Paving the Way to the Future?
Education and Young Europeans’
Paths to Work and Independence

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ABSTRACT This article discusses young people’s transitions from school to work at a time when educational systems have become more closely connected to the economy than ever before. The serious situation of high unemployment, unstable employment conditions and poverty among young people and young adults in Europe is highlighted. Using Sweden as an illuminative example, it is argued that the increasing commercialisation and competition within the education sector add to the risks connected to school-to-work transitions. The associated shift to outcome-based curricula and focus on narrow competences and skills rather than a broad education including social, cultural and democratic elements, will provide young people with poor navigation instruments in this process. The need to analyse the long-term impact of the market-oriented culture on young people’s self-understanding, orientations and choices is emphasized.

I apply for jobs I know I won’t get
my name carries the weight of resistance now
democracy is standing outside the revolving doors
and begs and craves to be let inside.
they say they will check my references
and then don’t call back
it is the early two thousands and it’s still
far to equality
I leave the country with two packed cases
while the places of work fall silent behind me.
(Jenny Wrangborg, ‘Blacklisted’ [my translation])

This poem was written by a young Swedish woman who recently made her debut with a collection of poems, The Cold Buffet, describing her job working in a cold buffet, and the hopeless search for a job after leaving school (Wrangborg, 2010). The issue of young people’s transitions from school to work and independence is a burning question at a time when fifteen million young Europeans are unemployed and many more live under precarious conditions. Knowledge, education and lifelong learning have never been assigned more crucial roles in terms of social and economic development than today, but the question of how education relates to young people’s transitions and biographies is far from simple or given; it has to be continuously and critically analysed by the research community. Nevertheless, although several educational researchers have made important contributions to addressing these issues, it is hardly a prominent theme in educational research; most researchers in the field of school-to-work transitions have backgrounds in other disciplines.
(e.g. sociology, social work or economics). This conference may serve as an illustration; few presentations relate to questions of career trajectories of young people, as far as I can see.

My intention is first to outline the contours of culturally and historically formed patterns of young people’s school-to-work transitions. Second, I touch upon the serious current situation of record-breaking unemployment, unstable employment conditions and poverty among large swathes of young people and young adults in Europe. Third, I connect this with the ongoing transformation of educational systems into semi or full markets, and the consequences for young people in the process of leaving school and trying to become established in the labour market and society. Sweden is used as an illustrative example, because Sweden has travelled further since the early 1990s than most other countries towards creating an educational market at pre-, primary and secondary school levels.

### Insecure Paths – troublesome transitions

‘What will you be when you grow up?’ This classical question indicates that there are essentially straight paths to working life, and that you choose an occupation once and for all. However, young people’s transitions to working life have become protracted and increasingly uncertain in most countries (Walther et al, 2002; Colley et al, 2007; Evans 2009). For instance, in Sweden the average age of establishment, defined as the age at which 75% of young people have obtained some kind of employment, was 21 at the beginning of the 1990s, but 28 less than two decades later (SOU, 2006, p. 102). Research from a number of countries has shown that young people’s transitions have also become increasingly individualised, diversified and non-linear. So-called yo-yo transitions – frequent, repeated movements back and forth between education, spells of work and (often) unemployment – have become increasingly common (Walther, 2006; Kovacheva & Pohl, 2007). The young Swedes (aged 25-29) who participated in interviews reported in Lena Lidström’s doctoral dissertation, all unemployed at the time of the interviews, had made on average eight to nine transitions – to and from four to five places of work in different occupations, interspersed with three educational episodes – after compulsory school. I shall illustrate this common situation with the case of Tomas, who described a typical yo-yo process in his efforts to find training and work:

After various troubles I finally got permission to change from the National Science to the Media program, in another municipality…. After completing Media, I thought of becoming a ‘sound technician’. I applied to media programs several times, but it is enormously difficult to get accepted for such programs, well, in the whole media sector…. Then I let go of that and applied to do a 1-year course in English at a folk high school. I really wanted to get away, [I] like languages and thought that may always be useful…. Then I worked as a replacement parts seller for a couple of years and came in contact with computers and got interested in them…. Eventually I did a computer course at university level. But I haven’t got a job in that field yet, so I step in and do other things sometimes. (Quoted in Lidström, 2009, p. 67 [my translation])

Such individualised trajectories to working and adult life were primarily interpreted as expressions of young men’s and women’s own choices and constructions, or so-called ‘choice biographies’ in the biographical, agency-oriented youth research that became influential from the early 1990s (Baethge, 1989; du Bois Reymond, 1995). The increasing emphasis on individual agency notwithstanding, many studies have convincingly shown that place, class, gender, ethnicity and religion are far from irrelevant or obsolete aspects in attempts to understand young people’s varying trajectories (cf. Hansson & Lundahl, 2004; Blossfeld & Hofmeister, 2005; Henderson et al, 2007; Olofsson & Panican, 2008; Evans, 2009). As Furlong et al (2006) point out, one has to distinguish between ‘movement that is a consequence of labour market precarity from movement that suggests flexibility’ (p. 227). For many young people, ‘complex transitions are best regarded as disadvantaged routes, not the “choice biographies” of the affluent’ (p. 227).[1] Concepts from middle-range theories such as ‘structured individualization’ (Roberts, 1997; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007) and ‘bounded agency’ (Evans 2009) highlight the necessity of considering both such structural factors and agency – including self-understanding, ambitions and actions – when analysing young people’s paths into the future.

The individual is facing not only far more complex choices than counterparts just a generation ago, but also more risky ones (Walther et al, 2002; Colley et al, 2007; Evans, 2009).
the majority of European countries unemployment and poverty rates are higher among 18- to 25-
year-olds than among other cohorts in the early 2000s (Colley et al., 2007; Fahmy, 2007; 
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2008). In a recent OECD 
report it is estimated that 30-40% of school leavers in the OECD countries are at risk either because 
they cumulate multiple disadvantages (the so-called left behind youth) or because they have 
difficulties in becoming established in the labour market (‘poorly integrated new entrants’, 
Scarpetta et al, 2010, pp. 19-20). I will return to these aspects later. Risks associated with youth 
transitions, such as unemployment and social marginalisation, are postulated to be related to both 
young people’s resources (in terms of education and competence, family support and social 
networks) and their personal driving forces (Furlong et al., 2003). Tomas, whom I cited above, 
probably belongs to a low-risk group despite his spell of unemployment, as he has completed upper 
secondary and some tertiary education, receives support from his parents and is highly motivated 
for further studies and career-making. The big problem today is that such large groups of youths 
and young adults fall within the high-risk groups as defined by Scarpetta et al (2010).

**A European Dilemma**

‘So damned unemployed’[2]

In 2009, youth unemployment rocketed, and will probably remain at a very high level for some 
years to come. Fifteen million young Europeans aged 15 to 24 were unemployed in 2010, on 
average a fifth of the whole age cohort, but with huge variations, ranging from 8% in the 
Netherlands to 40% in Spain (Eurostat, 2010). In most European countries, young people run more 
than twice the risk of becoming unemployed as adults. In my own country, Sweden, the risk is four 
times as high (Scarpetta et al, 2010, p. 10). Unemployment hurts. It is estimated that 30-40% of 
young people risk getting ‘scarred career prospects’ in the long-term perspective. In other words, a 
spell of unemployment when young continues to have a harmful impact in later life (Eurostat, 
2010; Scarpetta et al, 2010). For example, based on British data, the economists David Bell and 
David Blanchflower (2009) found that youth unemployment continues to hurt two decades later in 
terms of several important variables – namely, unemployment, health status, wages and job 
satisfaction. An overwhelming number of investigations have come to the same conclusions - that 
the young people with the least education and fewest skills and young people from ‘minority 
groups’ are worst hit by unemployment and the scars I just mentioned. The less education one has, 
the more unemployment hurts.

It is hardly surprising that discussion of young people’s social exclusion mainly addresses 
youth unemployment, and that advocated solutions centre, to a large extent, on making 
adolescents and young adults employable, while the kinds of jobs and working conditions that are 
available are largely neglected. This discourse effectively obscures other aspects of marginalisation 
and inequality. The concept ‘the new precariat’, a portmanteau of ‘precarious’ and ‘proletariat’ 
(Wacquant, 2007; see also Gill & Pratt, 2008) seems all too applicable, as a large proportion of 
European youths work in precarious employment conditions – insecure, temporary and low-paid 
jobs [3] - and poverty is considerably more widespread among young people than it is in other age 
groups (Colley et al., 2007; Fahmy, 2007). A recent ILO paper concludes: ‘For the majority of the 
world’s youth, therefore, the main concern is not so much unemployment, but the continuation of 
decent work deficits and entrapment in the cycle of working poverty’ (ILO, 2010, p. 60).

Furthermore, most research and investigations of youth transitions ignore some of the most 
vulnerable groups of young Europeans – notably, disabled young people and Roma youth. For the 
latter, I do not have to refer to examples from France, Italy, Romania or Hungary; I may equally 
well cite cases in Sweden, where Roma people are ordered to leave the country because of begging, 
although begging is not forbidden. In Malmö, the southernmost Swedish city, 80% of the Roma 
population is unemployed, almost half of the children do not attend grades 7-9 of compulsory 
school, and virtually none progress through upper secondary education, although completion of 
education at this level in reality is essential to get a job (Söderman & Ström, 2008). Some 
educational researchers do address the situation of Roma children and youth (Gobbo, 2004, 2009; 
O’Higgins & Ivanov, 2006; see also EUMC, 2006), but more need to engage with these issues. The 
possibilities for young disabled people to become established in working life and society are
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another largely neglected research field (Shah, 2008). Lack of comparable European statistics is a major obstacle (ANED, 2009). However, available data support Groce’s (2004) conclusion: ‘young people with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed, underemployed (working fewer hours, working at seasonal jobs) or employed at a lower wage, than their non-disabled peers. Moreover they are often the last to be hired and the first to be laid off or fired’ (Groce, 2004, pp. 20-21).

Transition Policy Patterns

Researchers (e.g. participants in the European youth research network EGRIS and the German GLOBALIFE project [Lópèz Blasco et al, 2003; Blossfeld & Hofmeister, 2005]) recognise a number of so-called welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1996) – that is, clusters of welfare states with similar traditions and solutions - when comparing young people’s school-to-work transitions and transition policies. Andreas Walther distinguishes between four such regimes: Nordic universal; conservative-employment oriented; liberal; and conservative sub-protectionist. These regimes differ with regard to how comprehensive and standardised the education systems are, the degree of openness and regulation of the labour market in relation to young labour, the characteristics of the social security net, and the scope of female employment (Walther, 2006). Even the ways of conceptualising youth, youth unemployment, ‘at risk’ or disadvantaged youth and the political strategies to manage school-to-work transitions tend to differ between the regimes (Table I).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime</th>
<th>Countries (examples)</th>
<th>Dominant conceptualizations and focus of youth</th>
<th>Dominant conceptualizations and focus of youth unemployment</th>
<th>Dominant conceptualizations and focus of disadvantage</th>
<th>Dominant conceptualizations and focus of transition policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universalistic</td>
<td>Denmark, Sweden</td>
<td>Personal development, citizenship</td>
<td>‘Not foreseen’</td>
<td>Mixed (individualised/structure-related)</td>
<td>Education, activation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative/</td>
<td>Germany, France,</td>
<td>Adaptation to social positions</td>
<td>Disadvantage (deficit model)</td>
<td>Individualised</td>
<td>(Pre-) vocational training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment-centred</td>
<td>Netherlands, Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>UK, Ireland</td>
<td>Early economic independence</td>
<td>Culture of dependency</td>
<td>Individualised</td>
<td>Employability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative/Sub-</td>
<td>Italy, Spain,</td>
<td>Without distinct status</td>
<td>Segmented labour market, lack of training</td>
<td>Structure-related</td>
<td>‘Some’ status: work, education or training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td></td>
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Table I. Youth, unemployment and disadvantage: conceptualizations and policies.

In all four clusters, education and training are regarded as key factors for young people’s transitions, but the emphasis differs with regard to the kind of education and training emphasised, in terms of (inter alia) the universality or selectivity of educational measures, and the degree of flexibility or standardisation of education and training. We have also found variations in local transition policy patterns in Swedish municipalities, based on similar distinctions (Lundahl & Rönnberg, 2008; Lundahl & Nilsson, 2010).

However, it is now perhaps time to question the explanatory value of this kind of categorisation of transition regimes. For example, the variations in youth unemployment and poverty in several notable cases are greater within national transition regimes than they are between them. For instance, in the Scandinavian universal group there were (and are) major variations in unemployment among young people, ranging from 8.9% in Norway to 25% in Sweden in 2009. In the conservative-employment-oriented cluster there were similar differences – from 7.7% in the Netherlands to 23.5% in France. In almost all European countries the poverty rates were higher among youth and young adults (aged 16-29) than among those aged 30 or more, and the countries with the largest differences in this respect can be regarded as espousing all four regimes: the Netherlands, France, Italy, Finland and Denmark (Fahmy, 2007). So-called misleading trajectories – paths ending in blind alleys and problems of establishment in the labour market – can
also be found in all countries, even if they may be of partially differing kinds (Lopéz Blasco et al., 2003).

**Education Markets**

If becoming adult previously referred to a rather linear and not very lengthy passage from a publicly regulated, quite lucid education system to a market for work and exchange of goods and services, it is today relevant to speak of transitions from a diversified educational market, via a market of youth schemes and various facilities intended to support transitions (job centres, mentoring and coaching services, etc.) to a regional, national and international labour market. Globalisation is not just about worldwide economic and political restructuring, but also encompasses corresponding cultural changes that heavily influence young people’s education, training and transitions. Education has become a key factor in the now dominant economic imaginaries of the so-called knowledge-based economy in the 2000s:

The education system ... is increasingly construed in post-national terms and is being reorganised on this basis at various scales; it is increasingly construed as a directly economic factor (education is now located within the profit-oriented, market-mediated economic or, at least, subject to commodification and/or evaluation in terms of market proxies); and, where it is located outside the market or quasi-market economy, it is nonetheless increasingly seen as an extra-economic factor that bears directly and ever-more critically on economic competitiveness. (Jessop et al., 2008, p. 29)

**Several Education Policy Paradigms Collapse into One?**

Esping-Andersen’s (1996) welfare regime model may serve as a basis for formulating different patterns or clusters of educational policy (see Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006). Here the social democratic and liberal paradigms are chosen as examples, representing two major approaches to education with regard to the major functions of education, its values basis, and the initiation of educational change (Table II). The first dimension concerns the relative emphasis on the socio-cultural and economic functions of education. The second concerns the degree of equality and comprehensiveness versus differentiation and elitism in education, and the third dimension concerns the sources or agency for educational change. One may distinguish: politically initiated education changes; internal initiation (i.e. initiatives by educational personnel); and external transactions where groups outside education impose new demands and pressures on schools. In centralised systems, political governance is a dominant factor, while all three forces are important in decentralised systems (cf. Archer, 1985). In the social democratic welfare-state, education is seen as a major vehicle of social progress, justice and welfare. Schools should embrace all children regardless of class, gender and geographical origin. Public comprehensive education with little streaming and tracking, and with inclusion of the full diversity of students in mainstream classrooms, is favoured. Even if schools and education serve economic functions, they enjoy a relative autonomy vis-à-vis the economy. In contrast, differentiation, competition and achievement are cornerstones of the liberal paradigm, and the links to the economy and market are stronger. Activation and self-empowerment are promoted, as well as choice among public and private forms of education. Early streaming and tracking are also favoured (Hudson & Lidström, 2002; Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006).

However, this model and the previous regime models tend to emphasise and conserve what has now become the past, even if it is a past that still shapes, to a certain extent, current education and schooling. Maybe the time has come to argue that the marked shift in recent decades, in which the liberal paradigm or pattern has gradually influenced the others, has been so strong that all patterns now tend to collapse into the liberal one.
Making Youths More Saleable in the Labour Market

Education is increasingly expected to have marked elements of training for employability and entrepreneurship (see European Commission, 2007; OECD, 2008), while contents and functions other than the economic are being gradually disregarded (see Ball, 1998, 2007; Young, 2008; Jessop et al, 2008). The recommendations in the previously cited OECD report to reduce the high youth rate of unemployment following the latest economic crisis (Scarpetta et al, 2010) signify the creation of a labour supply of young people with a certain minimum of education and training demanded by the employers, ‘in particular through apprenticeship and focuses on the acquisition of a recognised qualification that is valued by employers, rather than simply spending more time in a classroom’ (Scarpetta et al, 2010, p. 27).

The OECD report is not just concerned with short-term change - it also describes the crisis as an opportunity to promote structural, long-term reforms aimed at ensuring that all young people gain the skills needed in the labour market (on the labour-supply side). It argues that evidence from several countries has proved that working while in school is ‘a more important and effective part of the school-to-work transition than the traditional model of school first, then work’ (OECD, 2008, p. 26). The boundaries between school and work are to be erased by expanded apprenticeship training opportunities, internships, student jobs, better cooperation between employment services and the education system and early guidance for school-leavers (outreach programmes). The OECD report also makes recommendations for influencing the demand side by reducing ‘the cost of employing low-skilled youth’ (p. 30). That is, intensive efforts should be made to make young people employable and saleable in the labour market. This may possibly seem understandable given the urgent situation outlined above. However, it is inevitably a very poor and narrow kind of education that is outlined, in both the short and the long run, and is a policy that simply targets the most needy or those at risk of becoming unemployed and marginalised. Surely we should aim higher than this – for all young people! Also, such proposals conceal the underlying basic fact that there are simply insufficient jobs available when large parts of the youth labour market have disappeared (Bell & Blanchflower, 2009; also see Ryan, 2001).

A recent reform of Swedish upper secondary school clearly illustrates the present dominance of economic functions of education; employability is, allegedly, to be promoted by a range of measures, including: a much clearer separation of vocational and academic tracks; massive support for apprenticeship training (which has been dormant in Sweden for many decades in spite of recurrent resuscitation efforts); and increased influence of stakeholders. It is telling that democratic education is not mentioned at all in the reform policy documents (Lundahl et al, 2010).

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<tr>
<th>Table II. Education policy patterns: social democratic and liberal welfare regimes. Source: Arnesen &amp; Lundahl, 2006</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functions of education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social democratic education policy</td>
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<td>Liberal education policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stronger emphasis on social/cultural functions</td>
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<td>Stronger emphasis on economic functions</td>
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<td>Value basis of education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual development framed by social community and security</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solidarity and social responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Market values</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elitism and early differentiation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private responsibility and individual choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empowerment and competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particularism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation of educational change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central state and politics play a crucial role</td>
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<td>Initiation by political, internal and external actors</td>
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</table>

Reshaping Public Schools into Markets: the Swedish case

As I pointed out earlier in this keynote address, young people’s transitions from school to work do not only involve preparation for a market in the school institution; increasingly this is actually done
in a market, under market-like conditions in school per se. In Sweden, the education system was previously characterised to a high degree by detailed top-down state governance, but a number of educational reforms introduced around 1990 have led to radical decentralisation, deregulation and marketisation of education – from preschool to upper secondary level. Swedish schools have acquired the greatest autonomy to decide their activities in the whole OECD area, and the freedom of parents and students to choose between schools has been especially promoted – for example, by the introduction of tax-funded, so-called independent or free schools (Lundahl, 2002, Lundahl et al, 2010). Today, the free school market is expanding rapidly, particularly at upper secondary level, and it increasingly functions as a market like any other. Marketisation of upper secondary schools is most far-reaching in the cities; in Stockholm, more than half of the student population goes to independent upper secondary schools; in Gothenburg the figure is 42%, and in Malmö it is 36% (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010). Furthermore, a growing proportion – at present, approximately 30% – of the independent schools are run by large corporations and combines, and schools are bought and sold in order to maximise profits; unlike almost all other countries, owners of Swedish independent schools may pocket the profits – and they often do (Erixon Arremman & Holm, 2011). The private education companies even generate higher profits than other private companies, with 16% returns on total capital in 2007 on average, compared with around 10% for all private companies (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2009a, p. 58). However, the marketisation of education in Sweden concerns much more than the free schools – all schools are now competing with each other, marketing their programmes and local profiles. The market logic also permeates the upper secondary school curriculum, with an emphasis on outcomes, assessments, enterprise and employability, especially in the recent reform. Rankings and comparisons are also increasingly important.

The Market Situation and Market Culture:
possible effects on young people’s transitions in Sweden

I will raise some of the consequences of the school market situation on young people’s transitions – effects that I argue are harmful both to the individuals (particularly those I have identified above as being at risk) and to society at large.

Addressing students as customers and consumers of education already before they enter upper secondary education, the new market situation involves massive marketing of a vast range of national and local, specially designed upper secondary programmes by all kinds of channels and means. Hardly surprisingly, students report feelings of frustration, anxiety and abandonment when they have to take crucial decisions about their future paths in this veritable jungle of more or less serious offers (Dresch & Lovén, 2010). Many students shift programmes after a while, and their study times have become prolonged (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010).[4]

The de-standardised and fragmented educational market also probably makes evaluation of the educational credentials of young people more difficult for employers. When there is a highly stable, stratified and standardised education system, employers receive relatively clear and consistent messages. In a de-standardised and less stratified educational system, employers have to collect information in other ways, and individuals increasingly have the responsibility to provide them with such information themselves. No recent study of this aspect has been conducted in Sweden, but previous research on school-to-work transitions has shown that the degree of standardisation of education and training is highly important in this respect (Allmendinger, 1989; Shavit et al, 1998).

Several evaluations indicate that the market situation, in combination with decentralisation, contributes to increased social and cultural segregation of the students, and to larger variations (Söderström & Uuisitalo, 2005; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2009b). This in turn affects and differentiates both the resources and the individual agency provided to different groups of students when they make the transition to adulthood and economic independence.

In the 1990s, Basil Bernstein discussed a neoliberal form of pedagogic identity (de-centred market identity) of education and schools, but more as a theoretical construct than a (then) lived reality (Bernstein, 1996; Bernstein & Solomon, 1999). Bernstein defined pedagogic identity more generally as the embedding of knowledge, moral and locational careers in a collective base, a
construction of a sense of belonging and difference, of internal and external relationships. His concept ‘de-centred market identity’ referred to a ‘strong orientation to optimise the exchange value of knowledge’, meaning that the focus is on short-term rather than long-term gains, and extrinsic rather than intrinsic values. Today, such elements are clearly visible in narratives of staff and students, and in the homepages and advertisements of Swedish upper secondary schools, both independent and public, although to varying degrees. A shift to extrinsic values – performance, visibility and saleability – has occurred. The core message is: ‘this is us and this is what we will provide’ (Erixon Arreman et al, 2010).

**Final Reflections**

The Swedish example outlined above clearly illuminates a global tendency to locate education within the profit-oriented market economy and to subsume it under semi-market conditions as part of the knowledge-based economy (see Jessop et al, 2008). Swedish profit-based free schools have been characterised as a model for other countries, not least by the Conservatives before and after the 2010 elections in the UK. The case is particularly interesting as Sweden used to be (and in some respects still is) a prominent example of a social democratic, universalistic welfare regime. Hence, the willingness, and eagerness, to embark on a seemingly total makeover of education is intriguing, and even mystifying. I have here argued that the direct marketisation of education is harmful given the difficult situation faced by a large proportion of young Europeans when they are trying to make their transition into the future in several respects. Equally importantly, the associated shift to outcome-based curricula, intimately coupled to an assessment culture, from more comprehensive approaches (Young, 2008), and the focus on narrow competences and skills rather than on a broad education, including social, cultural and democratic elements, will provide young people with poor navigation instruments. For example, very few young people acquire the intellectual tools to critically analyse and understand the economic and political processes that frame and affect their lives. In addition, schooling too seldom includes recurring opportunities for students to raise awareness of their own abilities and possibilities in relation to an increasingly complex and changing environment. Career guidance and education in schools is non-existent for large groups of students, or - as in Sweden, for instance - it is typically piecemeal and separated from education (Watts & Sultana, 2004; Lundahl & Nilsson, 2009).

I want to end where I started, by emphasising the need for longitudinal research, including both in-depth and extensive analyses, on education and training in young people’s transitions to working life and adulthood. As such processes have become increasingly non-linear and protracted, it is important to conduct studies over quite long periods of time. Such work is certainly being conducted already, nationally and in international comparative perspectives. However, more educational researchers have to engage in the analysis of the long-term effects of education – in terms of, for example, curricular orientation, special education and teacher support. In addition, there is a need to analyse the long-term impact of the market-oriented culture on young people’s self-understanding and orientations, both in education and when they are paving their way to the future. Finally: is it not about time an EERA network on education and youth research was established?

**Notes**

[1] The dominant research orientations in youth research may have contributed to the construction of stability or change found in the transition patterns in different periods of time. The scope of complex transitions may have been underestimated when the research commonly focused on structures and tendencies at the macro level, and overestimated when researchers focused more on individual narratives and biographies (Furlong et al, 2006).


[3] In 2007, 41% of young workers in the European Union had temporary employment contracts. The corresponding figure for adults was 11% (Eurostat, 2010 [European Labour Force Survey]). However, there are substantial variations between countries in this respect: in 2008, at least half of all young workers had a temporary contract in Poland, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, France, Germany and
Switzerland, but the proportion was 20% or lower in Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Turkey and the United Kingdom (Scarpetta et al, 2010, p. 17).

[4] In 2009, more than 15% of all students in the third (and last) grade of upper secondary school had changed school and/or programme, and 10% did so after they had studied for a fourth year or even longer – a rising tendency in both cases (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010, p. 28).

References


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