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# Social inclusion as an unfinished verb: a practice-based approach

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## **Abstract**

The Australian Government has embarked on a social inclusion agenda that includes ambitious targets to increase and widen participation in higher education. From the evidence to date their approach to social inclusion in higher education focuses attention on statistical indicators of "proportional representation". Most of the available measures of social inclusion and exclusion have an individualistic focus and tend to characterise social exclusion as a "state" in which people are assumed to be "excluded" from access to higher education. Such a perspective focuses attention on the point of entry but backgrounds how the relational experience of under-represented groups in learning environments impacts on their engagement, participation and success in higher education. In this paper, we advocate an alternative, expanded, conception of social inclusion as situated, engaged, relational, ongoing practices rather than end-state orientated. We present, in a practice-based study, a framework in which the "doing" of social inclusion is conceived as a dynamic complex of practices of respect and recognition, redistribution, representation and voice, and belonging and connectedness. In this paper we suggest that the focus of social inclusion should not stop with the student. Our empirical work demonstrates that the students' learning experience and their sense of inclusion are entangled with the sessional teachers' experience of respect, recognition and representation and belonging - they are co-constitutive. We conclude that a practice-based approach broadens the focus of social inclusion beyond access and achievement to include the relations that both create and are created by institutional practices.

## **Keywords**

era2015, unfinished, verb, inclusion, social, practice, approach

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# Social Inclusion as an unfinished verb: A practice-based approach<sup>1</sup>

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The Australian Government has embarked on a social inclusion agenda that includes ambitious targets to increase and widen participation in higher education. From the evidence to date their approach to social inclusion in higher education focuses attention on statistical indicators of “proportional representation”. Most of the available measures of social inclusion and exclusion have an individualistic focus and tend to characterise social exclusion as a “state” in which people are assumed to be “excluded” from access to higher education. Such a perspective focuses attention on the point of entry but backgrounds how the relational experience of under-represented groups in learning environments impacts on their engagement, participation and success in higher education. In this paper, we advocate an alternative, expanded, conception of social inclusion as situated, engaged, relational, ongoing *practices* rather than end-state orientated. We present, in a practice-based study, a framework in which the “doing” of social inclusion is conceived as a dynamic complex of practices of respect and recognition, redistribution, representation and voice, and belonging and connectedness. In this paper we suggest that the focus of social inclusion should not stop with the student. Our empirical work demonstrates that the students’ learning experience and their sense of inclusion are entangled with the sessional teachers’ experience of respect, recognition and representation and belonging – they are co-constitutive. We conclude that a practice-based approach broadens the focus of social inclusion beyond access and achievement to include the relations that both create and are created by institutional practices.

**Key Words:** social inclusion, social justice, practice-based, relational, higher education, widening participation.

## 1. Introduction

The notions of social inclusion and exclusion have had significant influence in policy discourse on higher education in the past couple of decades, particularly in the northern hemisphere (Popay, Escorel, Hernandez, Johnston, Mathieson, & Rispel, 2008). Although there is enormous diversity in approaches to social inclusion/exclusion, there is now overwhelming evidence demonstrating the centrality of social connectedness and social support for both well-being (Berkman, 1995; Wilkinson, 2005) and success in higher education (Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009; Johnson & Stevens, 2008; Scott, Shah, Grebennikov, & Singh, 2008; Thomas, Tran, & Dawson, 2010). The international research on the social determinants of health demonstrates that indicators of social inclusion – a sense of control over your life (Marmot,

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase social inclusion as an unfinished verb is adapted from Griffiths (2003, p. 57) who argues that social justice is a verb that is always unfinished and revisable.

2004), a sense of belonging (Wilkinson, 2005) and a sense of agency and hope for the future (Berkman, 1995; CSDH, 2008) – are key risk/protective factors in relation to well-being, health and “success” in life.

Recently, the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion have been institutionalised in Australian social policy with a National Social Inclusion Unit and Board established in 2008 to “advise the Government on ways to achieve better outcomes for the most disadvantaged people in our community” (Australian Government, 2008, p. 1). In relation to higher education, the Federal Government in 2009 set two ambitious targets for widening and increasing participation. These are that 20% of undergraduate enrolments in Australian Universities will be students from “low socioeconomic status (LSES)” backgrounds by 2020 and, by 2025, 40% of all 25-34 year olds will attain a bachelor’s degree (Australian Government, 2009, pp. 12-13). Commenting on the emergence of this more socially inclusive policy approach Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, and Bered-Samual (2010) describe a shift “from universities as elite institutions for the few to higher education as a birthright of the many” (p. 126).

From the evidence to date, the Australian government’s approach to social inclusion focuses attention on statistical indicators of “proportional representation”. Such a perspective targets the point of entry but backgrounds how the relational experience of under-represented groups in learning environments impacts on their engagement, participation and success in higher education.

Most of the available measures and indicators of social inclusion/exclusion have an individualistic focus that provides “descriptions of ‘states’ of exclusion, neglecting the relational nature of these ‘states’ and the exclusionary processes generating them” (Popay et al., 2008, p. 43). Such conceptions tend to characterise social exclusion as a “state” in which people or groups are assumed to be “excluded” from access to higher education (Popay et al., 2008). However, about a third of students who drop out in their first year make no connections and have no personal contact with academic staff (Crosling et al., 2009; Krause, 2005; Scott et al., 2008). Sen (2000, p. 8) argues that only by emphasising and focusing attention on the role of relational features will the concept of social exclusion contribute to appropriate and effective ways of addressing exclusion, disadvantage and inequity in higher education.

The current policy with its emphasis on statistical equality is in tension with the growing body of literature that argues that to increase the participation and retention of students from low socio-economic status (LSES) backgrounds requires both a focus on access and a recognition that what goes on in teaching and learning spaces is critical to tackling exclusion (Crosling et al., 2009; Devlin, 2011; Gale, 2011a; Tinto, 1997). Indeed, learning, teaching and assessment practices play an even more important role in the retention and success of students from under-represented groups as the formal learning experience is often the only element of university life they experience (Johnson & Stevens, 2008; Yorke, 2008). Students from low socio-economic status backgrounds are more likely to live off campus, study part-time and/or have work and family responsibilities which makes it more difficult for them to participate in co-curricular activities and socialising (Crosling et al., 2009; Raey, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001).

In order to connect social inclusion with the student learning experience we argue that a different conception of social inclusion than the one that currently prevails in higher education policy is required. We employ resources from contemporary practice theory and a participatory action research project to investigate the questions: What alternative conceptions of social inclusion may contribute to effectively finding ways to deal with exclusion, inequity and injustice in higher education? Is the Australian Government’s current approach to social inclusion in higher education measuring what matters?

In this paper, we advocate an expanded conception of social inclusion as situated, engaged, relational, ongoing *practices* rather than end-state orientated. From this focus on practice, we present a framework in which the “doing” of social inclusion is conceived as a dynamic complex of practices of respect and recognition, redistribution, representation and belonging.

This paper is organised as follows. First, we introduce the relational practice-based approach informing our analysis. Second, we critically review the literature on social inclusion and higher

education and describe some of the current debates in the discourses of social inclusion. Third, we situate our social inclusion study and describe our research methodology and methods. Fourth, based on our qualitative and quantitative analysis of our fieldwork and our approach we extend current discourses of social inclusion to offer an alternative practice-based approach to social inclusion. Finally, we speculate about its possible implications for teaching and learning arrangements in Universities and for the Australian Government's approach to indicators and measures of social inclusion.

## 2. A practice-based approach to social inclusion

Practice-based studies refer to the work of scholars from different disciplines who have developed explanations of social, cultural and material phenomena based on the notion of practices (Barad, 2007; Green, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). In contemporary educational research, this (re) turn to practice has been evident for the past couple of decades (Arnseth, 2008; Dunne & Hogan, 2004; Green, 2011). Practice-based theorising on learning and teaching in education employs a range of research approaches including activity theory, situated learning theory and communities of practice, cultural and aesthetic perspectives, actor-network theory and work-based learning. These practice-based approaches foreground different aspects of practice and draw on rich philosophical and epistemological traditions including neo-Aristotelianism, pragmatism, phenomenology, neo-Marxist epistemology, Vygotsky's social constructivism, Wittgenstein's later philosophy, Foucault's power/knowledge nexus and Bourdieu's practice theory (Green, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002).

Although there is no unified theory of practices (Gherardi, 2006), contemporary practice scholars share "family resemblances" (Arnseth, 2008; Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003; Schatzki et al., 2001). They share a desire to go beyond *dualisms and dichotomies* in educational research such as cognitivist and structuralist accounts of educational phenomena (Arnseth, 2008). Instead they emphasize the *relational* character of learning and knowing in practice. We need to belong to learn and this belonging is an intrinsic condition for the creation and sharing of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Thus, educational practice is viewed as *socially and collectively constituted* rather than individually constituted. Relatedly, the attention paid to doing and this move away from a cognitive conception of knowledge emphasises the *embodiment and the materiality* of teaching and learning. Both teaching and learning are viewed as *situated, sociomaterial, provisional, contested and pragmatic* activities.

Because of the rich philosophical and sociological heritage of the term "practice", in the literature there is diversity of use and debate about what constitutes practice. In this paper, "practices do not simply refer to regularised patterns of human activity but rather to dynamic, situated, embodied, spatially and temporally extended ways of humans and other-than-humans 'doing' things together" (Keevers, Treleaven, Sykes, & Darcy, 2012, p. 101). Practices are materially and discursively constructed networks of intra-active<sup>2</sup> performances that constitute something at issue and at stake "whose definitive resolution is always prospective" (Rouse, 2007, p. 51).

For this paper, a practice-based approach recommends a view of social inclusion as an ongoing sociomaterial accomplishment, constituted and reconstituted as actors engage in the world of

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<sup>2</sup> Intra-action and intra-active are words coined by Barad (2007) to signify a relational ontology of entanglement and inseparability. She substitutes the notion of "inter-action" with "intra-action" in order to stress that the actors in a relationship should not be seen as separate entities, acting upon each other from "outside", but as entangled agencies that establish each other as well as being created themselves (Rouse, 2002). Intra-action is distinct from relations of mutual constitution or reciprocal interaction common in some dynamic social theories, for although they acknowledge entities are changed by interaction with each other, they maintain their ontological separation (Orlikowski, 2007). As intra-action fits well with the relational ontology and performative epistemology assumed in our practice-based approach it is used throughout this paper.

teaching, learning and research in higher education (Orlikowski, 2002). Such an approach suggests a focus on the local, situated complexity of social inclusion-in-practice.

### 3. Discourses of social Inclusion/exclusion and higher education

Social inclusion and exclusion are amorphous concepts that refer to a range of competing theoretical positions, values and ideals. A widely accepted working definition describes social exclusion as:

a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in society, whether economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Levitas et al., 2007, p. 9).

As this definition makes clear, social exclusion and inclusion usefully encompass hardships and oppressions beyond the material aspects of poverty, and are thereby able to speak directly to the work of higher education. In this section, we begin by discussing the discursive diversity of social inclusion and then examine some of the problems with a narrow conceptualisation of social inclusion. Finally, we discuss the discourses of recognition, redistribution and representation that are integral to the development of a more expansive view of social inclusion.

#### 3.1. Discursive diversity of social inclusion

The discursive diversity of social inclusion/exclusion is well illustrated in Levitas's (1998) work in the United Kingdom. She distinguishes three contrasting discourses shaping the meaning of social exclusion/inclusion. She dubs these: RED, the redistributionist egalitarian discourse; SID, the social integrationist discourse; and MUD, the moral underclass discourse (Levitas, 1998, 2005). RED combines discussions of the problems (exclusion) and remedies (inclusion) with an understanding of the material dimensions of poverty. SID defines inclusion in terms of labour market attachment, positioning paid work as the ideal source of social cohesion. MUD places emphasis on the moral deficits and behavioural delinquency of the excluded. Both SID, with its limited focus on labour market participation, and MUD, which labels people as passive welfare dependants, have been more influential than RED in Australia, at least during the past two decades.

Perhaps the appeal of social exclusion/inclusion lies in this discursive diversity and the flexibility it offers (Smyth, 2010). As Levitas (1998) explains:

Social exclusion is a powerful concept, not because of its analytical clarity, which is conspicuously lacking but because of its flexibility. At an individual level, it mobilises personal fears of being excluded or left out ... At a political level, it has broad appeal, both to those who value increased participation and those who seek greater social control. (p. 178)

The discourse of social inclusion implicitly binarises the "included" and "excluded" and promotes an insider-outsider metaphor (Levitas, 2005). Such conceptions tend to characterise social exclusion as a "state" in which people or groups are assumed to be "excluded" from social systems and relationships (Popay et al., 2008). Further, a discourse of social inclusion that focuses on integrating excluded individuals into higher education often fails to acknowledge the ways in which exclusion, inequality and inaccessibility are created and maintained by higher education institutions and processes (Nevile, 2006). However, neither the broader conception of social inclusion/exclusion as a "state", nor the three discourses argued by Levitas (1998; 2005) to shape its meaning offer adequate guidance for transforming higher education into a more inclusive experience for all students.

Arguably, the discourse of social inclusion that offers investigative advantages for this paper is one that recognises the relational interdependence of all social systems and views exclusionary processes as dynamic, multi-dimensional and driven by unequal power relationships (Popay et al., 2008, p. 36). Such a view also recognises that societal processes and institutions often create

exclusionary processes. Further, recent literature focused on social inclusion in the Australian higher education context argues that to be effective, social inclusion needs to be incorporated into a rich, expansive concept of social justice that encompasses ideals, experiences and politics of recognition, representation, redistribution (See for example, Gale, 2011b; Gidley, et al., 2010; McLeod, 2011; Sellar & Gale, 2011; Smyth, 2010). Accordingly, in following such an approach we provide a brief description of these discourses that broaden social inclusion to include a politics of recognition, redistribution and representation.

### **3.2. Recognition**

Contemporary recognition theorists such as Nancy Fraser, Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth offer rich and contrasting political theories of recognition. However, they all agree “a just society is one in which everyone receives due recognition” (Thompson, 2006, p. 186) and that respect should be at the forefront of our relationship with others. Taylor (1994) identifies recognition as a “vital human need” (p. 26) and underlines the damaging impact of misrecognition on identity. Honneth (1997) concurs and asserts social life is made possible through inter-subjective recognition. He argues that the harms created through misrecognition include cultural domination, invisibility, degradation, exclusion and disrespect. For recognition theorists like Taylor and Honneth, the primary harm of misrecognition is to preclude subjectivity and render subjects into objects.

The recognition discourse has been usefully mobilised in discussions of social inclusion and justice in education (Connell, 2007; Gale & Tranter, 2011; Sellar & Gale, 2011). It foregrounds the relational processes needed to create inclusive higher education and points to the need to go beyond “proportional representation” to a sense of “epistemological equity” (Gale & Tranter, 2011). Epistemological equity, as described by Dei (2008), refers to creating inclusive spaces where multiple ways of knowing can flourish and “co-exist in the Western Academy” (p. 8).

### **3.3. Recognition and redistribution**

While Taylor’s (1994) theory of recognition ignores issues of class and redistribution, Honneth (2003) argues economic and distributive patterns are best understood as cultural patterns of recognition on a continuum of respect (p. 135). Fraser (1997) disagrees asserting that maldistribution and misrecognition are mutually irreducible. Thus, she maintains a dualistic analytical distinction between claims for material redistribution and claims for cultural recognition. By proposing a “perspectival dualism”, Fraser’s approach is sensitive to both economic and cultural agendas. In contrast to Honneth and Taylor, Fraser frames recognition as a question of status rather than identity, thereby emphasising the economic underpinnings of social status. She argues “what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but rather the status of group members as full partners in social interaction” (Fraser, 2001, p. 24).

We argue that neither Fraser’s treatment and labelling of some apparatuses as economic and some as “merely cultural”<sup>3</sup>, nor Honneth’s subsuming of the economic into the cultural, sufficiently grasp the entangled character of social inclusion and the complex ways in which “identity and subjectivity are penetrated by structural dynamics of power” (McNay, 2008, p. 9).

Furthermore, both Honneth’s and Fraser’s concepts of the material are limited to the merely economic. This stands contra to the alternative concept of materiality offered by a practice-based approach discussed in the previous section. As Barad (2007) explains, “it is not the case that economic practices are material while the presumably separate set of social matters such as gender, community and identity are merely ideological. The nature of production is reconfigured as iterative intra-activity” (p. 283). So according to a practice-based account, production in higher education is a process of not only making research or delivering education, but also of making subjects and re-making structures.

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<sup>3</sup> “Merely cultural” is the term used by Judith Butler (1997) in her critique of Fraser’s dual construct of social justice.

### 3.4. Representation

In more recent work, Fraser (2005; 2007) has revised her framework with the addition of a third analytic category that she calls “representation”. This third category adds the political dimension required to realise economic and cultural struggles over social inclusion and justice. She argues that a politics of redistribution and recognition must be joined to a politics of representation, oriented to decision-making processes and governance structures (Fraser, 2005). This move shifts the emphasis from an either/or opposition between the dimensions of redistribution and recognition towards an appreciation that struggles over recognition are struggles for inclusion and political voice (Phillips, 2003). Thus, the denial of participation as peers in social interaction and higher education is a central part of what misrecognition involves (Dahl, Stoitiz, & Willig, 2004). The politics of representation and creating possibilities for “parity of participation” (Fraser, 2005, 2007) make the inclusion of this political dimension important in the development of a practice-based framework of social inclusion in higher education.

## 4. Site and methods

Although this paper is primarily conceptual, it is based on data from a broader study in an Australian regional university funded by a Social Inclusion Participation Scheme (SIPS) grant. The SIPS project focused on teaching teams of large first-year subjects and aimed to enhance their capacities to create inclusive and effective learning environments with students. Four subject co-ordinators, twenty-one sessional academics and 738 students enrolled in four first-year subjects in two faculties participated in the project. They were from the discipline areas of computer science, electrical engineering, languages and communication, and media studies.

This study focused on teaching teams for the following reasons. In an era in which an increasingly diverse student population is accompanying dramatic growth in student numbers, it is the sessional academic workforce led by subject-coordinators upon whom faculties rely to ensure the delivery of their curricula. The majority of first-year students at the University in this study are taught by full-time academics in large-group classes and sessional academics in small-group classes. These sessional teachers are often students’ first point of personal connection in their transition to tertiary study.

### 4.1. Methodology

A practice-based approach using a participatory action research (PAR) framework (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Wadsworth, 1991) was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data and actively involve participants in the project. We position participatory action research as a practice-changing practice that has the capability to change people’s practices, their understanding of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice (Kemmis, 2009). This approach was used to engage the teaching teams to begin embedding practices that create an “ecology of inclusion” (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). In this way the research project was “interventionist” in its orientation, attempting to work with teaching team members to improve their capacity to create inclusive learning environments for both students and for sessional academics.

Two researchers worked with the members of each of the four teaching teams for a single iteration of each subject. We met regularly as a group throughout the semester to discuss inclusive learning practices, to design, implement and evaluate a situated action-learning project, and to discuss issues arising from the research project.

### 4.2. Data gathering methods

Within our PAR cycles we incorporated multiple methods for accessing a variety of data. Six mixed-methods were used: observing teaching team practices and processes, written ethnographic accounts of observations, reflexive group discussions with the teaching teams (recorded and transcribed), comparison of subject retention rates and student results over a three



year period; surveys of students and sessional teachers using indicators of social inclusion; and documentation from the project.

### 4.3. Data analysis

Qualitative data from group discussions, observations and surveys was collated and analysed to identify dominant themes and trends. The researchers initially coded the data using words from the texts, and then developed more “abstract” codes to arrive at the themes and patterns (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

Quantitative data from the sessional staff and student surveys was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In relation to the surveys we achieved a 95.5% response rate from the sessional staff and a 77% response rate from the students. A five factor Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the questionnaire items, which were combined into the following sub-scales for both the student surveys and the sessional teacher surveys:

- learning experience for students/ teaching experience for sessional academics;
- sense of belonging;
- sense of hope for the future;
- experience of respect and recognition;
- sense of agency and control over one's life;
- experience of representation and voice.

To examine relationships between students' perceptions and sense of inclusion and sessional teachers' perceptions and sense of inclusion, we compared the sessional teachers' scores in each of the indicator categories of social inclusion (listed above) with the students' responses for the corresponding indicator categories. In order to make this comparison, we created independent variables for the sessional teachers perceptions by classifying each sessional teacher's score as high or low on each of the subscale composite variables, using the median score as the distinguishing point for low and high classification. Scores at the median were classified as low in order to create a more balanced distribution of student subjects. A MANOVA was then performed using the sessional teachers' high/low classification as independent variables and the corresponding student perceptions of each of the composite indicators of social inclusion as dependent variables. Interactions and main effects were then examined using the Roy Bargmann Stepdown F-test. We used our conceptual framework developed from the literature and our qualitative data to order the priority of dependent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In this way the Roy Bargmann stepdown F-tests enabled our theoretical framework and qualitative data to inform our quantitative analysis.

Drawing on our fieldwork data and our conceptual work, we present and illustrate a multi-dimensional, practice-based framework for describing and analysing social inclusion in higher education in the following section.

## 5. Practising social inclusion in higher education

The relational practice-based approach, outlined in section 2 of this paper, suggests focusing attention on praxis and practising. This orientation to practices and actions warns against conceptualising social inclusion as a state that can be achieved once and for all. From our observations and discussions with academic teaching teams in first year classrooms we suggest social inclusion cannot be tamed. It cannot be simplified to a set of targets. Nor can social inclusion be reduced to a set of principles to be evaluated against. Instead, there are no definitive solutions to social inclusion and struggles *over* inclusion and recognition will continue and remain unfinished.<sup>4</sup> By focusing on praxis, social inclusion, recognition and justice become, according to Tully (2000):

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<sup>4</sup> Following Tully (2000; 2004) we use the phrase struggles *over* social inclusion and justice in preference to struggles *for* social inclusion and justice to indicate that these struggles are relational, mutual, multiple,

partial, provisional, mutual, and to-all-too-human parts of continuous processes of democratic activity in which citizens struggle to change their rules of mutual recognition as they change themselves. If the study of struggles over recognition is to be critical and enlightening, then it should be practical and “permanent” rather than theoretical and end-state oriented. (p. 477)

### 5.1. Practice-based framework of social inclusion in higher education

Our practice-based framework of higher education “doing” social inclusion is summarised and depicted diagrammatically in Figure 1.

The diagram attempts to depict the co-emerging political, cultural, social and economic dimensions of social inclusion. In each inner circle the intra-acting forms of social inclusion are named which are themselves the results of intra-actions of material-discursive practices. Some of the material-discursive practices of social inclusion, identified in our fieldwork, are named in the entangled rings depicted both merging and dividing. The pattern of these colours (for example, the inner ring of “representation and participation” corresponds with the colour of the outer ring of connectedness and belonging) illustrates how practices intra-act, collaborate, depend on each other, include one another and co-emerge in struggles over social inclusion and justice. The diagram shows how a myriad of everyday practices “hang together” to create inclusive and engaged learning spaces.

This two-dimensional diagram is inadequate in that it cannot capture the multi-dimensional, complex and fluid character of connections and changing practices and possibilities (Barad, 2007). Further, the diagram gives the impression of an assemblage of individual forms, categories and sets of practices, whereas these dimensions are intra-acting, co-emerging and constituting one another. Nevertheless, with these caveats in mind, the diagram is presented as a heuristic device to aid analysis and understanding of higher education’s contributions to practising social inclusion.

In this framework, social inclusion is characterised as a knot of on-going, iterative practices that entail being open and awake to each encounter, each intra-action (Barad, 2007). The possibilities and impossibilities for social inclusion and justice are made and remade in engagement with one another. What is included and excluded in the enactment orders the teaching and learning experience differently, since different realities (worlds) are sedimented out of particular practices/doings/actions (Barad, 2007).

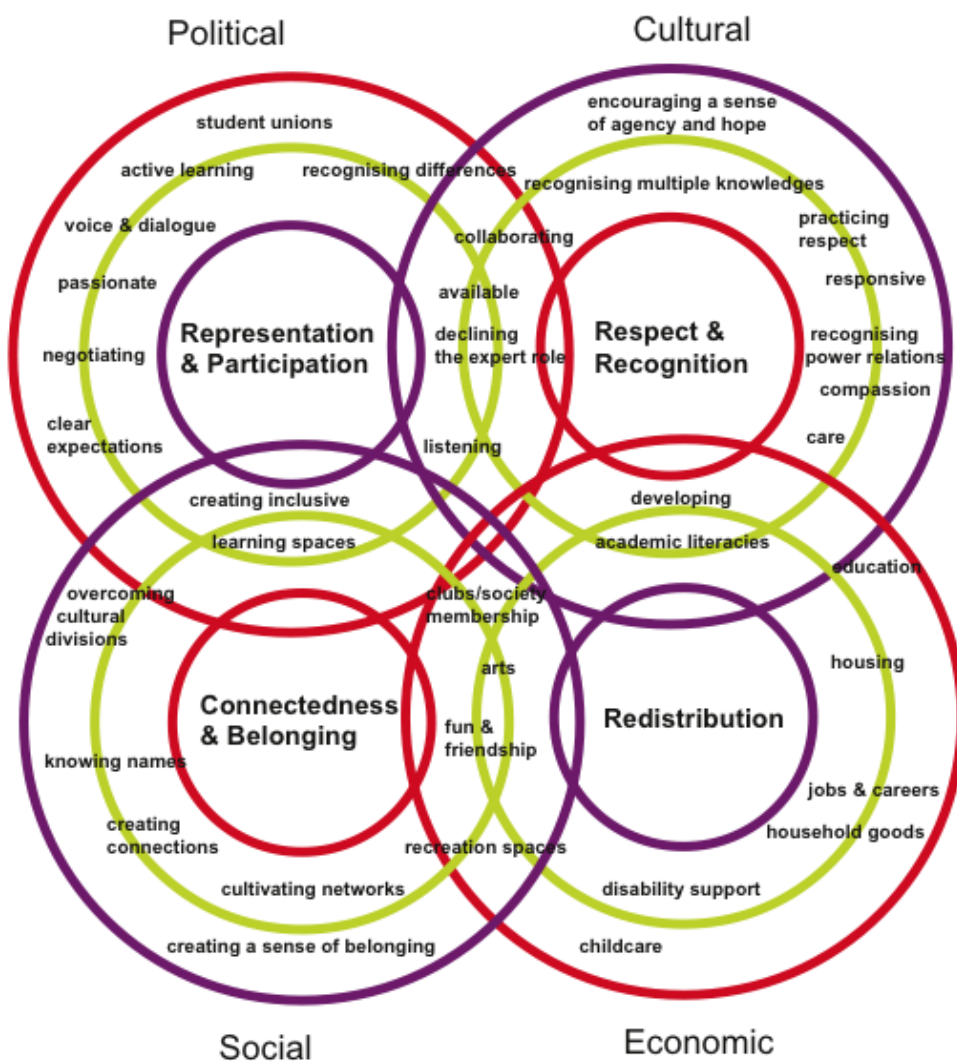
The framework attempts to synthesise the discourses of social inclusion and justice as recognition, redistribution, representation and social connectedness outlined in the previous section. This synthesis emphasises the relations and entanglements among the components and incorporates the social *and* political *and* economic *and* cultural dimensions. Moreover, this framework recognises that social inclusion is bound up in connections, entanglements and responsibilities to one another. Haraway’s (2008) considerations of the etymology of the word respect foregrounds the specific relationality involved in this kind of regard:

to have regard for, to see differently, to esteem, to look back, to hold in regard, to hold in seeing, to be touched by another’s regard, to heed, to take care of. This kind of regard aims to release and be released in oxymoronic relation. Autonomy as the fruit of and inside relation. Autonomy as trans-acting (Haraway, 2008, p. 164).

In this view, autonomy begins in encounters. For as Sennett (2003) explains, “Rather than an equality of understanding, autonomy means accepting in others what one does not understand about them. In so doing, the fact of their autonomy is treated as equal to your own” (p. 262).

## Practice-based framework of higher education 'doing' social inclusion

Co-emerging dimensions of social inclusion



**Figure 1:** Framework of social inclusion practices<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This diagram is adapted from Keevers, Treleaven, Backhouse and Darcy (2010). It references the “iconic” photographic image of entangled photons. The image can be viewed at <http://www.tongue-twister.net/mr/physics/photons.jpg>

The practices of social inclusion demand a detailed knowing of the material-discursive practices and apparatuses of exclusion. Without such knowing, academics risk leaving unquestioned the taken-as-given dimensions of their own practices, thereby insufficiently engaging with the potential exclusivity of their practices.

Critically, the framework focuses on recognition *and* power. As Foucault (1978) and Butler (1993) emphasise, power is constitutive of practical identities and is not an external force that acts on the subject. Struggles over recognition and inclusion entail the “dynamic intra-workings of the instruments of power through which particular meanings, bodies and boundaries are produced” (Barad, 2007, p. 230). Recognition of the entanglement of subjectivity and power relations helps develop practical and material understandings of both agency and the production of social exclusion. In this framework, subjectivity becomes through practice, however, unlike the recognition discourses discussed earlier, “power relations are not secondary to the process of subject formation” and agency is not tethered to identity (McNay, 2008, p. 14). The foregrounding of practice implies that oppression and misrecognition are endlessly sedimented through the intra-action of multiple, material-discursive apparatuses and lived-through the always-becoming body (Barad, 2007). Class, gender, race and a sense of belonging are realised through one another in the modest daily practices of teaching teams in higher education classrooms. At the same time, a perspective on practice with its anticipatory or prospective dimension opens the space of agency. The possibility of encounters with the unanticipated in practices, which when practised are rarely simply reproduced in exactly the same way, is a potential source of innovation and change in educative practices (McNay, 2008).

Finally, this performative, relational practice-based approach seeks to understand struggles over social inclusion and justice as a dynamic complex of enfolded practices of respect and recognition, redistribution, representation and participation, belonging and connectedness. This approach suggests that to create an “ecology of inclusion” (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009) throughout the university, these forms of social inclusion practices need to spiral outwards, linking the individual teacher-student level through teaching-team, school and faculty levels to the institutional level such that a field of social inclusion practices is woven together (Gherardi, 2006). The diagram presented here is restricted to naming practices at the level of the teaching team and related student support services and infrastructure.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all of the material-discursive practices of social inclusion evident in our fieldwork data and included in the diagrammatic presentation of the framework. We therefore discuss a few illustrative examples of practices of belonging and connectedness, practices of representation and voice and practices of respect and recognition at the level of the teaching team.

## 5.2. Practices of belonging and connectedness

According to the literature, when students arrive at University they often feel anonymous in an unfamiliar crowd and experience the context as isolating and distancing, especially in large classes (Mann, 2001; Hockings, 2011). In our study, about 70% of the students from one faculty reported that they did not know the students in their tutorials by name and that their teachers did not know their names. However, many of the academics in our study employed a number of “belonging” practices to transform an unwelcoming and silencing physical environment into a welcoming, safe and “noisy” learning and teaching space.

One teaching team created lively, participatory classrooms with a strong sense of belonging, respect and trust in a group of about 200 students in an introductory Spanish subject. From the first week they collectively establish “guidelines” and an “agreement” for engaging, collaborating and learning together in the subject. These “guidelines” emphasise the importance of being willing to participate and contribute, of mutual respect to enable a learning space in which people feel free to speak-up and safe to take risks. These “guidelines” also stress the celebration of mistakes, stating mistakes “are best friends” in learning Spanish (fieldnotes and subject documentation). The importance of fun, enjoyment and daily practise was also highlighted. The teaching team uphold, practise and reiterate the “guidelines” in the early weeks

of the subject and they gradually create an inclusive climate in which “the guidelines” become the tacit way of engaging in the subject.

The teaching team members not only recognise the importance of building strong connections with students, but also emphasise the importance of facilitating connections and relationships between students. The teaching team created lots of opportunities for the students to get to know each other. They establish and cultivate informal networks between students who have successfully completed the subject and students currently enrolled to meet regularly over coffee and talk together in Spanish.

This sense of connectedness and belonging is also extended to the ways this teaching team work together. The team was led by an expressive, inspired and passionate subject coordinator and the team meetings we witnessed were lively, with lots of laughter accompanied by a seriousness towards their teaching practice. In observing a teaching-team meeting it would be difficult for an “outsider” to identify the subject coordinator. She acknowledges the asymmetrical power relations between her position and that of the sessional team members and actively works to strengthen collegial, horizontal relations amongst peers. Such practices not only contributed to the sessional teachers’ sense of belonging and connectedness, but by recognising and listening to the “voice” of sessional teachers, they are also threaded through practices of representation and participation.

### 5.3. Practices of representation and “voice”

Recent literature argues that attention to a politics of representation in higher education involves not only creating spaces for student “voice” but also for institutional “listening” (McLeod, 2011; Gale, 2011b). Attention to practices of representation, voice and listening were also evident in our fieldwork data. In a communication and media studies subject with about 300 students, the teaching team instituted “peer teaching” as part of the pedagogy and assessment. To incorporate the effective use of feedback in learning, the teaching team facilitated the establishment of “syndicate learning groups”<sup>6</sup> amongst the students. These small groups took responsibility for facilitating the learning and leading the discussion on a topic, and they also provided feedback to their peers on the sessions they led. The teaching team paid attention to educating the students on giving and receiving useful feedback and facilitating active learning. They also carefully scaffolded the assessable group work. The students engaged with the feedback and used it to examine and articulate their perspectives, ideas and assumptions in their written assessment. These organising practices combined to create the conditions for *listening* and *dialogue* in tutorials. One student commented:

Lisa [tutor] is awesome! I feel like she really listens to us. And so I really learnt a lot from the other students, the different opinions and our discussions in tutes (student survey).

These facilitated learning practices enabled a dialogic space for students’ voices to be heard, widening participation and increasing academic engagement.

These organising practices were mirrored in the way the teaching team worked together. For example, they shared their tutorial preparation with one another, taking turns in assuming lead responsibility. Commenting on this organising practice Greg said:

It allowed you to compare what you thought the readings were talking about, how you might explore it, with what other people thought. So I think the double whammy there, saving time and engaging with the other members of the team was great. Also, Janna’s [subject coordinator] emails and feedback motivate me to want to deliver the course in a way that’s positive and engaging. I feel part of a team, respected. So I think Jaana’s approach is excellent! (transcript, reflexive group discussion).

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<sup>6</sup> This term was suggested by one of the tutor’s in the teaching team. For an explication, see Collier (1980).

Here we see how these organising practices of representation and participation, also contributed to a sense of belonging and connectedness and an experience of respect and recognition for sessional staff.

#### 5.4. Practices of respect and recognition

Our research shows that a crucial aspect of both students and teachers overcoming the kinds of marginalisations and humiliations that concern people's sense of well-being and inclusion is experiencing respect. To convey respect entails finding the words, the gestures, and the layout of the physical space that makes respect felt and persuasive.

According to this account respect is an expressive performance. For example, one of the subject coordinators in our study put enormous effort into knowing the students' names and a little about their backgrounds and lives. He did this in a faculty context in which neither subject coordinators nor laboratory demonstrators are expected to know their students' names. He also carefully tracked students' progress, especially those who he identified as at risk of failing. He skilfully challenged the approach and behaviour of these students without turning them off. Using these mundane practices, he performed respect. Such practices have an enormous impact on both the students' experiencing respect and their sense of belonging (Hockings, 2011). Throughout the surveys, the students repeatedly commented on the subject co-ordinators knowing their names and taking a personal interest in their progress: "you are not anonymous"; "Wahid is the best lecturer ever... he gets to know you"; "it helps you build a connection, personal communication."

### 6. Implications for the higher education social inclusion agenda

Two broad implications for conceptualising social inclusion emerge from a practice-based approach. First, a practice-based lens suggests a shift from a narrow focus on student access and over-coming barriers or deficits to participation, to a wide view that encompasses the need to sediment inclusive practices in classrooms through to teaching-teams, schools, faculties, service units and the institution.

Second, a practice-based approach has implications for how we measure social inclusion. The dominant framework employs generalised, statistical measures of the numbers and proportions of students from low socio-economic backgrounds (LSES) that access and complete University courses. A practice-based approach warns that adopting such a narrow approach to measurement means that the local, situated, complexity of *practising* social inclusion may be overlooked. In this section we briefly discuss these two implications with evidence from our study.

#### 6.1. Entanglements: sessional academics and the student learning experience

Our research suggests that the focus of social inclusion should not stop with the student. Our study demonstrates that the students' experiences of inclusion, respect, representation and recognition are entangled with the sessional teachers' experience of respect, recognition and representation and inclusion – they are co-constitutive.

For instance, we analysed our survey data to investigate if there were statistically significant relationships between the sessional teachers' perception of their inclusion in their teaching team and university communities and their students' perception in relation to their learning experience and the indicators of social inclusion. The analysis shows a statistically significant relationship between the tutor's teaching experience and overall sense of inclusion and their students' learning experience and sense of inclusion ( $F(6,478)= 4.27, p<.001$ ). Roy Bargmann step down  $F$  tests were used for assessment of which dependent variables this multivariate effect referred. These tests indicate that the significant multivariate effect pertains to the students' learning experience ( $F(1,483)=9.47, p<.005$ ); their sense of belonging ( $F(1,482)=9.30, p<.005$ ); and their sense of hope for the future ( $F(1,481)=4.36, p<.05$ ). We then conducted post-hoc comparisons of means, which are detailed in the following table.

**Table 1.** Post-hoc comparison of means.

Students' sense of inclusion (dependent variables)	Tutors' overall sense of inclusion (independent variable)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Learning Experience	High Score	29.17	3.66
	Low Score	28.14	3.60
Sense of belonging	High Score	19.99	3.70
	Low Score	18.53	3.60
Sense of hope for the future	High score	11.96	1.78
	Low Score	11.35	1.78
Experience of respect & recognition	High Score	33.74	3.69
	Low score	32.69	3.49
Experience of representation & voice	High Score	12.06	1.73
	Low Score	11.58	1.75
Sense of agency & control over one's life	High Score	18.70	2.75
	Low Score	17.64	2.70

This table indicates that those students whose tutors experience a greater sense of inclusion perceive their learning experience, their sense of belonging, and their sense of hope for the future, to be higher than students' whose sessional teachers' sense of inclusion was lower.

These results indicate that if teaching teams are collegial and inclusive, and the sessional staff experience: a sense of belonging to university communities; recognition and respect by their faculties; representation and voice; a sense of hope for their future; and a sense of control and agency in relation to their academic teaching; such social inclusion has a significant, measurable, positive effect on the students' learning experience and their sense of social inclusion.

Our findings support the views of Sellar and Gale (2011) and Devlin (2011) who argue that we need to broaden the focus of social inclusion from "equity" students and their deficits and needs for support, to encompass the entire institution and its practices.

## 6.2. Measurement matters

The current approach to social inclusion in higher education is based on the assumption that setting targets and measuring statistical progress will improve the system. However, DEEWR has been collecting statistical data on LSES participation based on postcodes since 1990, and it has not improved in that time but has stayed at around 15-16% (Devlin, 2011).

Our research demonstrates that this privileging of quantitative approaches to measurement is part of the problem. A narrow, "statistical equality" view does not adequately engage with social inclusion as dynamic, relational, ongoing practices. The "how", the doing, the practising of social inclusion is relatively overlooked. In measuring social inclusion and exclusion, both quantitative and qualitative data – indicators and stories – are essential to capture relational, dynamic exclusionary and inclusive processes and practices (Popay et al., 2008). Generalised, statistical measures render specific, situated complexities immaterial. Yet if the aim is to address access, participation and quality in higher education, we do need to engage with the local, situated complexity of the teaching and learning experience. This is because social

inclusion is materialised in everyday practice, not in the dissemination of generalised knowledge in the form of targets and guidelines. To engage with everyday practices of social inclusion, there is a need for research that creates a space for critical analysis, reflexivity and participative engagement (Hockings, 2011).

A practice-based approach to social inclusion does not however deny the importance of access to high-quality, readily-available statistical data. In a practice-based approach we do not start our thinking about social inclusion from statistical representations. They come last rather than first in the account. At the national level we have relatively good access to data on individual behaviours and outcomes but our ability to meaningfully measure and understand the relationship between social and structural dynamics and the well-being of under-represented groups is not well developed compared to other countries (Pholi et al., 2009).

Further, even though we live in a higher education policy space that emphasises quantitative measurement, our experience in this research project is that, especially at the regional and local level, we have almost no measures or statistical data that cover key indicators of social inclusion such as a sense of belonging, a sense of agency and control over one's life, a sense of hope for the future, an experience of respect and recognition and of representation and voice.

## 7. Conclusions

Our paper suggests that universities can play a vital role in providing an infrastructure that enables the conditions necessary for social inclusion – reciprocal exchange, recognition and respect across the boundaries of unavoidable dependencies, inequalities and differences (Sennett, 2003). It is in cobbling together ways of designing and enacting curricula, and facilitating learning spaces that encourage and express such respect and inclusion that the teaching teams in our study make a distinctive contribution to social inclusion. The practice knowledge of teaching academics is a vital link between the vision of social inclusion and its implementation. Academic teachers can “do” and “undo” social inclusion. Classrooms are sites where it may be possible for people to be connected to one another and made responsive to one another. This study suggests that to realise the aims of the social inclusion agenda will require a new sensitivity to what is local, specific and contingent. The *how* of social inclusion is in the details of practice.

This paper argues that a practice-based approach offers new ways of conceptualising social inclusion that contribute to the possibility of, in Gale's words, “a space in higher education not just for new kinds of student bodies but also for their embodied knowledges and ways of knowing” (Gale, 2009, p. 14). Such an approach broadens the focus of social inclusion beyond access and achievement to include the relations that create and are created by Institutional practices.

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