YOUNG PEOPLE AND
TRANSITIONS POLICIES IN NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

This paper argues that the effectiveness, or otherwise, of policies concerned with youth transitions between education and employment is related to the adequacy of the concepts of youth transition that inform them. An overview of transitions policies in New Zealand is offered with a view to identifying the concepts of transition that have driven and continue to drive them. The "extended linear" model this overview identifies as being at the heart of much transitions policy is then considered in the light of a growing body of international research, the findings of which have led researchers to reconsider traditional understandings of transition, mindful of the complex ways in which young people manage the processes and relationships involved. The paper concludes that an understanding of young New Zealanders' experiences of transition is an essential starting point for the development of effective policy.

INTRODUCTION

School-leavers in New Zealand at the beginning of the 21st century face a labour market characterised by high levels of uncertainty. Not the least uncertain aspect of this concerns the relationship between post-compulsory education and the job market. Where once relatively uncomplicated transitions were established between, for example, apprenticeship training and employment in skilled trades work, or between university education and professional employment, in recent years the multiplication of post-compulsory education courses, the fragmentation of the labour market and the attenuation of the link between education/training and the workplace have combined to make transitions between education and employment a complex process.

Currently we know too little about the nature of these transitions in New Zealand. Reporting on the "Seminar on Children's Policy" held in association with the launch of the Government's "Agenda for Children", Smithies and Bidrose (2000:53) comment

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that there is, in general, a lack of good New Zealand data about many of the transitions that children and young people experience, and that this is "particularly the case for transitions from adolescence to adulthood. For example, there is little information on the move from education to employment, or on the combination of the two among young adults."

Aspects of transition have, nevertheless, been explored in a range of projects in recent times. Several longitudinal studies have considered (or may in future consider) transition in the lives of their young participants: these include the Competent Children study of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (Wylie et al. 1999), the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (Silva and Stanton 1996) and the Christchurch Health and Development Study (Fergusson and Woodward 2000, Maani 2000). Other research programmes have looked at educational inequality within the compulsory sector and touched on issues of transition: the Christchurch School Leavers Study (Lauder and Hughes 1990), the Access and Opportunity in Education Survey (Nash 1993), the Progress at School Project (Nash and Harker 1998) and the Smithfield Project (Lauder and Hughes 1999).

While these projects have not had transition as a particular focus, they have identified some crucial influences on the transition process: socio-economic class clearly has a significant bearing on post-compulsory destinations and ethnicity may also be significant (Coxon et al. 2002, Ministry of Education Group Māori 2002). But statistics about higher rates of university participation by pupils of high socio-economic status, or the under-representation of Māori and Pacific youth in tertiary education, do not explain the nature of the transition process for these groups. For this, more qualitative work with young people is needed. Nash's recent account of interviews with Pacific students about their aspirations is a good example, and the recent survey of school leavers by the NZCER (Boyd et al. 2001) is a welcome development in transitions research.

The present paper is a contribution to the developing discussion in New Zealand about education–employment transitions and about policy in relation to them. In particular, it argues that how we conceptualise transition is crucially important in crafting effective youth policy, and that such policy should recognise the complexities young people face as they manage not one but a multiplicity of transitions involving education, employment, family and peer relationships, housing and so forth. The first two sections of the paper offer an overview of transitions policies in New Zealand with a view to identifying the concepts of transition that have driven and continue to drive them. The discussion then considers these concepts in the light of a growing range of international research, the findings of which have led researchers to reconsider traditional understandings of transition, mindful of the complex ways in which young people manage the processes and relationships involved.

TRANSITION IN THE POST-WAR YEARS

Lauder (1992:3) observes that, during the post-war years, New Zealand operated "an elite [education] system in which large numbers of students were 'cooled out' into the workforce without qualifications largely through the mechanisms of the School Certificate exam." In this system, a class elite moved on to university and thence, generally, to professional employment. At the same time, full employment created job opportunities for the unqualified young that enabled, and encouraged, them to move into the labour market early.

This process was highly gendered. As late as 1981 only 2.8% of women had a university qualification compared with (only) 6% of men – the elite to which Lauder refers. Among those who did not go to university some gained other tertiary qualifications: in 1981 13.9% of women and 16.9% of men had a non-university tertiary qualification (Horsfield 1988:361). For many young men, but few young women, this qualification was an apprenticeship.

The apprenticeship system that drew young men into the skilled trades largely excluded young women. Indeed, until 1972 there were legal barriers to young women taking up apprenticeships, and not until 1983 were they actively encouraged to do so. Even then, not many took this path (Murray 2001). In the early 1980s women took on between 8% and 10% of new contracts each year, three quarters of which were in hairdressing (Horsfield 1988:368). Many young women moved instead into female-dominated occupations, particularly clerical work, nursing and teaching (Horsfield 1988, Horsfield and Evans 1988, NACEW 1990, Davies and Jackson 1993).

One of the reasons these paths into employment were so successful in channelling young people into gender-segregated occupations was that they provided ports of entry into the labour market that were sheltered from competition from more experienced workers (Higgins 2001). In the case of apprenticeships, the system was set up formally to offer young people (men) places in firms where they could train on-the-job. In so doing, they gained access not only to trade skills but also to extended internal labour markets; that is, to networks of employers and fellow workers through whom access to employment opportunities could be negotiated.

Meanwhile, for young women the path into clerical, nursing and teaching work was sheltered also – not formally (except for nursing students, who undertook the equivalent of an apprenticeship), but for the most part informally in so far as the labour market participation of women, particularly in full-time work, was bi-modal: women left the workforce in their early to mid-twenties and many did not return (if they returned at all) until their late thirties or forties, and then often only to part-time work (Davies and Jackson 1993).

Finally, the transition infrastructure in the post-war years was also characterised by assumptions about the place of Māori and (later) Pacific youth in the labour market. The Native Schools, to which many Māori children went as late as the 1950s, had a curriculum that emphasised agriculture, manual and vocational training for boys and domestic training for girls. There was little emphasis on skilled manual work, professional qualifications or academic education (Rice 1992). This meshed with policy encouraging migration to the cities by Māori and (later) Pacific peoples to feed the demands of post-war industrialisation for unskilled labour (Hill and Brosnan 1984, Brosnan 1987, Horsfield and Evans 1988, Nicol 1991).

Clearly, assumptions about transition that informed policy in the post-war environment had in mind some fairly straightforward processes: that an elite would carry on to university and that the remainder would move into (gendered, and to an extent, ethnically segregated) employment straight from school.

This is not to say that these assumptions were not disputed, resisted and challenged, as Nolan's (2000) account of New Zealand women's experience of education and employment makes clear. Nevertheless, in the post-war years, important mechanisms within the education/training system and the labour market fostered segmentation among young people as pupils, and subsequently as workers.

This post-war transition experience illustrates the way transition policies can act as powerful sorting mechanisms. This happens because the transition infrastructure these policies generate (that is, the configuration of relationships they foster between educational, labour market and social welfare institutions) establishes particular avenues of access to educational, training and employment opportunities. Such infrastructures may be more or less formal in different contexts. In the case of Germany, for example (Hahn 1998, Blossfeld and Stockmann 1999, Heinz 2000), and Japan (Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989, Brinton and Kariya 1998), paths through education to employment have been strongly institutionalised over a long period, while in the United Kingdom (Wallace and Cross 1990, Deakin 1996) and, to a lesser extent, the United States (Rosenbaum et al. 1990, McNeal 1997, Lewis et al. 1998) the institutionalisation of transition has been a more recent, and somewhat haphazard, response to rising youth unemployment. New Zealand falls into the latter group.

One of the key concerns for policy makers when considering transitions policies is, therefore, the extent to which these policies can be designed to contribute to an infrastructure in which opportunities are genuinely equitable. Clearly the post-war system was not so organised, but tended to reinforce the structured nature of the compulsory education system in which socio-economic class, gender and ethnicity were powerful determinants of an individual's qualifications and competencies at the end of his or her schooling career. This raises a further question for policy makers: to

what extent, if at all, can transitions policies (such as affirmative action) be used to counter the effects of earlier factors in a child's life that have conferred disadvantage? During the 1980s and 1990s answers to these questions were sought in the market.

MARKETS AND MERITOCRACIES: 1980s-1990s

The infrastructure of transition that developed in the full employment years was ill matched for the transformed economic environment that New Zealand experienced from the mid-1970s onwards. In response to rising unemployment, successive governments attempted to recreate full employment through government work schemes by means of direct job creation in the public sector, and subsidised wages in the private sector. This approach came to an abrupt halt with the election of the fourth Labour government in 1984 (Higgins 1997). Transitions policies in the years that followed were characterised by a neo-liberal commitment to the market and, in the 1990s, a neo-conservative commitment to the role of the family in supporting young people. The model of transition implicit in these policies was different from, but in many ways as straightforward as, the model that operated in the post-war years. At its core was a concern to establish a genuinely meritocratic system through the creation of properly functioning educational and labour markets. Policies were directed, therefore, towards creating competitive environments in education and employment and enhancing individuals' access to these.

Dezoning and the option for bulk funding of school budgets were introduced to provide a competitive environment in which schools would "strive for excellence", and parents' access to the schools that best suited their aspirations for their children would be enhanced. Similarly, at the post-compulsory level the availability of student loans and the provision of a choice of institutions operating in competition with each other were intended to remove financial barriers to tertiary education and create open access and choice for all. These policies were intended to produce a meritocratic transitions system characterised by high-quality institutions and open access. Their effectiveness rested on a number of assumptions, considered below.

The model of transition that became current in the 1980s and 1990s was summarised as follows by former Minister of Education, Wyatt Creech:

> The student loan scheme is a good scheme. It improves access into universities by providing a vehicle by which students can afford to pay the fees. They get the loan; the fees are paid. They get their education, go out into the work-force, and earn money. From those earnings they repay their loan over a 15-year period on average. That is very defensible (*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates,* 15/12/92, Vol. 532, 13234).

Although a rather bald summary statement, this does point to the model of transition that was implicit in a range of related policies. In this model:

• education is a commodity and access to it is a matter of access to finance;

• an uncomplicated relationship exists between gaining educational qualifications, gaining skills and getting employment;

• the investment in education can be paid for by the employment to which that education gives access;

• in making decisions about education and employment, teenagers and parents act rationally and with full knowledge of their options.

Some of the key issues associated with these assumptions are explored below.

Access and Equity

It was characteristic of transitions policies during these years that the formal provision of access through open markets was expected to foster a genuine meritocracy. Within this model, once certain barriers to education and training had been removed (or at least significantly diminished) through policies such as dezoning and the loans scheme, the transitions process would "sort" young people according to ability and motivation rather than, for example, class, gender or ethnicity. This approach effectively conflated access with equity.

Barriers to access were viewed primarily in financial terms. It is consistent with this approach that targeted assistance to low-income schools (through the decile system) and to low-income students (through the allowances scheme) remained in place while a range of other equity mechanisms relating to education did not.

For example, shortly after the 1990 election the requirement that school charters incorporate gender and tangata whenua equity provisions became optional (Middleton 1992). Alongside this came the abolition of a series of groups that had been mandated, during the 1980s, to promote educational equity. These were documented by Irwin (1992, 1993) and O'Neill (1993) at the time: they included the Women's Advisory Committee on Education and the Rūnanga Matua, both nationally constituted advisory groups established to provide contestable advice to the Ministry of Education on the education of girls and women, and of Māori, respectively; Te Wahanga Māori, a unit within the Ministry of Education set up to work on issues associated with tangata whenua equity; the Girls' and Women's Section of the Policy Division of the Ministry, which was, at the time of its demise, examining why women were still being channelled into traditional female occupations; and the Contestable Equity Fund, established to support educational equity in various forms.

In general, then, transitions policies of the 1980s and especially the 1990s looked to properly functioning markets and the overcoming of financial barriers to offer access and choice sufficient to address the issue of equity in the transitions infrastructure.

Qualifications and Employment

In the model of transition summarised above by Mr Creech, the relationship between qualifications and employment is relatively simple: getting a job follows from gaining a qualification. This sits neatly with other aspects of transitions policy formulated during this period and subsequently. In particular, in keeping with the supply-side models that informed economic policy during the 1980s and 1990s, transitions policies drew heavily on the notion of skills deficits to address youth unemployment and to encourage participation in post-compulsory education. In 1985 the abrupt shift from employment creation programmes to training schemes as the predominant focus of employment assistance for the unemployed young signalled this changed interpretation of youth unemployment (Gordon 1990, Higgins 1997).

The skills deficit thesis has not only underpinned a proliferation of "life skills" and "generic skills" training programmes for this group; it has also been prominent in the knowledge economy discourse that has informed, or at least adorned, tertiary education/training policy in recent years (see, e.g., Butler 1996, Ministry of Education 1998, Frederick and McIlroy 1999, Lee and Lee 1999, Department of Labour 2001, New Zealand Government 2001).

Within this understanding of labour market trends, individuals must become more highly trained, more skilled and more qualified if they wish to participate in the knowledge economy, which, in return, has significant rewards to offer. This latter element of the jobs-qualifications equation is an important feature of the transitions model. It assumes that the jobs to which qualifications give access will more than recompense an individual for his or her educational investment: in other words, that qualifications are commensurate with labour market power.

This being so, the argument that tertiary education is a private or largely private good from which individuals derive considerable personal benefit gains traction, as indeed it did over these years (in, for example, the Treasury's 1987 briefing papers, the 1988 government working party report on post-compulsory education and training, *The Hawke Report*, and the government's 1989 response to this, *Learning for Life*).

The private benefits of tertiary education/training were seen to include the capacity of individuals educated/trained to recoup the costs (and more) of their educational investment once in the labour market. This model of transition links tertiary education closely to the needs of industry, both practically and conceptually: practically, in so far

as students are expected to be highly instrumental in their choice of courses if, in their subsequent careers, they are to pay off the loans they have accrued over their student years; conceptually, in so far as it draws on the upskilling discourse commonly associated with the knowledge economy to assert that increasing levels of education are required for economic growth, progress, competitive edge, and so forth.

Faith in human capital theory and the knowledge economy come together, therefore, to model a transition path that leads, in a fairly straightforward manner, from qualifications gained through investment in education to sought-after skills in the labour market and thence to income through employment; student loans are repaid; income forgone over the training years is recouped.

Implicit within this model is an identification of qualifications gained in the classroom with the skills required for employment in a workplace. For some young people (although during the 1990s not many) this was a relatively simple matter because some employers provided work-based training through the Industry Training Organisation infrastructure whereby industries establish ITOs to oversee training in the workplace that is government-subsidised and incorporated within the National Qualifications Framework. But, for a variety of reasons work-based training became the poor cousin of the tertiary education/training system during the 1980s and 1990s (Higgins 2001).[2]

Some recent policy initiatives suggest a move to reverse this trend. The Modern Apprenticeship scheme (for those aged 16-21 years) and the Gateway programme (for school students) both involve work-based learning, as do a number of pre-employment programmes run by Skill New Zealand. Although in their early stages (in the case of the apprenticeships and Gateway) and relatively small-scale,[3] these developments do nevertheless acknowledge, as policy discourse did not in the 1990s, that qualifications are not skills.

An Extended Linear Model

Developments in the 1990s included attempts to increase the flexibility of the education/training system through the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework, which aimed to provide access to qualifications at a wide variety of sites and to a wide range of individuals. This fitted well with the knowledge economy discourse that identified "lifelong learning" as a significant goal.

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[2] Skill New Zealand (2001) reports that fewer than 10% of industry trainees are young people.

[3] In 2000/01, 8% of trainees in Training Opportunities and 12% in Youth Training received some training in a workplace. The Skill Enhancement programme, targeting Māori and Pacific youth, incorporates a work-based component of at least 20% (Skill New Zealand 2001).

Alongside these developments, however, the model of transition that emerged from this period contained strong elements of linearity. It was, in several ways, an "age and stage" model offering a linear pathway for young people to follow from education into employment. In it, education/training was strongly associated with the young prior to their arrival in the primary labour market. Study Right reduced tertiary fees for students who undertook their first three years of study by age 22 and the loans scheme also encouraged a degree of linearity in that prompt repayment of a loan required immediate and sustained employment following one's exit from education or training.

Consistent with the age-and-stage nature of this model was the way in which the role of the family was perceived in these policies. The expectation that young people would embark on extended periods of study was accompanied by an expectation that during this period they should continue to be regarded as "adults in waiting"; that is, they should be dependent on their families for financial support.

This expectation is clearly established in the student allowances scheme, introduced in the 1990s and continued into this decade, which targets allowances according to parental income until a student reaches the age of 25. It is also evident in a series of welfare measures introduced through the 1990s in which access to income support was progressively tightened, and in some cases removed altogether, as young people were encouraged to pursue the linear path of education to employment, and to remain dependent on their parents while they did so. These measures included:
• abolition of the Domestic Purposes Benefit for those under 18 years (1991);
• reduction in the Unemployment Benefit for single people, 18-19 years (1991);
• abolition of the Independent Youth Benefit for 16-17 year olds, except in cases of family breakdown or absence (1998);
• abolition of training benefits for 16-17 year olds who had been in previous training or tertiary study (1998); and
• reduction in benefits for unemployment, training or sickness for those aged 18-19 years with no dependants and living with their parents (1998).

In these terms, the model was an "extended linear" model: linear, in that incentives were presented to young people to pursue certain pathways from education into employment; extended, in that the model has responded to prolonged periods of education and training in adolescence by reinforcing the connection between formal learning and childhood dependency.

The model of transition implicit in policy in the 1980s and 1990s thus conflated access with equity, qualifications with labour market power, and student status with childhood dependency. None of these equations tally particularly well with the accounts of transition emerging from research elsewhere. It is to this work that we now turn.

TRANSITION RESEARCH

An extensive range of research investigating youth transitions has been published in recent years in Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and North America. The best of this work is at pains to understand how young people actually manage and negotiate their lives – what Liebau and Chisholm (1993:8) call "taking young people and their lives into serious account". Although this may seem an obvious starting point, from a policy perspective it is not easily done in that it requires an appreciation of the complexity involved in young people's negotiation of multiple transitions. As Australian researchers Wyn and White (1997:110) argue, this means developing policies that are "based on the different realities of young people's lives rather than on a fictional mainstream." In support of this latter point, they cite evidence from their own and others' research of "gaps in the institutionalised processes of transition in Australia" leading to the marginalisation of large numbers of young people, particularly early school-leavers.

This research has considerable value for understanding transitions in this country. In particular, the nature of the transition processes it has explored suggests the need for a more complex conceptualisation of transition than the post-war and market models discussed above if we are to understand the ways young people manage these processes.

For example, it is clear from this work that the "linear pathways" metaphor implicit in much youth policy is inappropriate for describing the ways young people actually manage various overlapping spheres in their lives, including education, employment, housing, family and other relationships (Wyn and Dwyer 1999, 2000). Within these spheres, traditional markers of entry into adulthood – such as leaving school and home, getting a job, getting married and having children – have become not stages cumulatively achieved, but processes that may be impermanent, transitory and, sometimes, reversible (Wyn and White 1997). As Wyn and Dwyer (2000:148) point out:

> The concept of transition that has dominated discourses on youth over the last decade has been modelled on ... past experience and has relied heavily on the notion of a linear progression from childhood, through youth to the achievement of adult status. ... For the more recent generation, however, there has been an increasing lack of "fit" between these ideas of development and a reality in which traditional life events have become less certain markers of adulthood (getting a job for example) or associated only loosely with adulthood (such as leaving school or becoming a parent).

This observation is particularly apt for the school-to-work transition. For many, this transition is not the uni-linear and singular movement from education to employment

it may once have been (particularly for men), but involves a more complex overlapping and balancing of these spheres in young people's lives. Diverse new ways of negotiating transition have been opened up by the multiplication and fragmentation of educational and employment opportunities. At the same time, high levels of risk, fragmentation and uncertainty have come to characterise labour markets generally.

These developments have meant that many young people are required to be, and are choosing to be, proactive in their management of education/training and the job market in the pursuit of desirable – or in some cases any – employment. The research points to a high level of commitment by them to the idea of work, and indicates that, in the face of significant labour market obstacles, they exercise considerable ingenuity and persistence in pursuing that commitment into multiple economic spheres, including the formal waged, informal waged, informal non-waged, welfare and, sometimes, criminal arenas (Chisholm 1997, MacDonald 1998, McDonnell et al. 1998).

Perhaps because they are required to manage their own transitions processes more actively than in the past, many young people display high levels of consciousness of their own choices, and (sometimes surprising) optimism about their abilities to exercise this agency to convert educational credentials into desirable employment destinations (Chisholm and du Bois Reymond 1993, Hodkinson et al. 1996, Rudd and Evans 1998, Andres et al. 1999, Wyn and Dwyer 1999, Ball et al. 2000). Much of this research sounds a cautionary note about this optimism: indeed, part of the complexity it reveals has to do with the renegotiation of transition processes in the face of the false starts, set-backs and disappointed aspirations that arise from encounters with real structural constraints such as circumscribed access to education and training opportunities, job instability and high levels of unemployment.

Transition in this literature is, therefore, identified as something that young people themselves manage within the constraints associated with the institutions of education, social welfare and the labour market, and within relationships with employers, educators/trainers, family and peers. Thus defined, transition is highly context-dependent. This may seem an obvious, even trivial, point, but as the abstract market model of transition described earlier indicates, it is not. Two examples illustrate why.

Because skills and qualifications have different meanings and different leverage according to cultural, economic, social and political contexts, the relationship between labour market power and qualifications is by no means necessarily commensurate (Brown and Lauder 1996). Recent work by Gordon and Morton (2001) explores this in terms of the gender pay gap in the New Zealand public service. Surveys of New Zealand graduates are also instructive. In 1996 the Vice Chancellors' Committee reported that, six years after graduating, a "significant minority" of 1990 university graduates were not using their degrees or diplomas in their employment: 17% were

using their qualifications "a little" or "not at all" but this average concealed figures of up to 50% in some subject areas. Despite extra qualifications, science graduates had more difficulty obtaining employment than graduates on average. The graduates attributed their difficulties to labour market conditions, lack of jobs in their degree area and lack of work experience (NZVCC and MRST 1997).

This last points to the importance of factors beyond qualifications in the forging of labour market power. Work experience and access to labour market networks are particularly valuable, but these depend on the nature of the labour market and the transition infrastructure: an infrastructure that institutionalises workplace training is more likely to offer access to these than one in which all education/training takes place in the classroom (Windolf and Wood 1988, Rosenbaum and Kariya 1989, Miller and Rosenbaum 1997, Strathdee and Hughes 2000, Dalziel et al. 2001, Ryan 2001).

Of course young people operate not only within this broad institutional context, but also within the context of family relationships: indeed, it is important not to underestimate the significance of these relationships and resources in young people's lives (Allatt 1993, Nash 1993, Irwin 1995, Ball et al. 2000). The research points to the family as one of the primary sites through which resources are mobilised and from which access to qualifications, labour market networks and job search resources is negotiated. It identifies the importance of family provision both of financial and (certain forms of) cultural capital. For example, Ball et al. (2000:91) found that, for the middle-class participants in their research, "a whole variety of familial resources and skills are marshalled to support them through key moments of 'choice'". These resources and skills provided access to finance, transport, space (both local and global), parental networks in education and the labour market and parental knowledge of how these institutions operate. Choices are, therefore, shaped by factors other than access to finance alone.

While finding no simple correlation between social class and "choice-making", Ball et al. (2000) suggest that it is important to understand how families may guide and channel choice-making, perhaps ruling some options out while positioning others as real alternatives. Families with strong histories of tertiary education may position these alternatives differently from those with no such history. For example, when tertiary education is considered a viable option, the latter often cede educational expertise to their children, leaving them to choose their own pathways. In families with more experience of tertiary education, parents' own educational histories may provide a template for the expectations that children encounter.[4] It is through such processes that

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[4] Cf. Boyd and Chalmers' (2001) finding that the primary information source on transition was the school for children from lower decile schools, and the family for children from higher decile schools.

social divisions and, particularly, class divisions are reinforced (Aggleton 1987, Allatt 1993, Nash 1993).

All of this points to high levels of complexity in the choice-making that takes place in the transition process in relation to tertiary education and employment, and cautions against simplistic assumptions about how access to education/training is accomplished.

Finally, it is important to note that despite the strong commitment to work that this research identifies, education/training and work are only one part of young people's lives, and not always the most important in terms of how they see themselves "learning to become somebody" (Ball et al. 2000, see also Wyn and Dwyer 2000). On the contrary, their choices are:

> embedded in ... social and familial relationships. They are not rational choices in any simple sense, nor educational and vocational in any simple sense. They are about and invested in identities and opportunity. They are framed and formed by key events, moments and influences – various significant others. (Ball et al. 2000:40)

This raises a last point, easily overlooked: young people's choice-making is concerned with the present as much as, if not more than, the future. The literature voices a concern about policy that brackets the present because it conceptualises young people as adults-in-waiting engaged in education and training in preparation for "real life" (Wyn and White 1997, Ball et al. 2000). This is problematic not only because young people are in fact engaged in a range of adult activities while still in education – including paid work, caring and domestic responsibilities and sexual relationships – but also because they do not see themselves simply as potential workers but as individuals seeking to craft an identity through a wide range of activities in the present.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored conceptualisations of transition in New Zealand policy, both in the post-war years and more recently. I have not attempted to test these models for effectiveness against local empirical data; that important task belongs to a much wider research programme and that programme, well advanced elsewhere, has barely begun in New Zealand. My aim has been, rather, to consider these models in the light of significant developments in the understanding of transition now emerging from research internationally. What this research suggests is that the concepts of transition that have driven policy here have been somewhat impoverished.

The international literature makes clear that young people encounter transition as a multi-faceted, non-linear process deeply embedded in institutional and social relationships and practices. In the post-war years in New Zealand, however, transitions policies simply transferred segregation among pupils into segregation among workers, while in the 1980s and 1990s the purity of the model of transition employed in policy assumed away a network of complexities that young people encounter in their choice-making and experiences of transition.

A clearer understanding of how these processes operate for young New Zealanders is an urgent, because neglected, task. Important questions include:
• What roles do financial and cultural capital play in young people's choice-making and in their forging of labour market power?
• What are the advantages and disadvantages of building a transition infrastructure that strongly institutionalises relationships between schools, tertiary education institutions and industry?
• To what extent (if any) can early disadvantage be addressed in transitions policies?
• What mechanisms do young people perceive as helpful (and unhelpful) in the transitions process?

All these questions begin, although they do not end, with exploring the experiences of young New Zealanders, and taking them and their lives into serious account.

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New zealand council for educational research. Te rūnanga o aotearoa mō te rangahau I te mātauranga. Wellington. And what can we learn in relation to policies and practices, and where they might usefully go from here? The research was prompted by our interest in the way young people tend to be seen as the problem of transition through a "pathways framework" coming from three system-wide shifts in New Zealand (Vaughan, 2004)—a largely deregulated tertiary system, a National Qualifications Framework, and an increase in career development support for a wider range of post-school careers, particularly vocationally-oriented.   v © NZCER Young people and participation We conducted semi-structured and An overview of transitions policies in New Zealand is offered with a view to identifying the concepts of transition that have driven and continue to drive them. The "extended linear" model this overview identifies as being at the heart of much transitions policy is then considered in the light of a growing body of international research, the findings of which have led researchers to reconsider traditional understandings of transition, mindful of the complex ways in which young people manage the processes and relationships involved. The paper concludes that an understanding of young New Zealand...