

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Ingrid Schoon and Rainer K. Silbereisen, eds., *Transitions from School to Work: Globalization, Individualization, and Patterns of Diversity*. The Jacobs Foundation Series on Adolescence. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 408 pp. \$US95.00 hardcover (978-0-521-49068-9)

In this edited book, the authors collectively examine the many contours of the transition from school to work. In fact, many chapters go beyond what is suggested in the title by recognizing simultaneous multiple transitions, of which the school-to-work transition is merely one. In the introductory chapter the editors set the tone for the book, offering a “unifying framework for the study of transitions in times of social change.” Elements of the framework are for the most part implicit in the remaining chapters and not addressed directly. Instead, chapter authors are eclectic in their choice of theories — including, for example, those of welfare regimes, value change, and rational choice within a life course perspective — and analytical methods including descriptive statistics, econometric modelling, optimal matching, analyses of qualitative data, and policy analysis. Shanahan and Longest (ch. 2) provide a hard hitting critique of grand narratives in relation to life course research, taking particular aim at Arnett’s concept of emerging adulthood. They argue strongly and well that this and other grand narrative approaches provide inaccurate and misleading representations of youth in that any singular transition or set of transitions is gendered and classed, and as such, will be experienced differently according to one’s location in the cultural, social, economic, and ethnic fields of life.

Several chapters offer single country case study analyses (e.g., Finland, Germany, UK, USA), while one (ch. 5) offers an analysis of 14 countries. A number of chapters lean toward the individualistic side of the agency/structure nexus by focussing on, for example, young men and stable employment (ch. 3, Corcoran and Matudaira) and the gender trap in Switzerland (ch. 9, Buchmann and Kriesi). These chapters could have been strengthened, for example, by problematizing issues such as the nature of policies, practices, and societal views in twenty-first century Switzerland that continue to perpetuate gender inequalities. Chapters utilizing typologies such as the late bloomer/dater/worker/well-rounded adolescent/early starter typology offered by Garrett and Eccles (ch. 11)

or the idler/player/worker/strategist typology employed by Schneider (ch. 12) could have followed the advice offered in Chapter 2 by considering more strongly gender and class dimensions in the conceptualization, analyses, and implications for policy and practice.

The most interesting and informative chapters in this volume rise to the challenge of offering complex conceptualizations of the transition from school to work, carrying out analyses employing techniques that are well suited to complexity, and offering solid implications regarding enacting change through policy to facilitate the transition from school to work. Four chapters excel in this regard.

In Chapter 10, Schoon, Ross, and Martin use a life course perspective within the context of two time periods — 1958, a period of “extraordinary economic growth and social expansion” and 1970, “the Crisis Decades” characterized by “increasing instability and insecurity” — to classify economic activity sequences over time. Using 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) data and 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) data and employing the technique of optimal matching, they aptly diffuse theories which attempt to categorize youth transitions as homogeneous.

In Chapter 7, Jones describes the challenges of aligning policies in the UK with the realities of young people and their families in the transition from dependence. Through the lenses of social context and governmental perspectives about “(in)dependence and support,” Jones analyzes existing policies in conjunction with the voices of young people to demonstrate their experiences, frustrations, and constraints at this critical juncture in their lives. She highlights the importance of a comprehensive understanding of life course transitions for policy formulation.

In Chapter 15, du Bois-Reymond addresses the complexities of youth transition policies in Europe under three themes: the mismatch between today’s young people and their learning environments; migrants, racism, and resulting “insider” and “outsider” status; and the future and fate of young families within aging societies. By adopting a structure and agency perspective to policy analysis, she concludes that “transition policy ... should be judged according to the action space it provides for or withholds from young people.”

In the final chapter, Karoly examines changes in the US labour force from a supply and demand and international comparative perspective. Numerous tables and figures illustrate evidence of, for example, changing demographics, labour utilization, and educational achievement. However, two figures require further explication. That 7 of the 20 projected top occupations with the fastest employment growth from 2006–2016 (Figure 16.9) and 15 of the 20 projected top occupations with

the largest employment growth from 2006–2016 (Figure 16.10) do not require any postsecondary credentials begs for an explanation and interpretation in light of the overarching claim of “the demand for highly skilled workers beyond the current supply.”

Portraying life courses as lived and formulating effective within country or multicountry policies is an on-going challenge to researchers and policy makers. Because of the range, breadth, and depth of perspectives, analyses, findings, and implications for further research, policy, and practice, this book is a valuable and welcome addition to the body of literature on life course transitions. Each chapter moves us forward in our thinking about these issues.

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