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2012

Editorial: Social inclusion--are we there yet?

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Publication Details

McMahon-Coleman, K., Percy, A. & James, B. (2012). Editorial: Social inclusion--are we there yet?. Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 6 (2), E1-E6.

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Abstract
This special edition of the Journal of Academic Language and Learning arose out of a Forum titled Critical Discussions about Social Inclusion held at the University of Wollongong, Australia in June 2011. It was organised by academic language and learning educators from five different universities: Ingrid Wijeyewardene from the University of New England, Helen Drury from the University of Sydney, Caroline San Miguel from the University of Technology Sydney, Stephen Milnes from the Australian National University, and ourselves from the University of Wollongong. Initially funded by a grant from the Association for Academic Language and Learning, this funding was later supplemented by the University of Wollongong and the Forum became designated as a strategic priority.

Keywords
inclusion, we, there, editorial, yet, social

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Publication Details
McMahon-Coleman, K., Percy, A. & James, B. (2012). Editorial: Social inclusion--are we there yet?. Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 6 (2), E1-E6.

This journal article is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/asdpapers/297

Journal of Academic Language & Learning
Vol. 6, No. 2, 2012, E1-E6. ISSN 1835-5196

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Association for Academic Language and Learning

Editorial: Social Inclusion – Are we there yet?

This special edition of the *Journal of Academic Language and Learning* arose out of a Forum titled *Critical Discussions about Social Inclusion* held at the University of Wollongong, Australia in June 2011. It was organised by academic language and learning educators from five different universities: Ingrid Wijeyewardene from the University of New England, Helen Drury from the University of Sydney, Caroline San Miguel from the University of Technology Sydney, Stephen Milnes from the Australian National University, and ourselves from the University of Wollongong. Initially funded by a grant from the Association for Academic Language and Learning, this funding was later supplemented by the University of Wollongong and the Forum became designated as a strategic priority.

As practitioners and academics interested in the new Social Inclusion agenda currently propelling institutions of higher education into action, we devised the Forum as a way of providing the space for those charged with responsibility for enacting the Social Inclusion agenda to talk about what we are doing, have done and want to do. Equally importantly, we wanted the Forum to shift this story telling into a more critical space – a space in which we were not simply repeating or retelling, but thinking, re-thinking and questioning. The critical questions that drove this Forum related to issues of identity and difference and the ways in which policy and practice are grounded in the production and representation of the student as subject of higher education.

Locating Social Inclusion – a History

In many ways, the current social inclusion agenda is not dissimilar to previous moves towards increased diversity and participation in the higher education sector. In fact, it is possible to argue that Australian universities have been subject to expansion, diversification and increasing "inclusion" almost since their outset: it is just the discursive, regulatory and operational environment that continues to change. Australian higher education has a long history of attempting to move away from an elitist model of tertiary education, towards broader, more socially inclusive participatory models. From the Mills (1950), Murray (1957) and Martin (1964) reports of the Menzies era that maintained a meritocratic sense of "equality of opportunity", to Dawkins' proposed reforms in the 1990s that introduced the notion of "equity", to the Bradley Review of 2008 which is currently informing Higher Education policy, the professional imperative has been to "do" Social Inclusion in various ways at particular historical moments.

The Murray (1957) and Martin (1964) reports, for example, can be said to have emerged out of a constellation of factors that saw the expansion of higher education as an important solution to a range of social, economic and political exigencies. The social factors included a growing demand for education as the population expanded, became increasingly affluent and looked to education as a means for social mobility. The economic and political factors included the imperatives of post-war construction, the rapid technologisation of industry and the desire to build a scientific and technical workforce. It was in this era that the university became harnessed to the State in unprecedented ways. But despite the logic of "equality", these assumptions of who should attend university were still grounded in beliefs about intellectual ability established in the intelligence testing of the 1920s. Although "equality of opportunity" framed the massive expansion both reports sought to promote in higher education, it was still framed in a meritocratic sense.

The last of the Menzies-era reports, the Martin Report on the *Future of tertiary education in Australia*, argued that "higher education should be available to all citizens according to their inclination and capacity" (Martin, 1964, p. i). Although it advocated expansion of tertiary education, it was firmly ensconced in a meritocratic version of equality of opportunity. Its recommendations led to federal funding of universities being increased substantially (Marginson, 1997) and the establishment of Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE) and

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Institutes of Technology, attracting a large number of first-in-family Baby Boomers into higher education.

In 1974, the Whitlam Labor government abolished tertiary fees and introduced a living allowance for about half of the student population (Marginson, 2004), with the stated aim of equalising access to higher education for students from all socio-economic backgrounds (Gale & Tranter, 2011, p. 34). During this decade, federal funding increased threefold – ultimately becoming 90% government funded (Marginson, 2004, p. 2) – yet inequalities persisted as the system became effectively stratified, with students from low socio-economic backgrounds enrolling at CAEs and newer universities, and those from higher SES backgrounds remaining at the established universities and within professional disciplines (Gale & Tranter, 2011. See also Anderson, Boven, Fensham, & Powell, 1980; Anderson & Vervoorn, 1983; Marginson, 1997).

In the neo-liberal economic rationalist era from the mid-1980s onwards, however, there was a move towards privatisation and marketisation, based on the Thatcherite model from the United Kingdom. By the end of the decade, it became apparent that the publicly-funded model was unsustainable, and if tertiary participation was to be expanded in Australia, an increase in market competition through the introduction of a fee payment scheme would be necessary. This initially took the form of the Higher Education Administration Charge (or HEAC), in 1985, which was later replaced with the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) schemes.

The Hawke/Keating Labor government reorganised the binary system of universities and colleges into the National Unified System (Luke, 1997, p. 1), and moved towards public accountability through performance indicators (Luke, 1997, p. 1). These changes, sometimes known as the Dawkins reforms (after the then-Education Minister, John Dawkins), were accompanied by Commonwealth equity schemes, designed to open up "university to many who had previously been excluded" (Dobson & Skuja, 2005, p. 53). Despite these attempts, students from the 25% of postcodes at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy still represented only 15-16% of student enrolments, with disproportionately lower enrolments again in degrees such as Medicine and Law (Dobson & Skuja, 2005). This is one of the areas which the current government is attempting to redress in its education policy. Even as governments across the world are attempting to reduce such inequalities in education, however, the reality may well be, as Benjamin Levin notes, that "[i]n a field like education, there will always be more demands for additional service than can be supported" (Levin, 2007, p. 334).

The John Howard-led Coalition government pushed educational policy and institutional practice along a continuum towards reduced government expenditure. It increased marketisation and privatisation of state-supported operations in an increasingly less regulated educational market (Luke, 2007, p. 1). During this time, higher education was viewed largely as a consumer good, desired when basic human needs are met, and which was closely linked with national economic development (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). On an individual level, higher education became a means of differentiating social advantage as the completion of secondary education became commonplace (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). More recently, this competitive rhetoric has been extrapolated in such a way that tertiary completion rates are now being used as a measure of a nation's economic success and productivity, relative to others (OECD, 2007).

The 2007 Australian Labor Party Education Revolution positioning paper sought to redress some of the inequities in the education system, but strongly utilised the aforementioned productivity discourse. This focus on economic dividends is, perhaps, an attempt to convey messages about education in a political and educational climate which has so long been dominated by the discourses of economic rationalism. Professor Denise Bradley's 2008 Report into Higher Education, commissioned in response to the Rudd Government's Education Revolution, uses a similar discourse and even goes so far as to cite the same statistics. There is a repetition of the human capital investment discourse, when Bradley notes that the "real wealth of the nation" is the "capacity of its people" (Bradley, 2008, p. xvii). She further argues that the "reach, quality and performance of a nation's higher education system are key determinants of its economic and social progress" (Bradley, 2008, p. ix).

Bradley advocates the implementation of public performance indicators which "would assist public understanding of where we are internationally" (Bradley, 2008, p. xvii). Bradley moves the economic advantage argument subtly into the social advantage discourse, noting that "we must also look to members of groups currently under-represented within the system, that is, those disadvantaged by the circumstances of their birth: Indigenous people, people with low socio-economic status, and those from regional and remote areas" (Bradley, 2008, p. xi).

Nevertheless, the stark reality remains that despite this series of initiatives designed to combat social disadvantage and in the face of marked increases in participation rates over the last half-century, the same six groups – women (in particular disciplines), students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, students from regional areas, students from low socio-economic status backgrounds and Indigenous students – continue to be under-represented. This suggests that current practices need to be reviewed for efficacy. In the face of directives to act, we need to maintain commitment to thought, detach from agenda and critically reflect on it as an object of research, rather than as a problem.

As stated earlier, in many ways the current agenda is not dissimilar to previous moves towards increased diversity and participation in the higher education sector. The current changes, however, are occurring in quite a different discursive and regulatory environment. In a highly globalised and competitive higher education market, tertiary education standards are represented as an indicator of national worth and a matter of national pride, rather than in terms of adding to the international body of knowledge; that is, in terms of economic, rather than social, dividends. Professor Denise Bradley's report on change in the higher education sector – the cornerstone of the current federal government's higher education policy – is predicated on notions of Australia "falling behind other countries in performance and investment in higher education" (Bradley, 2008, p. xi), and under-represented groups are identified as areas from which we can improve the nation's overall statistical performance.

The history of social inclusion that we have briefly sketched is not a seamless or continuous one. Rather it is an account which is punctuated by multiple and overlapping discourses: neo-liberal economic rationalism, socialism, marketisation, globalisation, the knowledge economy, and more. While Foucault has schooled us well to understand that discourses are always associated with relations of power (Foucault, 1982), discourses are also, following Derrida (1972) and Butler (see, for example, Butler, 1997, p. 40) never saturable, able to be broken with and challenged. This leaves open the possibility for *imagining* and *doing* social inclusion differently; for improvising within discursive constraints.

We enact these overlapping and at times contradictory discourses of social inclusion in various ways in our local contexts and our local attempts to develop social inclusion programs and policies. What comes to count as "good practice" and "good policy" in relation to social inclusion, for example, is shaped and constrained by what is understood as intelligible within these discourses. Our interest in producing this special journal edition, therefore, is to continue the conversations that we began at the *Critical Discussions about Social Inclusion Forum* and to begin the process of mapping the multi-directional and co-constitutive relations among social inclusion practices, policies, discourses and the student as the subject or "object" of social inclusion. Our purpose is both critical and pragmatic. As a critical endeavour, we want to begin to mark out and question more specifically the domain of actions and subjects who are understood as "intelligible" or "viable" (Butler, 2004, p. xvii) within the current social inclusion focus in Australian higher education. This questioning is perhaps paradoxically also our attempt to contribute to practice, that is, to provoke the possibility of knowing, doing and being otherwise.

Contemporary Social Inclusion Practices

The participants in the *Critical Discussions about Social Inclusion Forum* included people working in higher education policy and governance, in teaching and research positions in the faculties, in the academic language and learning field, and in academic staff development.

There was a real thirst for the time, the conversations and the critical reflection that we built into the Forum design, as well as a sense that we had only started the conversations and that these needed to continue. In this journal, you will find some of the papers that were presented at the *Critical Discussions about Social Inclusion Forum*. We have grouped these papers around identity, student cohorts, and teaching practices.

This journal begins with the plenary by Professor Martin Nakata which is concerned with the academic under-preparation of Indigenous students and the complexity of offering useful and appropriate learning pathways to enable their successful transition into higher education study. Nakata argues that while Indigenous student centres in tertiary institutions have made a significant contribution to Indigenous student transition and retention through their "multi-faceted" co-curricula activities, it is timely that their disconnection from the mainstream teaching and learning context be reconsidered. Nakata argues that strategies for social inclusion "must find better ways to attend to providing students' access to the knowledge, discourses, and literacies of the disciplines", and that this requires "a larger re-contextualisation of the Indigenous position *vis-a-vis* the disciplines". He goes on to locate the learner at the cultural interface where Indigenous students are constituted as subjects through a matrix of abstract discourses that are inscribed in "the disciplines and the corpus". This process positions them in ways that often place them in conflict with the "Western order of things". For this reason, he advocates the use of standpoint theory (Pohlhaus, 2002) as a method of enquiry to interrogate "the social relations within which we as 'knowers' know" in order to create a critical Indigenous standpoint. This allows Indigenous students to understand the political nature of their position, maintain themselves in the face of it and work against the ways in which knowledge holds power over them.

The identity of the student is also taken up in Williamson's paper, "Generation 1.5: the LBOTE blind spot", which challenges the perceived homogeneity of the student cohort with Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LBOTE). Specifically concerned with producing a more nuanced understanding of the diversity within LBOTE cohorts of students, Williamson provides a useful analysis of the "Generation 1.5" student, a student who has migrated to Australia from a non-English speaking country during childhood, and whose cultural and linguistic diversity may not be directly recognised by current systems of observation. She argues that while these students tend to be verbally proficient in the native tongue, this proficiency often masks significant struggles with literacy practices, particularly at the academic level. Williamson calls for more research into this area of student identity in order for more useful and targeted programs to be implemented.

Ashton-Hay and Roberts' paper is premised on the argument that inclusive practice is socially responsible practice and must, therefore, include international students. While this group of students is not designated as an under-represented group in current social inclusion discussions, Ashton-Hay and Roberts employ Marginson's phraseology (2004) to suggest that by not targeting support for this group we are in danger of charges of "neo-imperial economic exploitation of Asia". Further, the authors argue that international students represent "canaries in the coal mine" and as such their experiences of learning provide a valuable indicator of the quality of teaching and learning across all student cohorts. The authors go on to present a case study of an integrated approach which provided discipline content and disciplinary focused academic writing models for a group of Chinese students from a Chinese partner institution who were completing the final segment of their degree in an Australian university setting.

Hitch et al. take a holistic approach to supporting students to achieve their potential, arguing that existing strategies for social inclusion have focused on "supporting non-traditional students to fit in rather than challenging existing structures to support their needs". They outline what they call a "resource based approach" which capitalises on the resources and capacities that students bring with them to their learning environment. This approach draws on three main domains: intrapersonal resources, skills resources, and environmental resources. These are a complex set of resources and take account of a range of stakeholder interests. The authors argue that the intersection of these three domains is the space "where academic skills and personal

qualities, values and characteristics combine to form the intrapersonal factors influencing student success". A resource based approach, the authors argue, avoids a deficit model of student learning.

Keevers and Abuodha take a differently nuanced practice based approach to social inclusion, although they also argue for the need to shift from a deficit model. They argue that social inclusion needs "to encompass the institution and its practices". They present a practice based study which attends to "the dynamic complex of practices of respect and recognition, redistribution, representation and voice, and belonging and connectedness". Their paper also demonstrates the ways in which students' experiences of inclusion and belonging are intertwined with institutionally engendered experiences of their teachers in relation to respect and recognition and a sense of belonging. Academic teachers, they argue, can both "do" and "undo" social inclusion and it's the details – the words, gestures, even the layout of the physical space – that matter.

Particular cohorts and the links between social factors and social inclusion are examined in the final two articles. Dearlove and Marland consider the external time and financial constraints on low SES students and impacts on their studies, basing their research around one campus of a multi-location University. Bosanquet et al. also consider the lived experiences of tertiary students by examining the inclusion – or exclusion – of the terms associated with the social inclusion agenda in Graduate Attributes across the sector.

It is obvious from the collection of papers in this journal that we are very definitely not there yet – social inclusion remains an ongoing challenge. The papers presented here have taken up quite different aspects and approaches to social inclusion. Perhaps this is partly because we are operating in an environment where different and competing claims are being made. Our attention, for example, is equally drawn to the discussions about Standards and the continuing role that international students play in the Australian higher education context. Within this context, we would suggest that social inclusion remains critical but unfinishable business, replete with ongoing tensions and challenges. We would argue that the assumptions, discourses and regulations that frame these challenges are worthy of close and continuing scrutiny, particularly if universities are seeking intelligent, rather than expedient, solutions.

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