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An 'at risk' curriculum for 'at risk' students?

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Australian Curriculum Studies Association Sydney 7 - 9 October 2011



- The international context
- The Australian context
- Methodology
- Generic issues
- Practitioner viewpoints
- Questions for the future

The International Context

- UN declaration on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Jomtien (Education for All 1990)
- Salamanca Statement (1994)
- Educational impact (e.g. the English 'national curriculum'; IDEA in USA)

The Australian Context

- Disability Discrimination Act (1992)
- Disabilities Standards for Education (2005)
- Melbourne Declaration (2008)
- Education (Australian Early Development Index 2009)
- Employment (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003)

- (The UN Convention has) "frightening potential for the ultimate destruction of Western family values" and the Committee on the Rights of the Child as "an unelected body, which claims to be responsible only to the children of the world (and which therefore ultimately is responsible to no-one)". *National Observer* (Australia, 1999)
- (UK Prime Minister) "Mr Cameron and most Tories want to see the Human Rights Act scrapped or drastically watered down"
The Australian October 7, 2011

An illustrative study

- Rationale - 6 thematic areas
- Sample - x8 practitioners in 2 national settings
- Data collection - semi structured interview based on 6 themes
- Analysis - key words/phrases (manual and *Nvivo*)

6 Themes

- Inclusion
- Relevance
- Involvement
- Flexibility
- Delivery
- Accountability

Generic issues

- Broad international consensus amongst SEND practitioners
- Tensions with policy formulation
- Parallels in challenges encountered by mainstream & specialist settings
- Widespread recognition of CAR synergies in SEND curriculum

Practitioner viewpoints

- “I think the time has come for us as practitioners to ask different questions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for students with special educational needs and disability. It is no longer appropriate to expect that student’s learning needs will be met through an individual or personalized response to a systemic curriculum. If we do then we simply perpetuate the myth that students with special educational needs and disability are not real learners.” (Principal - Australia)
- ‘In spite of what some people might say, there’s a lot more which connects us with mainstream schools...what we do is really built around the same things. I think it’s odd that there is such a lot of attention given to special practice, when really it’s part of a continuum’ (Teacher - England)

- 'Curriculum practice in special educational needs has to be directed towards the end-user, not to an external set of requirements...it follows that we have to provide curriculum experiences which are actually different, and this needs a different set of practices and skills' (Teacher - England).
- 'We battle all the time against a bolt-on approach because that just means we are an afterthought...nobody benefits from this' (Teacher - Australia)
- 'An absence of connection between what we teach and how we assess it indicates to me that there is a lack of understanding about what specialist provision is really all about'. (Principal - Australia)

Questions for the future

- Authentic CAR approaches for SEND as learners
- Productivity agenda in education linked to policy
- Locating this discussion within the current discourse
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- National Disability Strategy

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