

Employability of Non-Traditional students: An Exploration of Class and Race

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Abstract

Race and class inequalities have remained on the political and educational agenda within the area of employability. This paper presents some of the findings of a large European Union project on employability being undertaken by six European universities from Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK focusing on employability of non-traditional students. The aim of this research was to consider the students' perspectives and experiences regarding their potential employability. This was a qualitative study and the findings presented in this paper are based on biographical interviews with 10 non-traditional undergraduates and postgraduates students from the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom. Findings revealed that students believed that the degree offered them opportunities to develop transferable skills that could potentially make them employable. However, many encountered class and race-based disadvantages in the labour market as well as in their internships. Some felt that their socioeconomic background disadvantaged them as most employers especially in the business and finance industry required them to dress smartly. This was beyond most of those from low social class with the result that they were not employed. The findings presented in this paper suggest that any understanding of non-traditional students' employability must include a consideration of the students' class and race, including in particular gender within the labour market.

Keywords: Class, Employability, Race, Students