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CONCLUSIONS

The chapters in this book illustrate the rich ways in which the relationship between continuity and discontinuity in learning careers occur in different learning situations and at different levels. Discontinuities can be easily recognised as a distinctive phenomenon, which is more and more common and widespread in contemporary western countries that witnessed the crisis of linearity in different aspects of human life. A paradigm based on life-lasting jobs and predictable life stages is largely a thing of the past as it no longer reflects people's everyday life. Many authors of reflexive modernisation theory, such as Bauman, Giddens, Beck, describe the progressive uselessness of inherited and consolidated patterns in decision making as well as the possible effects in terms of creativity and emancipation and also of anxiety and fear.

In general we can assume that in contemporary western societies people are facing transitions that involve a discontinuity with previous generations in terms of a variety of socio-economic aspects, but what effect is this having on transformation in the educational system that are historically constructed on the ideas of stability?

> There is a proximity between the ideas of order and continuity. Social order may thus be conceived as an expression of the continuity of institutions and culture. The integrity of the self, as another expression of order, can also be interpreted as a form of continuity, sustained by the capacity to avoid ruptures or the ability to resolve crisis. To some extent, the history of education can be interpreted as a constant research for increasing order, either organizationally (e.g. school's efficiency) or from a social and normative point of view (e.g. equity and justice). (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017, p. 121)

It is possible to consider the continuity/discontinuity dimensions as an interplay of different systemic levels: macro, meso and macro. At the macro level we can retrace the wider socio-economic and cultural assumptions while the meso level is represented by the proximal social contexts that are fundamental for the construction and recognition of one's identity (family, higher education, professional contexts etc). Finally, the micro level is represented by individual lived experiences. In a systemic view (see Formenti et al., 2014) those levels are considered as interdependent and mutual influencing.

The book chapters invite us to reflect on various aspects related to these different levels.

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At the macro level the fundamental question is how educational systems are dealing with discontinuities, in terms of educational policies and what are the assumptions underlying this theme. Fenwick highlighted a general lack of metaphors to "appreciate transitions as multiple, complex pathways" and the urgent need for representations of mobility and change, like "oscillating, expanding, returning, stitching" (Fenwick, 2013, p. 363). This possibility of a more complex map has also to do with how we deal with temporality and rhythms' (Alhadeff-Jones, 2017) and how these attitudes shape concepts like "lifelong learning" and "transitions". Roquet's chapter addresses this theme directly, showing how continuity and discontinuity in relation to perceived temporality offers differentiated forms of professional identity construction.

Many of the book chapters can be considered as offering useful insights in order to understand how educational systems in different domains – or "meso levels" (higher education, health systems, social institutions, different professional contexts) are facing challenges related to the continuity/discontinuity issue.

In higher education, for example, one of the most urgent issue is related to non-traditional students and their need to compose the discontinuity of different backgrounds and life worlds (in terms of belonging) in order to construct a learner identity which is able to deal and cope with HE institutions that still hold assumptions, languages, expectations that meet certain middle class habitus (Finnegan et al., 2014). Broadhead's chapter and the chapter authored by King, Eamer and Ammar's give us examples of existing tensions on this theme but also gazes on new possibilities.

The transition between higher education and the market is becoming more and more "non-linear" and needs a resource of imagination in order to create new useful mediations. Non-traditional students represent a category potentially at risk, that may face particular difficulties: Thunborg and Bron's chapter show us how HE can become a means for realising a segregated labour market rather than an arena for equality and social mobility. Paradoxically the market creates difficult conditions not only for those with untraditional learning backgrounds but also for those who have developed key competences for the knowledge economy. This is the case of PhD graduates who are facing more and more difficulties in obtaining a long term career inside the academy and, at the same time, are risking a skill-mismatch in relation to transitions oriented towards non-academic contexts. Galimberti and Ratti's chapter give us an example of an original way to deal with this issue both theoretically and pragmatically.

Another interesting meso level is represented by health systems: Fernando and King's chapter introduces us to learning careers in mental health institutes in relation to previous interrupted educational experiences; an effort to face disruptive disconnections and transform them into social integration with supporting programmes involving different institutions (mental health institutions, hospitals, university campus). Other social institutions where educational processes take place are represented in the book. Pillera's chapter explores the experience of detention in prison: a moment that can be experienced only as a "negative" discontinuity with ordinary life, but at the same time, offering a "liminal" dimension, which has the

potential for experiencing differences in lifestyle and possibilities that may trigger generative learning.

Finally at the micro level the single individual trace the continuities and discontinuities of his/her experience and afterwards construct a narration about it. Here there is the space to understand how macro and meso dimensions are interpreted, shaped and performed by individuals in their lives.

At the micro level it is interesting to explore a subject's positioning in relation to their contexts and transitions between them. This experience involves also assuming a personal stance in relation with values, norms, requests that a professional context may require and this means taking a stance also in relation with wider themes related to educational systems (what we called before the "macro" level). Thompson and Wolstencroft's chapter describes subjects positioning in relation to macro-issues like the hegemony of performativity and measurement in education; Paulos's chapter reflects on adult educators' copying strategies in relation to the uncertainty of their professional careers in the adult education field.

Moving attention to the micro level is particularly interesting as individual narratives may open up new points of view on issues raised at the meso and macro levels and that risk to be treated in a too simplistic and generalistic way. For example, Tenorio-Rodriguez, Padilla-Carmona and Gonzàlez-Monteagudo's chapters help us to understand how the status of "non-traditional" student – a status which often reduces employability opportunities – can also become an added value in individuals' narratives. In this case the research participants felt they were better protected in the transition to the market as they have previous career paths and a set of contacts that can facilitate their further insertion. Also their greater life experiences leads them to become more autonomous and to consider themselves as more prepared to open up their own career opportunities by means of self-employment.

An experience of discontinuity can represent for individuals a potential risk but at the same time an opportunity to challenge one's experience and frames of reference, as highlighted by Ted Fleming in the introduction chapter. At this level the question, for educators, becomes: which conditions are useful in order to create leaning contexts that promote transformative processes and support this learning potential? The importance of setting transitional spaces (West & Carlson, 2007) in learning contexts is crucial to sustain people dealing with continuity and discontinuities in their careers. Silva, Dionìso and Cunha's chapter and Leal's chapter are example of how participation in formal learning situations has effects on individual identities and their possibilities to develop critical consciousness. Kastner's chapter helps us to focus also on contexts based on competence assesment that – even not formally – may become places for learning, social inclusion and recognition in crucial transitional moments.

These examples of learning potential in formal and non-formal learning contexts are inspiring and fundamental in order to understand how learning on (and from) transitions may take place in particular contexts. At the same time, as educators, we have to be careful in avoiding the idea that more educational opportunities are

always useful in order to trigger better learning processes. Education tends to be accepted as good for helping subjects in transitioning but this must not be accepted in an uncritical way. Ecclestone (2009) warns about the risk of working for a better adaptation in ways that are infantilizing, guiding subjects towards a ready-made idea of "successful transition".

In an interesting study Field and Lynch (2015) highlight how education may be a factor contributing to the sensation of getting "stuck" in the transitions: educational contexts may both become enabling spaces or alienating ones. In order to avoid this risk we have to nurture a complex way of thinking, connecting the interplay of different factors and levels in order to understand which processes are taking place in the learning contexts and how continuity/discontinuity dimensions in learning and professional careers contribute to shape these experiences, and, at the same time, is shaped by them.

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