

ESRC FUNDED SEMINAR SERIES

'How to motivate (demotivated) 14-16 year olds with special reference to work-related education and training'

Seminar 3 Mapping of 14-16 year olds

Friday 16 May 2003

Paper 1

Teenage aspirations for education and work and long-term outcomes. Evidence from the 1958 National Child Development Study and the 1970 British Cohort Studies

Ingrid Schoon City University

This paper considered evidence from two longitudinal cohort studies, the NCDS (born 1958) and the BCS (born 1970). The holistic approach adopted aims to integrate developmental and socio-economic factors to explain differences in educational outcomes when measured initial ability is held constant. Comparing the two cohorts, the risk of social maladjustment and poor academic achievement associated with social class disadvantage appears to be greater for the BCS cohort than for the NCDS cohort. Proportions estimated to be 'resilient' or 'disadvantaged' among the socially disadvantaged had both increased for the BCS cohort. The 'resilient' are still only 12 per cent and the 'disadvantaged' 37 per cent. Resilience is not a personality attribute

- It is a dynamic process whereby individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma.
- It is a two-dimensional construct defined by the constellations of exposure to adversity and the manifestation of positive adjustment in the face of that adversity.

The holistic approach adopted aims to investigate the active interaction between a developing individual and a changing socio-economic context to explain differences in educational outcomes and adult attainment.

Protective factors associated with resilience are:

- Attributes of the children themselves
- Characteristics of their families
- Aspects of the wider social context

In a regression model analysing factors explaining achievement at 16 both own job aspirations and own educational motivation have significant explanatory power in accounting for a better than expected outcome. The paper stressed the need for systematic investigation of processes underlying adaptation patterns. The paper concluded that

- Interventions and policies should focus on positive outcomes, and not only be directed toward the reduction of negative outcomes

- Efforts should try to harness notable strengths of ‘vulnerable populations’, capitalising on specific resources within particular populations
- There should be systematic investigation to aid understanding of the processes underlying adaptation patterns in different contexts
- Intervention or prevention programs should be holistic and integrated into the cultural context, the educational programme, and personal behavioural repertoire of the developing individual
- Adopt a strong developmental focus
Interventions should aim to provide equal opportunities for all

Paper 2

The early post-school experiences of the unqualified / low qualified: using the Labour Force Survey to map the 14-16 year old low-achievers

Steven McIntosh, Centre for Economic Performance

This paper is based on Labour Force Survey data on the cohort of individuals who were entitled to leave school in the summers of 1993, 1994 or 1995, and examined their further education decisions and early labour market outcomes.

The results revealed that still sizeable minorities of this recent cohort have not obtained any qualifications by the time that they complete compulsory schooling. The analysis then went on to show that such a situation can significantly impact on labour market success, with this group of unqualified school leavers being much less likely to be employed than their contemporaries at school who obtained qualifications. For men, those without work are split approximately equally between unemployment and inactivity. Women who do not work after leaving school with no qualifications are much more likely to be inactive than unemployed, however.

What can this group do to solve their lack of employment opportunities? The obvious answer is to try to obtain some qualifications post-school, which could involve re-sits of school qualifications, but more likely vocational qualifications. The results however reveal that although there is some take up of NVQ level 2 qualifications by both male and female unqualified school leavers, and of apprenticeships and low level City and Guilds qualifications by such men, very few individuals who obtained no school level qualifications manage to reach level 3 through the vocational route, and only around a third of this group manage even to reach to level 2. This is a pity, because the final part of the paper shows that for those unqualified school leavers who do obtain vocational level 2 or 3 qualifications, the gap between their labour market outcomes, such as employment probabilities and wages and the labour market outcomes of those who reach these levels via the academic route at school closes dramatically.

The vocational route as it stands therefore seems to be for the group who do obtain good GCSEs at school, since a level 3 vocational qualification for this group also closes the employment and wage gaps on those with A levels from school, and crucially there is significant take-up of these qualifications by the GSCE group. Therefore over 40% of the both men and women in our

cohort who leave school with at best GCSEs manage to obtain a level 3 qualification or better post-school.

The implication is therefore that, if there is always going to be a significant minority that emerge from school at age 16 having failed along the academic route, then more needs to be done to help them reach level 2 or level 3 along the vocational route, otherwise this group is going to remain, and probably become increasingly, marginalised on the labour market.

Paper 3

Work-Related Learning – Motivation and Attainment Transfer

Dave Hall and Carlo Raffo, University of Manchester Post-16 Studies Unit

Research was based on a work related learning programme administered in the Greater Manchester area and financed by DfES

Small element of our work formed part of a national action research evaluation project on work-related curriculum at KS4 conducted by SWA

Programme designed by the local TEC to address non participation, truancy and underachievement amongst 14-16 year olds

Six school terms in years 10 and 11

One day per week working in a particular occupational area ie 72 days on the programme

Choice of occupational areas

Broad aims of the programme

Increase participation in education pre-16

Improve achievement of recognised qualifications

Increase participation in structured learning post-16

Research Methods

A detailed 18 month longitudinal shadowing and interviewing of 10 pupils (from different occupational areas, from a range of schools and across the four participating local authorities) semi-structured interviews were also conducted with parents/guardians and other relevant stakeholders.

The purpose - to explore more deeply the various influences impacting upon young peoples attitude to the project and schooling.

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

This data was supported by a questionnaire that was administered to 117 pupils at the beginning of the project in early part of year 10 and then re-administered towards the end of year 11.

Results

- Within the sample transfer benefits were inconsistent (positive, negative, neutral)
- Explaining transfer (1) Programme and recognition issues.

- Additionality and timetabling
- Young people gained vocational qualifications not GCSE – school recognition problems
- Communication flows – attendance
- Critical interventions – Importance of transport to and from the workplace, identification of problems at an early stage, involvement of parents

Explaining transfer (2). The nature of learning and experiences in the workplace/contrasts with school

- Treated ‘like an adult’
- Nature of the KS4 curriculum
- Removal from established peer groups (positive and negative)
- Learning within workplace settings
- Understanding of career entry requirements – workplace voices with authenticity and impact
- Problems with transfer in general

Explaining transfer (3)

Convergence between young people’s wider social and cultural experiences and their experiences in the workplace

- Prior knowledge of the occupational area
- Prior experience of forming relationships with adults other than teachers/friends/family

Some concluding thoughts/questions in relation to this aspect of the research

- To what extent does transfer to school based motivation and attainment matter?
- Awareness of the wider lives of young people
- Low level (?) complexity of managing partnerships – e.g. flows of information
- Growing-up - relationship between development and schooling

Young people on the project and the influence of networks of social relations and social capital development

A number of examples where young people benefited positively from being part of a particular school/friends/family/project network.

Particularly if

there is a congruence or compatibility between the values and norms of that individual and the various components/other individuals that make up that network

the individual was in a strong position to access resources from that network, eg the project provided information about, and introductions to, particular labour markets,

that those networks had good access to external resources, eg the project related to labour markets that were growth labour markets, and

there was a complementarity between the various school, peer, family and project networks in terms of values, orientations and norms that therefore provided a strong rationale to 'emotionally commit' to actions and decisions taken.

Where this was in evidence the evaluation suggested that young people enhanced their social capital and hence their chances of making more successful transition from school into further education, training or work.

Summary of Discussion and Points Raised

On the first paper (IS, City University) teenage aspirations were the focus of the paper and the discussion. These were broken down into

Strivings

Life-plans

Personal goals

The generations born in the '70s encountered quite different expectations about the transition from school to work. Material conditions improved but inequalities and therefore the impact of social factors became stronger. There seemed to be evidence in the presentation that the BCS socially disadvantaged were less likely to fulfill their real potential than the NCDS. Nevertheless their job expectations were more ambitious. Possibly this points to a growing gap between expectations and realisation. Could this be part of the explanation of disaffection?

We must take the developmental focus seriously and recognise that motivations change across the school years. Children start off optimistic and become less optimistic. Disadvantage from risk factors (risk not randomly distributed but systematically linked to social background) kicks in very early. Possibly the disadvantaged are less 'plugged in' at an early age to the importance of early educational attainment. There is an accumulating risk effect which points to the importance of early intervention. Later cohorts continue to have high aspirations, but there will be an increasing polarisation, an increasing number of young people who are left out, who are disillusioned about their prospects, and who become alienated from society, unless appropriate measures are taken, offering opportunities for marginalized young people to develop meaningful and valued roles for adulthood.

On the second paper (SM, CEP) the importance of vocational qualifications in levelling up life chances (especially employment probability) was emphasised. Unfortunately the LFS data cannot be linked with any other datasets to provide a longitudinal perspective. This means that it is not possible to disentangle employment and qualifications and to determine whether employment led to NVQ qualifications being gained or the reverse. The very disadvantaged position of young women (even relative to their male counterparts) with no or low qualifications was an important point to emerge from the paper. It was also noted that the proportion claiming

no qualification is higher than the proportion registered as having no qualifications from DfES records. This means that those with a few low grade GCSE passes are classifying themselves as having no qualifications.

On the third paper (DH and CR, University of Manchester it was pointed out that findings on 'transfer benefits' from the programme described were inconclusive. Many on the programme were judged to be on course to low levels of achievement at KS4 but some missed eg maths lessons as a result of timetable clashes with the programme. 'Recognition issues' were also a problem as vocational qualifications gained on the programme were not recognised or understood by the school. Also hostility from school towards programme. There were also 'partnership problems' when a young person would slip between school and workplace and it was difficult for employers to contact schools.

Some benefits of the programme which helped to explain transfer were

Travel outside the local area

'being treated like an adult'

removal from negative influences of peer group (but some workplace peers had a negative effect)

- workplace enabled young person to perform at a higher cognitive level than in school
- enhanced understanding of career entry requirements (school careers advice had had no impact)

all parents expressed positive aspirations for children at school but actually were giving very different messages to children (relating own negative attitudes to and experience of school)

It was noted that previous experience of forming relationships with adults outside the family helped young person to cope in the workplace

BUT positive experiences did not necessarily translate into better outcomes at KS4

Cultural disadvantage at school may be cultural advantage at work.

There were problems for schools in managing the complexity of the partnerships

The main question for such a programme is how to maximise positive experiences of workplace – which can be very empowering and limit or eliminate negative experiences which can be quite damaging. Problem with this approach is management complexity and unpredictability of outcomes. There is also no continuity of funding and therefore an added instability in programme.

Final Conclusions

Aspirations were a theme running through the presentations today. Aspirations of the disadvantaged are not more unrealistic than among the advantaged - it is rather that the formation of aspirations among the socially disadvantaged appears to depend on different processes. High aspirations among the disadvantaged involve more risks (both material and social) than high aspirations among the advantaged. The formation of aspirations for the future among the disadvantaged appears to be based on careful negotiations with parents, weighing the pros and cons of different strategies, and taking into consideration the available family resources to support a continued education. Educational failure can be more easily mitigated by the more

privileged young people and their parents, and disadvantaged families tend to make choices by opting for security.

The gap between aspiration and achievement may have widened for the younger cohort as formal qualification requirements have become more important. The younger cohort seems less likely to fulfill early promise than the older (NCDS) cohort. Those with some low qualifications at 16 may consider these worthless and record that they have none – or they may just have not bothered to pick up their results from school. Post-16 vocational qualifications seem to offer the best chance for improving prospects but only a small minority achieve these. Intervention 14-16 through workplace experience can yield good results but the outcomes are unpredictable. It seems clear that understanding how to form and fulfill aspirations is not being fostered adequately by the school as far as this group is concerned and that parents too are not well informed about how to support aspirations. Workplace experience can be positive in this respect but again, this is variable.

Comparing NCDS and BCS, the proportion of BCS aspiring to a professional job is twice the proportion of NCDS for Social Classes 4 and 5. The aspiration to further education is also considerably higher (40 per cent compared to 10 per cent for NCDS). Undoubtedly, therefore, aspirations are higher but the evidence shows that the BCS cohort are less likely to realise their potential at 16 than the NCDS cohort. The widening gap between aspiration and realisation could be an important factor contributing to increased visibility of disaffection.

We should pay much more attention to how early aspirations are formed and how these can then be supported by school and by better informed parents

Almost certainly such intervention needs to be earlier than 14-16 but when?

Are schools able to provide positive messages about the value of vocational qualifications and to give encouragement to those who aspire to them? This is such an old and apparently deep-rooted problem that it may be necessary to give up on schools as sources of guidance on post-16 routes to vocational/occupational qualifications. If so, a more systematic alternative than workplace experience will need to be found.