Exclusion and Inclusion in Education and Training

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Executive Abstract

I   The field of education and training

A definition of the inclusion of (formerly excluded) groups of people in the field of education and training should incorporate the social context of those groups of people, as well as the existing inequalities between different groups due to socio-economic background and supposed characteristics of gender, age and ethnicity. In the Lisbon Agenda (EC, 2000) 'lifelong learning' is mentioned as a key element of the strategy to make Europe the most competitive and dynamic 'knowledge-based society' in the world. The 'lifelong learning' concept of education and training is a useful concept for such a definition of inclusive education, because education and training are placed in a broad perspective and social inclusion is an important issue. Although the current practice of 'lifelong learning' focuses on employment-related aspects, the other objectives of learning, such as active citizenship and personal fulfilment, are waiting to be explored.

The field of education and training encompasses the compulsory system, post-compulsory education, and different forms of learning practices through expression and art. The compulsory education system is quite similar in all the EU countries. It always involves a certain amount of full-time education for a period of eight to twelve years. Beside the (free) public education, in most countries, there is private education as well. We can divide the European countries into three groups, according to the nature of the relationship between private education and the public authorities: private schools receive no public funding, a link exists between private schools and the public authorities, or, finally, as is the case in the majority of countries in the EU, subsidised private schools have much in common with public-sector schools. In most European countries, compulsory education is divided

into primary education and secondary education (both for different periods in different countries).

In all European countries, compulsory education can be followed up by entering a post-compulsory education, divided into post-secondary and higher education. The post-secondary level often consists of vocational training, pre-academic education, and part-time vocational training (a combination of working and following classes). Higher education is mostly divided into higher vocational training, colleges, and universities. Besides the formal education system, there are other types of process to facilitate learning and development. Non-formal and informal education processes often reflect different rationales, sometimes responding to exclusion dynamics within the formal system.

In this paper, we distinguish three key exclusion dynamics in the field of education and training: access to education, the process of education, and the outcome of education.

Education and training – Key Exclusion Dynamics
Access to education. The concept of lifelong learning assumes the principle of equality and justice in the distribution of educational resources, but within the educational system, all kind of different thresholds are put up to deny certain individuals or groups access. These thresholds are mostly established by the formulation of entry levels for different forms of education.
Process of education. The content of education is subject to a process of standardisation. Global competition and homogenisation in education are increasing due to processes like international reporting, scientific evaluation, and educational exchange. In post-industrial countries, there is a general tendency to focus on general and more abstract types of knowledge, while specific and more practical skills seem to be less valued.
Outcome of education. Within the compulsory education system diplomas from secondary education do not always result in a proper qualification to enter the labour market. Another such inequality applies to the people who years ago finished their education in skills and competences now obsolete, or to those who have worked in industries executing tasks which are being taken over by modern technology and who are now faced with unemployment and strongly reduced possibilities to ever enter the labour market again.

We link these mechanisms of exclusion with Bourdieu's relational and conflict-oriented understanding of social fields and the struggles between dominating and dominated rationales within the fields. The dominating rationality of the educational system, the neo-liberal rationale, favours certain cultural and social

capitals and reproduces social inequality. Socially Creative Strategies (SCS) can challenge this dominating principle. With the goal of eliminating the three exclusion dynamics, the central question is: How can we, on the one hand, change the traditional school system in order to facilitate accessibility, to contribute to social integration by balancing different backgrounds, to reflect society's diversity (gender, class, ethnicity, age), to answer the contemporary needs of society, to ensure a link towards the labour market, while, on the other hand, being as creative and flexible as possible, in order to address the unmet needs of the many different groups involved, to make room for interaction and new learning forms.

II   Lessons from Socially Creative Strategies (SCS)

In this paper, we divide the SCS into three types. The first group of SCS combats exclusion in such a way that the main aim of the SCS is to make the excluded groups adapt to the features of education and training supported by the dominant rationale. This dominant rationale is a neo-liberal-oriented learning style with competitive meritocratism as its most important feature. In the second group of SCS, we see a mixture of strategies in which both an adaptation to the dominant rationale plus activities supported by conflicting rationales (e.g. a bottom-up learning style) take place. The third group is about strategies that operate completely outside the dominant rationale, supported by alternative rationales that are based on the experiences of the excluded groups addressed.

Lessons from the SCS Case Studies
Adaptation to the Dominant Rationale:
Educational Priority Policy (EPP) (Belgium (Flanders), Ireland, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Scotland) This strategy is performed by national governments in six European countries. It is mainly about an additional financing mechanism for schools or educational areas with a high incidence of students who are at risk of being excluded from education. It also implies positive discrimination in relation to other educational areas, where school exclusion problems are less serious. The policy is implemented within the established education system.
Education programmes for Roma primary school students (Czech Republic) About 40% of Roma children who attend mainstream schools fail to complete their compulsory education, and a many as 70% of Roma children end up in special education for the learning-impaired. In reaction to this, during the last decade, the

Czech Republic has been compelled to address this situation. Various programmes for Roma children, initiated by NGOs, have been implemented.

Mixture of Strategies:

Second Chance Schools (Greece, Finland, Netherlands, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, Sweden and United Kingdom)

Second Chance Schools is an international organisation in the field of learning young people with lack of skills or qualifications to successfully gaining access to higher education programmes or to the labour market. Starting point is that these youngsters are no longer subject to compulsory schooling. As the target groups consist mainly of school dropouts, the schools are finding new ways to validate informal and personal skills and competencies, without losing sight of the need for formally recognised qualifications equivalent to those awarded in mainstream education.

Vocational training for women only (Netherlands)

A vocational school to boost women's job prospects and change labour market attitudes towards women. Over the years, this has been accomplished through tailored programmes, individual support for women during their participation in the college programme, and through close relationships with a wide range of partners (vocational training centres and employers). The students learn about recruitment, personal guidance, how to complete application forms, and how to manage careers alongside domestic commitment.

Outside the dominant rationale:

Community banks for urban shantytown dwellers and rural communities (Mexico)

A NGO in Sonora, a state in Mexico, develops small community banks in shantytowns to which local people, mostly women, contribute savings and from which they draw to fund their micro-businesses. They work in areas for which the commercial banks show no interest, because the women's micro-businesses generally operate in the informal economy. The women, therefore, operate their own financial mechanism, which works according to cooperative principles.

Good examples of SCS seem to capture the attention of the national and/or European levels, while the initiative remains at least partly in the control of the local level (e.g. second-chance schools). A bottom-up approach of initiatives with a multidisciplinary team proved to provide the best conditions for the inclusion of non-qualified young people in a learning situation.

In all SCS that have been described in the paper we find elements that were successful, but always there were also some counterproductive elements. an

approach on macro-level, only looking at social class and ethnic background of students doesn't provide a good mean to prevent exclusion. A top-down approach seems to cause little or no positive change to the social and/or cultural capital of the excluded groups involved. On the other hand at the micro level we did find some good results, especially where more partners were actively involved beside the educators. Other key factors are the presence of good management, the availability of human and material resources and the conditioning of the funding upon certain basic requirements. So apparently on the local level a bridge between the dominant rationale and the alternative rationale can have positive results. We may conclude that the best grounding for a SCS is to address excluded groups in a way that promotes a partial or general adaptation to the mainstream rationale, but also leaves room for the integration of (parts of) the alternative rationales. And the successful integration of the SCS in the local community, both financially and with regard to content, is likely to be an essential condition for success.