

Rethinking Widening Participation In Higher Education

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Extending the chance for people from diverse backgrounds to participate in Higher Education (HE) is a priority in the UK and many countries internationally. Previous work on widening participation in HE however has focussed on why people choose to go to university but this vital new research has focussed on looking at why people choose not to go. Moreover, much of the extant literature concentrates on the participation decisions of teenagers and young adults whereas this book foregrounds adult decision-making across the life-course. The book is also distinctive because it focuses on interview data generated from across the membership of inter-generational networks rather than on individuals in isolation, in order to explore how decision-making about educational participation is a socially embedded, rather than an individualised, process. It draws on a recent UK-based empirical study to argue that this network approach to exploring educational decision making is very productive and helps create a comprehensive understanding of the historically dependent, personal and collective aspects of participation decisions. This book examines, therefore, the ways in which (non-) decision-making about HE is embedded within a range of social networks consisting of family, partners and friends, and to what extent future participation in HE is conceived as within the bounds of possibility. It: provides a conceptual framework for understanding the value of network-based decision-making about participation in HE, in the light of the changing historical and policy contexts in which it is always located; highlights the importance of researching the socially embedded narratives of 'ordinary people' in order to critique the deficit discourse which dominates debates about widening participation in HE; discusses the policy and practice implications of the network-based approach for widening participation and educational institutions.

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