

# Pathways Symposium

## sponsored by JVET

Thursday 27 June 2019 14.00 to 18.00

Prestwich room, St. John's College, St Giles, OX1 3JP

PLEASE NOTE. This event is NOT in Keeble College

You can leave suitcases in a secure room near the porters' lodge. Please ask at the lodge when you arrive.

**2:00 - 2:15 pm** **Leesa Wheelahan introduces the symposium themes**

**2:15 - 3:00 pm** **First session chaired by Leesa Wheelahan**

2:15 - 2:20 pm Leesa introduces the session on institutionalising transitions

2:20 - 2:25 pm Michael Klassen: Neo-institutionalism and the global governance of engineering education

2:25 - 2:30 pm Juliette Sweeney: Using Bourdieu to understand the challenge and maintenance of dominant norms in engineering education

2:30 - 2:35 pm Christine Arnold: International policy learning in Canada

2:35 - 3:00 pm Discussion

**3:00 - 3:15 pm** **Break**

**3:15 - 4:00 pm** **Second session chaired by Kevin Orr**

3:15 - 3:20 pm Kevin introduces the session on vulnerabilities

3:20 - 3:25 pm Stephanie Allais: Skill formation in developing countries

3:25 - 3:30 pm Lesley Powell: Oscillating precariously between VET and work in the informal sector

3:30 - 3:35 pm Lesley Powell and Simon McGrath: Zones of vulnerability that impede pathways through technical vocational education and training

3:35 - 4:00 pm Discussion

**4:00 - 4:15 pm** **Break: tea and coffee**

**4:15 - 4:45 pm** **Third session chaired by Gavin Moodie**

4:15 - 4:20 pm Gavin introduces the session on pathways to social inclusion

4:20 - 4:25 pm Bill Esmond: Transition theories, emerging pathways and permeability in England

4:25 - 4:30 pm Sue Webb: thinking with Bourdieu and Bernstein to understand vocational institution degrees in a high participation system

4:30 - 4:45 pm Discussion

**4:45 - 5:00 pm** **Break**

**5:00 - 6:00 pm** **Fourth session chaired by Anne-Marie Bathmaker**

5:00 - 5:05 pm Anne-Marie introduces the last session on change

5:05 - 5:10 pm Jörg Markowitsch: A VET theory of change of VET

5:10 - 5:15 pm James Avis: Comfort radicalism

5:15 - 5:45 pm Discussion

5:45 - 6:00 pm Anne-Marie closes the symposium

## Abstracts

### **Neo-institutionalism and the global governance of engineering education**

Mike Klassen

Regulated occupations are an exception to the norm of weak pathways in liberal market economies. Stronger links between educational institutions, employers and occupational bodies support higher flows of graduates to occupations in their field of study compared to non-regulated fields. I focus on the case of engineering to investigate the social relations of curriculum governance, focusing on accreditation to understand how professional bodies and universities negotiate criteria for knowledge selection.

I draw on Bernstein's pedagogic device and Scott's three institutional pillars. The pedagogic connects broader structural dynamics of power and control with underlying knowledge structures, while Scott's three pillars explains the spread of organizational processes, structures, roles and models across scales.

I draw on key informant interviews to unpack conflicting explanations of the purpose of the Washington Accord, a key multi-lateral agreement for engineering accreditation. First conceived as a mechanism for mobility of accredited degree graduates among a small homogenous group of countries, Accord expansion introduces new countries – some with weaker regulation of engineering. Signatories enjoy the legitimation of their engineering education, but some see professional bodies constraining the freedom of academics, while the old guard defends the importance of links to regulated practice. In parallel to the debate, criteria and models for outcomes-driven accreditation spread globally with differing interpretations in national bodies and individual universities. Neo-institutionalism helps explain the decoupling of technical rationality from organizational practice, as decreasing proportions of graduates seek professional qualifications (in all countries) at the same time as countries with no regulation adopt the strappings of a regulated profession.

### **Using Bourdieu to understand the challenge and maintenance of dominant norms in engineering education**

Juliette Sweeney

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields in many countries continue to experience difficulties attracting and retaining women. In 2017 female participation in Canadian engineering programs offered at colleges and universities was 22% and has grown only 6% since 1991. This research examines how dominant norms in engineering education are maintained or challenged using a Bourdieusian conceptual framework in dialogue with contemporary scholars. The role of altruism within engineering identities and the impact of a culture of meritocracy and depoliticization are examined using Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital. The research uses Bourdieu's theories concerning power relationships within fields to shed light on how social change and replication occurs within engineering programs, and what institutional factors influence the inclusion or exclusion of women in engineering programs at colleges and universities in Canada.

### **An opportunity for international policy learning in the Canadian landscape**

Christine Arnold, Mary Wilson, and Leesa Wheelahan

The Learning Outcomes for Transfer—Publication Project aims to assess the theoretical and conceptual foundations, assumptions, and implications of using learning outcomes for the purposes of credit transfer and student mobility. There is increasing interest within the Canadian context regarding the use of learning outcomes as a tool for informing credit transfer among tertiary education institutions. This current interest

provided an ideal opportunity to conduct a comprehensive and critical assessment of outcomes-based approaches as they impact and influence student movement.

In several Canadian provinces, learning outcomes have been implemented in an increasingly systematic manner as a means of improving credit transfer between colleges and universities. This project was initiated to engage in policy learning from international jurisdictions as a way of informing policy in Ontario, Canada's largest province. International scholars from the United States, United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, and South Africa were invited and identified analytical themes and learning opportunities across their jurisdictions. While Canada rarely looks beyond North America when contemplating tertiary education policies, this investigation was designed to broaden the policy lens through theorizing the experiences of other jurisdictions using Raffe's (2009) arguments for the advantages of policy learning versus policy borrowing.

It was essential to examine the social, cultural, political, economic, and institutional frameworks in which outcomes-based approaches were developed internationally to develop appropriate national and regional responses (Allais, Raffe, & Young, 2009; Raffe, 2009).

### **Applying institutional political economy and specifically Varieties of Capitalism to skill formation in the developing country context**

Stephanie Allais

I attempted to apply the approach developed within institutional political economy, and specifically within the 'varieties of capitalism' tradition, to the developing country context, in the hope that it would provide insights into nature of skill formation systems. I therefore started by attempting to gather data in the five spheres studied in the institutional political economy literature: industrial relations; corporate governance; inter-firm relations, employee relations, and vocational and educational training. What became clear is that the small size of the formal labour markets in these countries makes a focus on the above factors tell only a very small part of the overall story. What seemed to be more important is the small size of the formal labour market combined with the strong cultural valuing of university education and elite academic secondary schooling. This has long routes in the history of colonial education as well as the nature of colonial administrations. My reflection is that the starting point was a useful one, even if it proved inapplicable, as it provided direction for exploring the nature of differences between TVET systems in wealthy and poor countries.

### **Oscillating precariously between VET and work in the Informal Sector**

Lesley Powell

The *Lived Livelihoods* study, funded by MerSETA and undertaken through the *Chair: Youth Unemployment, Employability and Empowerment* at Nelson Mandela University, was established to improve understandings of the ways in which vocational education and training (VET) can transform informal work and livelihoods in engineering related areas.

A challenge to the study is that a language that is specific and particular to the relationship between VET and the informal sector and that provides a discourse for understanding the findings simply does not exist. The discourse that has been applied to this literature has largely been extracted, transplanted and transposed from discourses related to the responsiveness of VET to the formal sector with the debate centered on the skills needs of the informal sector.

In an attempt to make sense of the emerging empirical data, the *Lived Livelihoods* study is messily forging a language that allows it to talk to and understand the empirical findings. This contribution to the *Pathways*

*Colloquium* aims to share some of these empirical complexities. The hope is that doing so will bring to the forefront the epistemological, methodological and theoretical challenges framing and constraining our understandings of the roles that VET can play in expanding sustainable livelihoods.

### **Zones of Vulnerability (ZoVs) that impede pathways through Technical Vocational Education and Training**

Lesley Powell, Simon McGrath

Concern with low success and throughput rates in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in South Africa and internationally has raised the importance of identifying those Zones of Vulnerability (ZoVs) that have the greatest impact on student success. The notion of ZoVs emerged from an analysis of interviews undertaken with cohorts of TVET college students in Cape Town (2010 to 2012) and in Port Elizabeth (2016). ZoVs represent the antithesis of Vygotsky's zones of proximal development in that they are zones (or moments/events) that have the greatest impact on learners dropping out of their TVET programme and that most negatively affected their wellbeing. The interviews highlighted three ZoVs: (i) waiting for confirmation of student funding, (ii) the first large assessment, and (iii) the delay in the return of supplementary results. The findings show that all three ZoVs, while magnified by the socio-economic challenges faced by students, are well within the control of the TVET college sector. This contribution to the Pathways Colloquium highlights the value of ZoVs as an instrument to identifying system blockages and the importance of methodologically drawing on student experience as a key evaluative tool for identifying ZoVs as well as for expanding the criteria of evaluation.

### **Transition theories, emerging pathways and permeability in England**

Bill Esmond

In England, where hierarchical distinctions have tended to disadvantage higher education students in vocational institutions, newer forms of provision with significant work-based elements have been claimed to provide links to high-level employment opportunities. However, concerns about differentiated outcomes appear to lie behind demands for lateral permeability at the point of higher education entry. A study of existing 'bridging' provision provided useful insights into these possibilities.

Whilst national comparisons among transitions have focused on education or employment logics (Agnelli and Raaffe 2007), broader social theory has identified both more individuated (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991) and more inequitable transitions (Piketty 2014). Thus, linear, relatively short transitions remain the property of advantaged groups, the confinement of disadvantaged groups to additional pathways normally serving to reproduce their disadvantage; exceptions might include provision supporting those otherwise excluded, through extended study or access from vocational pathways. In this study, broad-based routes appear to have been eroded in favour of relatively narrow pathways. The provision studied reinforced the logic of a binary, if coded, division between pathways, with progression routes either perpetuating employment norms or reinforcing those of the academy. These forms appear to offer limited scope for individuated transitions, or for disrupting the reproduction of inequalities.

### **'A degree is a degree': Thinking with Bourdieu and Bernstein to understand vocational institution degrees in a high participation system**

Susan Webb, Elizabeth Knight, Steven Hodges and Shaun Rawolle

Focusing on the growth of Bachelor degrees in vocational institutions in Australia, this presentation draws on the theoretical contribution of Bourdieu and Bernstein to understanding whether or not these degrees are contributing new pathways to social inclusion or the reproduction of social inequality. National statistical data and new quantitative and qualitative was collected to explore the fields of power operating across the higher education system between college based vocational institution providers and the

universities in the 'line of sight' for students who have taken the vocational institution pathway. Analysis draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of distinction to argue that the entry of qualifications by new providers trouble some of the boundaries between the VET and higher education fields. VET provider degrees emerge as a new point of distinction in the higher education field, offering benefits that resonate with changes in the market for degrees. VET provider degrees potentially alter the structure of the higher education field, disturbing the established order and changing the rules of the game. Basil Bernstein's concept of 'message systems' is drawn on to nuance the theory of distinction in the context of the Australian tertiary landscape. Attention is thus drawn to messages associated with teaching, curriculum and assessment in VET providers that help us to examine the action of these providers in reconfiguring distinction. The analysis presented here hints at a redefinition of what makes a degree distinctive.

### **A VET theory of changing VET**

Jörg Markowitsch

VET researchers are particularly good at applying theories from other disciplines (like the ones mentioned in the call). In which areas do we actually have original VET theories? As I am interested in the change of VET systems, my question is: Do we need a theory of change of VET systems which is peculiar to VET? And if so, how does it have to look like? And how can we develop it?

### **Wherefore a politics of hope: Comfort radicalism, neoliberalism and revolutionary reformism?**

James Avis

Rob Macdonald<sup>(1)</sup> closed his professorial inaugural by referring to a politics of hope. After a rather bleak portrayal of working class experiences in Teeside, he concluded his lecture with a picture of a Corbyn rally in Newcastle. The photograph captured the youthful enthusiasm with which the then new leader of the Labour Party was met. Rob used this picture to illustrate a politics of hope which suggested that things could be different, a theme that ran throughout his lecture. Frequently papers that address the plight of education in general and postsecondary<sup>(2)</sup> education in particular conclude by drawing out the radical possibilities that inhere in the present and that presage the transformation of society. We may consider the limits and possibilities that arise or alternatively point towards contradictions whose resolution require fundamental change albeit, through practices of revolutionary reformism. My aim is to open up discussion about a politics of hope and on the way, considers comfort radicalism, neoliberalism as well as Fraser and Jaeggi concern with contesting capitalism, etc.

(1) 'Not under conditions of their own choosing': youth transitions, place and history - 28 March 2019

(2) I am using postsecondary in the way in which Aronowitz does to refer to HE.