

When the sociology of education meets the world of work: School-to-work transition and work in educational institutions

Conference organized by the Sociology of Education Research Network of the Swiss Sociological Association (SSA)

8 & 9 November 2018, Campus HEP Vaud

Educational institutions differ in their proximity to the world of work. While some of them directly prepare learners for a specific occupation or profession (e.g. initial vocational education and training, universities of applied sciences, or teacher education), others offer a more general educational orientation.

Nonetheless, all educational institutions define their existence more or less explicitly in line with a certain conception of the world of work and the knowledge and skills learners should acquire. The practical and soft skills (attitudes and behavioural norms) educational institutions foster, and the cognitive expectations they explicitly or implicitly formulate, are also related to the demands of workplaces and the organization of labour in the wider society.

Moreover, educational institutions have been increasingly faced with economic utility demands in recent decades. These demands have emerged in parallel with the continuing expansion of the educational system and intensified economic competition in the global era. From an economic point of view, the success of educational programmes is for instance attained when predefined standardized results are obtained. The main actors driving such demands come not only from economic, political, and educational institutions, but might also include parents or individual learners who aim to optimize their (children's) educational investment.

From another point of view, all types of schools – even those most distant from the world of work (kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, colleges or universities) – are work organizations that cannot escape the structural, political, and socio-economic changes of the current labour system. Teachers, principals, administrative, and other employees are also workers who are increasingly held responsible for obtaining educational results. Schools also have their specific work conditions and forms of work organization as well as logics of employee recruitment, promotion, and qualification. And what about pupils: can they also be considered workers? At the very least, they are expected to “produce” and to adopt behaviour similar to what is expected in the contemporary world of work (e.g. autonomy, responsibility, social and communicational skills, personal engagement, goal attainment).

Authors are invited to submit proposals that explore the relationship between work and education, interpreted broadly, based at least partially on research in Switzerland. We invite theoretical or empirical contributions using qualitative and/or quantitative sociological methods. All analytical levels can be focused on: micro (e.g. individual trajectories between school and work, subjective experiences, interactions in class), meso (e.g. organizational logics, collective actors), or macro (e.g. educational policy, governance of education). Proposals may address but are not restricted to the following thematic perspectives:

1. Preparation for the world of work: What are the current trends in the transition of individual learners from school to work? What kinds of knowledge and skills are valorized in the

transition from school to work? How are these knowledge and skills transferred and evaluated in schools and at workplaces? What social inequalities are manifested? What measures are developed to facilitate the transition from school to work (e.g. vocational guidance) and how they are legitimized?

2. Educational programmes involving workplace learning: What do the various educational programmes involving workplace learning (e.g. internships, alternating training courses/dual VET) train for? How do they prepare students or apprentices for an occupation, the world of work, and related contemporary changes? What kinds of knowledge circulate between different learning places and how? How are these learning places interrelated and divided? As more and more educational programmes include workplace learning, what are the advantages and limits of these programmes for the various social actors?

3. Work in educational institutions: What are the working conditions and the forms of work organization within educational institutions? How is labour divided between pupils, teachers, families, and other (educational) workers (e.g. psychologists, speech therapists, nurses, principals, janitors, secretary, after-school care)? What social inequalities derive from this division? How do the current changes in the labour market affect educational institutions? How have economic utility demands (e.g. new public management) been integrated or resisted?

Keynote speakers

Anne Barrère (University of Paris-Descartes) and Christian Imdorf (University of Basel).

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