

Proposal for conference “Transitions, career learning and career management skills”

Type of contribution: Paper presentation

Title of proposal: “Factors of importance for career choices and future life among Swedish students in the process of transition to upper secondary education”

Information on how the contribution is related to the conference theme

The paper presentation results from a questionnaire study conducted within the Swedish project “Learning for career management skills” The focus of the project is to explore the existence and format of career learning and career management skills among students who is in the transition process to upper secondary education.

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Keywords: upper secondary school choice, Sweden, career learning

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

Almost all students (98%) in Sweden go on to studies at upper secondary school after completing compulsory school (Skolverket 2014). As a consequence of the huge expansion of the Swedish school market during the past decade, the amount of options of schools, programs and profiles has increased immensely. Research shows that many students perceive the school choice process as both challenging and risky and school staff have noted increasing unrest, drop out-rates and switches in programs among students (Lidström, Holm & Lundström, 2014). This means that the choice of upper secondary education has become even more important nowadays than before for future employment and career choices. It also stresses the importance of compulsory schools providing their students with career learning skills; i.e. knowledge and skills required to navigate in the school market and future transitions to working life. Some countries provide such career education in school already, but this is not the case in Sweden (Skolinspektionen 2013). There are several factors at both individual and structural level that influence students’ selection of upper secondary school and program (Lundahl et al, 2010). Influential motives are, for example, the character of school and schooling, the influence of marketing and education policy, as well as young people’s identities and positions. Also, young people’s decision-making seem to vary according to gender, social- and ethnical background and geographical locality (Reay et al. 2015; Skolverket, 2013).

Lack of education constitutes a risk factor for future unemployment and marginalization. In Sweden today, a large group of students do not reach the objectives of the Swedish comprehensive school. Furthermore, the proportion of students that is not qualified for upper secondary school is rising. Reasons for this may be multiple. It is therefore of vital importance to examine factors associated with choice of education and school among young people, and their learning for career management skills.

The aim of this paper is to explore factors of importance for young people's choice of upper secondary education and future life. The analysis is based on data from a questionnaire study among Swedish students in grade 9 (students aged 15-16), conducted in close connection to their choice of school and program for upper secondary school. The study is conducted within the ongoing project "Learning for career management skills" (2016-2019), funded by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (FORTE). Some preliminary results from the project are presented in the paper.

Theoretical framework: The analysis of data draws on Hodkinson's and Sparkes's careership theory (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997), arguing that individuals make pragmatic and rational decisions within their 'horizons for action'. This means that student career choices are dependent on their everyday context and framed by the view of what they perceive as desirable and possible in their life. Possibilities at both individual and structural level (such as gender, family background, life history, as well as school intake and labour market) render and restrict the decisions students make within the horizons for action.

Methods/methodology

The paper mainly builds on an analysis of answers from a questionnaire addressing approximately 1500 grade 9-students in three Swedish regions. The questionnaire consisted of both fixed and open questions regarding the students' view of themselves, factors associated with their choice of education and transition to work as well as questions about career guidance activities and career management skills. In addition, some of the questions concerned student expectations of their future lives (concerning aspects e.g. family and work). Some questions were formulated in identical ways as in similar questionnaires from 1992 and 2005 (Holm, 2010), which makes it possible to study potential changes over time.

Expected outcomes/results

As the questionnaire study was conducted in December 2016- March 2017, the response rate is still unknown and the analysis of data is not yet started. Consequently, we have no outcomes/results to present yet.

Intent of publication: high-quality scientific journal in the field of youth studies and/or school-to-work transitions (e.g. School choice, Young)

References

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