



Towards a learning identity: Young people becoming learners after leaving school

Education Employment Linkages

Research Group

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Outline

1. Objective 2, Phase 4
2. Research process
3. Towards a learning identity
4. What supports the move towards a learning identity?
5. Education-employment linkages
6. Current environment: some issues and questions

Objective 2, Phase 4

This work builds on earlier phases of EEL:

1. The international research literature
2. The mapping of education-employment linkages provision in NZ for young people with low or no qualifications
3. Interviews with providers and policy analysts.
- 4. Hearing the voices of young people**

Research question

What do young people who have left school with low or no qualifications have to say about their capacity to develop education employment linkages...?

including:

- what facilitates these links?
- what barriers impede these links?

Focus groups

- 12 focus groups in 5 learning organisations
- 51 young people in total
- 2 learning centres with young people facing multiple difficult challenges
- 2 learning centres for teen mothers
- 1 learning centre offering both Youth Guarantee and fee paying courses

What learning was taking place?

- NCEA levels
- National certificates
- Driver's license
- Fitness
- Work experience
- Sporting and social activities

From the research literature

Young people construct a *sense of self as a learner* that changes over time and is *mediated by the institutional structures* in which they learn and which therefore impacts upon their view of work/career possibilities.

Young people's understandings of their own learning capacities are critical to their aspirations and ability to engage with particular education-employment linkages.

- *EEL literature review p.22*

Towards a learning identity

- Participants were in a learning environment.
- Most had left school deeply disengaged from schooling.
- Most had been NEET for a period post-school.
- Almost all expressed dissatisfaction with their NEET experience.
- They now saw themselves as learners.
- Significant identity work was taking place.

Advice to early school leavers

‘At least do something with your life – staying at home you’re wasting your life – no future.’

‘Being here [in a learning environment] is better than being a bum.’

‘At home you’re nothing.’

‘Don’t sit around and be a bum.’

Advice to early school leavers

‘Make sure you’re not going to be a bum – it’s all right to be a bum for the first week, but then it’s so boring.’

‘I’ve been a bum and it got pretty boring and that’s when you got bored and did crime and shit.’

‘Since I was at home all day I was getting bored so I started going to town and I became a town bum and then I fell pregnant.’

Getting 'an education'

'No-one goes "don't get an education" ...'

'Everyone is like, you've got to stay in school, but school's not for every person, but there's lots of other things you can do to get educated - like here, for example, there's all sorts of courses. School's not for everyone, school can be a harsh place.'

'Some people are the type of people that are school people, and some people are the type of people that have to be on a course.'

Recognition and relationships

Being seen:

'I had this real nice teacher who was really motivating and supported me and everything, but then I had teachers that didn't help you at all, so I didn't see any point in going to their classes, ***it was like you weren't even there half the time*** and they wouldn't teach you and just send you to referral and I just got over it.'

Recognition and relationships

Being seen:

'Here it's more like in your own environment. Here we're all the same age. We all think the same thing.'

'You're around people who are going to understand your situation.'

'[Here they] understand you and they all get on. If you are a person that has just come into school, no-one's really like you. And when you come here it's all like chilled and you can talk.'

Recognition and relationships

Understanding and trust:

'You can talk to [the tutors] about anything. You don't have to hide nothing from them.'

'And no matter what it is, you can tell them eh? If you're in trouble.'

'They've got your back, hard.'

'When someone leaves here, just walks out, they get texts and stuff like that, like 'are you all right?' but in school it's just 'tell the principal'.'

Recognition and relationships

Authority structures:

'[Young people leave school because of] all the teachers and all the rules.'

'[Tutors] are not your teachers, they don't treat you like a student.'

'They treat you like adults.'

'Here they trust you more.'

'[Tutors here] don't tell us what to do. They give us the option.'

Learning in a non-school environment

Choice: 'If we don't want to be here they'll tell us to go. They're straight up. Either you stay here or you know where the door is.'

Relevance: 'The work at school is kind of pointless – the work here is good because it's based on what you want to do. They treat you like adults.'

Paced learning: 'Here they give you time.'

Class size: 'It's easier to work in a small class.'

Encouragement: 'You just need the positive push.'

***Positive Youth Development in Aotearoa:
Weaving Connections: Tuhonohono Rangitahi - WFCT***

<p>High Support/Low Challenge</p> <p>Patronising Boring Damaging What's the point? Development?</p>	<p>High Support/High Challenge</p> <p>Stimulating Want to be there Learning Understanding Resilience Growth/Development</p>
<p>Low Support/Low Challenge</p> <p>Boring Don't want to be there It sucks Why are we doing this? Dumb No growth</p>	<p>Low Support/High Challenge</p> <p>Scary Don't want to be there Feeling unsafe Damaging experience Lonely No growth</p>

Crafting pathways: emotional support

Who would you talk to about making plans for the future? Someone who:

- is understanding of my situation
- is trustworthy
- listens 'really well'
- has patience
- has high expectations
- is honest about employment

Crafting pathways: motivation

What is the single most important thing you need in order to do what you want to do?

'You just need to be in "go" mode.'

'Be determined to succeed.'

'Be able to want to do something.'

'Think about what you actually want.'

'Myself. My motivation. I've got to go the extra mile. It's all up to me. The teachers help me do it, but it's my extra motivation.'

Crafting pathways: systemic support

Transition into a learning organisation came through:

- Recommendation from a known and trusted source (parent, friend, sibling, midwife, youth worker, social worker, teacher) i.e. by belonging to a trusted network.
- Bail/supervision condition.
- Some commented that ‘these places aren’t advertised enough’.

Crafting pathways: finding a way into work

This came through:

- Individualised assistance
- Internet based research
- Acquaintances
- Career expos
- Job search assistance
- Work experience

Informal networks and employer involvement are key.

Crafting education employment pathways

Maintaining a learner identity, crafting a worker identity:

‘Everyone needs an education so they can get qualifications for a job.’

‘No-one wants to work at KFC all your life.’

What will happen if jobs are not available?

Current policy environment

1. The current strong focus on 16-17 years olds risks missing those for whom the shift towards a learning identity takes place over a longer time period.

Building confidence within the complexity of these young people's lives takes a lot of time and one-to-one support. They are second chance learners.

Current policy environment

2. Pursuit of NCEA L2: if this leads organisations to replicate schools (e.g. performance measures, course structure and length) they are unlikely to cater well for these young people.

Gateway and the Trades Academies do not currently cater for many of these young people: 'You had to be real good at everything to be eligible.'

Conclusions

1. This shift towards a learning identity is a crucial moment for young people who have been NEET.
2. High levels of support and tailored education facilitate and support it.
3. It takes time.
4. Current processes for work experience and access to employment opportunities are ad hoc and often unhelpful.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION