

Social Inclusion: Context, Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This paper reviews the literature on social inclusion in Australia and provides an overview of the current situation regarding university/community engagement. Social inclusion is a contested term in both academic and policy literature entailing a range of interpretations. The paper will argue that there is a spectrum of ideological positions underlying theory, policy and practice. The broad theoretical construct put forward regards social inclusion in relation to areas (who is to be included?) and degrees (ideologies) of inclusion. Possible areas of inclusion are socio-economic status, culture (including indigenous cultures), linguistic group, religion, geography (rural and remote/isolated), gender, sexual orientation, age (including youth and old age), physical and mental health/ability, and status with regard to unemployment, homelessness and incarceration. Degree of inclusion comprises a nested threefold schema incorporating a spectrum of ideologies involving—from narrowest to most encompassing—the neoliberal focus on access and economic factors, the social justice focus on community participation and the human potential focus on personal and collective empowerment stemming from positive psychology and critical/transformational pedagogies. Contemporary Australian social inclusion policy is related to UK policy. While policy rhetoric indicates a broad interpretation of social inclusion, concerns are raised that a dominant economicist agenda favours corporate and national economic interests over social and psychological ones. Questions are also raised about the privileging of some areas of inclusion over others and the possibility that reductive interpretations of social inclusion are forms of cultural assimilation. Social inclusion in practice is addressed both in relation to degrees of inclusion and through case studies. The paper provides an overview of examples of social inclusion interventions, including a review of two initiatives of RMIT University and Victoria University focussing on industry/community partnerships. The paper concludes with some challenges and issues for further research on social inclusion including a proposed in-depth survey and consideration of literature on integrative phenomena such as ecological sustainability, and contextualisation of social inclusion within broader movements of global socio-cultural change.

Keywords

Community participation, economicism, human potential, ideologies, social justice

1. Introduction

This paper addresses social inclusion in contemporary higher education, focusing on Australia, with supplementary regard for the UK. It firstly constructs a broad theoretical framework regarding social inclusion. This includes the identification of types, areas, and degrees of inclusion. Secondly, it discusses recent policy. Thirdly, it addresses social inclusion in practice—both with respect to interventions from the perspective of degrees of inclusion, and through two case studies. The intention of the paper is to act as an *opening* to a broader and deeper conversation, rather than convey a comprehensive account.

2. Theoretical indications

2.1. History

The notion of social inclusion can be dated back at least to the nineteenth century sociologist Weber and regard for the importance of social cohesion. In terms of more recent history, the term is more readily identified through its counterpart, *social exclusion*. This can be traced to the 1970s French notion of *les exclus*—those excluded from the social insurance system (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards, 2008). The concept spread through Europe and the UK throughout the 1980s and 90s. Its surfacing in Blair's government, culminating in a Social Exclusion Unit, catalysed Australian usage, first in South Australia in 2002 and more recently via the Rudd government's Social Inclusion Board inaugurated in 2008.

2.2. Areas of inclusion

Social inclusion can pertain to a variety of areas of social groupings. These include demographic differentiation with respect to

- socio-economic status;
- culture and primary language, including indigenous groups, and those for whom English is not a first language;
- religion;
- geography, including those in regional, rural and/or remote areas;
- gender and sexual orientation;
- age, including youth and senior groups;
- health, including physical and mental disabilities;
- unemployment;
- homelessness; and
- incarceration.

2.3. Degrees of inclusion

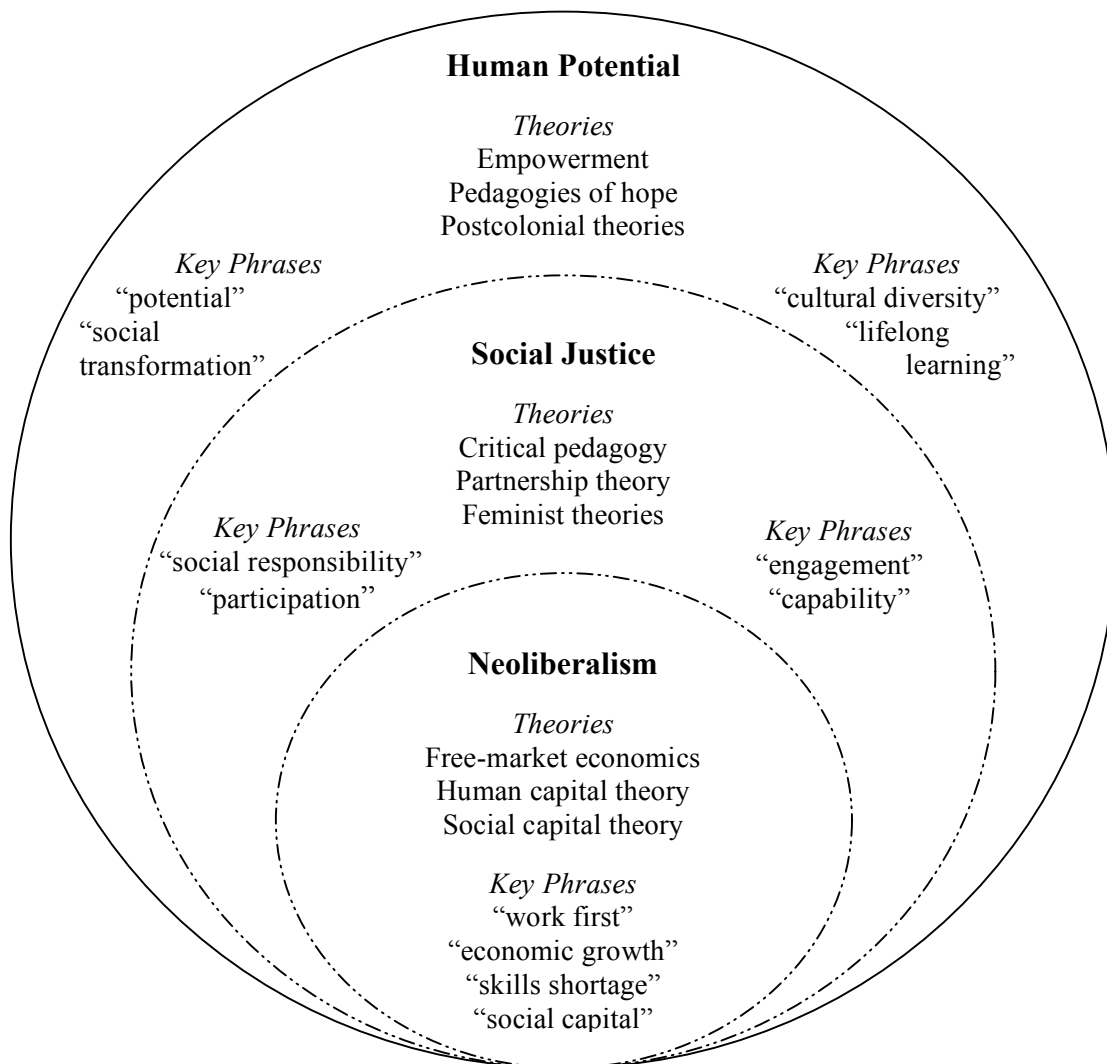
Social inclusion can be understood as pertaining to a nested schema regarding degrees of inclusion. The narrowest interpretation pertains to the neoliberal notion of *social inclusion as access*; a broader interpretation regards the social justice idea of *social inclusion as participation*; whilst the widest interpretation involves the human potential lens of *social inclusion as empowerment* (see Figure 1).

2.3.1. Neoliberal access

The narrowest interpretation of social inclusion is linked to the ideology of neoliberalism which began to take hold in the 1980s. From the perspective of neoliberal ideologies, increasing social inclusion is about investing in human capital and improving the skills shortages for the primary purpose of economic growth as part of a nationalist agenda to build the nation's economy in order to better perform in a competitive global market. Political scientist Manfred Steger describes neoliberalism's central tenets as including

The primacy of economic growth, the importance of free trade to stimulate growth, the unrestricted free market, individual choice, the reduction of government regulation, and the advocacy of an evolutionary model of social development anchored in the Western experience and applicable to the entire world (Steger, 2005, p. 8-9).

Figure 1: Spectrum of Ideologies Underlying Social Inclusion Theory and Policy



Neoliberalism can be differentiated from classic liberalism in its interest in the state *enforcement* of liberalism—an *illiberal* manoeuvre.

Within higher education theory and policy one of the ways that this ideology may appear is through the notion of *social capital*. The original concept of social capital, as put forward by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, addresses “the reproduction of social class divisions and inequalities of power” (Bexley, Marginson, & Wheelahan, 2007, p. 11). However, the currently popular neoliberal appropriation of the concept, as exemplified by Putnam’s usage, instead forces nonmercantile community resources into “a quasi-market framework, where assets such as networks of trust, expertise and social support can be subjected to various forms of social accountancy.” (Bexley, Marginson, & Wheelahan, 2007, p. 10-11)

An associated concept is that of *access* to higher education. From a neoliberal perspective, access may be regarded as a sufficient expression of social inclusion due to the neoclassical economic conceptualisation of human beings as autonomous rational decision makers free from social power imbalances. Exemplifying this perspective would be the idea that social *exclusion* pertains to “restriction of access to opportunities and limitations of the capabilities required to capitalise on these” (Hayes, Gray, & Edwards, 2008, p. 9).

Somewhat akin to the axiom of mainstream economics pertaining to *scarcity* of resources, this perspective on social inclusion works from models of *deficiency*. It can also be reductive in the sense of promoting a dominator hierarchy *homogenising* “that which is included.” The reduction of social explanation to economic factors is an example of *conceptual* reductive integration, whilst *lifeworld* reductive integration would be exemplified both by cultural assimilation and stakeholder dominator hierarchies. The latter, for instance, might involve corporate interests or government attempting to marginalise the interests and agendas of community voices such as those of indigenous, homeless, disabled, gay, youth or elderly groups (or their advocates). Critical apprehension of differences between rhetoric and reality may also be elicited. For example, a discourse that refers to *social justice*, *social responsibility* or *fair go* may nonetheless mask economic intent regarding merely *skills shortages* and/or *economic growth*.

2.3.2. Social justice participation

A more inclusive interpretation of social inclusion is identified through social justice ideology. From the perspective of social justice ideologies, increasing social inclusion is about human rights, egalitarianism of opportunity, human dignity, and fairness for all. It may or may not be linked to economic interests, but its primary aim is to enable all human beings to participate fully in society with respect for their human dignity. Here, acts of community *engagement* and *participation* are foregrounded. This can also be linked to notions of community *sustainability* (Langworthy, 2008, p. 57) and contextualised within *paradigmatic* conceptions of participation (Eisler, 1987, 2001). Exemplifying the participatory perspective is the idea that social inclusion pertains to the ability to “participate in the key activities in the society in which they live” (Saunders, Naidoo, & Griffiths, 2007, p. 17).

The university can play a key role in participatory social inclusion via university-community partnerships. Boyer’s schema comprising four major types of scholarships valorises such a notion: it includes the scholarship of application or service which is conceptualised as a two-way process of inquiry and learning between university and community. Such “partnership synergies” are furthered by Kenworthy-U’Ren and U’Ren’s research regarding such theoretical constructs as *linkage complexity*, *learning theory*, *network embeddedness*, and *participatory action research* (Kenworthy-U’Ren & U’Ren, 2008, p. 89) under the rubric of shared interests, privileges and responsibilities. Such university *engagement* can also be analysed in relation to processes of “collaboration, complexity and contract” (B. Thompson, 2008, p. 46), involving such features as *authentic learning*, *academic service learning*, *experiential education*, and *constructivist teaching* (B. Thompson, 2008, p. 42-43). In contrast to reductionist forms of integration promoted by neoliberalism, social justice interpretations of social inclusion comprise *complex* integrations involving participatory *dialogue* arising from the full ecology of interests regardless of power. Such participatory complexity is further enhanced within human potential ideologies.

2.3.3. Human potential empowerment

From the perspective of human potential ideologies, increasing social inclusion goes beyond merely justice and human rights and seeks to maximise the potential of each human being. Employing models of possibility instead of models of deficiency, human potential approaches centre on the interpretation of *social inclusion as empowerment*. Among other things, Jayne Clapton from Griffith University claims that empowerment involves “the moral imperative of working with the *complexity* of humanity” (added emphasis) (Olsson, 2008, p. 9)—a form of *complex* integration (as identified above). Such a perspective foregrounds the

notion that *all* human beings (whether mainstream or marginalised) are *multi-dimensional* beings, who have needs and interests that go well beyond their role in the political economy of a nation. Here, social inclusion valorises difference and diversity, pointing to collective individualism. Through this, education can be understood as *transformative*, facilitating one's potential for "a life of common dignity" (Nicholson, 2008, p. 2 of 4).

Discourses inspiring such perspectives include adult developmental psychology theories that propose higher stages of human reasoning {Commons, 2002 #1336; Cook-Greuter, 2000 #901; Sinnott, 1998 #1040}, critical and transformative pedagogies that reverse the focus on disadvantage and deficit and look towards positive development, lifelong learning and empowerment (Bassett, 2005; Hart, 2001; Montuori, 1997), postcolonial development theories that resist the westernisation and homogenisation of diverse cultures (Jain & Jain, 2003; Jain, Miller, & Jain, 2001) and discourses regarding multicultural histories, and positive futures visioning (Gidley, 2001, 2005). The general understanding identifies that:

When a person's pathways thinking is enhanced, and they become more able to generate effective pathways to their goals, it is likely that they will then become more motivated to follow these routes. Conversely, when a person becomes more motivated to pursue their goals, it is likely that they will thus be more energised to think of workable routes to their goals." (Egan, Butcher, & Ralph, 2008, p. 35)

3. Policy indications

The term *social inclusion* is in increasing usage in Australian policy. Promoted by the Rudd/Gillard leadership, it appears poised to replace terms such as "access and equity" which reflected earlier policy iterations regarding disadvantaged groups in higher education. The new policy also indicates a reference to similar orientation in the UK. It is notable that the term makes an important linguistic shift from the negative framing of "poverty", "disadvantage", "deprivation" and "exclusion" to the more positive framing of "inclusion." It is to be hoped that this marks the beginning of a directional shift in attitude from models of *deficiency* to human potential models of *possibility*. Indeed, policy rhetoric often includes reference to social and psychological dimensions in addition to economic ones. For instance, the Bradley Report includes recommendations regarding "awareness of higher education," "aspiration to participate," and "educational attainment to allow participation" (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 40). Policy statements by Julia Gillard MP also address "community resilience" and the issue of minority groups getting "their voice heard" (Gillard, 2008b).

Despite social and psychological inclusion, however, an economicist bias can be discerned: for instance, in the Bradley Report, five of the eight recommendations regarded increasing *funding* (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 40). A fair proportion of Gillard's language also pertains to the economic agenda. For instance, in her launch of the Bradley Review of Higher Education she spoke of the challenge for Australian universities to ensure they are "globally oriented, competitive, and socially inclusive"; she noted that these characteristics were "linked to the needs of the Australian economy and labour market." Economic metaphors in her languaging: "social *capital*" and "*investing* in children" (added emphasis) (Gillard, 2008a) tilt towards neoliberal human capital theory. In general, both *purpose* of social inclusion and *process* involved in seeking social inclusion tend to be framed economically. Purpose centres around both individual employment opportunities and national economic growth, whilst process is primarily discussed in terms of monetary cost. Moreover, even where languaging appears to be more inclusive, practice may not follow suit. Indeed, the reality may be closer to the reverse—an appropriation of normative social policy

by market-driven neoliberal economic values. Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Tony Nicholson, for instance, has concerns that social inclusion rhetoric is largely a rebranding of old values and policies and is not being taken seriously by either the community sector or government bureaucracy. A case study of “dimensions of social inclusion” in a post-1992 British university, for instance, cautioned about approaches that claim to be about economic factors *and* social justice, but where the dominant mode of inclusion was economic in nature. This study found that

the structures and attitudes reflected an instrumental view of higher education, in which the goal of higher education became that of obtaining employment and maintaining economic viability throughout the university experience (Andreshak-Behrman, 2003, Abstract).

Questions can also be raised in relation to how adequately policy addresses *areas* of inclusion. Within the policy literature of the current Australian government, the predominant emphasis is on the following groups: disadvantaged geographic areas, indigenous Australians, and those living with homelessness, joblessness, disability, health and/or mental health issues (Gillard, 2008a); and there has been a subsequent focus on particular localities, even postcodes, within both urban and rural settings (Vinson, 2007). But this leaves numerous gaps between practice and the theory identified above which would supplement this policy orientation with diversity in relation to such groupings as culture, language, religion, age, incarceration status, gender and sexual orientation. With regard to the last of these, for instance, it is notable that whilst Australian social inclusion literature remains silent on inclusion of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, the UK’s policy on social inclusion specifically identifies this group as a category of concern, noting, for instance, that there are a number of factors that make young LGBT people vulnerable to sexual exploitation, mental health problems, alcohol and drug misuse, and undue risk-taking (NCSS¹).

Finally, a critical question can be raised regarding the danger of inclusion as inferring *assimilation*. In this regard, a senior manager at Relationships Australia, Mandy Flahavin, points out that “ethnic and Indigenous minorities are particularly wary of the term social inclusion because of its implicit connotations of cultural assimilation” (Flahavin, 2008, Abstract). Wurundjeri woman, Sue Anne Hunter, manager of the Community Outreach Unit of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency further elucidates that

Social inclusion must be framed from the perspective [of] dealing with the unfinished business of the reconciliation process and respect for the rights of Aboriginal communities as First Peoples. ... Without such a conversation Aboriginal people will continue to be subject to covert and overt forms of neo-colonialism (Hunter, 2008, Abstract).

4. Practice indications

4.1. Introduction

The Bradley Review of Higher Education identified and analysed the higher education participation rates from 1989 to 2007 of six groups perceived to be under-represented (while noting that the groups were not all mutually exclusive). The data demonstrated that while the

¹ The National CAMHS Support Service (NCSS) is sponsored by the Department of Health (DH) and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) with the aim of offering additional capacity to support the implementation of a comprehensive Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The NCSS is part of the Care Services Improvement Partnership Children, Young People and Families national programme, which is delivered in the regions of England. <http://www.csip.org.uk/~cypf/camhs/national-camhs-support-service-ncss.html>

participation of students with disabilities appears to have doubled from 2% to 4%, all other groups have either remained static or declined in participation (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 28, Figure 2):

During the last 15 years there has been a long term failure to increase the rate of participation of low socio-economic status, indigenous and regional and remote students. This has happened at a time where some other nations have begun to see results from their social inclusion initiatives. (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 149).

In relation to low socio-economic status, a major Universities Australia-commissioned study by Centre for the Study of Higher Education concurs:

the share of university places for people from low SES backgrounds – approximately 15 per cent of places, compared with a population reference point of 25 per cent – has remained virtually unchanged for 15 years despite the overall expansion of access to higher education during that period (R. James, 2008, p. 2).

Indeed, even with regard to disability, the participation of students with disabilities in 2007 still only represents half the proportion of their representation in the general population (ibid. p. 28, Table 4).

Additionally, a case study of “dimensions of social inclusion” in a post-1992 British university... the dominant university response to diversity reflects a *deficiency* model, where non-traditional students have many “needs”; but, there is not much evidence that diversity is regarded as a resource or a source of social transformation.” (Andreshak-Behrman, 2003, Abstract)

4.2. Interventions

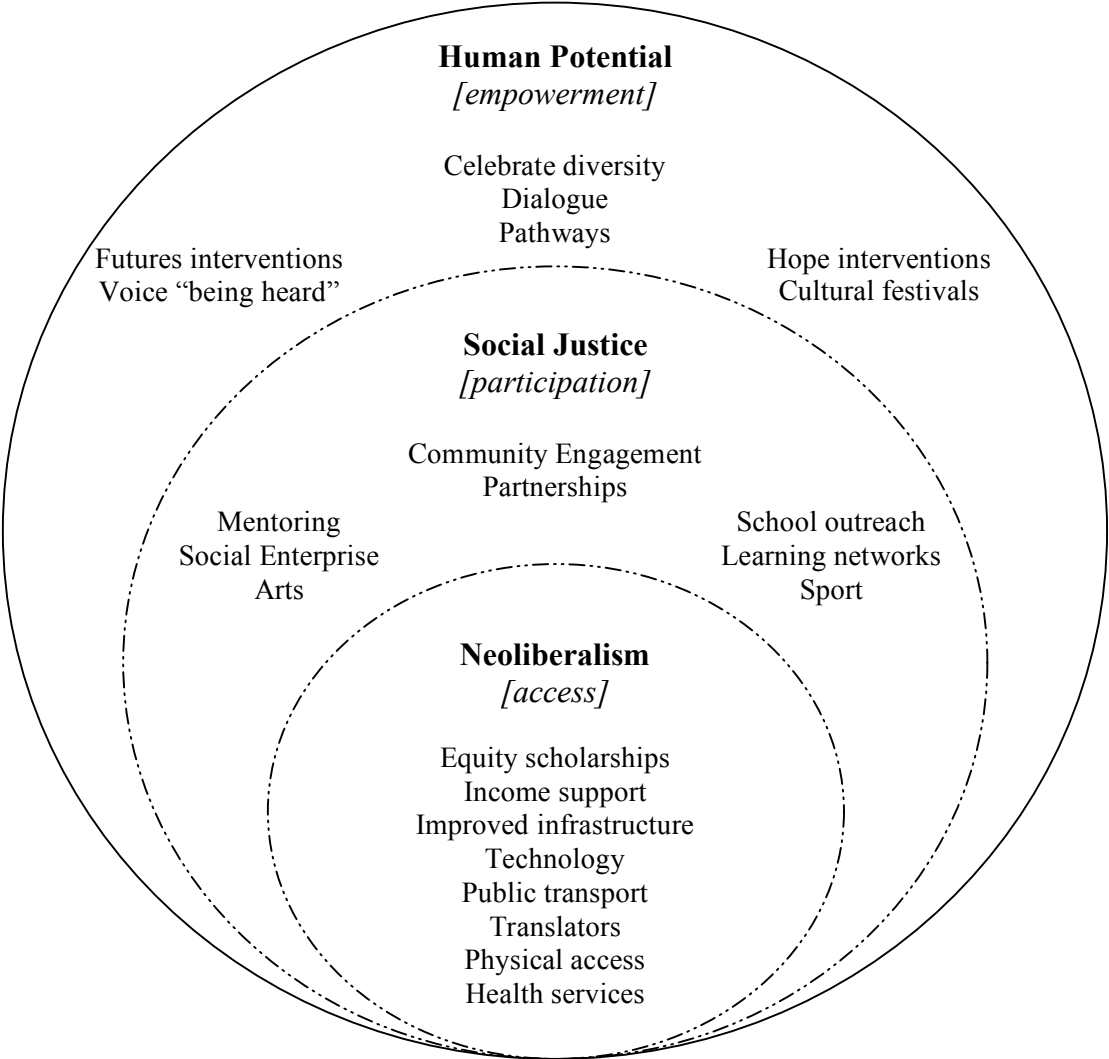
Social inclusion interventions can be identified with respect to their apparent ideology and disciplinary focus: interventions which focus on the economic benefits of social inclusion are generally underpinned by neoliberal economic theory; those which focus on social justice tend to be grounded in sociology and/or critical social theory; whilst human potential interventions are often grounded in positive psychology or transformative pedagogies foregrounding psychological and spiritual values (see Figure 2). The following section indicates these three directions through brief reference to a few representative examples.

4.2.1. Neoliberal access

The following list exemplifies social inclusion as pertaining to the neoliberal agenda of *access* to higher education; these can be regarded as first stepping stones to the more inclusive understandings of social justice and human potential interventions:

- more equity scholarships for low SES groups;
- better income support for low SES students;
- improved regional infrastructures, including better public transport and technology access for rural and isolated and particularly indigenous students;
- physical and architectural modifications for students with disabilities;
- additional teaching assistance and translation assistance for students with learning disabilities or from CALD backgrounds; and
- better counselling and health services for students with mental and physical health challenges

Figure 2: Social Inclusion Interventions Nested within Ideological Underpinnings



4.2.2. Social justice participation

In recent years there seems to have been a gradual increase in the number and range of social justice oriented social inclusion interventions in Australian universities. These include the following.

Partnerships—The notion of partnerships has become almost ubiquitous in social inclusion literature. Indeed, in October 2008 an entire conference was devoted to Partnerships for Social Inclusion at the University of Melbourne’s Centre for Public Policy. Many of the examples below were presented as papers at this conference.

Social Enterprise—The notion of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship is emerging as a way “to tackle deep-rooted issues in the areas of regeneration, community empowerment, long-term unemployment ... and improving public service delivery” (Robbie, 2008, Abstract).

Mentoring—The value of mentoring for building a sense of community among young people in regional areas has been reported in a study where a Network Partnership Model was used (Broadbent & Whitehead, 2008). A student peer mentoring program has also been reported to assist new university students from under-represented schools by matching them

with continuing university students who attended the same school; the mentor would organise activities for their mentees in their first month of university (R. James, 2008, p. 66).

Sport—The role of sport in increasing the social inclusion of newly arrived and refugee young people in Melbourne has been highlighted in a project that created a partnership between the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Australian Football League (AFL). It was found that “participants of the Program are increasing their social and civic participation within their local communities” (McGill, 2008, Abstract).

School Outreach—School outreach programs include partnership with the Smith Family’s Learning for Life Program; academic assistance in schools; and academic enrichment and university orientation {Universities Australia, 2008 #1835, pp. 60-61}. School outreach can also assist with negotiation of special entry programs. These may include: teacher recommendation systems; portfolio entry; bridging courses; and TAFE/VET pathways. RMIT has a school outreach program called *Schools Network Access Program* (SNAP), which aims to increase “the access and participation of low SES students in the geographical regions to which RMIT has a commitment... Participation ratios of Indigenous and disability students through SNAP are comparable to the total student population” (Fels, 2008, p. 6). Griffith University *Pathways to Prevention* focuses on prevention by intervening in the early years transition from home to school (Olsson, 2008).

Arts—Two recent studies report the value of engagement in the arts to facilitate social inclusion. The first was a project whereby people with disabilities, their families and carers could access and participate in arts and cultural programs over four stages: “reflect, connect, create and celebrate” (A. Thompson, 2008, Abstract). Another project took the idea of arts for social inclusion even further reviewing two major research and evaluation reports on the significance of arts in strengthening communities, concluding that this occurred in several ways:

- “Engaging socially excluded population;
 - providing new career pathways and work opportunities;
 - providing a creative focus for communities to explore issues and aspirations;
 - developing confidence, pride and a sense of belonging in participants; and
- creating new and diverse artistic work and cultural experiences.” (Grinblat & Kershaw, 2008, Abstract)

4.2.3. Human potential empowerment

The following interventions *deepen* social justice interests through emphasising empowerment and the encouragement of individual potential. The potential of the “pathways” may paradoxically correspond to their apparent indirectness.

Voice “being heard”—The importance of having “voices heard” is one of Gillard’s criteria for social inclusion, yet how is this actually enabled? Irish researcher, Chris McInerney, focuses on the underlying politics of governance in partnering institutions such as universities and how the processes in so-called democratic institutions can be quite exclusive and in need of reconstruction with respect to decision-making processes and the redistribution of power (McInerney, 2008, Abstract). The notion of voice has also been the focus of social inclusion interventions with Indigenous people. A recent Victorian government initiative to give voice and representation to Indigenous Australians involves community networks and integrative frameworks “designed to address the multi-dimensional nature of Indigenous disadvantage” (Callaghan & Moser, 2008).

Dialogue—Addressing *voice* enables dialogue to emerge. Anglican Archdeacon, Philip Newman, for instance, has taken up the issue of *interreligious* dialogue as a pathway to increasing social inclusion (Newman, 2008), whilst Professor Ashok Gangadean (co-founder

of the Global Dialogue Institute, Philadelphia) has identified the significance of the role of *intercultural* dialogue (Gangadean, 2006).

Futures—If social inclusion interventions are to be effective as ways to create long-term improvements then it is advantageous to undertake some form of long-term future planning and/or envisioning of preferred futures scenarios with respect to particular under-represented groups. In a New Zealand initiative—the *Long Term Council Community Plans* project—local councils have been mandated to undertake community strategic planning, to “articulate economic, social, environmental and cultural well-beings which then influence the level and mix of services delivered by councils and contribute to the achievements of community outcomes” (Reid, 2008, Abstract). The significance of taking a long-term view in planning and social interventions has been stressed for decades by futures researchers. Furthermore, the psychological and hence pedagogical value of interventions that assist young people to envisage positive futures has been highlighted in various Australian studies (Eckersley, Cahill, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2007; Eckersley, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2006; Gidley, 2001; Gidley & Inayatullah, 2002; Stewart, 2002).

Hope—Interventions addressing young people’s views and visions of their futures are closely connected with interventions aimed at facilitating hope and empowerment (Gidley, 2004, 2005). In this regard, a range of theoretical perspectives can be drawn on. For instance, educational philosopher Henry Giroux states that we need to “educate students to work collectively to make ‘despair unconvincing and hope practical’ by refusing the role of the disconnected expert, technician, or careerist and adopting the practice of the engaged and transformative intellectual” (Giroux, 1992, p. 105). Additionally, Paulo Freire’s pedagogical theories and practices of working with oppressed people in Latin America can be aptly utilised to facilitate social inclusion through creating pedagogies of hope rather than hopelessness (Freire, 1970, 1995). An intervention that gives hope to incarcerated women is operated by internationally acclaimed Brisbane advocacy and human rights organisation, *Sisters Inside*, which provides pathways to higher education as a means of rehabilitation (Olsson, 2008, p. 6).

Cultural festivals—One of the best ways to facilitate the deeper feelings of social inclusion that align to engagement and empowerment (in contrast to having access but still feeling disempowered) is for people to be able to express their own cultural values in ways whereby they are fully honoured. Indian researcher Ashis Nandy has written extensively on the significance of the categories of knowledge that we live by, and the need to make transparent the power that lives in these dominant categories of knowledge (Nandy, 2000). Professor Denise Bradley makes a similar point in reference to the issue of deepening the social inclusion of Indigenous people:

Indigenous involvement in higher education is not only about student participation and the employment of Indigenous staff. It is also about what is valued as knowledge in the academy. Indigenous students and staff have unique knowledge and understandings which must be brought into the curriculum for all students and must inform research and scholarship (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 32).

A similar point could be argued for any group that experiences social exclusion, whether they be Indigenous, non-English speaking, gay, physically/mentally unwell or elderly. The inclusion of culturally diverse voices in the broadest possible interpretation in educational curricula and processes is surely a way forward to increase not just access, but participation, engagement and human potential.

4.3. Case studies

4.3.1. RMIT Learning Community Partnerships Group

The Learning Community Partnerships Group, located within the College of Design and Social Context, brokers learning and research opportunities at the Hamilton Centre and through learning partnerships in northern metropolitan Melbourne. The group has over 10 years experience of community engagement work that involves collaboration and management of cross-sectoral partnerships with industry, schools, other education and training providers and government.

Currently, the group runs significant partnership projects which focus on raising the aspirations of youth and increasing awareness of young people to higher education and other training opportunities. For example, *Career Connections RMIT*, a federally funded program, facilitates school and industry partnerships including structured workplace learning opportunities and a range of activities, including “Hands on Health” and “Try a Trade,” which introduce 13-19 year olds to the world of work. In addition, programs such as Linking Young People to Employment and Training provide mentoring to youth at risk of leaving school.

Program Director, Dr Leone Wheeler {Wheeler, 2004 #327} addressed the university management of such community engagement projects as part of her doctorate, using an action research approach to investigate the operational framework of a sustainable learning network (RMIT LearnLinks) over three funding cycles from mid 1998 until 2002. A framework of operations was developed based on principles of action research, involving a cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection as well as an understanding of the lifecycle of the project—is it time to establish, expand or exit? The learning from each cycle is pooled into the knowledge base and used to plan the next cycle; it is also used to select other projects. Over the 10 years of the life of the Learning Network program, it touched the lives of over 7000 learners in community settings. As our partners taught us, it is about local people meeting local needs with local solutions. This action reflection approach still forms the basis of an operational framework for managing partnership programs.

4.3.2. Victoria University Community Engagement Activities

The Community Engagement Coordinator (CEC) is housed in the Victoria University Office for Industry and Community Engagement and is directed by Elleni Bereded-Samuel. The CEC is accountable for planning, developing and implementing strategies to increase the scope of the university's community engagement, especially with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, through the development of existing and new community engagement relationships. This is achieved through the following key processes.

Identifying Community Needs—developing relationships with communities from migrant/refugee background and relevant service providers. A particular model has been developed by Bereded-Samuel at Victoria University to build the trust of the communities from migrant/refugee background that students belong to. The process includes: making initial contact with community leaders; attending the community's celebrations and functions, to assist with understanding the cultural context; identifying community needs through dialogue with the community at grass root level; and facilitating meetings with community leaders and Victoria university staff to assist with designing and implementing education and training to suit that particular student/community. The value of such an approach was recognised in the 2007 Business/Higher Education Roundtable Award for outstanding University-Community Engagement activities.

Clear Contact Point for communities from Migrant and Refugee background—providing both a clear first contact point and also ongoing personal support for students. Having a dedicated, culturally sensitive person to facilitate the course decisions and enrolments of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds—and to provide ongoing support and advocacy when necessary—improves student access to the institution and supports their ongoing participation in learning.

Advocacy and Information Dissemination—providing information and advocacy about the needs of particular communities from migrant and refugee backgrounds to local, state, and federal governments, and other service providers. Through the above-mentioned processes the CEC is able to act as a resource for cross-cultural information so that many organisations can be better informed about the needs and status of communities from migrant and refugee background. The development of engagement is a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge between the university and the community. It also builds the capacity of the community members to navigate their way in the system.

5. Toward further research

This paper acts as an *indication* of theory, policy and practice regarding social inclusion. Further research could take more account of international research. Also further research could comprehensively survey Australian universities to ascertain what initiatives they are undertaking to ensure that social inclusion of under-represented groups becomes a reality in the not too distant future. Indeed, it would be valuable if a longer-term futures approach could be taken to the next phase of research in this area.

With regard to time, for example, a multifaceted challenge arises. Firstly, social inclusion interventions take time to design, implement and evaluate. The kinds of individual and social change that we are proposing here might take years, decades or even generations to unfold. Secondly, regarding community partnership, there may be “tension between partners’ time commitments and the need to commit time to achieving partnership goals” (S. James & Mallett, 2008, Abstract). Thirdly, different people, groups and cultures have different senses of time. Whilst university staff and government bureaucrats may embrace the industrial clock-time of modernity, other cultures may have a sense of time that is more linked to seasonal cycles or cultural ceremonies. Sensitivity towards such diverse time-senses is currently under-researched yet may well impact on the success of social inclusion programs.

Finally, much of the social inclusion and university-community engagement literature points to the need for more integrated and holistic approaches, yet little of the research on social inclusion appears familiar with the extensive literature on integrative-integral-holistic perspectives, such as postformal and ecological (sustainability, planetary) approaches. Going beyond “either/or” thinking to “both/and” possibilities, such perspectives have the opportunity of linking social inclusion to bigger picture concepts of inclusion. As such, social inclusion can form part of 21st century paradigmatic change rather comprising merely a bureaucratic add-on.

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