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6. Short abstract:

EDUCATIONAL RESPONSES TO SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN EUROPE

The origins of the European Union were economic rather than social and lay in the reconstruction of Europe after the Second World War. However, over the last twenty years a growing policy theme addresses social issues, in particular problems of social exclusion.

Exclusion as more than unemployment. Initially, social exclusion policy was perceived in terms of unemployment, but more recently exclusion has been addressed on both a wider and a more sophisticated front. Themes related to the development of enterprises and the changing nature of the demands for labour with the growth of the knowledge society in the information age are still commonplace in current policy. The debate is now more sophisticated as waves of employment have resulted in skill shortages while the long-term unemployment rates remain stubbornly high. These phenomena have generated responses that address more fundamental problems in European social structure such as issues related to empowerment, regeneration, identity, discrimination, diversity and human rights.

Beyond vocational retraining. The result is a rigorous current discourse on social exclusion, not confined to vocational training. Indeed, there is a growing recognition that mass retraining programmes are not effective. One primary tool to combat exclusion is education and innovative developments have been initiated and designed to combat exclusion. These concentrate more on meeting individual needs and the needs of specific target groups, who are experiencing acute exclusion, despite positive changes in the level of economic activity.

Research and practice in combating exclusion. From fifteen years' experience of practice and research into the role of lifelong learning in this area, it is possible to review the lessons learned from engagement across Europe with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, settled ethnic minorities, Roma and Gypsy people, former substance abusers and the very long term unemployed. While most interventions are targeted short term project based initiatives, there are now more general and transferable lessons learned and new work is

being developed to share these and to disseminate more widely what has been learned at community level in the field.

Research. This work highlights the need to revisit the relationships between different discourses that were previously thought to be separate, for example, the relationship between employability and discrimination, and the impact of new legislation on human rights on job recruitment and retention. Current EU policy emphasises the key role of empowerment through beneficiary participation, and new work has highlighted the need to involve all stakeholder groups. (Walters, Lygo-Baker, Strkljevic, 2002).

Significance. These new developments have direct significance for mainstream education, particularly for those programmes that have a vocational orientation or are concerned with the transition of school or college to work. They have the potential impact on mainstream educational provision to change both curriculum content and methods of delivery, as well as challenging all educators about their own analysis of the social context of their work.

Bibliography

www.surrey.ac.co.uk/Education/cseinfo.htm

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