

Navigating through the borderlands of youth and education

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Youth is often depicted as a highly controversial time and liminal space with lots of internal and external struggles to come to terms with. Therefore, it is considered to be an important “rite of passage” or a crucial transition from childhood to adulthood. But indeed, these questions of finding one’s own way in a globalized world and developing some sense of independence coincide with competitive procedures of educational selection that have a great influence on the individual’s future pathway and social milieu.

In a study focusing on educational transitions from Primary Education to Higher Secondary Schools in Germany, I intend to show the ways educational transitions affect the “personal geographies” of young people. Since I refuse to use the term “personal geographies” simply as a black box, I get entangled in some more conceptual questions, like: How are “personal geographies” being assembled? – How are you doing “personal geographies”? – What are they doing to you?

Drawing on individual stories of students living in and actively doing educational transitions, I try to outline how children negotiate the challenges of their new competitive educational environments. What kind of strategies do they learn in order to manage the educational as well as personal transition, simultaneously? Is this transitional phase experienced as some kind of “liminal space” evoking fear of failure? Contrarily put: Do young people consider the transition rather to be a positive challenge to face?

I conclude that transitions are crucial events affecting the students’ identity and personal geographies on the one side. On the other side, empirical findings can help us elaborate the concept of “personal geographies” in more detail.