

RESEARCH SEMINAR

organised by
British Educational Research Association
Special Interest Group in Postcompulsory & Lifelong Learning
and
Education & Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University

Young people's transitions: international perspectives

Tuesday 23 January 2007 Manchester Metropolitan University

Programme

10.00-10.30	Arrival and coffee
10.30-10.45	Welcome and introduction to the day
10.45-11.00	Curriculum choice, flexibility and differentiation at 14-19: the way forward or flawed prospectus? David Yeomans, Post-14 Research Group, Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Leeds
11.00-11.45	New Zealand's Neo-Liberal Generation: Tracing Discourses of Economic (Ir)Rationality Karen Nairn, Faculty of Education, Otago University, NZ
11.45-12.30	Discussion
12.30-1.30	Lunch
1.30-2.15	Can Further Education Compensate for Society? Some Initial Reflections Gareth Rees, Cardiff School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University
2.15-3.00	Is it FE or HE? An exploration of the nature and meaning of transitions in FE/HE institutions in England Ann-Marie Bathmaker, School of Education, University of the West of England, & Diane Burns, School of Education, University of Sheffield.
3.00-3.15	Tea
3.15-4.0	Discussion & close

see following pages for abstracts & directions...

Young people's transitions: international perspectives

Abstracts

This seminar brings together national and international research to illuminate developing perspectives on young people's transitions after compulsory schooling. Beyond the late-20th century recognition that these transitions are now fragmented and uncertain, these presentations explore in-depth the complexity of transitions which may 'yo-yo' or even be circular. They discuss the tensions between lived experiences of transitions, and the ways in which policy and professional discourses construct them. And they offer new ways of theorising educational transitions that locate them in a wider social context.

Curriculum choice, flexibility and differentiation at 14-19: the way forward or flawed prospectus?

David Yeomans

This paper will refer briefly to policy rationales for the promotion of increased choice, flexibility and differentiation in the 14-19 curriculum and some of the policy interventions designed to bring about change. It will examine historical examples of the exercise of curricular choice and differentiation and some of the debates which took place around these practices. It will then draw upon examples from recent 14-19 research to illustrate current practice in the aftermath of Tomlinson and the 14-19 Education and Skills White Paper. The paper will end by using the historical examples to raise some key political, educational and curricular issues around current policy and practice.

New Zealand's Neo-Liberal Generation: Tracing Discourses of Economic (Ir)Rationality

Karen Nairn and Jane Higgins

Young New Zealanders currently in transition to post-school lives have grown up during a period of intensive neo-liberal reform, the speed and scope of which was unprecedented in western economies. We explore how New Zealand's neo-liberal generation craft their identities in the transition years, making sense of their educational and employment experiences and choices in the context of neo-liberal discourses. The transition talk of these young people is imbued with neo-liberal rationality, mediated through two key discourses in particular: those of the knowledge economy and the cultural economy. We argue that these individuals are not passive recipients of neo-liberal rationality, but are involved in actively crafting their identities, making use of the resources that neo-liberal and other discourses provide, within the discursive and material constraints that their environments allow.

Can Further Education Compensate for Society? Some Initial Reflections

Gareth Rees, Martin Jephcote, John Roberts, Jane Salisbury

Debates about the effects which education has on life-chances are an enduring feature of the sociology of education. This paper sets out, initially, to clarify the terms of these debates; and suggests that much depends on the mode of analysis which is adopted. The discussion then focuses on the further education sector, where analysis of the relationships between education and life-chances is somewhat less developed than for other parts of the educational system. This part of the discussion draws on empirical data from a TLRP project based in three FE colleges in industrial South Wales, as well as other studies. Contrasts are drawn between the students' actual trajectories through the FE system and into the labour market, their own beliefs about the efficacy of the educational system in influencing these trajectories and the claims made about the latter by the colleges and in policy statements more widely.

Is it FE or HE? An exploration of the nature and meaning of transitions in FE/HE institutions in England

Ann-Marie Bathmaker and Diane Burns

Widening participation in English higher education involves an increasingly diverse range of contexts for higher education provision. This includes what have been termed 'dual sector' institutions, that is, educational institutions that offer both further and higher education. This paper considers young people's transitions in the context of such 'dual sector' institutions, by exploring the experience of a small number of students who are moving between further and higher education in this context. These students are amongst those targeted by widening participation strategies, and previous research has shown that transitions are often experienced as more complex and difficult by such students.

We are interested in the ways in which students negotiate the transition from further to higher education, how they construct meanings for the processes of transition and how these processes are related to identity formation, particularly the formation of educational identities. We are concerned with issues of structure and agency, and with the formation of individual 'learning' identities. An underlying question for us is what work does HE in FE do? In a system which is differentiated and stratified, what meanings do students themselves make of their experience, and how do they perceive how they are positioned within the education system and within a wider social context.