the other chapters in this collection engaged explicitly with this typology, implicit recognition is paid to the impact of specific national policies. The analysis of volunteering presented by Matthews and colleagues (in Chapter 9), for example, is tied quite closely to contemporary social policy in the United Kingdom, in which considerable emphasis has been placed on developing new forms of citizenship. Youth volunteering has been one of a number of high-profile initiatives aiming to inculcate 'appropriate' citizenship values and community cohesion (DfES, 2006; Brooks, 2007). Similarly, Young's (Chapter 10) discussion of the impact of 'e-portfolios' on the transitions of newly qualified teachers is closely tied to particular policy decisions by educational bodies within the United Kingdom that decided to invest in this technology. Nevertheless, while the generalisability of this specific case study is rather limited, the analysis clearly links to wider debates about the extent to which new technologies can facilitate new forms of learning and ease transitions between different settings (of work, education, leisure etc.).

Although this book has brought together chapters from three continents of the world, there remains a need for wider comparative research on education-to-work transitions. Youth researchers in mainland Europe have taken an important first step in conducting rigorous comparative work across the continent and identifying strong commonalities in the experiences of young people as they complete their full-time education (notably the European Group for Integrated Social Research (EGRIS), but see also Evans et al. (2000), Roberts (2003) and Walker (2007)). There have also been some important studies that have drawn largely on comparative data from a number of different Anglophone countries (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001). However, the majority of these studies have focussed exclusively on developed nations. Determining the extent to which some of the key themes from these studies articulate with the experiences of young people (and older learners) from less developed countries constitutes a key challenge for researchers across the social sciences.

The concept of 'transition'

Finally, we return to the question of whether the concept of 'transition' has continued relevance in contemporary society. Chapter 1 outlined some of the recent challenges to 'transition studies', namely that this body of work does not capture effectively the non-linear nature of many young people's lives as a result of the increasing array of opportunities open to them, and the pressure on young adults to go about reflexively constructing a 'biographical project' of the self. However, the chapter also rehearsed some of the arguments that have been advanced in favour of retaining the term. In engaging with this debate, the book, more generally, does not advance any one particular argument about the way in which the concept of 'transition' should be understood. Instead, the various chapters demonstrate the variety of ways in which the term can be deployed. These range from accounts which highlight the structural factors that impinge upon young people's decision-making (e.g. Chapters 2, 3 and 4) to others which suggest that much greater emphasis needs to be put on the agency of individual actors (Chapters 5 and 6). Moreover, Harris and Rainey (Chapter 3) argue for a more nuanced account of education-to-work transitions which places greater emphasis on transitions between different types of education and training and, in doing so, recognises the increasingly permeable boundaries between learning and work. King (Chapter 12) also adopts an innovative approach to the concept of transition by suggesting that its theoretical purchase comes from the way in which it allows us to analyse the means by which young people account for their experiences of education and work and, in doing so, *produce* adult identities. Thus, while the chapters in this collection certainly do not operationalise the term in exactly the same way, they point to the continuing relevance of the concept of 'transition' in youth studies, as well as in educational research more generally.

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