

THEMATIC SESSION 2: Wednesday, 25 March 2009, 15:00 – 17:00 (room 214)

Identity dynamics in transitions

Chair: Tania Zittoun, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Discussant: Laurent Fillietaz, University of Geneva, Switzerland

In Switzerland, adolescents enter in vocational education and training (VET) at the end of compulsory education, or alternatively, after vocationally oriented transitory programs. The transition from school to vocational forms of education brings important changes in the daily life of these young people. VET demands the participation to new social settings, new modes of interactions with adults and peers, and the acquisition of specific forms of social and technical competencies.

From a psychosocial, or sociocultural perspectives, the transitions in which engage young learners engage three types of interdependent developmental processes: (i) the actual acquisition of knowledge and competencies (social, technical, theoretical); (ii) processes of identity re-definition (e.g., from pupil to apprentices; from “disqualified by school” to “responsible worker”, etc.); (iii) processes of meaning making, by which young people can confer sense to these changes, for instance through a time-oriented narrative, or through other means of symbolisation. This symposium proposes to focus on the identity dimension of VET. Each of the papers will develop its own perspective on the processes of change engaged in the transition to VET, yet the focus of their analysis will be the dynamics of identity.

The symposium thus has two goals. Firstly, the symposium aims at giving a better view of the extent to which actual learning processes, or the dynamics of commitment into a program, are connected to, or dependent on identity dynamics. Secondly, because the authors of the papers belong to different research traditions, the symposium also aims at highlighting a range of methods by which identity processes in VET can be studied. The two goals have scientific implications, as they participate to the development of the growing field of studies on transitions, and educational ones, as it might help to identify key aspects of learning processes.