Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Pathways Framework meets Consumer Culture: Young People, Careers, and Commitment

Karen Vaughan

This article engages with current debates in New Zealand over the legitimacy of various young people's activities within a transition-to-work framework based around the metaphor of 'pathways'. The article argues for a more complex understanding of the imperatives young people now face in choosing careers within a deregulated, seamless tertiary education system that intensifies particular kinds of consumer choice-making. Drawing on analysis from the frst year of a longitudinal study of 'navigations' of pathways from school, young people's reflexive application of risk management to themselves is explored. Young people's descriptions of their activities illustrate a 'just in time' flexibility sitting in tension with a 'just in case' pursuit of qualifications and experience. The indeterminate domains and possibilities of identity produced for young people are discussed in terms of both 'moments of consumption' and opportunities for critical support of young people.

Pathways to a Successful Life

> My biggest problem was there were too many choices, so it was really hard to find out about everything and then, this is what I want to do, and this is what I don't want to do. That's what my Dad said as well; he said in his time there was a lack of choices and in mine, there are too many. (yp73)

For many parents, the most important thing they believe they will do for their children is to offer them, or make them aware of, as many choices and options in life as possible. Some of these will be work and lifestyle prospects and perspectives with

Correspondence to: Karen Vaughan, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, PO Box 3237, Wellington 6000, New Zealand. Tel: +64 4 384 7939; Fax: +64 4 384 7933; Email: karen.vaughan@nzcer.org.nz. The author is grateful to her colleagues Rosemary Hipkins, for her comments on earlier drafts of this article, and Stephanie Doyle, for discussions in relation to the ongoing research.

which they are familiar. Others will be opportunities they never had or have only a limited understanding of in today's world.

A similar notion of providing abundant options, also promoted as of equal status, underpins school-to-work transition policy in New Zealand. A 'pathways' framework on transition says to young people: no matter what your background and how successful or unsuccessful you were at school, there are options for you; there are pathways to a good career and future. There is an invocation of individual choice framed by a consumer culture.

It is not only significant that there are a lot of options, but that these form a veritable 'maze' in a society where 'it is estimated that every year 200,000 new jobs are created and 150,000 disappear or are transformed' and 'a reliable and enjoyable career cannot be left to chance' (Career Services *rapuara* undated). To moderate this for young people leaving school, the New Zealand government agency Career Services *rapuara* has brought out a raft of resources for teachers and students in schools. These include workbooks, *Options Kits* and interactive software designed to help secondary students make connections between school and their working life, 'discover transferable skills' and 'balance work and leisure times'. Schools are encouraged to purchase these resources to help meet their legal obligation to make careers education available to all students. Advertising for different options often includes case study vignettes or 'success stories'. In 2004 the Government provided funding for careers education in schools at the youngest year level yet—75 schools will take part in Designing Careers, a two-year pilot programme for Year 10 students[1].

So how do young people negotiate all these options and forms of guidance? Are they overwhelmed with excitement or just overwhelmed? A critic of the (North American) apparent over-abundance of consumer choices suggests the latter sentiment is a major dilemma. Schwartz (2004) argues that we'd be better off becoming 'satisficers' and settling for the 'merely excellent', cutting across the inclination to weigh up a myriad of options in search of the very best one.

Research begun early in 2004 suggests there is an issue here for New Zealand young people. The Pathways and Prospects project is informed by other local and overseas research on young people's 'navigations' (Raffe 2003) of pathways from school and by international literature that has highlighted the implications of social and economic shifts for young people's priorities and identities. Pathways and Prospects involves in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 114 young people, currently aged 17 or 18 years, every 10 months over a four-year period (2004–2007). This article draws on the first set of interviews with those young people, all in the first few weeks of a chosen employment or study pathway option after leaving the school at the end of the previous year (2003).

Approximately 20 young people from each of following pathway options volunteered to take part—army soldiers and officers, university students (mainly enrolled in arts and teaching degrees), university bridging programme [2] students (enrolled in study skills and either the introductory arts or science options), Youth

Training [3], students at a Private Training Establishment [4] (a basic administration and computing course), and Modern Apprentices [5]. Interview questions were focused on their choice-making processes, reflections on choices made and not made, opinions on the importance (or not) for young people to set goals, the pleasures and challenges of being their particular age, and hopes for their future (including what they never wanted to do, have happen, or become).

Only the Youth Trainees and some of the bridging university students fit within an 'at risk' definition. The majority of participants are young people who are ostensibly 'following the rules' of youth transition, making a direct move from school into a recognised pathway. The type of sample (not focused on at-risk young people) was part of a deliberate attempt to problematise the transition-as-pathways framework by looking at how transition (and decision-making) was experienced by young people who were engaging in it according to the model expected or set out in policy [6].

The young people's choice processes ranged from the random (whichever application form seemed easiest to fill out) to the forced (particularly for university bridging students who had intended to come to university but failed the entry examination), to the advance-planned (particularly for army officer cadets who underwent rigorous selection processes). Some young people who carefully planned their choices were still quite ambivalent about them. Some of the others who had seized an unexpected opportunity or 'fallen' into something reported surprised enthusiasm for their choice or for having made a choice at all.

Many expressed some confusion about the actual process of making choices. They reported liking to have choices but also that they felt overwhelmed and pressured by those choices. Some contrasted their new-found decision-making responsibilities (and power) with their experiences at school or with family.

> You're used to having your parents making your choices for you. It's kind of a bit scary because you don't know if you're making the right one. It's just thinking you could probably get away without making one, but in the end you have to. It all just comes down to what you think is the best one. Hopefully it's the right one. You're stressing if it is the right one. (yp46)
>
> Once you take a path or whatever, it always opens heaps of new ones. There is always the domino effect from that one, but I don't know, sometimes I think I get too many choices and your head just gets too blocked with it. (yp26)

There is more going on than a grouping of young people overwhelmed by their options. Our participants were clearly engaged in a complex interplay of identity and lifestyle establishment, on the one hand, and negotiation of transition-to-work policies and institutional practices on the other. That interplay is framed by (Western) world shifts in child/adult boundaries, disintegrating border lines between education, work, leisure and entertainment (Kenway & Bullen 2001), and a decentralised, flexible (post-Fordist) labour market. Like the young people in other youth transition studies around the world, our participants seem to be exploring and adopting work, study and lifestyle options in a particularly reflexive way. Their own

active involvement in creating their lives, in line with both consumer savvy and oblivion, and a perpetually flexible disposition, lies at the heart of their decision-making. In short, they seem to be negotiating the modern paradox of a proliferation of choices that demand ever more reflection and justification (du Bois-Reymond 1998) within the particular conditions of a decentralised tertiary education environment in New Zealand.

The Double-move to Pathways

The need for appropriate career-related decision-making is a by-product of the focus on, and concern with, transition-to-work—not only in New Zealand, but also in other countries such as Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and The Netherlands. In New Zealand that focus has cast changes within the labour market in terms of demands to be met by the education system and a prioritising of the management of young people (Vaughan & Boyd 2005). The government has responded to youth unemployment, skill shortages, and concerns about a lack of knowledge about youth transitions, and coherence within transition policy by increasing funding to new and existing national and regional transition initiatives (especially for at-risk youth). In 2003 the government committed $56 million to establishing the Education and Training Leaving Age Package. The package's aim of having all 15–19 year olds in appropriate education, training and work by 2007 (New Zealand Treasury 2003, p. 9) was given another $56 million boost in 2004.

   A particular characteristic of this focus on transition in New Zealand is its conceptualisation through a metaphor of *pathways.* This metaphor builds on earlier progressive ideas popular in New Zealand education and describes

- the mechanism by which successful youth transition can take place—young people are increasingly referred to as being 'pathwayed' through education and into certain careers;
- the educational options that lead to participation in the labour market; and
- the flexible character of those educational options—pathways may be distinguished from earlier ideas about transition beyond school through current attempts to create continuity and linkages between institutions, courses, qualifications, and employment options (Vaughan 2004, p. 65).

The concept of pathways has been criticised for its linear approach in some literature (see Raffe [2003] summarising Dwyer & Wyn, Furlong & Evans, and Cohen & Ainley). However it should be acknowledged that New Zealand pathways policies do attempt to avoid a linear, one-size-fits-all approach. The implicit recognition in a pathways framework that school-to-work transition is complex and is, increasingly, lengthened emphasises seamlessness between institutions and qualifications, clear routes to qualifications and careers related to those qualifications, and being able to flexibly construct those qualifications from a range of general and specialist units and courses.

The flexible character of pathways means it is not the cold, hard face of a sorting mechanism from school as it was in 1970s New Zealand where 'transition' represented academic failure and a selection of schemes that managed that failure. Like the concept of pathways today, transition then meant transition to work; the labour market dominated what it meant to make a successful transition beyond school. However, students who were not achieving academically took 'work experience' at school through 'transition classes', usually becoming 'early school leavers' and taking up semi-skilled or un-skilled work (Higgins 2002). The academic pathway was the only recognised successful way through school. Nowadays a concept of pathways provides a way to recognise success as something more than academic achievement. It presents an all-encompassing vision linking school and the world of work, with a subtext of diversity and choice. However, it is also an arrangement that has been described as 'loose' in terms of links between school and work, and characterised by a tendency to foster 'job shopping' for young people in transition (Higgins 2003).

The Development of a National Qualifications Framework

The move to a pathways framework in New Zealand was rooted in reforms to the education sector as a whole, which re-organised provision and administration away from models of professional accountability to models of Government investment subject to managerial fiscal imperatives such as performance, efficiency, accountability and audit. The changes across all levels of the education sector throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s put into practice quasi-market conditions that privileged consumer choice in a double-move—the development of a new National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the deregulation of tertiary education provision [7] (Vaughan & Boyd 2005).

The NQF was designed as a response to a dearth of clear pathways beyond school that were not academic and leading to university. It attempted to address increasingly important needs associated with skills and knowledge in the economy, and was charged with providing qualifications that would be credible and useful to employers, understood by the public, and would enable students to find ongoing opportunities to achieve their chosen qualifications (Ministry of Education 1997). The NQF endeavoured to create an open credit transfer system based on an outcomes (standards-based rather than normative assessment) model, recognise prior learning, and remove the 'time-served' aspect of gaining qualifications (Peddie 1998). This was popularly advertised in terms of making the organisation and attainment of educational qualifications, and the provision of education, 'seamless'. It made it possible for schools to offer similar qualifications to those of tertiary institutions and for some secondary schools and tertiary institutions to align their curricula.

Deregulating and Re-regulating the Tertiary Education Sector

The second dimension of the move came through a deregulation of tertiary education that recast 'equity' as 'access' and 'participation' (Higgins 2002). The participation and achievement of secondary school students became the responsibility of locally elected Boards of Trustees. The largely free elite tertiary system was re-focused towards being a demand-driven mass system. The private contributions within the public (Government) and private (tertiary institutions and students) cost-sharing arrangement were increased, fostering a competitive market-based model that emphasised the private returns from tertiary education, student choice and wide participation (McLaughlin 2003).

Between 1989 and 1992 the Government made polytechnics and colleges of education largely autonomous, established a bulk funding system that treated all providers of similar education in a similar way, provided funding on the basis of equivalent full-time students [8], increased funding to Private Training Establishments and creating Wananga (Maori centres of tertiary education). New institutions and programmes grew rapidly as the competitive spirit of tertiary provision was encouraged and a counter-balance to the increased private costs of tertiary education was established through student loans and student allowances [9] (McLaughlin 2003). Participation increased too but major shortcomings of the change included a lack of useful consumer information for students, a 'bums-on-seats' mentality in institutional planning, and duplication of courses and programmes.

This situation is currently being revisited by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), newly established in 2002 to facilitate 'collaboration and co-operation in the tertiary education system, and a greater connectedness to wider New Zealand businesses, communities, iwi and enterprises' (Tertiary Education Commission 2004), leading to an emphasis on non-academic pathways. The TEC has had a role in raising the status and profile of these through its management and promotion of Modern Apprenticeships and through public comments about the costs and benefits of academic and vocational pathways made by its first Chief Executive Officer. The profile of the non-academic pathways has also been raised through the recognised of Industry Training Organisations as Tertiary Education Organisations alongside polytechnics and universities, and the emergence of school-level transition resources and programmes such as Gateway and the Secondary–Tertiary Alignment Resource as integral to the school curriculum (Vaughan & Kenneally 2003).

The Imperatives and Prerogatives of the Consumer

The upshot of all this is an intensification of an imperative for young people to become involved in ever more decisions about their subject choices and appropriate links to future study and work options. This is because the pathways metaphor applies itself to all young people, no longer just those who do not achieve in academic areas according to the old model of transition. Secondary school students must now make considered decisions about different streams or versions of compulsory

subject classes at their school, optional subjects they might take, and their overall school programme. They are also highly likely to experience career guidance in a form that has moved away from behaviourist approaches—what are your vocational aptitudes?—towards approaches focused on individual interests and responsibility—what do you want to do? Their school-based decisions should ideally take into account future plans they might have, particularly where these involve further education. These decisions in particular are consumer-based ones: about tertiary providers and their reputation, entry criteria, course locations, course costs, opportunity costs, future earnings, course lengths, and opportunities for cross-crediting or changing direction or linking qualifications (Vaughan & Boyd 2005). And sources of that information now expand beyond family, friends and teachers to include volumes of print and television advertising from tertiary education providers and government agencies, together with websites designed to help young people calculate financial and opportunity costs against future earning capacity [10].

Furlong and Cartmel's (1997) paraphrasing of Roberts' (1995) metaphor of the active car driver superseding the passive rail passenger underlines the choice-making imperative. It is the perception of individual skill and decision-making in a car journey (or pathway) that it critical to the shift in how young people conceive their own transitions. In New Zealand, advertisers appeal to the idea of smart, highly skilled individual choices by contrasting student loan debt accrued in tertiary education institutions against 'earning while learning' options such as Modern Apprenticeships, Industry Training, and the armed forces—options that can lead to the same qualifications.

The Relationship of Goals and Plans to Youth Activities

While none of the young people we interviewed specifically used phrases such as 'opportunity cost', many were certainly aware of such matters and were very active in calculating the different types of cost. There was an implicit understanding that any refusal to undertake decision-making on these terms would immediately place the young person in a position to be considered 'at risk' or dangerous in Donzelot's (1979) double-sense of danger. In this case, young people would be 'in danger' of economic marginalisation and 'a danger to' society. Thus, nearly all the young people considered a state of goal-less-ness to be 'a bad thing' and confidently stated their belief that it was important for people their age to have goals. However, few had any definite plans towards their own goals. Some associated definite plans with a notion of (future) adulthood as dull and routine or a closing down of options:

> [Goals] are important but they're not things to bet on beforehand because you never do know how everything's going to map out. Like yes, it's best to sort of deal with them when you get there instead of when you see it with your binoculars from far away . . . with everything planned out it kind of ruins things. (yp27)
> There might not be goals where you go 'I am going to do that', but there are goals which are kind of halfway between that and having no goals. So you can still

consider other options and still be out there, half. Part of your mind is still going 'I have no idea what to do', so you are more receptive to what everyone else is suggesting or what's going on, other than those type of people, who, they have one goal and they avoid everything else which doesn't have to do with those goals. (yp76)

Others preferred describing short-term goals as time-gaining and space-gaining strategies while they considered their options:

[My goals are] to pass everything at this course, pass all the assessments. And another [goal] would be to actually find out what I might become and stuff, and to achieve that. (yp1)

[My parents] wanted me to join as an officer and I wanted to join as a soldier first . . . get a little bit more experience in the army and then try out officer training. Also the reason [is to do] a trade versus a degree, which I can do as a soldier . . . I'm at an age where I can, like, make a decision and change that and it won't effect me too badly down the track . . . it's just like a time to make mistakes and learn from it and all that. And, yeah, it's just an experience. (yp88)

I'm trying it out because my Dad told me try lots of options and then choose from what you have and take the best pick, and so I am trying out computers, business admin, and then maybe I'll do something else next year. (yp4)

As overseas research has shown, sometimes young people's response to such high-level, consumer-based, individual decision-making is to deliberately postpone the development of career and/or work identities. This has been theorised as a coping strategy (du Bois-Reymond 1998) and as a characteristic of an 'options generation' who tend to remain non-committal for as long as they can before adopting short-term goals and temporary solutions (Mackay 1997). Our participants' general reluctance to make long-term commitments to training or education options that lead to a specific career or work path may later prove to be linked with what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development have termed 'milling and churning'—the process of moving between diverse activities before settling to one (2000, p. 76).

There is currently debate in New Zealand about how to interpret, and deal with, young people's commitment (or lack of) to defined career paths, their milling and churning, and the value and costs of a university education against and the status of other non-academic pathways. Following the Government's aim to have all 15–19 year olds in education, training or work by 2007, a series of *Youth Transitions* reviews focused on young people not participating in work, education or training, with the various descriptions of these young people as 'inactive', 'economically inactive', 'disengaged', 'disconnected' or simply 'NEET'—Not in Employment, Education, or Training (Ministry of Social Development 2003). The Deputy Prime Minister effectively broadened the definition of 'inactivity' to include young people who *are* in education through his recent criticism of the tertiary sector allowing young people to 'wander aimlessly through education' (New Zealand Press Association 2004). Similarly, the Associate Minister of Education (Tertiary Education) was reported

as saying that Industry Training Organisations needed to increase their presence to ensure that young people did not go to a tertiary education provider as a default option to avoid making 'genuine if difficult decisions' (Industry Training Federation 2003). The implication is that tertiary institutions, particularly universities, may provide opportunities for young people to be 'aimless' or postpone commitment to a particular pathway.

Just-in-time and Just-in-case

However, the debate misses an important dimension of young people's navigations of transition. Many of the young people in our study appear to be doing something akin to milling and churning but through the guise of doing something likely to be considered more 'appropriate'. Rather than fall within a definition of 'youth inactivity' (or into an at risk category), the young people were keeping busy and ostensibly following pathways. However, the young people's descriptions of what they were doing suggested 'job shopping' and a preoccupation with avoiding 'settling down'. This does not necessarily point to a lack of commitment to education, training and/or work. In fact the young people seemed to be very motivated and determined and were committed—just not necessarily, or with any long-term vision, to a career or job at the end of the pathway they were currently on.

This illustrates some shifts in the priorities and identities of young people arising out of the nexus of their general saturation in consumer-media culture in the Western world (Kenway & Bullen 2001) and the privileging of consumer choice that has occurred through economic and education reforms in New Zealand. As an editorial in largest newspaper in New Zealand recently pointed out, young people have learned well the lesson about education through student loans (for tertiary study): education is an investment (The Editor 2004). Little wonder then that their commitment is to future-proofing themselves by taking a consumer approach to education and an enterprising approach to their lives. This involves a kind of reflexive application of risk management, balancing *just-in-time* dynamism and *just-in-case* education. On the one hand, the young people favour just-in-time approaches to knowledge in line with a flexible, decentralised labour market and changing notions of knowledge as valued for what it can *do* (Gilbert 2003). On the other hand, having watched their parents struggle with redundancy or retrenchment, and being steeped in advertising on the rapidity of the changing work order and the desirability of making good choices, they collect just-in-case qualifications and experience. Many were putting a 'fall back' option in place *before* undertaking work towards their most desired job and/or lifestyle:

> I was either going to come [to university] or I was going to be a Police Officer, so I decided to be a teacher first and then do my Police Officer training course so I'll have something to fall back on in case something happens to me in the Police Force. (yp29)

> If I get qualifications in computers, it's just a back up for me and I can then go and do what I really want to do . . . It's just a qualification that I want . . . next year I am going to a Hairdressing College. (yp6)

> I didn't do my [plumbing] apprenticeship which I was, like, going to do, but then I was thinking I don't want to be stuck at the apprenticeship all my life so I'll do something before I do it so I just came and did this . . . I want to do [the plumbing apprenticeship] straight after I do this, after I have finished this. (yp2)

Young People and Work

The postponement of work identities, at least in a linear or fixed model, is not only about shopping around for work; wider (Western) international trends are also reflected—the commercialisation of pleasure, the transformation of parenthood into a lifestyle choice; the rise of divorce and remarriage, and different forms of family (Rose 1999), shifting legal and social definitions of adults and children, and the tendency for people's identities to be about culture and lifestyle as much as about paid work. As Ball *et al.* (2000) point out in their study of youth transition, although paid work is still central to inclusion in society, it no longer constitutes the major source of identity for young people; instead, music, fashion and leisure may be more important. There is evidence that where the demarcations between education, entertainment and advertising have collapsed (Kenway & Bullen 2001), heavy targeting of young people by consumerism makes possible new ways for young people to constitute themselves (Côté & Allahard 1996). The tangled and contentious role(s) of education (Egan 2001) sits at a junction with a fluidity of opportunities and moments of consumption (Kenway & Bullen 2001), producing all manner of indeterminate domains and possibilities of identity for young people.

Many young people we interviewed had a relationship with work that illustrated the shift away from typical work identities derived from a linear progression of school-as-learning and work-as-earning. As in other countries, work in New Zealand is no longer necessarily the entry point to adulthood. Eight-five per cent of New Zealand 16 and 17 year olds are engaged in education or training, and 43% of those are also in (mostly part-time) work (Department of Labour 2003). Some New Zealand research has suggested this is about gaining experience or simply a way to earn money during times of economic pressure (Boyd *et al.* 2002; Vaughan & Kenneally 2003) but Australian research suggests it is also young people's preference to blend elements of the transition process (Wyn & Dwyer 1999). Transition-oriented programmes such as Gateway and Secondary–Tertiary Alignment Resource in New Zealand schools may have fostered this preference through the combinations of classroom-based and workplace-based learning. Young people may now come to *expect* such a blend. This might explain the comments from one participant with excellent school qualifications that gave him entry to university (if he so chose):

> [when I left school] *I felt like I had no choices really*. I thought it was *either* go to uni *or* work. And when I saw the ad [for this cadetship], that opened things up a bit, so I had this option of learning and earning at the same time. This is a good

combination. You're actively doing something rather than just sitting taking notes. You're out there learning. (yp51; emphasis added)

Young people's reflexivity here makes them the enterprise and their entire lives the portfolio. Ironically it is an apparent need for enterprising behaviour, as an answer to economic problems, that has been so lauded in New Zealand over the past decade. However, young people are re-interpreting the risks of transition in ways that tend to make adults uncomfortable. The usual attractions of salary increases and promotion are far less effective for employers in a world where workers seem to require constant stimulation and rejuvenation, and expect movement within and across the organisations (Tadros 2004). The distinctions between youth activity and inactivity, as defined by the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, are harder to monitor because indeterminate domains emerge. There is also evidence from overseas research that those activities that do not clearly reveal whether they are as leisure or professional activities can be the most attractive to young people (du Bois-Reymond 1998). Examples of these ambiguous activities around the world include lucrative sporting contracts, Internet gaming events and dot.com business ventures. Any of these may at some point drive new qualifications within a New Zealand qualifications framework that is still in the process of developing industry-based standards and considering the re-regulation of tertiary education providers that proliferated during the 1990s.

Generally speaking, where self-actualisation in life and pleasure in work is increasingly an expectation, the possibilities to innovate through unusual combinations of post-school activity or participate in literally risky sporting or leisure activities as a 'foil' to certain career patterns open up. Some risks may appear undesirable to both policy-makers and young people—for example, the accumulation of a student loan with no clear goal in mind. However, other risks are perceived and calculated differently. Some may even be integral to the transition process for young people.

Placing Young People at the Centre

It does not necessarily make sense to try and replace some forms of milling and churning with greater pressure on young people to choose or commit to pathways—especially with New Zealand currently having to revisit the somewhat short-sighted boosting of tertiary education numbers with little thought to the wider implications. And there is no getting away from a consumer culture, no golden age of childhood to which we can return (Kenway & Bullen 2001; Lesko 2001). Instead adults—including parents, policy-makers, careers educators and other practitioners—may do better to understand the character of young people's navigations of transition today and support young people beyond the merely informational. A number of our participants spoke out strongly against being left alone to fathom the meaning of tertiary education promotional material given out by careers teachers at school. They

provide an example of where the active consumer is not necessarily the powerful consumer (Kenway & Bullen 2001).

The patterns that seem to be emerging from the research so far suggest a convergence of wider international labour market and societal trends with New Zealand specific reforms in tertiary education. For New Zealand careers teachers and policy officials, it might mean supporting young people *through* apparent indecision and changes of heart rather than eradicating those things because they are how young people make sense of the complex transition environment. It may mean that we place work identity creativity at the centre, rather than banishing it to the periphery of what transition is all about.

In fact, a pathways framework demands this creativity and understanding of complexity perhaps more than any other framework because a pathways emphasis on active (consumer) involvement and the invocation of individual choice diverts attention from how young people's choices are *not* made without reference to particular circumstances or limits. Ball *et al*.'s (2000) study in England highlighted the continuing importance of social class, ethnicity, gender and age in relation to young people's transitions. The issues are similar in New Zealand. When we asked participants what they never wanted to become, many of the working class Pacific Nations young people [11] stressed that they did want to become cleaners. The Pakeha (or white) young people did not mention these kinds of jobs; it is an outcome far more removed from their experience of what is possible or likely.

The paradox is that the current stress on youth independent choice and opportunities comes at a time of greater dependence on parents, the education system (particularly qualifications) and a welfare system (Kenway & Bullen 2001; Higgins 2002). The tension between just-in-time and just-in-case is likely to be different depending on the nature of the various circumscriptions. A pathways framework is therefore a change for better *and* for worse, depending on the advantages that open up for some and close down for others. That so many of the young people interviewed felt optimistic about having choices and what opportunities were open to them, regardless of their backgrounds, highlights the normalising character of a pathways framework of choice-making. This, together with the subtleties of their different strategies of action, are still to be explored. However, it is the tensions "'between option/freedom and legitimation/coercion" which mark "choice biographies'" (du Bois-Reymond 1998, p. 65) for young people navigating New Zealand's tertiary education pathways. It is neatly summarised in a final quote from a university student we interviewed:

> Yeah, our teachers told us to set yourself realistic goals that can be achieved or something, but I thought that was a bit strange ... You'd set yourself a goal and they'd say, 'that's unrealistic' ... but I don't know how they judged it. (yp24)

Notes

[1] Year 10 students in New Zealand are aged around 13 years old.

[2] All universities in New Zealand run bridging programmes for students not meeting the usual academic criteria. The programmes prepare students for full entrance into university courses.

[3] Youth Training is a government-funded scheme that provides basic training for young people who have left school with few or no formal qualifications.

[4] In New Zealand, Private Training Establishments exist alongside government-funded universities, polytechnics, teachers colleges and (partially funded) industry training organisations such as Tertiary Education Institutions.

[5] Each institution or employment group set up a meeting with young people who met the criteria of having been at school the previous year (2003). After a presentation on the project, volunteers were sought. Where the number of volunteers exceeded 20, researchers selected a group of 20 based on a mix of course options, gender and ethnicity (and over-sampling Maori, the indigenous population of New Zealand).

[6] There are other valuable studies on 'at risk' youth taking place.

[7] Some features of the latter are currently being re-examined with a view to reform.

[8] Note that the TEC is currently re-evaluating tertiary funding in line with a newly established—and much debated—Performance-Based Research Fund.

[9] The latter used an 'age-and-stage model', conceptualising young people as 'adults in waiting', following linear pathways that extended students' childhood dependence on their families until they reached the age of 25 (Higgins 2002).

[10] For example, www.sorted.org.nz offers a Qualification Calculator and a Net Worth Calculator.

[11] Approximately six per cent of New Zealand's population have a Pacific ethnic background and are over-represented among the unemployed, lower-skilled workers and low-income earners. Pacific Nations include Fiji, Tuvalu, Samoa, Tonga, Niue, the Cook Islands, and Tokelau (see www.stats.co.nz).

References

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M. & Macrae, S. (2000) *Choice, Pathways and Transitions Post-16: New Youth, New Economies in the Global City*, RoutledgeFalmer, London.

Boyd, S., McDowall, S. & Cooper, G. (2002) *Innovative Pathways from School: The Case Studies*, phase 1 report, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington.

Career Services *rapuara* (undated) *Career Education: The Partnership Approach*, information brochure, Career Services *rapuara*, Wellington.

Côté, J. E. & Allahard, A. L. (1996) *Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late Twentieth Century*, New York University Press, New York.

Department of Labour (2003) 'Youth pathways: the big picture', *WorkINSIGHT*, vol. 2, pp. 8–13.

Donzelot, J. (1979) *The Policing of Families: Welfare Versus the State*, Random House, New York.

du Bois-Reymond, M. (1998) 'I don't want to commit myself yet': young people's life concepts', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 63–79.

Egan, K. (2001) 'Why education is so difficult and contentious', *Teachers College Record*, vol. 103, no. 6, pp. 923–941.

Furlong, A. & Cartmel, F. (1997) *Young People and Social Change: Individualization and Risk in Late Modernity*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Gilbert, J. (2003) 'New knowledges and new ways of knowing: implications and opportunities', Paper presented at the *Educating for the 21st Century: Rethinking the Educational Outcomes we Want for Young New Zealanders. Proceedings of the NZCER Annual Conference*, Wellington, August.

Higgins, J. (2002) 'Young people and transitions policies in New Zealand', *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, vol. 18, pp. 44–61.

Higgins, J. (2003) *Labour Market Programmes for Young People. A Review*, Youth Transitions Report Series 2003, Ministry of Social Development, Wellington.

Industry Training Federation (2003) 'Minister champions the value of industry training', *Training Federation Update*, vol. 94, 28 July.

Kenway, J. & Bullen, E. (2001) *Consuming Children: Education–Entertainment–Advertising*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Lesko, N. (2001) *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, Routledge Falmer, New York.

Mackay, H. (1997) *Generations: Baby Boomers, their Parents and their Children*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney.

McLaughlin, M. (2003) *Tertiary Education Policy in New Zealand*, The Ian Axford New Zealand Fellowship in Public Policy, Wellington.

Ministry of Education (1997) *A Future Qualifications Policy for New Zealand: A plan for the National Qualifications Framework*, Green Paper, Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Ministry of Social Development (2003) *Young People Not in Employment, Education, or Training: Key Indicators 2003*, Draft, Ministry of Social Development, Wellington.

New Zealand Press Association (2004) 'Cullen warns "aimless" students', *Stuff National News*, Retrieved 16 April 2004, Available at: http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,2876236a7694,00.html

New Zealand Treasury (2003) *Budget 2003: Budget Speech*, The New Zealand Treasury, Available at: www.treasury.govt.nz/budget2003

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2000) *From Initial Education to Working Life: Making Transitions Work*, OECD, France.

Peddie, R. (1998) 'Plus ca change . . .? Assessment, curriculum and the New Zealand qualifications authority', Paper presented at the *Ten Years On: Reforming New Zealand Education. Biennial Conference of the New Zealand Educational Administration Society*, Wellington, 11–14 January.

Raffe, D. (2003) 'Pathways linking education and work: a review of concepts, research, and policy debates', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 3–21.

Roberts, K. (1995) *Youth and Employment in Modern Britain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Rose, N. (1999) *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Schwartz, B. (2004) *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York.

Tadros, E. (2004) 'Work and play', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April, p. 11.

Tertiary Education Commission (2004) *Who We Are*, Tertiary Education Commission, Retrieved 4 April 2004, Available at: http://www3.tec.govt.nz/about_tec/who_we_are.htm

The Editor (2004) 'Editorial: no need for concern at student debt', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 April.

Vaughan, K. (2004) *Beyond the Age of Aquarius: Reframing Alternative Education*, NZCER Press, Wellington.

Vaughan, K. & Boyd, S. (2005) 'Pathways, junctions, and pitstops: youth transition policy in New Zealand' in *Youth Transition in a Globalised Marketplace*, ed. N. Bagnall, Nova Science Publishers, New York.

Vaughan, K. & Kenneally, N. (2003) *A Constellation of Prospects: A Review of the Secondary-Tertiary Alignment Resource (STAR)*, Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Wyn, J. & Dwyer, P. (1999) 'New directions in research on youth in transition', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 5–21.