

Adult learning & communities in a world on the move: between national tensions and transnational challenges

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Non-traditional students in a world on the move (EMPLOY project)

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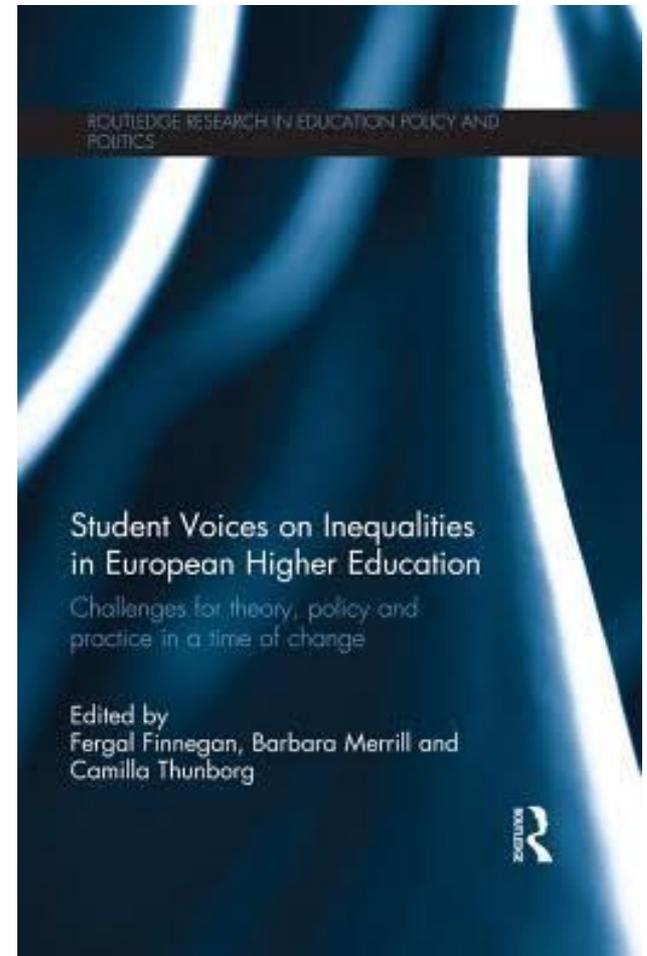


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RANLHE: the previous project

Student Voices on Inequalities in European Higher Education: Challenges for theory, policy and practice in a time of change;
Routledge Research in Education Policy and Politics, 2014;

by Fergal Finnegan, Barbara Merrill, Camilla Thunborg (eds.)



EMPLOY – about the project

Objectives:

- Understand employability from the student and graduate perspective.
- Explore the impact of age, gender, class, ethnicity and disability on students' employment prospects.
- Explore the approaches, attitudes and needs of employers (different sectors) and other stakeholders
- Map the different HE contexts in relation to the employability of NTS in the partner countries and identify the differences and similarities across Europe

EMPLOY – about the project

Definition:

We define non-traditional students as including those from low-income families, under-represented ethnic and socio-economic groups, mature students, first generation into HE and people with disabilities (both younger and older students).

Methods:

Biographical narrative interviews with final year students and graduates. Also interviewed university staff and employers.

The broad context for the research: an era of dilemmas and contradictions

Economy and society

- ❖ Uncertain and weak growth and rise in unemployment in leading industrialised countries.
- ❖ Neoliberal globalisation. Increased mobility of capital and massive growth in global workforce.
- ❖ Significant restructuring of labour markets and welfare regimes in Europe.
- ❖ Rising inequalities, increased precarity and individualisation.
- ❖ Crisis. See (Lapavitsas, 2013; Standing, 2009; Streeck, 2016).

Education

- ❖ More time than ever spent in formal education (Illeris, 2007).
- ❖ Remarkable expansion of higher education (HE) (Teichler, 2007).
- ❖ “Human knowledge is being taught, certified and applied on a scale not witnessed before in human history” (Brown et al 2011, p. 12). New educational opportunities.
- ❖ Underemployment. Intense competition: globally, regionally, between cities, sectors and firms and amongst individuals .

Uncertain pathways and risky transitions in a 'world on the move'



Lila's story: extended experience of precarity and searching for stability

- **The socio-political context of the 1990s (the first years of the political system transformation in Poland) and the first experiences of precarity**
When I finished school, there was, of course, no employment in my profession and I did not want to work. It was 1992 when I finished school. Young people were mainly employed illegally. There was a problem to find a permanent legal job. In addition to that there was a big unemployment in 1992.
- **Maternity as the second context for experiencing precarity**
I spent a total of 3 years at home on maternity leave. In the meantime, my workplace was moved to Warsaw, but as I was only a contractor, my contract was over, because it was a fixed-term contract. And then the problems with finding a new job began. I graduated only that secondary school. You needed a degree even if you wanted to serve coffee.

Lila's story: extended experience of precarity and searching for stability

- **Family situation as the third context of precarity. Lack of support from her parents, parents in law and the subsequent necessity to organize daily forced her to look for employment which would offer her time flexibility. She found work as a tram driver in the Municipal Transport Company. In order to be able to take up the role she had to complete a tram driving course.**

Well, I did great; my instructor said I was his best student. So let me say that, I passed the exam and then waited for my employment(...). There were no questions about our or my private life. I was employed after half a year of waiting.

- **First university experience as the fourth context of precarity (lack of support from her employer and the need to juggle the three worlds of study, work and family)**

And then When I started the studies my manager at work asks me if I am the group leader at school, and I say that no, and I ask why: - And he says" because the oldest are always chosen as group leaders. And he asked me if my colleague students called me Grandma "... It was hard. The first year was very difficult for me. I had to put up with stupid remarks at work that the workers do not have to improve their education and expand their knowledge, then it was so, that when I had this weekend study session I had to go to work. I had to take a day off to study.

Experiences of precarity in the Polish students' stories

- Experiences of being overqualified while only unstable, temporary, low-paid jobs are available.
- Lack of opportunity for promotion and career progression.
- The diploma does not guarantee employment, but...
- University as an opportunity for not only securing (any) employment but predominantly as a possibility for a meaningful quality-related change (meaningful, stable job).
- Students are sceptical on the one hand, but they do believe that by undertaking various professional and educational activities they do increase their chances in this market.
- They do not identify in a critical way the notions and consequences of the 'employability' discourse in a social spaces.