

**'SUCCESFUL CAREER' - THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF SECOND CHANCE
EDUCATION ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S CAREERS**

Dr Szilvia Schmitsek
CONTED, The University of Oxford
Email:smicsek@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: *This paper introduces young people's voices to describe how they experienced the world of education and the world of work after having completed their studies in second chance provision in England, Denmark and Hungary. These young people attended second chance education, because they had dropped out of and felt alienated in mainstream education. This research reflects on how experiences gained in second chance provision developed their skills and their personalities. These supported them in re-engaging into mainstream education and making career choices, as well as functioning in their later careers. From the analysis of students' interviews, two themes emerged. The first captures the positive effects of second chance provision. The second describes students' reflections on the significant role of second chance in the given country context. The paper recommends that rigid education systems need to adopt more flexible methods, individual study pathways and career guidance to work with challenging youth.*

KEYWORDS: second chance provision; dropouts; career adapt-ability; career concern, curiosity, and confidence

INTRODUCTION

This research paper explores former students' accounts of how they experienced the world of education and/or the world of work after having completed their studies in second chance provision in three national contexts, namely in England, Denmark and Hungary. It also reflects on how experiences gained in second chance provision enriched their skills and developed their personalities. These supported them in re-engaging into mainstream education and/or transitioning to the labour market and making career choices, as well as functioning in their later careers.

From the analysis of their interviews, country-independent and country-dependent themes emerged. This research paper discusses the most dominant theme named '*Successful career*' that describes different walks of life. It includes various career pathways and ambitious future plans. In order to describe how research participants became agents, and later authors of their own lives and careers (Savickas, 2005), individual life trajectories are introduced using four adapt-ability competences which were defined by Savickas and colleagues: career concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2013). Applying these competences contributes to exploring individuals' career-adaptive responses to transitions.

The second theme introduces research participants' critical voices and is called '*The Role of Second Chance in the Education System*'. It describes the importance of second chance

provision in the given country context and students' reflections on the significant role of policy making in combating early school leaving (ESL). These themes will now be discussed.

Overall, this paper provides evidence of the significant role of second chance provision in the research participants' transitions that occurred after second chance. More precisely, it points out the long-term effects of the experiences and the improvement in knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation. In addition, research participants' life trajectories illustrate how these long-term effects are valued in their careers.

The main characteristics of second chance provision

As the three sites- namely (pseudonyms) Landing College in Grey Town(England), Helping School in Paprika City (Hungary) and Support School in Øresund City (Denmark) chosen for this research represent different forms of second chance provision that are influenced by the given country's policy context, they play different roles in the education system. Details about the key features of the three types of provision follow.

In Denmark, the operation of the huge variety of youth schools is traditionally the local government's responsibility, specifically that of the Education and Childcare Department. The department has a duty to care for young people aged 14 to 25 who are deemed not ready for the transition from lower secondary education to upper secondary education, or who have dropped out. The youth schools always adapt to students' and to local needs by providing versatile full-time or part-time study programmes. Thus, second chance provisions are part of the package of preventative and compensatory measures in the Danish policy context that support young people's return to learning, and help them take the exams and obtain the qualifications relevant to further studies or finding a job. In contrast, in the Hungarian system for those students who do not fit into mainstream education for many different reasons, there are only a few dedicated schools that provide support, with limited targeted funding from the government. One of these schools is the Helping School, which supports those who have left school early, aged 16 to 25. Unfortunately, the uncertainty surrounding its funding mechanisms have placed the sustainability of the institution and the organisation that runs it in jeopardy. Helping Schools' main professional mission is person-centred teaching that helps youngsters obtain the skills and the secondary school leaving certificate (matriculation: equivalent to GCSE) necessary for getting the right career.

Finally, in England, Landing College is a further education college that offers different courses, second chance and bridging programmes, such as the Prince's Trust, Volunteering and Life Skills Programmes, as well as apprenticeship schemes. On these programmes, students aged 16 to 25 can improve their confidence and ability to decide on a career path. As part of their individual learning programme, students go on work placements to experience the world of work.

In summary, the Danish second chance programmes have created alternative learning contexts that are adapted to students' different needs immediately after comprehensive school to help smooth the transition to secondary education. In order to identify the most suitable path, students are led by guidance counsellors from the beginning of Year 8 (age 15). Therefore, according to the findings, more structured professional support is available to Danish students that is specifically designed to prevent students dropping out of secondary education compared

to the other two participating countries. However, it should be noted that both the Hungarian and the English second chance programmes provide alternatives to students who are mostly older than the majority of the Danish at-risk cohort, and typically have experienced more failures, including dropping out of the education system several times. One reason for this that emerged from the interview analysis is the existence of a supported transition from initial to secondary education that is supported by guidance counsellors.

LITERATURE: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

In this research, the future perspectives and careers of at-risk students/dropouts are explored in three different urban areas, and stress is placed on describing and understanding how research participants handled changes and challenges in their careers in these contemporary contexts. Careers in the modern global economy require individuals to negotiate volatility and uncertainty in the labour market, as well as constant job changes, without losing their sense of self and social identity. A number of related challenges have been identified in constructionist career theories such as career construction theory or Life Design (Savickas, 2005, 2012, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009), Narrative Career Counselling (Cochran, 1997), Psychodynamic Counselling (Peavy, 1998), Action Theory (Young & Domene, 2012) and the STF/Story telling approach (Patton & McMahon, 1999; McMahon, 2006), all of which are designed to help people acquire career-related skills (e.g. self-efficacy and career adaptability) and deal with changes. These theories share some common features; for instance, they are holistic, the individual makes sense of their experiences through dialogue, and the narrative 'is built from history, culture, society, relationships and language, and it embodies context' (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 8). According to Savickas (2005), vocational development is affected by multiple factors, which are interdependent and interactive. Accordingly, the means of assessment should be not as limited to the use of a few tests or an interview, but narrative approaches should be applied to obtain a balanced picture of an individual's prospects.

Savickas's career construction theory focuses on the processes through which 'individuals construct themselves, impose direction on their vocational behaviour, and make meaning of their careers' (Savickas, 2013, p. 1). The former author considers careers to be boundary-less, requiring subjective construction by the individual and adaptation to changes. Savickas's theory 'views career as a story that individuals tell about their working life, not progress down a path or up a ladder' (Savickas, 2013, p. 6). The theory expands Super's 'life-span, life-space' theory (Super, 1957), which emphasises that vocational development involves a process of decision making in vocational choices that are steered by individual self-concept. It also sheds light on developmental contextualism and social context, as well as acknowledges the differences among individuals and among occupations (Hall & Mirvis, 2013). Savickas's career construction theory is a model for understanding vocational behaviour across the life cycle.

The initial concept is self-construction, which starts in childhood as people are firstly actors and only later become agents, and later authors, of their own lives and careers (Hall & Mirvis, 2013; Savickas, 2013). The theory applies social constructionism as a meta-theory for developing the idea of vocational personality types and vocational development duties as processes with potentials. From a constructionist viewpoint, a career is an everlasting process

– a pattern of a life theme built up by past memories, present experiences and future aspirations (Savickas, 2005). According to this theory, adaptation to transitions (from school to work, from job to job, and from occupation to occupation) is fostered by five principal types of behaviour: orientation, exploration, establishment, management and disengagement (Savickas, 2013).

In considering adaptability, career construction theory draws attention to specific attitudes, beliefs and aptitudes – ‘the four Cs’ – that shape the problem-solving strategies and coping behaviours that individuals apply to integrate their vocational self-concepts with work roles. The ‘four Cs’ of career construction are career *concern*, *control*, *curiosity*, and *confidence* (Savickas, 2013). Career concern refers to a future orientation and recognition of the importance of planning that is characterised by optimism. Career control requires the ability to control one’s own choices. Career curiosity follows self-control, as an individual becomes curious about their interests, wishes and occupational alternatives in the labour market. The important role of curiosity is reflected in the attention which is paid to exploration in other theories of career development (Savickas, 2013). Career confidence reflects self-efficacy or anticipating success regarding education and career opportunities on the labour market (Savickas, 2013).

Career construction theory is strongly related to the concept of career adapt-ability (Bimrose et al., 2011; Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Wright & Frigerio, 2015). Career adaptability is a multidimensional construct (including control, curiosity, cooperation, confidence and concern) that refers to how individuals handle transitions in different phases of their lives and in different contexts (Savickas, 2013). The concept is used in this research since it reinforces the idea that, for young adults, career adaptability is a developmental task.

In the related literature, there have only been a few qualitative investigations of career adaptability using in-depth interviews to explore psychological factors, individual networks and support, and opportunities and career orientation related to an individual’s career adaptability (McMahon, Watson, & Bimrose, 2010). Nonetheless, this approach would help with understanding how career adaptability can positively impact the skills of young people, and their careers and future perspectives. For this reason, this research is designed to contribute to understanding *how second chance programmes have developed at-risk students’/dropouts’ career adapt-ability* through an analysis of qualitative interviews, using Savickas’s (Savickas, 2013) career adaptability framework. Bearing this in mind, my research questions embody this perspective and emphasise the interaction between human beings, their interactions and their context:

- What are the factors and experiences gained in second chance provision that enriched at-risk students’/dropouts’ skills and developed their personalities? How do these factors impact their future career and support them in re-engaging into mainstream education and/or transitioning to the labour market?

METHODOLOGY

This research paper explores the positive experiences of former students in second chance provision. In order to perceive a subjective dimension, qualitative research methods were applied, therefore a total of 28 semi-structured, retrospective interviews were conducted with

former students (aged 23-30) in the countries under consideration. Research participants were selected with the help of supportive professionals from each second chance school. To gain deeper insight into the students' everyday lives, observations were conducted. The fieldwork was carried out over the course of 14 months.

The flexible qualitative research approach applied in this research is inspired by grounded theory, more precisely, by the systematic procedures of Corbin and Strauss (2008) which guided the sampling of participants, data collection and data analysis. The data analysis has three main stages: the continuing discovery of emerging themes which guides further data collection; the coding of data and creation of categories; and finally, the contextualisation of findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For this qualitative analysis Nvivo software was used.

According to my findings, the relevance and importance of personal support with special regard to the creation of positive relationships emerge strongly from the analysis as motivating factors for attending education. Moreover, this personal support helped students prepare for future challenges with their career transitions and development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The most dominant theme that emerged from the analysis of research participants' interviews was a '*successful career*', including various career pathways and ambitious future plans. Research participants' narratives point to the development of self-efficacy in second chance provision and illustrate how this has contributed to greater opportunities in education and/or in the labour market. Similarly, with regard to personal ties, a number of research participants maintained that they had been able to reinforce relationships with family members and other members of society as a result of the skills and experiences they gained from second chance provision. Interestingly, one Danish and two Hungarian research participants choose a teaching career and have returned to their former second chance provision providers as teachers. They reflected on what they had learnt from their role models and on their former second chance teacher's personality and methods. For instance, they highlighted that second chance teachers' perseverance, patience and dedication towards their profession and young people gave them an example. The rest of the research participants articulated that second chance teachers and the years spent in second chance provision significantly influenced their future careers. Regarding the different career pathways research participants have chosen, it is noticeable that most have entered professions that centre on people/caring professions, such as teaching, childcare, social work, hair and beauty, and hospitality. Others have entered arts-related careers such as directing, music and art history. The future plans of the Hungarian interviewees stood out compared with the interviewees from the other countries in one dimension: their plans to migrate abroad in the hope of better chances of making ends meet. Unfortunately, this tendency has been widespread in Hungarian society among young people and professionals since 2010 (when a right-wing government came into power), and reflects economic difficulties, serious cutbacks in public spending, and the right-wing populist political climate (Jones, 2016).

The research participants' narratives illustrated important turning points regarding different levels of success and failure. A career, as articulated by Savickas (2013), can be considered boundary-less, and 'as a story that individuals tell about their working life, not progress down a path or up a ladder' (Savickas, 2013, p. 6). By following his model, vocational behaviour can

be understood across the life-cycle (Savickas, 2005). In order to comprehend how individuals adapt to transitions in their careers, Savickas and colleagues (2013) construed four competencies: control, curiosity, confidence, and career concern. These four competencies are used here as an overarching framework to examine how one interview participant from each country under analysis became adaptive over time.

The first example is Fanni (41, female, Hun) who has now been working as a youth worker for eight years in a hall of residence for secondary school students mainly with special educational needs and/or behavioural problems. She is married and has a daughter who has just started primary school. Her narrative illustrates how she has become adaptive having completed secondary education.

Control: Fanni's career narrative shows how she has taken control over her career direction. Having dropped out of a secondary school due to behavioural problems and depression, Fanni went to Helping School. During the two years spent in Helping School she was chosen to be a student-assistant who could organise afternoon clubs for newcomers and become accustomed to good practices regarding how to deal with disadvantaged youth. She was found to be professional, and the school leadership offered her a teaching assistant position after the final exam (matriculation). She recalled: 'I remember saying to my pair-teacher that all I want for my future career is to show my passion and enthusiasm to young people.' She stayed there for five years organising various programmes for young people. She decided to study social pedagogy at the university level and started teaching civic education in the last year of her studies. She mentioned her heuristic experience at university: 'I just realised that all I had experienced in practice at Helping School could be found in books, it was such a relief not to be scared of different disciplines. I just loved reading about humanistic psychology and pedagogy. I knew I had found the right pathway...' After completing her qualification, she applied for a leading position at a youth centre where she spent five '*prosperous years both personally and professionally*'. She then moved to two NGOs to work as a trainer holding trainings for youth workers, and writing tenders for the funding of the organisation of different activities for young people. In addition, she also completed training in behaviour management. 'I worked 12 hours sometimes even at the weekends. Luckily, my husband was so supportive and my enthusiasm made him happy, but there was a point when we decided to start a family...' she explained. She then moved to the student's hall of residence to work as a youth worker with problematic secondary school students, while also providing training for teachers and other professionals. Fanni has been working there for eight years and maintains a satisfactory work-life balance to avoid becoming depressed due to her demanding workload.

Curiosity: Fanni's account clearly shows her desire to broaden her knowledge as she has worked in many different settings, experiencing different roles from teaching assistant to senior trainer. These roles have enabled her to express her passion for young people to different audiences. In addition to doing her degree, she also worked as a social worker and a teacher. She has moved the sector in which she works to deal with the same target group from various professional angles. Even though she is satisfied with her current position, she would like to move on to try out a less controlled working environment:

You know I have been here for more than seven years. Having spent a longer period of time in the same workplace, I always need a change; moreover, my daughter is older now, and finally, this student hall of residence is part of the mainstream system, a bit

bureaucratic and not as freedom-oriented as the Helping School – where I became what I am now.

Confidence: Fanni is a confident professional, mother and wife, and truly believes in her capabilities. She has held so many positions at different levels, from teaching assistant to team-leader and trainer, where – according to her narrative – she has shown dedication. As she stated:

The confidence I gained at Helping School through peers, teachers' and later my colleagues' encouragement has helped me through a number of difficulties ... I kind of learnt that every problem has a solution, which is my motto. I have always experienced support at my workplaces, and I truly believe I support everyone with the best of my knowledge.

In the interview, Fanni mentioned that as a well-acknowledged youth worker she had been confident enough to criticise her '*role models*' (former colleagues in Helping School) about giving '*less than we had back in the old days*' in terms of providing individual support to disadvantaged youngsters. In practice, she is in daily contact with Helping School as she has sent students to study there from the student's hall of residence intake. Once, she was unexpectedly invited to a meeting in Helping School to discuss professional issues concerning this problem: 'it was obvious that money and time constraints held them back, because of the government's cuts; basically, they could not hire new teachers even though the number of students had doubled ... by the end of the meeting we made some changes in their timetable to ease their demanding work.' Thus, Fanni's constructive comments mirrored the way her teachers (then former colleagues at Helping School) had '*taught*' her to criticise or intervene when work-related problems occurred. It was also important that her opinion was heard and considered by former colleagues in terms of finding effective solutions. Fanni's well-established confidence is based on her professional and personal experience, which allows her to successfully achieve her goals by recognising her strengths that help overcome her depression.

Concern: Fanni's narrative highlights her positive attitude towards the future, as seen in her claim that '*every problem has a solution*', and attitude of '*if there is a challenge, just deal with it*'. She has demonstrated various coping strategies related to her past, present and future that demonstrate her values and passion towards young people. For instance, she restrained her enthusiasm for new challenges when she and her husband decided to set up a family, and applied for a position with regular working hours. Her critical and assertive approach towards professional issues has helped her constructively interact with colleagues and introduce some positive changes to the system. Regarding future plans, she is considering working in a more flexible working environment as her ambitions would be more fully satisfied; moreover, a reduction in family duties would allow her to focus more on her professional work.

The second case that is analysed according to this competency framework is that of Karl-Georg (male, 28, DK), who works as a teacher in one of the youth schools in Øresund City and has the task of organising free-time activities for secondary school students. In addition, he is studying anthropology at university. He lives with his partner in the suburbs. His narrative illustrates how he has become adaptive after completing secondary education.

Control: Karl-Georg's career narrative shows how he has taken control of his career direction. Karl-Georg went to the Support School having been '*assessed as not ready to go to secondary*

education’ because of his severe dyslexia and challenging behaviour. Thus, he was directed to Support School by his career counsellor for a year to develop his academic and personal skills. During the year spent in Support School, he ‘*became geeky, completely transformed Mathswise, and sociable*’ due to the ‘*inspiring teachers and methods they used*’. He was admitted to a secondary school with a speciality in science, and at the same time attended a scuba-diving course at one of the youth schools where he talked to the head teacher about his passion for teaching. He summarised his knowledge about role-play and the other activities that he was organising for young people. Surprisingly, despite his young age, he was offered a job: ‘I’d just turned 18 and it was the youngest age when you were allowed to teach, and he was like, “Yeah, ok, you are hired”, and I was like, “What? Seriously?” He was like, “yeah, let’s try it”...’. He immediately built up pleasant relationships with both staff and students by drawing upon his role models’ (former teachers at Support School) attitudes towards teaching:

I had this idea that I should be friends with the students if they wanted to be, in the sense that I should both be professional and a friend, so, like, they can have the same cool experience as I had in the Support School, like, where the teachers were kind, too ... It’s a very powerful combination.

He also worked as a lifeguard over the summer holidays for five years where he followed exactly the same approach, which helped him deal with ‘*hardcore youngsters*’. For instance, he said:

Colleagues called the police, actually, and the guys were spat on and had biscuits thrown at them and so on, it was totally chaotic ... but I thought let’s try to respect them as human beings, like, being kind and firm at the same time, and then I tried some small talk with them when they did something, and it worked, they behaved.

Karl-Georg has been a teacher in the youth school’s professional community for eight years, and has participated in all the teachers’ meetings, which he considers ‘*a kind of privilege*’. He said:

It’s been so great to meet my old teachers, and they said like, ‘We knew you would become something great’, and, well I had the feeling: OK, if I’m here with these people, these totally cool people, then I must be kind of cool myself, it’s like giving me a lot of self-confidence, this is so-so awesome.

Besides his part-time job, he is in his last year of a Masters’ course in anthropology and would like to start a doctorate in the same discipline.

Curiosity: Karl-Georg’s thirst for knowledge and desire to broaden his horizons can be easily traced in his account. Besides his studies, he started working part-time from a very early age in order to put his understanding about education into practice. He has worked in two different settings to ‘*educate youngsters*’, and by attending regular meetings organised by the youth schools of Øresund City he has been eager to learn from his senior colleagues. In order to get deeper insight into ‘*human behaviour*’ he has studied anthropology and intends to expand this knowledge by completing a doctorate in the future.

Confidence: After spending a ‘*year of transformation*’ in Support School, his self-efficacy developed and he became a confident young professional who truly believes in his capacity to support and treat young people in the same way that he was encouraged when he was a ‘*reserved*

and problematic young teenager'. His professional confidence expanded further in meetings with his '*role models*' when they acknowledged him as a colleague.

Concern: Karl-Georg is optimistic, passionate, and open to future challenges. He appreciates his past experiences in the education system and is grateful for present opportunities in his professional and private life. His experiences have helped him adapt to new challenges related to young people. He always starts the first lesson with a new group of youngsters by saying:

I'm the teacher and hopefully I have a lot of good ideas and I can give you something great, but if you have any good ideas yourself, or if you think that I'm mistaken, or said something that you did not like or anything on purpose, you should feel very free to speak up, come with your own opinion, criticise me if you want, of course, try to do it in a constructive way, but you should feel free to do that.

This statement illustrates how he takes on and enacts the values he respected in Support School. His intention is to make many young people benefit from the values and positive statements he believes in – for instance:

'We are all humans and we turn to each other with respect and kindness'; 'when you die, you won't regret the things you did, you'll regret the things you didn't do'; and 'I'm the teacher, and if there's a problem I will try to spend more time with the student to hopefully help a great deal'.

Regarding his future career, his passion for teaching remains, but he would like to try a more challenging environment, such as in Danish academia.

The third example is Kirsty (32, female, Eng) who works as a support worker in a care home for adults with ASD and in a foster care home for young people. In addition to her two part-time jobs, she is doing a Level 3 course in behaviour management. She has a 6-year-old daughter and a new partner.

Control: Kirsty's career narrative shows how she has taken control of her career direction. Due to her low GCSE grades and severe dyslexia she went to college to complete a hairdressing course. She admits: 'I was slightly more practical than theory-based, so I just decided to do hairdressing.' Later, she moved to Dubai to work as an au-pair to save up money for her future. She spent two years in Dubai before returning to England. After her arrival in Grey Town she was unemployed for a period and decided to change careers. Her intention was to move on to supporting roles in youth work, but had no relevant information about professional opportunities. She became a volunteer at a women's centre, and sometimes helped as an independent visitor. In the meantime, she gave birth to a child and became a single mother. She lived with her parents and '*struggled financially*'. She was desperate to study and tried to ask relevant people in the centre. At the volunteering programme in the centre she met a tutor who told her about the course at Landing College. As she recalls: 'The experience sounded brilliant, it was exactly what I needed at that time ... So it was just like, I say, a foot in the door, a chance to get some experience in supporting areas.' She spent a year in the volunteering programme as a full-time student helping the youth workers, mainly with the 'Looked after children: children in care' (LAC) champion in Landing College. Kirsty arranged to get funding for childcare through the volunteering programme and was able to afford to take her daughter to the college crèche. She became inspired most by following the LAC champion's work, which really encouraged her: '*she always said I'd be really good within the foster system.*' As a result, after

leaving college she started working with young people aged 16-18 in care homes (semi-independent living). Her main duties are to ‘help girls with things that they might struggle with’, ‘to teach life skills’ and ‘to motivate them to go to college and to persuade them not to quit’. After some years working in the foster system, she was eager to find new challenges, so she decided to take on behaviour management related to people with ASD. As she recalled:

If I hadn’t had the confidence that I built up in college, I probably wouldn’t have gone that way, but it made me want to go more into behaviour. I mean, I dealt with different conflicts, but the adults with autism was new ... something pushed me to wanna see a bit more.

At the time of interview she had been working part-time with adults with ASD for 8 months and had completed two courses (Level 2 and 3) in behaviour management. Her intention is to continue working in the care home for people with ASD for a couple of years, as she said she is ‘getting quite a bit of experience and learning a lot about behaviour’.

Curiosity: Kirsty’s thirst for new challenges and knowledge can be traced in her career narrative. She decided to change career direction many times in order to fulfil her aspirations. She has worked in a number of demanding settings to learn about support work. In addition, she has completed a number of courses to update and expand her knowledge base.

Confidence: She described herself as follows:

I think I was confident enough before Volunteering Programme, but there I learnt how to handle pressure in awkward circumstances, which was a real boost to my confidence ... I think I learnt neither to push myself too hard, nor to get involved too much.

She does believe in her ability to fulfil her aspirations and goals. She is also aware of her tendency to get involved with too many activities at once, but she has been working on that.

Concern: Kirsty’s account illustrates her positive attitude towards her future career as she clearly stated her aspirational goals in the interview. Her past and present experiences mean that she is able to adapt well to the demands and challenges of the labour market by following her aspirations and values. In addition, her assertive nature has always inspired her to expand her future perspectives:

I mean, I was a qualified hairdresser and I hated it, I never enjoyed it. I needed a change, so I experienced loads of different fields in support work. And it gave me plenty of ideas of what to do next within support work. Because all I knew was that I wanted to be a support worker. In the volunteering programme, I learnt that there are a lot of different roles within support work, which inspired me to discover more.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the four career adapt-ability competences provide a framework in which to analyse three success stories in different country contexts. These shed light on the positive long-term effects of the years spent in three different types of second chance provision, which helped the three research participants to become adaptive in a challenging labour market.

The Role of Second Chance in the Education System

The other important theme relates to the research participants’ critical voices that describe the importance and the role of second chance provision in each country’s education system and the

role of policy making in combating early school leaving. These critical voices partly stem from the contrasting experiences research participants had in mainstream and second chance education. Besides, as observed, research participants' critical voices also reflect the constructive conversations, open discussions and democratic forums that take place in second chance provision. During the fieldwork, it was salutary to experience how the democratic and equal atmosphere in second chance provision opened students' eyes to seeing and criticising social inequalities and/or anti-democratic values, and the malfunctioning of education systems in the respective societies. For instance, the democratic atmosphere and learner-centred pedagogies of each second chance provision and the egalitarian partnerships between students and teachers clearly encouraged research participants to express their opinions freely, and to approach the world around them with an open mind. Moreover, designated, open student-led forums in these provisions (e.g. the students' assembly in Helping School on each Wednesday) urged students to find their voices. As a result, students explained that they felt responsible for their life events and had a sense of collectivism that helped them shape the rules of their community needed to work together effectively and respect each other's personal and learning needs. According to research participants, these activities contributed to their *'critical view and open mind'* towards different issues in society and the world around them, and to become *'reflective citizens'*. The most touching experience was that of one Danish participant, Ali (25, male, DK), who quoted Martin Luther King by heart in describing equality and the position of minorities in a society. He also mentioned that his English teacher in second chance had drawn his attention to Martin Luther King's thoughts.

During the interview process, one of the closing sets of questions focussed on each country's policy context. I asked respondents, *'What would you advise policy makers to do to change the education system if you were a student representative in parliament?'* in order to investigate what research participants who had experienced *'failures'* in the mainstream education system and *'successes'* in second chance provision would recommend. It is worth mentioning that failures experienced with learning affected research participants' views of the malfunctioning of education systems. Answers varied, reflecting the particular policy context, but those responses that were related to the role of second chance provision in the education system were analogous. Analysis of answers revealed that, even though this question is abstract compared to those, which focus on personal issues, research participants could easily respond. For instance, research participants from the Danish cohort drew attention to *'their privileged positions'* due to the country's well-developed welfare system compared with other countries where education is not free of charge. As Mathias (29, male, DK) stated:

But Denmark has a unique educational system, only the Master's, I think, you have to pay for. All the other [courses] from the basic school, through upper school to the university, the state pays for. And you can get SU [the Danish government grant, from the age of 18 for 6 years]. Actually, I think some students do not think about how privileged they are. They should think about what to do with this education, 'cos they get it for free from the state.

Likewise, Ali (25, male, DK), a young person with a migrant background who experienced racism throughout his career in mainstream education, gave a thought-provoking account, and advised policy makers to consider the position and rights of minority groups in the host society. He stated his opinion in the interview as follows:

The education system? I would probably say that they should pay more attention to minorities. Like minorities, what I say is people from my country, for example, people in my situation. Take care of them more, because if you don't take care of people, like humans, they might end up turning into terrorists or whatever, because they have been treated badly, and they might press the button... They get treated like an outsider. I got treated like an outsider as well, but I just took it in another way. Treat everyone equally. Don't treat them by their religion; don't treat them by where they come from, what they are, how they look, etc. We are all, in the end, we are all human beings. We have to stay together, we have to keep together, and we have to fight together.

Research participants from the Hungarian cohort criticised the government for the underfinancing of education and the social security system. Above all, they expressed their concerns and worries about their and the country's future. Attila (37, male, Hun) exemplified this sentiment with his statement:

As you might know, we have such a useless government. Teachers are underpaid, there is no chalk, markers and paper in schools, and teachers are forced to beg for resources from parents. Look at the Helping School: it has not been renovated for more than a decade, everything is falling apart, and teachers are working there for a miserable salary, doing extra working hours and dealing with trouble makers like I was ... and why? Because the government is not willing to give money. Improving education is not important to them. Not to mention healthcare, and the situation of the unemployed. There are lots of people in a desperate state in my neighbourhood.

Similarly, Marci (40, male, Hun) who was a former student at Helping School, and now works as a teacher there, gave a very dark picture of the education system:

Yeah, financially speaking there is a constant struggle in this school, because we always go on summer holidays with concern and fear that we might not have enough financial support to run the school [when we get back]. There are months when we receive less salary, but the spirit and the fantastic atmosphere of this place keep me working here. I am also worried about my children's future because schools have become so rigid due to the new changes in the National Curriculum, and the government's intention is to suffocate alternative flexible schools like ours.

Research participants from the English cohort also criticised the education system and the government for not paying enough attention to young people's voices, desires, aspirations and needs. According to them, individual study pathways and tailor-made programmes would be very helpful for those students who are considered '*different*' to help them integrate into education, and subsequently into society. For instance, Chloe (25, female, Eng) who really appreciated the atmosphere of Landing College, expressed her opinion about how differences are not considered enough in the education system, based on her own experience:

They should give more freedom and trust 'cos there is a minority that teachers definitely don't trust ... there is always that group of people in every year, they're naughty kids anyway, but like fair enough they would deserve attention. It annoys me when everyone says "all these teenagers..." because no teenager is the same, we differ anyway. That's what I'd probably say: just lean back a bit and don't treat everyone the same.

Similarly, Jessica (23, female, Eng) who enjoyed college life, articulated her opinion about why she prefers college to 6th Form:

I would tell them [policy makers] to make 6th Form more flexible 'cos it is too strict for some young people. I did 6th form 'cos my mom wanted me to do it, and I dropped out ... I'll tell them young people should choose what they want, and then just work hard for it. I know I shouldn't have gone to 6th form, I should have come straight to college. College does many practical things, for example, apprenticeships and volunteering. Because it's like me, you give me paperwork, it goes over my head, so doing a course is really no good for me, it has to be practical, not theory-based. Like going to college and learning to be a peer mentor in a classroom is just perfect for people like me.

The students' accounts above draw attention to some features of the malfunctioning of the three countries' education systems. Danish research participants positioned themselves more optimistically in the given policy context than their English or Hungarian counterparts, as the flexible Danish education and lifelong guidance system provides them with tailor-made solutions that make them *'feel acknowledged and supported by society'* Mathias (29, male, DK) and assist them in finding adequate careers.

Regarding the role of second chance provision in the education system, all of the students highlighted in their narratives that the importance of this provision should be recognised by policymakers in order to make secondary education more enjoyable and accessible to students who are 'a bit different', and help them get qualifications and a compatible knowledge base so they have more chances in the volatile labour market. As the Danish alternatives in the education system provide more second chance and tailor-made opportunities for young people compared to the other two countries, Danish research participants gave the most detailed accounts about how to design a student-friendly education system; their comments were based on reflections of their own experiences. For instance, Christian (male, 40, DK) placed emphasis on the role of different governments in setting up opportunities for young people:

Depends on what kind of government you have, because when I was a teenager we had a very liberal left-wing one and they created free youth education where you could take a lot of courses, and you could go to different places ... I mean and then under the other government there were some cuts ... you have to find a balance in that. You have to make young people active and motivated and productive. But I think that there is a tendency in the Western world, and there's a conservative way of thinking about education. But I don't think that's good. You'll lose a lot of potential I think, and there is a lot of pressure on young people. Not only from parents, but also from society, and I would advise them [policy makers] to relax and think about it and listen to what young people want.

Andreas (32, male DK) also drew attention to the importance of having student-friendly schools, and made a point about the difficulty of measuring the efficiency of second chance provisions:

So I think if there's a possibility of places like Support School, it should be cherished. They [policy makers] do not see it, like, clearly. But if you look beneath the curtains and try to find the real answers, it's hard to measure something like Support School ... just because the thing is hard to discover or measure it doesn't mean it's bad, so it's very

stupid not to respect it. There are so many cool kids, who wouldn't be inspired enough without schools like this ... perhaps, in the long run they might not build a hospital in the future ... so, everything is interlinked, you can't just focus on one element of the circle.

It can therefore be seen that the democratic atmosphere and learner-centred pedagogies of each second chance provision and the egalitarian partnerships between students and teachers made research participants feel encouraged to express their opinions freely and approach the world around them with an open mind. Research participants emphasise the importance of second chance provision, flexible programmes and/or alternative options in the education system; a factor which can be considered a country-independent theme. Moreover, the responsibility and role of governments and of policies in designing learner-centred study pathways that can contribute to integration to the world of work and to society are also highlighted in the interviews.

CONCLUSIONS

This research paper has focused on participants' perceptions of how they experienced the world of education and/or the world of work after having attended second chance provision. Their narratives provide an account of career pathways experienced by young people in their country's policy context. Following their statements about second chance provision, it could be argued that the second chance years have positively influenced the research participants' careers and personal lives. Their different walks of life illustrated various milestones and coping strategies in their career pathways. In order to describe how research participants using Savickas et al.'s (2013) four adapt-ability competences. Applying these competences contributed to an exploration of individuals' career-adaptive responses to transitions.

The research participants' critical voices about education systems and society were explored and the importance of second chance provisions were investigated to develop adaptive and motivating pathways for young people to combat early school leaving. This paper, therefore, provides powerful evidence of the significant role of second chance provision in the research participants' transitions that occurred after second chance. More precisely, it highlights the long-term effects of the experiences, knowledge, skills, confidence and motivation that were developed. In addition, research participants' life trajectories illustrate how these long-term effects are valued in their careers.

Implication to Research and Practice

As mentioned above, each second chance provision has implemented a holistic approach to challenging youth in which dedicated and qualified teachers, staff members and professionals with specialised skills help young people. In contrast, the everyday practice of mainstream education is different. In the interviews, criticism about this was expressed in the claim that mainstream teachers are not prepared to deal with challenging youths. These teachers require specialist training programmes that focus on a certain type of pedagogical thinking and attitude, which not only emphasises measurable achievements, but puts the student's personality at the centre and approaches the individual as a whole person.

From the good practices in second chance education, the importance of individual study pathways and learning programmes also emerged strongly from all three countries in the form

of individual educational plans that were formulated for students based on their attributes, abilities and wishes. These pathways are supported with pedagogical methods characterised by innovation, flexibility and personalisation, while developing the skill of ‘learning how to learn’ is of key importance. For instance, a very good example of the wide variety of individual learning programmes is the youth school system in Øresund City wherein the institutions are differentiated according to the young people’s needs, and also consider the given local community’s needs. There is an entire spectrum of possibilities for the young people of Øresund. Employees at YSS launch programmes with new educational content and methods as a supplement to the traditional school system with the goal of leading young people back into education. The greatest advantage of these programmes is that they are a stable part of the education system because they are subsidised by local government which keeps them sustainable in the long run. In contrast, the English and Hungarian second chance provisions’ financial sources of support are not as sustainable as the Danish ones because they receive funds from different sources for a fixed period of time, which keeps these programmes in a state of uncertainty. In summary, it can be stated that more flexible programmes with steady financial support should be introduced into the Hungarian and English education systems to create more opportunities for at-risk students concerning the transition to secondary education – similarly to the Danish system.

Conclusively, the holistic approach to challenging youth in second chance provisions where dedicated teachers and other professionals work together can set a good example for mainstream schools in primary and in secondary education as well. Therefore, policies that support holistic and multi-disciplinary teams focus on students’ well-being, learning issues, career education and guidance should be implemented in the mainstream education systems to help students plan their educational trajectories.

Finally, and most importantly, the rigid mainstream education systems that are currently in place need to adopt more flexible methods and trained teachers to work with challenging youth.

Future Research

Regarding future research, longitudinal surveys could be conducted to track the target group’s careers after secondary education and to identify what they achieve in the labour market, indicating the turning points in their careers and mapping out different sources of support that help them act effectively in the process of choosing a new career pathway.

The results of more longitudinal surveys might help the integration of young people into the labour market and contribute to breaking the cycle of deprivation that leads to the social exclusion of far too many young people across Europe.

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