

MAKING FUTURES WORKING PAPER #1

Julie McLeod

Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne

jemcleod@unimelb.edu.au

What is the Making Futures Project?

Background and rationale

Making Futures: Generational change, youth values and education is a qualitative study of young people's journeys through the senior years of secondary schooling and into the world beyond. It forms part of a larger study of youth, education and generational change, funded by the Australian Research Council (2012-2016). The larger study has two components: Project 1 is a documentary and historical study investigating scholarly and policy understandings of youth identity and educational inequality in Australia; Project 2 is a qualitative, 'born digital' study of young people and generational and educational change. It includes semi-structured life history interviews with students and their parents and combines longitudinal and cross-generational approaches.

Aims

The project aims to explore how young people, living in contrasting regions in Australia, navigate their educational, social and familial worlds and imagine and work towards their futures. In particular, it seeks to gain insight into their perceptions of gender relations and perspectives on diverse forms of social issues and differences. It develops an historical and comparative approach to processes of youth identity and educational change, both cross-generationally and in the present. It compares young people's perspectives today with 1) findings from an earlier longitudinal qualitative study of a generation of young people and schooling conducted by McLeod and Yates (2006) during the 1990s; and 2) with their parents' recollections of their own educational experiences and perceptions of gender relations and social inequality.

The project also aims to develop exemplars of new models of digital research, building archives of qualitative data for review by other researchers in the present and future. Data from the project will be disseminated via a project website, and, subject to consent, anonymised interview transcripts will be archived and available for wider viewing and future use, with appropriate ethical, access and storage protocols in place.

Approach

The project comprises three dimensions:

- i) longitudinal study of students in the final 3 years of secondary school and the first year beyond;
- ii) cross-generational interviews with students' parents across the same time period; and
- iii) contextual studies of the region and educational provision.

It is designed to be digitally-archived, with anonymised data available for re-use by other researchers, subject to participant consent and established access and management protocols adopted by Archival Repositories. It aims to contribute longitudinal, cross-generational and place-based insights to current knowledge about youth pathways, their social and political values and their views on gender roles and social differences as they unfold and are experienced in a formative period of the life course, and in interaction with different types and locations of schools.

Three core questions guide the study.

1. How are gender relations, mediated by place, migration and mobility, class, religion, ethnicity, and race, taking shape in the present; how do these compare cross-generationally?
2. What forms of social difference and educational inequalities are recognised as significant, now and in earlier generations, and how do young people understand and negotiate them in different eras?
3. Are new relations and sites of inequality emerging? Are there persistent patterns and axes of social differentiation?

The study will yield insights into the contemporary experience of senior schooling and the socially diverse ways in which young people make their lives, and engage in ethical thinking about social inequality, citizenship, knowledge that matters to them, and social and personal values in interaction with schooling, families and location. The full significance of this study, however, lies in its comparative design and the generational contrasts this allows. The design provides immediate generational comparisons between parents' recollections of their education and growing up and children's contemporary experiences and views. Findings will also be compared with:

- 1) a previous longitudinal study conducted by McLeod and Yates (2006) of young people growing up in the 1990s-2000s; and
- 2) findings from re-analysis by McLeod of earlier qualitative studies of young people undertaken in the 1950s -1970s, such as W.F. Connell's landmark study *Growing up in an Australian city* (1957), and R. W. Connell et al's study *Making the Difference* (1981)

The study engages with a burgeoning scholarship on youth and cross-generational studies (Andres & Wyn 2010; McLeod & Wright 2009), bringing these into critical dialogue with place-based studies of inequality and youth identity (Kenway *et al* 2006; Dillabough & Kennelly 2010) and historical sociology (Somers 2008). It explores what is different in the present from preceding generations, continuities with older traditions and practices and how and what type of social differences and inequalities are recognised as 'problems' by younger and older generations and by academic and policy experts.

Finally, the project seeks to advance knowledge of the potential applications and benefits of digital archiving and re-analysis of qualitative research data (Savage 2010; McLeod & Thomson 2009), specifically with reference to implications of these processes for educational research and practice, through production of exemplars of re-analysis and a 'case-study' of a digitally archived new qualitative project that will also provide a model and an impetus to other researchers.

Setting up the study

Participants will be selected from contrasting regions, including: an inner-suburban area of Melbourne, with mixed social class and ethnic composition; an outer-suburban area on the rural/urban fringe of Melbourne, a large city whose urban boundaries are extending, creating new pockets of disadvantage; and a mid-size regional town experiencing mixed economic fortunes with a downturn in local industry and farming and growth in tourism and lifestyle hospitality.

Participants

Students

Up to six students (gender mix) will be selected from a secondary school in each location. Students will be interviewed at least once on their own each year over 4 years, beginning in year 10 (aged 15 or 16), and finishing in the year following the final year of schooling. The semi-structured interviews will include discussion of life-line activities, school memories – prompted by visuals and objects provided by participants – daydreaming and future thinking, their social and political values, views on social issues of concern such as religion and ethics, and on gender relation and social inequalities and differences.

Parents

Parents or guardians of participating students will be invited to undertake a semi-structured life history interview, reflecting on their own educational experiences and values and hopes when younger, aspirations for their children, thoughts on education today and their current social values. Parent interviews will be conducted without their children present.

Contextual research

Interviews will be supplemented with profiles of the school communities based on public domain documentation (e.g. photographic, web-based, policy reports and discussion papers), socio-demographic and historical profiles of each region, drawing from approaches to place-based ethnography (Kenway *et al* 2006), including social reputation, patterns of migration, employment, class status and educational provision.

Digital archiving

The project will build archives of qualitative data for review by other researchers in the present and future. Summaries of anonymised interviews and updates on emerging findings will be disseminated via a project website. At the conclusion of the project, and subject to participant consent, anonymised copies of transcripts will be digitally archived and deposited in an Archive Service, such as the Australian Data Archive, for future use by researchers, with appropriate ethical, access and storage protocols in place. Subject to participant consent, non-anonymised audio recordings of interviews (raw data) would also be deposited at the Archive Service, and could be made available (on application) for future researchers 50 years after the completion of the project – 2067).

Approach to analysis

The approach is inductive, following methodological principles from biographical methods (Chamberlayne *et al* 2000), oral history (Perks & Thomson 2006; McLeod & Thomson 2009) and narrative enquiry (Andrews 2007). Analysis of longitudinal and cross-generational interviews is recursive, multi-layered and ongoing, following

themes across cohorts (synchronic analysis), over time in individuals and school groups (diachronic) and integrating these analyses into profiles of participants and emerging themes (Thomson 2009; Henderson *et al* 2007). This analysis will be developed in dialogue with findings from large-scale and comparative studies and with theoretical and research literature on youth identity, generational change and social values and difference in education (Dolby & Rizvi 2008; Harris & Wyn, 2009; Mitchell & Parker 2008; Nayak & Kehily 2009).

References

- Andres, L. and J. Wyn. 2010. *The making of a generation: the children of the 1970s in adulthood*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- Andrews, M. 2007. *Shaping history: narratives of political change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chamberlayne, P., J. Bornat and T. Wengraf, eds. 2000. *The turn to biographical methods: comparative issues and examples*. London: Routledge
- Connell, W.F., Francis, E.P., and Skilbeck 1957. *Growing up in an Australian City: A study of adolescents in Sydney*. Melbourne, Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Dillabough, J. and J. Kennelly. 2010. *Lost youth in the global city: class, culture and the urban imaginary*. New York: Routledge.
- Dolby, N. and F. Rizvi, eds. 2008. *Youth moves: identities and education in global perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- Harris, A. and J. Wyn. 2009. 'Young people's politics and the micro-territories of the local', *Australian Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 2: 327-344.
- Henderson, S., J. Holland, S. McGrellis, S. Sharpe and R. Thomson. 2007. *Inventing adulthoods: a biographical approach to youth transitions*. London: Sage.
- Kenway, J., A. Kraack and A. Hickey-Moody. 2006. *Masculinity beyond the metropolis*. London: Palgrave.
- McLeod, J. and Thomson, R. (2009) *Researching Social Change: Qualitative Approaches*, Sage, London.
- McLeod, Julie and Wright Katie (2009) 'The Talking Cure in Everyday Life: Gender, Generations and Friendship', *Sociology*, Vol. 43, No.1, February, pp.122-139.
- Mitchell, K. and W.C Parker. 2008. 'I pledge allegiance to... Flexible citizenship and shifting scales of belonging'. *Teachers College Record* 10, no.4: 775-804.
- Nayak, A. and M.J. Kehily. (2009) *Gender youth and culture: young masculinities and femininities*. London: Palgrave.
- Perks, R. and Thomson, A. ed. 2004 *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed. Routledge, London.
- Savage, M. 2010. *Identities and social change in Britain since 1940*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Somers, M. 2008. *Genealogies of citizenship: markets, statelessness, and right to have rights*. New York: Cambridge University Press.