

NEET as a “wicked social problem”

New uses for QUALITATIVE METHODS



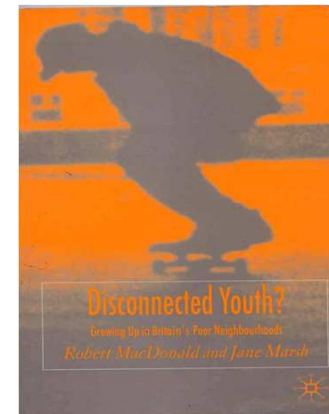
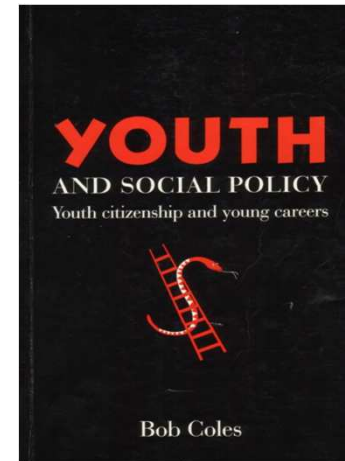
Bob Coles University of York, UK

Bucharest - March 10th 2014

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

FIVE aims of the presentation

1. To examine the implications of focussing on NEET rather than youth unemployment
2. To highlight some of the problems of relying on measures of both NEET and youth unemployment based upon large scale “household surveys” alone
3. To examine the value of qualitative methods in our understanding of NEET:
 - Giving a voice to young people through case studies
 - Calculation the cost-effectiveness of interventions
4. To emphasise the importance of studying BOTH SIDES THE LABOUR MARKET and the potential role of government interventions in both
5. Concluding remarks: - NEET as a “wicked social problem”



Why NEET and not “youth unemployment”?

- NEET (not in employment, education or training)
 - Academics remain sceptical about the concept
 - Defined by a set of negatives (but no positive)
 - Diversity between sub-groups - little homogeneity
 - Why not (more obviously) “youth unemployment”?

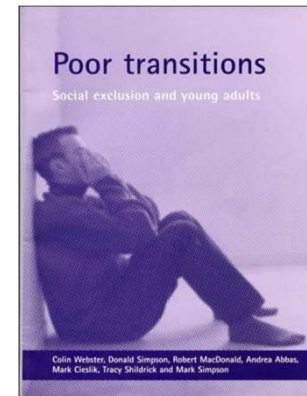


The more obvious alternative?

- Unemployment (ILO definition) = “seeking” + “available” for work

BUT

- There are **other young people**
 - “excluded” from the labour force
 - “not economically active”
 - (.yet)



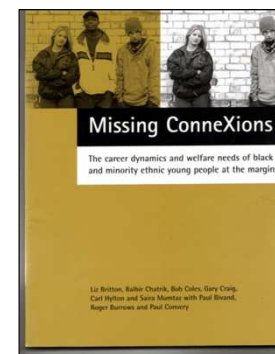
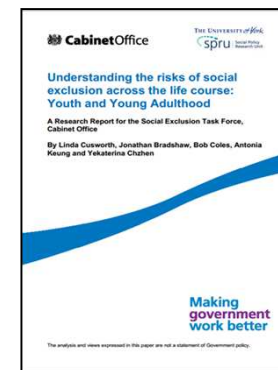
These include **categories of vulnerable of young people**;
young carers, teen mothers, young people with SEN or disabilities,
care leavers, young offenders, young travellers etc.

- **no less worthy** of our **attention, help** and **intervention**
- Whose **return to work may be longer term and complex** – but not impossible

But there are problems with measures of BOTH youth unemployment and NEET

- Plenary 1: EUROFOUND – excellent authoritative report on NEET and youth unemployment across Europe emphasise both complimentary and complementary
- BUT often the data collected on both NEET and youth unemployment is only via household surveys
- Chapter 5 of the report points out that some categories of young people are not reached by such surveys:
 - Those not in households; - institutions, the army, hospitals, prison, residential care, young homeless, hard-to-reach or traveller families
 - More likely to be NEET (and in vulnerable categories) Also not **(yet)** available for employment
- i.e. NEET but not “unemployed” as defined by ILO
- That is why a focus on NEET is preferable to a focus merely on “youth unemployment”

BUT is this more effectively studied through (other) perhaps **longitudinal qualitative methods** ?



(Longitudinal) Qualitative Methods

Developments in Youth Studies and American Criminology – suggest alternatives to big sample surveys

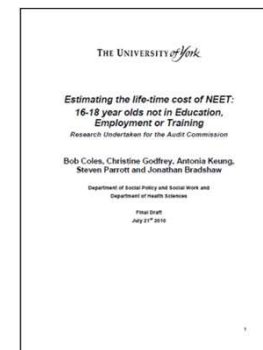
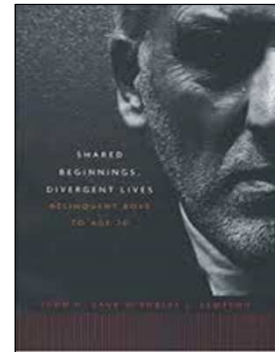
- Data collected through (sometimes several) biographical, in-depth interviews (over time)

Laub and Sampson (2003) *Shared Beginning Divergent Lives*, Harvard, Cambridge delinquent boys at age 70

- Turning points, “critical moments”
- (marriage or the army)

Henderson, S et al., *Inventing Adulthood* (2007), London, Sage

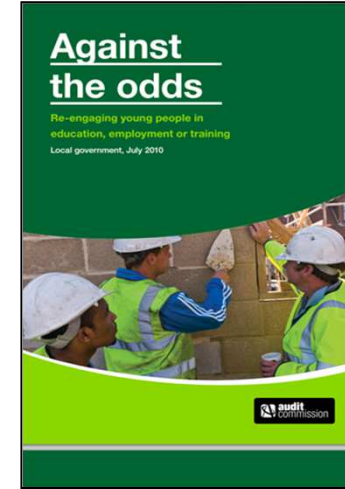
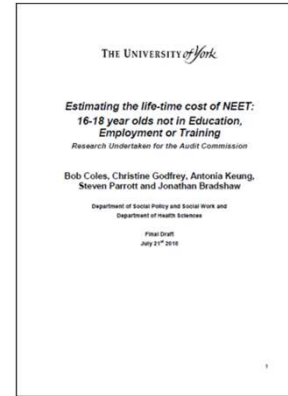
- Six interviews with YP aged 11-28
 - Identification of “critical moments”, cross roads
- **BUT** can we utilise this approach in the study of NEET?
- Can “critical moments” be “designed” and deliberate?
- And strategic “interventions” policy driven rather than unplanned and accidental?



The Cost of NEET in the UK (2010)

Included repeating macro-costing estimates
(as previously attempted in 2002) **BUT ALSO**

- Extended case study analysis (17 cases)
 - Seven Type A case studies (real cases)
 - including: SEN disabilities; care leavers (x 2);
 - teenage mum; young carer; young offender;
 - school drop-out
 - Seven contrasting Type B case studies (with ideal typical but pessimistic) scenarios, based on wider research samples of the category as carried out by social researchers
 - Also THREE more base-line cases:
 - One person who was never NEET
 - One more typical NEET who moved from
 - NEET to a precarious attachment to labour market
 - One mid-life FE “returner” - re-starting his career
- Based mainly upon already completed studies using longitudinal qualitative (or biographical) methods
- For each of the 17 case study, we added a detailed calculation of the public finance cost (including the cost of any welfare interventions)
So we could calculate cost-effectiveness of interventions



Base-line case studies

Three base line cases (Eve, Simon and Tom)

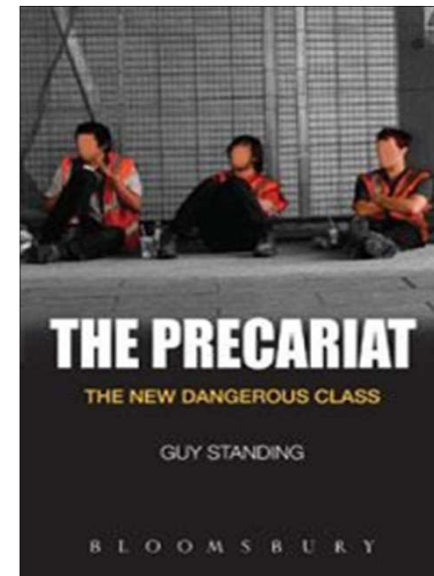
- Eve - ALL cases had SOME “welfare cost” (over the life-course)
 - Cost of post compulsory education or training
 - Some cases also made use of financial incentives (at the time) to stay in education
 - (Educational Maintenance Allowance – since abandoned in 2010)
 - Some cost of children-related benefits (over the life-course)
- Simon - the most common and typical NEET career – involved “churning”
 - between unemployment and insecure employment”



= part of the new youth “precariat”

n.b. This is the result of changes in labour market DEMAND

- Third case (Tom) involved “second chance” returner – retrained in his 30s to change direction with his career



Base-line case studies – the costs

- Types of public finance cost include:
 - Mainly unemployment benefit
 - and tax losses
 - Child related costs (including tax credits)



- Life-time public finance cost of cases

Varies significantly between different types of NEET:

- Not NEET – Eve (who has children) £64K
- NEET to life-time churning – Simon £293K
- Mid-life-returner (no kids) – Tom £142K

(cp Tariq B – the life-time cost of (involving crime) of £2.6million)



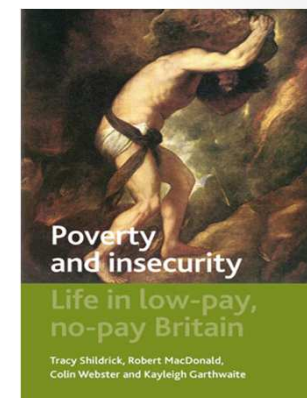
- **Some costs** which accrue are **specific to categories** of NEET

- Criminal justice costs
- Social welfare cost
 - Cost of taking a child into care
 - Relief care costs for young carers (e.g. State support for looking after a father with dementia)
- Health costs



FOUR lessons from base-line cases

1. NEET and youth unemployment must be thought of as long and complex, DYNAMIC PROCESS rather than a single static “status” (NEET or not-NEET)
 - Young people move in and out of employment, sometimes because the jobs they obtain are often short-term or insecure (Simon)



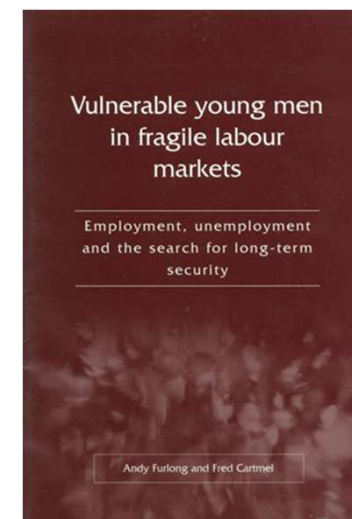
Many NEETers ↔ become “churners”

2. Much of this is often the result of **labour market DEMAND** (the job-contracts on offer) rather than the characteristic of the young person

Even more important for Romania

3. The **profile of NEET** in different countries is **likely to vary** – according to the prevalence of different types of NEET, and different types of Labour Market attachment/detachment

4. The public finance **costs** of NEET **will also vary** between countries according to **differences in welfare regimes** and benefit entitlements



Example from one case: SEN - disability: ("mild" form of autism): Dan A

Unusual early diagnosis

– followed by 14 years of support

Narrative

- Diagnosis at age 8
- Support in 2 years of junior school
- Extra support on school transfer at age 11
- Support for 5 years in secondary school
- School sixth form
- University- AoN + support
- Drop out from PGCE
- Employed in non-grad job



Special Educational Needs: DAN B

(More usual scenario based on research literature)



Narrative

- No diagnosis in junior school
- Disaffection (truancy) at age 11-12
- Diagnosis of autism at age 13
- Some school support BUT
- Only gets 4 x F and G grades
- Leaves at school at 16 (NEET)
- Connexions and training = E2E
- But can't cope; drops out
- Mainly benefits - Employment Support Allowance (ESA)
- Age 40 becomes a carer

Cost differences of A and B

Dan A

- Diagnosis = £2K
- School transfer = £3K
- 5 years sec school = £8K
- School sixth form = £4K
- University
Extra support = £5K
- Life time Employed
- **TOTAL = £22K**

Dan B

- EWO x 2 = £1K
- Diagnosis = £2K?
- School extras = £7K

At 16 NEET

- Connexions Advisor = £1K
 - Youth training = £4K
 - Benefits = £87K
 - Carers allowance = £114.7K
- TOTAL = £217.7K
+ Lost Tax and NI = £424,278

TOTAL

Public finance cost = £641,984



Romanian case studies

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN0mlAly4YU>

More lessons: interventions and impact

5. Interventions across the case studies in our research varied enormously in the type, length of support, and their cost

- Many of the intervention costs are very modest (e.g. £4K per case)
- Sometimes interventions were long term and complex (e.g. Dan A - early diagnosis and 14 years of support)

6. One element ALONE unlikely to be “causal”

- Focus on BOTH - the type of jobs available as well as - the education and skills of young people
- And the more holistic circumstances of their lives
 - The biggest intervention cost (£265K) was not for intervention with a young person at all, but the cost of caring for his father of a young carer (His father was 70 and had dementia.)



7. The biggest cost differences between A and B scenarios

= £2million – was the cost of those careers which involved persistent offending and later imprisonment

- Other major cost involve the cost of children being taken into care – which we costed as just short of £1million

NEET as a “wicked social problem”?



“Wicked social problems”? NOT – evil or bad; or simply “cool” BUT

“A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to define and sometimes difficult or impossible to solve”

EXAMPLES – climate change, flooding, poverty, and NEET

NEET as a “wicked social problem”

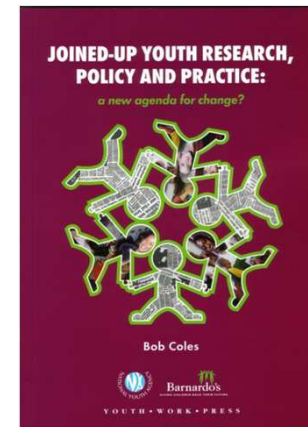
- Difficult to define with any precision
- Complex and multi-factorial (NOT a single issue)
- No single cause (complex multi-causal)
- Requiring disaggregated and multiple solutions
- Likely to require partnership arrangements (and alliances between different agencies) to have any significant impact
- Also likely to be fairly intractable and require a commitment to complex and long-term interventions
- Which is why governments usually try to avoid them, redefine them in their own terms (“scroungers”), or bury them!

(NEET 16-18 an obsession 1999-2010 is now about to become simply illegal in the UK)

Many of the interventions introduced in the UK before 2010

(Connexions and the Educational Maintenance Allowance)

- all abolished



Conclusions

1. Romania and EU are right to focus on NEET rather than simply “youth unemployment”
2. You may need to spend some time at the start looking at the complex heterogeneity of NEET (here in Romania rather than in Europe in general)
3. To do so might need the use of research conducted on small, carefully targeted, samples and by using qualitative methods
 - These may also reveal previously hidden but vulnerable (categories of?) young people
 - It can also help calculate the cost of NEET
 - And identify strategic (critical) moments for intervention
4. BUT ... NEET is a wicked social problem
Do not expect quick, magical solutions
 - Intervene on labour market demand (employers) as well as supply (young people)
5. Investing in NEET may be a long and difficult journey
 - But it can prove cost-effective and - it is worth it !



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